

Brian Hawkins, PhD PMP
Program Manager for Battelle Arctic Research Operations
Arctic Research Support & Logistics Services Program
Mobile: 614.551.7148
hawkinsb@battelleecology.org

Helicopter Support to Toolik Field Station

Presentation for Toolik Steering Committee Meeting on 18 January 2023

Background

- Under the Arctic Research Support & Logistics Services contract, the Battelle Arctic Research Operations Team provides helicopter support to TFS including a helicopter coordinator and multiple helicopters/pilots during the field season
- Multiple issues occurred during the 2022 field season related to helicopter support at Toolik, including safety, harassment, and code of conduct-related issues
- Toolik Steering Committee sent Battelle a letter (4 January) to express concerns and make specific requests related to Toolik helicopter support

The Battelle ARO Team, the NSF, and the Toolik Steering Committee are all aligned on safety as the highest priority and the Battelle ARO Team is implementing enhancements to improve support for the 2023 Season

Request 1:

Safe, Professional Behavior by Helicopter Staff

- After commencing ARSLS Program operations for the 2021 Field Season, Battelle performed a Best Value competition, consistent with Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) for Toolik helicopter support
 - The evaluation for that 2021-2022 competition involved a combination of technical factors and price, with technical factors including approximately 60 specific criteria spanning requirements for Flight Operations, Aircraft, Pilots, Maintenance, Refueling, Hazardous Materials, and Safety
 - Battelle is re-competing the Toolik helicopter support subcontract using expanded criteria developed in collaboration with NSF and the Department of the Interior Office of Aviation Services (DOI OAS)
 - Additional criteria were added in the areas of Flight Operations, Pilot Requirements, and Maintenance Requirements; some Refueling Requirements were removed (because Battelle ARO intends to provide the fueling system for future years to increase the vendor pool)



Request 1: Safe, Professional Behavior by Helicopter Staff

- Changes to evaluation criteria/requirements for the Toolik helicopter support procurement for 2023:

Flight operations updated to emphasize experience at Toolik, experience supporting science, experience in mountainous terrain, and a documented safety program

Criteria

Go / No Go Criteria (All Go required for consideration)

Flight Operations Requirements

Aircraft Requirements

Pilot Requirements

Maintenance Requirements

Refueling Requirements

HAZMAT Requirements

Safety Requirements

Pilot updated to evaluate the vendors' approach to providing pilots with the experience and credentials needed

Refueling updated to remove the requirement for a fuel system

Maintenance updated to emphasize maintenance certifications

Request 2: Excellent Communication between Helicopter Staff & Researchers

- Based on the feedback from the Toolik Steering Committee and experience from the 2022 Field Season, Battelle has initiated a root cause analysis of the underlying issues (communication and scheduling) to identify and develop corrective actions to improve performance



Request 3:

Clear Channel of Communication from Researchers to Battelle ARO

- The Battelle ARO Team, the NSF, the Toolik Steering Committee, and the research community all feel that a clear channel for direct, timely feedback from researchers to Battelle ARO is essential to enabling prompt action
 - Prompt feedback regarding the Pollux pilot's in-flight behavior led to a timely safety stand-down during the 2022 field season and discussions with Toolik Field Station on establishing criteria for lifting the stand-down.



Request 3:

Clear Channel of Communication from Researchers to Battelle ARO

- Multiple options are possible for clear communications, including:
 - Dedicating time during the weekly Toolik Facilities & Operations call between UAF IAB and Battelle ARO
 - Posting signs providing an email address and telephone number to contact with feedback on helicopter services and including that info in the flight plan template that is used throughout the season
 - Emailing PIs periodically during the period of helicopter support at Toolik to solicit feedback
 - “Snap” surveys using Likert scales after every flight, with a check-box option for requesting follow-up discussion

Feedback Requested

- The Battelle ARO Team welcomes feedback on the planned path forward and is committed to providing the best possible support to Science at Toolik Station
- We welcome and encourage you to reach out to the Battelle ARO Team with feedback, comments, and concerns at any time

