

PUBLIC MEETING

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT

SCOPING MEETING FOR THE
PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL
IMPACT STATEMENT FOR
GEOLOGICAL AND GEOPHYSICAL ACTIVITIES
ON THE GULF OF MEXICO

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 12, 2013

GOVERNMENT PLAZA
205 GOVERNMENT STREET
MOBILE, ALABAMA

6:30 P.M.

PRESENT ON BEHALF OF BOEM:

GARY GOEKE

BETH NORD

Reported by: Sali Sears, C.C.R.

PUBLIC MEETING

1 MS. NORD: Welcome. You have arrived at our
2 third meeting that we're holding for Geological and
3 Geophysical activities in preparation for Program EIS
4 in the Gulf of Mexico. We're at our third venue here
5 in Mobile. And we'll be heading east along the Gulf
6 region. And then we also have our last meeting in
7 Silver Spring, Maryland.

8 The EIS is actually going to be prepared by
9 two agencies together. The Bureau of Ocean Energy
10 Management. We're actually a piece of what used to be
11 the MMS. And also the National Marine Fisheries
12 Service.

13 The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management is
14 part of the Department of the Interior. And our
15 mission is to regulate development of energy and
16 mineral resources in the Outer Continental Shelf. And
17 the National Marine Fisheries Service is a part of the
18 Department of Commerce. And they are participating in
19 this effort, because they are responsible for
20 stewardship of the marine resources in the Gulf of
21 Mexico.

22 BOEM's mandate is to expeditiously and
23 orderly develop the resources of the Outer Continental
24 Shelf. And as a part of that mandate, we permit and
25 approve G & G activities in the Gulf of Mexico.

1 Our EIS is being prepared under the National
2 Environmental Policy Act. The National Environmental
3 Policy Act is kind of an umbrella, environmental law,
4 that deals with federal actions, and requires that the
5 federal government, before they undertake an action,
6 assess the impacts of that action, allow the public's
7 input and review of the action, and before we make a
8 decision about what our final action is going to be,
9 to get input from the public. And we do that so that
10 we can be making informed decisions on our federal
11 activities.

12 NEPA also requires that we coordinate with
13 other federal, state and local agencies under various
14 environmental laws and regulations. And as part of
15 the EIS process, we are coordinating with the National
16 Marine Fisheries Service. But we're also partnering
17 with them related to the Marine Mammal Protection Act
18 compliance, which deals with incidental take
19 statements, as well as the Endangered Species Act
20 compliance.

21 The NEPA process is a process -- okay. I'm
22 sorry. So part of developing the EIS includes
23 identifying various items, including the purpose and
24 need of the activities. Alternatives. Describing the
25 existing environment. Assessing the potential impact

1 of proposed actions. And looking for measures to
2 reduce the impact of the activities. And we typically
3 call those mitigation measures. So if we identify
4 that one of our activities could cause an impact, we
5 look for methods that we could utilize to reduce those
6 impacts.

7 And we also develop methods to consult and
8 coordinate with other federal and state agencies, as
9 part of NEPA.

10 And then this is a slide that -- okay. Now
11 it's going to go too far. The Council of
12 Environmental Quality is another federal agency. And
13 they have developed regulations for implementation of
14 NEPA. The green boxes on the right-hand side of the
15 slide show you basically the step-by -- large
16 step-by-step process that we follow to develop an EIS.
17 And the notice of intent was already released, and
18 that identified that we were going to be holding these
19 scoping meetings. And also identified the public
20 comment period of May 10th to July 9th.

21 We also -- the next step in the phase that
22 we're in right now is scoping, which is we are here to
23 get comments from you about alternatives, about
24 resources that could be impacted, about impact
25 reducing factors that you can identify. And basically

1 anything else you have to say about the proposed G & G
2 activity EIS in the Gulf of Mexico.

3 After the scoping period, we develop and
4 draft EIS. And we actually put that document in a
5 formal process, where we put it out for public comment
6 for 60 days. We take those public comments and we
7 revise the draft EIS and develop a final, and come up
8 with a decision for the alternative that we're going
9 to select, as well as identify if there are mitigation
10 measures that will be utilized in those mitigation
11 measures.

