



Updated November 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.

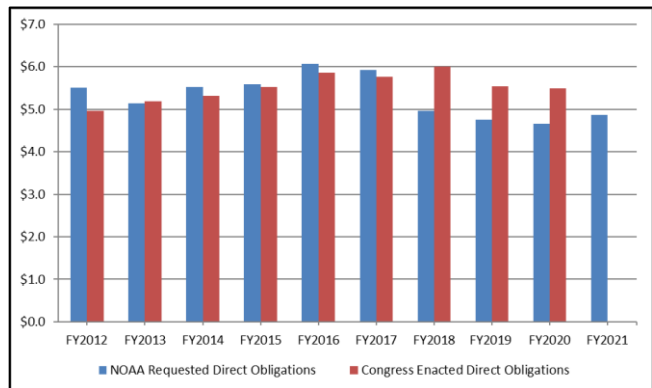
Congress generally funds NOAA, an agency of the Department of Commerce (DOC), in the annual Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS), and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. Congress provides NOAA with discretionary and mandatory appropriations. Discretionary appropriations support two broad accounts—operations, 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 ORF and PAC for FY2021 and potential issues for Congress, such as NOAA’s proposed changes to certain grant programs, satellite programs, the agency’s role in space commerce, and the Promote and Develop American Fishery Products & Research Pertaining to American Fisheries Fund (P&D Fund).

Agency Funding

NOAA requested a total of \$4.86 billion in discretionary direct obligations for ORF and PAC for FY2021, including \$4.63 billion in appropriations (Table 1). Direct obligations include annual appropriations, transfers, and recoveries from prior year obligations. Division B of the House-passed H.R. 7617 would provide \$5.68 billion for ORF and PAC direct obligations, \$179.6 million (3.3%) greater than the FY2020 enacted level and \$823.6 million (17.0%) greater than the FY2021 request. The FY2021 Senate Committee Majority Draft bill would provide \$5.62 billion for ORF and PAC direct obligations, \$122.1 million (2.2%) above the FY2020 enacted level and \$767.4 million (15.8%) above the FY2021 request. Over the last 10 years, enacted NOAA ORF and PAC direct obligations (in nominal dollars) peaked in FY2018 (Figure 1). Since FY2012, the

amounts enacted in the PAC account have 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 (CRS), from NOAA budget justifications and congressional explanatory statements.

Notes: Direct obligations include annual appropriations, transfers, and recoveries from prior year obligations. Amounts do not include supplemental appropriations.

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 (primarily goods and services from federal and nonfederal entities) under ORF and PAC, totaling over \$159.6 million. NOAA also requested a reduction to 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 reduction. GSC includes grants awarded to nonfederal entities, such as states, universities, and corporations. The proposed decreases to GSC represent between 0.3% (NESDIS) and 34.5% (OAR) of the line offices’ FY2021 base amounts. NOAA’s other requests would decrease services from nonfederal entities, advisory services, contracts with federal entities, personnel compensation and benefits, travel, and other program adjustments. NOAA proposed similar changes in the previous three fiscal years. The FY2021 House and Senate bills would not implement the agency’s proposed GSC changes, with the House Appropriations Committee report language stating support

for “NOAA’s ongoing collaboration with academia and the private sector through cooperative institutes and competitive research.”

Table 1. NOAA FY2020-Enacted, FY2021-Requested, and FY2021 House-Passed and Senate Committee Majority Draft Amounts for Discretionary ORF and PAC Accounts Direct Obligations and Appropriations
(\$ in millions, nominal)

