relinquished have been re-leased. Thus, leases that may be uneconomic at today's oil and gas prices can be re-leased and developed later as economic, geologic, or technological conditions changes. In this case, allowing market conditions and future discoveries to determine the best time to explore and develop tracts is preferable to offering financial incentives for current development.

In addition, we considered other issues that would have impacts on implementing a sound program of royalty relief for nonproducing leases.

Auction and Tract Evaluation Process Impacts

Reducing royalties on nonproducing leases could distort the auction process because some losing bidders may have submitted higher bids had they known that lease royalty rates could be reduced. Also, the program would complicate fair market value determinations because lease stipulated royalty rates could change before the start of production.

Workload Impacts

The potential workload associated with a relief program could become burdensome and drain MMS resources from other important jobs. Even a program of categorical relief (i.e., one based on predetermined qualifying criteria such as drill depth or pressure) could create a significant new workload. Although certain criteria may have substantial impact on project costs, many factors ultimately determine a project's economic viability. The effort to develop comprehensive qualifying criteria and keep them up to date may actually create more of a workload for MMS than accepting applications on a case-by-case basis.

Revenue Impacts

We considered the proposal to offer certain relinquished tracts at a lower royalty rate. However, the relinquishment of a tract, even if it is on the indicated hydrocarbons list, and its failure to be re-leased at the next lease sale, are not absolute determinants of its current or future economic viability. Tracts in the Central and Western Gulf may be offered time and again. As noted earlier, tracts that are uneconomic at one time may be re-leased and developed with changes in oil and gas prices or advances in technology that reduce drilling and production costs or enhance ultimate resource recovery. In these cases, the government would receive royalties at the regular royalty rate plus any bonus received on re-leasing.

In summary, the economic climate for the oil and gas industry in the Gulf of Mexico does not warrant taking action at this time. We will continue to monitor activities in the Central and Western Gulf and will move to exercise the authority if changed conditions require it.

We welcome all comments on issues related to this Notice and will consider them in determining the nature and timing of future actions.

Dated: April 21, 1998.

Walter Cruickshank,

Associate Director for Policy and Management Improvement.

[FR Doc. 98–11012 Filed 4–24–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310–MR–M

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Minerals Management Service

Outer Continental Shelf, Western Gulf of Mexico, Oil and Gas Lease Sale 171

AGENCY: Minerals Management Service, Interior.

ACTION: Availability of the proposed notice of sale.

Gulf of Mexico Outer Continental Shelf (OCS); Notice of Availability of the Proposed Notice of Sale for Proposed Oil and Gas Lease Sale 171 in the Western Gulf of Mexico. This Notice of Availability is published pursuant to 30 CFR 256.29(c), as a matter of information to the public.

With regard to oil and gas leasing on the OCS, the Secretary of the Interior, pursuant to section 19 of the OCS Lands Act, as amended, provides the affected States the opportunity to review the proposed Notice of Sale. The proposed Notice sets forth the proposed terms and conditions of the sale, including minimum bids, royalty rates, and rentals.

The proposed Notice of Sale for proposed Sale 171 may be obtained by written request to the Public Information Unit, Gulf of Mexico Region, Minerals Management Service, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123–2394, or by telephone at (504) 736–2529.

The final Notice of Sale will be published in the **Federal Register** at least 30 days prior to the date of bid opening. Bid opening is currently scheduled for August 1998.

Dated: April 20, 1998.

Cynthia Quarterman,

Director, Minerals Management Service.

[FR Doc. 98–11019 Filed 4–24–98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

National Park Service

Buffalo National River, Arkansas; Concession Contract Negotiations

SUMMARY: Public notice is hereby given that the National Park Service proposes to award a concession contract authorizing the continued overnight accommodations, food service facilities and vending machine services for the public at Buffalo National River for a period of five (5) years from January 1, 1999, through December 31, 2003.

EFFECTIVE DATE: June 26, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Interested parties should contact National Park Service, Buffalo National River, P.O. Box 1173, Harrison, Arkansas 72602–1173, or phone (870) 741–5443 to obtain a copy of the prospectus describing the requirements of the proposed contract.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This contract renewal has been determined to be categorically excluded from the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act and no environmental document will be prepared.

The existing concessioner has performed its obligations to the satisfaction of the Secretary under an existing contract which will expire by limitation of time on December 31, 1998, and therefore pursuant to the provisions of Section 5 of the Act of October 9, 1965 (79 Stat, 969; 16 U.S.C. 20, *et seq.*), is entitled to be given preference in the renewal of the contract and in the negotiation of a new proposed contract, providing that the existing concessioner submits a responsive offer (a timely offer which meets the terms and conditions of the Prospectus). This means that the contract will be awarded to the party submitting the best offer, provided that if the best offer was not submitted by the existing concessioner, then the existing concessioner will be afforded the opportunity to match the best offer. If the existing concessioner agrees to match the best offer, then the contract will be awarded to the existing concessioner. If the existing concessioner does not submit a responsive offer, the right of preference in renewal shall be considered to have been waived, and the contract will then be awarded to the party that has submitted the best responsive offer.

The Secretary of the Interior will consider and evaluate all proposals received as a result of this notice. Any proposal, including that of the existing concessioner, must be received by the