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Accounting and Information
Management Division

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September 26, 1995

The Honorable Phil Gramm
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce,
Justice, State, the Judiciary,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter responds to your office's September 21, 1995, request for information relating to the National Weather Service's (NWS) Modernization and Restructuring Program. In particular, your staff requested information on NWS' current and future field and headquarters staffing levels and field office structure.

Through its Modernization and Restructuring Program, NWS promised sizeable staff reductions. Specifically, in fiscal year 1989, NWS set a goal of ultimately reducing its staffing level by about 1,072, from 5,100 to 4,028. This 21 percent staff reduction was to be made possible through the introduction of new weather observing, information processing, and communication technologies and the restructuring of field offices.

Since establishing these original staffing goals, NWS has increased both its onboard staffing and target staffing levels. As of September 22, 1995, NWS reported that its staffing level was 5,230.¹ More importantly, however, the target staffing level for the modernized and restructured NWS has grown to 4,678. This is a staffing reduction of 422, or 8 percent, from NWS' 1989 staffing level of 5,100—a significantly smaller reduction in staff than was originally anticipated. This aggregate increase in

¹This increase is consistent with NWS' planned bulge in staff to maintain conventional operations while implementing its modernized operational activities.

target staffing level, the majority of which NWS has known about for almost 2 years, has heretofore not been published outside of the Department of Commerce and the Office of Management and Budget. NWS attributes the increase primarily to the need for more staff than were originally envisioned to operate and maintain its new systems, including staff associated with moving certain contractor operations and maintenance functions in-house. The increase is also due to unanticipated field and regional office and specialized forecasting requirements that were beyond NWS' control. (See enclosure I for more detail on current and future field and headquarters staffing levels.)

NWS' current field office restructuring goal—reducing the number of field offices from 254 to 118—has held relatively steady since NWS' fiscal year 1989 goal of 115 offices. NWS' plans for closing these offices are governed by the Weather Service Modernization Act (P.L.102-567), which requires, among other things, that the Secretary of Commerce certify that there is no degradation of service resulting from office closures associated with the modernization. Such certification is not expected to occur until after fiscal year 1997. However, should this legislation be repealed, NWS has stated that some field office closures could occur sooner, some even immediately. Precisely how many and how soon has yet to be determined, and is the subject of ongoing NWS deliberations.

We provided a draft of this letter to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Deputy Assistant Administrator for Operations, who generally agreed with the information presented. We have incorporated NOAA's comments where appropriate. If you have any questions concerning this information, please call me at (202) 512-6253, or Randolph C. Hite, Assistant Director, at (202) 512-6256.

Sincerely yours,



Joel C. Willemsen
Director, Information Resources
Management/Resources, Community,
and Economic Development

Enclosure

NWS' CURRENT AND FUTURE FIELD AND HEADQUARTERS STAFFING LEVELS
(in full time equivalents)

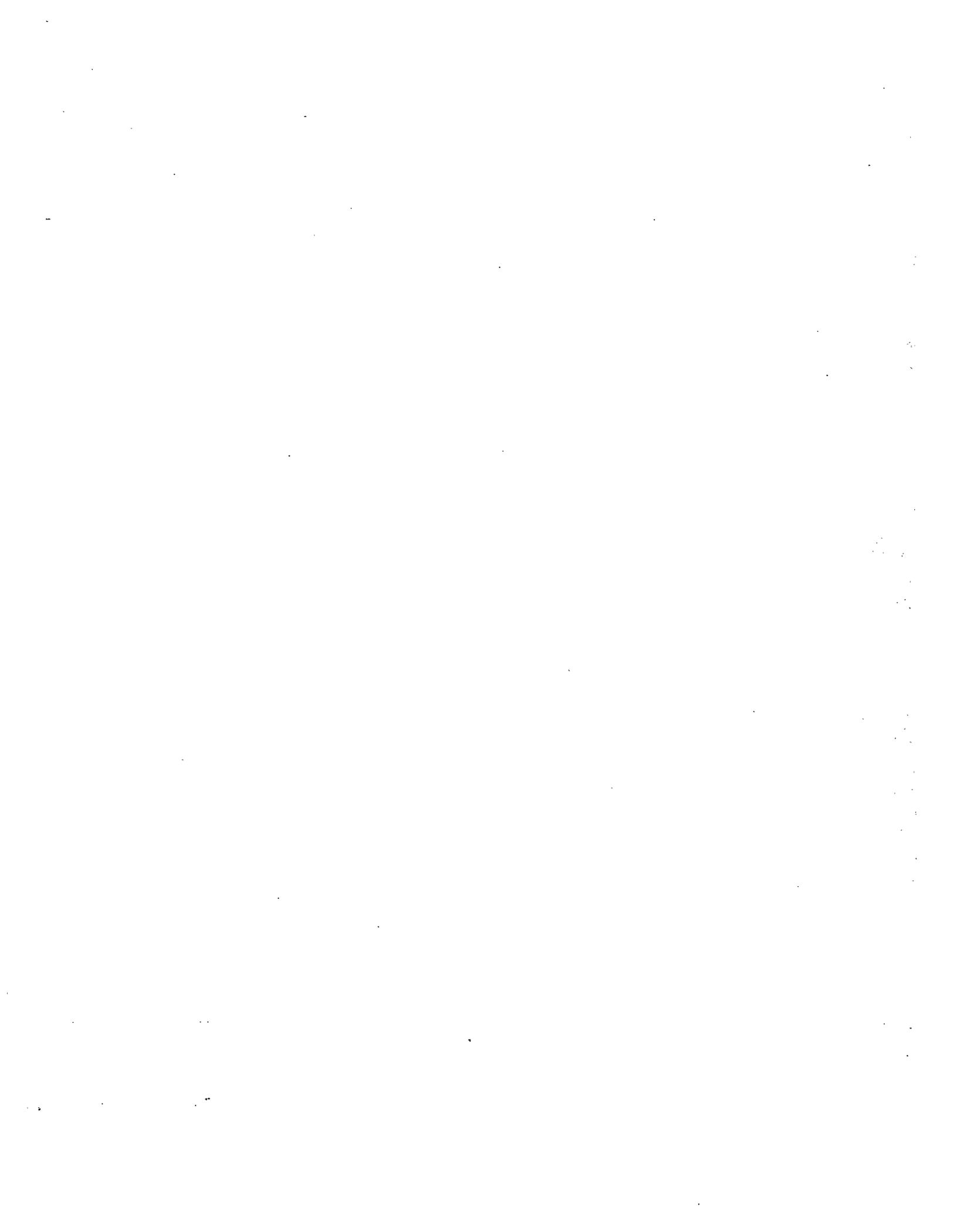
	Current	Target
Field		
Operations	3,611	3,249
Overhead	268	189
Headquarters		
Operations	930	904
Overhead	421	336
Totals	5,230	4,678 ^a

Note: We did not independently verify these data.

^a The staffing target established in 1989 was 4,028.

Source: National Weather Service.

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