

WEATHER SERVICE MODERNIZATION ACT

(15 U.S.C. 313 note)

TITLE VII—WEATHER SERVICE MODERNIZATION¹

SEC. 701. SHORT TITLE.

This title may be cited as the “Weather Service Modernization Act”.

SEC. 702. DEFINITIONS.

For the purposes of this title, the term—

(1) “automate” means to replace employees with automated weather service equipment;

(2) “change operations at a field office” means transfer service responsibility, commission weather observation systems, decommission a National Weather Service radar, change staffing levels significantly, or move a field office to a new location inside the local commuting and service area;

(3) “Committee” means the Modernization Transition Committee established by section 707;

(4) “degradation of service” means any decrease in or failure to maintain the quality and type of weather services provided by the National Weather Service to the public in a service area, including but not limited to a reduction in existing weather radar coverage at an elevation of 10,000 feet;

(5) “field office” means any National Weather Service Office or National Weather Service Forecast Office;

(6) “Plan” means the National Implementation Plan required under section 703;

(7) “relocate” means to transfer from one location to another location that is outside the local commuting or service area;

(8) “Secretary” means the Secretary of Commerce;

(9) “service area” means the geographical area for which a field office provides services or conducts observations, including but not limited to local forecasts, severe weather warnings, aviation support, radar coverage, and ground weather observations; and

(10) “Strategic Plan” means the 10-year strategic plan for the comprehensive modernization of the National Weather Service, required under section 407 of the National Aero-

¹This title was enacted as title VII of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Authorization Act of 1992 (Public Law 102-567), which is included elsewhere in this compilation.

navitics and Space Administration Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 1989 (15 U.S.C. 313 note).

SEC. 703. NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN.

(a) NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN.—As part of the budget justification documents submitted to Congress in support of the annual budget request for the Department of Commerce, the Secretary shall include a National Implementation Plan for modernization of the National Weather Service for each fiscal year following fiscal year 1993 until such modernization is complete. The Plan shall set forth the actions, during the 2-year period beginning with the fiscal year for which the budget request is made, that will be necessary to accomplish the objectives described in the Strategic Plan, and shall include—

(1) detailed requirements for new technologies, facilities, staffing levels and positions, and funding, in accordance with the overall schedule for modernization;

(2) notification of any proposed action to change operations at a field office and the intended date of such operational change;

(3) identification of any field office that the Secretary intends to certify under section 706, including the intended date of such certification;

(4) special measures to test, evaluate, and demonstrate key elements of the modernized National Weather Service operations prior to national implementation, including a multistation operational demonstration which tests the performance of the modernization in an integrated manner for a sustained period;

(5) detailed plans and funding requirements for meteorological research to be accomplishment under this title to assure that new techniques in forecasting will be developed to utilize the new technologies being implemented in the modernization; and

(6) training and education programs to ensure that employees gain the necessary expertise to utilize the new technologies and to minimize employee displacement as a consequence of modernization.

(b) TRANSMITTAL TO COMMITTEE.—The Secretary shall transmit a copy of each annual Plan to the Committee.

(c) CONSULTATION.—In developing the Plan, the Secretary shall consult, as appropriate, with the Committee and public entities responsible for providing or utilizing weather services.

SEC. 704. MODERNIZATION CRITERIA.

(a) NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL REVIEW.—The Secretary shall contract with the National Research Council for a review of the scientific and technical modernization criteria by which the Secretary proposes to certify action to close, consolidate, automate, or relocate a field office under section 706. In conducting such review, the National Research Council shall prepare and submit to the Secretary, no later than 9 months after the date of enactment of this Act, a report which—

(1) assesses requirements and procedures for commissioning new weather observation systems, decommissioning an

outdated National Weather Service radar, and evaluating staffing needs for field offices in an affected service area;

(2) assesses the statistical and analytical measures that should be made for a service area to form an adequate basis for determining that there will be no degradation of service; and

(3) includes such other recommendations as the National Research Council determines are appropriate to ensure public safety.

