6-13-2001

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Recommended Citation
Keeler, Sharon, "Sen Gregg Announces 2 Million to UNH to Develop Space Based Lasers to Measure Winds around the Globe" (2001). UNH Today. 2513.
https://scholars.unh.edu/news/2513

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Sen Gregg Announces 2 Million to UNH to Develop Space Based Lasers to Measure Winds around the Globe
Sen. Gregg Announces $2 Million to UNH to Develop Space-Based Lasers to Measure Winds around the Globe

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June 13, 2001

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DURHAM, N.H. -- U. S. Sen. Judd Gregg (R-NH) and the University of New Hampshire today announced that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has awarded a $2,170,842 grant to UNH's Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space for its GroundWinds project to develop and test new technologies for measuring the wind in the atmosphere from space.

A major element of the project is a ground-based lidar system located at the Mount Washington Observatory's Bartlett, N.H., research site, that has been operating since 2000. (Photo credit Gary Samson)
This grant brings the total funding received by UNH from NOAA to demonstrate the feasibility of using satellite-based lidar to measure wind speeds around the globe to more than $8 million. This technology uses laser light to measure the motion of aerosols and molecules in the air.

Gregg has helped UNH secure these funds through his position as the ranking minority member of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee that oversees NOAA’s budget.

In making the announcement, Gregg stated that "The GroundWinds project uses cutting-edge technologies to significantly improve our weather forecasts, especially extended day and hurricane forecasts. It will bring forecasters an entirely new set of data -- continuous wind speed readings from around the globe. Currently, we can only accurately measure winds over land masses, and we miss very important weather phenomenon which originate over the oceans.

"UNH was considered visionary when it first proposed this technology four years ago," Gregg continued. "In trials last September, they proved the technology works on the ground. Anyone familiar with New Hampshire and New England knows the critical need to accurately predict inclement weather. These funds will further the research needed to develop a satellite-based sensor in the near future."

A major element of the project is a ground-based lidar system located at the Mount Washington Observatory's Bartlett, N.H., research site, that has been operating since 2000. The observatory provides ongoing operational support for the installation.

Berrien Moore, III, director of the UNH Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space, expressed delight with the new award.

"We are gratified by the continuing support of Sen. Judd Gregg and NOAA for this cutting-edge technology development," said Moore. "Not only have we been able to demonstrate successfully this new technology with a ground-based system located near North Conway, but we are now developing a new unit that will be located at 11,000 feet atop Mauna Loa in
Hawaii. The next step will be, hopefully, space."

He also noted that the technology appears to have many other applications including measuring atmospheric turbulence and pollution.

Moore said that the Mt. Washington Observatory has been an essential partner in this project. "Not only is its research site near Mount Washington excellent for research purposes," he said, "but having them as a partner directly contributes to the success of the project. This link, like that with the Plymouth State College Meteorological Department in other atmospheric investigations, is directly contributing to the growth of our institute.

"This is very advanced technology and quite demanding. But we have shown that it works on the ground, and we are excited about the future," Moore continued. "We are also particularly pleased that we have had students participating in the research every step of the way."

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