



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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JUL 27 1976

The Honorable Robert P. Griffin  
United States Senate

and

The Honorable William D. Ford  
The Honorable James G. O'Hara  
The Honorable Phillip E. Ruppe  
House of Representatives

In your March 2 and 3, 1976, inquiries, you requested us to determine, among other things, what savings would result from closing the Lake Survey Center in Detroit, Michigan, and its marine facility in Monroe, Michigan, and whether the closing will lessen the National Ocean Survey's ability to provide water-level data and nautical charts for the Great Lakes area.

To make these determinations, we interviewed officials and employees and reviewed financial records and related data at the Lake Survey Center and its marine facility and at the National Ocean Survey Headquarters of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Rockville, Maryland. We also visited the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and discussed matters with the Director of the Atlantic Marine Center in Norfolk, Virginia.

Our examination showed that, as a result of closing the Lake Survey Center, the National Ocean Survey will save about \$428,200 in fiscal year 1977 after deducting estimated costs of \$271,100 for moving Lake Survey Center personnel and property to the Atlantic coast. Our examination also showed that the closing should not result in a lessening of water level and charting services on the Great Lakes. Actually, the National Ocean Survey plans to increase its level of activity on the Great Lakes to update charts and other material that the Lake Survey Center has not updated for an extended period of time.

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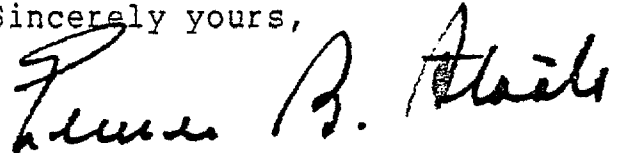
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We have not obtained written comments from the agency but we have discussed the facts with agency officials who agreed with such facts.

Enclosures I and II provide background information as well as answers to your specific questions.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James B. Aho".

Comptroller General  
of the United States

Enclosures - 2

LAKE SURVEY CENTERBACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since October 3, 1970, the Lake Survey Center, in Detroit, Michigan, with a marine facility at Monroe, Michigan, had been part of the National Ocean Survey, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Rockville, Maryland. Before that time, the Corps of Engineers had been responsible for the functions of the Lake Survey Center. The Lake Survey Center's primary functions were to provide information on water levels and to prepare nautical charts on the Great Lakes, Lake Champlain, the St. Lawrence River, and the New York Barge Canal. In all, its activities covered 95,000 square miles of water bounded by more than 6,000 miles of U. S. shoreline.

In fiscal year 1976 the Lake Survey Center's operating budget was \$1,716,900. Of this amount, \$1,154,000 was for salaries and fringe benefits for 58 permanent and about 25 seasonal employees. About \$153,000 was set aside for travel--transportation and subsistence for personnel and transportation of equipment--mainly for technical personnel working in the Great Lakes area. The remaining amount was for renting office space in the U.S. Federal Building and Court House in Detroit, Michigan, and a marine facility in Monroe, Michigan, and for purchasing equipment, supplies, and materials.

LAKE SURVEY CENTER  
ACTIVITIES

To obtain water-level data, the Lake Survey Center maintained gages located throughout the Great Lakes and contiguous waters. This information is used mainly to determine

--changes in the volume of water in each lake and

--low-water data and flows in the connecting channels.

Principal users of water-level data are mariners and the Corps of Engineers. The Corps uses this information for lake level regulation, flood forecasting, and issuing construction permits.

The Lake Survey Center also maintained 144 charts of various parts of the Great Lakes showing water depths, ship channels, and aids to navigation. Nautical charts were prepared on the basis of data obtained from water-level gages and from surveys of the water areas. Most harbor and river inlets are surveyed every 3 years because of the greater risk to navigation in these areas. Surveys of deeper parts of the lakes are made only periodically because there are fewer hazards to navigation.

The principal users of these charts are recreational boat owners and commercial shippers. The charts are sold by about 500 authorized sales agents in the Great Lakes area--10 in or near Detroit.

