



U.S. Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region

NEWS RELEASE

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**MMS Identifies Areas for Proposed
2003 and 2005 Lease Sales in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico**

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) has identified the proposals, alternatives, and mitigating measures to be analyzed in environmental analyses covering two proposed offshore oil and natural gas lease sales in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico (GOM). The two proposed Eastern GOM sales under consideration are Sales 189 and 197. Both of the proposed sales are included in the recently approved 2002-2007 oil and natural gas leasing program. Sale 189 is tentatively scheduled to be held in December 2003 and Sale 197 is tentatively scheduled to be held in March 2005.

Regarding these sales, MMS published a Call for Information and Nominations and Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the *Federal Register* in February 2002, and subsequent scoping meetings on the two-sale EIS have been held.

This MMS area identification decision will be incorporated in the two-sale EIS as well as in a planned subsequent Environmental Assessment (EA) for Eastern GOM Sale 197, the second sale. The EA will focus primarily on new issues, to determine whether MMS should prepare either a Finding of No New Significant Impact or a supplemental EIS. The draft EIS is scheduled to be released in late November with public hearings to follow in January 2003.

The general area to be studied includes unleased whole blocks located within the portion of the Eastern GOM Planning Area that is west of 87 degrees 30 minutes West Longitude, and which generally range from 100 to 196 miles south of Alabama and from 70 to 148 miles offshore Louisiana. This area is the same area that was offered for lease in Eastern GOM Sale 181 held in December 2001. The area consists of approximately 1.5 million acres, of which approximately 0.8 million acres are currently available for bid in Sales 189 and/or 197.

Included where applicable in the planned environmental analyses will be three stipulations designed to reduce potential conflicts between oil and natural gas operations and military activities, and one stipulation designed to mitigate potential adverse effects on protected marine species.

MMS is the federal agency in the U.S. Department of the Interior that manages the nation's oil, natural gas and other mineral resources on the outer continental shelf in federal offshore waters. The agency also collects, accounts for and disburses mineral revenues from federal and Indian leases. These revenues totaled nearly \$10 billion last year and more than \$120 billion since the agency was created in 1982. Annually, nearly \$1 billion from those revenues go into the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the acquisition and development of state and federal park and recreation lands.

-MMS-GOM-