



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



FOR RELEASE:

December 1999

**Minerals Management Service
To Prepare an Environmental Assessment
for Proposed Federal Oil and Gas Lease Sale 177 in the Western Gulf of Mexico**

Background

A single Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared for all four Western Gulf of Mexico Planning Area (WPA) sales scheduled in the current 5-Year Program (MMS 98-0008). Although the EIS addressed four proposed sale actions, only one sale decision will be made each year. The EIS served as a decision document for Sale 171, which was held on August 26, 1998. One Call for Information and Interest and Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS was issued at the beginning of the multisale prelease process to explain the multisale approach. Additionally, only one Area Identification (Area ID) was prepared to cover the 4-year period. The Area ID described the sales' geographical area, the proposed actions, and alternatives for the four scheduled WPA sales. Sale-specific notices will be done as usual, except that the proposed notices will be published after completion of the final NEPA document for each sale.

Action

The Minerals Management Service (MMS) has published an announcement to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) for proposed WPA oil and gas Lease Sale 177. The sale included in this action is tentatively scheduled for August 2000. The EA Notice was published in the December 16, 1999, issue of the *Federal Register*. The proposed action analyzed in the EA will be Proposed Lease Sale 177 (scheduled for August 2000) for the WPA.

The purpose of this EA will be to reexamine the potential environmental effects of the proposal and alternatives based on any new information regarding potential impacts and issues that was not available at the time the Final EIS was prepared. Consideration of the EA and any comments received in response to the Information Request will result in either a Finding of No New Significant Impact or the determination that the preparation of a Supplemental EIS is warranted.

Comments regarding the proposed lease sale or the EA should be received within 30 days following the publication date in the *Federal Register*, i.e., no later than January 18, 2000. Responses may be sent by FAX to (504) 736-2407 or mailed to the following address:

Minerals Management Service
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region
Office of Leasing and Environment
Attention: Regional Supervisor (MS 5410)
1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard
New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394

Specific information on the Environmental Assessment may be obtained from Mr. George Hampton at (504) 736-2465. Specific information on the proposed lease sale may be obtained from Mr. Charles Hill at (504) 736-2795.

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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