To better serve the Great Lakes area, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration drew up a plan in 1972 to consolidate all its Michigan activities--the Lake Survey Center, the U.S. Weather Bureau, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, and the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratories--in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Consistent with this plan, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration transferred the Lake Survey Center's Limnology (the scientific study of physical, chemical, meteorological, and biological conditions in fresh waters) Division to Ann Arbor in 1974. As this Division was involved solely in research, it was made part of the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory already located in Ann Arbor.

Subsequently, when the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration was directed by the Office of Management and Budget to reduce its budget, the Administrator decided, among other actions, to close the Lake Survey Center and move its remaining operations (non-research) to other National Ocean Survey facilities rather than to Ann Arbor.

ANSWERS TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS  
ON CLOSING OF THE LAKE  
SURVEY CENTER

WHAT, IF ANYTHING, WILL BE "SAVED" BY THE CLOSING OF  
THIS VITAL FACILITY AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF ITS LAKE-  
ORIENTED ACTIVITIES TO FACILITIES ON THE ATLANTIC COAST?

Our examination disclosed the closing of the Lake Survey Center will result in a savings of \$428,200 to the National Ocean Survey in fiscal year 1977, computed as follows:

Salaries and fringe benefits on positions eliminated	\$449,700
Rent for office in Detroit and office and warehouse with dock in Monroe eliminated	152,800
Avoidance of equipment and supply purchases to operate the Lake Survey Center	48,900
Elimination of other expenses associated with operating Lake Survey Center	<u>47,900</u>
Total savings from closing	699,300
Less: Relocation costs (see p.7 for explanation)	<u>271,100</u>
Net savings	<u>\$428,200</u>

Salaries and fringe benefits eliminated

The savings in salaries and fringe benefits will be realized by eliminating 28 positions. Of this amount, \$410,500 was for salaries and was based on the General Schedule grade level table for the positions shown in the Lake Survey's table of organization. Applicable fringe benefits of \$39,200 were based on amounts paid in 1976.

The remaining 30 positions were transferred to other National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration activities--15 went to the Atlantic Marine Center, 10

went to the National Ocean Survey and 5 to the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory.

Rent eliminated

Originally, the National Ocean Survey determined it would save \$195,800 in fiscal year 1977 by closing a commercially owned office building and warehouse with a dock in Monroe, Michigan, and the Lake Survey Center office in the U.S. Federal Building and Court House in Detroit. Rentals paid for these facilities in 1976 were \$77,800 and \$118,000, respectively.

However, a decision by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to continue renting the warehouse and dock at Monroe in 1977 for the ship Shenehon and to rent additional space at Norfolk for Lake Survey Center personnel being transferred reduced the expected savings by \$43,000 to \$152,800. Of this additional rent, \$33,000 was for the Monroe facility and \$10,000 for space in Norfolk.

While the savings in rental of \$152,800 is valid for the Lake Survey Center, there is no overall savings to the Government from the Lake Survey Center vacating the space in the Federal building because the General Services Administration has been unable to rent the vacated space to a Federal agency currently occupying commercial space in the Detroit area.

Avoidance of equipment and supplies purchases to operate the Lake Survey Center

The National Ocean Survey believes the closing will avoid purchases of equipment and supplies for the Lake Survey Center. The National Ocean Survey estimated savings of \$48,900 is based on an analysis of 1976 purchases to determine which purchases could be avoided if the Lake Survey Center closed. Its analysis indicated that purchases, such as test equipment and auto parts, could be avoided. As purchases of this type recur and appear to be necessary to operate the Lake Survey Center, we believe the basis used and the savings computed are reasonable.

Elimination of other expenses associated with operating the Lake Survey Center

The National Ocean Survey also anticipates that many expenditures necessary to operate administratively will

also be saved by closing the Lake Survey Center. Its analysis indicates that about \$47,900 will be saved in 1977 and is based on a review of expenditures in 1976. This analysis shows that expenditures, such as purchases of administrative computer services and travel expenses of supervisors whose jobs have been eliminated, will be avoided. Our review shows that its estimate is reasonable.

