National Council for Science and the Environment

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Testimony of the
NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE AND THE ENVIRONMENT
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Regarding the
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY and
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
FY 2008 Budget Request

To the
UNITED STATES SENATE
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
April 26, 2007

Summary

The National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE) urges Congress to appropriate $1.2 billion for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in FY 2008. NCSE recommends a minimum appropriation of $700 million for EPA's Office of Research and Development (bringing it back to FY 2004 levels), including at least $150 million for EPA's Science to Achieve Results (STAR) research grants program and $20 million for EPA's STAR graduate fellowship program. NCSE recommends a total of $900 million for EPA's Science and Technology account. NCSE also urges Congress to restore full funding for the Office of Environmental Education at a level of at least $10 million.

The National Council for Science and the Environment is dedicated to *improving the scientific basis for environmental decisionmaking*. We are supported by over 500 organizations, including universities, scientific societies, government associations, businesses and chambers of commerce, and environmental and other civic organizations. NCSE promotes science and its essential role in decisionmaking but does not take positions on environmental issues themselves.

U.S. Geological Survey

The U.S. Geological Survey provides essential services for the nation yet suffers from a long-term funding shortfall. In real terms, funding for the USGS is currently at its lowest level since FY 1996, when the National Biological Service was first integrated into the USGS (Figure 1). The USGS budget has declined in real dollars for five consecutive years and is targeted for another budget cut in FY 2008. The President's budget request would cut funding for the USGS by approximately $8 million or 1 percent to $975 million in FY 2008.

As a founding member and co-chair of the USGS Coalition, NCSE joins with numerous other organizations in recommending an appropriation of $1.2 billion for the U.S. Geological Survey in FY 2008. This increase would enable the USGS to restore the science cuts proposed in the budget request, accelerate the timetable for deployment of critical projects, launch new science initiatives that provide the scientific basis for addressing emerging national needs, and begin to reverse the cumulative effects of the long-term funding shortfall that has left the USGS budget

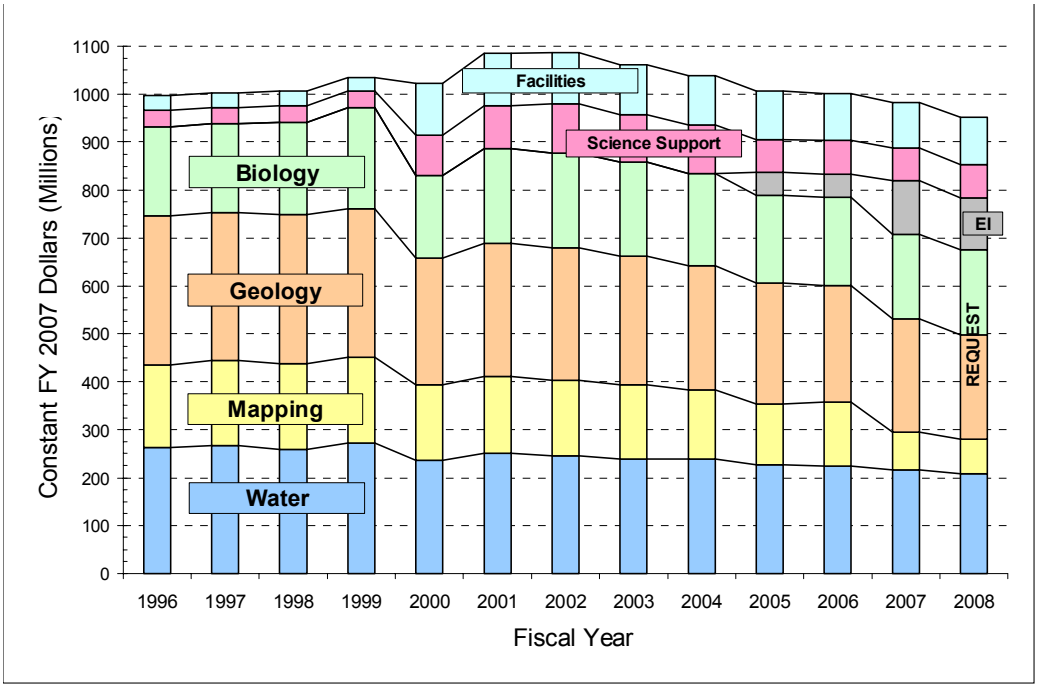

Figure 1. USGS funding in constant dollars, FY 1996 – FY 2008. EI is the Enterprise Information account. Data source: USGS Budget Office.

stagnant for the past decade. After years of stagnant funding and absorption of uncontrollable cost increases, the USGS has a large and growing backlog of science and monitoring needs.

