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**MMS Moves to On-Line Public Commenting With “Public Connect”
User-Friendly Access to MMS Regulatory and Planning Information**

Improving citizen access and ease of commenting on public documents, the Minerals Management Service today launched “Public Connect,” a new online public commenting system. The new system allows the public to find, view, and submit comments on MMS’s proposed regulations, lease sale notices, operational plans, environmental reports, and related documents. Public Connect is designed to serve as MMS’s main interface with the public for formal responses and comments on regulatory and planning information.

The service is initially available only for the MMS’s Offshore Minerals Management Service program. Other MMS program offices, such as Minerals Revenue Management and Policy and Management Improvement, will be added to the Public Connect system in the future.

MMS Director Johnnie Burton said of the new system, “The Public Connect system will simplify how the public participates in the federal Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas program. We expect that providing easier access will encourage public participation.”

The first OMM document available for on-line public commenting is a Notice of Extension of an Information Collection (1010-0149), 30 CFR 250, Subparts J, H, and I, “Fixed and Floating Platforms and Structures.”

Public Connect will provide user-friendly access to agency information and easier on-line participation in MMS’s regulatory and planning processes. Advanced search features allow users to quickly search for keywords that identify projects and documents with similar programmatic focus, geographic areas or regulatory domain. User-friendly, on-line help functions and links to associated documents are also features of Public Connect.

“Involving citizens in the management of federal resources is an important part of our mission and this system makes it easier and more efficient for those with relevant information to be heard,” said Burton.

By re-engineering, streamlining, and web-enabling its business processes, MMS will be able to assemble, review, and post documents for public access, as well as receive, track, manage, and archive public comments. The Public Connect system automatically associates and stores submitted comments with the appropriate project and documents; comments can thus be viewed by citizens in the context of the relevant project. Although on-line submissions using Public Connect will be the MMS-preferred method for public commenting, comments received through traditional delivery services, like the U.S. Postal Service, will also be accepted and uploaded into the system to help maintain complete records.

Public Connect is the first interactive on-line system released as part of a phased, multi-year e-Government transformation of MMS's OMM program called "OCS Connect," or Outer Continental Shelf Connect. The blueprint for the OCS Connect project was developed in response to the increasing complexity of oil and gas operations, greater workloads, and the need for more sophisticated technical analyses and data exchange. To meet future mission requirements and encourage participation in the domestic OCS oil and gas programs, OCS Connect will dramatically reform and streamline business operations.

Within the Department of the Interior's e-Government strategic framework, MMS has recently embarked upon several e-Government projects that align with the President's Management Reform Agenda. Some other examples include the Gulf of Mexico Region's Online Ordering System and eWell Permitting and Reporting System. For more information on these and other e-Government initiatives, please visit the MMS.gov website.

The Minerals Management Service is the Federal agency in the U.S. Department of the Interior that manages the nation's oil, natural gas, and other mineral resources on the Outer Continental Shelf in Federal offshore waters. The agency also collects, accounts for, and disburses mineral revenues from Federal and American Indian lands. MMS disbursed more than \$8 billion in FY 2003 and more than \$135 billion since the agency was created in 1982. Nearly \$1 billion from those revenues go into the Land and Water Conservation Fund annually for the acquisition and development of state and Federal park and recreation lands.

MMS Main Website: www.mms.gov
Public Comment System: <https://ocsconnect.mms.gov>
OCS Connect Website: www.mms.gov/ommegov

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