



Response of the National Weather Service Employees Organization to the President's FY '15 Budget Request

"No department of the government has done more for the honor of science and the good of the people, according to its means, than the Weather Bureau; and the whole nation will be disappointed if Congress does not provide for it most liberally and put it upon the best possible footing."

- The New York Herald, March 4, 1872

Despite the increasing frequency of severe weather and its corresponding impact on the nation's safety and economy, the President's budget for the National Weather Service contains shocking reductions that total \$54 million – representing 5% of the agency's budget – and more than the reductions required by the FY '13 sequestration decreed by the Administration. Even the agency's own Congressional Submission concedes that a number of these reductions will endanger the public and impede the agency's ability to continue or improve services.

There are two reductions of primary concern to NWSEO: the failure to fully fund anticipated inflationary increases and the elimination of the Information Technology Officers at each of the nation's 122 Weather Forecast Offices.

According to the Congressional Submission, the NWS's base includes \$18,678,000 "to account for the **full funding requirement for inflationary adjustments** to current programs," including the estimated 1% Federal employee pay raise, as well as inflationary increases for non-labor activities such as service contract and rental increases. However, the PB "only includes an increase of \$9,908,000 to cover these costs" and the NWS will ostensibly offset \$8,770,000 of its inflationary costs through other unspecified "program management efficiencies." Congressional Submission, p. NWS-5. The NWS's failure to request full funding in prior years resulted in unauthorized reprogramming and the removal and retirement of senior NWS officials. The failure to request full funding of anticipated inflationary increases will place the NWS back in the position it was in both FY '12 and FY '13 when it was required to request reprogramming in order to avoid furloughs and interruptions in services.

Congress has repeatedly rejected the agency's proposal to eliminate the **Information Technology Officers**. As the Senate Appropriations Committee has

observed, the “IT staff have proven to be valuable parts of the local weather forecast teams.” The ITOs routinely restore failed local systems in time critical manner during severe weather events, in addition to developing local applications tailored to local climatology and service needs.

For example, the NWS’s preliminary Service Assessment of its response to the May 2013 Moore, Oklahoma tornado noted that a local application developed by the ITO at the Norman Forecast Office was critical to FEMA’s efforts:

WFO Norman produced GIS [graphical information systems] products showing a preliminary estimate of the likely tornado track, which the office made available while the tornado was in progress in Moore, OK. Meteorologist in Charge (MIC), serving as the radar interpreter, worked with the Information Technology Officer (ITO) to use a prototype local application on AWIPS II, the AWIPS’s next-generation software, to generate the GIS files on AWIPS. The GIS files were emailed to the EMs in affected regions and to the Southern Region Regional Operations Center (SR ROC) and posted on social media. WFO Norman used all available radar data and other information to draw potential damage paths. The local application allowed the meteorologists to select points, scan-by-scan, to identify where a tornado was located. This process includes forecaster interpretation in the analysis loop and is different and separate from the rotation tracks products available from the National Severe Storms Laboratory (NSSL). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director noted these products are “extremely valuable” when integrated into FEMA’s GIS applications. These preliminary tracks allowed FEMA to identify the impacted areas and determine resources that might be needed for the recovery as much as 3–4 hours before resources were requested. . .

These GIS products saved FEMA 3–4 hours of response time and helped FEMA staff determine the need for additional urban search and rescue teams before local EMs formally requested this assistance.

Service Assessment: May 2013 Oklahoma Tornadoes and Flash Flooding, pp. 8-9 (NWS, January 2014). In contrast, the NWS’s service assessment of its response to Hurricane/Post-Tropical Cyclone Sandy (p. 44) found that the agency’s decision support services (“DSS”) was impaired because the ITO position at the New York Forecast Office was vacant:

Another critical position that was vacant was the Information Technology Officer (ITO) at WFO Upton, an office severely impacted by the storm. Historically, the ITO at WFO Upton plays an integral role in a number of unique, high-visibility DSS initiatives. These include DSS projects tailored to meeting the diverse needs of NYCOEM, such as visualization and forecasting tools depicting tropical storm wind speeds at skyscraper heights, and a graphical, color-coded weather hazards briefing sheet. The ITO vacancy meant the WFO could not provide these products.

The Congressional Submission makes the unsubstantiated and absurd claim that 24 regional IT specialists can “replicate the service currently provided by [122] on-site ITOs . . . that meets or exceeds current service levels.” (p. NWS-33). The Congressional Submission also claims that “the current service delivery model has redundancies” but fails to identify a single one.

