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MMS ANNOUNCES AREA IDENTIFICATION FOR
GULF OF ALASKA/YAKUTAT 158 (#40029)

The Interior Department's Minerals Management Service (MMS) today announced the area to be studied for possible inclusion in the next federal outer continental shelf (OCS) lease sale offshore Alaska in the Gulf of Alaska. The sale is tentatively scheduled for July 1996.

The area includes approximately 997 whole and partial blocks encompassing about 5.3 million acres. It is situated in Federal waters in the Gulf of Alaska near Yakutat and extends from 3 to approximately 65 nautical miles into the Gulf of Alaska. Water depths range from 165 to more than 13,000 feet.

A draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared by MMS which will discuss the proposals for oil and gas leasing in the Gulf of Alaska. This will be the fourth OCS lease sale held in the Gulf of Alaska.

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NOTE: A detailed fact sheet and map are attached.

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The Interior Department's Minerals Management Service today announced that it has selected the area for proposed outer continental shelf (OCS) oil and gas lease Sale 158, Gulf of Alaska/Yakutat, to be analyzed in an environmental impact statement (EIS). This action constitutes the administrative prelease step referred to as Area Identification. This fact sheet contains a description of the area to be analyzed, as well as background information relevant to the proposed sale. A description of the prelease process for the proposed sale also is provided.

AREA IDENTIFIED

- * The Area Identification covers approximately 5.3 million acres or approximately 997 blocks.
- * Distance from shore ranges from approximately 3 miles to 65 miles.
- * Water depths in the planning area range from 165 to more than 13,000 feet.
- * Approximately \$8.9 million has been invested to date on environmental and socio-economic studies exclusive to the area.

The area selected was based upon nominations received from industry and the comments received regarding environmental and other issues. (A map of the proposed area is attached.)

LEASING HISTORY

Three sales have been held in the area: Sale 39, held April 13, 1976; Sale 55, held October 21, 1980; and Sale RS2, held June 30, 1981.

EXPLORATION ACTIVITY

One deep stratigraphic test (DST) well was drilled in October 1975 by industry to examine the geology of the area prior to the first Cook Inlet lease sale. Thirteen exploration wells were drilled on OCS leases in the Gulf of Alaska/Yakutat Planning Area between 1977 and 1983. All have been plugged and abandoned.

EVENTS LEADING TO AREA IDENTIFICATION

- * Sale 158 appears in the 1992 Comprehensive Program and is tentatively scheduled for July 1996.
- * A Call for Information and Nominations was published in the Federal Register on August 21, 1992. It identified the area believed by MMS to be geologically favorable for hydrocarbons, and asked respondents to outline areas within the Call area that they would like included in the proposed sale. The Call requested information that would be useful in identifying potential conflicts with approved local coastal management plans, potential environmental effects and use conflicts, possible mitigating measures, and possible lease terms and conditions.
- * One company responded to the Call indicating specific areas of interest.
- * General comments were received from the State of Alaska, City of Yakutat, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and the Marine Mammal Commission.

ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

The process of identifying issues to be discussed in the EIS was initiated by the publication in the Federal Register of the Call for Information and Nominations and the Notice of Intent to Prepare An EIS. The Alaska OCS Region will review information provided in response to the Call for Information for the proposed sale. Written comments were due 45 days after the Call was published in the Federal Register.

FURTHER ACTIONS REGARDING THE PROPOSED SALE

The potential effects of leasing in the area identified will undergo extensive environmental analysis in the EIS. Comments received on the Call for Information and Nominations and the Notice of Intent, and during the EIS scoping process, will be used with existing environmental data to develop alternatives to the proposed action and to design appropriate mitigating measures.

- * After a draft EIS is issued, public hearings will be held. Comments received will be used to develop the final EIS.
- * A decision whether to issue a proposed Notice of Sale will be made in conjunction with the issuance of the draft EIS. If issued, it will present a proposed decision on blocks to offer; special mitigating measures to protect human, coastal, and marine resources in the area; and other conditions and terms that will apply to the leases. The Governor of Alaska will be asked for his recommendations on the size, timing, and location of the proposed sale. After careful consideration of the Governor's comments, the Secretary of the Interior will make a final decision.

The final Notice of Sale will be issued at least 30 days before bids are opened. Copies of the area map are available from:

Minerals Management Service
Alaska OCS Region
949 E. 36th Ave., Room 110
Anchorage, AK 99508-4302

(907) 271-6010

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