

## **Report from the Alaska Subcommittee of the MMS OCS Scientific Committee**

### **North Aleutian Basin (NAB) Planning Meeting**

**Nov 28- Dec 1, 2006, Anchorage, Alaska**

Dr. Michael Castellini, Chair, Alaska Sub-committee, Dr. Will Schroeder, Dr. Duane Gill

The NAB planning meeting was called by MMS Alaska Region to bring together scientific, agency, user, and public members to describe the major issues relative to possible lease sales in the NAB basin. Attached is a link to the electronic version of the program, maps, and outlines of the invited speakers and invitation list (<ftp://ftp.evs.anl.gov/pub/Alaska/>). The program was coordinated and run by Argonne National Laboratories under contract to MMS. The Alaska Subcommittee was invited to attend and we held a phone conference call with the subcommittee members in October to prepare for the meeting. Some of the subcommittee members attended the Chukchi planning meeting in early November and others attended this NAB meeting.

The NAB planning meeting was organized around a day of review presentations by scientists' major fields of concern and then 2 days of workshops designed to derive the studies needed in five major areas (oceanography, fisheries, social/subsistence, marine mammals and birds). On the last day, working group recommendations were presented to the entire body. The meeting adjourned and then the Argonne facilitators, MMS personnel, and subcommittee members worked for several hours on recommendations and the process that will occur during the next several months.

The crux of this meeting was that if the lease sales are included in the upcoming 5-year plan by MMS, then MMS will begin work immediately on critical data needs that would be necessary for Environmental Impact Statements, National Environmental Policy Act, and various permitting processes. Therefore, the working groups were tasked with describing research needs within the framework of the agency requirements.

A full report on the meeting and the results of workshops are to be provided by Argonne sometime in December.

The purpose of this subcommittee report is to comment on the meeting process, to request materials for review as the agency moves through the next several steps of recommending studies, and to provide a "first-look" review of the scientific findings of the meeting.

The NAB planning meeting was open to the public and a broad group of scientists, agencies, non-government organizations, and public; university and regional corporations were both invited and attended. A list of the invitees is in the back of the meeting documents. Not everyone could attend, but the subcommittee verifies that the meeting was driven by the attendees and that Argonne facilitated, but did not direct the discussions. Further, we verify that MMS did not direct the meeting to influence the outcome of which studies should be considered as priorities. That is, MMS staff members were in the working groups to add information or help describe the process, but they did not direct the discussion to include any particular project.

The three members of the Scientific Committee attended all working groups several times each day but only marginally participated in the discussions, if at all. We did not influence the recommendations nor offer the view of the Scientific Committee members.

When we met with MMS personnel and Argonne facilitators on Friday after the planning meeting, the subcommittee outlined several items and requests:

1. We requested that MMS provide the full Scientific Committee with monthly updates on the process of how projects prioritized for funding were selected, reviewed, and announced.
2. Given that many of planning group recommendations involved major Bering Sea ecosystem monitoring components, we stressed that MMS must collaborate with the North Pacific Research Board (NPRB) and with the National Science Foundation (NSF) Bering Sea programs. These two agencies have similar goals and objectives and working with them is critical.
3. Because many of the panel recommendations dealt with nearshore oceanography and biology, MMS will need to approach those issues with the realization that NSF and NPRB do not have nearshore programs. MMS will need to be the lead on these projects as they move in that direction.
4. Societal impacts of NAB development will also need to be conducted primarily through MMS direction. There are programs in the region dealing with socioeconomics and subsistence utilization, but they do not offer the coordinated objectives that would be necessary for NAB development.
5. The subcommittee followed the discussions of MMS about which suggested programs they felt were immediately critical to their needs. While we cannot discuss those suggestions in this document, the full Scientific Committee will see them as they are developed and reported under #1 above.

**MMS Alaska OCS Region Responses to:  
Report from the Alaska Subcommittee of the MMS OCS Scientific Committee  
North Aleutian Basin (NAB) Planning Meeting  
November 28 – December 2, 2006, Anchorage, Alaska**

**1) We requested that MMS provide the full scientific committee with monthly updates on the process of how projects prioritized for funding were selected, reviewed and announced.**

There has been little to report since the events of the NAB planning meeting; however, with the release of the Final Proposed 5-year Plan, 2007- 2012 activities are now proceeding. The Alaska OCS Region is proceeding with plans to procure a number of high priority research projects consistent with the events of the NAB planning meeting. Projects currently in the “procurement” stage were selected on the basis of managerial assessment of greatest utility in meeting the agency responsibilities under the OCS Lands Act.

**2. Given that many of planning group recommendations involved major Bering Sea ecosystem monitoring components, we stressed that MMS must collaborate with the North Pacific Research Board (NPRB) and with the National Science Foundation Bering Sea programs. These two agencies have similar goals and objectives and working with them is critical.**

MMS has taken steps to circulate information and to initiate collaboration with other agencies involved in Bering Sea research. Workshop reports provide one important vehicle of communication, and these reports are scheduled to become public documents by the end of May. More significantly, MMS has initiated an inter-agency agreement with NMFS to develop a cooperative research effort consistent with the discussions of the NAB planning meeting. MMS staff has also attended relevant meetings to explore more directly the potential for future collaboration. For example, an MMS oceanographer attended the North Pacific Research Board Contaminants Workshop in early 2007, and joint funding with NSF on an arctic social science project in 2006 will facilitate opportunities for potential new collaboration in the Bering Sea.

**3. Because many of the panel recommendations dealt with nearshore oceanography and biology, MMS will need to approach those issues with the realization that NSF and NPRB do not have nearshore programs. MMS will need to be the lead on these projects as they move in that direction.**

The MMS Alaska OCS Region will proceed along such a line of leadership.

**4. Societal impacts of NAB development will also need to be conducted primarily through MMS direction. There are programs in the region dealing with socioeconomics and subsistence utilization, but they do not offer the coordinated objectives that would be necessary for NAB development.**

MMS has nominated and prioritized for FY08 funding a social research study on subsistence activities in select communities. This effort will likely involve collaborative efforts with Alaska Department of Fish & Game.

**5. The subcommittee followed the discussions of MMS about which suggested programs they felt were immediately critical to their needs. While we cannot discuss those suggestions in this document, the full scientific committee will see them as they are developed and reported under #1 above.**

As will be seen in the MMS Alaska OCS Region's Studies Development Plan, 2008-2010, the nomination and prioritization of the relevant research projects for the NAB area are well underway.