Evaluation of NWS Staffing Impacts on Operational Response to High-Impact Weather Events

Evaluation Report OIG-27-004-I
November 4, 2026

➤ **What We Evaluated |** Our objective was to determine whether staffing levels, hiring limitations, and operational practices at National Weather Service (NWS) field offices have impacted the agency's ability to effectively respond to high-impact weather events through timely forecasts, warnings, and impact-based decision support services.

➤ **Why This Matters |** The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is responsible for science and stewardship activities related to weather, ocean, and coastal environments. NOAA's NWS provides data, forecasts, and impact-based decision support services to protect life and property. NWS has 122 weather forecast offices. In 2025, there were also 13 river forecast centers and 9 national centers, in addition to other specialized service offices. We refer to the centers, service offices, and weather forecast offices collectively as NWS field offices.

We identified challenges related to NWS staffing in our fiscal year (FY) 2024 *Top Management and Performance Challenges* report. We noted that NWS hiring had not kept pace with employee departures, leading to a vacancy rate of about 5 percent. Starting in January 2025, NWS staffing was further affected by a series of executive orders, memorandums, administration-directed separation programs, and termination of probationary employees. By the end of FY 2025, the NWS vacancy rate exceeded 16 percent.

➤ **What We Found |** We found that overall, staffing-related challenges did not have a measurable impact on NWS's ability to respond to high-impact weather events in FY 2025. NWS's performance forecasting and warning for high-impact weather events in FY 2025 was comparable to or better than performance for the prior 4 years. Our analysis showed no significant degradation in the mission-essential support provided by weather forecast offices, in terms of both the timeliness of warnings and the provision of impact-based decision support services. We observed that much of weather forecast offices' ability to respond to severe weather events was aided by operational adjustments made to mitigate their staffing challenges.