

BOEM ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES PROGRAM: ONGOING STUDIES

BOEM OCS Region: [Gulf of Mexico](#)

Planning Area: Gulfwide

Title: Seismic Survey Mitigation Measures and Marine Mammal Observer Reports (GM-08-02)

Total Cost: \$150,000

Period of Performance: FY 2008-2012

Conducting Organization: GeoCet Group, LLC

BOEM Contact: [Dr. Deborah Epperson](#)

Description:

Background: As a result of the 2002 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Biological Opinion for Lease Sale 184 (western planning area), Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEM) implemented a seismic survey mitigation measures Notice to Lessees (NTL). This initial NTL (2002-G07) has subsequently been updated (2003-G08; 2004-G01; 2007-G02) and expanded to include a variety of mitigations and reporting requirements. These measures apply to all on-lease surveys conducted under 30 CFR 250 and all off-lease surveys conducted under 30 CFR 251. Seismic operators in the Gulf of Mexico (GOM) are required to submit reports on the 1st and 15th of each month. Reporting requirements include an observer effort report, survey reports and sightings report. These reports are sent electronically to BOEM through a protected species mailbox (protectedspecies@bsee.gov) which is monitored by a protected species biologist in the Leasing and Environment (LE) section. As part of the original Biological Opinion that resulted in the seismic survey observer program, NMFS also required that an annual report be submitted documenting all sightings of sperm whales and sea turtles, the species likely to be sighted currently listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). As a result, BOEM now has considerable data from the observer program and is in a position to evaluate existing mitigations and their effectiveness. These data would be timely for both BOEM and NMFS as we proceed through the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) rulemaking process.

Objectives: The purpose of this study is to summarize and synthesize submitted seismic survey observer reports for the years 2002-2008. After synthesis of these data, recommendations will be made as to the effectiveness of required mitigation measures, as well as suggestions for new and/or improved mitigations.

Methods: Due to the proprietary nature of the reports, this analysis will require close coordination with LE personnel. Working with existing spreadsheets and data, a separate analysis of all three reports (observer effort, survey, and sightings) will be completed. Characterizations of seismic activity levels, species occurrence and behavior, and observer effort are among the types of data that will be analyzed. Additional details about the types of data collected for each report can be found in the latest JOINT NTL

2012-G02-. <http://www.boem.gov/Regulations/Notices-To-Lessees/2012/2012-JOINT-G02-pdf.aspx>

Products: Final report and journal publication.

Importance to BOEM: This study will provide information about the existing seismic survey mitigation program. By a thorough review of all reporting received since the inception of the program in 2002, BOEM will be able to quantify many facets of the program and evaluate its effectiveness. In addition, received data on geophysical activities in the GOM can be compared with projected estimates used in NEPA documents. These data will provide much needed information to both BOEM and NMFS for MMPA and ESA consultations.

Current Status: Final report is in review.

Final Report Due: April 2012

Publications: none

Affiliated WWW Sites: none

Revised date: March 2012

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