

Feds, 5 states to push for Great Lakes wind farms

March 30 2012, By JOHN FLESHER , AP Environmental Writer

(AP) -- The Obama administration and five states have reached an agreement to speed up approval of offshore wind farms in the Great Lakes, which have been delayed by cost concerns and public opposition.

Under the deal, which administration officials disclosed to The Associated Press ahead of an announcement scheduled for Friday, state and federal agencies will craft a blueprint for speeding regulatory review of proposed [wind farms](#) without sacrificing environmental and safety standards. The Great Lakes have no [offshore wind turbines](#), although a Cleveland partnership announced plans last year for a [demonstration project](#) that would place five to seven turbines in Lake Erie about 7 miles north of the city, generating 20-30 megawatts of electricity.

Offshore [wind projects](#) have been proposed elsewhere in the region, including Michigan and New York, stirring fierce debate.

Critics say they would ruin spectacular vistas, lower shoreline property values and harm birds and fish. New York Power Authority trustees last September abandoned a plan for private companies to place up to 200 turbines, each about 450 feet high, in lakes Erie and Ontario. The Canadian province of Ontario in February 2011 ordered a moratorium on [wind energy development](#) in its Great Lakes waters to allow more study of environmental issues.

Supporters describe the lakes' winds as a vast, untapped source of clean energy and economic growth.

"This agreement among federal agencies and Great Lakes states is a smart, practical way to encourage the development of homegrown energy that will create jobs, power homes and reduce pollution in American communities," said Nancy Sutley, chairwoman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

Administration officials said the region's offshore winds could generate more than 700 gigawatts - one-fifth of all potential wind energy nationwide. Each [gigawatt](#) of offshore wind could power 300,000 homes while reducing demand for electricity from coal, which emits greenhouse gases and other pollutants, according to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colo.

Public resistance and logistical problems would pose formidable obstacles to approaching those levels. Yet harnessing only a small portion of the Great Lakes' offshore wind could generate thousands of jobs, officials said.

Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New York and Pennsylvania signed the agreement. The other three states with Great Lakes coastlines - Indiana, Ohio and Wisconsin - declined invitations but could join the partnership later, an administration official said.

The agreement is modeled after another between the federal government and Eastern states designed to support wind energy production in the Atlantic and encourage investment in new offshore wind technology.

"This agreement will enable states to work together to ensure that any proposed offshore wind projects are reviewed in a consistent manner, and that the various state and federal agencies involved collaborate and coordinate their reviews," Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett said.

Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn said developing offshore [wind energy](#) would

"promote economic development and create jobs, while reducing our dependence on foreign energy sources."

Among 10 federal agencies taking part are the Pentagon, the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, NOAA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Developers would need state and federal approval to establish [offshore wind farms](#). State governments own the [Great Lakes](#) bottomlands within U.S. territory, while a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would be required to erect the turbines and all 10 federal agencies would review the plans.

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