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The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS): Background and FY2026 Appropriations

Background

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), in the Department of the Interior (DOI), provides scientific information to support the management of water, energy, mineral, ecosystem, and land resources and to mitigate risks from natural hazards. The USGS also collects long-term data to understand and report on the Earth's geologic and ecosystem processes, using satellite imagery, mapping, and ground-based instruments. The USGS is not a regulatory agency and does not manage federal lands.

Congress created the USGS in 1879 in the USGS Organic Act (43 U.S.C. §31). The USGS Organic Act defined the initial scope of the USGS:

> [The Director of the USGS] shall have the direction of the United States Geological Survey, and the classification of the public lands and examination of the geological structure, mineral resources, and products of the national domain.

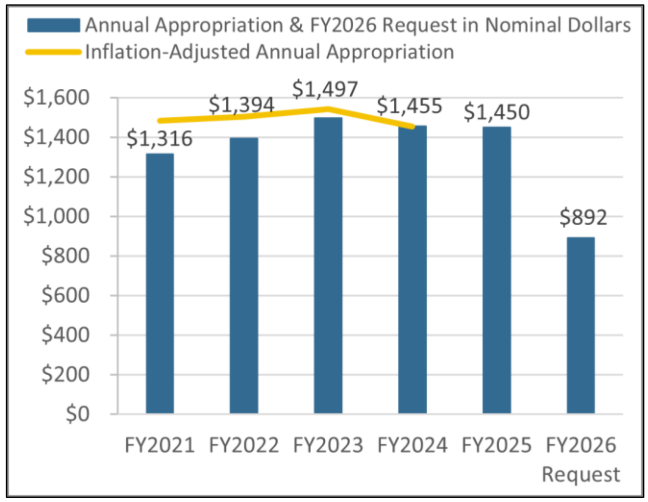
Since then, Congress has expanded the USGS's statutory authority to "such examinations outside the national domain where determined by the Secretary [of the Interior] to be in the national interest." Under this authority and additional congressional direction, the USGS now also conducts activities related to water resources, ecosystems, and natural hazards that span the globe. The USGS conducts scientific activities under interdisciplinary mission areas, and each mission area has its own budget line. The USGS also has budget lines for Science Support (administrative activities and information) and Facilities. Congress typically appropriates funds for the USGS under its Surveys, Investigations, and Research account in annual Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations acts.

FY2026 Budget Request

President Trump's FY2026 budget request for the USGS is $891.6 million. The request is $558.6 million less (-39%) than FY2025 annual appropriations of $1.450 billion provided by the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (P.L. 119-4). For the USGS, the budget request "eliminates programs that provide grants to universities, duplicate other Federal research programs and focus on social agendas (e.g., climate change)." The budget states that the USGS would "focus on achieving dominance in energy and critical minerals."

Figure 1. USGS Annual Appropriations, FY2021-FY2025, and FY2026 Budget Request

(in millions)



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on enacted appropriations laws and the President's FY2026 budget request.

Notes: The dollar amounts labeled correspond to nominal dollars. The yellow line shows inflation-adjusted FY2020-FY2024 amounts in FY2024 dollars using U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, "Table 3.9.4. Price Indexes for Government Consumption Expenditures and Gross Investment." FY2025 and FY2026 figures are not adjusted.

Mission Area and Budget Line Funding

On May 30, 2025, DOI published its *FY2026 Interior Budget in Brief*, which includes highlights of proposed changes for USGS mission areas, budget lines, and a few selected programs for FY2026 compared with previous fiscal years. In the Budget in Brief, figures for FY2024 reflect "actual funding" for the fiscal year and the FY2025 figures are labeled as "notional." In passing FY2025 appropriations, Congress did not include an accompanying report or explanatory statement for P.L. 119-4 to detail FY2025 funding for USGS mission areas, budget lines, and programs. In the Budget in Brief, the Administration specifies that the FY2025 notional figures are estimates and that the "President reserves his authority under the 'Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025' (P.L. 119-4) to revise spending within the amounts provided by Congress" (i.e., within the $1.450 billion for the USGS).

Ecosystems Mission Area. The FY2026 USGS budget request would eliminate the Ecosystems mission area, which was funded at $292.9 million for FY2025. This mission area conducts biological and ecological science to inform natural resource management decisions through its five programs and its cooperative research units. Science activities conducted under the Ecosystems mission area include research related to invasive species, wildlife management, ecosystem restoration, climate change, and environmental contaminants, among other focuses. The Budget in Brief explains that a reason for proposed elimination is "so that the bureau can focus on high priority energy and minerals activities."

