



ARCTIC PASSION

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Arctic GEOSS

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Summary

The Arctic GEOSS has been developed under the Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks (SAON) and supported by the Arctic PASSION project and aims at integrating Arctic-specific Earth Observations (EO) into the global GEO (Group on Earth Observations) framework. Arctic GEOSS responds to the Arctic Council's call for a coordinated, pan-Arctic observing system to address rapid environmental change and its societal impacts.

Arctic GEOSS efforts focus on four pillars: Obtaining GEO recognition, promoting *Shared Arctic Variables* (SAVs), highlighting ArcticPASSION *Pilot Services*, and engaging in communication and outreach activities.

Two applications to elevate Arctic GEOSS to full *Initiative* status (submitted for the *GEO 2023–2025 Work Programme* and the *GEO Post-2025 Work Programme*) documented a suite of Arctic PASSION *Pilot Services*. While both applications were acknowledged for technical readiness and alignment with GEO priorities; concerns over thematic cohesion led to the promotion to *Convener*. In any case Arctic GEOSS is a part of the GEO Work Programme in the current GEO phase.

The concept of *Shared Arctic Variables* has been promoted within GEO as a regional adaptation of GEO's Essential Variables (EVs), emphasizing co-designed, policy-relevant observations that reflect Arctic community needs, including Indigenous knowledge.

Arctic GEOSS has actively participated in GEO Weeks and GEO Forums, and actively worked with other GEO activities to promote Arctic perspectives.

Arctic GEOSS aims to reapply also for *Initiative* status by reformulating its focus on *services* (2–3 thematically related services), and reinforcing its co-designed, user-driven model. Advancing the SAV concept fits well in the *Convener* role and all the current *Pilot Services* will still have a GEO affiliation through this role.



1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Arctic is experiencing rapid environmental change, with impacts on local communities, ecosystems, and global climate systems. The Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks (SAON)¹, a joint initiative of the Arctic Council and the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), has worked to strengthen Arctic observing coordination. SAON is in a unique position to fulfil this role, since it among its members have Arctic and non-Arctic states, regional and global organizations, Arctic Council Working Groups and Indigenous organisations (the so-called *Permanent Participants*).

As part of this effort, Arctic GEOSS was established to align Arctic observing priorities within the Group on Earth Observations (GEO)² framework. The mandate for this comes from the Arctic Council (AC) Salekhard Declaration³ (2006), where the Council urges “... *Member States and other entities to strengthen monitoring and research efforts needed to comprehensively address Arctic change and to promote the establishment of a circumpolar Arctic observing network of monitoring stations with coordinated data handling and information exchange for scientific data, statistics and traditional knowledge as a lasting legacy of the IPY (and as the evolving Arctic component of the Global Earth Observing System of Systems, GEOSS)*”.

Historically, GEO has had little focus on the Arctic and Arctic local and Indigenous Peoples, and the aim of Arctic GEOSS was to ensure that the Arctic is represented in the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) and that Arctic priorities are integrated into GEO’s strategy. Arctic GEOSS work has been organized through four pillars:

- Obtaining relevant status and engagement (Chapter 2 below)
- Promoting the *Shared Arctic Variables* (SAVs) (Chapter 3 below)
- Promoting services based on Arctic Observing (Chapter 4 below)
- Interacting with GEO and other stakeholders interested in Earth Observations at relevant events (Chapter 2 and 5 below, Annex)

The EU-funded project Arctic PASSION⁴ aims to overcome known flaws in the present observing system by refining its operability, improving, and extending pan-Arctic scientific and community-based monitoring and the integration with Indigenous and Local knowledge, by streamlining the access and interoperability of Arctic Data systems and services, and by ensuring the economic viability and sustainability of the observing system for years to come. As one of its goals, Arctic PASSION has wanted to advocate for its actions and services globally, and a forum for this is the Group on Earth Observations (GEO). This document is a deliverable of Arctic PASSION to document this effort (see the text box below).

