

**WRITTEN STATEMENT ON THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC  
ADMINISTRATION'S FY 2007 BUDGET REQUEST  
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**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, STATE, JUSTICE, AND  
COMMERCE  
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, before I begin my testimony I would like to thank you for your leadership and the generous support you have shown the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Your continued support for our programs is appreciated as we work to improve our products and services for the American people. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 Budget Request for NOAA.

In the last year we have witnessed natural disasters on an unprecedented scale, including a tsunami in south Asia, earthquakes in Pakistan, and hurricanes, volcanic activity, drought and wildfires here in the United States. As a Nation, we labored to rebuild the nations and lives destroyed by the December 26, 2004 tsunami in south Asia, and this catastrophic event focused the spotlight on the threat tsunamis pose to all coastal communities. In 2005 we experienced the most active hurricane season in history with Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma battering the Gulf Coast and Florida, resulting in devastation unlike anything the Nation had witnessed before. Even now we are battling drought and wildfires in our Midwest and plain states, and sporadic eruptions of St. Augustine in Alaska. Never in our Nation's history has the need to understand the weather and our environmental resources been so great, and never before has NOAA stood more ready to face the challenges ahead.

The FY 2007 President's Budget supports NOAA's priority to advance mission-critical services. The FY 2007 request is \$3.684B, which represents a \$345M or 10.3% increase over the FY 2007 base. This request includes the level of resources necessary to carry out NOAA's mission, which is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, and conserve and manage coastal and marine resources to meet our Nation's economic, social and environmental needs. At NOAA we work to protect the lives and livelihoods of Americans, and provide products and services that benefit the economy, environment, and public safety of the Nation. Before I discuss the details of our FY 2007 budget request, I would like to briefly highlight some of NOAA's notable successes from the past fiscal year (2005).

## **FY 2005 ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **NOAA Provided Critical Information and Support Before and After Hurricane Katrina**

NOAA's National Weather Service is the primary source of weather data, forecasts and warnings for the United States and its territories. NOAA's forecasts and warnings for Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita pushed the limits of state-of-the-art hurricane prediction. The National Weather Service operates the most advanced weather and flood warning and forecast system in the world, helping to protect lives and property and enhance the national economy. In partnership with DOD, NASA, NSF, and other federal agencies, the long-term continuous research efforts, including observations, modeling, and expanded computational resources have led to NOAA's current predictive capabilities and improved ways of describing uncertainty in prediction. Reconnaissance data from NOAA and Air Force Reserve aircraft provided critical data required for accurate hurricane prediction. Hurricane forecasts for Katrina and Rita were more accurate than ever for storm track, size, intensity, surge, and warning lead time, allowing for evacuation of 80% of New Orleans, and 90+% of Galveston.

NOAA's work did not end with the forecast. NOAA responded immediately to the destructive 2005 hurricanes by providing over 9,500 aerial images of the impacted coastline to help emergency responders assess the situation, analyzing satellite imagery to determine the coastal impacts, sending Scientific Support Coordinators to address nearly 400 hazardous material spills, and Navigation Response Teams to survey for obstructions to navigation in critical ports and waterways to allow relief supplies to be delivered and maritime commerce to resume. NOAA ships THOMAS JEFFERSON and NANCY FOSTER were diverted from planned missions to areas impacted by the hurricanes and helped collect data needed to reopen critical Gulf Coast ports and to assess impacts on Gulf Coast ports and fisheries. Readings from NOAA's National Water Level Observation Network (NWLON) tide stations in the region provided emergency responders with real time storm tides, and are now invaluable data that can be used in planning the rebuilding of the coast.

NOAA capabilities continue to support the impacted areas with response to spills and maritime incidents. NOAA has invested more than \$3.7M in 2005 grant funding to Gulf States to build, and in some cases re-build, their infrastructure and capacity to determine and deliver consistent and timely geodetic height information. Accurate land and water level heights are critical to determining effective highway evacuation routes, levee heights, storm surge modeling, flood plain mapping, sea level rise calculations, vessel under-keel and bridge clearance, subsidence monitoring, and restoration of coastal habitats.

