

Biological Assessment

**Submitted By: Alison McCartney, BLM
June 6, 2013**

This project has been reviewed for effects to Federal trust resources under our jurisdiction and currently protected by the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Act). The project, as proposed,

- () Will have no effect on those resources
- (X) Is not likely to adversely affect those resources. **LBB**

This finding fulfills the requirements under Section 7(a)(2) of the Act.

Deborah J. Sullivan June 24 2013
 Acting Supervisor
 Louisiana Field Office
 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**EOI #1724
T2N, R3E, Sec. 28, S2SW (79.86 acres)
Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana**

**EOI #1725
T1N, R4E, Sec. 12, NESE (37 acres)
Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana**

**EOI #1726
T3N, R3E, Sec. 10, Lot 3 (0.96 acres), Sec. 14, Lot 3 (0.88 acres), Sec. 32, Lot 7 (7.08 acres), Sec. 62, All (fractional, north of the red river - 2.44 acres), Sec. 64, All (fractional 1.36 acres) (12.72 total acres)
Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana**

Three lease nominations or Expressions of Interest (EOIs) were submitted to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Southeastern States Field Office in February and March 2013. Site visits were conducted at the following locations to evaluate and document habitat characteristics and to determine potential affects that the three leases could have on the environment including rare species; T2N, R3E, Sec. 28, S2SW (79.86 acres) (EOI #1724), T1N, R4E, Sec. 12, NESE (37 acres) (EOI #1725), and T3N, R3E, Sec. 10, Lot 3 (0.96 acres), Sec. 14, Lot 3 (0.88 acres), Sec. 32, Lot 7 (7.08 acres), Sec. 62, All (fractional, north of the red river - 2.44 acres), Sec. 64, All (fractional 1.36 acres) (12.72 total acres). All three EOIs are located in Avoyelles Parish in central Louisiana.

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Wildlife and Vegetation

EOI #1724

EOI #1724 consists of 79.84 acres and is located less than a mile west of Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge. The proposed site is located less than a mile southwest of Highway 194 and less than 2 miles south of Highway 1 (Appendix A). Approximately 40 acres of the nominated parcel consists of old cropland that is currently a pasture with short grasses and wildflowers (Appendix A). Approximately 32 acres is active cropland. A thin line of pines and mixed hardwood trees is located along the entire northern, eastern, and southern boundaries. An additional strip of hardwood trees surrounds a thin creek that runs north/south through the center of the parcel. In addition there is a 2 - 3 acre patch of pine/mixed hardwood forest located near the northern boundary in the center of the tract. Dominant tree species include red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), American elm (*Ulmus americana*), and yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*). Hardwood trees range in height from 5 - 25 feet tall. Pine trees average 30 feet tall. An ATV trail is located along the boundaries. The area within a two mile radius of this parcel is primarily cleared for agriculture.

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Wildlife diversity is likely limited due to the high percentage of cleared land, however common species likely to occur include: white-tailed deer, southern short-tailed shrew (*Blarina caroliniensis*), evening bat (*Nycticeius humeralis*), and golden mouse (*Ochrotomys nuttalli*). Bird species that likely occur on this tract include: chuck-will's-widow (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*), great crested flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*), and Carolina chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*). Reptile and amphibian species likely to occur include: southern leopard frog (*Rana utriculara*), northern cricket frog (*Acris crepitans crepitans*), southern copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix phaeogaster*), speckled kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula holbrooki*), and box turtle (*Terrapene carolina triunguis*).

EOI #1725

EOI #1725 consists of 37 acres and is located less than 1 mile south of Spring Bayou Wildlife Management Area (Appendix B). The northeast corner of the nominated parcel is within La Vielle Rivere (Appendix B). A tributary to La Vielle Rivere runs through the southeast corner of the tract. Old River Road runs diagonally through the center of the tract with many houses along the road. Approximately 2 acres of the tract consists of a mixed/bottomland hardwood forest. Dominant tree species include: water oak (*Quercus nigra*), willow oak (*Q. phellos*), sweetgum, and red maple (*Acer rubrum*). The area within a 2 mile radius of this tract is primarily open water and bottomland hardwood forest.

