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STUDY TITLE: A socioeconomic OCS Issue Analysis of Stakeholders in the Central Gulf of Mexico

REPORT TITLE: Outer Continental Shelf Issues: Central Gulf of Mexico

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BACKGROUND: This report summarized the research effort and findings of an investigation of the issues associated with Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas activities in the Central Gulf of Mexico. Stakeholders assessed for the delineation of the issues associated with OCS oil and gas activities ranged across the offshore oil and gas industry; the offshore support sector; other direct and indirect coastal users; stakeholders that benefited from economic growth in general; concerned citizen groups, and public and government organizations.

OBJECTIVES: (1) To identify and describe the various stakeholder groups in the coastal Central Gulf of Mexico, define their interests, and the degree of their concerns about Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas activities; (2) to identify the specific social and economic issues and concerns related to the Central Gulf of Mexico oil and gas activity that are seen as being important by different major stakeholders and other

knowledgeable individuals; (3) to identify the underlying assumptions held by various stakeholders concerning the effects of Outer Continental Shelf activities, which determine the position they take on the social and economic issues.

DESCRIPTION: Throughout the course of the study 131 individuals in coastal communities in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana were interviewed concerning their perspectives on offshore oil and gas development. Selection of the sample communities occurred in May of 1993 in conjunction with MMS representatives. We examined census data at the county and community level, but in the end relied most heavily on our combined knowledge of coastal communities in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Initially we selected four Louisiana communities. Cameron, Morgan City and Grand Isle were selected for their location on the coast, and their primarily blue collar association with the offshore oil sector. Grand Isle was also selected for its concentration of other direct and indirect coastal users, primarily concentrated around shrimping and tourism. Lafayette was selected for its white collar association with the offshore oil sector, having long been a regional center for offshore activity. We selected Gulfport, Biloxi and Pascagoula in Mississippi because they represented the overwhelming majority of the coastal Mississippi population, and a wide diversity of coastal uses and occupations. In Alabama we selected Mobile because it was a major port city, Dauphin Island for its other coastal users, and Gulf Shores and Fairhope primarily for their coastal tourism and retirement sites.

Because the key informants constituted a previously unidentified and thus unknown population, a technique known as snowballing was utilized. This technique is specifically appropriate to field research. Snowball sampling is a method through which the researcher develops an ever-increasing set of sample observations. One respondent in the sample under study is asked to recommend others for interviewing, and each of the subsequently interviewed participants is asked for further recommendations. This is the only feasible type of sampling procedure which fit the requirements of the project to: 1) identify various stakeholder groups through a referral process and, 2) retain flexibility in the field to identify and sample stakeholder groups as they are "discovered" through the sampling process.

All of the interviews in the coastal communities were recorded. The tapes of the interview were transcribed during the fall of 1993 and spring 1994. The transcripts were then content analyzed for the emergence of issues across five locations, Lafayette, LA and vicinity, coastal Louisiana, coastal Mississippi, Mobile County Alabama and Baldwin County Alabama.

SIGNIFICANT CONCLUSIONS: Both positive and negative economic and environmental issues emerged across the three states (Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama) surveyed. While jobs and economic spinoffs emerged as issues in all regions they were more frequently mentioned in Louisiana. Negative economic impacts also came out as issues across the three states, but were more closely associated with the coastal tourism region of Alabama. There were marked differences in the issues

associated with regulating OCS activities with Louisiana respondents maintaining that the activity was too heavily regulated and Mississippi and Alabama respondents maintaining that careful regulation was necessary. There were also marked differences in the extent to which aesthetic considerations emerged as issues. In Louisiana aesthetic consideration did not emerge as an issue, while in Mississippi and Alabama they did.

STUDY RESULTS: Several general trends can be seen although exceptions to these are also evident. In general, In Louisiana, where offshore activities have been ongoing for almost five decades, respondents generally focused on the issues of jobs and economic spinoffs and felt that the current offshore regulatory structure was burdensome and too restrictive. In contrast in Mississippi and Alabama, where coastal tourism was more important, the issues of potential aesthetic and environmental impacts were more evident, and respondents overwhelmingly agreed that careful regulations of the offshore industry was necessary if offshore development was to go forward. A fair amount of environmental concern associated with a number of specific issues was evident in all the sample areas except the Lafayette vicinity sample, and both individuals who expressed support for and opposition to offshore development expressed environmental concerns. This led to the conclusion that, at least in this case, stakeholders could not be characterized by neat mutually exclusive sets of issues, but had more complex mixes of stakes associated with the potential impacts of offshore development. Two groups (offshore fishermen, including commercial fishermen and shrimpers) focused on single issues (rigs as reefs and trash on the bottom respectively), and these groups were spread geographically across the survey region.

STUDY PRODUCT: Gramling, R., S. Brabant, C.J. Forsyth, and C.E. Palmer. 1995. Outer Continental Shelf Issues: Central Gulf of Mexico. OCS Study MMS 95-0032. U.S. Department of the Interior, Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, New Orleans, LA. 78pp.