Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
Scoping Meeting
Gulf of Mexico
Geological and Geophysical (G&G) Activities
Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Gulfport, Mississippi
Marriott Gulfport Beachfront Hotel
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6:30 p.m.

Reported by: Patsy C. Poteat, CCR
Appearances:

Beth Nord
Gary Goeke
Howard Page
Bob Davidge

Also Present:

Tamara Artz
Travis Olivier
Cathy Rosa
MS. NORD:

Good evening. Thanks for joining us this evening. You have arrived at the scoping meeting for the Gulf of Mexico, G&G EIS. As you can see from the first slide, we're on our fourth meeting in a series of seven across the Gulf of Mexico Region. And we have our final meeting up in Silver Spring, Maryland, where our headquarters and the National Marine Fisheries Service headquarters is located, or in the general D.C. area.

Next slide, please. We're here to talk about an EIS document that we are going to be preparing. We have two agencies that are going to be co-leads on this EIS: the Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management, which is who we are with, which is a division of the Department of Interior. And our mission is to oversee the safe and environmentally responsible development of the Outer Continental Shelf. We are working on our EIS with the National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA. And their mission is to protect
the nation's living resources, and not
just in the Gulf of Mexico, but in the
marine environments.

Go ahead. Again, here's our mandate.
And basically we're to make resources in
the Outer Continental Shelf available and
expeditiously and orderly develop those
resources, subject to environmental
safeguards. And that's why we are
involved in the EIS process.

Okay. The National Environmental
Policy Act is the over-arching
environmental law that deals with
protecting the environment and relates to
federal agencies considering actions,
performing federal actions. NEPA
requires us to identify and assess
alternatives to the proposed action. It
also requires us to get input from the
public for decision-making and to
incorporate environmental and other
technical information into our documents.
And another main thing that we need to do
is to coordinate and consult with other
federal, state, and local agencies.
To develop the EIS, the general process is identifying the purpose and need, alternatives, impacting factors, potentially affected environmental and socioeconomic resources. We also need to consider cumulative impacts, identify mitigation measures, measures where we can reduce the impact in our proposed alternatives. And we need to establish consultation and coordination with state, federal, and local agencies.

The Council on Environmental Quality is the federal agency that has identified the framework and the regulations for how federal agencies implement NEPA. You can see, we have a step-wise process, shown on the right-hand side of the slide in green, and it talks about preparing a notice of intent, it shows scoping, draft EIS, comment period, and finally EIS and decision-making.

And you can see, we're early in the process here. We're starting scoping. So we're out basically right now to get input from the public, resource agencies,
interested parties, industry. And what we're going to do with our scoping information is, we're going to use that information to help us make our decision in an informed manner. We're going to identify resources that are necessary to evaluate, because they're likely to be impacted, and eliminate other resources that may not be significant. And we're going to use -- We're going to identify information that may not be available.

Okay. So, again, we're early in the process. You saw that we were the second box as we dropped -- stepped through. And scoping -- The purpose of scoping is to gather input. So we're hoping that these meetings that we're having across the Gulf and in the D.C. area will allow us to get information, both from the public and from federal, state, and local agencies and other interested parties and organizations and industry.

We talked earlier about some of the consultations that we will be conducting as a part of the EIS preparation. Around
NEPA, there are -- which is kind of the umbrella environmental law -- we have some of the other environmental laws that we are going to be coordinating for. Most of these relate to activities with National Marine Fisheries Service, or NOAA, Marine Mammal Protection Act, National Marine Sanctuary Act, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Act.

But we also have consultations that we do with other agencies, state agencies like the Coastal Zone Management Act, Endangered Species Act. We coordinate both with National Marine Fisheries Service and Fish and Wildlife Service. So all these consultations will be incorporated into what we're doing with the EIS.

Go ahead. Okay. So what types of activities are we talking about when we talk about geophysical and geological surveys? So this is an example of a seismic survey that would be considered a geophysical survey. And what we have is
a vessel that is towing an acoustic sound source. And we have receivers that are also being towed by the same vessel. The sound source is emitting sounds. They're bouncing off the bottom, the subsurface, and they are being reflected up and information is gathered -- received by the receivers.

