

National Digital Forecast Database (NDFD)
Alaska Experimental Elements
Product Description Document
September 6, 2006

Part I - Mission Connection

- a. Description of Product - Under statute, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Weather Service (NWS) is charged to collect data on climate, water, and weather, provide forecasts and warnings of severe weather in order to protect life and property, and create and disseminate forecasts and other weather information for the benefit of a wide range of weather sensitive businesses and activities.

By capitalizing on rapid advances in science and technology and infusing these advances into its operations, the NWS has taken steps to proactively respond to ever changing and growing demands of its customers and partners. The 2003 Fair Weather report, produced by the National Research Council, recommended making NWS data and products available in an Internet accessible digital form. The specific recommendation is as follows: *“Information held in digital databases should be based on widely recognized standards, formats, and metadata descriptions to ensure that data from different observing platforms, databases, and models can be integrated and used by all interested parties in the weather and climate enterprise.”*

Since the Internet is now a principal means of communicating NWS forecasts, the NWS provides Internet access to operational and experimental forecasts of base and derived weather elements through the National Digital Forecast Database (NDFD). NDFD contains a seamless mosaic of digital forecasts from NWS field offices working in collaboration with the National Centers for Environmental Prediction (NCEP). Additionally, the NWS makes available graphic forecast displays (<http://weather.gov/forecasts/graphical/sectors/index.php>) that are web-based presentations of digital forecast data originating from local Weather Forecast Office (WFO) digital databases and the NDFD server.

The most recent experimental digital datasets (and associated graphic forecast displays) integrated into NDFD are the following elements for Alaska: **Maximum Temperature, Minimum Temperature, 12-hour Probability of Precipitation, Wind Speed, Wind Direction, and Significant Wave Height.**

- b. Purpose – In support of the mission described in the *National Weather Service Strategic Plan for FY2003 - FY 2008*, the NDFD is a “...national information database and infrastructure which can be used by other governmental agencies, the private sector, the public, and the global community.” The NDFD is the primary means by which digital information will be made available to customers and partners. As part of this digital database, experimental Alaska information has been made available in response to

growing user needs for planning purposes and critical safety decisions. Future digital datasets will continue to be developed in accordance with growing user needs.

- c. Intended Audience - The current audience for the NDFD Alaska experimental elements includes large volume users of forecast information, the transportation and trucking industry, utilities, emergency managers, government agencies, academia, and recreational users. It is also for anyone else who wishes to decode and explore various potential applications of the NWS digital data; or simply view, post, or distribute the graphic images.
- d. Presentation Method – There are three methods to acquire the NDFD Alaska forecast data. Binary formatted information is made available in a directory on a File Transfer Protocol (FTP) server. The base data is presented in GRIB, Edition 2 format and can be readily decoded for those who wish to create derived products from the forecast parameters/values contained within the NDFD. A user defined GRIB2 access method is also available. This service allows the user to provide latitude/longitude points for two corners and a weather element. A resulting GRIB2 message is built “on-the-fly” and downloaded by the user. For more information about User Defined GRIB2 access, please refer to the Products/Service Description Document at the following URL:

http://products.weather.gov/PDD/User_Defined_Grib2.pdf

In addition, Alaska forecast data is available in Extensible Markup Language (XML). XML is a service that provides the ability to request NDFD data over the internet and receive the information back in an XML format. The request/response process is made possible by the NDFD XML Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) server. For additional details regarding XML, please refer to the NDFD XML Service Description Document at the following URL:

http://products.weather.gov/PDD/Extensible_Markup_Language.pdf

Finally, Alaska forecasts are presented as web-based graphic images. These images follow a standard display prescribed by the NWS to best meet the needs of its customers and partners. They can be accessed by the user via a mouse click on the “Alaska” label beneath the national mosaic graphic at the following URL:

<http://weather.gov/forecasts/graphical/sectors/index.php>

Another mouse click on the display will zoom to one of six predefined and slightly overlapping geographic regions of Alaska including: 1) Northern Alaska, 2) Southeast Alaska, 3) Alaska Southern Coast, 4) Southwest Alaska, 5) Eastern Mainland, and 6) Aleutians. For both geographic levels of display, the user may select the weather element and time period, and create animations of the images.

- e. Feedback Mechanism - We are always seeking to improve our products based on user feedback. Please submit your comments on these experimental elements by completing our brief [experimental product survey](#) during the Alaska experimental element comment period specified in Table 1 below. Comments may also be submitted by clicking on the

“Survey/Comments” links on the experimental product web pages. For general questions regarding the National Digital Forecast Database, please email: nws.ndfd@noaa.gov

Graphic Element	Comment Open Date	Comment Close Date
Maximum Temperature	9/06/2006	4/07/2007
Minimum Temperature	9/06/2006	4/07/2007
12-hour Probability of Precipitation	9/06/2006	4/07/2007
Wind Speed	9/06/2006	4/07/2007
Wind Direction	9/06/2006	4/07/2007
Significant Wave Height	9/06/2006	4/07/2007

Table 1. NDFD Alaska Forecast Elements Comment Period

Technical questions regarding the NDFD Alaska forecast elements may be addressed to:
National Weather Service Headquarters
ATTN: David Ruth, W/OST21
1325 E-W Highway, SSMC2
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Part II - Technical Description

- a. Format & Science Basis - The NDFD forecast element definitions and technical information (e.g. temporal and spatial resolution of the graphics, and geographic coverage) may be found on the NDFD technical page at the following URL:
<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/ndfd/technical.htm>
- b. Product Availability – The latest NDFD Alaska forecast elements have been made continuously available via FTP, eXtensible Markup Language (XML), or web browser. To access the Wind Gust forecast data, or for further availability and technical information (e.g., temporal and spatial resolutions, forecast projections, and geographic coverage) please visit the following URL:
<http://www.weather.gov/ndfd/technical.htm>

Alaska images may also be accessed from the NWS homepage, www.weather.gov, and clicking on the “Graphical Forecasts” tab, or directly at the following URL:
<http://weather.gov/forecasts/graphical/sectors/index.php>

- c. Additional Information –
 - (1) For more information on the NDFD, please refer to the NDFD Information web site at the following URL: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/ndfd/index.htm>
 - (2) Experimental gridded elements are differentiated from operational elements by their file access locations. Graphic elements are differentiated from NWS operational elements by the “experimental” label found on the individual graphics.

- (3) Experimental elements are evaluated on both objective (e.g., statistical and technical aspects), and subjective (e.g., internal and external feedback) criteria.