

NOAA Report

AF0000 (A-List/12)
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May 21, 1990

COMING UP

Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee meetings in Washington, D.C., May 22-23.

Federal Agency's Response to Hazardous Incidents and Releases Technical Exchange Conference in Las Cruces, N. Mex., May 22-24.

North American NOAA Polar Orbiter Users Group meeting in New Carrollton, Md., May 23-25.

Improved Weather Reconnaissance System Program Council meeting in Rockville, Md., May 31.

WMO/UNEP Bureaus meeting and 42nd Session of the World Meteorological Organization's Executive Council in Geneva, Switzerland, June 2-23.

Dr. Earle Nominated As NOAA Chief Scientist:--The White House has announced that President Bush will nominate Dr. Sylvia Earle as Chief Scientist of NOAA. Dr. Earle, a distinguished marine scientist and explorer, is Chief Executive Officer of Deep Ocean Technology, Inc., of San Leandro, Calif. The author of more than 70 publications on marine science and technology, Dr. Earle has extensive field experience, including more than 50 diving expeditions totalling in excess of 5,000 hours under-water. She holds a record for solo deep diving (3,000 feet.)

Study Supports Mandatory Turtle-Excluder Use:--Turtle-excluder Devices (TEDs) should be required for all shrimp trawls at most place and most times of the year from Cape Hatteras, N.C., to the Texas-Mexico border to protect endangered sea turtle species, a National Research Council committee of experts has concluded.

In a summary of its report released in Washington, D.C., May 18, the committee said that shrimp trawls, which accidentally capture turtles in nets that are drawn along the sea floor, are by far the greatest source of turtle mortality by humans. At least 11,000 turtles, and possibly three to four times that many, die as a result of shrimp fishing each year it said.

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TEDs are "the best method currently available" to conserve populations of the Kemp's ridley, loggerhead, green, hawksbill, and leatherback sea turtles, the committee concluded. At a few places and time where TEDs might be ineffective - for example, where there is a great deal of vegetation or debris in the water - alternative measures might be required such as reducing the length of time shrimp nets are in the water or, as a last resort, closing some fisheries.

Moreover, because habitat degradation and predation also result in turtle deaths, conservation and recovery of all U.S. sea turtle species should include protection of nesting habitats, eggs, and animals of all sizes. Incidental deaths associated with other human activities - such as flounder fisheries, dredging, oil-rig removal, and plastic debris and abandoned fishing gear in the ocean - should also be studied and reduced, the committee said.

Speaking of TEDS, a volatile issue with many shrimpers who say the devices lessen their catch, the summary said:

"Shrimping can be compatible with the conservation of sea turtles if adequate controls are placed on trawling activities." For example, TEDs are basically trap doors that release turtles from trawling nets without releasing shrimp. The committee recommended the use of TEDs in bottom trawls (which are dragged along the sea floor) at most places and most times of the year along southern coasts; "the waters off northern Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Texas are most critical," it stressed. Where turtles are rare or absent, restrictions could be dropped or relaxed, it said.

Moreover, additional research on TED design and technology transfer needs to be done, the report stressed.

As specified in the 1988 amendments to the federal Endangered Species Act, NOAA asked the National Research Council, the principal operating agency of the National Academies of Sciences and Engineering, to study five turtle species and their ecology and identify strategies to protect them from further population decline. The committee was not asked to assess the economic impact of TED use on the shrimping industry.

The committee's report, "Decline of the Sea Turtles: Causes and Prevention," will be available in September.

NOAA Responds To NAS Study on Sea Turtles:--William W. Fox, NOAA Assistant Administrator Fisheries, issued the following response to the sea turtle study described above:

"The NAS study corroborates the idea behind the current sea turtles conservation regulations in concluding that the most important human-associated source of mortality (of sea turtles) is

incidental capture in shrimp trawls. The Congressionally mandated study, however, recommends that additional measures be taken to protect sea turtles.

"We know that the existing regulations are in need of some revision, but the National Marine Fisheries Service plans to carefully evaluate the study, as well as consult with interested and affected parties, before proposing any modification or expansion of the existing regulations."

Video Optical Disk With NOAA Data Produced:--The first video optical disk containing NOAA data has been produced through a cooperative project between NOAA and NASA. The disk contains data from the Coastal Zone Color Scanner and NOAA in situ observations to earth-gridded geophysical fields. It stores more than 29,000 satellite images and corresponding in situ observations and allows the researcher to browse quickly through large quantities of information.

