

FOR RELEASE: May 3, 1994 CONTACT: Barney Congdon
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MMS ANNOUNCES CALL FOR INFORMATION FOR
CENTRAL AND WESTERN GULF LEASE SALES, 157 AND 161
(#40031)

The Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) today announced a Call for Information and Nominations and Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (Call/NOI) for natural gas and oil Lease Sale 157 in the Central and 161 in the Western Gulf of Mexico Planning Areas. The sales are tentatively scheduled for March and August, 1996, respectively.

"Publishing this Call/NOI in today's Federal Register is the first of a series of detailed steps to be taken that may result in lease sales taking place," said MMS Director Tom Fry. "We're committed to making our Nation's offshore natural gas and oil resources available to the domestic economy, while assuring protection for the marine environment."

The Call/NOI constitute one of the initial data gathering steps (in the two to three year pre-lease sale planning process) assuring that all interests and concerns regarding specific sales are communicated to MMS. The Call, which outlines the area to be considered for leasing and the area MMS believes has hydrocarbon potential, requests nominations from industry on areas of interest and information from interested parties on environmental or special concerns. The Notice of Intent begins the "scoping" process used in preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and is designed to involve Federal agencies, State and local governments, and other interested parties.

"Pre-sale notification allows time for the public input which, along with sound scientific research, is critical to us in determining the issues that must be addressed in the EIS," said Fry. "Extensive environmental and economic studies have been conducted in the proposed sale areas since 1973. We've gathered and evaluated environmental information on biologically sensitive habitats, physical oceanography, ocean-circulation modeling, and ecological effects of natural gas and oil activities."

The general areas detailed in the Call/NOI cover the entire

central and western portions of the Gulf of Mexico between approximately 88 degrees W. longitude on the east and approximately 97 degrees W. longitude on the west and from the Federal-State boundaries seaward to the provisional maritime boundary between the United States and Mexico. The entire Call area (divided into two planning areas) is offshore the States of Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. The total area available for nominations and comments consists of approximately 83.7 million acres (47.8 in the Central Gulf of Mexico Planning Area and 35.9 in the Western Gulf of Mexico Planning Area).

Nominations and comments are due 45 days following publication in the Federal Register. Written comments on the scope of the EIS, significant issues which should be addressed, and alternatives which should be considered are also due within 45 days. Responses should be sent to:

Minerals Management Service
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region
Regional Supervisor
Leasing and Environment
1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard
New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394

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EDITORS: DETAILED FACT SHEETS AND A MAP ARE ATTACHED

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SALE 157, CENTRAL GULF OF MEXICO PLANNING AREA
CALL FOR INFORMATION AND NOMINATIONS AND NOTICE OF INTENT
TO PREPARE AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) has issued a Call for Information and Nominations and Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (Call/NOI) for an offshore natural gas and oil lease sale, Sale 157, tentatively scheduled for March 1996, in the Central Gulf of Mexico. This fact sheet contains a description of the area included in the Call/NOI, as well as relevant background information.

PURPOSE OF Call/NOI

The Call/NOI is one of the initial information gathering steps to ensure that all interests and concerns regarding the specific sale are communicated to MMS for future decisions in the leasing process. This Call/NOI does not indicate a preliminary decision to lease in the area described below.

Information submitted in response to this Call/NOI will be used for several purposes:

- * To further identify areas of potential for natural gas and oil development;

- * To initiate the scoping process used in preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), designed to involve Federal agencies, State and local governments, and other interested parties in aiding MMS in determining significant issues and alternatives to be addressed in the EIS.

Comments may be used in developing lease terms and conditions to ensure safe offshore natural gas and oil activities and to point out potential conflicts between offshore natural gas and oil activities and the Coastal Zone Management Programs (CZMP) of affected States.

DESCRIPTION OF AREA

The Central Gulf portion of this Call/NOI covers the entire Central Gulf of Mexico Planning Area, from approximately 88 degrees W. longitude on the east to its western boundary at the offshore line between Texas and Louisiana, and then southeasterly to approximately 28 degrees N. latitude, and east to approximately 92 degrees W. longitude, and finally south to the provisional maritime boundary with Mexico which constitutes the southern boundary of the area. The area available for nominations and comments consists of about 47.8 million acres. The northern part of the area is bounded by the Federal-State boundary offshore the states of Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi.

RECENT LEASING HISTORY

In May 1992, the MMS offered 5,213 tracts covering 28 million acres in the Central Gulf of Mexico Sale 139. Of the area offered, 144 tracts were leased for bonuses totaling \$54.4 million.

Central Gulf Sale 142 was held on March 24, 1993, and offered 5,443 tracts covering 29 million acres. Of the area offered, 187 tracts were leased for bonuses totalling \$63.9 million.

Sale 147 in the Central Gulf was held March 30, 1994, and offered 5,759 tracts covering 31 million acres. Of the area offered, 375 tracts received high bids totaling \$277 million. Results from sale 147 will be finalized upon completion of the bid review process.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

As required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), MMS also is announcing its intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Sale 157. The Notice of Intent also serves to initiate the "scoping" process, involving other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and other interested parties. Scoping helps MMS determine significant issues and alternatives to be addressed in the EIS. The EIS will focus on the potential environmental effects of leasing, exploration, and development on the blocks included in the area defined in the Area Identification as the proposed area of the

lease sale. Alternatives to the proposal which may be considered are: to delay the sale, cancel the sale, or modify the sale.