¹ <https://arcticobserving.org>

² <https://earthobservations.org/>

³ <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/items/1acce708-87a9-4560-859e-9b824bffb37>

⁴ <https://arcticpassion.eu/>



Box: Description of deliverable

Compile together the meetings where with Arctic PASSION input Arctic Observing expansion and sustainability have been raised and estimate the impact of these interventions.

1.2 Group on Earth Observations (GEO)

The Group on Earth Observations (GEO) is an intergovernmental partnership that seeks to improve the availability, access and use of Earth Observations (EO). The GEO definition of EO is “... data and information collected about our planet, whether atmospheric, oceanic or terrestrial. This includes space-based or remotely-sensed data, as well as ground-based or in situ data”. The focus of GEO is EO-based tools, addressing the GEO work program targets: The *UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the *Paris Agreement*, and the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction*.

GEO has worked through two-year work plans, but has transitioned into a living document-like planning mode. In its work plan, GEO operates with four levels of contributions: *Flagships*, *Initiatives*, and *Pilot Initiatives* (formerly *Community Activities*) and the new *Convener* contribution. *Flagships* are high-profile activities demonstrating impact on global challenges, often with strong policy mandates. They deliver operational services or decision-support systems addressing critical global needs. *Initiatives* are focused activities that develop coordination and capacity-building in specific thematic or regional areas aligned with GEO priorities. They typically have a clear structure, defined objectives, active stakeholder engagement, and tangible outputs under development or operational. *Pilot Initiatives* are early-stage activities that test and refine concepts before advancing to full *Initiative* status. They allow GEO communities to develop governance, clarify objectives, demonstrate stakeholder demand, and align with GEO’s priorities while refining the activity’s structure and outputs.

Arctic GEOSS historically had status as a GEO *Pilot Initiative*. The plan for Arctic PASSION was that Arctic GEOSS should be developed to the *Initiative* level.

2. Arctic GEOSS in the GEO Work Programme

SAON started the engagement in GEO as a *Participating Organisation* (PO). A GEO PO is an international body or association that joins GEO to support its mission of advancing the coordinated use of Earth observations for societal benefit. These organizations can contribute expertise, data, and resources and participate in GEO’s activities and governance discussions. As described above, Arctic GEOSS was established to work towards a situation where Arctic priorities are more actively integrated into the GEO strategy. As part of this, Arctic GEOSS has applied to obtain *Initiative* status in the two latest GEO Work Programmes: *2023-2025 GEO Work Programme* (section 2.1 below) and the *Post-2025 GEO Work Programme* (section 2.2 below).



2.1 Arctic GEOSS submission to the 2023-2025 GEO Work Programme. Arctic GEOSS governance

Submissions to the GEO Work Programme must comply with certain requirements, and in the 2023-2025 submission for *Initiative* status, the Arctic GEOSS was requested to demonstrate how it would advance the GEO mission by providing integrated EOs for societal benefit, in this case in and for the Arctic. GEO requested a description of planned outputs and services, the users these will serve, and the societal impacts expected. GEO also asked for details on the scientific and technical methods Arctic GEOSS would use to deliver these outputs and evidence of policy demand for this work. Additionally, GEO requested information on how Arctic GEOSS would govern and manage its activities, including stakeholder engagement with Indigenous and local communities, as well as plans for co-design and user testing. GEO finally requested Arctic GEOSS to outline funding, and key milestones, alongside plans for monitoring and evaluating its effectiveness and reporting progress.

In the application, Arctic GEOSS documented that it could advance the operationalization of a pan-Arctic observing system, built on among other things Arctic PASSION *Pilot Services* (in the following just referred to as *Pilot Services*). The application outlined these three (then ready and available) *Pilot Services*:

- Integrated Fire Risk Management (INFRA) Service⁵
- Pan-Arctic requirements-driven Permafrost Service (ALEX)⁶
- Improving Safety for Shipping in the Polar Seas' Service (POLARIS)⁷

The application also included a description of the RNA CoObs⁸ work to *Support for Indigenous Food Security and Sovereignty* in the Pacific Arctic, co-developed with Indigenous communities to align observations with local food security needs. This work later developed into the *Salmon and Food Security Expert Panel*⁹ within the ROADS framework. It was argued that these services aim to support decisions across local communities, Indigenous organizations, researchers, shipping operators, and policymakers.

