

U.S. Department of the Interior Minerals Management Service Gulf of Mexico OCS Region

GENERAL INFORMATION

April 2010

Mid- and South Atlantic OCS Geological and Geophysical Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

The Minerals Management Service (MMS) is preparing a programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321-4347) to evaluate the potential environmental effects of multiple geological and geophysical (G&G) exploration activities on the Mid- and South Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). The NEPA is the foundation of environmental policymaking in the United States. The NEPA process is intended to incorporate the best available information and stakeholder input to help public officials make decisions based on an understanding of environmental consequences and take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment for authorized actions.



The G&G surveys provide information used by the offshore energy industry and the government to evaluate the potential for offshore oil, gas, and methane hydrate resources; nonenergy mineral resources (i.e., sand and gravel); geologic hazards; and renewable energy activities. Industry needs accurate data on the location, extent, and properties of hydrocarbon resources, as well as information on shallow geologic hazards and seafloor geotechnical properties, in order to explore, develop, produce, and transport hydrocarbons safely and economically. The MMS also needs this information to fulfill its statutory responsibilities to ensure that the G&G data needed by industry and government are obtained in a technically safe and environmentally sound manner, pursuant to regulations in 30 CFR 250, 251, and 281.

The proposed PEIS will evaluate the environmental impacts of multiple G&G activities in OCS waters of the Mid- and South Atlantic. The PEIS is proposed for the Mid- and South Atlantic OCS in light of

multiple permit requests received by MMS and industry's expressed interest in expanding activities into the Atlantic offshore waters. This PEIS will determine whether significant impacts to Atlantic resources could occur as a result of G&G activities and, where needed, will outline mitigation and monitoring measures that will reduce or eliminate the potential for impacts to the environment.

The NEPA process began with the Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare a PEIS, which was published in the *Federal Register* on January 21, 2009. A *Federal Register* notice was also published on April 2, 2010, announcing the dates, times, and locations of public scoping meetings, and announcing the reopening of the public comment period for the PEIS. Through the NEPA process, MMS holds public scoping meetings on the PEIS to solicit comments from stakeholders on the scope of the PEIS, identify significant issues to be analyzed in the PEIS, and identify possible alternatives to the proposed action.

In addition to NEPA, G&G activities must also comply with several other environmental statutes, such as the Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Conservation Management Act, and Coastal Zone Management Act. These statutes all require further coordination and consultation, and in some cases authorization, with several agencies on specific environmental issues (e.g., effects to threatened and endangered species, marine mammals, essential fish habitat, benthic resources, and coastal zones).

For further information regarding the Atlantic OCS G&G PEIS, please visit our website at <http://www.gomr.mms.gov/homepg/offshore/atlocs/gandg.html>.