

American Samoa OCS Mineral Leasing Process Update

June 2026

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Talofa! My name is Natalie Dayal and I serve as the Leasing Coordinator for the critical mineral leasing process offshore American Samoa with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's Pacific Region. This presentation is on the Outer Continental Shelf (or OCS) Mineral Leasing Process in American Samoa.

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In this presentation, I will provide an overview of BOEM's role in managing resources on the OCS, an overview of the OCS mineral lease sale process including authorized activities on a lease, the latest step of Area Identification, an overview and update on the current environmental review process, seabed mineral related studies and surveys, and next steps.

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BOEM's Mission is to manage the development of energy, mineral, and geological resources on nearly 3.2 billion acres of the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf in an environmentally and economically responsible way.

BOEM is one of 11 bureaus within the U.S. Department of the Interior, and has three regional offices, including BOEM's Pacific OCS Regional office, located in Camarillo, California. We are the federal agency responsible for managing energy and mineral resources on all submerged federal lands within the U.S. exclusive economic zone (or EEZ) beyond coastal waters off California, Oregon, Washington, and Hawai'i, which includes 3 miles from the coastline to approximately 200 miles offshore); as well as submerged federal lands within the EEZ adjacent to all U.S. Pacific territories, which was included in the definition of the OCS in the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act in the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.

Taking a quick look at this map, the light yellow areas indicate potential areas of cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts. The light blue areas indicate potential areas of polymetallic nodules. And the overlapping darker yellow areas indicate potential areas of both crusts and nodules.

This map represents areas where crusts and nodules may occur according to oceanographic and geologic data but it does not necessarily indicate whether mineral resources have been found there.

BOEM continues to work closely with the U.S. Geological Survey (or USGS), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (or NOAA), and other partners to advance

the understanding and assessment of critical minerals in the Pacific OCS. USGS and NOAA continue to support BOEM by providing the latest scientific data on critical mineral resources, as well as potential environmental impacts and hazards associated with seafloor development.

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“OCS minerals” are mineral resources found on or beneath the seabed of the Outer Continental Shelf, generally seaward of state and territorial waters. And this presentation focuses on non-energy marine minerals, meaning minerals other than oil, gas and sulfur.

This diagram shows several types of seabed mineral deposits that may contain critical minerals, including nickel, cobalt, lithium, manganese, and rare earth elements. These minerals are important to U.S. energy, technology, manufacturing and defense needs. And In November 2025, the Department of the Interior updated the U.S. List of Critical Minerals to include 60 different minerals.

In the OCS offshore American Samoa, we are primarily discussing the potential for polymetallic nodules, which are nodules that occur on soft sediments of abyssal plains (at depths of 3,500-6,000 meters, or 11,000 to 20,000 feet) as well as cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts that form on the sides and summits of seamounts and ridges (at depths of 400-7,000 meters, or 1,300 to 23,000 feet) deep.

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BOEM is in the early stages of evaluating whether certain offshore areas near American Samoa may be appropriate for non-energy mineral leasing.

For the Leasing Process for minerals offshore American Samoa, the process began with a Request for Information and Interest, or RFI, which allowed BOEM to gather information from the public, industry, government agencies and other interested parties. BOEM then used that information to identify an area for further consideration.

That identified area is now undergoing review under the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA. The area is intentionally broad at this stage, so BOEM can evaluate potential mineral resources and leasing considerations before deciding whether to move forward.

If BOEM decides to continue after area identification and environmental review, the next step would be a Proposed Leasing Notice published in the Federal Register. That notice would describe the proposed lease sale process, including potential lease terms, payments, stipulations and bidding procedures.

BOEM would then consider comments from the Governor before deciding whether to issue a Final Leasing Notice. A Final Leasing Notice would identify the specific areas and minerals offered for lease and provide the final auction details and lease terms.

Only after those steps are complete could BOEM hold a competitive OCS mineral lease sale.

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If a lease sale is held, then under an executed lease, a Lessee would only be authorized to: 1) conduct preliminary activities on its lease area which include performing bathymetric, geological, geophysical, mapping, and other surveys necessary to develop a comprehensive delineation, testing, or mining plan; and 2) submit these delineation, testing, or mining plans for technical and environmental reviews by BOEM.

Delineation plans describe the activities to locate minerals and quantify and qualify minerals.

Testing plans describe feasibility studies, pilot programs to evaluate processing techniques and technology, and activities to determine environmental impacts.

And the mining plan includes detailed technical and engineering information and would cover all mineral development, production, and processing activities, including detailed descriptions, illustrations, and explanations of the proposed activities and accurately present the lessee's proposed plan of operation.

A Lessee may submit a Delineation plan and/or Testing Plan before submitting a Mining Plan if those activities are needed to obtain additional data and information to develop their Mining Plan.

Lessees are required to submit a Mining Plan for review prior to conducting mining activities under their lease, and the Mining Plan may include proposed delineation or testing activities.

It is important to note that the Lessee must receive approval from BOEM prior to conducting the delineation, testing, and mining activities described in their plan or plans.

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The latest completed step in the process was Area Identification, also called Area ID, for potential critical minerals leasing on the OCS offshore American Samoa, which was published on November 10, 2025.

The Area ID defined the specific areas that are undergoing environmental analysis to assess reasonably foreseeable environmental impacts of preliminary activities (like seafloor sampling or surveying).

This step followed the publication of the Request for Information and Interest (RFI), which was in the Federal Register on June 16, 2025, which initiated a 30-day public comment period, later extended by an additional 30 days at the request of the Governor of American Samoa.

