

Policy News & Monthly Review

AGI policy news briefs summarize geoscience policy activities and related events in Washington, D.C. as part of an effort to keep AGI member societies and other audiences informed about relevant federal policy and legislative updates.

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NOAA's Five Year Research & Development Plan

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) published a five year plan that details their objectives for

research and development. The plan's main objectives focus on climate, weather, oceans, and coasts. NOAA plans to improve climate adaptation and mitigation by developing higher resolution models, improving communication and application of climate information tools and services, testing and strengthening climate vulnerability tests and increasing public awareness and understanding of climate change.

House Committee holds oversight hearing on hardrock mining

The House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a mining oversight hearing on June 13, 2013. The hearing focused on mining fees and royalties, the withdrawal of certain lands from new mining claims, and Good Samaritan legislation for the cleanup of abandoned mine lands (AMLs).

NRC report studies land change models

At the request of the U.S. Geological Survey and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Research Council (NRC) produced a report synthesizing the most advanced models for assessing land change. The report focuses on how each model can best be used to help agriculture, regional planning, and disaster relief.

USGS trains volcano scientists from around the world

Scientists and technicians from volcano observatories in nine countries traveled to the United States this month to participate in the International Training Program in Volcano Hazards Monitoring. The goal of the program is to help participating nations become self-sufficient in volcano monitoring, in order to decrease the negative impacts of a volcanic eruption.

House Natural Resources Committee hearing on OCS leasing

On June 6, 2013 and June 11, 2013 the House Natural Resources Committee held hearings on the Offshore Energy and Jobs Act (H.R. 2231). The proposed bill would open new outer continental shelf (OCS) land for leasing, unlocking an estimated 2.5 billion barrels of oil, and more than 7.5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas for production.

Federal investments in R&D, CRS report

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) recently released a report outlining the President's proposed federal investments in research and development for fiscal year (FY) 2014. Under the President's FY 2014 request, \$142.773 billion is allotted for federal research and development, a \$1.861 billion (1.3%) increase from the FY 2012 actual spending levels.

House committee holds hearing on wildfires

The House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation held an oversight hearing on wildfire and forest management on July 11, 2013. The hearing focused on the need for active forest management, which includes both timber sales and prescribed burns, to reduce the fuel available to wildfires.

EPA's Improved Environmental Impact Statement Map

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed a mapping tool that organizes Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) prepared by federal agencies, as well as EPA's comments concerning the EIS's. The National Environmental Policy Act requires federal agencies proposing projects or making decisions on major federal actions to develop an EIS. Within the database, one can search by year, by state, or by EIS's with open comment records since 2004. EPA comment letters issued within the last 60 days are also available on the map.

House subcommittee holds markup of the Weather Forecasting and Improvement Act of 2013

On July 9, 2013 the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittee on Environment held a markup of the Weather Forecasting and Improvement Act of 2013 (H.R. 2413).

Exxon investing to build up workforce capabilities

Exxon Mobil Corporation announced on Friday, June 7th, that it will invest \$500,000 for a specialized workforce training program that would help create curricula and programs for students interested in certification or degrees in petroleum engineering and other related fields. The program is part of an ongoing campaign to enhance science and math education, with the goal of expanding training in trades necessary for petrochemical processing and manufacturing.

Federal Register June-2013

FTZB – The Foreign-Trade Zones Board announced that the LLC dba Hawai'i Gas company proposed production activity of synthetic natural gas in Kapolei Hawaii. Approval of this request would permit Hawai'i Gas to utilize fuels from any source in foreign status. The public comment period is open until July 15, 2013. [Monday, June 03, 2013(Volume 78, Number 106)]

Federal Register - Sept. 2013

Geoscience Policy Federal Register

NSF grants fund new ocean observation center

The National Science Foundation awarded \$16 million in grants to fund a new observation system in the sub-polar region of the North Atlantic Ocean to better understand the 'global conveyor belt' – the system of surface ocean currents that carry warmer waters northward, and the deep ocean currents that carry cooler waters southward toward the equator. This initiative is part of the U.S.-led Overturning in the Subpolar North Atlantic Program (OSNAP).

October budget update and the government shutdown

New U.S.-Russia International Park sparks concerns

This October, the United States and Russia agreed to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) regarding stewardship of the Bering Strait region. The two international superpowers hope to create an International Park connecting the Beringia National Park in Chukotka, Russia, with the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve and the Cape Krusenstern National Monument on Alaska's Seward Peninsula.

Hearings postponed due to government shutdown

The House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology postponed all hearings during the government shutdown. Additionally, other committees were unable to hold hearings because so many furloughed federal employees were unable to testify during the partial shutdown.

