Benthic Carbon Cycling and Population Dynamics within the RUSALCA Program

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Benthic Carbon Cycling and Ecosystem Structure in the Pacific Arctic Region as part of RUSALCA

**Objectives**

- evaluate carbon export to benthos via sediment oxygen uptake and nutrient exchange studies (HAPS corer)
- sediment indicators (TOC, chl a, grain size)
- benthic infaunal population structure and biomass (133 cm² cores and 0.1 m² van Veen grabs)
- stable and radioisotope analyses

PIs: Jackie Grebmeier and Lee Cooper, UMCES/CBL
RUSALCA 2009 Cruise Effort

Map 1: RUSALCA 2009 stations, bathymetry in meters

- 2009 RUSALCA stations
- Sea Ice Extent Sept. 13, 2009
- 200 Nautical Mile Limit

Map 2: Rusalca 2009 Station positions

- Bering Strait (BS)
- Cape Lisburne (CL)
- Central (CEN)
- Chukchi South (CS)
- Herald Canyon (HC)
- Ice Edge (IE)
- Long Strait (LS)
- Siberian Shelf (SS)
- Wrangel North (WN)
- Geologic Dredge (GD)
Bottom water temperature and salinity during the RUSALCA09 cruise

- Increasing BW salinity SE to NW highest
- Highest BW temperatures in the SW Chukchi Sea and eastern side of Herald Canyon
- Low BW temps western side of system and in East Siberian Sea

[Courtesy Bob Pickart-CTD team]
Sediment community oxygen consumption 1984-2010

- spatial patterns indicative of the amount of carbon reaching the sediments

[updated from Grebmeier et al. 2006, unpubl. data]
High nutrient efflux from sediments in regions of high organic carbon deposition during RUSALCA 2009
Macrobenthic biomass (gC/m$^2$) during RUSALCA 2009

- high benthic biomass head Herald Valley, decrease moving northward down the valley to Herald Canyon; lowest benthic biomass moving further north offshore
- main contributors are bivalves and polychaetes
Rich benthic communities on the western side of the Bering/Chukchi Sea system 1970-2010

- “footprints” of high benthic biomass reflect pelagic-benthic coupling and export of carbon to sediments
- Advection of organic carbon also influences biomass patterns

[updated from Grebmeier et al. 2006a]

[T. Weingartner]
Dominant benthic fauna by gC biomass
-5 groups dominated by bivalves, polychaetes, flatworms (Rhynchozoa) and sea anemones (Anthozoa)
Rich benthic communities on the western side of the Bering/Chukchi Sea system

- macroinfaunal biomass dominated by bivalves, polychaetes, amphipods and sipunculids

[Greblemeier et al. in prep.]
% Silt and clay content-indicator of deposition zones
% Silt & Clay Content: RUSALCA 2004, 2009 and All Station data
Total organic carbon content in surface sediments indicator current speed and material deposition zones
TOC Content: RUSALCA 2004, 2009 and All Station data

[update of Grebmeier et al. 2006, Prog. Oceanogr., 71: 331-361]
C/N surface sediments - indicator of quality food supply
Sediment Chlorophyll a (mg/m²)-short-term indicator of carbon supply to benthos

- Depends on overlying water column production seasonally
Surface sediment $\delta^{13}C$ values

[Image of a map showing surface sediment $\delta^{13}C$ values with color coding for different ranges of values. The map includes the East Siberian Sea, Chukchi Sea, Beaufort Sea, Russia, United States, and Bering Sea.]

[Grebmeier et al. 2006, Prog. Oceanogr., 71: 331-361]
C/N versus C-13 carbon isotope relationship

Figure 4

C/N = -14.246 + 0.968 \times \delta^{13}C; r^2 = 0.646

Cooper et al. 2009, Deep-Sea Research
Comparison $\delta^{13}C$ values over time series (1993, 1995, 2004) in the Chukchi Sea

Cooper et al. 2009, Deep-Sea Research
C/N versus stable carbon isotope values for time series cruises in the Chukchi Sea: 1988-2004

\[ \text{C/N} = -9.33 - 0.73 \times \delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{VPDB}}; r^2 = 0.511 \]

Cooper et al. 2009, Deep-Sea Research
SUMMARY

1. Highest observed infaunal benthic biomass was observed at the head of Herald Valley in the southeast Chukchi Sea in the known “hotspot” of *Macoma* bivalves the extends from across the US-Russian boundary. This high biomass region results for the high productivity of the Anadyr Water and tight pelagic-benthic coupling between the upper water column production zone and underlying benthos during annual primary production.

2. Sediment community oxygen consumption (SCOC) and surface sediment chlorophyll (sed chl a) was highest under the Anadyr water in the SE Chukchi Sea and in portions of the East Siberian Sea and Long Strait, indicative of efficient carbon export to the benthos.

3. Areas of highest carbon export to the benthos (SCOC, sed chl a) coincident with highest areas of infaunal biomass (gC/m^2) which are important prey to walrus gray whales, and bearded seals.

4. Lowest observed infaunal biomass occurred in the furthest northern station at about 600 m at the “pockmark” sites. Very fine sediments were observed at this site.
Thank you. Any questions?

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