

Alaska, USA

Cross border travel

- People

- You may need a visa to enter the United States of America, it depends on your citizenship.
Read more about entry into the USA and the different types of visas here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas.html>
- Some countries participate in the Visa Waiver Program, and if you are a citizen of one of those countries, you will not need a visa so long as you apply for the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), which is good for two years. ESTA will allow you to enter for stays in the USA of 90 days or less. When you apply for ESTA, you (as a scientist) need to indicate that your purpose is business, not tourism.
Find a list of countries that participate in the Visa Waiver Program, and ESTA application information here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/tourism-visit/visa-waiver-program.html#ESTA>
For more information, see FAQs: <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/faq>
- If your country does not participate in the Visa Waiver Program, you (as a scientist) will need to obtain a B-1 visa for short-term business. Do not get a tourist visa, as that will make it difficult or impossible to have your travel expenses reimbursed by a U.S. field station.
- All researchers will also need a letter of invitation from the hosting field station, for customs (whether you use ESTA or not).
- If you are planning to study or work at a university in the USA for longer than 90 days (for example for a sabbatical or exchange program), you will need to apply for a J-1 visa, which requires sponsorship by an educational institution in the U.S. Other forms of employment visas and immigration require a different process.
- Note that all visa applications (and ESTA application) may require payment of a fee to process the applications!
- Note that it takes time to process an application!

Covid-19

It is highly recommended to check with the US Department of State website (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/ea/covid-19-information.html>), the US Customs and Border Protection website (<https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/coronavirus>), Alaska State website (<https://covid19.alaska.gov/>), and/or air carriers, to evaluate the current situation before booking plane tickets.

More information on travel restrictions can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

Note that travelers in violation of travel restrictions will have their ESTA and/or visas canceled!

- Instrumentation (import/export)
 - There are no general permits required for bringing scientific instruments into the US, and they are normally not subject to duty. However, you will need to declare them to customs. Find more information here: <https://www.cbp.gov/document/guidance/3550-073a-duty-free-entry-scientific-instruments>

- Samples (import/export)
 - Import or export of threatened species (listed by the CITES convention) requires a permit. The US is a party to CITES and the US Fish and Wildlife Service is the agency with responsibility for implementing CITES in the US. For more information and lists of species, see <https://www.fws.gov/international/cites/>.
 - The US does not require export permits for plant samples^[ET1], however if your home country requires a “phytosanitary certificate” for import of plant samples from the U.S., you may obtain one through the US Department of Agriculture here: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/planthealth/sa_export/export-services-program.
 - Importation of soils into the US always requires a permit, and is strictly regulated by the US Department of Agriculture, because of the possibility of introducing pathogenic organisms. Find more information here: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/planthealth/import-information/permits/plant-pests/sa_soil.
Export of soils from the US does not require a US permit, but may require a permit from your home country, which should be obtained ahead of time, as a copy of the permit will be needed for shipping.

- Chemicals (import/export)
 - In general, it is recommended to use a shipping/transport agency, in order to reassure compliance with the complex set of regulations.
 - There are strict regulations in the US that govern the transport and disposal of chemicals and radioisotopes, and these must be followed even if chemicals are imported. In addition, there may be customs considerations for imported chemicals.
 - All chemicals imported into the US must comply with the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). More information on the TSCA can be found here: <https://www.epa.gov/tsca-import-export-requirements/tsca-requirements-importing-chemicals>.
 - Use and transport of radioisotopes are regulated by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). Find more information here: <https://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/cfr/part110/full-text.html>
 - An excellent alternative to bringing your own chemicals with you is to order them from US chemical vendors and have them shipped directly to the field station at which you will be working. In addition, there may be some chemicals available at the field station, if you need only small quantities. Please consult with the station that is offering you access.

Access to specific areas

- If your work is in a State of Alaska legislatively designated Special Area (state game refuge, critical habitat area, or wildlife sanctuary), you may need a special area permit. More information can be found here: http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=uselicense.do_i_need_permit
- Find a map and information about where Special Areas are located here: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=conservationareas.locator>
- Contact details of the local habitat section offices can be found here: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=uselicense.contacts>

- Remote areas
 - No permits identified

- Protected areas
 - Within U.S. National Parks and Wildlife Refuges located in Alaska, access may be regulated, and destructive research and sample collection are generally not permitted.
 - Contact the relevant National Park, Preserve, or Wildlife Refuge Office, as regulations vary from one protected area to another.
 - Find an overall list of Parks in Alaska here: <https://www.nps.gov/state/ak/index.htm>
 - Some Parks and Refuges that may be of interest to researchers working in Alaska:
 - Gates of the Arctic National Park: <https://www.nps.gov/gaar/index.htm>
 - Bering Land Bridge National Preserve: <https://www.nps.gov/bela/index.htm>
 - Cape Krusenstern National Monument: <https://www.nps.gov/cakr/index.htm>
 - Kobuk Valley National Park: <https://www.nps.gov/kova/index.htm>
 - Noatak National Preserve: <https://www.nps.gov/noat/index.htm>
 - Denali National Park and Preserve: <https://www.nps.gov/dena/index.htm>
 - Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/arctic/>

- Restricted areas
 - No permits identified

Fieldwork and sample collection

- You may need zero, one or more research permits when conducting research in Alaska.
- Whether you need to obtain permits depends on the area you want to go to and the type of research you conduct. The most general permits are described below.
- There is no central coordination of research applications in the USA, so scientists need to identify all relevant permits themselves and obtain these from relevant authorities. Both national and regional agencies are included in this section.
- Note that it may take up to 6 months to process an application!

