



Updated March 27, 2024

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS): Background and FY2024 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.

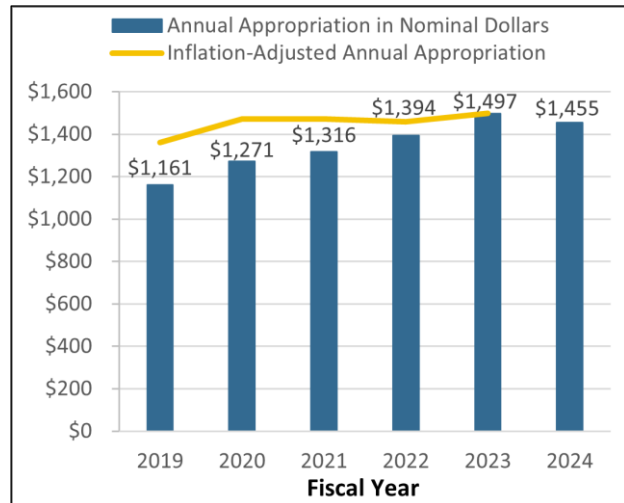
Since 1879, Congress has expanded the USGS’s statutory authority to “such examinations outside the national domain where determined by the Secretary [of the Interior] to be in the national interest.” This expansion has included activities related to water resources, ecosystems, and natural hazards that span the globe. The USGS conducts scientific activities under interdisciplinary mission areas, and each mission area has its own budget line (see **Table 1** for mission areas). The USGS also has budget lines for Science Support (administrative activities and information) and Facilities. Congress typically appropriates funds for the USGS through annual Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations acts. For FY2024, issues for Congress included determining the amount, terms, and conditions of funding for USGS activities and whether to enact related Biden Administration proposals.

USGS FY2024 Annual Appropriations

P.L. 118-42 appropriated \$1.455 billion to the USGS for FY2024 under Division E, the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2024. FY2024 annual appropriations were \$330.1 million below the FY2024 President’s budget request of \$1.786 billion and \$41.7 million below the FY2023 enacted level of \$1.497 billion (a 3% decrease; **Figure 1**). For FY2024, P.L. 118-42 appropriated less funding for all mission areas and budget lines compared with FY2023 enacted levels and the FY2024 President’s budget request (**Table 1**). However, not all activities within mission areas or budget lines were decreased, as per the examples provided in sections below. As part of the FY2024 appropriations, Congress included four congressionally directed spending items, also known as earmarks, for the USGS, totaling \$5.2 million, under “Special Initiatives.”

Figure 1. USGS Annual Appropriations, FY2019-FY2024

(in millions)



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

Notes: The yellow line shows FY2019-FY2023 amounts as adjusted for inflation to FY2023 dollars, using FY2025 Budget of the U.S. Government, Historical Tables, Table 10.1.

Table 1. USGS Funding: FY2023 and FY2024 Annual Appropriations and FY2024 Budget Request
(nominal \$, in millions)

Mission Area or Budget Line	FY2023 Enacted	FY2024 Requested	FY2024 Enacted
Ecosystems	307.2	395.0	299.4
Energy and Mineral Resources	104.2	150.8	101.1
Natural Hazards	200.3	226.2	198.6
Water Resources	304.4	313.4	288.8
Core Science Systems	284.6	368.6	273.2
Science Support	106.3	134.2	105.0
Facilities	188.1	197.5	184.1
Total	1,497.2	1,785.5	1,455.4

Sources: FY2024 U.S. Geological Survey budget justification and explanatory statements accompanying P.L. 117-328 and P.L. 118-42.

Note: Table figures do not add to totals shown due to rounding and congressionally directed spending items in FY2023 (\$2.1 million) and FY2024 (\$5.2 million).

The following sections summarize FY2024 annual appropriations for USGS mission areas and budget lines.

Ecosystems Mission Area

The Ecosystems mission area conducts biological and ecological science to inform natural resource management decisions through five programs and cooperative research units. P.L. 118-42 decreased FY2024 annual appropriations for the mission area by \$7.8 million compared with FY2023 appropriations; the FY2024 President's budget had requested a 29% increase. All five programs received less FY2024 appropriations compared with FY2023, while the Cooperative Research Units received the same amount (\$28.3 million). The explanatory statement recommended appropriations for certain activities under the programs at the same levels as FY2023. For example, the National and Regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers, which are university-based research centers that help resource managers understand and adapt to climate change, received the same appropriations as FY2023 (\$63.1 million).

