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CONTACT: Lee Scurry

(202) 208-3983

MMS EXTENDS COMMENT PERIOD FOR NEW 5-YEAR OCS LEASING PROGRAM

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) is extending by 30 days the initial comment period for the new 5-Year Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 1997-2002 and the accompanying Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), officials announced today.

The initial request for comments, published in the November 16 Federal Register, set a 45-day comment period to close on January 9, 1995; the new deadline is February 1.

"It is our intent at MMS to listen to all our customers and to make sure they have sufficient input to the decisionmaking process," said MMS Acting Director Cynthia Quarterman. "MMS has received requests from various groups for an extension of the comment period, and we are responding.

"Several requests have come from coastal states that are experiencing a change in state government administration. Other constituents have indicated that the holiday season has made it difficult to coordinate their comments," she said. "It makes good sense and good government to extend the comment period."

Comments, due February 1, 1995, should be mailed to: 5-Year Program Project Director, Minerals Management Service, MS-4400, Room 1324, 381 Elden Street, Herndon, VA 22070. Also, MMS will accept hand deliveries at 1849 C Street, NW, Room 4013, Washington, DC. For more information contact Carol Hartgen, 5-Year Program Project Director, at (703) 787-1216.

The Interior Department is required by the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Lands Act to prepare and maintain an OCS natural gas and oil leasing program that covers a 5-year period. The current program ends in July 1997.

MMS is the federal agency that manages and regulates the nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the Outer Continental Shelf, and collects and disburses revenues from offshore federal mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on federal and Indian lands.

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