



Trump picks Neil Jacobs to head NOAA, a scientist with 'Sharpiegate' ties

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Neil Jacobs, an atmospheric scientist, is Trump's pick to head NOAA.

Win McNamee/Getty Images

Who: Neil Jacobs

Nominated for: Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

You might know them from: Jacobs led the agency on an acting basis during part of the previous Trump administration.

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- An atmospheric scientist by training, he previously worked in the weather monitoring industry.

- He was cited for misconduct during an incident known as "Sharpiegate" when President Trump, during his first term, used a map with an altered path for Hurricane Dorian that didn't actually exist

What does this role do:

- NOAA's offices study and monitor the ocean and atmosphere; the weather-forecasting efforts of the National Weather Service; and organizations that manage the nation's oceanic fisheries as well as its marine monuments.

President Trump has nominated Neil Jacobs to be the administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA. Jacobs, an atmospheric scientist, was previously the agency's acting leader during part of the first Trump administration, where he emphasized the agency's focus on weather forecasting.

Jacobs was also [cited for misconduct](#) after the "Sharpiegate" incident, in which he and other [Trump-appointed NOAA officials were found to have exerted pressure on scientists](#) to alter the forecast for 2019's Hurricane Dorian to align with misstatements made by President Trump, suggesting the hurricane would veer into Alabama. It did not, and the weather modeling had not indicated that it was likely to.

"He was found to have compromised the scientific integrity of NOAA," says Andrew Rosenberg, a former NOAA deputy director who is now a fellow of public policy at the University of New Hampshire. "I find it very unfortunate that he would be renominated because that means there's no consequence for just ignoring the science."

Under the second Trump administration, the agency's priorities are expected to change, de-emphasizing climate research and potentially rolling back environmental protections for oceans and fisheries, areas that had been prioritized during the Biden Administration.

The nomination will require Senate confirmation. Republicans hold a majority of seats in the Senate.

NOAA was established in 1970 under President Richard Nixon as part of the Department of Commerce. NOAA administrators have primarily been scientists positioned to direct the agency's broad portfolio of both scientific research and regulatory efforts. Jacobs' nomination continues that pattern. Jacobs is an atmospheric scientist by training, and has worked in the weather monitoring industry. He is currently the chief science advisor for the United Forecast System, an initiative within NOAA to "better predict weather and climate", according [to its website](#).

The agency makes up about [40% of the Department of Commerce's 2025 budget](#) and has more than 11,000 employees across the country and territories.

Rosenberg says a vast cross section of Americans benefit from the science that the agency provides - from weather forecasts to charts that recreational boaters use.

"If you care about the weather, if you care about the ocean, if you care about the climate," Rosenberg says, "then you are dependent to a significant degree on the work that NOAA does. Whether you know it or not."

Under Biden, NOAA expanded the ocean's protected areas and invested in climate and weather research. Biden [allocated billions](#) toward the agency's efforts to improve weather forecasting capabilities, and to boost climate resilience in coastal cities.

Trump and many of his supporters have specifically criticized NOAA's climate research efforts. Project 2025, a conservative agenda created by the Heritage Foundation, described the agency's climate research wing as "one of the main drivers of the climate change alarm industry," suggesting the wing should be "disbanded."

It also suggested the entire organization should be broken up, moving or dismantling many of its current offices and privatizing others, like the National Weather Service. In nomination hearings last week, the Commerce department nominee Howard Lutnick said he [did not intend to move or disband the agency](#).

Trump has previously expressed interest in privatizing national weather forecasting efforts. During his first administration, Trump proposed that the NOAA administrator position go to Barry Myers, who was at the time the CEO of Accuweather. Myers withdrew his candidacy before the Senate was scheduled to vote on his confirmation.

The previous Trump administration also took aim at climate and weather science at the agency. Craig McLean, who served as acting chief scientist for the agency during the first Trump administration, recalls the pressure on Jacobs and other scientists exerted during "Sharpiegate" to confirm the presidents' unfounded predictions.

McLean is concerned similar pressure will fall on scientists in the new administration. "You know that pressure is going to be there," he says.

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