



# NEWS

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## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Office of the Secretary

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### **SECRETARY BABBITT AND FOREIGN SECRETARY GURRIA ANNOUNCE MARITIME BOUNDARY TALKS FOR THE GULF OF MEXICO**

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Mexican Foreign Secretary Angel Gurría today announced their intentions to commence discussions to resolve a longstanding boundary issue between the two nations. Today's announcement follows the recent exchange of instruments of ratification, placing in force maritime boundaries off the coast in the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean. That treaty did not address two "gaps" in the areas beyond 200 miles from the coastlines of the two countries in the Gulf of Mexico. The purpose of the discussions would be to establish a continental shelf boundary in the Western Gap.

U.S. oil and gas exploration and leasing activities have progressed toward deep water areas in the vicinity of the Western Gap. Under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, the Secretary's 5-year offshore program provides for two sales in the Gulf of Mexico annually. Although the northern portion of the Western Gap has been offered in past lease sales, the most recent sale in August 1997, (Sale 168) offered the area under special provisions to hold bids unopened until a Secretarial decision on or before March 3, 1998.

In light of the joint undertaking to commence discussions in the very near future, and after consulting with the Department of State, Secretary Babbitt has determined that it is in the best interests of the United States to return all unopened bids from Sale 168. For the same reason, the Secretary will withdraw the tracts in the Western Gap area proposed for lease in upcoming Sale 169 (tentatively scheduled for March 1998).

Secretary Babbitt and Foreign Secretary Gurría intend for the boundary discussions to commence in March 1998.

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