

The NewsRoom

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Oceans Managed Securely and Safely

How does one of the smallest and youngest agencies in the federal government oversee 2 billion acres of ocean land? The answer is as serious as our nation's economic future and as complex as the mineral resources and marine animals that we protect. Through extensive research and safe operation programs, the Minerals Management Service works to provide a secure energy future for America and protect the environment. As you will see in this article, MMS is performing many important and vital tasks to protect and preserve our ocean environment.

MMS's efforts include finding better ways to ensure safe operations for the thousands of offshore oil and gas platforms, to conducting essential environmental studies using cutting edge technology.

In addition to providing access to critical energy and other mineral resources needed for the nation's economic well-being, MMS also collects and disburses around \$6 billion a year in mineral revenues--\$135 billion since 1982.

With all that activity, the MMS has, for the past 22 years, helped provide America with domestic offshore energy while ensuring safe operations for people and the environment. And it has done so with stringent regulation of this vital offshore industry.

Offshore oil production now accounts for about 30 percent of total domestic production – more than double what it was just 12 years ago. And experts estimate it may increase to as much as 40 percent by 2010.

With national security interests in mind, MMS is aggressively leading the way, with industry, to help find new domestic deposits of oil and natural gas in the Gulf of Mexico and off Alaska.

Director Johnnie Burton said, "With an eye on the future, we are not only actively involved in finding needed energy for the American people but are also considering alternative sources of energy, like harnessing energy from offshore wind farms, and looking at ways to extract natural gas from deepwater methane hydrates."

Energy exploration in deep water is perhaps the most significant area of innovation in energy exploration. Now in its ninth year of expansion, deepwater oil and gas development in the Gulf of Mexico is a workhorse for U.S. domestic oil and gas production. Ocean oil production rose 535 percent between 1995 and 2002, and deepwater gas production rose 620 percent over those same years.

If current trends continue, by 2006, as much as 77 percent of daily oil production in the gulf and 26 percent of daily gas production could come from the deep water regions.

MMS has a long tradition in keeping a watchful eye on the marine environment.

For years the agency has funded important studies to gain a better understanding of that environment in order to make safe and responsible leasing decisions.

MMS' Offshore Energy and Minerals Management (OEMM) program is responsible for all phases of mineral resource management on the OCS. Under this umbrella is the Environmental Studies Program, which provides the scientific information necessary to make sound decisions pertaining to our ocean role.

"Our scientists coordinate oceanographic research involving underwater archaeology, ocean currents, sea ice conditions in Alaska, deep-sea chemosynthetic communities, marine mammals, and the potential use of retired offshore platforms as sites for harvesting marine bioproducts," says Jim Kendall, Chief Scientist for the agency.

At the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History, diligent staff catalogue and store millions of specimens sent to them by MMS supported scientists. Many of the research projects that MMS supports involve the collection of organisms, ranging from tiny shrimp to fist-sized mollusks. The reason: Before exploratory drilling in new "frontier areas" begins, MMS must determine if unique or fragile communities live in the areas, and if these communities could be harmed by offshore oil and natural gas development.

Along with the agency's regulatory arm, is an ocean science program that has funded over \$650 million in environmental studies over the last 20 years, and about \$17 million for its Technology Assessment and Research Program.

The agency's research activities have funded significant findings in marine research on marine mammal distribution, abundance, and behavior and the potential effects of human activity on their habitat. The agency prepares essential environmental assessments and impact statements, and works with coastal universities to gather needed scientific information used to make responsible offshore leasing decisions.

Coastal areas account for less than 10 percent of America's land area, but are home to half the population, and 40 percent of new commercial and residential development. The population explosion is only part of the new environmental stresses being put on the nation's coastal areas, which are under constant assault from the elements. Proactive management and coastal restoration efforts like the MMS beach replenishment partnership program are critical to stabilizing these receding shorelines.

MMS collects and provides geologic and environmental information, developed through partnerships with fourteen coastal States, to identify and make available sand deposits in Federal waters suitable for beach nourishment and wetlands protection projects. Information collected in conjunction with these efforts assists the MMS in making future decisions relative to the possible leasing of these deposits.

In the complex world of managing oil and gas exploration and development on the nation's OCS, MMS is carrying out its mission by employing the best scientists, funding far reaching studies, and ensuring that the highest safety standards are met so that America gets its needed energy.

“We are convinced that offshore oil and gas development, supported by a strong federal regulatory system, will continue to play an important role in securing a safe and dependable energy supply for our nation,” said Burton.

MMS, part of the U.S. Department of the Interior, oversees 1.76 billion acres of the Outer Continental Shelf, managing offshore energy and minerals while protecting the human, marine, and coastal environments through advanced science and technology research. The OCS provides 30 percent of oil and 23 percent of natural gas produced domestically, and sand used for coastal restoration. MMS collects, accounts for, and disburses mineral revenues from Federal and American Indian lands, with fiscal year 2004 disbursements of around \$8 billion and more than \$143 billion since 1982. The Land and Water Conservation Fund, which pays for acquisition of state and federal park and recreation land, gets nearly \$1 billion a year.

Relevant Web Sites:

[BOEM Website](#)

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[MMS: Securing Ocean Energy & Economic Value for America](#)
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