Testimony submitted by
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University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR) to the
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, of the
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Regarding Fiscal Year 2012 Appropriations for the Department of Interior (DOI)
March 28, 2011

On behalf of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR), a consortium of 76 research universities that manages the National Center for Atmospheric Research, I submit this written testimony regarding the FY 2012 appropriation for the Department of the Interior (DOI) for the record of the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. DOI’s programs in climate science, adaptation, and education contribute a unique and critical component to the country’s efforts to better understand, predict, and respond to the impacts of climate variability on human and natural systems. I urge the Subcommittee to fund the FY 2012 budget request of $72.9 million for Climate Variability Science, including $31.0 million to complete the national network of Climate Science Centers, and $62.5 million to complete the national network of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives.

A federal leader in natural resources science, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has recently begun contributing to and integrating scientific data and research on the impacts climate variability is having and may have in the future on natural resources. USGS is building the knowledge and capacity to guide hunters, farmers, natural resource managers, Indian tribes, and resource-dependent businesses toward more sustainable, productive, and resilient management practices. In particular, the establishment of eight regional Climate Science Centers as well as a national network of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives will provide a scientific base for adaptive land and water management decisions related to climate variability. By building on the body of basic research conducted by the atmospheric research community and applying it to benefit society, USGS’s climate science and adaptation programs leverage the value of the entire national scientific enterprise.

With the establishment of a National Climate Change and Wildlife Science Center in 2008 and its current effort to complete a national network of eight Climate Science Centers and 21 Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, USGS is focusing on impacts such as wildlife migration patterns, wildfire risk, drought, coastal erosion, and invasive species. These programs will bring critical regional information to local and regional resource managers and decision makers. The eight Climate Science Centers, based at national universities that serve different areas of the country, will advance the science by teaming with other universities and national laboratories to conduct research and develop computer models that can better predict the extent and impacts of climate variability on natural resources. The nationwide network will serve the Alaska, Pacific Islands, Northwest, Southwest, North Central, South Central, Northeast, and Southeast regions. Landscape Conservation Cooperatives will in turn engage with other federal agencies, states, tribes, and local partners, to develop products and craft strategies that are based on the science and can be easily translated into adaptive management solutions. The network of 21 Landscape Conservation Cooperatives extends across the U.S. and into Mexico and Canada.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has plans to develop a NOAA Climate Service that operates in coordination to the DOI climate science centers and that will differ markedly from the DOI programs. While NOAA climate services will focus on coastal and marine resource management and adaptation, and impacts on commerce, DOI climate services are directed toward
adaptation and management of natural and cultural trust resources that include water resources, land use changes, ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural resource restoration. In order to improve coordination between the agencies and avoid any potential overlap or duplication, NOAA and DOI entered into a Memorandum of Understanding in July 2010 that clearly delineates boundaries and roles for each agency regarding climate-related activities. The efforts of the two agencies to provide much needed guidance regarding adaptation to climate variability in all regions should serve the country effectively.

Thank you in advance for your support of USGS efforts to add to and disseminate knowledge that will enable stakeholders to protect and more efficiently use our natural resources as evolving long-term weather patterns bring changes that must be addressed.