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Collaborative funding for continued visual Aerial Megafauna Surveys in southern New England Wind Energy Areas

January 7, 2022

The Regional Wildlife Science Entity (RWSE) is pleased to announce a collaborative funding plan for the continuation of Aerial Megafauna Surveys in the Massachusetts and Rhode Island Wind Energy Areas to support pre-construction monitoring for offshore wind development from January through August 2022.

The New England Aquarium (NEAq) [has been conducting aerial surveys of marine megafauna since October 2011](#) in waters scheduled for wind energy development off Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Over that time the surveys have been funded by the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC) and the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), with additional contributions in 2021 from Equinor Wind U.S., Mayflower Wind Energy LLC, Ørsted North America, and Vineyard Wind. The surveys follow consistent line-sampling methods and have provided valuable information about the abundance and distribution of multiple marine mammal and turtle species, including the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*).

The RWSE Interim Steering Committee has been working since September 2021 to identify potential sources of funds for the Aerial Megafauna Surveys and other collaborative activities to support wildlife monitoring, beginning with convening taxa-based Subcommittees to develop an RWSE Science Plan over the next year. The Science Plan will articulate the data collection and analysis activities needed for identifying, assessing, and avoiding impacts to the

distribution, abundance, and behavior of wildlife due to offshore wind development, and provide a roadmap for entities to fund those activities.

As a result of the Interim Steering Committee's efforts this fall, MassCEC, BOEM, the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environment (CT DEEP) have agreed to pool funds to support six months of Aerial Megafauna Survey effort conducted by NEAq. In addition, MassCEC has agreed to consolidate and manage these funds and monitor the work performed by NEAq on behalf of the funders. Further leveraging these commitments, NEAq also secured support from an anonymous fund at the Maine Community Foundation that will enable them to conduct an additional two months of surveys. The total commitments from all state, federal, and private funders will support eight months of Aerial Megafauna Surveys between January and August 2022.

In 2022 the RWSE will continue to collaborate with its federal, state, NGO, and industry members and science experts to develop plans for continued wildlife monitoring, including consideration of future Aerial Megafauna Surveys, integration of survey data with data derived from other methods, and identifying additional potential funding sources for data collection and analysis.

Resources

- [Work plan for 2022 Aerial Megafauna Surveys of the Massachusetts and Rhode Island wind energy areas](#)
- [Most recent Aerial Megafauna Survey report](#) (Campaign 6)
- [MassCEC page with background, methods reports and data for Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Surveys](#)
- [Regional Wildlife Science Entity latest news and information](#)
- [Interactive map of the Aerial Megafauna Survey transects on the Northeast Ocean Data Portal](#)

For more information, please contact the RWSE Director, [Emily Shumchenia, PhD](#)

RWSE Steering Committee

The following entities volunteered to serve on the RWSE Interim Steering Committee in 2021. As of January 2022, each Sector has selected members to serve on the 2022 Steering Committee.

* marks entities serving on both Interim and 2022 Steering Committees

‡ marks entities new to the 2022 Steering Committee

- Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind‡
- Bureau of Ocean Energy Management*
- Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
- Equinor*
- Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
- Maryland Energy Administration*
- Massachusetts Clean Energy Center*
- National Audubon Society*
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*
- National Wildlife Federation
- Natural Resources Defense Council*
- New York State Energy Research Development Authority*
- Ørsted North America‡
- Shell* (alternate member)
- The Nature Conservancy‡
- US Fish & Wildlife Service‡