

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 13, 2025

The Honorable Howard Lutnick
Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick:

We write to express serious concerns regarding the decision to terminate a significant number of National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) staff in Oregon and across the nation. These terminations threaten critical programs and research that strengthen and shape domestic and international ocean, fisheries, climate, space and weather policies. We urge you to provide clarity on the status of NOAA staffing levels and detail the steps being taken to reinstate terminated staff and mitigate disruptions to these critical programs.

NOAA's many assets — including research programs, vessels, satellites, science centers, laboratories and a vast pool of distinguished scientists and experts — play an active role in daily weather forecasts, severe storm warnings, and climate monitoring, as well as fisheries management, coastal restoration and supporting marine commerce. NOAA's research and services support the economic continuity and impact more than one-third of America's gross domestic product.

Oregon is home to NOAA's Marine Operations Center – Pacific in Newport and serves as homeport to two NOAA ships on the West Coast. This operations center provides logistical, engineering, electronics, maintenance and administrative support to all ships in NOAA's Pacific fleet. The fleet currently includes fifteen multi-purpose oceanographic research vessels, fisheries survey vessels, and hydrographic survey vessels. The ships in NOAA's Pacific fleet collect data essential to protecting marine mammals, coral reefs and historic shipwrecks, managing commercial fisheries, understanding climate change, and producing nautical charts that help keep mariners safe. NOAA ships also deploy and help maintain buoys that gather oceanographic and weather information and warn coastal communities of tsunamis.

The loss of NOAA staff will have significant impacts on oceanographic and atmospheric monitoring systems that are vital to Oregon's economic and environmental sustainability. It is our understanding that some of the layoffs include key leadership personnel that directly contribute to local leadership, strategic planning, and local emergency response as well as scientists and technicians who lead strategic efforts related to ocean acoustic science and data that aids in the prevention of overfishing and bycatch.

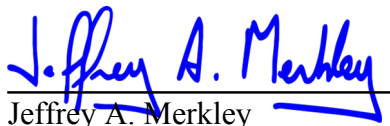
Additionally, the loss of National Weather Service (NWS) employees will have a drastic impact on Oregon's ability to maintain radar systems, especially during critical weather events like Oregon's record breaking 2024 wildfire season. NWS offices in Oregon routinely provide critical training in fire weather forecasting to incident command teams in advance of the wildfire season. NWS will not have personnel to administer these life-saving trainings for the 2025 wildfire season because of these employment terminations.

Because we continue to receive reports of impacts to NOAA staffing, please respond to the following questions:

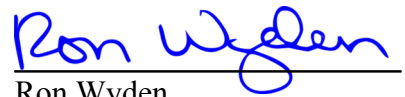
1. What is the status of NOAA staffing across all sectors, and what plans does the Department of Commerce have for reinstating laid-off employees?
2. How does the Department of Commerce intend to address disruptions caused by the reduction in NOAA personnel on ongoing research projects, including for critical personnel at the NWS?
3. What criteria were used to determine which NOAA staff positions were terminated?
4. How does the Department of Commerce plan to mitigate the impact of these layoffs on collaborative research efforts with universities and industry partners?
5. Are there plans to rehire the terminated NOAA employees if staffing levels are restored?
6. What measures is the Department of Commerce implementing to ensure that critical research areas continue without interruption?
7. How is the Department of Commerce engaging with industry stakeholders to assess and address the impact of these staffing changes?
8. What steps is the Department of Commerce taking to prevent similar disruptions in the future and ensure the stability of NOAA research programs?

Given the importance of NOAA research and support in our home state of Oregon and across the country, we urge the Department of Commerce to take immediate steps to reinstate all affected staff. The continuation of NOAA's vital work is critical to ensuring the long-term stability and success of America's atmospheric and oceanographic economy.

Sincerely,



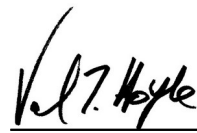
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle
Member of Congress



Janelle S. Bynum
Member of Congress



Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



Maxine Dexter
Member of Congress