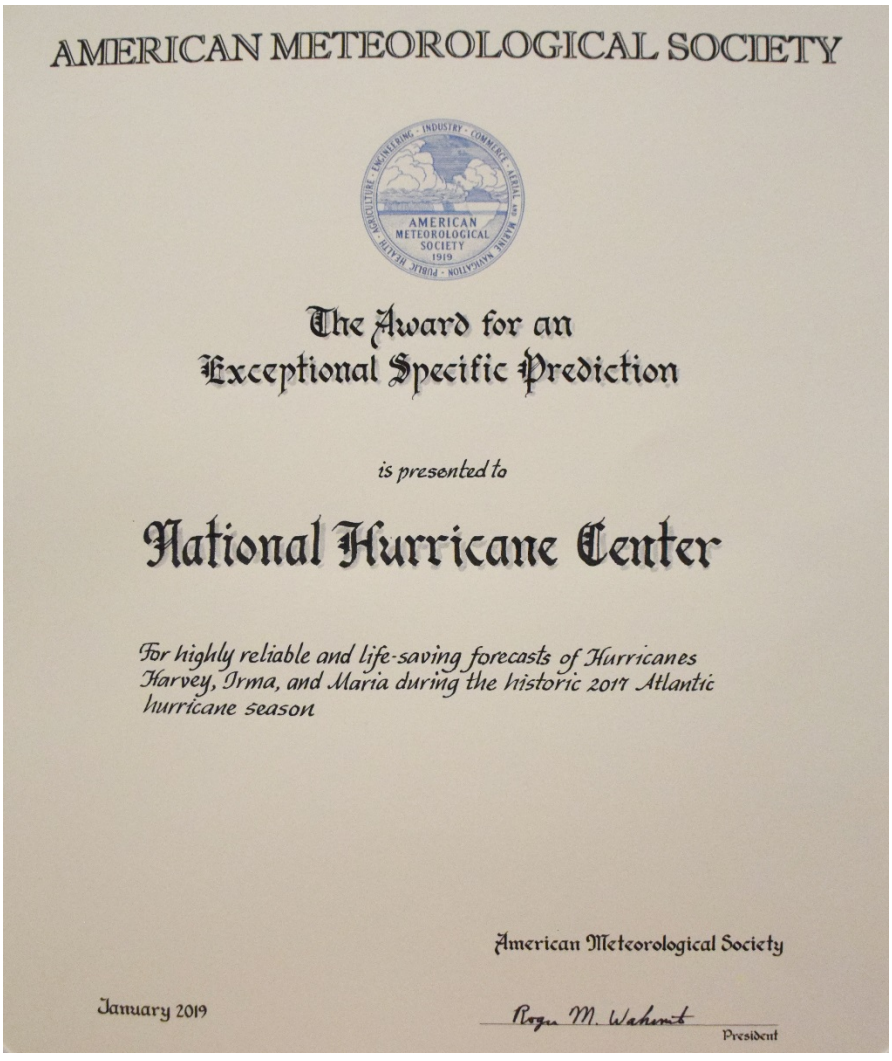
Directors of the National Hurricane Center
1943 to present



AMERICAN METEOROLOGICAL SOCIETY

The Award for an
Exceptional Specific Prediction

is presented to

National Hurricane Center

For highly reliable and life-saving forecasts of Hurricanes
Harvey, Irma, and Maria during the historic 2017 Atlantic
hurricane season

American Meteorological Society

January 2019

Roger M. Wakimoto
President

One of several prestigious awards received by the National Hurricane Center

GRADY NORTON (1943-1954)

Grady Norton (seated) headed the nation's hurricane forecast and warning program, though he did not have the official title of Director of the National Hurricane Center (NHC) because neither the title nor the center formally existed at the time. But, he is universally recognized as being the first NHC director. Norton was previously in charge of the Jacksonville Weather Bureau office. In 1943, its hurricane forecast unit was moved to Miami where the Weather Bureau, Air Corps, and Navy established a joint hurricane warning service under Norton's direction.

