

Congress passes FY 2018 omnibus with record funding of geoscience agencies

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After a series of continuing resolutions to provide more time to craft a comprehensive appropriations omnibus bill for fiscal year (FY) 2018, Congress finally passed a \$1.3 trillion spending bill on March 23, 2018, that will fund the federal government through September 2018. The 2,232-page Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 with accompanying committee report language funds some of the priorities outlined in President Donald Trump's FY 2018 budget request, such as increased spending for military, infrastructure, border security, and solutions to the opioid epidemic, but mostly rejects the Trump Administration's proposed deep cuts to science agencies. Instead, many science agencies received increased funding reflecting the increased budget authority for FY 2018 non-defense discretionary spending agreed to last month in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018.

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The committee report acknowledges Members of Congress are aware that agencies are working to implement Executive Order 13781, a Comprehensive Plan for Reorganizing the Executive Branch, and highlights the longstanding requirements that agencies must submit reorganization proposals for committee review prior to their implementation. The report specifically directs agencies not to implement any part of a reorganization that modifies regional boundaries, unless they receive approval consistent with these guidelines.

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS):

The bill provides \$1.148 billion for the USGS – a \$63 million or 6 percent increase from the FY 2017 enacted level, and a \$230 million or 25 percent increase above the President's FY 2018 request of \$922 million. The Natural Hazards mission area received a 23 percent increase from FY 2017, mostly due to significant increases for the Earthquake and Volcano Hazards programs funded at \$83.4 million and \$42.6 million, respectively. Within this funding, the report language directs \$12.9 million for continued development of an earthquake early warning system and for the first limited public rollout of ShakeAlert, \$5 million for upgrades and replacement equipment for the Advanced National Seismic System, and \$1.4 million for adoption of seismic stations currently deployed as part of the National Science Foundation (NSF) Earthscope USArray project. It also directs the USGS to report back to Congress identifying specific areas of the country that are at highest risk from landslide hazards. Energy, Minerals, and Environmental Health received a 9 percent increase from FY 2017 levels with report language directing \$1 million toward the domestic mineral base survey, \$4.7 million for implementation of Secretarial Order 3352, which provides for development of energy resources in the National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska, and \$12.4 million for toxic substances hydrology supporting comprehensive research on harmful algal blooms.

Core Science Systems received essentially flat funding at \$116.3 million, which includes \$23 million for 3D Elevation Program (3DEP) National Enhancement and continued flat funding of \$24.4 million for the National Cooperative Geologic Mapping Program. For Water Resources, the omnibus bill provided a modest increase of two percent that includes funding directed towards groundwater resource studies and streamgages. Congress accepted the Administration's proposal for restructuring and renaming the Climate and Land Use Change mission area to Land Resources, providing \$152.5 million for this mission area. Landsat 9 is fully funded at \$78.5 million and funding is provided for the eight regional science centers and grant awards. Furthermore, Congress allocated \$120 million for Facilities, including more than double the amount appropriated for deferred maintenance in

FY 2017 with an allowance of \$11.8 million for moving from the Menlo Park location.

Other Interior Agencies:

The FY 2018 omnibus provides \$1.33 billion for Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which is a \$79 million increase above the FY 2017 enacted level and \$110 million above the President's FY 2018 request. This amount includes \$1.17 billion for Management of Lands and Resources, with increases providing for improved rangeland and multiple-use management and responsible natural resource development activities. Additionally, the committee report notes their concern about maintaining the United States' global competitiveness in the production of natural soda ash, and directs BLM to consider using its authority to reduce the Federal royalty rate for soda ash to 2 percent.

The request for the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) efforts to initiate a new five-year offshore leasing program is fully funded and the committee report language encourages an expeditious and thorough review. The appropriations committees do not approve of the proposal in the President's budget request to divert outer continental shelf oil and gas revenues from Gulf of Mexico coastal communities. The FY 2018 omnibus also appropriated \$3.19 billion for the National Park Service (NPS), an increase of \$255 million above the FY 2017 enacted level. This includes a \$175 million increase for construction backlog, maintenance, and funding for new park units.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):

Rejecting President Trump's FY 2018 proposed cuts of 31 percent to the EPA, Congress retained the EPA's funding at the FY 2017 enacted level of \$8.1 billion. Accordingly, EPA's Science and Technology program remains flat at \$706 million. The bill retains or increases funding for the EPA's geographic programs, which were targeted for elimination by the President's request. The bill also provides additional funding for high priority permitting, infrastructure, and cleanup work. Dismissing EPA's proposal for agency-wide workforce restructuring, Congress emphasizes in report language that it does not expect the EPA to consolidate or close any regional offices nor undertake large-scale adverse personnel actions or incentive programs in FY 2018.

Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies

National Science Foundation (NSF):

Overall, Congress appropriated \$7.77 billion for NSF, an increase of \$295 million or 4 percent above FY 2017 enacted level and \$1.1 billion above the President's budget request. Report language justified this strong investment in basic science research due to Congress' growing concern that China and other competitors are outpacing the United States in terms of research spending, as noted in the 2018 Science and Engineering Indicators report. Research and Related Activities received \$6.3 billion – an increase of 5 percent from FY 2017 – which includes \$1.8 million for the Antarctic Infrastructure Modernization for Science program. The committee report language also reiterated the importance of ensuring that NSF-funded marine research vessels with unique seismic capabilities remain available to the academic marine geology and geophysics community to support a variety of important undersea research efforts. Major Research and Equipment Facilities Construction received a 13 percent decrease in funding to \$182.8 million, with \$10 million for continuing construction of three Regional Class Research Vessels.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA):

The bill provides NOAA with \$5.9 billion, an increase of \$234 million or 4 percent above the FY 2017 enacted level and \$1.1 billion above the President's FY 2018 request. The bill provides full funding for NOAA's flagship weather satellites including funds for the Polar and Space Weather Follow-ons, and provides funding to procure an additional Hurricane Hunter to provide backup for future hurricane reconnaissance missions. Report language included a strong warning to the National Weather Service regarding management and staffing challenges and directs funding to improve failing infrastructure at Weather Forecast Offices across the country. Funding is also included to continue NOAA's fleet recapitalization to replace the agency's oldest research vessels. Increased funding across NOAA's line offices continues to support hydrographic charting, the National Sea Grant College program, the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, and the Integrated Ocean Observing System. Congress rejected the Administration's request to eliminate NOAA's Office of Education and provided funding for the program at \$28 million, a 5 percent increase from FY 2017.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA):

Congress increased NASA's budget to \$20.7 billion, an increase of \$1.1 billion or 6 percent above FY 2017 enacted level and \$1.6 billion above the President's FY 2018 request. While Science received an eight percent increase to \$6.2 billion, Earth Science funding remained flat at \$1.9 billion. This amount includes \$147,000,000 for the Plankton, Aerosol, Cloud, and ocean Ecosystem (PACE), \$17,000,000 for the Climate Absolute Radiance and Refractivity Observatory (CLARREO) Pathfinder, \$1,700,000 for the Deep Space Climate Observatory (DSOVR), \$9,700,000 to launch the Orbiting Carbon Observatory-3, and \$175,800,000 for LandSat-9. The bill also maintains \$100 million for NASA's Office of Education despite the President's request to decrease funding to \$37 million.

Energy and Water, and Related Agencies

Department of Energy (DOE):

DOE received one of the largest increases in FY 2018 with Congress appropriating \$34.7 billion for the Department, an increase of \$3.8 billion or 12 percent from FY 2017 enacted level and \$6.5 billion above the President's FY 2018 request. DOE's Office of Science received \$6.26 billion for an increase of 16 percent above the FY 2017 enacted level. Rejecting the President's proposal to eliminate ARPA-E, the bill increased funding for the program to \$353 million, which is \$47 million above the FY 2017 enacted level. In the report language, Congress prioritizes and increases funding for energy programs that encourage U.S. economic competitiveness and advance "all-of-the-above" solutions to U.S. energy independence. DOE Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy received an 11 percent increase to \$2.32 billion in FY 2018, despite the President's proposal to reduce the program's funding to \$636 million. Funding for Fossil Energy Research and Development increased by 9 percent to \$727 million – \$447 million above the President's budget request. The bill also includes \$7.1 billion for environmental management activities, including \$6 billion for defense environmental cleanup and \$298 million for non-defense environmental cleanup.

Sources: American Association for the Advancement of Science, Department of Interior, Federal Register, Library of Congress, U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
