



August 10, 2010

Public Comment: NOAA's Next-Generation Strategic Plan

<http://www.ppi.noaa.gov/ngsp.html>

http://www.ppi.noaa.gov/NGSP2/NOAA_NGSP.pdf

MAPPs is a national association of more than 180 firms providing services in mapping, spatial data and geographic information systems services. MAPPs member firms employ more than 10,000 individuals in geospatial related positions. MAPPs actively promotes and monitors legislation, policy and regulations that impact the private geospatial profession.

MAPPs appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on NOAA's Next-Generation Strategic Plan.

On page 1, MAPPs applauds NOAA Administrator Lubchenco's language on "A New Era for Climate Science and Services":

"A New Era for Climate Science and Services. Another new focus of this plan is NOAA's ability to provide climate services. Climate change trends are being documented nationwide, including rising temperatures, heavier precipitation, rising sea levels, longer growing seasons, reductions in snow and ice, and changes in river flows. NOAA climate science has been at the center of documenting these trends for decades, but we must now expand on this knowledge to provide the information that governments, businesses, and communities need in order to make scientifically-informed decisions. NOAA's commitment to improving climate services reflects our larger vision of resilience."

The Federal government currently lacks a data infrastructure that enables the measuring, monitoring, verifying and validating of the effects of global climate change. Acquiring the basic data sets would enable scientists, as well as Congress, the White House and other policy makers to make informed decisions about environmental controls that could have serious economic and quality of life implications for the American people.

MAPPs believes such geospatial data sets would be developed by surveyors, mapping professionals and others in the geospatial disciplines, and should include:

- a series of mid-resolution land remote sensing satellite images;
- a series of high-resolution satellite and aerial photographic images;
- a national elevation data set utilizing LiDAR and RADAR technology to quantify change in vegetative canopy structure and coincident field measurements of aboveground biomass;
- a network of geodetic bench marks, coastal tide and sea level gauging and shoreline delineation maps for measurement and observation of long- and short-term change;
- a series of historic and current land use and land cover classification data;
- a national administrative/government boundary data set delineating jurisdictions for Federal, state, local and tribal lands;
- a series of hydrographic map layers charting the surface water held in rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and along coastlines; and

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- a national transportation mapping program that models all of the systems that allow for moving people and goods from location to location via roads, waterways, pipelines, and other means.

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On pages 2, 17, 18, and 21, MAPPS applauds the numerous references to surveying and mapping data, charts and navigational information, earth observations and scientific data sets.

There is a robust private sector geospatial community that is well positioned and qualified to perform the various professional services and provide the various products needed by NOAA. Private sector geospatial firms have been innovative in staffing, scheduling, applying technology and deployment to ensure that the government receives value for its money.

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On pages 5, 16, 17, 19 and 20, MAPPS is pleased to see terminology such as “coastal and marine spatial planning”, “spatially relevant and integrated data”, “an improved geospatial framework”, “place-based spatial plans”, “geospatial data and visualization tools”, and “geospatial information” enhancing comprehensive ocean and coastal planning and management.

MAPPS continues to advocate the concept of a robust “Digital Coast” as first recommended by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). The Digital Coast provides an opportunity to help America’s fragile oceans, coasts and shorelines by addressing issues raised by the U.S. Oceans Commission, the Pew Commission, as well as several NAS reports, all of which have highlighted the needed surveying, charting, remote sensing and geospatial data for America’s coasts, harbors and ports, shoreline and ocean resources critical to our nation’s most basic activities.

The “Digital Coast” program should:

- improve coordination and support an annual mapping and charting inventory;
- identify priorities;
- define standards and standardize methods for data acquisition, processing and distribution to ensure broadest utility of data;
- contract for the collection and creation of feature data sets to include, shallow bathymetric data, airborne elevation data, large scale land use and land cover maps, benthic habitat and aquatic vegetation mapping, parcel data, planimetric data, and Socio-economic and human use data.
- create a seamless geodetic framework;
- arrive at a nationally consistent definition of shoreline in terms of a tidal datum; and
- coordinate with neighboring countries to collaborate on initiatives that have an impact on common borders, especially the coastal and great lakes areas.