12 The EIS that we're preparing right now is
13 the programmatic. So that will be setting the stage
14 for future analysis for site specific G & G activities
15 that will then have an additional NEPA evaluation. So
16 this is the overarching evaluation that's on a broad
17 scale, that looks not just at resources and impacts,
18 but also cumulative impacts across the Gulf of Mexico.
19 And we'll utilize that as the base for future NEPA and
20 future permitting activities.

21 So the purpose of this scoping meeting is
22 that, as I said before, is to receive comments on what
23 you think should be evaluated, as well as recommended
24 alternatives, information that you may have about
25 special resources in the area, impact producing

1 factors, and other. We're hoping to gather
2 information from federal, state and local governments,
3 the local public, special interest groups, industry.

4 Some of the consultations that we're going
5 to be doing in conjunction with preparing this EIS are
6 shown on the slide above. Marine Mammal Protection
7 Act, that is going to be an important consultation
8 that we do, because we are preparing this document
9 with National Marine Fisheries Service. Because we
10 hope that they will be able to utilize this for their
11 incidental take authorization or their permitting
12 under MMPA.

13 We also deal or coordinate with the National
14 Marine Fisheries Service, related to the
15 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Act, the
16 Endangered Specifics Act, the Coastal Zone Management
17 Act, and other federal and state agencies with other
18 acts not listed above.

19 Okay. So what is a seismic survey. This
20 picture depicts a very basic example of a geophysical
21 survey. The geophysical survey has a sound source
22 that develops some kind of acoustic energy wave that
23 is bounced off the bottom of the sea floor and the
24 sound waves then come up and are detected by these
25 receivers. This is just a very basic example of what

1 a geophysical survey could be.

2 And in some cases, there are multiple
3 vessels pulling multiple streams of receivers. In
4 other cases, we could have the receivers actually on
5 the bottom of the sea floor. And many different types
6 of surveys. But, in general, that would be a very
7 basic geophysical survey.

8 And the purpose of these surveys are to
9 reflect the information about the subsurface. Either
10 the immediate layers of sand just below the surface of
11 the -- the subsurface, or actually deeper penetration,
12 to look at things like oil and gas, and the
13 foundation, the subsurface, to see if they are
14 suitable for siting renewable energy platforms or
15 other platforms.

16 Okay. So what are G & G survey activities
17 conducted for? They deal with all three of the
18 program areas that BOEM is involved with. Oil and gas
19 activities. Renewable energy activities. And marine
20 mineral activities, which is actually sand mining in
21 the OCS.

22 So geological -- G & G surveys are done to
23 assess the subsurface, to look at what is available,
24 what oil and gas resources are available below the
25 surface.

1 Again, also to look at siting locations for
2 renewable energy. What does the subsurface look like?
3 Is that foundation suitable for building a structure,
4 let's say one of those large offshore windmill sites?
5 Or marine minerals, what kind of source of sediment do
6 you have below the surface. Is it sand? Is it silt,
7 clay? Is it gravel? You know, what is that resource
8 below the surface, and will it be suitable material
9 for, say, a beach nourishment project or some other
10 similar type of project.

11 Okay. This is just a list of various
12 geophysical and geological surveys. Again,
13 geophysical surveys are emitting the sound sources and
14 bouncing them off the surface of the subsurface.

15 And then the geological surveys are the
16 techniques that we use to actually drill or core the
17 upper layers of the sea floor.

18 And another type of survey that is not
19 currently utilized, but we would be investigating, is
20 an emergency technology, which is called marine
21 vibroseis, where the technique for generating the
22 sound, as opposed to being the waves, is more of a
23 continuous low frequency sound that is generated by
24 using pistons.

25 Okay. The area that we will be evaluating

1 is throughout the northern Gulf of Mexico. It
2 includes eastern planning area, central planning area,
3 western planning area. And the area that we will be
4 evaluating is both the Outer Continental Shelf, as
5 well as some state waters. And the boundary line for
6 the evaluation is the white line. The red and white
7 dash lines shows the demarcation between state and
8 federal waters.