### **NOAA Continues to Lead the Advancement of the Integrated Earth Observing System**

NOAA led the development and is now leading the implementation of the *Strategic Plan for the US Integrated Earth Observing System*, through the U.S. Group on Earth Observations

(USGEO). At the third Global Earth Observation Summit held in February 2005 in Brussels, the 10-year implementation plan for a Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) was endorsed. By endorsing the plan, the nations have accomplished the first phase of realizing the goal of a comprehensive, integrated, and sustained Earth observation system.

One of the Nation's highest technical priorities is to build integrated, global Earth observations. We need to build, on a global basis, the capability to observe the Earth in many dimensions and time scales, and improve the scientific basis for using those observations to predict weather conditions, understand climate trends, and reveal the complicated physical and biological relationships that shape the health and productivity of our ecosystems. GEOSS is an excellent example of science serving society. Over time, GEOSS will provide an important scientific basis for sound policy and decision making in every sector of our society including energy, public health, agriculture, transportation and numerous other areas that shape the quality of everyday life. In addition, it will enhance our capability to address natural disasters in the United States and throughout the world.

### **NOAA's Successful Satellite Launch Ensures Continuity and Improved Collection of Data**

A major component of GEOSS is NOAA's satellite program. NOAA-N was successfully launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base, California on May 20, 2005. Upon achieving orbit NOAA-N became NOAA-18 and was declared operational on August 30, 2005 as the primary afternoon satellite in the Polar Operational Environmental Satellite (POES) constellation. NOAA-18 marks the beginning of the NOAA and the European Organization for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites (EUMETSAT) Initial Joint Polar System (IJPS) agreement. The IJPS project comprises two NOAA polar satellites (NOAA-18 and NOAA-N Prime) and two EUMETSAT satellites (Metop A and Metop B). The IJPS agreement gives NOAA and EUMETSAT the ability to share satellite instrument data and products. Coordination among nations with different global observing systems is a cornerstone to the success of the GEOSS mission.

### **Recovering Threatened and Endangered Salmonids**

Efforts to conserve and recover the Nation's protected marine resources have made steady progress, as reported in the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) 2004 Biennial Report to Congress on the recovery program for threatened and endangered species, published in August 2005. In recent years, the abundance of both hatchery-reared and naturally spawning populations of listed salmon and steelhead has generally increased. Improvements are seen in many salmon populations — 16 of 26 species or evolutionarily significant units (ESU) of Pacific salmon are stable or increasing, six more than had been anticipated at this time.

## **NOAA Begins Expansion of U.S. Tsunami Warning Program; Prevents Costly and Unnecessary Evacuations on West Coast**

In response to the December 26, 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the Administration committed to expand the U.S. Tsunami Warning Program. A multi-year implementation plan, developed with supplemental funding in FY 2005, will improve the Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System and Tsunami Forecast System. Improvements in FY 2005 included: providing 24 hours a day, seven days a week (24/7) operations at NOAA Tsunami Warning Centers, seismic monitoring, and improved community preparedness through NOAA's TsunamiReady program. NOAA also utilized the experimental Tsunami Forecast System to accurately predict a tsunami off the coast of Oregon following an approximately 7.2 magnitude earthquake off of the northern California coast in June 2005. Within five minutes of the June 14 earthquake, NOAA's West Coast/Alaska Tsunami Warning Center issued a tsunami warning for areas within a two hour wave travel time, which included coastal areas from the California-Mexico border to the northern tip of Vancouver Island, B.C. The warning was cancelled about an hour later, after NOAA tide gauge and Deep-ocean Assessment and Reporting of Tsunamis (DART) buoy station data indicated the 10-15 cm wave would be non-destructive. Cancellation of the tsunami warning prevented unnecessary, and potentially costly, evacuations of people from the Oregon coast. For example, the accurate forecasting of a non-destructive tsunami in November 2003 saved Hawaii an estimated \$68M in projected evacuation costs.

The expanded U.S. Tsunami Warning System will be one of the systems contributing to a global tsunami/all-hazards warning system, joining the emerging Indian Ocean system and a planned Mediterranean/North Atlantic system.