Energy and Mineral Resources Mission Area

The Energy and Mineral Resources mission area includes scientific research and assessments related to energy and minerals. P.L. 118-42 decreased FY2024 annual appropriations for the mission area by \$3.1 million compared with FY2023; the FY2024 President's budget requested a 45% increase. While both the Energy Resources Program and the Mineral Resources Program received decreased appropriations compared with FY2023, the explanatory statement recommended the same level of appropriations for certain activities, such as the Earth Mapping Resources Initiative (Earth MRI) and critical mineral mapping in Alaska. The explanatory statement also encouraged the USGS to develop geologic mapping to study lithium resources and recovery.

Natural Hazards Mission Area

The Natural Hazards mission area provides scientific information to reduce losses from natural hazards. P.L. 118-42 decreased FY2024 annual appropriations for the mission area by \$1.6 million compared with FY2023; the FY2024 President's budget requested a 13% increase over the FY2023 enacted level, mostly for the Coastal and Marine Hazards and Resources Program. Three programs received the same appropriations as FY2023: the Earthquake Hazards Program (\$92.7 million), the Volcano Hazards Program (\$37.5 million), and the Landslide Hazards Program (\$14.4 million). The remaining three programs received decreased appropriations.

Water Resources Mission Area

The Water Resources mission area monitors water resources and researches water processes. P.L. 118-42 decreased FY2024 annual appropriations for the mission area by \$15.7 million compared with FY2023; the FY2024 President's budget requested a 3% increase over FY2023 appropriations. The Water Resources Research Act Program, a federal-state partnership that conducts regional water research, received the same appropriations as FY2023 at \$15.5 million. Cooperative matching funds for cost-shared activities across the mission area also received the same appropriations as FY2023 at \$66.5 million. While all

other programs in the mission area received less appropriations compared with FY2023, the explanatory statement recommended appropriations for various activities under these programs at the same level as FY2023, including federal priority streamgages at \$25.7 million and the Next Generation Water Observing System at \$29.5 million. The explanatory statement also encouraged the USGS to build workforce capacity and expertise for the water resources sector.

Core Science Systems Mission Area

The Core Science Systems mission area generally focuses on the USGS's mapping activities and supports science across the agency. The mission area includes the National Land Imaging Program, which operates Landsat satellites, among other activities. P.L. 118-42 decreased FY2024 annual appropriations for the mission area by \$11.4 million compared with FY2023; the FY2024 President's budget requested a 30% increase. All programs under the mission area received decreased appropriations compared with FY2023; however, some activities under these programs, such as the 3D Elevation Program, received the same appropriations as FY2023. The explanatory statement did not specify what, if any, appropriations were provided for certain activities under the mission area as requested by the Administration. For instance, the FY2024 President's budget requested an increase of \$30.0 million for a high-performance computing initiative to advance USGS science data delivery and an increase of \$34.6 million to create a federal climate data portal and an atlas to inform decisions for the Administration's America the Beautiful Initiative.

Science Support and Facilities Budget Lines

The Science Support budget line includes funding to provide business services and information technology management to operate USGS science programs. Congress decreased FY2024 annual appropriations for the budget line area by \$1.3 million compared with FY2023; the FY2024 President's budget requested a 26% increase. Both Administration and Management Services received decreased appropriations compared with FY2023. The Facilities budget line includes funding for rent, facility operations and maintenance, and deferred maintenance and repair. P.L. 118-42 decreased FY2024 annual appropriations for the budget line area by \$4.0 million compared with FY2023; the FY2024 President's budget requested a 5% increase. Under the budget line, Deferred Maintenance and Capital Improvement received the same funding as FY2023 at \$74.8 million.

Supplemental Appropriations

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA; P.L. 117-58) provided the USGS supplemental appropriations of \$510.7 million, \$69.0 million of which are first made available in FY2024. This total includes \$64.0 million for 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 USGS has provided information on how it plans to spend its IIJA funding.

Anna E. Normand, Specialist in Natural Resources Policy

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