Offshore wind showed up big during the East Coast's brutal cold

America's two utility-scale offshore wind farms performed as well as gas power plants and better than coal in January — including during Winter Storm Fern.

By **Maria Gallucci** 12 February 2026

Bone-chilling cold and Arctic winds gripped the northeastern U.S. over the past few weeks, straining electricity systems and raising power prices as people cranked up their heat. Now, as the region finally starts to thaw, early data shows how America's offshore wind farms helped keep electricity flowing during the extreme-weather stretch.

The results demonstrate the bitter irony of the Trump administration's ongoing — and potentially unlawful — battle against U.S. offshore wind development. Federal officials are calling for additional fossil-fueled power to prevent future winter blackouts, all while trying to block the build-out of offshore wind, one of the most valuable resources for cold-climate coastal states.

"Performance data is showing in real time that offshore wind delivers reliable power when the grid needs it the most … at the scale this region and our country need," said Liz Burdock, president and CEO of Oceantic Network, which advocates for marine renewable energy sectors.

Burdock was speaking on Tuesday in New York City at the group's annual International Partnering Forum, where hundreds of offshore wind developers, policy experts, and labor leaders gathered to regroup following President Donald Trump's yearlong attacks on five in-progress offshore wind farms.

For years, independent energy experts have forecast that offshore wind could deliver substantial amounts of power to densely populated, land-constrained communities along America's east coast — particularly during winter cold spells, when demand for fossil gas exceeds supply. And grid operators in the region have been banking on offshore wind capacity to come online to meet the rising electricity needs of data centers and electrified homes and vehicles.

The data from January shows that the nation's two operating utility-scale offshore wind farms — South Fork Wind and Vineyard Wind — performed as well as gas-fired power plants and better than coal-fired facilities, including during last month's Winter Storm Fern, experts said at the event.

The 132-megawatt South Fork Wind farm, which delivers power to Long Island, New York, had a "capacity factor" of 52% last month. The metric reflects how much electricity the project actually generated compared with the maximum amount it could generate in a given period. That puts South Fork Wind on par with New York state's most efficient gas plants.

"The wind capacity in the Northeast is absolutely amazing, particularly over the winter," said Mikkel Mæhlisen, vice president of the Americas Generation division for Ørsted, which jointly owns South Fork Wind with Skyborn Renewables.

The 12-turbine project became America's first utility-scale offshore wind farm in 2024, when it started providing power to some 70,000 homes. Last winter, it was also a beacon of reliability, notching a 54% capacity factor between December 2024 and March 2025.

Vineyard Wind, meanwhile, can already produce as much as 600 MW of clean electricity off the coast of Massachusetts. The project, which is 95% complete, is one of the five offshore wind farms that were forced to halt construction late last year in response to Trump's stop-work orders, which cited ambiguous "national security" concerns. Federal judges have allowed all five projects to proceed as the developers' complaints move through the legal system.

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However, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum says the Trump administration plans to appeal those court rulings, Bloomberg reported on Wednesday.

During Winter Storm Fern, Vineyard Wind had a 75% capacity factor, Burdock said. Once fully operational, the project will deliver power at a price of $84.23 per megawatt-hour to the New England grid. That's markedly less than spot wholesale prices during the storm, which spiked to over $870 per MWh on Jan. 25.

Soaring gas prices and limited supplies pushed utilities in New England to fire up oil-burning power plants in order to avert blackouts, assets that are typically too expensive to justify running. The result will be even higher bills for the region's residents, who have historically faced some of the highest energy costs in the nation — in part because New England lacks

recoverable resources like oil and gas, said Katie Dykes, commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

Having a more diverse energy mix would help states reduce their reliance on firm, dispatchable, but also costly and dirty power plants during such challenging periods.

"Variable resources like wind and solar, when they're operating during these cold weather periods, they're actually helping to keep a lid on prices," Dykes said during a panel. "It means we can reduce the runtimes of those more expensive oil units. It also means that we can preserve the runtime of those [fossil] resources that are relying on stored fuel."

Proponents of America's nascent offshore wind industry said they're hopeful the five in-progress projects will be completed as planned. In New York, Ørsted's Sunrise Wind and Equinor's Empire Wind would together provide 1.7 gigawatts of new capacity — enough to meet more than 10% of the electricity needs in New York City and Long Island.

"The last few weeks have been extremely stressful," Gary Stephenson, a senior vice president for the Long Island Power Authority, said about the region's cold snap. The municipal utility, which serves 1.2 million customers, purchases power from South Fork Wind and will connect its grid to Sunrise Wind, which is expected to start operating in 2027.

"I really wish we had that Sunrise facility online. That would have taken so much pressure off the natural gas system," Stephenson said at the event. "So we're looking forward to that [coming online] towards the end of next year."

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