

Accountable Budget Review

Division of Utah Geological Survey

Overview

The research and data gathered by the Utah Geological Survey enables the state, counties, communities and families to make scientifically informed decisions.

With significant population growth expected statewide, sound understanding of geologic hazards, like landslides, earthquakes and rockfalls will allow communities to grow in a safe and responsible manner. Additionally, better understanding of ground water and energy and geologic resources will help Utah maintain the quality of life families expect, while balancing the demands and needs of tomorrow.

Line Item: RNAA

1) What are the statutory requirements? Should the statute/scope of the entity be adjusted?

No changes are currently needed for the Utah Geological Survey Title 79, Chapter 3 - 202 enabling statutes.

To further the mission, products, and services of the division, we suggest adding statutory language to Utah Code requiring political subdivisions of the state and state agencies to submit geologic-related reports they produce and receive from others for archiving by the Utah Geological Survey (UGS). These reports contain valuable information about surface and subsurface geologic conditions, as well as geologic hazards, that significantly help improve the detail and accuracy of UGS products and services. This requirement would be similar to the existing state statute that requires submission of water well driller's logs to the Utah Division of Water Rights. The financial impact to political subdivisions of the state and other state agencies would be negligible since most of these geologic reports are already submitted in a digital format.

Does each program have a mission, goals, and objectives that are meaningful and tied to the enabling statute? Yes

2) How well has this "investment" performed in the past? What are the goals for the future?

What value does this division/program add to society?

Three significant issues facing Utah now and in the future are water availability and quality, geologic hazards affecting development and infrastructure, and energy availability and impact. All three issues directly affect the quality of life and social sustainability for the citizens of Utah. The Utah Geological Survey (UGS) monitors and studies these issues as conditions change, providing valuable, unbiased applied scientific information to policy makers, local governments, and the public through effective products and services that aid in making informed decisions. The financial investment in the UGS directly supports the health, welfare, and safety of Utah and its people.

Are there meaningful performance measures?

Yes, the Utah Geological Survey (UGS) generally has meaningful performance measures. Overall, however, performance is difficult to measure quantitatively, as each function, product, or service is different in magnitude, scope, and detail from the others. Some important measures of success used internally include:

- Number of website user requests/queries to UGS interactive map layers. The number of requests represents user engagement, which we measure against the cost of delivering information through our web-based interactive maps.*
- Number of public inquiries that come to the UGS through phone calls, email, and walk-in customers.*
- Number of manuscripts submitted by UGS authors for publication by the UGS or by outside publishers.*
- Number of visits to the core repository each year. Visitors include energy companies, academic researchers and students, and K-12 classes.*

How well do they tie to the organization’s mission, goals, and objectives?

All the Utah Geological Survey’s performance measures are directly related to the division’s mission, goals, and objectives.

Are the targets reasonable? Yes

Are the results acceptable?

Yes, based on the current qualitative performance measures and quantitative feedback from users and those we interact with, the results of the Utah Geological Survey (UGS) are acceptable as described below.

3) What programs should be funded for FY 2021? How much?

Why is state government providing these services? Could this function be done by a local government or the private sector?

One of the important tenets of government is to help protect the health, welfare, and safety of the public. Per statutory requirements and authority the Utah Geological Survey (UGS) directly supports this tenet by providing unbiased, scientific information without conflicts of interest to local governments, other agencies, industries, and the public to promote informed decision making as described below. This information and the services provided by the UGS could not easily be performed by local governments or the private sector due to: (1) the lack of highly specialized, applied geologic research expertise on staff at these organizations, (2) most geologic issues are not bounded by local political boundaries, and (3) the private sector often has significant conflict of interests in dealing with these issues. The UGS also performs this applied research at a much lower cost than the private sector and is eligible for federal match funding that can help lower project costs.

What will happen if the division/program is eliminated or downsized? Who will notice? Who will be affected the most?

The UGS is expected (by statute) to deliver sound science needed to address societal needs, safety, and public concerns. We work with a multitude of state and federal agencies to meet those needs. Downsizing the UGS any further will significantly impact our ability to meet its statutory obligations. Our ability to respond to requests from other state and federal agencies in a timely manner will be hindered.

