

7 IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS OF RESOURCES

Section 102(2)(c)(ii) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that an environmental impact statement (EIS) include information on any adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided, should the proposed action be implemented. A commitment of a resource is considered *irreversible* when the primary or secondary impacts from its use limit the future options for its use. An *irretrievable* commitment refers to the use or consumption of a resource that is neither renewable nor recoverable for use by future generations.

7.1 MINERAL RESOURCES

The offshore oil and natural gas resources recovered as a result of the proposed action would be irretrievable once they are consumed.

7.2 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Offshore and onshore oil and gas activities, such as aircraft, vessel, and vehicle traffic; facility construction; and platform removal, could permanently displace some fauna and flora species from favorable habitats to unfavorable habitats. Displacement and habitat loss may result in the reduction of some local populations and become irretrievable if alterations to the environment were permanently maintained. However, the degree of displacement and amount of irretrievable habitat loss should represent a transitory and negligible effect on the overall populations of species.

An irreversible and irretrievable commitment of biological resources may occur where wetlands are impacted by dredging, construction activities, or oil spills. Dredging and construction activities can destroy wetland vegetation, which results in soil erosion and wetland loss. This loss would be greatest in areas where oil and gas activities are currently not occurring.

7.3 LAND USE AND SOCIOECONOMIC RESOURCES

Land used for support of oil and gas development and processing would not revert to its predevelopment characteristics; however, the land may become favorable to other urban or industrial uses.

7.4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Irretrievable prehistoric archaeological sites and cultural materials may be lost through indiscriminate or accidental activity on known and unknown sites such as placement of a pipeline across a shipwreck. Loss of ground context in which artifacts are located is a very important factor in dating and relating an artifact to other artifacts. The archaeological protection requirements should mitigate some losses.

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