



**U.S. Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Office of Public Affairs**

NEWS RELEASE

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**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR WILL NOT CONDUCT SAND AND GRAVEL
LEASE SALE OFFSHORE NEW JERSEY**

Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt today decided not to initiate preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or take any other steps toward conducting a commercial sand and gravel lease sale offshore northern New Jersey. This decision is in response to a request from a New Jersey company that the Department of Interior's Minerals Management Service begin the process toward conducting a competitive lease sale for sand and gravel resources in that area.

The MMS published a Request for Interest and Information (RFII) in the Federal Register on January 10, 2000, and asked the public and industry for written comments and indications of interest about the proposal. The comment period closed on April 10, 2000. The MMS held public meetings in Bradley Beach and Carteret, New Jersey, in February 2000, and participated in a public meeting in Long Branch, New Jersey, in March 2000. The MMS also received almost 800 written and e-mail comments from the public, industry, trade associations, labor unions, environmental organizations, fisheries associations, and various other entities.

While there were comments both favoring and disfavoring the proposal, the Secretary was impressed by the strong opposition to it from such disparate groups as commercial and recreational fishermen, residents of the potentially impacted communities, recreational user groups, public officials, environmental groups and diving organizations. Based on the volume, breadth and diversity of the objections raised by those in opposition to the proposal, and considering his responsibilities with regard to natural resources, he has decided not to initiate preparation of an EIS or take any other steps towards conducting a lease sale at this time.

"Such a proposed lease sale ought to be considered within a broader context of other existing environmental issues in the New York and New Jersey harbor area," said Babbitt. "That area's proud history as a port, a fishery, and a recreational mecca is challenged by diminishing wetlands, as well as dredge disposal, channel

widening, and other concerns. Perhaps, in the future, sand and gravel mining for commercial purposes could be revisited but only if it is consistent with an overall vision for the future of the New York and New Jersey harbor area, one that takes into account the cumulative impacts of all potential activities. I would encourage the Governors of the two states and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to work toward that end."

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

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MMS Internet website address: <http://www.boem.gov>

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