Document ID: 0.7.783.17203

From: Stanley Grell <(b) (6) [redacted] t>
To: Undisclosed recipients: <undisclosed recipients:>
Cc:
Bcc:
Subject: IMPORTANT: NWSEO Response to NWS CONOPS Evolve Plan
Date: Sat Dec 03 2016 05:36:12 EST
Attachments: 16_12_02_NWSEO_ResponseNWS.pdf
Untitled attachment 00056.htm

Folks,

This is a big document, but one that should be read or looked at by all. NWS management and NWSEO are not on the same page as steps are taken to facilitate the OWA.

Stan

Dear Stewards,
In October, NWSEO distributed a news release and posted a press kit online detailing impacts of the National Weather Service's plans to consolidate offices and distribute the forecast from a national center and part-time operations at many local forecasting offices (NWS CONOPS 2).

The NWS sent all managers a detailed list refuting NWSEO's statements. Please know that NWSEO's information is gathered from OWA meetings where this plan was developed and specific data collected by NWSEO over the years.

Below, in red text is the unedited version NWS sent to their managers including the NWSEO statements. Note, this sheet tells managers how to respond to your inquiries about the new NWS CONOPS. Please note that what you are told by your manager may not be what the manager actually thinks about the CONOPS but is fact what they are told to think.

In black text, are NWSEO collected details and documentation that you may present during media questions – or questions from members and non-members in your office – to verify NWSEO's original statements.

We realize this is a long document, a Table of Contents appears on the following page to guide you directly to specific topics. We want you to have this documentation for your communications with media, members and co-workers.

Thank you for your support of NWSEO.

Dan Sobien
NWSEO President

Lisa Luciani
Executive Director
National Weather Service Employees Organization
202-907-3036

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In October, NWSEO distributed a news release and posted a press kit online detailing impacts of the National Weather Service's plans to consolidate offices and distribute the forecast from a national center and part-time operations at many local forecasting offices (NWS CONOPS 2).

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Dan Sobien
NWSEO President

NWSEO Documentation and Response
To the NWS work to refute the NWSEO Press Kit

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NWSEO Documentation and Response
To the NWS work to refute the NWSEO Press Kit

Origin of OWA (CONOPS 2) Plan- not a request by Core Partners; NWS efforts to use a "new tool."

The materials in this folder are for your use in responding to employee and stakeholder questions about the issues NWSEO has recently raised.

The Talking Points on Evolving the National Weather Service should be carefully reviewed, understood and its basic concepts memorized. These are the "go to" messages that employees and others should know about the current state of the OWA project and evolution of the National Weather Service.

The Facts About Evolve/NWSEO Claims is a more comprehensive document outlining specific rebuttals to NWSEO claims in press kit and other materials it made available on its website.

The National Media Statement on Evolve was distributed to media across the country. Feel free to handle inquiries about Evolve from your local media partners, if you are comfortable doing so. You may also provide them with this national media statement and/or refer them to Susan Buchanan in the NWS Public Affairs Office, 301-427-9000.

National Weather Service Responses to NWSEO Misstatements on Evolve

Introduction

Recently, the National Weather Service Employees Organization (NWSEO) issued several documents that mischaracterize parts of the recent National Weather Service Operations and Workforce Analysis (OWA), part of the Evolving the NWS initiative. The following facts address specific claims made by NWSEO in these documents.

NWSEO Claim:
Rather than filling the nearly 650 vacant positions in the National Weather Service, on September 28 the agency's senior leadership informed employees that it has decided to automate the forecast and warning process, further reduce field staff, and close an unspecified number of the nation's 122 Weather Forecast Offices at night. The agency's plans are similar to a downsizing plan called "CONOPS" (or "Concept of Operations") proposed by the NWS during the Bush Administration and rejected by Congress. See Government Accountability Office, Weather Forecasting: NWS Is Planning To Improve Service and Gain Efficiency, But Impacts Of Potential Changes Are Not Yet Known, GAO Report-06-792 (July 2006).

Facts:

NWSEO attempts to confuse facts in this claim. They are addressed separately here:

NWS is not automating the forecast and warning process.
? In fact, NWS is creating a more robust collaborative forecast process that provides forecast consistency demanded by NWS' core partners in the Emergency Management community who make life-saving decisions based on the information and decisions support services NWS provides.
? The Collaborative Forecast Process relies on the 1,200 local forecasters.
? Forecast staff at WFOs will continue to contribute to the forecast, working in collaboration with other offices and centers.

NWSEO Documentation and Response– No requests by Core Partners

When asked by the NWSEO of a list of core partners demanding a more consistent forecast or more specifically complaining about special consistency, management's response was that list did not exist (see email exchange below).

---------- Forwarded message ----------
From: [redacted] - NOAA Federal [redacted]
Date: Mon, Jul 18, 2016 at 4:12 PM
Subject: RE: IDSS Core Partner Responses?
To: [redacted] - NOAA Federal [redacted] [redacted] NOAA Federal [redacted] [redacted] - NOAA Federal [redacted]

Hi [redacted],

We do not have a list of specific feedback given to the agency from core partners or deep relationship partners. As [redacted], indicated on that call, she did not believe a list of this information existed, and I do not know of any specific list.

Regardless, the point of our NBM demo is not to solve that problem. Our challenge is that we've been given this new tool, and we are to look into how best NWS can make use of it within operations. I couched this in the updated NBM Demo sub-team plan document, found at **https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rY4waVBKjQ20wBP4WzkKPKIBht3gHxeyYNLi648TP3w/edit#**, which I put together for our sub-team's consideration and comments today.

Our purpose is to demonstrate the new tool's capabilities. Why it was developed, and issues related to current processes not meeting our customer's expectations, are good background info but they are not the drivers behind the work we're doing.

A few other comments to your questions posed to [redacted], [redacted] and I:
- Could you please elaborate on why you think this team and associated efforts are "without complete transparency to internal and external stakeholders"? The Engagement Strategy is the document that outlines exactly how we engage stakeholders and will lay out exactly how that is to be done both internally and externally. We're just starting the effort now – guess I am unclear what could have been done prior to starting.

4

- Once the Engagement Strategy is adopted and the NBMDT begins executing, there will be additional ways for stakeholders to see this information. For internal stakeholders, we are already using all-hands emails, Insider updates and a website on the NWS Insider dedicated to this effort. These methods have been underway since January, and have given transparency to the team's work. Information flow will grow deeper with the adoption of the Engagement Strategy., both to internal and external stakeholders.
- The 10-102 process requires us to have public comment and review periods. There will be at least 3 public comment and review periods for the NBM that will run for 3 months each starting with the V2.0 release in September and continue with each subsequent version release.

We are at the very beginning of the NBM demo process and are just now getting to the point where we can fully advertise it. It is a process and we are trying to work it correctly. Hope this clarifies the questions you had below.

[redacted],

From: [redacted] - NOAA Federal [mailto[redacted]]
Sent: Monday, July 18, 2016 1:19 PM
To: [redacted],- NOAA Federal; [redacted], - NOAA Federal; [redacted] - NOAA Federal
Subject: IDSS Core Partner Responses?

Good afternoon [redacted],

I'm writing to see if there has been any progress obtaining a list of complaints and suggestions from our core Regional and National IDSS partners. This was an action item a few NBMDT calls back, and one that NWSEO has requested on multiple occasions.

Since so much of this NBM Demo Plan involves the quality (i.e., apparent spatial "Consistency") of the NDFD grids, it's not only logical, but also highly informative to list and clarify such user input.

It's alarming to see that the NWS is embarking on an internal, scatter-shot plan without such input to greatly assist in designing and selling such a plan, and without complete transparency to internal and external stakeholders.

This will allow the NBMDT to work toward a unified and meaningful goal, that will provide the best detail, spatial and temporal consistency, and most importantly, "Accuracy and value" to our core and deep core partners, and the American pubic to help create the best possible Weather Ready Nation.
I look forward to seeing this valuable information soon.
Thanks for your time and assistance in this matter, and have a nice afternoon.
[redacted],

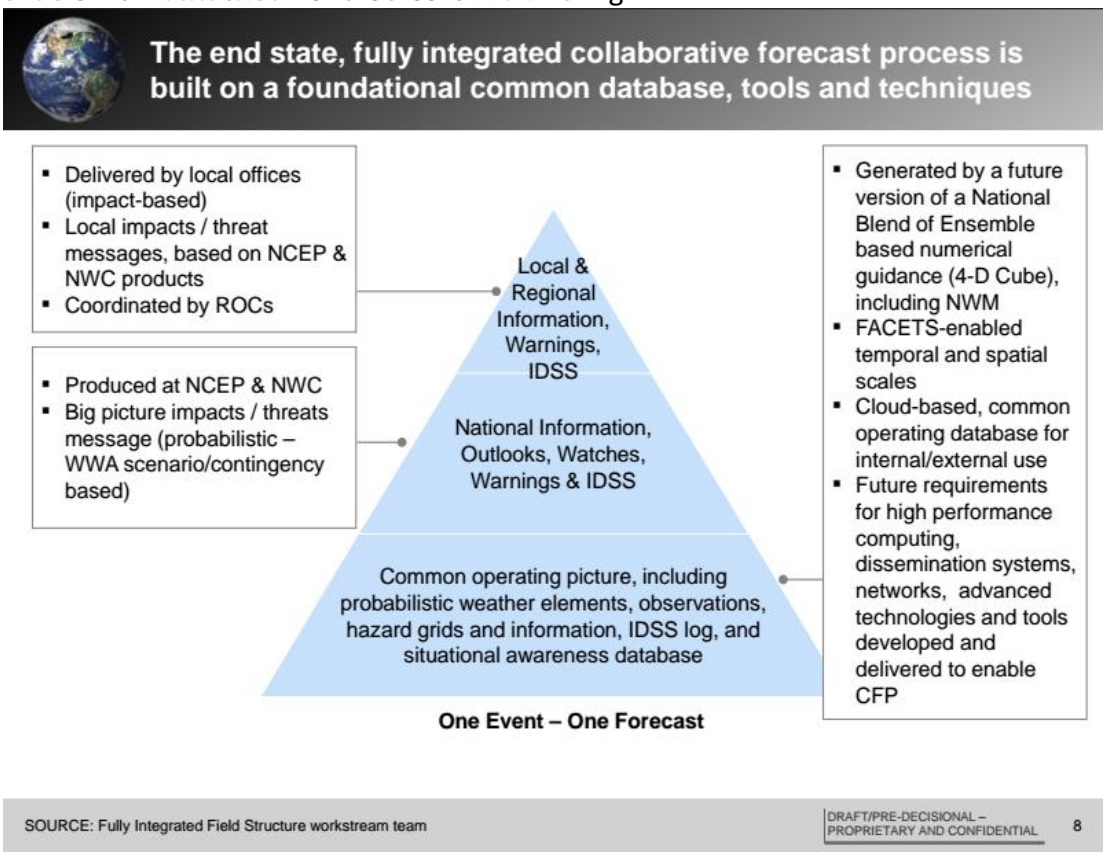
NWSEO Background on the OWA Fully Integrated Field Structure (FIFS) Teams

