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### **Environmental Study May Benefit Eroding Beaches in Alabama**

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) has awarded the first contract of its kind in the Gulf of Mexico to study the environmental effects of moving sand from the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) adjacent to Alabama for beach restoration efforts in that state.

"We recognize that portions of coastal Alabama are in critical need of high-quality, compatible sand. Federal waters may prove to be an excellent source of the materials needed for beach restoration projects," said MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman. "This study will determine the extent of biological impacts and disruptions to bottom-dwelling ocean life in the offshore sites that could be used as possible sources of sand."

The \$500,000.00 project, slated to last about two and a half years, will be managed by Aubrey Consulting, Inc. Well-known coastal geologist Dr. Mark Byrnes, will oversee the physical oceanographic data collection and analysis. Conducting the biological portion of the study will be Barry A. Vittor and Associates of Mobile, Alabama, and Continental Shelf Associates of Jupiter, Florida.

Physical and biological information will be collected from five previously identified sand borrow areas offshore and south of Dauphin Island and the Morgan Peninsula. Physical oceanographic data will also be collected to assess whether removal of material would affect the physical regime between these areas and the beach. These data will be invaluable in considering future decisions regarding the use of Federal sand offshore the State of Alabama.

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 annually in revenues from offshore mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on federal and Indian lands.

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