

Testing Arctic Waters: A New Arctic Multi-Year Research Program Gets Underway in June

The North Pacific Research Board's Arctic Program begins summer research sampling in the Chukchi Sea upon arrival of R/V Sikuliaq in Nome, June 7th. This is the first of several research cruises planned for 2017-2019.

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Anchorage, Alaska—

Beginning in June, the North Pacific Research Board's (NPRB) Arctic Program, will commence field collection aboard R/V *Sikuliaq*—the first of several research cruises planned during spring, summer, and fall seasons of 2017-2019. The Arctic Program is a \$16 million multi-disciplinary collaborative effort that will span from 2017-2021 and includes additional funding partners, Collaborative Alaskan Arctic Studies Program (formerly the North Slope Borough/Shell Baseline Studies Program), Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), and the Office of Naval Research Marine Mammals and Biology Program. Generous in-kind support has been contributed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of Alaska Fairbanks.



Photo by Mark Teckenbrock

R/V *Sikuliaq* will depart Nome on June 9th (arrival June 7th) with a research team of twenty-five or so scientists affiliated with UAF/CFOS, NOAA, BOEM, UW, USFWS¹, Bigelow Marine Lab, among others. For twenty days, the team and vessel crew will call the 260ft metal hull of R/V *Sikuliaq* and the surrounding waters of the Chukchi Sea home, traveling as far north off the coast of Cape Lisburne and south to the eastern and western coasts of St. Lawrence Island. This team, along with the other scientists involved with the Arctic Program, will be studying how Arctic sea ice reduction and its environmental impact has affected the Chukchi Sea ecosystem—something all too timely as the sea ice break up this season is well underway in the Bering and Chukchi Seas.

“This program has been long in the making and involved considerable effort from dedicated scientists as well as strong investment and engagement from coastal communities, national and regional partners,” noted Dr. Matthew Baker, NPRB Science Director. Baker further added that, “the launch of the cruise is incredibly exciting and important given current ice conditions and anticipated changes in this part of the Arctic.”

¹Affiliations: University of Alaska Fairbanks, College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences (UAF/CFOS); National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM); University of Washington (UW); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Arctic research has been ongoing for several decades and local traditional knowledge about this environment is vast. However, there is still a clear need for additional studies to better understand the processes driving the Arctic marine ecosystem as a whole. Changes in sea ice timing, presence, extent, or thickness will have profound influences on coastal communities, marine mammals, seabirds, fishes, plankton, and oceanography. The Arctic Program aims to fill these key gaps in the collective knowledge of the Chukchi Sea through a multi-disciplinary approach, sampling at poorly known locations and times of year.

Aboard R/V *Sikuliaq* this June, the research team will be conducting a series of oceanographic and lower-trophic level measurements. These include phytoplankton net tows; zooplankton collection using Bongo nets; CTD water sampling for measuring salinity, temperature, and depth; benthic sediment collection; growth rate experiments; and fish trawl surveys. Submerged moorings will also be deployed to collect marine mammal acoustics, ocean chemistry, nutrient availability, and ocean currents.

KEY DATES:

- R/V *Sikuliaq* loads gear in Dutch Harbor – June 4th
- R/V *Sikuliaq* arrives in Nome – June 7th
- Vessel departs Nome – June 9th
- Vessel returns to port of Nome – June 29th

VESSEL COMMUNICATION:

R/V *Sikuliaq* and lead scientist will follow the proper ship-to-shore communication protocol during the research cruise. When possible, this information will also be distributed via social media channels including Facebook ([@nprbarctic](#)), Twitter ([@nprbarctic](#)), and Instagram ([@nprbarctic](#)). Social media and NPRB's blog site, <http://blog.arctic.nprb.org> will serve as main points of general communication throughout the cruise with all scientists aboard.

WHO TO CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS WHILE VESSEL IS UNDERWAY:

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