This would be a very basic type of seismic survey. Some of the larger surveys that go on currently in the Gulf of Mexico employ multiple vessels, multiple tow lines. They don't necessarily go in a straight line. Some of them do coil surveys, where they are actually running in spirals. So this just shows you a basic example of that type of survey. They utilize many different types of sound-producing sources. Or some activities -- You may have heard of air guns or other high-resolution geophysical devices. So our EIS would be covering a variety of activities, in a variety of sensors.

So what are these G&G activities used
for? They're used to generate data for oil and gas exploration and development. They're used to generate data for renewable energy, siting sites, identifying what is below the water -- on the sea floor that would identify if an area is suitable for, say, a platform for a windmill to be built on related to renewables.

We also have marine mineral investigations. That would be looking at what's on the sea floor to see if the sand or the gravel is suitable, let's say, for a coastal restoration or a beach nourishment project. So the G&G activities cover a variety of activities and program areas that BOEM oversees.

Okay. Go ahead. And this is just a listing of some of the geophysical and geological surveys. 2D, 3D, 4D seismic, high-resolution seismic, nodes and ocean bottom cables. That's where you would have your receivers actually strung out on the bottom instead of being towed by a vessel.
And then geological surveys would be cores, box cores, piston cores. So that would be for mechanical removal of some of the sand from the bottom.

And then another type of survey that we would likely be analyzing in the EIS are some emerging technologies. And one of those is called marine vibroseis.

Go ahead. The area that we would be evaluating in the Programmatic EIS is the area outlined in white. It includes the three Gulf of Mexico planning areas: the western, central, and eastern planning area, as well as state water bottoms, excluding estuaries along the Coast. So we're not just looking at federal waters; we're going to be actually looking at some state waters as well. The red dotted line shows the federal-state line. So you can see that the white line extends further inshore than out.

Go ahead. Okay. Why are we doing this EIS? We need to assess the programmatic impacts of multiple G&G activities in the Gulf of Mexico so that
we can use this information for future permitting and approvals for G&G activities.

We need to identify monitoring and mitigation activities that we may need to implement in conjunction with these activities to reduce impacts. And we need to have information available so that our partner, National Marine Fisheries Service, can do what we're making under the Marine Mammal Protection Act to actually approve impacts associated with seismic activities.

Go ahead. Okay. So as I said before, we issue permits for authorized activities, for G&G activities, oil and gas, marine mineral and renewable and the National Marine Fisheries Service permits what are called Incidental Take Authorizations under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. And that relates to impacting marine mammals. In this case, it would likely be disturbance of the marine mammals from the sounds generated by the acoustic sources. And the goal is
to develop this EIS so that we can use it as our over-arching document, environmental documents for permitting. And they can use it as their over-arching document to develop the rulemaking.

Go ahead. Okay. So what kind of information are we looking for from you, or what kind of things could you help us with? One of the things that we talked about earlier is that we look at potential resources to analyze. A NEPA document is not necessarily encyclopedic. So what we would like to do is lay out what potential resources could be impacted, and then identify ones that could be impacted significantly.

Resources that we typically analyze in the Gulf of Mexico region are listed on the screen. And that is one of the ways that we could get public input in the scoping process, if you have any additional resources that you think should be analyzed and addressed in the EIS, or resources that you see on the list but you think are especially
significant that we should identify.

Go ahead. Another area where we're looking for information or help is identifying impacting factors. And, again, this is a list of potential impacting factors that we anticipate, you know, for this project. But do you have any other impacting factors that you've identified? We already said that acoustic sound sources and impacts to marine mammals were possible with our activities. There's also vessel equipment noise that are associated with these kind of activities. We could be impacting commercial and recreational fishing. There will be sea floor disturbance if we're coring or doing box cores. So, again, this is an area where we could get input from the public or industry.