As to the forecast process the FIFS team proposed, over NWSEO objections, and the OWC approved, over NWSEO objections, that WPC would put out one NWS forecast for all but the first period or two of the forecast package. The below slides are the pertinent ones for the

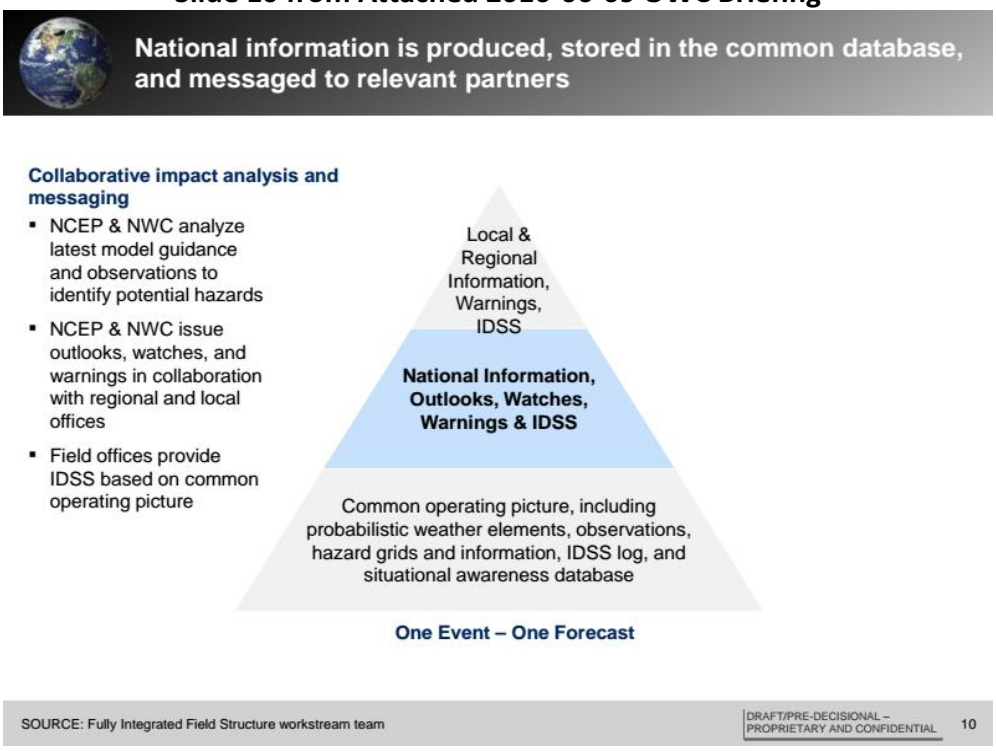
OWC meeting. NOTE: The local impacts/threat are based on NCEP and NWC products – NOT the expertise of local forecasters.

NCEP – National Centers for Environmental Prediction
NWC – National Water Center
WPC
IDSS- Impact-based Decision Support Services – working with core partners to help them make the best decisions in severe weather and emergencies.
WFO – Weather Forecast Offices (122 local forecast offices nationwide)
CONOPS – Concept of Operations, a 2006 plan to consolidate the NWS that failed due to the likelihood of a degradation of service.

Slide 8 from Attached 2016-06-09 OWC Briefing



Slide 10 from Attached 2016-06-09 OWC Briefing



An interesting note is that the FIFs slides evolved from referring to WFOs doing IDSS to field offices doing IDSS taking the word forecast out of their name. The plan that the FIFS team presented would provide a window (approximately one hour) for local offices to provide input to WPC of local effects. Ownership of the forecast however would belong to WPC, in other words whether to include the local WFO's input or not is WPC's decision.

NWSEO Concern over loss of jobs

NWS Comments
NWS is not reducing field staff nor closing offices.
? In fact, the Evolve initiative's blueprint for change specifically states that no jobs will be eliminated. They might be relocated, but no jobs will be lost.
? The vision of the collaborative forecast process and the fully integrated field structure do not reduce staff numbers. They envision a reallocation of staff and staff time to provide better service.
? The blueprint for increased NWS collaboration through the fully integrated field structure is expected to increase staff flexibility and free up staff time for enhanced Impact-based Decision Support Service to partners.

NWSEO Documentation
We take NWS at their word that no *net* jobs will be lost. Having said that if you work in a community; you have roots in that community, your spouse works there, your kids go to school there, and your church is there. If you are given a directed reassignment to another location perhaps hundreds of miles away, for many people they will chose to not go and therefore for those people they will lose their jobs. For the NWS to say they will not give you a directed reassignment we believe to be disingenuous. It would be unethical and perhaps illegal for them to continue to pay you if you have no meaningful duties at a location just because you chose not to leave it. So while no net jobs will be lost, certainly some people will likely lose their jobs as a result of the CONOPS 2.

Vacancies: Documentation of More than 650 NWS Vacancies

NWS Comments
NWSEO vacancy information is incorrect.
? NWSEO often uses a vacancies number that is inaccurate. NWS can only fund positions that fall within appropriated levels. As of August 20, 2016, NWS had:
? 376 funded vacancies, of which
? 313 active recruitments were underway.
? NWS estimates approximately half of these recruitments will result in internal hires.
? NWS has, for years, struggled with filling vacancies due to a combination of budget uncertainties faced by all federal agencies that was exacerbated by the Sequestration and subsequent NOAA hiring freeze in place until January 31, 2014, and execution challenges within NOAA's Workforce Management Office.
? NOAA and NWS have been aggressively addressing the vacancies and hiring backlog.

NWSEO Documentation

Below is a slide from a document NOAA submitted to Congress concerning vacant positions in NOAA. You will note as of March 1, 2016, NOAA informed Congress there were 654 vacant

positions in the NWS of the 4,874 appropriated positions within the National Weather Service. The NWS's documentation to Congress directly contradicts their above claim.

Vacancy Report - As of 1 March 2016

Column A	Column B	Column C	Column D	Column E	Column F	Column G	Column H
LO/SO	Vacant Positions Available (D - C)	Onboard Positions* (As of 2/29/16)	FY16 Authorized Positions (PB Enacted) (E + F)	FY16 Appropriated Positions (Enacted)**	FY16 Reimbursable & Fee-Funded Positions (Enacted)**	Hiring Actions In Process (As of 2/29/16)	Current Staffing Level Percentage (C / D)
NWS	654	4394	5048	4874	174	381	87%
NMFS	474	2930	3404	3093	311	313	86%
NOS	294	1070	1364	1279	85	57	78%
NESDIS	183	751	934	889	45	49	80%
OAR	155	673	828	775	53	54	81%
OMAO***	63	619	682	681	1	55	91%
SO/USEC	39	933	972	935	37	89	96%
Grand Total	**1862**	**11370**	**13232**	**12526**	**706**	**998**	**86%**

* Data Source: AS of 28Feb16 - NFC pulled 1Mar16
** Data Source: NOAA FY16 Budget (Enacted)
*** Note: 321 Commission Corps positions not included

Vacancies are current and do not include estimate future attrition

Below is the NWSEO's table of vacancies as of 10/21/2016. You will see there are still 650 vacancies in the NWS not the 376 the NWS claims.

NWS vacancy summary - updated 10/21/2016			Pending vacancies are included in the totals below		
Region/Organization	**Offices**	**Total**	**Bargaining Unit**	**Management**	**Total**
Eastern Region WFOs	23	23	60	9	69
Southern Region WFOs	32	32	62	6	68
Central Region WFOs	38	38	78	5	83
Western Region WFOs	24	24	54	3	57
Alaska Region WFOs	3	3	13	3	16
Pacific Region WFOs	2	2	8	2	10
River Forecast Centers	13	13	23	3	26
Center Weather Service Units	20	21	3	1	4
National Centers for Environmental Prediction	10	10	65	9	74
Weather Service Offices / DCOs	15	15	12	0	12
Port Meteorological Officers	14	14	1	0	1
Weather Service Headquarters	1	1	164	19	183
Regional Headquarters	5	6	30	6	36
Regional Operations Centers	0	6			
Pacific Tsunami Warning Center	1	1	2	1	3
National Tsunami Warning Center	1	1	2	0	2
International Tsunami Information Center	1	1	1	1	2
Alaska Aviation Weather Unit	1	1	1	0	1
Spaceflight Meteorology	1	1	0	1	1
FAA Academy	0	1			
FAA Command Center	1	1	2	0	2
NWS total	**206**	**215**	**581**	**69**	**650**
WFO total	**122**	**122**	**275**	**28**	**303**

Below is the FY 17 NOAA Budget Submission to Congress. You will note that in its submission to Congress, the NWS has budget authority for 4,874 positions; this is exactly the same number of appropriated positions as the March 1 document of p.7, where the NWS claimed 654 vacant positions. That does not include positions funded by other agencies such as CWSU meteorologists. This number exactly agrees with the NWSEO numbers and is the basis for our claim of 650 vacancies. The NWS's claim of 376 funded vacancies is playing loose with the facts and if the NWS has only 376 funded vacancies it is because that have chosen to spend the money for those positions elsewhere, such as expensive contracts to develop this CONOPS.

