BOEM Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

Piloting an Approach to Community-Informed Characterization of Environmental Justice (EJ) Communities Potentially Impacted by BOEM-Authorized Activities

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Laura Mansfield and Meghan Cornelison| Office of Environmental Programs

BOEM Information Need

Determine the best ways to incorporate more local information about communities, ideally informed by communities, into Environmental Justice (EJ) sections of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents.

WHY? EJ sections currently discuss potential impacts in a general, hypothetical sense. It is critical to characterize communities so that NEPA analyses can present rationale for whether potential impacts would occur, and their magnitude, given local contexts.

WHAT? Produce a collection of brief EJ community characterization summaries – 10 communities in each of the 3 identified study areas, a subset of which would include self-characterization methods.

PICOC Summary

Problem	Environmental analyses at BOEM could provide better support for decision-making with more specific information on the EJ communities that may be affected by BOEM-authorized activities.
Intervention	Develop and conduct a pilot application of an approach to utilize existing data in conjunction with community-provided input to produce short community characterization summaries.
Comparison	Without community characterizations, NEPA assessments will likely continue to describe communities generally and may fail to acknowledge local contexts and impacts to EJ communities, including overlooking impact nuances between communities.
Outcome	A collection of brief EJ community characterization summaries for approximately 10 communities within three chosen study areas, a subset of which would include targeted community input.
Context	A pilot study of selected areas representing various stages of BOEM's energy-related processes.

Background

- A lot of data is currently available on:
  - Poverty, population composition, personal disruption, sea level rise risk, labor force structure, housing characteristics, housing disruption, urban sprawl, etc.

- Will work closely with others interested in this information including:
  - NOAA Fisheries, NYSERDA, DOE Wind Energy Technology Office, and Sea Grant (intersections with fisheries and energy justice)

Study Objectives

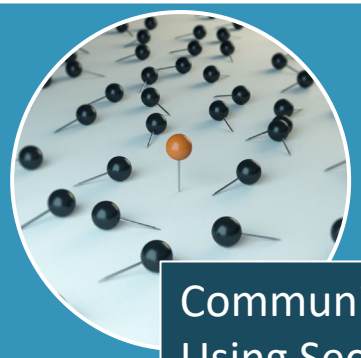
- Characterize EJ communities, using existing information, to expand BOEM's knowledge of communities and populations that may potentially be affected
- Pilot an approach to developing locally informed summaries that will highlight unique contexts and concerns of EJ communities
- Improve engagement with EJ communities and incorporation of community information and data into environmental analyses.
- Record preliminary ideas on additional information, data, or decision tools needed in the future to more fully evaluate potential impacts on EJ communities.

Methods

Select Areas

Select 3 areas in which BOEM-authorized activities are occurring or are expected to occur that represent different stages of BOEM's offshore energy planning process

Select approx. 10 communities in each area to characterize



Community Characterization Using Secondary Research

Apply best practices for EJ community identification

Use existing data from multiple sources to produce short community characterization summaries for 30 communities

Community-Informed Primary Research

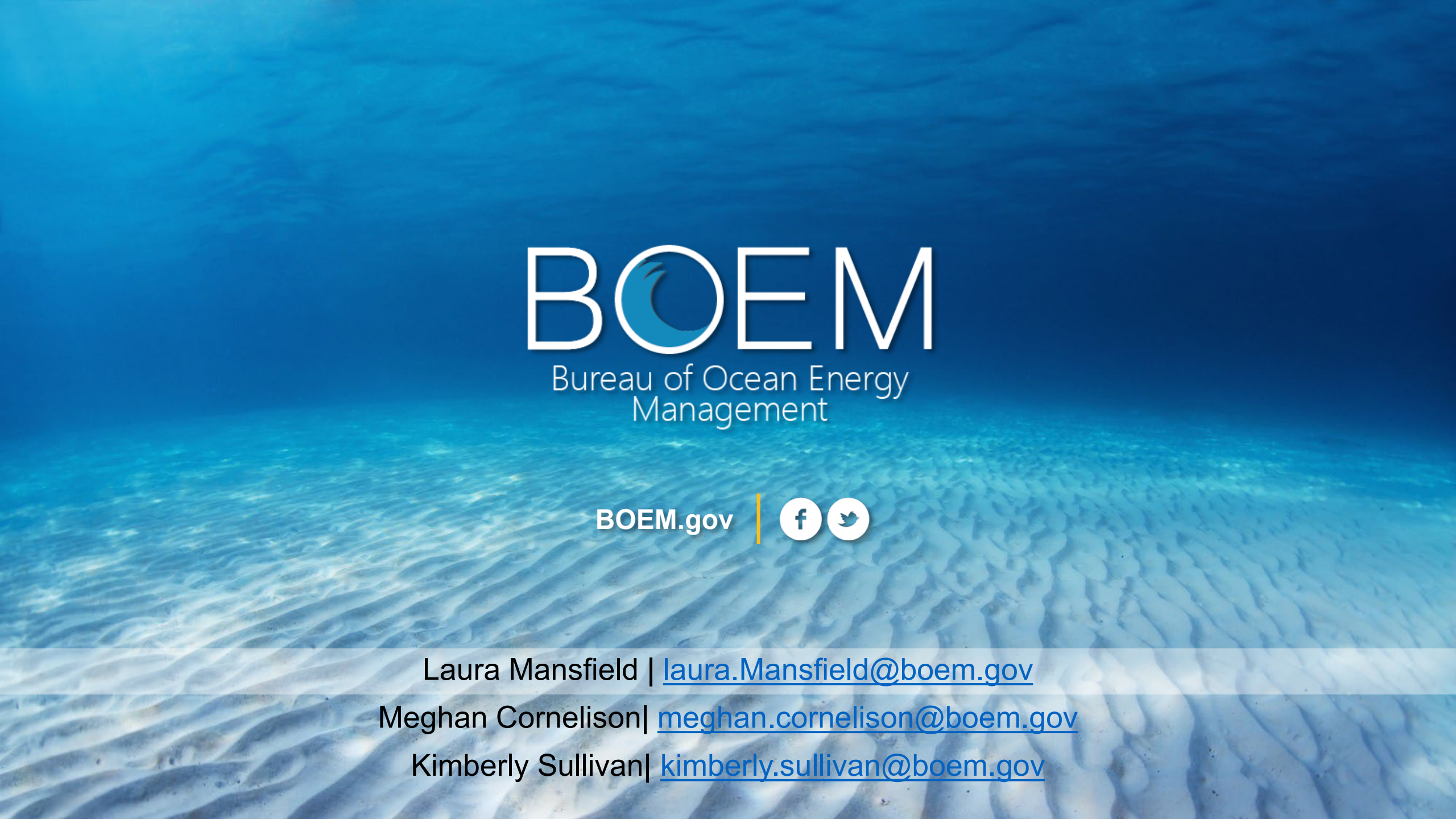
Select a small subset of communities to engage and collect locally informed context to "ground truth" characterizations

