

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Minerals Management Service****Preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) for Proposed Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Lease Sale 215 in the Western Gulf of Mexico Planning Area (2010)**

AGENCY: Minerals Management Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an EA.

SUMMARY: The purpose of the NOP is to gather information on oil and gas leasing, exploration, and development that might result from an OCS oil and gas lease sale tentatively scheduled for mid-2010.

DATES: Comments must be received no later than October 9, 2009 at the address specified below.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For information on the NOP, you may contact Mr. Gary Goeke, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394, telephone (504) 736-3233.

Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Assessment*1. Authority*

This NOP is published pursuant to the regulations (40 CFR 1501.7) implementing the provisions of NEPA of 1969 as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.* (1988)).

2. Purpose of Notice of Preparation

Pursuant to the regulations implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA, the MMS is announcing its intent to prepare an EA on an oil and gas lease sale tentatively scheduled for mid-2010 in the Western Planning Area (WPA) offshore of Texas and western Louisiana. The MMS is issuing this notice to facilitate public involvement. The preparation of this EA is an important step in the decision process for Lease Sale 215. The proposal for Lease Sale 215 was analyzed in the Gulf of Mexico OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sales: 2009-2012; Central Planning Area Sales 208, 213, 216, and 222; Western Planning Area Sales 210, 215, and 218—Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Supplemental EIS, OCS EIS/EA MMS 2008-041). This EA for proposed Lease Sale 215 will examine the potential environmental effects of the proposed lease sale and its

alternatives (*i.e.*, excluding the unleased blocks near biologically sensitive topographic features; and no action) based on changes and any new relevant information and circumstances regarding potential environmental impacts and issues that were not available at the time the Supplemental EIS was prepared to determine if preparation of a new supplemental EIS is warranted.

3. Supplemental Information

Final delineation of this area for possible leasing will be made at a later date and in compliance with applicable laws, including all requirements of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) and Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) and other applicable statutes. Established Departmental procedures will be followed.

The MMS routinely assesses the status of information acquisition efforts and the quality of the information base for potential decisions on a tentatively scheduled lease sale. An extensive environmental studies program has been under way in the Gulf of Mexico (GOM) since 1973. The emphasis, including continuing studies, has been on “environmental analysis” of biologically sensitive habitats, physical oceanography, ocean-circulation modeling, ecological effects of oil and gas activities, and hurricane impacts on coastal communities and the environment.

Federal regulations allow for several related or similar proposals to be analyzed in one EIS (40 CFR 1502.4). Each proposed lease sale and its projected activities are very similar each year for each planning area. The Multisale EIS (OCS EIS/EA MMS 2007-018) addressed WPA Lease Sale 204 in 2007, Sale 207 in 2008, Sale 210 in 2009, Sale 215 in 2010, and Sale 218 in 2011; and Central Planning Area (CPA) Lease Sale 205 in 2007, Sale 206 in 2008, Sale 208 in 2009, Sale 213 in 2010, Sale 216 in 2011, and Sale 222 in 2012. However, the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006 repealed the Congressional moratorium on approximately 5.8 million acres located in the southeastern part of the CPA. Therefore, it was necessary to prepare additional NEPA documentation to address the MMS proposal to expand the CPA by the 5.8 million acre area. A single Supplemental Multi-sale EIS was

prepared for the remaining seven WPA and CPA lease sales scheduled in the OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program: 2007-2012 (5-Year Program). In September 2008, MMS published a Supplemental Multi-sale EIS (OCS EIS/EA MMS 2008-041) that addressed seven proposed Federal actions that would offer for lease areas on the GOM OCS that may contain economically recoverable oil and gas resources.

After completion of this EA, MMS will determine whether to prepare a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or a Supplemental EIS for Sale 215 and subsequent sales. The MMS prepares a Consistency Determination (CD) to determine whether the lease sale is consistent with each affected State’s federally-approved Coastal Zone Management program. Finally, MMS will solicit comments via the Proposed Notice of Sale (NOS) from the governors of the affected States on the size, timing, and location of the lease sale. The tentative schedule for the prelease decision process for Lease Sale 215 is as follows: EA/FONSI or Supplemental EIS decision, March-April 2010; CDs will be sent to the affected States 5 months before the lease sale; Proposed NOS sent to the governors of the affected States 5 months before the lease sale; Final NOS, if applicable, will be published in the **Federal Register** in July 2010.

4. Comments

Federal, State, and local government agencies, and other interested parties are requested to send their written comments on the EA, significant issues that should be addressed, and alternatives that should be considered in one of the following two ways:

1. In written form enclosed in an envelope labeled “Comments on the Lease Sale 215 EA” and mailed (or hand carried) to the Regional Supervisor, Leasing and Environment (MS 5410), Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394.

