



NEWS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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Interior Department Seeks Public Comment on Outer Continental Shelf Energy Development

The Interior Department's Minerals Management Service today announced that it is seeking initial public comment on the development of its 2007-2012 five-year leasing plan for energy development on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) and accompanying environmental impact statement.

The announcement is the first step in a two-year process to develop the leasing plan. It does not include proposals for new lease sales but instead asks the public for general information and comment not only on energy development but also on other economic and environmental issues in the OCS areas.

"The Outer Continental Shelf contains billions of barrels of oil and trillions of cubic feet of natural gas that can be safely produced," Norton said. "With our reliance on imports of foreign oil climbing each year, we would be irresponsible if we did not consider how we might develop these abundant domestic resources."

Presidential withdrawals or congressional moratoria have placed more than 85 percent of the OCS off the lower 48 states off limits to energy development.

The Bush Administration has repeatedly expressed its support for the existing moratoria, based upon deference to the wishes of the states to determine what activities take place off their coasts.

However, recent energy legislation passed by Congress calls for a comprehensive inventory and analysis of the oil and natural gas resources for all areas of the OCS.

Therefore, as MMS undertakes the process of drafting its proposal, the agency is seeking comment on the potential resources available in all areas of the OCS, recognizing that many of these areas are subject to existing moratoria and will not be fully analyzed for possible leasing.

In seeking public comment, Secretary Norton reaffirmed the Bush Administration's pledge not to conduct any new leasing under the 2007-2012 five-year plan within 100 miles of Florida's coast, in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico Planning Area. MMS is also asking the public to comment specifically on whether the existing withdrawals or moratoria should be modified or expanded to include

other areas in the OCS; and whether the Interior Department should work with Congress to develop gas-only leases.

The 2007-2012 OCS oil and gas leasing program will be the seventh program prepared since Congress passed the OCS Lands Act in 1978. The Act requires the Secretary of the Interior to prepare and maintain five-year programs for offshore oil and natural gas leasing. The current program runs through June 30, 2007.

Once public comment is received, MMS will develop a draft proposed program followed by a proposed program and draft EIS. The public will have an opportunity to comment on both documents.

The following is the schedule for the 2007-2012 five-year program:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Step</u>
August 20, 2005	Solicit comments and information (Federal Register Notice)
Winter 2005	Issue draft proposed program (60-day comment period)
Summer 2006	Issue proposed program and draft EIS (90-day comment period)
Winter 2007	Issue proposed final program and final EIS (60-day waiting period)
Spring 2007	Approve five-year program for July 2007-July 2012

Comments responding to this solicitation are due by October 11, 2005, and may be submitted electronically through the Public Connect online commenting system at: www.mms.gov/5-year/2007-2012main.htm, or by mail to: 5-Year Program Manager, Minerals Management Service (MS-4010), Room 3120 Elden Street, Herndon, Virginia 20170. A related map and fact sheets are also available at this web site.