

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Office of Communications**

NEWS RELEASE

FOR April 17, 1997
RELEASE:

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LEASE SALE 149 IN COOK INLET TO PROCEED

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) announced today it will proceed with federal Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Lease Sale 149, Cook Inlet. The final Notice of Sale will be issued in the Federal Register next week. The sale will be held on June 11, 1997.

"The decision to proceed with the sale was made after we considered all comments received from fishing groups, natural gas and oil companies, industry support companies, environmental organizations, State and local governments, and numerous local residents" said MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman. A number of protective measures have also been developed to address concerns raised during MMS's consultations with constituency groups.

The area of the sale offering includes 101 whole and partial blocks encompassing about 430,000 acres. This is an approximate 78 percent reduction from the area originally analyzed in the environmental impact statement. The original area under consideration was 402 blocks covering about 2 million acres.

MMS met numerous times with affected communities throughout the pre-lease process, which began in 1991. The MMS has also invested approximately \$2.6 million on environmental and socio-economic studies exclusive to the Cook Inlet planning area, including a water quality study conducted in cooperation with the University of Alaska.

The Cook Inlet proposed sale area is located in Federal waters between Kalgin Island in the north and to the southern extent of state owned offshore leased area north of Anchor Point. The southern boundary of the proposed sale area is about 15 miles north of the entrance to Kachemak Bay. This area was previously offered in 1977 and 1981. The 1977 offering included all of the lower Cook Inlet, and the 1981 offering included all of lower Cook Inlet and tracts in Shelikof Strait. As a result of the previous offerings, MMS issued 100 leases on which companies drilled 13 exploration wells. Those leases have expired and the exploration wells have been plugged and abandoned. There was also a 1982 offering, however no leases were issued.

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

Editor's Note: Copies of the Federal Register Notice of Sale will be posted on the MMS website.

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