

Overview: Reasons and Hope for the Study

Harry Luton

Independent Researcher

September 12, 2022

Abstract

Over decades, BOEM applied research has amassed a treasure of social and economic information and analyses, but these materials are difficult to utilize. They are so because applied work takes up and drops work as needed and fills “gaps,” leaving the synthesis to the BOEM analysts. The collection’s episodic quality makes using it difficult. DIGITAL CURATION resolves this problem by developing codes based on NEPA impact and assessment concepts and by applying these codes to the full texts of BOEM studies and to other selected documents. Because NEPA concepts motivate BOEM research, these codes provide a consistent system of organizing its content. They are a useful system because NEPA concepts are fundamental to BOEM assessment and are central to public concerns.

A difficulty with this approach is its demanding labor requirements; developing and applying valid codes “takes a village:” intensive, iterative, brainwork from people well versed in the issues and their contexts. DIGITAL CURATION adapts the NEPA concept of scoping to assemble such a village. After all, the idea behind scoping is to partner with concerned, committed citizens who have local knowledge; and who else could best help construct these codes or apply them? The organizational structures to conduct the work are established under a cooperative agreement with Nicholls State, known for its strong commitments to the Gulf Coast. This NEPA-based approach is truly local and interactive, bringing BOEM staff and citizens, deans and undergrads, faculty and Native Americans together into close working relationships. The staff-level demands on BOEM are great, but it has shown unexpected benefits. For example, it has opened doors to dialogue with representatives of communities such as the Houma and local institutions such as the Bayou Collaborative.