

BOEMRE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES PROGRAM: ONGOING STUDIES

Region: Pacific

Planning Area: Northern California, Oregon/Washington

Title: Marine Mammal and Seabird Surveys of Potential Renewable Energy Sites Offshore Northern California, Oregon, and Washington (PC-10-05)

Total Cost: \$1,700,000

Period of Performance: FY 2010-2013

Conducting Organization: USGS Western Region Ecological Research Center

BOEMRE Contact: Greg Sanders

Description:

Background: BOEMRE funded seabird surveys offshore central and northern California in 1980-1983 (MMS 84-0043) and marine mammal/seabird surveys offshore Oregon and Washington in 1989-1990 (MMS 91-0093). While these surveys provide a good foundation of information for the area, they may be limited by potential shifts of species' distribution and abundance that may have occurred over the past two decades. The proposed study would review and refine the methodology used in earlier studies to provide up-to-date information and establish a more robust longitudinal data set from which to draw on for environmental analyses.

The Pacific Region is now updating its "Summary of Knowledge" (SOK) for northern California, Oregon, and southern Washington (completion date 12/2009). The SOK will help us identify data gaps and researchers active in this area. Data collected by other survey efforts will be evaluated to ensure that new surveys complement earlier studies and avoid duplication of effort. In many cases, past studies have focused fine scale data collection on areas not being considered for renewable energy development (e.g. Marine Sanctuaries and other marine protected areas). This survey effort will focus on offshore areas suitable for renewable energy development.

Objectives: Objectives of this study would include:

1. Review and refinement of methodologies used for previous marine mammal/seabird surveys;
2. Monthly field surveys (aerial) offshore northern California, Oregon, and southern Washington over an 24-month period;
3. Assessment, analysis, and comparison of data collected with other sources of survey data;
4. Characterization of the current marine mammal/seabird composition, distribution, abundance, seasonal variation and habitat use within the survey area; and,
5. Publication of report(s) on the findings of the surveys and data analysis.

Methods: Survey methodologies used in previous BOEMRE studies and other survey efforts would be reviewed and modified, as necessary, to account for new technologies and equipment availability. Available funding would likely limit the field effort to

monthly aerial surveys along prescribed transect lines, supplemented by other sources of aerial/shipboard data as available.

Importance to BOEMRE: BOEMRE is considering renewable energy proposals offshore northern California, Oregon, and southern Washington. This study will provide up-to-date information on species composition, distribution, abundance, seasonal variation, and habitat utilization of marine mammals and seabirds along this section of coast. Data generated will be used for overall evaluation of proposed renewable energy sites and environmental review of specific project proposals received by BOEMRE.

Current Status: Awarded July, 2010

Final Report: January 31, 2014

Publications:

Affiliated WWW Sites:

Revised date: December, 2010