



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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ADMINISTRATION/CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE **Commerce/National Climate Service**

On May 5, Dr. Jane Lubchenco, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Administrator, testified before the House Science and Technology Committee, Subcommittee on Energy and Environment, regarding developing a National Climate Service (NCS). "The climate challenge before us is real," she said announcing the pending release of a report, *Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States*, the result of sustained collaboration and federal and extramural partnerships involving the U.S. Climate Change Science Program and U.S. Global Change Research Program which produced the report, 21 synthesis and assessment products, and a comprehensive survey of the state of knowledge about climate change impacts in the U.S.

"More work is needed, however, to understand users' needs and deliver climate-relevant information to inform decision-making.... Just as the nation's climate research efforts require and benefit from interagency and academic partnerships, so too will the communication of climate information to users. No single agency is capable of providing all of the information and services needed to inform decision-making. To be successful, this effort will require sustained federal agency partnerships and collaboration with climate service providers and end users." She shared NOAA's vision of working with relevant government agencies and diverse public and private sector partners to "shape a national effort that builds on existing capabilities and leverage the capabilities of other federal agencies to develop new information, services and delivery mechanisms to realize the potential of such a Service."

Dr. Lubchenco, a native of Denver, noted, "Within the United States, extensive climate-related changes have been documented over the last century. These include increases in continental-average temperatures, rising sea levels in many coastal locations, an increased frequency of extreme heavy rainfall events, lengthening of the growing season, earlier snowmelt, and altered river flow volumes. Water is an issue in every region, but the nature of the potential impact varies. Drought is a serious problem in many regions, especially the West and Southeast; and floods and water quality problems are likely to be amplified by climate change in most regions." Drought and flood losses average \$6-\$8B and \$5.2B respectively, and cause over 80 deaths per year.

She continued, "Until now, the systems and infrastructure that we as a nation have developed as the foundation of our water, energy, transportation, agriculture, and other sectors have been designed and built based on...our understanding of the past. In the same way, our approaches to the management and conservation of ecosystems and species have largely relied upon our scientific, historical understanding of those systems. For example, water planning and management have been based on historical fluctuations in records of stream flows, lake levels, precipitation, temperature, and water demands. All aspects of water management including reservoir sizing, flood operations, maximum urban stormwater runoff amounts, and projected water demands have been based on these records. Because climate change will significantly modify aspects of the water cycle, the assumption of an unchanging climate is no longer appropriate for many aspects of water planning.... [D]ecision-makers will need to be supported with access to the best climate information science can provide, and tools to apply that data to guide their decisions."

She explained, "Meeting the climate challenge will require an unprecedented level of coordination among federal agencies, along with our nongovernmental partners, to pull together our collective expertise to accomplish the goal of providing high quality climate information and services that are user-friendly, responsive, and relevant.... As we move forward we must find ways to maximize use of these capabilities, by integrating efforts to provide climate information and services that most effectively and efficiently respond to user needs. The nation's need for user-driven climate services is increasing and the federal government recognizes the importance of responding to these increasing demands."

Dr. Lubchenco noted that the Western Governors' Association, at a hearing before the Committee in May 2007, had stated that "decision makers at all levels of government and in the private sector need reliable and timely information to understand the possible impacts and corresponding vulnerabilities that are posed by climate change so that they can plan and respond accordingly." She added, "The nation needs an objective, authoritative, and consistent source of consolidated, reliable, and timely climate information to support decision-making.... I believe our country must address the impacts of the changing climate head-on...."

Unlike climate services, weather services are familiar to most citizens. Weather services focus on the description, analysis, and atmospheric forecasting on very short time scales.... The objective is to provide forecasts of continually changing weather conditions and warnings of severe weather events to protect life and property. The benefits of this service are measured in lives saved, injuries avoided, and reduction in property damage.... In contrast to weather, climate refers to the longer-term statistical properties of the atmosphere....” She noted that climate variability and change are products of external factors, such as the sun, complex interactions involving different earth system components, and human-induced changes. She stated, “Improving development and targeting delivery of climate information through a National Climate Service offers untold economic, public health and safety, and national security benefits.”

She testified, “NOAA has a vision of a National Climate Service [NCS] as a partnership that would be established with other federal agencies, various levels of government, and the private sector. The NCS would provide credible and authoritative climate information and services.... This would include policy-relevant information for decisions related to climate change mitigation and adaptation.... NCS must enable decision-makers, including resource managers, and the public to better anticipate, plan, and respond to impacts...must also remain engaged in climate change science to maintain credibility, awareness, and flexibility, and to avoid insularity...[and] must engage with a diversity of users to fully understand the needs and provide salient and useable information, tools, and expertise.... The NCS will build on many agencies’ strengths and experience.”

For more of Dr. Lubchenco’s testimony and other witnesses, including Dr. Michael Strobel, Director of the National Water and Climate Center, Dr. Philip Mote, Director, Oregon Climate Change Research Institute, and Dr. Nolan Doesken, Colorado State Climatologist, visit: <http://science.house.gov/publications>.

Interior/Bureau of Reclamation

On May 5, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a hearing on Interior nominees, including Michael Connor, as Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. Mike testified, “Taking the helm of the Bureau of Reclamation is a monumental task. As a New Mexican, one who understands the importance of water in the West, it is a job that I will relish. Water is a recurring part of my family history.... I am confident that my background as an engineer and lawyer and my experience in the private sector and in government have prepared me well for this position. I understand the issues facing Reclamation. Drought, climate change, aging infrastructure, increasing population, environmental needs, and site security....

We have made tremendous progress in this Committee in establishing the programs necessary to confront these issues. It is my hope that the Senate will now allow me to work on the implementation side. I am fully aware that the key to making progress on critical water...issues is to work cooperatively and openly with the different constituencies involved in these issues. The states, water users, power users, environmental community, Indian tribes, scientists, and several Federal agencies, all have an important role to play. Progress on seemingly intractable issues will only come through a cooperative effort based on fundamental recognition of the legitimate interests of...stakeholders and a serious commitment to achieving long-term certainty in water use and allocation. Without [which] water policy will continue to be formulated in the courtrooms rather than the negotiating table.”

ENVIRONMENT

Endangered Species Act

On April 28, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke announced that they were revoking Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation rules that the Bush Administration finalized in December. The rules modified the process so that federal agencies were not required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) if their actions were unlikely to have an adverse impact on a listed species.

“Because science must serve as the foundation for decisions we make, federal agencies proposing to take actions that might affect threatened or endangered species will once again have to consult with biologists at [FWS and NMFS],” Secretary Salazar said in a joint press release. Secretary Locke echoed this, “Our decision affirms the Administration’s commitment to using sound science to promote conservation and protect the environment.” (Interior Press Release 4-28)

When the rule was promulgated, then-Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne said federal agencies had long made their own determinations about when to consult on a project and that the rules clarified the threshold for when consultation should occur. However, critics, including House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Nick Rahall (D-WV), the Sierra Club, and the American Bird Conservancy, criticized the rules as giving federal agencies too much discretion to determine when consultation should occur and narrowing the scope of activities that may adversely impact listed species (WSW #1821, #1809, #1805).

Congress specifically authorized revocation of the rules, without the usually required notice and comment procedures, in the 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act. President Obama also directed a review of the rule in March. Salazar and Locke said that FWS and NMFS will conduct a new review to determine if any consultation improvements should be proposed.