WILL THERE BE ANY DENIGRATION OF SERVICE BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE PROPOSED ELIMINATION OF THIS LAKE-BASED FACILITY, CAN THIS BE MEASURED IN DOLLAR TERMS AND IF SO, TO WHAT EXTENT WILL THIS FURTHER REDUCE THE "SAVINGS" WHICH NOAA CONTENDS ARE INVOLVED?

According to present plans prepared by the National Ocean Survey, there will be no lessening of services by closing the Lake Survey Center. Actually, the plans call for increasing services on the Great Lakes mainly by improving the accuracy and timeliness of charting with better equipment available at the Atlantic Marine Center.

Services on the Great Lakes will now be provided through the combined efforts of the Atlantic Marine Center in Norfolk and the National Ocean Survey in Rockville. These facilities provide similar services along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. The Atlantic Marine Center will be responsible for compiling data to revise and update nautical charts on the Great Lakes. The National Ocean Survey will be responsible for compiling, processing, and distributing water level data. There will be a slight cost increase because of added travel costs for reasons discussed on page 9.

Previously, Lake Survey Center personnel compiled charting data on the Great Lakes during the summer months and processed the data during the winter months. National Ocean Survey officials said that closing the Lake Survey Center will permit the Atlantic Marine Center more flexibility and efficiency in assigning personnel and permit the personnel to compile data throughout the year. The data will be processed by lower level clerical help. Closing the Lake Survey Center will also eliminate the cost of maintaining separate computers to process water-level data. We believe that, if the plan is properly implemented, better service should be provided.

WERE THERE ACTUALLY 15 SUPERVISOR POSITIONS IN THE DETROIT OPERATION THAT COULD BE DECLARED "EXCESS" AND IF SO, WHAT JUSTIFICATION DOES NOAA HAVE FOR MAINTAINING SUCH A HIGH LEVEL OF UNNECESSARY JOBS AT THE DETROIT FACILITY? IN THIS REGARD, COULD THE REDUCTION IN SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL BE ACCOMPLISHED AND THE SAME "SAVINGS" REALIZED, MERELY BY GETTING RID OF ANY EXCESS SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL AT DETROIT, NORFOLK, AND ROCKVILLE?

We found no evidence of excess supervisory positions at the Lake Survey Center before its closing. Of the 58 total positions, 28--5 supervisory, 12 administrative, and 11 technical support--were eliminated as a result of the closing.

The supervisory positions were the Lake Survey Center Commander and his deputy, the Supervisor of the Monroe facility, and the Director of Charting Operations and his supervisor. The 12 administrative positions dropped were the administrative officer and various clerical and secretarial positions. Technical support positions dropped ranged from auto mechanics to those involved in maintaining equipment at Monroe.

The closing permits the Atlantic Marine Center in Norfolk to assign technical personnel to carry out its functions wherever and whenever needed, including the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and the Great Lakes. In the past, the Lake Survey Center could use its personnel only on the Great Lakes and most productively during the summer months when surveys were made. In the winter months, technical personnel were used largely for clerical functions.

To ease the burden of closing, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration transferred or attempted to find new jobs for all Lake Survey personnel, even for those whose jobs were eliminated. The status of all positions and employees at June 14, 1976, follows.



<u>Position</u>	<u>Number of positions</u>	<u>Positions vacant</u>	<u>Employees filling positions will</u>		
			<u>Transfer</u>	<u>Retire</u>	<u>Quit</u>
Transferred	30	5	16	4	<u>a/5</u>
Eliminated	<u>28</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>b/16</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
Total	<u>58</u>	<u>c/10</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>9</u>

- a/ One employee had quit to accept a position in industry.
- b/ Transferred to other existing vacant positions in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
- c/ Positions were not filled after resignations and retirements because of the anticipated closing of the Lake Survey Center.

WHAT WILL BE THE ONE-TIME COSTS OF CLOSING THE OPERATION, MOVING THE EQUIPMENT, AND PAYING FOR THE RELOCATION EXPENSES OF PERSONNEL WHO WILL BE TRANSFERRED EITHER TO NORFOLK OR ROCKVILLE AS A RESULT OF CLOSING THE DETROIT FACILITY? WHAT IMPACT WILL THESE COSTS HAVE ON THE ALLEGED "SAVINGS"?

