



April 24, 2020

# National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA): FY2021 Budget Request and Appropriations

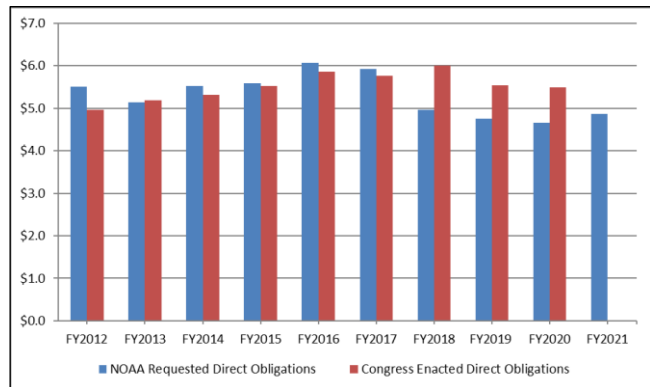
The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA’s) mission is to understand and predict changes in weather, climate, oceans, and coasts; to share that information with others; and to conserve and manage coastal and marine ecosystems and resources. NOAA’s work is divided among six line offices: National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NESDIS); National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS); National Ocean Service (NOS); National Weather Service (NWS); Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR); and Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO). NOAA also has an overall Mission Support (MS) office, which provides planning, administrative, financial, information technology, and other services to NOAA’s line offices.

Congress generally funds NOAA, an agency of the Department of Commerce (DOC), in the annual Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations law. Congress provides NOAA with discretionary and mandatory appropriations. Discretionary appropriations support two broad accounts—operations, research, and facilities (ORF) and procurement, acquisition, and construction (PAC)—as well as several relatively small accounts. Mandatory appropriations generally provide a small percentage of total NOAA appropriations and are disbursed to a variety of funds that support programs in NOS, NMFS, and OMAO. This CRS product examines discretionary funding for FY2021 and potential issues for Congress, such as NOAA’s proposed changes to certain grant programs, the Promote and Develop American Fishery Products & Research Pertaining to American Fisheries Fund, satellite programs, and the agency’s role in space commerce.

## Agency Funding

The Administration requested a total of \$4.86 billion in discretionary direct obligations for ORF, PAC, and other small accounts for FY2021, including \$4.63 billion in appropriations, according to the agency’s FY2021 budget summary. Direct obligations include appropriations, transfers from NOAA funds, and recoveries of canceled prior-year obligations. The FY2021 direct obligations request is \$193.0 million (4.1%) higher than the Administration’s FY2020 request, and \$643.0 million (11.7%) less than the enacted FY2020 level noted in the explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 116-93. Enacted discretionary direct obligations for NOAA over the last 10 years peaked in FY2018 (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Since FY2012, the enacted PAC account has ranged from about 28% to 41% of the total enacted direct obligations.

**Figure 1. NOAA Requested and Enacted Discretionary Direct Obligations, FY2012–FY2021**  
(\$ in billions, nominal)



**Source:** Congressional Research Service, from NOAA budget justifications and congressional explanatory statements.

**Notes:** Direct obligations include appropriations, transfers from NOAA funds, and recoveries of canceled prior-year obligations. Amounts do not include supplemental appropriations, rescissions, or sequestration.

## Issues for Congress

According to NOAA’s FY2021 budget summary, the requested budget supports priorities to (1) reduce the impacts of extreme weather and water events, (2) expand the “American Blue Economy,” and (3) advance space innovation.

## Proposed Program Funding Changes

For FY2021, NOAA proposed funding increases to 20 activities under ORF and PAC, totaling over \$159.6 million, primarily for goods and services from federal and nonfederal entities (**Table 1**). NOAA also requested a reduction or elimination of 105 activities totaling \$976.4 million. Grants, subsidies, and contributions (GSC) make up a majority (\$573.2 million, 58.7%) of the \$976.4 million. GSC includes grants awarded to nonfederal entities, such as states, universities, and corporations. GSC proposed to be eliminated represents between 0.3% (NESDIS) and 34.5% (OAR) of the line offices’ FY2021 base amounts. The remaining proposed eliminations are to services, such as aircraft repair, from nonfederal entities, advisory services, contracts with federal entities, personnel compensation and benefits, travel, and other program adjustments. The Administration proposed similar changes in the previous three fiscal years. For FY2020, Congress stated that it “retains many of these grant programs which allow States and communities to steer financial priorities through a bottom-up approach instead of Federal agencies driving local decisions from afar” (S.Rept. 116-127).

