

Santa Lucia's New Climate & Clean Energy Committee

By Jim Miers and Alex Mintzer, Climate and Clean Energy Committee

Offshore wind farms, port infrastructure, and energy storage facilities are proposed for the SLO Coast. The Sierra Club has worked on offshore wind projects in other regions and our participation will help address potential impacts to the environment and coastal communities. We will also be evaluating how this may affect the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary. Put simply, because of [the dangerous threats to our coast from climate change](#), the Sierra Club supports offshore wind energy development if it is done right.

Sierra Club defers taking a position on individual renewable project proposals until the draft environmental impact report is issued and analyzed. The Club supports responsibly developed renewable energy projects and may suggest various ways to mitigate potential impacts. Projects are evaluated on a case-by-case basis by Sierra Club's network of chapters. Chapters collaborate closely with the national Club to decide on whether to support individual projects. Especially important to local projects is the [Renewable Energy Project Siting \(REPS\) Policy](#). The REPS policy makes the resources of the California and National Sierra Club organizations available to local Chapters. It requires a mutual consultation process dependent upon local political and environmental issues, project specifics, Club policy, and technical expertise.

Ensuring Equitable and Sustainable Coastal Renewable Energy Solutions

Santa Lucia Chapter promotes the socially and environmentally responsible development of proposed onshore battery storage and offshore wind generation projects along the SLO coast. It is our mission to advocate for the best interests of the ocean, wildlife, and local economies during the green energy transition. We will work alongside local and regional environmental, community-based groups, and meet with offshore wind companies to ensure that the interests of the affected communities are heard and issues with marine life and wildlife are addressed. We are dedicated to acting in accordance with the Sierra Club's principles of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Sierra Club actively seeks to communicate scientific information to the community to educate them about battery electric storage and offshore wind development. We seek to build strong, resilient working relationships with other community groups and organizations to ensure that we progress into a green future in a way that lets all voices be heard.

Join our clean energy movement!

If this mission excites you, please join us in our campaign to transition SLO County communities from polluting power generation to clean and renewable energy. For more information or to volunteer, contact the [Climate and Clean Energy Committee](#).

Offshore Wind

Offshore wind energy refers to the use of wind turbines in the ocean to generate electricity. A group of interconnected wind turbines is referred to as a wind farm. As the U.S. seeks to develop renewable, homegrown, and cost-effective energy sources, we've seen a surge in proposed offshore wind energy projects.

As of 2024, considering only offshore wind farms with 400 MW capacity, throughout the world there are 44 operating offshore wind farms, with 41 more under development and many more in the proposal stage. As this industry expands, it's essential to understand both the benefits and negative impacts offshore wind farms can have on our marine environment, coastal economies, and recreational use areas.

Port Infrastructure for Offshore Wind

There are three types of port terminals that will be needed to develop offshore wind.

- 1) Staging and Integration Ports (S&I Ports) - to receive, stage, store, assemble, and load out offshore wind components
- 2) Manufacturing/Fabrication Sites - receive raw materials and create components that are large and can only be transported on water
- 3) Operations and Maintenance Berths (O&M Berths) - these are smaller facilities that can be accommodated by existing ports and should be close to the wind farm.

The installation of the proposed wind farm off the coast of San Luis Obispo County will require at least one deep water S&I port. However, after considering the port improvements that would be necessary for S&I sites, recent port evaluation studies have determined the best sites to be Humboldt and Long Beach. Both Morro Bay and Port San Luis were rated as good candidates for O&M berths. Additional infrastructure studies are in progress.

The components of the very large offshore windmills can only be transported by ship because the blades are too large for surface transport. The components will be assembled and stood up at a port and then towed out to the wind farm site.

Coastal Energy Storage Projects

Several energy storage projects are being considered in SLO County. Currently, the only one actively seeking a permit is the proposed Vistra – Morro Bay Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) that would be located on the site of the closed Morro Bay Power Plant, near Morro Rock. [Here is a Vistra presentation](#) to the Morro Bay City Council in February 2021. In June 2021, the Morro Bay City Council approved a [binding Memorandum of Agreement](#) with Vistra to move the project forward. Vistra will need to seek additional approvals from the City of Morro Bay, San Luis Obispo County, the California Coastal Commission, and the California Independent System Operator (CAISO).

The Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Morro Bay BESS plant is currently being prepared. The Chapter is working with the National Sierra Club to collect background information needed to do a thorough evaluation of the DEIR when it comes out.