Line Offices	FY2020 Enacted ^a	FY2021 Base ^b	FY2021 Budget Request	FY2021 House-Passed ^c	FY2021 Senate Comm. Majority Draft	FY2021 Enacted
NESDIS	\$1,514.2	\$1,514.0	\$1,504.0	\$1,509.7	\$1,521.1	NA
NMFS	\$947.7	\$973.3	\$841.7	\$967.6	\$961.4	NA
NOS	\$606.5	\$616.9	\$381.0	\$631.4	\$624.4	NA
NWS	\$1,168.6	\$1,195.2	\$1,120.3	\$1,204.5	\$1,201.5	NA
OAR	\$590.4	\$598.7	\$352.7	\$626.4	\$594.1	NA
OMAO	\$342.4	\$350.5	\$332.1	\$377.3	\$374.7	NA
Mission Support	\$330.4	\$358.3	\$323.0	\$361.5	\$345.0	NA
Total Direct Obligations^d	\$5,500.1	\$5,607.0	\$4,854.8	\$5,679.7	\$5,622.2	NA
Total Appropriations^e	\$5,294.8	\$5,383.9	\$4,631.8	\$5,396.0	\$5,345.5	NA

Sources: CRS, using explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 116-93; NOAA, *Budget Estimates Fiscal Year 2021*; H.Rept. 116-455; H.R. 7617; and Senate Appropriations Committee majority draft explanatory statement.

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

- The table shows the FY2020 NESDIS amount as noted in the explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 116-93.
- FY2021 base is equal to the FY2020-enacted amount plus expected “Adjustments-To-Base,” such as certain inflationary adjustments.
- There is a discrepancy between the direct obligations totals noted in H.Rept. 116-455 (\$5,678.4 million) and House-passed Division B of H.R. 7617 (\$5,679.7 million). The table shows the amounts per line office from H.Rept. 116-455 and total direct obligations and appropriations as passed in Division B of H.R. 7617.
- “Total Direct Obligations,” or total program or funding level, include annual appropriations, transfers, and recoveries from 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 supplemental appropriations.

Satellite Programs

NOAA provides global weather and environmental data from satellites and other remote sensing technologies to federal agencies, the public, and the private sector. Congress may consider changes, such as increased oversight or required reporting, to NOAA’s satellite programs, including Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellites (GOES). For instance, issues with the main imaging instrument on GOES-17, which launched in 2018, prompted NOAA and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to convene a mishap investigation board and the DOC Office of the Inspector General (OIG) to separately complete an investigation. NOAA plans to launch two more GOES in the next four years. In report language accompanying the proposed bills, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees each directed DOC to maintain oversight of NOAA satellite programs. Both chambers also instructed NOAA to continue to provide quarterly satellite briefings to the committees.

Space Commerce

Together with other agencies, DOC regulates and promotes the commercial space sector, including commercial remote sensing satellites. NOAA houses the Commercial Remote Sensing Regulatory Affairs Office (CRSRA) and Office of Space Commerce (OSC). As in previous years, NOAA’s

FY2021 budget request proposed to move CRSRA and OSC out of NOAA and into DOC as departmental activities. In report language accompanying the proposed bills, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees did not approve the relocation.

P&D Fund

The P&D Fund, an account outside of ORF and PAC, is financed through a mandatory transfer from the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to DOC of 30% of duties on imported fisheries products. In FY2021, NOAA proposed that (1) Congress directly appropriate mandatory funding to DOC rather than transfer amounts from USDA, and (2) funds would be used for ORF activities only. In previous years, Congress has kept the transfer structure in place and directed NOAA to use the P&D funds to support specific ORF fisheries activities and the congressionally authorized Saltonstall-Kennedy (S-K) grant program, which supports fisheries research and development projects. H.R. 7617 and accompanying report language would retain the transfer from USDA and direct NOAA to use the funds for ORF Fishery Science and Management program activities, with no mention of S-K funding. The Senate Appropriations Committee bill and report language would direct NOAA to (1) use the funds for activities that “directly benefit U.S. fisheries and fishery communities,” and (2) support the S-K program. For more on the P&D Fund and S-K program, see

CRS Report R46335, *Saltonstall-Kennedy Act: Background and Issues*, by Harold F. Upton.

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