

Arizona Geological Survey

“A new law that consolidates the Arizona Geological Survey within the University of Arizona at Tucson could result in dramatic cuts to state geological services, according to the Survey and some industries that rely on its capabilities. However, Arizona governor Doug Ducey’s office maintains that the cost-cutting action benefits taxpayers while building on synergy between the Survey and the university.

The action, part of broader budget [legislation](#) Ducey signed into law in May, calls for the Survey to vacate its current quarters by 30 June and move into space 75% smaller, but the law does not provide funding for the Survey for fiscal year (FY) 2017, which begins on 1 July.

The University of Arizona has agreed to provide the Survey with the equivalent of the Survey’s FY 2016 state appropriation of \$941,000 for the upcoming fiscal year, after which the Survey would need to become entirely self-supporting, according to Lee Allison, Arizona state geologist and director of [the Survey](#). Allison serves as a member of the *Eos* editorial advisory board.

At risk is funding for mapping, hazard monitoring, and other services.

Reduction in Services

Since 2011, the Survey received \$5.36 million from the state while entrepreneurially raising an additional \$35.8 million through external research grants and contracts, according to a Survey document, which notes that the Survey had 27 employees earlier this year.

Allison applauded the University of Arizona for agreeing to replace state funds for the Survey for the coming year. However, he told *Eos* that the grant and contract funding that the Survey has raised on its own to support its state services now “will mostly go to the university to support [its] services, resulting in a 40%–50% reduction of those [Survey] functions and the staff that carried them out.” He said that concerns about the Survey’s future have prompted 20% of its staff to take other jobs. Allison also has notified another 25% of staff of pending layoffs.

The uncertainty of having only 1 year of funding “puts the Survey’s medium-term capabilities and functions at risk,” Survey director Lee Allison said. The uncertainty of having only 1 year of assured funding for the remaining staff “puts the Survey’s medium-term capabilities and functions at risk,” he said. As the Survey transitions to

a soft money grant-seeking center, Allison said that state service priorities, subsidized through indirect costs from grants and contracts, “could go by the wayside.”

State services at risk include a program to map Earth fissures—giant tension cracks formed by subsiding basins—which developers and local planners depend on; the state’s earthquake-monitoring network; and the Survey’s mineral resources program, according to Allison.

Governor’s Office Defends Action

The consolidation language, which was in the final state budget package approved in May, reflects a strategic way to cut the budget while taking advantage of synergies between the Survey and the university, according to Dan Scarpinato, spokesman for Arizona governor Ducey. He said the consolidation is a cost-efficient “net positive” for the Survey and the clients it assists and for the university.

Experts need to figure out how to combine programs and make the consolidation work “in a way that doesn’t have an impact on the clients themselves or the services that are provided,” according to the governor’s office. “Anytime you change something that’s been operating one way for a very long period of time, there are going to be concerns and there are going to be questions,” he said, adding that the state wants to address concerns so that the consolidation works. With the budget approved, experts need to “come to the table and figure out how we combine these programs [and] make the consolidation work in a way that doesn’t have an impact on the clients themselves or the services that are provided.”

University of Arizona spokesman Chris Sigurdson [reiterated to *Eos*](#) what he told the *Arizona Daily Star*—that the transfer of the Survey to the university “makes scientific sense to us and is in line with our land-grant mission of service.”

Consolidation Could Be “Devastating”

However, Doug Bartlett, president-elect of the [Arizona Chapter of the American Institute of Professional Geologists](#), said that moving the Survey to the university without a long-term funding mechanism “will be devastating to the Survey.”

He told *Eos* that the move will result in a loss of primary research, field mapping, monitoring for geological hazards, and detailed geologic mapping useful to Arizona's minerals industries. "Private industry cannot and will not step in to replace what the Survey does," he said.

Steve Trussell, executive director of the Phoenix-based [Arizona Rock Products Association](#), said that perhaps the biggest concern about the changes affecting the Survey is what might happen to mapping and other services it provides. He said, for instance, that the Survey's maps and other programs help the construction, real estate, mining, and natural resources-related industries."

—Randy Showstack, Staff Writer, EOS

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