



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT

Pacific OCS Region

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July 16, 2026

Director Agnes M. Sablan
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Division of Coastal Resources Management
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Saipan, MP 96950

Dear Director Sablan:

On April 8, 2026, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) Pacific Region held a virtual meeting with you regarding the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) mineral leasing process offshore the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). We appreciate the early coordination and the opportunity for timely, collaborative discussions. As a follow up to our meeting, BOEM is submitting this Negative Determination for commercial leasing for minerals offshore the CNMI to the CNMI Division of Coastal Resources Management in compliance with Section 930.34 *et seq.* of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Federal Consistency Regulations (Title 15 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 930 Subpart C). This Negative Determination documents that an OCS mineral lease sale offshore the CNMI will not affect the coastal zone of the CNMI.

If you have questions about the attached Negative Determination for commercial leasing for minerals offshore the CNMI, please contact Natalie Dayal at natalie.dayal@boem.gov or Sindey Chaky at sindey.chaky@boem.gov.

Sincerely,

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DOUGLAS BOREN
Date: 2026.07.16
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Douglas P. Boren
Regional Director
Pacific Regional Office

One Enclosure:

Negative Determination for Commercial Leasing for OCS Minerals Offshore the CNMI

Negative Determination

Commercial Leasing for Minerals Offshore the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

Pursuant to the Coastal Zone Management Act



Submitted to:

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Coastal Zone Management Program

Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality

Division of Coastal Resources Management

Prepared by:

Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

Pacific Outer Continental Shelf Region

July 16, 2026

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Determination

In accordance with Section 307(c)(1) of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (CZMA), as amended, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) determined that the Proposed Action of issuing leases in the Proposed Action Area shown in **Figure 1**, which would authorize the lease holder to conduct only preliminary activities, will not affect the coastal zone of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and therefore, does not require a consistency determination. There are no reasonably foreseeable coastal effects on any land or water use or natural resources of the coastal zone of the CNMI based on the limited scope of preliminary activities and the lack of direct spatial overlap between the Proposed Action Area and nearshore environments. Accordingly, BOEM submits this Negative Determination in compliance with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office for Coastal Management (OCM) regulations (15 CFR § 930.35).

The Proposed Action Area, for potential leasing by BOEM lies entirely within the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) and includes two geographically distinct areas, one east and one west of the CNMI. The area east of the CNMI is 35,483,044 acres (143,595 km²) or 6,502 whole or partial blocks and is 128 mi (206 km) from Saipan and 127 mi (205 km) from Guam at its closest point. The area west of the CNMI is 33,618,369 acres (136,049 km²), or 6,248 whole or partial blocks, and is 54 mi (87 km) from Saipan and 46 mi (74 km) from Guam at its closest point. The southern boundary of the Proposed Action Area is north of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Administrative Boundary between the CNMI and Guam on the OCS ([Area ID Memo, March 2026](#)). The area is approximately 69,101,413 acres with eastern area water depths ranging from 3,700–25,100 feet (1,130–7,650 meters [m]) and western area depths ranging from 2,820–18,670 feet (860–5,690 meters [m]).

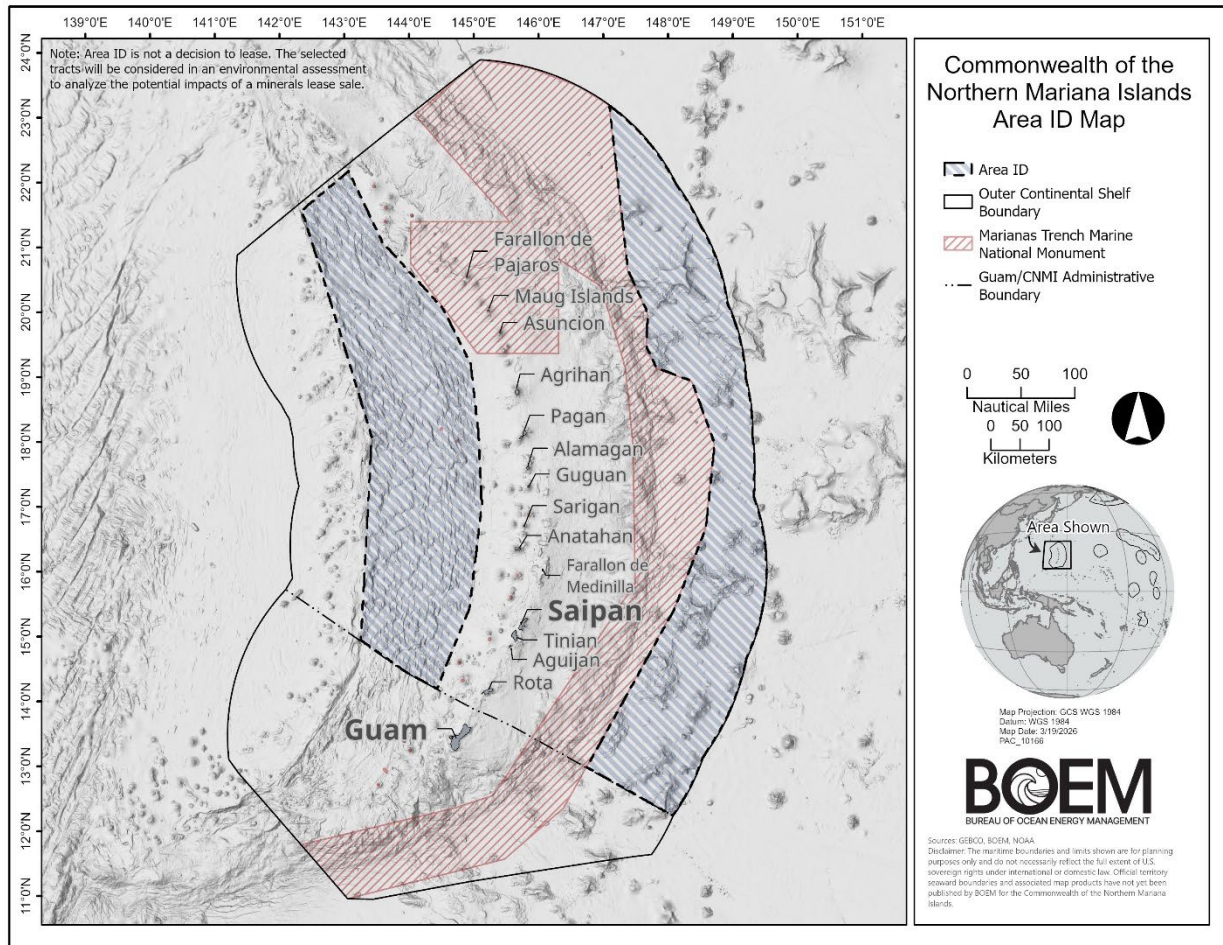


Figure 1. CNMI Area ID (Proposed Action Area) Map.

Background

BOEM manages the development of U.S. OCS energy, mineral, and geological resources in an environmentally and economically responsible way. The OCS is the federally managed ocean area extending across the outer boundaries of U.S. controlled waters 3 to 200 nautical miles (nmi) from shore, with some exceptions.

On November 12, 2025, BOEM initiated the process to potentially lease for seabed critical minerals offshore the CNMI. On March 18, 2026, BOEM completed the Area ID step, which determined the specific areas on the OCS that will undergo environmental review of proposed commercial leases for critical minerals in the form of an Environmental Assessment (EA) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Additionally, BOEM is conducting required consultations with other responsible agencies implementing applicable laws, including Endangered Species Act (ESA), Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

Potential lease instruments will include any stipulations derived from Best Management Practices (BMPs) resulting from environmental review and consultations.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to issue up to six leases within the Proposed Action Area, three within the area to the East and three within the area to the West, that authorizes preliminary activities only; any future action would require submission of a plan and a separate BOEM environmental review. A maximum of six leases is reasonable due to the need for sufficiently large lease areas to allow for mineral exploration and to consider the number of companies that responded with interest in the Request for Information and Interest comment period. Issuing up to six leases promotes competition, accounts for the unquantified commercial value, and provides opportunities for potential commercial development.

If all of the CNMI Proposed Action Area were offered for lease, each lease could be approximately 11 to 18 million acres in size. Offering large lease areas provides flexibility for exclusion areas that may be deemed necessary on an environmental or technical basis.

Issuing leases would authorize the lease holder to conduct only preliminary activities. Geological, geophysical, and other surveys classified as preliminary may indicate the presence of mineral resources and, in the case of geological sampling, may involve collection of limited samples of the seabed. The regulatory classification of these activities as preliminary is determined in part objectively, but more by the scope and concentration of potential environmental effects of the activity. Preliminary activities are described in **Table 1**. Additional activities are not authorized by the lease and have separate environmental review processes.

Based on the limited scope of preliminary activities and the lack of direct spatial overlap between the Proposed Action Area and nearshore environments, there are no reasonably foreseeable coastal effects on any land or water use or natural resources of the coastal zone of the CNMI.

