



The Four Winds

National Weather Service Employees Organization

NWSEO Legislative Education Efforts Results in Six Senators Urging NOAA to Rethink NOHRSC Relocation

(May 6, 2014) Six members of the United States Senate from five north central states have written NOAA Administrator Sullivan to express their concerns about the NWS's plans to relocate the National Operational Hydrologic Remote Sensing Center (NOHRSC) to the National Water Center in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The NOHRSC, currently in Chanhassen, Minnesota, conducts NWS's snow surveys and analysis. This letter from the senators is the result of NWSEO's legislative education efforts.

Minnesota was originally selected as the site for NOHRSC 30 years ago because it is in the center of that portion of the country most affected by snowmelt flooding events. Most of the "customers" served by NOHRSC are located in Minnesota, the Dakotas, Wisconsin and Iowa, as well as in Canada. The Red River basin is most at risk for snowmelt flooding.

NOHRSC is currently co-located with the Twin Cities Weather Forecast Office and the North Central River Forecast Center. As the Senate letter explains:

"These three groups share existing facilities and their close working proximity enables collaboration across operational lines. This arrangement has allowed for accurate and timely monitoring of spring snowmelt in the Midwest, providing local leaders with the information they need to make critical decisions.

"Communities along the region's rivers rely upon accurate forecasts and communications built upon the strong working relationships that NOHRSC has developed over the years. We are concerned about any impacts the proposed move could have on interagency communications."

The letter was sent on May 5 by Minnesota Senators Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken; Iowa Senator Tom Harkin; South Dakota Senator Tim Johnson; Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin and North Dakota Senator Heidi Heitkamp. In closing, these Senators wrote:

"We request that you provide us with a response to concerns that this proposed move could reduce operational effectiveness, break existing links and local partnership, and impact the region's ability to prepare for and respond to flooding from snowmelt."

NOHRSC provides comprehensive analysis of both national and regional snow conditions, including maps, commentary, observations and statistics, including the National Snow Observation Database, airborne snow surveys, satellite snow cover mapping, snow modeling and applied snow research. Data from these snow surveys are used to predict snowmelt flooding in the Mississippi, Minnesota and Red River basins.

The airborne snow surveys are conducted using two NOAA aircraft based at Flying Cloud Airport in Eden Prairie, MN. These two aircraft will be relocated to MacDill AFB in Tampa. In their letter, the Senators questioned whether NOAA's aircraft can be "efficiently deployed and can respond on short notice across the Midwest" after the relocation.

Relocation is scheduled to be complete by April 2015. NOHRSC has a staff of 16, including NWS employees, UCAR contractors and NOAA Corps Officers. The average NWS permanent change of station move costs approximately \$100,000 per employee. There will be no cost savings derived from vacating current office because it is collocated in the same facility as the Chanhassen WFO and North Central RFC.

-NWSEO-

**No one cares more for National Weather Service employees than
National Weather Service employees.**

**No one works harder for National Weather Service employees than
National Weather Service employees.
We are NWSEO.**