

OIL AND BEACHES - A PARTNERSHIP WITH IMPACT

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Abstract

Marine debris associated with offshore oil and gas operations in the Gulf of Mexico has been an issue of major concern for over 10 years. Responding to solution strategies beyond regulatory controls, the oil and gas industry has excelled as a participant, leader, and partner. Public, private, and regional initiatives focused on public education, loss prevention, and removal of solid waste adversely impacting coastal beaches have been fueled by the petroleum industry. Besides identifying the outstanding level of the gas and oil industry's voluntary participation in efforts to reduce the causes and effects of marine debris, this paper identifies coastal and marine recreational benefits stemming from the offshore leasing program in the Gulf of Mexico region.

Introduction

The Minerals Management Service (MMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior, is responsible for leasing and developing gas and oil prospects on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). As a regulatory agency, MMS is charged with assessing and protecting the marine and coastal environment potentially affected by offshore gas and oil operations. The leasing program is approaching its golden anniversary in the Gulf of Mexico region with a proud history of accomplishments. Besides supplying a major portion of America's domestic energy production, gas and oil revenues from offshore operations in the Gulf have fueled public park and recreation developments in all 50 states and U.S. territories (USDOI/MMS, 1991). Through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which derives over 80% of its revenue from offshore gas and oil leasing and production, more than \$3 billion has been invested in over 37,000 public recreation projects.

Community Leaders

The private companies operating and servicing offshore leases are often the leading proponents and supporters of conservation and civic improvement projects throughout the coastal communities where their employees live and work. The MMS actively cooperates with other Federal agencies and the Gulf States in encouraging industry support and participation in voluntary initiatives designed to enhance public use and

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enjoyment of coastal and marine resources. The oil companies have always been some of the most generous supporters of conservation projects promoted by private environmental groups, and they have responded in recent years to public initiatives designed to extend, reclaim, and enhance the beauty and enjoyment of the Gulf's recreational beaches and offshore waters affected by their offshore operations. Specific examples of community projects where industry partnership and leadership have been outstanding include coastal beach cleanups and beach adoptions (Reggio, 1990), the Boaters Pledge initiative (Reggio et al, 1993), and the Louisiana and Texas Rigs-to-Reef programs (Reggio and Kasprzak, 1991).

The increasing popularity of offshore petroleum structures as productive fishing locations led the MMS to assist the States of Louisiana and Alabama in developing and publishing offshore recreational fishing maps that depict the locations of permitted artificial reefs, production platforms and other features of interest to marine fishermen and divers. Also included on these maps are tips and information designed to encourage safe use and enjoyment of offshore areas impacted by offshore gas and oil operations.

Recognition

In 1987 MMS developed and began conveying an annual Conservation Award for Respecting the Environment (CARE Award). This award was specifically designed to honor those companies involved in the offshore gas and oil program that go beyond regulatory requirements to enhance the coastal and marine environment. MMS encourages and solicits CARE Award nominations from other public agencies, environmental groups, local governments, corporate neighbors, or individuals that can identify and attest to outstanding corporate efforts to protect and enhance natural resources (USDOE/MMS, 1994).

This poster presentation will provide graphic and pictorial information on the recreation and conservation achievements of the OCS Program and identify specific companies working with MMS and Gulf Coast communities to ensure the Gulf of Mexico region remains an attractive place to work and live.

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