Go ahead. As a part of the NEPA process, we need to consider and evaluate not just a proposed action or preferred alternative, but a variety of alternatives. So we have to evaluate a
no-action alternative as well as a proposed action and then other alternatives so that we can move through the process and fairly look at options before making a final decision about what the federal action is going to be.

Other alternatives that are potential for this project is various mitigation measures and technologies that would reduce impacts, in conjunction with performing the G&G activities.

Go ahead. Some examples of mitigation measures that could be analyzed and then potentially ultimately included in a preferred alternative are listed on the slide. And it talks about passive acoustic monitoring, which is identifying if they're using sound to identify if there are marine mammals in an area even if you can't visually see them on a surface.

Separation distances for concurrent surveys. So that's keeping those boats or those vessels that we saw on that slide apart so that the sounds that
they're making aren't impacting the same area. Lowest practicable sound source level. Minimizing the sounds that are coming out the devices. And then also things like avoiding sensitive benthic communities.

Next slide. Right now, we have our tentative schedule posted. There are many opportunities to participate in this process. They're indicated in red on the slide. And so right now we're in the scoping meeting is one opportunity. But, also, we have a public comment period that is associated with the scoping meetings that is between May 10 and July 9. So that you can have an opportunity, if you would like to provide comments, if you don't want to speak tonight, through another method that we'll talk about later.

And then as we develop the document and put out a draft EIS, there's an opportunity to comment on that. And actually, there's another opportunity when we publish the final EIS. So
there's many opportunities to participate.

Go ahead. What we have set up is a station for comments. However, we don't have anybody signed up at this time to provide comments.

MR. GOEKE:

Oh, we do.

MS. NORD:

Oh, we do? Okay. Super! So we have Mr. Howard Page.

MR. HOWARD PAGE:

Go ahead? Three minutes?

MS. NORD:

Come on up. We'll have the microphone on. And please address Gary.

MR. HOWARD PAGE:

Yes, my name is Howard Page. And I work with a group called the Steps of Coalition here on the Gulf Coast. And the thing I would like to focus on is sensitivity to the impacts of the BP spill. So, you have some very thoughtful considerations of marine mammals and sea turtles and benthic environments, of
these activities in general. But I think we should be aware that we have some injured populations. And until the NRDA work is done, which is going to actually take quite a long time -- But as NRDA does their work, we really don't know what the impacts were yet.

So, for example, the marine mammals. Not only do we always need to be sensitive of how this sonic activity affects whales and dolphins, but we need to recognize that these populations have somehow been harmed by the BP spill, and very likely at least we've seen a lot of dolphin mortality -- unusual dolphin mortality here on the Coast.

And so I would ask that that be considered, that in the future, since we're recovering from the impacts of the BP spill that we be aware that we have not healthy populations that we need to be cautious with; we actually have some injured and recovering populations.

And I would especially ask that that be looked at with benthic areas. Because
I think that's the most out-of-sight out-of-mind populations. And there's a great deal of concern that the oil and dispersants went down to the benthic layer and still may be down at the benthic layer.

And what I understand is, some of the species in the benthic layer grow very slowly and live very long. And so -- And we know less about them than we know about other parts of the ecosystem. So I would ask that any studies that we do really look at what harm has been done to the benthic layer, what was probably the healthy, you know, -- the healthy situation before the spill, what has been harmed. And I think that's the -- We know the least about them. And I just have this big concern that there's discussants and oil still down there. And we really don't know what value they add to the ecosystem. And they probably do add some pretty significant values. That we look carefully at the benthic populations.
And then I'd like to finish by saying that I support all the mitigation measures that I heard about, sonic uses. And I know, it would seem like you would want to do what's effective but minimize the volume of the sound and be careful that the marine mammals aren't in the area and sea turtles aren't in the area, as best you can.

But one thing I didn't see, and you probably do consider this, but in addition to the individual events, I would ask that you look at the frequency and duration. So how often -- Even assuming that these are relatively healthy activities that you're doing or harmless, I'm sorry, activities to the populations, but even assuming that you've taken some caution to look at how often these populations are exposed and how long these populations are exposed. Thank you.

