NOAA Town Hall
Seattle, WA
Jane Lubchenco
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
May 28, 2009
As Delivered

Thank you John, for that kind introduction. *Good afternoon* everyone. I am deeply honored to be with you today on my first trip to Seattle as the new administrator of NOAA. This is only my third time speaking directly to a group of NOAA employees outside of D.C. so I am especially excited about the opportunity to hear from you; and I'm also happy to be back in the beautiful Pacific Northwest!

Although my visit this time is brief and I will not have the chance to meet all of you, I am certain I will be back. This is so much going on here; I've only begun to scratch the surface.

I must confess that when I received the call asking me to come to NOAA, I was initially reluctant. I taught at Oregon State University for more than 30 years – a job that I loved. I was able to juggle a wonderful combination of teaching,

research, outreach and service. But the opportunity to have a hand in connecting science to policy and management in a more direct fashion, to work with the many wonderful people at NOAA on issues ranging from oceans to climate, to weather on earth and in space, and to help President Obama achieve his vision was too much to resist. Moreover, since I've always counseled my students to make career choices based on what gives them energy -- choices to learn, to grow, and to be helpful to the greater good - I decided to listen to my own advice. Now, just a few months into the job, I'm glad I did. I'm finding my sea legs, thanks to the help of the superb team of NOAA folks.

My very wise parents always encouraged all six of their daughters to explore, try new things and embrace new challenges – whether they were new trying foods or new sports, exploring strange ideas, or mastering new skills. My parents also modeled tolerance, public service, rational thought and family values. My husband of 33 years and I share a passion for combining family and work, as well as a deep commitment to scientific discovery, education, and good public policy grounded in science. So perhaps it was the right time for me to embrace a new challenge in which many of these values and opportunities are interdigitated.

Despite the very tough challenges facing Americans these days, President Obama has energized us with a sense of hope and optimism, and a belief that if we work together, we can build a better world for ourselves, our children, and grandchildren.

I am inspired by President Obama's vision for our country, and his commitment to bring good science to good government.

I am inspired by you - the gifted team at NOAA whom I know from personal experience to be both talented and committed.

And I am inspired by our opportunity to seize the moment to make meaningful changes for our nation and our environment.

Since taking the helm at NOAA, I have identified four main areas for us to initially focus our efforts upon. Two are management challenges—areas where we can improve how the agency currently operates. Two are strategic

opportunities-areas where, if we act now, we can position the agency to respond to emerging challenges.

The **first management challenge** is to address how we manage fisheries. I'm sure many of you who work with fisheries issues share my goal of moving towards proactive fisheries management, where we can rely less on responding to low fish populations with disaster declarations and more on innovative fishery management approaches such as catch shares.

The **second management challenge** is addressing the difficulties we've faced with procurement of the National Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System, known as NPOESS. As those of you who work in this area know, both technical and interagency management difficulties throughout procurement process have resulted in cost overruns and delays. The deployment of NPOESS is critical to our ability to provide weather forecasts, maintain continuity of key climate measurements, and understand Earth's environmental systems. We are working with our federal partners to get NPOESS back on track. I share your frustrations with this process and look forward to finding ways to improve the way we procure satellite systems.

The **first strategic opportunity** to position NOAA to respond to emerging challenges is to establish a National Climate Service. The idea for this service was conceived in NOAA and we believe its time has finally come. It is still in the early stages of development, but it clearly must be designed and implemented in a collegial and cooperative fashion. I fully expect it will require an enterprise solution, and I expect NOAA to play a key role in this climate enterprise.

My vision of a National Climate Service is a partnership that would be established with other federal agencies, state and local governments, and the private sector. The National Climate Service would provide credible and authoritative climate information and services to assist the nation, and by extension the world. This would include policy-relevant information for decisions related to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The **second strategic opportunity** revolves around the ever increasing national requirements for uses of our ocean environment. Traditional uses such as fishing and resource extraction are being joined with new demands such as the siting of aquaculture facilities or alternative energy projects such as wind or tidal power. In order to meet these increasing demands we need to look into ways to plan and manage our uses through marine spatial planning—finding ways to zone

the ocean to minimize conflicts among users and ensure that ocean environment is protected.