GORDON E. DUNN, Ph.D.
(1955-1967)

Gordon E. Dunn became the meteorologist-in-charge of the Miami forecast office in 1955. The office officially became the National Hurricane Center several years later with Dunn as its director. He is credited with developing ways to improve public awareness of the hurricane threat, including having hurricane preparedness conferences in hurricane-prone regions. He pushed for the exchange of ideas between forecasters and researchers, and trained many forecasters to use conceptual models and reasoning in their forecasts.

ROBERT H. SIMPSON, Ph.D. (1968-1973)

Robert Simpson followed Dunn as director. He brought an emphasis on science from his time as director of the National Hurricane Research Project, a predecessor to today's NOAA Hurricane Research Division. While at the NHC, he established the "Hurricane Specialist" (forecaster) position and worked with Dr. Herb Saffir to define the well-known Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale.

NEIL L. FRANK, Ph.D.
(1974-1987)

Neil L. Frank succeeded the retired Robert Simpson as director of NHC in 1973. During his tenure, Frank raised awareness of the hurricane problem, especially along the U.S. Gulf Coast where rapid growth was occurring. He made great use of electronic media to get people to take action during a hurricane threat.

ROBERT C. SHEETS, Ph.D.
(1987-1995)

Robert “Bob” Sheets became director of NHC after Neil Frank retired. His accomplishments included relocating NHC to Florida International University to a facility designed to keep the staff safe and operational in any hurricane situation. Another advance was the acquisition of the G-IV aircraft for hurricane operations and research. As Director, he enhanced Neil Frank’s hurricane preparedness programs and, at the same time, made a successful push to improve track forecasts through model improvements.

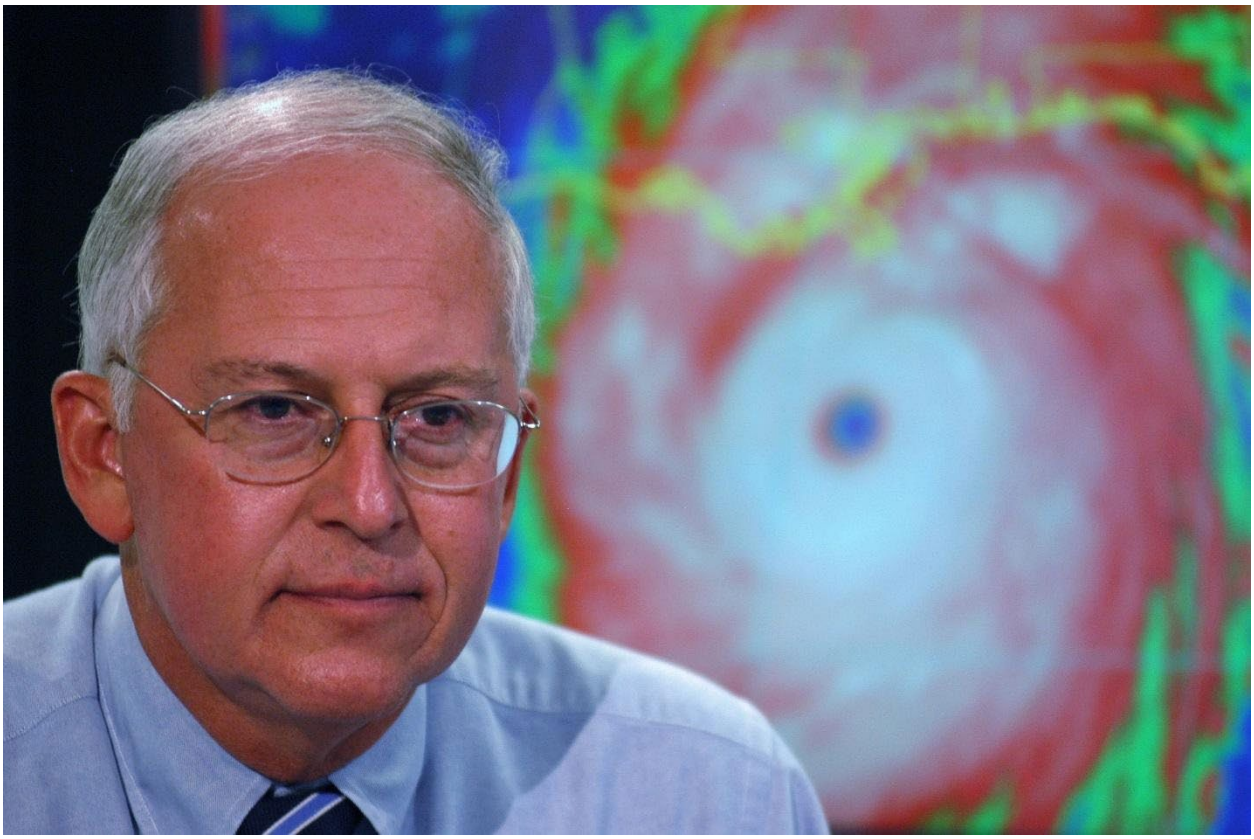
ROBERT W. BURPEE, Ph.D.
(1995-1997)