**Table I. NOAA FY2020-Enacted and FY2021-Requested Discretionary ORF and PAC Accounts Direct Obligations and Appropriations**  
(\$ in millions, nominal)

Line Offices	FY2020 Enacted <sup>a</sup>	FY2021 Base <sup>b</sup>	Requested Increases from Base	Requested Decreases or Terminations from Base	FY2021 Budget Request	FY2021 Enacted
NESDIS	\$1,514.2	\$1,514.0	\$98.1	\$108.0	\$1,504.0	NA
NMFS	\$947.7	\$973.3	\$0.4	\$196.8	\$841.7	NA
NOS	\$606.5	\$616.9	\$11.0	\$246.9	\$381.0	NA
NWS	\$1,168.6	\$1,195.2	\$7.0	\$81.9	\$1,120.3	NA
OAR	\$590.4	\$598.7	\$10.7	\$256.7	\$352.7	NA
OMAO	\$342.4	\$350.5	\$2.0	\$20.4	\$332.1	NA
Mission Support	\$330.4	\$358.3	\$30.3	\$65.6	\$323.0	NA
<b>Total Direct Obligations<sup>c</sup></b>	<b>\$5,500.1</b>	<b>\$5,607.0</b>	<b>\$159.6</b>	<b>\$976.4</b>	<b>\$4,854.8</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Total Appropriations<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>\$5,294.8</b>	<b>\$5,383.9</b>			<b>\$4,631.8</b>	<b>NA</b>

Sources: CRS, FY2020 - explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 116-93; and FY2021 - NOAA Budget Estimates Fiscal Year 2021.

Notes: NA = not available; ORF = operations, research, and facilities; PAC= procurement, acquisition, and construction.

- FY2020 NESDIS PAC enacted amounts differ between the two sources noted. The explanatory statement amount is used in this table.
- FY2021 base is equal to the FY2020-enacted amount plus expected Adjustments-To-Base, such as certain inflationary adjustments.
- “Total Direct Obligations,” or total program or funding level, includes direct new appropriations, transfers from other NOAA accounts, and recoveries of canceled prior-year obligations. Totals may differ due to rounding.
- “Total Appropriations” are a part of the total direct obligations. They include the enacted or requested appropriation dollars for the fiscal year and do not include recoveries of canceled prior-year obligations, transfers from other NOAA accounts, or supplemental appropriations.

### Promote and Develop American Fishery Products & Research Pertaining to American Fisheries Fund (P&D Fund)

The P&D fund is a small account that is financed through a mandatory transfer from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) of 30% of duties on imported fisheries products (e.g., \$183.8 million transferred to NOAA in FY2020). NOAA is again proposing that Congress directly appropriate mandatory funding to DOC, rather than transferring amounts from USDA. According to NOAA, the funds would support previously funded activities and the initial funding level would be equal to the expected transfer from USDA in FY2021, with adjustments in future years. As in the previous three fiscal years, the Administration’s request would transfer all P&D funds to ORF, leaving no funding for the Saltonstall-Kennedy (S-K) grant program. In recent years, Congress has directed the agency to use P&D funds to benefit U.S. fisheries and fishing communities (rather than ORF activities broadly) and “reject[ed] the administration’s proposal to eliminate the S-K grant program,” as described in S.Rept. 116-127.

### Satellite Programs

NOAA provides global weather and environmental data from satellites and other remote sensing technologies to other federal agencies, the public, and the private sector. Congress has previously raised questions about NOAA’s satellite programs, particularly the Joint Polar Satellite System (JPSS) and the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellites (GOES). In FY2020, Congress

approved the agency’s proposal to merge JPSS and Polar Follow On into one subactivity (Polar Weather Satellites). NOAA and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration jointly convened a board to study the 2018 malfunction of the advanced baseline imager on GOES-R (leading to periodic loss of infrared data) issued recommendations in July 2019. Congress may consider whether NOAA has appropriately responded to these recommendations. The DOC Office of the Inspector General has also expressed interest in the GOES-R program—the office initiated an audit in March 2020 to assess the program’s progress in achieving launch readiness for the next mission, named GOES-T.

### Space Commerce

Together with other agencies, DOC regulates and promotes the commercial space sector, including commercial remote sensing satellites. NOAA currently houses the Commercial Remote Sensing Regulatory Affairs Office (CRSRA) and Office of Space Commerce (OSC). NOAA’s FY2021 budget request again proposes to move CRSRA and OSC to DOC. In FY2020, Congress did not approve the proposal and directed the Secretary of Commerce to contract with the National Academy of Public Administration to conduct an independent review of the proposal. The contract was awarded on March 2, 2020.

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