

## **Coast Guard Cutter Polar Sea departs for Bering Sea cruise**

### **Local News**

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : February 24, 2010 at 5:16 am

SEATTLE &mdash; The Coast Guard Cutter Polar Sea, one of the world's most powerful non-nuclear icebreakers, homeported in Seattle, departs the week of Feb. 22 for a two-month deployment in support of the Bering Sea Ecosystem Study (BEST).

The BEST cruise is part of a six year study of the Bering Sea ecosystem supported by the National Science Foundation and the North Pacific Research Board.

The central focus of the scientific cruise is to examine the impacts of changing ice conditions on food web structure in the Bering Sea. A team of twenty-five scientists will study processes and collect data relating to food webs in the northern Bering Sea.

"We will be working at the ecological boundary where the Bering Sea shifts from a fish dominated system to one where more true arctic animals such as walrus, bearded seals and Spectacled Eiders use sea ice as a platform to take advantage of abundant seafoods on the sea floor," said Lee Cooper, chief scientist of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Sciences.

"Changing ice conditions are likely to influence the potential expansion of Bering Sea fisheries further north as well as to shrink arctic habitat currently available on the shallow continental shelf," said Cooper.

Data and samples to be collected include sea floor sediments, sea ice and water samples, and plankton. Other topics of research include studies of the distributions of birds and marine mammals, including the world population of Spectacled Eiders that winters south of Saint Lawrence Island.

"The overall effort will contribute to understanding how climate change and reduced ice cover will impact the Bering Sea ecosystem," said Cooper.

The Polar Sea was built by Lockheed Shipbuilding and Construction Company in Seattle . Commissioned in 1978, the Polar Sea has operated around the globe and is designed to perform science, icebreaking, and all Coast Guard missions in both Polar Regions. With a reinforced hull and up to 75,000 horsepower, the cutter can break up to 21 feet of ice, or 6 feet of ice at a continuous speed of 3 knots. The ship's icebreaking capabilities allow the crew to perform logistics, search and rescue, ship escort, environmental protection, and enforcement of laws and treaties in places most ships cannot reach.

For more information please contact

[emily.c.holt@uscg.mil](mailto:emily.c.holt@uscg.mil)

For more information about the Coast Guard Cutter Polar Sea,&nbsp;please visit the following links:

<http://www.uscg.mil/pacarea/cgcPolarsea/default.asp>

<http://www.icefloe.net>

Information on the science mission is available at <http://www.nprb.org>

<http://arctic.cbl.umces.edu>