

# Oil & Natural Gas Technology

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## Quarterly Research Performance Progress Report (Period ending 12/31/2014)

### Characterizing the Response of the Cascadia Margin Gas Hydrate Reservoir to Bottom Water Warming Along the Upper Continental Slope Project Period: October 1, 2013 – September 30, 2016

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2013, the University of Washington initiated a three-year study funded through DOE-NETL entitled: Characterizing the response of the Cascadia margin gas hydrate reservoir to bottom water warming along the upper continental slope. The objective of this project is to understand the response of the WA margin gas hydrate system to contemporary warming of bottom water along the upper continental slope. Through pre-cruise analysis and modeling of archive and recent geophysical and oceanographic data, we have (1) inventoried methane hydrates along the WA margin and defined the upper limit of gas hydrate stability, (2) refined margin-wide estimates of heat flow and geothermal gradients, (3) characterized decadal scale temporal variations of bottom water temperatures at the upper continental slope, and (4) used numerical simulations to provide quantitative estimates of how the shallow boundary of gas hydrate stability responds to modern environmental change. These pre-cruise results have provided the context for a systematic geophysical and geochemical survey of methane seepage along the upper continental slope of the WA margin during a 10-day field program from 10-19 October 2014. This systematic inventory of methane emissions along this climate-sensitive margin corridor and comprehensive sediment and water column sampling program will focus on determining methane sources (microbial, thermogenic, gas hydrate dissociation), sinks, and fluxes within the sediment and water column, and how they relate to contemporary intermediate water warming.

During this reporting period, we conducted a 10-day field program on the *R/V Thompson* from 10-19 October 2014. The field program was successful and consisted of an along-margin multi-beam sonar survey of active methane seepage and targeted coring, water column sampling, and heat flow measurements. Sampling activities were focused at seep sites identified within the depth range that our earlier modeling efforts suggest gas hydrates should be dissociating in response to contemporary bottom water warming. Detailed seafloor slope maps generated for the entire WA upper continental slope and backscatter analysis of archive multi-beam data further guided coring operations. Coring locations were further refined by real-time processing of the shipboard EM302 multi-beam sonar data. As a result of careful planning and an excellent shipboard scientific party, we accomplished much more during the research expedition than anticipated. We surveyed the upper continental slope of the entire Washington margin and discovered several new seep sites, sampled nine independent seep sites at the upper limit of gas hydrate stability, deployed 39 gravity cores and two piston cores, deployed 20 CTD casts for full water column sampling, and sub-sampled >300 sediment whole-rounds for pore water geochemical analyses. We analyzed for pore water salinity, pH, and alkalinity shipboard, as well as bottom water C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>4</sub> hydrocarbon concentrations. These shipboard results identified several sites with pore water salinities <20 psu with some as low as 10 psu, and many of the cores penetrated the sulfate-methane transition zone. We have now completed Phase II of the project and have moved on to Phase III, the shore-based analytical program. Shore-based Cl, SO<sub>4</sub>, C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>4</sub> hydrocarbon, and sediment porosity analyses are in progress, and should be completed by the next reporting period. Though we processed the multi-beam bathymetry data shipboard in near real-time, shore-based post-processing of the mid-water column data and 3.5 kHz sub-bottom data is in progress.

In addition to the research expedition and the start of the shore-based analytical program, the

manuscript detailing the results of our thermal simulations on the response of the Washington margin gas hydrate reservoir to long-term bottom water warming has been published in *Geophysical Research Letters*. The paper generated a considerable amount of public interest and received significant news and popular media coverage.

## **PROGRESS, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION**

### **Task 1.0 Project management and planning**

*Completed in previous reporting period* - The project management plan was finalized and submitted on October 17, 2013.