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On page 6, MAPPS is alarmed by NOAA’s reliance on non-private sector sources to supplement its own work:

“To supplement its own work, NOAA will rely on and support efforts undertaken by partners at other agencies and research institutions around the world to understand economic, environmental, and social risks, and to communicate these findings.”

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On pages 2, 7, 11, 12, 21, 24, 27, MAPPS is deeply concerned with the various references to NOAA’s satellite, aerial, and ocean based assets, maintaining these assets, capabilities, expansion, and future capacity building. These references indicate NOAA’s intent to duplicate and compete with current assets and capabilities found in private sector geospatial

firms. At a time of high unemployment, NOAA's current wording will help undermine investment and jobs creation activities of the private sector. There is an enormous capacity and capability in the private sector that NOAA fails to utilize.

NOAA needs to focus in-house resources on maintaining core operational capabilities and performing the inherently governmental tasks within its mission and pursue larger budgets for contracting for geospatial services and products rather than competing with commercially available services and products. NOAA can stretch its dollars to support commerce and ensure safe navigation by transforming itself into an organization that performs only those services that are inherently governmental in nature. It should not be expending funds for in-house performance of commercially available mapping activities. We believe NOAA should focus its in-house activities on the establishment of professional and technical standards, certification of data, research and development, funding and administration of grants, and perform those services that are inherently governmental in nature and which are not competitive with the private sector. NOAA should be a leader in putting geospatial data in the hands of users who need such data for a variety of applications.

For too long, NOAA has unwisely spent taxpayers' dollars by attempting to perform commercially available geospatial activities. MAPPS urges NOAA use the Next-Generation Strategic Plan to change this paradigm. This is not a recommendation that comes solely from MAPPS, but it is one that has been advocated by virtually every study conducted on NOAA's programs. Numerous studies, including those in which NOAA has participated or which NOAA funded, have recommended that NOAA end its performance of commercially available surveying, charting, photogrammetric mapping, aerial photography and geodetic activities and focus on inherently governmental functions. Despite these findings, NOAA continues to operate its activities in-house, costing the taxpayers millions of dollars a year.

Vice President Gore's "Reinventing Government" study, 1993, said, "The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will experiment with a program of public-private competition to help fulfill its mission. NOAA, a part of the Commerce Department, maintains a fleet of ships to support its research on oceans and marine life and its nautical charting. But its fleet is reaching the end of its projected life expectancy. And even with the fleet, NOAA has consistently fallen far short of the 5,000 days at sea that it claims to need each year to fulfill its mission. NOAA faces a basic question--whether to undertake a total fleet replacement and modernization plan, estimated to cost more than \$1.6 billion in the next 15 years, or charter some privately owned ships. The experience of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which contracts out 30 to 40 percent of its ocean floor charting to private firms, shows that the private sector can and will do this kind of work. Competition among private companies for these services also might reduce costs."

In the U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Inspector General, Semiannual Report to Congress, March 1996, is said, "In 1992, NOAA began a \$1.9 billion, 15-year plan to modernize its in-house fleet of research vessels. Since then, the Commerce Department's IG repeatedly has urged NOAA to explore more cost-effective options such as privatization. NOAA has ignored these suggestions even though the IG found that "(1) NOAA's fleet is clearly more expensive than available alternatives, (2) its decisions regarding the fleet have been based on faulty assumptions and inaccurate cost data, and (3) its actions have impeded attempts to form external partnerships with public and private sector organizations."

The Commerce Department Inspector General reported that NOAA's costs for performing hydrographic surveys are significantly higher than the private sector, at a rate of \$21,000 per ship per day or \$15 million per year. (NOAA Should Decommission its Ships and Terminate the Recent Billion-Dollar Fleet Modernization Plan, Inspector Report IPE-7794, March 1996.)

The Commerce IG has also recommended shutting down NOAA's fleet of aircraft, including its aerial photography program, citing NOAA's costs at 42% higher than the private sector. (NOAA's Light Aircraft Fleet Should Be Privatized, STD-9952-8-001, August, 1998.)

