



**House, Senate Appropriations Committees increase funding to support NWS operations;
Disapprove elimination of ITOs in FY 14**

(July 19, 2013) The House Appropriations Committee added nearly \$11 million to the FY 14 Commerce appropriations bill above the amount requested by the President for “Local Warnings and Forecasts” on Wednesday, July 17. This is the line item that primarily funds NWS employees’ salaries. The House Appropriations Committee also rejected the Administration’s request to eliminate the NWS Information Technology Officers this year. The Committee stated that any proposal to eliminate the ITOs should be part of an overall plan for the future of the NWS structure developed in consultation with its stakeholders.

The Senate Appropriations Committee took similar action and increased funding for “Local Warnings and Forecasts” by \$12 million to \$670 million on Thursday, July 18. The Committee also rejected the Administration’s proposal to eliminate the ITOs during FY 14, but directed the NWS to provide a multi-phase plan to streamline and consolidate NWS IT operations in the future as part of an overall workforce staffing plan that results in no degradation of service and which addresses how the affected employees will be reassigned or repurposed.

Overall, the House Appropriations Committee approved \$941 million for NWS Operations, Research and Facilities (ORF) for FY 14 and the Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$962 million. The difference between the House and Senate funding levels (the “marks”) is attributable to extra funding the Senate Committee included for Mesonet and AHIPs.

The recommendations of the Appropriations Committees may have a negative impact on the employees of NOAA’s Office of General Counsel, which is also represented by NWSEO. The House Appropriations Committee has included a 10% reduction in the line item that funds most of their salaries. The Senate Appropriations Committee has directed that the NMFS Northeast Regional Office, where a number of the attorneys represented by NWSEO are stationed, be closed and employees relocated.

The recommendations of the each of the Appropriations Committee will need to be approved by the full House of Representatives and the Senate in the coming months. Inconsistencies between the House and Senate versions will then be reconciled “in conference” by leaders from both committees.

There is an overall large gap between the House and Senate Appropriations Committees “marks” for NOAA overall - \$678 million – that must be reconciled and could affect funding levels. If the final funding levels for the NWS are similar to those approved by the two

committees, it should result in a substantial increase in funding above what has been available in FY 13, even if some form of sequestration occurs if the final FY 14 appropriations sums exceed the levels authorized by the Budget Control Act. The “pre-sequestration” approved funding for FY 13 was \$642 million for “local warnings and forecasts” (as compared to \$669 million in the FY 14 House mark and \$670 million Senate mark). The “pre-sequestration” approved funding for FY 13 for all NWS operations (“ORF”) was \$909 million (as compared to \$941 million in the FY 14 House mark and \$962 million Senate mark). However, as in FY 13, the NWS may be required to operate under a continuing resolution at a lower funding level for part of FY 14 until the final Commerce Appropriations Act is approved.

The relevant section of the House Appropriations Committee report follows:

“The Committee recommends \$669,000,000 for the Local Warnings and Forecasts Base, which is \$10,769,000 more than the request. The Committee does not support the requested reduction in information technology officers at each of the Weather Forecast Offices or the proposal to reduce operations and maintenance for, or slow the implementation of, new Advanced Weather Interactive Processing System tools and capabilities. The Committee agrees that the NWS needs to revisit its current model in response to technological advances and other changes in the provision of weather products and services. However, a piecemeal plan that does not include a vision for the future of the NWS is not the most thoughtful way to proceed. The Committee expects NOAA to present a detailed plan for the entire NWS structure that is mindful of fiscal constraints and informed by a wide variety of stakeholders, including recommendations outlined by the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) and the National Academies of Science.”

The relevant section of the Senate Appropriations Committee report follows:

“Local Warnings and Forecasts Base. —The budget request proposes once again to eliminate Information Technology Officer [ITO] positions at the 122 Forecast Offices around the country, a proposal which was previously rejected by the House of Representatives and the Senate Committees on Appropriations in the fiscal year 2013 bill. While possessing technical merits in updating NWS’s IT infrastructure, this repeated request continues to fall short of acknowledging the much broader and unresolved issue of NWS’s inability to baseline its entire workforce.

“Since 2010, NWS has seen a reduction of 290 positions, or approximately 6 percent of its workforce, with many forecaster and other positions left vacant across the country. The Committee will not presume or dictate to NOAA the right size of the NWS workforce. However, having worked recently with the administration to resolve Antideficiency Act violations and ungrounded operating costs, the Committee still does not possess evidence that the NWS has its workforce plan completely under control at this time—certainly not enough to propose further workforce reductions without NOAA addressing why some positions remain unfilled or articulating what the proper staffing level is for field offices. A discussion on a right-sized NWS must occur, but this budget request is not the forum, and this Committee will not serve as the moderator. Thus, the

Committee's recommendation for the NWS provides funding to retain existing ITO positions in fiscal year 2014.

"However, separate from any underlying workforce issues, the Committee sees merit in consolidating IT infrastructure, which may be analogous to similar IT consolidation efforts occurring throughout the Federal Government and in industry. Such a consolidation is also consistent with recommendations made in the May 2013 report by the National Academy of Public Administration [NAPA] titled, "Forecast for the Future: Assuring the Capacity of the National Weather Service." The Committee directs NOAA to submit a report to the Committee on Appropriations not later than 90 days after enactment of this act outlining a multi-phase plan for consolidating NWS IT operations that would streamline system configuration, shore up existing cybersecurity vulnerabilities, contribute to the expedited rollout of AWIPS II, and achieve cost savings. Such a report should address potential consolidation of NWS IT staff in the context of an overall workforce staffing plan, discuss a phased approach that results in no degradation of service, discuss how field office employees affected by this consolidation would be appropriately reassigned or repurposed throughout NWS, and take into consideration any impacts, risks, and benefits a consolidation would have on NWS's mission.

"Weather Service Modernization.—The Committee is supportive of NWS moving forward with broad plans to modernize its services, operations, and infrastructure. Using the recent NAPA report and the National Research Council's report "The National Weather Service Modernization and Associated Restructuring: A Retrospective Assessment", NWS has sufficient independent feedback to make a wide variety of improvements in a scalable and manageable manner. The Committee encourages NWS to work with all its external partners and internal components to deliver a comprehensive weather modernization plan to the Committee that includes short-term and long-term objectives. Many groups—Federal agencies, weather center managers, employees, industry supporters, private sector collaborators, and emergency managers—are awaiting positive advancements in NWS's forecasting capabilities and all should be part of the modernization conversation."

-NWSEO-

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National Weather Service employees.**

**No one works harder for National Weather Service employees than
National Weather Service employees.
We are NWSEO.**