Exhibit 10

Department of Commerce
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM AND PERFORMANCE: DIRECT OBLIGATIONS
(Dollar Amounts in Thousands)

		FY 2015 Actuals		FY 2016 Currently Available		FY 2017 Base Program		FY 2017 Estimate		Increase/ (Decrease)	
Comparison by program/sub-program		Personnel	Amount	Personnel	Amount	Personnel	Amount	Personnel	Amount	Personnel	Amount
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE (NWS)											
Observations	Pos/BA	683	196,819	844	216,363	973	234,483	973	222,996	0	(11,487)
	FTE/OBL	681	205,849	804	222,755	933	234,483	933	222,996	0	(11,487)
Central Processing	Pos/BA	220	96,086	244	92,871	244	93,357	146	88,388	(98)	(4,969)
	FTE/OBL	219	93,092	232	99,143	232	93,357	134	88,388	(98)	(4,969)
Analyze, Forecast and Support	Pos/BA	2,871	480,406	3,163	496,031	3,052	490,617	3,064	485,931	12	(4,686)
	FTE/OBL	2,863	492,076	3,010	507,894	2,899	490,617	2,908	485,931	9	(4,686)
Dissemination	Pos/BA	70	52,678	86	44,743	86	45,236	86	47,236	0	2,000
	FTE/OBL	70	50,459	82	49,086	82	45,236	82	47,236	0	2,000
Science and Technology Integration	Pos/BA	423	122,921	514	138,826	496	138,835	496	131,956	0	(6,879)
	FTE/OBL	422	134,324	488	146,323	470	138,835	470	131,956	0	(6,879)
TOTAL NWS - ORF	**Pos/BA**	**4,267**	**948,910**	**4,851**	**988,834**	**4,851**	**1,002,528**	**4,765**	**976,507**	**(86)**	**(26,021)**
	FTE/OBL	**4,255**	**975,800**	**4,616**	**1,025,201**	**4,616**	**1,002,528**	**4,527**	**976,507**	**(89)**	**(26,021)**
TOTAL NWS - PAC	**Pos/BA**	**33**	**132,377**	**23**	**135,315**	**23**	**135,315**	**23**	**142,785**	**0**	**7,470**
	FTE/OBL	**33**	**183,048**	**22**	**151,431**	**22**	**135,315**	**22**	**142,785**	**0**	**7,470**
TOTAL NWS	**Pos/BA**	**4,300**	**1,081,287**	**4,874**	**1,124,149**	**4,874**	**1,137,843**	**4,788**	**1,119,292**	**(86)**	**(18,551)**
	FTE/OBL	**4,288**	**1,158,848**	**4,638**	**1,176,632**	**4,638**	**1,137,843**	**4,549**	**1,119,292**	**(89)**	**(18,551)**

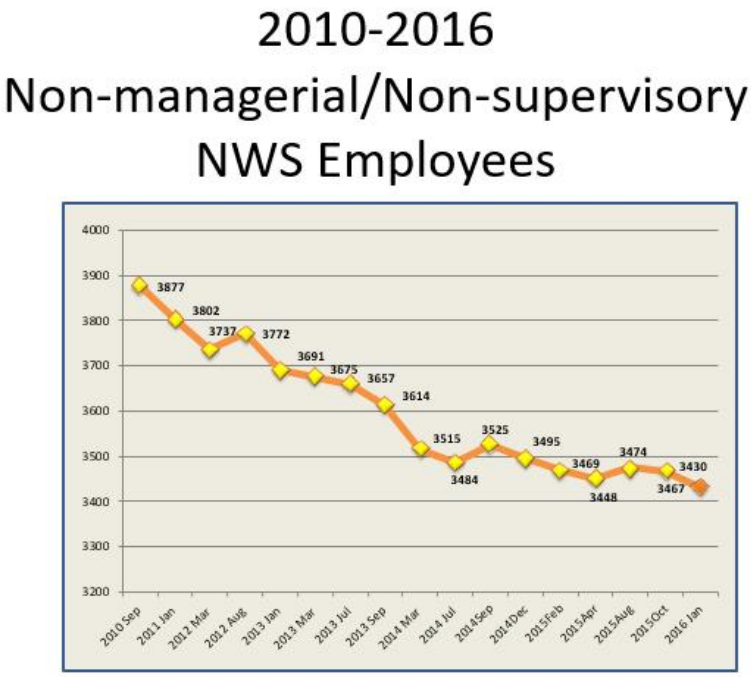
*NWS FY 2016 Obligation amounts are estimates only under the new PPA structure. They reflect carryover from prior years which will be obligated in the PPA in which it was origionally ap

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL SATELLITE, DATA AND INFORMATION SERVICE (NESDIS)											
Environmental Satellite Observing Systems											
Office of Satellite and Product	Pos/BA	219	91,991	237	102,000	237	133,246	237	137,674	0	4,428
Operations	FTE/OBL	218	93,910	237	102,398	237	133,246	237	137,674	0	4,428

Pos/BA - positions for which there is budget authority:

Exhibit 10 - 6

The graph below shows the decrease in NWS Bargaining Unit Employees from 2010 to 2016.



NWSEO stands behind our vacancy spreadsheet numbers, which are confirmed by some of management's own internal documents.

Again, sequestration and the associated hiring freeze ended almost three years ago. Why is no one being held accountable for "execution challenges" which have lingered within WFMO for years now? There are NWS "emergency essential" forecaster positions nationwide which have been vacant anywhere from six months to 2+ years. There are more vacancies at weather forecast offices today than in November 2015 and even January 2016. Bottom line, the number of vacant positions have increased year over year, instead of decreased. These facts do not indicate that NOAA/NWS is "aggressively addressing the vacancies and hiring backlog".

Below are two and a half years' worth of news articles. In some the agency agrees with the union's numbers, in some they disagree. In all they state the agency is actively working to fill vacant positions, exactly as they state in this document. However Two and a half years later there are as many or more vacant positions in the NWS.

Greenwire May 14, 2014

> "Vaccaro confirmed the union's number as roughly accurate, though he said he could not provide an official tally of vacancies."

Chris Vaccaro, a spokesman for NWS, said that the agency is working as fast as it can to fill such positions. So far, he said, NWS has posted job announcements for 200 positions, prioritizing critical positions such as lead forecasters. But he acknowledged that some of those positions are filled internally, merely switching one vacancy for another. He said he could not say how many employees the agency has added to its workforce since it lifted the hiring freeze in January; that number, he said, is a moving target. "It's been a continuous stream in the hiring process -- from getting announcements on the street to getting the list of best applicants to doing interviews to getting hired," he said. Vaccaro confirmed the union's number as roughly accurate, though he said he could not provide an official tally of vacancies. But he emphasized that "every role in every shift has always been covered," even if managers have to step into positions themselves or forecasters from other offices filling in. "Not at one point has the Weather Service dropped the ball on forecasts," he said. "

May 5, 2014 NBC 5 Dallas (At the time there were 500 vacancies)
http://www.nbcdfw.com/investigations/Many-National-Weather-Service-Offices-Short-Handed-This-Storm-Season-258023201.html

"The NWS won't confirm or deny the total number of vacant jobs on the union's list but told NBC 5 Investigates it's aggressively trying to hire at least 190 people right now including 43 forecasters to work in local weather service offices."

May 6, 2014 http://www.nbcnews.com/news/investigations/budget-cuts-mean-weather-forecaster-shortage-tornado-alley-n97341

"NBC owned and operated station KXAS in Dallas/Ft. Worth has acquired union documents showing as many as 500 vacancies at NWS offices around the country, including nearly 200 unfilled jobs for front-line meteorologists….
Last summer a government report found "critical staff shortages" affected the weather service's response to Hurricane Sandy, which battered the East Coast in October 2012."

NBC Houston KPRC May 6, 2014
http://www.click2houston.com/news/national-weather-service-staffing-shortage

"NWS spokesperson Chris Vaccaro says, "The NWS is working to fill almost 200 jobs.""

Sept. 30, 2014 Philadelphia Inquirer - Tony Wood
http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/weather/Weather-warning.html

"National Weather Service spokesman Chris Vaccaro said that of the 31 Eastern Region vacancies for which it has funding, the weather service is in the process of filling 27 of them."

Energywire PM: NOAA: 2 NWS technicians worked 7 straight months without a day off. November 14, 2014
http://www.eenews.net/eenewspm/stories/1060008967
Also at http://nwseo.org/media_center_Archives.php

““Agencywide, he said, officials "are doing everything we can to expedite the filling of vacancies within our ranks." That includes a new contract with the Office of Personnel Management to speed up the process.”

Two National Weather Service employees worked seven consecutive months without a day off, according to an email from the agency's director that addresses the consequences of "budget uncertainty."

NWS Director Louis Uccellini sent the email yesterday to follow up on accusations made at last week's All-Hands Town Hall webinar. At the meeting, the head of the agency's union referenced employees working "at least seven straight months of rotating shift work" at a weather forecasting office in American Samoa.

The National Weather Service Employees Organization has long railed against what it says are widespread vacancies throughout the agency. Earlier this year, union officials asserted that 14 percent of positions were vacant; NWS officials say they are filling them as quickly as they can and are on an upward trend.”

2016
Palm Beach Post – Kimberly Miller
http://www.mypalmbeachpost.com/news/weather/weather-service-vacancies-concern-during-severe-we/np9x9/
January 25, 2016

National Weather Service officials recognize more hiring is needed, although the agency's vacancy numbers may not exactly match those of the union. In a statement, the service said there are five vacancies in Miami because of retirements and transfers. "We continue to work through the hiring process to fill all operationally critical vacancies across the National Weather Service, and staffing shortages haven't affected our ability to provide forecasts," the statement read in part. "To assist in covering forecast shifts while we fill these vacancies, we have provided meteorologists on rotational assignment to Miami from other forecast offices."

2015
December 28, 2015

NBC 5 Investigates: Staff Shortage Left NWS Scrambling To Cover Tornado Outbreak
http://www.nbcdfw.com/investigations/NBC5-Investigates-Staff-Shortage-Left-NWS-Scrambling-To-Cover-Tornado-Outbreak-363607261.html
For more than a year, NBC 5 Investigates has reported on hundreds of vacant jobs at NWS offices across the country. By the union's count, there are currently more than 600 vacant positions nationwide, including hundreds of forecaster jobs in local offices responsible for issuing critical weather warnings.
For months the weather service has blamed the shortage on federally mandated budget cuts, and then on short staffing in the agency's own human resources department.

Weather service spokeswoman Susan Buchanan said weather service administrators are actively working to fill the vacant forecaster jobs in the Dallas-Fort Worth office.

Source: NBC 5 Investigates: Staff Shortage Left NWS Scrambling To Cover Tornado Outbreak | NBC 5 Dallas-Fort Worth http://www.nbcdfw.com/investigations/NBC5-Investigates-Staff-Shortage-Left-NWS-Scrambling-To-Cover-Tornado-Outbreak-363607261.html#ixzz4PM3Rj1o1
Follow us: @nbcdfw on Twitter | NBCDFW on Facebook

TODAY Show NBC May 15, 2015
Concerns grow over Weather Service staff shortage
Scott Friedman (KXAS)

"The weather service says it's trying to hire 190 forecasters now."
http://www.today.com/video/today/55138865/#55138865
National Weather Service Office in Fort Worth Understaffed This Storm Season
May 14, 2015 – Position vacant for more than a year.

http://www.nbcdfw.com/investigations/National-Weather-Service-Office-in-Fort-Worth-Understaffed-This-Storm-Season-303814841.html

In a statement, National Weather Service spokesman, Chris Vaccaro, wrote, “Recent delays we have encountered are a result of constraints within NOAA's human resources division, and not related to budget.”
Vaccaro added, “…we're actively filling vacant positions throughout the organization as quickly as possible.

