



Communications Office NWS FOCUS

A newsletter for employees of the NOAA National Weather Service (NWS)

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NWS Focus

April 20, 2009

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On April 14, NWS Deputy Director Vickie Nadolski addressed the Annual Emergency Preparedness Conference of The Joint Commission in Washington, DC. An independent, not-for-profit organization, the Joint Commission accredits and certifies more than 15,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States. Nadolski discussed how the medical community can optimize the predictive capacity of NWS products and decision support services and the importance of building and strengthening partnerships with local Weather Forecast Offices. (photo, NWS Communications Office)

From Jack Hayes

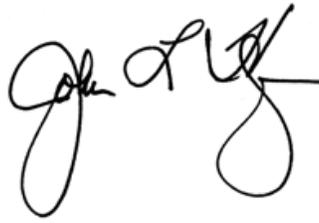
There have been a lot of things happening of late and I wanted to briefly update you on a couple of items.

Our new NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco is now in place and is hard at work. I met with her recently and detailed the important contribution the National Weather Service makes for America every day. My presentation is [available online](#). Dr. Lubchenco has an ambitious travel schedule and is stopping by some NWS offices. Don't be surprised if you get a request from her staff for a short turnaround visit to your office. My take away message from my meeting with her is that she needs us to continue to talk about and demonstrate our real world impacts in protecting lives and property.

As you know the NWS Strategic Planning effort is fully underway. The Local Office Team reports we received—nearly 160 different offices around the country—showed a breadth of interest and a depth of understanding that are remarkable. We had a survey team review the data and provide an initial analysis, along with the raw reports, to the [Strategic Plan Core Team](#) and the NWS Employee's Organization, who are meeting this week. I'm looking forward to seeing their final report and getting started incorporating the concepts into a Strategic Plan.

External engagement is also underway now. I'm meeting with many of the top executives from our partner and customer organizations and we've received input via our web page from about 60 other organizations. Many of the contributors have been emergency managers and state climatologists. If you know of other customers and partners who should participate please let them know about this opportunity by sending them to the <http://www.weather.gov/news/stratplan> web page. Everything they need to know about contributing is detailed there. We expect to get a draft Strategic Plan out for initial feedback in July.

I'm pleased with our efforts so far.



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Update on the Continued Flooding in the Dakotas and Minnesota

Widespread flooding continues over much of North and South Dakota, and northwest Minnesota. Most of North Dakota and western South Dakota continue to be under Flood Warnings. [Click here for the current hazards in effect for the country.](#)

The Missouri Basin River Forecast Center and North Central River Forecast Center resumed 24 hours of operations Monday night, April 13. NWS Central Region forecast offices, river forecast centers and the regional operations center continue daily conference calls with federal, state, county and city emergency managers and other partners involved in the flood fight.

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Don Berchoff: From the Air Force to the NWS and AWIPS II

by Harriet Loeb

NWS Communications Office

Editor's Note: This is the third story in our AWIPS II series.

We've arranged a civilization in which most crucial elements profoundly depend on science and technology.

~~ Carl Sagan ~~

As an 8 year old, Don Berchoff became fascinated with East Coast storms. His science teacher explained that in order to have snow, it has to be cold. Then, she added that in order to have cold, you have to have high pressure and high pressure means fair weather. Confused by her explanation, Berchoff became interested in meteorology. He started keeping diaries and drawing weather maps he saw on television.

Berchoff said, "I have always been a person of discovery, in learning and understanding why things are happening." His transition from a young boy of incurable curiosity to the Director of the NWS Office of Science and Technology (OST) included years of experience and learning. Twenty-four of these years were spent in the Air Force.

Berchoff says he is foremost a forecaster. A native of New York, he received his degree in meteorology from the State University of New York at Oneonta. He holds two Masters Degrees: one in International Relations from National Defense University and another in Procurement and Acquisition Management from Webster University.

