

USGS Coalition

Prepared Remarks

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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about the President's fiscal year (FY) 2011 budget request for the United States Geological Survey (USGS). The USGS Coalition urges Congress to provide at least \$1.3 billion for the USGS in FY 2011.

Before I address the current budget request, I would like to thank the members of the subcommittee and recent subcommittee chairmen for your efforts on behalf of the USGS. Over the years, Congress has worked in a bipartisan manner to restore budget cuts that have been proposed by President's from both parties. Through the leadership of members of this committee, some programs within USGS have received important funding that has helped the agency better meet its mission.

I am here in my capacity as co-chair of the USGS Coalition. The Coalition is an alliance of more than 70 organizations united by a commitment to the continued vitality of the unique combination of biological, geological, hydrological and mapping programs of the USGS. The USGS Coalition works to raise the profile of the USGS and to promote an appropriate 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.

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.

Since it was established by an act of Congress 131 years ago, the USGS has served the nation. The USGS provides reliable and objective scientific information to describe and understand the Earth (physical and living systems), minimize loss of life and property from natural disasters,

and assist others in managing water, biological, geological, geographical, and other natural resources. It is the science agency for the Department of the Interior, but USGS personnel and products contribute substantially to the broader scientific enterprise. The USGS is an internationally respected natural science agency.

The USGS is essential to our collective ability to understand and resolve complex problems. The unique blend of scientific and technical disciplines within the USGS enables the agency to strategically leverage expertise to address many of our most pressing scientific questions, such as those associated with global climate change, environmental stewardship, natural hazards, and energy production.

In recent years, various reports from the National Academies, National Science Foundation, and others have argued that interdisciplinary approaches are required to answer our most challenging science questions, such as those related to climate change, environmental stewardship, and energy production. Importantly, the USGS has the expertise to develop cross-disciplinary teams capable of addressing these challenges. The FY 2011 budget request includes funding for several of these important initiatives – the New Energy Frontier Initiative, the Climate Change Adaptation Initiative, the WaterSMART Program, and the Treasured Landscapes Initiative.

Funding Shortfall

The USGS budget declined in real dollars from FY 2001 to FY 2008 (Figure 1). Although funding has increased slightly from FY 2008 to present, when considered in constant dollars funding for the USGS remains below the annual levels appropriated in fiscal years 2001, 2002, and 2003. The decline in funding for the USGS during this time period would have been greater if Congress had not repeatedly restored proposed budget cuts.

As announced by the Office of Science and Technology Policy on February 1, 2010, the federal, non-defense research and development budget is slated to grow by 5.9 percent in FY 2011. In contrast, the proposed increase for the R&D component of the USGS budget is approximately 2.9 percent and the overall growth rate for the USGS budget is 1.9 percent. However, these potential increases are overstated. The proposed budget would cut funding for some on-going research efforts and, importantly, fails to fund \$13.5 million in fixed cost increases. When just this \$13.5 million cost is deducted from the proposed budget increase of \$21.6 million, the real funding increase is a mere \$8.1 million – most of which would be applied to new initiatives.

USGS Budget Request

For FY 2011, the President has requested \$1.1 billion for the USGS. This represents a \$21.6 million increase over the FY 2010 enacted level. The budget request includes funding for important new initiatives in the areas of renewable energy, climate change, water availability and use, natural hazards, and Landsat. Further, the budget places an emphasis on science that will assist managers in ensuring the long-term vitality of wildlife and habitat as energy and alternative energy resources are developed on Federal lands and the Outer Continental Shelf;

contribute research to enhance ecosystems-based management of coastal resources; enhance multi-disciplinary work related to climate change; and ensure the initial phase of the establishment of Landsat ground stations.

