



U.S. Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region



FOR RELEASE:

July 29, 1999

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**MMS Releases Report on Scientific Study of
"Live Bottom" Habitat Communities
on the Northeastern Gulf of Mexico Seafloor**

The Gulf of Mexico OCS Region of Minerals Management Service (MMS) has just released a new scientific report on the "live bottom" habitat communities on the floor of the northeastern Gulf of Mexico. *Ecology of Live Bottom Habitats of the Northeastern Gulf of Mexico: A Community Profile* (OCS Study MMS 99-0004) summarizes available information on studies of the ecology of live bottom communities between the Mississippi River Delta in Louisiana and Cape San Blas in Florida. The study area extended from the coastline out to the point where the Gulf is approximately 200 meters (660 feet) deep. This information allows scientists to develop a picture of living biological resources and serves as reference material for both research and resource management interest.

The term "live bottom" is used to refer to the biological assemblages attached to hard substrates found interspersed between sand and mud bottoms of the continental shelf. These assemblages often consist of colorful sponges, corals, sea whips, and sea fans rising from the benthic environment. Some of these features have extensive vertical relief rising far into the water column and serving as a reefal habitat for numerous commercially and recreationally important fish species. Most of the investigations of offshore live bottoms originated from fisheries investigations.

The continental shelf off Mississippi, Alabama, and northwest Florida is important as a multiple use area for commerce, fisheries harvest, recreation, and other activities including oil and gas exploration and development. The petroleum industry's interest in the area has brought the need for effective resource management policy into focus. An understanding of the biological communities present and the dominant environmental processes affecting them is critical to managing this valuable resource.

Copies of the study report are available from the Public Information Office, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, Minerals Management Service, 1201 Elmwood Park Blvd., New Orleans, LA 70123. Credit card orders may be placed by dialing 1-800-200-GULF, or by faxing (504) 736-2620.

MMS is the Federal Agency that manages the Nation's oil and gas and other mineral resources on the OCS and collects, accounts for, and last year disbursed about \$6 billion in revenues from Federal offshore mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on Federal and Indian lands.

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