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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MMS to Evaluate North Aleutian Basin for OCS Lease Sale

Anchorage, Alaska-- The Minerals Management Service (MMS) today issued a Call for Information and a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Lease Sale 214 in the North Aleutian Basin Planning Area proposed for 2011 under the 2007-2012 Oil and Gas Outer Continental Shelf Leasing Program.

The Call for Information and the Notice of Intent, which begins the information-gathering and scoping process, are the first steps in the potential leasing and National Environmental Policy Act evaluation processes. This action is to gather information and does not indicate a preliminary decision to lease in this area. It provides an opportunity for the public, industry, and state officials to offer comments and suggestions about the potential lease sale, to identify environmental concerns and other uses of the area that may be affected by the leasing, and to propose possible alternatives, lease terms, and mitigation measures.

When MMS issued its 5 Year Leasing Program in 2007 it scheduled the potential sale late in the program to allow sufficient time to supplement existing environmental information and to collect new environmental data.

“With this step MMS begins a more formal information gathering process and continues our process of consulting with local villages, interest groups, including environmental groups, and industry,” said MMS Director Randall Luthi . “We encourage all groups to provide extensive comments and information so that we can have a comprehensive and thorough assessment of issues and concerns.”

The Call area is believed to be gas-prone and is located offshore the State of Alaska in the North Aleutian Basin Planning Area in the southeastern Bering Sea and covers about 5.6 million acres.

MMS has taken many steps to gather information already for the consideration of this potential sale. MMS sponsored the North Aleutian Basin Information Status and Research Planning Meeting in 2006 to gather input from stakeholders and identify needed research and monitoring activities related to potential energy development in the North Aleutian Basin. Subsequently, MMS recently published a Report of the Proceedings and a synthesis of the Literature and Information related to the Natural Resources of the North Aleutian Basin. About 600 new sources of information were noted. The document can be found at http://www.mms.gov/alaska/reports/2007rpts/2007_066.pdf

With the assistance of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, MMS has contracted with Rutgers University to modify an ice-ocean circulation model for Alaska's Bristol Bay. The contract consists of adapting an existing ice-ocean circulation model of the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska to the specific oceanographic conditions within Alaska's Bristol Bay. This study will aid in determining the necessary actions to protect this area. Rutgers will use the Regional Ocean Modeling System (ROMS), which has a significant peer-reviewed record of use in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea. The modeling study began in the fall of 2007 and will continue for two years.

MMS and the National Marine Mammal Laboratory of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are collaborating to study the distribution, relative abundance, and habitat use of the endangered North Pacific right whales in the Bering Sea, north of the Aleutian Islands. The \$5 million research program began in the summer of 2007 and will continue over the following three-and-one-half years. MMS is planning to begin three new studies in FY08 that will focus on subsistence activities, salmon life cycles, and juvenile fish and the settling behavior of the red king crab. Other studies will include a wide variety of seabirds and waterfowl including critical habitat for the federally listed Steller's eider. It is anticipated that FY09 will also include additional new study efforts by MMS.

Over the past 30 years, MMS has funded nearly \$300 million for environmental studies related to Alaska waters. Since 2000, we have had 30 – 40 active environmental studies each year offshore Alaska, totaling over \$45 million. Eleven more studies have been commissioned this year.

Comments may be sent to: MMS Alaska OCS Region
Attn: Sale 214 CALL
3801 Centerpoint Drive, Suite 500
Anchorage, AK 99503-5823

or submitted via e-mail to akeis@mms.gov. Please call MMS at 907-334-5208 or toll-free at 1-800-764-2627 if you have additional questions.

Relevant Website: www.mms.gov/alaska

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