(b) CRITERIA.—No later than 12 months after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in consultation with the National Research Council and the Committee and after notice and opportunity for public comment, shall publish in the Federal Register modernization criteria (including all requirements and procedures), based on the report required under this section, for—

(1) commissioning new weather observation systems, decommissioning an outdated National Weather Service radar, and evaluating staffing needs for field offices in an affected service area; and

(2) certifying action to close, consolidate, automate, or relocate a field office under section 706.

SEC. 705. CHANGES IN FIELD OFFICE OPERATIONS.

(a) NOTIFICATION.—The Secretary shall not change operations at a field office pursuant to implementation of the Strategic Plan unless the Secretary has provided the notification required by section 703.

(b) WEATHER RADAR DECOMMISSIONING.—The Secretary shall not remove or permanently decommission any National Weather Service radar until the Secretary has prepared radar commissioning and decommissioning reports documenting that such action would be consistent with the modernization criteria established under section 704(b)(1). The commissioning report shall document that the radar system performs reliably, satisfactory maintenance support is in place, sufficient staff with adequate training are present to operate the system, technical coordination with weather service users has been completed, and the radar being commissioned satisfactorily supports field office operations. The decommissioning report shall document that the replacement radar has been commissioned, technical coordination with service users has been completed, and the radar being decommissioned is no longer needed to support field office operations.

(c) SURFACE OBSERVING SYSTEM COMMISSIONING.—The Secretary may not commission an automated surface observing system located at an airport unless it is determined, in consultation with the Secretary of Transportation, that the weather services provided after commissioning will continue to be in full compliance with applicable flight aviation rules promulgated by the Federal Aviation Administration.

SEC. 706. RESTRUCTURING FIELD OFFICES.¹

SEC. 706. (a) PROHIBITION.—The Secretary shall not close, before January 1, 1996, any field office pursuant to implementation of the Strategic Plan.

(b) CERTIFICATION.—The Secretary shall not close, consolidate, automate, or relocate any field office, unless the Secretary has certified that such action will not result in any degradation of service. Such certification shall include—

(1) a description of local weather characteristics and weather-related concerns which affect the weather services provided within the service area;

(2) a detailed comparison of the services provided within the service area and the services to be provided after such action;

(3) a description of any recent or expected modernization of National Weather Service operations which will enhance services in the service area;

(4) an identification of any area within any State which would not receive coverage (at an elevation of 10,000 feet) by the next generation weather radar network;

(5) evidence, based upon operational demonstration of modernized National Weather Service operations, which was considered in reaching the conclusion that no degradation in service will result from such action; and

(6) any report of the Committee submitted under section 707(c) that evaluates the proposed certification.

(c) PUBLIC REVIEW.—Each certification decision shall be preceded by—

(1) publication in the Federal Register of a proposed certification; and

(2) a 60-day period after such publication during which the public may provide comments to the Secretary on the proposed certification.

(d) FINAL DECISION.—If after consideration of the public comment received under subsection (c) the Secretary, in consultation with the Committee, decides to close, consolidate, automate, or relocate any such field office, the Secretary shall publish a final certification in the Federal Register and submit the certification to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology of the House of Representatives¹.

(e) SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.—The Secretary may not close or relocate any field office—

(1) which is located at an airport, unless the Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Transportation and the Committee, first conducts an air safety appraisal, determines that such action will not result in degradation of service that affects aircraft safety, and includes such determination in the certification required under subsection (b); or

¹So in law.

¹In accordance with section 1(a)(10) of Public Law 104-14 (109 Stat. 187), “the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology of the House of Representatives shall be treated as referring to the Committee on Science of the House of Representatives”.

(2) which is the only office in a State, unless the Secretary first evaluates the effect on weather services provided to in-State users, such as State agencies, civil defense officials, and local public safety offices, and includes in the certification required under subsection (b) the Secretary's determination that a comparable level of weather services provided to such in-State users will remain.

(f) LIAISON OFFICER.—The Secretary may not close, consolidate, automate, or relocate a field office until arrangements have been made to maintain for a period of at least 2 years at least one person in the service area to act as a liaison officer who—

(1) provides timely information regarding the activities of the National Weather Service which may affect service to the community, including modernization and restructuring; and

(2) works with area weather service users, including persons associated with general aviation, civil defense, emergency preparedness, and the news media, with respect to the provision of timely weather warnings and forecasts.

SEC. 707. MODERNIZATION TRANSITION COMMITTEE.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established a committee of 12 members to be known as the Modernization Transition Committee.

(b) MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS.—(1) The Committee shall consist of—

(A) five members representing agencies and departments of the United States which are responsible for providing or using weather services, including but not limited to the National Weather Service, the Department of Defense, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency; and

(B) seven members to be appointed by the Secretary from civil defense and public safety organizations, news media, any labor organization certified by the Federal Labor Relations Authority as an exclusive representative of weather service employees, meteorological experts, and private sector users of weather information such as pilots and farmers.

(2) The terms of office of a member of the Committee shall be 3 years; except that, of the original membership, four shall serve a 5-year term, four shall serve a 4-year term, and four shall serve a 3-year term. No individual may serve for more than one additional 3-year term.

(3) The Secretary shall designate a chairman of the Committee from among its members.

(c) DUTIES.—(1) The Committee may review any proposed certification under section 706 for which the Secretary has provided a notice of intent to certify in the Plan, and should review such a proposed certification if there is a significant possibility of degradation of service within the affected service area. Upon the request of the Committee, the Secretary shall make available to the Committee the supporting documents developed by the Secretary in connection with the proposed certification. The Committee may prepare and submit to the Secretary, prior to publication of the proposed certification, a report which evaluates the proposed cer-

tification on the basis of the modernization criteria and with respect to the requirement that there be no degradation of service.

(2) The Committee shall advise the Congress and the Secretary on—

(A) the implementation of the Strategic Plan, annual development of the Plan, and establishment and implementation of modernization criteria; and

(B) matters of public safety and the provision of weather services which relate to the comprehensive modernization of the National Weather Service.

(d) **PAY AND TRAVEL EXPENSES.**—Members of the Committee who are not employees of the United States shall each be paid at a rate equal to the daily equivalent of the rate for GS-18 of the General Schedule under section 5332 of title 5, United States Code, for each day (including travel time) during which the member is engaged in the actual performance of duties vested in the Committee. Members shall receive travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, as authorized by section 5703 of title 5, United States Code.

(e) **STAFF.**—The Secretary shall make available to the Committee such staff, information, and assistance as it may reasonably require to carry out its activities.

(f) **TERMINATION.**—The Committee shall terminate on December 31, 1999.

SEC. 708. WEATHER SERVICE REPORT.

(a) **REPORT.**—The Secretary shall prepare a report on the proposed modernization of the National Weather Service and transmit the report, not later than 6 months after the date of enactment of this Act, to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology of the House of Representatives¹.

(b) **CONTENTS.**—(1) The report required by subsection (a) shall identify the size of the geographic area of responsibility of each proposed Weather Forecast Office and shall include an explanation of the number and type of personnel required at each Weather Forecast Office. For each proposed Weather Forecast Office covering a geographic area greater than two times the average geographic area of responsibility of Weather Forecast Offices nationwide, the report shall detail the reasons for assigning those Weather Forecast Offices a geographic area which differs significantly from the national average.

(2) The report shall list the number of next generation weather radars that will be associated with each Weather Forecast Office nationwide under the proposed modernization plan. If some Weather Forecast Offices will be associated with more than one such radar, the report shall explain the deviation from the National Weather Service's stated policy of associating one such radar with one Weather Forecast Office, and shall analyze and compare any differences in the expected efficiency of those Weather Forecast Of-

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fices with Weather Forecast Offices that will be associated with only one such radar.

(c) CONSULTATION.—In preparing portions of the report that address Weather Forecast Offices located in areas of the Nation that are uniquely dependent on general aviation as a means of transportation, the Secretary shall consult with local aviation groups. In the case of Alaska, such local groups shall include the Alaska Aviation Safety Foundation, the Alaska Airmen's Association, and the regional representatives of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association.

SEC. 709. REPEALS.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 1989 (15 U.S.C. 313 note), is amended by repealing—

- (1) subsections (b), (c), and (d) of section 407; and
- (2) section 408.