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### MMS EXPANDS SOCIOECONOMIC STUDIES PROGRAM (#30002)

The Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) announced today a two part expansion of its socioeconomic studies program. Funding for the multi-million dollar plan will come from MMS's Environmental Studies Program (ESP). MMS administers federal offshore natural gas and oil operations.

"The MMS Environmental Studies Program has spent more than half a billion dollars to obtain environmental information about such disciplines as air quality, fisheries, protected species, geology, physical oceanography and socioeconomic studies," said MMS Director Scott Sewell. "To initiate the expanded socioeconomic work, MMS will first enter into a \$150,000 cooperative agreement with the University of New Orleans to coordinate and conduct a national planning workshop, as recommended by the National Academy of Sciences in a recent report.

"This workshop will provide the framework and blueprints for the expanded socioeconomic work," continued Sewell. "Part two of the MMS plan calls for three major research projects to be awarded under cooperative agreements to the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Southwestern Louisiana State and Louisiana State University (LSU).

According to Sewell, \$100,000 will go to the University of Texas to do an analysis of socioeconomic issues for the western Gulf of Mexico. It will identify interested constituents in the private and public sectors and at the local, State, and federal levels. The University of Southwestern Louisiana will receive \$250,000 to study the impact of decline in federal offshore activity. That project will also examine the effects natural gas and oil activities have had on Louisiana communities.

The third research project will collect and analyze historical demographic data for all five Gulf coast States. Those states (Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas) will collectively contribute \$250,000 in matching funds toward the total \$750,000 cost; MMS will provide the remaining \$500,000. LSU will coordinate this gulfwide study.

"We chose the Gulf Region for these initial studies," said Sewell, "because it has an extensive and mature OCS oil and gas

industry."

MMS administers federal offshore mineral programs and manages the federal minerals royalty program. The agency is committed to achieving the appropriate balance between protecting the environment and providing opportunities for the discovery and recover of critical energy resources such as natural gas and oil.

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