



Written Testimony American Geosciences Institute

Testimony Submitted by
American Geosciences Institute
Wilson Bonner and Maeve Boland
Geoscience Policy Program

To the United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations

April 24, 2013

Thank you for this opportunity to provide the American Geosciences Institute's perspective on fiscal year (FY) 2014 appropriations for geoscience programs within the Subcommittee's jurisdiction. We ask the Subcommittee to support and sustain the critical geoscience work of the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the National Park Service, and the Smithsonian Institution. **Specifically, we ask support for the President's request for \$1.167 billion for USGS, \$246 million for the National Park Service's Natural Resource Stewardship and Everglades Restoration activities, and \$869 million for the Smithsonian Institution.**

The Earth provides the energy, mineral, water, and soil resources that are essential for a thriving economy, national security, and a healthy population and environment. We must understand the Earth system in order to sustain and improve our quality of life and the quality of the environment, while reducing risks from natural hazards. The USGS is the nation's only natural resource science agency that can provide the objective data, observations, analyses, assessments, and scientific solutions to these intersecting Earth-focused needs.

AGI is a nonprofit federation of 48 geoscientific and professional associations that represent approximately 250,000 geologists, geophysicists, and other earth scientists who work in industry, academia, and government. Founded in 1948, AGI provides information services to geoscientists, serves as a voice of shared interests in our profession, plays a major role in strengthening geoscience education, and strives to increase public awareness of the vital role the geosciences play in society's use of resources, resilience to natural hazards, and the health of the environment.

U.S. Geological Survey

AGI urges support of USGS at least at the level of the President's budget request of \$1.167 billion. We endorse the use of \$18.6 million for science-based hydraulic fracturing studies that will be coordinated with other agencies. We strongly urge you to reject proposed cuts of \$5 million to the nationally important Mineral Resources Program which has suffered budget cuts for more than a decade.

USGS addresses a wide range of important problems facing the nation including natural hazards, water resources, waste disposal, environmental change, and energy and mineral resources. USGS plays a prominent and unique role in providing the impartial geoscience information needed to grow the economy, build a skilled workforce, and foster a natural resource-literate public. USGS geoscience data and understanding should be incorporated more fully into actions for balanced and sustainable development.

Mineral Resources Program (MRP): AGI strongly supports the President's request for an additional \$1 million for rare earth element research activities and \$1.13 million for high-priority research on critical minerals. This work will help to strengthen the economy and national security. But we are deeply concerned by proposed cuts of \$5 million to ongoing MRP activities. The proposed reduction of \$1.157 million to minerals information activities is particularly puzzling. The MRP is the world's leading source of statistical information on current production and consumption of about 100 mineral commodities, both domestically and globally, covering approximately 180 countries. MRP data and analyses are used by the Department of the Interior, Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Department of State, the Federal Reserve, other federal, state and local government entities, foreign governments, private companies, and the general public to guide economic and strategic decision making. Additional proposed cuts of \$3.8 million to MRP research and assessment activities will drastically curtail the flow of information on mineral resources for land planning, economic development, and mineral policy decision making. There are no alternative public or private sources for this information. **Please reverse all cuts to the Mineral Resources Program and provide \$50 million for minerals information and research in the national interest.**

Hydraulic Fracturing: AGI supports USGS work to better understand the scientific aspects of hydraulic fracturing, to reduce potential impacts, and to provide decision-support information. We are pleased to note the collaboration between USGS, the Department of Energy, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. **We support the allocation of \$18.6 million for scientific research on this economically important technology.**

Water Resources Program: AGI is pleased to see a modest overall increase in funding for Water Resources activities at USGS but we are concerned with the decreased funding in the President's request for several elements of the Program. The USGS is the nation's premier federal water science agency and knowledge about water quality and quantity is necessary for economic growth and land-use planning. Eliminating \$5.5 million in grants to more than 250 applied research and information transfer projects under the Water Resource Research Act Program will affect university water resource education and research and weaken our future workforce. The nation needs more information on the quantity and quality of our water resources; we should be investing more, not less, in water assessment activities.

We respectfully ask that funding for the Methods Development and Assessment in the National Water Quality Assessment Program, for Interpretative Studies/Assessments in the Cooperative Water Program, and for annual base grants under the Water Resource Research Act Program be maintained at FY 2013 levels.

