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Federal Government Initiates Commenting Period for Potential OCS Lease Sale in Cook Inlet, Alaska ([/full-blog/2012/06/federal-government-initiates-commenting.html](#))

"Bureau of Ocean Energy Management" ([/full-blog?category=%22Bureau+of+Ocean+Energy+Management%22](#)), "Cook Inlet Planning Area of Alaska" ([/full-blog?category=%22Cook+Inlet+Planning+Area+of+Alaska%22](#)), "Cook Inlet" ([/full-blog?category=%22Cook+Inlet%22](#)), "Proposed Final OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program" ([/full-blog?category=%22Proposed+Final+OCS+Oil+and+Gas+Leasing+Program%22](#)), "request for interest" ([/full-blog?category=%22request+for+interest%22](#))



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By: Elizabeth Watson, Staff Member

On March 27, 2012, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), the bureau within the Department of the Interior that “manages the exploration and development of the nation's offshore resources,”[1] with an eye toward environmental concerns, published in the Federal Register a request for interest (RFI) regarding oil and gas exploration and drilling in the Cook Inlet Planning Area of Alaska.[2] The request initiates a 45 day comment period in which any individual, including private citizens and oil and gas corporations, may submit comments about “geologic and economic information,” “environmental, biological, archaeological, and socioeconomic conditions,” and any other impact that may occur if a proposed federal lease Sale 244 in 2013 were to occur in the Cook Inlet.[3] While industry interest is a main goal of the request for information, BOEM also voices particular interest in comments from “tribal, local, and state governments, Federal agencies, and the general public,” concerning the best ways to proceed in evaluating applicable laws, including: The Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Endangered Species Act (ESA).[4]

While Alaska’s state leasing program sees much success in this region, with the most recent sale in 2011 covering 575,202 acres, “there are currently no active Federal OCS leases in Cook Inlet.”[5] Thus, through commenting, BOEM seeks to gauge the “renewed interest in exploring for and developing additional hydrocarbon resources . . . both offshore and onshore.”[6] All comments must be received by May 11, 2012, and the Federal Register outlines different commenting and disclosure requirements for individuals versus interested corporations.[7]

In the Federal Register, BOEM emphasizes that after the commenting period and review of environmental impact considerations, the bureau will “then decide on whether to proceed with further evaluation of this special interest sale. This RFI does not indicate a decision to include Sale 244 in the Proposed Final OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2012-2017 (Final Program) or to lease in the Cook Inlet Planning Area.”[8] And, without sufficient industry interest, evidenced through commenting, the sale will not proceed.[9]

With renewed industry interest, one expects to see many more comments received from the industry during this time than the meager three comments received in a past federal lease sale of this area in 2008, which had no industry nominations.[10] Additionally, expect more push back from those representing environmental concerns, such as the protection of the Beluga Whale population in the Cook Inlet.[11]

[1] BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT, <http://www.boem.gov/> (last visited April 1, 2012).

[2] 77 Fed. Reg. 18,260, 18,260.

[3] *Id.* at 18,261.

[4] *Id.* at 18,260.

[5] *Id.* at 18,261.

[6] *Id.* at 18,260.

[7] *See id.* at 18261-62.

[8] *Id.* at 18260.

[9] *Id.* at 18261.

[10] *Id.*

[11] *See* Patti Epler, *New drilling operation begins in Alaska's Cook Inlet*, ALASKA DISPATCH (Aug. 22, 2011), <http://www.alaskadispatch.com/article/new-drilling-operation-begins-alaskas-cook-inlet?page=0,0>.

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