Berchoff joined the NWS in the fall of 2008. He always wanted to be part of the NWS, but back in 1984, in the months leading up to graduation from college, there was a freeze on hiring at the Weather Service so he entered the Air Force.

"I told my wife it was only going to be a 4-year career [with the Air Force] and then I would get out. It turned into a 24-year career, and I gained tremendous experience with operational forecasting," said Berchoff. "I helped build and lead a 180-person regional weather center responsible for providing weather forecasts, severe weather warnings and aviation forecasts for aircraft and bases across the Northeast United States."

Berchoff's Air Force career also included six years of "hands on" field forecasting experience at Langley Air Force Base and with presidential Air Force One missions at Andrews. He is a specialist in East Coast weather and still gets excited over a cold air damming event or good snowstorm. Berchoff was at Andrews Air Force Base where he led the installation of the first Doppler radar principal user processor and the Air Force's first automated weather

forecast production system, moving from maps on the wall to the computer monitors.

Berchoff believes we are in a seminal moment in meteorology. He believes decision makers are moving from a 'cope to and avoid' attitude to depending on weather forecasts.

As Berchoff said, "Weather information is becoming a commodity in demand because weather service capabilities, and most importantly our people, have taken forecast skill to a level where the information can be exploited. The work we are doing in terms of saving lives, protecting property and enabling economic prosperity is just going to get better over time."

As OST Director, Berchoff is responsible for the success of AWIPS II, which is one of the biggest efforts taking place in his office. He sees AWIPS II as the vehicle by which the NWS is going to migrate to the next generation forecast system.



Don Berchoff is briefed by Deirdre Jones, Director of the Systems Engineering Center in NWS's Office of Science and Technology. Jones is spearheading the design and production of AWIPS II, which will soon be the foundation for the delivery of more effective and accurate weather information. (photo, NWS Communications Office)

Berchoff says that AWIPS is going to be laying the architecture and infrastructure for the NWS to share information with users, through common operating standards and by putting the data out in the right formats so that other people can pull it into their systems. Having access to this data will help people make good decisions.

According to Berchoff, AWIPS II overhauls the underlying architecture that will provide greater flexibility for growth in the future. He said, "My number one priority is to deliver AWIPS II to the field with the least amount of pain possible." His goal is to field a well-tested, polished version for forecasters in the field.

Berchoff cautions that the transition of AWIPS II into field operations will have its challenges. He says he wants to keep the lines of communication open so things can be addressed quickly. Thus far, he has been impressed with the effort the regions and NCEP has put forth in helping to make AWIPS II fielding a success. This is also a big change for NCEP as they migrate from the legacy N-AWIPS system.

"I will tell you that I am very sensitive to the things that can go wrong. We are doing our best to understand what those possibilities are, and to mitigate them," said Berchoff. "If the field tells me this was a lot less painful than they imagined, I will feel that we succeeded."

[Click here to listen to what Don Berchoff, Director of the National Weather Service Office of Science and Technology, has to say about the future of the National Weather Service.](#)

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Conference Commemorates Tenth Anniversary of the May 3, 1999, Tornado Outbreak

Weather experts and those affected by the May 3, 1999, tornado outbreak including emergency managers, first responders and city officials will speak at the "May 3 Tornado Outbreak 10th Anniversary Event" sponsored by NOAA in Norman, OK, at the National Weather Center.

The historic 1999 outbreak saw over 70 tornadoes affect Oklahoma and southern Kansas, killing 48 people and causing \$1.1 billion in damage. Advance watches and warnings saved many lives, but the devastation wrought by an F5 tornado claimed many lives that day.

The day-long conference will include [four sessions](#) focusing on Science and Technology, Emergency Preparedness and Recovery, Community and Societal Impacts, and Individual Impacts: The People Speak.

Moderators of the event's sessions will be local television meteorologists Gary England from KWTW News9, Mike Morgan from KFOR News 4, and Rick Mitchell from KOCO News 5. Session speakers will discuss progress in weather warnings, community preparedness and recovery operations over the past 10 years. The importance of tornado warnings and safety, then and now, will be highlighted.

