

NOAA Holds Keel-Laying Ceremony for 2nd New Charting and Mapping Vessel



A welder from Thoma-Sea Marine Constructors, LLC, welds the initials of the Navigator's sponsor, Rear Admiral (retired) Evelyn Fields, onto a steel plate that will be incorporated into the ship, in keeping with maritime tradition, at a keel-laying ceremony for the new ship on December 4, 2025, at the International WorkBoat Show in New Orleans, Louisiana. (Image credit: NOAA)

By Keely Belva, NOAA, Dec. 4, 2025

NOAA leadership was joined by partners today to celebrate the keel-laying for Navigator, a new charting and mapping vessel being constructed for NOAA. The vessel is being built by Thoma-Sea Marine Constructors, LLC., in Houma, Louisiana.

The keel-laying is a centuries-old maritime tradition that

formally recognizes the start of a ship's construction. During today's ceremony, the initials of the ship's sponsor, [NOAA Corps Rear Adm. Evelyn Fields \(ret.\)](#), were welded onto a steel plate that will be incorporated into the ship during construction.

"NOAA's investments in data collection platforms, like Navigator, are integral to understanding and predicting our environment," said Neil Jacobs, Ph.D., undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "NOAA, and our science mission, is also proud to support the Maritime Industrial Base and our nation's shipbuilding economy. We look forward to Navigator's completion and the ability to incorporate emerging technologies like uncrewed systems, to help NOAA meet its mission."

In 2023, NOAA announced the addition of [two new charting and mapping vessels](#) to the NOAA fleet. [Surveyor](#) is expected to be completed in 2027 and Navigator in 2028. The ships will be used primarily for ocean mapping and nautical charting as part of NOAA's mission to deliver tools and information to help mariners safely navigate the \$2.3 trillion worth of cargo that comes in and out of the nation's ports and harbors.

"Mariners navigating U.S. waters depend on NOAA charts," said NOAA Corps Rear Adm. Chad Cary, director of the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps and NOAA Marine and Aviation Operations. "These new, state-of-the-art ships will ensure that we can continue to meet our mission to support safe navigation in established waters as well as evolving regions like the Arctic for decades to come."

The vessel's name, Navigator, highlights one of NOAA's central missions: facilitating the safe navigation of mariners throughout U.S. waters. The Navigator will be homeported in Newport, Oregon.