Table 1. Preliminary activities allowed with lease issuance and evaluated in this Negative Determination

Description from 30 CFR 582.21d	Activity	Leases in the Eastern Area	Leases in the Western Area
Bathymetric, Geophysical, Mapping, and Other Surveys	Use of survey vessels, autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs), and remotely operated vehicles (ROVs)	Yes	Yes

Description from 30 CFR 582.21d	Activity	Leases in the Eastern Area	Leases in the Western Area
Bathymetric, Geophysical, and Mapping Surveys	High-resolution geophysical (HRG) surveys using sound sources that are documented as causing little to no impact to species, Tier 4 <i>de minimis</i> sound sources ^{1,2}	Yes	Yes
Other Surveys	High-resolution video or acoustic cameras Sampling seabed (sediments, minerals), water, and species from an ROV	Yes	Yes
Other Surveys	Anchors on the seafloor for moorings, buoys, and physical, chemical, or biological data collection	Yes	Yes, with prior visual clearance and controlled placement
Other Surveys	Scientific physical, chemical, and biological monitoring from a ship that does not contact the seafloor, including towed equipment,	Yes	Yes
Other Surveys	Scientific physical, chemical, and biological monitoring from a ship that does contact the seafloor and use of landers	Yes	Yes
Geotechnical Survey	Box core sampling, free floating grab samples	Yes	No
Other Surveys	Expendable equipment, such as weights and underwater transponder positioning units	Yes	Yes, with prior visual clearance and controlled placement
Other Surveys	Irretrievable equipment meant for one-time use, such as expendable bathy thermographs	Yes	Yes
Other Surveys	Focused biological surveys from the air, from the ship, or in water can utilize aerial digital imaging, visual observation, radar, and thermal or acoustic monitoring	Yes	Yes

Note: ¹Sound sources are described in NMFS (2025) ²Center for Marine Acoustics (2023)

Preliminary activities are similar for both the eastern and western sides, except no box cores will be collected from the western area and more ROV sampling may take place in the west. The eastern and western sides of the CNMI differ due to the seafloor conditions associated with distinct types of critical mineral deposits. In the waters east of the CNMI, mineral deposits are associated with abyssal, soft sediments and relatively flat bathymetry, which may allow for box coring without risk of notable impacts. In the waters west of the CNMI, mineral deposits are generally associated with hard or consolidated sediments and/or hydrothermal systems that are not amenable to tools like box cores. More selective sampling from an ROV would be more feasible to minimize habitat disruption and collect the targeted information. Tools like rock drills and piston cores are not considered within the scope of preliminary activities.

Vessel Trips and Number of Survey Days

The survey duration in days and number of vessel trips anticipated for the Proposed Action (Preliminary Activity) surveys and equipment deployments are estimated in **Tables 2 and 3**. The number of survey vessels at any one time is estimated to be two with a maximal

statistical potential of five per lease. A vessel trip is a two-way voyage of a ship moving from a port or harbor to the survey area and then returning. BOEM assumes vessels will utilize the Port of Saipan, but vessels could use other ports from the CNMI region. Transit to the CNMI would likely be from U.S. mainland ports but could be from other energy hubs in the Pacific Ocean (e.g., Malaysia, Australia). Available ships that can access deep waters and stay in the open ocean are limited in the global market. BOEM projected vessel trips information from the initial assessment of the Clarion Clipperton Zone's Nauru Ocean Resources property and from Tonga Offshore Mining Limited Clarion Clipperton Zone Project Exploration Area.

For leases in the eastern area, there is a range for the survey duration estimates listed (**Table 2**), which is due to varying densities reported from related assessments. Survey duration combined the following factors: (1) expected duration of the survey work using the calculated line miles and expected velocity, (2) number and duration of line turns, (3) expected daily time for deck work, such as AUV or device deployments, retrievals, or sampling operations, and (4) amount of time when no work is conducted because of either mechanical or weather delays. The sum of these factors approximates the survey duration.

For the three potential leases in the western area, there is also a range of survey duration estimates (**Table 3**). These estimates are based on factors listed above, as well as assumptions about the expected magnitude and duration of AUV and ROV surveys, including amount of time to sample and move among deposit sites.

Table 2. Estimated number of vessel trips for surveys and for equipment or mooring deployments on the leases in the eastern area

Survey	Duration of Survey in Days ¹ and Number of Vessel Trips ²
Mapping survey: initial or coarse survey with low or medium frequency (one survey)	56.9 (45.9 to 70.2) days across 5 trips (low frequency) 112.7 (91.7 to 137.8) days across 8 trips (medium frequency)
Geological, geotechnical, and biological sampling: ³ initial or coarse, lease area, and fine (total of three) surveys	946.5 (388.6 to 1,969.9) days across 55 trips
Oceanographic/biological surveys: include deployment and retrievals of equipment, water, chemical, avian, fishes, marine mammal, and sea turtle (total of four) surveys ⁴	328.8 (279.3 to 382.6) days
Total estimated number of days at sea with vessel trips	1,668 (1,174.5 to 2,504.7) days across 156.2 (117.1 to 220.6) trips

Notes:

1. Survey days and vessel trip numbers and ranges were calculated using methodology in Appendix A of the CNMI Environmental Assessment (EA). Values are intended to be conservative estimates of survey requirements accounting for weather and maintenance.

2. A vessel trip is a two-way voyage of a ship moving from a port/harbor to the survey area and then returning.

3. Geotechnical and biological sampling assume 24-hour survey days.

4. Avian, fish, marine mammal, and sea turtle surveys are typically conducted during daylight hours (10 hours).

Table 3. Estimated number of vessel trips for surveys and for equipment or mooring deployments on the leases in the western area

Survey	Duration of Survey in Days ¹ and Number of Vessel Trips ²
Mapping and chemical oceanography survey: MBES and CTD tow-yos	46.3 (38.2 to 56) days across 6 trips mapping with an EM122 109.8 (89.4 to 134.4) days across 10 trips mapping with an EM304 146.6 (89.6 to 230) days across 13 days to conduct CTDs
AUV survey with six AUVs: identify inactive and extinct vents along exposed faults or “off axis”	395 (298.1 to 502.7) days over 31 trips
ROV survey: targeted collection of water, sediment, rocks, and animals	1,381.3 (465.9 to 3,299.3.) days over 104 trips
Total estimated number of days at sea with vessel trips	2,214.5 (1,226.7 to 4,201) days across 191 (116.2 to 340.1) trips

Notes:

1. Survey days and vessel trip numbers and ranges were calculated using methodology explained in Appendix A of the CNMI EA. Values are intended to be conservative estimates of survey requirements accounting for weather and maintenance, with actual numbers likely to be lower.

2. A vessel trip is a two-way voyage of a ship moving from a port/harbor to the survey area and then returning.

Vessels that install moorings and conduct surveys are typically 90 to 122 m in length (German Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources 2018; China Minmetals Corporation 2024). Crew boats used for buoy operations and maintenance are typically 16 to 17 m in length, with 100- to 400-hp engines and 1,800-gal fuel capacity. The remote location is a large cost for data collection. BOEM anticipates larger survey vessels would attempt to collect as much data as possible while on the water. While a cruise may have a particular category or priority, survey vessels could function as platforms for collecting HRG, geotechnical, biological, and oceanographic information. Vessels performing surveys or towing equipment are relatively slow moving at approximately 4–6 knots.

Outside of Coastal Zone

BOEM determined that the Proposed Action would occur outside the coastal zone. Section 304 of the CZMA (16 U.S.C. 1453) defines the term “coastal zone.” For the CNMI specifically, the coastal zone is defined in the *Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America* (U.S. Public Law 94-241). As described in the CNMI Coastal Zone Management Program (CNMI CZMP), the CNMI coastal zone includes all non-federal land and water areas, including submerged lands and waters extending seaward to a distance of three (3) nautical miles. The CNMI is an island chain consisting of more than 13 islands. Each island, in its entirety, is designated as a “coastal zone” in the context of the CZMA, under 15 CFR § 923.31(a)(7). CNMI’s coastal zone does not include federal lands, which under Section 304 of the CZMA are excluded from a coastal state’s coastal zone. Excluded lands include the federally-leased northern two-thirds of Tinian, all of Farallon de Medinilla, and approximately 72 hectares at Tanapag Harbor in Saipan.

However, BOEM recognizes that actions outside the coastal zone may affect land or water uses or natural resources along the coast and therefore are subject to the provisions of the Act. Consequently, a Coastal Effects Analysis of Enforceable Policies is provided below. BOEM's analysis of potential coastal effects as they pertain to the CNMI CZMP enforceable policies demonstrates that the Proposed Action would not result in reasonably foreseeable adverse effects to coastal resources or uses.

Coastal Effects Analysis of Enforceable Policies

The Northern Mariana Islands Administrative Code Chapter 15-10 contains the Coastal Resources Management rules and regulations and defines the following as: "Coastal land" means all lands and the resources thereon, therein, and there under located within the territorial jurisdiction of the Coastal Resources Management (CRM) program, as specified by 2 CMC §1513; "Coastal resources" means all coastal lands and waters and the resources therein located within the territorial jurisdiction of the CRM program, as specified by 2 CMC § 1513; and "Coastal waters" means all waters under the marine resources subject to the territorial jurisdiction boundaries of the Coastal Resources Management program as specified in 2 CMC § 1513.

BOEM has analyzed the potential impacts of the Proposed Action on the coastal zone by looking at the reasonably foreseeable direct and indirect potential effects on coastal uses and resources. Consistent with 15 CFR 930.33 (a), BOEM analyzed the relevant enforceable policies from the CNMI CZMP under the Northern Mariana Islands Administrative Code Chapter 15-10, Coastal Resource Management Rules and Regulations. Below are discussions of the enforceable policies determined to be applicable to the Proposed Action. Any enforceable policies not addressed were evaluated and found to not be applicable to the Proposed Action and this determination.