### **NOAA and EPA Urge Americans to "Be Air Aware"**

Air quality forecasts produced by NOAA and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) were enhanced and expanded to better serve more regions of the United States. Forecast information for ground-level ozone has been available for the northeastern United States, and will now include areas from just east of the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Hour-by-hour forecasts, which look out to midnight the following day, are available online at: <http://www.weather.gov/airquality>. These forecasts provide information to more than 180 million people on the onset, severity, and duration of poor air quality. State and local air quality forecasters use this information as a tool in issuing next-day alerts for poor air quality to more than 300 communities.

### **New NOAA Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS<sup>®</sup>)**

The Columbia River is now the 13th major waterway in the United States to install a NOAA Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS<sup>®</sup>). PORTS<sup>®</sup> support safe, cost-efficient marine transportation by providing accurate real-time oceanographic and meteorological data. Managed by NOAA, the system is operational and serving the Columbia River maritime community. Nearly 48 million tons of cargo transits through the Columbia River annually; vessel operators must know the depth of the water in order to maximize ship efficiency and minimize groundings and accidents. In port areas, water levels and currents frequently differ

from predictions, as a result of changes in winds and water run off. PORTS<sup>®</sup> provides accurate real-time information needed to make marine transportation both safe and efficient. The Tampa Bay economy receives more than \$7M a year in savings and direct income from the operation of PORTS<sup>®</sup>. Users of PORTS<sup>®</sup> information include port authorities, vessel pilots, shipping companies, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, recreational boaters, fishermen, coastal managers, environmental organizations, academia and surfers. PORTS<sup>®</sup> information is available online at [http://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/d\\_ports.html](http://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/d_ports.html).

### **Significant Progress in Modernizing NOAA's Fleet of Ships**

NOAA's newest world class fisheries survey vessel (FSV), OSCAR DYSON, was delivered, commissioned and began operations collecting data to manage fishery stocks and protect marine mammals from its home port of Kodiak, Alaska. NOAA launched the second FSV, HENRY B. BIGELOW, which will be delivered in May. Construction began on FSV #3, and NOAA exercised the option to build FSV #4. In addition, a contract was awarded and conversion begun in 2005 on the former Navy T-AGOS vessel CAPABLE, which will be NOAA's first ship devoted to ocean exploration. Through a national ship-naming contest, CAPABLE will be re-commissioned OKEANOS EXPLORER.

## **FY 2007 BUDGET REQUEST HIGHLIGHTS**

### **Support People and Infrastructure**

As always, I support NOAA's employees by requesting adequate funding for our people, infrastructure, and facilities. NOAA's core values are people, integrity, excellence, teamwork, and ingenuity. Our ability to serve the Nation is determined by the quality of our people and the tools they employ. Adjustments for inflationary costs are the highest priority budget increase in FY 2007. These adjustments have been concentrated in the National Weather Service, which has labor-intensive 24/7 forecasting operations. These adjustments focus on maintaining and investing in our workforce and supporting NOAA's most important resource – our people.

This year, we focus our infrastructure improvements on our core mission to observe and monitor the Earth. Central to this mission is the operations and maintenance of NOAA vessels and critical enhancements to marine safety, facility repair and modernization. Out of nearly \$150M in Mission Support program increases, \$7.5M will support Marine operations for NOAA ships. \$13.8M will be used to modernize our fleet. \$4M will go toward education and training. Only upon a strong foundation can we fulfill our mission.

The backbone of the NOAA infrastructure is our integrated observation effort, including building state-of-the-art satellite programs. NOAA serves with NASA and OSTP as lead for the federal government in developing our U.S. integrated observing strategy. In addition, I serve as one of four intergovernmental co-chairs of the effort to develop the Global Earth Observation System of Systems. The FY 2007 NOAA budget request includes significant increases to support requirements for NOAA's leading role in building an integrated earth observing system. NOAA integrated observation efforts include state of the art satellite programs, including a requested

increase of \$20.3M for the tri-agency National Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS), which will replace the Polar Operational Environmental Satellite (POES) program after completion of the current K-N' series of satellites. As you are aware, the NPOESS program has encountered significant cost and schedule overruns, which are not included in the FY 2007 request. NPOESS is currently undergoing a recertification review in accordance with Nunn-McCurdy requirements. This review will shape the way forward and future budget requirements. The Department of Defense request for NPOESS matches the NOAA request, as part of the shared funding arrangement.

The Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite (GOES) program requested increase for FY 2007 of \$104M supports continuity of essential weather satellite coverage with advanced capabilities for supporting the Nation's severe weather events, such as hurricanes. The 2005 hurricane season illustrated a need for continued support in this area. FY 2007 funds will be used to continue the operation and acquisition of our current GOES series and move the development of the next-generation GOES series, GOES-R, into the system acquisition phase of its procurement. GOES-R is scheduled for launch in 2012.

The FY 2007 President's Budget builds on funding provided in the past two fiscal years (\$14.5M in the FY 2005 supplemental appropriation and \$9.5M in the FY 2006 appropriation) by requesting an additional \$12.4M to operate and maintain the strengthened U.S. Tsunami Warning Network. Funds will be used to operate and maintain the newly expanded DART buoy systems, new sea-level monitoring stations, the upgraded local seismic networks supporting the West Coast/Alaska and Pacific Tsunami Warning Centers, and to operate both centers as 24/7 Operation Centers. An increase of \$1.4M is needed to operate and maintain the seven new data buoys deployed in 2005, which enhance real-time hurricane data and observations and storm monitoring in the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic.

The President's FY 2007 request also includes \$13.7M in increases for core administrative functions. This request includes increases for information technology and for administrative support services to the individual line offices. These increases are necessary to implement, operate, and maintain the NOAA enterprise IT security architecture and to maintain the levels of direct administrative, technical, human resources, financial and security services which are crucial in achieving NOAA's mission.

### **Invest in Ecosystems Management and Research**

In FY 2007, NOAA proposes increases of \$19.7M for fisheries activities in the Gulf of Mexico. The additional support will help a variety of fisheries in this region, which has been greatly impacted by hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. NOAA has also identified the Gulf of Mexico as a priority large marine ecosystem for new funding due in part to the region's readiness to implement a Regional Ecosystem Plan and in part to the socioeconomic value of its fisheries. This increase will enhance data collection, improve estimates of socioeconomic benefits and costs associated with our management regimes, and enhance research to reduce bycatch and reduce harm to protected resources during commercial and recreational fishing. Expected benefits are increased knowledge of fish species through stock assessment studies; increased knowledge of impacts to fishing communities through socio-cultural surveys; and increased

knowledge of the impacts of hurricanes on the commercial and recreational fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem. As the Gulf region rebuilds, these programs will ensure that adequate science and management resources are available to promote and support sustainable and robust fisheries. Some of the individual components of the initiative are discussed below.

The FY 2007 Budget Request includes significant resources for NOAA's ocean and coastal programs, and fisheries and protected species activities in support of the President's U.S. Ocean Action Plan. Highlights of our net increase of \$107.6M include initiatives to advance ecosystem-based approaches to managing our coastal and ocean resources. Among these requests are \$11.2M for Habitat Conservation, \$22.5M in Protected Species, and \$31.9M for Ecosystems and Fisheries and Research and Management. With this funding, NOAA will extend our Habitat Restoration Program to the Great Lakes, expand dedicated fishery access privilege programs, improve regional collaboration and planning of coastal state managers to improve management of coastal watersheds and marine resource areas, and enhance observing and information delivery systems to inform the public. NOAA requests an increase of \$7.6M to increase and improve assessments of fish stocks, which includes support to assist the Southeast and Gulf regions in recovering from hurricane damage. Also included in the request is a \$22.5M increase for protected species to investigate ocean noise and its effects on the recovery of protected species, expand and modernize stock assessments, complete Endangered Species Act (ESA) mandated activities, and pilot proactive conservation efforts for species nearing the need for ESA listing, preventing additional listings.

NOAA is requesting \$6M in funding to support the Open Rivers Initiative, a major project that is a result of the Administration's Executive Order on Cooperative Conservation. This new Initiative will contribute to the repair of vital riverine ecosystems, benefit communities, and enhance populations of key species – all using a grassroots, consensus-based approach. To date, NOAA has received over 60 very deserving applications responding to its call for proposals, highlighting the nation-wide attention that this Initiative has already attracted.

By applying innovative strategies to improve internal and external coordination and integration based on ecosystem principles, and by establishing baselines and integrated observations of ecosystem indicators, NOAA will increase the effectiveness of its many program activities intended to produce healthy and productive ecosystems that benefit society. Initiating ecosystem approaches to management requires better monitoring and characterization, and more effective integration and collaboration among NOAA programs and its external partners. The requested budget increases allow NOAA to meet its responsibilities as stewards of living marine resources for the benefit of the Nation, through science-based conservation and management and the protection of ecosystem health.

### **Expand Climate Services and Observations**

The FY 2007 Request contains investments in several programs aimed at increasing our predictive capability, enabling NOAA to provide our customers (farmers, utilities, land managers, weather risk industry, fisheries resource managers, decision makers) with assessments of current and future impacts of climate events such as droughts, floods, and trends in extreme climate events. One such investment is the request of \$6.0M to enable NOAA to continue

building the ocean component of the global observing system which contributes to GEOSS, including floats, buoys, tide gauge stations and other ocean reference stations, per our international commitment. Advancing ocean systems toward global coverage will allow NOAA to better understand the state of the climate system and improve climate predictions.

NOAA's budget requests an increase of \$14.5M as part of the President's Climate Change Science Program (CCSP). The CCSP is responsible for coordinating and integrating federally funded research, observations, and decision-support activities related to climate variability and change. CCSP program plans for FY 2007 incorporate the relevant budgets from the CCSP departments and agencies and include the direct alignment of agency climate change science programs with the goals and sub-goals in the CCSP Strategic Plan. In FY 2007, CCSP near-term climate research priorities include integrating new remote-sensing observations, research and modeling; an integrated North American Carbon Program; understanding the impacts of climate variability and change on ecosystem productivity and biodiversity; and coping with drought through research and partnerships.

Another key investment is the request for \$4.0M to go towards drought impact research for the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), which will aid decision makers faced with drought and water resource management issues, and which has been identified as a near-term opportunity for implementation of the U.S. Integrated Earth Observation System. The request also includes \$2M to establish the capacity to produce consistent and continually-updated climate analysis data, deliver regular and systematic explanations of the state of the climate system, and advance understanding and predictions of climate extremes.

NOAA's FY 2007 Budget Request includes an increase of \$6.5M for high performance computing and communication, which restores NOAA's ability to use advanced computing power to forecast the Nation's weather and climate, model ecosystems and the ocean, and disseminate environmental information. Within this request is funding for NOAA's Data Centers and Information Services, which archive and provide access to the world's largest collection of data, including climate data, to more than 50,000 users per year.

### **Sustain and Improve Weather Forecasts and Warnings**

The FY 2007 budget includes increases of \$46.1M to sustain and improve weather forecasts and warnings. NOAA's weather and water services make a tremendous contribution to the Nation's health and economic vitality. For instance, weather warnings protect the public from extreme environmental events while forecasts are essential to weather- and climate-sensitive industries, which account for one-third of the Nation's GDP. As an example of the benefits, during a typical hurricane season NOAA's efforts save the Nation \$3 billion. Drought costs the Nation \$6-8 billion annually, and floods cost \$5 billion and cause more than 80 deaths per year. Estimates suggest the U.S. can reap a twelve-to-one return annually for every dollar invested in better water resource forecasting.

In addition to the \$12.4M in requested increases discussed above for the U.S. Tsunami Warning System and the \$1.4M for operations and maintenance for the new hurricane data buoys, the FY 2007 budget request includes funding to sustain and enhance other critical services. This

includes \$2.5M for the National Weather Service Telecommunications Gateway (NWSTG) Critical Infrastructure Protection. Funds will be used to implement a telecommunications network solution that resolves an existing single-point-of-failure issue associated with the commercial service provider for the NWSTG CIP. This network solution will ensure uninterrupted delivery of critical meteorological data necessary for the protection of life and property.

