Environmental Studies Program: Ongoing Study

Field	Study Information
Title	Digital Curation: Streamlining Access to Research Across Gulf of Mexico Communities (GM-17-11)
Administered by	Gulf of Mexico Region
BOEM Contact(s)	Dustin Reuther (dustin.reuther@boem.gov)
Procurement Type(s)	Cooperative Agreement
Conducting Organization(s)	Nicholls State University
Total BOEM Cost	\$479,240
Performance Period	FY 2020-2024
Final Report Due	September 2024
Date Revised	October 24, 2023
Problem	BOEM needs a system to better access research relevant to social impact assessments, to support analyses required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and to strengthen interchanges with affected communities on the Gulf Coast.
Intervention	Using a cooperative research approach, establish a coding system and full text, fully searchable database, along with public outreach to include input and concerns of underserved, vulnerable communities.
Comparison	The extensive body of literature relevant to social impact assessment would remain difficult to access and analyze completely and would not be readily available to BOEM or the interested public.
Outcome	A system to more efficiently access relevant research and a better understanding of stakeholder concerns, particularly vulnerable communities in remote areas of the State.
Context	Central GOM planning area.

BOEM Information Need(s): The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) needs an advanced information tool that synthesizes and brings to bear all relevant socioeconomic research and is fine tuned to address prominent environmental assessment issues. This tool needs to incorporate relevant government and academic research and the research and points of view of the communities affected by Agency decisionmaking. This tool will provide BOEM's analysts with a centralized, quick response capability to complete environmental assessments and respond to queries (e.g., management, public) faster with clarity and comprehensiveness. It also will address BOEM's need to strengthen ties with local communities, particularly vulnerable communities, by creating opportunities to work together to build this publicly available tool.

This study is in response to the Bureau's ongoing concern to develop more robust assessments of the socioeconomic consequences of its decision-making and fully supports several Executive Orders (E.O.) including E.O. 12898, E.O. 13990, and E.O. 14008. The study aims to strengthen socioeconomic impact

assessments related to federal conventional and renewable energy development in the Gulf of Mexico (GOM) Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) by leveraging existing resources, engaging stakeholder communities, and maximizing efficiencies.

Besides ongoing efforts to streamline the environmental assessment process under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), such as by making the provision of scientific analyses more efficient, this study comes as a response to the changing landscape for socioeconomic resources and the need for a synthetic and up-to-date view of relevant research on these resources. The offshore industry has changed rapidly in recent years, in structure and process. These industry changes occurred within the context of various environmental and societal changes. Also, the BOEM Gulf of Mexico Regional Office (GOMRO) will be hosting its first offshore wind energy auction in December 2022, which increases the urgency and depth of information needs in the Region. In response to the information need driven by governmental efficiency efforts, frontier renewable energy projects, and the changing socioeconomic landscape, BOEM proposes an information tool development and public outreach study.

Background: The petroleum industry as a whole in the GOM OCS has matured over several decades and is well-developed, expansive, extensive, and deeply intertwined in the regional communities and economies of the coastal states. Since the late 1990's, the offshore oil and gas industry has been changing rapidly, often in unanticipated directions, including: such as the removal of the Oil Export Ban, development of new facilities to export oil and liquid natural gas, rapid changes in the international business climate, business practices, industry reorganizations, mergers and outsourcing, advances in technology and control systems, and significant energy market shifts in response to the often volatile fluctuations in oil and gas prices, and changes in policy. These industry changes occurred within the context of various societal and environmental changes – e.g., migration, land-use, employment shifts, land-loss, subsidence, increasing/heightened storm activity with flooding and high winds, warming trends, etc. Furthermore, a new era of offshore renewable energy development has dawned for the Region, the impacts of which have yet to be explored. As a consequence, the onshore social and economic impacts of offshore energy development are evolving and necessitate new tools to identify and assess these changes, which are substantial and cumulative in the sense that they establish the baseline conditions for what is yet to come as the Gulf adjusts to future changes in the energy industry.

Objectives: The study addresses BOEM's evolving NEPA needs to (1) streamline environmental assessments and (2) to engage affected communities. The study accomplishes this by supporting the development of an advanced information tool incorporating:

- A significant socioeconomic information source providing synthesized NEPA relevant information on the GOMR's O&G industry and associated social and environmental issues;
- A heightened understanding of relevant stakeholder concerns at the community level and the identification of proactive, positive and non-confrontational stakeholder engagement approaches.

Methods: The project will be centered on a data collection and textual analysis effort to code (thematic analysis) and synthesize key studies, external research publications, and conversational transcripts. Prospective methods include literature reviews, data analysis, coding, fieldwork, expert consultation, and research group conferencing. Important NEPA topics and their content will provide context for the study.

The project will identify promising information sources for coding. Then, coders will train, and refine reliable codes, by working in teams with oversight and cross-checking their work. The analytical period will require regular team interactions to ensure that the coding procedures are working, and the project remains focused on NEPA relevant topics. A coding seminar and workshop will begin the coding effort by introducing relevant concepts, methods, software, and holding group and individual training sessions. As work progresses, any critical information gaps will be identified. Limited fieldwork will also be used for that purpose in the form of outreach, particularly to vulnerable communities. The outreach component of the project will occur simultaneously with the coding effort. Project staff will work closely with members of affected communities to identify significant issues and related materials to be incorporated. Project staff will engage actively with the business and civic community's public activities. Outreach activities will express or facilitate the aims of the study. Information gathered during outreach will be coded and added to the project database. Outreach activities will ensure that the products will be relevant and available to local communities.

This research will be labor intensive and require BOEM technical oversight and participation to assess in the ongoing analyses and to help resolve issues regarding NEPA-related questions and the overall balance of the project's effort. Throughout the project, BOEM and outside experts will consult and conference to adjust the content of each topical area to ensure sufficient scope, scale, and detail are met to meet the needs of the end user (federal and state entities).

Deliverables to be produced under this study include, but are not limited to, project management team meeting reports, internal project website, coding workshops, coding team summary reviews, draft and final study synthesis reports, presentations, bibliographies, final report out (presentation/meeting style); and a full text, fully searchable database.

Specific Research Question(s): Is it possible to design a coding system and fully searchable database that will simplify BOEM NEPA analyses and garner a greater understanding of stakeholder concerns?

Current Status: Coding is complete and work on the final report is ongoing.

Publications Completed: N/A

Affiliated WWW Sites: N/A

References: N/A