

FOR RELEASE: August 17, 1994

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MMS ANNOUNCES AREA IDENTIFICATION FOR
CENTRAL GULF OF MEXICO SALE 157
AND WESTERN GULF OF MEXICO SALE 161 (#40060)

The Interior Department's Minerals Management Service (MMS) today announced the areas to be studied for possible inclusion in the 1996 federal Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico. Sale 157 in the Central Gulf is tentatively scheduled for March 1996 and Sale 161 in the Western Gulf is scheduled for August 1996.

The area identified for inclusion in the leasing proposal for Sale 157 contains approximately 30.9 million acres on about 5,760 blocks in the Central Gulf. The area proposed for consideration in Sale 161 contains approximately 28.0 million acres on about 5,100 blocks in the Western Gulf. The blocks in the proposed sales are located from 3 to approximately 220 miles offshore Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.

The MMS will prepare a draft Environmental Impact Statement which will discuss the proposals and alternatives for oil and gas leasing in the Central and Western Gulf of Mexico.

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MMS ANNOUNCES AREA IDENTIFICATION FOR
CENTRAL GULF OF MEXICO SALE 157 AND WESTERN GULF OF MEXICO
SALE 161

The Interior Department's Minerals Management Service today announced that it has selected the areas for proposed Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas lease Sales 157 and 161 in the Central and Western Gulf of Mexico, to be analyzed in an environmental impact statement (EIS). 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 sales. A description of the prelease process for the proposed sales also is provided.

AREA IDENTIFIED

*The area identified for inclusion in the leasing proposal for Sale 157 contains approximately 30.9 million acres on about 5,760 blocks in the Central Gulf. The area proposed for consideration in Sale 161 contains approximately 28.0 million acres on about 5,100 blocks in the Western Gulf.

*Distance from shore ranges from approximately 3 miles to 220 miles.

* Water depths in the planning areas range from 13 to more than 11,000 feet.

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

LEASING HISTORY

Sale 157, scheduled for March 1996, will be the 52nd lease sale held in the Central Gulf; and Sale 161, scheduled for August 1996, will be the 35th sale held in the Western Gulf.

Leasing activity involving areas within the Central and Western Gulf of Mexico has been extensive. Indeed, these areas have been offered in some form since 1954.

EVENTS LEADING TO AREA IDENTIFICATION

*Sales 157 and 161 are two of the annual Gulf of Mexico lease sales included in the 1992 Comprehensive Program.

*A Call for Information and Nominations was published in the Federal Register in May 1994. The Call 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.

*Two responses to the Call were received, one from industry and one from the Marine Mammal Commission.

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 for Information and Nominations and the Notice of Intent, and during the EIS scoping process, will be used with existing environmental data to analyze alternatives to the proposed action and appropriate mitigating measures.

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

*A decision whether to issue a proposed Notice of Sale will be made in conjunction with the issuance of the draft EIS. If issued, it 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 Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas 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.

The final Notice of Sale will be issued at least 30 days

before bids are opened. Copies of the area map are available from:

Minerals Management Service
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region
1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard
New Orleans, LA 70123-2589

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Subject: PR-8/17/94 Sales 157, 161/MMS Announces Area ID for GOM
Sales 157, 161 (#40060)