PRESS RELEASE

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US Wind Applauds Whale Research in Maryland Offshore Lease Area

Monitoring Buoy to Provide Real-Time Data to Inform Development and Conservation Efforts

July 12, 2021 – Today, US Wind, Inc. ("US Wind") announced its coordination with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR), Maryland Energy Administration (MEA), University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES), and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) on the deployment of an ocean buoy that monitors and provides daily reports of whales detected off Maryland's Atlantic coast.

The whale monitoring buoy, located about 23 miles offshore in the Maryland Lease area, will monitor the presence of a wide range of baleen whales who either call the ocean offshore Maryland home or pass during migration along the coast. The buoy system includes an underwater listening device called a hydrophone that will record the marine mammal calls. A detection algorithm will analyze the calls to determine the presence of humpback, fin, sei, and the critically endangered North Atlantic Right whale species.

"The deployment of this whale monitoring buoy is a major achievement for science and research," said Todd Sumner, Director of Permitting for US Wind. "US Wind is proud to have coordinated with Maryland DNR, the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, the Maryland Energy Administration, and WHOI on this effort to monitor marine mammal activity in our Lease area. The information obtained from this buoy will ensure greater protection of marine life in our Lease area, including the critically endangered North Atlantic Right whale."

The data collected will be transmitted to shore, verified by UMCES scientists, and shared daily on the buoy website: robots4whales.whoi.edu. The data from the monitoring buoy will help further advance the ongoing research efforts of Dr. Helen Bailey with the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory at UMCES to understand the distribution of marine mammals off Maryland's shoreline and characterize the current ambient noise environment.

"It's wonderful to be able to use this state-of-the-art technology to provide alerts about endangered whale species offshore of Maryland," said Dr. Helen Bailey, a Research Associate Professor at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. "Many people don't realize that whales pass by the Maryland coast during their winter migration. These real-time detections will be freely available on the Whale Alert and Ocean Alert apps so mariners can see when whales are in the area and slow down to help avoid collisions with whales."

The moored buoy includes three enabling technologies developed by WHOI, including a digital acoustic monitoring (DMON) instrument; the low-frequency detection and classification system (LFDCS); and an acoustically quiet mooring that utilizes patented stretch hoses to dampen wave-induced motion. These technologies help avoid masking low-frequency calls of large whales from background noise and wave action.

“Year-long whale detection information from this buoy will contribute to an expanded understanding of species presence off our coasts across all seasons," said Catherine McCall, Director of the Department of Natural Resources' Office of Ocean and Coastal Management. "We look forward to continuing work with partners to advance our understanding of wildlife patterns to inform offshore wind development off of Maryland's coast."

The deployment is scheduled for at least one year and will support current and near-real-time alerts to help inform on-water changes in vessel traffic and develop recommendations for mitigation efforts to protect marine life during construction and maintenance of Maryland Offshore wind activities.

"The Maryland Energy Administration is committed to supporting research projects which help inform offshore wind development," said Eric Coffman, Division Director of Energy Programs at MEA. "This project will provide important data about the presence of marine wildlife and their behavioral patterns off the coast of Maryland, which can assist offshore wind developers plan their construction and operations activities to mitigate any potential impacts while aiding overall marine wildlife conservation efforts.”

“This buoy is a key addition to a network of identical buoys deployed from Massachusetts to North Carolina that will let industry, government and the public know when whales are nearby,” said Mark Baumgartner, Senior Scientist at WHOI. “This network will be especially helpful for reducing risks to the North Atlantic right whale, a species that lives on our coast and has fewer than 400 animals left.”

US Wind acquired an 80,000-acre federal lease area off of the coast of Maryland in 2014. In 2017, the company was awarded Offshore Renewable Energy Credits (ORECs) from the State of Maryland for the first phase of its MarWin project. In total, the company's lease area can support approximately 1.5 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind energy capacity. In 2019, Maryland passed the Clean Energy Jobs Act, which increased the state's offshore wind energy requirements, calling for an additional 1.2 GW to be procured from developers with projects near the state's coast.

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About US Wind

US Wind was founded in 2011 and has established its position as a premier offshore wind energy development company in the United States. In 2014, US Wind obtained a federal lease for site control to develop approximately 1.5 GW of offshore wind power generation off the coast of Maryland. US Wind is majority-owned by Renexia SpA, a leader in renewable energy development in Italy and a subsidiary of Toto Holding SpA. Toto Holding SpA has more than 40 years of experience specializing in large construction and infrastructure projects, primarily in the energy, transportation, and aviation sectors.