COMMENT PERIOD

Nominations and comments concerning the Call and scoping comments resulting from the NOI must be received no later than 45 days following publication of the Call/NOI in today's Federal Register in envelopes labeled "Nominations for Proposed 1996 Lease Sales in the Gulf of Mexico," or "Comments on the Call for Information and Nominations for Proposed 1996 Lease Sales in the Gulf of Mexico," as appropriate. Comments are sought from all interested parties about particular geological, environmental, biological, archaeological, or economic conditions or conflicts, or other information which may bear upon the potential leasing and development of this particular area. The original Call map with indications of interest and/or comments must be submitted to:

Minerals Management Service
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region
Regional Supervisor, Leasing and Environment
1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard
New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394

The standard Call map outlines the Call area and shows the area identified by MMS as having potential for the discovery of natural gas and oil. The map is available, free of charge, from the Gulf of Mexico OCS Regional Office at the Louisiana address shown above or by telephone at (504) 736-2519.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Final delineation of the area for possible leasing will be made at a later date in compliance with applicable laws including all requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) as amended, and the OCS Lands Act, as amended, and with established departmental procedures. Tentatively scheduled major actions that will precede Sale 157, proposed for March 1996, are:

Comments Due on the Call and Notice of Intent (scoping) June '94
Area Identification July '94
Draft EIS Published March '95
Proposed Notice of Sale Issued. March '95
Public Hearings on Draft EIS Held May '95

Governor's Comments Due on Proposed Notice. June '95
Final EIS Published November '95
Final Notice of Sale Published. February '96
Sale. March '96

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SALE 161, WESTERN GULF OF MEXICO PLANNING AREA
CALL FOR INFORMATION AND NOMINATIONS AND NOTICE OF INTENT
TO PREPARE AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) has issued a Call for Information and Nominations and Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (Call/NOI) for an offshore natural gas and oil lease sale, Sale 161, tentatively scheduled for August 1996, in the Western Gulf of Mexico. This fact sheet contains a description of the area included in the Call/NOI, as well as relevant background information.

PURPOSE OF Call/NOI

The Call/NOI is one of the initial information gathering steps to ensure that all interests and concerns regarding the specific sale are communicated to MMS for future decisions in the leasing process. This Call/NOI does not indicate a preliminary decision to lease in the area described below.

Information submitted in response to this Call/NOI will be used for several purposes:

- * To further identify areas of potential for natural gas and oil development;

- * To initiate the scoping process used in preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), designed to involve Federal agencies, State and local governments, and other interested parties in aiding MMS in determining significant issues and alternatives to be addressed in the EIS.

Comments may be used in developing lease terms and conditions to ensure safe offshore natural gas and oil activities and to point out potential conflicts between those offshore activities and the Coastal Zone Management Programs (CZMP) of affected States.

DESCRIPTION OF AREA

The Western Gulf portion of this Call/NOI covers the entire Western Gulf of Mexico Planning Area, from approximately 97 degrees W. longitude on the west, to its eastern boundary at the offshore boundary between Texas and Louisiana and then southeasterly to approximately 28 degrees N. latitude, and east to approximately 92 degrees W. longitude, and finally south to the provisional maritime boundary with Mexico which constitutes the southern boundary of the area. The area available for nominations and comments consists of about 35.9 million acres. The northern part of the area is bounded by the Federal-State boundary offshore the state of Texas and, in deeper water, offshore Louisiana.

RECENT LEASING HISTORY

In August 1992, the MMS offered 4,405 tracts covering 24.2 million acres in the Western Gulf of Mexico Sale 141. Of the area offered, 60 tracts were leased for bonuses totaling \$30.5 million.

Sale 143 in the Western Gulf was held September 15, 1993 and offered 4,682 tracts covering 25.7 million acres. Of the area offered, 149 tracts were leased for bonuses totaling \$62.6 million.

Sale 150 in the Western Gulf is currently set for August, 1994.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

As required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), MMS also is announcing its intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Sale 161. The Notice of Intent also serves to initiate the "scoping" process, involving other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and other interested parties. Scoping helps MMS determine significant issues and alternatives to be addressed in the EIS. The EIS will focus on the potential environmental effects of leasing, exploration, and development on the blocks included in the area defined in the Area Identification as the proposed area of the lease sale. Alternatives to the proposal which may be considered are: to delay the sale, cancel the sale, or modify the sale.

COMMENT PERIOD

Nominations and comments concerning the Call and scoping comments resulting from the NOI must be received no later than 45 days following publication of the Call/NOI in today's Federal Register in envelopes labeled "Nominations for Proposed 1996 Lease Sales in the Gulf of Mexico," or "Comments on the Call for Information and Nominations for Proposed 1996 Lease Sales in the Gulf of Mexico," as appropriate. Comments are sought from all interested parties about particular geological, environmental, biological, archaeological, or economic conditions or conflicts, or other information which may bear upon the potential leasing and development of this particular area. The original Call map with indications of interest and/or comments must be submitted to:

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TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Final delineation of the area for possible leasing will be made at a later date in compliance with applicable laws including all requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) as amended, and the OCS Lands Act, as amended, and with established departmental procedures. Tentatively scheduled major actions that will precede Sale 161, proposed for August 1996, are:

- Comments Due on the Call and Notice of Intent (scoping) June '94
- Area Identification. July '94
- Draft EIS Published. March '95
- Proposed Notice issuedMarch '95
- Public Hearings on Draft EIS Held.May '95
- Governor's Comments Due on Proposed Notice June '95
- Final EIS Published.November '95
- Final Notice of Sale Published July '96

Sale August '96

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Subject: PR-05/03/94 Sales 157, 161/MMS Announces Call for
Information for Central and Western Gulf Lease Sales, 157 and 161
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