



**U.S. Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Office of Public Affairs**

NEWS RELEASE

FOR RELEASE:

November 1, 2000

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MMS PARTICIPATES IN DEEP-SEA EXPLORATION

Scientists from the Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service are participating in an exciting undersea research project exploring the mysteries of the ultra deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Using the deep submergence vessel *Alvin*, MMS joined scientists from NOAA, the Department of Energy, the National Undersea Research Program, and the University of North Carolina-Wilmington to learn more about the Gulf's seldom explored deep ecosystems.

During a 17-day exploration cruise that began October 15, in Galveston, TX, and concludes November 1, in Key West, FL, the on-board scientists hope to gather crucial information about marine organisms such as tubeworms, mussels, and clams that live in chemosynthetic communities. Also, the scientists will attempt to characterize the health and function of the deepwater environment and compare it with other oceanic regions.

"This fascinating deep-sea mission will provide the MMS an opportunity to understand more about the mysteries of the deep water environment and the organisms living on the bottom of the ocean floor," remarked MMS Director Walt Rosenbusch. "This research project will also provide information to help ensure that oil and gas found in the deep waters of the Gulf will be developed in an operationally safe and environmentally sound manner," he added.

Owned and leased by the Woods Hole Institute, *Alvin* and its support vessel *Atlantis* are equipped with highly sophisticated underwater tools to monitor deep-sea environments. This research began in the OCS region of the Gulf known as Alaminos Canyon, the site of the deepest exploration well in the Gulf, in water 7,000 feet deep. The scientists also conducted dives in the Green Canyon area, one of the most studied seep sites in the Gulf where seep creatures feed on hydrocarbons, including giant tubeworms, mussel and clam beds.

MMS is the federal agency that manages the Nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the OCS, and collects, accounts for and disburses about \$4 billion yearly in revenues from offshore federal mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on federal and Indian lands.

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