National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) and Other Natural Hazards: A key role for the USGS is providing the research, monitoring, and assessment that are critically needed to better prepare for and respond to natural hazards. The tragic 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan; the deadly 2013 earthquakes and landslides in Sichuan, China; and the economically damaging disruption of air travel after the 2010 eruption of Eyjafjallajökull remind us of the need for preparation, education, mitigation and rapid response to natural hazards.

With great forethought, the Earthquake Hazards Reduction Authorization Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-503) called for modernization of existing seismic networks and for the development of the Advanced National Seismic System (ANSS)—a nationwide network of shaking measurement systems focused on urban areas. ANSS can provide real-time earthquake information to emergency responders as well as building and ground shaking data for engineers and scientists seeking to understand earthquake processes and mitigate damage. With 2,564 of 7,100 stations in operation at the end of 2012, the ANSS is far from achieving its goals. Critical investments now will help to reduce earthquake risks; help to create jobs and grow the economy by improving and modernizing seismic networks and the built environment; help support external earthquake research and education efforts; and help to support other major earthquake science initiatives. Given all of these factors, now is the time to increase investments in USGS-NEHRP through the Earthquake Hazards Program. **AGI strongly supports reauthorization and funding of NEHRP in the 113th Congress.**

AGI supports robust appropriations of at least the President’s request for the Earthquake Hazards Program (\$57.9 million), the Volcano Hazards Program (\$24.7 million) and Landslide Hazards Program (\$3.7 million).

National Cooperative Geologic Mapping Program (NCGMP): AGI is very grateful to Congress for passing the re-authorization of the National Cooperative Geologic Mapping Program in the 2009 public lands omnibus (P.L. 111-11, Sec. 11001). This important 20-year-old partnership between the USGS, state geological surveys, and universities provides the nation with fundamental data for addressing natural hazard mitigation, water resource management, environmental remediation, land-use planning, and raw material resource development. **AGI thanks the committee for its previous support for the National Cooperative Geologic Mapping Program and requests a total of \$28.3 million in FY 2014.**

National Geological and Geophysical Data Preservation Program (NGGDP): The data preservation program (Public Law 109-58, Sec. 351) is administered by the U.S. Geological Survey in partnership with state geological surveys and other stakeholders. Private and public entities collect geologic and geophysical data in the form of paper records, digital files, and physical samples. Often these data and samples are given to state geological surveys either voluntarily or because of regulatory statutes. These data are worth far more than the cost of preserving them because they provide information about natural resources and natural hazards that are used by others for business or safety. The program generates more value in terms of economic development, environmental stewardship, hazard mitigation and fulfilling regulatory requirements than it costs to run.

The President's budget request for FY 2014 places the NGGDPP and the Biological Information Management and Delivery Program within a single subactivity called Science Synthesis, Analysis, and Research. **AGI supports a modest increase of \$100,000 over the FY 2012 estimate for a total appropriation of \$2 million.**

Smithsonian Institution

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History plays a dual role in communicating the excitement of the geosciences and enhancing knowledge through research and preservation of geoscience collections. AGI asks the Subcommittee to provide steady funding to cutting-edge Earth science research at the Smithsonian Institution. **We support the President's request of \$869 million for the Smithsonian Institution in FY 2014.**

National Park Service

The national parks are very important to the geoscience community and the public as unique national treasures that showcase the geologic splendor of our country and offer unparalleled opportunities for research, education, and outdoor activities. The National Park Services' Geologic Resources Division was established in 1995 to provide park managers with geologic expertise. Working in conjunction with USGS and other partners, the division helps ensure that geoscientists are becoming part of an integrated approach to science-based resource management in parks. **AGI supports the President's request for \$236 million for Natural Resource Stewardship activities and \$10 million for Everglades Restoration so the NPS can adequately address the treasured geologic and hydrologic resources in the National Parks.**

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony to the Subcommittee. If you would like any additional information for the record, please contact Maeve Boland at 703-379-2480, ext. 228 voice, 703-379-7563 fax, mboland@agiweb.org, or 4220 King Street, Alexandria VA 22302-1502.