

New head of NOAA says science will guide policy

March 19 2009, By JEFF BARNARD , AP Environmental Writer

(AP) -- The new head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will not only be talking the talk on global warming, she will be walking the walk - eight blocks from the Metro station to her office.

Former Oregon State University marine biologist Jane Lubchenco had planned to rent a small apartment close enough to walk to her offices in the nation's capital, but got sticker shock when she saw the prices - \$5,000 for a one-bedroom apartment - enough to finance a large house back home.

So she settled for a little place in the Cleveland Park neighborhood near the Red Line station, walking distance from grocery stores, drug stores and parks, though not the coastal marine ecosystems that have been her lifelong interest.

Lubchenco, whom the Senate confirmed for the NOAA job Thursday, has also signed up for the Zipcar car-sharing service to take the place of her Honda Civic hybrid back home in Corvallis.

"I don't see myself as a pioneer in this area, because I know a lot of people who are becoming more and more aware of their own carbon footprints," she said.

One of the first things Lubchenco and her husband, fellow OSU marine biologist Bruce Menge, did for the new apartment was replace the

incandescent lights with energy-saving compact fluorescent bulbs. She was encouraged by how easy it was to find them in neighborhood stores.

"It used to be the case that it was hard to find compact fluorescents," she said. "Now, in many places that's all you can find. In a relatively short period of time there has been a very rapid transition. It's not fast enough. But it really is happening. Especially when doing the right thing is also saving you money in the long run."

Like President [Barack Obama](#), Lubchenco is an avid Blackberry user. She first received word that Obama wanted her for NOAA in an e-mail received on the device.

After repeatedly telling the transition team they should pick someone else, she agreed to fly to Chicago to meet him, and was won over by "his commitment to making policy based on good science - his commitment to address [climate change](#)."

She does not expect to be able to text or talk to the president via Blackberry.

"That is a super-inner circle," she said.

Echoing Obama's recent remarks on federal funding for stem cell research, Lubchenco said science, not politics, will guide the agency as it confronts global warming, declining fisheries and forecasting natural disasters.

"This is a new era," she said. "Many issues will be seen through a different lens."

NOAA oversees ocean and atmospheric research and the National Weather Service. One of its divisions, NOAA Fisheries Service,

oversees the protection and restoration of threatened and endangered marine species such as whales, salmon and sea turtles.

Lubchenco expects her agency, which is part of the Commerce Department, to play a role in creating jobs in coastal areas, where half the county's population lives, and developing a green economy that reduces the emissions of greenhouse gases.

"It is important to emphasize that jobs and a healthy environment go hand in hand," she said. "That's true on land and true in the ocean. As we think about recovering the economy, creating jobs, one key to doing that is to have jobs that are green jobs and jobs that are working toward a healthy environment.

"I think we can revive our fisheries, and the economies and communities that they support. I think we can improve weather forecasting and disaster warnings. I think we can provide credible information about climate change and ocean acidification to the country. And I think we can protect and restore our coastal ecosystems."

A global authority on climate change and its effect on oceans, Lubchenco has been president of the National Association for the Advancement of Science, is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and has served on the Pew Oceans Commission that recommended steps to overcome damage to the oceans from overfishing, pollution, coastal development and climate change.

She is also founder of the Leopold Leadership Program, named for conservationist and author Aldo Leopold. It puts scientists through a communications boot camp to prepare them to testify before Congress and speak to reporters.

While traveling around the country developing the Oceans Commission

report, Lubchenco said she heard consistently from people that they want clean beaches, healthy and safe seafood, stable fisheries, abundant wildlife and vibrant coastal communities.

Acknowledging that all those things have been declining, Lubchenco said, "that is our challenge and our goal is to achieve that vision."

Lubchenco said her appointment came as a complete surprise, though she has been active in presenting science to policy makers in the capital and the United Nations, and she was excited to be in a position she never envisioned for herself.

"Clearly, this administration has made climate a focus," she said. "It has emphasized the need to address the realities of climate disruption."

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