

STUDY TITLE: Boating Uses, Economic Significance, and Information Inventory for North Carolina's Offshore Area, "The Point."

REPORT TITLE: Boating Uses, Economic Significance, and Information for North Carolina's Offshore Area "The Point." Volume III: Data Related to the Hatteras Middle Slope ("The Point") Area

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SPONSORING OCS REGION: Gulf of Mexico

APPLICABLE PLANNING AREA(S): Mid and South Atlantic

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KEY WORDS: The Point, commercial fishing, tourism, oil spill

BACKGROUND: The U.S. East Coast continental slope from Norfolk Canyon south to Cape Lookout, North Carolina represents a dramatic physiographic and sedimentological transition between the Middle Atlantic Bight province of major submarine canyons and the South Atlantic Bight province of the Blake Plateau. Recent investigations revealed that the Hatteras slope (in an area of undetermined geographic extent) is characterized by anomalous biological and physical attributes. These include the highest densities of benthic infauna anywhere along the U.S. East Coast continental slope, unusual communities of benthic fishes and megafaunal invertebrates, a particulate sedimentation rate much higher than that at adjacent regions, and sedimentary evidence for an exceptionally high flux of labile organic carbon to the bottom. In addition to the unique physical and biological attributes of this region, the area has been a target for potential hydrocarbon exploration since 1982. The lack of appropriate environmental data to assess impacts from potential development prompted many recent studies.

OBJECTIVES: The purpose of this study is to create a centralized compilation of the research conducted in the area known as “The Point.”

DESCRIPTION: In response to the increased number of recent studies in the area of “The Point,” MMS in conjunction with North Carolina funded this compilation of the research. This annotated bibliography includes published, unpublished, and ongoing studies through 1999. Each citation is georeferenced. The area of interest represents a block around the Manteo Exploration units at 35° 29' 23.6" N; 74° 46' 12.7" W. East and west boundaries end at the 20 meters and 2000 meters depth contours, respectively. The north and south borders extend 40 kilometers on either sided.

SIGNIFICANT CONCLUSIONS: One very important thing learned in the process of collecting this information is that “The Point” is a productive and important fishing area, with physical conditions that concentrate biota (birds, marine mammals, turtles, fishes) in a relatively small part of the ocean.

STUDY RESULTS: This report represents a fairly complete compilation of the data that have been collected in a small area bounding the Manteo Exploration units. Each citation is georeferenced and a map is included in each section. While the report is not a data synthesis, it should be an important foundation for future environmental assessments.

STUDY PRODUCTS(S): Palmquist, R.B., P.W. Schuhmann, and J.A. Michael. 2002. Boating Uses, Economic Significance, and Information for North Carolina’s Offshore Area “The Point.” Volume II: Economic Analysis of “The Point” and Adjacent Counties: Baseline Information, Valuation, and Potential Impacts. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, New Orleans, LA. OCS Study MMS 2002-046. 32 pp