

UAF chooses shipyard to build Alaska Region Research Vessel

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This is an artist's rendering of the Alaska Region Research Vessel. Credit: Image by The Glostén Associates

More than three decades ago, marine scientists in the United States first identified the need for a research vessel capable of bringing scientists to Alaska's icy northern waters.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks has announced its intent to award a \$123 million contract that will meet that need. The university has selected Marinette Marine Corporation of Marinette, Wis. to build the 254-foot Alaska Region Research Vessel.

When complete, the vessel will be one of the most advanced university research vessels in the world and will be capable of breaking ice up to

2.5 feet thick. According to project leaders, the ARRV's home port will be in Alaska, most likely at UAF's Seward Marine Center.

"Ocean scientists need this ice-capable vessel now, more than ever before, to study the changes occurring in arctic waters," says Denis Wiesenburg, a co-principal investigator on the project and the dean of the UAF School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences.

The \$123 million for the ship construction contract is funded entirely by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The total cost for the project is \$200 million.

"In the short term, constructing this world-class research vessel will create American jobs to help our nation pull out of the current recession," said Sen. Mark Begich. "The University of Alaska has dreamed of having a new research vessel for decades and I am thrilled to see work will soon get underway through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Once complete, the ARRV will be a state-of-the-art platform to conduct the scientific research necessary for Alaskans to understand the challenges we're feeling from climate change and its implications on the changing arctic environment."

The vessel will be owned by the National Science Foundation and operated by UAF as part of the U.S. academic research fleet. It will be used by scientists in the U.S. and international oceanographic community through the University-National Oceanographic Laboratory System. The vessel was designed by The Glostén Associates, a marine architecture firm in Seattle.

After the ship has been completed, the crew will take the vessel from the shipyard through the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway transit system and the Panama Canal to Alaska in 2013. While in transit, scientists and crewmembers will test the scientific components of the ship in

preparation for unrestricted science operations beginning in 2014.

"I have been working on the Alaska Region Research Vessel project for quite a while and am pleased to see it advance to the next phase with the shipyard contract," said Sen. Lisa Murkowski. "This world-class ice-capable research ship will support critical science in the Arctic as well as the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska, where the marine ecosystems support the nation's most productive fisheries. I commend the National Science Foundation and the University of Alaska Fairbanks for their efforts to make this project a reality."

In addition to its ice-breaking capabilities, the ARR V will allow researchers to collect sediment samples directly from the seafloor, host remotely operated vehicles, use a flexible suite of winches to raise and lower scientific equipment, and conduct surveys throughout the water column and sea bottom using an extensive set of research instrumentation.

The ship will be able to transmit real-time information directly to classrooms all over the world. The vessel design strives to have the lowest possible environmental impact, including a low underwater-radiated noise signature for marine mammal and fisheries work. The ARR V will have accommodations for up to 26 scientists and students at a time, including those with disabilities.

"This project is something I have worked on for many years with Sen. Stevens," said Rep. Don Young. "It is an extremely important vessel for Alaska, not only because of the jobs it will create, but because of the opportunity that will come from it. The United States is an arctic nation because of Alaska and Alaska will provide the gateway to our nation's future. We have the opportunity now to address the prospects of industry years down the road and how we can use changing arctic conditions to our advantage, and the Alaska Region [Research Vessel](#) is going to help

put us at the forefront of those changes."

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