

Research finds recreationists support offshore wind energy development

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From boat enthusiasts to anglers, researchers at the University of New Hampshire have found surprisingly widespread support for offshore wind energy development (OWD) among outdoor recreationists. Also unanticipated was the strong support across the entire political spectrum, from liberals to moderates and conservatives, with respondents seeing OWD as a positive impact upon their recreation experience.

"These findings are unique because most previous studies show that recreationists tend to oppose [energy](#) development on or near [public lands](#) and protected areas," said Michael Ferguson, assistant professor of [recreation](#) management and policy. "But most of the respondents in our research embraced the idea of offshore wind development. Besides the benefits of renewable energy, they saw it as a benefit to the entire community and region, creating tourism opportunities, and enhancing their own recreation experiences."

In the study, recently published in the *Journal of Great Lakes Research*, the researchers from UNH and Pennsylvania State University examined more closely factors influencing water-based recreationists' perceptions towards OWD in general on Lake Erie. As part of the study, respondents were asked questions about recreation frequency, OWD [support](#) and opposition, political orientation, and perceptions towards climate change. Of the 242 respondents, nearly one-half identified as boaters, with the remaining evenly split between beach users and anglers and all were largely repeat day trip visitors. The results of this study suggested significantly high levels of support for OWD among the water-based

outdoor recreationists at Lake Erie across the political spectrum.

"Offshore wind energy [development](#) has been slow to develop in the United States for various social, ecological, and political reasons," said Ferguson. "But our findings suggest that recreationists may be open to it and supportive of it."

Some examples cited for support include unique recreation and tourism attractions like boat tours to OWD sites, better fishing opportunities especially in areas that lack natural structures that would attract more fish (like rocks and reefs), and more job opportunities for everything from construction to tourism related businesses like rentals and restaurants.

More information: Michael D. Ferguson et al, Winds of change – Predicting water-based recreationists' support and opposition for offshore wind energy development in the Great Lakes, *Journal of Great Lakes Research* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jglr.2018.10.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jglr.2018.10.006)

Provided by University of New Hampshire

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