

SOCIAL VALUES, BELIEFS, PERCEPTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE RELATIVE TO OFFSHORE WIND ENERGY

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Being a large energy resource, offshore wind power has the potential to play a significant role in climate change mitigation and coastal energy policy in the coming decades. In the US, the development of offshore wind energy is at a critical juncture, where issues are more social and regulatory than technological. Meanwhile, coastal and ocean resources already are relied on to provide a myriad of ecosystems services and support marine wildlife. The central question is: How will society accommodate industrial-scale offshore wind power while also advancing important social and cultural values in ocean and coastal resources which may or may not be in alignment with offshore energy development?

Here we present results from a mail and Internet survey of Maryland and Delaware residents (with coastal residents over-sampled) regarding development of a federally-designed Wind Energy Area, off the coast of Ocean City, Maryland and Fenwick Island, Delaware. The survey was administered during Spring 2015. The presentation will provide insight to state policymakers, coastal planners, local residents, coastal tourists and other stakeholders.

The study finds strong majority support for building a large (300MW) offshore wind project approximately 11 miles from the shore off the coast in the Atlantic Ocean among coastal residents and more generally, among both Delaware and Maryland residents statewide.

The presentation will discuss the role that place-based attachment, and the extent to which the ocean (as compared to e.g., mountains or forests) being a part of a person's identity affects offshore wind power perceptions. As well, the presentation will consider whether engaging in environmental activities and how one perceives the relationship of humans to nature and the relationship of government to business and individuals affects support and opposition to offshore wind power.

Residents also evaluated a range of possible electricity price increases, project sizes (ranging from 200 MW to 1 GW), and visual impacts. The study finds that roughly a third of respondents equally weighed project size and visual impacts with ratepayer price impacts. The presentation will discuss these findings, suggesting that for a large subset of the population, aesthetics and fit within the landscape play an important role in influencing support. Finally, the presentation will consider data that finds that concerns over user conflicts (e.g., vessel navigation and effects on the local fishing) influences project support and discuss implications for policymakers.