

Dated: December 11, 2007.

Helen M. Hankins,

Arizona Associate State Director.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Minerals Management Service

Gulf of Mexico (GOM), Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), Central Planning Area (CPA) and Western Planning Area (WPA), Oil and Gas Lease Sales for Years 2009–2012

AGENCY: Minerals Management Service (MMS), Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and Public Hearings.

SUMMARY: The MMS has prepared a draft SEIS on oil and gas lease sales tentatively scheduled in 2009–2012 in the CPA and WPA offshore the States of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. As mandated in the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006 (GOMESA) (Pub. L. 109–432, December 20, 2006), the MMS shall offer, as soon as practicable, approximately 5.8 million acres located in the southeastern part of the CPA (“181 South Area”). The CPA Sale 208 (March 2009) will be the first sale to include the “181 South Area.” The draft SEIS analyzed the potential environmental effects of oil and natural gas leasing, exploration, development, and production in the “181 South Area” and newly available information.

Authority: This NOA and notice of public hearings is published pursuant to the regulations (40 CFR 1503) implementing the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.* (1988)).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: As mandated in GOMESA, the MMS shall offer the “181 South Area” for oil and gas leasing pursuant to the OCS Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1331 *et seq.*). In March 2009, proposed Lease Sale 208 would be the first CPA sale to offer the “181 South Area.” The draft SEIS supplements the *Gulf of Mexico OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sales: 2007–2012; Western Planning Area Sales 204, 207, 210, 215, and 218; Central Planning Area Sales 205, 206, 208, 213, 216, and 222, Final Environmental Impact Statement (OCS EIS/EA MMS 2007–018, Multisale EIS)*. The Multisale EIS did not analyze the “181 South Area”, therefore the MMS has prepared the draft SEIS to address the addition of the

“181 South Area” to the proposed CPA sale area. Also an extensive search was conducted for new information published since completion of the Multisale EIS, including various Internet sources, scientific journals, and interviews with personnel from academic institutions, and Federal, State, and local agencies.

Based on new information and the expanded CPA sale area, the MMS has reexamined potential impacts of routine activities and accidental events associated with the proposed CPA and WPA lease sales, and a proposed lease sale’s incremental contribution to the cumulative impacts on environmental and socioeconomic resources. Like the Multisale EIS, the resource estimates and scenario information for the SEIS analyses are presented as a range that would encompass the resources and activities estimated for any of the seven proposed lease sales. At the completion of the SEIS process, a decision will be made for proposed CPA Sale 208 (2009) and WPA Sale 210 (2009).

Draft SEIS Availability: To obtain a single, printed or CD-ROM copy of the draft SEIS, you may contact the Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, Public Information Office (Mail Stop 5034), 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, Room 114, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123–2394 (1–800–200–GULF). An electronic copy of the draft EIS is available at the MMS’s Internet Web site at <http://www.gomr.mms.gov/homepg/regulate/environ/nepa/nepaprocess.html>. Several libraries along the Gulf Coast have been sent copies of the draft SEIS. To find out which libraries, and their locations, have copies of the draft SEIS for review, you may contact the MMS’s Public Information Office or visit the MMS Internet Web site at <http://www.gomr.mms.gov/homepg/regulate/environ/libraries.html>.

Public Hearings: The MMS will hold public hearings to receive comments on the draft SEIS. The public hearings are scheduled as follows:

- Tuesday, May 13, 2008, Larose Civic Center, 307 East 5th Street, Larose, Louisiana, 6 p.m.
- Wednesday, May 14, 2008, Louisiana State University, Center for Energy Studies, 1077 Energy, Coast and Environment Building, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1 p.m.
- Thursday, May 15, 2008, Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel, 64 South Water Street, Mobile, Alabama, 6 p.m.

If you wish to testify at a hearing, you may register one hour prior to the meeting. Each hearing will briefly recess when all speakers have had an

opportunity to testify. If there are no additional speakers, the hearing will adjourn immediately after the recess. Written statements submitted at a hearing will be considered part of the hearing record. If you are unable to attend the hearings, you may submit written statements.

Comments: Federal, State, and local government agencies and other interested parties are requested to send their written comments on the draft SEIS in one of the following two ways:

1. In written form enclosed in an envelope labeled “Comments on the Supplemental Multisale EIS” and mailed (or hand carried) to the Regional Supervisor, Leasing and Environment (Mail Stop 5410), Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123–2394.

2. Electronically to the MMS e-mail address: environment@mms.gov.

Comments should be submitted no later than 60 days from the publication of this NOA.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For more information on the draft SEIS or the public hearings, you may contact Dennis Chew, Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard (Mail Stop 5412), New Orleans, Louisiana 70123–2394, or by e-mail at environment@mms.gov. You may also contact Mr. Chew by telephone at (504) 736–2793.

Dated: March 14, 2008.

Chris C. Oynes,

Associate Director for Offshore Minerals Management.

[FR Doc. E8–7775 Filed 4–10–08; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Reclamation

Yakima River Basin Conservation Advisory Group Charter Renewal

AGENCY: Bureau of Reclamation, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of renewal.