Dr. Robert Burpee became director of NHC in 1995 upon the retirement of Bob Sheets. He helped establish the FEMA/NOAA Hurricane Liaison Team at NHC, a partnership that facilitates communication between forecasters and government officials. He also encouraged an expansion of NHC's line of graphical analysis and forecast products.

JERRY D. JARRELL
(1997-2000)

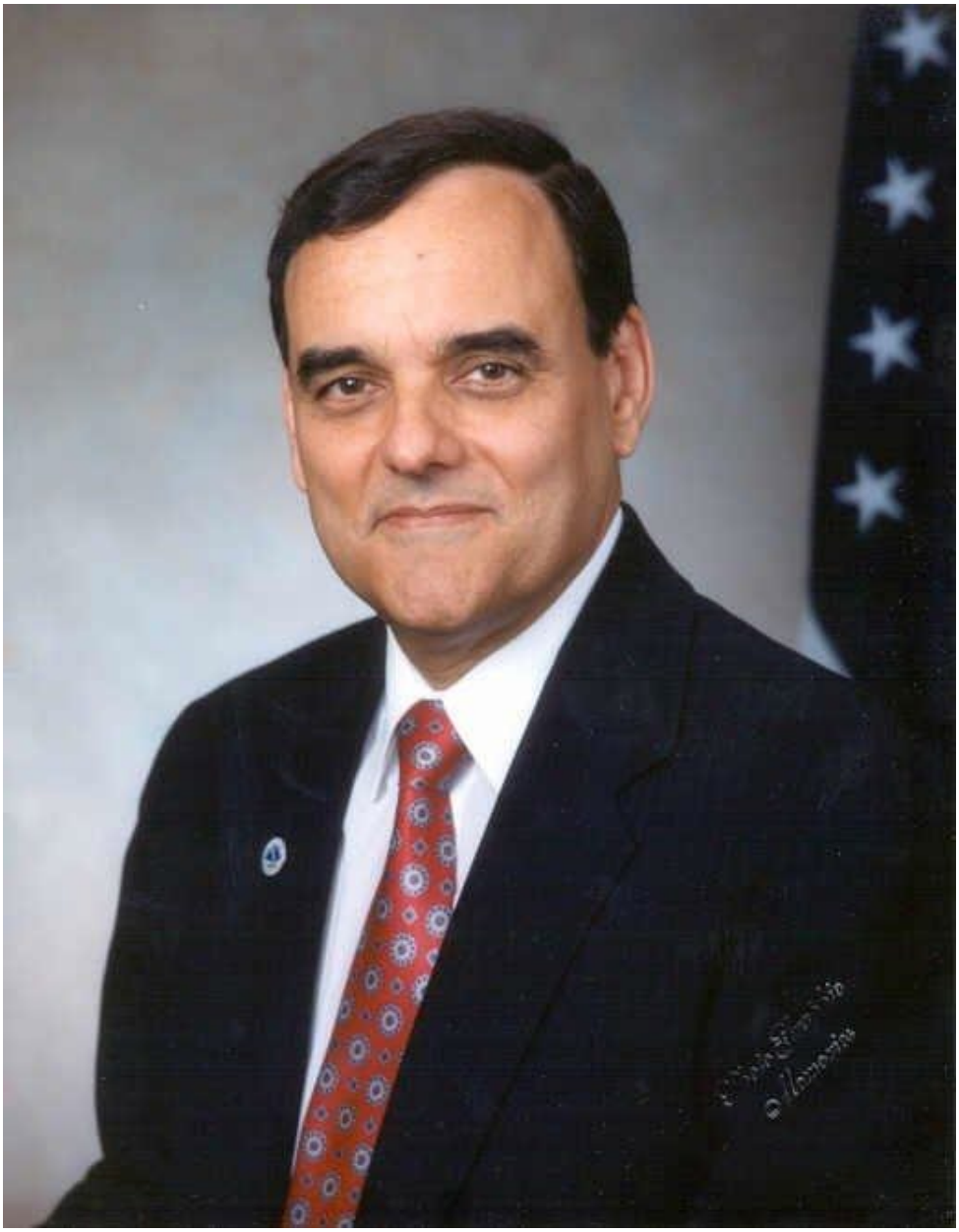
Jerry Jarrell became director of NHC in 1997 upon the departure of Robert Burpee. Jerry brought to the director's position his experience as head of the Joint Typhoon Warning Center and his insights and skills as a developer of operational tropical cyclone applications.