Due to the close proximity to the River, wildlife diversity is probably high for this tract. Mammals likely to occur include: Seminole bat (*Lasiurus seminolus*), Eastern woodrat (*Neotoma floridana*), and swamp rabbit (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*). Bird species that could occur include: swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*), Mississippi kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*), bachman's warbler (*Vermivora bachmanii*), red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), barred owl (*Strix varia*), and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*). Amphibians and reptiles that likely occur are: marbled salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*), southern dusky salamander (*Desmognathus auriculatus*), eastern cricket frog (*Acris crepitans crepitans*), river cooter (*Chrysemys concinna*), yellow-bellied water snake (*Nerodia erythrogaster*), and green water snake (*Nerodia cyclopius*).

EOI #1726

EOI #1726 consists of 5 separate tracts totaling 12.72 acres surrounding Highways 107 and 105 near the town of Effie (Appendix C). The 0.96 acre tract located in Sec. 10, Lot 3 consists of ~40% of cleared land (pasture, back yard to a house, shed, and garage) and 60% wooded with dominant tree species of white oak (*Q. alba*) and loblolly pine. The northeastern parcel located in Sec. 14, Lot 3 consists of 0.88 acres of which 95% is cleared active cattle pasture. Five percent of the parcel contains loblolly pines and is located in the southwest corner of the tract (Appendix C). The 1.36 acre tract located in Sec 64 is 100% wooded and consists of a mixed pine/hardwood forest. Dominant tree species include; white oak, southern red oak (*Q. rubra*), and loblolly pine. The 7.08 acre tract located in Sec. 32, Lot 7 is 98% wooded. A house and yard is located in the southeast corner and a gas pipeline runs through the northwest corner of the tract. An intermittent stream runs through the tract and drains into Wiggins Bayou. The tract

consists of bottomland hardwood forest. Dominant tree species include: water oak, willow oak, sweetgum, water hickory (*Carya aquatica*), and green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*). The southern-most tract is 2.44 acres and consists of a bottomland hardwood forest. Wiggins Bayou runs through the tract. Dominant tree species include; water oak, willow oak, green ash, and sugarberry (*Celtis occidentalis*). The area within a 2 mile radius of all of these tracts, except for the southern-most tract located in Sec. 64 is ~50% cleared for housing and roads and 50% pine/mixed hardwood forest. The area within 2 miles of the tract in Sec. 64 is almost entirely bottomland hardwood forest and open water.

Wildlife for all the tracts except the one located in Sec. 64 is likely limited due to some cleared acreage and urban environment. However, common species that likely occurs include: opossum, American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) blue jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*), turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), red-tailed hawk, and common garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*). Wildlife located on the tract in Sec. 64 is likely diverse due to the bayou and rich habitat within and surrounding the tract. Species likely to occur includes: northern raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), nine-banded armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*), white-tailed deer, swamp rabbit, evening bat, red bat (*Lasiurus borealis*), red-tailed hawk, little blue heron (*Florida caerulea*), great egret (*Casmerodius albus*), cottonmouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*), yellow-bellied water snake, and river cooter.

Special Status Species

Current state and federal lists of rare, threatened, endangered, and candidate species were reviewed with regards to potential impacts from the proposed project. Infrared aerial photography, topographic maps, and websites for the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Web Soil Survey, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) were also accessed to determine potential affects that the proposed project could have on special status species. Table 1 provides the USFWS list of federally listed species that have been documented to occur in Avoyelles Parish. Also included in the table is BLMs determination for potential effects that the proposed leases could have on each species. Below the table is a description of each species, known habitat requirements, and justification for determination.

Table 1: Summary of Effects		
Species	Federal Status	Determination
Pallid Sturgeon (<i>Scaphirhynchus albus</i>)	Endangered	EOIs #1724 and 1725 No Effect Due to Unsuitable Habitat EOI #1726 May affect, but is not likely to adversely affect
Louisiana Black Bear (<i>Ursus americanus luteolus</i>)	Endangered	EOI #1724 No Effect Due to Unsuitable Habitat EOI #1725 and 1726

		May affect, but is not likely to adversely affect
Sprague's Pipit (<i>Anthus spragueii</i>)	Candidate	EOI #1724 and 1726 May affect, but is not likely to adversely affect EOI #1725 No Effect Due to Unsuitable Habitat

Pallid Sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*) (Endangered)

The pallid sturgeon is a large fish species known from the Mississippi River and its major tributaries including the Red River. This species is dependent upon a fast flowing current for all phases of its life cycle. Spawning occurs over rock or gravel bottom areas from March to April. EOIs #1724 and 1725 do not contain tributaries that drain into the Mississippi or Red River and therefore BLM has determined that there will be no affect on the pallid sturgeon from the proposed leases for EOI #1724 and 1725. However, the parcel located in Sec 32, Lot 7 of EOI #1726 contains a tributary that drains into Wiggins Bayou which drains into the Red River. The southern-most parcel of this EOI, which is located in Sec. 62 contains Wiggins Bayou. If development were to occur on the proposed 2 leases, runoff from the proposed sites could impact water quality and quantity in Wiggins Bayou and potentially the Red River which could in turn have an effect on this species. As a result, is BLMs determination that projects on these 2 parcels of EOI #1726 may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the pallid sturgeon.