### **Task 2.0 Compile relevant archive data**

*Completed in previous reporting period* – We have compiled the relevant MCS profiles and swath bathymetry on the WA margin. All available high-resolution CTD, glider and ARGO float temperature profiles, extending to depths below 200 m, were extracted and compiled from the World Ocean Database 2013 (National Oceanographic Data Center) for the region 124.5°W to 127.5°W and 46.5°N to 48.5°N off the Washington margin. We have also compiled all of the acoustic backscatter data from archive and recent (EM122 and EM302 data) *R/V Langseth*, *R/V Thompson*, and *R/V Atlantis* expeditions at the Washington margin.

### **Task 3.0 Estimate sediment porosity and in situ thermal conductivities**

*Completed in a previous reporting period* – We converted existing archive MCS data to Vp-vs-depth profiles and then used these data to estimate sediment porosities. From the estimated sediment porosities, we calculated thermal conductivities along the WA continental slope. We have completed a compilation of sediment core archives from legacy coring programs on WA margin for sediment lithology in order to provide guidance regarding the distribution and partitioning of the sediments into turbidites and pelagic sediments within a specific geographic area. These data are necessary to convert seismic velocities and structural components into a plausible model of thermal conductivity.

### **Task 4.0 Constrain hydrate distribution and geothermal gradients**

*Completed this reporting period* – We have evaluated Bottom Simulating Reflectors (BSRs) from the COAST MCS cruise to establish the distribution of gas hydrates and geothermal gradients along the WA margin in combination with heat flow measured during our recent WA margin heat and fluid flow survey (Johnson et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2014). This work has been completed for the region surveyed during the COAST MCS expedition in 2012, which overlaps with our proposed track-line for our research expedition in October 2014. We evaluated BSRs from other legacy datasets along the WA margin, including both commercial (Western Geophysical) and USGS MCS expeditions in the area.

### **Task 5.0 Analyze recent temperature data and long-term bottom water record**

*Completed in a previous reporting period* – As stated in the Executive Summary, after filtering, there are 2122 high-quality, open-ocean temperature profiles that were linearly interpolated to 10 m depth intervals ranging from 50 to 1000 m. Averaged over the entire region, the temperature at the upper limit of gas hydrate stability shows persistent warming over the last 40 years. The time series also clearly shows the influence of the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) at the upper

limit of gas hydrate stability. Taking into account other independent variables such as latitude, water depth, and the monthly Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) index, our calculations studying sensitivity to methodological choices yield a constant and significant warming trend off the WA margin from 1960 to present.

### **Task 6.0 Non-steady state thermal simulations and impact of bottom water warming on the upper limit of the gas hydrate stability field**

*Completed in a previous reporting period* – In collaboration with Robert Harris at Oregon State University we used a 2-D finite-element conductive heat flow model to simulate the change in temperature distribution in the shallow sediments at the upper limit of gas hydrate stability resulting from the warming intermediate-depth water temperatures. The upper boundary of the thermal model is based on the historic temperature records on the WA margin, and the bottom boundary condition is set by the heat flow estimated from regional BSR data, historic heat flow surveys, and borehole data. In situ thermal conductivity is estimated from MCS data using vertical seismic velocity profiles to estimate porosity, then porosity is converted to thermal conductivity (Task 3.0). Thermal diffusivities were also measured during a recent GeoPRISMS expedition off the coast of WA by Johnson and Solomon (Johnson et al., 2013, EOS: Homola et al., in press, Elementa, 2014). The base of the gas hydrate stability zone is calculated integrating the Pitzer equations in Tishchenko et al. (2005). The model is stepped through time over the 45-year historic record of bottom water temperatures for the WA margin. Results show that the upslope limit of the gas hydrate stability zone on the WA margin is sensitive to the contemporary warming of intermediate waters and retreats downslope over the 40-year period along all three profiles simulated along the margin. This modeling effort guided the field program in Phase II of the research project. The results of the characterization of the long-term bottom warming trend and these model simulations are described in Hautala et al. (2014).

### **Task 7.0 Planning and Preparations for Research Expedition**

*Completed this reporting period* – During this reporting period, the PIs met weekly to discuss our sampling strategy, work flow, and cruise track. We completed planning and preparations for the October 2014 research expedition at the beginning of the quarter. The expedition occurred from 10-19 October 2014, and we successfully achieved the objectives of the cruise plan and were able to sample many more sites than originally planned.

