

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Statement

Larry M. Whiting, PLS
ACSM Certified Hydrographer
Managing Partner
Terra Surveys, LLC
P.O. Box 1549
Palmer, Alaska 99645
907-745-7215
Email: larry@terra-surveys.com

Statement on the Implementation of The Hydrographic Services Improvement Act of 1998

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I am the managing partner of Terra Surveys, LLC of Palmer, Alaska, a small hydrographic surveying firm. We are probably the smallest hydrographic survey firm with a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) contract for hydrographic surveying for nautical charting. We are certified by the Small Business Administration as a Small Disadvantaged Business and as a participant in the 8(a) Business Development Program. We are also members of the Management Association of Private Photogrammetric Surveyors (MAPPS).

The Hydrographic Services Improvement Act was intended to reduce the backlog of critical areas requiring up-to-date nautical charts and to modernize the NOAA operation. NOAA has implemented contracting for these services to seven private companies. Two of these companies are among the largest of the international survey firms, three are relatively large national survey or engineering-survey firms and two (including Terra Surveys, LLC) are small business enterprises.

The NOAA contract management team has demonstrated experience and innovation that, once a project has started, has helped in the production and accuracy of the survey. However, at the start of this season, there have been delays in either the contract or the first task order that jeopardized a complete work season. There are many reasons that can cause delays in government contracting including Federal Acquisition Regulations, funding delays, insufficient personnel to administrate contracts. These delays can be extremely harmful to projects and production during Alaska's short season. Our start time was significantly delayed at the start of this season. The best time to survey in Alaska is from May through September, with incidence of storms increasing after mid-July and the best weather in May and June. Although advertised in early November of 1999 the process of selecting a contractor and putting the first task order in place took until the 27th of June. For whatever reason, June and July were both missed completely this season. Improvements in the contract management of NOAA could provide a more timely start of projects.

After a contract and task order have been negotiated, the NOAA contract administration has worked hard to insure that crews are not demobilized from the project until the survey area is complete. Timely, adequate

and continuous funding of contracting will allow continuous work without demobilizing equipment and personnel at the end of a sheet or a task order.

There has also been a change that allows a discussion of planned task orders. We recognize that the commitment for a task order is not made until it has been signed, but this does allow for some advance planning.

NOAA has been very pleased with the hydrographic surveys that Terra Surveys, LLC has completed. This work has been very important to the growth in Terra Surveys, LLC. We have grown from eight employees to eighteen, with five of them just about full time with NOAA projects. After a late start this survey season, we will have fifteen personnel working on these projects including several seasonally employed college students. The additional work available to private industry hydrographic surveyors has made hydrographic survey courses available to college students in Alaska.

Conclusion

Safety of navigation is inherently governmental in nature.

NOAA has the responsibility for the navigational charting program.

NOAA should maintain a core hydrographic survey capability to ensure the establishment of standards, both technical and professional, for the accuracy of hydrographic survey data.

The government should not maintain or expand activities that compete with the private sector.

There is no reason for NOAA to further add survey capability. It has enough survey assets to adequately train it's staff to monitor contractors and any further capability will only compete against the qualified private hydrographic survey industry.

NOAA needs to streamline and further develop their contract

#