

7. NESDIS Ocean Winds and Rain Experiment

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Primary IFEX Goal: 2 - Develop and refine measurement technologies that provide improved real-time monitoring of TC intensity, structure, and environment

Motivation: This effort aims to improve our understanding of microwave scatterometer retrievals of the ocean surface wind field and to evaluate new remote sensing techniques/technologies. The NOAA/NESDIS/Center for Satellite Applications and Research in conjunction with the University of Massachusetts (UMASS) Microwave Remote Sensing Laboratory, the NOAA Hurricane Research Division, and the NOAA Aircraft Operations Center have been conducting flight experiments during hurricane season for the past several years. The Ocean Winds experiment is part of an ongoing field program whose goal is to further our understanding of microwave scatterometer and radiometer retrievals of the ocean surface winds in high wind speed conditions and in the presence of rain for all wind speeds. This knowledge is used to help improve and interpret operational wind retrievals from current and future satellite-based sensors. The hurricane environment provides the adverse atmospheric and ocean surface conditions required.

The Imaging Wind and Rain Airborne Profiler (IWRAP), which is also known as the Advanced Wind and Rain Airborne Profiler (AWRAP), was designed and built by UMass and is the critical sensor for these experiments. IWRAP/AWRAP consists of two dual-polarized, dual-incidence angle radar profilers operating at Ku-band and at C-band, which measure profiles of reflectivity and Doppler velocity of precipitation in addition to the ocean surface backscatter. The Stepped-Frequency Microwave Radiometer (SFMR) and GPS dropsonde system are also essential instrumentation on the NOAA-P3 aircraft for this effort. The NASA GORE (GNSS reflection) system is also desired to provide measurements to support the NASA CYGNSS mission.

The Ocean Winds P-3 flight experiment program has several objectives:

- Calibration and validation of satellite-based ocean surface vector wind (OSVW) sensors such as ASCAT and OSCAT.
- Product improvement and development for current and planned satellite-based sensors (ASCAT, RapidScat, ScatSat, CYGNSS and SCA)
- Testing of new remote sensing technologies for possible future satellite missions (risk reduction) such as the dual-frequency scatterometer concept. A key objective for this year will be the collection of cross-polarized data at C-band to support ESA and EUMETSAT studies for the ASCAT follow-on (SCA), which will be part of EPS-SG.
- Advancing our understanding of broader scientific questions such as:
 - Rain processes in tropical cyclones and severe storms: the coincident dual-polarized, dual-frequency, dual-incidence measurements would enable us to improve our understanding of precipitation processes in these moderate to extreme rainfall rate events.
 - Atmospheric boundary layer (ABL) wind fields: the conical scanning sampling geometry and the Doppler capabilities of this system provide a unique source of measurements from which the ABL winds can be derived. The raw data system will enable us to use spectral techniques to retrieve the wind field all the way down to the surface.
 - Analysis of boundary layer rolls: linearly organized coherent structures are prevalent in tropical cyclone boundary layers, consisting of an overturning “roll” circulation in the plane roughly perpendicular to the mean flow direction. IWRAP has been shown to resolve the kilometer-scale roll features, and the vast quantity of data this instrument has already collected offers a unique opportunity to study them.
 - Drag coefficient, C_d : extending the range of wind speeds for which the drag coefficient is known is of paramount importance to further our understanding of the coupling between the wind and surface waves under strong wind forcing, and has many important implications for hurricane and climate modeling. The new raw data capability, which allows us to retrieve wind profiles closer to the ocean surface, can also be exploited to derive drag coefficients by extrapolating the derived wind profiles down to 0 m altitude.

Flight Profiles:

Altitude:

The sensitivity of the IWRAP/AWRAP system defines the preferred flight altitude to be below 10,000 ft to enable the system to still measure the ocean surface in the presence of rain conditions typical of tropical systems. With the Air Force typically flying at 10,000 ft pressure this, we have typically ended up with an operating altitude of 7,000 ft radar. Operating at a constant radar altitude is desired to minimize changes in range and thus measurement footprint on the ground. Higher altitudes would limit the ability of IWRAP/AWRAP consistently see the surface during precipitation, but these altitudes would provide useful data, such as measurements through the melting layer, to study some of the broader scientific questions.

Maneuvers:

Straight and level flight with a nominal pitch offset unique to each P-3 is desired during most flight legs. Constant bank circles of 10-30 degrees have been recently implemented, as a method to obtain measurements at incidence angles greater than the current antenna was design for. These would be inserted along flight legs where the desired environmental conditions were present. Generally it would be a region of no rain and where we might expect the winds to be consistent over a range of about 6-10 miles, about the diameter of a circle. This would not be something we would want to do in a high gradient region where the conditions would change significantly while we did the circle.

Patterns:

Typically an ideal ocean winds flight pattern would include a survey pattern (figure 4 or butterfly) that extended 20-50 nm from the storm center. The actual distance would be dictated by the storm size and safety of flight considerations. Dependent upon what was observed during the survey pattern a racetrack or lawnmower pattern would be setup over a feature of interest such as a rain band or wind band.

Storm types:

The ideal ocean winds storm would typically be a developed hurricane (category 1 and above) where a large range of wind speeds and rain rates would be found. However, data collected within tropical depressions and tropical storms would still provide very useful observations of rain impacts.