

Video Postcard From Seattle's Western Region Center

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Seattle, WA

Good afternoon, everyone.

I'm speaking to you today from the lush, tranquil grounds of NOAA's Western Regional Center along the shores of Lake Washington in Seattle.

This magnificent backdrop is the perfect setting for the first of what will be regular video messages from the field. I will use this format to showcase NOAA's excellent work and introduce you to the larger NOAA family.

I hope to meet as many of you as I can in the coming months. I've already visited NOAA offices in Honolulu, Silver Spring, Boulder, and now the spectacular Emerald City.

It's great to be back in the Pacific Northwest. This region is very dear to me. I spent many wonderful years at the University of Washington and at Oregon State University studying the ecology of the near-shore marine life.

I can tell you that the Pacific Northwest is a key location for the work we do at NOAA. Some of you may know that the Western Regional Center is home to the largest number of NOAA employees outside of Silver Spring.

We have a number of research and operations facilities in the area including the Northwest Fisheries Science Center, the Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory, National Ocean Service, and the NOAA Center for Tsunami Research, to name just a few. We also have stewardship responsibility for the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary and the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Our Seattle "hub" connects us to the people of this region, many of whom share our commitment to an ecosystem-based approach to conservation and preservation. Those who live here are deeply connected to nature, and by tradition are heavily invested in the health and well-being of the environment.

The work being done by NOAA in the Pacific Northwest resonates not only within our agency, but with the public and our many partners.

Take for example our efforts in the beautiful Puget Sound:

The Puget Sound is perhaps the most dominant geographical feature of the Northwest Region. It's an ecologically diverse estuary that supports a number of shoreline communities as well as marine habitats for endangered species of salmon, southern resident orcas and other fish and wildlife.

NOAA's Northwest Fisheries Science Center, along with the National Ocean Service and other NOAA offices, is collaborating with the Puget Sound Partnership to support Washington's goal to recover the Sound by 2020.

NOAA takes an ecosystem-based approach — also known as, “from summit to sea” — to help support the recovery. We are conducting the science — what researchers call integrated ecosystem analyses — that will provide a big-picture view of all the pressures being placed on the Sound.

On a more practical level, the National Ocean Service and other partners are assisting in the labor-intensive restoration and clean-up of the Sound's estuaries, shorelines, marshes and watersheds.

Of course, our work extends well beyond Puget Sound and its environs.

The Pacific Marine Environmental Lab, located a short walk from here, was the first in the world to establish a monitoring array for El Niño, which has major consequences for weather around the world. The system uses high-tech monitoring buoys in the equatorial Pacific to help forecast weather across North America.

In the Arctic, sub-surface buoy technology and numerical climate forecast models are being used by NOAA, NASA, the Navy and other partners to help project major changes in the arctic ice cover.

We are also blazing new trails when it comes to understanding and exploring our oceans.

Dr. Richard Feely from PMEL's Ocean Acidification Laboratory has been a pioneer in quantifying how increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is making oceans more acidic.

His team is asking: is the acidification of seawater happening slowly enough for fish and marine life to adapt? Dr. Feely and his team are employing data from high-tech sensed buoys and ship surface surveys to lay the critical groundwork necessary to answer just that.

NOAA's Center for Tsunami Research is changing the way we forecast and measure tsunamis. The DART® tsunami-measuring buoy is a great NOAA success story. This cutting-edge technology measures tsunami activity deep in the ocean and relays data in real-time—which can help save lives.

And I'm thrilled to report that this coming month our National Weather Service tsunami warning centers in Honolulu and Anchorage will be fully operational with this new system.

I am immensely impressed by and proud of the hard work being done by our NOAA family here and in all of our research labs, weather offices, marine sanctuaries, estuarine reserves, science centers, NOAA ships, and the many, many other outposts across the country. Those of you who work in the field provide our closest connection to the people and communities we serve.

It is not possible to cover all the achievements of this region, or any other for that matter, in a single message. I encourage you to explore the NOAA.gov and NOAA World web sites to learn more.

Until next time, keep up the great work you do on behalf of the American people.

I hope to see you in your neck of the woods soon.