Geology, Energy, and Minerals Mission Area. The budget request also proposes creation of a new mission area—Geology, Energy, and Minerals—in the USGS. The Budget in Brief states that the reorganization combines geologic data and mapping activities with activities conducted under the existing Energy and Minerals mission area. Under the current Energy and Minerals mission area, the USGS conducts scientific research and assessments for energy and minerals and analyzes and forecasts critical mineral supply chains. The request states that the proposed funding of $137.1 million for the Geology, Energy, and Minerals mission area would support Executive Orders 14154 and 14241, "Unleashing American Energy" and "Immediate Measures to Increase American Mineral Production," respectively. Under the reorganized mission area, Energy Resources funding would increase from $34.7 million for FY2025 to $36.9 million for FY2026, while Mineral Resources funding would decrease from $75.4 million to $69.9 million.

Natural Hazards, Water Resources, and Core Science Systems Mission Areas. Other proposed changes for the USGS highlighted in the Budget in Brief include funding reductions for the remaining mission areas. The Natural Hazards mission area would decrease in funding from $196.1 million for FY2025 to $136.5 million for FY2026 (-30%). The document states that the request "maintains Earthquake Hazards funding for core national earthquake monitoring and reporting capabilities." The budget requests $223.8 million for the Water Resources mission area, a reduction from its FY2025 funding of $288.8 million (-22%). The request would support artificial intelligence and machine-learning approaches for USGS's water models and assessments, and it would "maintain support for USGS streamgages." Funding for the Core Science Systems mission area would decrease from $228.0 million for FY2025 to $165.0 million for FY2026 (-28%). Under this mission area, the budget would restructure the Landsat Next mission by working with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration "to identify more affordable ways to maintain the continuity of Landsat data."

Science Support and Facilities. The budget request would also reduce funding for its remaining budget lines. Science Support would decrease in funding from $105.0 million for FY2025 to $80.0 million for FY2026 (-24%). Funding for Facilities would decrease from $184.1 million for FY2025 to $149.1 million for FY2026 (-19%).

Congressionally Directed Spending

For FY2022 through FY2024, appropriations acts included Member-requested funding for geographically specific activities. The House Appropriations Committee refers to such funding requests Community Project Funding (CPF), whereas the Senate Appropriations Committee designates this funding as Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS). The Senate FY2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill would have funded five CDS requests totaling $4.5 million under the USGS's account; however, the final measure, P.L. 119-4, did not fund any CPF/CDS requests. For FY2026, the Senate Appropriations Committee again allowed Members to request CDS items for the USGS's account, whereas the House Appropriations Committee did not allow CPF requests for the account.

Supplemental Appropriations for FY206

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA; P.L. 117-58) provided the USGS supplemental appropriations of $510.7 million, $64.0 million of which are first made available in FY2026. This FY2026 IIJA funding is for the Earth Mapping Resource Initiative (Earth MRI), which Congress first funded in 2019. DOI states that funding for Earth MRI from regular and supplemental appropriations has supported the USGS, partnering with 40 states, to more than triple its coverage of high-resolution data that can support assessments of critical mineral resources and other national resource applications.

Issues for Congress

Congress may examine how the FY2026 budget request, which proposes decreasing USGS's funding by 39% compared with FY2025, would shape the focus of the agency's scientific activities. DOI's Budget in Brief provides topline request levels for USGS's mission areas and budget lines but does not detail requested funding levels for most activities and programs. Congress may seek further information from the Administration regarding the requested funding levels for specific USGS activities, including which ones—if any—the request would eliminate in addition to those under the Ecosystems mission area.

President Trump's budget request proposes restructuring the USGS. As previously stated, the request would eliminate the Ecosystems mission area. The Secretary of the Interior testified that this mission area's activities were not part of the original scope of USGS and that they may be "better suited to be in U.S. Fish and Wildlife." In addition, the budget request proposes creating a new Geology, Energy, and Minerals mission area to support the USGS's "Map, Baby, Map! mission" and the Administration's energy and minerals agenda. Some stakeholders instead support the USGS's current structure and activities. USGS activities supported by such stakeholders include those that are authorized by Congress and those that are funded based on appropriations direction. As such, Congress may consider the priorities and scope of the USGS's activities and mission areas when crafting appropriations legislation and accompanying direction for FY2026 funding. In addition, Congress may consider what, if any, statutory authorities to amend or enact to shape USGS activities.

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