

commercially guided wildlife viewing, photography, environmental education, and interpretation; and (10) beneficial use of dredge material.

Alternatives: The Service developed three alternatives for management of the refuge (alternatives A, B, and C), with Alternative B as the proposed alternative. We believe this alternative will be the most effective one to contribute to the purpose for which the refuge was established and to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Alternative A, also called the "No Action" alternative, is the baseline or status quo of refuge programs and is usually a continuation of current planning unit objectives and management strategies, with no changes or changes that would have occurred without the CCP. Sabine Refuge, which was severely affected by Hurricane Rita in September 2005, is currently closed to most activities other than essential operations, and hurricane clean-up and restoration activities.

Non-essential programs, such as public use, would cease. Research monitoring activities and the fire program, including both prescribed fire as well as extinguishing wildfires, would continue. Hazardous debris removal and Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act projects would continue. Oil and gas operations would continue. Law enforcement operations would increase to ensure that the more than 300,000 annual visitors who normally use the refuge comply with the closure. Sabine Refuge staff would function at an office located off-site. Cultural resources would continue to be protected. As hurricane recovery is accomplished, the refuge would essentially be managed as it was prior to the devastation from the historic storm. The East Cove Unit would continue to be managed under an inter-agency management agreement.

Alternative B, our proposed alternative, would continue to keep the refuge operational with minimal public use programs functional but at a reduced cost (near-term). It would increase marsh restoration, enhance fish and wildlife management, and expand public use (long-term).

Over the near-term, programs would continue throughout the refuge commensurate with the levels of hazardous material clean-up and restoration. Over time, public use areas would be re-opened as repairs to infrastructure and restoration of habitat occur. Fire and research programs would remain active. Existing oil and gas operations would continue at the normal level, but new operations would

be closely assessed under Service regulations and Federal laws. Staff assigned to the refuge would function out of a hurricane-resistant building to be located at the original headquarters site.

Over the long-term, under Alternative B, Sabine Refuge would increase marsh restoration and enhance wildlife management, stepping up these efforts from current levels. Like Alternative A, Alternative B would maintain salinity monitoring throughout the refuge at established discrete salinity stations. Improving water quality would be a major thrust for the refuge. The refuge would provide additional opportunities for friends, volunteers, partners, and interns to assist the refuge.

Management of the East Cove Unit under Alternative B would be identical to Alternative A. Gates at the water control structures would be operated to restore preferred vegetated plant communities associated with intermediate or possibly slightly brackish environments. Staff would evaluate the use of terraces to improve vegetation of open-water areas. During the life of the CCP, an assessment would be conducted to determine the need for sanctuary in the East Cove Unit, which would minimize detrimental waterfowl disturbances. The invasion of exotic plant species, with special emphasis on giant salvinia, would be monitored. Public fishing access to the East Cove Unit would be improved.

Alternative C would hold the refuge in custodial form. Major restoration and recovery efforts from devastation caused by Hurricane Rita would be curtailed. The fire and research programs would remain active throughout the refuge. Oil and gas operations would continue at the current level. No active habitat management would occur. Instead, refuge and complex staff would serve as good caretakers or custodians of the refuge, observing and monitoring the natural forces and ecological succession that would shape its habitats and effectively determine their suitability for wildlife. The Service would conduct no prescribed fire and would limit fire management to hazardous fuel reduction and suppression of wildfires. There would be no need to replace and upgrade equipment and facilities, such as pumps, tractors, and water control structures. This alternative would result in very little effective high-quality waterfowl sanctuary. That is, high ground would succeed to a mix of Chinese tallow, willow, and hackberry, while lower ground reverted to dense stands of maidencane. There would be few open areas.

With regard to public use, each of the six priority public uses would be strongly encouraged but facilities would be limited. Management of cultural resources and the East Cove Unit under Alternative C would be identical to Alternatives A and B.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Judy McClendon, Natural Resource Planner, Telephone: 870/347-2074, Extension 43; Fax: 870/347-2908; or electronically at: Judy_McClendon@fws.gov.

Authority: This notice is published under the authority of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Public Law 105-57.

Dated: April 30, 2007.

Cynthia K. Dohner,

Acting Regional Director.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[WO-220-07-1020-JA-VEIS]

Notice of Availability of Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental Report for Vegetation Treatments on Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the Western United States, Including Alaska

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Availability.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) hereby gives notice that the Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Final Environmental Report on vegetation treatments involving the use of chemical herbicides and other methods on the public lands administered by 11 BLM State offices in 17 western States, including Alaska, is available for public review and comment. The BLM is the lead Federal agency for the preparation of this Final Programmatic EIS in compliance with the requirements of NEPA. If it is approved, the BLM would:

1. Approve the use of four new herbicide formulations on public lands.
2. Decide which of 20 currently approved herbicides will continue to be used on public lands.
3. Decide on a protocol to follow that adds new EPA-registered chemical formulations to the BLM list of approved herbicides.
4. Identify which best management practices should be used with all

applications of herbicide and other types of vegetation treatment methods (mechanical, fire, biological, etc).

