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Great Lakes Commission

State-fed agreement announced to enhance coordination of offshore wind projects in the Great Lakes

*Five Great Lakes states and 10 federal agencies
sign Memorandum of Understanding*

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Washington, D.C. – A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on offshore wind in the Great Lakes was signed today by the heads of 10 federal agencies and the governors of Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New York and Pennsylvania. The purpose of the MOU is to promote the efficient, orderly and responsible evaluation of offshore wind proposals for the Great Lakes.

The agreement was modeled after a similar MOU signed between 10 east coast states and the U.S. Department of the Interior in 2010. The Great Lakes MOU, however, carries additional significance because states own the bottomlands of the Great Lakes and ultimately have the primary authority about what can and cannot occur in those state waters.

Numerous federal laws and interests are also at play in the Great Lakes. For example, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has federal authority to approve or deny placement of structures in navigable waters. Nine other federal agencies who signed the MOU also have regulatory roles or federal interest in whether and how offshore wind gets permitted in the Great Lakes.

The MOU establishes a Great Lakes Offshore Wind Energy Consortium that will make the regulatory and permit review processes transparent and provide insight into potential improvements to ensure that proposal reviews are clear and expeditious. With so many agencies involved, there is high potential for duplication and protracted review times that can be unnecessarily costly to both prospective developers and relevant state and federal government agencies.

Tim Ryan, president of Apex Offshore Wind, noted that his company is excited to see the commitment to cooperation among the states and federal agencies. "It is a good sign for

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the future of offshore wind in the Great Lakes,” he said. “The MOU should yield lower costs and improve processing of permit applications, as each government unit learns from others’ experiences.”

Mark Clevey, manager of the Michigan Energy Office and co-chair of the Great Lakes Wind Collaborative, said he hopes that the agreement will lead to greater innovations related to sustainable development of windpower in the binational Great Lakes region.

The MOU does not create any new laws, call for new regulations or change existing authorities. Rather, it empowers the state and federal agency signatories to coordinate and share information concerning how offshore wind proposals are reviewed and evaluated with the goal of improving coordination among all of the relevant agencies and ultimately the efficiency of such reviews.

The cooperation produced by the MOU is aimed at improving efficiencies in the review of proposed offshore wind projects by enabling simultaneous and complementary reviews, and avoiding duplicative reviews. The MOU will send a market signal to prospective developers and investors that the Great Lakes region is ready to consider offshore wind proposals and that the regulatory process will be timely and efficient.

Victoria Pebbles, Great Lakes Commission program director and staff liaison for the Great Lakes Wind Collaborative, noted the importance of the federal-state collaboration. “It’s gratifying to see cooperation among our state and federal partners that will hopefully improve the regulatory process and benefit all involved.”

Offshore wind can contribute to meeting state renewable energy goals. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, each gigawatt of offshore wind installed could produce enough electricity to power 300,000 homes, eliminating 2.7 million metric tons of carbon emissions. The development of even a small portion of the Great Lakes’ offshore wind potential could create tens of thousands of clean energy jobs and generate revenue for local businesses.

The concentrated efforts made possible by the MOU will also shore up existing investments in offshore wind technologies by ensuring a regulatory environment that inspires innovation and helps to bring clean energy solutions to market.

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The Great Lakes Wind Collaborative (GLWC) is multi-sector coalition of wind energy stakeholders working to facilitate the sustainable development of wind power in the binational Great Lakes region. For more information about the GLWC, see www.glc.org/energy/wind.