

Subglacial Lake Whillans: A Shallow Active Reservoir Beneath a West Antarctic Ice Stream

*Huw Horgan (1), Knut Christianson (1,2), Robert Jacobel (2), Sridhar Anandakrishnan (3,4),
Richard Alley (3,4)*

(1) Antarctic Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

(2) Department of Physics, St. Olaf College, 1520 St. Olaf Avenue, Northfield, MN 55057

(3) Dept. of Geosciences, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802

*(4) Earth and Environmental Systems Institute, Pennsylvania State University, University Park,
PA 16802*

Seismic and surface observations from Subglacial Lake Whillans (SLW), West Antarctica, reveal that this active lake forms a persistent, albeit fluctuating, reservoir beneath Whillans Ice Stream. Imaging and phase observations using active-source seismic data show that SLW, which was in a low-stand state when surveyed, is a perpetually shallow feature with a water column of less than 8 m depth imaged along 5 km of the 45 km profiled. This water column presents a suitable drill site at S 84.240°, W 153.694°. The water column is located within the lake's hydropotential low and is within the region of maximum observed ICESat elevation range. Elsewhere, the majority of the bed appears wet with water thicknesses below the imaging resolution of our data (< 5 m). The surface expression of the active lake, previously revealed by ICESat elevation data and image differencing, generally corresponds to the seismic estimate of water extent, with notable exceptions occurring at the upstream and downstream ends of the lake. These exceptions indicate that SLW: (1) grounds, or has negligible water, in places at low-stands (2) has disconnected or transient active and inactive portions, or, (3) is a system in transition.