Louisiana Black Bear (*Ursus americanus luteolus*) (Threatened)

The Louisiana black bear is federally listed as threatened. This species typically inhabits bottomland hardwood (BLH) communities but other habitat types may be utilized. Remoteness is an important spatial feature of black bear habitat. In the Southeast, remoteness is relative to forest tract size and the presence of roads. High quality cover for bedding, denning, and escape cover is of great importance as forests become smaller, more fragmented, and as human encroachment and disturbance in bear habitat increases.

Presently there are two known breeding bear subpopulations occurring in two Louisiana river basins; the Tensas River Basin, located in northeastern Louisiana, and the Atchafalaya River Basin located in south-central Louisiana. There are reported sightings of bears outside of these areas, but it is unknown whether these bears are reproducing or are only wandering subadult and males.

EOI #1724 is primarily cleared land with primarily cleared land surrounding the parcel for a 2 mile radius and is therefore probably unsuitable for the Louisiana black bear. BLM has determined that there will be no affect on the Louisiana black bear from EOI #1724. EOI #1725 and the tract located in Sec. 62 of EOI #1726 are primarily bottomland hardwood forests and open water. This is suitable habitat for this species and therefore the proposed leases EOI #1725 and 1726 may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect, the Louisiana black bear.

Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) (Candidate)

Sprague's pipit is a small, short-distance migrant strictly associated with well-drained, open grasslands and fields, with a preference for native grasses of intermediate height and thickness; and moderate litter depths for foraging and nesting. Breeding occurs throughout the summer (April – November) on the native prairies of the Great Plains (southern regions of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba provinces to Montana, North and South Dakota, and Minnesota). Pipits migrate southward from September into November, to wintering grounds on the grasslands of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and into Mexico. Threats to this species include destruction and decline of breeding and wintering habitat suitability due to agriculture, overgrazing, and introduction of non-native grasses. Sprague's pipits are likely to be observed in open fields with few to no shrubs or woody vegetation.

EOI #1724 and the parcel located in Sec. 14 of EOI #1726 contain pastures and therefore contain potential suitable habitat for the Sprague's pipit. As a result, these 2 parcels may affect, but are not likely to affect the Sprague's pipit. EOI #1725 does not contain suitable habitat for this species and therefore will not affect this species.

Migratory Bird Species of Concern

The following provides a list of migratory birds of conservation concern with the potential to occur on EOI #1724 and the parcel located in Sec. 62 of EOI #1726 based on species preference for bottomland hardwood forests in all successional stages (Peterson 1980, Hamel 1992, and USFWS 2020).

Species	Habitat Suitability
Little blue heron	Suitable, Optimal
Swallow-tailed kite	Marginal, Suitable, Optimal
Yellow Rail	Marginal
Red-headed woodpecker	Marginal, Suitable, Optimal
Wood thrush	Marginal, Optimal
Prairie warbler	Marginal
Cerulean warbler	Suitable
Prothonotary warbler	Suitable, Optimal
Worm-eating warbler	Marginal, Suitable
Swainson's warbler	Suitable, Optimal
Kentucky warbler	Marginal, Optimal
Louisiana waterthrush	Marginal

The following provides a list of migratory birds with the potential to occur on EOIs #1725 and some parcels of 1726 based on species preference for pine/mixed hardwood forests in all successional stages:

Species	Habitat Suitability
American swallow-tailed kite	Marginal
American kestrel	Marginal, Suitable, Optimal
Chuck-will's-widow	Suitable, Optimal
Red-headed woodpecker	Marginal
Brown-headed nuthatch	Marginal
Bewick's wren	Marginal
Wood thrush	Marginal, Suitable
Prairie warbler	Marginal, Optimal
Worm-eating warbler	Marginal
Kentucky warbler	Marginal
Louisiana waterthrush	Marginal
Bachman's sparrow	Marginal, Suitable
Smith's Longspur	Marginal
Harris's sparrow	Marginal