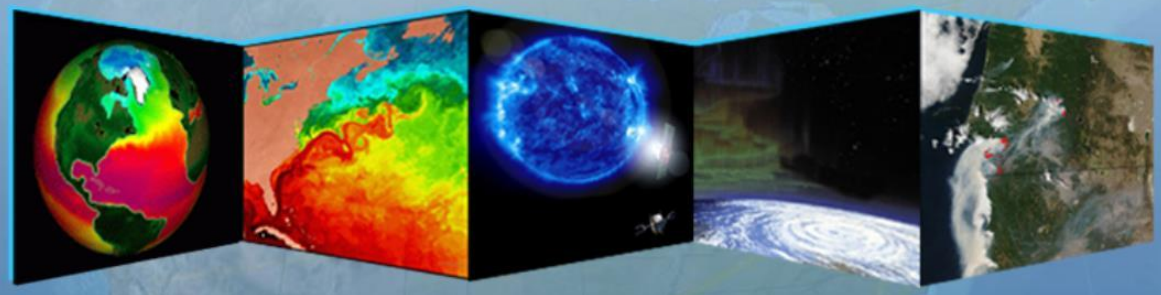
NWS “Evolve-OWA” is CONOPS 2

NWS comment

The OWA project and CONOPS program cannot and should not be compared.
? The OWA project was, in fact, supported by Congress
? The OWA project and its recommendations were a direct result of two Congressionally mandated studies that recognized the NWS’ need for change.
? To accomplish the recommendations from these studies, NWS contracted with McKinsey and Company to conduct the OWA - an independent, agency wide analysis.

NWSEO Documentation and Response:
There are many similarities between CONOPS version 1 proposed in 2006 and CONOPS version 2 proposed in 2016. CONOPS 1 proposed using “Clustered Peer Offices” with a super WFO within each cluster. The other WFOs would still issue warnings and local forecasts but with a reduced number of people on shift. Additional workload would be dynamically shifted among the peer offices. In CONOPS 2016, this current version, the NWS has been less transparent about their plan likely because it is even more extreme. They have mentioned there will be their version on Cluster Peer Offices by stating that some WFOs will be part-timed and other 24/7 with the first period or two of the forecast being done at the 24/7 offices. CONOPS 2016 is even more extreme than the 2006 CONOPS in that it centralizes all forecasts and warning beyond the first period or two to the WPC. Below are posted slides from then NWS Assistant Administrator D.L. Johnson of a 2006 presentation to the National Weather Association showing many similarities between what was proposed then and what is proposed now.

NOAA National Weather Service's
Future in the Digital Age



Brig. Gen. David L. Johnson, USAF (Ret)

NOAA Assistant Administrator for Weather Services &
National Weather Service Director

National Weather Association 31st Annual Meeting

October 16, 2006

The Way Forward

Guiding Principles for Change

- We will maintain 122 Weather Forecast Offices.
- Employees will have a job as long as they want one and can do the job
- There will be no degradation of service.
- We will provide equitable services across the Nation.
- We will continue to be transparent in our planning and will involve the employee organization & constituents. http://www.nws.noaa.gov/com/digitalera
- We will demonstrate operability, performance, effectiveness, and efficiency before committing to changes.

The Way Forward

New Concept of Operations

CONOPS Team Report

- *Develop and prototype Clustered-Peer CONOPS*
- *Clustered-Peer CONOPS*
  - Provide a platform for key operational shifts
  - Field offices operate as equals within a cluster
  - Cluster delivers environmental information and decision support services focused on high-impact events
  - Basic forecast suite is provided without interruption within the cluster and centers
  - Cluster Management Team (WFOs, RFCs, National Centers) allocate their resources
  - WFOs have evolved to the current state where they work as a team to dynamically shift workload

Corporate Board agreed to pursue recommendations

Local Forecast Offices will no longer "own the forecast" - NBM focus on "consistency over accuracy"

NWS Comments

NWSEO Claim:

Presently, the professional meteorologists at each forecast office utilize their years, if not decades, of experience with local climatological conditions and weather patterns to prepare 7-day forecasts for their area of responsibility, which averages a population of 3 million. In so doing, these forecasters consult various computer model outputs and resolve conflicts between inconsistent models based on updated weather observations and their knowledge of the reliability of competing models under particular local conditions.

Fact:

These statements are true, but are used to bolster a claim that these skill sets will be "taken away," which is simply untrue.

? Local Weather Forecast Offices (WFOs) will continue to have the "last touch" before a forecast is published until tests and evaluations and other ways of doing it are proven to be equally accurate.
? The NWS recognizes the great value and importance of local WFOs in providing local knowledge to local communities. For this very reason, a central tenet of the OWA recommendations is to make more time available for local impact through the "last touch" on the forecast and through the provision of Impact-based Decision Support Services (IDSS) to the community.
? The Collaborative Forecast Process is intended to streamline the process of consulting various model outputs NWSEO describes in its claim. Streamlining this process gives forecasters more time to deliver IDSS to partners.
? WFOs will work in closer collaboration with other offices and National Centers.
? WFO staff must keep local situation awareness -- local presence and expertise is prerequisite to delivering IDSS to partners.

NWSEO Documentation and Response

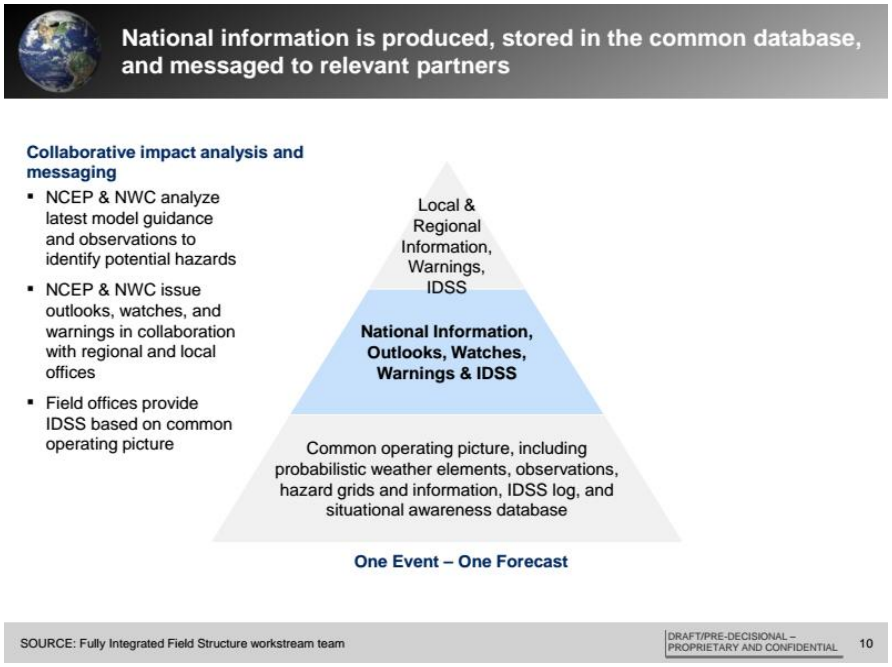
This "last touch" mantra was never discussed in the FIFS meetings the NWSEO representatives participated in. Note also that their "last touch" promise is time-limited until "other ways of doing it are proven to be equally accurate." Management's version of "equally accurate" during FIFS discussions relied on use of URMA verification, which is known (particularly in areas of complex terrain or strong gradients in forecast fields such as along the West Coast) to discount actual point observations in favor of model first-guess fields. Therefore any changes that the forecaster makes to the model guidance, even if those changes are supported/verified by actual point data, will score as inferior to the model, since under URMA the model essentially verifies itself.

Also regarding the "last touch," it is difficult to give that management claim much credibility when we already have reports from Central Region that local forecasters are being highly discouraged or possibly even prohibited at certain WFOs from making changes to the raw "Central Region Superblend" model output, which is being automatically loaded into the forecast databases of those offices (wiping out the existing forecast) twice daily from the second forecast period out through Day 7.

Management's response does not address a central concern of NWSEO which was raised on multiple FIFS calls – how can there be assurance that forecasters will maintain proper local situational awareness when they have been largely removed from the forecast process? Even the "last touch" process described above is a far cry from the level of forecaster involvement in the current forecast process. Inevitably, removal of local forecasters from the forecast process beyond some "collaboration" and a "last touch" will result in degradation of the very local knowledge necessary to provide high-quality IDSS.

The NWSEO FIFS representative made this point about local situational awareness in written comments submitted during a cross-workstream Google hangout session after the OWA call on 6/29/2016:
Question 2: What is the biggest cultural hurdle in terms of moving forward with the pyramid CFP idea? (i.e. Accuracy, Local Impacts, Ownership, Sci & Tech, Consistent Messaging, other)
My answer: Disconnect between the forecast and the messaging/IDSS flowing from the forecast. If the forecast is largely produced from WPC with WFO input minimized as much as possible (which appears to be the direction that FIFS is going), how will WFO forecasters maintain the proper SA for good IDSS? What happens when the WFO or a group of WFOs completely disagrees with the WPC forecast and is unable to resolve those differences through collaboration, then is left to provide IDSS on a forecast they totally disagree with? This is a major culture/forecast ownership issue. Expecting forecasters to passively observe the weather/forecast situation on D2D when their opportunity for input to the forecast is deliberately minimized, but yet maintain good SA and understanding of the forecast is not realistic.

