

BOEM ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES PROGRAM: Ongoing Studies

Region: Pacific Region

Planning Area(s): Southern California

Title: Pacific Regional Intertidal Sampling and Monitoring (PRISM) Study

BOEM Information Need(s) to be Addressed: The information collected through the direct monitoring of rocky intertidal shores by BOEM staff will be used to determine the effects of OCS oil and gas operations, including those from accidental oil spills, on the nearby shoreline habitats.

Total BOEM Cost: \$100,000

Period of Performance: FY 2011-2015

Conducting Organization: BOEM Pacific Region. This study is conducted with in-house biologists.

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Description:

Background: OCS platforms offshore California are located in close proximity to the shoreline where important biological resources are present. Activities from offshore oil and gas drilling have the potential to directly affect these shoreline habitats, especially in the event of an accidental oil spill. The OCS Lands Act states in 43 U.S.C 1345 Section 20 (3)b that “*Subsequent to the leasing and developing of any area or region, the Secretary shall...monitor the human, marine, and coastal environments of such area or region in a manner designed to provide time-series and data trend information which can be used for comparison with any previously collected data for the purpose of identifying any significant changes in the quality and productivity of such environments, for establishing trends in the areas studied and monitored...*” This study is designed to monitor shorelines across the four counties that border producing OCS oil and gas facilities. The BOEM PRISM team (formerly the MMS Intertidal Team or MINT) is one of twelve monitoring teams which collect the data for the Multi-Agency Rocky Intertidal Network (MARINe) rocky intertidal monitoring at over 120 established sites. However, importantly, in addition to the biannual monitoring of established rocky intertidal sites, PRISM staff design and implement individual studies of associated resources to answer questions identified in the field during this monitoring, and to support the overall BOEM mission. The monitoring work in this study was initiated in 1991. PRISM presence in the field has the added benefit of interacting with the public during monitoring and provides BOEM with the opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to the environment in a visible manner.

Objectives: This study has three objectives. The first objective is to collect data in the field monitor the shoreline adjacent to existing oil and gas operations, collecting data about natural and anthropogenic perturbations in the rocky intertidal habitat, so that BOEM has the basis to determine effects from our operations, including those from an accidental oil spill. The second objective accomplished by this study is to improve our understanding of the effects of OCS activities through the direct study by BOEM staff in field studies designed to further understand effects on shoreline habitats. Lastly, this study fulfills our commitment to participate

in the Cooperative Agreement with the University of California for MARINe. BOEM funds a separate study for the monitoring, analysis and publication of these data and management of the MARINe Network which spans two coastlines. Federal participation is a requirement of Cooperative Agreements with the State.

Methods: There are several tasks included in this study. The first task, biannual monitoring, remains the same throughout the five-year program. An additional 4-6 tasks will be identified at the beginning of the fiscal year in an annual plan which is reviewed and approved by the region and headquarters. These additional tasks are either special short-term studies designed by staff to answer specific questions, or efforts which support the monitoring task (e.g., updating maps, archiving specimens, etc.)

For the monitoring task, PRISM biologists collect data each fall and spring at a majority of the 24 sites established in each of four counties bordering oil and gas platforms. PRISM biologists work directly with the University biologists and provide support where the need is greatest. Individual staff average completion of 8-12 sites/5-10 field days each year. Fixed replicate plots of barnacles, mussels, turf algae, rockweeds and anemones are photographed for determination of percent cover. Barnacle recruitment is counted in the field using magnification. Seastars and black abalone are measured and counted in irregular plots. Owl limpets are counted and measured in circular plots with a 1 meter diameter. Percent cover of surfgrass and associated species is estimated along line transects. Poached species such as *Postelsia* are counted where they occur. Motile invertebrates (snails, crabs, chitons, limpets) are counted systematically in subsamples of existing photoplots. Data is collected in the field by PRISM biologists and sent to the University for analysis.

Examples of the range of topics pursued by the PRISM team include testing new protocols, developing archiving protocols, analyzing data from special studies, devising new field mapping efforts and developing rapid shoreline field response protocols.

Current Status: PRISM biologists completed Fall 2011 sampling and will be conducting 2012 spring sampling the spring monitoring, which includes motile invertebrate plots.

Final Report Date: October 2015.

Affiliated WWW Sites: <http://www.BOEM.gov/omm/pacific/enviro/prism.htm>

Revised Date: April 18, 2012