



July 7, 1999

**MMS Announces Area Identification
and Public Scoping Meetings
for
Proposed Eastern Gulf of Mexico Sale 181**

The Interior Department's Minerals Management Service (MMS) today announced that it has selected the area to be studied in the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for proposed Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas lease Sale 181 in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico (EGOM). This action constitutes the administrative prelease step referred to as Area Identification. This fact sheet contains a description of the area to be analyzed, as well as background information relevant to the proposed sale. A description of the process leading up to the proposed sale in the year 2001 also is provided (prelease process).

Area Identified

The area identified for analysis in the EIS for Sale 181 contains 1,033 blocks covering 5.9 million acres.

Water depths in the planning areas range from about 108 to more than 10,980 feet.

The selection of this area is based upon consideration of nominations received from industry and the public comments received regarding environmental and other issues. (A map of the proposed area is attached.)

Leasing History

Sale 181, scheduled for December 2001, will be the eleventh lease sale held in the EGOM.

Events Leading to Area Identification

Sale 181 is the only proposed sale in the EGOM included in the 1997-2002 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

A Call for Information and Nominations (Call) on Sale 181 was published in the *Federal Register* on January 25, 1999. As part of the Call, the MMS asked respondents to outline areas within the Call area that they would like included in the proposed sale and requested information that would be useful in identifying potential conflicts with approved local coastal management plans, potential environmental effects and use conflicts, possible mitigating measures, and possible lease terms and conditions.

Twenty-six responses to the Call were received.

Further Actions Regarding the Proposed Sale

The potential effects of leasing in the area identified will undergo extensive environmental analysis in the draft EIS. Comments received on the Call and Nominations and the Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS, and during the EIS scoping process, will be used with existing environmental data to analyze alternatives to the proposed action and appropriate mitigating measures.

In order to provide an early and open process for determining the scope of the EIS and for identifying the significant issues, alternatives, and potential mitigating measures to be addressed in the EIS, MMS will hold scoping meetings. Many comments have already been received in response to the NOI/Call. Those comments are considered part of the scoping comments. Additional written scoping comments will be accepted during the actual meetings and through the mail until August 6, 1999. Information specific to the scoping meetings will be distributed to an extensive list of interested parties, announced in the *Federal Register*, and advertised in local newspapers.

The scheduled scoping meetings are:

Place Civic Center
Port Sulphur, Louisiana
Date Monday, July 19, 1999
Time 7-10 p.m.

Place Ramada Plaza Hotel, 600 South Beltline Highway
Mobile, Alabama
Date Tuesday, July 20, 1999
Time 6-10 p.m.

Place Civic Center, 505 West Pensacola Street
Tallahassee, Florida
Date Wednesday, July 21, 1999
Time 2-6 p.m.

Place New World Landing, 600 South Palafox Street
Pensacola, Florida
Date Thursday, July 22, 1999
Time 6-10 p.m.

Place Plantation Inn, 1381 West Tunnel Boulevard
Houma, Louisiana
Date Tuesday, July 27, 1999
Time 7-10 p.m.

After a draft EIS is issued, public hearings will be held. Comments received will be used to develop the final EIS.

A Proposed Notice of Sale, if issued, will present a proposed decision on blocks to offer; special mitigating measures to protect human, coastal, and marine resources in the area; and other conditions and terms that will apply to the leases. The Governors of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida will be asked for their recommendations on the size, timing, and location of the proposed sale. After careful consideration of the Governors' comments, the Secretary of the Interior will make a final decision on whether to proceed with the sale.

If it is decided to proceed, the Final Notice of Sale will be issued at least 30 days before bids are opened.

