



U.S. Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region

SPECIAL INFORMATION

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Notice of Availability of the Environmental Assessment for Proposed Western Planning Area Lease Sale 196 (OCS EIS/EA MMS 2005-010)

The Minerals Management Service (MMS) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for proposed Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas Lease Sale 196 in the Western Gulf of Mexico (GOM) (Lease Sale 196) scheduled for August 2005. Proposed Lease Sale 196 is the fourth Western Planning Area (WPA) lease sale scheduled in the *Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program: 2002-2007* (5-Year Program, OCS EIS/EA MMS 2002-006). The preparation of this EA is an important step in the decision making process for Lease Sale 196.

The proposal for Lease Sale 196 (the offering of all available unleased acreage in the WPA) and its alternatives (the proposed action excluding the unleased blocks near biologically sensitive topographic features, and no action) were identified by the MMS Director in January 2002 following the Call for Information and Nominations/Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and were analyzed in the *Gulf of Mexico OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sales: 2003-2007; Central Planning Area Sales 185, 190, 194, 198, and 201; Western Planning Area Sales 187, 192, 196, and 200 – Final Environmental Impact Statement; Volumes I and II* (Multisale EIS, OCS EIS/EA MMS 2002-052). The Multisale EIS analyzed the effects of a typical WPA lease sale by presenting a set of ranges for resource estimates, projected exploration and development activities, and impact-producing factors for any of the proposed WPA lease sales. The level of activities projected for proposed Lease Sale 196 falls within these ranges.

In this EA, which tiers from the Multisale EIS and incorporates that document by reference, MMS reexamined the potential environmental effects of the proposed action and its alternatives based on any new information regarding potential impacts and issues that were not available at the time the Multisale EIS was prepared. No new significant impacts were identified for proposed Lease Sale 196 that were not already assessed in the Multisale EIS. As a result, MMS determined that a supplemental EIS is not required and prepared a Finding of No New Significant Impact (FONNSI).

Interested parties are requested to send comments on this EA/FONNSI within 30 days of the Notice of Availability in the *Federal Register*. Comments may be submitted in one of the following three ways:

1. Electronically using MMS's Public Connect on-line commenting system at <https://ocsconnect.mms.gov>. This is the preferred method for commenting. From the Public Connect "Welcome" screen, search for "WPA Lease Sale 196 EA" or select it from the "Projects Open for Comment" menu.
2. In written form enclosed in an envelope labeled "Comments on WPA Lease Sale 196 EA" and mailed (or hand carried) to the Regional Supervisor, Leasing and Environment (MS 5410), Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394.
3. Electronically to the MMS e-mail address: environment@boemre.gov.

All comments received will be considered in the decision making process for Lease Sale 196.

To obtain a copy of this EA, you may contact the Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, Attention: Public Information Office (MS 5034), 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, Room 114, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394 (1-800-200-GULF). You may also view this EA on the MMS website at <http://www.gomr.mms.gov>.

MMS, part of the U.S. Department of the Interior, oversees 1.76 billion acres of the Outer Continental Shelf, managing offshore energy and minerals while protecting the human, marine, and coastal environments through advanced science and technology research. The OCS provides 30 percent of oil and 23 percent of natural gas produced domestically, and sand used for coastal restoration. MMS's collects, accounts for, and disburses mineral revenues from Federal and American Indian lands, with Fiscal Year 2004 disbursements of approximately \$8 billion and more than \$143 billion since 1982. The Land and Water Conservation Fund, which pays for cooperative conservation, grants to states, and Federal land acquisition, gets nearly \$1 billion a year.

MMS Main Website: www.mms.gov
Gulf of Mexico Website: www.gomr.mms.gov

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