

are requested and these potential impacts will be analyzed.

The environmental analysis may identify and describe: reasonably foreseeable environmental effects of the proposed agency action; reasonably foreseeable adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided should the proposal be implemented; a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed agency action, including an analysis of any negative environmental impacts of not implementing the proposed agency action in the case of a no action alternative that are technically and economically feasible and meet the purpose and need of the proposal; the relationship between local short-term uses of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity; and any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of Federal resources which would be involved in the proposed agency action should it be implemented.

Schedule for the Decision-Making Process

NMFS plans to convene the Team in 2026 and 2027 to develop consensus recommendations on Plan modifications, as necessary to ensure the impacts of U.S. commercial fisheries on Atlantic large whales complies with the MMPA, while also minimizing regulatory burdens. NMFS anticipates completing an Environmental Assessment or draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), if required, by late 2027. If a DEIS is required, NMFS will publish a notice of availability requesting public comments. After the public comment period ends, NMFS will review, consider, and respond to comments received and will develop the FEIS, if an FEIS is required. NMFS will make the FEIS available to the public at or around the time NMFS publishes the final rule. NMFS will make and issue a Record of Decision in late 2028, in order to meet the timeline set forth by Congress in the CAA.

This NOI commences a public scoping period in which NMFS requests public comment on issues and potential alternatives to modify the Plan to reduce M/SI of large whales in U.S. commercial fisheries to below PBR while also reducing regulatory burden. This is not a notice of proposed rulemaking. Throughout the scoping process, Federal agencies, state, tribal, local governments, and the general public have the opportunity to help NMFS determine reasonable alternatives and potential measures to be analyzed, as well as to provide additional information.

Everyone potentially impacted by or interested in changes to the Plan is invited to participate in the public scoping process by submitting written input via the *Regulations.gov* comment portal, or by giving oral input at the scoping meeting. This scoping process aims to gather input on the gillnet and trap/pot fisheries regarding the scope of actions to be proposed for rulemaking, the development of alternatives to analyze, and the potential impacts of management actions.

Information received through this scoping process will inform the potential development of alternative risk reduction measures for an environmental analysis on modifications to the Plan. Only inputs and suggestions that are within the scope of the proposed actions will be considered when developing the alternatives for analysis. The purpose is to develop measures to fulfill the requirements of section 118 of the MMPA, which regulates the taking of marine mammals incidental to U.S. commercial fishing operations and the CAA. NMFS is also soliciting comments on measures that would further the recovery goals of ESA-listed right whales as affected by fisheries regulated under the Plan, as well as topics related to incidental take authorizations and statements under the MMPA and ESA. NMFS implements additional endangered species conservation and recovery programs under the ESA and also affords marine mammals protections under multiple programs pursuant to the MMPA.

To promote informed decision-making, input should be as specific as possible and should provide as much detail as necessary to fully inform NMFS of the commenter's position. Input should explain why the issues raised are important to the consideration of potential environmental impacts and potential alternatives to a proposed action, as well as economic and other impacts affecting the quality of the human environment.

It is important that commenters provide their input prior to the close of the scoping period and clearly articulate their concerns and contentions. Input received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for a proposed action discussed in this notice. Input submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered.

References

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Hayes, S., E. Josephson, K. Maze-Foley, P.E. Rosel, and J. McCordic, Eds. 2024. U.S. Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Marine Mammal Stock Assessments 2023. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-NE-321. 372 pp.

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Pace, R.M., R. Williams, S.D. Kraus, A.R. Knowlton, H.M. Pettis. 2021. Cryptic mortality in North Atlantic right whales. *Conserv. Sci. Pract.* 3:e346.

(Authority: 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*; 16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*)

Dated: August 13, 2026.

Kimberly Damon-Randall,

*Director, Office of Protected Resources,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[Docket No. 260707–0164]

XRIN 0648–XA008

Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Issuance of an Exploration License to The Metals Company USA, LLC for “USA–B” (EISX–006–48–2CM–1779948024)

AGENCY: Office for Coastal Management, National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NOAA announces its intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate the environmental impacts of issuing an exploration license to The Metals Company USA, LLC (TMC–USA) under the Deep Seabed Hard Mineral Resources Act (DSHMRA or “the Act”) for the application area designated by TMC–USA as “USA–B.” The proposed license, if issued, would authorize TMC–USA to conduct seabed mining exploration activities (*e.g.*, vessel and autonomous vehicle operation, sonar use, and deployment of box corers)

within the seabed area beyond national jurisdiction for a period of ten years subject to terms, conditions, and restrictions. This notice announces the beginning of the scoping process under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to solicit public comments and identify relevant issues with respect to the proposed agency action.

Additionally, this notice seeks public comment and input under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and its implementing regulations.

DATES: NOAA will consider written comments received by September 16, 2026.

ADDRESSES: Comments may be submitted to the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NOS-2026-1816> or go to www.regulations.gov and enter “NOAA-NOS-2026-1816” in the search bar. Click the “Comment Now!” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

Comments must be submitted by the date and electronic method described above to ensure that the comments are received, documented, and considered by NOAA. Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period may not be considered. Comments that are not related to preparation of the EIS to evaluate the impacts of issuing an exploration license to TMC-USA for the Application B Area or that contain profanity, vulgarity, threats, or other inappropriate language will not be considered. To ensure full consideration by NOAA, comments must be submitted in English. Comments that are not submitted in English may not be posted to the public dockets on [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) or considered by NOAA. All relevant comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address) submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or information that is otherwise sensitive or protected. NOAA will accept anonymous comments (enter “N/A” in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Requests for additional information may be sent to dshmra.nepa@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: DSHMRA (30 U.S.C. 1401–1473) charges the NOAA Administrator with the responsibility for issuing to U.S. citizens licenses for exploration and permits for

commercial recovery of hard mineral resources from areas beyond national jurisdiction. U.S. citizens must obtain licenses and permits from NOAA before undertaking deep seabed mining exploration or commercial recovery activities, respectively. NOAA may issue licenses and permits to U.S. citizens in areas beyond national jurisdiction under DSHMRA, provided all statutory and regulatory requirements are met, including under NEPA. Before issuing a license or permit, NOAA is required under DSHMRA to prepare an EIS on the environmental impacts of the activities proposed by the applicant (30 U.S.C. 1419(d)).

On July 28, 2025, NOAA received an amended application from TMC USA for a license to conduct seabed mining exploration activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone of the central Pacific Ocean.¹ NOAA determined that this application is fully compliant with the applicable information requirements of the Act and its implementing regulations. On December 23, 2025, NOAA published notice of the TMC-USA license application for public review and comment (90 FR 60064). Following the close of the public comment period and receipt of written comments from certain Federal agencies, NOAA certified TMC-USA’s application for an exploration license pursuant to 30 U.S.C. 1413(c) and 15 CFR 970.400 on May 26, 2026. NOAA now announces its intent to prepare an EIS in accordance with NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4336a(c), to evaluate the environmental impacts of issuing an exploration license to TMC-USA. The main goal of this scoping process is to help NOAA focus the analysis of the EIS on the relevant environmental issues and alternatives. Subsequently, NOAA plans to publish notice of the proposal to issue a license to TMC-USA, proposed terms, conditions, and restrictions on the license, and the draft EIS for public review and comment and host a public hearing pursuant to 30 U.S.C. 1419(d) and 1426(a).

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

In Executive Order 14285, “Unleashing America’s Offshore Critical Minerals and Resources,” issued on April 24, 2025, President Donald J.

Trump stated that the U.S. “has a core national security and economic interest in maintaining leadership in deep sea science and technology and seabed mineral resources” and “must take immediate action to accelerate the responsible development of seabed mineral resources,” including polymetallic nodules containing strategic minerals, that are “vital to our national security and economic prosperity.” To advance U.S. leadership in responsible seabed mineral development, NOAA was directed to, among other things, “expedite the process for reviewing and issuing seabed mineral exploration licenses in areas beyond national jurisdiction under the Deep Seabed Hard Mineral Resources Act (30 U.S.C. 1401 *et seq.*), consistent with applicable law.”

In applying for an exploration license under DSHMRA, TMC-USA’s objective is to determine the nature, location, and extent of hard mineral resources, and environmental characteristics in a 121,830.2 km² area beyond national jurisdiction comprising six noncontiguous subareas collectively located between approximately 769 miles southeast of Hawaii and 1,892 miles west of Mexico and referred to here as the “Application B Area.” These proposed exploration activities would be undertaken in anticipation of future commercial recovery operations of these hard mineral resources, subject to receiving a separate NOAA permit to conduct commercial recovery operations. Based on NOAA’s authority under DSHMRA to issue exploration licenses to eligible applicants (30 U.S.C. 1412) and Executive Order 14285’s directive, the purpose and need for NOAA’s action is to determine whether to issue a license to TMC-USA to conduct exploration activities within areas beyond national jurisdiction. NOAA will make its determination after consulting with interested Federal agencies, considering public comments, and evaluating whether the exploration proposed by the applicant meets the requirements for issuance of a license. 30 U.S.C. 1415(a); 15 CFR 970.500(c). NOAA must find, among other things, that the exploration activities proposed by the applicant “cannot reasonably be expected to result in a significant adverse effect on the quality of the environment, taking into account the analyses and information in any applicable environmental impacts statement prepared pursuant to section 1419(c) or 1419(d) of this title.” 30 U.S.C. 1415(a)(4); 15 CFR 970.506.

¹ NOAA previously referred to the application for this exploration license as “TMC USA Application B” or “Application B” in the **Federal Register** Notice announcing receipt of this application. 90 FR 60064 (Dec. 23, 2025). The “TMC USA Application A,” that was also announced at that time, is not the subject of this notice of intent.

