

**ENVIRONMENTAL
PLANNING**

April 14, 1995

Honorable Pete V. Domenici
Chairman, Committee on the Budget
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510-6100

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Congress faces a daunting task as it seeks ways to reduce the Federal deficit. One budget cutting proposal being seriously considered would abolish the U.S. Geological Survey, the Federal government's principal source of scientific and technical expertise in the earth sciences.

The Minnesota Governor's Council on Geographic Information urges you not to support the wholesale elimination of the USGS. While understanding budget reductions are very likely, we recommend that Congress seriously work to identify those core agency missions that are indispensable assets to the nation. You may conclude that the existing structure needs reorganization, but we urge you to preserve those products and services that the USGS provides that we feel are so necessary and useful.

The Minnesota Governor's Council on Geographic Information, formed by executive order in 1991, promotes the wise use of resources by providing leadership in the development, management, and use of geographic information in the state. The Council is well qualified to evaluate the effectiveness of the USGS as it relates to geographic information policy and services. Four USGS program areas have been particularly valuable to the state of Minnesota:

Providing Information. The USGS plays a unique and essential role in providing maps, aerial photographs, geologic and hydrologic information to other federal agencies, state and local government, the private sector and the public. For more than 100 years, the USGS has set a standard for consistent, high-quality mapping of our nation's resources.

Today, these accurate maps form the cornerstone of a burgeoning technology called geographic information systems (GIS). The vast majority of information that state and local governments use daily is geographic; it deals with the location of features across the landscape and can be mapped. GIS technology makes it possible for government to automate the mapping process and analyze geographic information in ways not previously possible. These new capabilities allow government to more efficiently and effectively fulfill its responsibilities to taxpayers.

The digital data products of the USGS provide fundamental information that fuels GIS for state and local government. These products include data about land elevation, roads, water resources, and place names. Users have confidence in this information because of the consistently high quality they have come to expect from the USGS. Without the oversight, experience, and impartiality of this federal agency, development of these necessary data products could become inconsistent and unreliable, a condition that will severely diminish their value.

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Fostering Cooperation. The USGS has a long history of leveraging federal funds by cooperating with state agencies to satisfy mutual needs. In recognition of this spirit of cooperation, Minnesota Governor Arne H. Carlson presented the USGS with a certificate of commendation in 1994 for its partnership efforts with state agencies.

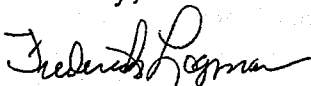
The long history of cooperation between the USGS and Minnesota serves as a fine example of how state and federal governments can work together, eliminating wasteful and expensive duplication of effort while better serving citizens. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, Minnesota and the USGS cooperated to finish medium scale topographic mapping for the state in a \$10 million collaborative effort. Over the past six years Minnesota's Legislature has invested half the \$6.5 million for cooperative projects with the USGS to make available new statewide aerial photography, convert much of that photography into a highly accurate computer-readable form, and update critical quadrangle maps. At the same time, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources engages in annual joint funding agreements with the USGS of up to \$1 million for ongoing water-related monitoring programs and resource studies. Looking ahead, the State Legislature is currently considering allocating \$560,000 over the next two years to complete state coverage of computer-readable aerial photography.

Developing Standards. Standards are crucial to information sharing. Data standards developed by the USGS through its own programs and through its lead role responsibilities on the Federal Geographic Data Committee have been invaluable to the Council. This work needs to continue to maximize the public benefit for geographic information.

Making Information Accessible. The USGS has been a national leader in making its information readily available, from the distribution of topographic maps to its World Wide Web home page on the Internet. The USGS EROS Data Center, in its first year of providing data files over the Internet, recorded more than 700,000 requests. It is important that this USGS service be continued and further developed.

We strongly support the coordination, program development, and scientific information gathering and distributing missions of the U.S. Geological Survey. While accepting the reality of budget cuts, we urge you to support these programs that serve our nation so well.

Sincerely,



Frederick Logman

Chair,

Minnesota Governor's Council on Geographic Information

Honorable Slade Gorton
Chairman, Subcommittee on Interior
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
Dear Mr. Chairman:
Honorable Slade Gorton

Honorable Robert Byrd
Subcommittee on Interior
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
Dear Senator Byrd:
Honorable Robert Byrd

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Dear Mr. Grams:
Honorable Rod Grams

Honorable Paul Wellstone
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Dear Mr. Wellstone:
Honorable Paul Wellstone

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Dear Mr. Gutknecht:
Honorable Gil Gutknecht

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Dear Mr. Minge:
Honorable David Minge

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Honorable William P. Luther

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Dear Mr. Peterson:
Honorable Collin Peterson

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Dear Mr. Oberstar:
Honorable James L. Oberstar