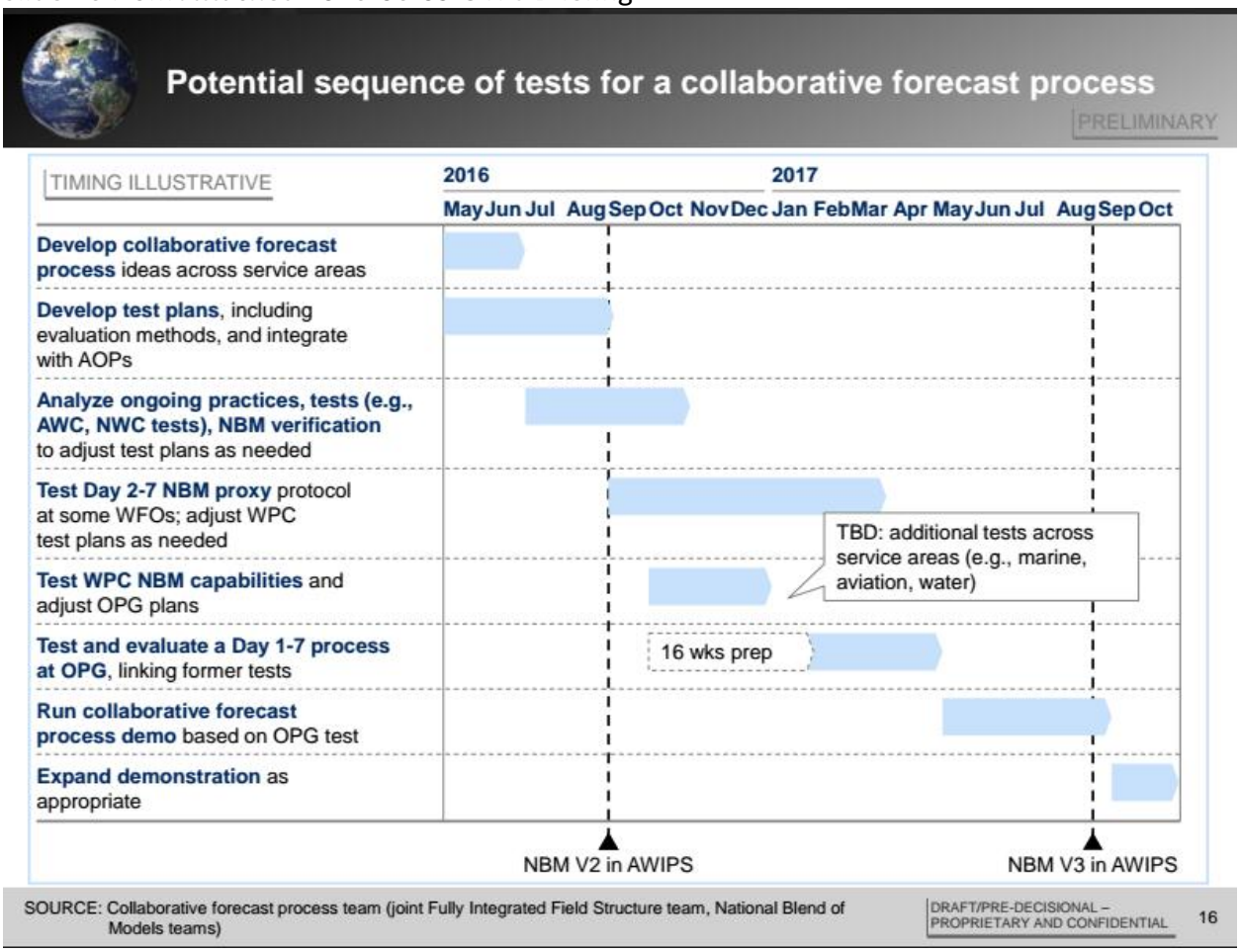
Posted below is a repeat of an above slide, this is what was presented by the FIFS team and agreed to by the OWC and the last specific information the NWS has provided to the union about its plans. According to this slide and the 2016 plans, ownership of the forecast will belong to WPC and whether to include the local WFO's input or not is WPC's decision. Note: the NWS is focusing on a "consistent" forecast over an accurate forecast.



In this plan forecasts and warnings will be done by National Centers, "Field Offices will do IDSS based on common operating picture." While the NWS is being very opaque about their plans for the future of the WFOs, for instance making vague comments about part-timing some

offices. The OWC agreed to a testing timeline that makes it very clear they want to test doing days 1 through 7 of the forecast from a central location (see the following slide).

Slide 16 from Attached 2016-06-09 OWC Briefing



Staffing levels at local offices will be diminished; Role of the local meteorologist will be diminished

NWS Comments

NWSEO Claim:

The weather models that the forecasters consult lack the resolution to handle complex terrain, so forecasters utilize their local knowledge and expertise to forecast for mountainous communities where necessary. Forecasters on the next shift start with and modify the previous shift's forecast based on updated observations and changing conditions, and add a new 12-hour period to the back end of the 7-day forecast. As an essential part of this process, the local forecasters maintain "situational awareness" of radar and changing weather conditions, and issue watches and warnings of emerging severe weather when needed.

Fact:

As in the previous response, local presence most certainly matters and the Evolve initiative works to enhance this. In addition, evolving the NWS is one of only four agency priorities for NOAA and this includes major technological advancements that will allow the NWS models to improve spatial and technological resolution

NWSEO Response

NWS does not guarantee (anywhere in writing) similar staffing levels, or even a presence of these same local Weather Forecast and Warning Offices (WFOs) to continue critical IDSS service, which ensures timely actions by Core and Deep Core Partners (such as state and local Emergency Managers, law enforcement, school districts and the general public). NWS's Senior Management has already been insincere in their efforts to meet these requirements. NWS Senior Management has allowed, and/or created severe staffing shortages throughout many of its 122 WFOs over the past several years (stripping them of their injection of local forecaster expertise), which severely hampers efforts for "Robust internal and external engagement" with Deep Core partners going forward.

Note that NWS completely fails to address our statement regarding the models' difficulty with handling complex terrain. NWSEO FIFS Team members made this point repeatedly during FIFS calls – most of their testing of model blends so far has been over flat interior terrain (i.e. the non-mountainous portions of Central Region). Our belief is that NBM or other model blends as they are currently constructed will be disastrously bad over complex terrain, along land/marine interfaces, or in areas with tight gradients of forecast fields (Appalachians, most of the Western CONUS, Great Lakes, West Coast, Alaska, and Hawaii).

Supercomputers and model upgrades cannot replace the expertise of the local forecaster; Under the NWS CONOPS 2, staffing levels and role of the local forecaster will be diminished.
(This is a complex issue and so there are several red NWS statements followed by NWSEO documentation.)

? Thanks to the ongoing and long-lasting commitment and support of Congress, the NWS continues to advance the science and technology through new supercomputers, better data assimilation, and model upgrades.

NWSEO Response
NWS management has severely failed on this initiative, as its "Core" GFS model has fallen from 2nd to 4th place in rank among other International models (such as the ECMWF and it's associated ensembles that accurately predicted the track of devastating Hurricane Sandy several days out). Rather than focusing the NWS model developer's expertise on one (or a few) model(s) to serve their stated, but quite simplistic goal of "One event, one forecast", NWS Senior Management and Scientific Leaders have opted to continue their disjointed, scatter-shot approach by developing, maintaining and running multiple models on various spatial and temporal scales. While each of these models has great value to varying weather event types and duration, attempts to "Blend" them with the 4th-rated GFS core model, creates "inflexibility" in the forecast, while leading to internal boundary issues that pollute or corrupt the data on a spatial and temporal scale, and create great inconsistency and unwanted confusion for our valued partners. NWS meteorologists with years or decades of "local experience and expertise" are needed to constantly monitor, adjust, and convey this critical data to Core and Deep Core Partners (with the goal of the public's safety first in mind, rather than the overly-simplistic and often inaccurate information resulting from the NWS management's stated approach).

NWSEO strongly believes in creating the ability to meet the growing needs of IDSS throughout the country by fully staffing the 122 WFOs with the our current blend of Expert Meteorologists and Support Staff (comprised of Electronic Technicians and ITOs), while launching an initiative to create "additional" positions such as "Social Media Experts" and "IDSS consultants."

? The scientific expertise of NWS meteorologists and hydrologists are second-to-none, they are what make NWS the best weather service provider in the world.

NWSEO Response
There are several facets of the Evolve Initiative that would seriously reduce the number of NWS meteorologists available locally at WFOs to recognize critical and often life-threatening weather situations, and share this expertise via a timely, accurate, consistent and trusted message through increasingly important relationships and IDSS to our Deep Core partners (including the General Public).

? NWS partners expect -- in fact, demand -- a high level of scientific expertise and rely on that expertise to help them make decisions.

NWSEO Response
NWSEO consistently strives to meet the growing demands or our Core and Deep Core Partners. NWSEO envisions creating and conveying highly-valued and critical weather information and customer service beyond the simplistic "One Event, One Forecast" stance of Senior NWS management by developing and maintaining a flexible, temporally and spatially detailed forecast database that's capable of being quickly adjusted (using the input and expertise of local Meteorologists) to meet the diverse and changing needs of ALL partners that exist on a National, Regional and Local level. NWSEO recognizes that the unbeatable combination of "Local presence" and the globally unsurpassed "Expertise" of our meteorologists will create the best possible service to partners on ALL levels in meeting the stated NWS initiative of creating the best possible Weather Ready Nation.

? Local meteorological knowledge and related situational awareness will always be a vital factor for delivering IDSS. Enabling local knowledge, relationships, and service to be maximized is a core function of the Evolve initiative.

NWSEO Response
NWSEO completely agrees with this statement, but goes a few steps further in meeting this highly valued objective. NWSEO sees it vital that NWS Management quickly works toward returning staffing at WFOs to full levels that were noted several years ago, prior to the onset of the current severe staffing shortages.
There's nothing stated that guarantees the combination of the 3 crucial elements noted by NWS management, which are:

1) local WFO presence,
2) the actual number of WFOs, and
3) the exact staffing levels of the Expert Meteorologists (and supporting Bargaining Unit staff) at these offices (WFOs).

NWS Comments
NWSEO Claim:
The NWS has decided to eliminate local forecasting, and with it the thousands of years of cumulative experience of the nation's 1,200 local forecasters.

Fact:
This is simply false.
? The above facts convey the NWS and the "Evolve" commitment to enhance local knowledge and presence.
? The Collaborative Forecast Process relies on the 1,200 local forecasters.

? Forecast staff at WFOs will continue to contribute to the forecast, working in collaboration with other offices and centers.

NWSEO Response

Again the NWS is being purposely opaque about their intentions. They mention they will need 900 to 1200 forecasters to achieve their plan. There are approximately 1900 operational WFO positions in the NWS. If they do away with local forecasting which is certainly implied in their slides, are they saying they only need 900 to 1200 operational employees? They have mentioned in webinars of their plans to part-time some offices. Weather forecasting is very clearly a 24/7 function. That along with the FIFS and OWC decisions certainly implies that the only function of the part time offices will be IDSS and not a forecast function. FIFS team discussions certainly gave final ownership of the forecast to WPC allowing local offices to only collaborate any changes they want to make. The entire emphasis of this 2016 CONOPS is to make a more consistent forecast, which in itself implies less local variations. When Assistant Administrator Louis Uccellini was asked who will own the forecast, meaning who will have the final say, his response the NWS will own the forecast.

Forecasts will be issued from a centralized location as a "blend" of computer models.

NWS Comment

NWSEO Claim:

Forecasts will be issued from a centralized location and will be a "blend" of the various computer models. Ironically, this "blend" will not include the European Center for Medium Range Forecasting model, which is the most reliable even for U.S. weather, and which forecasters can now consult when preparing their local forecasts. This blend of models will not adjust for local weather effects or terrain, which are currently accounted for in local forecast preparation.

Fact:

NWS has never said it will centralize forecasts. As noted previously:

? The National Blend of Models will serve as a nationally consistent starting point for the gridded forecast, not the end. It will drive seamless gridded predictions that will be used to create more consistent and skill products - something that our core EM partners have requested, and was highlighted in NAPA's findings - and will be the basis for improved IDSS.

? Local Weather Forecast Offices (WFOs) will continue to have the "last touch" before the forecast is published until tests and evaluations and other ways of doing it are proven to be equally accurate.

? WFOs will work in closer collaboration with other offices and National Centers to create a more efficient forecasting process in terms of hours spent developing and accurate and consistent forecast.

