

The method for calculating population size using females with cubs sightings (Keating *et al.* 2002) and the method for calculating the unknown and unreported mortalities (Cherry *et al.* 2002) have been published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. We are seeking comments only on the document Reassessing Methods to Estimate Population Size and Sustainable Mortality Limits for the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear, which applies these peer-reviewed methods to the Yellowstone grizzly bear population.

Based on the comments received, the Service will finalize this methodology for calculating total population size and establishing sustainable mortality limits for the Yellowstone grizzly bear population and append it to the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan prior to publishing a final rule to designate the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem population of grizzly bears as a distinct population segment and to remove the Yellowstone distinct population segment of grizzly bears from the Federal list of endangered and threatened wildlife.

Public Comments Solicited

Section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act, as amended in 1988, requires that public notice and an opportunity for public review and comment be provided during recovery plan development. We consider all information presented during a public comment period prior to approval of each new or revised recovery plan. We and other Federal management agencies also will take these comments into account in the course of implementing approved recovery plans. We now seek public comment on the draft document Reassessing Methods to Estimate Population Size and Sustainable Mortality Limits for the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear to address both Task Y11 in the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan and the Court Opinion (*Fund for Animals v. Babbitt*, 903 F. Supp. 96 (D. D.C. 1995); 967 F. Supp. 6 (D. D.C. 1997)). All comments received by the date specified in the **DATES** section above will be considered prior to finalization of the information. Appropriate portions of the information will be appended to, and become part of, the 1993 Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan and the Final Conservation Strategy for the Grizzly Bear in the Greater Yellowstone Area.

Literature Cited

Cherry, S., M.A. Haroldson, J. Robison-Cox, and C.C. Schwartz. 2002. Estimating total human-caused mortality from reported mortality using data from radio-instrumented grizzly bears. *Ursus* 13:175–184.

Keating, K.A., C.C. Schwartz, M.A. Haroldson, and D. Moody. 2002. Estimating numbers of females with cubs-of-the-year in the Yellowstone grizzly bear population. *Ursus* 13:161–174.

Authority: The authority for this Notice is under section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1533(f).

Dated: July 11, 2005.

Ralph O. Morgenweck,

Regional Director, Denver, Colorado.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Minerals Management Service

Preparation of an Environmental Assessment for Proposed Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Lease Sale 200 in the Western Gulf of Mexico (2006)

AGENCY: Minerals Management Service, Interior.

ACTION: Preparation of an environmental assessment.

SUMMARY: The Minerals Management Service (MMS) is issuing this notice to advise the public, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended, 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*, that MMS intends to prepare an environmental assessment (EA) for proposed Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas Lease Sale 200 in the Western Gulf of Mexico (GOM) (Lease Sale 200) scheduled for August 2006. 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 200. The proposal and alternatives for Lease Sale 200 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 Gulf of Mexico OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sales: 2003–2007; Central Planning Area Sales 185, 190, 194, 198, and 201; Western Planning Area Sales 187, 192, 196, and 200—Final Environmental Impact Statement; Volumes I and II (Multisale EIS, OCS EIS/EA MMS 2002–052). This EA will reexamine the potential environmental effects of the proposed action (the offering of all available unleased acreage in the Western Planning Area (WPA)) and its alternatives (the proposed action excluding the unleased blocks near biologically sensitive topographic features; and no action) based on any new information regarding potential

impacts and issues that were not available at the time the Multisale EIS was prepared.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Dennis Chew, Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, MS 5410, 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 Multisale 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 Central Planning Area (CPA) and WPA lease sales scheduled in the OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program: 2002–2007 (5-Year Program, OCS EIS/EA MMS 2002–006). Under the current 5-Year Program, five annual areawide lease sales were scheduled for the CPA (Lease Sales 185, 190, 194, 198, and 201) and five annual areawide lease sales were scheduled for the WPA (Lease Sales 184, 187, 192, 196, and 200). Lease Sale 184 was not addressed in the Multisale EIS; a separate EA was prepared for that proposal. The Multisale 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 Multisale EIS addresses nine proposed lease sales, decisions were made only for proposed CPA Lease Sale 185 and proposed WPA Lease Sale 187 based on the EIS. For the subsequent sales, an additional NEPA review (an EA) will be conducted the year prior to each proposed lease sale, 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 the lease sale 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 the lease sale. The tentative schedule for the prelease decision process for Lease Sale

200 is as follows: EA/FONNSI or Supplemental EIS decision, March 2006; CD's sent to affected States, March 2006; PNOS sent to governors of the affected States, March 2006; Final Notice of Sale published in the **Federal Register**, July 2006; and Lease Sale 200, August 2006.

Public Comments

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. Comments may be submitted in one of the following three ways:

1. Electronically using MMS's new Public Connect on-line commenting system at <https://occonnect.mms.gov>. This is the preferred method for commenting. From the Public Connect "Welcome" screen, search for "WPA Lease Sale 200 EA" or select it from the "Projects Open for Comment" menu.
2. In written form enclosed in an envelope labeled "Comments on WPA Lease Sale 200 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.
3. Electronically to the MMS e-mail address: environment@mms.gov.

To obtain single copies of the Multisale 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 Multisale EIS or check the list of libraries that have copies of the Multisale EIS on the MMS Web site at <http://www.gomr.mms.gov>.

Dated: October 24, 2005.

Chris C. Oynes,

Regional Director, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region.
[FR Doc. 05-23073 Filed 11-21-05; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Minerals Management Service

Gulf of Mexico, Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), Central Planning Area, Oil and Gas Lease Sale 198 (2006) Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Minerals Management Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Availability of an Environmental Assessment.

SUMMARY: The MMS is issuing this notice to advise the public, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended, 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*, that MMS has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for proposed OCS oil and gas Lease Sale 198 in the Central Gulf of Mexico (GOM) (Lease Sale 198) scheduled for March 2006. Proposed Lease Sale 198 is the fourth Central Planning Area (CPA) lease sale scheduled in the Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program: 2002-2007 (5-Year Program, OCS EIS/EA MMS 2002-006). The preparation of this EA is an important step in the decisionmaking process for Lease Sale 198. The proposal for Lease Sale 198 (the offering of all available unleased acreage in the CPA) and its alternatives (the proposed action excluding the unleased blocks near biologically sensitive topographic features, the proposed action excluding the unleased blocks within 15 miles of the Baldwin County, Alabama, Coast, and no action) 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 Gulf of Mexico OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sales: 2003-2007; Central Planning Area Sales 185, 190, 194, 198, and 201; Western Planning Area Sales 187, 192, 196, and 200—Final Environmental Impact Statement; Volumes I and II (Multisale EIS, OCS EIS/EA MMS 2002-052). The Multisale EIS analyzed the effects of a typical CPA lease sale by presenting a set of ranges for resource estimates, projected exploration and development activities, and impact-producing factors for any of the proposed CPA lease sales. The level of activities projected for proposed Lease Sale 198 falls within these ranges. In this EA, which tiers from the Multisale EIS and incorporates that document by reference, MMS reexamined 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 Multisale EIS was prepared. No new significant impacts were identified for proposed Lease Sale 198 that were not already assessed in the Multisale EIS. As a result, MMS determined that a supplemental EIS is not required and prepared a Finding of No New Significant Impact (FONNSI).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. James F. Bennett, Minerals Management Service, Minerals Management Service, Headquarters Office, Attention: Environmental Division, Environmental

Assessment Branch (MS 4042), Parkway Atrium Building, 381 Elden Street, Herndon, Virginia 20170-4817. You may also contact Mr. Bennett by telephone at (703) 787-1660.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In November 2002, MMS prepared a Multisale 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 9 of the 10 CPA and Western Planning Area (WPA) lease sales scheduled in 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 Multisale EIS; a separate EA was prepared for that proposal. The Multisale 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 Multisale 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 NEPA review (an EA) 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 FONNSI or a Supplemental EIS. The MMS will then prepare and send Consistency Determinations (CD's) to the affected States to determine whether the proposed lease sale is consistent with their federally-approved State coastal zone management programs. 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 proposed lease sale. The tentative schedule for the prelease decision process for Lease Sale 198 is as follows: CD's sent to affected States, upon publication in the **Federal Register** of the NOA; proposed NOS sent to governors of the affected States, upon publication in the **Federal Register** of the NOA; Final Notice of Sale published in the **Federal Register**,