These two management challenges and two strategic opportunities complement our ongoing core responsibilities which include:

- **Understanding and adapting to climate change**
- **Creating jobs through innovation**
- **Restoring ocean health and vitality.**
- **Providing critical weather information.**

I believe that, together, we can address all of these challenges, and more.

To do so, it is useful for us to get to know one another. So let me tell you a little bit about myself. I grew in Denver in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains. My family loved to camp, fish, sing, hike, play sports and have fun.

We played multiple sports – in a pre-Title-IX era - because our parents believed that sports, individual and team sports were important, in addition to academic and a variety of extracurricular activities.

As doctors, both of my parents valued learning, open inquiry, free-ranging discussions and, of course, quality education. My Mom was from North Dakota and Minnesota – and her parents were from Norway and French Canada. Daddy's family hailed from S. Carolina and Ukraine. My sisters and I saw firsthand how different cultures could blend and enrich each other. We were encouraged to be well-rounded with a balanced portfolio of active intellectual, spiritual, athletic, cultural, public service and family activities.

I fell in love with the oceans on sailing adventures with my Girl Scout troop in the San Juan Islands and during a college class in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, at the Marine Biological Laboratory. To a Colorado native, sea life was exotic and endlessly fascinating. My exposure to the oceans was love at first sight and there was no turning back. I couldn't get enough of things marine, and decided to pursue graduate studies – initially at the University of Washington, then Harvard. Since 1975, I have taught marine biology and environmental science at Harvard and Oregon State University. As an ecologist, I focus on connections – connections among the land, sea, and air, and connections between nature and people. This perspective will serve me well at NOAA, as we work together as a team and connect with our many partners in other agencies, on Capitol Hill, in the states, civil society, and the private sector.

One reason that I am so excited to be here is the track record of diverse and excellent science at NOAA, coupled with the commitment to make policy and management decisions based on scientific knowledge, and the focus on delivering useful services based on that science.

With the extraordinary changes in our world's oceans and atmosphere expected in the decades to come and with consequences that may dramatically change the way we live our lives, there is much work for us all to do.

Over the past two days I have learned much from briefings and field inspections on the prospects for recovery of Salmon in the Columbia River system. Clearly, climate, water and fish are interconnected and we must understand these connections if we are to properly inform management decisions. Climate change will have other impacts – the west was built on the use and management of water – industries, people and nature all depend on it.

In the oceans, the thread is the same – a necessary transition from understanding and managing separate parts of the ecosystem to understanding and managing the ecosystem as a whole. I am encouraged that NOAA in Seattle is

assisting the Puget Sound Partnership in their efforts to use science to support decisions to recover the Puget Sound ecosystem.

On our coasts, ocean acidification, harmful algal blooms and hypoxia are all threats – in addition to the challenges of sustainable resource management. Pollution that harms marine life is still a fact of our world. I'm encouraged by the West Coast Governors' Agreement on Ocean Health, a commitment to work together to solve common problems.

In managing our Nation's fisheries recent scientific analyses show that catch share programs perform better than fisheries managed with traditional tools, and they can help restore the health of ecosystems and get fisheries on a path to profitability and sustainability. Moving forward to implement more catch share programs is a high priority for me. Catch shares that are well designed and thoughtfully prepared. I applaud the efforts over the past couple of years on the West Coast to develop a catch share program for groundfish and acknowledge that in Alaska catch share programs are already in place.

I am encouraged to learn about the many ways you are working to share our science with the public. A good example is the recently formed partnership between the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, "OMSI," and NOAA to install *Science on a Sphere* as the centerpiece in the museum's Earth Science Hall is particularly exciting. This will utilize NOAA science from all across the agency to increase the public's understanding of the interconnected nature of earth systems. It will also encourage stewardship and informed decision-making based on knowledge of natural resources, environmental issues, and human impacts.

