

---

Statement from the  
**Geological Society of America**  
Dr. Craig M. Schiffries, Director for Geoscience Policy

To the  
**Honorable Ken Salazar**  
**Secretary of the Interior**

Regarding  
**Proposed Department of the Interior Strategic Plan Framework**

11 November 2009

## Summary

The Geological Society of America (GSA) urges the Department of the Interior (DOI) to elevate science to a mission area in the final version of its strategic plan. The new science mission area of the DOI strategic plan should be consistent with the science strategy of the U.S. Geological Survey.

The Department of the Interior's new strategic plan should contain a set of mission areas that reflect the top priorities of the Department. Science is a top priority of the Department of the Interior but science is not included among the mission areas in the proposed DOI strategic plan framework for FY 2010-2015.

The Geological Society of America is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Department of the Interior strategic plan framework for FY 2010-2015.

*Founded in 1888, the Geological Society of America, is a scientific society with over 22,000 members from academia, government, and industry in all 50 states and more than 90 countries. Through its meetings, publications, and programs, GSA enhances the professional growth of its members and promotes the geosciences in the service of humankind. GSA encourages cooperative research among earth, life, planetary, and social scientists, fosters public dialogue on geoscience issues, and supports all levels of earth science education.*

SCIENCE ■ STEWARDSHIP ■ SERVICE

## Introduction

The Geological Society of America urges the Department of the Interior to elevate science to a mission area in the final version of its strategic plan for FY 2010-2015. GSA Executive Director John W. Hess made this recommendation on 8 October 2009 in Denver at the first public comment meeting on DOI's proposed strategic plan framework. It is our understanding that DOI recently decided to elevate science to a mission area in the revised strategic plan. We would like to thank you for taking this action.

After discussing why it is important to elevate science to a mission area in the DOI strategic plan, we provide a potential framework for the new science mission area with a set of outcome goals and outcome areas. We welcome the opportunity to work with you to continue developing the new science mission area of the DOI strategic plan.

## Elevating Science to a Mission Area

Five reasons for elevating science to a mission area in the DOI strategic plan are summarized below:

1. President Obama emphasized his commitment to “restoring science to its rightful place” in a speech at the National Academy of Sciences on 27 April 2009. The Department of the Interior can help President Obama achieve his goal of “restoring science to its rightful place” by elevating science to a mission area in its new strategic plan.
2. President Obama said he was “leading a new effort to ensure that federal policies are based on the best and most unbiased scientific information.” The Department of the Interior can be in the vanguard of the President’s effort to “ensure that federal policies are based on the best and most unbiased scientific information” by elevating science to a mission area in its new strategic plan.
3. Science is one of three major clauses in the mission statement of the Department of the Interior, which says:

The U.S. Department of the Interior protects and manages the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provides *scientific* and other information about those resources; and honors its trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated Island Communities.” (emphasis added)

Science is essential to the mission of every bureau in the Department of the Interior. In keeping with the mission of the Department of the Interior and its bureaus, science should be elevated to a mission area in the Department’s strategic plan for FY 2010-2015.

4. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), which is one of the nation’s premier science agencies, addresses many of society’s greatest challenges, including energy resources, climate change, water resources, and natural hazards. The growing need for unbiased

science to meet these and other major societal challenges should be reflected at the highest level of the Department of the Interior's strategic plan.

5. The Department of the Interior's current strategic plan, which was drafted by the previous administration, puts science at the foundation of all activities conducted by the Department. Given President Obama's goal of "restoring science to its rightful place," it would be ironic if science is less visible in the new strategic plan than in the current strategic plan. Elevating science to a mission area would avoid the perils of making science less visible rather than more visible in the new strategic plan for the Department of the Interior.

### **Science Outcome Goals and Outcome Areas**

Science is critical to the success of every mission area in the DOI strategic plan framework, from protecting and sustainably using natural resources, to empowering people and communities, to creating opportunities for young people in the outdoors, to building a 21<sup>st</sup> century Interior. The DOI strategic plan should contain cross-links between the new science mission area and each of the other mission areas.

The Department of the Interior has a dual responsibility for providing science in support of its internal needs and in support of the needs of other stakeholders, including state and local governments and the general public. This dual role should be reflected in the new strategic plan.

The U.S. Geological Survey's science strategy, "Facing Tomorrow's Challenges: U.S. Geological Survey Science in the Decade 2007-2017," can be used as a framework for defining outcome goals and outcome areas under the science mission area of DOI's new strategic plan. The six science directions in the USGS science strategy are listed below:

1. Understanding Ecosystems and Predicting Ecosystem Change
2. Climate Variability and Change
3. Energy and Minerals for America's Future
4. A National Hazards, Risk, and Resilience Assessment Program
5. The Role of Environment and Wildlife in Human Health
6. A Water Census for the United States

These science directions can be mapped into appropriate outcome goals and areas under the new science mission area of the DOI strategic plan. It is important to note, however, that the USGS science strategy "does not reflect all aspects of USGS work" and "it does not directly deal with the details of many things that the USGS does extremely well and that are critical to the mission." The six science directions in the USGS science strategy can be supplemented with other mission-critical goals, such as providing topographic maps, satellite imagery, and a geospatial framework for the nation.

A possible outline of the science mission area in the DOI strategic plan is provided below.

## **Mission Area: Providing Science for Decision Making**

### **Outcome Goal: Science for Sustainable Resource Use and Protection**

- Understanding, Monitoring, Assessing, and Predicting Ecosystem Change
- Understanding, Monitoring, Assessing, Predicting, Mitigating, and Adapting to Climate Change
- Understanding, Monitoring, and Assessing Energy and Mineral Resources
- Understanding, Monitoring, Assessing, and Predicting Water Availability and Quality
- Improving the Scientific Basis for Sustainable Land-Use Management

### **Outcome Goal: Science for Protecting and Empowering People and Communities**

- Understanding, Monitoring, Assessing, Forecasting, and Mitigating Risks from Natural Hazards
- Understanding the Role of Environment and Wildlife in Human Health
- Improving Science Education for Visitors to Public Lands
- Improving Science Education for Native American, Alaska Native, Insular, and Native Hawaiian Communities

### **Outcome Goal: Creating Science Opportunities for Young People in the Outdoors**

- Creating a Scientifically Literate Youth Conservation Corps
- Engaging Young People in Environmental Science Programs

### **Outcome Goal: Building the Natural Science Foundation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

- Providing the Science and Information Framework for Understanding the Earth
- Providing the Geospatial Framework for the Earth, including Topographic Maps, Satellite Imagery, and Geospatial Data
- Improving Science Education for the Public and Building a Scientifically Literate 21st Century Workforce

Thank you very much for elevating science to a mission area in the strategic plan for the Department of the Interior. We welcome the opportunity to work with to continue developing the outcome goals, outcome areas, and metrics for the new science mission area.

The Geological Society of America is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the Department of the Interior's proposed strategic plan framework.