? WFO staff must keep local situation awareness -- local presence and expertise is prerequisite to delivering IDSS to partners.

NWSEO Response

This is simply not what has been presented to the NWSEO. In all briefings the last touch will be at WPC. Local forecasters will be allowed to collaborate with WPC before the forecast is issued but it is WPC's call. How can a WFO have a last touch on a forecast if it is closed, as is planned for the majority of WFOs. The Weather Forecast Office title is no being changed to "Service Delivery Outlet", taking the word forecast from their name.

Removal of Local Forecast from the Forecast Model – discussions on Non-Meteorologists hired for traditional Meteorological positions

NWS Comments

NWSEO Claim:

According to the National Research Council, "local knowledge of phenomena, terrain, and infrastructure is an important factor in forecasting, and it needs to be accounted for in any potential regionalization of functions." The Council therefore found that:

[A]n in-depth statistical analysis of the relative comparison of the local product to the NWP-[numerical weather prediction] produced guidance will be necessary before the NWS considers moving some or all of this public forecasting task to regional centers.

Such a consideration would include a statistical analysis of the added value of the human element in day-to-day fair weather forecasting, as well as the value of experience in such forecasting in improving severe weather forecast skill.

(National Research Council, Weather Services for the Nation: Becoming Second to None (National Academies Press, 2012) at 42.) However, no such statistical analysis demonstrating that an automated forecast based on computer models is as reliable as the experienced human forecaster with local knowledge has been conducted.

Fact:

The NWS, through the Evolve initiative or otherwise, has not made any claims that a computer model -- or even a blend of models -- is as reliable or as accurate as forecasts involving human scientific expertise. The "claim" seems to bolster a perception that the NWS would be removing the human element from the forecast process, which is simply false.

? The National Blend of Models will serve as a nationally consistent starting point for the gridded forecast: it does not preclude local knowledge.

? The Evolve process is designed to test and evaluate the value of modeling on forecast process and report the results, before any decisions are made.

? This is a multi-year process; there will be many tests and evaluations made of related components in the Collaborative Forecast Process that must be made.

NWSEO Response

The plan is to remove the local forecast element from the forecast process and replace it with collaboration. NWSEO FIFS Team members distinctly note that there were discussions of possibly hiring non-meteorologists for some WFO / local service outlet positions that have historically been filled by meteorologists in the future. This begs the questions, "How would non-meteorologists be anything other than briefers at one of these local service outlets?"

No one argues that the NBM will be a very useful tool for forecasters but it should be just that - a tool. Using the NBM as a mandated starting point will be very inefficient costing the NWS and thereby the taxpayers.
We are certainly in favor of common starting grids, from an accurate model that has been tested thoroughly. We just want the caveat that they not be mandated for all circumstances. For instance, if a national model or blend of models or even human created starting grids have a very poor solution for an area, mandating that a forecaster clear an already produced representative forecast and replace it with a poorly forecast common operating picture - only to readjust that grid back to the original more accurate forecast would be a waste of time and taxpayer money.

Many Local Forecast Offices will have reduced staffing; part-time hours

NWS Comment

NWSEO Claim:
The number of positions at the local forecast offices will be reduced from approximately 2,800 now to between 900 and 1,200. The NWS also plans to automate weather balloon launches, now being conducted by paraprofessional hydrometeorological technicians, whose positions could be eliminated. An undisclosed number of offices would be closed at night, and others are to be staffed by a single person on shift at some or all times. The remaining staff will be relegated to "interpreting" the forecasts developed elsewhere and briefing local emergency management personnel, which the NWS calls "decision support services." It is unclear whether this residual staff will be professional meteorologists since their primary responsibility will no longer be forecasting.

Facts:
These claims obfuscate the facts laid-out in recent webinars and other communications with staff, emergency managers, media, Congress, industry partners -- and even directly with NWSEO representatives themselves (although the union's president sent a local delegate to a briefing specifically designed for national union leadership) -- about the results of the OWA and the blueprint for change.
? It is important to recognize the the NWS is only now entering a multi-year test and evaluation phase.
? Some of the recommendations outlined in the blueprint for change will not even be considered for several years as other key "unlocks" take higher priority and serve as prerequisites for subsequent tests.

NWSEO Response
We note that while the agency claims the union is obfuscating the facts, the agency does not deny any of the assertions in its response.
This concept was already tested by Environment Canada with very negative results. Environment Canada started with almost exactly the same plan that has been

proposed by NWS. In less than 10 years, the Meteorological Service of Canada was reduced from 54 weather offices and 8 forecast centers to 14 forecast centers. The Meteorological Service of Canada currently has 5 public weather forecast offices and two centers for aviation weather forecasting. A 2008 report "Degradation in Environment Canada's Network, Quality Control and Data Storage Practices: A Call to Repair the Damage" stated Environment Canada was 'unable to fulfil its goal of ensuring the safety and security of Canadians' and that the Weather forecasting 'degraded' after the reduction of offices. NWSEO suspects that the NWS' plan to "test" the concept is little more than an LMR maneuver to minimize their need to negotiate this with the union.

Reduction in NWS positions nationwide

NWS Comments

NWS will not reduce the total number of positions within its field workforce.

? The number of hours those staff spend on IDSS will be increased by some of the ideas we are testing to free up local forecasters' time.

? The 900 - 1,200 number relates to the number of person hours the NWS needs to free up either in local offices or other parts of the NWS field in order to meet IDSS demand by our partners across the country.

NWSEO Response

The agency has already reduced the number of positions across the agency by 650. They have been disingenuous in their claims that they are trying to fill the positions for over four years. The union also has a hard time believing that this or any future administration will pay for 1200 weather briefers across the country.

Collaboration vs. Forecasting

NWS Comments

NWS forecasters will not be relegated to "interpreting" the forecast developed elsewhere nor strictly briefing others' forecasts.

? The role of local forecasters in the forecast process was explained above. NWS forecasters are meteorologists and hydrologists and their scientific expertise is what makes NWS the best weather service provider in the world.

? Local meteorological knowledge, and related situational awareness, will always be a vital factor for IDSS.

NWSEO Response

The plan is to remove the local forecast element from the forecast process and replace it with collaboration. Collaboration is not forecasting. Ownership of the forecast and by that we mean the final decision must be at the point of delivery to be effective.

Documentation and discussions on Part-timing Weather Forecast Offices

NWS Comments
NWSEO Claim:
As the offices will no longer operate 24x7, severe weather warning functions will of necessity be centralized elsewhere, and the NWS and NOAA are developing other computer models that they hope will issue warnings of severe weather automatically. The National Research Council wrote that even if it was demonstrated that centralized forecasts based on models were proven to be as reliable as the human forecaster, "[t]he responsibility for hazardous weather outlooks, advisories, and warnings would still reside at the local offices (as deployed today to coincide with NEXRAD Doppler radar coverage)."

Fact:
The analysis concluded, and NWS has emphasized in every briefing, that 94 percent of IDSS is provided at the local local. That will not change. The claim implies every local office will not be 24/7, which is simply not true.
? The NWS is looking at all options for all functions right now.
? We said from the start that this is a comprehensive project, and we wouldn't be doing our jobs if we didn't consider all options. Delivering warning information is critical at the local level for our mission and for IDSS; we will not jeopardize that.
? NWS is exploring alternatives to more effectively communicate hazard messages, through the FACETS and Hazard Simplification projects currently () underway. Through these efforts warnings may change as we include a more probabilistic approach in the extended timeframe, but they will still be provided at the local level
? With that kind of change in mind, we are open to test ideas that will be vetted and assessed with the engagement of you and our external partners.

There is no implication that every office will not be 24/7, much like the original CONOPS which was the basis for this 2016 CONOPS there will be two tiers of WFOs, some 24/7 others with part-time operations. Our claim speaks specifically of the offices that are not 24/7. We note again nothing in the agency's comments rebuts the NWSEO's claims.

It was very clear in multiple FIFS meetings that part-timing of offices is on the table. Here are the NWSEO Team member notes from the 6/23/2016 FIFS call:

> *6) Field Question of the Week - Mike Cantin (presented by Cobb)*
> *Cantin is not on the call, Cobb shows the shift work slide with a supposed field question about reducing midnight shifts and possibly closing some offices at night. Cobb - "DSS is improved if we have more people around on the day shift". "More flexible scheduling" so that folks can respond to big events that happen at night. My question – is part-timing offices on the table? Answer – it may be. I raised a scenario of a middle of the night toxic chemical train derailment where the local WFO is closed, it would take an hour or more to get anyone into the office, and the backup office is hundreds of miles away and the*

people (person?) on shift is unfamiliar with the local EMs/local area where the incident occurred. Management did not really have an answer for this – floated the idea of having folks respond from home using "AWIPS in the cloud". I also stated that shift work is part of the NWS, there are plenty of jobs in the world that don't involve shift work, and people should know what they signed up for when they joined NWS. I also stated that until management decides to be transparent with the staffing plan, there will continue to be a widespread belief in the field that the real purpose of all this is to reduce staff by cutting shifts and then stating that there is not enough DSS/partner work during the daytime to support the existing staff numbers at some offices. Response was that the Regional directors are still working on the "staffing exercise".

The Shrinking NWS – Six years of Staffing Reductions and Shortfalls

NWS Comments

NWSEO Claim:

These staffing reductions are not being driven by funding reductions or shortfalls. Not only has Congress appropriated the full amount of funding requested for the NWS by the President each year, but because of the bipartisan support the NWS employees and their mission receive, Congress has actually increased the President's request for the NWS every year for the past several years, while rejecting requests to further cut the agency's staff. In fact, the NWS ended FY 2015 with over $52 million in unspent funds; it ended FY 2014 with $125 million in unspent funds; and in FY 2013, during sequestration, the NWS ended the year with $144 million unspent. NWS leadership has said that part of the staff savings achieved will be used to significantly increase the number of managers in the agency.

Fact:

The claim implies that NWS is seeking staff reductions, which is completely false.

? As outlined earlier, NOAA and NWS are aggressively addressing the vacancies and hiring backlog.

? It should be recognized that many vacancies have been and will continue to be filled through internal promotions.

? Furthermore, NWSEO has often claimed that "carryover" (unobligated funds carried from one fiscal year into the next) be reprogrammed to more rapidly fill vacancies in the organization.

? However, NWS hiring challenges are not a budget issue, but an execution issue.

? In FY2016, NWS had a budget execution rate of approximately 98 percent minimizing carryover.

NWSEO Response

The agency's reply is disingenuous. The NWSEO has heard from almost all regions recently that the money is not there to fill vacant positions or to pay PCS for filling these positions. We have heard from one region that they do not have enough money for the positions that are currently filled. At least one mass bid vacancy announcement has been canceled or delayed, that is not an execution issue. Several positions are being held for two even three years before being

submitted to be filled, if that is an execution issue it is an internal NWS execution issue that has not been fixed for over four years.

