

Oil & Natural Gas Technology

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Quarterly Research Performance Progress Report (Period ending 12/31/2012)

Mapping Permafrost and Gas Hydrate using Marine CSEM Methods

Project Period (10/1/2012 – 09/30/16)

Submitted by:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the first quarter of this project, which included the Society of Exploration Geophysicists and American Geophysical Union meetings, and the Christmas holiday season, and so we have really only just started work. The main accomplishment was creating and revising the Project Management Plan and having it accepted by DoE. The PI presented an overview of our work in using EM techniques for mapping gas hydrate at the 2012 American Geophysical Union annual meeting in an oral presentation to the gas hydrate community, and was co-author on two posters. Peter Kannberg, the student funded by this project, was first author on one of the posters. Kannberg continued working on a gas hydrate data set collected under industry funding in late 2011, developing skills that will serve him well as we start to collect data for this project. We started to consider designs for the transmitter and receiver systems we will develop for this project.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Major goals of project

Permafrost underlies an estimated 20% of the land area in the northern hemisphere and often has associated methane hydrate. Numerous studies have indicated that permafrost and hydrate are actively thawing in many high-latitude and high-elevation areas in response to warming climate and rising sea level. Such thawing has clear consequences for the integrity of energy infrastructure in the Arctic, can lead to profound changes in arctic hydrology and ecology, and can increase emissions of methane as microbial processes access organic carbon that has been trapped in permafrost or methane hydrate dissociates. There has, however, been significant debate over the offshore extent of subsea permafrost.

Our knowledge of seafloor geology relies largely on seismic data and cores/well-logs obtained from vertical boreholes. Borehole data are immensely valuable (both in terms of dollar cost and scientific worth), but provide information only about discrete locations in close to one (vertical) dimension. Seismic data are inherently biased towards impedance contrasts, rather than bulk sediment properties. In the context of mapping offshore permafrost and shallow hydrate, seismic methods can identify the top of frozen sediment through the identification of high amplitude reflections and high-velocity refractors but simple 2D seismic surveys do little to elucidate the bulk properties of the frozen layers, particularly the thickness. However, permafrost and gas hydrate are both electrically resistive, making electromagnetic (EM) methods a complementary geophysical approach to seismic methods for studying these geological features. Deep ocean EM methods for mapping gas hydrate have been developed by both academia and industry, but the deep-ocean techniques and equipment are not directly applicable to the shallow-water, near-shore permafrost environment. This project addresses this problem by designing, building, and testing an EM system designed for very shallow water use, and using it to not only contribute to the understanding of the extent of offshore permafrost, but also to collect baseline data that will be invaluable for future studies of permafrost degradation.

We will use the new equipment to carry out a pilot project to map the contemporary state of subsea permafrost on part of the U.S. Beaufort inner shelf, reoccupying seismic lines acquired in 2010 to 2012. We will combine the interpretation of EM data with seismic data through a no-cost collaboration with Carolyn Ruppel of the USGS. Modeling suggests that a 500 m long EM array will be adequate to sense the top of permafrost in many of the areas where the USGS has completed mapping. The 500 m towed array will be supplemented by the deployment of 2 to 4 seafloor recorders that will be retrieved after the cruise so that nothing remains in the area. The use of a small number of seafloor recorders will allow us to collect data at larger offsets, providing insight into deeper structure.

We are exploiting the close association of hydrate and permafrost at high latitudes, and in particular their common response to changing climate. By using a second geophysical method to supplement seismic data, we will be able to better map the current extent of permafrost and so better understand the impact of past sea level rise on the hydrate stability field, and provide a critical baseline for studies which target the effects of current climate change.

Our work will not only expand our geophysical tool-kit but also expand our understanding of the geological and hydrological systems associated with gas hydrate. Instrumentation and analytical methods developed for this project can be easily applied for future mapping elsewhere.

Work accomplished during the project period

Production and acceptance of the Project Management Plan. The revised Project Management Plan was accepted on 19 November 2012.

Initial design concepts considered. Our engineering and scientific group started considering design approaches to the transmitter and receiver being developed under this contract.