The USGS provides essential services that address many of the nation's highest domestic priorities. A few examples are provided below:

- In the wake of recent floods, wildfires, earthquakes and hurricanes, there is a growing appreciation of the role of USGS science in preventing natural hazards from becoming natural disasters.
- As the nation grows increasingly concerned about energy, water, mineral and biological resources, it will rely increasingly on the USGS for resource assessments and understanding to improve the scientific basis for managing our natural resources.
- The potential for an avian flu pandemic remains a global concern, and the USGS is conducting targeted surveillance of birds for avian flu in North America. The USGS provides information necessary to track and respond to other infectious diseases that can be transmitted from wildlife to people. It also monitors the spread of invasive species that can pose significant economic threats.
- The USGS is poised to make greater contributions to climate change science by taking advantage of its unique multidisciplinary expertise and distributed geographic infrastructure to interpret the consequences of climate variability to the nation's ecosystems and land and water resources.
- The USGS is producing a new generation of digital geospatial data products that provide a virtual infrastructure for resource management, science, commerce, recreation, and homeland security.

Proposed budget cuts would adversely affect the ability of the USGS to achieve its mission. For example, more than $20 million would be cut from the Mineral Resources program, a

devastating decrease of more than 40 percent. The entire budget ($6.4 million in FY 2006) for the Water Resources Research Institutes, which are located in all 50 states, would be eliminated. We encourage Congress to restore these and other cuts proposed in the FY 2008 budget request, but this funding should not come at the expense of other high priority programs elsewhere in the USGS.

The USGS benefits every American every day. It deserves the continued support of Congress. NCSE is grateful to Congress for its past support of the USGS and for restoring proposed budget cuts. More investment is needed to strengthen USGS partnerships, improve monitoring networks, produce high-quality digital geospatial data and deliver the best possible science to serve the needs of the nation.

Environmental Protection Agency

EPA's research and development portfolio has declined while the nation's environmental challenges continue to grow. In order to fulfill its mission, EPA needs increased investments in both its intramural and extramural science programs, as well as such associated services as environmental education and information. EPA's strategic plan calls for science-based decisionmaking, but the agency will be unable to achieve this goal if its capacity to conduct science is not improved.

EPA's funding for R&D is at its lowest level in nearly two decades in real dollars and would fall even further under the President's budget request for FY 2008 (Figure 2). After several years of steady declines, EPA's R&D funding level in FY 2008 would be 27 percent below the FY 2004 funding level in real dollars, according to data compiled by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. EPA's extramural research grants program has suffered disproportionate budget cuts since FY 2002.

NCSE recommends a minimum appropriation of $700 million for EPA's Office of Research and Development (bringing it back to FY 2004 levels), including at least $150 million for EPA's STAR research grants program and $20 million for EPA's STAR graduate fellowship program. NCSE recommends a total of $900 million for EPA's Science and Technology account. NCSE also urges Congress to restore full funding for the Office of Environmental Education at a level of at least $10 million.

EPA created the extramural Science to Achieve Results (STAR) program as part of a set of reforms proposed by the National Academy of Sciences in the 1990s. The STAR program provides EPA with an opportunity to take better advantage of the intellectual and scientific resources of the academic community and apply these resources to the challenges faced by EPA. The STAR program has been widely praised. The National Academies issued a laudatory report, *The Measure of STAR*, which concludes that the program supports excellent science that is directly relevant to the agency's mission. According to the report, the STAR program has "yielded significant new findings and knowledge critical for regulatory decision making." The report says, "The program has established and maintains a high degree of scientific excellence." It also concludes, "The STAR program funds important research that is not conducted or funded by other agencies. The STAR program has also made commendable efforts to leverage funds through establishment of research partnerships with other agencies and organizations." The National Academies report says, "The STAR program should continue to be an important part of EPA's research program."