MAX MAYFIELD
(2000-2007)



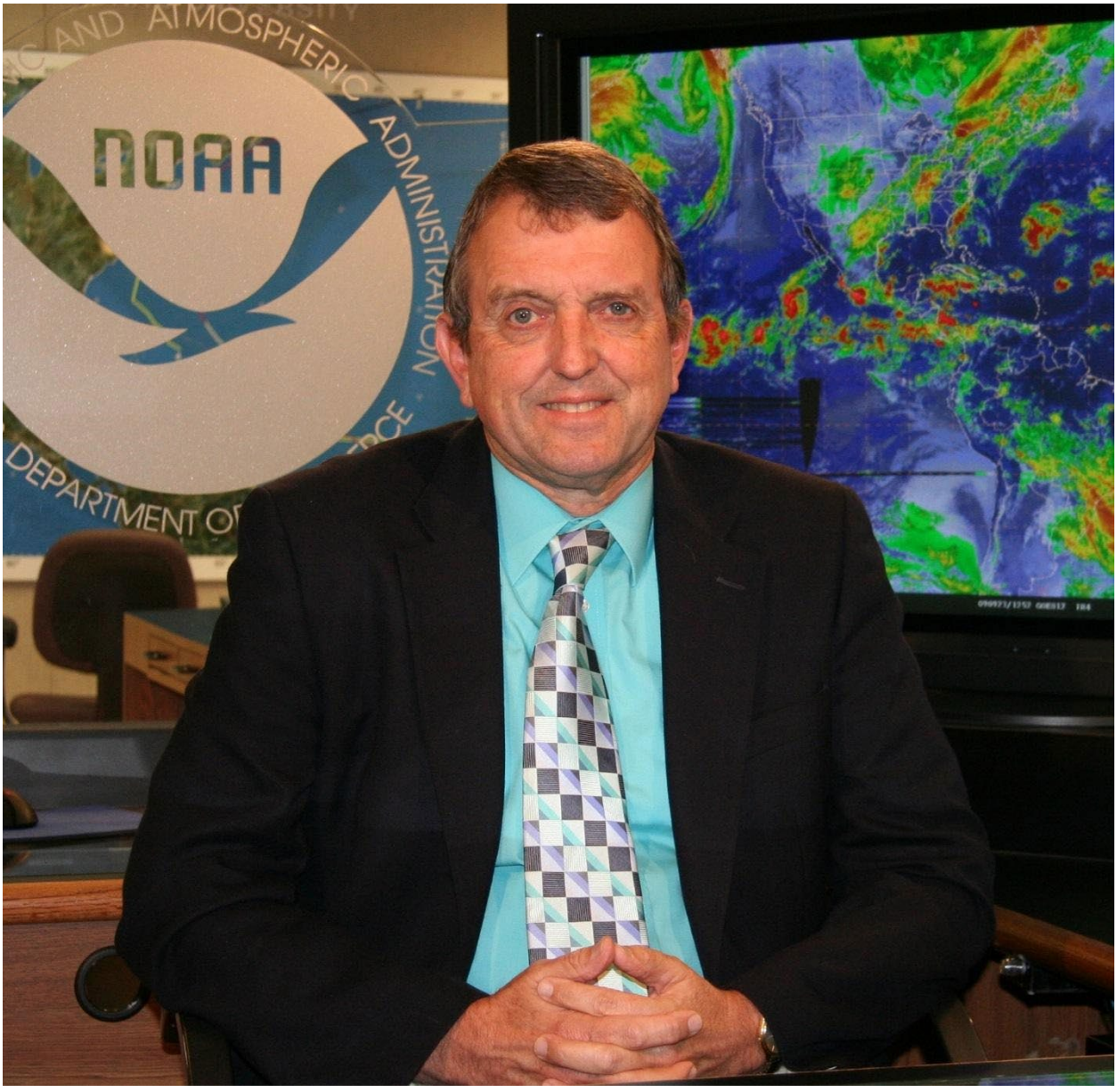
Max Mayfield became director of NHC in 2000 upon the departure of Jerry Jarrell. A constant and steady media presence, Mayfield became a household name during the record breaking 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons when he guided coastal residents through eight U.S. landfalling hurricanes, including Hurricane Katrina. He helped to secure funding for extra buoys, the Stepped-Frequency Microwave Radiometer (SFMR) for estimating winds speed over the ocean, and four additional hurricane specialists.