In response to the Commerce IG report, NOAA contracted with Mitretek Systems to review the IG recommendations and the push toward fleet privatization. The review confirmed what everyone outside of NOAA has been saying. It concluded "maintenance of the needed core capability does not require government ownership of ships supporting NOS hydrographic surveys" (emphasis added). (Hydrographic Survey Data Collection: Analysis, Conclusions, and

Recommendations, Mitretek Systems, report to NOAA pursuant to task order 56-SPNA-8-23032 of contract 50-SPNA-4-00023, October, 1998.)

Rather than accept and implement the audit report, NOAA again hired Mitretek, to study its aircraft operations. The Mitretek report found that NOAA historically has used more crew members for its flight operations than the private sector. Mitretek also found that some NOAA aircraft, including those used for aerial imaging, are **twice** as expensive to operate as the equipment used by the private sector. (*NOAA Light Aircraft Operations: An Independent Internal Assessment*, prepared by Mitretek Systems, contract 50-SPNA-9-00009 for NOAA, Office of Marine and Aviation Operations, U.S. Department of Commerce, February 2000.)

The aforementioned Mitretek report made the case in unequivocal terms. It stated, “NOAA light aircraft services are not inherently governmental in nature”. It went on to say, “Missions requiring the collection of data only with no government personnel on board (e.g. aerial photography) represent the easiest missions to transfer to the private sector.”

As a result, NOAA was designated as a "high risk" agency by the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Its hydrographic surveying fleet of ships has been so designated because its operation is so much more expensive than the private sector. It was on the GAO list of “major performance and management challenges” at the Department of Commerce (GAO/OCG-99-3). The GAO said, “Although NOAA has increased its outsourcing with the private sector, universities and other public entities for these services, it continues to rely on its old, inefficient fleet, which lacks the latest available technology ... the Commerce IG recommended that NOAA terminate its fleet modernization efforts; cease investing in its ships; immediately begin to decommission, sell or transfer them; and contract for the required ship services. According to the Commerce IG, NOAA’s failure to adopt a sound business approach to obtaining the best fleet services for its programs will continue to expose its programs to unnecessary costs and risks... Although NOAA has made some progress, more needs to be done.

When NOAA first identified this issue as a material weakness in 1990, it estimated that the issue would be resolved by 1993. Today, NOAA has not committed to a specific completion date ... In the meantime, NOAA continues to rely on its old, inefficient in-house fleet, which does not have the latest state-of-the-art technology.”

As early as 1973 an OMB study found that mapping is a commercial activity and recommended that more of it be contracted. NOAA participated in that study. (Report of the Federal Mapping Task Force on Mapping, Charting, Geodesy and Surveying, OMB, July 1973) “Private cartographic contract capability is not being used sufficiently. We found this capacity to be broad and varied and capable of rendering skilled support to federal MC&G (mapping, charting and geodesy) programs. Contract capability is a viable management alternative, and using it would be consistent with the President’s desire to limit the size of the Federal payroll. Its use should be encouraged in lieu of continued in-house build-up.” The President referred to was Nixon and the build-up that it warned against has indeed occurred.

In 1985, NOAA asked the National Academy of Sciences to study the Office of Charting and Geodetic Services. It found, “commercial resources offer time-proven expertise and professionalism in a wide range of cartographic activities.”

President Reagan’s last budget submission to Congress in January, 1989, recommended increased use of private mapping firms by all Federal agencies, including NOAA, when it reported use of the private sector “is an important management tool to raise productivity, cut costs and improve the quality of Government services (the advantage of which is) efficiency, quality and innovation in the delivery of goods and services ... specific areas where the Government could place greater reliance on private sector providers include ... map-making activities”.

In 1994, the GAO investigated NOAA’s fleet and recommended contracting of mapping activities. Even then, GAO found NOAA moving slowly. It said, “NOAA is beginning to take some additional actions to experiment with chartering activities, in particular for hydrographic charting and mapping services – one NOAA program mission for which chartering shows promise as an alternative to purchasing or leasing new vessels.” (Research Fleet Modernization: NOAA Needs to Consider Alternatives to the Acquisition of New Vessels, GAO/RCED-94-170, August, 1994.)

NOAA asked the Marine Sciences Committee of the National Research Council, NAS, to look at its nautical charting program. The report recommended “NOAA should facilitate private contractor participation in performing the required surveying by providing opportunities for private companies to compete for contracts to survey.” (Charting a Course into the Digital Era: Guidance for NOAA’s Nautical Charting Mission”, National Academy Press, 1994.)

