



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
The Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere
Washington, D.C. 20230

DEC 10 2012

The Honorable Paul Broun, MD
Chairman, Subcommittee on Investigations
and Oversight
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Broun:

Thank you for your letter regarding the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) Hurricane/Post-Tropical Cyclone Sandy Service Assessment. I understand your concerns and assure you that we are indeed moving forward with an assessment of NWS services during Sandy.

Since your letter of November 20, 2012, we have finalized an assessment charter that includes knowledgeable and independent federal experts from a wide range of disciplines, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. I have also elevated oversight of the assessment to NOAA and included team members from other NOAA line offices. The team leader is a National Marine Fisheries Service scientist with 20 years of service at NOAA and extensive team lead experience. The team composition is robust, diverse, and ensures that the review will be thorough, collaborative, and multi-disciplined.

The primary focus of the Sandy assessment will be to examine and evaluate the effectiveness of the policies underlying NWS watch and warning products, the production and issuance of storm surge products, and public communications, particularly forecast information dissemination and NWS Web sites as a public communication tool. The assessment will result in a concise report that identifies best practices and provides recommendations for service improvements. The team will begin its work by January, and a draft of the best practices, findings, and recommendations are due to me by March 31, 2013.

Your letter included several questions related to an earlier effort to develop a team and charter for the Sandy assessment. The initial team was in its formation stages, with no charter signed and therefore never commissioned. In addition, the initial team included proposed team members, including the proposed co-lead, who were not federal employees. Generally, any group composed of federal and non-federal officials that meets to provide consensus, advice, or recommendations to a federal agency or official must comply with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) of 1972 (5 U.S.C. App., 2). In order to assess our services during Sandy in a timely manner, NOAA opted to conduct a Sandy assessment using only federal team members.

THE ADMINISTRATOR

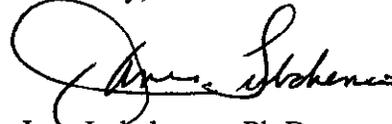


While NWS program staff were proceeding to initiate an assessment following established practices, my leadership team was discussing the potential for broader federal collaboration and elevating the review from the NWS-level to the NOAA-level, as we did for the recent Hurricane Irene assessment. The proposed team began organizing and held preliminary conference calls. Regrettably, at least one team member who was unaware that the assessment had not yet been formally approved and chartered made his invitation public. This led to media reports giving the impression that the proposed team had been officially commissioned to carry out the assessment.

I can assure you the newly established, formally approved Sandy assessment team will conduct interviews and collect information from a broad range of external parties. In addition to avoid this misunderstanding in the future, NOAA anticipates addressing non-federal participation in service assessments by the start of the next hurricane season on June 1, 2013.

I appreciate your continued support of NOAA and its programs. If you have further questions, please contact Amanda Hallberg Greenwell, Acting Director of NOAA's Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 482-4981.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jane Lubchenco". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "L".

Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D.

Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere