

Interest in sub-glacial waters global

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The study of Antarctica's sub-glacial environment will be the next focus for polar research, predicts a Texas A&M professor who led several Antarctica studies.

The scientific knowledge learned from the world beneath the ice sheets will change how humans understand the planet, oceanography professor Mahlon Kennicutt II said in a news release.

The international scientific community already has found more than 150 lakes and a vast river system beneath the ice, he said.

"We've known for about 10 years that there were lakes under the ice sheets, but discoveries in the last few years have shown just how complex the water systems are," Kennicutt said. "It has changed the way we now view Antarctica and its evolution over time."

With the Antarctic summer approaching the area, the pace of research activity will pick up, Kennicutt said. Russian officials announced plans for the Russian Antarctic Expedition to enter the largest of the known lakes this year. Other countries -- such as the United States, Japan, France, Italy, the United Kingdom -- also plan to study what lies beneath the ice.

"The countries involved all agree that whatever research is conducted should be performed without causing significant environmental damage," he says.

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