

3/25/87

EROS DATA CENTER BRIEFING SHEET

The EROS Data Center is operated by the Department of the Interior's U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and works closely with NASA, NOAA, and other Federal agencies to develop and implement advanced earth science and natural resource information systems using satellite data, computer technology, telecommunications, and advanced mapping systems.

1. The EROS Data Center was established by the Department of the Interior prior to the launch of the first NASA satellite in 1972 to archive, process, and distribute Landsat satellite data.
2. South Dakota and the Sioux Falls community were extremely active in influencing the decision to locate the Center in Sioux Falls. They donated the required land to the Federal Government and built the facilities under a 20-year lease purchase agreement with the USGS. The Sioux Falls community remains very supportive of the Center and its staff, is very aware of the Center's cultural and economic impact, and is politically active in support of the Center.
3. The annual operating budget of the EROS Data Center is \$16.7 million and the annual payroll is almost \$12 million. The Center employs approximately 350 people, more than half of which are professional scientists and engineers.
4. In addition to satellite data handling and applications research activities, the EROS Data Center supports other USGS efforts such as archiving and distribution of aerial photography and earth science data sets, advanced computer mapping systems development, map data digitizing, image mapping, development of geographic information systems technology, and the development of a variety of USGS computer software systems.
5. Over the past few years, the EROS Data Center has become increasingly dependent upon non-USGS funding (primarily NOAA, but also including NASA, DOD, CIA, and others) with approximately 60 percent of the operating budget coming from non-USGS sources.

6. NOAA is now responsible for the Landsat Satellite Program and will reimburse the EROS Data Center almost \$7 million this year to process, archive, and distribute Landsat data in support of the commercial operator.
 - a. Landsat satellites orbit the earth obtaining repetitive electronic images of the earth's surface that contribute to our basic scientific knowledge of geology, hydrology, biosciences, cartography, land use, and environmental dynamics. The data are also used for mineral and petroleum exploration, crop vigor and yield assessments, and foreign economic intelligence.
 - b. The Landsat Satellite Program was originated by NASA in 1969...there have been 5 Landsat satellites launched by the Federal Government since 1972.
 - c. NASA operated the Landsat Program until 1983, at which time the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the Department of Commerce assumed responsibility as the first step towards "commercialization" of the program.
 - d. EOSAT Co. was selected by NOAA and Commerce in 1985 as the Landsat owner-operator following a competitive selection process and legislative authorization (P.L. 98-365) to proceed in a phased way towards a privately owned and operated system.
 - e. There are currently two operating Landsat satellites in orbit (Landsats 4 and 5). NOAA now spends approximately \$30 million per year to operate these satellites and to process and distribute the data (\$7 million a year to EDC).
 - f. In addition to the U.S. satellites, the Russians have an active program, the French launched their SPOT satellite in 1986, and the Japanese launched a similar satellite in early 1987; Canada, India, and the European Space Agency all have firm programs leading to satellite launches in the late 1980's and early 1990's.
 - g. The Federal Government initially agreed (in 1985) to provide \$250 million (plus launch costs) spread over 5 years to the EOSAT Co. to support the development of two additional Landsat satellites (Landsat 6 and 7) to provide data until the mid-1990's.

- h. The Government provided \$90 million to EOSAT for FY1985 and FY1986 as the first installment of the \$250 million subsidy, but the Administration recently rejected NOAA and EOSAT requests for additional payments. A reduced single satellite program (Landsat 6) was also rejected by Congress because it would not result in commercialization without major costs increases over the original plan.
 - i. As of February 1987, the future of the Landsat Program appears very bleak. Landsat 5 should operate into 1988 but there are no U.S. satellites planned to follow it.
7. As part of their commercialization plan, EOSAT (and NOAA) had planned to build new ground data handling facilities in Lanham, Maryland. These new facilities were to have been put into operation in mid-1988...thus ending the Center's Landsat data handling responsibilities and associated NOAA funding.
 8. The Administration's budget request for FY1988 cuts the USGS' EROS Program appropriation by \$2 million...from \$9 million to \$7 million...which will directly impact the EROS Data Center's core activities. The additional loss in the late 1980's of a significant part of the \$7 million of NOAA support will seriously jeopardize the Center's future.
 9. Unless other sources of funding for the EROS Data Center are found, the Center's operating budget could drop from \$16.5 million in FY1987, to a questionably viable \$10-11 million by 1990.
 10. NOAA and the USGS have jointly agreed to establish the legislatively required (P.L. 98-365) National Satellite Land Remote Sensing Data Archive at the EROS Data Center and a Cooperative Federal Land Remote Sensing Research Program collocated with the Archive, but no funding has been approved for this activity to date.
 11. The USGS' EROS Data Center enjoys a national and international reputation as a highly competent world leader in remote sensing and geographic information systems technology development and has been involved in the satellite land remote sensing field longer and stronger than any other single facility in the world.
 12. However, increasing budget pressure on the National Mapping Division and the USGS are severely limiting available options and forcing consideration of a variety of alternatives concerning the EROS Data Center, including possible transfer of activities to other locations and closing of the Center.

13. The Director of the USGS recently initiated a Program Review of the EROS Data Center during which these mission alternatives, along with others, will be investigated, funding strategies will be evaluated, and a future course of action will be recommended.
14. Alternatives being considered by the Review Group include:
 - a. Transfer additional USGS program activities (and associated funding) to the Center.
 - b. Strengthen ties with other Federal agencies such as NASA, NOAA, and the Defense Department for increased reimbursable support activities.
 - c. Transfer remaining activities to other locations such as Denver or Reston and close the Center.