

U.S. Continental Shelf Limit

Description - Article 76 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides a definition and a detailed formula for determining the limit of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles. Consistent with Article 76 of UNCLOS and the 1958 Convention on the Continental Shelf, the U.S. continental shelf is comprised of the sea-bed and subsoil of the submarine areas that extend beyond its territorial sea throughout the natural prolongation of its land territory to the outer edge of the continental margin, including that portion beyond 200 nautical miles from the baseline. Under international law, the continental shelf is defined to include the sea-bed and subsoil beyond the continental margin out to a distance of 200 nautical miles from the baseline. The U.S. has sovereign rights and exclusive jurisdiction over the exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf.

Primary Agency – Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, as requested by the Department of State, Memorandum of Understanding dated October 5, 1994.

Spatial Extent - 100 fathom isobath as outer limit (Presidential Proclamation, No. 2667, 1945). This limit shall not exceed either 350 nautical miles from the baseline from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured or 100 nautical miles from the 2,500 meter isobath (Thormahlen 1999a).

Description - 1958 Convention on the Continental Shelf, UNCLOS, Art. 76; Presidential Proclamation No. 2667, 1945, 3 CFR 67; Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act of 1953, 43 USCS 1331 (a) (2001) Definition: The term "outer Continental Shelf" means all submerged lands lying seaward and outside of the area of lands beneath navigable waters as defined in section 2 of the Submerged Lands Act (Public Law 31, Eighty-third Congress, first session) 43 USCS @ 1301] , and of which the subsoil and seabed appertain to the United States and are subject to its jurisdiction and control)

Official Depiction – Delimitation not charted yet.

Known Digital Data Source – No known digital source.

Notes - 100 fathom isobath was outer limit (Presidential Proclamation, No. 2667, 1945). Under Article 1 of the 1958 Convention on the Continental Shelf, the outer limit of the continental shelf is subject to change in light of technological advances. It defines the outer limit as extending "to a depth of 200 meters or, beyond that limit, to where the depth of the superjacent waters admits of the exploitation of the natural resources of the said areas."

Under Article 76 of UNCLOS, the limit of the continental shelf shall not exceed either 350 nautical miles from the baseline or 100 nautical miles from the 2,500 meter isobath (Thormahlen1999a).

Issues - No vertical datum or quantitative description is specified.