The application further referred to SAON's plans to implement *Shared Arctic Variables* (SAVs)¹⁰ to prioritise observations, using co-design with stakeholders to ensure usability and relevance. It also documented the *SAON Data Portal*¹¹ as a documentation of the capability of the Arctic observing community to organize observing data. The application finally detailed collaboration with other GEO

⁵ <https://arcticpassion.eu/wp4/ps4/>

⁶ <https://arcticpassion.eu/wp4/ps2/>

⁷ <https://arcticpassion.eu/wp4/ps6/>

⁸ Research Networking Activities for Sustained Coordinated Observations of Arctic Change (RNA CoObs):

<https://sites.google.com/alaska.edu/rna-observations>

⁹ Salmon and Food Security Expert Panel: <https://roadsadvisorypanel.org/expert-panel?view=article&id=19:salmon-and-food-security-expert-panel&catid=2:uncategorised>

¹⁰ Details about the development of *Shared Arctic Variables* are found in *Report on SAON Progress in ROADS* (ArcticPASSION deliverable D6.3: <https://zenodo.org/records/15856556>)

¹¹ Details about the development of the *SAON Data Portal* are found in *Website with data information, description of available and emerging web services and user client to find data regardless their location and regular updates on datasets that have been FAIRified* (ArcticPASSION deliverable D2.3: <https://zenodo.org/records/14956434>). Link to the data portal: <https://data.arcticobserving.org>



activities (especially *GEO Mountains*¹², *GEOCRI*¹³, *Global Wildfire Information System (GWIS)*¹⁴), and that funding to the activities came via EU (ArcticPASSION), US contributions, and national agencies, ensuring sustainability for the *Pilot Services*.

In the review of the application from GEO, it was recognised that Arctic GEOSS demonstrated readiness and alignment with GEO priorities and that Arctic GEOSS addresses an important gap in GEO's geographical coverage. It was, however, recommended that Arctic GEOSS continued as a *Pilot Initiative*¹⁵. The concerns raised by GEO included that the objectives were too broad and that the governance of Arctic GEOSS was not well explained. The details of the application and the response are found in the ArcticPASSION deliverable *Application for GEO initiative to GEO Program Board* (D8.1, 2022).

In response to the request to clarify the governance of Arctic GEOSS, the Arctic GEOSS Assembly was established; it held its inaugural meeting in May 2023 and decided on its Terms of Reference¹⁶.

2.2 Arctic GEOSS submission to the *Post-2025 Global Work Programme*

The next iteration of the GEO WP had the title *Post-2025 Global Work Programme*. In order to apply for *Initiative* status within the WP, applicants should provide an explanation of its planned EO services and their societal impacts. Information should be provided about what the applicant would deliver, who the users were, how it would support decision-making, and how it would align with GEO's open data principles and strategic priorities. Details should be provided on technical methods, governance, partnerships, resource sustainability, and monitoring plans to ensure that the applicant could deliver operational, impactful, and user-driven services that addressed societal needs. Restrictions imposed included that there was only space for describing three EO services.

In the application¹⁷, Arctic GEOSS had worked with the leads of seven of the *Pilot Services*, since Arctic GEOSS did not want to restrict itself in this respect. The application documented these Pilot Services: *Pan-Arctic requirements-driven Permafrost Service (ALEX)*¹⁸, *State of the Arctic Environment service*¹⁹, *Integrated Fire Risk Management (INFRA) Service*²⁰, *Local Atmospheric Pollutant Forecast' Service (AURORAE)*²¹, *Improving Safety for Shipping in the Polar Seas' Service (POLARIS)*²², *CBM for Arctic marine climate change, noise pollution & impacts on marine living resources*²³, and *Lake Ice Service for Arctic*