- Permit to conduct research (observations, handling and sampling within all disciplines, incl. collection of genetic resources)
 - The USA is not yet a signatory to the Nagoya Protocol of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and there are no national permits required for collection of genetic samples. However, your home country may have rules about the importation of genetic samples.

- Land use permits for research: In Alaska, land-use permits for research are handled by agencies that own or have jurisdiction over the land. These land-use permits also cover research instrumentation installed at your research site. Maps showing land status of the State of Alaska, the area around Toolik Field Station, and the area around Utqiagvik may be found at: <https://toolik.alaska.edu/gis/maps/maps.php?category=general>
- Research involving animals: Any research involving the handling of animals (e.g. trapping, surgery, etc.) requires an approved protocol from a University's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, which is usually obtained by the researcher's home institution.
- For research that involves fish or waters containing fish, you may need a fish habitat permit from the Alaska Dept of Fish and Game (which regulates all waters in Alaska, whether under the control of the State of Alaska directly or not). Find information here: http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=uselicense.do_i_need_permit

Field Instrumentation

- Area allotment for instrumentation
 - See Land use permits for research under 'Permit to conduct research' above.
- Drone use
 - Note that the regulatory environment for drone use is complex and challenging. Therefore, it is recommended to contact the managers at the field stations well in advance to check, if they can meet your needs (e.g. with licensed operators who can collect imagery for you).
 - The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulates the use of drones in the USA. Use of a drone for research falls under commercial regulations. Part 107 Commercial Use requires international users to obtain a Remote Pilot's Certificate (RPC) or be supervised by a person with a current RPC under the stipulation that the person holding the RPC must be able to take immediate control of the drone in case of emergency. To obtain an RPC, international users must pass an in-person aeronautical knowledge test administered at a designated testing center. Testing centers are only located in the US. The FAA currently does not recognize any foreign drone licensure.
 - If the drone is registered in a foreign country, you must submit an application (<https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/docs/Part%20375%2012%20flight%20SA%20Instructions%202011.pdf>) for a Part 375 foreign aircraft permit at least 15 days in advance of the flight.
 - If the home country does not require drone registration, you must contact the Department of Transportation Air Carrier Licensing Division for help completing the foreign aircraft permit application.
 - Register the drone using the FAA's DroneZone website: <https://faadronezone.faa.gov/#/>. This is different from the above foreign aircraft permit, and both must be done. After registering with the FAA, you are required to mark your drone with the registration number.

- Additional resources:
Office of the Secretary of Transportation (OST), Office of International Aviation Information for International UAS Operators in the US:
https://www.faa.gov/uas/resources/foreign_operators/
Department of Transportation foreign aircraft permit (Part 375 application):
<https://www.transportation.gov/policy/aviation-policy/licensing/foreign-carriers>

Safety related permits

- Weapon
 - If you wish to bring a firearm and/or ammunition into the US, you will need a permit from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) (<https://www.atf.gov/>)
 - Find the application/permit form for temporary import of firearms and ammunition by nonimmigrant aliens here: <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/docs/atf-f-5330-3dpdf/download>
 - Note that the processing time to receive approval varies, but can easily be as long as 2 – 3 months! The permit is valid for one year. You may use it to cross the border with your firearms any number of times during that period. The form must include serial numbers of all firearms and any ammunition you will bring into the country. You will undergo an ATF background check. Your form will be returned to you indicating whether or not it has been approved.
 - When you arrive at the border, you must declare your firearm, provide the required documents, and answer all questions truthfully. The border services officer must be satisfied that you have a valid reason for importing the firearm, and may check to ensure that you have stored your firearm properly for transportation. They will review your paperwork and may verify that the firearm you have with you matches the one described in the documents.
 - You should also check field station specific requirements for using a firearm (e.g. safety training, storage plan).
- Radio permits
 - Radios and Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) are licensed by the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Information can be found here: <https://www.fcc.gov/wireless/bureau-divisions/mobility-division/personal-radio-services>
 - You can operate a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) device in any place where the FCC regulates radio communications. A PLB device must be certified by the FCC. A certified PLB device has an identifying label placed on it by the manufacturer. Find more information on how to operate a PLB device here: <https://www.fcc.gov/wireless/bureau-divisions/mobility-division/personal-locator-beacons-plbs>
 - Each PLB device must be registered with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Registering your PLB device provides emergency information to search and rescue personnel. You can register your PLB device in the NOAA Beacon Registration database. (<https://beaconregistration.noaa.gov/RGDB/>)
 - Use of radios requires an FCC license (which is good for 10 years). It is recommended that you check with the field station that you are accessing to see if licensed radios are available for check-out.

- For more information on radios, see: <https://www.fcc.gov/general-mobile-radio-service-gmrs>

Regional/local level permits

A handbook on permits and policies at Toolik Field Station can be found here:
<https://www.uaf.edu/toolik/handbook/permits-policies.php>

Additional information of relevance

No information available