

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION GUIDELINES TO PROTECT FISH AND WILDLIFE SET

Final guidelines designed to encourage the protection of fish and wildlife values in oil and gas exploration permit decisions were published by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the December 1 Federal Register.

The guidelines prescribe the objectives, policies, and procedures to be followed by the Service in its review of proposals for oil and gas exploration and development activities relating to navigable waters that are regulated by the Corps of Engineers, the Coast Guard, or the Environmental Protection Agency.

The guidelines discourage the exploitation of one resource at the expense of another and encourage the use of environmentally sound planning. They focus on the conservation, development, and improvement of fish and wildlife, their habitats, naturally functioning ecosystems, and related human uses of water and wetlands.

The objectives of the guidelines are to prevent or minimize damage to fish and wildlife resources and to preserve the rights of use and enjoyment of these resources by the people. More specifically, the Service's long-range objectives include providing assistance to other Federal agencies in their enforcement of regulatory programs.

The Service opposes activities affecting the Nation's waters and wetlands which would needlessly destroy or damage fish and wildlife resources

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or their habitat. The Service places special emphasis on the protection of vegetated or productive shallow waters and estuaries.

The procedures recommend that water-related developments must be shown to serve a recognized public need and pose minimal environmental damage. If investigations indicate avoidable fish and wildlife losses, the Service will recommend to the appropriate Federal permitting agency that permission not be granted for the proposed work or that plans be modified to reduce damage to fish and wildlife.

The following kinds of information will be required for assessing a project's impact on fish and wildlife: overall map showing the project location in relation to water depths, direction of sheetflow water and water currents, location of freshwater outflows, location of shellfish leasing areas, aerial photographs of the project area, scale drawings and project area maps showing the work in relation to high and low tides, a description of methods and the kinds of equipment to be used, types and dimensions of shallow water areas to be excavated or filled, and details of all planned facilities that could alter or disturb water or wetlands.

Other specific provisions of the guidelines discuss the use of explosives, the building of docks, piers, bulkheads, transmission lines, access roads, bridges, jetties, levees, lagoons, and navigation channels. The disposal of spoil materials is discussed in detail. Acceptable methods of drilling wells and piping the oil or gas discovered are also spelled out.

The Service emphasized that it stands ready to assist permit applicants at all times to formulate environmentally sound proposals. Direct contact with Service facilities, regional offices, or Washington staff is encouraged.

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