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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Science Chairman authors draft legislation for NSF grant approval process
On November 13, the House Research and Technology Subcommittee held its first public hearing to examine the discussion draft of Frontiers in Innovative Research, Science, and Technology (or FIRST) Act unveiled by Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX).

Conference Committee established for water resources bills
A House-Senate conference committee met on November 20 to begin resolving the differences between their versions of Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).

Federal Register - November 2013
A list of notices from the federal register for November 2013 from agencies including the Department of the Interior, EPA, FEMA, USGS and more.

2014 NDAA includes critical mineral provisions

Reauthorization of NIDIS
The House Science, Space and Technology Committee passed the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) Reauthorization Act of 2013 (H.R. 2431).
Weather Forecasting Improvement Act of 2013
The Weather Forecasting Improvement Act of 2013 (H.R. 2413) was passed in December by the House Science, Space and Technology Committee.

New NASA/JAXA global precipitation satellite
The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) recently announced the launch date for a new joint-venture satellite.

USDA & EPA partner to support water quality trading
The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a partnership to implement and coordinate policies that support water quality trading programs for nutrients, sediments, and other pollutants for economic and environmental benefit.

Federal Register - December 2013
A list of notices from the federal register for December 2013 from agencies including the Department of the Interior, EPA, FEMA, USGS and more.

December budget update
This December, the House and Senate Budget Conference Committee led by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) came to an agreement on a proposed fiscal year (FY) 2014 budget.
Landrieu expected to assume Senate Energy Chairmanship

Capitol Hill is about to experience a massive shuffle. Senator Max Baucus (D-MT), current Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, was recently nominated by President Obama to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to China.

Senate bill to move NOAA to Department of the Interior

Senator Richard Burr (R-NC) introduced a bill this December that will transfer the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) from the Department of Commerce to the Department of the Interior.

Senate Finance Committee proposes new reforms to energy tax incentives

The Senate Finance Committee recently released a new proposal to overhaul some energy provisions in the tax code in the United States.

CRS report on energy tax credit

The production tax credit (PTC) for renewable energy, a corporate tax credit available to businesses producing renewable energy through a number of green technologies, expired at the end of 2013.

USGS develops county-scale temperature and precipitation maps

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) recently released a new website featuring maps and summaries of historical and projected temperatures and rainfall for counties inside the contiguous United States.
National Academies report on the impacts of climate change

DOI plans to reduce energy consumption, use clean energy
This December, the Department of the Interior (DOI) released its 2013 Sustainability Plan, which aims to cut energy use and waste throughout the Department.

Interior awards $7M for climate science research
The Department of the Interior announced that it will award an additional $7 million in funding for climate change research.

House bill amends CERCLA, expanding states rights
The Reducing Excessive Deadline Obligations Act (H.R. 2279) passed the House of Representatives 225-188 on January 9.

EPW Committee evaluates President Obama’s Climate Action Plan
On Thursday, January 16, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW) held a full committee hearing on the implementation and effects of President Obama’s Climate Action Plan (CAP).
Update on OSM stream protection rule
The House Natural Resources Committee has launched a new set of hearings devoted to analyzing the potential socioeconomic impacts of the Office of Surface Mining’s (OSM) proposed Stream Protection Rule (SPR).

Southernmost leg of Keystone XL opens
The southernmost portion of the TransCanada Corporation owned Keystone XL pipeline began transporting crude oil from Cushing, Oklahoma, to Nederland, Texas, on January 22.

New developments in seismic exploration and OCS future
On January 10, the House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a hearing to discuss seismic exploration on the Mid- and South Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf (OCS).

Governor calls for drillers to follow now defunct water regulations
On December 20, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court struck down Act 13, state drilling regulations that would have established a protected zone around the PA’s waterways, preventing any drilling within 300-feet them.

Federal Register - January 2014
A list of notices from the federal register for November 2013 from agencies including the Department of the Interior, EPA, FEMA, USGS and more.
Groups demand US export crude oil
Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Ranking Member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) Committee and a major proponent of oil and gas development, is calling for the government to reduce regulations on U.S. exports of crude oil.

World Bank starts Thirsty Energy Initiative
According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), global energy consumption will increase by nearly 50 percent by 2035 due to population growth and the ensuing increases in demand from the developing world.

