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Ocean Exploration Trust Launches Expedition with New Mapping Sonar to Explore Deeper than Ever!

Corps of Exploration onboard E/V Nautilus will spend 13 days at sea mapping the Central Pacific seafloor and surveying open-ocean seabird biodiversity.

[Click here for accompanying assets.](#)

(New London, CT – June 10, 2026) – The Ocean Exploration Trust’s (OET) Exploration Vessel (E/V) *Nautilus* sets sail today on our first expedition of 2026, bringing with it a brand-new piece of multibeam sonar technology that allows us to explore deeper than ever before. The [Pacific Mapping \(NA178\) expedition](#) will be the first operational deployment of the newly installed [Kongsberg EM 304 MKII multibeam](#) on E/V *Nautilus*! This essential upgrade was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Office of Naval Research (ONR) awarded to the University of New Hampshire’s Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping (UNH/CCOM) and implemented in partnership with the sonar manufacturer Kongsberg Discovery. Through this partnership, E/V *Nautilus* serves as a unique field platform enabling ONR, UNH/CCOM, and Kongsberg Discovery to advance ocean mapping, autonomous surface and underwater vehicle development, and hands-on training of early career scientists.

The ocean remains more than 70% unmapped at high resolution, with most of the unmapped areas in the Pacific lying at depths between 4,000 and 6,000 meters. The new EM 304 will substantially increase OET’s ability to gather data from deep seafloor environments and effectively double the area E/V *Nautilus* was able to map previously, halving survey times and reducing the costs of mapping in remote areas. This capability will enable OET to contribute more effectively to [NOAA’s Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute](#), the [Seabed 2030 initiative](#), and other programs that expand our knowledge of the vast expanses of unmapped seafloor within U.S. waters and beyond.

Acquired with funding provided by the Office of Naval Research to the University of New Hampshire’s Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping and implemented in partnership with industry leader Kongsberg, OET is proud to host this new acoustic mapping system. Not only will the system be used to map previously unsurveyed areas, but it will also be used to field-test new software and system improvements for the benefit of the scientific community, a collaboration that showcases the importance of private-public partnerships in increasing the exploration efficiency of our largely unmapped ocean.



“This sonar represents the latest state-of-the-art system for mapping deep ocean habitats ranging from the edge of the continental shelf to the deepest parts of the ocean,” says **OET Mapping Manager Derek Sowers**. “The EM 304 is optimized for features of interest we tend to explore, like complex canyons, seamounts, ridges, trenches, seafloor spreading centers, and subsea volcanoes. It allows us to map and reveal these amazing features in greater detail and sets us up for success for further exploration using our ROVs and other assets.”

From Hawai'i to Guam, the expedition will map previously uncharted seafloor, with the goal of filling gaps in seabed mapping and thereby supporting the priorities of the [US National Strategy for Mapping, Exploration, and Characterization](#), and the Seabed 2030 initiative. In addition to continuous seafloor mapping operations, the expedition will leverage the ship's path across over 3,800 miles of open ocean to survey marine biodiversity in some of the most remote areas of the Pacific. For this purpose, trained observers will document seabirds and other marine fauna from the observation deck of E/V *Nautilus*, thereby helping to fill the large data gaps in some of the most poorly explored parts of the world.

OET's five 2026 expeditions will fill critical gaps in ocean knowledge and support US and international scientific priorities by characterizing the deep ocean's habitats, biodiversity, bathymetry, and geological formations, including marine critical minerals and the environments where they are found. The data gathered aboard E/V *Nautilus* establishes a scientific baseline that future research, resource management, and responsible ocean stewardship decisions depend on. The goals of each expedition are developed with national exploration priorities and input from scientists, resource managers, and local community stakeholders in the regions where the expeditions will take place.

As the pace of ocean discovery accelerates, OET's acquisition of this mapping system will increase opportunities for scientific discovery and for sharing this data publicly to catalyze further scientific research and management activities. As with other data from E/V *Nautilus* expeditions, the mapping data collected with the new EM 304 system will be made publicly available, thereby providing an important foundation that can be leveraged by researchers across many disciplines.

“Sadly, at this point in time, over 70% of the ocean floor remains unmapped,” says **Larry Mayer, Director of the Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping**. “The new mapping system on E/V *Nautilus* will be a key contributor to filling this gap while at the same time, providing an experimental platform from which we can explore new approaches to making mapping more efficient and effective.”

The expedition will be streamed live on [NautilusLive.org](#), a 24-hour platform that brings ocean exploration directly to viewers from around the world, who can join from anywhere with an Internet connection. Telepresence technology allows viewers to engage with the team at sea, asking questions and receiving real-time behind-the-scenes updates via [NautilusLive.org](#), as well as on social media. Classrooms worldwide are invited to connect with the at-sea team of STEAM professionals via [free educational Q&A interactions](#).

About the Ocean Exploration Trust



The Ocean Exploration Trust was founded in 2007 by Dr. Robert Ballard to explore the ocean, seeking out multi-disciplinary discoveries while pushing the boundaries of STEAM education and technological innovation. Our international program is launched from aboard Exploration Vessel (E/V) *Nautilus*, offering live exploration to participants on shore and the public via live video, audio, and data feeds. [Learn more about Ocean Exploration Trust.](#)

Ocean Exploration Trust explores the deep ocean and makes all data from E/V *Nautilus* expeditions freely and publicly available to anyone – researchers, governments, conservation organizations, and communities. We conduct our Pacific expeditions as guests in ocean regions with deep Indigenous and cultural histories, and we take seriously our responsibility to be transparent about our work and our partnerships. We are working to earn and maintain the trust of the communities in whose waters we operate. We welcome direct conversations and collaborative partnership inquiries at info@oet.org.

The 2026 E/V *Nautilus* expeditions are sponsored by NOAA Ocean Exploration via the Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute. OET program sponsors and partners for 2026 also include LeeWay Marine, the Office of Naval Research, Flying Fish, National Center for Education & the Economy, QPS, and the Phillip Stephenson Foundation. [Learn more about our partners and sponsors.](#)