Tentative Sale 181 Schedule: The following is a list of planned presale process steps and related tentative dates applicable to proposed Sale 181:

Process Step	Tentative Completion Date
Call/NOI	January 1999
Comments due on Call/NOI	March 1999
Area Identification	June 1999
Draft EIS	August 2000
Public Hearings	September 2000
Final EIS	June 2001
Proposed Notice of Sale & CZM Consistency Determination	July 2001
Final Notice of Sale	October 2001
Bid Opening/Reading	December 2001

Written comments on scoping can be sent to:

**Ann Bull (MS 5412)
Minerals Management Service
1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard
New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394**

Copies of the area map are available from:

**Gulf of Mexico Public Information Unit
Minerals Management Service
1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard
New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394
Telephone: (504) 736-2519 or (800) 200-GULF**

For background and current information visit Sale 181 website: <http://www.gomr.mms.gov/homepg/lseale/181/egom181.html>

MMS is the Federal Agency that manages the Nation's oil and gas and other mineral resources on the OCS and collects, accounts for, and last year disbursed about \$6 billion in revenues from Federal offshore mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on Federal and Indian lands.

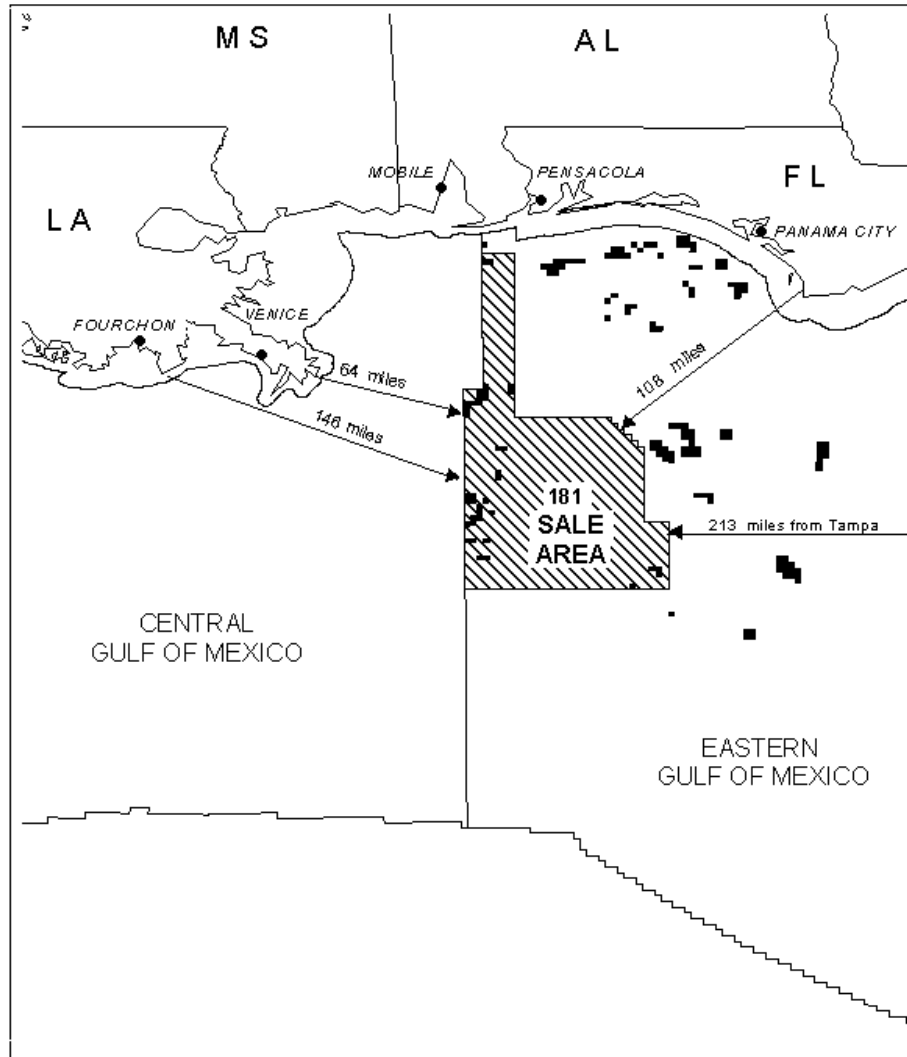
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MMS's Website Address: www.mms.gov
24 Hour Fax-on-Demand Service: 202-219-1703


MMS

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

Eastern Gulf of Mexico Proposed Sale 181



30 0 30 60 Miles

 Available for Leasing Consideration

 Active Leases