BOEM's analysis of potential coastal effects as they pertain to the CNMI CZMP's enforceable policies demonstrates that the Proposed Action would not result in reasonably foreseeable adverse effects to coastal resources or uses. Coastal effects are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

Enforceable Policies Analysis:

§ 15-10-303: Standards to Avoid Adverse Impacts

(c) “Adverse impacts” includes, but is not limited to any of the following:

(1) Alteration of chemical or physical properties of coastal or marine waters that would impair or prevent the existence of the natural biological habitats and communities

Oceanography and Water Quality

The affected environment for oceanography and water quality spans the Proposed Action Area and the navigation routes between the Proposed Action Area and the ports where survey vessels would stage, such as the Port of Saipan or the Port of Tinian. The CNMI Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality protects and preserves the CNMI’s natural resources and bodies of water, including monitoring, and when necessary, remediating both marine and freshwater systems.

In general, the most common threats to coastal water quality are stormwater runoff from onshore infrastructure, sewage discharge from failing infrastructure, fecal contamination from feral and domesticated animals, and heavy metal contamination from legacy WWII sites (Yuknavage et al. 2022). Several of these sources can lead to fecal indicator bacteria (Enterococci) levels exceeding the CNMI water quality standards (Yuknavage et al. 2022).

Waters near the Port of Saipan are designated Class A; the objective of this class of waters is that their use for recreational purposes and aesthetic enjoyment be protected (Paradigm Environmental 2017). However, port waters are considered use-impaired due to levels of Enterococci, phosphate, nitrate, and lead in bivalves (Denton et al. 2009; Yuknavage et al. 2022). In addition to port and marina activities, there is a closed municipal dump and wastewater treatment plant that may contribute to frequent exceedances of water quality standards and trace element enrichment of surface sediments (Denton et al. 2009; Paradigm Environmental 2017). The Port of Tinian is also designated as Class A and considered use-impaired due to levels of Enterococci, phosphate, and dissolved oxygen (Yuknavage et al. 2022).

Routine activities associated with the Proposed Action that could impact oceanography and water quality are vessel traffic and discharges (e.g., bilge and ballast water), geotechnical and benthic sampling, mooring anchoring and decommissioning, and lander deployment. Oil and hydrocarbon spills are non-routine events that have the potential to impact water quality.

Vessel traffic and discharges are not expected to have lasting impacts on water quality. Under Section 402 of the Clean Water Act, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

regulates discharges of any point source pollution into navigable waters (33 U.S.C. 1342). Any non-recreational, non-Armed Forces vessels greater than 79 feet in length must comply with vessel discharge requirements established by the EPA's 2013 Vessel General Permit and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) discharge regulations (33 CFR 151.10). Permitted vessel discharges would be treated to meet water quality standards, such as technology-based effluent limits, and diffuse rapidly in the water column.

Geotechnical and benthic sampling, mooring anchoring and decommissioning, and lander deployment are expected to temporarily decrease water quality. These activities would resuspend sediments where equipment physically disturbs the seafloor. Upon cessation of these activities, resuspended sediment would resettle onto the seafloor, but there is uncertainty about when and where redeposition would occur.

Sediment properties that influence resettlement are largely unknown in the Proposed Action Area, such as particle size, shape, and behavior. On the east, abyssal nodule fields can be associated with fine-grained clays and biogenic oozes (Dutkiewicz et al. 2020; Zawadzki et al. 2020). On the west, sediments likely consist of volcanic muds and calcareous ooze (Eldredge 1983). Fine and non-circular particles settle more slowly than coarse and circular particles (Komar and Reimers 1978; Dietrich 1982). Flocculation, in which particles aggregate to become larger, can reduce settlement time (Gillard et al. 2019; Elerian et al. 2023).

Local physical conditions influence resuspended sediment behavior but are uncharacterized. Background vertical turbulent diffusion can maintain sediment in suspension (Peacock and Ouillon 2023). Bathymetric slope and bottom currents play a role in particle propagation and transport (Gazis et al. 2025). Sample operations, such as descent speed and tilt, also factor into turbidity changes (Blomqvist et al. 2015).

This analysis relies on standards established by previous deep-ocean research and assumptions that sediment behavior in the Proposed Action Area is similar to other marine systems. During modified box core field trials in the Baltic Sea (3–150 m water depth), Blomqvist et al. (2015) recorded turbidity inside the sampling chamber up to 60 times the background turbidity at a descent speed of 24 m per min. When the box core was left open on the seafloor for observation, turbidity returned to ambient levels within one minute (Blomqvist et al. 2015). Box core removal would suspend additional sediment. Preliminary activities are anticipated to result in suspended sediment that rapidly resettles onto the seafloor in the same area as the physical disturbance, and water quality would return to ambient conditions within minutes. An accidental release of oil and hydrocarbon products (e.g., diesel, lubricates) may result in short-term impacts on water quality in the immediate vicinity of the release before it dissipates and evaporates.

Therefore, oceanography and water quality impacts are expected to resolve within minutes at the disturbance site for preliminary activities and are located well clear of the coastal zone. Vessel discharges must comply with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), USCG, and local regulations and requirements if leases are issued.

Geologic Resources

Leases in the western area are inside the Mariana back-arc basin, beginning just to the east of the Mariana Trough (an active spreading center) and extending west to the West Mariana Ridge. Leases in the eastern area are dominated by the presence of an intra-ocean convergent margin. In this margin the Pacific plate is subducting below the approaching Philippine Sea plate. The Mariana trench is the result of this subduction zone (Stern 2002; Artemieva 2023).

The seabed minerals area is largely in the abyssalpelagic zone of the western Pacific plate. In the western area, BOEM expects interest from potential lessees would be restricted to the abyssal plain. The abyssal plain is generally defined as a flat, featureless area below 2,000-m water depth with a nearly level (1:1,000) slope. Abyssal plains are the area where polymetallic nodules are most likely to exist in mineable quantities. Meanwhile, seabed morphology (Harris et al. 2014) indicates that of the eastern area only 82,458 km² would be considered abyssal plain, while 69,963 km² would be made up of guyots, seamounts, ridges, or escarpments.

In the abyssal plain, east of the Marianas Trench, the seafloor sediment is likely to consist of oozes and very soft abyssal clays (Sidlauskas Jr and Mills 1996). Near the guyots, seamounts, and seamounts the sediment is likely coarser due to sedimentation from the seabed features. The sides of guyots may have outcropping basalt and the tops of the guyots are likely carbonate reef material, sediment, and polymetallic crusts.

Leases in the western area are dominated by an active spreading center in the Mariana back-arc basin, the Mariana Trough (Hilbert et al. 2024). The Mariana Trough is formed as tectonic forces pull the seafloor apart.

Sediment in the western area thickens east of the spreading center towards the Mariana Arc, and west towards the Western Mariana Ridge (Oakley et al. 2009). The sediment is mostly volcanoclastic. Elsewhere, the sediment is likely very soft to soft thinly covering the underlying basalt.

Anticipated impacts on the local geological resources by the preliminary activities include geotechnical sampling, deploying of sensors on the seafloor, and various types of geophysical and bathymetric survey. Geotechnical sampling in the eastern seabed mineral area will result in the disturbance of the seafloor. For leases in the eastern area, boxcores

and free-fall grab samplers will be used to collect information of the abundance and type of nodules, along with samples of the sediment for use in environmental and pore water studies. In the western area, seabed samples will likely be taken by ROV using various implements, including scoops and the ROVs manipulator arm. Oceanographic moorings will likely be deployed in both eastern and western areas, with anchors securing the instruments to the seabed. Navigation transponders will also likely be deployed to assist navigation of AUVs and ROVs in both areas. Geophysical and bathymetric surveys will likely consist of several survey missions, with increasing resolution, over several years.

BOEM calculated the expected amount of seabed disturbance from the preliminary activities in both areas separately, due to the difference in survey methods. For each lease in the eastern area, BOEM calculated that 3,619 m² of seabed would likely be removed for sampling or disturbed for oceanographic moorings and landers. Compared to the size of the eastern seabed minerals areas, 138,000 km², the expected disturbance area (3,619 m²) is roughly 0.0000026% of the total area.

For leases in the western area, 15,654 m² of seabed was calculated as likely to be disturbed for sampling or disturbed via oceanographic moorings and landers. Compared to the size of the leases in the western lease area, 135,200 km², the expected disturbance area (15,654 m²) is roughly 0.0000115% of the total area.