Improved collaborations are a key to meeting many of our challenges. NOAA's Regional Collaboration effort is a big step to make this happen. The Western Region Collaboration Team is currently working across all line offices and with our stakeholders, to use our collective expertise and resources to assist our partners address critical issues in the West related to climate, water, fish and hazards.

I've had the pleasure of meeting this morning with many of the NOAA entities in the Northwest and have enjoyed getting to know more about what this great agency can do.

For example, this morning I learned more about how PMEL has been responding to the threat of tsunamis with the deep ocean tsunami detection or DART array.

We discussed how terrain blocks part of the sampling area of the local National Weather Service Forecast Offices, limiting the ability to detect and analyze storms. I'm pleased to announce that NOAA will be installing new weather radar on the Washington coast shortly, with site surveys planned for this year. I'd also like to commend the forecast offices for their excellent forecasts during major storms during December 2007 and 2008, even without this critical tool.

We talked about how climate change will affect marine ecosystems, including how fish stocks including salmon may be affected by a changing climate and also how this change may influence contamination of marine ecosystem by toxic chemicals.

I learned more about NOAA's habitat restoration and derelict fishing gear cleanup efforts in the region, and about the critical efforts to reach out to our

constituents—the American public, through the dedicated efforts of the folks in the Sea Grant program and at the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary.

I've also had a chance to hear more about the challenges we face in procuring a site for NOAA's west coast ship base—the Marine Operations Center Pacific. I'd like to thank the employees of the marine center and NOAA's ships in the region for their patience and flexibility, working under trying conditions since the pier fire in July of 2006. I'd like to assure the employees that NOAA is undertaking a careful, well defined acquisition process which is free of political influence.

I am uninvolved in the selection process, so I have no new information to share today, other than to assure you that the Marine Center is well represented in this process and the quality of life for the employees has been carefully considered and incorporated into the evaluation criteria.

I am only beginning to learn about all the many important activities here in Seattle. From research on oceans to weather, climate and atmosphere, NOAA here is focused squarely on saving lives and property, and broadening scientific

horizons, sparking our imaginations, and finding answers to guide social decisions. While our resources here are impressive, the challenges we face are daunting.

The good news is that President Obama has made it clear that good government depends on good science. NOAA's science is providing knowledge and understanding to inform policy and management decisions and to enable citizens to appreciate and value nature. Our own health, prosperity and well-being depend intimately on healthy productive and resilient ecosystems, on land and in the ocean. Our work here in Seattle is crucial. But we have serious challenges ahead- from climate change to ocean acidification to increased development of coastal areas, from increased unpredictability of extreme weather events to sea level rise. All of these are underway and society is seeking our guidance. Your work is essential to frame, guide and inform key decisions and to help people understand what is at risk and what the likely consequences are of different choices.

Being the administrator of NOAA is a big job. Some of the challenges I know well and others I am just learning. I will need your help. I look forward to working with, and learning from you.

I am inspired by the opportunity for NOAA to seize this moment to make meaningful changes for our nation and our environment, especially amid a changing climate. I am mindful of the challenges, yet inspired to find durable solutions. NOAA has a central role to play in the research, synthesis, communication, management, policy and provision of services. And to this end, I pledge to bring diligence, transparency, fairness, integrity and accountability to the job.

I'm pleased to be at the helm of the agency focused on integrated science, service and stewardship. We will uphold the rule of law, we will produce and respect science, and our decisions will be firmly grounded in scientific knowledge. We will integrate across difference parts of NOAA and to that end I look forward to getting to know more of you and working with all of you. I invite each of you to now join me at this very special moment in history.

This is <u>our</u> time, our chance to build on NOAA's impressive track record and create an enduring legacy for our environment, our economy and our children!

Thank you for taking the time to come here today, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have at this time.