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UW wins major grant to explore ocean floor

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By [LORI MATSUKAWA](#) / KING 5 News

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SEATTLE - It's the largest federal award ever for the University of Washington. The school will received \$126 million over the next five years to build a 500-mile long power and Internet grid along the ocean floor.

It's part of the "Ocean Observatories Initiative" that will give researchers real time video and data 24 hours a day, seven days a week, changing the way oceanographers do their work. Some \$35 million of the grant comes from federal stimulus dollars.

"It will allow scientists here at the UW and just as importantly students here... to have real time access to information that flows from the seabed floors in ways that were unimaginable not very long ago," said University President Mark Emmert.

The power and Internet cables will be placed on the Juan de Fuca plate. Mobile observatories and monitoring stations can plug in and give us a telepresence on the ocean floor, accessible on the Internet.

The grant is the culmination of a 20-year effort by UW Oceanography professor John Delaney and a team of fellow UW scientists. He said for the first time scientists will be able to make real time observations across a huge ocean floor over extended periods of time.

Researchers believe the data gathered will help them understand all sorts of natural phenomena such as volcanoes, earthquakes, storms, rainfall patterns, tsunamis, algae blooms, oxygen depletion and sea life. Natural events that influence climate change.



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"There's so much more that we need to understand ourselves as scientists and as a society," said Delaney. "But we also need to share that with the public so they understand more powerfully what this is all about."

Delaney says most people don't really know much about the ocean.

"They say they love the ocean and they're passionate about the ocean. That's the equivalent of saying 'I looked at the edge of a razor blade and now I understand the steel industry,'" he said.

The UW's portion of the Ocean Observatories Initiative is called the RSN for Regional Scale Nodes. The entire initiative will cost \$385 million and is expected to produce data for 25 years.