The budget request includes a \$3.5M increase to support the Wind Profiler Network. NOAA operates and maintains a network of 33 profiler stations which provide high-frequency wind data to benefit several important missions, including severe weather warnings (for tornadoes, flash floods, and winter storms), watches, and short-term forecasts. These products are important for public safety, aviation, and wildfire managers. The increase will fund engineering design and award a development contract for new frequency compliant transmitters that will enable the Profiler network to operate without interference from search and rescue beacon-equipped satellites being deployed by the European Space Agency \$1.2M is requested for Aviation Weather, which will fund procurement and fielding of 75 additional water vapor sensors as part of an Integrated Upper Air Observing System. Water vapor sensors are critical to describing weather hazards and increasing forecast accuracy to continue to improve U.S. aviation safety and economic efficiencies.

### **Facilitate Transportation**

The U.S. economy relies upon a transportation network of ship, rail, highway, and air transport to move people, cargo and commerce to, from and across the nation. This movement is heavily dependent upon the information and services that NOAA provides – weather and ice forecasts, real-time and forecast water level conditions and obstruction surveys, navigational charts, hazardous materials response, and satellite search and rescue. From 1990 to 2003, the value of U.S. international merchandise trade increased an average 6% annually, from \$889 billion to about \$2 trillion (in current dollars). The U.S. Marine Transportation System (MTS) carried as much as 95% of this trade by volume and 41% by value in 2003, more than any other transportation mode. The Nation also loses at least \$4 billion annually due to economic inefficiencies resulting from weather-related air-traffic delays, and the injuries, loss of life, and property damage from surface weather-related crashes cost an average of \$42 billion annually. NOAA's products and services help maintain the efficient flow of transportation and commerce.

Among our Commerce and Transportation programs, we are requesting \$2.0M to continue implementation of the National Vertical Datum Transformation Tool database, or VDATUM. VDATUM allows federal, state, and local government agencies to share geospatial data more effectively and benefits NOAA's modernization efforts. The FY 2007 budget request also includes \$1.9M to continue NOAA's efforts to provide Electronic Navigational Charts (ENCs). Sustained funding at this level will enable NOAA to cover all U.S. waters by 2010. In addition, \$2.7M is requested for tide and current data; \$2.0M of these funds will be used to rebuild and strengthen the National Water Level Observation Network's (NWLON) ability to provide navigation and storm tide information throughout extreme weather and water events such as hurricanes. Several stations were damaged or destroyed during the 2005 hurricane season.

## **Support Facilities Maintenance and Construction**

The FY 2007 President's Budget Request also includes important increases for facilities, necessary to provide a safe and effective working environment for NOAA's employees. An increase in funds for facilities management and modernization of \$9.4M will be used to provide crucial funding for new and planned facility repair and maintenance projects which address facility conditions affecting either employee safety or mission-operational readiness. Funding will also support the development and implementation of an annual integrated facility inspection program to assess conditions at NOAA-owned facilities, coordinated capital investment planning and execution for construction projects, and program direction and oversight for NOAA's major construction program.

An increase of \$11.0M will complete the construction of the NOAA Center for Weather and Climate Prediction (NCWCP) at the University of Maryland's M2 complex, fund the outfitting and relocation costs, and support the overlapping system functionality needed to transition from the World Weather Building to the NCWCP. Building occupancy is scheduled for February 2008.

## **CONCLUSION**

NOAA's FY 2007 Budget Request provides modest new investments in our priority areas while maintaining critical services, reflecting NOAA's vision, mission, and core values. The work NOAA accomplished in 2005 impacted every U.S. citizen. We will build on our successes from last year, and stand ready to meet the challenges that will surface in FY 2007 and beyond. NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through research and accurate prediction of weather and climate-related events, and to providing environmental stewardship of our Nation's coastal and marine resources. That concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to present NOAA's FY 2007 Budget Request. I am happy to respond to any questions the Committee may have.