Geotechnical sampling would result in 0.0000064% bottom disturbance for both seabed minerals areas. For the leases in the eastern area, samples would be taken, at a maximum density, of a 5-km grid over a very limited area. For leases in the western area, sampling will be denser over sulfide deposits. However, the distance between deposits has been shown to have an average of 60 km. Geophysical surveys, part of the preliminary activities, would not impact the geological resources of either area. The impacts are expected to be minimal for the Proposed Action, and coastal effects are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

BOEM expects no alteration of chemical or physical properties of CNMI's coastal or marine waters that would impair or prevent the existence of the natural biological habitats and communities.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects from potential alteration of chemical or physical properties of coastal or marine waters that would impair or prevent the existence of the natural biological habitats and communities, including potential impacts on

oceanography, water quality, and geologic resources, are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

(2) Accumulation of toxins, carcinogens, or pathogens which could potentially threaten the health or safety of humans or aquatic organisms

Air Quality

Air Quality can be degraded by non-anthropogenic sources (e.g., dust or sea salt); however, human activity is responsible for most ambient air pollution, which includes emissions from industrial and transportation sources, such as power plants, manufacturing, resource extraction, automobiles, vessels, and aircraft. Air quality tends to be the most degraded in metropolitan areas and near other large sources of air pollutants. Additionally, dry climates and rugged terrain can capture pollutants, degrading local air quality. As an archipelago with a population of 51,000, the CNMI has low levels of air pollution.

The Clean Air Act requires the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) to establish National Ambient Air Quality Standards for criteria pollutants to provide protection from adverse effects of certain pollutants. There are two sets of standards. Primary standards protect public health, including the health of sensitive populations, such as people with asthma, children, and older populations. Secondary standards protect public welfare (including visibility), the health of animals and plants, and infrastructure. The criteria pollutants are nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), carbon monoxide (CO), sulfur dioxide (SO₂), ozone (O₃), fine (PM_{2.5}) and coarse (PM₁₀) particulate matter (PM), and lead (Pb). The criteria pollutants released by OCS activity associated with the Proposed Action, include NO₂, CO, SO₂, PM_{2.5}, and PM₁₀. Nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and volatile organic compounds, known as precursor pollutants, are released by the same activity, and may form O₃ through photochemical reactions. Deposition of NO₂ and SO₂ may harm plants, including agriculture, as well as degrading infrastructure and water quality.

When these standards are exceeded, the USEPA designates the area as nonattainment. The CNMI is in attainment with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Note that the air above the OCS is undesignated.

During preliminary activities, emissions from vessels and other equipment may impact air quality in onshore areas near ports and when vessels pass close to shore. When vessels are further away from shore, emissions will dissipate before reaching shore. This

dissipation will help limit the volume of emissions likely to impact people. These emissions may have been notable if they were to be released in areas with high concentrations of ambient pollution. However, the CNMI is within attainment, with no notable sources of emissions over the OCS; therefore, no notable impacts are expected.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects from potential accumulation of toxins, carcinogens, or pathogens which could potentially threaten the health or safety of humans or aquatic organisms, including the potential impact of emissions on air quality, are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

(3) Disruption of ecological balance in coastal systems and marine waters that support natural biological communities

Marine Mammals and Sea Turtles

There are numerous marine mammal species in the Pacific, including baleen whales, toothed whales, dolphins, seals, and sea lions, some of which are listed under the ESA of 1973, as amended and/or considered depleted under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) (Carretta et al. 2024). Hill et al. (2020) documented the Mariana Archipelago as a breeding area for humpback whales. Five ESA-listed species of sea turtles (green, hawksbill, leatherback, loggerhead, and olive ridley) also inhabit the Pacific region. Historical baseline nesting information in general is not widely available but 57 nesting turtles of the Central West Pacific green turtle DPS have been observed in the CNMI (Seminoff et al. 2015). Detailed species descriptions, including habitat ranges, population trends, predator-prey interactions, and species-specific threats are described in the U.S. Pacific Marine Mammal Stock Assessments (Carretta et al. 2024) and sea turtle status reviews (Conant et al. 2009; NMFS and FWS 2014; Seminoff et al. 2015; NMFS and FWS 2020a; 2020b). Critical habitats (CHs) also are present in the Pacific Ocean, but none overlap with the Proposed Action Area; thus, no effects are anticipated. NOAA Fisheries has proposed critical habitat for the Central West Pacific DPS of Green Sea Turtles, but the designation has not yet been finalized.

Potential stressors associated with the Proposed Action to marine mammals and sea turtles include noise, collisions with project-related vessels, entanglement risks, accidental spills, and trash and debris.

- *Noise from HRG Surveys:* Ruppel et al. (2022) divided marine acoustic sources into four tiers that could inform regulatory evaluation. Tier 4 includes most high-resolution geophysical, oceanographic, and communication/tracking sources, which are considered unlikely to result in incidental take of marine mammals and are therefore termed *de minimis*. All the acoustic sources under this Proposed Action fall into this *de minimis* category. BOEM will require the precise equipment types, equipment settings and uses for planned surveys to be submitted to BOEM 30 days or more prior to use for review to confirm that the sources comply with the *de minimis* criteria described in Ruppel et al. (2022). If the proposed survey equipment is determined to have a potential risk of disturbing or harming ESA-listed species, BOEM will not approve the activity or use of equipment without initiating consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).
- *Vessel Noise:* Given that the noise associated with the operation of project vessels is below the thresholds that could result in injury, no injury is expected. However, vessel noise has the potential to disturb marine mammals and elicit an alerting, avoidance, or other behavioral reaction. These reactions are anticipated to be short term, likely lasting the amount of time the vessel and the whale are in close proximity (Watkins 1981; Richardson et al. 1995; Magalhães et al. 2002), and not consequential to the animals (Holt et al. 2015). Current evidence indicates that sea turtles respond to vessel noise at very close ranges, making population-level impacts unlikely. Therefore, the noise from vessels is not likely to affect sea turtles at further distances, and if a sea turtle hears a vessel nearby or sees it as it approaches, they would likely avoid it or result in limited to temporary non-injurious changes in behavior.
- *Aircraft Noise:* The effects of underwater transmission of airborne noise from helicopters or fixed-wing aircraft are minimal and unlikely to affect marine species.
- *Geotechnical Survey Noise:* Geotechnical surveys (vibracores, piston cores, gravity cores) related to the Proposed Action are typically numerous, but very brief, sampling activities that introduce relatively low levels of sound into the environment. Recent analyses of the potential impacts to protected species exposed to noise generated during geotechnical survey activities determined that effects to protected species from exposure to this noise source are extremely unlikely to occur (NMFS 2021).
- *Vessel Strike Risks from Project-related Vessel Traffic:* BMPs for Vessel Strike Avoidance and Injured/Dead Protected Species Reporting are expected to minimize the risk of vessel strikes. Additionally, wherever available, lessees would be required to ensure all vessel operators check for daily information regarding protected species sighting locations. BOEM expects that impacts on protected species from vessel interactions would be minimal because of vessel strike avoidance BMPs.
- *Entanglement or Entrapment Risks:* Ocean buoys with surface expression and anchoring could be used as part of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action also

includes the use of HRG survey equipment, which includes lines that pose an entanglement risk such as deep tow lines. BOEM will require lessees to follow established protocol for minimizing potential entanglement of marine mammals and sea turtles. BOEM will review all survey plans to ensure that reasonable low risk designs are used. Potential impacts from entanglement related to buoys and lines associated with HRG survey equipment are thus expected to be discountable. With BMPs in place, effects from secondary entanglement related to buoy deployment and operations are expected to be discountable. Additionally, due to the extreme unlikelihood of entrapment and reduction of impact with the use of BMPs, impacts from moon pool usage is expected to be discountable.

- *Accidental Fuel Spills:* Although spills are not anticipated and are not part of the Proposed Action, if an accidental fuel spill occurred, it would be an acute event in a small area. The potential of an accidental spill is low, especially with the USCG spill prevention requirements in place. Additionally, since diesel fuel is lighter than water and may float on the water's surface or be dispersed into the water column by waves, diesel would be expected to dissipate very rapidly, evaporate, and biodegrade within a few days (MMS 2007; Tetra Tech Inc. 2015).
- *Trash and Debris:* IMO MARPOL Annex V is the globally recognized regulations for discharge from vessels at sea (International Maritime Organization 2026). Vessels follow MARPOL Annex V regulations for implementing trash and debris reduction and improved handling practices to reduce the amount of offshore trash that could potentially be lost into the marine environment. In addition, all authorizations for shipboard surveys would include guidance for marine debris awareness. The guidance would be similar to Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement's (BSEE's) Notice to Lessees (NTL) No. 2015-G03 ("Marine Trash and Debris Awareness and Elimination") or any superseding NTL. Therefore, the amount of trash and debris dumped offshore would be expected to be minimal, as only accidental loss is anticipated. Moreover, with the use of BMPs, risks to marine mammals and sea turtles would decrease. Addition of trash and debris from the Proposed Action is extremely unlikely, and, with BMPs and BSEE's guidance, effects to marine mammals and sea turtles are expected to be discountable.

As a result of BMPs, which lessees would be required to comply with as part of the stipulations if leases are issued, potential impacts on protected marine mammal and sea turtle species from preliminary activities are anticipated to be slight, and coastal effects are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under

30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

Marine and Coastal Birds

The marine bird population in the region encompassing the Northern Mariana Islands and its surrounding OCS waters is composed of over 50 species (Yano et al. 2022; eBird 2026; U.S. Navy 2026). Of the different types of birds that are expected to be in this area, marine birds are expected to be the most sensitive to the potential impacts of the Proposed Action. Marine birds in this region include species of jaegers, terns, tropicbirds, albatrosses, storm-petrels, gadfly petrels, shearwaters, frigatebirds, and boobies. While some of these species breed in the area, others may spend their nonbreeding period there or may simply pass through during migration. This section discusses the potential impacts of routine events associated with the Proposed Action on marine birds. Potential impacts for marine birds may include (1) vessel attraction, (2) larger ocean buoys, (3) trash and debris, and (4) accidental fuel spills. Noise-related potential impacts for marine birds are expected to be minimal.