DATES: The document will be available for July 30, 2007.

ADDRESSES: The Final Programmatic EIS and associated documents will be available for review in either hard copy or on compact disks (CDs) at all BLM State, District, and Field Office public rooms. The entire document can also be reviewed or downloaded at the BLM National Web site <http://www.blm.gov>. Written comments should be sent to Project Manager, National Vegetation EIS, BLM Nevada State Office, P.O. Box 12000, Reno, NV 89520-0006. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Brian Amme, Project Manager at (775) 861-6645 or e-mail: brian_amme@blm.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This Final Programmatic EIS provides a comprehensive analysis of the BLM's use of chemical herbicides in its various vegetation treatment programs related to hazardous fuels reduction, invasive terrestrial and aquatic plant species management, noxious weeds, and resource rehabilitation following catastrophic fires, and other disturbances.

In addition, an accompanying environmental report for vegetation provides an assessment of the expected effects of the use of herbicides, in addition to other vegetation treatment methods (fire, mechanical, manual, and biological) on up to approximately 5,030,000 acres of public lands per year. Together, these documents:

- Consider reasonably foreseeable activities, particularly hazardous fuels reduction treatments, emergency stabilization and rehabilitation efforts, noxious weeds, and invasive terrestrial plant species management.
- Address human health and ecological risk for proposed use of chemical herbicides on public lands.
- Provide a cumulative impact analysis for the use of chemical herbicides in conjunction with other treatment methods.

The Final Programmatic EIS is neither a land-use plan nor a land-use plan

amendment. The Final Programmatic EIS and Environmental Report will provide a comprehensive, programmatic NEPA document and environmental report that allows effective tiering and incorporation by reference, environmental effects and baseline cumulative impact assessments for other new, revised, or existing land use and activity level plans and implementation projects that involve vegetation modification or maintenance. This Final Programmatic EIS does not affect the status of the herbicide court injunction in Oregon. The analysis area includes only surface estate public lands administered by 11 BLM State offices: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana (North Dakota/South Dakota), New Mexico (Oklahoma/Texas/Nebraska), Nevada, Oregon (Washington), Utah, and Wyoming.

The BLM issued a Notice of Availability of the Draft Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Programmatic Environmental Report on November 10, 2005. The BLM held ten public hearings in late 2005, and extended the public comment period an additional 30 days to February 10, 2006.

The BLM responded to over 3,000 individual public comments during the Draft Programmatic EIS public review period. Comment responses and resultant changes in the impact analysis are documented in this Final Programmatic EIS and Environmental Report per requirements under 40 CFR 1503.4. Additional information and analysis is included in the Final Programmatic EIS addressing comments related to chemical degradates, use of surfactants and risks associated with endocrine disrupting chemicals. In addition, the Final Programmatic EIS contains subsistence analysis required under Section 801(a) of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). The BLM will prepare a Record of Decision (ROD) for the EIS after July 30, 2007.

Bud Cribley,

Deputy Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Minerals Management Service

Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), Eastern Gulf of Mexico (GOM), Proposed Oil and Gas Lease Sale 224, March 2008

AGENCY: Minerals Management Service (MMS), Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Public Hearings.

SUMMARY: The MMS has prepared a draft supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) on a tentatively scheduled 2008 oil and gas leasing proposal (Sale 224) in the Eastern GOM, off the States of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. As mandated in the recently enacted Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) of 2006 (Pub. L. 109-432, December 20, 2006), the MMS shall offer a portion of the "181 Area," located in the Eastern Planning Area, more than 125 miles from Florida for oil and gas leasing. The proposed action involves 130 tracts.

Authority: The NOA and notice of public hearings is published pursuant to the regulations (40 CFR 1503) under the authority of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); the Environmental Quality Improvement Act of 1970, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4371 et seq.); Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. 7609); and Executive Order 11514 (March 5, 1970, as amended by Executive Order 11991 (May 24, 1977)).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The recently enacted GOMESA of 2006 (Pub. L. 109-432, December 20, 2006) mandated MMS to offer a portion of the "181 Area" located in the newly defined Eastern Planning Area, more than 125 miles from Florida and west of the Military Mission Line (86 degrees, 41 minutes 30 seconds West longitude) for oil and gas leasing "as soon as practicable, but not later than 1 year, after the date of enactment of this Act." The Act mandates offering this area "notwithstanding the omission of the 181 Area * * * from any OCS leasing program under section 18 of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1344)." However, this action is not exempted from other legal requirements, such as NEPA or the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA). The MMS has prepared an SEIS to the original Sale 181 EIS published in 2001 (which encompassed the lands now being considered for Sale 224) in order to address these requirements. To meet the 1-year requirements of GOMESA, this sale should be held no later than December 2007. However, to comply fully with all pertinent laws, rules, and