Proposed Action and Preliminary Alternatives

Pursuant to DSHMRA, NOAA plans to prepare an EIS that evaluates the proposed issuance of an exploration license to TMC-USA to carry out seabed mining exploration activities within the Application B Area. See 30 U.S.C. 1419(d). This license, if issued, would be valid for a period of ten years and would be subject to terms, conditions, and restrictions that NOAA would propose to include in the license. The Applicant, under the proposed license and subject to applicable requirements, would operate vessels and autonomous vehicles, use sonars and cameras, collect photographs and geotechnical samples, collect biological samples, and collect sediment samples from the seafloor through the use of box corers and multi-corers.

NOAA will evaluate reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Action, including a no action alternative. Under the no action alternative, NOAA would deny issuance of an exploration license to TMC-USA, and the proposed exploration plan described in TMC-USA application would not be authorized to proceed under DSHMRA.

In the draft EIS, NOAA is considering analyzing the following preliminary alternatives:

- Issuance of an exploration license with terms, conditions, and restrictions to TMC-USA to conduct the exploration activities and environmental mitigation and monitoring measures as proposed in TMC-USA's exploration plan.
- Issuance of an exploration license with terms, conditions, and restrictions to TMC-USA to conduct the exploration activities as proposed in TMC-USA's exploration plan, with additional and/or modified environmental mitigation and monitoring measures.
- Denial of the license (*i.e.*, no action).

NOAA welcomes comments on all preliminary alternatives as well as suggestions for additional alternatives.

Summary of Potential Impacts

NOAA expects that the primary environmental impacts from exploration activities will include those from vessel and vehicle operation, (*e.g.*, disturbance of fauna from human presence and activity), sonar use (*e.g.*, sound impacts on marine species), and sample recovery (*e.g.*, sediment disturbance from box corers). Potential effects include, but are not limited to, impacts on water quality, marine wildlife, the deep seabed, deep seabed habitat, and marine infrastructure. As appropriate, NOAA will coordinate with the U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, Environmental Protection Agency, applicable States, and others to ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act; Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act; Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act; Clean Water Act; NHPA; and other applicable laws.

As part of its compliance with NHPA section 106 and its implementing regulations (36 CFR part 800), NOAA seeks comment and input from the public regarding the identification of historic properties within the Proposed Action's area of potential effects, the potential effects on those historic properties from the activities proposed by the Applicant, and any information that supports identification of historic properties under the NHPA. NOAA also solicits proposed measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any adverse effects on historic properties.

Cooperating Agencies

NOAA has invited the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Departments of State, Energy, and the Interior to cooperate on this EIS. NOAA requests that additional parties that have an interest in cooperating on this EIS so indicate in their response to this Notice.

Scoping Process

NOAA will consider input provided by Federal and State agencies, Territories, Tribal Governments, local governments, private parties, the public, and any other interested parties during this scoping process in the preparation of the EIS. Publication of this notice initiates the public scoping process to solicit public and agency comment regarding the full spectrum of environmental issues and concerns relating to the scope and content of the EIS including:

- information, studies, and analyses of the human and marine resources that could be affected;
- the nature and extent of the potential significant impacts on those resources;
- a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed action; and
- mitigation and monitoring measures.

In accordance with DSHMRA, 30 U.S.C. 1419(d), NOAA anticipates that this decision making process will conclude within one year of the certification of TMC-USA's exploration application for the Application B Area.

Authority: 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*, 30 U.S.C. 1419(d).

Neil A. Jacobs,

*Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator,
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.*

[FR Doc. 2026-16722 Filed 8-14-26; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Patent and Trademark Office

[Docket No. PTO-C-2026-0562]

Request for Comments on Community Outreach Office Locations in the Southwest States

AGENCY: United States Patent and Trademark Office, U.S. Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Request for comments.

SUMMARY: The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO or Office) is seeking information to consider regarding the selection of locations for one or more community outreach offices (COOs) in the agency's Southwest Region, which comprises Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri.

DATES: To ensure consideration, written comments must be received by 5 p.m. ET on or before September 16, 2026, and should be submitted in accordance with the instructions in the **ADDRESSES** section. No public hearing will be held.

ADDRESSES: Comments must be submitted electronically to NewOffices@uspto.gov. Attachments will be accepted as MICROSOFT WORD® or ADOBE® PDF documents. To be considered, comments must be submitted to the email box. Information that the submitter does not desire to be publicly available, such as an address or phone number, should not be included in the comments.

If submission of comments to NewOffices@uspto.gov is not feasible due to a lack of access to a computer and/or the internet, please contact the USPTO using the contact information below for special instructions regarding how to submit comments by mail or by hand delivery, based on the public's ability to obtain access to USPTO facilities at the time.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Chris Shipp, Chief of Staff, Office of the Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the USPTO, at 571-272-8600.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: