New Orleans, Louisiana 70123–2394, Telephone: 1–800–200–GULF.

4. Areas Deferred from this Call. High Island Area, East Addition, South Extension, (Flower Gardens), Block A– 375 and Block A–398 (WGOM).

Mustang Island Area, Blocks 793, 799 and 816 (offshore Corpus Christi) are excluded from this Call.

5. Instructions on Call. Indications of interest and comments must be received no later than 45 days following publication of this document in the Federal Register in envelopes labeled "Nominations for Proposed 1997 Lease Sales in the Gulf of Mexico" or 'Comments on the Call for Information and Nominations for Proposed 1997 Lease Sales in the Gulf of Mexico." The standard Call for Information Map and indications of interest and/or comments must be submitted to the Regional Supervisor, Leasing and Environment, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, at the above address.

The standard Call for Information Map delineates the Call area, all of which has been identified by the MMS as having potential for the discovery of accumulations of oil and gas. Respondents are requested to indicate interest in and comment on any or all of the Federal acreage within the boundaries of the Call area that they wish to have included in proposed Sale 166 in the Central Gulf and proposed Sale 168 in the Western Gulf.

Although individual indications of interest are considered to be privileged and proprietary information, the names of persons or entities indicating interest or submitting comments will be of public record. Those indicating such interest are required to do so on the standard Call for Information Map by outlining the areas of interest along block lines.

Respondents should rank areas in which they have expressed interest according to priority of their interest (e.g., priority 1 [high], 2 [medium], or 3 [low]). Respondents are encouraged to be specific in indicating blocks by priority, as blanket nominations on large areas are not useful in the analysis of industry interest. Areas where interest has been indicated but on which respondents have not indicated priorities will be considered priority 3 [low].

Respondents may also submit a detailed list of blocks nominated (by Official Protraction Diagram and Leasing Map designations) to ensure correct interpretation of their nominations. Specific questions may be directed to the Chief, Leasing Activities Section at (504) 736–2761. Official Protraction Diagrams and Leasing Maps can be purchased from the Public Information Unit referred to above.

Comments are sought from all interested parties about particular geological, environmental, biological, archaeological and socioeconomic conditions or conflicts, or other information that might bear upon the potential leasing and development of particular areas. Comments are also sought on possible conflicts between future OCS oil and gas activities that may result from the proposed sales and State Coastal Management Programs (CMP's). If possible, these comments should identify specific CMP policies of concern, the nature of the conflict foreseen, and steps that the MMS could take to avoid or mitigate the potential conflict. Comments may either be in terms of broad areas or restricted to particular blocks of concern. Those submitting comments are requested to list block numbers or outline the subject area on the standard Call for Information Map.

6. Use of Information from Call. Information submitted in response to this Call will be used for several purposes. First, responses will be used to identify the areas of potential for oil and gas development. Second, comments on possible environmental effects and potential use conflicts will be used in the analysis of environmental conditions in and near the Call area This information will be used to make a preliminary determination of the potential advantages and disadvantages of oil and gas exploration and development to the region and the Nation. A third purpose for this Call is to use the comments collected to initiate the scoping process for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and to develop a proposed action and alternatives. Fourth, comments may be used in developing lease terms and conditions to ensure safe offshore operations. And, fifth, comments may be used to assess potential conflicts between offshore gas and oil activities and a State CMP.

7. *Existing Information.* Prior to the Call, the sale planning process includes an Information Base Review (IBR), a documented MMS assessment of the status of information acquisition efforts and the quality of the information base for potential decisions on a specific leasing proposal.

The Information Transfer Meeting in November 1994 served as the initial forum for soliciting information enhancements for the IBR. In February-March 1995, an internal review of available data and planned studies was conducted by the Gulf of Mexico Region to obtain a comprehensive assessment of the status of the information base. The information base, in part, is documented in the Long-Range Strategic Plan for Environmental Studies in the Gulf of Mexico, 1995–1999.

Appropriate study proposals and research plans will be incorporated into the environmental studies planning and evaluation process, the direction of the Technology Assessment, and Research Program, and other mechanisms in MMS (reviews and Industry Standards Committees). No comments were received from parties outside the MMS.

As a result, it has been determined that the status of the existing data available for planning, analysis, and decisionmaking is adequate and extensive. In accordance with the relevant statutes and regulations which govern OCS oil and gas leasing, no informational needs were identified which would provide a legal basis for the delay or cancellation of the leasing process. Therefore, the lease sale process should continue with the next step, a Call for Information and Nominations.

An extensive environmental studies program has been underway in this area since 1973. The emphasis, including continuing studies, has been on environmental characterization of biologically sensitive habitats, physical oceanography, ocean-circulation modeling, and ecological effects of oil and gas activities. A complete listing of available study reports, and information for ordering copies, can be obtained from the Public Information Unit referenced above. The reports may also be ordered, for a fee, from the U.S. Department of Commerce, National **Technical Information Service**, 5285 Port Royal Road, Springfield, Virginia 22161, or telephone (703) 487-4650. In addition, a program status report for continuing studies in this area can be obtained from the Chief, Environmental Studies Section, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region (see address under "Description of Area"), or telephone (504) 736-2896.

Summary Reports and Indices and technical and geological reports are available for review at the MMS, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region. Copies of the Gulf of Mexico OCS Regional Summary Reports may be obtained from the OCS Information Program, Office of Offshore Information and Publications, Minerals Management Service, at 381 Elden Street, Herndon, Virginia 22070.

8. *Tentative Schedule.* The following is a list of tentative milestone dates preceding Sale 166 and Sale 168: