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The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS): Background and FY2025 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 has no regulatory authority 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 1879, 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" (43 U.S.C. §31(b)). This expansion has included 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 (see **Table 1**). 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 through annual Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations acts and, in some years, has provided supplemental appropriations.

FY2025 Annual Appropriations

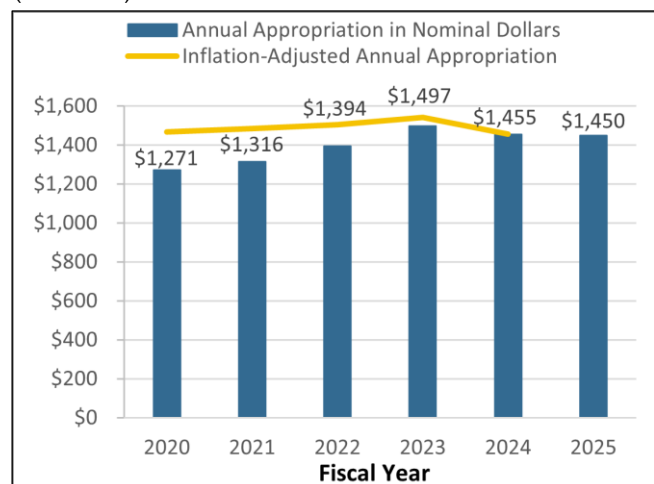
President Biden's budget request for USGS annual appropriations in FY2025 was \$1.578 billion, \$122.9 million more than FY2024 annual appropriations of \$1.455 billion provided by P.L. 118-42, Division E (an 8% increase). The House passed its FY2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill (H.R. 8998) on July 24, 2024. That bill contained \$1.376 billion for the USGS. The next day, the Senate Appropriations Committee reported its FY2025 measure (S. 4802); the bill would have appropriated \$1.482 billion.

The Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (P.L. 119-4), enacted on March 15, 2024, appropriated \$1.450 billion for the USGS (**Figure 1**). The FY2025 appropriation is \$128.1 million less than President Biden's FY2025 budget request and \$5.2 million less than

FY2024 annual appropriations. The FY2024 law had contained \$5.2 million for congressionally directed spending items under the "Special Initiatives" line item. P.L. 119-4, Division A, Section 1111, provides that the law does not include funding for FY2024 "earmarks."

Figure 1. USGS Annual Appropriations, FY2020-FY2025

(in millions)



Source: Congressional Research Service, based on enacted appropriations laws.

Note: The yellow line shows FY2020-FY2024 amounts as adjusted for inflation to FY2024 dollars, using U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, "Table 3.9.4. Price Indexes for Government Consumption Expenditures and Gross Investment" (accessed March 2025).

P.L. 119-4 generally provides that appropriations for FY2025 for the USGS (among other agencies) are at the same rates and under the same terms and conditions as enacted in P.L. 118-42, Division E, unless otherwise specified. P.L. 118-42, Division E, specified funding for USGS satellite operations (\$95.3 million) and deferred maintenance and capital improvement projects that exceed \$100,000 in cost (\$74.8 million). P.L. 119-4 did not specify other USGS funding allocations. Instead, Division A, Section 1113, generally directed departments and certain agencies to submit spending, expenditure, or operating plans to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, at the program, project, or activity level or any greater level of detail required for FY2024. Such FY2025 plans, often referred to as *operating plans*, are due not later than 45 days after enactment of P.L. 119-4.

In earlier action, committee reports accompanying House and Senate FY2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bills recommended funding levels

for USGS budget lines and for certain activities within budget lines. For example, the House committee report (H.Rept. 118-581) recommended decreases for every budget line compared with FY2024 appropriations, except for a \$10.0 million increase for Core Science Systems. Conversely, the Senate committee report (S.Rept. 118-201) recommended increases for every budget line, except for a \$12.4 million decrease for Facilities, and included \$4.5 million for congressionally directed spending items.

Table 1. USGS Funding: FY2024 and FY2025 Enacted Annual Appropriations and FY2025 Budget Request
(nominal \$, in millions)

Budget Line	FY2024 Enacted	FY2025 Requested	FY2025 Enacted
Ecosystems	299.4	326.1	NA
Energy and Mineral Resources	101.1	120.3	NA
Natural Hazards	198.6	210.6	NA
Water Resources	288.8	309.6	NA
Core Science Systems	273.2	313.0	NA
Science Support	105.0	118.2	NA
Facilities	184.1	180.4	NA
Total	1,455.4	1,578.3	1,450.2

Sources: FY2025 U.S. Geological Survey budget justification; explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 118-42; and P.L. 119-4.

Note: NA = Not available. The FY2024 enacted total includes \$5.2 million in congressionally directed spending items funded under a separate line item called Special Initiatives. The FY2025 request amounts do not add to the total listed due to rounding. For FY2025 enacted, P.L. 119-4 did not specify how USGS appropriations would be allocated to budget lines.

FY2025 Supplemental Appropriations

In some years, Congress has provided funding to the USGS through supplemental appropriations acts. For example, Division J, Title VI, of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA; P.L. 117-58) provided the USGS emergency supplemental appropriations of \$510.7 million, \$69.0 million of which are first made available in FY2025. This total includes \$64.0 million for the Earth Mapping Resource Initiative (Earth MRI) and \$5.0 million for the National Geological and Geophysical Data Preservation Program. The IIJA funding for the USGS is to support

scientific studies that address critical mineral information and geological data preservation.

The American Relief Act, 2025 (P.L. 118-158), Division B, Title VII, provided the USGS emergency supplemental appropriations of \$2.7 million for FY2025 for “necessary expenses related to the consequences of natural disasters occurring in and prior to calendar year 2024.” This amount was requested by the Biden Administration on November 24, 2024, to repair or replace streamgages and seismic monitoring stations in Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee that were damaged during Hurricane Helene and to restore data lost while the streamgages were offline.

Selected Issues for Congress

In general, Congress may be interested in how FY2025 appropriations for the USGS are allocated across budget lines and activities within the agency. Under P.L. 119-4, as noted, DOI is required to transmit to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees a plan with detailed information on allocations.

Congress may examine how implementation of FY2025 appropriations influences the direction of the USGS’s mission. Some stakeholders contend that the agency’s mission has expanded beyond the scope of its original focus on mapping, geology, water monitoring, and energy and mineral resources. They assert that funding certain areas that reflect the USGS’s broader mission, such as ecosystem research, may result in lower funding and reduced efforts devoted to early USGS endeavors. In contrast, others contend that the USGS has expanded its scope due to congressional program direction and appropriations, such as for natural hazard monitoring.

The debate on the USGS mission centers on the agency’s authority to conduct various activities. The USGS has interpreted the Organic Act’s authority to the Director as providing flexibility to carry out a wide variety of scientific activities that address issues of national significance. Further, the Secretary of the Interior has used the USGS to help meet departmental statutory requirements. Among others, issues for Congress might include whether the USGS is meeting or exceeding its authorities in conducting scientific activities in nontraditional subject areas, whether to amend the agency’s statutory authorities, and whether to fund only activities with specific authorities.

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