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POLAR SEA (WAGB 11) ACHIEVES THE ARCTIC SERVICE MEDAL

SEATTLE—The crew of U.S. Coast Guard Cutter POLAR SEA, homeported at Pier 36, Seattle, was awarded the Arctic Service Medal for operating north of 60 degrees North latitude for twenty one consecutive days. This is the first time the ship has received this award in ten years. Returning to Seattle on December 5th, the six week patrol to Arctic Alaska showcased the icebreaker's multi-mission capabilities and the breadth of maritime responsibility assigned to the USCG.

POLAR SEA departed Seattle on October 23rd to operationally test propulsion system upgrades following a five month shipyard availability. The cutter transited to Kodiak, AK where the crew attended fishery law enforcement training and embarked an HH-65C Dolphin helicopter and crew. Personnel from Afloat Training Group, Everett, provided training to the crew on casualty and damage control during the transit.

In support of the Coast Guard's Marine Environmental Protection mission, the ship tested a DIP-600 oil skimmer system off the coast of Nome, AK. This system is deployed from Coast Guard ships to clean up oil spills. The Coast Guard is the lead federal agency in responding to marine pollution incidents. POLAR SEA also hosted a U.S. Fish and Wildlife ornithologist conducting a bird population study.

POLAR SEA sailed into the Arctic Ocean to conduct ice trials on the improved engine plant. These ice operations also supported the Coast Guard's Arctic Domain Awareness mission. The ship patrolled to 77°55'N, only 725 miles shy of the North Pole. While north of the Arctic Circle, the icebreaker experienced 5 days of darkness when the sun did not rise, and temperatures plunged to -7°F.

On the return trip south, POLAR SEA patrolled the Maritime Boundary Line between Russia and the United States to enforce treaties protecting American fisheries. The cutter also enforced federal law by conducting an at-sea boarding of a U.S. flagged fishing vessel in the Bering Sea.

The 399' Coast Guard icebreaker is capable of conducting a variety of missions and is designed to operate in both Polar Regions. POLAR SEA is capable of breaking up to 20 feet of ice. Commissioned in 1978, POLAR SEA is a conventionally-powered heavy ice breaker with a crew of 143.