Conference attendance is free but registration is required by April 29. [Online registration](#) and the [conference agenda](#) are available online at the [conference web page](#).

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Space Shuttle Commander Congratulates NWS Meteorologist for Years of Service

After 35 years of government service, Richard Lafosse received a phone call from NASA Space Shuttle Discovery commander Lee Archambault from space.

Archambault called to Houston's Mission Control Center at Johnson Space Center to congratulate Lafosse on his retirement and thank him for superior NASA spaceflight weather support during more than 66 shuttle missions. Lafosse retired from the National Weather Service's [Spaceflight Meteorology Group](#) on April 3.

“We recognize Rich's outstanding work in keeping the crew and shuttle safe with exceptional launch and landing weather forecasts,” Archambault said. “Rich's support will be missed and we wish him well as he heads into retirement.”

Lafosse began working for the National Weather Service (NWS) Forecast Office in Brownsville, TX, in January 1974 as a Meteorologist Intern. In 1978, he transferred to the Center for Weather Service in Houston, and in 1993, he began working for the NWS Spaceflight Meteorology Group.

Lafosse served as lead forecaster for 12 shuttle missions and received the Director's Award from the NWS Southern Region in 2006. He led SMG efforts in weather radar coordination and Applied Meteorology Unit collaboration.

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Richard LaFosse at work at the NWS Spaceflight Meteorology Group

Sandhill and Whooping Cranes Visit Hastings, NE, Weather Forecast Office

Every spring, nearly 500,000 Sandhill Cranes migrate through the Platte River Valley in south central Nebraska. They winter in Texas, New Mexico, and Mexico and come through the Platte River Valley, on their way to northern Canada, Alaska and even eastern Siberia.

They usually stop for around three weeks to rest and refuel. The cranes and the many other species of migratory birds can easily be seen on the Hastings, NE, Weather Forecast Office (WFO) radar nearly every morning in the spring and fall.

In addition to the Sandhill Cranes, there are a few Whooping Cranes that migrate through the Platte River Valley. The Whooping Cranes are one of the most famous of the endangered species with only around 200 Whooping Cranes in the wild and only 400 total in the world.

Forecaster Julia Berg, from WFO Hastings found a “Whooper” while out photographing the Sandhill Cranes on March 3. A week later, Senior Forecaster, Corey King, saw a Whooping Crane as well. This Whooping Crane is an adolescent (note the tan feathers on the neck) that is believed to have lost both parents this winter and was travelling with a group of Sandhill Cranes.



Forecaster Julia Berg of the Hastings, NE, forecast office, photographed this adolescent Whooping Crane. (photo, Julia Berg)

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Shift Worker's Corner: Nutrition, Exercise, and Sleep - the Three Pillars of Health

Editor's Note: Shift work is a unique and necessary element of the NWS work culture. While shift work is part of the job, there's no doubt it impacts the professional, personal, and family lives of employees. The information passed along in "Shift Worker's Corner" can help employees with the impacts of shift work, and can help improve the wellness and work life of all NWS employees.

Shift work in the NWS presents a significant sleep challenge for many employees, and current studies provide a wealth of evidence tying shift work to potential health effects. It has also been shown that health threats may be heightened for rotating shift workers. Many of the negative health effects are tied to poor sleep habits.

Make an effort to get your Z's--your health could suffer if you don't. Insights and incentives for this effort can be gained on the web at the [Division of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical School](#) where some excellent educational resources have been posted.

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Employee Milestones

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- [Click here](#) to see RETIREMENTS/DEPARTURES from NWS in March 2009.
- [Click here](#) to see NWS EMPLOYEE AWARDS for March 2009.

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Click here to take a look at NOAA-wide employee news, as posted in the latest issue of [NOAA World](#).

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