

NEWS RELEASE FOR RELEASE: February 7, 1996

CONTACT: Tom DeRocco (202) 208-3983

**MMS ANNOUNCES PROPOSED 5-YEAR OCS OIL AND GAS LEASING PROGRAM FOR 1997-2002**

The Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) today announced the Proposed 5-Year Program for oil and natural gas activities on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) for 1997-2002. The Proposed Program does not differ from the Draft Proposed Program, released in August 1995, which considered up to 16 lease sales in eight offshore planning areas.

"The Proposed Program reflects the input of all affected parties," said MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman. "We've been working with our constituents since November of 1994 when we published a Federal Register notice soliciting comments for the new five-year program. The fact that there were no changes to the draft program demonstrates the benefits of working extensively with affected parties.

"States, industry, the environmental community, and all other interested parties, including forums such as the Alaska Stakeholders Task Force, will continue to play a role in formulating the Final Program," said Quarterman.

MMS also announced the availability of the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which presents the results of environmental analyses of the Proposed Program. The Federal Register of February 9 will carry notices of the availability of the Proposed Program and the DEIS.

"The DEIS analyses include an option to hold an Atlantic OCS lease sale in 2000," said Quarterman "but it doesn't appear on the proposed schedule." Two additional alternatives in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico also are examined in the DEIS, according to Quarterman. The first alternative includes a sale in 2001 of an additional 384 deep water blocks in an expanded program area. The second alternative would add a sale in 1999 in the deep water blocks of the expanded program area.

"Although neither alternative was selected for the Proposed Program," stressed Quarterman, "they will be considered again in subsequent program decisions." The adequacy of the DEIS will be the subject of public hearings this spring, Quarterman said. "We're arranging for hearings in Houston, New Orleans and Mobile, Alabama, as well as Anchorage, Yakutat, Homer, Barrow and Kotzebue in Alaska. Specific dates, times and locations will be published as soon as arrangements are complete," she said. Comments on the Proposed Program and DEIS are due May 9, 1996.

Mail comments to: Minerals Management Service, 381 Elden Street, Herndon, VA 22070. Please include Mail Code 4430 for comments on the proposed program, and Mail Code 4320 for comments on the DEIS in the address. MMS will accept hand deliveries at

the Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, NW, Room 4227, Washington, DC. Envelopes or packages should be identified as "Comments on the Proposed 5-Year OCS Oil & Gas Leasing Program for 1997-2002," or "Comments on the 1997-2002 Oil & Gas Program Draft EIS."

MMS is the federal agency that manages the nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the OCS, and collects, accounts for, and disburses about \$4 billion yearly in revenues from federal offshore leases and federal and Indian onshore mineral leases.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The Proposed Program document, the nationwide list of libraries with copies of the DEIS, the February 9 Federal Register notices, and copies of this news release are available on MMS's home page on the Internet: {<http://www.mms.gov>}. Additional information on the availability of the DEIS follows: --Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Coasts contact: Regional Director, Gulf of Mexico Region, MMS, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, LA, (504) 736-2519; --Alaska contact: Regional Director, Alaska Region, MMS, 949 East 36th Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99503-4302, (907) 271-6438; --Pacific Coast contact: Regional Director, Pacific Region, MMS, 770 Paseo Camarillo, Camarillo, CA 93010, (805) 389-7520; --or by contacting Dick Wildermann, Chief, Environmental Projects Coordination Branch, MMS, 381 Elden Street, MS 4320, Herndon, VA 22070-4817, (703) 787-1674. Additional information on the availability of the Proposed Program may be obtained by contacting: Carol Hartgen, 5-Year Program Director, MMS (MS 4430) Room 1324, 381 Elden Street, Herndon, VA 22070 (703) 787-1185. SPECIAL INFORMATION FOR RELEASE: February 7, 1996 (Updated) CONTACT: Tom DeRocco (202) 208-3985

#### PREPARATION OF THE 5-YEAR OUTER CONTINENTAL SHELF (OCS) OIL AND GAS LEASING PROGRAM FOR 1997-2002

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) has set the following schedule for preparing the next 5-year program for 1997-2002. The schedule was developed to assure adequate opportunities for MMS to consult with constituents on the new program while allowing a timely and orderly transition from the current one. Date Step November 16, 1994 A Federal Register notice was published soliciting comments for developing the new 5-year program February 1, 1995 Comment period closed May 3, 1995 Received recommendations from Alaska Regional Stakeholders Task Force August 9, 1995 Issued Draft Proposed Program October 9, 1995 Comment period closed February 7, 1996 Issue Proposed Program and Draft EIS February 9, 1996 Federal Register notices published announcing the Proposed Program and Draft EIS May 9, 1996 Comment period closes August 1996 Issue Proposed Final Program and Final EIS(60-day waiting period) October 1996 Approve 5-year Program for July 1997-July 2002

BACKGROUND o The preparation of the 5-year program is a multi-staged process that can take from two to three years. It consists of five major steps:

- 1) Initial Solicitation of Comments and Information;
- 2) Draft Proposed Program released to the public for comment;
- 3) Proposed Program and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released to the public for comment;
- 4) Proposed Final Program and Final EIS submitted to the President and to Congress for review; and,
- 5) approval of the Final Program by the Secretary of the Interior.

o The process started with the November 16, 1994, Federal Register notice requesting comments and suggestions for preparing the new program and for information on issues and alternatives that should be analyzed in the programmatic EIS. The comment period was extended for a total duration of 77 days. More than 2,300 written responses were received from state and local governments, environmental groups, Alaska Natives, industry, and individuals. All input was considered in formulating the draft proposed program and will help to determine the scope of the EIS.

o MMS carefully considered the more than 90 comments received on the draft proposed program.

o The Alaska Regional Stakeholders Task Force was established to assist MMS in defining the Alaska Region elements of the new program; the Task Force presented findings and recommendations that were accepted by the OCS Policy Committee in May 1995. The Task Force report was endorsed by the Policy Committee and played a key role in program formulation. The Task force will continue to play a role in making recommendations for the final proposal.

o Before both the draft proposed program and the proposed program were issued, MMS conducted extensive outreach efforts nationwide to describe the overall 5-year program process, to discuss formulation of the draft proposal, and to continue the scoping of issues for the EIS.

o Similar outreach efforts are planned for the next step in the program preparation process, the development of the proposed final program. Efforts will include hearings on the draft EIS that will be conducted during the 90-day comment period in each OCS region affected by the proposed program.

o For further information contact Carol Hartgen, 5-Year Program Project Director, at (703) 787-1216.

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