

**The NewsRoom**

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**MMS Awards \$5.5 Million to Study Gulf's Loop Current**

**NEW ORLEANS** – The Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) has awarded a \$5.5 million contract to Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to conduct a major study of the Gulf of Mexico Loop Current. The Loop Current, which forms the upstream portion of the Gulf Stream, is the Gulf's principal ocean current which transports energy, mass, heat, momentum and salt from the eastern to the western half of the Gulf.

The five-year study will focus on learning more about the dynamics of the Loop Current in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico through observations and numerical modeling. The findings of the study will help MMS fulfill its regulatory mission by providing information on how energetic currents may interrupt oil production and change or affect the movement of oil spills, including natural seeps from the ocean floor. Human activities in the Gulf of Mexico and its coastal areas can also be made safer with an increased understanding of the Loop Current.

"We are very excited to have initiated this ground-breaking study," said MMS Director Randall Luthi. "MMS has spent \$800 million over 25 years on environmental studies. The wealth of knowledge that MMS scientists will discover during this study will greatly aid MMS in securing our nation's energy resources in an environmentally responsible manner for future generations."

Nine moorings, or anchored lines, will be placed in the Gulf waters for approximately 30 months. The instruments attached to the moorings will measure current strength, water temperature and salinity levels.

Scientists from the Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Lab (AOML) will join SAIC to study the thermal structure of the Loop Current and hope to use this data to more accurately forecast the intensification of hurricanes entering the Gulf of Mexico. In addition, scientists from Princeton University, the University of Rhode Island, and the University of Colorado are part of the SAIC team to carry out the state of the art modeling, deep ocean circulation field observations and the remote sensing observations for this study.

All data from this study will be submitted to the National Oceanographic Data Center and made available to other agencies and research groups, including the National Hurricane Center, the U.S. Navy and the oil and gas industry.

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