

Canada and US join up to map Arctic continental shelf

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The U.S. Extended Continental Shelf Task Force, chaired by the Department of State, plans two Arctic cruises by the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Healy* this summer, one of which will be conducted in collaboration with the Government of Canada. The cruises are part of an interagency effort to collect scientific data about the continental shelf and oceanic basins in the Arctic.

The first cruise, August 14 to September 5 from Barrow, Alaska, will employ a sophisticated echo sounder that will collect data to create a three-dimensional map of the Arctic seafloor in an area known as the Chukchi Cap. This cruise is led by the University of New Hampshire's Joint Hydrographic Center, with support from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The second cruise, September 6 to October 1, also from Barrow, will be conducted in cooperation with Canada. The *Healy* will map the seafloor and it will also create a straight and open path through the ice, while the Canadian icebreaker, *Louis S. St. Laurent*, follows and collects multi-channel seismic reflection and refraction data aimed at determining the thickness of sediment.

This collaboration will assist both countries in defining the continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean. It will also save millions of dollars for both countries, provide data of great interest to both countries, and increase scientific and diplomatic cooperation. The U.S. Geological Survey will lead the expedition for the U.S., while Natural Resources Canada will lead the Canadian team.

In addition to the U.S. Department of State acting as chair, participants in the Extended Continental Shelf Task Force include: the Executive Office of the President, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Coast Guard, the National Science Foundation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the U.S. Navy, the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Minerals Management Service, and the Arctic Research Commission.

This will be the fourth summer that the U.S. has collected data in the Arctic in support of defining the limits of its extended continental shelf (the portion of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles, where a coastal nation has sovereign rights over natural resources). This data, most of which will be released to the public, will also provide greater scientific insight into relatively unexplored regions of the ocean.



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