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President Obama Proposes Moving NOAA to Interior Department

On January 13, President Obama proposed to dissolve the U.S. Department of Commerce and move many of its constituent parts into a new, yet-unnamed business and trade cabinet-level agency. Science and technology agencies like National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and the U.S. Patent Office would be among the agencies moved in the new consolidated agency. NOAA, which is currently the largest agency in the Department of Commerce, would move into the Department of the Interior, where it would also be the largest agency in that cabinet department.

In announcing his proposal, President Obama said the restructuring would reduce regulatory burdens on businesses and save money by eliminating duplicative government functions. For example, both NOAA research and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in the Department of the Interior conduct climate research, efforts which some believe could benefit from tighter integration and management.

If the reorganization does proceed, it is estimated that the government would save a total of $3 billion over 10 years and cut more than 1,000 jobs. Obama said he ultimately hopes to eliminate similar inefficiencies throughout the federal government.
The President does not currently have the authority to restructure the Executive Branch, although previous Presidents have held this power under statutory law. Obama has asked Congress to grant him this restructuring authority, once again, to consolidate the federal government. It is unlikely that this will happen before the November election.

**Obama Administration Drops Nomination of NOAA Chief Scientist**

On January 24, the White House withdrew the nomination of Scott Doney to be Chief Scientist at NOAA.

Doney's nomination, which would have required confirmation by the Senate, enjoyed bipartisan support, but Sen. David Vitter (R-LA) blocked Doney's nomination beginning more than a year ago, linking the nomination to a demand that Obama administration officials testify before Congress on the Interior Department's decision to halt deepwater drilling in the wake of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Vitter spokesman Luke Bolar said the senator's hold was still in effect as of this week. Bolar said Vitter had no specific objections to Doney but had significant concerns with the administration's handling of Gulf drilling. "I am uncomfortable confirming a high-level science advisor within your administration while there remain significant outstanding concerns over scientific integrity at federal agencies and the White House, including with regard to the recent drilling moratorium and the ongoing bottleneck in permitting, which I would characterize as a continuing de facto moratorium," Vitter wrote in a December 2010 letter to the president.

When nominated in August 2010, Doney was a Senior Scientist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution whose research focused on marine ecosystem dynamics and the role of the ocean in the global carbon cycle. The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee approved Doney's nomination in each of the last two sessions of Congress, and Chairman Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) last May expressed optimism that his Republican colleagues could help lift Vitter's hold.

The Chief Scientist position, which has been vacant for more than a decade, oversees NOAA's science and technology priorities.

**Robert Detrick Selected To Be NOAA's Assistant Administrator for Research**

NOAA has chosen Dr. Robert Detrick to become the next Assistant Administrator for Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), Acting Chair of the NOAA Research Council and NOAA Climate Goal Lead. Detrick will begin in his new role on February 13.

Dr. Detrick has served as Director of the NSF Division of Earth Sciences since 2008 and was previously as senior scientist and Vice President for Marine Facilities and Operations at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. A leading marine geophysicist, Dr. Detrick is a Fellow of the American Geophysical Union, and received the A.G Huntsman Medal in 1996, which honors "marine scientists who have had and continue to have a significant influence on the course of marine scientific thought."
Acting Assistant Administrator Craig McLean, who has served in the role for over a year, will return to his position as Deputy Assistant Administrator for programs and administration on February 20.

**NOAA Releases Scientific Integrity Policy**

In early December, NOAA released its scientific integrity policy. Among the highlights, NOAA scientists, employees, and contractors, may speak with the media and the public about their science without prior approval from a supervisor or public affairs officer. Furthermore, the policy protects those who report scientific misconduct.

NOAA's scientific integrity policy comes two and a half years after President Obama issued a memorandum in March 2009 directing agency heads to each create a scientific integrity policy for their agencies. Of the 19 agencies that have drafted policies, only six are publicly available. The Department of the Interior, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Education, NOAA, and NASA have released final policies while the EPA and the NSF have released drafts for public comment.

The entire process has received criticism from scientific integrity advocates who say the finalized policies have taken too long to develop and do not go far enough to protect science and scientists.


