



OVERVIEW

The Historic Preservation Program within the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement's Environmental Compliance Program focuses on monitoring, verifying, improving, and enforcing industry's compliance with environmental standards during Outer Continental Shelf operations.

BACKGROUND

Archaeology is the study of past human behavior through the investigation of sites and the analysis of artifacts and other physical remains. Marine archaeology is a sub-discipline that focuses on archaeological sites in marine environments.

The federal OCS comprises over 1.7 billion acres of seafloor. Under federal law, BSEE is responsible for the management of underwater archaeological sites that may exist in and around energy development projects offshore. Archaeological and cultural resources on the OCS represent the remains of the nation's maritime history and culture and are non-renewable.

Indigenous sites dating to the conclusion of the Last Glacial Maximum are present on the federal OCS. Over 10,000 years ago, sea levels were hundreds of feet lower than they are today. Many of these sites, which were on former dry land, are now located under the federal OCS seafloor.

Historic shipwrecks dating from as early as the 16th century have been identified on the federal OCS. These shipwrecks include vessels associated with the colonial period, coastal commerce, pirates and privateering, trafficking of enslaved people, steamships, military operations, tankers, the fishing industry, and energy development projects.

The primary tools used to identify archaeological sites on the federal OCS include high-resolution remote sensing survey equipment such as the magnetometer, side-scan sonar, and sub-bottom profiler. Data collected by these instruments are then analyzed by the archaeologists and used by both Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and BSEE to make decisions on how best to protect archaeological sites on the OCS.



BSEE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

BSEE is required by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 to institute procedures to ensure that federal plans and programs contribute to the preservation and enhancement of non-federally owned sites, structures and objects of historical, architectural, or archaeological significance.

To determine if a proposed energy development or decommissioning activity possesses potential to affect an archaeological site or historic property on the OCS, BSEE's Historic Preservation Program works with BOEM to review those activities. BOEM archaeologists conduct a seafloor pre-disturbance review of high-resolution survey data and historical records to identify potential archaeological sites or historic properties that may be impacted by bottom disturbing activities. BOEM then provides BSEE an assessment of all the potential archaeological sites that have been identified, and which have the potential to be impacted during proposed energy development projects.

BSEE reviews the findings and ensures that the appropriate information and mitigations are applied to the permit and provided back to the operator. Once those operations are complete, BSEE archaeologists review all post activity documentation to determine if the operator has complied with the various conditions, mitigations, and stipulations required in the permit. In the event the operator did not comply, BSEE takes further action to bring the operator back into compliance with the permit, conditions, and/or regulations.

A major component of BSEE's mission is ensuring compliance with environmental regulations that aid in protecting the environment offshore, including archaeological and cultural resources. BSEE does this by developing project-specific mitigation measures in consultation with the operator prior to conducting seafloor disturbing activities. Through coordination and science-based compliance, BSEE protects not only our natural resources, but also our nation's submerged cultural heritage.

For additional information please visit the BSEE Historic Preservation Program webpage or contact us at: Env-Compliance-Arc@bsee.gov.



Image courtesy of the
NOAA Office of Ocean
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The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, established in 2011, is a U.S. Department of the Interior agency. BSEE promotes worker safety, environmental protection and conservation of resources through regulatory oversight and enforcement of the offshore energy industry on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf.