

# USGS COALITION

18 April 2019

The Honorable James Reilly  
Director, U.S. Geological Survey  
12201 Sunrise Valley Drive  
Reston, VA 20192

Director Reilly:

We write you as individual members of the USGS Coalition, an alliance united by a commitment to the continued vitality of the USGS and its ability to provide critical data and services to the nation. Our organizations include professional societies with members that work for and in collaboration with USGS, as well as private companies that rely on well-informed USGS employees and research. United by our shared commitment to grow and disseminate USGS research, we urge you to reconsider your new position on scientific meeting attendance for USGS employees. We are concerned that further limiting the ability of USGS scientists to collaborate and learn at scientific meetings may harm the USGS' ability to contribute to the long-term health, security, and prosperity of the nation.

Scientific and technical conferences help maintain a "talented and interconnected workforce" — one of the three critical pillars of a vibrant, economically productive scientific enterprise identified in the National Research Council's *Furthering America's Research Enterprise* report. These conferences promote collaborations between federal scientists and those in private industry and academia, provide for rapid dissemination of federally funded research results, and provide high quality professional development for the next generation of scientists and engineers. For federal employees also involved in program management, conferences are cost-effective venues for overseeing multiple projects in one location, disseminating information about agency policies and programs, and gathering information on the most promising research directions to guide smart decisions when allocating federal research funding.

As you are aware, the purpose of scientific and engineering meetings is to foster and encourage these vital collaborative interactions. They serve as the focal point of scientific and engineering communication across industry, academia, and government. The formal presentation of peer-reviewed research, the robust peer-to-peer conversations that occur on the sidelines, and the ability to expand one's horizons and examine problems in a new light result in unanticipated and important connections being forged, not only in technical arenas, but also in policy and program areas.

It is precisely this kind of unanticipated stimulation that led to the commercial use of GPS satellites for telecommunications, for automotive and maritime location assistance, and a myriad of other commercial applications of a technology originally developed for military purposes.

A balance of smaller and larger scientific meetings is critical to share information with key audiences at local, national, and global scales. Smaller conferences can allow for more time to collaborate with core groups of individuals. Large conferences allow attendees to interact with a much wider number of people from a wider range of disciplines, many of whom may not attend smaller conferences. These large conferences can be the most effective means of disseminating information about USGS programs and activities to a wide audience. In addition, large scientific meetings allow for interdisciplinary conversations, expanding horizons and broadening scientific breakthrough potential. Forcing USGS

scientists to choose a single venue in which to share critical information and collaborate will not only impair their work, but also the broadest and most useful application of their taxpayer-funded research. For these reasons, we hope that you will reconsider your limitations on attendance of scientific meetings for USGS scientists.

We would be happy to further discuss these issues with you. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