SUMMARY: This notice is published in accordance with Section 9(a)(2) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972 (Pub. L. 92–463). Following consultation with the General Services Administration, notice is hereby given that the Secretary of the Interior is renewing the charter for the Yakima River Basin Conservation Advisory Group (CAG). The purpose of the CAG is to provide recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior and the State of

Washington on the structure and implementation of the Yakima River Basin Water Conservation Program. In consultation with the State, the Yakama Nation, Yakima River basin irrigators, and other interested and related parties, six members are appointed to serve on the CAG.

The basin conservation program is structured to provide economic incentives with cooperative Federal, State, and local funding to stimulate the identification and implementation of structural and nonstructural cost-effective water conservation measures in the Yakima River basin. Improvements in the efficiency of water delivery and use will result in improved streamflows for fish and wildlife and improve the reliability of water supplies for irrigation.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ms. Dawn Wiedmeier, Deputy Area Manager, Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Program, telephone 509-575-5848, extension 213.

Certification

I hereby certify that Charter renewal of the Yakima River Basin Conservation Advisory Group is in the public interest in connection with the performance of duties imposed on the Department of the Interior.

Dirk Kempthorne,
Secretary of the Interior.

[FR Doc. E8-7728 Filed 4-10-08; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Reclamation

Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead

AGENCY: Bureau of Reclamation, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Availability of the Record of Decision for the adoption of Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead.

SUMMARY: The Department of the Interior, acting through the Bureau of Reclamation, published a **Federal Register** notice on November 2, 2007 (72 FR 62272) which informed the public of the availability of the final environmental impact statement on the proposed adoption of specific Colorado River Lower Basin shortage guidelines and coordinated reservoir management strategies to address the operations of

Lake Powell and Lake Mead, particularly under low reservoir conditions, through 2026. We are now notifying the public that the Secretary of the Interior signed the Record of Decision (ROD) on December 13, 2007. The text of the ROD is found below.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Terrance J. Fulp, Ph.D., at (702) 293-8500 or e-mail at strategies@lc.usbr.gov; and/or Randall Peterson at (801) 524-3633 or e-mail at strategies@lc.usbr.gov.

The ROD is electronically available on Reclamation's project Web site at: <http://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/programs/strategies.html>. Alternatively, a compact disc or hard copy is available upon written request to: Regional Director, Lower Colorado Region, Bureau of Reclamation, Attention: BCOO-1005, P.O. Box 61470, Boulder City, Nevada 89006-1470; fax at (702) 293-8156; or e-mail at strategies@lc.usbr.gov.

Dated: March 28, 2008.

Dirk Kempthorne,
Secretary, Department of the Interior.

Record of Decision; Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and the Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead (December 2007)

Recommending Official: Robert Johnson, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation, December 13, 2007.

Approved: Dirk Kempthorne, Secretary of the Department of the Interior, December 13, 2007.

Record of Decision; Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and the Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead Final Environmental Impact Statement (November 2007)

I. Introduction

The Colorado River Basin (Basin) is in the eighth year of drought—the worst eight-year period in over a century of continuous recordkeeping. Reservoir elevations have declined over this period and the duration of this ongoing, historic drought is unknown. This is the first long-term drought in the modern history of the Colorado River, although climate experts and scientists suggest droughts of this severity have occurred in the past and are likely to occur in the future. The Colorado River provides water to two nations, and to users within seven western states. With over 27 million people relying on the Colorado River for drinking water in the United States, and over 3.5 million acres of farmland in production in the Basin, the Colorado River is the single most

important natural resource in the Southwest.

The Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) has a unique role on the Colorado River—charged with management of a vast system of dams and reservoirs that have provided water for the development of the Southwest.

Under these conditions, conflict over water is unsurprising and anticipated. Declining reservoir levels in the Basin led to interstate and inter-basin tensions. As the agency charged with management of the Colorado River, the Department of the Interior (Department) had not yet developed operational rules for the full range of operations at Lake Powell and Lake Mead because these types of low-reservoir conditions had simply not yet occurred.

Against this background, at the direction of the Secretary, the Department initiated a public process in May of 2005 to develop additional operational guidelines and tools to meet the challenges of the drought in the Basin. While water storage in the massive reservoirs afforded great protection against the drought, the Department set a goal to have detailed, objective operational tools in place by the end of 2007 in order to be ready to make informed operational decisions if the reservoirs continued to decline.

During the public process, a unique and remarkable consensus emerged in the basin among stakeholders including the Governor's representatives of the seven Colorado River Basin States (Basin States). This consensus had a number of common themes: encourage conservation, plan for shortages, implement closer coordination of operations of Lake Powell and Lake Mead, preserve flexibility to deal with further challenges such as climate change and deepening drought, implement operational rules for a long—but not permanent—period in order to gain valuable operating experience, and continue to have the federal government facilitate—but not dictate—informed decision-making in the Basin.

Today, this Record of Decision (ROD) constitutes the Department's final decision after facilitating, analyzing, and considering public input over the past two and one-half years, during which the ongoing drought continued to focus nationwide attention on the Basin. A broad range of considerations have been analyzed, involving water supply, environmental protection, hydropower production, and recreation—all benefits that flow from the management of the Colorado River.

This document is the ROD of the Department of the Interior, regarding the Preferred Alternative for Colorado River