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

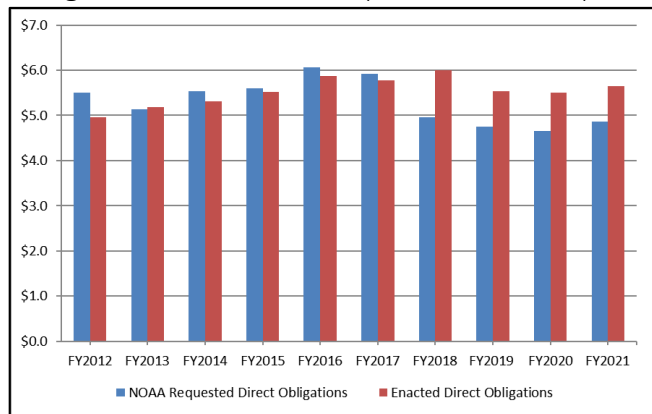
The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) mission is to understand and predict changes in weather, climate, oceans, and coasts; to share that information with others; and to conserve and manage coastal and marine ecosystems and resources. NOAA's work is divided among six line offices: 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 and 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. Under P.L. 116-260, Congress provided \$5.65 billion for ORF and PAC direct obligations, \$149.4 (2.7%) greater than the FY2020 enacted level and \$794.7 million (16.4%) greater than the FY2021 request. As part of the \$5.65 billion total, Congress provided \$5.37 billion in appropriations. 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 27% to 41% of the total enacted direct obligations (e.g., for FY2021, PAC is 27.4% of the total).

Figure 1. NOAA Discretionary ORF and PAC Direct Obligations, FY2012-FY2021 (\$ in billions, nominal)



Sources: CRS, from NOAA budget justifications and congressional explanatory statements.

Notes: ORF = operations, research, and facilities; PAC = procurement, acquisition, and construction. 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 Grant Programs 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 or elimination of 105 activities, totaling \$976.4 million. Grants, subsidies, and contributions (GSC) made up a majority (\$573.2 million, 58.7%) of the proposed reduction. GSC includes grants awarded to nonfederal entities, such as states, universities, and corporations. The proposed decreases to GSC represented 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. Under the explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 116-260, Congress maintains FY2020 levels or increases funding for grant programs and retains the H.Rept. 116-455 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 and FY2021 Requested, House-Passed and Senate Committee Majority Draft, and Enacted 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	1,518.5
NMFS	947.7	973.3	841.7	967.6	961.4	964.9
NOS	606.5	616.9	381.0	631.4	624.4	628.2
NWS	1,168.6	1,195.2	1,120.3	1,204.5	1,201.5	1,204.4
OAR	590.4	598.7	352.7	626.4	594.1	614.1
OMAO	342.4	350.5	332.1	377.3	374.7	373.7
Mission Support	330.4	358.3	323.0	361.5	345.0	345.8
Total Direct Obligations^d	5,500.1	5,607.0	4,854.8	5,679.7	5,622.2	5,649.5
Total Appropriations^e	5,294.8	5,383.9	4,631.8	5,396.0	5,345.5	5,372.9

Sources: CRS, using explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 116-93; NOAA, *Budget Estimates Fiscal Year 2021*; H.Rept. 116-455; H.R. 7617; Senate Appropriations Committee majority draft explanatory statement; and explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 116-260.

Notes: 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 above 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 to separately complete an investigation. NOAA plans to launch two more GOES in the next four years. Under the explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 116-260, Congress retains H.Rept. 116-455 language accompanying the House bill that directs DOC to maintain oversight of NOAA satellite programs and provide quarterly briefings to Congress.

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. Under the explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 116-260, Congress approved the request to merge CRSRA and OSC but retained the combined office within NOAA rather than moving it to DOC, as requested.

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. The explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 116-260 directs NOAA to follow FY2020 Senate direction, which required the transfer of funds from USDA and maintained the provision restricting the use of the P&D Fund to activities that “directly benefit U.S. fisheries and fishery communities,” including the S-K grant program. For more

on the P&D Fund and the S-K program, see CRS Report R46335, *Saltonstall-Kennedy Act: Background and Issues*, by Harold F. Upton.

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