

exists that individual marine mammals, marine turtles, birds, and fish can be injured or killed, there is unlikely to be a lasting effect on baseline populations.

4.8. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SHORT-TERM USE OF MAN'S ENVIRONMENT AND THE MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

In this section, the short-term effects and uses of various components of the environment in the vicinity of proposed actions are related to long-term effects and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity.

Short-term refers to the total duration of oil and gas exploration and production activities, whereas long-term refers to an indefinite period beyond the termination of oil and gas production. The specific impacts of a proposed action vary in kind, intensity, and duration according to the activities occurring at any given time. Initial activities, such as seismic surveying and exploration drilling, result in short-term, localized impacts. Development drilling and well workovers occur sporadically throughout the life of a proposed action, but also result in short-term, localized impacts. Activities during the production life of a platform may result in chronic impacts over a longer period of time (over 30 years), potentially punctuated by more severe impacts as a result of accidental events. Platform removal is also a short-term activity with localized impacts; the impacts of site clearance may be longer lasting. Over the long-term, several decades to several hundreds of years, natural environmental balances are expected to be restored.

Many of the effects discussed in **Chapter 4.2.1.**, Alternative A – The Proposed Actions, are considered to be short-term (being greatest during the construction, exploration, and early production phases). These impacts could be further reduced by the mitigation measures discussed in **Chapter 2.**

The principle short-term use of the leased areas in the GOM would be for the production of 0.065-0.085 BBO and 0.265-0.340 Tcf of gas from a typical proposed action. The short-term recovery of hydrocarbons may have long-term impacts on biologically sensitive offshore areas or archaeological resources.

The OCS activities could temporarily interfere with recreation and tourism in the region, in the event of an oil spill contacting popular tourist beaches. The proposed leasing may also result in onshore development and population increases that could cause very short-term adverse impacts to local community infrastructure, particularly in areas of low population and minimal existing industrial infrastructure (**Chapter 4.2.1.15.**, Impacts on Human Resources and Land Use). A return to equilibrium could be quickly expected as population changes and industrial development are absorbed in expanded communities. After the completion of oil and gas production, the marine environment is generally expected to remain at or return to its normal long-term productivity levels. To date, there has been no discernible decrease in long-term marine productivity in OCS areas where oil and gas have been produced for many years. Areas such as the Atlantic Coast, which experienced repeated incidents of oil pollution as a result of tanker groundings during World War II, show no apparent long-term productivity losses, although baseline data do not exist to verify this. In other areas that have experienced apparent increases in oil pollution, such as the North Sea, some long-term effects do appear to have taken place. Populations of pelagic birds have decreased markedly in the North Sea in recent years—prior to the beginning of North Sea oil production. Until more reliable data become available, the long-term effects of the chronic and major spillage of hydrocarbons and other drilling-related discharges cannot be accurately projected. In the absence of such data, it must be concluded that the possibility of decreased long-term productivity exists as a result of the proposed actions.

The OCS development off Louisiana and Texas has enhanced recreational and commercial fishing activities, which in turn has stimulated the manufacture and sale of larger private fishing vessels and special fish recreational equipment. Commercial enterprises such as charter boats have become heavily dependent on offshore structures for satisfying recreational customers. The proposed actions could increase these incidental benefits of offshore development. Offshore fishing and diving has gradually increased in the past three decades; platforms have been the focus of much of that activity. As mineral resources become depleted, platform removals would occur and may result in a decline in these activities. To maintain the long-term productivity of site-specific, artificial reefs attractive to fishermen and divers may need to eventually replace removed platforms.

Short-term environmental socioeconomic impacts could result from the proposed actions, including possible short-term losses in productivity as a result of oil spills. Long-term adverse environmental

impacts would not be expected because archaeological regulations and the proposed biological stipulations are proposed as part of the proposed actions. However, some risk of long-term adverse environmental impacts remains due to the potential for accidents. No long-term productivity or environmental gains are expected as a result of the proposed actions; the benefits of the proposed actions are expected to be primarily those associated with a medium-term increase in supplies of domestic oil and gas. While no reliable data exist to indicate long-term productivity losses as a result of OCS development, such losses are possible.