

USGS Coalition

American Congress on Surveying
and Mapping
American Fisheries Society
American Geological Institute
American Geophysical Union
American Institute of Biological
Sciences
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Civil
Engineers
American Water Resources
Association
Association of State Floodplain
Managers
California Institute of Technology
Crop Science Society of America
Earthquake Engineering Research
Institute
Ecological Society of America
Geological Society of America
Incorporated Research Institutions
for Seismology
Interstate Council on Water Policy
National Association of State
Universities & Land Grant
Colleges
National Biological Information
Infrastructure
National Council for Science and
the Environment
National Ground Water
Association
National Institutes for Water
Resources
National Mining Association
National Science Collections
Alliance
NatureServe
Ornithological Council
Seismological Society of America
Society of Economic Geologists
Soil Science Society of America
Southern California Earthquake
Center
The Wildlife Society
University of Southern California
Water Environment Federation
Western State Seismic Policy
Council

Testimony of the USGS Coalition
Craig Schiffries and Robert Gropp, Co-Chairs

Regarding the U.S. Geological Survey
FY 2007 Budget Request

To the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
March 16, 2006

Summary

The USGS Coalition urges Congress to increase the budget of the U.S. Geological Survey to \$1.2 billion in FY 2007.

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

From 1996 to 2006, total federal spending for research and development has risen by 55 percent from \$87 billion to \$134 billion in constant dollars. By contrast, real 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.

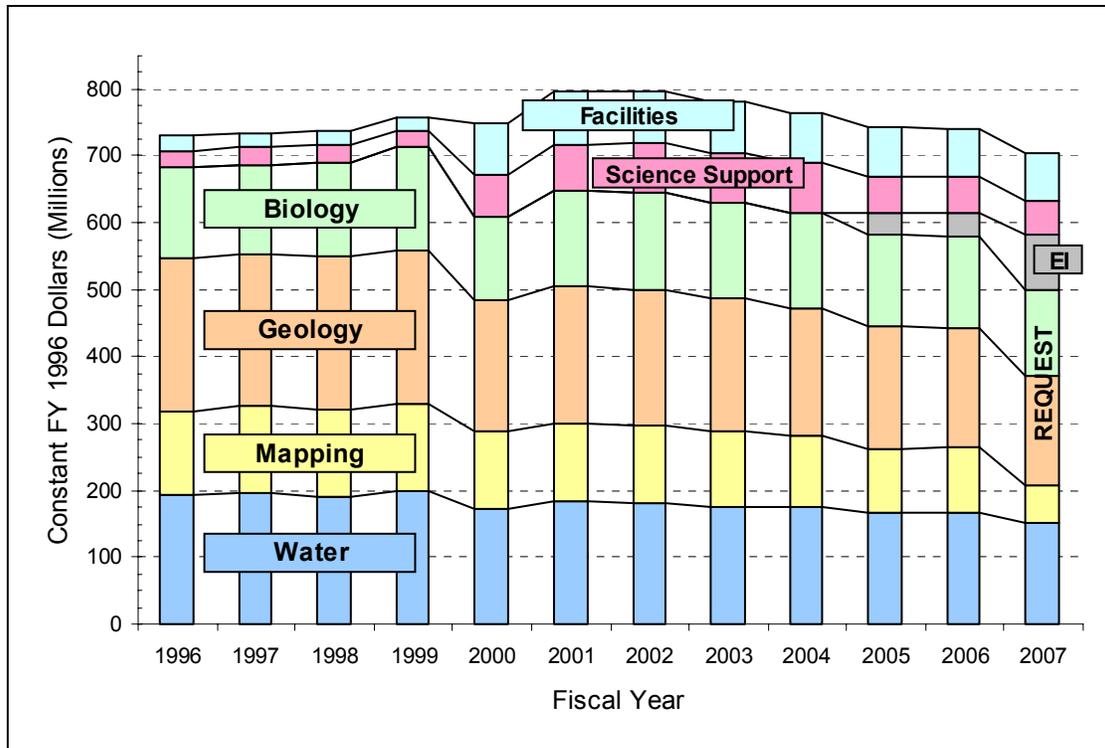


Figure 1. USGS funding in constant dollars, FY 1996 – FY 2007. EI is the Enterprise Information account. Source: USGS Budget Office.

The need for USGS science in support of decisionmaking has never been greater. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the USGS was praised for quickly arriving on the scene and providing specialized geospatial maps to locate victims trapped in flooded neighborhoods and support rescue efforts. The USGS provided water level and flow measurements from stream gages for the dewatering of New Orleans and performed health-based water quality and sediment analyses throughout the Gulf Coast.

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. Research on ecosystem structure and function assists forest and rangeland managers with forecasting fire risk and managing natural systems following fires.

After a series of devastating natural disasters during the past two years, 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.

Equally as important as natural hazards, natural resources—from energy to freshwater supplies—captured the public’s attention in 2005. The USGS conducts essential assessments of water levels, flow rates and quality, and of mineral, coal, oil and natural gas resources. USGS biologists assess wildlife populations, such as through the bird-banding program, that provide land managers with data needed to effectively manage fishing and hunting, as well as public

lands for healthy wildlife populations. These comprehensive assessments are among the most reliable source of data for natural resource management at a national level.

The potential for an avian flu pandemic remains a global concern. The USGS is conducting targeted surveillance of aquatic birds for avian flu in North America. Other biological programs assess the health, distribution, and diversity of wildlife and provide information necessary to track and respond to infectious diseases that can be transmitted from wildlife to people. Still other programs help sustain land and water resources and monitor the spread of invasive species that can pose significant economic threats.

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 said: “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” (S.Rpt. 108-341).

USGS Budget Request

The USGS Coalition urges Congress to increase the budget of the U.S. Geological Survey to \$1.2 billion in FY 2007, which is necessary for the agency to continue providing critical information to the public and to decisionmakers at all levels of government. The recommended budget increase would enable the USGS to restore the science cuts proposed in the budget request, accelerate the timetable for deployment of critical projects (such as the National Streamflow Information Program), 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 President’s FY 2007 budget request would cut funding for the USGS by \$20.6 million or 2.1 percent to \$944.8 million. The budget request would add \$40.1 million in new programs and fixed costs, which would be offset by redirecting \$50.7 million from lower priority activities and eliminating \$10.0 million in earmarked funds, according to USGS budget documents.

The USGS budget request would provide funding for several initiatives, including a multi-hazards pilot initiative, development of Landsat 8, increased energy research, and testing for avian influenza in wild birds as part of an expanding detection effort. These initiatives deserve the support of Congress.

The USGS budget request would cut \$22.0 million from the Mineral Resources program, a 41.7 percent decrease in funding that would decimate the program. The budget request would also eliminate the entire \$6.4 million budget for the Water Resources Research Institutes, which are located in all 50 states. These and other 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 Mineral Resources program is an essential source of unbiased research on our mineral resources. This guidance is important to reduce the environmental impacts of mining and to maintain the growing value of processed materials from mineral resources that accounted for \$478 billion in the U.S. economy in 2005, an increase of 8 percent over the previous year. The proposed cuts would terminate multidisciplinary research that has important implications for public health (such as studies on mercury, arsenic and other inorganic toxins), environmental protection, infrastructure, economic development, and national security.

The Water Resources Research Institutes have been highly successful in developing cooperative programs that leverage federal investments with funds from other sources. The proposal to eliminate all funding for this partnership is inconsistent with guidance from the House Appropriations Committee: “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” (H.Rpt. 108-542).

The USGS budget request includes an increase of \$20.7 million for non-discretionary “fixed cost” increases (such as salaries and rent), of which \$15.2 million are budgeted and \$5.5 million are “absorbed.” The cumulative effect of absorbing fixed cost increases over many years 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 could increase our vulnerability to natural disasters and increase the costs of recovery.

In addition to restoring 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, implement important bioinformatics programs, 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 require additional information or to learn more about the USGS Coalition, please contact co-chairs Robert Gropp of the American Institute of Biological Sciences (rgropp@aibs.org) or Craig Schiffries of the National Council for Science and the Environment (schiffries@NCSEonline.org).