



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers**  
Buffalo District

## **Great Lakes Off-Shore Wind Energy Projects and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Permitting Process**

As interest grows in alternative fuel research and production, so does the potential for off-shore wind energy projects. While lake morphology, wind resource, and proximity to large population centers present opportunities for off-shore development in the Great Lakes, it also presents complex permitting issues for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), and other involved regulatory and resource agencies. Issues likely to be considered as part of the permit evaluation include potential impacts to both local and migratory avian species, potential shifts in littoral/wave action processes, the effects of ice flows and currents, impacts to air traffic/radar capabilities, acoustic disturbances to aquatic species, potential shipping disruptions and aesthetic concerns for on shore residents. The greatest unknowns currently include potential avian impacts, ice concerns, and potential acoustic impacts to aquatic species.

### **Regulatory Authorities**

Under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act, the Corps regulates the placement of fill material and structures, including utility lines, in, over, or under Navigable Waters of the U.S. An example of a Navigable Water of the U.S. is Lake Erie. Additionally, under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, the Corps regulates the placement of fill material (i.e. concrete, stone, etc.) in Waters of the U.S., including wetlands. Off-shore wind energy projects will often involve structures, fill material, and utility lines that will require Corps Permits.

### **Corps Permit Types**

The Corps will determine the appropriate permitting review on a “per project” basis. Factors to be considered in determining the appropriate permit type include, but are not limited to, impacts to the aquatic environment, wildlife and fisheries resources, historic resources, view shed, etc. Prospective applicants should engage the Corps and other involved agencies as early as possible in the planning process since applications will likely require extensive review. Requesting a pre-application meeting with the Corps that includes the respective regulatory and resource agencies is the ideal means of obtaining preliminary feedback on proposed projects.

### **Other Involved Agencies**

Other agencies with either direct authority or involvement through the Corps permitting process may include Federal agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Endangered Species Act, wildlife & fishery impacts including migratory birds & bats), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (fill material in the waterway), U.S Coast Guard (navigation), Federal Aviation Administration (aircraft safety), and State resource agencies such as the State Departments of Natural Resources, Environmental Conservation or Environmental Protection. Other State agencies would include Coastal Management Agencies/Offices,

Historic Preservation Offices, Public Service Commissions, Submerged Lands Leasing Offices, etc. Early coordination and contact with the Corps and all involved agencies is key to a thorough review.



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### **Corps Permitting Process**

Wind power projects in the Great Lakes will likely be evaluated using Standard Permit procedures. These procedures include a public comment period advertised through a public notice, coordination with interested Federal and State agencies, a full public interest review, preparation of environmental documentation and a final permit decision. Comments received during the public comment period will be fully considered. Environmental documentation may include an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement, as determined on a case-by-case basis. Permit decisions are based on compliance with the 404(b)(1) guidelines and the public interest review. Further information regarding the Corps permitting regulations may be found at [http://www.usace.army.mil/CECW/Pages/reg\\_permit.aspx](http://www.usace.army.mil/CECW/Pages/reg_permit.aspx).

### **Great Lakes Corps Districts**

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716-879-4330  
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