

National Council for Science and the Environment

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**Testimony of the
NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE AND THE ENVIRONMENT
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**Regarding the
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY and
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
FY 2006 Budget Request**

**To the
United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies
April 29, 2005**

Summary

The National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE) urges Congress to appropriate \$1.0 billion for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in FY 2006, an increase of 7.1 percent over the FY 2005 enacted level. For the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), NCSE urges Congress to appropriate at least \$790 million for the Science and Technology account, including at least \$100 million for the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) research grants program and \$10 million for the STAR graduate fellowship program, as well as \$10 million for the Office of Environmental Education.

As a result of the committee's recent reorganization, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies now has broader jurisdiction over environmental research and education. NCSE commends the subcommittee for its past bipartisan leadership in support of science to improve environmental decisionmaking. We ask for your continued leadership in addressing pressing national challenges by appropriating strong and growing funding for environmental research and education at the USGS, EPA, and other agencies under the subcommittee's expanded jurisdiction.

The National Council for Science and the Environment is dedicated to *improving the scientific basis for environmental decisionmaking*. We are supported by over 500 organizations, including universities, scientific societies, government associations, businesses and chambers of commerce, and environmental and other civic organizations. NCSE promotes science and its essential role in decisionmaking but does not take positions on environmental issues themselves.

U.S. Geological Survey

The vital importance of the USGS in protecting public safety was highlighted by the tragic loss of life caused by the tsunami that was triggered by a great earthquake beneath the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004. Investments in the USGS pay enormous dividends by reducing risks from earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, landslides, and other natural hazards.

As a founding member and co-chair of the USGS Coalition, NCSE joins with 68 other organizations in recommending an appropriation of \$1.0 billion for the U.S. Geological Survey in FY 2006, an increase of 7.1 percent above the FY 2005 enacted level. This increase would enable the USGS to restore the science cuts proposed in the budget request, accelerate the 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 shortfall that has left the USGS budget stagnant for the past decade.

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 NCSE. The budget request would cut \$28.7 million from the Mineral Resources program, a devastating 53 percent decrease in funding. 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 that helps guide economic development of natural resources and protection of the environment. 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 Mineral Resources 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 complement NOAA's effort to enhance and expand the tsunami warning system to detect any tsunami that might strike anywhere along the U.S. coast. 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 uses. 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 pilot studies to assess ground-water depletion in the western United States, strengthen ecosystem studies in the Puget Sound, and address other important issues. These initiatives deserve the support of Congress.

The USGS budget request would provide \$17.2 million to fully fund 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 further 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 provide additional increases that would enable the USGS to meet the tremendous need for science in support of 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.

During the past ten years, total federal spending for non-defense R&D has risen by 64 percent in constant dollars. By contrast, R&D funding for the USGS has remained nearly flat over the past decade after adjusting for inflation. Even this flat funding for the USGS reflects congressional restoration of proposed budget cuts.

We encourage Congress to provide the USGS with a budget that will allow for the modest growth necessary to address emerging needs for science. After years of stagnant funding and absorption of uncontrollable cost increases, the USGS has a large and growing backlog of monitoring and science needs. The National Council for Science and the Environment urges Congress to appropriate \$1.0 billion for the USGS in FY 2006. This investment will help the USGS improve monitoring networks, strengthen partnerships, produce high-quality data, and deliver impartial science that serves the needs of the nation.

Environmental Protection Agency

The National Council for Science and the Environment urges Congress to appropriate a minimum of \$790 million for EPA’s Science and Technology account, including at least \$100 million for EPA’s Science to Achieve Results (STAR) research grants program and \$10 million for EPA’s STAR graduate fellowship program. NCSE also urges Congress to restore full funding for the Office of Environmental Education at a level of at least \$10 million. In order to fulfill its mission, EPA needs increased investments in both its intramural and extramural research programs.

The FY 2006 budget request for the STAR programs is \$63.3 million, which is 39.5 percent below the FY 2004 request of \$104.7 million. The budget for the research grants program has been on a steady decline despite extremely positive reviews from the National Academy of Sciences. The budget for the graduate fellowships has oscillated between \$5 million and \$10 million in recent budget cycles. These programs deserve strong and stable funding.

Last year, Rep. Vernon Ehlers, Chairman of the House Science Subcommittee on Environment, Technology and Standards, convened a hearing to examine the proposed cuts to EPA’s STAR programs. He concluded, “I have not heard a convincing reason today for why the STAR

program was cut so dramatically. By all accounts, it is a well-run, competitive, peer reviewed program that produces high quality research. These proposed reductions should not be allowed to take effect.” We believe the same is true today. NCSE recommends a minimum appropriation of \$100 million for the EPA STAR research grants program in FY 2006, the same funding level proposed in the President’s FY 2004 budget request.

Deep budget cuts to the EPA STAR program have been proposed less than two years after the National Academies issued a laudatory report, *The Measure of STAR*, which concludes that the program supports excellent science that is directly relevant to the agency’s mission. According to the report, the STAR program has “yielded significant new findings and knowledge critical for regulatory decision making.” The report says, “The program has established and maintains a high degree of scientific excellence.” It also concludes, “The STAR program funds important research that is not conducted or funded by other agencies. The STAR program has also made commendable efforts to leverage funds through establishment of research partnerships with other agencies and organizations.”

The EPA STAR research program compares favorably with programs at other science agencies. According to the National Academies report, “The STAR program has developed a grant-award process that compares favorably with and in some ways exceeds that in place at other agencies that have extramural research programs, such as the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.”

The STAR research grants program expands the scientific expertise available to EPA by awarding competitive grants to universities and independent institutions, to investigate scientific questions of particular relevance to the agency’s mission. The National Academies report says, “The STAR program should continue to be an important part of EPA’s research program.”

NCSE urges Congress to appropriate at least \$10 million for the STAR graduate fellowship program in FY 2006. This is the only federal program aimed specifically at students pursuing advanced degrees in environmental sciences. According to the National Academies report, “The STAR fellowship program is a valuable mechanism for enabling a continuing supply of graduate students in environmental sciences and engineering to help build a stronger scientific foundation for the nation’s environmental research and management efforts.” The STAR fellowship program is highly competitive, with only 7 percent of applicants being awarded fellowships. This level of funding is insufficient to allow all students whose applications are rated as excellent to receive fellowships.

The President’s budget request has proposed deep cuts in the STAR graduate fellowship program in recent years. The budget request would have cut funding for the STAR graduate fellowship program by 50 percent in FY 2004 and by 100 percent in FY 2003. Congress restored full funding for the EPA STAR graduate fellowship program in both years. NCSE encourages Congress to restore full funding for the program again in FY 2006.

The FY 2006 budget request proposes no funding for the EPA Office of Environmental Education. NCSE strongly encourages Congress to restore full funding of at least \$10 million to support the congressionally mandated programs administered by this office. These programs provide national leadership for environmental education at the local, state, national and international levels, encourage careers related to the environment, and leverage non-federal investment in environmental education and training programs.