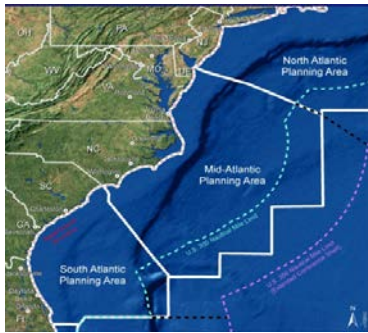


Mid- and South Atlantic Geological and Geophysical Surveys

Consideration of Fisheries and Recreational Resources



The Mid- and South Atlantic Planning Areas include commercial and recreational fisheries and other recreation-related activities that have significant cultural and economic importance to the Nation. These resources, directly or indirectly, support hundreds of thousands of jobs and generate billions of dollars in economic activity for the region. In light of this contribution, BOEM was careful to consider the potential impacts to fisheries that could result from geological and geophysical (G&G) survey activities in its Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) (for more information see <http://www.boem.gov/oil-and-gas-energy-program/GOMR/GandG.aspx>).

Access to Federal Waters

BOEM promotes energy independence, environmental protection, and economic development through responsible, science-based management of offshore conventional and renewable energy and marine mineral resources. The authority to carry out these responsibilities is derived from the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA). As BOEM considers major potential action, it is required to conduct environmental reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act. Therefore, every application to conduct G&G activities on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) must be reviewed for both compliance with OCSLA and for the potential impacts to the human and marine environment. As a part of the comprehensive review process, which includes public engagement, BOEM reviews impacts to other ocean uses, including other commercial and recreational activities on the OCS. In order to reduce the chance that competing uses for OCS waters may conflict, BOEM requires G&G permittees to issue Local Notices to Mariners specifying survey dates, locations, and recommended avoidances. This early planning and notification process presents the best possible opportunity for all OCS users to avoid potential disruption of their planned activities.

Impacts to Fisheries and Recreational Activities

BOEM recognizes shared interest in coastal resources, and local cultural and economic benefits are important and must be valued. For this reason, BOEM conducted a thorough analysis of commercial fishing and recreational activities in the region and has sought input from the States and the public throughout the process. Furthermore, BOEM analyzes the specific activities proposed under each application for potential impacts on other users and to coastal and marine resources, and coordinates with the affected State(s) and other Federal agencies. Through this multi-tiered, cooperative process, BOEM has determined that potential space-use conflicts resulting from proposed G&G activities are expected to have no impact or a negligible impact on commercial and recreational activities.

Human-generated sound resulting from G&G activity, such as the use of airguns, can affect the behavior of at least some fishes. To date, there has been no documented scientific evidence of noise from air guns used in G&G seismic activities adversely affecting animal populations. However, studies have demonstrated that behavioral responses cannot be predicted for an entire species or multiple species.

Responses to human-generated sounds can even vary widely among individuals of a species, and behavior may be affected by motivation, previous exposure(s), environmental conditions, the nature of the sound, or other factors. Despite these difficulties, researchers have attempted to determine the impact of seismic surveys on landings of various commercially valuable fish species. The results of these research efforts have been inconclusive to date. Although some studies have documented temporarily reduced landings in the vicinity of airgun activity, the reduction could result from a temporary change in behavior (reducing gear effectiveness), temporary displacement of the target species, or other factors. Subsequently, landings returned to normal.

Looking Forward

BOEM estimates G&G surveys would contribute to a minor increase in total OCS marine activity in these regions. Through the year 2020, approximately 32-103 non-bottom-disturbing surveys are projected; this estimate does not include localized bottom sampling, such as sediment cores, engineering property tests, and benthic fauna surveys. Based on the analyses performed by BOEM, the potential G&G survey activity in Federal waters over the Atlantic OCS is expected to have no impact or a negligible impact on the overall commercial and recreational fisheries and other recreational activities in the affected regions.