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Russian Federation and U.S. Sign Pioneering Agreement

The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Russian Federation's Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environment Monitoring (ROSHYDROMET) today signed a Memorandum of Understanding that will serve to upgrade ROSHYDROMET's observational network. The agreement will help ROSHYDROMET provide more accurate weather forecasts with greater lead time, strengthen its institutional capacity for emergency preparedness and improved information dissemination, and modernize data processing, archiving, computing and telecommunications facilities.

The agreement was signed by Dr. Alexander Bedritsky, head of ROSHYDROMET, and Retired USN Vice Admiral Conrad C.Lautenbacher, Ph.D., U.S. under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator.

Under the agreement, NOAA will assist ROSHYDROMET modernize its forecasting and hydrological services. "The agreement is a significant and gratifying opportunity to work collaboratively with Russia on crucial environmental areas," Lautenbacher said. "The U.S. National Weather Service underwent a similar major modernization effort during the 1990s, and I am pleased we can share that experience with the Russian Federation."

Emphasizing the importance of mutually beneficial cooperation, Bedritsky said that the agreement promoted cooperation in exchanging scientific resources, personnel, technical information and services in the fields of meteorology, hydrology and oceanography in both countries. Funded with loans from the World Bank and Russian Federation, the effort will help support the Russian society's changing needs for potentially lifesaving weather and climate data and services over the coming decades.

Designed to facilitate the hydrometeorological security of Russia's estimated 145 million people and its property and economy, the agreement will bring an important range of benefits through:

- More accurate weather forecasts that will help reduce loss of life and property due to extreme weather and climate events.
- Improved hydrometeorological services that will support the development and operation of Russia's infrastructure and transportation, public utility and agricultural services.

- Improved understanding of global weather patterns and accelerated data exchange that will contribute to more effective weather forecasting in the region and for neighboring countries.
- Accumulation of scientific data and promotion of its exchange across national borders and scientific disciplines.

Modernization will include upgrading the World Meteorological Center in Moscow, the Regional Meteorological Centers in Novosibirsk and Khabarovsk, and the data storage and archiving facilities in Obninsk. A high-speed communications system will be created to link these four resources.

To prepare for the Russian and U.S. collaboration, ROSHYDROMET meteorologists and hydrologists are now visiting NOAA facilities in the U.S., including the National Weather Service weather and river forecast offices and climate data and environmental prediction facilities. They will also visit the Meteorological Service of Canada.

The agreement is a vital link in the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). The Russian Federation, Canada and the U.S. are actively engaged in building GEOSS, which is supported by nearly 60 countries and over 40 international organizations. By linking many thousands of valuable individual technological assets as one comprehensive, integrated and sustained global system, GEOSS aims to ensure that 21st-century technology will be as interrelated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects. With global and U.S. 10-year implementation plans already in place, and several other countries now developing national plans, GEOSS will revolutionize our understanding of Earth and how it works over the next decade.

The emergence of GEOSS reflects challenging global needs. In 2003, for instance, smoke from giant Siberian forest fires affected the air quality in Seattle, Washington. This past January, Russia and northern Europe experienced the strongest storms in 40 years. About 100 electric plants were put out of order in Russia.

GEOSS will help reduce loss of life and property from such hazards. It will help mitigate the impact of other disasters, such as last December's devastating tsunami. GEOSS will make it possible to forecast next winter's weather months in advance. It will help predict where and when malaria, West Nile virus, SARS and other diseases are likely to strike. GEOSS will make more effective monitoring of forest fires possible, and provide farmers with immediate forecasts essential to maximizing crops yields. Energy costs, in the U.S. alone, could be cut by about \$1 billion yearly.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of the nation's coastal and marine resources.

<http://www.noaa.gov/eos.html>