We note the agency was not responsive to the claim that the agency wants to significantly increase its number of managers.

We also note the agency has decreased the size of the NWS workforce by 650 people over the last few years.

NWSEO has been tracking vacancies and the hiring process for years, and in May of 2013 started a detailed spreadsheet that incorporates data from each office. The creator of the spreadsheet noted the following:

> "This "execution issue" has been lingering for years now. I started the vacancy spreadsheet in May 2013. At that time an argument could be legitimately made that the vacancies were due mainly to sequester and hiring freeze. The time during which that argument held any weight has long ago passed. We have seen one excuse after another used to try to explain away why positions are not being filled in a timely manner. After being told for the past couple of years now that the main problem was in WFMO and that coming reforms/changes there would fix the problem, now that a combination of WFMO changes and increased utilization of HR contractors seems to be helping with the problems in HR, NWS is now suddenly claiming (at least based on the reports we have heard) that there is a shortage of PCS money or possibly an overall shortage of budgetary authority in general. We can be sure that the incoming administration will put a hiring freeze in place on or very soon after January 20. Although there are supposed to be exemptions for public safety positions, will NWS even try to get secure such an exemption? My guess is that they will not – an actual hiring freeze (on top of the four-year long combination of hiring freezes and extreme hiring slowdowns) would serve management's purposes at this point."

NWS Comments

NWSEO Claim:

In 2012, Congress requested an additional study to examine NWS operations. This mandate reads: "NOAA shall enter into a contract with an independent organization with experience in assessing Federal agencies for the purposes of evaluating efficiencies that can be made to NWS operations. This review shall include consultations with emergency managers and other user groups as well as NWS employees. Any recommended efficiencies should not result in any degradation of service to the communities served by local forecast offices and River Forecast Centers, nor should such recommendations place the safety of the public at greater risk."

Fact:

This statement is correct. In fact, "No degradation of service" was a key project principle. The request from Congress resulted in the NAPA study (2013). One of the key recommendations

from the NAPA study was to conduct further "analyses of staff alignment and functions." McKinsey and Company was contracted to conduct this staffing and functional analysis (the OWA). McKinsey's process included extensive consultations and interviews with all parties including with emergency managers.

NWSEO Claim:
The NWS' Operations and Workforce Analysis has not even addressed the requirement to ensure that there is no degradation of service nor has it established any criteria or process to ensure that the automation of forecasts and additional staff reductions and office closures do not place the public at risk.

Fact:
This is absolutely not true.
? Every idea presented in the blueprint for change is a recommendation based on improvements in service. Tests and evaluations of these ideas will include criteria for success and the tests will either prove or disprove the validity of the recommendations.

NWSEO Response
We respectfully disagree

NWS failure to obtain NWSEO input on staffing decisions

NWS Comment
NWSEO Claim:
The NWS has failed to obtain any input from NWSEO on these staffing decisions. In its May 2013 Report, the National Academy of Public Administration recommended that the agency conduct a "zero-based analyses of staff alignment and functions" and that the "NWS should involve employees from across the organization, including through NWSEO, in the development of analyses and evaluation of results." (Report at 50). "Such an analysis should . . . include the National Weather Service Employees Organization." (Report at 9). Although NWSEO has been provided the opportunity to provide input on several aspects of the NWS ongoing Operations and Workforce Analysis (virtually all of which was rejected by NWS), it has not been privy to, nor was its input sought during, any discussions on staffing levels or hours of operations at the forecast offices.

Fact:
NWSEO had representatives on four OWA workstreams including the fully integrated field structure workstream that discussed the collaborative forecast process.
? OWA workstreams were not decision-making bodies, but rather places where the diagnostic findings were analyzed and ideas generated to evolve NWS.
? Workstream ideas and recommendations were presented to the Operations and Workforce Committee (OWC); NWSEO leadership was invited to participate in the OWC.

? Additionally, NWS leadership briefed NWSEO leadership throughout the process including before all hands with employees where new ideas and recommendations were presented.

NWSEO Response

It is true that the NWSEO was a member on four of the OWA teams. On a few of these teams, the NWSEO opinions were discussed and acted upon, although not all of them. On one of the teams, the FIFS team, NWSEO ideas were never considered and just added as a minority opinion on their briefing slides. (FIFS is the Fully Integrated Field Structure team that planned for the use of the consolidated forecast model.) On one of the FIFS meetings NWSEO representatives were told they were not allowed to have a dissenting opinion. (Team member notes are included below.)

NWSEO President Dan Sobien does sit as an advisor to the Operational Workforce Committee, the governing committee of the OWA. He is not a voting member and has only been invited to three of their meetings. There have been references to OWC meetings to which, Mr. Sobien was not invited. We have no idea how many times the OWC met when Mr. Sobien was not invited. Also, when the OWC meets, Mr. Sobien is not included for the entire meeting, just a portion of it. We have no idea what is discussed in the other portions of these meetings as they are done in secret. On the first and second of the meetings that Mr. Sobien attended, there was nothing contentious discussed and Mr. Sobien consented on the action plan to move forward. The third meeting was done by phone and Mr. Sobien strongly dissented on their plan to move forward and provided reasons for his objections. His objections were ignored, he did not even have a vote, and the OWC pushed forward. In none of these meetings were part timing offices discussed.

From the NWSEO FIFS Team member:

The NWS response is highly disingenuous, and nowhere do they refute our statement that we did not have input into staffing levels or office hours of operation.

From my notes of the very first OWA call on which I participated (5/12/2016):
FIFS team restart - no longer considering office structure/staffing from now forward (Cobb says "that has been broken off"), only considering collaborative forecast process

From my notes of FIFS team call on (5/19/2016):
My comment: *"This is at least the second time during the OWA process that the staffing/office structure discussions within "fully integrated field structure" were moved to another team without NWSEO representation, just before the existing team that was previously discussing those issues gained NWSEO representation. What team is now handling staffing/office structure?"*
Response from Courtney Draggon: *"FMC directors have been involved in those discussions (6 Regions, NWC, NCEP), FIFS was not previously involved"* (note that this appears to contradict statement made by Cobb on the May 12 OWA call)

I also made a point regarding lack of transparency on staffing plans in written comments submitted during a cross-workstream Google hangout session after the OWA call on 6/29/2016:
Question 2: What is the biggest cultural hurdle in terms of moving forward with the pyramid CFP idea? (i.e. Accuracy, Local Impacts, Ownership, Sci & Tech, Consistent Messaging, other)
Lack of transparency from the RDs on the staffing/office structure plan. We are currently having these discussions in a vacuum. RDs need to be forthcoming with their plans, even if they are currently still under development. This lack of transparency causes folks to be concerned about where their jobs will be located, what they will be doing, and what will happen to their grades.

It was also stated on multiple calls ahead of the 6/8/2016 OWC briefing that NWSEO questioning or outright opposition to ideas presented by management would not be allowed:

From NAME REDACTED (NWSEO FIFS Team Member 2's) notes of the 5/26/2016 FIFS team call:
Local offices nature of warning changes, embedded in EOCs, warning changes based on customer (???). Sounds like has to be based on NBM and regionalization. They asked for comments, but I did not know where to begin. ***Dan (Cobb)said he didn't want to take anyone on when I asked where the slide came from****. Ann Marie (McKinsey) said this is just an idea and nothing has been decided. Sounded like Dan (Cobb) and others developed it.*
They had ground rules that did not allow for questioning the ideas, just the testing of them.

From my notes of the 6/6/2016 FIFS team call:
I asked Dan (Cobb) if we could have our outright opposition to the centralized watch issuance and transfer of grid production to NCEP placed on slide 8, but he said ***that would not be allowed as NWSEO "would be telling the OWC what to do"****. I asked why OWC was afraid of NWSEO input on those issues, but he did not really respond and just said that all of the OWA teams have to operate under these same rules. I don't think that is true based on what I've seen from the other teams.*

PLEASE NOTE: I included (Cobb) in the first two cases for clarification, NAME REDACTED(NWSEO FIFS Team Member 2) had it in the third.

NWS Comments -- Do we want to keep these in here and respond to them – or just remove them?

Claim: "This could be a huge mistake that could cost lives."
Fact: Our goal is to save more lives by improving our products and services to America. In no way will services degrade as a result of the effort to Evolve the National Weather Service. Every

idea will be tested and evaluated, and proven to work before implementation. Services will continue to operate at the quality they are today, or better.
NWSEO Respectfully disagrees.

Many local weather forecast offices will become part-time offices.

Claim: "NWS is planning to go from a full to a part-time operation."
Fact: The National Weather Service will continue to provide forecast products and decision support services 24/7/365 across every inch of the U.S., just as we do today. As we evolve the National Weather Service, we will undergo a test and evaluation process to determine whether some local offices do not need to be open 24/7/365, in order to better allocate staff time in support of local partners, when local partners need them most. Rather than being on shift at midnight during quiet weather when our partners are not at work, offices will collaborate to provide coverage 24/7/365, enabling more local NWS employees to sit at the planning table, or be side-by-side in the field with Emergency Management, for instance. We will be "users of our own expertise." When weather is benign, we plan to explore not having staff on the midnight shift so we can better engage our deep partners. When the forecast is for dangerous weather, we will certainly be there to meet the needs of our emergency managers.

Many offices will remain 24/7.. Some offices may cover neighboring communities during periods of quiet weather. This is a very similar concept to how we currently provide "service back-up" when needed. In the future, however, this coverage would be planned and scheduled during calm weather to free up local forecasters' time to provide more robust decision support services to local decision-makers.

Our employees have overwhelmingly expressed that shift work is very difficult for work-life balance, and studies have shown that overnight shifts have negative health implications. This proposal would help mitigate the health issues associated with shift work as well as put our people when and where they need to be - which is right alongside our partners who are on the front lines saving lives.

NWSEO Response and Documentation

Many local offices will become part-time offices.
NWS management has for years fought against NWSEO efforts to establish and maintain alternate work schedules which help to mitigate the negative effects of rotating shift work. Within the past few weeks, NWSEO has received several new anecdotal reports of management at various WFOs/Regions trying to eliminate established alternate work schedules.

If management were really concerned about the health of their employees in regards to long-term effects of rotating shift work, they would join with NWSEO in seeking early retirement authority for NWS operational staff. Such authority is currently in place for many other rotating shift workers in the federal government, including air traffic controllers, law enforcement, and firefighters.

NWS management plans would likely be even more detrimental to workers' health than the existing situation, as rather than being able to count on established shift schedules and plan their work/life balance and sleep needs accordingly, employees would be subject to frequent last-minute changes to the schedule in order to accommodate normally part-time offices remaining open overnight during periods of active weather. Such last-minute schedule changes would be extremely disruptive to employees' lives, especially those who also must deal with issues such as child care, elder care, or care of a sick significant other. This "on-demand" or "gig economy" type of scheduling would be completely incompatible with the provision of high quality local forecasts, warnings and IDSS from properly rested employees.

