

For Release: August 9, 1995

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MMS ANNOUNCES THE DRAFT PROPOSED 5-YEAR OCS OIL AND GAS LEASING PROGRAM FOR 1997-2002

The Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) today announced the Draft Proposed 5-Year Program for natural gas and oil activities on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). The program proposes consideration of up to 16 lease sales in eight offshore planning areas from 1997 to 2002.

"The new 5-Year Program is based on three main policy objectives endorsed by President Clinton and Secretary Babbitt: 1) consensus-based decision making, 2) science-based decision making, and 3) the use of natural gas as an environmentally preferred fuel," said MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman.

"This program differs from previous programs in the way it was formulated -- using consensus-based decision making," Quarterman said. "If we've learned anything from the past, it is that MMS must engage in a dialogue with the parties most affected by the program. Consequently, more emphasis than ever before is being placed on communication with constituents in the regions. For instance, the Regional Stakeholders Task Force that was established to address Alaska issues has played an important part in developing the Alaska portion of this program.

"To help ensure that leasing decisions are based on sound scientific information, I'm asking the OCS Policy and Scientific Committees to form a subcommittee to provide an independent review and evaluation of specific information needs for areas where controversy has led to executive or legislative restrictions on leasing.

"From the perspective of future energy supplies, the Final Program for 1997-2002 will determine the extent to which domestic offshore energy resources help meet energy needs well into the 21st century," said Quarterman. "The focus of this particular 5-Year Program is on natural gas-prone areas and protecting sensitive coastal and marine environments."

Quarterman said that MMS had received more than 2,300 written comments from local, state and federal agencies,

Congress, industry, environmental groups, Alaska natives, and private citizens in response to an earlier request for input.

The OCS Lands Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to develop a 5-year leasing program that helps meet the nation's energy needs while protecting the environment. Today's announcement is the second step in a two-year process that involves extensive analysis and public consultation.

MMS is soliciting comments on the Draft Proposed Program from all interested groups and individuals. Comments may address a variety of topics including environmental concerns, the schedule of sales, and the level of industry interest in specific locations. All responses will be considered, along with additional internal analysis, in the preparation of the Proposed Program and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which are scheduled to be released early next year.

Comments are due October 9, 1995. Mail comments to: 5-Year Program Director, Minerals Management Service (MS-4430), Room 1324, 381 Elden Street, Herndon, VA 22070. MMS will accept hand deliveries at 1849 C Street, NW, Room 4230, Washington, DC. Envelopes or packages should be marked "Comments on the Draft Proposed 5-Year OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 1997-2002."

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PREPARATION OF THE 5-YEAR OUTER CONTINENTAL SHELF (OCS)
OIL AND GAS LEASING PROGRAM FOR 1997-2002

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) has set the following schedule for preparing the next 5-year program for 1997-2002. The schedule was developed to assure adequate opportunities for MMS to consult with constituents on the new program while allowing a timely and orderly transition from the current one.

Date	Step
November 16, 1994	A Federal Register notice was published soliciting comments for developing the new 5-year program
February 1, 1995	Comment period closed
May 3, 1995	Receive recommendations from Alaska Regional Stakeholders Task Force
August 9, 1995	Issued Draft Proposed Program
October 9, 1995	Comment period closes
January 1996	Issue Proposed Program and Draft EIS (90-day comment period)
August 1996	Issue Proposed Final Program and Final EIS (60-day waiting period)
October 1996	Approve 5-year Program for July 1997-July 2002

BACKGROUND

The preparation of the 5-year program is a multi-staged process that can take from two to three years. It consists of five major steps:

- 1) Initial Solicitation of Comments and Information,
- 2) Draft Proposed Program released to the public for comment,
- 3) Proposed Program and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released to the public for comment,
- 4) Proposed Final Program and Final EIS submitted to the President and to Congress for review, and
- 5) approval of the Final Program by the Secretary of the Interior.

The process started with the November 16, 1994, Federal Register notice requesting comments and suggestions for preparing the new program and for information on issues and alternatives that should be analyzed in the programmatic EIS. The comment period was extended for a total duration of 77 days. More than 2,300 written responses were received from state and local governments, environmental groups, Alaska Natives, industry, and individuals.

All input was considered in formulating the draft proposed program and will help to determine the scope of the EIS.

The Alaska Regional Stakeholders Task Force was established to assist MMS in defining the Alaska Region elements of the new program; the Task Force presented findings and recommendations that were accepted by the OCS Policy Committee in May 1995. The Task Force report was endorsed by the Policy Committee and played a key role in program formulation.

Before the draft proposed program was issued, MMS conducted extensive outreach efforts nationwide to describe the overall 5-year program process, discuss formulation of the draft proposal, and continue the scoping of issues for the EIS.

Similar outreach efforts are planned for the other steps in the program preparation process. Such efforts will include hearings on the draft EIS that will be conducted during the 90-day comment period in each OCS region affected by the

proposed program.

For further information contact Carol Hartgen, 5-Year Program
Project Director, at (703) 787-1216.

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