

FOR RELEASE: May 17, 1995

CONTACT: Lee Scurry  
(202) 208-3983  
Barney Congdon  
(504) 736-2595

## MMS PROVIDES ACCESS TO OCS SAND FOR FLORIDA BEACH NOURISHMENT

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) and the City of Jacksonville, Florida completed the first negotiated agreement under a new law that offers states and localities noncompetitive access to federal offshore sand for certain projects of public benefit, MMS officials announced today.

Through a negotiated lease agreement, MMS will provide the city of Jacksonville access to 1.24 million cubic yards of sand on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) approximately seven miles off the coast of Duval County. The sand will be used to renourish Atlantic Beach, Neptune Beach and Jacksonville Beach this year.

This is the first such completed lease agreement under an October 1994 amendment to the OCS Lands Act, which provides the Secretary of the Interior the authority to negotiate agreements for use of sand, gravel and shell resources located on federal offshore lands for projects of public benefit. The law allows the Department to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with other federal agencies involved in such projects and negotiate a noncompetitive lease with the appropriate state or local government agency. MMS previously signed an MOA with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to promote interagency cooperation on this Florida project.

"The negotiated agreement approach under the new law is a significant and beneficial addition to existing procedures that require a competitive bidding process to obtain a lease for mineral resources on the OCS," said MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman. "The competitive bidding requirement was cumbersome, not responsive to the needs of the states, and discouraged state interest in OCS sand for important public works projects.

"Although the law provides for assessing fees for the OCS sand resource, MMS waived the fee in the interest of equity and

fairness," she said. "The Jacksonville project is in the third phase of renourishment that dates back to the 1970s. For that reason, the project was deemed a special case.

"In keeping with MMS' overall stewardship responsibilities and our obligation to protect the environment, the agreement also calls for a study at the site to determine how quickly marine organisms recolonize the area after dredging," said Quarterman. "The study will add substantial information to broaden our knowledge of marine ecosystems. Already, a series of environmental studies are underway to assure that sand dredging is conducted in a sound manner."

Louisiana, New Jersey, South Carolina and Virginia have also expressed interest in the negotiated agreement process.

MMS is the federal agency that manages the nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the OCS, and collects 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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