

OCEAN MEANINGS AND SUPPORT FOR AN OFFSHORE WIND FARM

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Private companies and federal agencies are enthusiastic about developing electricity-generating wind farms off the Atlantic coast of the United States. Successful deployment of offshore wind energy technology, however, will depend heavily on acceptance of these projects by the public. Although an extensive literature has developed around public acceptance of offshore wind and other ocean-based renewable energy technologies, little research has focused on how perceptions of the human-ocean relationship influence public attitudes toward specific projects. Construction of the first offshore wind farm in the U.S. has begun three miles off the southeast corner of Block Island, within the boundaries of Rhode Island's state waters.

This presentation will highlight results from a survey of a systematic sample of island residents and visitors conducted during the summer of 2015. Survey responses reveal how various factors, including beliefs about the ocean, influence support for the Block Island Wind Farm. Specifically, ascribing importance to existence values (i.e., valuing the ocean as a home for wildlife, a place of human culture, and as a source of knowledge) is associated with lower levels of project support and expectations that the project will have negative impacts on marine resources and the local community. Wind energy developers and regulators should acknowledge these beliefs and find ways to meaningfully incorporate public concern about the ocean into planning processes.