As of June 14, 1976, the National Ocean Survey estimated costs of the closing at \$271,100. These costs, as shown below, were deducted from savings resulting from the closing.

Relocation of personnel	\$161,700
Severance pay	69,300
Relocation of property	28,100
Rental of Monroe facility	<u>12,000</u>
Total	<u>\$271,100</u>

The relocation costs and severance pay estimates were based on the decisions of personnel to transfer, decline transfer, or retire as shown in the answer to the preceding question. We verified the computations for moving personnel and severance pay and found such action taken to be reasonable and consistent with Civil Service regulations.

The relocation of property costs cover moving 185,200 pounds of equipment from Detroit and Monroe to Norfolk and Rockville. The estimate was determined in accordance with General Services Administration regulations for actions involving property.

The rental expense covers 2-1/2 months' lease expense for the Monroe facility. The lease expires in mid-September.

WILL THE COST OF OPERATING THE SHIP SHENEHON, ONCE IT HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED TO THE ANN ARBOR OPERATION, BE THE SAME, LESS, OR MORE THAN WHEN THE VESSEL WAS OPERATED BY THE LAKE SURVEY CENTER, AND, IN THIS REGARD, IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THE SHENEHON WILL ACCOUNT FOR ONLY A "PAPER" SAVING FOR THE GOVERNMENT? IN THIS REGARD, WE WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF YOU COULD ADDRESS YOURSELF TO THE EFFECT THE PROPOSED CHANGE WOULD HAVE ON THE FACILITY AT ANN ARBOR, WHICH WILL ASSUME ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY NOT ONLY FOR THE SHIP BUT FOR THE SUPPORT FACILITY AT MONROE, MI.

The cost of operating the Shenehon should not change significantly. The Lake Survey Center operated the Shenehon for the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, not for its own operation. The commander of the Shenehon has been transferred to the Research Laboratory and was not considered in the savings estimate. (Three technicians, plus a vacant position, were also transferred to the Research Laboratory but were not involved with the Shenehon).

The Research Laboratory operating costs will increase as a result of absorbing the Lake Survey Center's warehouse and dock facility costs for the Shenehon in Monroe and for the personnel transferred; however, the cost to the Government will remain unchanged.

IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE LEVEL OF ON-SITE INSPECTION ACTIVITIES WHICH HAS PREVAILED IN THE PAST, HOW MUCH COST WILL THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION INCUR IN TERMS OF TRAVEL AND PER DIEM EXPENSES INVOLVED IN SENDING SURVEY TEAMS FROM ROCKVILLE AND/OR NORFOLK, AND HOW WILL THESE EXPENSES COMPARE WITH THE EXPENSES FOR ON-SITE SURVEYS CONDUCTED FROM THE DETROIT CENTER?

IF THERE WILL BE ADDITIONAL TRAVEL AND PER DIEM EXPENSES, TO WHAT EXTENT WILL THEY REDUCE OR EVEN ELIMINATE, THE "SAVINGS" THAT THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION CONTENDS IT WILL REAP FROM THE CLOSING OF THE LAKE SURVEY CENTER?

In fiscal year 1976, Lake Survey Center travel costs were estimated at \$153,000. This was paid mainly to technical personnel for preventive and emergency maintenance of widely dispersed water gages, for revisory charting on the Wisconsin side of Lake Michigan and Lake Superior, and for survey work on the Ohio side of Lake Erie.

Because technical personnel are paid per diem and travel for this work whether based in Detroit or elsewhere, we do not anticipate any significant increase in travel costs for like work when the Lake Survey Center is closed. About the only added expense would be the transportation of personnel to the area from Rockville or Norfolk for preventive and emergency maintenance of water gages. Our analysis shows that this expense together with the seasonal transport of personnel for revisory charting and survey crews would be less than \$10,000 annually.

The added costs of travel are so minimal that they should have practically no adverse impact on the savings.