

NESDIS Overview of the 2016-17 IRT

NOAA's Satellite and Information Service—also known as NESDIS—is pleased to announce the conclusion of its latest Independent Review Team (IRT) assessment. This marks the third independent evaluation that NESDIS has commissioned since 2012 to provide expert analysis of how well NESDIS has addressed the challenges and opportunities facing the enterprise. This latest team was led by Mr. Tom Young, who chaired NESDIS's prior IRTs and previously served as the director of Goddard Space Flight Center and president of Martin Marietta Corporation. We broadened the charter of this IRT assessment to include NESDIS's strategic path forward and our capability to embark upon that path. Additionally, we value the independence of the body to appraise any topic they found relevant to our mission and organization. It is our pleasure to discuss the IRT's findings below.

A VITAL NATIONAL MISSION

The IRT validated NESDIS's critical national mission as equal to and no less important than national defense. Our weather forecasting and severe storm monitoring data save lives and property, protect national security, and enhance economic vitality and quality of life. Satellite observations represent over 80% of the data routinely assimilated into the National Weather Service's weather prediction models. These data enable timely and accurate forecasts to inform decision-makers and the public of impending severe weather hazards before the threats appear. Our enterprise collects and distributes timely and accurate data and information, facilitating data-driven business decisions for the nearly one-third of our Nation's gross domestic product that is impacted by weather. Additionally, NESDIS satellites also provide vital search-and-rescue services to facilitate lifesaving first response to the maritime, aviation, and outdoor recreation communities.

As the Nation's operational civil space agency, we have a unique mandate to ensure the

quality, timeliness, and absolute continuity of our data. The IRT reminded us that the significant national impact from any disruption of our products and services defines our focus and discipline: we have a zero-failure tolerance for our mission. We must remain vigilant to apply our resources and capabilities to ensure continued mission success.

CONTINUED PROGRESS

We are delighted to see that the IRT has reaffirmed NESDIS's progress since 2012. That first assessment took place during a time of great transition following the establishment of the Joint Polar Satellite System (JPSS) program. Now, due to our continued commitment to strengthening the enterprise, the positive collaboration with our NASA partner, and the individual dedication of each NESDIS and contractor employee, the IRT has assessed that our organization stands ready and able to ensure mission success.

Since our last IRT assessment and over the last 2+ years, NOAA NESDIS and NASA together have successfully launched DSCOVER, the

world's first operational deep space satellite; Jason-3, an interagency and international collaboration to continue NOAA's leadership in ocean altimetry; and GOES-16, a revolutionary addition to our geostationary-orbiting constellation. Our team is on track for the launch of JPSS-1 and COSMIC-2A later this year. NESDIS's success has been, and always will be, rooted in the consistent high-quality work and dedication of its people and our commitment to our partnership to deliver continually improving capabilities drawing on the best of each of us.

The IRT observed that while progress is good, more work remains. In particular NESDIS must continue to refine the JPSS program execution to ensure the essential long-term continuity of observations from our polar constellation. They urged us to continue the work we have underway to simplify the JPSS organization and to accelerate the deployment of a truly robust series of JPSS satellites.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

In 2016, NESDIS unveiled its latest Strategic Plan, which the IRT included in the scope of its review. Like the IRT, we believe the NESDIS Strategic Plan is a living document that will guide our path forward. The space industry is changing, and we must change with it. However, our mission to provide timely and secure data of national importance demands our focus on ensuring that our customers never experience any disruption in our delivery of critical observations and information. We agree with the recommendation to complete and put into effect detailed plans to implement the new Strategic Plan.

Our current efforts to study future architectures and observing system options is an example

of one of the enabling capabilities to meet this demand. We appreciate the IRT's praise for our new Office of Systems Architecture and Advance Planning, which provides NESDIS with critical architecture and systems engineering expertise to mold NESDIS systems for the future.

NESDIS's continued success depends on its ability to meet its 24/7 uninterrupted mission while simultaneously evolving the enterprise to become more agile to respond to the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow.

REVITALIZING PARTNERSHIPS

We cannot fulfil our mission alone, and we thank the IRT for highlighting the importance of our key mission partners to NESDIS's continued success. NESDIS has a deep-rooted partnerships with NASA and Department of Defense (DoD) that date back to the dawn of the space age. The IRT focused on the critical importance of the NOAA-NASA relationship, highlighting both the role of NASA as NESDIS's technical implementation team and its forward-looking role in the development of new observing capabilities. We are committed to investing in and evolving these relationships, as our path forward depends on these key interagency partners to support our enterprise and meet legacy and future requirements.

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY AND OVERSIGHT

As a key component of our Nation's critical infrastructure, our enterprise is closely monitored by the White House, Congress, and taxpayers. The IRT noted several key areas where administrative processes limit NESDIS's effectiveness and contribute to noticeable mission risk. We value the IRT's recommendations for improving our administrative capacity and processes. NESDIS will continue to promote

efficient program management in order to ensure mission success and sound stewardship of taxpayer dollars, while maintaining the high standards of program transparency expected for our very public mission.

CONCLUSION

We appreciate the IRT's dual conclusions that we have made great progress since 2012 and are organized and poised for success and that such success is in no sense assured. We have delivered the first of our critical satellite systems, GOES-16, and will soon deliver JPSS-1, but the criticality and complexity of our mission demands continuous performance and improvement by NESDIS and our sponsors.

NESDIS has always valued the insight of independent bodies, and this IRT is no different. This particular team was comprised of 10 leaders in the aerospace and earth observation disciplines and provided our leadership with unbiased and objective analysis on the health of our organization. From the report, it is clear that NESDIS's trajectory is positive, yet it is imperative that we continue to work towards the future. We are pleased to share these findings with our stakeholders, and we look forward for another opportunity to commission an independent assessment at the next appropriate juncture.



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