

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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MAJOR ATLANTIC COAST ECOLOGICAL INVENTORY TO IDENTIFY SENSITIVE COASTAL RESOURCES, REDUCE POTENTIAL ENERGY CONFLICTS

A major new inventory of Atlantic coastal ecology has been launched by the Interior Department to yield information that could reduce major conflicts between energy projects and the environment, Under Secretary of the Interior James Joseph announced today.

"This new inventory will provide critical data on those sensitive resources that are potentially vulnerable to oil and gas processing, manufacturing, and transportation -- particularly refineries, petrochemical complexes, and gas and liquid natural gas facilities," Joseph said.

Joseph announced that a \$221,676 contract for the comprehensive inventory has been awarded to Dames & Moore of Bethesda, Maryland. The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will supervise the project. The initial study will be completed by July, 1980, with publication of a map series and narrative report to follow.

The need to produce energy and the sometimes competing need to protect the environment has led occasionally to costly delay of projects, due in part to protracted litigation after considerable money and time have been committed.

"This study will not attempt to tell industries where they can or cannot locate facilities. We are trying to provide information which will help their initial planning by alerting them to areas with the greatest potential for conflict with environmental values," Joseph said.

"We see this as a way to get out in front and provide some guidance, instead of passively waiting until after industry's large investment in a site has begun. Information of this type can provide the basis for a much better way of dealing with environmental and economic issues, before all sides are entrenched."

The study will focus on those resources and ecological values subject to the provisions of major Federal environmental laws, such as the Endangered Species Act and the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act.

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The inventory will compile information on:

- Important coastal fish and wildlife species, especially those with special designations ("endangered," "migratory," etc.) or high commercial, recreational, and esthetic value;
- Habitats of these species; and
- Special land use designations in the coastal area (National Wildlife Refuges, National Parks, and State wildlife management areas, for example).

Special emphasis will be given to collecting existing information already compiled by the States for use in developing their own coastal zone plans -- the first time that such a compilation has been undertaken.

Though not identifying particular areas where energy siting may be accomplished, the inventory is designed to be the first step in a broader plan to identify areas and resources having the highest relative ecological sensitivity to the impacts of East Coast energy development.

Most refineries and energy complexes along the Eastern Seaboard are now concentrated in the New York-New Jersey-Delaware area. There are proposals for one new plant in Maine, two in Virginia, and two in North Carolina. The one in Maine (Eastport) and one of the two in Virginia (Hampton Roads) have attracted controversy for their potential effects on the endangered bald eagle and the marine resources of the Chesapeake Bay, respectively.

The inventory, focusing on broad areas of the Atlantic coastal zone, will consist of a set of 30 maps, displayed on a relatively small scale (1:250,000) using the U.S. Geological Survey National Topographic Map Series as a base. The Geological Survey is advising on the design of the maps. A narrative report will accompany the maps and describe all of the resources displayed and their location.

"Using this information, potential conflicts can be identified early in the planning stages of projects, before a site is even selected. This will lessen the chances for serious disputes later after development has actually begun," Joseph said.

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