Title	Understanding the Recreational Uses of OCS Infrastructure
Administered by	BOEM Gulf of Mexico Region
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Procurement Type(s)	Contract
Performance Period	FY 2019–2021
Date Revised	August 20, 2018
PICOC Summary	Write one or two sentences for each of the following elements, as appropriate.
Problem	BOEM has insufficient information regarding the recreational uses of offshore oil and gas infrastructure.
Intervention	This study will entail data analysis, interviews, and mapping tools.
Comparison	The above methods will be used across geographies and through time.
Outcome	To improve BOEM's knowledge of the baseline environment, to assist in predicting routine and cumulative impacts, and to improve policy decisions.
Context	Recreational uses of offshore platforms in the Gulf of Mexico Region are evolving due to technology, economic forces, and government policies.

BOEM Information Need(s): Offshore recreational activities, such as fishing and diving, are important to the social and economic frameworks of many communities along the Gulf Coast. However, the existing literature does not adequately describe the extent to which these recreational activities are dependent on OCS infrastructure. In addition, technological advances, socioeconomic changes, and regulatory changes have likely changed patterns of recreational practices since a prior BOEM study regarding this issue (Hiett and Milon, 2002). This study will obtain improved information regarding the recreational uses of OCS infrastructure.

The information obtained from this study will improve BOEM's pre-lease and post-lease NEPA analyses. For example, this study will allow BOEM to more accurately estimate the distances from shore that BOEM activities and recreational activities interact in various locations. This study will also improve BOEM's cumulative analysis of overall decommissioning trends, as well as broader BOEM analyses of recreational impacts. In addition, BOEM will soon develop a programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS) regarding decommissioning activities. The decommissioning PEIS is a particularly high priority, and this study would provide important information to that PEIS. This study will also inform decisions regarding which structures should be maintained through Rigs-to-Reefs programs. Finally, this study would support public outreach efforts and essential fish habitat consultations.

Background: Offshore recreational activities, such as fishing and diving, are important to the social and economic frameworks of many communities along the Gulf Coast. Hiett and Milon (2002) provided information regarding the overall levels of

fishing and diving near oil and gas platforms; they also estimated the economic impacts originating from expenditures by these fishermen and divers. While that study was productive, it also has its limits. It was based on 1999 data, which is becoming dated as the recreational landscape changes. It also did not examine certain subcategories of these activities, such as the scales of recreational fishing and diving that occurred in state versus Federal waters, or site-specific determinants of recreational uses of OCS infrastructure.

Since the Hiett and Milon (2002) study, there have been various changes and events that could have altered recreational practices along the Gulf Coast. For example, improved offshore communications, better safety technologies, and improved navigational aids have allowed the OCS to become increasingly accessible to anglers and divers. Public awareness of the oceans, environmental impacts, and ocean dynamics may have altered the levels of ecotourism and other recreational activities. Furthermore, the costs associated with recreational activities, as well as the structure of the U.S. economy as a whole, have evolved in recent years. Finally, the number of offshore platforms has been declining, and those that are being installed are generally in deeper waters where they are less accessible to recreational users. Fishermen, divers, government agencies, and industry participants would benefit from information regarding the changed landscape so they can plan and adjust their utilization.

Objectives:

1. To understand the overall scales, geographic extents, and site-specific determinants of recreational uses of offshore oil and gas infrastructure.

2. To develop a plan for longer-term data collection.

Methods: Due to a pressing need for information to be included in the decommissioning PEIS, this study will entail methods that can yield results quickly, while laying the groundwork for a potential future larger-scale study. This study will use multiple methods. First, it will conduct a limited number of interviews (individually or through a workshop) with recreation industry participants and government officials. Second, it will complete a literature review and compile existing relevant data. For example, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries recently took over responsibility (from the National Marine Fisheries Service) for Louisiana recreational fishing data; this study will explore the potential insights of this new data. Third, it will explore whether information regarding the recreational uses of platforms could be built into existing data gathering efforts. Fourth, it will also develop visual representations of how platforms and other artificial reefs correlate with socioeconomic indicators relevant to recreational fishing. Fifth, it will examine the appropriateness of a larger-scale, OMB-approved survey effort that would allow more quantitative estimates to be developed. Finally, this study will develop suggestions for the initial steps such a survey effort would take, and would develop potential survey questions. There is considerable collaborative potential by fostering partnerships with Federal and state fisheries agencies to leverage existing data collections and increased communication with stakeholders as interviews are conducted.

Specific Research Question(s): What are the overall scales, geographic extents, and site-specific determinants of recreational uses of offshore oil and gas infrastructure? To what extent can existing information sources address these questions?

References:

Hiett, R.L. and J.W. Milon. 2002. Economic impact of recreational fishing and diving associated with offshore oil and gas structures in the Gulf of Mexico: Final report. OCS Study MMS 2002-010. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, New Orleans, LA. 98 pp.