

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
Policy on Partnerships in the Provision of Environmental Information  
January 2006**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) "Policy on Partnerships in the Provision of Environmental Information" strengthens the partnership among government, academia, and the private sector which provides the Nation with high quality environmental information.

**History**

The policy responds to recommendations contained in both the National Research Council's (NRC) study, "Fair Weather: Effective Partnerships in Weather and Climate Services," (National Academy Press, 2003) [<http://books.nap.edu/catalog/10610.html>] and extensive public comments on a proposed policy. The NRC study identified the need for a policy that would recognize advances in technology, as well as the enactment of relevant laws and implementing guidance, particularly the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, 44 USC Part 45, and OMB Circular No. A-130, "Management of Federal Information Resources," 61 FR 6428 (February 20, 1996), [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars/a130/a130trans4.html>] which were promulgated subsequent to a previous National Weather Service (NWS) policy issued in 1991. (56 FR 1984, (January 18, 1991))

During the period January 12 through June 30, 2004, NOAA sought and received 1473 comments on a proposed policy. On December 1, 2004, NOAA promulgated a policy responding to recommendations from the NRC study, incorporating applicable law and government-wide information policies, and responding to comments on the proposed policy.

During the period August 4 through November 2, 2005, NOAA sought and received 139 comments on proposed clarifying language to more clearly express NOAA's views of the critical role played by the private sector in the environmental information enterprise as a whole. This document responds to these comments and promulgates final language for the Policy.

The complete policy history is retained at <http://www.noaa.gov/partnershippolicy/history>

**Introduction**

Environmental information services about weather, water, and climate are expanding to include chemical, biological, and ecological parameters. This policy uses the term "environmental information services" to capture this reality and convey the intended scope: This policy concerns provision of environmental information by all of NOAA's programs, which are organized by the NOAA strategic plan into NOAA's four mission goals:

- Protect, Restore, and Manage the Use of Coastal and Ocean Resources Through an Ecosystem Approach to Management
- Understand Climate Variability and Change to Enhance Society's Ability to Plan and Respond
- Serve Society's Needs for Weather and Water Information
- Support the Nation's Commerce with Information for Safe, Efficient, and Environmentally Sound Transportation

Similarly, the broad enterprise providing these services and composed of government, private sector, and academic/research institutions is expanding the scope of the types of information services provided. The term "environmental information enterprise" is used throughout to refer to this growing and vigorous enterprise – both traditional and emerging elements.

The Nation's environmental information enterprise is conducted by many parties whose contributions are complementary and at times overlapping. NOAA has specific mission responsibilities as part of this enterprise, and NOAA also has a responsibility to foster the growth of this complex and diverse enterprise as a whole to serve the public interest and the Nation's economy. The Nation benefits from government information disseminated both by federal agencies and by diverse nonfederal parties, including commercial and not-for-profit entities. This policy commits NOAA to give due consideration to these abilities, and to consider the effects of its decisions on the activities of these entities in accordance with applicable law and government-wide policy. NOAA will not haphazardly institute significant changes in existing information dissemination activities, or introduce new services, without first carefully considering the full range of views and capabilities of all parties as well as the public's interest in the environmental information enterprise.

The NRC study examined the respective roles of the government, academic, and private sectors, and provided recommendations regarding how the partnership can effectively move forward in an era of rapid advances in science and technology. This three-sector system has led to an extensive and flourishing set of services that are of great benefit to the public and the economy. The NRC also found that some level of tension is an inevitable but acceptable price to pay for the excellent array of weather and climate products and services our Nation enjoys. The NRC study challenged the community to reduce the frictions and inefficiencies of the existing system, permitting the three sectors to live in greater harmony. This policy will help advance that goal.

The policy directs all NOAA offices to "establish and publish procedures to implement this policy" and identifies the NOAA Assistant Administrators and Chief Information Officer as responsible officials for implementation within the policy and management context of each office. It applies to all NOAA activities concerned with provision of environmental information services.

The policy recognizes external parties may disagree with decisions made at the program level and provides these parties recourse to cognizant leadership when they do. The policy also recognizes responsible NOAA officials may need access to independent advice to exercise their oversight of NOAA's information services.

### **Scope and application**

The Nation's environmental information enterprise is conducted by many parties. For convenience, these parties are typically grouped into three sectors – government, private sector entities, and the academic and research community – although the enterprise as a whole also includes non-governmental organizations, private citizens, and others. Activities of NOAA, other government agencies, the private sector, and the academic/research community include, but are not limited to:

- NOAA's mission is to provide information to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, and conserve and manage coastal and marine resources to meet the Nation's economic, social, and environmental needs. To carry out this mission, it conducts research, produces various assessments and information products, and develops and maintains an infrastructure of observation, communications, and prediction systems that support the entire enterprise. NOAA also has specific obligations to provide information services to other government agencies.
- Other government agencies at all levels – federal (civilian and military), regional, state, local, and tribal – carry out activities that support the enterprise.
- The private sector includes weather companies, practitioners working for private companies or as consultants, broadcasters, risk managers, and others. The private sector uses NOAA information and also develops and maintains an infrastructure of observation, communication, and prediction systems to create products and services tailored to the needs of their company or clients. A critical private sector role is working with NOAA to communicate forecasts and warnings that may affect public safety.
- Academia educates future generations of participants in the enterprise, advances the science, and develops new technologies and services. These activities contribute to advances in the public and private sectors, and spin off new private sector entities.

This policy only applies to the *provision* of environmental information services by NOAA. It sets forth basic principles NOAA will apply in making decisions regarding these information services for the purpose of advancing the Nation's environmental information enterprise. It does not apply to NOAA *acquisition* or *use* of information. Other NOAA policies apply to NOAA's acquisition and use of information in carrying out its mission responsibilities, and to publication of reports, journal articles, and the like.

And in particular, this policy does not apply to NOAA's acquisition, use, or provision of information in connection with performing its regulatory responsibilities carried out under applicable law, including the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act, and the Land Remote Sensing Policy Act.

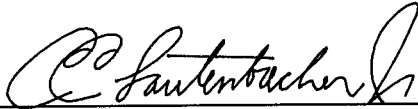
## **Policy**

1. NOAA will adhere to the policies contained in the Paperwork Reduction Act, the Government Paperwork Elimination Act, OMB Circular No. A-130, "Management of Federal Information Resources," and other relevant laws. These policies are based on the premise that government information is a valuable national resource, and the benefits to society are maximized when government information is available in a timely and equitable manner to all.
2. In furtherance of these policies, NOAA will carry out activities that contribute to its mission, including conducting research; providing environmental assessments; collecting and archiving data; ensuring their quality; issuing forecasts, warnings, and advisories; and providing open and unrestricted access to publicly-funded observations, analyses, model results, forecasts, and related information products in a timely manner and at the lowest possible cost to users.
3. To advance the environmental information enterprise, NOAA will provide information in forms accessible to the public as well as underlying data in forms convenient to additional processing, to the extent practicable and within resource constraints. NOAA will make its data and products available in internet-accessible, vendor-neutral form and will use other dissemination technologies, e.g., satellite broadcast, NOAA Weather Radio, and wireless, as appropriate. Information will comply with recognized standards, formats, and metadata descriptions to ensure data from different observing platforms, databases, and models can be integrated and used by all interested parties.
4. The Nation benefits from government information disseminated both by federal agencies and by diverse nonfederal parties, including commercial and not-for-profit entities. NOAA recognizes cooperation, not competition, with private sector and academic and research entities best serves the public interest and best meets the varied needs of specific individuals, organizations, and economic entities. NOAA will take advantage of existing capabilities and services of commercial and academic sectors to support efficient performance of NOAA's mission and avoid duplication and competition in areas not related to the NOAA mission. NOAA will give due consideration to these abilities and consider the effects of its decisions on the activities of these entities, in accordance with its responsibilities as an agency of the U.S. Government, to serve the public interest and advance the Nation's environmental information enterprise as a whole.

5. NOAA is committed to open consultation with all who are affected by NOAA's environmental information services and will use appropriate mechanisms to encourage the maximum practicable and timely input from and collaboration with interested persons and entities on decisions affecting the environmental information enterprise. These mechanisms include:
  - a. Establishing orderly processes for seeking input and suggestions to create, modify, or discontinue products and services;
  - b. Cooperating with, and as necessary establishing, open processes concerned with advancing the environmental information enterprise; and
  - c. Seeking advice on matters of concern in accord with the Federal Advisory Committee Act.
6. NOAA will promote the open and unrestricted exchange of environmental information worldwide, and seek to improve global opportunities for developing the enterprise.
7. NOAA's participation in the environmental information enterprise will be founded on the following principles:
  - a. Mission connection: NOAA's information services will support the NOAA mission. As a government agency, NOAA recognizes its core responsibility to protect life and property.
  - b. Consultation: Unless public safety or national security concerns dictate otherwise, NOAA will provide interested persons and entities adequate notice and opportunity for input into decisions regarding the development, dissemination, and discontinuance of significant products and services.
  - c. Open information dissemination: NOAA recognizes that open and unrestricted dissemination of high quality publicly funded information, as appropriate and within resource constraints, is good policy and is the law.
  - d. Equity: NOAA will be equitable in dealings with various classes of entities and will not show favoritism toward any particular entity within a class. NOAA recognizes it has special responsibilities to some users (e.g., public safety officials) and different legal requirements for its interactions with entities of different types (e.g., other federal agencies). NOAA will not provide an information service to one entity unless it can also be provided to other similar entities.
  - e. Recognition of Roles of Others: When faced with requests for information services, NOAA will explain existing NOAA services, including their uses and

limitations, and inform the requester that others in the environmental information enterprise may be able to meet the requester's needs.

8. **Implementation.** NOAA offices will establish and publish procedures to implement this policy. Responsible officials include the NOAA Assistant Administrators and Chief Information Officer.
9. **Complaints.** Persons who believe NOAA offices' information services are being provided in a manner contrary to this policy may bring the matter to the attention of the responsible officials (see above) who will ascertain the facts and advise the complainant of their conclusions.
10. **Administrative Review Mechanism.** NOAA will establish discretionary administrative review processes that responsible officials may use, as appropriate, to assist in making decisions regarding the creation, modification or termination of significant environmental information services.
11. **Periodic Review.** NOAA will review the effectiveness of this policy every five years beginning five years after the implementation date.



Date: JAN 19 2006

Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr.  
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.)  
Under Secretary of Commerce for  
Oceans and Atmosphere