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U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Natural Resources

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Opening Statement of

Chairman Doug Lamborn

Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources

On Tuesday, March 24, 2015

1334 Longworth House Office Building

Oversight Hearing on "*Examining the Spending Priorities and Mission of the U.S. Geological Survey in the President's FY 2016 Budget Proposal.*"

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DAVID WATKINS
DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

We are here today to consider the President's proposed fiscal year 2016 budget and missions for the U.S. Geological Survey.

I'd like to thank the acting Director and her staff for reaching out and briefing the Members of my subcommittee and their staff on the President's FY-2016 budget proposal for the USGS. I know that took time and commitment on your part to visit as many offices as you did.

I see that the 2016 budget request for the USGS is \$1.2 billion, an increase of \$149.8 million and 207 FTE (full time employees) from the 2015 enacted level -- somewhat unexpected when our National debt is so high.

Just as a reminder, the Survey was founded on March 3, 1879 for the purpose of classifying public lands and to examine geologic structures, mineral resources, and products within and outside the national domain. While that mission has expanded to cover about every resource; in fact if I remember correctly several years ago I compared it to Genesis and acknowledged the USGS has taken on the responsibility for the entire world: the rocks, waters, animals, and air. It sounds like an incredibly daunting job and a lot of mission creep.

Currently the only authorized program at USGS is the "National Cooperative Geologic Mapping Program" a partnership program with the various State Geological Surveys. Most other programs under the jurisdiction of this subcommittee are justified by the short but seemingly all encompassing 'organic act' from the 1879 appropriations law.

While many of the programs are meritorious and provide great value to the American Taxpayer, no one in the 1870s would have dreamed of the technological capabilities that we have today.

These might include the development of an Earthquake Early Warning System that received an increase in 2015 through the appropriations process or the 3D Elevation Program (3DEP) **initiative** - 3D elevation data is collected using light detection and ranging referred to as lidar - **initiative** being the operative word here.

Then there's the request for an increase of \$8.6 million for the All-of-the-Above Energy **initiative**, which includes helping with the development of 'unconventional oil and gas resources' and the environmental impact of uranium mining.

'Unconventional oil and gas development' has been ongoing for a couple of decades or more and the environmental impact of uranium mining, or any mining for that matter, has been understood for decades and has to be addressed in the permitting process by the land management agencies or entities issuing the operating permits.

Then there is the request for an increase of \$1.4 million that would allow the USGS to conduct research to identify likely areas of potential geothermal resource exploration and development – something that the private sector is willing to pay the American taxpayer handsomely for the opportunity to do – they only ask that their projects be permitted in a timely manner.

Under the Climate and Land Use Change program area you request an increase of \$55.8 + million and an additional 58 FTEs over the 2015 enacted level. While a significant portion of this increase, \$29.6 million, would be dedicated to upgrading Landsat – a program that I support very strongly – most of the increase in FTEs, 56, are slotted for climate and land use change.

I do want to thank you for your work on the minerals program to monitor rare earth elements and other critical minerals. Your effort to alert agencies when a supply constraint may be approaching is helpful.

I could go on regarding specific requests in the budget but I will finish by reminding us, including the Administration, that baseline geologic information allows the United States to make informed decisions on how to best reduce our dependence on foreign sources of fuel and non-fuel mineral resources improving our economic and national security.

We're not going to be able to manage our ecosystems, monitor our water or rebuild after a natural disaster without these important natural resources. But, the USGS needs to avoid mission creep, which only dilutes the valuable work you should be doing.

I look forward to hearing from our witness today.