Presentation made at fall American Geophysical Union meeting. Three presentations related to this and past DoE-funded work were made at the fall American Geophysical Union meeting. See PRODUCTS.

Student worked on data processing and interpretation skills. See “training and professional development” below.

Training and professional development.

The PhD student funded by this project, Peter Kannberg, continued work on processing and interpretation of a data set collected in the San Nicolas Basin in late 2011. Marine EM is a relatively new discipline and there are few, if any, commercial software tools for processing and interpretation. As a consequence, we develop most of our software in-house. Kannberg developed some code to assist in transmitter navigation, and is learning how to use our new 2D inversion code. These skills are directly applicable to the data we expect to collect under the current project.

Kannberg also attended the fall American Geophysical Union meeting, presenting a poster as first author, participating as third author on an oral presentation given by the PI, and attending the various sessions devoted to gas hydrate and EM techniques.

Plans for next project period.

During the next project period we will develop plans and designs for the instrumentation needed for this project.

Table 1: Milestone status report.

Milestone Title	Planned Completion Date	Actual Completion Date	Verification Method	Comments on progress
Equipment design approved	3/1/2013			
Equipment passes tests	8/1/2013			
Harrison Bay data collection	9/1/2014			
Harrison Bay data processing	9/30/2014			
Camden Bay data collection	9/1/2015			
Camden Bay data processing	9/30/2015			
Publications(s) submitted	4/1/2016			
Publications(s) accepted	9/30/2016			

PRODUCTS

Project Management Plan. The revised Project Management Plan was accepted on 19 November 2012.

American Geophysical Union abstracts. The following 2012 abstracts were relevant to this and past DoE funded research:

Mapping methane hydrate with a towed marine transmitter-receiver array, Peter K. Kannberg; Steven Constable, presented in *GP33A. Advances in Electromagnetic Induction: From the Near Surface to the Deep Mantle III Posters.*

Mapping marine gas hydrate systems using electromagnetic sounding, Steven Constable; Karen A. Weitemeyer; Peter K. Kannberg; Kerry W. Key, presented in *OS34A. Marine and Permafrost Gas Hydrate Systems III*.

Electrical conductivity of lab-formed methane hydrate + sand mixtures; technical developments and new results, Laura Stern; Wyatt L. Du Frane; Karen A. Weitemeyer; Steven Constable; Jeffery J. Roberts, presented in *OS43B. Marine and Permafrost Gas Hydrate Systems IV Posters*.

PARTICIPANTS AND OTHER COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS

Name: Steven Constable
 Project Role: PI
 Nearest person month worked: 1
 Contribution to project: Management, scientific direction
 Funding support: Institutional matching funds
 Foreign collaboration: Yes
 Country: United Kingdom
 Travelled: No

Name: Peter Kannberg
 Project Role: PhD student
 Nearest person month worked: 3
 Contribution to project: Development of analysis tools
 Funding support: Institutional matching funds
 Foreign collaboration: No

CHANGES/PROBLEMS

We are getting off to a slightly slow start as a result of the busy holiday and meeting season in Q4, but we are likely to make rapid progress as we start the instrument design, so no problems or changes are anticipated.

BUDGETARY INFORMATION

Table 2: Spend profile

baseline	Budget Period 1							
	10/1/12 – 12/31/12		Q1		Q2		Q3	
	Q4	Cum. Total	Q1	Cum. Total	Q2	Cum. Total	Q3	Cum. Total
Baseline cost:								
Federal	\$49,969	\$49,969	\$33,192	\$83,161	\$19,810	\$10,2971	\$18,771	\$121,742
Non-federal	\$9,897	\$9,897	\$9,897	\$19,794	\$9,897	\$29,692	\$29,897	\$59,589
Total	\$59,866	\$59,866	\$43,089	\$102,955	\$29,707	\$132,663	\$48,668	\$181,331
Actual cost:								
Federal	\$19,027	\$19,027						
Non-federal	\$10,874	\$10,874						
Total	\$29,901	\$29,901						
Variance:								
Federal	-\$30,942	-\$30,942						
Non-federal	\$977	\$977						
Total	-\$29,964	-\$29,964						

Entries for the last quarter reported are estimates, since expenditures for the last month of the quarter have not yet been reported to the PI.