

Environmental Studies Program: Studies Development Plan | FY 2026–2027

Field	Study Information
Title	Port Fourchon, Louisiana: Effects of the Outer Continental Shelf Petroleum Industry on the Economy, Infrastructure, and Community (GR-26-01)
Administered by	New Orleans Office
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Procurement Type(s)	Contract or Cooperative Agreement
Conducting Organization(s)	TBD
Total BOEM Cost	TBD
Performance Period	FY 2026–2030
Final Report Due	TBD
Date Revised	April 2, 2026
Problem	Port Fourchon is the base from which most vessel support to Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas operations originates, and as such, current impact analyses are vital to understanding how changes in OCS oil and gas activity affect regional economies. A previous two-part study was developed to achieve this aim, but it is now out-of-date and requires an update.
Intervention	This study would provide new and updated data. This study will build on the multidisciplinary, mixed methods analyses from the previous study and consider new analyses for current information needs.
Comparison	Baseline conditions from the previous study will allow for some limited trends analysis, while new analyses incorporated in this proposed study will serve as a point of comparison for future research findings.
Outcome	BOEM analysts and decision makers will be better able to explain how oil and gas development in the Gulf of America results in social, economic, industrial, and community effects within onshore communities supporting such activity.
Context	Southeastern Louisiana

BOEM Information Need(s): Port Fourchon services nearly the entirety of the Gulf of America’s (GOA) deepwater energy portfolio (GLPC 2025). This port is one of the most significant locations for oil and gas activities in the US. BOEM requires information on the development of the oil and gas industry in the GOA and its effects on the economy, infrastructure, and communities associated with Port Fourchon. A previous two-part study was commissioned in the late 1990s (Keithly 2001, Hughes et al. 2002) to analyze the port’s impact on the local economy and infrastructure. While useful upon its completion, its findings are now outdated with the passage of time and changes in technology, development, and programmatic direction. This proposed study will address these changes by collecting data needed to meet the requirements of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA).

Background: Port Fourchon, located on the coast of Lafourche Parish in Louisiana, was established in 1960 to support fishing, oil and gas activity, and foreign trade (Keithly 2001). The port has long been one of the nation's most significant in facilitating oil and gas development and distribution. Today, Port Fourchon continues to be a multi-use port, supporting the oil and gas industry, commercial fishing, recreation, and shipping (GLPC 2025). The port includes over 250 companies and services nearly the entire GOA deepwater energy portfolio with ~15,000 people moving through the port monthly to work offshore, ~400 daily vessels using its channels, and ~1,200 daily trucks coming through the port system (GLPC 2025). The port is also the land base for the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port (LOOP), which handles between 10–15% of U.S. domestic oil and is connected to 50% of the nation's refining capacity (GLPC 2025).

The original two-part study (Keithly 2001, Hughes et al. 2002) applied an economic impacts model, a road wear model, and implemented an employee survey (conducted by the GLPC), a license plate visual survey, and select set of interviews with industry and port personnel. This study sought to better understand how a relatively abrupt increase in oil and gas development and concomitant economic and demographic growth stressed the region's public services, including roads, utilities, law enforcement, schools, welfare agencies, water supplies, and more (Hughes et al. 2002).

Since the original study was undertaken, Port Fourchon and the surrounding communities have faced a number of new developments and suffered impacts from multiple hurricanes. In turn, the port's management is seeking to complete various enhancements, such as a multi-purpose heavy industry facility on Fourchon Island (LeBlanc, 2023), that would further heighten Port Fourchon's significance to the oil and gas industry. In addition, BOEM's Marine Mineral Program, through GOMESA, sponsors coastal restoration and resiliency projects, including the Port Fourchon Shoreline Protection Project (BA-0251) and the Port Fourchon/Fourchon Island Long Term Resilience Analysis (TE-0178) (LA CPRA 2024; 2025). These efforts impact the port's ecosystem through their use of federal sand resources. As such, further information is needed as to the scope of these impacts and their relation to the GOA oil and gas industry.

Objective(s): The overall objectives of the proposed study are:

- To better characterize the variety of connections to OCS activities at Port Fourchon and the economic, infrastructural, and community impacts these OCS-related activities have in the surrounding region.
- To investigate how market trends (e.g., volatility) associated with the OCS oil and gas program impact Port Fourchon's operations and the public services supporting surrounding communities.
- To explore how information (e.g., research design, methods, findings) from this case study might be used to better understand the effects of oil and gas activities at other onshore facilities (such as serving as a template for additional studies).

Methods: Like the previous study, this analysis of Port Fourchon will take a multimethod approach which characterizes port activities and impacts from a variety of data and analyses, to be fine-tuned with the principal investigators. Methods will include a model of economic impacts of the port, an inventory of current port businesses, an overview of port operation and planning information, an analysis of existing data available (e.g., Dismukes (2010, 2024), other BOEM/BSEE data, public records from the Greater Lafourche Port Commission), discussions with current port employees and experts, and a historic overview (which could be built out from BOEM's past oral history projects – e.g., McGuire (2008)). Additional methods might include, for example, using aerial photographs and review of

environmental assessments to understand the port's role in the historical ecology of the region. Buy-in from the port could also open additional methods, such as formal survey.

The original study provides some initial structure to methods and analyses to consider. The model of economic impacts used in the first study—the Louisiana Community Impact Model (Hughes et al. 2002)—may require modification or a different approach. An updated model of economic impacts of the port on surrounding communities could include information such as a tax review and the impact of that revenue on public services, using data such as from the U.S. Census Bureau, Louisiana Department of Economic Development, and Greater Lafourche Port Commission.

One of the key components of the original study was an analysis of road wear from port traffic. Since Lafourche Parish used that previous study to help raise funds to elevate Highway 1, it is expected that other issues may be more useful to contemporary decision making at BOEM. For example, how have disasters, such as major hurricanes, the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, and land loss impacted the port (including understanding how normal operations were stopped during acute disasters and how the port recovered the ability to operate, as well as show how these have affected development and planning)? It's likely that BOEM's Marine Minerals Program is a key component of this. Connections among the port and other key OCS oil and gas infrastructure would also be useful to delineate. For example, it would be helpful to understand to what extent other ports may be able to (or have) compensate(d) for major weather impacts to Port Fourchon. Also, it may be possible to better characterize the LOOP system to better capture the full impacts of Port Fourchon as an entry and/or terminal point in that system. Discussions with port personnel and industry experts should be incorporated throughout to contextualize secondary data and analyses of such.

Specific Research Question(s): The proposed work is designed to address the following questions:

1. How has Port Fourchon developed in recent decades and what will the port look like (e.g., layout, main functions, infrastructure) in the reasonably foreseeable future? How do these developments connect to the wider supporting network of infrastructure related to OCS oil and gas (e.g., LOOP)?
2. How has socioeconomic activity (employment, population, residential construction, etc.) in communities around the port changed in relation to port development?
3. How have the port's role and functions in supporting oil and gas activities in the Gulf of America changed in recent decades?
4. How are public services (water, schools, police, etc.) impacted by OCS oil and gas development?
5. In what ways have major disasters, such as Hurricane Ida, the *Deepwater Horizon* spill, and coastal land loss, impacted Port Fourchon and how do port responses to these disasters impact surrounding communities?
6. What lessons from Port Fourchon's development and challenges could inform BOEM's understanding of other Gulf onshore support facilities?

Current Status: N/A

Publications Completed: N/A

Affiliated WWW Sites: N/A

References:

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