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MMS Begins Planning for Next Arctic Sales

Multiple Sale EIS Incorporates Planning and Analysis for Arctic Sales

ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- The Minerals Management Service (MMS) today issued a Call for Information and Nominations and a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for two Beaufort Sea and two Chukchi Sea oil and gas lease sales proposed under the Final 2007-2012 5-Year Program. This is the second time the agency has issued a multiple-sale call for the Arctic. A similar process was used for the three Beaufort Sea sales in the 2002-2007 5-Year Program.

The multiple-sale process for the proposed Arctic sales will incorporate planning and analysis for sales 209 and 217 in the Beaufort Sea and sales 212 and 221 in the Chukchi Sea.

The Call for Information is the first step in a process that will take about 2 years to complete.

This will be the first opportunity the public and industry have to provide comments on and suggestions for the area of the potential lease sales, identify environmental effects and other uses of the area, and propose possible alternatives, lease terms, and mitigating measures.

"Because many of the issues are the same, we plan to evaluate sales in both the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas together," said MMS Alaska Regional Director John Goll. "This approach will make it easier for the public and us to key in on the most important issues and their effects."

"We will prepare a single EIS for the four Arctic sales in the 2007-2012, 5-Year Program, which will maintain our strict environmental standards and our commitment to producing a complete scientific record on which to base leasing decisions," Goll said. "After the first EIS is completed for sales 209 and 212, we will prepare an environmental assessment, or supplemental EIS, for sales 217 and 221. Consistency determinations will be prepared for each sale individually. The public will have opportunity to comment on each individual sale proposal."

Since 1979, MMS has written 10 lease sale Environmental Impact Statements and two lease sale environmental assessments and has held 12 lease sales in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas. MMS oversees an extensive environmental, social, and economic studies program that evaluates the

impacts of offshore oil and gas development in the arctic, as well as in other Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) areas.

Some of the ongoing Beaufort Sea studies include monitoring studies of the Northstar and Liberty development project areas, under-ice currents, oil spill risk from oil production and transportation in the arctic, the annual Bowhead Whale Aerial Survey, and changes in trace metal concentrations.

The MMS sponsored a three-day scientific meeting in Anchorage in November 2006 to review the monitoring needs that would accompany oil and gas exploration in the Chukchi Sea after Sale 193, scheduled for February 2008. Ongoing studies in the Chukchi Sea include monitoring marine birds in the eastern Chukchi nearshore area, aerial photography of bowhead whales to estimate the size of the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort population, traditional knowledge about Bowhead whales in the Chukchi Sea, and monitoring impacts on offshore subsistence hunting.

The MMS is also co-sponsoring a project through the National Oceanographic Partnership Program (NOPP) to examine the coastal effects of diminished ice in the Arctic Ocean and the periodic upwelling of zooplankton within a Bowhead whale feeding area near Barrow, AK.

The Beaufort Sea planning area is located offshore Alaska's northern coast. It extends from about three to approximately 205 statute miles offshore and covers about 33 million acres.

The Chukchi Sea planning area is located offshore Alaska's northwest coast from north of Point Barrow to northwest of Cape Lisburne. The sale area extends from about 25 to 275 statute miles offshore. The proposed sale area excludes waters within 25 miles of the coast. This buffer zone encompasses the "polynya," a system of ice leads through which the bowhead and beluga whales, other marine mammals, and marine birds migrate north in the spring, and in which local communities subsistent hunt. The sale area covers about 40 million acres.

Comments may be sent to: MMS Alaska OCS Region
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or submitted via e-mail to arcticmultisale@mms.gov. Please call MMS at 907-334-5208 or toll-free at 1-800-764-2627 if you have additional questions.

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