

# U.S. Coast Guard Refits Commercial Icebreaker Aiviq for Service as USCG Storis



The tug Aiviq traveling with the mobile drilling unit Kulluk in tow 116 miles southwest of Kodiak City, Alaska, in 2012. *Credit: U.S. Coast Guard | Petty Officer 2nd Class Chris Usher* The Coast Guard awarded a contract Nov. 20 to Offshore Service Vessels LLC, of Cut Off, Louisiana, to acquire the motor vessel (M/V) Aiviq, a 360-foot U.S.-built polar class 3-equivalent icebreaker, U.S. Coast Guard Media Relations said in an Dec. 16 email.

“The Coast Guard first presented its research and recommendation to acquire a commercial icebreaker in a 2021 report. This approach was made possible through direction and statutory relief provided in the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 and funding appropriated in fiscal year 2024,” the email said.

The Coast Guard renamed the Aiviq into Storis, a Scandinavian term meaning “a floating mass of closely crowded icebergs and floes.”

Much about the U.S. Coast Guard’s modifications and conversion of the commercial icebreaker, Aiviq, remains unclear as Coast Guard media did not respond to specific questions from *Seapower* about its refit, including schedule, cost, armament, crew complement, and material and structural changes.

The Coast Guard did tell *Seapower* that, “with minimal modifications, this polar icebreaker will be capable of projecting U.S. sovereignty in the Arctic and conducting select Coast Guard missions. The service will evaluate the vessel’s current condition and capability and identify

requirements, and what modifications will be necessary, to attain full operational capability. The firm fixed-price contract, with a total value of \$125.0 million, also includes provisions for technical data, spares, necessary modifications, certifications, crew training, and operational readiness activities.”

Built in 2012 by North American Shipbuilding Company of Larose, Louisiana, for \$200 million, Aiviq was designed for towing and laying anchors for drilling rigs and oil spill response in the Chukchi Sea of Alaska. That makes the Storis 12 years old as of 2024. In comparison, the only other Arctic medium icebreaker, USCGC Healy, was launched Nov. 15, 1997, and commissioned Aug. 21, 2000, and is 24 years old, and the only Antarctic heavy icebreaker, Polar Star, is 48 years old, having been commissioned in 1976. Polar Sea, Polar Star’s sister, is inactive due to an engine malfunction in 2010 and has served as a parts donor to the Polar Star.

The 360-foot (110 meter) Storis has a crew of 28 and accommodations for 64 personnel. Its beam is 80 feet (24.4 meters), depth of 34 feet (10.4 meters) with a draft of 28 feet (8.6 meters). Powered by four Caterpillar C280-12 engines, each producing 4,060 kilowatts, driving two ducted controlled-pitch propellers, the Storis can sail at 15 knots (28 km/h; 17 mph) and five knots (9.3 km/h; 5.8 mph) in one meter (3.3 feet) of ice. Stability comes from three bow thrusters and two stern thrusters.

“The recently acquired polar icebreaker will bridge national presence in the Arctic while the service awaits delivery of the Polar Security Cutters,” said a Coast Guard Media Relations spokesperson. The Coast Guard said the Storis’s homeport is to be determined soon although maritime publications hint at Juneau, Alaska. Current estimate for delivery of the first PSC is 2030.

“The Coast Guard’s initial activities will be focused on

readying the vessel for deployment to the Arctic in the summer of 2026," Coast Guard Media Relations Office said. "A series of phased modifications will then occur between annual Arctic operations to achieve full operational capability."