

USGS Coalition

American Congress on Surveying
and Mapping
American Fisheries Society
American Geological Institute
American Geophysical Union
American Institute of Biological
Sciences
American Society for
Photogrammetry & Remote
Sensing
American Society of Civil
Engineers
American Water Resources
Association
American Water Works
Association
AmericaView
Applied Technology Council
Association of American
Geographers
Association of State Floodplain
Managers
Clean Beaches Council
Earthquake Engineering Research
Institute
Ecological Society of America
Geo-Institute of ASCE
Geological Society of America
The Groundwater Foundation
Incorporated Research Institutions
for Seismology
National Association of State
Universities & Land Grant
Colleges
National Association of University
Fisheries and Wildlife Programs
National Council for Science and
the Environment
National Ground Water
Association
National Institutes for Water
Resources
National Mining Association
NatureServe
NBII Coalition
The Ornithological Council
Seismological Society of America
Society of Economic Geologists
University Corporation for
Atmospheric Research
The Wildlife Society

Testimony of the USGS Coalition

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Regarding the U.S. Geological Survey

FY 2006 Budget Request

To the U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

March 18, 2005

Summary

The USGS Coalition urges Congress to increase the budget of the U.S. Geological Survey to \$1 billion in FY 2006.

The USGS plays a crucial role in protecting the public from natural hazards such as floods and earthquakes, assessing water quality, providing emergency responders with geospatial data to improve homeland security, analyzing the strategic and economic implications of mineral supply and demand, and providing the science needed to manage our natural resources and combat invasive species that can threaten agriculture and public health. The USGS is working in every state and has nearly 400 offices across the country. To aid in its interdisciplinary investigations, the USGS works with over 2,000 federal, state, local, tribal and private organizations.

The USGS Coalition is an alliance of nearly 70 organizations united by a commitment to the continued vitality of the unique combination of biological, geographical, geological, and hydrological programs of the United States Geological Survey. The USGS Coalition supports increased federal investment in USGS programs that underpin responsible natural resource stewardship, improve resilience to natural and human-induced hazards, and contribute to the long-term health, security and prosperity of the nation.

Funding Shortfall

During the past ten years, total federal spending for non-defense research and development has risen by 64 percent from \$45 billion to \$74 billion in constant dollars. By contrast, funding for the USGS has been nearly flat, as shown in the accompanying chart (Figure 1). Even this flat funding for the USGS reflects congressional restoration of proposed budget cuts.

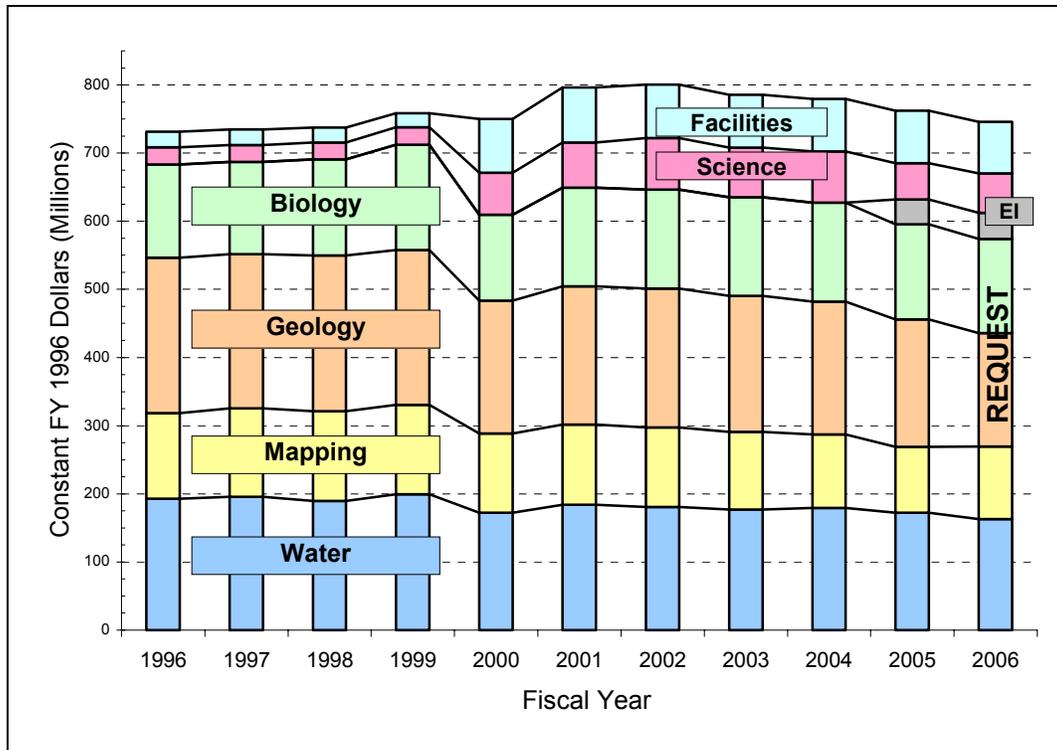


Figure 1. USGS funding in constant dollars, FY 1996 – FY 2006. EI represents the Enterprise Information account established in the FY 2005 USGS budget request. Source: USGS Budget Office.

The need for USGS science in support of decisionmaking has never been greater. During the past year, natural hazards have adversely affected many communities across the country, including landslides in California, hurricanes in Florida, as well as droughts, floods, and forest fires in many parts of the country. In addition, the recent activity at Mount St. Helens volcano deserves close monitoring for any potential danger its continued eruption may pose to communities, air quality and air traffic. After the devastating earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean, people around the globe have a greater appreciation of the need to improve environmental monitoring, forecasting, and warning systems that can prevent natural hazards from becoming natural disasters.

The USGS plays a lead role in reducing the impacts of natural hazards. It operates seismic networks and conducts seismic hazard analyses that are used to formulate earthquake probabilities and to establish building codes across the nation. The USGS monitors volcanoes and provides warnings about impending eruptions. It operates a stream gage system that enables the National Weather Service to issue flood warnings.

Equally as important as natural hazards, the USGS plays a vital role in bioinformatics and managing natural resources that are essential to our economy, security, and environment. The USGS provides knowledge and data that support water, energy and mineral resource management as well as wildlife and ecosystem management. The USGS provides science needed to combat invasive species (*e.g.*, snakehead fish, zebra mussels and tamarisk) and

wildlife diseases (*e.g.*, Chronic Wasting Disease) that can cause billions of dollars in agricultural losses and threaten public health.

Greater investment in the USGS is required to meet the tremendous needs of the future. That investment should be used to strengthen USGS partnerships, improve monitoring networks, produce high-quality digital geospatial data and deliver the best possible science to address societal problems and inform decisionmakers.

The USGS Coalition is grateful to Congress for its leadership in restoring past budget cuts and strengthening the U.S. Geological Survey. The House Appropriations Committee has expressed the importance of funding USGS science programs in the base budget. Likewise, the Senate Appropriations Committee report accompanying last year's spending bill says, "The strength of the Survey's existing efforts in many program areas is deserving of additional support. The Committee urges that future budget requests place a stronger emphasis on the Survey's core programs, which have proven value and strong public support."

USGS Budget Request

The USGS Coalition urges Congress to increase the budget of the U.S. Geological Survey to \$1 billion in FY 2006, an increase of 7.1 percent above the FY 2005 enacted level, which is necessary for the agency to continue providing critical information to the public and to decisionmakers at all levels of government. The increase recommended by the USGS Coalition would enable the USGS to restore the science cuts proposed in the budget request, accelerate the timetable for deployment of critical projects (*e.g.*, Advanced National Seismic System and the National Map), and launch new science initiatives that would begin to reverse the cumulative effects of the long-term funding short fall discussed above (Figure 1).

The FY 2006 budget request would cut funding for the USGS by \$1.9 million or 0.2 percent to \$933.5 million. The budget request would offset \$36.7 million of cuts in existing program activities with \$33.4 million in new and expanded program funding. Two large program cuts are of special concern to the USGS Coalition. The budget request would cut \$28.7 million from the Mineral Resources program, a 53 percent decrease in funding that would decimate the program. The USGS budget request would also eliminate the entire \$6.4 million budget for the Water Resources Research Institutes, which are located in all 50 states.

The USGS Mineral Resources program is an essential source of objective guidance and unbiased research on our mineral resources. This guidance and research is important to reduce the environmental impacts of mining and to maintain the growing value of processed materials from mineral resources that accounted for \$418 billion in the U.S. economy in 2004, an increase of 13 percent over 2003. The proposed cuts in the Minerals program would also terminate multidisciplinary research that has important implications for public health and environmental protection, such as studies on mercury, arsenic and other inorganic toxins.

The Water Resources Research Institutes have been successful in developing cooperative programs that leverage federal investments with funds from other sources. Last year, the House

Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies said, “The Administration has placed a high priority on cooperative programs that leverage funds from State and local governments as well as private entities. The Committee believes that Bureaus that are successful in implementing these policies should be rewarded and not penalized.”

The proposed budget cuts would adversely affect the ability of the USGS to achieve its mission. We encourage Congress to restore these cuts, but this funding should not come at the expense of other high priority programs elsewhere in the USGS budget.

The USGS budget request would add \$33.4 million in new and expanded program funding, including \$5.4 million for facilities and operations to provide more robust detection and notification of earthquakes that could generate a dangerous tsunami. The USGS effort will be conducted in conjunction with NOAA’s effort to enhance and expand the tsunami warning system to detect any tsunami that might strike anywhere along the U.S. coastal region. The budget request would also provide an increase of \$19.5 million for land remote sensing activities that support a broad array of economic, agricultural and environmental issues. This funding would allow the USGS to continue operation of the damaged Landsat 7 satellite and work with NASA and NOAA to begin building a ground-based system for a Landsat follow-on mission. The USGS budget request would provide small increases to improve volcanic monitoring, expand water availability pilot studies to assess ground-water depletion in the western United States, strengthen ecosystem studies in Puget Sound, and address a wide range of other issues. These initiatives deserve the support of Congress.

The USGS budget request contains \$17.2 million to provide full funding for increases in “fixed costs,” such as salaries and rent. In past years, increases in fixed costs were partially “absorbed” by individual programs. Cumulatively, this practice has had a disproportionate impact on core USGS programs in biology, geology, hydrology, and mapping, which cannot absorb cuts without affecting scientific research and monitoring activities. Without full funding of fixed cost increases, the USGS may be forced to curtail ongoing activities, hindering or preventing the delivery of data needed by natural resource managers and emergency planners. This would increase our vulnerability to natural disasters and increase the costs of recovery.

In addition to restoring the proposed program cuts, we encourage Congress to consider additional increases that would enable the USGS to meet the tremendous need for science in support of public policy decisionmaking. More investment is needed to strengthen USGS partnerships, improve monitoring networks, produce high-quality digital geospatial data and deliver the best possible science to address societally important problems. The USGS has a national mission that encompasses the homes of all citizens through natural hazards monitoring, drinking water studies, biological and geological resource assessments, and other activities.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our request. If you would like additional information or to learn more about the USGS Coalition, please contact Robert Gropp of the American Institute of Biological Sciences (rgropp@aibs.org), Craig Schiffries of the National Council for Science and the Environment (schiffries@NCSEonline.org), or Emily Lehr Wallace of the American Geological Institute (elw@agiweb.org) or visit www.USGScoalition.org.