¹² <https://geomountains.org>

¹³ <https://www.geocri.org>

¹⁴ <https://gwis.jrc.ec.europa.eu>

¹⁵ GEO Work Programme 2023-2025. Summary document:

https://old.earthobservations.org/documents/gwp23_25/geo_work_programme_2023_2025_summary_document_v3_20221214.pdf

¹⁶ Arctic GEOSS Assembly. Inaugural Meeting, May 2023. [Meeting documents](#)

¹⁷ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GWK3JcSqAkt6mT-VhfH2aBoS3gn-UrUC/view>

¹⁸ <https://arcticpassion.eu/wp4/ps2>

¹⁹ <https://arcticpassion.eu/wp4/ps3>

²⁰ <https://arcticpassion.eu/wp4/ps4>

²¹ <https://arcticpassion.eu/wp4/ps5>

²² <https://arcticpassion.eu/wp4/ps6>

²³ <https://arcticpassion.eu/wp4/ps7>



Climate and Safety (LIS)²⁴. Also included in the application were the documentation of a series of Finnish national Arctic services.

In the application, Arctic GEOSS argued that it is well aligned with GEO priorities on open data and user co-design, mainly describing how Arctic GEOSS involved Indigenous and local communities in tool development and testing to ensure usability. It detailed intended impacts, including improving public safety, enhancing preparedness, and reducing environmental impacts in the Arctic regions.

The application finally provided evidence of technical readiness, including the seven *Pilot Service* deployments. It outlined the (above described) governance structure under the Arctic GEOSS Assembly and that funding is supported by Arctic PASSION and national contributions, with financial sustainability plans extending through 2030 for several services.

In the review of the application, GEO believed that the services described were thematically disconnected. While the individual services were strong with positive sustainability prospects, it was believed that in order for Arctic GEOSS to obtain *Initiative* status, there should be a clearer branding and prioritization. GEO instead proposed that Arctic GEOSS should obtain status as a *Convener*, which happened in May 2025²⁵ (See also the Annex). On this status Arctic GEOSS continues to be a part of the *GEO Work Programme*. It deviates the focus from being on impactful services to nurturing a community that would develop services.

3. Promoting the concept of Shared Arctic Variables within the GEO process

A priority for SAON and Arctic GEOSS is to seek that Arctic-specific observational needs are included in the GEO framework. SAON has developed the concept of *Shared Arctic Variables* (SAVs) within the ROADS framework. SAVs are intended to identify and prioritize the most impactful observations in the Arctic, ensuring that observing system investments address societal needs²⁶.

Within the GEO process, *Essential Variables* (EVs) are used to structure and prioritize EO activities across thematic domains such as climate, biodiversity, and disaster risk reduction. SAON, through ArcticGEOSS, has engaged with the GEO community to advocate for Arctic-relevant EVs while introducing the SAV concept as a structured regional contribution to the GEO framework. This approach ensures that Arctic-specific variables and observing needs are visible and connected to global initiatives under GEO.

Arctic GEOSS has contributed to GEO-led processes to advance the implementation and refinement of EVs. The earliest contribution was to Lehmann *et al* (2023) where the definition of EVs for the cryosphere was directly linked to the ROADS process and the SAV concept. Arctic GEOSS has highlighted the importance of moving from general EVs toward SAVs, emphasizing collaboration with Indigenous

²⁴ <https://arcticpassion.eu/wp4/ps8>

²⁵ From the [GEO web page](#): *Conveners serve as communities of practice or communities of interest, bringing together partners and stakeholders to exchange knowledge, share best practices, and foster connections and collaborations within and across Focus Areas.*

²⁶ Details about the development of *Shared Arctic Variables* are found in *Report on SAON Progress in ROADS* (ArcticPASSION deliverable D6.3: <https://zenodo.org/records/15856556>)



Peoples and local communities to ensure that observations meet societal needs. The Annex offers an overview of the engagement with the GEO community from this perspective.

In the further engagement with GEO, Arctic GEOSS will consider its engagement with the *GEO Indigenous Alliance*²⁷ and *GEOVALUE*²⁸ as two enabling mechanisms established within GEO.

