

Opening Statement – Chairman Gosar
November 30, 2017
Legislative hearing on 4 bills

Today, the Subcommittee will hear testimony on four bills related to geologic hazards and resources.

The Enhancing Geothermal Production on Federal Lands Act, sponsored by Mr. Labrador, addresses the long-established topic of how critical a stable, affordable domestic energy supply is to our nation's economic health. Geothermal energy, generated as superheated water below the earth's surface is released as steam, is a clean, sustainable energy source for both direct-use and electricity production.

Despite its usefulness and promise, geothermal energy faces multiple obstacles to development. In particular, 90% of viable geothermal resources exist on federally managed lands, making its availability dependent on federal regulations. The Enhancing Geothermal Production on Federal Lands Act amends the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970, incentivizing development by easing the regulatory burden at exploration sites, allowing for coproduction of geothermal resources on land leased for oil and gas, and permitting noncompetitive leasing on adjacent federal lands for geothermal energy production. As Congress continues to pursue an all-of-the-above energy strategy, boosting the efficiency and affordability of renewable energy has become increasingly important. This bill is a substantial step forward in utilizing a valuable renewable energy source.

H.R. 4033, sponsored by Mr. Lamborn, reauthorizes the National Geologic Mapping Act through 2023 and keeps the authorization level equal to the current level.

The Geologic Mapping Act of 1992 established the National Cooperative Geologic Mapping Program. This program was designed to foster cooperation and coordination between the United States Geological Survey and the State Geologic Surveys in generating geologic maps in a cost-effective manner.

Each state has an advisory committee made up of the end-users of the geologic maps to ensure that areas with the highest priority are selected. More than 8,500 new geologic maps have been produced through this program. To date, 49 states and Puerto Rico have participated in this program, producing geologic maps for approximately 53% of the U.S.

These geologic maps provide valuable information needed for identifying energy, mineral and water resources, and hazards such as active faults, unstable ground subject to landslides, swelling soils, floodplains, and abandoned mine lands. Understanding the sub-surface geology and soil profiles can facilitate better planning for infrastructure projects. Monies expended in this program reap significant economic benefits and produce a good return on investment to the taxpayer.

The National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System Act, sponsored by Mr. Young of Alaska, strengthens volcano monitoring and early warning to help keep communities and travelers safe. Recently, we have seen how a volcano in Indonesia led to the mass evacuations of over 100,000 people and brought air traffic to a halt. Significant loss of human life could have resulted without the ability to detect the warning signs of an eruption.

This bill strengthens existing volcano monitoring systems, which include the Alaska Volcano Observatory, the Cascades Volcano Observatory, and the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory, and would unify them into a single connected system called the National Volcano Early Warning System. These observatories monitor, warn, and help protect citizens and travelers from volcanic activity, particularly from high-threat volcanoes.

H.R. 1675, sponsored by Ms. DelBene, directs the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to establish a National Landslide Hazards Reduction Program to identify and understand landslide hazards and risks, reduce losses from landslides, and protect human life.

The Oso landslide tragedy in Washington state, which killed 43 people, highlighted the severity of landslide hazards. But landslides are geologic hazards that exist in all 50 states and the U.S. territories. USGS estimates that landslides account for \$1- 2 billion in damages and an average of 25 fatalities every year. As expansion of urban and recreational development occurs, more and more people are exposed to potential impacts from landslide hazards. Landslides are often triggered by other events like heavy storms, earthquakes, volcanic activities, and wildfires. Puerto Rico recently experienced more than its share of landslides during the recent hurricanes. When choosing how and where to rebuild, a program like this can help the future loss of life and property.

Critical to understanding landslide hazards is good mapping. To this end, H.R. 1675 establishes a national 3D Elevation Program (3DEP) to produce 3D elevation data for the U.S. 3DEP would have value not only for assessing landslide hazards but also for identifying energy, mineral and water resources, geologic and environmental hazards such as active faults and seismic areas, unstable ground subject to landslides, swelling soils, floodplains and abandoned mine lands.