

## MMS ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES PROGRAM: ONGOING STUDIES

**Region:** Alaska

**Planning Areas:** Beaufort Sea

**Title:** Aggregate Effects Research and Environmental Mitigation Monitoring of Oil Industry Operations in the Vicinity of Nuiqsut (AK-08-09)

**MMS Information Needs to be Addressed:** The study will serve to verify and/or improve the effectiveness of pre-lease mitigation strategies and post-lease operations for future development activities on the OCS. 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 Beaufort Sea.

**Total Cost:** \$350,000

**Period of Performance:** FY 2009-2011

**Conducting Organization:** TBD

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

### **Description:**

*Background* The recent completion of several oilfield development projects, both onshore and offshore, in the vicinity of subsistence use areas for the village of Nuiqsut creates an opportunity to study and evaluate empirically the effectiveness of specific mitigation measures and processes in village Alaska. Social research can ascertain and document a wide range of information about some of the following pertinent questions:

- What is the track record for implementing mitigation plans over the life of a project?
- Have formal mitigation efforts been effective in reducing anticipated effects?
- What types of mitigation effort seem to work best to reduce social conflict?
- Have informal mitigation mechanisms emerged, and with what effect?
- What is the cumulative effectiveness of regional mitigation across multiple projects?
- How do various responsible agencies actually monitor and measure mitigation effects?
- Have industry operations been responsive to community feedback?
- What scientific parameters are appropriate to evaluate mitigation retrospectively?
- What specific data sets are most useful to collect before, during, and after a project?
- Are there significant social nuances to the mitigation process that merit further research?

This study will proceed as an inter-agency project, with at least collaborative manpower contributions from both federal and state agency representatives. Other cooperative funding may be established through coordination with NSSI, BLM, FWS, and/or the State of Alaska and private industry.

The study is intended to pilot-test the prospects for a more comprehensive future undertaking by limiting the initial scope of research to a few recent exploration and development projects. The projects to review would likely include Northstar, McCovey, Endicott, Alpine and satellites, NPR-A

exploration, and the most recent fields in Kuparuk (Meltwater and Tarn). The most substantial topics would likely derive from mitigation efforts effecting the human environment in and around the Colville Delta. For example, Alpine provides some concrete manifestations of publicly contested outcomes that might warrant focused research in the proposed study. Nuiqsut residents have asserted prominent discrepancies between pre-development guarantees and post-development realities with regard to many specific issues. The study would encompass research and documentation of both objective and subjective interpretations of mitigation effects.

### Objectives

1. Systematically identify the formal and informal mechanisms that relevant actors have negotiated and implemented in Development and Production Plans or Exploration Plans to mitigate specific anticipated impacts from oil development in the vicinity of Nuiqsut and its subsistence area, both onshore and offshore.
2. Develop a rigorous analytic method to evaluate the social effectiveness of mitigation measures and their predictability as they pertain to North Slope residents.
3. Establish an empirical basis to distinguish offshore/onshore oil related social impacts.
4. Provide socio-cultural insights into the challenge of mitigation to enhance government performance in predicting, monitoring, and managing the oil development process.

Methods Project sponsors will need to establish an appropriate steering committee across federal/state agencies to facilitate the study execution and to achieve a specific division of labor. Researchers will conduct a literature search to investigate and annotate the documented social nuances of mitigating social impacts within the framework of NEPA. Researchers will record a concise history of recent oilfield exploration and development near Nuiqsut. This may involve literature search, interviews, and fieldwork. Researchers will investigate and document the history of negotiated mitigation measures for select oil related exploration and development activities near Nuiqsut. They will identify and analyze both the formal and informal mitigation mechanisms that have emerged over time. Researchers will quantify industry/community interactions in relevant categories of analysis. Researchers will analyze the collected data to develop an objective narrative of events and interactions, including alternative stakeholder interpretations of past interactions to emphasize relevant subjective features of the mitigation process. Researchers will then summarize the findings and provide explicit analysis to improve agency understanding and management of the social process of mitigating impacts from oil development.

**Current Status:** Under procurement through coordination with NSSI

**Final Report Due:** N/A

**Publications Completed:** None

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

**Revised Date:** March 2008