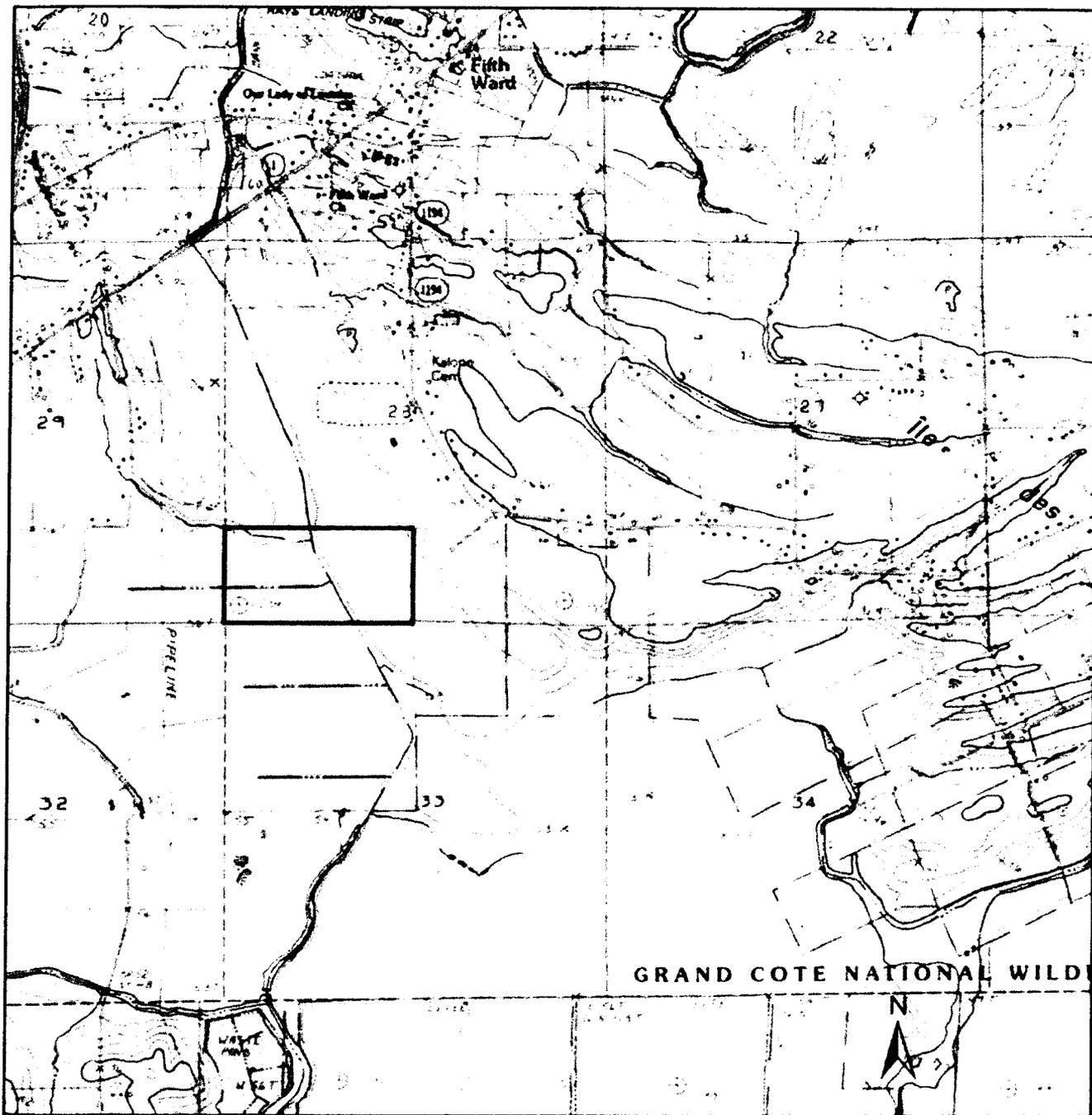
No migratory bird species of concern are known to occur on the proposed tracts, although there is potential for use by several species.

