

New Alaska Region Research Vessel Will Boost Arctic Research

From U.S. Arctic Research Commission Chair, Mead Treadwell
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The US Arctic Research Commission (USARC) issues this statement in support of the recent decision by the National Science Foundation (NSF) to take a major step in the management, acquisition, and operation of a 236' Alaska Region Research Vessel (ARRV) to operate in coastal waters of Alaska, including the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas. On August 8, 2007, the NSF awarded a cooperative agreement to the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) to complete Phase I of the ARRV project. The principal investigators will be Professor Terry Whittedge and Dean Denis Wiesenburg of UAF's School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences. Construction of the ARRV, to replace the RV Alpha Helix, which is more than 40 years old, has received enthusiastic and broad support from the Arctic scientific research community.

According to Mead Treadwell, Chair of the US Arctic Research Commission, "The ARRV is a key platform to understand Alaska's coastal waters. Our ecological knowledge will grow, and information to help sustain our fish, polar bears, walruses, and seals—in a challenging time of climate change—will expand with it."

The ARRV was conceived with the entire oceanographic community in mind, including academic research scientists, educators, industry, government scientists, and the general public. Details on the plans for the vessel, and the efforts to date, are available at www.sfos.uaf.edu/arrv. The ARRV will be acoustically quiet to enable fisheries research, yet strong enough to withstand the challenging conditions of ice-infested Arctic seas. Although not a polar-class icebreaker, design plans call for the ARRV to operate at 2 knots in ice as thick as 2.5 feet, and it will apparently be among the most versatile ships in the University-National Oceanographic Laboratory System (UNOLS, www.unols.org).

Phase I of the cooperative agreement, worth approximately \$2.6M, is to be completed in nine months, and incorporates an ARRV design update, an initial Project Execution Plan (PEP) and the creation of a management team and an NSF-appointed oversight committee that includes an indigenous representative. The key to accomplishing this phase is successfully negotiating within a tight shipbuilding market, in light of the impacts of Hurricane Katrina.

NSF anticipates the ARRV project's three future phases that include preparing and soliciting bids from US shipyards, constructing the

ship and establishing and overseeing transition operations. The ARRV is scheduled to be ready for operations at UAF by 2011.

The USARC has long been an active supporter of the ARRV since it will significantly enhance Arctic research. Says Treadwell, "Home porting of the ARRV in Seward, Alaska, will continue the long and distinguished history of that city as a base for oceanographic research."

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USARC was established by the Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984. USARC's principal duties are to develop and recommend an integrated national Arctic research policy and to assist in establishing a national Arctic research program plan to implement the policy. Commissioners also facilitate cooperation between the Federal government, state and local governments, and other nations with respect to Arctic research, both basic and applied.