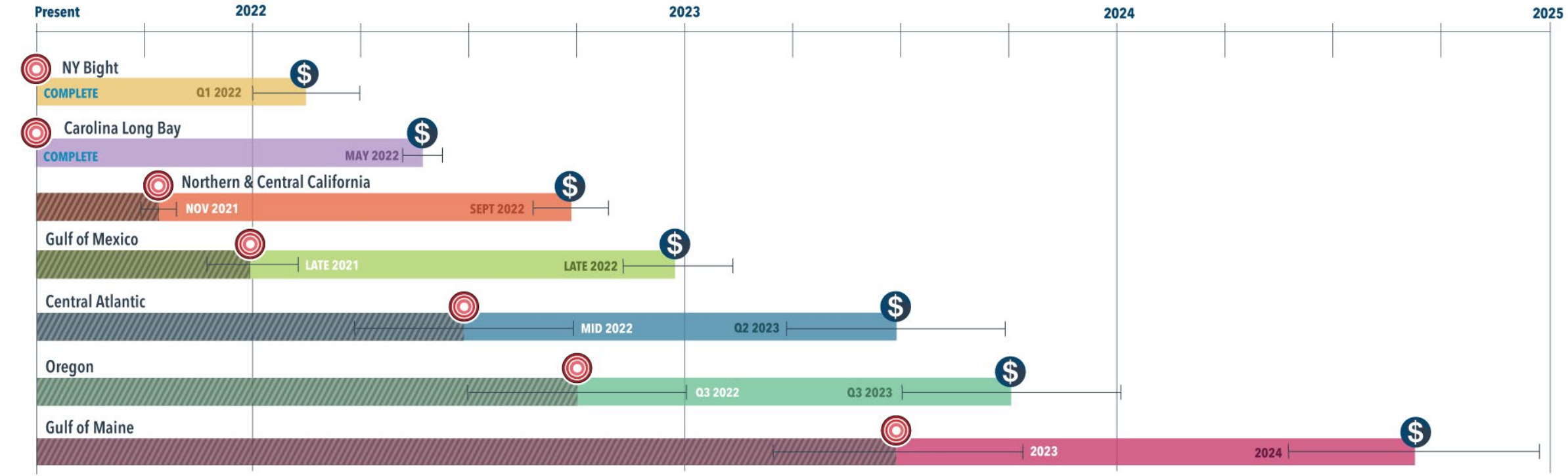
Compensate for knowledge

Code and analyze information to develop a thematic analysis

Research Questions

1. What are the social, economic, and cultural characteristics of each identified EJ community, as reflected in available secondary data?
2. What additional insights and characteristics can be gained through community-provided information?
3. When is the best time within the energy planning, leasing, or development process to conduct community summaries for BOEM use?
4. Based on knowledge gained during this research, what additional data gathering efforts or decision tool developments could be useful to develop in the future for assessing impacts on EJ communities?



Laura Mansfield | laura.Mansfield@boem.gov
Meghan Cornelison| meghan.cornelison@boem.gov
Kimberly Sullivan| kimberly.sullivan@boem.gov

Biden-Harris Administration Goals