

MMS ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES PROGRAM: ONGOING STUDIES

Region: Alaska

Planning Area: Chukchi Sea

Title: COMIDA: Impact Monitoring for Offshore Subsistence Hunting (AK-08-04)

MMS Information Needs to be Addressed: This study will constitute a key component of Chukchi Sea environmental studies pertinent to Chukchi Sea Lease Sale 193 scheduled for 2007. Industry has expressed strong interest in leasing in this area, likely followed by exploration and possibly development. The COMIDA Workshop in November 1-3, 2006 recommended the monitoring of offshore subsistence hunting. The MMS needs to establish an early baseline in the area and to monitor on an annual basis any significant changes in subsistence activities over time. In particular, monitoring efforts should be directed toward the hunt for marine mammals, including bowhead and beluga whales, walrus, polar bears, and seals. MMS analysts and decision makers will use the information in NEPA analysis and documentation for Lease Sales, EPs and DPPs and in post-sale and post-exploration decision making in the Chukchi Sea.

Total Cost: TBD

Period of Performance: FY 2008-2011

Conducting Organization: TBD

MMS Contact: [Chief, Alaska Environmental Studies Section](#)

Description:

Background The oil and gas industry has expressed strong interest in leasing in this Planning Area under Sale 193, which may be followed by further exploration and possibly development. In order to assure methodological continuity over time for a potentially large exploration area, appropriate planning and implementation of post-lease monitoring baselines are needed. There is very little up-to-date information about offshore subsistence activities along the Chukchi coast, and there is acute need for more information in the vicinity of Wainwright and Point Lay, where development might make landfall.

Objectives This study will gather long-term monitoring data to allow the MMS to assess whether OCS oil development activities in the Chukchi Sea will result in changes to offshore subsistence hunting practices. The first research question is whether subsistence hunting in the Chukchi Sea displays significant variation over time. The second question is whether such variation can be attributed to offshore oil and gas industrial activities.

- Monitoring Hypotheses 1: Offshore subsistence hunting patterns in the vicinity of Wainwright and Point Lay do not vary significantly from year to year.
- Monitoring Hypotheses 2: Variation in offshore subsistence hunting patterns are not related to offshore oil and gas activities.

Methods This project will entail extensive community engagement. Early procedures will

involve issue nomination and/or confirmation from the North Slope Borough Fish and Game Management Committee and community representatives. Researcher must establish a protocol or mechanism to facilitate community participation and a meaningful role in the technical aspects of monitoring efforts. Use of focus groups and community dialogue will help to establish acceptable fieldwork procedures for systematic observations and data collection, including: harvesting patterns and numbers; locations of strikes, with direction and distance from shore; number of hunting groups and composition; duration of hunting activities by active days; length of hunt and area searched; estimated costs per unit effort; report of any accidents or mishaps; and report of weather conditions and ice conditions. Much of the technical data may be recorded by Global Positioning System (GPS) instruments that the project will provide to cooperating local hunters, and may be supplemented by ethnographic observation and conversation. Researchers will then analyze collected information and provide a summary report at the end of each hunting season, with review opportunities by respective host communities to achieve collaborative results.

Current Status: Under procurement

Final Report Due:

Annual reports due in November. Final report is due in November 2011.

Publications Completed: None

Affiliated WWW Sites: <http://www.mms.gov/alaska/>

Revised Date: March 2008