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OUTER CONTINENTAL SHELF SAND AND GRAVEL LEGISLATION
WILL AID BEACH, WETLAND RESTORATION (#40078)

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) says recently passed legislation will streamline the process for using Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) sand and gravel for beach and wetlands restoration and onshore public works projects, while maintaining high environmental standards.

H.R. 3678, passed on Oct. 3 by the House of Representatives and on Oct. 6 by the Senate, will provide help in the effort to control eroding shorelines, said MMS Acting Director Cynthia Quarterman. "Coastal erosion affects all 30 coastal states and all U.S. island territories," she said. "This measure is an example of ecosystem management, and creating a successful balance by using offshore sand and gravel for the protection of onshore coastal areas."

H.R. 3678 will allow the Secretary of the Interior to negotiate sand and gravel agreements for public works projects in a more productive manner. Until now, access to offshore sand and gravel had to be obtained under the same kind of competitive leasing process as oil and gas producers must undergo.

The bill will give state and local governments and federal agencies a streamlined process for obtaining federal marine sand and gravel rights for beach restoration, flood control and other coastal projects. It will also permit the Interior Department to levy a fee for the sand and gravel, excluding federal projects, based upon an assessment of its value and the public interest served by promoting use of the resource.

"The new, streamlined process will still ensure that the same strict environmental standards are met for all minerals activities as before," Quarterman said.

"This kind of intergovernmental partnership -- made possible by the new legislation -- will make things easier, faster and cheaper for state and local governments," Quarterman said. "It's an example of a reinvented, customer-oriented federal government doing what it's supposed to do."

MMS has ten cooperative agreements with 16 coastal states to study the feasibility of using offshore sand and gravel. The primary focus of eight of the studies is the identification and assessment of OCS sand for coastal restoration.

MMS is the federal agency that manages and regulates the nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the OCS, and collects and disburses revenues from offshore mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on Federal and Indian lands.

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