Those affected most will be the public who rely on our ability to provide objective, science-based information regarding how to manage the state's geologic resources including hazard identification and monitoring, energy and minerals, and groundwater.

Can the taxpayers' investment be reduced by implementing or increasing user fees?

No, implementing or increasing user fees would be counterproductive to the mission of the Utah Geological Survey (UGS) in providing unbiased, applied scientific information and services. Since all UGS funds are public funds and the public has already paid for the work performed by the UGS, it would not be appropriate to charge fees to access the information produced from this work.

Should the funding mix be adjusted?

Potentially, yes. Historically the UGS relied on Mineral Lease royalty payments for approximately 1/3 of its operating budget. After the oil price collapse in 2015 it was reduced to about 25%, with the shortfall covered by funding from the legislature. As shown in Graph 1 below, Mineral Lease royalty payments to the UGS are steadily declining and future predictions show no significant turnaround in funding levels. This is due partly to significant decline in production from federal lands (see Graph 2) and unlike 2015 is not tied to price fluctuation. The decline in production is, in large part, due to the focus on unconventional resource plays which are not located on federal lands. Rather, they are on tribal, fee (private) and state lands.

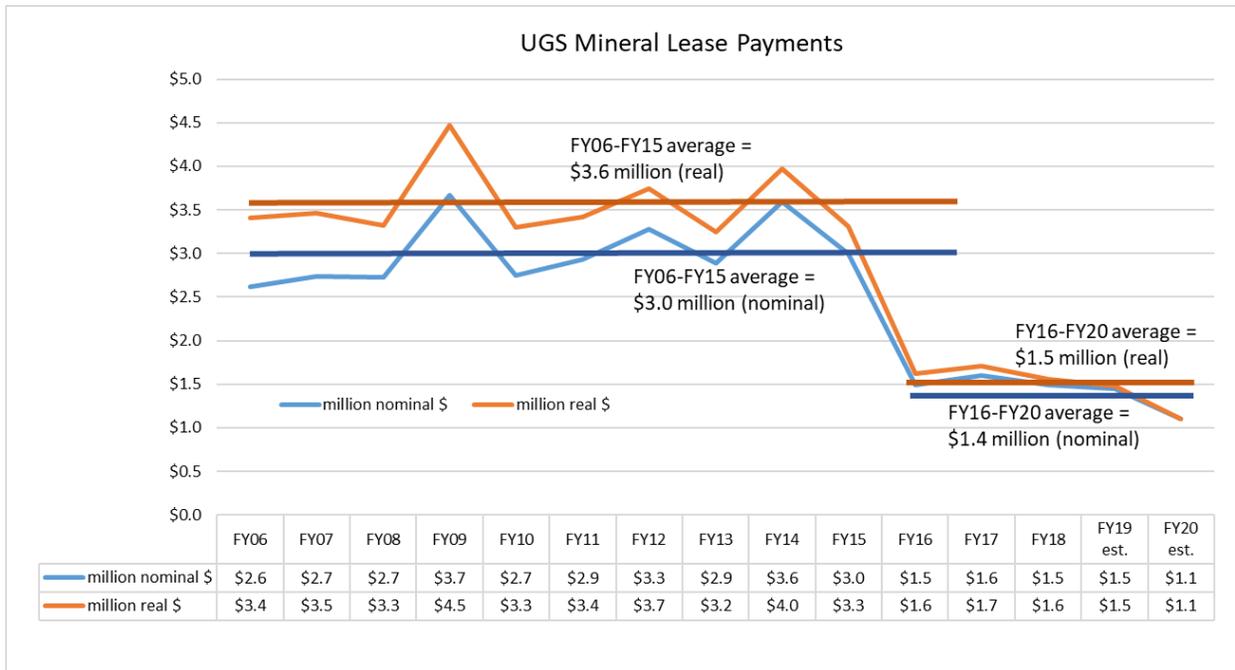
Going forward, we welcome the opportunity to discuss possible adjustments to the funding mix to provide stable year-to-year funding of the UGS. This will ensure we are able fulfill our statutory obligations and mission to the people of Utah.

