

Statement of
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Subcommittee on Energy and Minerals Subcommittee
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Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Suzette Kimball, and I am the Acting Director of the U.S. Geological Survey. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify on H.R. 2489, the AmericaView Geospatial Imagery Mapping Program Act. The Department supports the goals of the AmericaView program, but does not believe further legislative authority is necessary to meet these goals and objectives. If further legislation is discussed, we would like the opportunity to consult with the committee on appropriate legislation.

I will provide a brief history of AmericaView from the Federal Government's perspective. Then I will address the role that AmericaView plays in advancing the Department of the Interior and the Federal Government goals. Finally, I will provide a few comments on the Act itself.

In 1998, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) received appropriated funds to demonstrate the technology and capability for high speed processing and delivery of satellite data among academia and public agencies in the State of Ohio. This "OhioView" prototype, a University-led consortium in the State of Ohio consisting of 10 research universities distributed across the state, was intended to facilitate and expand the use of Landsat satellite data and imagery from other earth observing satellites, including NASA satellites. The OhioView Consortium, in turn, established computer systems and network infrastructure to redistribute the satellite data to member institutions and also make it available to Ohio citizens. The goal of the USGS was to establish the prototype as a pilot for a nationwide program.

This prototype with OhioView created a rapid data delivery infrastructure at the USGS Earth Resources Observation and Science (EROS) Center, capable of near real-time data distribution of satellite data and it reduced the costs of acquiring imagery to the OhioView Consortium members, in turn facilitating access to USGS data products and encouraging their widespread use. It developed a multi-sensor reception capability at the EROS Center. Perhaps most important, it grew the OhioView Consortium to include additional university participants, including several minority participants, thereby expanding the research and education community able to access remotely sensed data and in turn facilitating the development of a broad-based user constituency within the State of Ohio.

In 2000, Congress determined that the single-state prototype was well positioned to begin fulfilling the vision for a nationwide program. Accordingly, in FY 2000 appropriations language for the Department of the Interior, Congress instructed the USGS to pursue a

national concept initially entitled “Gateway to Earth,” based on the ongoing OhioView prototype. In 2001, “Gateway to Earth” – renamed “AmericaView” -- remained a fairly loose concept in which informal gatherings of interested parties briefed each other on local developments that utilized the OhioView model. Initiatives were established in other states, such as South Dakota, Alaska and Texas.

Since 2002, AmericaView has continued to emerge from its status as a USGS prototype project. Its members have worked intensively with the USGS to develop AmericaView into an independent organization capable of partnering with the USGS and other Federal agencies in support of mutually beneficial goals and objectives. Today, there are more than 35 states with hundreds of members actively participating in a national program dedicated to expanding access to and uses of our Nation's Earth observation satellite assets for education, research, hazards monitoring, and natural resources management. Other Federal agencies, such as the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service, as well as state agencies have benefited from the investment in AmericaView.

Now I will address some of the benefits that AmericaView has provided to the USGS and the Federal Government. The USGS-AmericaView partnership supports the USGS mission to serve the Nation by providing reliable scientific information to describe and understand the Earth; minimize loss of life and property from natural disasters; manage water, biological, energy, and mineral resources; and enhance and protect our quality of life. The AmericaView Consortium also supports the National Research Council’s recommendation from its 2007 report entitled “Earth Science and Applications from Space: National Imperatives for the Next Decade and Beyond” that the USGS should “... pursue innovative approaches to educate and train scientists and users of Earth observations and applications.” It has provided a network of State partners for enhancing the science of remote sensing and data sharing, accomplished needed research in the Earth sciences, and supplemented the USGS capability to deliver data to a growing user community.

Based in part on the suggestions the USGS received from the AmericaView members, the USGS has improved its computer systems and network infrastructure and its ability to meet our customers’ needs. These enhancements facilitated the web enabling of the entire Landsat archive. The USGS and the Nation have benefited from the research that has been performed by the AmericaView members and from the students that have been educated by the AmericaView members, not just in the field of remote sensing but in the science and engineering fields as well. It has been a highly successful partnership from which the USGS, AmericaView members, and the American public have all benefited.

The USGS fiscal year 2009 budget included \$1 million for competitive grants awarded to AmericaView members. The USGS fiscal year 2010 budget justification for Land Remote Sensing maintains the funding level of \$1 million to continue these competitive grants for national education outreach and research activity.

The USGS Science Strategy emphasizes societal benefits– namely better understanding of the role of the environment on human health, understanding ecosystems and the effects of ecosystem change, quantifying and forecasting the Nation’s freshwater resources, and risk assessment due to natural hazards. AmericaView achieves this goal across the Nation

by educating large sectors of the population across States and territories and leveraging assets for research issues that affect pressing issues on our society. The USGS is continually increasing the breadth and volume of geospatial imagery available to the public for education, research, assessment, and monitoring at the State level. It is essential that our future workforce has a firm foundation in the Earth sciences and the role that historic and present day remote sensing data and technology has on effective decision-making.

This concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to answer any questions you and other members may have. I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you and this Subcommittee.