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GREEN OCEANS LEADS 35 CO-PLAINTIFFS IN LAWSUIT ALLEGING U.S. AGENCIES ILLEGALLY APPROVED OFFSHORE WIND PROJECTS

LITTLE COMPTON, R.I. – Rhode Island-based Green Oceans, a non-partisan, grassroots not-for-profit organization dedicated to protecting the ocean and the ecosystems it sustains, filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, alleging four federal agencies shortcut statutory and regulatory procedures and violated environmental protection laws by approving the South Fork and Revolution Wind projects. An additional 35 co-plaintiffs joined the litigation.

The suit alleges that the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and their respective administrative leaders, issued permits for the two projects on the critical marine habitat known as Coxes Ledge, despite the acknowledgment of serious irreversible harm and without adequate environmental impact studies. The lawsuit asks the court to invalidate the approvals for both projects until the government complies with all relevant statutes and regulations.

“In a rush to meet state mandates, we cannot short-circuit our country’s most important environmental and natural resource policies. This suit will ensure the federal government follows its own rules and regulations,” said Green Ocean’s Co-founder and President Dr. Elizabeth Quattrocki Knight.

Filed under the Administrative Procedure Act, the suit intends to prove that the federal agencies violated eight statutes, including the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Coastal Zone Management Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, Clean Water Act, and their associated regulatory programs.

GREEN OCEANS FEDERAL LAWSUIT
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The suit highlights the alarming scale of proposed offshore wind plans – up to 1,000 turbines, each towering over 870 feet high. The closest turbines will reside just 12.9 nautical miles from the Rhode Island coast. Collectively, the nine projects planned for the waters off the coast of Rhode Island represent the largest offshore development anywhere in the world. The Green Oceans suit alleges that BOEM did not adequately consider the cumulative impact of the entire lease area, a legal requirement. No geographic boundaries exist between the nine different projects planned for the 1,400 square miles of coastal waters between Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

“Marine mammals will not appreciate whether any given turbine belongs to one project or another. Legally, BOEM must evaluate the collective impact, not just each project in isolation,” Dr. Quattrocki Knight emphasized. The projects threaten to permanently alter the environmentally sensitive Coxes Ledge, one of the last remaining spawning grounds for Southern New England cod and an important habitat for the North Atlantic right whale and four other endangered whale species.

Barbara Chapman, a Green Oceans trustee, added, “Even people who support the concept of wind power understand the threat to sea life. On the official NOAA site, they have granted the developer of Revolution Wind, just one project of many, permission to harm and harass over 13,000 marine animals, including 568 whales, during the course of a single year. We do not consider 13,000 a small number.”

“BOEM admits the projects will have adverse impacts on the health of our fisheries, navigation safety, historic resources, the North Atlantic right whale, and environmental justice populations, while having no effect on climate change. Why accept this irreversible environmental damage for no overall gain?” questions Green Ocean’s Co-founder and Vice President, Bill Thompson.

Co-plaintiffs to the suit include the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance, Save Right Whales Coalition, New England Fishermen’s Stewardship Association, Bat World Sanctuary, three former Rhode Island Fisherman’s Advisory Board members, along with local and regional recreational fishermen, sailors, boaters, pilots, conservationists, residents, and leading members of the business community.

Green Oceans is a nonprofit, non-partisan group of community members dedicated to combating climate change without jeopardizing biodiversity or the health of the ocean. For more information or to get involved, visit: <https://green-oceans.org/>.