United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

DEC 20 2024

The Honorable Pete Stauber
Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Stauber:

Enclosed are responses prepared by the U.S. Geological Survey to questions for the record submitted following the May 22, 2024, oversight hearing on *"Examining the President's FY 2025 Budget Request for the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement."*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this information to the Subcommittee.

.

Sincerely,

Pamela L. Barkin
Legislative Counsel
Office of Congressional and
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Ranking Member

Questions for the Record
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
Oversight Hearing: *"Examining the President's FY 2025 Budget Request for the United States Geological Survey and the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement"*
May 22, 2024

Questions from Chairman Stauber

1. **For purposes of developing the critical minerals list, the USGS tracks most minerals in terms of domestic deposits, and it can take some time for the USGS to undergo in- depth reporting on any specific element, with years passing before an update can be published. Accordingly, should minerals that are deemed a Defense Production Act (DPA) Title III priority material be immediately reviewed for USGS domestic resource reporting? Additionally, can this review period for DPA Title III minerals be shortened?**

Response: The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) provides supply chain analysis at multiple time scales. The USGS collects mineral supply chain information from industries and countries on a continuous basis and provides a comprehensive view of changes for both specific mineral commodities and the broader condition of supply chains on an annual basis, as illustrated by the annual publication of the *Mineral Commodity Summaries*. The Energy Act of 2020 mandates development of the list of critical minerals on a three-year cycle. However, if supply chain conditions or other circumstances change for a specific subset of mineral commodities, the criticality of those commodities can be re-evaluated with the existing methodology used to develop the current list and the most recent annual supply chain data. Doing so would require a separate publication and notification in the Federal Register.

The USGS also responds to more rapidly evolving decision-support needs. For example, the USGS has ongoing consultation with the Department of Defense (DoD) on the purchase and sale of mineral commodities for the National Defense Stockpile and routinely participates in the review of proposals for Defense Production Act (DPA) investments.

Questions from Rep. Mullin

1. **There are various ways we can improve earthquake preparedness: by supporting scientific programs, developing better building codes, or improving disaster planning, among others. Could you outline what you see are the best opportunities for the federal government to improve earthquake resilience?**

Response: The Congressionally authorized National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) is a four-agency partnership involving the USGS, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the National Science Foundation, established to promote the reduction of losses associated with earthquake hazards.

Improving earthquake resilience is an overarching goal for NEHRP, and the best opportunities for the federal government to improve resilience are laid out in the recent

2022-2029 strategic plan for the program (available at nehrp.gov). It shows that attaining these strategic goals will enable increased earthquake resilience throughout the Nation by improving life safety, reducing economic losses, and minimizing security, mission, or functional disruptions resulting from future earthquakes. This plan not only addresses ways to improve earthquake resilience, but also provides tools to measure successful implementation – how we know whether resilience practices and policies are effective.

NEHRP progress is dependent on the actions and cooperation of the four agencies whose missions are complementary and compatible with the needs of the Program. Broadly, the four NEHRP agencies improve earthquake resilience by advancing the understanding of earthquakes and their consequences; by monitoring domestic seismicity and characterizing seismic hazards; by expanding capabilities to monitor earthquakes and characterize their impacts to society and the built environment, both domestically and abroad; and by implementing lessons learned into earthquake preparedness and mitigation. NEHRP supports work that enhances how research is translated into operations and the understanding of hazard into risk reduction strategies. NEHRP has been integral in the development of a West Coast earthquake early warning system, managed by the USGS, which is now delivering alerts to people and systems in California, Oregon, and Washington. NEHRP supports the translation of models of our Nation's earthquake hazard, also developed by the USGS, into building codes and practices to improve the seismic performance of buildings and lifeline infrastructure.

For example, the 50-State USGS National Seismic Hazard Model released in 2023 is used as the basis for both seismic mitigation projects and for seismic provisions in building codes. *The Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves: 2019 Report*, published by the National Institute of Building Sciences, represents an exhaustive cost-benefit analysis of natural hazard mitigation, from adopting, and exceeding, up-to-date building codes to addressing the retrofit of existing buildings and utility and transportation infrastructure. This report shows a benefit-cost ratio of 12:1 for implementation of the International Codes, a $7 billion savings in the long term for every year of new buildings built to these codes based on USGS science.

The four NEHRP agencies also promote the transfer of knowledge to promote the adoption and implementation of earthquake risk reduction measures, because preparation involves partnership across all levels of federal, state, and local governments and NGO's. Finally, NEHRP has also established procedures to support learning from earthquake-related disasters through post-earthquake investigations aimed at supporting improvements to earthquake resilience in the future.

2. What challenges exist for the National Climate Adaptation Science Centers (CASCs) with respect to funding and beyond? How do you envision its mission will

need to evolve as climate impacts continue to increase in severity?

Response: The nine regional CASCs, established in 2010, have been successful in providing science to support DOI and partner decisions. In 2023 alone, the CASCs funded more than 60 on-the-ground projects resulting in approximately 200 scientific publications, and they trained more than 170 students. The CASCs must continue to evolve to meet ever-changing management needs and support those needs by developing climate-relevant technical resources. These activities use existing research and data communicated in a way that meets the specific place-based management question and provides the information in the most useful format. This is done in a different timeframe than traditional research – working with managers on questions in a weeks-to-month timeframe instead of years.

Finally, future management efforts should build upon adaptation approaches that are effective and widely used. To support the implementation of adaptation actions and their outcomes, the CASCs will need to invest in the nascent field of scientific approaches for evaluating the effectiveness of adaptation measures. Evaluation of a suite of climate adaptation management activities in different habitats will ensure that future management activities are effectively implemented and based on sound science.

Questions from Rep. Fulcher

1. **Earlier this month, Secretary Haaland testified that the Biden administration has only permitted five mines, and the BLM clarified last week that one of these mines began its permitting process under the previous administration. How could a lack of domestic permitting lead to increased import reliance on all minerals, including those on the current critical mineral list?**

Response: The USGS does not issue permits or leases for new or renewed mining activity nor do we direct economic policy. Consequently, the USGS is not in a position to comment on the status of federal permitting for new mines on public lands or whether recent permitting decisions have significant implications for longer term national mineral resource production, which spans federal, state, Tribal, and private lands.