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NOAA Enforcement Summit Focuses on Effectiveness, Consistency, Transparency, and Communications

NOAA's National Enforcement Summit will bring together tomorrow more than 60 stakeholders from the commercial and recreational fishing industries, non-governmental organizations, and state and federal enforcement officials to focus on how NOAA can better manage marine resources through consistent and transparent enforcement of natural resource laws.

The facilitated one-day meeting will help NOAA develop forward-looking strategies to advance its enforcement programs, as well as improve the process for setting enforcement priorities.

"Today's summit is the latest step as we re-shape the future of NOAA's enforcement efforts," said Dr. Jane Lubchenco, under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "Fair and effective enforcement is essential to sustainable fisheries, vibrant coastal communities, and stable economies."

Lubchenco called for the summit as part of her response to the critical Jan. 21 Inspector General's report on NOAA's past enforcement policies and practices.

The summit will include presentations and small group discussions to review and build upon actions initiated by NOAA under Lubchenco. Areas of focus at the summit will include achieving compliance; consistency, transparency and communications; and establishing a process to set enforcement priorities.

NOAA has retained a neutral third party, the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (Udall Institute), to facilitate the summit and compile the recommendations from participants. In addition to the diverse group of participants invited to attend, NOAA has worked with the Udall Institute to make the summit accessible to all those interested via web streaming on the summit website, <http://noaaenforcementsummit2010.ecr.gov>. The Udall Institute also posted a survey to the summit website to garner as much input as possible, and though the survey closed July 23, individuals can still submit their views to NOAA through the summit website.

A full agenda, as well as background documents and a list of attendees, is available on the summit website, and a summary provided by the Udall Institute and follow-up action items by NOAA will be posted there soon after the event.

NOAA has already taken a number of specific, concrete measures in fisheries law enforcement in response to the Inspector General's report:

- Shifted oversight of the Asset Forfeiture Fund from NMFS to the NOAA comptroller in February.
- Assigned Alan Risenhoover, director of the Office of Sustainable Fisheries, to serve as the interim director of the Office of Law Enforcement in March.

- Required, as an immediate interim measure, justification and approval from the NOAA comptroller for any expenditure from the Asset Forfeiture Fund of more than \$1,000.
- Froze the hiring of criminal investigators until a work force analysis is completed and approved that will address the appropriate mix of criminal investigators and civil enforcement officers.
- Required high-level review of all proposed charges for alleged violations and of all settlements by the general counsel.
- Finalized a rule to place the burden of justifying a particular civil penalty or permit sanction on NOAA rather than the respondent in cases before administrative law judges.

The mission of NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement is to ensure compliance with the laws and regulations enacted to conserve and protect our nation's marine resources.

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Visit us at <http://www.noaa.gov> or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/usnoaagov>.