The National Academy of Public Administration found, “NOS will likely be contracting for an increasing portion of its activities – which the panel thinks is desirable.” It said, “there also appears to be potential for increased contracting in the geodetic and photogrammetry sector ...” While NAPA said it opposed outright privatization, citing a Federal management responsibility, it found “participation by the private sector might be substantially increased through contracts.” (A Performance Based Organization for Nautical Charting and Geodesy, National Academy of Public Administration, June, 1996.)

Making matters worse, MAPPS has documented NOAA’s use of ARRA/Stimulus and other funding sources to bulk-up its in-house capabilities to compete with and duplicate private sector geospatial firms. NOAA should not be squandering scarce taxpayer resources. Below are just a few listed examples (between January 1, 2009 and May 25, 2010) of NOAA’s unwise procurements for activities and equipment duplicating and competing the private sector:

NOAA to spend ARRA money to repair ship; http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2009/20090924_rainier.html

NOAA – 300 KHz Lowered Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler (LADCP);
https://www.fbo.gov/?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=ff4368847e6ba0f1682f72d4570c8908&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Odom CVM and positioning system;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=0aff10133a3499f5643cbaf0c3f0e210&tab=core&_cview=1

NOAA – Renewal of Fledermaus Software Licenses;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=7450ed143a74d8470f7edf5cc6ec66ec&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – POSPac MMS Software with Maintenance and 1 Day of Training;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=d625005fe4cb6f59be0d79f9662aa09d&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – RECOVERY Acoustic Water Level Measuring Equipment;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=0621a453ecd935b380dac91723ddbaeb&tab=core&_cview=1

NOAA – Bathymetric Sonar Systems - Training Course;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=8f9d12447e2eedcc316aaa665f00e9c3&tab=core&_cview=1

NOAA – Procure yearly Maintenance Service Agreements for currently-owned HYPACK Survey, Hypack, & Hysweep Software Licenses; https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=d5f6cf0352d78ee422d9fd46eb095535&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – POSPac MMS Software with Maintenance and 1 Day of Training;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=1c09cea1f09832d7fd50a10aa322d4bb&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Hysweep Upgrade Licenses;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=3225b47bd1cb15081805432f4acc7c2b&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – RECOVERY G3 Hydrographics Gauges;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=da487a18af77a23df6b36a7ebf146853&tab=core&_cview=1

NOAA – POSPac Software Maintenance Renewal;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=a5a72460dbbda51af42a12e7b73d3f62&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – POSPac Software Maintenance Renewal ;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=1966a77f4b936414b0349a2e90e1915a&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Multibeam Echosounders;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=9e341cbc6a7dff21c9919f19fdb08e06&tab=core&_cview=1

NOAA – ODOM CV-200 Single Beam EchoSounder;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=2d75b555df80160d2c15efc82dadfb5&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Sound Velocity Sensors aka Moving Vessel Profilers;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=3e20bff84e93162b8687e75b7a09b53d&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Recovery and Reinvestment Act - Development of Hydrographic Survey Data Products and Automation of Data Processing Methods; https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=d3899fa2d1d3a604ca65098352961474&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Satellite Communication System;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=eae500f9c2ae9bdb0d192fed370b045&tab=core&_cview=1&cck=1&au=&ck

NOAA – POS MV Wavemaster;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=49237981c25e08fb313ff15f20ae9ed0&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Moving Vessel Profiler/Sensor -- Used to Test Ocean Water -- NOAA;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=992dcb7c2de00cf205ed73366df670eb&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – G3 Hydrographics Gauges;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=9495bc440efaf2729f8ca0ce785c0923&tab=core&_cview=1

NOAA – Recovery - 28 Foot Hydrographic Survey Launches;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=8fd44bb2b2680509113612e5a35b6068&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – ARRA: Development of Hydrographic Survey Data Products and Automation of Data Processing Methods;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=5880e7bb28e3b305fbbcd1f630a8bbf&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Hypack Max Software;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=20ef64e36b8af8a0ba489dad74619603&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Hypack and Hysweep Hydrographic Survey Software;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=0c69c1e648f8f75cf6895e9cb2b0bee5&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Hydrographic Survey Launch 3102 Winch and Hydraulic Systems Installation;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=bd5c3ab567578f742699f2e5c0d873d8&tab=core&_cview=1