MR. GOEKE:

Good points. Thank you.
MS. NORD:

Thank you. Okay. We didn't have anybody else sign up, but, sir, you just came in. Did you want to sign up to speak or --

MR. BOB DAVIDGE:

No. I work for BP, and I come to the various -- I don't know if you even want to know. My name is Bob Davidge.

MR. GOEKE:

If you wouldn't mind coming to the microphone so that we can all hear you. Thank you.

MR. BOB DAVIDGE:

Since you asked me to come up here, I apologize for coming late. I went to the Coliseum because that's where the Restore Council meeting was the other night. I just got programmed and realized when everybody was crossing the street for the fair, I was in the wrong place.

I'm Bob Davidge. I work for BP. I live here on the Coast. And I've been with them since the oil spill. I was with the casinos before that. And I'm
here because it's my community. It's my
Gulf of Mexico. I raised my family here.
I care. And they certainly support me
and my efforts here. And if you have
some questions, I'll try to help the best
I can. But sorry about coming in late.
MS. NORD:
   Oh, that's okay.
MR. BOB DAVIDGE:
   Thank you for doing this.
MS. NORD:
   Sure. Okay. What we're going to do
is, we're going to just take a 15-minute
break. But before we do that, let's
quick go to the next two slides.
   Okay. So if you don't want to
comment on the microphone today, that's
fine. That's no problem. We've got a
lot of different opportunities to
comment. The comment period is going to
be until July 9. We have an email
address that's listed on that slide. We
also have regulations.gov. The
directions on how to find those are
listed in the special information sheet
that you guys already have in the packets that you received. And then the third old reliable way to send comments is always snail mail. So the mailing address is there. And I don't know if you notice, you have a comment sheet in your package. If you want to use that, there's already an address put on the back so you can use that for additional comments, if you have any.

One more slide, please. We also have a website set up that has more information about the different survey techniques, devices, information about the mitigation measures that are currently in use in the Gulf of Mexico. So if you would like to get some more specific information, you can go to that site. And if you want to get on our EIS mailing list, you see that other address below.

Again, your information packets have a variety of information. And the information about commenting is on there so you don't have to scramble to write
all those addresses down.

Okay. We're going to take a 15-minute break. We'll come back. If you have questions in the meantime, talk to Gary, me. Tamara is in the audience. We'll go off the record.

(Recess)

MS. NORD:

Okay. We're going to go back on the record. Did we have anybody that wanted to come up and speak again? Howard, did you want to come back up?

MR. HOWARD PAGE:

I did want to say one more thing on the record.

MS. NORD:

Sure.

MR. HOWARD PAGE:

Howard Page with the Steps of Coalition. I did want to add that I understand that this year was the highest year of domestic oil production that we've had. And it was also the highest increase in domestic oil production that we've had. And based on that, I want to
take from that that we don't have owners' regulations so that we're safe in having regulation of these activities. So even with the status quo, we're having huge increases and plenty of production. So I wanted to -- I'm sorry. There was something else I was trying to think of. Thank you.

MR. GOEKE:

Good. Thank you.

MS. NORD:

Okay. Did anybody else have any other comments?

Like I said, look at your information packets. There's all the email addresses and ways to comment on there as well as if you want to sign up for the EIS list. So thank you, everybody, for coming, and we're going to close the meeting. Thank you.

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CERTIFICATE

STATE OF ALABAMA )
COUNTY OF MOBILE )

I, Patsy C. Poteat, CCR, as Commissioner, hereby certify that the above proceedings were taken down by me and transcribed by me using computer-aided transcription and that the above is a true and correct transcript of said proceedings taken down by me and transcribed by me.

I further certify that I am neither of kin nor of counsel to any of the parties nor in anywise financially interested in the outcome of this case.

I further certify that I am duly licensed by the Alabama Board of Court Reporting as a Certified Court Reporter as evidenced by the ACCR number following my name found below.

So certified on this, the 13th day of June, 2013.

Commission Expires: Patsy C. Poteat, ACCR #236 December 18, 2016

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