

OVERVIEW

The Marine Protected Species Program within the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement's Environmental Compliance Program uses science-based information to develop and enforce monitoring and mitigation measures that protect animals and their critical habitats during offshore energy and marine mineral operations.

BACKGROUND

Marine mineral and offshore conventional and renewable energy activities on the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, Pacific, and Alaska Outer Continental Shelf present several potential risks to protected species and habitats.

For example, oil and gas operators use air guns during seismic surveys to gather information on undersea geology and oil and gas reserves. The air guns generate loud, acoustic waves and may impact marine wildlife, including mammals and sea turtles.

Activities such as seismic surveys, pile-driving during construction, and vessel traffic increase the need for protected species monitoring and mitigations. Underwater noise from these activities is of particular concern to marine mammals as they use sound to communicate, navigate, and detect predators and prey.

Marine protected species include animals protected under the Endangered Species Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. OCS



protected species include over 100 species of fish, sea turtles, cetaceans (dolphins and whales), pinnipeds (seals and sea lions), sea otters and even polar bears. Species whose coastal habitats are protected by ESA include manatees, red knots, least terns, beach mice and sea turtles.

The ESA and MMPA provide frameworks for using current scientific knowledge to identify the risks posed to species and their habitats by OCS operations. They also provide guidelines for developing measures to minimize those risks.

Trained protected species observers monitor for marine wildlife visually, and by listening to sounds in the water using passive acoustics, during seismic surveys and explosive removals of offshore structures. This minimizes the chances that an animal will venture into the impact zone during active operations.

ECP advances the BSEE mission to protect the environment through vigorous regulatory oversight and enforcement.



BSEE PROTECTED SPECIES PROGRAM

Protected species ecologists in BSEE's ECP work with staff from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop, implement, and enforce monitoring and mitigation measures that minimize harm and adverse impacts to protected species and their habitats on the federal OCS and along coasts.

Mitigations are developed into requirements for leases, plans, and permits as conditions of approval. BSEE works with BOEM to develop mitigation measures per the National Environmental Policy Act, incorporating information derived from biological assessments, biological opinions, and other science-based information as required by the ESA and MMPA.

BSEE's protected species ecologists also conduct a variety of reviews and inspections to ensure offshore operators comply with all required environmental laws, regulations, and protective mitigations. This includes reviewing reports from protected species observers and post-activity submittals.

As renewable energy operations expand throughout the OCS, and new activities pose potential risks to marine animals and habitats, BSEE protected species ecologists continue to coordinate with other regulators and scientists to provide feedback and adaptive management recommendations to improve the effectiveness of protected species mitigations and regulations.

If you have any questions please visit our BSEE Protected Species webpage or contact us at ProtectedSpecies@BSEE.gov.

The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, established in 2011, is a U.S. Department of the Interior agency. BSEE promotes worker safety, environmental protection and conservation of resources through regulatory oversight and enforcement of the offshore energy industry on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf.

