



Secretary of Commerce Announces Plans to Raise Profile of Commercial Remote Sensing Regulatory Affairs Office

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At a recent meeting of the National Space Council, Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross announced his intention to merge the Commercial Remote Sensing Regulatory Affairs (CRSRA) office with the Office of Space Commerce and place them directly under his office. The announcement is aligned with the efforts of Vice President Mike Pence, who chairs the Space Council, to reform the regulations imposed on those who wish to engage in commercial space activities by creating a "one-stop shop."

Congress gave the Department of Commerce the authority to regulate commercial remote sensing satellites as part of the Land Remote Sensing Policy Act of 1992. The task has been delegated to CRSRA, a small office within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Satellite and Information Services (NESDIS). However, CRSRA has been challenged by the growing number of requests to operate private remote sensing satellites. These requests are expected to continue to rise due to the improved capabilities and reduced costs associated with small satellite (commonly referred to as "SmallSats") operations.

In addition, an application for a satellite remote sensing license currently is subject to intra-agency review due to the concerns of some within the defense and intelligence agencies about the types and quality of information that sensors aboard these satellites may be capable of collecting and how that information may be used. This review process, which is conducted pursuant to the April, 25, 2017 "Memorandum of Understanding Among the Departments of Commerce, State, Defense, and Interior, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Concerning the Licensing and Operations of Private Remote Sensing Satellite Systems," has been criticized by industry as taking too long and lacking transparency. Reporting directly to the Secretary of Commerce's office will raise the profile of CRSRA's mission, which should help in disputes that arise during the intra-agency process.

The Space Council also adopted a recommendation that the Department of Commerce propose legislative changes to "further enable the rapid, efficient, and predictable permitting of commercial remote sensing satellites" by July 1, 2018.

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