NOAA's scientific integrity policy is available here [http://nrc.noaa.gov/Scientific%20Integrity%20Policy_NAO%20202-735_Signed.pdf](http://nrc.noaa.gov/Scientific%20Integrity%20Policy_NAO%20202-735_Signed.pdf)

**NSB Reaffirms and Clarifies NSF Merit Review Criteria**

On January 9, the NSF's policymaking body, the National Science Board (NSB), published a report titled “NSF Merit Review Criteria: Review and Revisions.” After extensive review and stakeholder consultation, the NSB concluded that "Intellectual Merit" and "Broader Impacts" should be maintained as the two review criteria used to assess NSF proposals. The report provides clarification on the meaning of the two criteria and how they should be applied in the merit review process.

A NSB Task Force on Merit Review was established in February 2010 to examine the effectiveness of the two merit review criteria. The Task Force sought extensive stakeholder engagement including: interviews with senior NSF staff; a public consultation resulting in over four thousand responses from reviewers and Principal Investigators; data from two hundred Committee of Visitor Reports; and data from over 100,000 research proposals submitted to NSF between 2006-09.
NSB concluded that while the two criteria remain appropriate, there is a need to provide greater clarity on each of the criteria and explain how they relate to the NSF core principles. The updated review criteria definitions are:

* Intellectual Merit: The Intellectual Merit criterion encompasses the potential to advance knowledge; and
* Broader Impacts: The Broader Impacts criterion encompasses the potential to benefit society contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes.

NSB also established a set of overarching principles for merit review:

* Support highest quality projects.
* Aggregate of NSF projects to contribute to societal goal.
* Appropriate evaluation and assessment of projects.

NSF will be implementing the enhanced merit review criteria in upcoming months.


The current criteria can be found here [http://nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf11001/gpg_3.jsp#IIIA](http://nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf11001/gpg_3.jsp#IIIA)

NSB Releases Major Publication Warning of Asian Competition in R&D

On January 17, the National Science Board (NSB) released “Science and Engineering Indicators,” a biannual publication on the status of the science, engineering and technology workforce, education efforts and economic activity in the U.S. and abroad. Of note this year, the report highlights that while "the U.S. remains the global leader in supporting science and technology (S&T) research and development, it is only by a slim margin and could soon be overtaken by rapidly increasing Asian investments in knowledge-intensive economies."

According to “Science and Engineering Indicators 2012,” the largest global S&T gains occurred in the so-called "Asia-10"--China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand--as those countries integrate S&T into economic growth. Between 1999 and 2009, for example, the U.S. share of global research and development (R&D) dropped from 38 percent to 31 percent, whereas it grew from 24 percent to 35 percent in the Asia region during the same time. In China alone, R&D growth increased a stunning 28 percent in a single year (2008-2009), propelling it past Japan and into second place behind the United States.

NRC Report Warns of Major Challenges for USGCRP

On January 6, the National Research Council (NRC) issued a new report warning that the United States Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) faces major challenges over the next decade. The report reviewed the USGCRP's draft 10-year strategic plan, which aims to broaden USGCRP's scope from climate to include all climate-related global changes.
Over the next decade, an expanded USGCRP would build "from core USGCRP capabilities in global climate observation, process understanding, and modeling to strengthen and expand our fundamental scientific understanding of climate change and its interactions with the other critical drivers of global change, such as land-use change, alteration of key biogeochemical cycles, and biodiversity loss." An expanded scope would require researchers in ecology, social sciences, education and communication to join forces with the physical scientists who have dominated federal climate change research in the past. Such a shift would be in line with another National Academy of Sciences review in 2009 that said USGCRP's failure to examine and produce information on climate change's impacts on society had created an information vacuum at a time when many cities and states were rushing to address the problem.

The NRC report praises the USGCRP's ambition, but it also points out that the Program needs greater capacity to sufficiently undertake its new plans. A key concern is that the USGCRP does not have the adequate level of resources to achieve its proposed changes. The NRC report notes that "a draft federal plan to coordinate research into how to respond to climate change is unlikely to succeed without added resources and new ways to manage the Program."