Oil and gas regulators in Texas turn to seismology
The Texas Railroad Commission (RRC), the state agency responsible for the regulation of the oil and gas industry in Texas, announced that it will hire an in-house seismologist in response to a series of earthquakes in the small town of Azle, Texas.

EPA releases assessment on mining in Bristol Bay
On January 15, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a report on the potential environmental impact of a major open pit mining operation in Alaska’s Bristol Bay watershed.

Schweikert to assume Environment subpanel chairmanship
Congressman David Schweikert (R-AZ) will take over for Rep. Chris Stewart (R-UT) as chairman of the House Science, Space and Technology Subcommittee on Environment.
January budget update
Congress and the White House were able to come to an agreement on an omnibus spending deal this January, approving a budget for fiscal year (FY) 2014.

Simpson to introduce companion wildfire legislation in the House
Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Mike Crapo (R-ID) have recently introduced a bill (S.1875) to permit the use of emergency funding in fighting wildfires, in addition to money allocated in the Forest Service discretionary budget.

Human-induced earthquakes up, USGS reports
The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) reports that human-induced seismicity may be the cause of increased domestic earthquake activity over the past several years.

New legislation would further delay FEMA Flood Insurance Program
Senators Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Johnny Isakson (R-GA) are calling for a delay in new flood insurance rates that took effect in 2013.

Research set to continue at International Space Station
In January, the Obama Administration decided the $100 billion International Space Station (ISS) would see continued use until 2024 in efforts to continue international cooperation on scientific research.
Navy to update Arctic Strategy
On January 22, the U.S. Navy previewed a new strategy for the Arctic polar region at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, updating their 2009 plan.

Suzette Kimball nominated to lead U.S. Geological Survey
President Obama has nominated the current Acting Director of the U.S. Geological Survey, Suzette Kimball, to assume the position full time.

EPA releases outline of decision to raise the Social Cost of Carbon
On January 16, Ranking Member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee David Vitter (R-LA) received a letter from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) explaining the Obama Administration’s new definition of the social cost of carbon (SCC).

EPA guidance released on diesel use in fracking
On February 11, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a new set of guidelines on the use of diesel fuel in hydraulic fracturing activities.

Senate addresses chemical spill and water contamination in WV
On February 4, the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Subcommittee on Water and Wildlife held a hearing on safe drinking water supplies.
EPA reviews nuclear radiation limits; NRC reviews nuclear waste storage
The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is in the process of updating some of its nuclear energy regulations, including nuclear operation and waste storage standards.

Administration teams with France on climate change
The U.S. and France have teamed up to lead an international initiative to address climate change.

U.S. and India attempt to come to a climate change agreement
Notable senior officials including Indian Ambassador to the United States S. Jaishankar and National Security Advisor to President Obama, Susan Rice, among other industry leaders, environmental activists and government officials attended a sponsored U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue to facilitate cooperation on greenhouse gas (GHG) emission standards between the two nations.

Sec. Kerry and Administration ramp up climate rhetoric
The Obama Administration is strengthening its message on global climate change. In a series of speeches this February, Secretary of State John Kerry called upon the global community to do what they could to immediately reduce the impacts of climate change.

New U.S. Special Representative for the Arctic Region
Secretary of State John Kerry announced this month that the U.S. will appoint an Envoy to the Arctic. The new position comes at the request of Alaskan lawmakers like Senator Mark Begich (D-AK) who argue that an official ambassador is necessary for the U.S. to remain competitive in the region.
President hopes to create new climate change resilience fund
This February the President pitched a new climate change resilience fund to help communities across the country react to the impacts of climate change.

Senate investigates federal role in mitigating extreme weather
On February 12, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs held a hearing on "Extreme Weather Events: The Costs of Not Being Prepared."

NASA looks to industry to secure Moon’s resources
This month, NASA is requesting applications from private commercial spaceflight industries to partner with them in developing technologies capable of delivering cargo to the Moon.

February budget update
Following the passage of the bipartisan omnibus budget agreement in January, goodwill continued to permeate Capitol Hill as Democrats and Republicans in both chambers passed a clean bill to raise the debt ceiling until March 2015.

California drought catalyst for federal action
The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) claims diminished precipitation levels over the past three years could be the worst in California’s one-hundred-year recorded history. The drought has prompted legislative action from federal sources.