Regarding their claim that backup coverage would be planned during "calm weather", again, it is not possible to plan when an event such as a toxic chemical train derailment may occur in a particular location (see example provided above). Will local EMs/partners receive the same locally informed IDSS from a backup office hundreds of miles away, from forecasters they may have never met, as they would from their local office forecasters?

Local Offices will no longer disseminate warnings; Warnings will come from distant location

NWS Comment

Claim: "These warnings would no longer be delivered from this office. The warnings would be coming out of some distant location and the forecast would actually be coming out of Washington D.C."

Fact: This statement is completely false. The proposal calls for all forecasts and warnings to continue to be issued to local communities from the local forecast offices. We are proposing to use a national blend of models as an initial starting point for forecasts. This national blend of models is currently undergoing rigorous testing to ensure it will improve our local forecast capability while also providing more consistency in our suite of forecast products nation-wide. Once implemented, local forecasters would then take that initial forecast and contribute their unique knowledge and expertise, adding local weather nuances before they issue the forecast to their local communities.

We believe that using the National Blend of Models as an initial starting point for our forecasts nation-wide will result in better consistency, without hard starts and stops at artificial forecast office boundaries, and will enhance our forecasters' ability to collaborate across the nation. This will enable us to more efficiently use our national forecast assets and capabilities for the benefit of local communities.

NWSEO Response:

FIFS team discussions certainly gave final ownership of the forecast to WPC allowing local offices to only collaborate any changes they want to make. The entire emphasis of this 2016 CONOPS is to make a more consistent forecast that in itself implies less local variations. When

Assistant Administrator Louis Uccellini was asked who will own the forecast, meaning who will have the final say, his response the NWS will own the forecast.

NWS Comment

Claim: NWSEO believes forecasts should be kept local, instead of using blended forecast models from other parts of the country. "It will degrade services and potentially even costs lives. We have no idea how they could've of come up with this kind of solution," Sobien stresses.

Fact: NWS agrees that forecasts and warnings should emanate from the local level, but in this statement NWSEO President Dan Sobien blatantly misstates the facts. Anything NWS eventually implements will be proven - through rigorous testing and evaluation - to maintain or improve forecast accuracy and allow NWS to increase the quantity and quality of decision support services we provide to local communities. We would never implement a change to our products and services that "cost lives." The idea to test the use of a National Blend of Models to initiate the forecast was developed with the help of our workforce, working on teams that included NWSEO representation.

NWSEO Documentation:

From a member on the FIFS team:

> FIFS team discussions certainly gave final ownership of the forecast to WPC allowing local offices to only collaborate any changes they want to make. The entire emphasis of this 2016 CONOPS is to make a more consistent forecast, that in itself implies less local variations. When Assistant Administrator Louis Uccellini was asked who will own the forecast, meaning who will have the final say, his response the NWS will own the forecast.

CONOPS 2 "Evolve" recommendations did not include input from Forecast Office Meteorologists

NWS Comment

Claim: "But the idea should come from the meteorologist doing the job, not bureaucrats in Washington."

Fact: This quote is completely off-base. These ideas and recommendations were developed through extensive internal engagement with our employees. Local teams staffed by our field personnel with NWSEO representation developed these recommendations.

NWSEO Documentation

We would like to invite you to interview the NWSEO team members to learn how their input was restricted.

1. The OWA communications team talked about using "appropriate transparency" in communications with employees.

2. NWSEO team members were initially asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement, but upon their refusal last fall, they were "uninvited" from the teams. A few months later, they were invited back. However, they were not permitted input, the issues raised by NWSEO team members were dismissed, and the team meetings were then changed to schedules that would not permit the NWSEO members to attend the meetings.
3. NWSEO has a vision for advancing the NWS; only the NWS is forging ahead with their plans without accepting employee input.
4. Below NWSEO Team member detail how their input was restricted:

- Regarding "appropriate transparency", not being permitted input, and being unable to provide the best possible input due to agenda/call materials not being provided in advance, during the 6/29/2016 cross-workstream Google hangout session, Cobb and I had the following discussion (from my call notes):

Heated discussion between Dan Cobb and I about management not providing the agendas/slides in advance. I asked how NWSEO Team members and I provide pre-decisional input for NWSEO as a whole when I don't know what will be discussed, Dan said that none of our participation in FIFS is actually PDI, but is just "talking" and "brainstorming". Dan also said that NAME REDACTED(NWSEO FIFS Team Member 2) and I were not "special" team members, and that he didn't have the authority to negotiate with me. I responded that PDI is not "special" input, nor is it negotiation. Dan also stated that if the materials from today ended up on Facebook (specifically the breakout session document) that NWSEO would be excluded from future activities. *I responded that Dan knows very well that I am expected to share FIFS materials with NWSEO leadership.*

From notes of the 5/26/2016 FIFS team call:

Local offices nature of warning changes, embedded in EOCs, warning changes based on customer (???). Sounds like has to be based on NBM and regionalization. They asked for comments, but I did not know where to begin. ***Dan said he didn't want to take anyone on when I asked where the slide came from****. Ann Marie (McKinsey) said this is just an idea and nothing has been decided. Sounded like Dan and others developed it.*

They had ground rules that did not allow for questioning the ideas, just the testing of them.

From my notes of the 6/6/2016 FIFS team call:

I asked Dan (Cobb) if we could have our outright opposition to the centralized watch issuance and transfer of grid production to NCEP placed on slide 8, but he said that would not be allowed as NWSEO "would be telling the OWC what to do". *I asked why OWC was afraid of NWSEO input on those issues, but he did not really respond and just said that all of the OWA teams have to operate under these same rules. I don't think that is true based on what I've seen from the other teams.*

Note that this pattern of call materials not being provided in advance and agendas not being followed or changed at the last minute continued throughout NAME REDACTED(NWSEO FIFS Team Member 2)'s and my participation on the FIFS team.

I cannot comment regarding being uninvited and then invited back onto the OWA teams, as those events preceded my involvement on the FIFS team.

Regarding Cobb unilaterally changing the call schedule to make it difficult or impossible for FIFS NWSEO team members to attend the calls, here are the relevant parts of the email exchange Cobb, NAME REDACTED (NWSEO FIFS Team Member 2) and I had on this subject:

Cobb (8/14/2016):
I need to adjust the weekly FIFS calls due to multiple upcoming conflicts that look to be on the horizon for several upcoming Thursday afternoon. The new weekly meeting will be at 3pm EDT every Wed through early Dec...

NWSEO FIFS Team Member 2(8/14/2016):
This time does not work for me at all due to a standing weekly meeting for which my attendance is critical. I could make 4 pm ET or 2 ET. It would be helpful if you would ask the rest of the team before unilaterally changing the meeting times as it will likely impact others' ability to attend.

FIFS Team Member (8/14/2016):
Changing the day of the week for the FIFS meetings will make it very difficult for me to consistently attend. We work 12 hour shifts at HFO, and I work almost all night shifts 6pm-6am HST (12am-12pm EDT). I had swapped a number of shifts through the fall to free myself up as much as possible on Thursday mornings and avoid having night shifts on both Wednesday and Thursday nights. With the meetings changing to Wednesdays, there are many weeks during the remainder of the year where I am currently scheduled to work Tuesday and Wednesday nights, making it impossible for me to make a 9am HST Wednesday call and still get any decent sleep between shifts. I can try to rearrange my schedule once again with further swaps, but we are 3 forecasters down so the schedules are very tight. It is also extremely difficult to get management to cover a 12 hour night shift in the middle of the week, as doing so disrupts their schedule for most of the work week.

I formally request that the FIFS meetings remain at 9am HST on Thursdays as previously scheduled.

As NAME REDACTED(NWSEO FIFS Team Member 2) stated, it would be best if you would ask the other team members before unilaterally changing the meeting days or times.

Cobb (8/15/2016):
Would earlier Wed, 11a EDT work better for you? Everyone wants to have conference calls on Thu and it is becoming a headache. I could also do about anytime on Fri although may not have high attendance on Fri afternoons.

FIFS Team Member (8/15/2016):
Wednesdays at 11am EDT (5am HST) would not work well either, as I would either be finishing up a night shift (6p-6a HST) or likely sleeping. Getting up on my days off at 445am HST for the FIFS calls would not be appealing.

Friday would present the same problem of working night shifts on both ends as Wednesday - just different weeks affected. Since I had done all of my shift swaps to accommodate Thursday calls and had also informed our scheduler to try and keep me away from having to work both Wed & Thu nights in a given week, there are a number of weeks where I'm scheduled to work both Thursday and Friday nights.

I had really counted on the FIFS calls remaining at their current time on Thursdays when I made all of these swaps and schedule requests during the next few months to accommodate them.

FIFS Team Member (8/15/2016):
Please advise as soon as possible what the final decision will be for the FIFS conference calls weekly day/time. If the final decision is to shift the calls to Wednesdays as per your original email, I will need to notify my supervisor (Director of Operations Tom Evans) of the need for the office and myself to try and re-arrange my schedules over the next few months to accommodate the change.

I once again formally request that the FIFS calls remain at their previously scheduled day/time of 3pm EDT / 9am HST Thursdays.

Cobb (8/16/2016):
Wednesday is the day and can shift to either 2p or 4p to facilitate NAME REDACTED (the other NWSEO FIFS Team Member's) schedule. Which time do you prefer of those two and I will adjust.

NWSEO Team Member 2 (8/16/2016):
OK, 4 pm ET Wednesday but we cannot keep changing this meeting date/time. [redacted] is not the only operational person on the team and this is within the fixed schedule.

FIFS Team Member (8/16/2016):
As I discussed in our earlier email exchange, this abrupt change to the weekly call day/time causes difficulties for those team members like myself who work operational shifts, as well as for folks like NAME REDACTED(NWSEO FIFS Team Member 2) and possibly others who have other scheduled weekly calls.

I will do what I can to reshuffle my schedule here and free myself up for these calls going forward, but this change will force me to miss today's call and the August 24 call, since those dates are in the fixed schedule.

I request that there be no further changes to the weekly call day/time through at least December 14 (I'm assuming that the Dec 21 and Dec 28 calls will likely be skipped due to the holidays). If there is a need to change the call day/time again starting in January, the entire FIFS team could be consulted via call discussion, email and Doodle poll well in advance, so that the situation of changing the call day/time within the fixed schedule would be avoided in the future.

Cobb subsequently attempted to change the FIFS call days/times yet again, after I had done several additional schedule swaps to accommodate the rescheduled Wednesday calls. Intervention at the OWA level (DeLyne) was required to prevent this further change.