

determines that a meeting should be held, the meeting will be scheduled and conducted in accordance with 43 CFR 2310.3-1(c)(2).

This application will be processed in accordance with the regulations set forth in 43 CFR Part 2310.

For a period of two years from the date of publication in the **Federal Register**, this land will be segregated as specified above unless the application is denied or cancelled or the withdrawal is approved prior to that date. During this period the Bureau of Land Management will continue to manage this land.

Herbert Olson,

Acting Realty Officer.

[FR Doc. 98-4420 Filed 2-20-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-JB-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Minerals Management Service

Preparation of an Environmental Assessment on Exploration, Development, and Production Operations and Activities in the Deepwater Gulf of Mexico OCS

AGENCY: Minerals Management Service.

ACTION: Preparation of an environmental assessment (EA).

SUMMARY: The Minerals Management Service (MMS) is beginning preparation of an environmental assessment document on oil and gas operations and activities in the deepwater areas of the Gulf of Mexico. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations recommend that agencies prepare an EA on any action at any time in order to assist agency planning and decisionmaking. The objectives of this EA are to identify and evaluate the significance of potential impacts from exploration, development, and production operations in the deepwater areas (generally beyond 1,000 feet water depth) of the Gulf of Mexico outer continental shelf (OCS) and from associated support activities and infrastructure.

There has been a recent upsurge of exploration and development in the deepwater areas of the Gulf of Mexico because of the development of new deepwater drilling and development technologies, the development of new geophysical surveying technologies, the announcement of several deepwater discoveries, favorable economics, the passage of the Deep Water Royalty Relief Act, and the opportunity to lease blocks from recently terminated leases. Many impacting factors associated with deepwater activities are identical or

similar to those associated with conventional operations and activities on the continental shelf, which are evaluated in other MMS NEPA documents. Some deepwater operations may be significantly different from conventional operations in shallower waters of the shelf. For example, deepwater operations are farther from shore, encounter different environmental conditions, are technologically more sophisticated, may produce at much higher rates, and are subject to different economic determinants. These differences will present many technical and regulatory challenges. New and evolving technologies, larger and more complex facilities, modifications of procedures, and additional environmental protection issues are all anticipated for deepwater activities. Therefore, the EA will be used to determine the significance of impacts associated with deepwater operations. The EA will also be used to identify and eliminate from further detailed analysis those issues that are not deemed significant. If significant impacts are identified, they will be analyzed in future EIS's prepared for specific proposals that could cause these impacts. Appropriate measures to mitigate potential impacts will be developed and evaluated based on the analysis of the potential impacts of deepwater operations on the marine, coastal, and human environments.

The EA is scheduled for completion in July 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Questions regarding the EA should be directed to Deborah Cranswick, Environmental Assessment Section, (504) 736-2744. Questions regarding deepwater operations should be directed to Jim Regg, Field Operations, (504) 736-2843. The mailing address is Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, Minerals Management Service, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana, 70123-2394.

Dated: February 9, 1998.

Chris C. Oynes,

Regional Director, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region.

[FR Doc. 98-4394 Filed 2-20-98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Minerals Management Service

Outer Continental Shelf, Beaufort Sea

AGENCY: Minerals Management Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Proposed Offshore Oil and Gas Development and Production of the

Liberty Project in the Alaskan Beaufort Sea.

SUMMARY: The Minerals Management Service (MMS) is evaluating, through an EIS, approval of a Development and Production Plan (DPP) submitted by BP Exploration (Alaska) Inc. for activities to develop an offshore oil and gas discovery in Federal waters of the Beaufort Sea northeast of the Prudhoe Bay oilfields.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Fred King, Leasing Activities Section, Minerals Management Service, Alaska OCS Region, 949 E. 36th Avenue, Room 308, Anchorage, Alaska 99508-4302; telephone (907) 271-6696.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

1. Authority

This Notice is published pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), as amended, and the regulations issued thereunder (40 CFR Part 1501).

2. Purpose of Notice of Intent

The MMS is announcing its intent to prepare an EIS on the proposed DPP for the Liberty Project in the Alaskan Beaufort Sea. This announcement initiates the scoping process for this EIS.

The BP Exploration (Alaska) Inc. proposes to develop the Liberty oilfield from a man-made gravel island constructed on the Federal Outer Continental Shelf in Foggy Island Bay in approximately 22 feet of water inside the Barrier Islands. The Liberty project, which is located approximately 5 miles offshore the coast, is about midway between Point Brower to the west and Tigvariak Island to the east. The proposed island would be located in Federal waters between McClure Islands and the coast. The overall project includes a gravel island, stand-alone processing facilities on the island, associated infrastructure, subsea buried oil and utility pipelines (approximately 6.1 miles long), and an above-ground onshore pipeline (approximately 1.5 miles long) south to tie-in with the Badami pipeline system, an onshore gravel mine site, and ice roads. The BP Exploration proposes a construction start-up in December 1999, and that will conclude in December 2000. Initial development drilling will begin in October 2000 and conclude in April 2002. Production operations are expected to begin December 2000, and continue for an estimated 15-year field life.

The Liberty DPP will require approval by MMS, the lead permitting agency with jurisdiction over the development project, including construction, drilling,