X. WILLIAM PROENZA
(2007)



X. William “Bill” Proenza became director of NHC in early 2007 upon the retirement of Max Mayfield. He left NHC later that year and returned to the position of Director of the NWS Southern Region.

WILLIAM L. READ
(2008-2012)



Bill Read assumed the duties of director of NHC in 2008. During his time as director, Bill furthered efforts to improve storm surge forecasts. He also increased the emphasis on social science in the process of evaluating new products and services.

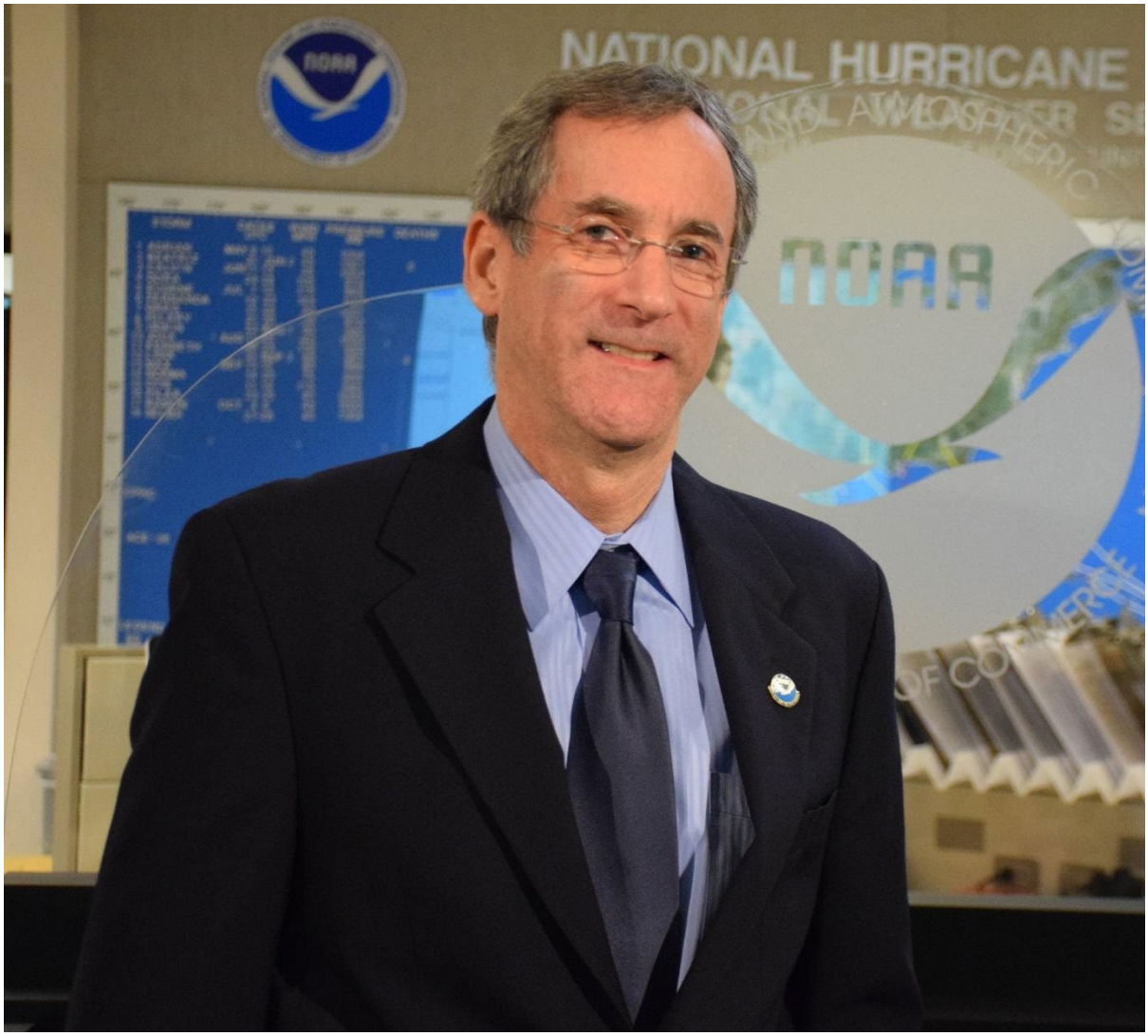
RICHARD D. KNABB, Ph.D. (2012-2017)

Rick Knabb became director of NHC upon the retirement of Bill Read. Under Rick's leadership, NHC's intensity forecast accuracy improved, new tropical cyclone genesis and post-storm products were introduced, and NHC increased greatly its social media presence.

KENNETH E. GRAHAM
(2018 - Present)

Ken Graham become the director of NHC in 2018. Ken was previously the meteorologist-in-charge of the NWS forecast office in New Orleans. He has extensive experience working directly with emergency managers during numerous high impact events and continues to focus attention on the individual hazards of tropical cyclones.

EDWARD N. RAPPAPORT, Ph.D.



Ed Rappaport was a member of NHC for more than 30 years. He served as its Deputy Director from 2000 until his retirement in 2021, And, in stints totaling seven years -- including the 2007 and 2017 hurricane seasons – served as its acting director.

Additional resources:

A Brief History of the United States Hurricane Warning Service
https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/pdf/A_brief_history_of_the_United_States_Hurricane_Warning_Service-Dunn.pdf

Gordon E. Dunn: Preeminent Forecaster of Mid-latitude Storms and Tropical Cyclones
https://journals.ametsoc.org/doi/abs/10.1175/1520-0434%281989%29004%3C0573%3AGEDPFO%3E2.0.CO%3B2

The National Hurricane Center-Past, Present, and Future
https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/pdf/NHC_Past_Present_Future_1990.pdf

Advances and Challenges at the National Hurricane Center
https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/pdf/NHC_WAF_Advances_Challenges_200904.pdf

Hurricane Forecasting, the State of the Art
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228526746_Hurricane_Forecasting_The_State_of_the_Art

Contact: NOAA NHC Public Affairs nhc.public.affairs@noaa.gov

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