



**BILLING CODE 4310-MR**

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**Bureau of Ocean Energy Management**

**[Docket No. BOEM-2017-0012; MMAA104000]**

**Gulf of Mexico, Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), Oil and Gas Lease Sale 249**

**AGENCY:** Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of availability of a Record of Decision.

**SUMMARY:** The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is announcing the availability of a Record of Decision for proposed Gulf of Mexico (GOM) nationwide oil and gas Lease Sale 249. This Record of Decision identifies BOEM's selected alternative for proposed Lease Sale 249, which is analyzed in the *Gulf of Mexico OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sales: 2017-2022; Gulf of Mexico Lease Sales 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 256, 257, 259, and 261; Final Multisale Environmental Impact Statement (2017-2022 GOM Multisale EIS)*.

**ADDRESSES:** The Record of Decision and associated information are available on BOEM's website at <http://www.boem.gov/nepaprocess/>.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** For more information on the Record of Decision, you may contact Mr. Greg Kozłowski, Deputy Regional Supervisor, Office of Environment, by telephone at 504-736-2512 or by email at [greg.kozłowski@boem.gov](mailto:greg.kozłowski@boem.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** In the GOM Multisale EIS, BOEM evaluated five alternatives that are summarized below in regards to proposed Lease Sale 249:

*Alternative A—Regionwide OCS Lease Sale:* This is BOEM's preferred alternative. This alternative would allow for a proposed GOM nationwide lease sale encompassing all three

planning areas: the Western Planning Area (WPA); the Central Planning Area (CPA); and the Eastern Planning Area (EPA). Under this alternative, BOEM would offer for lease all available unleased blocks within the proposed regionwide lease sale area for oil and gas operations with the following exceptions: whole and portions of blocks deferred by the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006; blocks that are adjacent to or beyond the United States' Exclusive Economic Zone in the area known as the northern portion of the Eastern Gap; and whole and partial blocks within the current boundary of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. The unavailable blocks are listed in Section I of the Final Notice of Sale for Lease Sale 249. The proposed regionwide lease sale area encompasses about 91.93 million acres (ac). As of June 2017, approximately 75.7 million ac of the proposed regionwide lease sale area are currently available for lease. The estimated amounts of resources projected to be leased, discovered, developed, and produced as a result of the proposed regionwide lease sale are 0.211-1.118 billion barrels of oil (BBO) and 0.547-4.424 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of gas.

*Alternative B—Regionwide OCS Lease Sale Excluding Available Unleased Blocks in the WPA Portion of the Proposed Lease Sale Area:* This alternative would offer for lease all available unleased blocks within the CPA and EPA portions of the proposed lease sale area for oil and gas operations, with the following exceptions: whole and portions of blocks deferred by the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006; and blocks that are adjacent to or beyond the United States' Exclusive Economic Zone in the area known as the northern portion of the Eastern Gap. The proposed CPA/EPA lease sale area encompasses about 63.35 million ac. As of June 2017, approximately 49.8 million ac of the proposed CPA/EPA lease sale area are currently available for lease. The estimated amounts of resources projected to be leased,

discovered, developed, and produced as a result of the proposed lease sale under Alternative B are 0.185-0.970 BBO and 0.44-3.672 Tcf of gas.

*Alternative C—Regionwide OCS Lease Sale Excluding Available Unleased Blocks in the CPA and EPA Portions of the Proposed Lease Sale Area:* This alternative would offer for lease all available unleased blocks within the WPA portion of the proposed lease sale area for oil and gas operations, with the following exception: whole and partial blocks within the current boundary of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. The proposed WPA lease sale area encompasses about 28.58 million acres (ac). As of June 2017, approximately 25.9 million ac of the proposed WPA lease sale area are currently available for lease. The estimated amounts of resources projected to be leased, discovered, developed, and produced as a result of the proposed lease sale under Alternative C are 0.026-0.148 BBO and 0.106-0.752 Tcf of gas.

*Alternative D—Alternative A, B, or C, with the Option to Exclude Available Unleased Blocks Subject to the Topographic Features, Live Bottom (Pinnacle Trend), and/or Blocks South of Baldwin County, Alabama, Stipulations:* This alternative could be combined with any of the Action alternatives above (i.e., Alternatives A, B, or C) and would allow the flexibility to offer leases under any alternative with additional exclusions. Under Alternative D, the decisionmaker could exclude from leasing any available unleased blocks subject to any one and/or a combination of the following stipulations: Topographic Features Stipulation; Live Bottom (Pinnacle Trend) Stipulation; and Blocks South of Baldwin County, Alabama, Stipulation (not applicable to Alternative C). This alternative considered blocks subject to these stipulations because these areas have been emphasized in scoping, can be geographically defined, and

adequate information exists regarding their ecological importance and sensitivity to OCS oil- and gas-related activities.

A total of 207 blocks within the CPA and 160 blocks in the WPA are affected by the Topographic Features Stipulation. There are currently no identified topographic features protected under this stipulation in the EPA. The Live Bottom Stipulation covers the pinnacle trend area of the CPA, affecting a total of 74 blocks. Under Alternative D, the number of blocks that would become unavailable for lease represents only a small percentage of the total number of blocks to be offered under Alternative A, B, or C (<4%, even if blocks subject to all three stipulations were excluded). Therefore, Alternative D could reduce offshore infrastructure and activities, but Alternative D may (and BOEM believes it is more reasonable to expect) only shift the location of offshore infrastructure and activities farther from these sensitive zones and not lead to a reduction in overall offshore infrastructure and activities.

*Alternative E—No Action:* This alternative is not holding the proposed regionwide Lease Sale 249 and is identified as the environmentally preferred alternative.

*Lease Stipulations* – The GOM Multisale EIS describes all lease stipulations, which are included in the Final Notice of Sale Package. In the Record of Decision for the Five Year Program, the Secretary required the protection of Biologically Sensitive Underwater Features in all Gulf oil and gas lease sales as programmatic mitigation; therefore, the application of the Topographic Features Stipulation and Live Bottom (Pinnacle Trend) Stipulation are being adopted and applied for applicable designated lease blocks in Lease Sale 249.

The additional eight lease stipulations for proposed regionwide Lease Sale 249 are the Military Areas Stipulation; the Evacuation Stipulation; the Coordination Stipulation; the Blocks South of Baldwin County, Alabama, Stipulation; the Protected Species Stipulation; the United

Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea Royalty Payment Stipulation; the Below Seabed Operations Stipulation; and the Stipulation on the Agreement between the United States of America and the United Mexican States Concerning Transboundary Hydrocarbon Reservoirs in the Gulf of Mexico. These 10 stipulations will be added as lease terms where applicable and will be enforceable as part of the lease. Appendix B of the GOM Multisale EIS provides a list and description of standard postlease conditions of approval that may be required by BOEM or the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement as a result of plan and permit review processes for the Gulf of Mexico OCS Region.

After careful consideration, BOEM has selected the preferred alternative (Alternative A) in the 2017-2022 GOM Multisale EIS for proposed Lease Sale 249. BOEM's selection of the preferred alternative meets the purpose and need for the proposed action, as identified in the GOM Multisale EIS, and reflects an orderly resource development with protection of the human, marine, and coastal environments while also ensuring that the public receives an equitable return for these resources and that free-market competition is maintained.

**Authority:** This notice of availability of a Record of Decision is published pursuant to the regulations (40 CFR part 1505) implementing the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*).

Dated: July 11, 2017.

**Walter D. Cruickshank,**

*Acting Director,*

*Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.*

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