

"a powerful deterrent" against wasteful use of animals.

Torricelli's bill, which calls for the creation of a National Center for Research Accountability, provides another measure of the widening gap between animal welfare groups and the biomedical research community. Although such a center strikes some NIH officials as unappealing, that opinion was disregarded in introducing this legislation.—JEFFREY L. FOX

FDA Resurrects Top Science Office

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently resurrected a top in-house science advisory group to improve science policy and beef up research at the agency. The new Office of Science has been reconstituted to raise the visibility of scientific issues at the agency, according to an agency announcement.

The office will be headed by a new assistant commissioner, whose elevated status will afford a "fast track to the FDA commissioner," according to Jess Stribling, a special assistant to acting FDA commissioner Mark Novitch. FDA plans to fill the post after reviewing candidates from inside and outside the agency.

The new office is a result of another round of bureaucratic reshuffling that has occurred over the past several years. A similar unit was formed in 1978, which eventually was combined with another FDA office. Last year, another science office was set up that had similar functions to the new one but was lower on the totem pole.

The new office's responsibilities combine the duties of the previous science office and the post of science adviser. Most of the nine staff members for the new office were transferred from the old science office.

Among its duties, the group is charged with advising the commissioner on science policy, representing FDA in discussions with other federal agencies, monitoring the management of research and training, and improving the quality of research. For years, critics from within the agency and on Capitol Hill have complained that the science at FDA is not up to snuff, especially when contrasted with

the agency's cousin a few miles away, the National Institutes of Health.

Bets on the selection of a new commissioner apparently are off now. As the election approaches, rumors about prospective candidates have died down. The Administration was hoping to find a woman for the job, but so far offers have been turned down by the various candidates. Agency staff say that Novitch, who has been an acting commissioner on and off for several years, would be a logical choice, but apparently the Administration wants somebody different.

—MARJORIE SUN

Landsat Sale Nears Resolution

The long and bitter argument over the commercialization of Landsat appears to be nearing a resolution. A number of administrative and legislative efforts have begun to converge, with the ultimate goal of getting the government out of the remote sensing business entirely (*Science*, 12 August 1983, p. 632).

First, the Commerce Department announced last week that seven companies have put in bids to operate the existing Landsat system, based on a request for proposals that went out in January. Ironically, the Communications Satellite Corporation, COMSAT, declined to bid on the grounds that it was overextended with other projects. COMSAT's earlier proposal to take over Landsat and the weather satellites was what set the current commercialization process in motion in the first place (*Science*, 11 February 1983, p. 752).

Next, although the bids are in limbo for the moment as everyone waits for Congress to specify its groundrules for the transfer, that action now seems very near. The House Committee on Science and Technology is putting the finishing touches on a bill (HR 5155) calling for a phased transfer to private contractors, and the Senate subcommittee on space has begun to consider a very similar bill (S 2292).

In the initial phase of the plan, the contractor would *not* have to buy the satellites themselves but would have the opportunity to educate potential Landsat users and thus to develop the

market, something both NASA and Commerce have done very little of.

Then, during a 6-year transition period, the government would subsidize new satellites. Finally, the private operators would be on their own.

Central to the plan is preservation of the so-called "open skies" policy, which guarantees every Landsat user—domestic or foreign—equal access to the data.

Open skies is very much in line with a recent report of the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), which stressed the importance of open skies to U.S. foreign policy. The free international flow of information is critical in the related area of weather data, for example. Moreover, Landsat has been a potent symbol in the less-developed countries that American space activities can be an opportunity rather than a threat; many are suspicious that proprietary data would be used for economic exploitation.

This does go against the grain of some of the potential Landsat operators, who maintain that the remote sensing business will not be profitable unless they can sell proprietary information. "[But] we made a philosophical decision a long time ago," says one House staffer. "You could either have narrow dissemination of high-cost data, or wide dissemination of low-cost data. We wanted the latter." Commerce Secretary Malcolm Baldrige has said that he would prefer to let the marketplace decide the open skies question but that he is basically quite willing to go along with the congressional plan. Swift passage thus seems likely.

One interesting possibility has been raised by the OTA, however. The national security community seems to have discovered the Landsat data only recently. But during the last year or so, it has suddenly emerged as one of the largest single users: the Central Intelligence Agency alone went from 440 scenes purchased in 1982 to more than 5000 in 1983. Most of the uses seem to involve nonclassified projects such as mapping and crop monitoring. But once the Landsats are transferred to the private sector, the national security community may be tempted to launch its own satellites, under government control—which means that Washington may end up paying for a separate Landsat system anyway.—M. MITCHELL WALDROP