Sea Ice Albedo Feedback Cycle

A major factor in the rapid warming of icy places like the Arctic is sea ice albedo feedback, a cycle that makes warming more severe where ice is lost. A surface’s “albedo” is how reflective it is of sunlight.

1. **ICE RETREAT**
   As the Arctic warms, ice cover melts, exposing more of the less-reflective water’s surface.

2. **LOCAL WARMING**
   Exposed surface waters absorb more sunlight. They and the air above grow even warmer.

3. **FEEDBACK**
   Enhanced local warming causes further ice melt and retreat. The cycle continues.