FOR RELEASE: October 3, 1995

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MMS GULF OF MEXICO ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH TO BE CONDUCTED BY NATIONAL BIOLOGICAL SERVICE

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) announced today that Interior's National Biological Service (NBS) will conduct one study of the Gulf of Mexico coastal and marine ecosystem for MMS, and manage three others.

The NBS will update the analysis of existing scientific data--or "characterization"--of the coastal area from the Mississippi River Delta to Apalachicola Bay. The study area will include all coastal counties extending offshore to the Federal leasing boundary. The study began this summer and is expected to take 30 months.

"The NBS will collect, organize and analyze information available from a variety of disciplines--including biology, hydrology, geology and socioeconomics--to understand how coastal habitats are affected by natural offshore processes such as tides and storms," said MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman. The study will cost approximately $200,000.

Quarterman said that over the next 3 to 4 years, NBS also will manage studies:

-- analyzing the distribution and abundance of marine mammals in the northern Gulf of Mexico to study marine life protected under the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammals Protection Act. The work will cost $500,000;

-- monitoring the ecosystem of the Mississippi/Alabama shelf of the northeastern Gulf of Mexico, such as observations of reef structure, organism growth rates and differences in diversity and density of life due to water depth. The study is expected to cost $700,000; and,

-- reviewing the cumulative ecological significance of the oil and gas structures of the Gulf of Mexico, whether through the conversion, removal or relocation of rig structures. Cost of the study is estimated to be $250,000.

"The MMS values its partnership with NBS," said Quarterman. "Our combined efforts promote good science, and provide the resources and knowledge necessary to ensure the future health and diversity of the marine life of the region."

Similar efforts to evaluate marine-related wildlife in federal waters have been initiated in Alaskan and Pacific coastal waters.

The NBS works with other agencies to provide the scientific understanding and technologies needed to support the sound management and conservation of the nation's biological resources.

The MMS is the federal agency that manages the Nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the Outer Continental Shelf, and collects, verifies, and disburses about $4 billion yearly in revenues from offshore federal mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on Federal and Indian lands.

--MMS--

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MMS ALASKA COAST ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH TO BE CONDUCTED BY NATIONAL BIOLOGICAL SERVICE

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) announced today that Interior's National Biological Service (NBS) will conduct for MMS one study of Alaskan waters coastal and marine ecosystem, and manage another.

The NBS will collect, collate and analyze existing scientific data needed to evaluate potential effects of offshore natural gas and oil exploration and development on sensitive marine birds in the Cook Inlet and Gulf of Alaska region. The study will be a continuation of seabird colony monitoring managed by NBS for MMS a year ago.

"The NBS study will determine the natural variability of seabird populations so that MMS can monitor conditions and recognize any changes that might occur," said MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman.

The MMS and NBS believe that it may be possible to coordinate this project with any related investigations conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or other studies evaluating the effect of the Exxon Valdez oil tanker spill.

Quarterman said that NBS also will manage the study of potential effects of offshore natural gas and oil exploration and development on non-endangered marine mammals and sensitive marine birds in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas.

"The MMS is working closely with and looking forward to continuing its partnership with NBS," said Quarterman. "The efforts should promote good science, and provide the resources necessary to help monitor, preserve and promote the diverse ocean wildlife of the region."

The Cook Inlet study will operate at a cost of $158,000. The Chukchi/Beaufort study $550,000.

Similar efforts to evaluate marine-related wildlife in federal

waters have been initiated in Pacific coastal waters and those of the Gulf of Mexico.

The NBS works with other agencies to provide the scientific understanding and technologies needed to support the sound management and conservation of the nation's biological resources.

The MMS is the federal agency that manages the Nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the Outer Continental Shelf, and collects, verifies, and disburses about $4 billion yearly in revenues from offshore Federal mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on Federal and Indian lands.

--MMS--

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MMS PACIFIC COAST ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH TO BE CONDUCTED BY NATIONAL BIOLOGICAL SERVICE

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) announced today that Interior's National Biological Service (NBS) will manage one study of the Pacific coastal and marine bird ecosystem for MMS, and support research through a second study.

As a follow-up to the 1990 study in the Santa Maria Basin, the NBS will evaluate the effects of an Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) natural gas and oil development and production platform on the abundance, species composition and movements of fish that inhabit natural deepwater reefs adjacent to a platform.

"An important question that needs to be addressed is whether fish populations around the reefs vary before or after drilling begins," said MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman. "If changes occur, are they related directly to changes in the reefs, directly to availability of prey species or indirectly to prey or shelter available beneath the platform."

Quarterman said that MMS also will benefit from NBS efforts to develop information on the population status and trends of two rare California seabirds - the Ashy Storm-Petrel on southeast Farallon Island and the Xantus Murrelet on Santa Barbara Island. The NBS study will supplement presently incomplete biological data on what is suspected to be a decline in the birds' populations.

"The MMS is looking forward to continuing its partnership with NBS," said Quarterman. "Our combined efforts promote good science, and provide the resources necessary to help monitor, preserve and promote the diverse ocean wildlife of the region."

The Santa Maria Basin study will operate at a cost of $500,000.

The California seabird study, about $1 million.

Similar efforts to evaluate marine-related wildlife in federal

waters have been initiated in Alaskan coastal waters and those of the Gulf of Mexico.

The NBS works with other agencies to provide the scientific understanding and technologies needed to support the sound management and conservation of the nation's biological resources.

The MMS is the federal agency that manages the Nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the OCS, and collects, verifies, 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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FOR RELEASE: October 4, 1995 CONTACT: Tom DeRocco
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CORRECTION

A news release dated October 3, 1995, announcing that the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Biological Service (NBS) will manage a study of the Pacific coastal and marine bird ecosystem for Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) was in error.

The California seabird study has been deferred indefinitely due to budget constraints.

The NBS will, however, support follow-up research to the 1990 pilot study in the Santa Maria Basin evaluating the effect of an Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) natural gas and oil development and production platform on the abundance, species composition and movements of fish that inhabit natural deepwater reefs adjacent to a platform. The Santa Maria Basin study will operate at a cost of $500,000.

-MMS-