

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Office of Communications**

For Release: April 25, 1996

Contact: Tom DeRocco - (202) 208-3983, Barry Congden - (504) 736-2595

MMS Joins Cooperative Effort To Prepare Louisiana Barrier Shoreline EIS

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS), in cooperation with the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and Louisiana's Department of Natural Resources (LDNR), is preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) to evaluate potential impacts of renourishing and restoring some of Louisiana's most severely eroded barrier islands.

The three agencies recently signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that outlines each agency's respective role in the 20-month EIS process and entered into a cooperative agreement with Louisiana State University to carry out the project.

"The Louisiana's coast is the fastest eroding coast in the Nation. Their barrier islands serve as important buffers to the wave action and salt water intrusion of ocean storms on the fragile wetland habitats commonly found behind the islands," said MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman.

"MMS, NMFS, and LDNR are committed to fully evaluating the environmental impacts of undertaking a large-scale barrier island restoration effort along the Louisiana coast," said Quarterman. "This EIS will provide the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act Task Force with a solid environmental foundation for decision-making regarding the funding of potential large-scale renourishment and restoration projects," she said. The task force, made up of federal and state participants, was created about three years ago by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act (CWPPRA), a law designed to mitigate coastal wetland losses.

CWPPRA is funding the wetlands restoration efforts, which include: using offshore sand as renourishment material, dune building, vegetation planting, and building hard structures. The EIS will be used to assist the CWPPRA Task Force in making funding decisions regarding the first phase of proposed restoration in the Barataria-Terrebonne Basin area.

"At the same time, the EIS will provide the MMS with the environmental information that is needed to make an informed decision on a possible noncompetitive lease for federal Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) sand. Louisiana would use the sand to restore certain barrier islands off the State's coast should this initiative be supported by the task force," Quarterman added.

Last year, the state requested an agreement with MMS to use federal sand from Ship Shoal, an offshore borrow area, to renourish Isle Dernieres and Timbalier Islands. Authority to negotiate such agreements for federal OCS resources was granted to MMS by a law enacted by Congress last year.

MMS is the federal agency that manages the Nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the OCS, and collects, accounts for, and disburses about \$4 billion yearly in revenues from offshore mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on federal and Indian lands.