



FY2013 BUDGET BRIEFING BY NOAA OFFICIALS

On February 16, 2012, the administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Jane Lubchenco and other NOAA officials, including Deputy Administrator Kathy Sullivan, provided a briefing on NOAA's FY2013 budget request. These SpacePolicyOnline.com meeting notes were originally published as an article on February 16 under the title NOAA Administrator: Weather Satellites Vital, but "Loom Large" in Budget. The budget request includes funding for JPSS, GOES-R, DSCOVR and Jason-3 satellites.

Referring repeatedly to the "painful choices" that had to be made, Jane Lubchenco, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), presented her agency's FY2013 budget request at a briefing on Thursday. The need to fund the nation's "vital" civil weather satellites means that other NOAA programs will be cut, she said, even though the agency as a whole is requesting a slight increase compared to FY2012.

NOAA, part of the Department of Commerce, is building a new generation of polar-orbiting weather satellites -- the Joint Polar Satellite System (JPSS) -- as well as a new generation of geostationary weather satellites -- the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite-R (GOES-R) series. The FY2013 JPSS budget request is \$916.4 million, a slight decrease from the \$924 million NOAA received for FY2012. For GOES-R, the request is \$802 million, up substantially from \$615.6 million in FY2012 -- Lubchenco called it a "planned increase." NOAA's total request is \$5.1 billion, an increase of \$154 million over FY2012.

Cost overruns and schedule delays in building the new weather satellites, highlighted by the programmatic failure of the tri-agency National Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS), have left Congress skeptical of the program management capabilities of NOAA and its NPOESS partner, the Department of Defense (DOD). DOD has its own polar orbiting weather satellites -- the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program (DMSP). NPOESS was supposed to merge the NOAA and DOD polar-orbiting systems, but the [Obama Administration gave up](#) on the effort in FY2011 after 16 trouble-filled years. The decision followed a final independent review that concluded the two agencies' cultures were simply too disparate for them to work together effectively.

The NPOESS divorce terms were that NOAA and DOD would revert to separate systems. NOAA's is JPSS and more urgently needed since all of NOAA's polar orbiting satellites already are in orbit. DOD still has two of its legacy DMSP satellites "in the barn" awaiting launch when needed. (DOD was planning a new system, the Defense Weather Satellite System, but it now also has been [cancelled](#).)

The Obama Administration included a sizeable increase for NOAA to get started on JPSS in the FY2011 budget. Unfortunately, that request was swept up in congressional turmoil as Republicans regained control of the House. Decisions on the FY2011 budget were delayed until half way through that fiscal year and many programs -- including JPSS -- were held to their previous year's level. Since the FY2010 level reflected the NPOESS program where NOAA and DOD were sharing the costs, it was less than half of what NOAA needed for JPSS.

The program fared better in FY2012, receiving \$924 million of the \$1.07 billion requested, but the damage was done. NOAA is concerned that there is very likely to be a "data gap" when existing satellites expire before the first JPSS is launched. Kathy Sullivan, Deputy Administrator of NOAA, said yesterday that there may still be a data gap even if Congress agrees to the funding level for JPSS included in the FY2013 request.

NOAA launched its last polar-orbit weather satellite in 2009. It has a five year design lifetime. A NASA research satellite, Suomi NPP, that was designed to test new technologies for the NPOESS program and was launched last fall will be pressed into service as an operational weather satellite to bridge the gap until the first JPSS is launched in late 2016 or early 2017. Suomi NPP has a three-year design lifetime. While satellites often exceed their design lifetimes, it is risky to bank on that, which is why NOAA is worried. Sullivan said that if all the satellites meet, but do not exceed, their design lifetimes, a 20-22 month data gap could result, especially taking into account that it requires several months for the JPSS satellite to be tested and calibrated after launch.

Lubchenco said yesterday that the FY2013 request provides a "stable funding path for the next five years" for JPSS and that the agency has committed to a funding cap for the lifecycle costs of the program. Senate appropriators included a cap in their version ([S. Rept. 112-78](#)) of the FY2012 appropriations bill that funds NOAA (P.L. 112-55), but it was not adopted in the conference report ([H. Rept. 112-284](#)). The Senate wanted to cap the program at \$9.43 billion through 2024. Lubchenco did not specify if that is the cap to which she is now committed. The Senate appropriators fretted about the "long term drain" JPSS could have on other NOAA programs. That sentiment was echoed in yesterday's briefing as well. Lubchenco stated that "the need to fund polar and geostationary satellites imposes serious constraints on the rest of NOAA's budget." Later, in response to a question about whether cuts to NOAA's education programs might be restored next year, she replied that satellites "will continue to loom large in our budget."

The GOES-R program has had its own significant overruns, although it appears to be on track at the moment. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has issued several reports about the program, [most recently](#) in 2010. The first of the GOES-R series is expected in the first quarter of FY2016. Lubchenco called the geostationary weather satellites "an unblinking eye in the sky" to monitor hurricanes and other weather phenomena.

Lubchenco's clear message, in fact, is that weather satellites are vital to many of NOAA's other programs, including fisheries, coastal management, and building a "weather-ready nation," not to mention many other aspects of American life, the economy and national security. Therefore, they must be a top priority for NOAA, she said.

NOAA's FY2013 request also supports two smaller satellite programs, JASON-3 and DSCOVR. JASON-3 is the third in a series of U.S.-European ocean altimetry satellites for which \$30 million is requested, up from \$19.7 million provided in FY2012. DSCOVR is a

space weather satellite that dates back to the Clinton Administration when it was called Triana. Vice President Al Gore was closely associated with developing the idea for the satellite and its launch was deferred for political reasons after George W. Bush became President. The return of White House control to Democrats in 2009 gave the project new life and NASA, NOAA and DOD are working together to get the spacecraft ready for launch and into space. NOAA is requesting \$22.9 million for FY2013, compared to \$29.8 million provided for FY2012.