

For Immediate Release
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FACT SHEET: Harnessing Observations and Data about the Earth to Stimulate Scientific Discovery, Economic Growth, and Public Services

The Federal Government invests roughly \$3.5 billion in civil Earth observations and data every year across multiple agencies, and also leverages investments made by State, local and tribal governments, academia and industry in order to make the most of data about our planet. By conservative estimates, these investments add \$30 billion to the U.S. economy each year by providing Americans with critical data and information about natural resources, climate and weather, disaster events, land-use change, ecosystem health, ocean trends, and many other phenomena. Because these investments generate a wide range of observations that support key public services, long-term research, scientific discovery, and technology innovation, it is critical that they are deployed in ways that are efficient, effective, and immediately useful.

That's why today, the White House Office of Science & Technology Policy (OSTP) released a [National Plan for Civil Earth Observations](#), a blueprint for maximizing the value of observations collected by Federal agencies of the Earth's land surfaces, oceans, and atmosphere. The Plan will help the U.S. Government maintain and advance its Earth observing systems in ways that help protect life and property, stimulate economic growth, maintain homeland security, and advance scientific research and public understanding.

National Plan for Civil Earth Observations. Last year, OSTP released a [National Strategy for Civil Earth Observations](#), providing a framework for routinely assessing and planning for the Nation's Earth observation infrastructure, and outlining an approach for lifecycle data management across the Earth-science agencies. Building on this strategy, as well as the first-ever internal assessment of the Federal Earth observation enterprise, conducted in 2012, the National Plan released today establishes priorities and supporting actions for advancing our civil Earth observations capabilities. Priorities established by the Plan include:

- Continuity of sustained observations for public services;
- Continuity of sustained observations for Earth system research;
- Continued investment in experimental observations;
- Planned improvements to sustained observation networks and surveys for all observation categories; and
- Continuity of, and improvements to, a rigorous assessment and prioritization process.

Big Earth Data Initiative. Publicly funded Earth observations that are open and freely available help increase understanding of complex issues such as energy security, climate change, human influence on food and water resources, and resulting impacts on societal health and well-being. Earth observations also support private-sector products and services, enhancing productivity, employment, and economic development. Through the Big Earth Data Initiative (BEDI), which is supported in the President's Fiscal Year 2014 and 2015 budget requests, the Administration

seeks to improve the discoverability, accessibility, and usability of data and information derived from Federal civil Earth observations, making these information products easier for everyone to find and use. By supporting data discovery, BEDI responds to the President's 2013 Executive Order on making open and machine-readable the default for government data, and also supports the President's Climate Data Initiative.

The U.S. Group on Earth Observations (USGEO). USGEO, which is chaired by OSTP and includes representatives from a number of Federal agencies, provides the coordination mechanism for agencies' civil Earth observations activities. In 2013, USGEO was re-chartered in under the OSTP-led National Science and technology Council with a threefold purpose: (1) to coordinate, plan, and assess Federal Earth observation activities; (2) to foster improved Earth system data management and interoperability throughout the Federal Government; and (3) to engage international partners through the intergovernmental Group on Earth Observations (GEO). [Learn more.](#)

The Intergovernmental Group on Earth Observations (GEO). In January 2014, the United States joined 90 governments and more than 65 international organizations to renew their commitment to the intergovernmental Group on Earth Observations (GEO), founded in 2005 as a global voluntary partnership to leverage Earth observations in support of decision making in an increasingly complex and environmentally stressed world. GEO is an intergovernmental organization in which the United States is a member and leader. USGEO, described above, is responsible for formulating the U.S. positions for, and coordinating U.S. participation in, the intergovernmental GEO. [Learn more.](#)

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