NCAR *Information Release*

1972-5

For P.M. Release
Thursday, April 27

Future of Weather Modification Depends on Public

Fort Collins, Colorado--"What the public thinks about weather modification, rather than what the scientists know about it, will play the dominant role in the future of this science. The most expertly developed technology, whether it be for augmenting water or suppressing damaging weather phenomena, will find only limited future application in the absence of a strong public demand."

This statement from a report issued by the Federal Interdepartmental Committee for Atmospheric Sciences was cited today by a speaker at the annual meeting of the Southwestern and Rocky Mountain Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science here to emphasize his view that weather modification has entered a phase in which its public-policy implications must receive as much attention as its scientific aspects.

In a paper prepared for presentation this afternoon (Thursday, April 27) at a symposium on environmental problems of the High Plains, Henry Lansford, information officer for the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) in Boulder, said that "increasing interest in the large-scale application of weather-modification technology in this region has already begun to raise a multitude of knotty questions involving environmental, social, legal, economic, and political considerations."

He said that many of these issues were discussed and debated during public hearings and legislative committee meetings on the Colorado Weather Modification Act of 1972, which has been passed by the Legislature and is now awaiting the Governor's signature. Lansford and Professor Lewis O. Grant of Colorado State University were asked by the Colorado Legislative Council to serve as professional advisors to the interim committee that drafted this bill.

Although fairly positive conclusions have been reached about the effectiveness of some weather modification techniques such as seeding mountain snowstorms to increase the snowpack, Lansford pointed out that scientific knowledge is still incomplete in many other areas of weather-modification technology. But the

-more-

possibility that the High Plains may be starting into a dry period similar to those of the 1930s and 50s has caused a sharp increase in interest in potential applications of weather modification technology among farmers, public officials, and others, he said.

Lansford said that it is important for the public to gain a better understanding of current scientific knowledge of weather modification, so that expectations about its usefulness will not be unrealistically optimistic. He pointed out that "to ensure that weather-modification technology is applied wisely and effectively to serve human needs, a third requirement must be added to the combination of expert technology and public demand: new and innovative public-policy mechanisms to bridge the great gap that may lie between what the scientists know and what the public wants."

Lansford said that new approaches are needed to complex issues involving such things as legal aspects of weather-modification operations, public involvement in weather-modification planning, realistic cost-benefit calculations for weather-modification projects, and the kind and extent of state and Federal regulation that should be exercised over weather-modification activities.

"Although many organizations, including my own, are examining questions of this sort," he said, "there is a pressing need for more studies of public-policy implications to be conducted concurrently with research programs on the physical problems of weather modification. The atmospheric scientists will be able to tell us what we can do to change the weather, but we must call on the lawyers, ecologists, sociologists, economists, and experts from other fields to help us decide what we should do."

-end-

Henry H. Lansford
Information Officer
National Center for Atmospheric Research
Post Office Box 1470
Boulder, Colorado 80302
303: 494-5151, ext. 261