



# TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE

## JERRY PATTERSON, COMMISSIONER

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Patterson: feds are gloating for nothing**

*U.S. Secretary of the Interior celebrates grant to Land Office, a little late*

**AUSTIN** — Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson wonders why the U.S. Department of the Interior is so pleased with itself.

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced a \$1.4 million grant to the Texas General Land Office to plug five abandoned oil and gas wells in the Gulf of Mexico.

“This money is appreciated and long overdue,” Patterson said. “Two years ago, Texas needed these wells plugged, so the Land Office took charge and got it done. We asked the Mineral Management Service for reimbursement and it took them a year to approve it. Another eight months pass and Secretary Salazar issues a press release about their partnership with the Land Office. That’s your federal government at work.”

Through the Energy Policy Act of 2005, Congress created the Coastal Impact Assistance Program to give money to eligible oil and gas producing states for coastal projects. But the money has to be funneled through a federal agency – in this case, the Mineral Management Service. The MMS slows many of these coastal projects to a halt through arduous grant approval processes that were never part of the original legislation, or approved by Congress.

“The MMS is basically a bottleneck for money that’s already been allocated for projects all along the coast,” Patterson said. “If we get a project approved, it makes sense to get the money before we do the work.”

In order to apply for these grants, each state can only be represented by one agency. The Texas Governor’s Office formally represents the state for CIAP funding, but appointed the General Land Office to head the projects. Other state agencies and local governments then apply for funding through the Land Office.

The Railroad Commission of Texas requested funding to close five abandoned wells, located offshore of Jefferson County. Congress approved the project, but MMS held on to the money for no apparent reason. The Railroad Commission could only wait so long, so the agency put up its own funds and went to work, keeping state waters clean from leaky well pollution.

"The Texas Coast is due our fair share, and the federal wheels must turn faster for us to stay ahead." Patterson said. "I call on Secretary Salazar to light a fire under his agency and get these dollars where they can do some good."

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