APPENDIX A

Topographic and Aerial Maps of

EOI #1724

Proposed Federal Oil and Gas Lease
EOI 1724



Proposed Lease Area
 Oil and Gas Wells
 Dry Hole, Temporarily Abandoned

Proposed lease area
 Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana, Louisiana Meridian
 T. 2N., R. 3E.,
 Sec. 28, S1/2SW1/4
 Total 79.84 acres

U.S. Department of the Interior
 Bureau of Land Management
 Eastern States
 Southeastern States Field Office
 Jackson, Mississippi

This map contains portions of the following USGS 1:24,000 Topographic Quadrangles: Effie, Belle D'Eau
 No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of this data for individual use or aggregate use with other data

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Imagery Date 5/31/2012 1998 31°06'46.98" N 92°10'35.19" W elev 54 ft

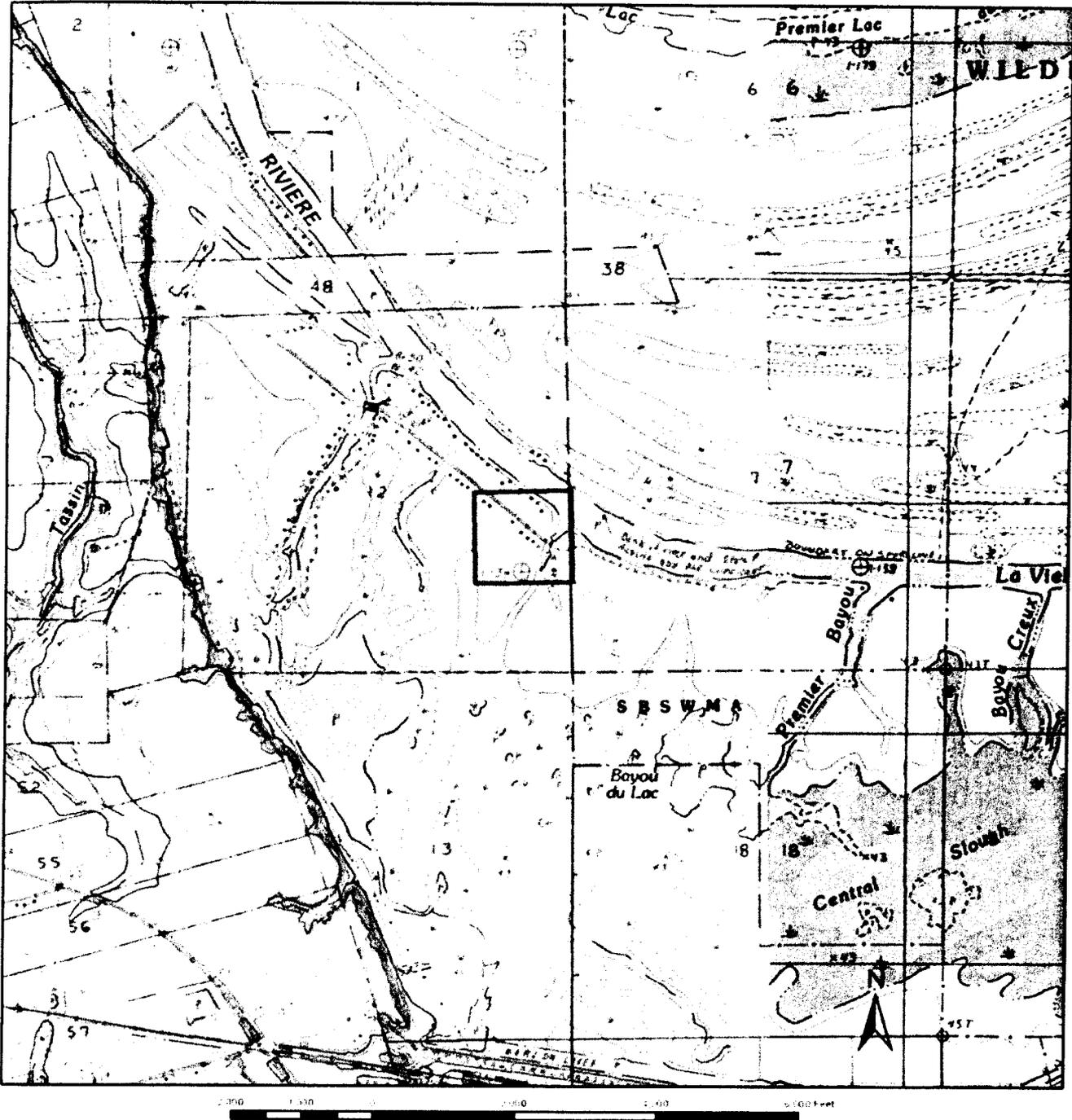
Eye alt 2973 ft

APPENDIX B

Topographic and Aerial Maps of

EOI #1725

Proposed Federal Oil and Gas Lease
EOI 1725



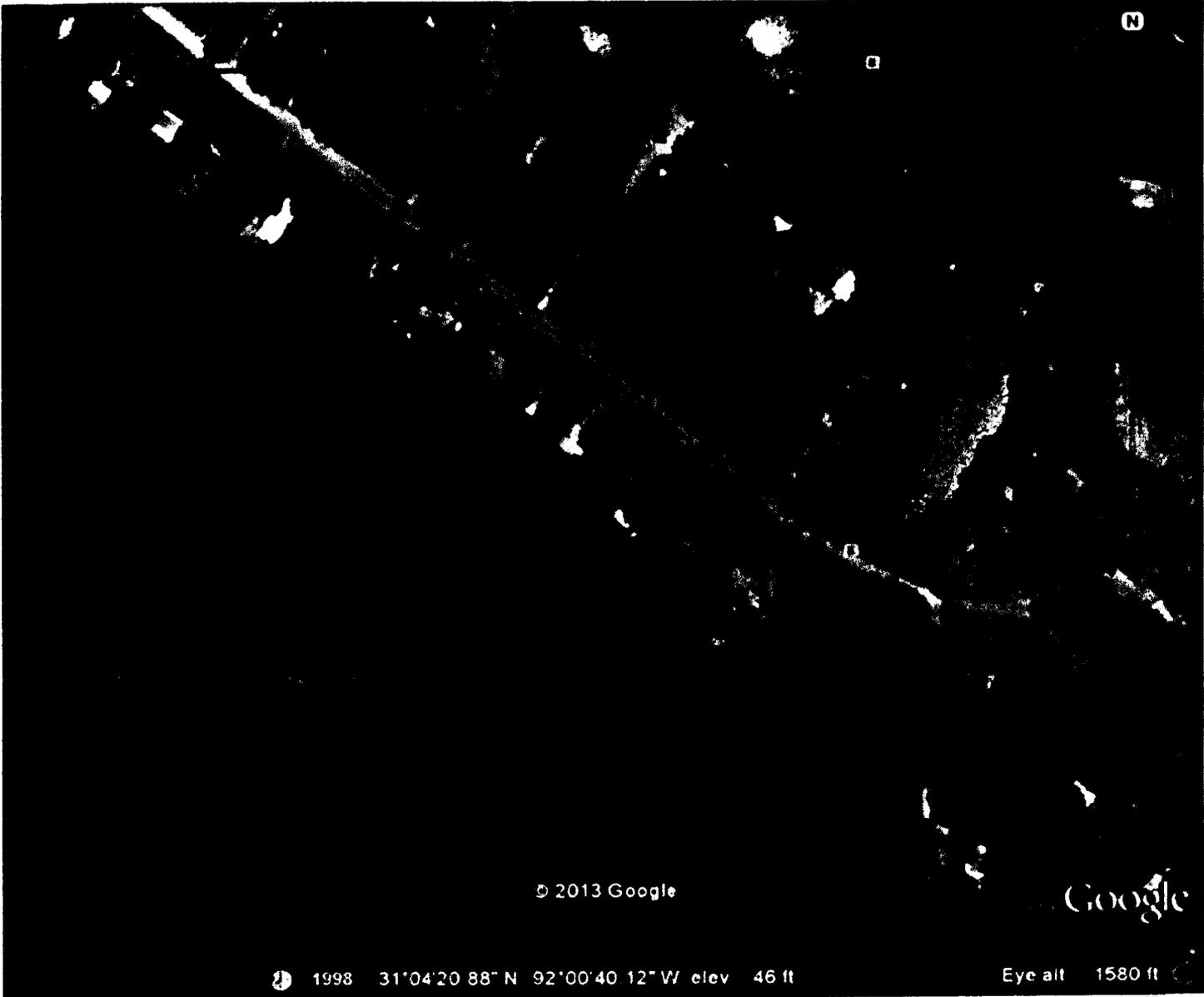
 Proposed Lease Area

Proposed lease area
Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana, Louisiana Meridian
T. 1N, R. 4E, Sec 12, NE1/4SE1/4
37 acres

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Eastern States
Southeastern States Field Office
Jackson, Mississippi

This map contains portions of the following USGS 1:24,000 Topographic Quadrangles: Marksville South, Moreauville

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1998 31°04'20.88" N 92°00'40.12" W elev 46 ft