- *Vessel Attraction*: The level of vessel traffic is not expected to be a notable increase when compared to existing vessel traffic in nearshore or offshore waters. In addition, vessels performing surveys are relatively slow moving (approximately 4–6 kn), which allows for marine birds to easily move out of the way of survey vessels. Federally endangered or threatened birds are not expected to occur in the Proposed Action Area, and it is highly unlikely that any would be affected by the Proposed Action activities. However, several special-status species—including albatrosses, gadfly petrels, and shearwaters may occur in the vicinity of the Proposed Action and could be attracted by vessel lighting. Even if birds were attracted to the survey vessels or dove near a survey vessel, there is a low potential for either vessel collision or entanglement since the vessels are moving relatively slowly (4–6 kn) and the gear is towed from 1 to 3.5 m below the surface. Given the low potential for collision or gear entanglement, the impacts are not expected to result in mortality or serious injury to individual birds, resulting in the determination that there would be minimal impact to these types of seabirds from vessel attraction.
- *Metocean Buoys*: Because the metocean buoys would be more than 46 mi from shore, the chances of birds colliding with the buoys would be rare, and these buoys are not expected to impact marine bird populations.
- *Trash and Debris*: Preliminary activities may generate trash comprising paper, plastic, wood, glass, and metal. Most trash is associated with galley and offshore food service operations. IMO MARPOL Annex V is the globally recognized regulations

for discharge from vessels at sea, including the types of trash listed above (International Maritime 2026). Vessels operating offshore follow MARPOL Annex Regulations to reduce the amount of offshore trash that could potentially be lost into the marine environment. In addition, all authorizations for shipboard surveys would include guidance for marine debris. Therefore, the amount of trash and debris dumped offshore would be expected to be minimal, as only accidental loss of trash and debris is anticipated, some of which could float on the water surface. Therefore, impacts from trash and debris on marine birds, as generated by preliminary activities, are anticipated to be minimal.

- *Accidental Fuel Spills*: The potential of a vessel collision occurring is quite low, with the potential for a resultant spill even lower. Dispersal, weathering, and evaporation would reduce the amount of fuel remaining on the sea surface. The level of impacts to marine birds from a spill incident involving survey vessels within offshore waters would depend on the timing and duration of the incident.

Loss of water column habitat, benthic habitat, and associated prey abundance are expected to have minimal impacts because of the area affected by the Proposed Action. Impacts on birds in nearshore waters from vessel traffic are expected to be minimal due to the amount of existing vessel traffic. Impacts on birds from preliminary activities, including attraction to vessels, are expected to be minimal. Impacts on birds from trash or debris releases and from accidental fuel spills are expected to be minimal. Potential noise impacts from the Proposed Action could have localized, short-term impacts on birds foraging near or migrating through the lease areas, and noise impacts are expected to be minimal. The risk of collision with metocean buoys is expected to be minimal because of the buoys' height and their distance from shore. Additionally, the Proposed Action includes BMPs for birds to reduce the potential for the Proposed Action to adversely impact marine birds. During leasing-related vessel activities, PSOs or trained crew members would document the presence and behavior of seabirds and avoid or minimize potential disturbance to protected avian species.

Threatened and Endangered Species

As described above for potential impacts to marine mammals, sea turtles, and critical habitats, although several CHs are within the Pacific region, none of them overlap with the Proposed Action Area, and no effects to the CHs are expected from the Proposed Action. BMPs, which lessees would be required to comply with if leases are issued, protect wildlife and the environment during the proposed activities. As a result of these BMPs and the nature of the Proposed Action, the impacts on protected marine mammal and sea turtle species from preliminary activities (e.g., noise from vessels, aircraft, and HRG and geotechnical surveys; collisions with project-related vessels; entanglement in survey

equipment, moon pools and buoy moorings; and accidental spills) are anticipated to be insignificant.

For marine birds, no listed species of marine birds likely overlap with any of the proposed activities; thus, no further analyses were conducted.

For fishes and invertebrates, potential stressors include fish-aggregating device (FAD) effects, noise, vessel strikes, and entanglement. Preliminary activities under the Proposed Action may affect listed species as they use epipelagic to mesopelagic zones and exhibit diel vertical migrations or foraging behaviors that may overlap with proposed activities. Surface buoys may act as FADs and alter the behavior of sharks. Increased local densities could elevate predation risk, disrupt trophic interactions, or attract fishing effort. However, the limited number and temporary nature of buoys reduce the likelihood of effects. Acoustic sources are Tier 4 *de minimis* levels and therefore are unlikely to cause injury, but behavioral responses may occur. Exposure is expected to be brief and spatially limited. Risks from vessel strikes are low due to the remote location which can act as a deterrent to vessels due to time and fuel costs, slow vessel speeds, and low density of large-bodied species. However, surface-oriented species (such as oceanic whitetip sharks and manta rays) may be vulnerable during basking or feeding. Mooring lines, expendable gear, and marine debris pose minimal entanglement risk due to their limited number, taut configuration, and deep deployment. No entanglement-prone gear (e.g., nets, longlines) would be used. With adherence to BMPs, the Proposed Action is not expected to result in adverse effects to listed fishes and invertebrates. Introduction of trash and debris, and other man-made substances foreign to the terrestrial or marine environment from the Proposed Action is extremely unlikely, and, with BMPs and BSEE's guidance, are expected to be discountable.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects from any potential disruption of ecological balance in coastal systems and marine waters that support natural biological communities, including marine mammals and sea turtles, marine and coastal birds, and threatened and endangered species, are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

(4) Addition of man-made substances foreign to the coastal and marine environment for which organisms have had no opportunity for adaptation and whose impacts are largely known

FAD Effect

For the duration of their emplacement, surface buoys and moored structures may act as FADs, altering the behavior and distribution of pelagic species such as tuna, mahi-mahi, and billfish (Kramer et al. 2015). These effects are most relevant in the epipelagic and upper mesopelagic zones. FADs can increase local fish densities, potentially enhancing predation risk, altering trophic interactions, and increasing fishing pressure, including bycatch (Seto et al. 2024). While the Proposed Action limits the number of buoys to twelve, their presence in a remote and relatively undisturbed region could have temporary ecological effects. The FAD effect will be eliminated with the removal of surface structures and is not expected to cause population-level changes within the region.

Marine Debris

While the Proposed Action does not intentionally introduce debris, the deployment of expendable gear and potential loss of equipment (e.g., underwater transponder positioning (UTPs), mooring components) could contribute to long-term accumulation of marine litter. Lost gear may persist for decades or longer in the deep sea, where degradation is extremely slow, and may pose entanglement risks or alter benthic habitat structure. Recovery operations for lost equipment, if required, could also cause additional seafloor disturbance. To mitigate these risks, all Proposed Action-associated activities will be conducted in compliance with applicable U.S. regulations, including the Marine Debris Act (33 U.S.C. § 1951 et seq.) and relevant provisions of International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) Annex V, which prohibits the discharge of plastics and other persistent solid wastes into the ocean.

Anthropogenic Noise

Noise from survey vessels, AUVs, ROVs, and acoustic equipment (e.g., MBESs, ADCPs, USBL systems) may affect species across all depth zones. Preliminary activities primarily include Tier 4 *de minimis* sound sources that are unlikely to cause take; however, short-term behavioral responses may occur for sensitive species in close proximity to the sound source during sound exposure. In abyssal habitats where light is absent and visual cues are limited, acoustic and mechanosensory systems may offer a key sensory modality for organisms to perceive their environment. Active venting can radiate acoustic energy that may provide organisms with behavioral cues (Crone et al. 2006; Chen et al. 2021). However, coastal effects are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where

preliminary activities would occur and the lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone.

Artificial Light

Artificial lighting from surface vessels, AUVs, and ROVs may temporarily disrupt diel vertical migration patterns in the epipelagic and mesopelagic zones. Many zooplankton and micronekton migrate nightly to feed in surface waters and return to depth during the day. Artificial light can suppress this behavior, altering predator-prey dynamics and carbon flux (Berge et al. 2020; Marangoni et al. 2022).

As depth increases, the role of vision transitions from dominant (epipelagic) to highly specialized (meso- and bathypelagic) to largely diminished (abyssal and hadal habitats) (Haddock and Choy 2024). In the mesopelagic zone, visual interactions are particularly important and have driven the evolution of sensitive eyes and bioluminescent signaling. In deeper zones, the scarcity of light leads to a shift toward other sensory modalities, although bioluminescence remains a key adaptation in many midwater species. Artificial light from AUVs or ROVs may disturb visually sensitive species such as gelatinous zooplankton and deep-sea fishes, but the spatial extent and temporal duration of artificial light from Proposed Action activities would be limited.

Electromagnetic Field (EMF) Alteration

Some survey equipment (e.g., ADCPs, USBL systems) and mooring components may generate or alter local EMFs. Though the concentration and spatial extent are expected to be minimal, EMF-sensitive species in all habitats may be affected during migration or foraging. However, given the limited deployment of EMF-generating gear, impacts are expected to be minimal.