9 Okay. So what are we going to be looking
10 at? We're going to be assessing potential
11 environmental effects on that whole laundry list of G
12 & G activities you saw in the previous slide.

13 And we're looking at all of the areas in the
14 Gulf of Mexico, central, eastern and western planning
15 areas, as well as some state waters, excluding
16 estuaries.

17 We are going to determine the impacts to
18 significant resources that could be impacted. And
19 we're developing this information to allow us to
20 proceed with permitting or approval activities for oil
21 and gas activity, marine and mineral activities, and
22 of their future renewable activities in the Gulf of
23 Mexico. As well as to provide EIS, that we hope our
24 partner National Marine Fisheries Service will be able
25 to utilize for completing rule making for Marine

1 Mammal Protection Act.

2 So, as I said before, BOEM will issue
3 permits. We issue permits for oil and gas activities,
4 and approvals for marine mammal activities, as well as
5 renewables. The NMFS issues incidental take
6 authorizations, which are under the Marine Mammal
7 Protection Act. And the programmatic EIS is going to
8 be an overarching environmental impact assessment
9 document that we will utilize for both our permitting,
10 and we hope for NMFS rule making under MMPA.

11 So what kind of resources could we be
12 looking at? Coastal environment. Marine birds.
13 Marine mammals. Wetlands. Commercial and
14 recreational fishing. And, basically, that's one of
15 the areas that we would be looking for input from the
16 public and other resource agencies. You know, what
17 are significant resources that you are aware of in the
18 Gulf or that you're concerned about. So that we
19 could, you know, look at those and determine if they
20 are significant and the level of impact assessment
21 that would need to be addressed in the EIS.

22 In addition to the resources, we also are
23 looking at various impacting producing factors.
24 Obviously, if we're producing sound and putting it in
25 the water, acoustic sound sources is an impacting

1 factor that we'll be evaluating.

2 But there's also vessel and equipment noise.
3 Waste from vessels. Trash and debris. And various
4 other impacting factors. Again, that's another area
5 where we're looking for input from, you know, folks
6 that operate or manage the Gulf, for their ideas.

7 Okay. So one of the things we need to do
8 under the National Environmental Policy Act is define
9 the no action alternative. And identify the proposed
10 action, as well as other alternatives, so that we have
11 a suite of alternatives to evaluate and hopefully come
12 up with an alternative that we would select.

13 So in this case, we anticipate that we're
14 going to have -- we're required to have a no action
15 alternative, which in this case likely would be an
16 existing condition, such that we do continue to permit
17 activities in the Gulf of Mexico. And we need that no
18 action alternative defined, so that we can compare
19 other actions against it. But we anticipate there
20 will be other alternatives that look at a variety of
21 mitigation measures. Most of those mitigation
22 measures are related to reducing the impact of sound
23 on the environment and marine mammals, as well as
24 fish, is what we anticipate seeing in this document.

25 This slide has a variety of mitigation

1 measures that could be evaluated in the EIS, that
2 could provide -- or could mitigate impacts of the G &
3 G activities. Again, a lot of these relate to impacts
4 from acoustic sound impacts on marine mammals. Some
5 of those include ramp-up of acoustic sources.
6 Establishing exclusion zones, that there are special
7 areas where marine mammals are migrating. Nursing.
8 Nursery grounds. Monitoring specific operations.
9 Limiting the number of surveys over time in an area or
10 in space, separating surveys. All these have the
11 potential of being evaluated in the EIS.

12 So the tentative schedule for the
13 preparation of the EIS -- and you can see we're at
14 scoping meetings in June 2013. We're anticipating
15 that a draft document would go out mid 2014. And that
16 we may be able to have a final EIS published in early
17 to mid 2015.

18 If you look at the schedule, you see that
19 there are a number of time periods that are
20 highlighted in red. Those are the opportunities that
21 the public has to provide public comments. So in
22 association with the scoping meeting, either talking
23 here today or that we have another -- a number of
24 other methods that are both identified in one of the
25 slides, but also identified in the project

1 information. Let's see. No. The general information
2 sheets that tell you how you can submit comments. I
3 was going to show you the page.

