

THE CONSIDERATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN OIL AND GAS DRILLING OPERATIONS

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In the United States, Gulf of Mexico, oil and gas industry operators are required by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to provide archaeological assessments of potential resources in their project area as a condition of the permit application process. Permit approval may depend on the investigation, mitigation, or avoidance of a submerged archaeological resource. All reasonable types of submerged cultural resources must be addressed in the assessment, and in shallow waters includes both historic shipwrecks and late Pleistocene/early Holocene occupation areas. All areas available for lease by oil and gas operators require an archaeological assessment, including the ever-increasing depths of deepwater exploration. The area of impact, as defined in the permit approval process, includes any ground disturbing activity. During construction activities this may include a drilling site for well installation, pipeline trench, or anchor spread. Ancillary impacts may include drilling splay, or temporary ground installations such as mud mats or acoustic positioning beacons. This presentation will introduce common methods used in assessing the potential presence of submerged archaeological resources, as well as oil and gas industry activities that have the potential to impact or damage submerged cultural resources.