Oil Spills

The risk of a petroleum spill is expected to be low but not minimal. Though small spills could affect many species, especially larvae in the surface waters of the epipelagic zone, compliance with 33 CFR Parts 151, 154, and 155 is expected to minimize this risk. Preliminary activities do not involve vessels carrying large quantities of petroleum. Therefore, if a spill did occur, it would be very limited in size and expected to dissipate quickly.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects from the potential addition of man-made substances foreign to the coastal and marine environment, including FAD effect, marine debris, anthropogenic noise, artificial light, EMF alteration, and oil spills, are not expected

given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

(5) Disruption or burial of bottom communities

Habitat Disturbance

Habitat disturbance would be most relevant where sampling devices, moorings, and landers make contact with the seabed. However, preliminary activities are expected to be individually much smaller than these disturbance experiments and dispersed throughout a large area. Remaining large patches of undisturbed habitat are expected to retain ecosystem structure and functioning within the Proposed Action Area.

Impacts from the Proposed Action are expected to be minimal and temporary due to limited and controlled bottom disturbance.

Seamount flanks may be affected by benthic-disturbing activities. These features often host vulnerable communities such as deep-sea corals and sponges, which are highly sensitive to physical disturbance and exhibit limited dispersal (Shank 2010). Avoidance of seamount habitats could minimize this risk.

As described in the Geologic Resources section above, geotechnical sampling would result in 0.0000064% bottom disturbance for both seabed minerals areas. Geophysical surveys, part of the preliminary activities, would not affect the geological resources of either area.

Sediment Resuspension and Turbidity

Sediment sampling, buoy and mooring activities, and placement of other benthic-oriented equipment may resuspend sediments and increase turbidity. Given only a very small part of the Proposed Action Area will be sampled and low organism densities, no population-level effects are expected from proposed activities. These are expected to be short-lived and spatially limited, and well outside of the coastal zone. Preliminary activities on the western seafloor of the CNMI are expected to result in sediment resuspension and increased turbidity that are short term and spatially limited due to controlled placement of equipment.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects are not expected to disrupt or bury marine bottom communities given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities

would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

(6) Interference with traditional fishing activities

Commercial and Non-Commercial Fisheries

Fishing is deeply embedded in the social fabric and food systems of the Chamorro and other resident communities of the CNMI, where catch is frequently shared through customary exchange networks alongside cash sales, blurring boundaries between “commercial,” “subsistence,” and “recreational” activities (Hospital and Beavers 2012; 2014). The CNMI is categorized as a “fishing community” by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council. This designation is based on the portion of the population that is dependent upon fishing for subsistence; the economic importance of fishery resources to the islands; and the geographic, demographic, and cultural attributes of the communities (Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council 2009a; 2009b; 2024).

Fisheries in the CNMI are managed under both federal and territorial authority. The Western Pacific Regional Management Council (WPRFMC) regulates the U.S. EEZ through Fishery Ecosystem Plans for pelagic, bottomfish, coral reef, crustacean, and precious coral fisheries (Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council 2005; 2009a). For territorially managed fisheries, the CNMI Division of Fish regulates nearshore and reef fisheries. The North Mariana Longline Fishing Prohibited Area prohibits commercial fishing within a buffer zone extending 30 nm seaward from the shoreline of each island within the CNMI, and purse seine vessels are excluded from operating within the U.S. EEZ. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a concern that undermines sustainable fisheries management and threatens the livelihoods of those who rely on legal fishing practices (The Maritime Executive 2020).

In the CNMI, there is a recreational and for-hire charter fleet, with small-boat, one- to two-day trips targeting pelagic and bottomfish species for purposes ranging from full-time commercial fishing to part-time recreational, cultural, and tourism-related activities (Chan 2024).

Pelagic fisheries that overlap with the Proposed Action Area may encounter space-use conflicts during the limited time when preliminary activities may occur. However, given the limited range of the small-boat fisheries, they are unlikely to frequently operate in the areas.

The bottomfish fishery, operating at depths less than 400 m, is unlikely to be directly disturbed due to the depths of the Proposed Action Area (860 to 7,650 m), but acoustic disturbance could indirectly affect prey availability or alter species behavior.

Potential space-use conflicts between fishing and offshore mineral activities—such as displacement from fishing grounds, increased transit times, gear entanglement, or port congestion—can be prevented or lessened through timely communication, strategic planning, and adaptive management.

Fisheries benefits that could arise from coordination between the fishing and offshore mineral industries include (1) port upgrades that improve fisheries infrastructure; (2) deterrence of illegal fishing; and (3) moorings and buoys that act as de facto FADs, increasing fishing opportunities, which could provide meaningful support to both the local fishing sector and the broader community.

To fulfill BOEM's statutory responsibilities under Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) and ensure that preliminary activities are conducted in a manner that minimizes conflicts and environmental impacts, BMPs include a Fisheries Communication Plan (FCP) and Fisheries and Wildlife Awareness Training (FWAT).

The FCP BMP is intended to proactively reduce the risk of spatial and operational conflicts between offshore mineral activities and commercial or subsistence fishing operations. By requiring early and ongoing communication with fisheries stakeholders and the development of a conflict-avoidance strategy, an FCP supports BOEM's mandate to balance resource development with other ocean uses and to prevent unreasonable interference with fishing activities. This BMP also provides a mechanism for adaptive response if repeated conflicts are documented, thereby enhancing operational accountability and stakeholder trust.

The Fisheries and Wildlife Awareness Training BMP is intended to reduce the potential conflicts with fishers and minimize adverse interactions with wildlife during lease activities. Training ensures that vessel crews and contractors are informed about regional ecological sensitivities, protected species, and best practices for avoiding vessel strikes, noise impacts, and gear conflicts. This BMP promotes environmental stewardship and compliance with applicable laws such as the ESA and MMPA, while also fostering situational awareness that can prevent costly delays or enforcement actions.

Conclusion

Potential space-use conflicts between fishing and offshore mineral activities—such as displacement from fishing grounds, increased transit times, gear entanglement, or port congestion—can be prevented or lessened through timely communication, strategic

planning, and adaptive management. Therefore, based on the analysis above, reasonably foreseeable coastal effects to traditional fishing activities are not expected.

(7) Development or activities which pose unreasonable risks to the health, safety, or welfare of the people of the Commonwealth or conflict with applicable federal or local laws intended to protect public health, safety, and welfare or ecological integrity of sensitive ecosystems

A more detailed analysis of water quality and air quality are provided in the above enforceable policies. Emissions from vessels and other equipment may impact air quality in onshore areas near ports and when vessels pass close to shore. When vessels are further away from shore, emissions will dissipate before reaching shore. This dissipation will help limit the volume of emissions likely to impact people. These emissions may have been notable if they were to be released in areas with high concentrations of ambient pollution. However, the CNMI is within attainment, with no notable sources of emissions over the OCS; therefore, no notable impacts are expected. Water quality impacts are expected to resolve within minutes at the disturbance site for preliminary activities and are located well clear of the coastal zone. Vessel discharges must comply with USEPA, USCG, and local regulations and requirements if leases are issued.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects related to the health, safety, or welfare of the people of the CNMI are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS. Additionally, there is no conflict with applicable federal or local laws intended to protect public health, safety, and welfare or ecological integrity of sensitive ecosystems.

(8) Impacts to air quality, scenic views, safe transportation, areas of cultural significance, or any other effect(s) as listed in 2 CMC § 1511

Marine Cultural Resources

No coastal effects are anticipated due to lack of spatial overlap of preliminary activities with the coastal zone.

BOEM will meet the reasonable and good faith effort requirements for the identification and evaluation of marine cultural resources through the evaluation of existing databases,

reports, and regional studies identifying potential or nonpotential marine cultural resources, and through consultation with the CNMI Historic Preservation Office and other consulting parties identified through consultation conducted pursuant to Section 106 of the NHPA.

BOEM conducted a review of reported shipwrecks in BOEM's Pacific OCS Shipwreck Database. Although this database does not provide a complete listing of all potential shipwrecks on the Pacific OCS, it serves as a baseline source of existing and available information for the purposes of corroborating and supporting identification efforts.

The Proposed Action Area has no potential for the presence of inundated Pre-Contact terrestrial sites because the water depths (in the eastern area 1,130–7,650 m, and in the western area 860–5,690 m) are well below the lowest sea levels during human habitation of the Mariana Islands. Micronesian watercraft and/or associated artifacts from the Pre-Contact Period or later could, however improbable, exist within the Proposed Action Area. Micronesian shipwrecks are extremely unlikely to be encountered mostly because of their inherent buoyancy. Pacific voyaging canoes used a double-hull design to achieve stability, instead of the use of ballast (Haddon and Hornell 1938). So far, the only in situ voyaging canoes have been discovered at nearshore terrestrial wet sites, instead of in oceanic contexts (Sinoto 1983; Johns et al. 2014; Maritime Heritage Program 2017; BOEM 2024). The likelihood of discovering or encountering artifacts from lost Micronesian watercraft in the Proposed Action Area also is unlikely.

Of these, vessel and aircraft losses from World War II are the most numerous. BOEM has determined that shipwrecks and downed aircraft are the cultural resources most likely to be encountered in the Proposed Action Area, given its water depth and distance from land. BOEM understands the Pacific Islanders place a deep cultural significance to the ocean itself and through consultation may determine if these lease areas or certain portions are culturally significant to specific communities.

