

Obama Administration Seeks Congressional Authority to Move NOAA into Interior Department

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On January 13, 2012, the White House released a [controversial plan](#) to move the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration (NOAA) into the Interior Department. The NOAA is currently in charge of atmospheric science, fisheries, and ocean energy development.

In his January 2011 State of the Union address, President Obama highlighted bureaucratic inefficiencies in the government by quipping that freshwater salmon are regulated by the Fish and Wildlife Services (a division of the Department of the Interior), while saltwater salmon are regulated by the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration (NOAA). Bundling the NOAA under the Interior Department would effectively bring all governmental salmon regulation under one roof, but pushback from lawmakers and environmental groups shows the result of this consolidation will have far greater ramifications than a shift in the regulation of one species.

Environmentalists and some lawmakers from states like Alaska have expressed concern that the move will sacrifice the scientific independence of the NOAA. They argue that personnel at NOAA have specialized expertise in oceanic species and ocean energy resources, and thus it is important to ensure that this agency has the necessary independence to make decisions that protect oceans and the ecosystems and economies that rely on them. Additionally, federal employee groups have expressed concern that the consolidation would result in job loss from elimination of redundancies.

On the other hand, other lawmakers have expressed support for the move. In their view, the Interior Department would be an ideal home for NOAA given the rising importance of oceanic energy projects (including off-shore oil, gas, wind, and wave and tidal energy). They also point to the scientific symmetry between the US Geological Survey's study of land and NOAA's study of atmosphere. Supporters of the President's initiative also note that the move is projected to result in a total savings of \$3 billion in government spending. Both the reduction in spending and the agency consolidation may improve Obama's political leverage in the upcoming presidential election.

The Administration needs Congressional approval to go ahead with the consolidation. Congress has approved similar consolidations by previous presidents.

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