NOAA – RECOVERY - NOAA Ship RAINIER Major Repair Period (MRP);
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=ae3847d6d57bae3653b87491712af784&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Recovery--Notice of intent to solicitate offerors for purchase of hydrographic gauge data loggers via GSA;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=b91999dc719c9190cbf544fabf06627f&tab=core&_cview=1

NOAA – Sources Sought - LIDAR System;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=d703e8a3947d82eb14b17d4ca6205989&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Upgrade/Modification of Government-Owned Klein 5000 V2 Bathy Hydrographic Sonar System;
https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=907b77c526e47dba17c8bf94cbf12e3f&tab=core&_cview=0

NOAA – Sources Sought - LIDAR System;
https://www.fbo.gov/?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=074fe81756dc02b60141567bae4b638c&tab=core&_cview=0

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On page 17, MAPPS seeks clarification on the following statement:

“To ensure efficient and environmentally sound operations throughout the MTS, NOAA will continue to work with federal, state, and local partners on technology infusion and improvements to MTS products and services, including reducing the hydrographic survey backlog in navigationally significant areas.”

MAPPS recommends the inclusion of “private sector geospatial firms” as the primary designee stakeholder needed to reduce the hydrographic survey backlog.

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On page 20, MAPPS seeks clarification on the following statement:

“To achieve this objective, NOAA will need to build and maintain a reliable, accessible suite of climate, weather, marine ecosystem, living marine resource, and geospatial information; improve the understanding of key environmental processes; build capacity in the social, behavioral, and economic sciences to support the valuation of ecosystem services, risk and vulnerability assessments, and decision-support services; and develop advanced technologies in sensors, computing and networking, and user interfaces to better observe, understand, model, and communicate knowledge of complex systems.”

MAPPS recommends the commercialization of “advanced technologies in sensors” so as to transition well developed technologies successfully researched and perfected onto the commercial marketplace for maximum utilization as a mature technology ready for prime performance in a professional manner.

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On page 18, MAPPS supports bolstering the following statement:

“Efforts to remove marine debris from coastal habitats will continue, and research will more clearly identify the damage marine debris causes to coastal economies and habitats.”

MAPPS recommends inserting the opportunity to contract with private sector geospatial firms for debris mapping and related activities.

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The plan mentions the term “contracts” once (page 27) and “acquire” twice (pages 16 and 27). The strategic plan fails to address NOAA’s intent to increase its reliance and utilization on private sector geospatial firms to fulfill its comprehensive goals within the strategic plan.

There is very little discussion of the role the private sector generally, and the private geospatial community in particular, can perform in these initiatives. The private sector has been contracted by all levels of government (Federal, state and local), and private clients, to provide geospatial services, data, and products.

For nearly 15 years, Congress has mandated or encouraged more contracting of mapping services by NOAA. The House-approved the fiscal year 1996 appropriations bill (H.R. 2076) for the Department of Commerce, including the mapping, charting and geodesy functions of the NOAA, included language in the Appropriations Committee Report seeking more contracting out of mapping activities. It read as follows:

Mapping and Charting.--The Committee has included \$37,500,000 for the NOAA mapping and charting program. This increase above the request is intended to increase the percentage of critical areas that could be surveyed in fiscal year 1996 and hasten the implementation of NOAA's new digital charting system.

The Committee intends that NOAA increase its reliance on contracting with the private sector to conduct mapping and charting activities. An increased reliance on the private sector will enable NOAA to decrease its FTE requirements and the need for additional vessels in its own fleet for these purposes. The Committee intends that the entire increase provided will be used to contract with the private sector and does not approve additional FTE for this activity.

The Senate joined with the House in its admonishment to NOAA with language in its Commerce Appropriations Committee Report saying:

For mapping and charting, the Committee recommendation includes the requested amount of \$33,586,000, instead of an increase as provided in the House-passed bill. The Committee supports efforts to privatize the charting and mapping functions and expects NOAA to rely more on use of contract vessels for these purposes instead of on its own fleet.