NOAA Corps Honors 17 Officers:--Capt. Max M. Ethridge recently was awarded the NOAA Corps Commendation Medal for his outstanding leadership and service as Chief of the NOS National Geodetic Survey Division's Office of Charting and Geodetic Services.

NOAA Special Achievement Award Medals for Sustained Superior Performance went to Capt. Gerry C. McKim, Cdr. Dean R. Seidel, Cdr. Dirk R. Taylor, Lt. Cdr. Kathryn A. Timmons, Lt. Cdr. Dean L. Smehil, Lt. Cdr. David H. Minkel, Lt. Richard B. Koehler, Lt. Steven A. Thompson, Lt. Duane A. Timmons, Lt. (jg) Steven P. Labossiere, and Ens. Matthew J. Wingate.

NOAA Corps Director's Ribbons for exemplary performance were awarded Lt. Cdr. Michael L. Vitch (Public Health Service), Lt. John A. Miller, Lt. (jg) David O. Neander, Lt. (jg) Raymond C. Slagle, and Ens. Matthew J. Hawkins.

SARSAT To Aid Around-the-World Plane Flights:--NOAA's Satellite-Aided Search and Rescue Program could play a critical role in the safety of two pilots in their attempts to fly around the world. Kelly Sandy, Director of NOAA's Western Administrative Support Center, provided pilot Tom Casey with an emergency beacon for his trip from Seattle, Wash., in an attempt to circle the globe in a single engine aircraft equipped with pontoons only. A second pilot, Tom Towle, Jr., will leave Miami, Fla., on June 11 on a two-month globe-girding jaunt. Towle will carry a new 406 mhz. beacon on his flight which will be near the equator. The older 121.5 mhz. system is limited essentially to the northern hemisphere and doesn't provide coverage on most of the equator.

The devices are part of NOAA's international COSPAS/SARSAT program which has helped save the lives of more than 1,400 aviators and mariners in distress. If the pilots should have to make an

emergency landing, they'll be able to use the beacons to transmit an emergency signal to a NOAA polar orbiting satellite. The satellite will retransmit the signal to a ground station where the location of the beacon is recorded. The information will be automatically transmitted to NOAA's Mission Control Center near Washington, D.C., which will notify a Rescue Coordination Center where appropriate search and rescue operations will be initiated.

NOAA Reviewing Delaware Reserve Proposal:--On May 2, NOAA received from Delaware Governor Michael N. Castle the site nomination and application for predesignation assistance for a proposed Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve. The reserve would include the lower St. Jones estuary and the upper Blackbird Creek estuary. The nomination and application are being reviewed.

Science Writers Briefed On NWS Modernization:--Approximately 70 members of The D.C. Science Writers Association met at the new Weather Service Forecast Office in Sterling, Va., on May 9 for a comprehensive briefing on the Weather Service modernization program and the new facility. Speakers included Deputy Under Secretary Gray Castle, Lou Boezi, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Weather Services, and James Belville, Meteorologist-in-Charge of the facility which serves Washington, D.C., and surrounding areas.

North Pacific Council Asks Fisheries Entry Moratorium:--The North Pacific Fisheries Management Council has voted to move ahead in placing a general moratorium on new entry into all fisheries under its jurisdiction, according to the National Marine Fisheries Service. Fishing under the moratorium will be limited to those vessels that participated in a fishery under the council's jurisdiction on or before Jan. 19 or had a keel laid by that date with the intent of operating under the council's jurisdiction. The moratorium would sunset after four years if it is not replaced by another limited access program. The council is preparing an options paper and anticipates approving a Federal Register notice at its June 24-29 meeting. The council expects to take final action recommending the moratorium to the Secretary of Commerce at its June 1991 meeting.

NOAA Data Used In Planet Earth Mosaic:--NESDIS satellite imagery data sets recently were contributed to the Eyes on Earth Project, which will use the data, along with other information, to generate the first cloud free mosaic of the entire planet. The Eyes on Earth Project, a non-profit organization, provides a bridge between scientists engaged in global climate change research projects and the general public whose lifestyles may be impacted by the scientific findings. NOAA is considering additional assistance to the project.

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July 23, 2010