

Frequently Asked Questions

Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the 2017 -2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program

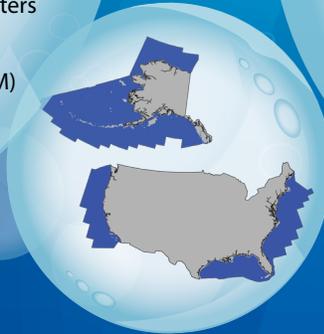
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What is the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS)?

Submerged lands seaward of state waters (see map).

The OCS consists of all submerged lands (the seafloor) lying seaward of State waters. OCS waters are federal waters and begin 3 nautical miles off the coast (except for Texas and the Gulf coast of Florida, where state waters go out approximately 9 nautical miles) and extend to 200 nautical miles from the coastline or where they meet another country's waters closer than 200 nautical miles.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) manages 1.7 billion acres of submerged lands on the OCS, which is more than 2/3 of the total land area of the United States!



2

What is the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act?

The Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, or OCSLA, was passed in 1953 and authorizes the Secretary of Interior to lease portions of the OCS for oil and gas development. The OCSLA authorizes the Federal Government, through BOEM, to grant leases for the exploration, development, and production of oil and gas from the OCS. The OCSLA dictates that the first step is to prepare and maintain a schedule of proposed lease sales determined to "best meet national energy needs for the five-year period following its approval or reapproval." The Secretary of Interior and BOEM are embarking on the preparation of the 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

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What is a Lease Sale?

A lease sale is the process by which BOEM transfers the right to apply for authorization to explore and develop the mineral resources within the leased area. Before authorizing any activities, BOEM carefully reviews all requests under the National Environmental Policy Act and numerous other environmental laws to ensure that the activities will be conducted in a safe and environmentally sound manner and that the interests of key stakeholders are effectively addressed.

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What is NEPA?

NEPA, the National Environmental Policy Act, was passed in 1970 and requires federal agencies to consider environmental impacts when they propose an action. NEPA also directs federal agencies to consider alternatives to their proposed action. For the Oil and Gas Leasing Program, BOEM first prepares a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Programmatic EIS) to comply with NEPA. BOEM prepares subsequent NEPA documents before an area is leased, including regional leasing and lease-specific analyses.

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How does NEPA integrate with the OCSLA process?

The OCSLA gives the Federal Government, through BOEM, the right to issue leases (see #2 and #3). NEPA requires federal agencies (such as BOEM) to consider environmental impacts and alternatives for a proposed action (see #4). When BOEM goes through the process of deciding what areas should be offered for lease, we look at the environmental impacts of leasing in those areas and what we could do instead of leasing in those areas.

The action BOEM takes under the OCSLA triggers the NEPA process.



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What is a Programmatic EIS?

Once the NEPA process is initiated, BOEM begins to prepare a Programmatic EIS, which is a document that analyzes the potential environmental impacts of an action with a broad geographic scope, such as oil and gas leasing in OCS waters. BOEM uses the Programmatic EIS to determine what the most important issues are when it comes to oil and gas leasing; how we can effectively avoid or manage environmental impacts; and what other options, or alternatives, for the proposed action are available. BOEM begins to determine what the issues and impacts are through a process under NEPA called "scoping."

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What is scoping?

All of the issues BOEM should consider.

The "scope" of the Programmatic EIS includes all of the issues that BOEM should consider when it is analyzing effects of the Oil and Gas Leasing Program in accordance with NEPA. It also includes the other options – or "alternatives" – BOEM should look at in addition to what is being proposed. BOEM uses past environmental documents we have prepared and, most importantly, we ask the public what you think. The most important things are "significant" impacts - that is, what places, habitats, species, or uses are the most likely to be affected? BOEM needs you to tell us what and where is most important to you when it comes to oil and gas development on the OCS.

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What is the Draft Proposed Program?

The second stage of a five-stage process to develop the 2017-2022 Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

The OCSLA requires BOEM to propose a schedule of lease sales every five years (see #2). This is referred to as the "Oil and Gas Leasing Program" and is the action that triggers NEPA (see #5). Preparation and approval of an Oil and Gas Leasing Program is based on the Secretary of the Interior's balancing of factors specified by Section 18 of the OCSLA to determine the size, timing, and location of lease sales. The Draft Proposed Program decision document lays out a proposed schedule of potential lease sales and is the first of three proposals to be issued for public review before a new Oil and Gas Leasing Program may be approved. The Draft Programmatic EIS is based on the Draft Proposed Program and analyzes the potential environmental impacts of the draft proposed program.

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What if I think oil and gas leasing is just a bad idea? What if I think it's a great idea?

Your opinion is important and we encourage you to make your voice heard. This process is focused on the environmental impact of the program – not whether or not there should be oil and gas leasing. There are other opportunities to participate in the process of developing BOEM's 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

Learn more about the leasing program and how you can provide input at www.boem.gov.

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Why should I participate?

The decisions that BOEM makes regarding where and when to lease areas of the OCS are based in part on the analysis we do in the Programmatic EIS. If BOEM does not know where you work and play on the ocean, we cannot consider that in our analysis.

Scoping (see #7) is an early and open process that provides an opportunity for you, the public, to provide useful input at the beginning of the Programmatic EIS process.

Your input ensures that BOEM is focusing our analysis on the important issues and areas.