4 Okay. What we're going to do next is we
5 have a speaker that has indicated they would like to
6 provide comments. And what we do is we'll let that
7 person come forward. The court reporter will record
8 your comments. And if you also have a written version
9 of your comments, you can submit those as well.

10 When we're done with our single speaker,
11 we'll go to the last two slides, which just provide
12 the information about providing comments. And then
13 when we get done with those, if the other attendee
14 would like to speak, we'll allow that, too. Whatever
15 you would like to do.

16 So we have our first speaker is Mr. Steve
17 Russell. And if you will check for me and make sure
18 that the microphone -- it should already be on. But
19 if not, let us know.

20 MR. RUSSELL: I feel like I'm in the City
21 Council meeting.

22 Good evening. I'm here to express my
23 support of the issuance of permits to conduct G & G
24 study activities in the Gulf of Mexico. My name is
25 Steve Russell. I represent OffshoreAlabama.com, a

1 partnership of over 230 companies in Mobile County who
2 are involved in various aspects of the offshore oil
3 and gas industry.

4 Members of OffshoreAlabama.com and some of
5 the jobs they represent are directly impacted by the
6 future of offshore oil and gas drilling and production
7 in the Gulf. Opening up new areas of increased
8 seismic activity is the first step to begin the
9 process of generating the data that will allow for
10 additional production in the Outer Continental Shelf.
11 Eventually, we hope that hundreds of local jobs will
12 be created, as more production comes online in the
13 ensuing years.

14 We believe that the draft EIS must be based
15 on the best available science, and fully consider the
16 environmental context when making any determination of
17 environmental consequences.

18 Finally, the continuation of the process of
19 seismic studies and offshore leasing in the Gulf of
20 Mexico is important to sustaining the health of the
21 Mobile economy. We appreciate the opportunity to
22 provide this public comment. Thank you.

23 MS. NORD: Thank you.

24 Did anybody else want to speak?

25 (NO RESPONSE.)

1 MS. NORD: Okay. Also in your handout
2 there's a page that has the state information that
3 shows the different methods of submitting comments.
4 In your information package, you have a sheet like
5 this. If you want to provide written comments, you
6 can fold it in half and mail it into our office in New
7 Orleans. The mailing address is already on there.
8 Then there's also an email address, gomggeis@boem.gov,
9 that you can submit comments to. And we also have a
10 method through regulations.gov, where you can provide
11 comments. Like I said, see the specific directions on
12 the general information sheets. And the last way is
13 is the plain old way, just write it up and mail it in
14 to Gary at the address listed on the screen.

15 We also have more information about G & G
16 activities in the Gulf. And they can be found at this
17 address. There's a lot of information about the
18 different G & G equipment types there. Information
19 about mitigation measures that are currently being
20 utilized for G & G activities in the Gulf of Mexico.
21 Information about Marine Mammal Protection Act.
22 Endangered Specifics Act. All kinds of useful
23 references.

24 And then we also, if you're interested in
25 being added to the EIS mailing list, if you would like

1 to receive this draft document when it comes out, you
2 can see that information by the website. And, again,
3 those addresses, as well as the information on how to
4 submit comments are in the information packet that you
5 picked up when you registered at the front -- front
6 desk. So you can find that in your information
7 sheets.

8 Okay. We're going to take a 15-minute
9 break, and come back and see if anybody has any
10 additional comments at that time. And if you don't,
11 then we'll adjourn after that.

12 Going off the record.

13 (BRIEF RECESS.)

14 MS. NORD: Okay. We have no other attendees
15 and no other comments. So we are done for the evening
16 and this is the end of the record.

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MEETING ADJOURNED.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ALABAMA

COUNTY OF MOBILE

I do hereby certify that the above and foregoing transcript of proceedings in the matter aforementioned was taken down by me in machine shorthand and the questions and answers thereto were reduced to writing under my personal supervision, and that the foregoing represents a true and correct transcript of the proceedings given by said witness upon said deposition.

I further certify that I am neither of counsel nor of kin to the parties to the action, nor am I in anywise interested in the result of said cause.



Sali Sears

SALI SEARS, C.C.R.

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