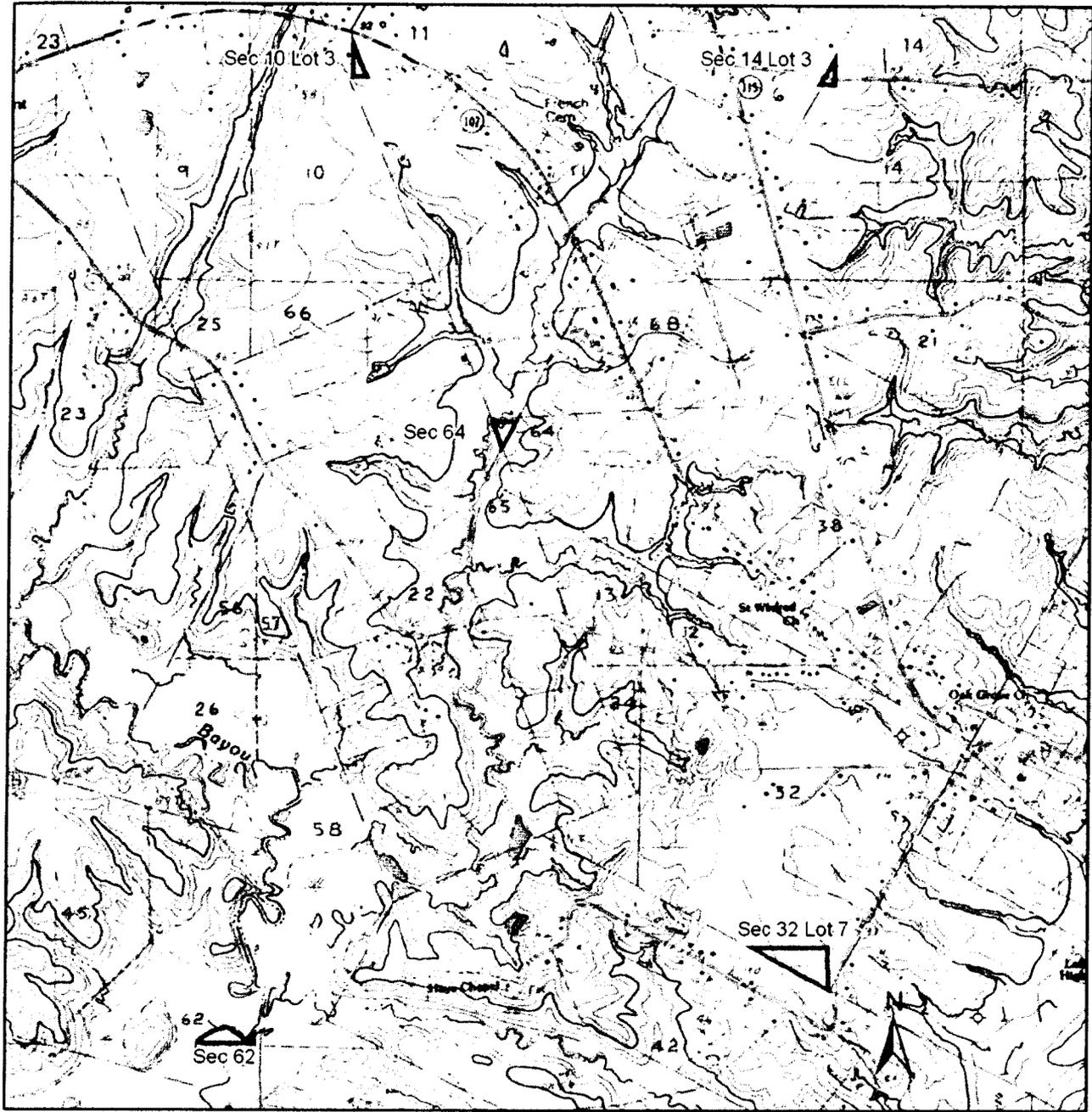
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APPENDIX C

