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MMS DEFERS PROPOSED SALE 158 IN GULF OF ALASKA

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) today announced its decision to defer a proposed federal offshore lease sale in the Gulf of Alaska/Yakutat, Sale 158, which had been proceeding toward a mid-1997 sale date.

"We made the decision after reviewing comments from the natural gas and oil industry, industry support companies, and a Native organization," said MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman. "It's important to remember that the current 1992-1997 5-Year Oil and Gas Lease Sale Program outlines a schedule of potential lease sales. Each sale, though, only takes place after lengthy review and discussion with affected customers and stakeholders. We've found that there just isn't sufficient interest at this time to proceed with the sale." In an April 10 Federal Register notice, the agency had asked potential bidders to indicate whether they had a continuing interest in three proposed Alaska sales; the other two are Sale 144/Beaufort Sea and Sale 149/Cook Inlet.

During the public comment period on the draft environmental impact statement for the Gulf of Alaska sale, MMS received information indicating that there was much less interest in the area among the companies that had earlier supported the proposal. The companies indicated that although not interested in the Gulf of Alaska now, they would like to review the area under future 5-Year Programs.

MMS is in the process of developing a new 5-Year Program for the period 1997-2002 and is considering inclusion of a sale in the Gulf of Alaska in 2001.

MMS is the federal agency that manages the Nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the OCS, and collects, accounts for and disburses about \$4 billion in revenues yearly from offshore federal mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on federal and Indian lands.

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