The Area ID decision was informed by the industry nominations, public comments, and feedback from local government and stakeholders received by BOEM during the RFI period.

Area ID is not a decision to lease, but a planning step that ensures future decisions are grounded in environmental analysis and intergovernmental coordination.

Additional information and the Area ID decision memo can be found on our BOEM American Samoa webpage.

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The current step in the process for critical mineral leasing offshore American Samoa is review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), conducted on the area for potential leasing.

NEPA is a procedural law intended to ensure that Federal agencies consider the environmental effects of proposed actions before making decisions.

Under NEPA, BOEM is preparing an Environmental Assessment, or EA, to evaluate the potential impacts associated with issuing a lease and authorizing preliminary activities. These preliminary activities can include things like surveys and data collection that help inform delineation, testing, or mining plans.

As part of this broader environmental review, BOEM also undertakes several consultations required by other federal laws. These include consultations under the National Historic Preservation Act, which ensures we consider impacts to cultural and historic resources; the Endangered Species Act, which focuses on protecting listed wildlife and their habitats; Essential Fish Habitat provisions, which evaluate potential effects on fisheries and marine ecosystems; and the Coastal Zone Management Act, which ensures that actions are consistent with state and territorial coastal management programs.

Together, these reviews and consultations form a comprehensive process that helps ensure BOEM's decisions are well informed, transparent, and protective of both environmental and cultural resources.

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The Environmental Assessment considers a range of topics related to biological, physical, and socioeconomic factors, including offshore and nearshore habitats, protected habitats, marine mammals and sea turtles, marine and coastal birds, and threatened and endangered species. It also considers air quality, oceanography and water quality, geology, commercial and non-commercial fisheries, economics, demographics, land and port use, quality of life and culture, navigation and vessel traffic, and marine cultural resources.

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BOEM also conducts scientific research to inform decisions regarding energy and mineral development on the OCS. Here is a brief overview of our ongoing and planned U.S. Pacific seabed mineral-related studies.

First, we have been partnering with NOAA and USGS on a major NOAA-funded multibeam mapping, AUV imaging, and box-coring effort survey, for Geological Mapping and Baseline Environmental Surveys offshore American Samoa. Survey fieldwork work is complete, and data processing is underway. Preliminary data and information is publicly available through the NOAA website. USGS is still analyzing physical samples but they anticipated some preliminary data releases within the next few months. Later this summer, NOAA is conducting deepwater

ROV surveys, during several NOAA Ship Okeanos Explorer expeditions in and around the Cook Islands and then American Samoa.

We are also developing a Socioeconomic Description and Analysis of Pacific Island Fisheries, in partnership with NOAA Fisheries. This effort will compile and analyze existing commercial and non-commercial fisheries data across U.S. Pacific Islands to support timely socioeconomic impact assessments.

Next is the Tuna Contaminants, Habitat, Movements, and Prey project (or Tuna CHaMP), awarded last month in May. This one is also in partnership with NOAA Fisheries. The project will take steps to begin assessing how seabed-mining plumes may affect tuna species, their prey, and seafood safety through integrating telemetry, micronekton ecology, diet studies, contaminant analyses, and plume and noise modeling.

We are also working to start several pilot efforts to better understand the potential environmental impacts of sediment plumes. This includes baseline sediment characterization offshore American Samoa. And this effort is in procurement.

We also plan to expand Sea Turtle Distribution studies through additional tagging work with NOAA Fisheries. This effort is also currently in procurement.

We are also working to restart the Maritime Heritage study originally led by East Carolina University. The study is currently in the process of being procured. And it will synthesize archival data on submerged and terrestrial archaeological resources and traditional cultural properties.

We also have an American Samoa Ports Assessment underway, which was awarded to Woolpert and Moffatt & Nichol, to evaluate port capabilities for potential seabed mineral development.

And finally, our Technology Assessment that will examine current and emerging deep-sea mining exploration and extraction technologies is also underway.

Together, these studies provide critical environmental, cultural, socioeconomic, and technical context that will help inform responsible decision-making around seabed mineral activities in the Pacific.

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Here we would like to highlight our seafloor mapping partnership work offshore American Samoa.

I referred to this project in the last slide. In January 2026, NOAA's Office of Coast Survey launched a three-month hydrographic survey to map and characterize more than 30,000 square nautical miles of federal waters. This effort provides essential baseline data that will help us identify potential critical mineral deposits and understand the overall prospectivity of the area.

NOAA's Office of Coast Survey is leading the project, with additional scientific expertise from NOAA Ocean Exploration, BOEM, and USGS. Additional information can be found at the links provided here.

The survey work is now complete, and the data is being processed. USGS has returned nodules that were collected to Santa Cruz, CA for compositional analysis.

The images on the right show examples of what was collected, including nodules obtained through box-coring, an AUV seabed image from the same location, and bathymetric data used to characterize seafloor composition.

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The next milestones in the process include completion of the Environmental Analysis of the area; and the issuance of a proposed leasing notice.

BOEM will continue to coordinate with the Government of American Samoa and the Deep-Sea Minerals Steering Committee as part of our ongoing efforts to strengthen relationships and ensure transparency in our planning process.

We will also continue ongoing and planned seabed mineral-related studies in the Pacific, working with federal and regional partners to identify and address key science and information needs.

We welcome your perspectives as we move into the next steps.

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Again, my name is Natalie Dayal. Fa'afetai tele lava and please feel free to reach out with any questions.