

In mid-July 2012, the Haida Salmon Restoration Corporation contacted the Global Drifter Program at NOAA's Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Lab (AOML) in Miami. Haida offered to deploy 20 satellite-tracked drifting buoys in an area of the North Pacific in which there was then a need for buoy coverage. Haida was identified in its communications and on its website as a fisheries research group. There was no suggestion of any interest in undertaking an ocean fertilization experiment; nor would the drifter buoys been adequate to the task of monitoring such an effort.

NOAA's Global Drifter Program is the principal component of the Global Surface Drifting Buoy Array, a branch of NOAA's Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) and Global Climate Observing System (GCOS). The drifters meet the need for accurate and globally dense in-situ observations of ocean surface conditions. They measure sea surface temperature, surface currents, barometric pressure, winds and salinity. This information is communicated to an orbiting satellite and then assembled and subjected to uniform quality control at a Drifter Data Assembly Center. The measurements are obtained as part of an international partnership, the ultimate goal of which is to make such data generally available for the purpose of improving climate prediction and to support climate research and monitoring.

The drifters are deployed worldwide by U.S. Navy vessels and NOAA research vessels, but to provide the array of drifters necessary to assemble critical climate data, AOML also routinely works with hundreds of privately owned vessels to get these drifters to areas in which they might be most useful. That service is performed on a volunteer basis, although the lab will occasionally request a cargo carrier to deploy the instruments. There are, on the average, over 1,200 of these satellite-tracked drifters in service each year.