4. Promoting ArcticPASSION *Pilot Services* within GEO process

As described above, the two last GEO Work Programmes have had focus on services. The *GEO 2023–2025 Work Programme* focused on *delivering user-driven, operational EO services that support global priorities, including climate action, disaster risk reduction, sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, and resilient cities*. The *Post-2025 Global Work Programme* “aims to evolve GEO from primarily facilitating Earth observation data access to actively developing user-driven, integrated products and services that inform decisions and empower society”²⁹.

The Arctic GEOSS interaction with GEO has promoted the *Pilot Services*, arguing that they address critical Arctic challenges such as climate monitoring, permafrost thaw, wildfire risk, and sea ice safety, which also have global relevance. They are illustrating how Arctic observations can directly address societal challenges and are co-designed with stakeholders, including Arctic communities and Indigenous Peoples; they thereby aligns with GEO’s user-driven approach.

As described in chapter 6, the Arctic GEOSS effort to obtain *Initiative* status will continue with a focus on bringing selected *Pilot Services* forward. The aim of Arctic PASSION Work Package 5 is to demonstrate the societal and economic value of the *Pilot Services*, and this is documented in the Arctic PASSION deliverable *Arctic services impact assessments and generalization* (D5.3, 2025). In addition, and as described in the Arctic PASSION deliverable *Report on SAON Progress in ROADS* (D6.3, 2025), the US Arctic Observing Network (US AON) Benefit Tool³⁰ has evaluated a subset of the *Pilot Services*. Both of these evaluation efforts will be brought forward in the upcoming *Initiative* application as significant documentation of the societal relevance of the *Pilot Services*.

5. Arctic GEOSS communication and outreach

Arctic GEOSS has presented its work within GEO by participating in GEO Weeks and the GEO Global Forum, and by contributing to discussions on *Essential Variables* (EVs) and Shared Arctic Variables (SAVs). The *Pilot Services* have been documented and showcased, demonstrating their societal benefits and relevance to GEO’s objectives while aligning with co-design principles, Indigenous engagement, and end-user needs. An overview of physical and virtual events are found in the Annex with a description of their outcomes and Impact. The events are further described in the ArcticPASSION deliverable *GEO/EuroGEO advocacy progress in Arctic issues to EO community* (D6.2, 2025).

²⁷ <https://www.geoindigenousalliance.com/>

²⁸ <https://earthobservations.org/groups/understanding-the-impacts-and-value-of-earth-observations>

²⁹ <https://earthobservations.org/our-work/geo-work-programme>

³⁰ <https://usaon.org/evaluation-and-planning/benefit-tool> and www.usaon.org/apps/benefit-tool



Arctic GEOSS maintains a web page³¹ with the subtitle *Global Earth Observations for the Arctic* and with the ambition of enhancing public visibility. The platform features stories, blogs, and e-poster presentations that communicate among other things the benefits and progress of Arctic PASSION's *Pilot Services*, helping to build community support and awareness across research, policy, and stakeholder audiences. The website serves as a public-facing platform to communicate Arctic GEOSS activities, the story of Arctic GEOSS, and updates on Arctic services relevant to GEO and EuroGEO priorities. It is also linking with the 'Windows to the Arctic' platform on the ArcticPASSION website.

Web traffic statistics shows that the interest was highest in 2023, which could be related to the promotion of Arctic GEOSS in the context of EuroGEO (see Figure, below).



Figure: Web traffic to <https://arcticgeoss.org>

6. Next steps

Over the past years, Arctic GEOSS has advanced from *Community Activity* and *Pilot Initiative*, and now to *Convener* status within the *Post-2025 GEO Work Programme*. This progress demonstrates GEO's recognition of the Arctic's importance while providing a structured platform for collaboration, advocacy, and further development of Arctic-focused observing and service capabilities.

Arctic PASSION has provided crucial technical and organizational support to Arctic GEOSS during this process, particularly through the *Pilot Services* and engagement with GEO and EuroGEO events, which demonstrated the practical value of Arctic-focused services within the GEO framework.

