The NewsRoom
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MMS Partners with Mexico to Study Ocean Currents Over the Western Slope of the Gulf

MMS awarded a three-year, $1.73 million contract to the Center for Scientific Investigation and Higher Education in Ensenada (CICESE) in Mexico, to record ocean currents throughout the water column over the outer continental shelf and slope so as to obtain a three-dimensional picture of the circulation of the western Gulf in Mexican waters. The program includes 13 months of field observations.

Leasing in the western Gulf of Mexico extends to deepwater near the U.S.-Mexico border in water depths exceeding 2,000 meters. This is an area with limited oceanographic and current data. The coupling of this study with a previously awarded MMS study, Survey of Deepwater Currents in the Western Gulf of Mexico, in U.S. territorial waters, will add significantly to the understanding of the physical oceanography of the western Gulf.

MMS Gulf of Mexico Regional Director Chris Oynes said that “This partnership with research institutions in Mexico to obtain data from the Mexican area of the Gulf of Mexico will greatly aid MMS.”

Oynes also noted, “The circulation in the western Gulf of Mexico is extremely energetic, not only from motions generated locally, but because many features of Gulf circulation originate in the eastern basin from the interactions of the Loop Current with its surroundings.” Warm eddies generated from the Loop Current propagate westward through the central Gulf or along its northern slope and dissipate along the Mexican coast.”

“The eastern Gulf of Mexico has been studied extensively, but few direct observations of currents have been made off its western shore, especially off Mexico, a region fundamental to understanding of the Gulf’s dynamics,” concluded Oynes.

Because there is a potential for more exploration by the oil and gas industry, which currently includes permit approvals for 100 exploratory wells in the Alaminos Canyon and Port Isabel areas of the western Gulf alone, MMS will need better current data from the area to fulfill its missions. The western Gulf is the boundary where Loop Current rings and eddies strongly interact with the seafloor and dissipate. In addition, significant amounts of drifting material in the Gulf land in this region. This proposed study would collect current and hydrographic measurements in the western Gulf that will allow identification of processes present in the region to go into the design of future oceanographic studies. Successful completion of this study will also ensure that understanding of the deep western Gulf is coincident with future exploration and development trends.

The Minerals Management Service is the federal agency in the U.S. Department of the Interior that manages the nation’s oil, natural gas, and other mineral resources on the Outer Continental Shelf in Federal offshore waters. The agency also collects, accounts for, and disburses mineral revenues from Federal and American Indian lands. MMS disbursed more than $8 billion in FY 2003 and more than $135 billion since the agency was created in 1982. Nearly $1 billion from those revenues go into the Land and Water Conservation Fund annually for the acquisition and development of state and Federal park and recreation lands.

Relevant Web Sites

MMS Main Website

Gulf of Mexico Website

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