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NOAA Spending Bill Orders New Study of National Climate Service

By ALLISON WINTER of [Greenwire](#)

The omnibus appropriations bill up for a vote today in the House directs the federal government to take another look at how it should organize a planned new National Climate Service.

The concept of a climate service has won broad support over the last year and a half, but lawmakers have clashed over who should run the agency: the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the White House or a group of federal agencies.

The spending bill could give a leg up to NOAA in that fight; it orders a study of the organizational options for a climate service within NOAA.

The concept of a climate service began in the waning months of the Bush administration when NOAA officials began exploring how to create a National Climate Service within that agency. The climate service would guide work on development of climate models and forecasts to help U.S. communities and businesses adapt to climate change

But the climate bill ([H.R. 2454 \(pdf\)](#)) approved last summer in the House put the White House, not NOAA, in charge of developing the structure of the program. The White House would have to determine how to draw on climate change research under way at more than a dozen federal agencies. The House legislation originally placed the climate service at NOAA, but lawmakers later modified their proposal.

Obama administration officials have not been in agreement on which agency should lead the program. In testimony before congressional panels, the president's science adviser avoided any endorsement of what agency should lead the program, while Commerce Secretary Gary Locke has pressed for a major role for NOAA ([ClimateWire](#), July 31).

The new study ordered in the conference agreement calls for the federal government to consider "maximum effectiveness and efficiency" for the service and how it could coordinate and align existing climate programs within NOAA and outside the agency.

It directs the report to include an assessment of how the climate service could provide information for regional, state and global leaders to help with decisionmaking on how to prepare for climate variability and climate change.

The report language in the bill directs NOAA to enter into a contract with the National Academy of Public Administration within two months to start the study and complete it 120 days after the contract is awarded.

NOAA funding

The massive omnibus spending bill, which cleared the conference committee Tuesday, includes funding for the State, Transportation, Labor and Commerce departments. The measure is expected to easily clear the House and Senate and be signed into law before the end of next week.

The measure includes billions of dollars for various climate change programs -- ranging from satellite programs at NOAA to State Department programs that aim to assist developing countries with climate change.

Within the Commerce-Justice-Science portion of the bill, the spending measure includes more than \$4.7 billion for NOAA. The nearly 9 percent increase is a greater spending boost than either the House bill or the Obama administration's request and would be the largest budget ever for the agency.

In the appropriations bills they passed earlier this year, the House and Senate both had similar overall spending numbers for NOAA but differed on how to allocate that money within the agency. For instance, the Senate gave a more modest boost for the National Marine Fisheries Service than the House but allocated more money for the National Ocean Service.

The conference agreement includes a major boost for the National Ocean Service -- exceeding both the House and Senate proposals. The \$522 million allocation is about 5 percent above funding levels from last year and nearly 13 percent higher than what the administration had requested. The Ocean Service oversees navigation services, ocean conservation and monitoring, estuary restoration and coastal zone management.

The conference agreement splits the difference between the House and Senate numbers on NMFS, with nearly \$905 million directed to the agency.

Within the total for the fisheries agency, the bill includes funding intended to help implement a new regime for fisheries management: sector-based management in New England and transitions to "catch shares" in other fisheries. Catch shares set up a cap-and-trade management regime for allocation of fish stocks.

The Obama administration is set to release a new policy today on catch-share management, intended to make it easier for fishery management councils to implement the plans. NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco has been a strong advocate for catch-share fisheries and requested more than \$18 million to support the programs in the budget.

The bill also acknowledges the massive threat climate change is posing to coral reefs. It includes \$29 million for coral reef programs, which funding report language in the bill says is crucial "given the magnitude of the effect of climate change on coral reefs worldwide and the vital role that coral reefs play in protecting the nation's beaches, sustaining fisheries and providing other economic benefits."

Within NOAA's accounts, the biggest funding increase would go to major new acquisitions for its weather and climate monitoring satellites, which are entering a critical procurement phase.

The bill also includes \$6.9 billion for the National Science Foundation, in line with the Senate numbers, and \$857 million for the National Institute of Standards and Technology, a nearly \$30 million cut from the

Senate proposal.

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