Are some of the past building blocks no longer a high priority?

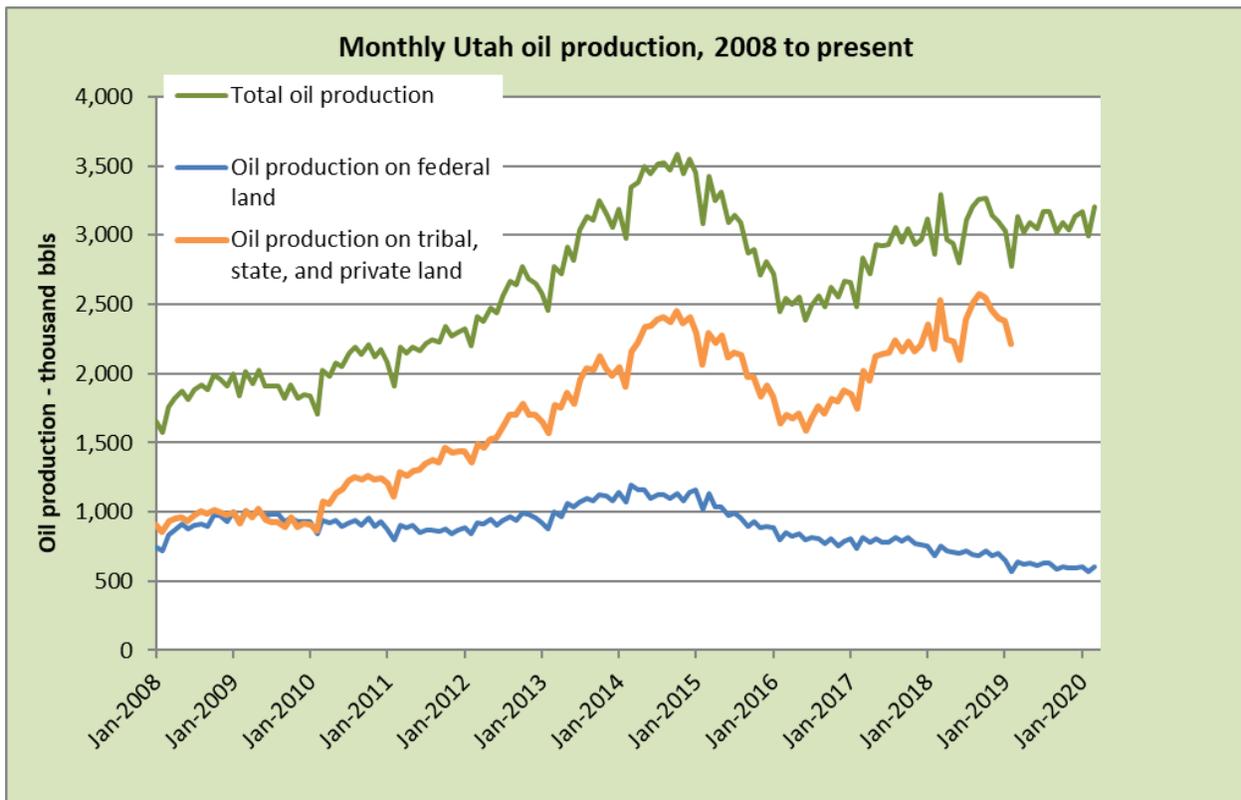
No, all the past Building Blocks approved for the Utah Geological Survey are still relevant and a high priority.

Can some of the expenditures be reduced or eliminated?

No, current and anticipated expenditures by the Utah Geological Survey are necessary to fulfill its statutory functions. Measures implemented in 2015 reduced staff by ~20%, deferred maintenance and put on hold needed space expansion for the Core Repository.



Graph 1. Federal Mineral Lease royalty payments to the UGS.



Graph 2. Monthly Utah oil production since 2008. Green line is overall oil production in Utah. Note the overall increase since the oil price collapse in 2015. The blue line is the amount of oil production from federal lands and shows an almost 50% decline since 2015.