



To: NOAA, National Data Buoy Center
Attn: Steve Curcullu
1007 Balch Blvd.
Stennis Space Center, MS 39529

Fm: Captain Dan Jordan
Lower Columbia Region Harbor Safety Committee (LCRHSC)
100 16th Street
Astoria, OR 97103

Re: Pacific Northwest Weather Buoys

The NOAA weather buoys are not only an important weather forecasting tool, but an essential source of data for mariners to assess current sea conditions, to determine the safety of crossing the coastal bars of the Pacific Northwest and for the preparation of coastal communities during winter storm events.

As of April 2009, the three most critical buoys that provide data off the Columbia River – buoys 46029, 46089 and 46005 – are either missing or inoperative. The pattern of repairing the buoys in the spring to provide weather data throughout the summer and fall does not provide reliable data when winter storms threaten the safety of mariners and coastal communities. Perhaps the NOAA weather buoys could be modified to better withstand the rigors of the Pacific Northwest.

The NOAA weather buoys are an essential forecasting tool, but are positioned too far offshore to provide accurate reports of bar conditions. Swell periods shorten and heights can more than double on the coastal bars.

Options being explored for reporting Columbia River Bar conditions are:

1. The Scripps Institute's Coastal Data Information Program (CDIP) has wave rider buoys deployed all along the West Coast but only two in the Pacific Northwest: one off Grays Harbor, Wash., and the other off the Umpqua River, Ore. A number of groups have expressed an interest in deploying two CDIP wave rider buoys on the Columbia River Bar.
2. The Columbia River Bar Pilots have offered to fund a satellite based wave monitoring system on a navigation buoy.

Organizations that are interested in CDIP wave rider buoys on the Columbia River Bar include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Coast Guard, Lower Columbia Solutions Group, Columbia River Bar Pilots, Columbia River Crab Fisherman's Association and the Lower Columbia Region Harbor Safety Committee.

The U.S. Coast Guard's concerns about non-government data being transmitted from a government-owned buoy have stalled the Columbia River Bar Pilots' efforts. However, since the navigation buoys generally stay in position throughout the winter they seem to be an ideal place to host observation equipment. A slight re-design of a navigation buoy could provide excellent devices at all coastal bars. This option could add an essential service without deploying additional buoys and reduce the overall federal expense.



Washington Senator Maria Cantwell has shown an interest in improving coastal weather forecasting through her efforts to improve weather radar coverage along the Washington Coast. There is also an increased need for wave buoys on coastal bars. It is time for all the groups and agencies to work together to find a long-range solution to coastal weather data observations and forecasts that survive throughout the winter season.

A roundtable discussion on these issues is scheduled for June 18 at the Cape Disappointment Visitor Center in Ilwaco, Washington from 10 AM to 2 PM. Julie Thomas from the Coastal Data Information Program (CDIP), Scripps Institution of Oceanography will give a short presentation. We look forward to your participation at this meeting.

Sincerely,

Captain Dan Jordan

Vice-Chair, LCRHSC

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