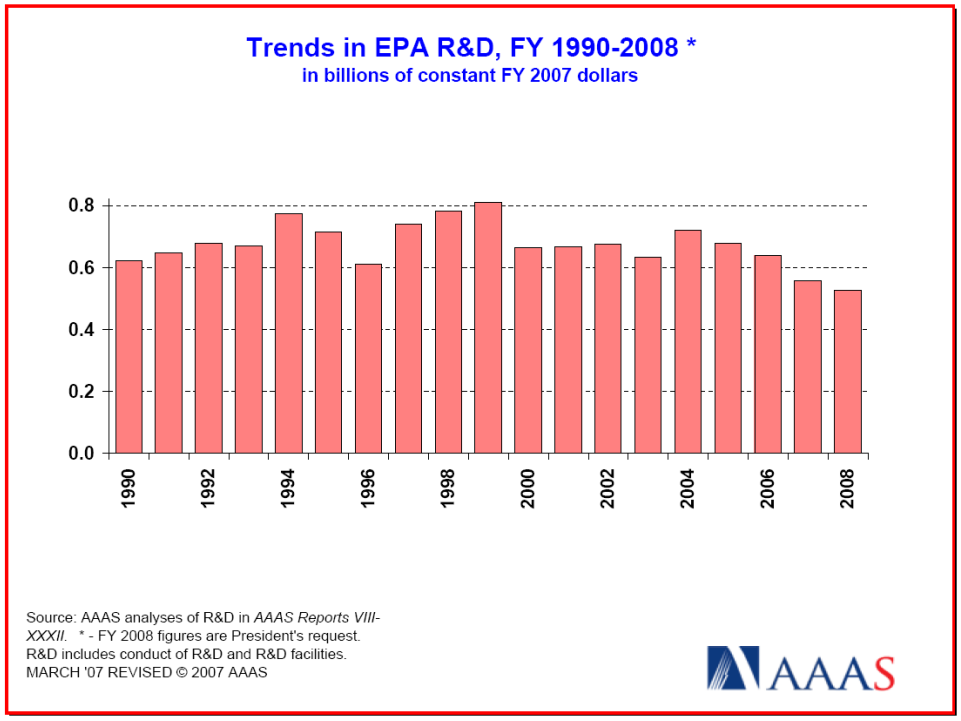

Figure 2. Trends in EPA R&D, FY 1990-2008 in constant dollars

Funding for the STAR program has been cut repeatedly over the past several years. The FY 2008 request for the STAR programs (including fellowships) is $61.9 million, which is approximately 44 percent below the FY 2002 level of $110 million and 28 percent below the FY 2004 level of $85.5 million. NCSE proposes that the STAR research budget be increased to $150 million, which would allow expansion of areas and scientists supported and would send a signal that Congress is serious about merit-based science for environmental decisionmaking.

EPA created the STAR graduate fellowship program to ensure a strong supply of future environmental scientists and engineers. It is the *only* federal program aimed specifically at students pursuing advanced degrees in environmental sciences. According to the National Academies, "The STAR fellowship program is a valuable mechanism for enabling a continuing supply of graduate students in environmental sciences and engineering to help build a stronger scientific foundation for the nation's environmental research and management efforts."

The STAR Graduate Fellowship program has been repeatedly proposed for budget cuts, only to be restored by Congress each year. The budget for the fellowship program has been slightly under $10 million for much of its 10 year history. NCSE recommends doubling the funding for STAR fellowships to $20 million, which can be accomplished without any decrease in the quality of the awardees.

The FY 2008 budget request again proposes no funding for the EPA Office of Environmental Education. NCSE strongly encourages Congress to restore full funding of at least $10 million to support the congressionally mandated programs administered by this office. These programs provide national leadership for environmental education at the local, state, national and international levels, encourage careers related to the environment, and leverage non-federal investment in environmental education and training programs.