



National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22230

4 April 2013

Dear Researcher:

As a federal agency, NSF is required to review, understand, and document the environmental effects of its actions before a funding decision is made. Researchers may be requested to assist NSF in meeting its compliance obligations. Examples of what PIs may be requested to do include: conducting community outreach with Arctic communities, developing Memoranda of Understanding with indigenous communities, responding to requests for specific details of field plans, securing Protected Resource Observers (PROs) on research cruises, and abiding by Polar Bear Interaction Plans. PIs may be asked to alter their field plans to accommodate compliance with environmental laws (e.g., if a project's activity may affect an endangered species) or the needs of other interest groups (e.g., reaching a compromise to a cruise track that reduces potential impacts to subsistence hunters while still meeting research objectives). There may be changes to field schedules as a result of the compliance process if the project requires mitigation, public comment or other action to achieve compliance. This is not an exhaustive list, but presents some common examples.

Requests for information may come from NSF or from CH2M HILL Polar Services (CPS), the arctic research support and logistics contractor to the Arctic Research Support and Logistics (RSL) Program. For each project subject to federal environmental compliance, NSF will conduct the applicable environmental review(s) and produce a decision document summarizing the proposed project's potential impact on the environment.

Much of the work done by NSF funded researchers is categorically excluded from a higher level of analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) according to NSF regulations because of the limited scope and environmental impact of most NSF research projects. All proposed research projects, even those categorically excluded from further analysis under NEPA, must undergo an appropriate level of environmental review and documentation under NEPA and other applicable federal environmental statutes and regulations. For proposed projects that occur outside of the U.S. and its coastal waters, NSF must comply with Executive Order 12114 and other applicable federal environmental authorities.

Researchers are still responsible for obtaining all the necessary permits for their projects. NSF may require information about those permits to maintain documentation relevant to the environmental review process.

NSF is committed to environmental stewardship in the Arctic while supporting field research. Thank you in advance for working with NSF to accomplish this goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Polly A. Penhale".

Polly A. Penhale, Ph.D.
Environmental Officer, Division of Polar Programs (PLR)
Polar Environment, Safety and Health Section