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Public Information Statement, Comment Request
National Weather Service Headquarters Washington DC
955 AM EDT Thu Jun 26 2014

TO: NWS Offices
Family of Services Subscribers
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Offices
Other NWS Aviation Customers and Partners

FROM: Cynthia Abelman
Chief, Aviation Services Branch

SUBJECT: Solicitation of Comments for Transition of Select Area
Forecasts (FA) to Digital and Graphical Alternatives
Continues until August 4, 2014

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), in coordination with the NWS, has submitted a notice to the Federal Register announcing its intent to transition seven (7) Area Forecasts (FAs), used as flight planning and pilot weather briefing aids, to digital and graphical alternatives. A joint-agency working group has concluded that these digital and graphical alternatives better-meet the needs of aviation users. Guidance with respect to the proper use of these alternatives is forthcoming.

The FA is an abbreviated, plain-language forecast of specified weather phenomena, covering a geographical area designated by the FAA and produced by NWS. The FA is used to determine en-route weather and to estimate conditions at airports that do not have a Terminal Aerodrome Forecast (TAF).

The FA contains weather information in a format originally developed in the 1930s. By design, it carries a character-count limitation and is prohibited from describing Instrument Flight Rule (IFR) conditions reserved for AIRMETs and SIGMETs. It covers an extremely large geographical area, typically, several states, and is issued only 3-4 times daily, each valid for 18 hours. These specifications tend to produce a broad forecast of limited value. NWS provides equivalent information through a number of better alternatives.

An FAA-NWS joint-agency working group recommended that the FA be transitioned to more-modern digital and graphical forecasts, observations, and communications capabilities that provide improved weather information to decision-makers. The FAA will formally recommend that NWS transition six (6) FAs covering separate geographical areas of the Contiguous United States (CONUS) and one (1) FA covering Hawaii to digital and graphical alternatives already being produced by NWS.

The seven (7) Area Forecasts (FAs) affected include:

FAUS41 (BOS)
FAUS42 (MIA)
FAUS43 (CHI)
FAUS44 (DFW)
FAUS45 (SLC)
FAUS46 (SFO)
FAHW31 (Hawaii).

FAs for Alaska, the Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico will not be affected at this time.

Existing potential alternatives identified by the joint-agency working group include, but are not limited to:

- surface weather analyses and prognostic charts
- public forecast discussions
- Significant Weather (SIGWX) charts
- National Digital Forecast Database (NDFD)
- Terminal Aerodrome Forecasts (TAFs)
- Airmen's Meteorological Information (AIRMETs)

Aviators already use many of these weather products during normal flight planning. Together, they provide information similar to that found in the FA. The products listed above are higher resolution and provide graphical depictions.

The joint-agency working group's membership included broad subject-matter expertise from both FAA and NWS, as well as the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). Members collected insight from additional aviation weather stakeholders including various pilot organizations, weather briefers, airlines and air traffic controllers.

Before the transition takes place, the FAA will conduct a formal Safety Risk Assessment as part of FAA's Safety Management System. Guidance with respect to the proper use of proposed alternatives is forthcoming. The agencies are targeting early 2015 for transition. Interested parties and stakeholders may submit comments regarding the planned transition by standard mail or by e-mail. Comments must be received on or before August 4, 2014.

Please provide comments to:

Kevin Stone
National Weather Service
1325 East West Highway, Room 13342
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
301-713-1726 X130
kevin.stone@noaa.gov

or

Michael Pat Murphy
Warning Coordination Meteorologist
Aviation Weather Center
7220 NW 101st Terrace, Room 101
Kansas City MO 64153
816-584-72048
Michael.Pat.Murphy@noaa.gov

National Public Information Statements are online at:

<http://www.weather.gov/os/notif.htm>

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