



## FY2013 BUDGET BRIEFING BY MARCIA MCNUTT, DIRECTOR, U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY REGARDING THE LANDSAT PROGRAM

On February 14, 2012, Marcia McNutt, Director of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and other USGS officials provided a briefing on their FY2013 budget request, which includes funding for the Landsat land remote sensing satellite system. USGS operates the two existing Landsat satellites and will operate the next in the series, Landsat 8, which is being built and launched by NASA. These notes were originally published on SpacePolicyOnline.com on February 14 under the title: [USGS Director: Landsat Has Many Fans, But Affordable Solution Needed for Future.](#)

Marcia McNutt, Director of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), said today that the Obama Administration is "full of fans of Landsat," but that an affordable solution must be found to continue this series of land remote sensing satellites.

McNutt spoke at a briefing on the FY2013 budget request for USGS, part of the Department of the Interior. USGS is requesting \$1.1 billion for FY2013, a \$35 million increase over its FY2012 level. The [request](#) includes \$53.3 million for USGS activities related to operating and disseminating data from Landsat 5 and 7, the two satellites now in orbit, and developing the ground system for the next in the series, the Landsat Data Continuity Mission (LDCM) or Landsat 8. NASA is funding the development and launch of the LDCM spacecraft. It is scheduled for launch in January 2013.

The pressing question is what comes next. The Landsat user community has grown tremendously since the data were made available for free in 2008. The medium resolution (30 meter and 15 meter) data from Landsat satellites have little commercial value compared to the high resolution (less than 1 meter) data available from companies like GeoEye and DigitalGlobe. Nonetheless, the data are critical for many applications, especially in agriculture and land use studies. The first [Landsat](#) (then called ERTS) was launched by NASA in 1972 and the resulting 40-year data-set is considered invaluable. The Landsat program has endured a [tumultuous programmatic history](#) and survives largely because of a strong and vocal user base.

Users now are worried about a gap in data acquisition both between now and when Landsat 8 is operational because Landsat 5 and 7 are failing, as well as after Landsat 8 stops functioning. Landsat 8 has a five-year design lifetime. Landsat 5 and 7 have operated long past their design lifetimes, but users cannot bank on that happening with future satellites. Landsat 5 was launched in 1984. Its operations were [suspended](#) last fall after it experienced an electronics failure.

Landsat 7 was launched in 1999 and its data have been degraded since 2003 because of a failure in its [scan line corrector](#).

In the FY2012 budget request, the Obama Administration proposed transferring the entire Landsat program to USGS, which would take responsibility for developing requirements and funding development, launch, and operation of future satellites. USGS is willing to take on the role, but Congress rejected the plan because of concerns about negative impacts on other parts of the USGS budget. Congress gave USGS only \$2 million in FY2012 for studies related to the next in the series, Landsat 9.

McNutt said that USGS is working with NASA, NOAA and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) on how to craft an affordable program that would keep the Department of the Interior in the lead because "everyone is still convinced" USGS is the agency that best understands the user community.

For FY2013, however, USGS is not even requesting \$2 million to keep level with FY2012. At today's budget briefing, Matt Larsen, Associate Director for Climate & Land Use Change, said that only "a quarter of a million" -- \$250,000 -- is in the budget proposal for Landsat 9 studies. USGS requested the National Research Council to conduct a [study](#) and make recommendations on how to implement a sustained land imaging program. Larsen said that would be one input to deliberations among Administration stakeholders, but that it also will release a Request for Information to the Landsat community in the coming weeks.