The House-Senate Conference on H.R. 2076 (Commerce Appropriations) adopted the following conference report language:

The conferees expect funds made available under this account and the NOAA Fleet Modernization account, including prior year carryover funds, for mapping, charting, and geodesy services to be used to acquire such services through contracts entered into with qualified private sector contractors. The conferees expect that contracts for hydrographic, geodetic, and photogrammetric surveying and mapping services shall be awarded in accordance with title IX of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 (40 U.S.C 541 et. seq.), as proposed in the House report. Further, the conferees intend that no funds provided under this account, in this Act or in any prior year appropriation, be used to procure equipment that replaces or modernizes NOAA's in-house measurement capabilities when similar services may be obtained by contract through the private sector. The conferees believe that it is inappropriate for NOAA to use its limited resources to acquire specialized equipment for the NOAA fleet, considering the uncertainty of the future of the fleet as well as the availability of such equipment among potential private sector contractors for mapping and charting activities.

Congress again addressed the issue in the FY1999 Commerce Appropriations bill, noting NOAA's failure to comply with previous Congressional directives.

The recommendation includes \$16,000,000 under the line item Address Survey Backlog/Contracts exclusively for contracting out with the private sector for data acquisition needs, an increase of \$2,500,000 above the current level and \$7,500,000 above the request. The Committee remains concerned that the NOS and NOAA have not taken sufficient steps to develop a viable short-term and long-term plan for hydrographic services. Given the age of NOAA's current hydrographic ships, and the fact that fiscal constraints will preclude additional government-owned replacement vessels, such failure jeopardizes NOAA's ability to meet this critical mission requirement. While the Committee appreciates the efforts of NOS to work with the Committee and all interested parties to address this matter, the Committee was disappointed that the report lacked specific plans to comply with some of the direction provided in the fiscal year 1998 report, including a plan for 50% outsourcing, as well as the development of innovative mechanisms and alternatives to maintain core capabilities for appropriate oversight to ensure data quality. The Committee is aware that an independent study is currently being conducted to address these issues. Therefore, the Committee directs NOAA to provide a report to the Committee no later than February 1, 1999, which address these issues and includes a plan for outsourcing not less than 50% of hydrographic survey work by fiscal year 2000. (House Report 105-636, to accompany H.R. 4276, July 20, 1998).

In 2004, the House Appropriations Committee instructed NOAA again.

The Committee expects NOAA to work with the private mapping community to develop a strategy for expanding contracting with private entities to minimize duplication and take maximum advantage of private sector capabilities in fulfillment of NOAA's mapping and charting responsibilities. NOAA shall submit a report on such a strategy to the Committee no later than November 1, 2004. This report shall include a description of activities currently performed by NOAA, and activities performed by contractors, accompanied by cost and percentage information for each. (House Report 108-576, to accompany H.R. 4754, July 1, 2004)

There is a capable and qualified private sector in mapping that can and should be used to a greater extent by NOAA. There is no justification, from a policy or fiscal point of view, for NOAA to maintain government activities that duplicate or compete with the private sector. Geospatial activities that are commercial in nature, such as geodetic surveying, aerial photography, remote sensing, photogrammetric mapping, and others related activities should be performed by the private sector.

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In conclusion, NOAA needs a strategic plan that engages the best of what our nation can muster. The proposed Next-Generation Strategic Plan if enacted without our recommended revisions will not further that goal. MAPPS respectfully urges that NOAA utilize private sector geospatial firms to collect and process data, and not increase or expand its internal capabilities to duplicate and compete with private geospatial firms for commercially available services and products.

It has become obvious to the contracting community both from the lack of growth in budget funding requests for contracting and also the proposed language in this Next-Generation Strategic Plan that it is NOAA's intent to instead grow its internal resources at the expense of contractors. MAPPS respectfully urges that a good strategic plan states why NOAA needs the private sector and how the private sector's capabilities (married with NOAA's existing capabilities) will better help NOAA fulfill their mission and provide better services and data to meet the public need. NOAA needs to increase the demand for and utilization of the robust geospatial expertise and capabilities found in private sector geospatial firms to satisfy its resilient ecosystems, communities and economies.

Sincerely,



John M. Palatiello
MAPPS Executive Director