Due to a lapse in fiscal year (FY) 2014 appropriations, the government underwent a partial shutdown from October 1 to October 16 until Democrats and Republicans were finally able to pass bipartisan legislation to temporarily reopen the government.

Tax code overhaul could spell bad news for oil and gas

House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dave Camp (R-MI) has acknowledged that tax credits normally enjoyed by the oil and gas industry are not off the table when it comes to overhauling the United States' tax code. In an effort to balance the budget and reinvigorate the economy, lawmakers are looking to reform the tax code, which currently sets the majority of corporate tax rates at approximately 40 percent and marginal federal corporate income tax rates at 35 percent.

EPA to hold meetings around the nation to discuss reducing GHG emissions

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is hosting eleven public listening sessions across the country to solicit ideas and input from the public regarding the best Clean Air Act approaches to reducing carbon pollution from existing power plants. Power plants are the nation's largest stationary source of carbon pollution, responsible for about one-third of all greenhouse gas pollution in the United States. The EPA hopes to enforce stricter regulations on existing power plants that would cut emissions by 26% by 2020.

U.S. is largest oil producer in 2013

PIRA Energy Group, a New York energy market consultancy, released a report this October indicating that the U.S. has surpassed Russia and Saudi Arabia to become the world's largest producer of oil in 2013. The report's total oil supply includes all forms of liquid oil supply. The report revealed that the U.S. total supply for 2013 is expected to average 12.1 million barrels per day (MMB/D). The U.S. surpassed Russia to become the second largest global supplier of oil in 2012, and this year U.S. production

grew at a faster pace than Saudi Arabia's.

Murkowski, Wyden introduce bipartisan critical minerals bill

Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, along with 15 other senators have submitted the latest round of legislation outlining a comprehensive minerals policy for the United States. The new bill, S.____ the Critical Minerals Policy Act of 2013, calls for the Department of the Interior to establish a list of critical minerals for the U.S.

Hearing on the Transboundary Hydrocarbon Agreement

On October 1, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing to discuss proposed energy legislation. The legislation in question would approve an agreement between the U.S. and Mexico to develop oil and gas reserves that cross the international maritime boundary in the Gulf of Mexico.

President signs helium bill

On October 2, following the government shutdown on October 1, President Obama signed H.R. 527, the Responsible Helium Administration and Stewardship Act, averting the shutdown of the federal helium reserve in Texas. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) federal helium reserve, which supplies the U.S. with 40 percent of its helium supply, was in danger of shutting down due to a lapse in funding.

Hearing on The National Park Service's Implementation of the shutdown

On October 16, the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee held a joint oversight hearing entitled *As Difficult As Possible: The National Park Service's (NPS) Implementation of the Government Shutdown*. The hearing examined the actions taken by the NPS following the government shutdown, which began on October 1 due to a lapse in fiscal year (FY) 2014 appropriations.

Keystone XL southern portion opening in November

This month, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit ruled not to grant the Sierra Club, Clean Energy Future Oklahoma, and the East Texas Sub Regional Planning Commission a temporary injunction to stop the construction of the Gulf Coast pipeline, the southern extension of Transcanada's Keystone XL tar sands export pipeline.

House hearing on impacts of regulations on US mining

On October 10, The House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a hearing on what Chairman Doug Lamborn (R-CO) called "abusive actions" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) against U.S. mining operations, including EPA's watershed assessment of Bristol Bay, Alaska. The goal of the hearing was to offer solutions to create jobs and grow the economy by bolstering America's mining industry. Due to the government shutdown, no representatives from the EPA were able to attend.

Smithsonian T-Rex reveal delayed by shutdown

The government shutdown from October 1 through October 17 caused a delay in the delivery of a *Tyrannosaurus rex* skeleton scheduled to be revealed at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History on National Fossil Day, October 16, 2013. The fossil, discovered in Montana, is one of the most complete *T. rex* skeletons ever recovered and was meant to be the main attraction at the annual Earth Science Week event. The Army Corps of Engineers was unable to transport the nearly 80% complete fossil because key staff were furloughed.

Supreme Court to review GHG rule

The Supreme Court agreed to hear six cases challenging the regulations set forth by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from stationary sources this October. The court agreed to examine whether EPA, under the Clean Air Act, rightfully determined that GHG emissions from new motor vehicles should require permits.

Program to buy back hurricane-damaged and high-risk homes

New Jersey and federal officials have teamed up to help buy back damaged or high-risk homes impacted by Superstorm Sandy. The first purchase made on October 18, 2013 is part of New Jersey's Blue Acres program, which will use \$300 million in federal

aid to buy out damaged or at-risk homes along the New Jersey coastline.

Congress takes up America COMPETES

As the dust settled on the latest fiscal crises this October, members of Congress were able to address the lapse in authorization for The America Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education and Science Act (COMPETES Act) that occurred at the end of September.

NASA gearing up for November MAVEN launch

NASA is preparing to launch its next spacecraft. The Mars Atmosphere and Volatiles Evolution mission (MAVEN) is set to launch on November 18 from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida. MAVEN will examine Mars' upper atmosphere, which could potentially provide data on the history of climate change on the Red Planet.

Court rules against EPA on agricultural stormwater case

In the case, *Alt v. EPA*, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of West Virginia ruled that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) cannot require a West Virginia poultry farm to obtain a Clean Water Act discharge permit for its stormwater. The court found that the stormwater discharge came from the farmyard that surrounds the concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) and that the farmyard itself was not a "production area" under the Clean Water Act.

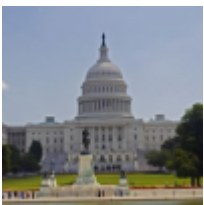
Federal Register - October 2013

DOI -- The Department of the Interior issued a final rule that amends the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) oil and gas resources regulations. The rule updates fees that cover BSEE's cost of processing and filing certain documents relating to its oil and gas resources program. [Tuesday, October 1, 2013, (Vol. 78, No. 190)]



November budget update

This November, the bipartisan bicameral Budget Conference Committee worked to create a consensus plan to keep the government running past the self-imposed January 15, 2014 shutdown deadline.



Calvert leads House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment

Congressman Ken Calvert (R-CA) has taken over from Congressman Mike Simpson (R-ID) as Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies.



Simpson to lead Energy and Water Development subpanel

Congressman Mike Simpson (R-ID) has been appointed as Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development.



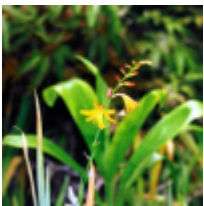
Legislation loosening hydraulic fracturing restrictions passes House

On November 20, the House of Representatives passed legislation limiting federal regulations on hydraulic fracturing in states where regulations already exist.



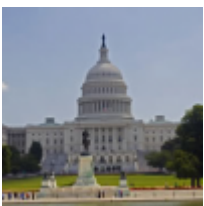
Executive Order to prepare for climate change

On November 1, President Barack Obama signed an executive order, Preparing the United States for the Impacts of Climate Change. The Executive Order directs federal agencies to take steps to help local communities strengthen their resilience to extreme weather and prepare for the impacts of climate change.



Full Committee on Natural Resources markup of H.R. 2824

The House Committee on Natural Resources met to markup the bill on Preventing Government Waste and Protecting Coal Mining Jobs in America (H.R. 2824), and other bills.



National Plan for Observing our Earth

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) accepted public feedback on the new National Plan for Observing our Earth.



Senate Committee advances multiple Obama nominees

The Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee advanced a number of President Obama's agency nominees this November.



Nomination for Land and Minerals Assistant Secretary

President Obama announced plans to nominate Janice Schneider to Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management within the Department of Interior.



Kornze nominated as Director of Bureau of Land Management

President Obama intends to nominate Neil Kornze to become the next Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).



Other Department of the Interior nominations

In further moves at the Department of the Interior (DOI), President Obama is nominating Rhea Suh to be Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, and intends to nominate Tommy Beaudreau to take Rhea Suh's position as Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget.



Law intended to reimburse states for reopening National Parks

Lawmakers are attempting to pass legislation to reimburse states that funded the reopening of National Parks during the partial government shutdown that occurred October 1 through October 17 of this year.



NASA and Amazon Web Services partner to bring Geoscience "Big Data" to the public

NASA and Amazon Web Services (AWS) are partnering to make NASA climate and Earth science satellite data available to users via AWS cloud.



House Committee reviews progress of Superstorm Sandy recovery

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee met on November 14 to address the preparedness, response, and recovery objectives from Superstorm Sandy.



USGS awarded funds to support Superstorm Sandy relief

The U.S. Geological Survey was recently awarded funds to investigate the rate of erosion along the east coast of the United States that resulted from Superstorm Sandy.



Obama expected to designate more national monuments

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell recommended that President Obama take executive action to create new national monuments . In the next few months, Jewell said she will be meeting with communities to locate public lands deserving of protection as national monuments.



Hearings held on controversial land swap in Arizona

Federal lawmakers and mining representatives in Arizona are attempting to trade 2000 acres of federal land for 5000 acres of company-held land.



Update on America COMPETES

Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle are attempting to reauthorize or recreate the America Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education and Science (COMPETES) Act.