Topographic and Aerial Maps of

EOI #1726

**Proposed Federal Oil and Gas Lease
EOI 1726**

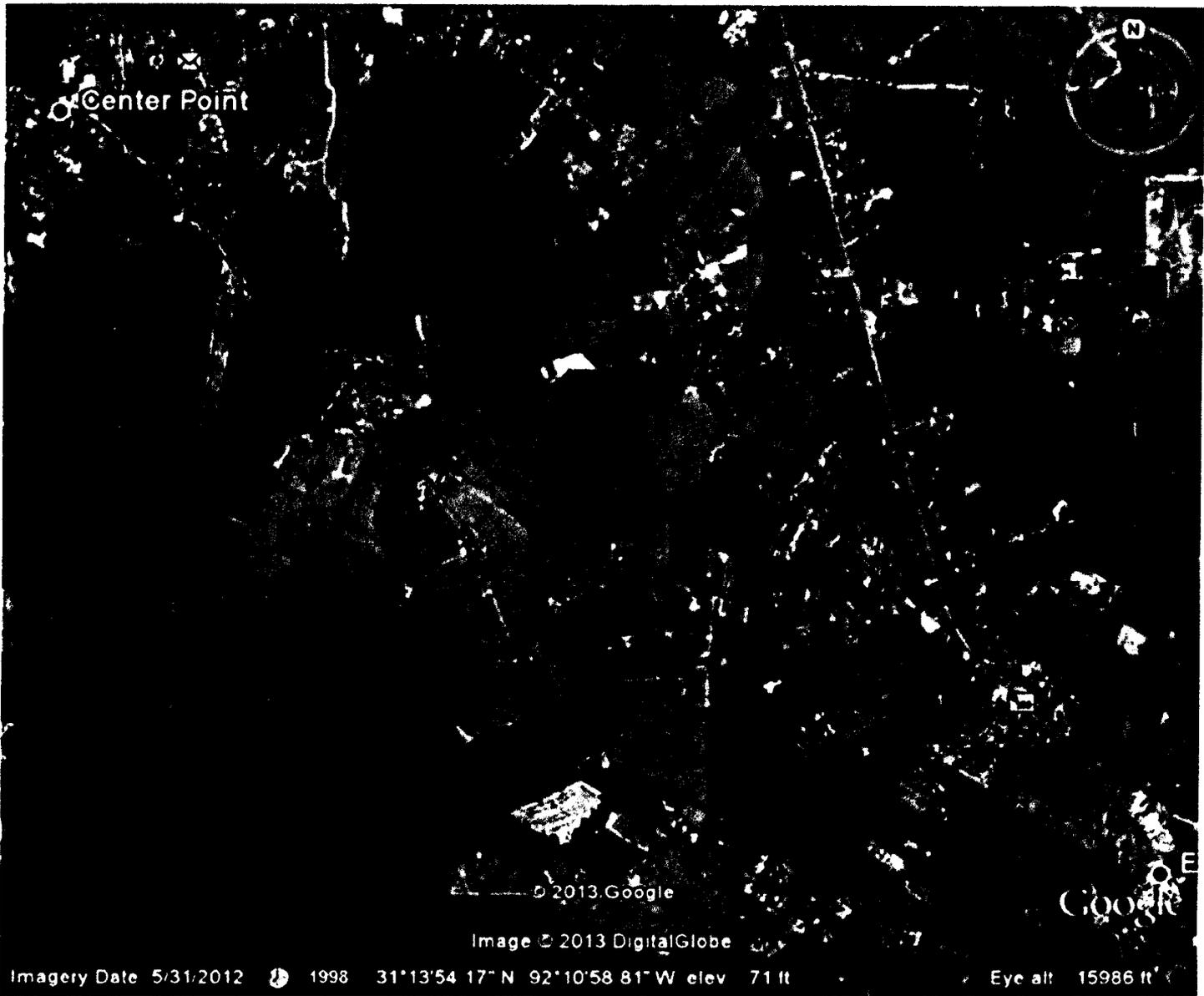


Proposed Lease Area
Oil and Gas Wells
 Dry Hole, Temporarily Abandoned

Proposed lease area
 Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana, Louisiana Meridian
 T 3N., R 3E.
 Sec. 10, Lot 3 - 0.96 acres
 Sec. 14, Lot 3 - 0.88 acres
 Sec. 32, Lot 7 - 7.08 acres
 Sec. 62, All (fractional, north of the red river - 2.44 acres)
 Sec. 64, All (fractional - 1.36 acres)
 Total 12.72 acres.

U.S. Department of the Interior
 Bureau of Land Management
 Eastern States
 Southeastern States Field Office
 Jackson, Mississippi

This map contains portions of the following USGS 1:24,000 Topographic Quadrangles: Effie, Buckeye
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Center Point



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Imagery Date 5/31/2012 1998 31°13'54 17" N 92°10'58 81" W elev 71 ft Eye alt 15986 ft