Contract awarded for NOAA Ship Henry B. Bigelow technology upgrade, essential maintenance



NOAA Ship Henry B. Bigelow near its homeport in Newport, Rhode Island. Credit: NOAA Marine and Aviation Operations/Katherine McGinnis

NOAA has awarded a $99 million contract to JAG Ketchikan, LLC. in Ketchikan, Alaska, to complete expanded upgrades and maintenance on NOAA Ship Henry B. Bigelow. Following the 2027 field season, the ship will undergo this work for a 14-month period.

The Bigelow is one of NOAA’s 15 research vessels and studies a wide range of marine life and ocean conditions along the U.S. East Coast with a primary mission to study and monitor fish

stocks.

“NOAA Ship Henry B. Bigelow is a vital part of NOAA’s fleet” said NOAA Administrator Neil Jacobs, Ph.D. “These critical improvements to the Bigelow will allow NOAA to meet our mission, improve our surveys, and continue to ensure responsible, science-based management of our nation’s world-class fisheries.”

NOAA is working to maximize the service life of each of its vessels through long-term maintenance planning and tracking. The goal of this forward-looking maintenance is to provide up-to-date, dependable vessels for use by NOAA scientists and science partners.

“Modernizing the shipboard technology will improve the Bigelow’s efficiency and operational safety, while ensuring that future research performed by the ship continues to be cutting edge,” said Rear Adm. Chad M. Cary, NOAA Corps director and NOAA Marine and Aviation Operations assistant administrator. “By investing in these upgrades, we are investing in the future of NOAA’s science missions along the U.S. East Coast.”

Replacing the propulsion system with variable speed Tier 4 generators, lighter and more efficient motors, and cutting-edge technology will equip the Bigelow to continue supporting NOAA science missions. The comprehensive maintenance will also replace pumps, fans, cranes, fire detection system and radars, and will increase the number of single-person staterooms. The agency anticipates that the Bigelow will be available for service in time for the 2029 field season.

NOAA has begun modifying other ships in its fleet to perform Bigelow’s mission while it undergoes maintenance. NOAA Ship Pisces was recently modified to conduct bottom trawling operations typically conducted by the Bigelow. These adjustments will ensure that the science and data collection

the Bigelow performs along the East Coast will continue seamlessly.

About NOAA Ship Bigelow

NOAA Ship Henry B. Bigelow was commissioned in 2007 and is homeported in Newport, Rhode Island. The ship’s primary mission is to study and monitor fish stocks in the North Atlantic. The ship also conducts habitat assessments and surveys marine mammal and seabird populations from Maine to North Carolina.