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MMS ANNOUNCES AREA IDENTIFICATION FOR BEAUFORT SEA SALE 144 (#40074)

The U. S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) has announced the area to be studied for possible inclusion in the next federal Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) lease sale offshore Alaska's northern coast in the Beaufort Sea. Sale 144, a part of the 1992-97 Outer Continental Shelf Natural Gas and Oil Resource Management Program, is tentatively scheduled to be held in early 1997.

The area includes 1,879 blocks encompassing about 9.8 million acres. The area is located 3 to 140 miles off Alaska's arctic coast in water depths ranging from 7 to 10,000 feet although a majority of the area is less than 300 feet deep. The area is considered to hold substantial reserves of oil. Areas around Barrow that are known to be subsistence hunting areas have been excluded.

The MMS has conducted 281 environmental, social, and economic studies about the effects of offshore petroleum exploration on the human and marine environment. Of these, 62 are exclusive to the Beaufort Sea Planning Area. MMS has spent more than \$16 million on studies exclusive to the area since the mid-1970s.

A draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to be prepared by MMS will discuss the proposals for oil and gas leasing in the Beaufort Sea. The draft EIS is scheduled for completion in 1995.

There have been five sales in the area: Sale BF, held December 11, 1979; Sale 71, held October 31, 1982; Sale 87, held August 22, 1984; Sale 97, held March 16, 1988; and Sale 124, held June 26, 1991. The MMS has issued 631 leases in the Beaufort Sea; 133 remain as active leases. Lessees have drilled 28 exploratory wells. Nine leases were determined by MMS to be producible although none are currently considered economically feasible.

MMS officials also announced that a \$387,802 contract has been awarded to Western Atlas International, Inc., of Houston. The

contract is for geological and geophysical data from state and federal OCS waters in the sale area. The data will be used in evaluating and preparing for the proposed sale, and for future possible Beaufort Sea sales.

Copies of the Area Identification map for Sale 144 are available from the MMS Library in Anchorage, or by writing to the Minerals Management Service at 949 East 36th Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska, 99508-4302. Copies may also be obtained by calling (800) 764-2627.

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AREA IDENTIFICATION SALE 144, BEAUFORT SEA

The U.S. Department of the Interior recently selected the area for proposed Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas lease Sale 144, Beaufort Sea, to be analyzed in an environmental impact statement (EIS). This action constitutes the administrative prelease step referred to as Area Identification. This fact sheet contains a description of the area to be analyzed, as well as background information relevant to the proposed sale. A description of the prelease process for the proposed sale also is provided.

BACKGROUND

- * There have been five sales in the area: Sale BF, held December 11, 1979; Sale 71, held October 31, 1982; Sale 87, held August 22, 1984; Sale 97, held March 16, 1988; and Sale 124, held June 26, 1991.
- * The MMS has issued 631 leases in the Beaufort Sea, 133 of which remain as active leases.
- * Lessees have drilled 28 exploratory wells. Nine leases were determined by MMS to be producible although none are currently considered economically feasible.
- * All wells have been permanently plugged and abandoned.

EVENTS LEADING TO AREA IDENTIFICATION

- * Sale 144 appears on the 1992-1997 Five-Year Program.
- * A Call for Information and Nominations was published in the Federal Register on December 10, 1993.
- * Five companies responded to the Call indicating specific areas of interest.

- * General comments were received from: other federal agencies, the State of Alaska, the North Slope Borough, the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, the Wilderness Society, and Greenpeace.

AREA IDENTIFIED

- * The area includes 1,879 blocks encompassing about 9.8 million acres.
- * The area is located 3 to 140 miles off Alaska's arctic coast in water depths ranging from 7 to 10,000 feet although a majority of the area is less than 300 feet deep.
- * The MMS has conducted 281 environmental, social, and economic studies about the effects of offshore petroleum exploration on the human and marine environment. Of these, 62 are exclusive to the Beaufort Sea Planning Area.

ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

The process of identifying issues to be discussed in the EIS was initiated by the publication in the Federal Register of the Call for Information and Nominations and the Notice of Intent to Prepare An EIS. The Alaska OCS Region will review information provided in response to the Call for Information for the proposed sale. Scoping meetings were conducted in Nuiqsut, Kaktovik, and Barrow, and Anchorage, Alaska in preparation for Sale 144, and written comments were due 45 days after the Call was published in the Federal Register.

FURTHER ACTIONS REGARDING THE PROPOSED SALE

The potential effects of leasing in the area identified will undergo extensive environmental analysis in the EIS. Comments received on the Call for Information and Nominations and the Notice of Intent, and during the EIS scoping process, will be used with existing environmental data to develop alternatives to the proposed action and to design appropriate mitigating measures.

- * After a draft EIS and proposed Notice of Sale is issued in 1995, public hearings will be held. Comments received will be used to develop the final EIS which is planned

for release in mid 1996.

- * A decision whether to issue a Notice of Sale will be made in late 1996.

The proposed Notice of Sale will present a proposed decision on blocks to offer; what special mitigating measures will be used to protect human, coastal, and marine resources in the area offered; and other conditions and terms that will apply to the leases. The Governor of Alaska will be asked for his recommendations on the size, timing and location of the proposed sale. The final Notice of Sale will be issued at least 30 days before bids are opened.

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Subject: PR-10/3/94 Sale 144/MMS Announces Area Identification of Beaufort Sea Sale 144 (#40074)