

Committee on Resources

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SUBCOMMITTEE STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE WAYNE T. GILCHREST, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS, AT THE HEARING ON H.R. 958, THE HYDROGRAPHIC SERVICES AMENDMENTS OF 2003, H.R. 959, THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION OCEANOGRAPHY ACT OF 2003, AND H.R. 984, THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION ACT OF 2003. MARCH 27, 2003.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration was created as a result of the recommendations included in the 1969 Stratton Commission report. Those recommendations were designed to create an agency with broad ocean authority, and to make several existing programs work together in a more coordinated manner to improve our understanding and management of the ocean and atmosphere. Two of the bills we are considering today, the NOAA Oceanography Act and the NOAA Act, further that purpose.

H.R. 984, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Act, updates and replaces the reorganization plan under which NOAA was created in 1970, establishes NOAA's primary missions, and authorizes appropriations for the agency's program support functions. H.R. 959, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Oceanography Act authorizes appropriations for several of NOAA's coastal and ocean research programs that are not authorized under other statutes. These bills address programs under the joint jurisdiction of the House Science and Resources Committees. These bills provide an up-to-date baseline from which the Committee can work later this year, and next year, when it considers recommendations of the National Commission on Ocean Policy.

Today we will also hear testimony on H.R. 958, the Hydrographic Services Amendments of 2003. Last year, Congress enacted a five year reauthorization of the Hydrographic Service Improvement Act of 2003. This bill addresses several minor issues on which final action was not taken last year, including the authorization of navigation response teams and the joint hydrographic institute and the treatment hydrographic services volunteers. The bill also names a cove in Alaska for Eric Steiner Koss, a crew member of the NOAA ship RAINIER who was killed in a work-related accident at that cove last summer. Finally, the bill authorizes NOAA to replace two aging hydrographic survey vessels, and three aging fishery survey vessels. These vessels are crucial if we are to ensure safe navigation in U.S. waters, and if we are to have the fishery data necessary to make wise ecosystem management decisions.

I look forward to the hearing from the distinguished witnesses and I would now recognize the gentleman from New Jersey, Congressman Frank Pallone.