³¹ <https://arcticgeoss.org>



The *Post-2025 GEO Work Programme* has an “evergreen” programme cycle, meaning that Arctic GEOSS at any point in time can submit an *Initiative* application for evaluation by the *GEO Programme Board*. The advice from GEO is that such an application should reduce the number of services to two or three.

Promotion of the SAVs within GEO processes has laid the groundwork for prioritizing the most impactful Arctic observations. By demonstrating the operational value of Arctic-focused pilot services, Arctic GEOSS has strengthened the case for Arctic contributions to climate action, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable development, aligning with GEO objectives.

Arctic GEOSS outreach activities, including participation in GEO Weeks, EuroGEO workshops, and targeted communications through the Arctic GEOSS web page have raised awareness within the global EO community.

Next steps include:

- Prioritize *Pilot Services* for the GEO *Initiative* application
 - Engage with GEO Secretariat and Programme Board to prepare a focused *Initiative* proposal leveraging *Convener* status
 - Identify 2–3 key services suitable for *Initiative* status under the *Post-2025 GEO Work Programme*. They should thematically be close to each other.
- Advance SAV Implementation within GEO
 - Share SAV documentation with GEO
 - Use GEO’s thematic networks (*GEO Mountains*³², *GEO Cold Region Initiative* (GEOCRI)³³) to identify implementation partners and pathways.
- Continue to promote Arctic GEOSS as the framework for co-designed and co-produced observing services, ensuring Indigenous knowledge integration and community benefits.

³² <https://geomountains.org>

³³ <https://www.geocri.org/>



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- Arctic PASSION (2024): The definition for the pilot set of Essential Arctic Variables (D1.2): <https://nextcloud.awi.de/s/Tni792iZnaSLoC4>
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Abbreviations

EO	Earth Observations
EV	Essential Variables
GEO	Group on Earth Observations
GEO WP	GEO Work Plan
GEOSS	Global Earth Observation System of Systems
IASC	International Arctic Science Committee
PO	Participating Organisation (to GEO)
SAON	Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks
SAV	Shared Arctic Variables



Annex: Promotion milestones within GEO

More details about the events listed below are found in the ArcticPASSION deliverable *GEO/EuroGEO advocacy progress in Arctic issues to EO community* (D6.2, 2025). That document also describes several parallel activities on Arctic PASSION contribution for EuroGEO.

Year	Event / Activity	Arctic GEOSS input	Outcome / Impact
2021	GEO Week (online)	Participation in sessions on Essential Variables (EVs) and climate action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiated dialogue on Arctic-relevant EVs Raised awareness of Arctic-specific needs Positioned <i>Pilot Services</i> within GEO climate discussions
2022	Application to <i>GEO 2023–2025 Work Programme</i>	Included selected <i>Pilot Services</i> and SAVs in Arctic GEOSS <i>Initiative</i> application	<i>Pilot Services</i> and SAVs formally introduced within GEO application materials
2022	Session at GEO Week, Ghana Co-organised with the <i>GEO Mountains Initiative</i>	Joint session with <i>GEO Mountains</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presented the SAV concept Showcased <i>Pilot Services</i> Identified synergies with cryosphere and mountain EV work
2023	GEO Week, South Africa	Booth presentations on Arctic PASSION <i>Pilot Services</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAVs in an e-poster <i>Pilot Services</i> presentations
2023	<i>GEO Mountains</i> and GEO EV community report contribution	Provided input on cryosphere EVs and SAV alignment	SAV concept reflected in GEO community EV report
Autumn 2024	Application to <i>Post-2025 GEO Work Programme</i>	Reaffirmed selected <i>Pilot Services</i> and SAVs in Arctic GEOSS <i>Initiative</i> application	Pathway for future <i>Initiative</i> application prepared
May 2025	GEO Global Forum, Rome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organised a session with <i>GEO Mountains</i> Presentation to the GEO Working Groups³⁴ planning session 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arctic GEOSS obtained status as <i>Convener</i> Maintained Arctic presence in the GEO 3rd decade priorities

³⁴ <https://old.earthobservations.org/wgs.php>

