

the MHCP planning area. Overall, 19,928 acres (67 percent) of the habitat in the total MHCP study area would be conserved under this alternative.

Under the increased preservation alternative, all large contiguous areas of habitat, all areas supporting major and critical species populations or habitat areas, and all important functional linkages and movement corridors between them would be conserved. Approximately 83 percent of coastal sage scrub, 93 percent of chaparral, 95 percent of coastal sage/chaparral mix, and 100 percent of riparian and estuarine habitats would be conserved in the total MHCP study area. Overall, 24,565 acres (82 percent) of the habitat in the study area would be conserved under this alternative.

Under the no project alternative, only listed species and habitat occupied by such species would receive protection. It was estimated that conservation levels would include 19 percent of coastal sage scrub, 31 percent of chaparral, and 18 percent of coastal sage/chaparral mix within the MHCP study area. Overall, 8,989 acres (30 percent) of natural habitats in the study area would be conserved under this alternative.

Purpose of Final EIS/EIR

The analysis provided in the final EIS/EIR is intended to accomplish the following: Inform the public of the Service's proposed action; address public comments received on the draft MHCP EIS/EIR; disclose the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of our proposed action; and indicate any irreversible commitment of resources that would result from implementation of the proposed action. This notice is provided pursuant to section 10 of the Act and National Environmental Policy Act (1972) regulations (40 CFR 1506.6).

Decision

We will consider all comments received during the comment period. We also will evaluate the permit application and associated documents to determine whether the application meets the requirements of section 10(a) of the Act. If we determine that the requirements are met, we will issue an incidental take permit to the City of Carlsbad. Subsequent to this decision, we will publish a separate notice of the availability of our Record of Decision and other decision documents.

D. Kenneth McDermond,

Deputy Manager, Region 1, California/Nevada Operations Office, Sacramento, California.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Minerals Management Service

Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), Central Planning Area, Oil and Gas Lease Sale 194 (2005)

AGENCY: Minerals Management Service (MMS), Interior.

ACTION: Preparation of an environmental assessment.

SUMMARY: The MMS is beginning preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) for proposed Lease Sale 194 (scheduled for March 2005) in the Central Planning Area (CPA) of the Gulf of Mexico (GOM). The preparation of this EA is the first step in the decision process for Lease Sale 194. The proposal and alternatives for Lease Sale 194 were identified by the MMS Director in January 2002 following the Call for Information and Nominations/Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and were analyzed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for Proposed Central Gulf of Mexico OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sales 185, 190, 194, 198, and 201, and Proposed Western Gulf of Mexico OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sales 187, 192, 196, and 200 (Final EIS). A CPA proposed action analyzed in the Final EIS was the offering of all available unleased acreage in the CPA. Three alternatives were analyzed: exclude blocks within 15 miles of Baldwin County, Alabama, coast; exclude blocks near biologically sensitive topographic features; and cancel the lease sale. The analysis in the EA will reexamine the potential environmental effects of the proposed action and its alternatives based on any new information regarding potential impacts and issues that were not available at the time the Final EIS was prepared.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Dennis Chew, Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394. You may also contact Mr. Chew by telephone at (504) 736-2793.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In November 2002, MMS prepared a Final EIS that addressed nine proposed Federal actions that offer for lease areas on the GOM OCS that may contain economically recoverable oil and gas resources. Federal regulations allow for several related or similar proposals to be analyzed in one EIS (40 CFR 1502.4). Since each proposed lease sale and its projected activities are very similar each year for each planning area, a single EIS was prepared for the nine CPA and

Western Planning Area (WPA) lease sales scheduled in the Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program: 2002-2007 (the 5-Year Program). Under the 5-Year Program, five annual areawide lease sales are scheduled for the CPA (Lease Sales 185, 190, 194, 198, and 201) and five annual areawide lease sales are scheduled for the WPA (Lease Sales 184, 187, 192, 196, and 200). Lease Sale 184 was not addressed in the Final EIS; a separate EA was prepared for that proposal. The Final EIS addressed CPA Lease Sales 185, 190, 194, 198, and 201 scheduled for 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007, respectively, and WPA Lease Sales 187, 192, 196, and 200 scheduled for 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006, respectively. Although the Final EIS addresses nine proposed lease sales, at the completion of the EIS process, decisions were made only for proposed CPA Lease Sale 185 and proposed WPA Lease Sale 187. In the year prior to each subsequent proposed lease sale, an additional National Environmental Policy Act review will be conducted to address any new information relevant to that proposed action. After completion of the EA, MMS will determine whether to prepare a Finding of No New Significant Impact (FONNSI) or a Supplemental EIS. The MMS will then prepare and send Consistency Determinations (CD's) to the affected States to determine whether Lease Sale 194 is consistent with their federally-approved State coastal zone management programs. Finally, MMS will solicit comments via the Proposed Notice of Sale (PNOS) from the governors of the affected States on the size, timing, and location of Lease Sale 194. The tentative schedule for the pre-lease decision process for Lease Sale 194 is as follows: EA FONNSI or Supplemental EIS decision, October 2004; CD's sent to affected States, October 2004; PNOS sent to governors of the affected States, October 2004; Final Notice of Sale published in the **Federal Register**, February 2005; and Lease Sale 194, March 2005.

