FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

FOR THE PROPOSED ELECTRICAL AND OPERATIONAL UPGRADE, SPACE ADDITION, AND GEOSTATIONARY OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL SATELLITE INSTALLATION PROJECTS AT THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL SATELLITE, DATA, AND INFORMATION SERVICE WALLOPS COMMAND AND DATA ACQUISITION STATION, WALLOPS, VIRGINIA

1. Background and Purpose

The National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NESDIS) is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). NESDIS operates the Wallops Command and Data Acquisition Station (WCDAS), gathering data from satellites via radio downlinks and controls satellites via transmission of radio signals. The WCDAS is a tenant on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Wallops Flight Facility (WFF).

Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations state that determination of significance using an analysis of effects requires examination of both context and intensity, and lists ten criteria for intensity (40 CFR 1508.27). NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216-6 Section 6.01b provides additional criteria for determining if impacts of a proposed action are significant. CEQ Regulations explain that significance embodies considerations of both context and intensity. For site-specific actions such as those proposed in this EA, appropriate context for considering significance of action is local, as opposed to national or worldwide.

NOAA/NESDIS previously prepared two, separate Categorical Exclusions for the majority of the proposed work: *Proposed Installation and Operation of Three GOES Antennas at the Wallops Command and Data Acquisition Station*, dated, September 29, 2010; and *Proposed Electric Utility Infrastructure Upgrades at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Wallops Command and Data Acquisition Station*, dated, February 2010. Both analyses were appropriate for project scope at time of their completion. However, unforeseen mission needs increased building size requirements past existing NOAA Categorical Exclusion thresholds. This is the sole reason for accomplishing this Environmental Assessment (EA), no environmental issues were causative.

NESDIS will distribute the EA and FONSI to NASA WFF and to the Eastern Shore Public Library. A legal notice of the availability of the documents will be published in the Eastern Shore News.

2. Description of Proposed Actions and Alternatives

NOAA/NESDIS proposes upgrades to the WCDAS site-wide electrical systems, infrastructure, and antenna systems to support new mission requirements. The Proposed Action includes:

- New, underground electrical and communication ductbanks including wiring and cabling
- Construction and operation of three Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite (GOES) antennas, one of which replaces an existing, in place antenna.
- Construct a new Powerhouse Building
- Construct an addition to the Operations Building to support GOES operations
- Road realignment and relocation of adjacent existing underground utilities and ductbanks
- Upgrade existing electrical distribution system within the Operations Building
- Renovate existing mechanical systems within the existing Utility Building

These improvements would occur entirely on existing WCDAS and NASA WFF property in areas previously built upon or otherwise disturbed. Approximate construction period is October 2011 to November 2013.

3. Environmental Consequences

Implementation of the proposed improvements would result in physical changes in the WCDAS environment. However, the Proposed Action would not adversely affect ecological or natural resources, protected species, or wildlife habitat. The proposed construction activities would not occur in wetlands subject to federal jurisdiction. There would be no adverse effects to wetlands or to the 100-year floodplain. Farmland and designated wild and scenic rivers are not present at or near the WCDAS and would not be affected.

Amount of vehicle traffic, noise, and emissions of air pollutants resulting from implementation of the Proposed Action would be temporary and insignificant; no long-term impacts will result. No adverse or disproportionately high numbers of environmental effects on minority or low-income communities would result. Socioeconomic impacts, if any, would be insignificant. No negative impacts to public health and safety would occur; the public would not frequent the area of activity.

No prehistoric or historic archaeological sites were identified in the areas of the Proposed Action. At the WCDAS, no existing structure is older than 50 years of age and there are no cultural resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Proposed Action construction expenditures would represent a modest beneficial impact to the local economy. However, there would be no resultant long-term increase in employment at the WCDAS or NASA WFF. Furthermore, none of the elements of the Proposed Action is, or uses controversial, uncertain, or unique technology or methods. Nor will precedence for future action be established.

Under the No Action Alternative, NOAA/NESDIS would not construct electrical, communications, and facility infrastructure upgrades, nor install new antennae. Operational functionality improvements would not occur, WCDAS facility and infrastructure shortfalls and functional efficiencies of the WCDAS would not be optimized. This would place WCDAS at increased risk of failing to maintain its mission requirements.

4. Conclusion

After careful and thorough consideration of facts herein, the undersigned finds that the proposed federal action is consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives set forth in sections 101(a) and 101(b) of NEPA and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or otherwise result in any condition requiring consultation pursuant to section 102(2)(c) of NEPA. Therefore a FONSI is supported and appropriate, and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not warranted.

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Assistant Administrator for
Satellite and Information Services

2 August 2011
Date