# Report In Brief

U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General

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## National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

## Audit of the Joint Polar Satellite System (JPSS): Challenges Must Be Met to Minimize Gaps in Polar Environmental Satellite Data (OIG-11-034-A)

### What We Found

1. While the National Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS) Preparatory Project (NPP) remains on track for an October 2011 launch, late development of the ground system (equipment for controlling the satellites and receiving and processing satellite data) has delayed the schedule for post-launch data production. In addition, NPP's ground system is not as robust as a typical operational system, increasing the risk of data loss and disruptions to satellite control during severe weather events.

2. Our examination of program-level activities confirms a coverage gap that NOAA expects to occur between NPP's end of life and the operational date of the first JPSS satellite. This gap will result in degraded weather forecasts and a break in the climate record.

3. The process for defining JPSS' operational baseline of capabilities, costs, and schedule has been prolonged, resulting in uncertain life-cycle cost estimates and budget requirements during a period when decision makers needed clarity in these areas.

4. The transition of instrument contracts from the control of the NPOESS program to JPSS has just been completed, but delays in finalizing the contracts could lead to further cost increases and schedule degradation.

### What We Recommended

1. NOAA should take steps to mitigate risks of using NPP data operationally by determining the availability of additional resources to support preparations for post-launch data production. Management should determine the feasibility of establishing an alternate mission management center and an additional station to which satellite data may be transmitted.

2. NOAA should also adequately oversee planning and coordination between the JPSS program and external entities to ensure the adequacy of JPSS development activities.

3. NOAA should coordinate efforts from across its line offices to minimize the degradation of weather and climate forecasting during gaps in satellite coverage.

4. To more efficiently manage the JPSS program under continued budget uncertainty, NOAA should provide decision makers with data illustrating the consequences of limiting satellite observational capabilities. NOAA should prioritize all of JPSS' requirements and develop a plan for making adjustments in response to funding shortfalls.

5. To fully transition from NPOESS to JPSS, contracts with instrument vendors must be finalized.