

Testimony in Support of Increased FY 2009 Funding for
United States Geological Survey

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Submitted by:

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Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
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The American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) encourages Congress to provide the United States Geological Survey (USGS) with at least \$1.3 billion for fiscal year (FY) 2009. Within this amount, we encourage you to provide at least \$230 million for the programs of the Biological Resources Discipline.

AIBS is a nonprofit scientific association dedicated to advancing biological research and education for the welfare of society. Founded in 1947 as a part of the National Academy of Sciences, AIBS became an independent, member-governed organization in the 1950s. AIBS is sustained by a robust membership of some 5,000 biologists and nearly 200 professional societies and scientific organizations; the combined individual membership of the latter exceeds 250,000. AIBS advances its mission through coalition activities in research, education, and public policy; publishing the peer-reviewed journal *BioScience* and the education website ActionBioscience.org; providing scientific peer review and advisory services to government agencies and other clients; convening meetings; and managing scientific programs.

The USGS provides independent research, data, and assessments needed by public and private sector decision-makers. A unique combination of biological, geographical, geological, and hydrological research programs enables USGS scientists to utilize innovative interdisciplinary research techniques to answer important questions. For instance, USGS data inform our understanding of how species and ecological systems may respond to climate change and how ecological systems might help ameliorate the effects of environmental change. Moreover, the USGS collects data that other federal agencies and nongovernmental scientists do not collect. We cannot afford to sacrifice this information; rather, we should increase our investments in this work.

USGS scientists work collaboratively and are vital members of the research community. Through offices and science centers located in every state and partnerships with more than 2,000 federal, state, local, tribal, and private organizations, the USGS has built the capacity to leverage additional research expertise. For example, through the Cooperative Research Units program USGS scientists are stationed at universities. This proximity to academic researchers heightens the intellectual and technical resources devoted to answering biological and natural resource questions. Cooperative Research Units are a vital component of our nation's education and training infrastructure, helping to develop the skills that graduate students need to become the natural resource professionals that government agencies require.

Natural resource managers demand reliable, relevant, and timely information. The Biological Informatics Program develops and applies innovative technologies and practices to the management of biological data, information, and knowledge. Increased funding for the USGS would enable the Biological Informatics Program to continue ongoing activities and begin to implement initiatives that the resource management and research communities have identified as priorities. For example, the National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) program, managed under the Biological Informatics program, provides scientists and managers better access to existing data. NBII connects diverse, high-quality biological databases, information products, and analytical tools maintained by NBII partners and other contributors in government agencies, academic institutions, non-government organizations, and private industry.

In the President's FY 2009 budget request, NBII was cut by \$2.9 million. This cut is likely to have significant negative impacts on the program. Full funding for NBII would allow for the establishment of new system nodes and support of existing system nodes, such as the National Framework for Early Detection, Rapid Assessment, and Rapid Response to Invasive Species (EDDR). The EDDR framework assists scientists and resource managers in correctly identifying invasive species, which cost the U.S. \$138 billion each year in health care, lost income, and environmental consequences.

The NatureServe program provides the scientific basis for wise natural resources management. Through a network of state Natural Heritage programs, NatureServe provides valuable information about rare species and threatened ecosystems. The NatureServe partnership provides numerous federal and state agencies with the information needed to make informed natural resource management decisions. The

NatureServe and NBII programs are vitally important for resource managers at the federal and state levels and should be fully funded and supported. We encourage Congress to restore cuts to NBII; however, not at the expense of other programs.

Biological science programs within the USGS gather long-term data not available from other sources. This data has contributed fundamentally to our understanding of bird migratory patterns and the status and dynamics of biological populations, and it has improved our understanding of how ecosystems function. This array of research expertise not only serves the core missions of the Department of the Interior, but also contributes to management decisions made by other agencies and private sector organizations. In short, increased investments in these important research activities will yield dividends.

The USGS is uniquely positioned to address many of the nation's biological and environmental challenges, including energy independence, climate change, water quality, and conservation of biological diversity. USGS research in biology and ecosystem science provides data on the potential impacts to ecosystems that could result from global climate change or from land management practices. Additional studies conducted by the USGS in global change indicate that sea-level rise will continue to impact coastal areas. These studies will provide critical data for resource managers as they develop adaptive management strategies for restoration and long-term use of the nation's natural resources.

Funding for the USGS has remained flat for nearly a decade. The situation is even worse when the budget is adjusted for inflation. The President's FY 2009 budget request for the USGS is \$969 million, \$38 million below the FY 2008 enacted budget and more than \$6 million below the FY 2008 operating plan. Despite inadequate budget requests from the present and prior Administrations, Congress has demonstrated its recognition of the importance of USGS science by restoring proposed cuts. In response, the USGS has made every effort to be responsible stewards of public funds and has sought to leverage its limited human and financial resources to the greatest extent possible.

There is growing concern from within the government and outside that funding for the USGS must improve if it is to continue to serve its mission. Without an increased investment in USGS science, core missions and national priorities will suffer. Thus, any effort that Congress can make to fundamentally improve funding for the USGS will be appreciated.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request.