While the USGCRP received most of the $2.6 billion the President requested for Fiscal Year 2012, there are signs that a tougher funding environment awaits in future years. In a letter that Republican members of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee, including Chairman Ralph Hall (R-TX) sent to the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction in October, signatories said they were "strongly opposed" to the Obama administration's request to increase the NSF's contribution to USGCRP to $425 million, a 33 percent bump. "We support further reductions to current spending for [USGCRP]," they wrote. These attitudes in Congress, combined with the financial drain of maintaining the federal government's aging network of environmental monitoring equipment, could spell trouble for any ambitious overhaul of the USGCRP.

The Obama Administration plans to release the final version of the new USGCRP strategic plan by January 29. The draft strategic plan is available here 
https://www.hSDL.org/?view&did=696217

Obama Administration Seeks Comments on National Fish, Wildlife and Plants Adaptation Draft Strategy *Due March 5, 2012*

On January 20, the Obama Administration released the first draft national adaptation strategy to help decision makers and resource managers prepare for and help reduce the impacts of climate change on species and ecosystems, and the people and economies that depend on them.

The strategy will guide the nation's efforts during the next five years to respond to current and future climate change impacts such as changing species distributions and migration patterns, the spread of wildlife diseases and invasive species, the inundation of coastal habitats with rising sea levels, and changes in freshwater availability with shifting precipitation and habitat types. The strategy does not prescribe mandatory activities that agencies must take nor suggest regulatory actions. Rather, it provides a roadmap for decision makers and resource managers to use in
considering climate change implications to their ongoing wildlife and habitat management activities.

Elements of the draft strategy include: (1) descriptions of current and projected impacts of climate change on the eight major ecosystems of the United States, the fish, wildlife and plant species those ecosystems support and the vital ecosystem services they provide; (2) goals, strategies, and actions to reduce the vulnerability and increase the resilience of fish, wildlife, plants and the communities that depend on them in the face of climate change; (3) collaborative strategies and actions that agriculture, energy, transportation and other sectors can take to promote adaptation of fish, wildlife and plants, and utilize the adaptive benefits of natural resources in their climate adaptation efforts; and (4) a framework for coordinated implementation of the strategy among government and non-governmental entities from national to local scales.

Congress called for a national, government-wide strategy in 2010, directing the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the Department of the Interior to develop it. CEQ and Interior responded by assembling a partnership of federal, state and tribal fish and wildlife conservation agencies, which involved more than 100 diverse researchers and managers from across the country. The partnership is co-led by Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, representing state fish and wildlife agencies.

The draft National Fish, Wildlife and Plants Climate Adaptation Strategy is available for public review and comment through March 5, 2012. It can be found on the web at www.wildlifeadaptationstrategy.gov along with other information about the draft strategy. Public comments can be submitted online through the strategy website via a special link.


In addition, there will be five public information sessions in various locations around the country and two webinars to provide details and encourage dialogue on the strategy and its development. To register for these meetings and for more information on the public comment process, visit http://www.wildlifeadaptationstrategy.gov/public-comments.php

NOAA Seeks Comments on Environmental Impacts of Arctic Exploration -- Due February 13, 2012

On December 22, NOAA released its draft environmental impact statement on oil and gas exploration in the Arctic. This is a new direction for NOAA as arctic sea ice begins to diminish and the Arctic opens up to more commercial activities than in the past.

The final statement will guide NOAA in protecting marine mammals and native tribes in the Arctic. It also will be used by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) on the permitting process for seismic surveys. Both NOAA and BOEM will host public hearings on the draft statement across Alaska in January and February 2012.
Comments may be emailed to arcticeis.comments at noaa.gov
The deadline is February 13.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is available here
http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/eis/arctic.htm
The NOAA press release is available here

**EPA Publishes Interactive Map of Greenhouse Gas Emitters**

On January 11, the EPA released an interactive online map that identifies sources of major greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters in the U.S., including chemical factories, paper mills, and power plants. The data is current through 2010 and covers 80 percent of U.S. emitters of major GHG's (CO2, N2O, CH4, PFC-14, PFC-116 & HFC-23) from large industries.

