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PNSWSH

Service Change Notice 17-89
National Weather Service Headquarters Silver Spring MD
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To: Subscribers:
 -NOAA Weather Wire Service
 -NOAAPort
 -Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Offices
 Other NWS Partners, Users and Employees

From: William Bauman
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Subject: Termination of CONUS Aviation Area Forecast: Effective October
10, 2017

Effective on October 10, 2017, the NWS will cease production of the Area
Forecasts (FAs) issued by the Aviation Weather Center (AWC) covering the
Contiguous United States (CONUS). The six (6) FAs affected are:

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

The NWS and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) have coordinated to
transition six (6) FAs, currently used as flight planning and pilot
weather briefing aids, to digital and graphical alternatives. A joint-
Agency working group concluded that these digital and graphical
alternatives better meet the needs of today's aviation users.

The change was considered over a period of nearly four years, with
significant subject-matter analysis and feedback from both Agencies, as
well as industry, and with multiple safety risk assessments completed.
Guidance with respect to the proper use of the alternatives is available
through standard FAA and NWS documentation, with changes to corresponding
FAA Orders and NWS Directives following normal update cycles and expected
to be completed by the end of CY 2017.

Note: FAs for Hawaii, Alaska, the Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico remain
unaffected at this time. Any potential changes to FAs outside of the
CONUS will be communicated separately.

The FAA and NWS agreed upon the July 10, 2017 transition date, to be
followed by a period of three (3) months parallel product availability,
where legacy text CONUS FAs will continue to be made available in order to
ensure a smooth transition.

Supplementary Information: United States Code directs the Administrator of the FAA to make recommendations to the Secretary of Commerce on providing meteorological services necessary for the safe and efficient movement of aircraft. The Secretary, in turn, is directed to cooperate with the Administrator and give complete consideration to any recommendations. As such, FAA has coordinated extensively with the NWS to review current and future aviation weather information requirements.

The FA is an abbreviated, plain-language forecast of specified weather phenomena, covering a geographical area designated by the FAA. The FA is used to determine en-route weather and to estimate conditions at airports without 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 was prohibited from describing Instrument Flight Rule (IFR) conditions (reserved for AIRMETS and SIGMETs). Each FA covers an extremely large geographical area (typically, several states) and is issued three times daily (each valid for 18-hours).

These specifications tend to produce a broad forecast of limited value to the aviation end-user. While the FA met aviation weather information needs for many years, NWS now provides equivalent information through a number of significantly better alternatives.

Given these limitations, the FAA-NWS joint-agency working group recommended that the FA be transitioned to more-modern digital and graphical forecasts and observations already providing improved weather information to aviation decision-makers.

FAA formally recommended that NWS transition six (6) FAs covering separate geographical areas of the CONUS on April 30, 2015. Since then, both Agencies have been working actively to implement the change.

Note: FAs for Hawaii, Alaska, the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico will remain unaffected at this time.

Existing alternative products 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)

Aviation end-users are already accustomed to consulting many of the weather products listed above, during normal flight planning. Together, they provide information similar to that found in the FA, in higher resolution and with the added benefit of graphical depiction.

To simplify access to the above aviation weather products and information, and to ensure a smooth transition for pilots and other end-users, NWS has

developed a web tool that centralizes all weather information needed to replace the legacy FA. This web tool, called the Graphical Forecasts for Aviation (GFA) tool, is available at <https://www.AviationWeather.gov/GFA>. To ensure access to the information for limited communication bandwidth locations, the NWS also implemented the Aviation Surface and Clouds Forecasts (i.e., GFA Static Graphics) available on NOAAPort and the www.AviationWeather.gov website.

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 also collected insight and formal comment(s) from additional aviation weather stakeholders including pilot organizations, weather briefers, airlines and air traffic controllers.

Multiple Safety Risk Assessments were completed as part of FAA's Safety Management System. Guidance with respect to the proper use of the alternative products is available.

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