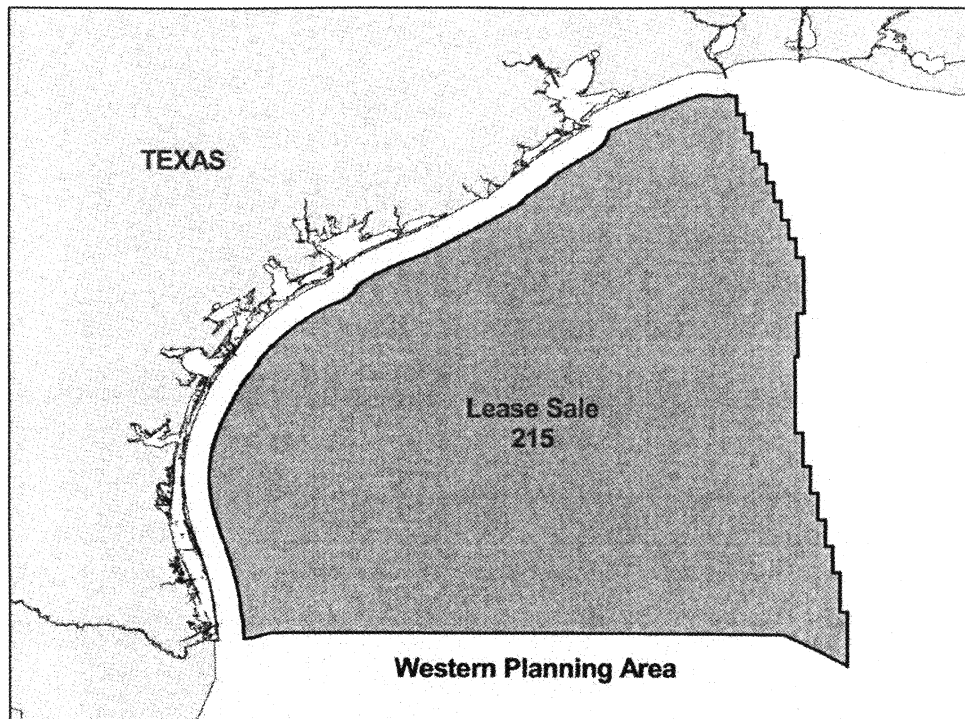
2. Electronically to the MMS e-mail address: WPA Lease Sale 215@mms.gov.

Comments should be submitted no later than 30 days from the publication of this NOP.

Dated: August 24, 2009.

S. Elizabeth Birnbaum,

Director, Minerals Management Service.



[FR Doc. E9-21670 Filed 9-8-09; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 4310-MR-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R5-R-2008-N198; 50133-1265-XENP-S3]

Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge, Kent County, MD

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability: draft comprehensive conservation plan and draft environmental assessment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announces the availability of the draft comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and draft environmental assessment (EA) for Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), located in Kent County, Maryland, with its office in Rock Hall, Maryland. The draft CCP/EA describes three alternatives, including our Service-preferred alternative B, for managing this refuge for the next 15 years. Also available for public review and comment are the draft compatibility determinations, which are included as appendix B in the draft CCP/EA.

DATES: To ensure our consideration of your written comments, please send them by October 9, 2009. We will also hold a public meeting in Rock Hall,

Maryland. We will announce and post details of the public meeting in local news media, via our project mailing list, and on our Regional planning Web site, <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/eastern%20neck/ccphome.html>.

ADDRESSES: Send your comments or requests for copies of the draft CCP/EA by one of the following methods.

U.S. Mail: Nancy McGarigal, Natural Resource Planner, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Westgate Center Drive, Hadley, MA 01035.

Fax: Attention: Nancy McGarigal, 413-253-8468.

E-mail: northeastplanning@fws.gov. Please put the words "Eastern Neck NWR CCP" in the subject line of your e-mail.

Agency Web site: View or download the draft document on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/eastern%20neck/ccphome.html>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Suzanne Baird, Project Leader, Chesapeake Marshlands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, 2145 Key Wallace Drive, Cambridge, MD 21613; phone 410-228-2692, extension 101; fax 410-228-3261; or e-mail at fw5rw_bwnwr@fws.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Introduction

This notice continues the CCP process for Eastern Neck NWR, which is one of the four refuges that comprise the Chesapeake Marshlands NWR Complex. The other three are Blackwater, Martin,

and Susquehanna NWRs. We prepared the draft CCP in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), and the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (Administration Act), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act), which requires us to develop a CCP for each national wildlife refuge. We published our original notice of intent to prepare a CCP in the **Federal Register** on June 11, 2002 (67 FR 40002). Due to changes in budget and staffing priorities, the project was put on hold in 2003. We subsequently announced we were restarting the process by publishing another notice in the **Federal Register** on January 22, 2007 (72 FR 2709).

Eastern Neck NWR is a 2,285-acre island that lies at the confluence of the Chester River and the Chesapeake Bay in Kent County, Maryland. Established in 1962 to protect migratory birds, the refuge is recognized regionally as a major feeding and resting place for a wide variety of migrating and wintering waterfowl. Its habitats are highly diverse, and include tidal marsh, open water, and woodland. Its managed croplands also contribute to the quality of its habitats by providing a ready source of high-energy food for wintering waterfowl when their reserves are low. The moist soil units and green tree reservoirs on the refuge also are managed to enhance habitats for