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SIMULTANEOUS LEASE SALE OFFSHORE ALASKA CANCELLED

The Chukchi Sea and Hope Basin lease sales offshore Alaska's north coast have been deferred by the Minerals Management Service (MMS) due to concerns raised over natural resources and limited interest by industry, Interior Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management Bob Armstrong announced today.

MMS issued a Request for Interest and Comments last September on pursuing a simultaneous sale with the Russian Federation. The U.S. portion of the simultaneous sale consisted of proposed sale 148 in the Chukchi Sea Planning Area and proposed sale 159 in the adjacent Hope Basin Planning Area.

MMS received 17 written comments during the comment period, which ended December 5, 1994. Two petroleum companies generally supported the sale, but stated they had no plans to participate in a sale at this time. Alaska Native groups and environmental organizations expressed concerns about potential adverse affects and opposed the proposed sale.

"Based on our analysis, which includes the concerns raised and the limited interest expressed by industry," said MMS Acting Director Cynthia Quarterman, "we recommended that the planning process for the simultaneous sale be stopped and that sales in the Chukchi Sea and the Hope Basin be deferred.

"Constituent interests and comments play a significant role in our decisionmaking process. We do listen, and in this case, it makes sense to cancel the sales at this time," she said. "MMS will continue to promote the sharing of scientific and technological information between the U.S. and the Russian Federation, and to encourage cooperative efforts related to assessing offshore mineral operations."

Armstrong made the announcement at the Alaska Lands Act Coordinating Committee's meeting in Anchorage, Alaska.