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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT TO STUDY USE OF OFFSHORE SAND FOR BEACH RESTORATION

The Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) today announced the signing of a cooperative agreement with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS). The agreement calls for an extensive examination of the potential environmental effects of moving sand from the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) adjacent to Virginia for use in beach restoration efforts.

"Considering the periodic hurricane damage sustained along the Virginia coast," said MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman, "it's easy to understand the growing interest in investigating the possibility of using sand resources from federal waters for beach restoration."

The 24-month, \$521,645 project will be managed by VIMS and will involve investigators from VIMS and Old Dominion University. The United States Geological Survey's Office of Marine Geology is also participating in the project. Scientists will collect physical and biological information within a coastal sector extending from just below the community of Sandbridge northward to Cape Henry at the Chesapeake Bay entrance and outward from the coast to a depth of approximately 15-meters.

"We're concerned about the impacts on bottom-dwelling creatures," said Quarterman. "This study will provide valuable data regarding the potential for biological impacts within offshore sites which have been identified as possible sand areas."

Physical oceanographic data will also be collected to assess whether or not removal of material would affect the physical regime between these areas and the beach. These data will be invaluable in making future decisions when the use of federal sand offshore the State of Virginia is being considered."

The MMS is the federal agency that manages the nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources--including sand--on the OCS, and collects and disburses about \$4 billion yearly in revenues from offshore mineral leases and mineral leases on federal and Indian lands.

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