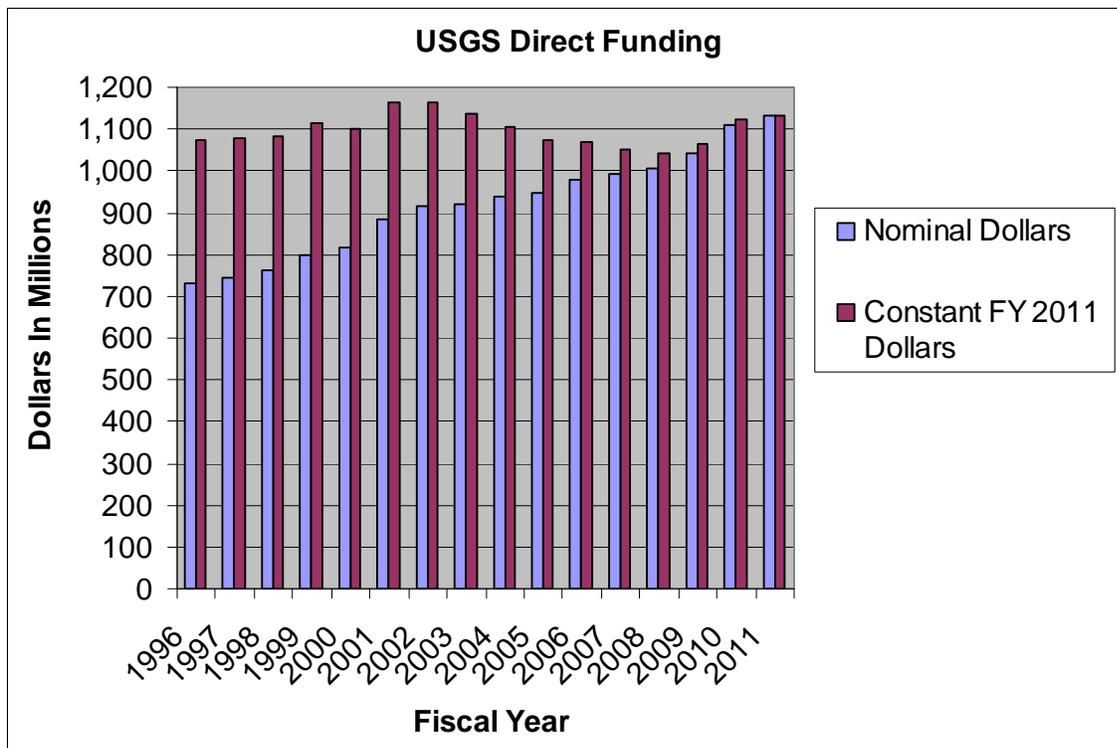


Figure 1. USGS funding in nominal and constant 2011 dollars, FY 1996 – FY 2011. FY 2011 numbers are for the President’s request. Data from USGS Budget Office.

The budget includes requests for important new funding for various cross-cutting initiatives and for the Geologic and Geographic research programs. Unfortunately, cuts are proposed to other important existing program areas, including \$3.5 million from the Water Resources Discipline, \$3.7 million from the Biological Resources Discipline, and \$4.5 million from Enterprise Infrastructure.

Of great concern, the budget fails to fund fixed cost increases. According to USGS budget documents, agency programs will absorb \$13.5 million in fixed costs. At this level, these expenses effectively reduce the proposed budget increase of \$21.6 million to \$8.1 million. Scientific and monitoring programs at the USGS have undoubtedly suffered in recent years as budget requests have repeatedly failed to fully fund fixed cost increases.

USGS Coalition Recommendation for FY 2011

The USGS Coalition requests that the subcommittee appropriate at least \$1.3 billion to the USGS in FY 2011. The FY 2011 budget recommended by the USGS Coalition would enable the USGS

to meet the tremendous need for science in support of public policy decision-making. The increased investment is needed to restore proposed cuts to on-going research and monitoring efforts, fully fund important new initiatives, and fully fund uncontrollable (fixed) cost increases.

The USGS Coalition is grateful to the House Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee for its leadership in restoring past budget cuts and strengthening the USGS. We look forward to working with you in the future to ensure that the USGS has the funds required to deliver the world-class science and products that inform decisions across the nation every day.