

November XX, 2018

RE: The USGS is considering charging for Landsat satellite data

Dear [contact name],

At the direction of the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the U.S. Geological Survey, a Federal Advisory Committee is currently reviewing USGS's current free-and-open policy for Landsat data - <https://www.usgs.gov/center-news/landsat-advisory-group-undertakes-a-landsat-cost-recovery-study>. On behalf of the Idaho geospatial community, the Idaho Geospatial Council Executive Committee (IGC-EC) would like to express our overwhelming support for continued open and free access to data collected under the Landsat program. The mission of IGC-EC is to provide leadership and coordination for the creation and maintenance of statewide geospatial data and overall support to the GIS community. We facilitate the use, development, access, sharing, and management of geospatial data and assist with communicating the value of geospatial information to citizens and decision makers in the state of Idaho. Landsat plays an important role in supporting the various missions of the Idaho geospatial community.

NASA launched the first Landsat satellite in 1972 and represents the world's longest continuously acquired collection of space-based moderate resolution land remote sensing data. The advances in the use of this unprecedented historical archive of Landsat data for natural resources management, including water, wildfire recovery, and landuse change have come because Landsat data are free. The user community of academia, federal, state, and regional institutions and a multitude of others will continue to develop valuable Landsat-based applications as long as Landsat data are provided at no-cost.

Open and free access to Landsat data allows urban and natural resource program managers, decision-makers, and staff at many levels (administrative, technical, GIS, and field) to engage in quality analyses to protect natural resources, provide data verification, and monitor changes. The range and variety of how satellite imagery is used - from regulatory and compliance monitoring to field mapping and scientific assessment – is a testament to its importance.

We acknowledge the budget pressures motivating the necessity to recoup the cost of Landsat; however, limited access will have considerable detrimental impacts to state, regional, and local governments already experiencing tightened budgets and reduced staff. We believe that collecting data that serves a public good is an excellent use of our federal dollars and should continue to be served freely and openly to the national GIS community, be it from the USGS/NASA program or from another national program that would be consistently funded.

Sincerely,

Bill Farnsworth
Idaho Geospatial Information Officer

Wilma Robertson
Chair, Idaho Geospatial Council–Executive Committee