

USGS COALITION

Testimony of the USGS Coalition
Elizabeth Duffy, Chair
On the U.S. Geological Survey FY2021 Budget

To the
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
March 2, 2020

Summary

The USGS Coalition appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony pertaining to fiscal year (FY) 2021 appropriations for the United States Geological Survey (USGS). **The USGS Coalition requests that Congress fund the USGS at \$1.35 billion in FY 2021.** The requested funding would allow the agency to sustain current efforts in scientific discovery and innovation and to make strategic investments that will produce the impartial knowledge and decision support tools needed by decision-makers across the country.

The USGS is uniquely positioned to provide information and inform responses to many of the nation's greatest challenges. The USGS is an agency that has a distinctive capacity to deploy truly interdisciplinary teams of experts to gather data, conduct research, and develop integrated decision support tools that improve ecosystem management, ensure accurate assessments of our water quality and quantity, reduce risks from natural and human-induced hazards, deliver timely assessments of mineral and energy resources, and provide emergency responders with accurate geospatial data and maps.

The USGS Coalition is an alliance of more than 85 organizations united by a commitment to the continued vitality of the United States Geological Survey to provide critical data and services. Coalition members include scientific organizations, universities, businesses, and natural resource managers.

The USGS conducts incredibly valuable work for the country, producing the knowledge needed to make informed policy decisions across a broad array of natural resource and natural hazard issues. The USGS is uniquely positioned to provide information and inform responses to many of the nation's greatest challenges. It has the distinct capacity to deploy interdisciplinary teams of experts to gather data and conduct research to reduce risks from natural and human-induced hazards, ensure accurate assessments of our water quality and quantity, deliver timely assessments of mineral and energy resources, and provide emergency responders with accurate geospatial data and maps.

The USGS Coalition urges Congress to appropriate \$1.35B for the USGS in FY21, which reflects only a modest increase over FY20 to cover the rate of inflation, deal with continued vacancies, and begin to cut down on the Survey's substantial maintenance backlog. Our proposed funding level would allow the agency to sustain current efforts in scientific discovery and innovation and to make limited strategic investments to produce the knowledge needed by decision makers in Congress and across the country.

Essential Services for the Nation

The USGS has a national mission that extends beyond our public lands to positively impact the lives of all Americans. It plays a unique role within the Department of the Interior, conducting research across a broad array of scientific disciplines and providing data that informs responses to many of the nation's greatest challenges. To highlight just a few examples, USGS scientists:

- Reduce risks from **natural hazards** – including earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides, volcanoes, flooding, drought, and wildfires – that jeopardize human lives and result in billions of dollars in damages annually. USGS not only works to improve the scientific understanding of these hazards, but also improves our ability to prepare for them and to more effectively respond to them when they occur.
- Inform management of **freshwater resources** – both above and below the land surface – for drinking water, agriculture, and commercial, industrial, recreational, and ecological purposes.
- Inform sound management of **natural resources** on federal and state lands, including control of invasive species and wildlife diseases that cause billions of dollars in economic losses. This information is shared with other Interior bureaus and state agencies to allow for adequate monitoring and management.
- Provide vital **geospatial and mapping data** used in economic development, environmental management, infrastructure projects, and scientific applications by states, federal agencies, and the private sector.
- Help predict the impacts of **land use** and climatic conditions on the availability of water resources and the frequency of **wildfires**. The Landsat satellites have collected the largest archive of remotely sensed land data in the world, which informs **agriculture production** and our nation's response to and mitigation of natural hazards.

- Help make decisions about the nation’s economic and energy future by assessing **mineral and energy resources** – including rare earth elements, coal, oil, unconventional natural gas, and geothermal. The USGS is the sole federal source of information on mineral potential, production, and consumption.

Funding

Over the years, Congress has worked in a bipartisan fashion to provide essential funding to this vital agency. These efforts have paid real-world dividends in our ability to plan for and respond to natural disasters, and in our ability to use scientific data to access vital natural resources for our nation’s growth.

The proposed USGS budget would make dramatic and harmful cuts in many essential programs, overall cutting almost \$300,000,000 from the FY20 budget approved less than three months ago. More specifically, the proposed budget would:

- Slash funding for Ecosystems by \$124 million, almost half of last year’s funding, and completely eliminate the Cooperative Research Units program that works in tandem with state agency partners to respond to the latest needs in wildlife and fisheries management.
- End the Land Resources mission area and decentralize the Climate Adaptation Science Centers to no longer be receptive to the scientific needs of stakeholders.
- Cut funding for Natural Hazards by \$32 million, including two-thirds of funding for earthquake early warning systems and all support for new seismic stations in Alaska and other existing seismic networks;
- Reduce Water Resources by \$53 million by making major cuts in virtually every program area;
- Cut Core Science Programs by \$35 million, including geologic mapping, the USGS Library, and land imaging; and,
- Reduce facilities funding by \$54 million, despite an admitted maintenance backlog of \$148.3 million.

Taken together, these cuts would hobble the ability of the USGS to maintain base funding for critical research and monitoring, update and maintain its facilities, and implement new initiatives.

Conclusion

The US Geological Survey provides an unparalleled service to the nation. Its activities inform decision makers on the needs and abilities to utilize natural resources for the betterment of Americans.

The USGS Coalition requests that Congress provide \$1.35 billion for the US Geological Survey in FY21. We are available to meet with you and answer any questions about this request. Please feel free to contact Coalition chair Elizabeth Duffy at eduffy@federalaffairs.com.

The USGS Coalition appreciates the subcommittee's past leadership in strengthening the United States Geological Survey. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the USGS.