Public Comments: Federal, State, and local governmental agencies, and other interested parties are requested to send within 30 days of this Notice's publication comments regarding any new information or issues that should be addressed in the EA to the Regional Supervisor, Leasing and Environment (MS 5410), Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, Minerals Management Service, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394. Comments should be enclosed in an envelope labeled "Comments on CPA Lease Sale 194 EA." You may also send comments

to the MMS e-mail address: environment@mms.gov. Comments, including the names and home addresses of respondents, will be made available for public review during regular business hours. You may request that your name, home address, or both be withheld from the public record by stating so at the beginning of your submission. The MMS will honor such a request to the extent allowable by law. All comments submitted by organizations and businesses or by individuals identifying themselves as representatives of organizations and businesses will be made available for inspection in their entirety. Anonymous comments will not be considered. To obtain single copies of the Final EIS, you may contact the Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, Attention: Public Information Office (MS 5034), 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, Room 114, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394 (1-800-200-GULF). You may also view the Final EIS or check the list of libraries that have copies of the Final EIS and their locations on the MMS Web site at <http://www.gomr.mms.gov>.

Dated: April 19, 2004.

Chris C. Oynes,

Regional Director, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region.
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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Minerals Management Service

Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), Eastern Planning Area, Oil and Gas Lease Sale 197 (2005)

AGENCY: Minerals Management Service (MMS), Interior.

ACTION: Preparation of an environmental assessment.

SUMMARY: The MMS is beginning preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) for proposed Lease Sale 197 (scheduled for March 2005) in the Eastern Planning Area (EPA) of the Gulf of Mexico (GOM). The geographic area for proposed Lease Sale 197 is shown on the map published with this Notice; it is the same area that was offered in Lease Sale 181 held in December 2001 and Lease Sale 189 in December 2003. The preparation of this EA is the first step in the decision process for Lease

Sale 197. The proposal and alternative for Lease Sale 197 were identified by the MMS Director in February 2002 following the Call for Information and Nominations/Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and were analyzed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for Gulf of Mexico OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sales: 2003 and 2005; Eastern Planning Area Sales 189 and 197 (Final EIS). A proposed action offering all available unleased acreage in the EPA and the No Action alternative were analyzed in the Final EIS. The analysis in the EA will reexamine the potential environmental effects of the proposed action and its alternative based on any new information regarding potential impacts and issues that were not available at the time the Final EIS was prepared.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Dennis Chew, Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394. You may also contact Mr. Chew by telephone at (504) 736-2793.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In May 2003, MMS prepared a Final EIS that addressed two proposed Federal actions that offer for lease areas on the Eastern GOM OCS that may contain economically recoverable oil and gas resources. Federal regulations allow for several related or similar proposals to be analyzed in one EIS (40 CFR 1502.4). Since each proposed lease sale and its projected activities are very similar, a single EIS was prepared for the two EPA lease sales scheduled in the Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program: 2002-2007 (the 5-Year Program). Under the 5-Year Program, proposed Lease Sale 189 was held in 2003, while proposed Lease Sale 197 is scheduled for 2005. An additional National Environmental Policy Act review will be conducted to address any new information relevant to proposed Lease Sale 197. After completion of the EA, MMS will determine whether to prepare a Finding of No New Significant Impact (FONNSI) or a Supplemental EIS. The MMS will then prepare and send Consistency Determinations (CD's) to the affected States to determine whether Lease Sale 197 is consistent with their federally-approved State coastal zone management programs. Finally, MMS will solicit comments via the Proposed Notice of Sale (PNOS)

from the governors of the affected States on the size, timing, and location of Lease Sale 197. The tentative schedule for the prelease decision process for Lease Sale 197 is as follows: EA FONNSI or Supplemental EIS decision, October 2004; CD's sent to the affected States, October 2004; PNOS sent to governors of affected States, October 2004; Final Notice of Sale published in the **Federal Register**, February 2005; and Lease Sale 197, March 2005.

Public Comments: Federal, State, and local governmental agencies, and other interested parties are requested to send within 30 days of this Notice's publication comments regarding any new information or issues that should be addressed in the EA to the Regional Supervisor, Leasing and Environment (MS 5410), Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, Minerals Management Service, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394. Comments should be enclosed in an envelope labeled "Comments on EPA Lease Sale 197 EA." You may also send comments to the MMS email address: environment@mms.gov. Comments, including the names and home addresses of respondents, will be made available for public review during regular business hours. You may request that your name, home address, or both be withheld from the public record by stating so at the beginning of your submission. The MMS will honor such a request to the extent allowable by law. All comments submitted by organizations and businesses or by individuals identifying themselves as representatives of organizations and businesses will be made available for inspection in their entirety. Anonymous comments will not be considered. To obtain single copies of the Final EIS, you may contact the Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, Attention: Public Information Office (MS 5034), 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, Room 114, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394 (1-800-200-GULF). You may also view the Final EIS or check the list of libraries that have copies of the Final EIS and their locations on the MMS Web site at <http://www.gomr.mms.gov>.

Dated: April 22, 2004.

Chris C. Oynes,

Regional Director, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region.

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