Using Google Maps as its base, the EPA interactive map allows searches by state, emissions range, type of GHG, and type of industry. Environmental groups are using the new online tool to highlight local and national utilities that have the worst emissions and applaud the map as a major accomplishment that can educate government officials and members of the public about local sources of pollution. David Doniger, policy director for Climate and Clean Air at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said, "[the EPA database] means that every high school student or local reporter can see who the biggest carbon polluters are in his or her own backyard. . . Carbon pollution and climate change are very abstract when you're dealing with national or international data. This brings it home."

You can find the EPA interactive map here
http://ghgdata.epa.gov/ghgp/main.do

**House Committee Passes Controversial Bill to Increase Transparency of Federal Research Grants**

In late 2011, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee approved the Grant Reform and New Transparency Act, or GRANT Act (H.R. 3433). The bill, which is still pending before the full House of Representatives, is intended to provide more transparency in the federal grant-making process by requiring all federal agencies to publicize the selection procedures for each grant program. It also mandates the White House Office of Management and Budget create a single, comprehensive website for all federal grant opportunities, among other provisions.

The bill's transparency requirements as they relate to the peer-review process are of concern to many in the research community, in particular the provision requiring the posting of full copies of funded proposals online. The amount of disclosure required is potentially damaging to the peer-review process.
Several Members of Congress have already weighed in with the bill's sponsor, Rep. James Lankford (R-OK), in opposition to the bill in its current form. It is also important that Members hear from the UCAR community in the event the GRANT Act makes it to the House floor for a vote this year.

Provisions of Concern:

- Before the awarding of a grant, an agency shall review the applicant's ability to carry out the grant, including the financial management system to carry out the grant, capability to comply with federal reporting requirements, the internal financial and administrative control systems of the applicant, and past performance and record of integrity of the applicant.

- For each competitive grant awarded, the granting agency would post to a central OMB grant website within 15 days the following information:
  - A copy of the final grant agreement
  - A copy of the grant proposal (Note: The agency can choose to post an abstract instead of the proposal for up to three years after the grant award. After three years the full proposal would be posted)
  - Documentation explaining the selection decision for the grant, as well as the number of proposals received and the numerical ranking of the proposal by the grant reviewers (if applicable)
  - Rationale for any deviation from numerical rankings
  - The name and title (or unique identifier) for individuals who served as peer reviewers for the grant
  - The name, title and employer of other individuals who served as reviewers (other than peer reviewers), regardless of whether they are employed by the federal government or non-federal sectors.

All information not subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) would be redacted from documents posted to the website. Of concern is the burden this would place on agencies to sort out what information is and is not subject to FOIA.

Positive Provisions:

- As noted above, OMB would be required to create a central grants website to which to post information about awarded grants. In addition, the following would be features of the website:
  - All agencies would be required to post information about the availability of competitive funds.
  - Agencies would be asked annually to forecast all grant solicitations that the agency expects to issue for the following calendar year and post that information to the grants website.
  - The bill would give an applicant the option of requesting a "debriefing" which explains the basis for the agency's award decision, including the decision not to award a grant to the applicant.
House Committee Passes Bill To Reauthorize, Cut Funding for Natural Hazards Programs

On December 1, the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee passed the Natural Hazards Risk Reduction Act of 2011 (H.R. 3479). The bill, which was introduced by Rep. Judy Biggert (R-IL), would reauthorize continued funding for two key programs: the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) and the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program (NWIRP). The bill passed by a party line vote of 21-12, with Republicans in support and Democrats in opposition.

Although the Democrats on the Committee say they recognize the importance of reauthorizing these programs and support some of the provisions included in the bill to make the programs more efficient and effective, they were uniformly concerned about the funding cuts proposed in the bill. The bill reduces the authorization level for NEHRP by 36 percent and NWIRP by 14 percent compared to the last year in which the programs were authorized. The bill further constrains both programs by providing flat authorizations that are 6 percent below current spending levels.

The bill is still pending before the full House of Representatives.

The NWIRP, led by the National Institute of Standards & Technology (NIST), conducts research and development to improve model codes, standards, design guidance, and practices for the construction and retrofit of buildings, structures, and lifelines.