### **Task 8.0 Research Expedition**

*Completed this reporting period* – We surveyed the upper continental slope of the WA margin from the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the Columbia River. During the expedition, we sampled nine independent seep sites at the upper limit of gas hydrate stability, deployed 39 gravity cores and two piston cores, deployed 20 CTD casts for full water column sampling, and sub-sampled >300 sediment whole-rounds for pore water geochemical analyses. We conducted ‘localized’ EM 302 surveys over each seep site to better refine targets for detailed coring and water column sampling. The survey at each site included EM302 and 3.5 kHz cross-track surveys, ADCP surveys to determine ‘down-current’ direction of emissions, CTD and Niskin bottle casts, and a suite of gravity cores for pore fluid chemistry. The cores were immediately sub-sampled shipboard in a cold room for both geochemistry and microbiology, and hydrocarbon samples collected along the core length will be analyzed via headspace methods on shore. Pore fluids were extracted in Ti squeezers under a hydraulic press and with Rhizon samplers. Salinity,

alkalinity, and pH were immediately analyzed shipboard, and the remaining pore fluid samples were preserved for shore-based hydrocarbon, major and minor element, and stable isotope ratio analyses. Approximately 23 Niskin water samples were collected from each of the 20 during CTD/hydrocasts targeting the seep sites. Water samples were preserved for shore-based geochemical analyses.

### **Task 9.0 Processing of Geophysical Data**

*In progress* – We are currently processing the remaining ship-board geophysical data, including ADCP, CTD, and 3.5 kHz profiles. Though we processed the multi-beam bathymetry and mid-water column data in real-time shipboard using Fledermaus and the FM-Midwater tool, additional post-expedition processing is in progress.

### **Tasks 10.0-12.0 Shore-based Geochemical Analyses and Modeling**

*In progress* – Pore water and water column sub-samples were preserved for each type of analyses and are stored under the appropriate conditions at UW. We are currently conducting the Cl, SO<sub>4</sub>, and C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>4</sub> hydrocarbon as well as sediment porosity analyses, and they should be completed by the next reporting period. The remaining concentration and isotope ratio analyses of both pore water and water column samples will be the primary focus of the research program over the next year.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The first six tasks comprise Phase 1 of the research project aimed at providing the context for a systematic geophysical and geochemical survey of methane seepage along the upper continental slope of the WA margin. These six tasks have been completed. We completed the preparations for the research expedition (Task 7), and successfully conducted the field program from 10-19 October 2014 completing Phase II of this project. We have now moved on to Phase III focused on post-expedition analyses, interpretation, publication, and reporting.

## **MILESTONE STATUS**

Milestone #1 – Determination of the gas hydrate distribution and geothermal gradients along the WA continental slope based on COAST MCS data

Completed June 2014, however additional work continues on legacy datasets north of the COAST survey area.

Milestone #2 – Finalize planning for cruise tracks/stations, identification of shipboard scientific party, and preparations for on-board data/sample acquisition and processing.

Completed September 2014.

Milestone #3 – 2014 field program on the R/V Thompson

Completed October 2014.

## **COST STATUS**

During the fourth quarter, a total of \$164,420 was spent to support the research expedition and post-expedition analytical program (the cost share breakdown by month is below). In addition, the UW cost share of \$200,000 was applied.

October 2014 = \$131,978  
November 2014 = \$24,229  
December 2014 = \$8,213  
University of Washington Cost Share = \$200,000

### **PROBLEMS OR DELAYS**

None.

### **PRODUCTS**

Completion of this quarterly report

Hautala, S.L., Solomon, E.A., Johnson, H.P., Harris, R.N., Miller, U.K., 2014. Dissociation of Cascadia margin gas hydrates in response to contemporary ocean warming, *Geophysical Research Letters*, 41, 8486-8494.