Seafaring has characterized the CNMI for millennia. Consequently, shipwrecks could be found within the Proposed Action Area and could reflect a variety of vessel types and time periods. Research suggests at least 147 reported vessel losses in the CNMI and Guam, with locations for at least 72 vessels, several of which have been found (Carrell 2009). Numerous aircraft have been documented in both the historic and archaeological records, especially nearshore (McKinnon 2015). Although no submerged archaeological sites are currently confirmed in the Proposed Action Area, historical records report vessels as having been lost within the Proposed Action Area, especially the western area. Twelve Japanese vessels were reported lost during World War II within the Proposed Action Area, including merchant marine transports, submarines, a gunboat, a repair ship, and a fleet

tanker (Carrell 2009). Military vessels and aircraft, whether American or Japanese, are protected under the Sunken Military Craft Act (10 U.S.C. § 113), and may also be submerged grave sites. The potential presence, and potential dangers, of unexploded ordinance should also be considered at submerged World War II-era archaeological sites (Raupp et al. 2015).

In consultation with other federal partners, BOEM marine archaeologists searched or coordinated reviews of multiple cultural resources databases (Automated Wreck and Obstruction Information System; BOEM Pacific OCS Shipwreck Database; U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command [U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command (USNHHC)]; and Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency) and received reports of missing vessels and aircraft. The USNHHC reported three US Navy shipwrecks and four US Navy aircraft wrecks in the Proposed Action Area.

The seafloor- and bottom-disturbing preliminary activities allowed with lease issuance (i.e., the collection of box core and free-fall grab samples and the deployment of UTPs, moorings, landers, and scientific equipment) have minimal potential to adversely affect marine cultural resources, if present.

If marine cultural resources are found to exist that have not yet been identified or discovered, then the unanticipated discovery protocol would be followed. BMPs would require the avoidance during seafloor- and bottom-disturbing activities of any known cultural resources, if any properties are identified. Additional BMPs would require the lessee to ensure a Qualified Marine Archaeologist is involved in specific surveys and inspections of samples, reviews all imagery to identify if any potential archaeological resources are present in the sampled areas, monitors the video feed in real time if a ROV survey is conducted near a potential or newly discovered archaeological resource, and conducts unanticipated discovery protocols in the event of a discovery or unanticipated effect. Obtaining survey data for mineral leasing in the ocean supports informed decisions that reduce uncertainty and improve resource management.

Considering the preliminary activities for the Proposed Action, BOEM anticipates that the impacts associated with ongoing and reasonably foreseeable planned actions in the Proposed Action Area have minimal potential to result in adverse impacts to marine cultural resources, if present.

BOEM anticipates that implementation of lease stipulations and existing federal historic preservation and environmental laws and regulations would reduce the magnitude of overall impacts on cultural resources by implementing requirements to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate project-specific impacts on cultural resources.

Culture and Quality of Life

Impacts to culture and quality of life may include temporary changes to access and use of communal or traditional fishing areas, and culturally significant coastal sites, which could affect subsistence practices and community cohesion. Increased activity near the ports may cause potential short-term disruptions to daily life. Chamorro and Carolinian cultural practices remain vibrant and have adapted to modernization by reviving traditional practices. This resilience reflects a commitment to preserving life and resources while maintaining the core values (Mushynsky et al. 2022). Thus, culture and quality of life are unlikely to be notably affected by proposed activities.

The Proposed Action is not expected to impact the social factors of the CNMI relating to quality of life and culture. No coastal effects are anticipated due to lack of spatial overlap of preliminary activities with the coastal zone.

Air Quality

As stated in the above section on air quality, the impact of emissions on air quality is not expected to be notable for the planned activities.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects to air quality, scenic views, safe transportation, areas of cultural significance, or any other related effects are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

§ 15-10-311: Specific Criteria; Areas of Particular Concern; Impact Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Required

(i) “Area of Particular Concern” or “APC” means an area included within CRM jurisdiction that is subject to special management because of its unique and important environmental properties, and is subject to specific criteria permit evaluations under Part 300 of these regulations.

Essential Fish Habitat

Essential fish habitat (EFH) is defined as “those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity” (16 U.S.C. §1802(10)). Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs) are defined as “discrete subsets of EFH that provide extremely

important ecological functions, are especially vulnerable to degradation, are particularly rare, or are already subject to substantial stress from development or fishing activities” (50 CFR § 600.815(a)(8)).

Through Fishery Ecosystem Plans and related documents, the WPRFMC has identified and described EFH and HAPCs for the Mariana Archipelago and for the pelagic fisheries of the western Pacific. Broadly, EFH in the Mariana Archipelago includes the water column down to 1,000-m depth from the shoreline out to the 200-mi EEZ boundary. The WPRFMC designated as HAPCs for managed pelagic species the upper 1,000 m of the water column above all seamounts and banks that are less than 2,000 m in the OCS. These areas are also designated as HAPCs for archipelago-managed species: coral reefs, all escarpments and slopes between 40–280 m, all banks with summits less than 30 m, and all no-take Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Additionally, specifically one coral reef ecosystem HAPC has been designated in the CNMI (Saipan Lagoon).

Any potential impacts from the Proposed Action related to offshore habitat disturbance, sediment resuspension and turbidity, FAD effect, marine debris, anthropogenic noise, artificial light, EMF alteration, or oil spills are described in the above enforceable policies. The impact analysis and conclusions from these sections that have habitats which correspond to EFH and HAPCs would be the same. No substantial adverse impacts are expected.

Any benthic impacts that could occur would be from accidental events, such as vessel grounding or collision, during transit to and from the Proposed Action Area. Impacts on fishes and EFH could occur from noise generated by project vessels and accidental introduction of non-native or invasive species from non-local project vessels, but these would be minimized by BMPs established by the EPA 2013 Vessel General Permit. These potential effects are not expected to affect viability of regional populations or cause long-lasting damage to habitats.

Based on the limited scope of preliminary activities and the lack of direct spatial overlap between the Proposed Action Area and nearshore environments, there are no expected impacts to nearshore environments from the Proposed Action.

Marine National Monument and National Wildlife Refuges

The Mariana Trench Marine National Monument (MTMNM), designated in 2009 by presidential proclamation, encompasses the Trench Unit, Volcanic Unit (an arch of undersea mud volcanoes and thermal vents), and Islands Unit. These areas include some of the deepest oceanic environments on Earth and contain unique geological and biological features.

The purpose of the MTMNM is to conserve the unique geological, biological, and ecological features of the region, including coral reefs, seamounts, mud volcanoes, hydrothermal vent communities, and the trench itself. The Proposed Action Area is adjacent to the monument's boundary. The MTMNM was established in 2009 and is jointly managed by the Secretary of Commerce (NOAA) and the Secretary of the Interior (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). The monument includes submerged lands and waters totaling over 95,000 mi² and overlaps with the Mariana Trench National Wildlife Refuge and the Mariana Arc National Wildlife Refuge. The MTMNM Management Plan and related scientific literature provide detailed descriptions of habitats and species and are incorporated here by reference (FWS 2026). The monument's deep-sea environments are distinct from shallower reef systems in the region, with communities dominated by specialized organisms adapted to high pressure, low temperature, and absence of sunlight. These include microbial mats, vent-endemic invertebrates, and deepwater fish species. The monument's management emphasizes the protection of these unique geological and biological resources, as well as the preservation of scientific, cultural, and ecological values.

Impacts to MTMNM are not expected from preliminary activities.

Local Marine Protected Areas (LMPAs)

A variety of LMPAs are located within the Mariana Archipelago (ProtectedSeas 2026a; 2026b). The CNMI LMPAs include Bird Island Marine Sanctuary, Bird Island Sea Cucumber Reserve, Bird Island Wildlife Conservation Area, Forbidden Island Marine Sanctuary, Laulau Bay Sea Cucumber Reserve, Lighthouse Reef Trochus Reserve, Managaha Marine Conservation Area, Sasanhaya Fish Reserve, Tank Beach Trochus Reserve, and the Tinian Marine Reserve. These areas are located within 3 nm from the shore and offer various levels of protection to natural and cultural resources. They often support a high diversity of reef fish, invertebrates, and marine plants.

There is no spatial overlap with the Proposed Action Area and therefore, no substantial adverse impacts are expected.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects to Areas of Particular Concern, including essential fish habitat, the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument, national wildlife refuges, and local marine protected areas, are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

§ 15-10-315: Criteria; Areas of Particular Concern; Lagoon and Reefs

Nearshore Habitats

Nearshore environments are defined as intertidal, benthic, and water column habitats and species out to 3 nm. The nearshore geomorphology and biological cover of the CNMI are described in National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (2005). Notable nearshore habitat types include coral reefs, seagrasses, and mangroves. Substrates around the port consist of mostly sand and pavement, which hosts seagrasses, macroalgae, and a fringe reef (National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science 2005; Brainard et al. 2012); there is also a small mangrove patch near the port facility (Paradigm Environmental 2017).