The NWS is currently installing and activating the AWIPS 2 forecasting system software around the country. AWIPS 2 is problem-plagued and has been installed at only 24 forecast offices to date, and the agency does not expect to complete installation before the end of FY '15. ITOs at those WFOs that have already installed AWIPS 2 have devoted full time to this project for the two months prior to and one month following installation. Under the NWS's AWIPS 2 Activation Policy (negotiated with NWSEO), there must be a trained ITO on station for installation. Defunding the ITO position for FY '15 will bring the installation of AWIPS 2 to a halt.

Ironically, on March 10, NWS Director Uccellini sent an email to all NWS employees notifying them that the agency was recruiting to fill 16 vacant ITO positions:

In the FY 2014 Omnibus, Congress instructed the NWS to fill the Information Technology Officer (ITO) vacancies at our local Weather Forecast Offices. We are pleased to announce the opening of a recruitment action to fill 16 ITOs. Please see the following links to those positions as they appear on USA Jobs.

If the agency proposal to eliminate funding for these positions is approved, the NWS will be required to RIF these 16 new hires by September 30, 2014, shortly after being hired.

The agency has requested \$3 million to conduct “baseline analyses” of the NWS workforce as a predicate to “restructure current NWS resources.” These will include “assessment of adequacy of protections against degradation of service.” Congressional Submission, pp. NWS-48, 49. The NWS should not be conducting structural changes and workforce reconfiguration, such as IT consolidation, until such analyses are completed.

While other proposed reductions do not directly jeopardize the employment security of the NWS workforce, they will deprive NWS employees and local communities of the tools they need to protect the American public. These include a \$6.5 million reduction for the **National Mesonet Network**; a \$4 million reduction in **Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Services**; and a \$6 million reduction in **Tsunami**

Hazard Mitigation Program Grants that would eliminate local education, awareness, and inundation and evacuation map development.

The agency's Congressional Submission itself describes the damage that would be caused by four additional reductions it seeks. The agency has proposed a \$9 million reduction in funding for the **Next Generation Air Transportation System Weather Program**. According to the Submission:

This funding decrease suspends most long lead time weather research and development efforts, including research to improve aviation parameter forecasts, applications to monitor and improve automatically generated forecast products, ensemble and probabilistic model development for aviation parameters . . .

A reduction to the NextGen Weather Program introduces operational and safety risks to this multi-agency Presidential Initiative. A slowed investment means that there will be less improvement in the accuracy, timeliness and consistency of weather products affecting air travel delays and safety and efficiency in the National Airspace System.

pp. NWS-42, 43.

Similarly, the agency also concedes that its proposal to reduce funding for the **Hurricane Forecast Improvement Project** by \$8.2 million will halt progress made in improving hurricane track and intensity forecasting and protecting those in harm's way:

Reduction to HFIP introduces risk to NOAA's efforts to improve regional and global weather models, as well as data assimilation techniques. Populations in vulnerable coastal regions of the United States will not benefit from improved guidance leading to continued over warning resulting in unnecessary, costly evacuations. Strategic partnerships with interagency and academic partners will be significantly scaled back or terminated risking the reputation of NOAA to be a contributing member of this research community.

Congressional Submission, p. NWS-58.

The PB proposes a \$1.5 million reduction that would "slow **Advanced Weather Interactive Processing System Service** Improvements." As a result of this reduction, the NWS will defer implementation of the AWIPS "Weather Event Simulator" from FY '15 to FY '17, even though this "comprehensive training capability, will enable NWS forecasters to develop and sustain AWIPS' product and service dissemination skills" and "will also allow forecasters to more effectively utilize new Weather-Ready Nation capabilities as they are added to the AWIPS infrastructure." In addition:

A reduction to AWIPS will delay future development work associated with new tools and capabilities aimed at improved decision support services to transform NWS' service delivery functions. NWS will be limited in providing future tools and capabilities which meteorologists/hydrologists use in situational awareness for warning/forecast preparation to better align with the emerging needs of a Weather-Ready Nation. The development of robust, efficient service backup capabilities to support local needs as well as COOP activities will also be deferred.

Congressional Submission, p. NWS-78.

Finally, the agency has proposed to reduce funding for **repairs at Weather Forecast Offices and River Forecast Centers** by \$2.4 million, despite “unacceptable conditions at leased facilities that could impact operations. . . Today, four of these leased facilities face a multitude of issues making them unsustainable for continued operations.” Congressional Submission, p. NWS-93.

NWSEO notes that the PB has proposed additional funds for NEXRAD service life extension, upgrades to IT infrastructure, re-architected Telecommunications Gateway, and relocation of the National Logistics Supply Center and National Reconditioning Center. These expenses do not represent new initiatives or service improvements, but rather delayed maintenance or upgrades or replacements to outdated facilities that should have been funded or addressed years ago. As such, they do not represent an investment in the future but rather are evidence of long-term neglect.