



Rear Admiral Shepard “Shep” Smith

Director, Office of Coast Survey



Rear Admiral Shepard M. Smith became Coast Survey director on August 26, 2016. He is the 30th leader of the agency since the first superintendent, Ferdinand R. Hassler, was appointed in 1816.

Hallmarks of Smith’s career have been his leadership in the modernization of NOAA’s charting systems and transformation of NOAA’s hydrographic technologies. That leadership and experience will now be applied to expanding Coast Survey’s data capabilities and supporting a data-enabled maritime economy, among other challenges.

Smith returns to Coast Survey from his most recent assignment as commanding officer of NOAA Ship *Thomas Jefferson*, on which he served three tours during his NOAA career. During his latest tour, Smith became NOAA’s first commanding officer to operationalize unmanned surface vehicles for mapping shallow areas previously inaccessible and uncharted.

Prior to his last ship assignment, Smith was the chief of Coast Survey’s Marine Chart Division. While there, he changed the nation’s charting tradition, established in the 19th century, by restructuring chart production and distribution. That modernization made U.S. navigational data more accessible to the public through a wider range of electronic formats, faster and more accurately.

Among his earlier ship assignments, Smith surveyed Alaska while on NOAA Ship *Rainier*. He was on the interagency response teams for the search and recovery of TWA flight 800, Egypt Air flight 990, and the private plane piloted by John F. Kennedy, Jr. He also commanded *Thomas Jefferson* during her six-week response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Smith’s other assignments with Coast Survey include chief of the Atlantic Hydrographic Branch, and deputy hydrographer. Elsewhere in NOAA, Smith served as the deputy director of the Office of Response and Restoration, on the staff of the USCG LANTAREA headquarters, and as a senior advisor to the assistant secretary of environmental observation and prediction. He was the NOAA representative to the Allied Maritime Sub Group, and was part of the U.S. delegation to the International Hydrographic Organization’s (IHO) Hydrographic Services and Standards Committee. He served as the chairman of the IHO Data Quality Working Group.

Thomas Jefferson, under his command, was awarded a Commerce Gold Medal for heroism. Smith has individually been recognized with two Commerce Bronze Medals, four NOAA Corps Commendation Medals, five NOAA Corps Special Achievement Medals, the Society of American Military Engineers’ Colbert Medal, the Association of Commissioned Officers’ Engineering Award, three U.S. Coast Guard awards and one National Intelligence awards for interagency operations, six NOAA Unit Citations, and the NOAA Corps Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal.

Smith is a native of Strong, Maine. He attended Deep Springs College and Cornell University, where he graduated with a bachelor of science in mechanical engineering in 1993. He earned a master of science in ocean engineering from the University of New Hampshire in 2003, also completing the requirements for the IHO Category “A” program from the same institution. He received a direct commission to the rank of ensign in the NOAA Corps in 1993.