Saipan Lagoon is designated as a coral reef ecosystem HAPC in the CNMI. With the limited scope of preliminary activities and the lack of direct spatial overlap between the Proposed Action Area and nearshore environments, there are no expected impacts on nearshore habitats from the Proposed Action.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects to lagoon and reefs are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

§ 15-10-320: Specific Criteria; Areas of Particular Concern; Managaha and Anjota Islands

The CNMI region includes the federally designated MTMNM, which encompasses the Trench, Volcanic, and Islands Units and is comanaged by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA. The CNMI has several locally established MPAs, including Managaha Marine Conservation Area, Bird Island Sanctuary, Forbidden Island Sanctuary, and others designated under the CNMI law. These protected areas contribute to the conservation of marine habitats but are distinct from the National Marine Sanctuary System. There are no NOAA designated National Marine Sanctuaries within or adjacent to the CNMI.

As described in the Commonwealth Ports Authority Rota West Harbor Master Plan, section 7.5.1. Sanctuaries and Refuges, the Anjota Island Preserve is located on Mayor Prudencio Taisacan Manglona Harbor Island Park and is connected by a causeway to the mainland. It lies between Rota West Harbor and Tweksberry Park, and is used as a picnic area by locals and tourists.

However, impacts on these nearshore habitats, including Managaha and Anjota islands, are not expected from preliminary activities. Any benthic impacts that could occur would be from accidental events, such as vessel grounding or collision, during transit to and from the Proposed Action Area. Impacts on fishes and EFH could occur from noise generated by project vessels and accidental introduction of non-native or invasive species from non-local project vessels, which would be minimized by BMPs within the EPA 2013 Vessel General Permit. These potential effects are not expected to affect viability of regional populations or cause long-lasting damage to habitats.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects to Managaha and Anjota Islands are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

§ 15-10-325: Specific Criteria; Areas of Particular Concern; Coral Reefs

Coral Reefs

The Mariana Archipelago hosts more than 375 species of hard corals and 130 soft corals (Paulay et al. 2003; Brainard et al. 2012). The region's corals are monitored and managed by several programs, such as the Marine Monitoring Team, Coral Reef Initiative, NOAA U.S. Pacific Islands National Coral Reef Monitoring Program, and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council. Common genera include *Astreopora*, *Cyphastrea*, *Favia*, *Leptastrea*, *Montastrea*, *Montipora*, *Pocillopora*, *Porites*, and *Psammocora* (Brainard et al. 2012). One ESA-listed coral species occurs in the CNMI, *Acropora globiceps*. In general, coral cover and reef fish biomass in the northern archipelago are higher than in the southern islands (Brainard et al. 2012). Surveys of southern islands (Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and Aguijan) observed coral and coralline-algal diseases that disproportionately affect reef-building species on those islands (Brainard et al. 2012). A status report in 2018 indicated that the coral reefs were in fair condition, although widespread coral bleaching may have happened since (NOAA 2018). There are two native species of giant clam that reside on the reefs (*Tridacna maxima* and *T. squamosa*), although several additional species have been introduced through mariculture (*T. derasa*, *T. gigas*, *Hippopus hippopus*) (Lowe et al. 2024). They tend to appear in higher densities in the northern islands (Brainard et al. 2012). However, impacts on nearshore habitats are not expected due to the limited

scope of preliminary activities and the lack of direct spatial overlap between the Proposed Action Area and nearshore environments.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects to coral reefs are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

§ 15-10-330: Specific Criteria; Areas of Particular Concern; Wetlands and Mangroves

Seagrass Beds

Seagrasses are aquatic, flowering plants that can form submerged meadows along the coast. They play key biological and physical roles in nearshore environments (Larkum et al. 2006; Duarte et al. 2008; McKenzie et al. 2021). Seagrass meadows provide habitat for fish and invertebrate communities, including nursery and recruitment grounds for adjacent habitats (Beck et al. 2001; Dorenbosch et al. 2005), that can also contribute to local fisheries (Gillanders 2006). Seagrasses stabilize sediments and dampen current and wave energy to protect shorelines (Koch et al. 2006). They also increase sedimentation rates (Gacia and Duarte 2001) and act as a biological filter for coastal waters (Marbà et al. 2006). Seagrass meadows are highly productive and contribute to carbon services (Duarte and Chiscano 1999; Mateo et al. 2006), as well as nutrient cycling, such as nitrogen and phosphorous (Marbà et al. 2006; Romero et al. 2006). There are five species of seagrass in the CNMI: *Enhalus acoroides*, *Halophila minor*, *H. ovalis*, *Halodule uninervis*, and *H. pinifolia* (Ellison 2009). On Saipan, seagrasses mainly occur on the western side of the island (National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science 2005). The majority of the CNMI wetlands occur on Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and Pagan, but there is presently less than 1% of wetland cover within the archipelago (Yuknavage et al. 2022), due to historical infill for agriculture and recent urban development (Brainard et al. 2012). However, impacts on nearshore habitats are not expected due to the limited scope of preliminary activities and the lack of direct spatial overlap between the Proposed Action Area and nearshore environments.

Mangroves

Mangroves are an important nearshore habitat that is found in the CNMI. Mangrove forests are highly productive, serving as habitat and nursery grounds for some species (Robertson

and Duke 1987; Paillon et al. 2014). They have high carbon densities and support global carbon cycling (Alongi 2012; Adame et al. 2021), as well as cycling of nutrients and organic matter (Singh et al. 2005). Mangroves provide protection against storms and coastal flooding through their ability to buffer waves and winds (Alongi 2008; Zhang et al. 2012; Das and Crépin 2013), which is especially important due to frequent wind and storm activity in the region (Lowe et al. 2024). The CNMI has three species of mangrove: spotted mangrove (*Rhizophora stylosa*), blind-your-eye mangrove (*Excoecaria agallocha*), and oriental mangrove (*Bruguiera gymnorhiza*) which is the only species of any abundance as of 2018 (Ellison 2009; Lowe et al. 2024). However, impacts on nearshore habitats are not expected due to the limited scope of preliminary activities and the lack of direct spatial overlap between the Proposed Action Area and nearshore environments.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects to wetlands, including seagrass beds and mangroves, are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

§ 15-10-335: Specific Criteria; Areas of Particular Concern; Shorelines

As described in the nearshore habitat related sections above, impacts on nearshore habitats and shorelines are not expected due to the limited scope of preliminary activities and the lack of direct spatial overlap between the Proposed Action Area and nearshore environments.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects to shorelines are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

§ 15-10-340: Specific Criteria; Areas of Particular Concern; Ports and Industrial Areas

Given the distance from shore to the lease areas and the uncertainty around employment and port usage for future surveys, no single city or county is expected to be the primary

recipient of the impacts of the Proposed Action. Therefore, potential societal impacts of the Proposed Action include all islands and associated communities of the CNMI.

Demographics and Economy

Direct economic interactions between proposed activities and the current economy are unlikely. Incidental linkages from the Proposed Action to demographics or economy are possible. Leasing activities that could affect the abundance or distribution of harvested species have potential implications for pelagic fisheries. If lease-related activity were to generate employment, training, or service contracts for residents, modest benefits may be realized in a setting where jobs are scarce. Impacts to population size and demographics are not expected, as few people are expected to relocate because of the proposed activities.

Port and Land Use

The use of the port facilities would have minimal effect and completely recover after preliminary activities are complete. The indirect impacts to land and port could be increasing demand for industrial development in areas with limited zoning and communal land ownership, and expansion of port operations may strain existing facilities. Proposed activities will occur offshore; therefore, no additional impacts are expected for land use apart from port maintenance and potential improvements.

The use of the port facilities would have minimal effect, and the resources are expected to completely recover after preliminary activities are complete. The Proposed Action is not expected to substantially impact the social factors the CNMI relating to economy and demographics and land and port use.

Conclusion

The Proposed Action will occur offshore and no additional coastal impacts are expected for land use apart from port maintenance and any potential improvements. The use of port facilities would have minimal effect and are expected to completely recover after preliminary activities.

Air and Water Quality Standards of the CNMI, Per 15 CFR § 923.82(e)

A more detailed analysis of water quality and air quality are provided in the above enforceable policies. Water quality impacts are expected to resolve within minutes at the disturbance site for preliminary activities and are located well clear of the coastal zone. Vessel discharges must comply with USEPA, USCG, and local regulations and requirements if leases are issued. Additionally, emissions from vessels and other

equipment may impact air quality in onshore areas near ports and when vessels pass close to shore. When vessels are further away from shore, emissions will dissipate before reaching shore. This dissipation will help limit the volume of emissions likely to impact people. These emissions may have been notable if they were to be released in areas with high concentrations of ambient pollution. However, the CNMI is within attainment, with no notable sources of emissions over the OCS; therefore, no notable impacts are expected.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, coastal effects on air and water quality are not expected given that water quality impacts are expected to resolve within minutes and the CNMI is within attainment for air quality. Additionally, preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS under 30 CFR 582.21(d).

Federal Actions

BOEM's Proposed Action is not a listed federal activity and does not require any license or permit as described in the CNMI CZMP.

Conclusion

In accordance with section 307c (1) of the CZMA, this Negative Determination concludes that the Proposed Action would not result in adverse effects to coastal resources or uses. Coastal effects are not expected given the extreme distance offshore where preliminary activities would occur, lack of spatial overlap with activities and the coastal zone, and requirements under 30 CFR 582.21(d) that preliminary activities must have no significant adverse impact on the natural resources of the OCS.

For additional information or questions, please contact Natalie Dayal at natalie.dayal@boem.gov or (805) 384-6264, or Sindey Chaky at sindey.chaky@boem.gov, or (571) 668-1407.

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