Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 8, 2011

The Honorable Jacob Lew
Director
The Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Lew:

We are writing to you regarding a critical project for our home state that will require the coordination and cooperation of numerous federal agencies.

Alaska is the only state in the United States that has not been digitally mapped on a statewide basis. Most states have completed or are refreshing their existing data. Alaska is lagging behind other states that are in some cases 20 years ahead of Alaska.

Currently, the US Geological Survey (USGS) topographical maps of Alaska are over 40 years old, inaccuracies of up to a quarter mile or more are commonplace and these maps do not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. A reliable base map is critical to control incoming layers of Geographical Information Systems used across all disciplines both public and private. None of the modern disaster preparedness and emergency management systems being deployed elsewhere in the nation will work in Alaska until the need for an accurate base map is resolved. Geospatial information is spread across many levels of government, but lacks means of organization. As a result, the economic benefits, disaster recovery initiatives, and government efficiencies go largely unrealized.

To rectify this, The State of Alaska began a Statewide Digital Mapping Initiative (SDMI) several years ago and has now realized the first collection of elevation data (representing about 10% of the State) to this goal. Our immediate problem is the cost of the initiative and the scope and diversity of federal agencies that need and would benefit from this data collection. The State of Alaska has made a great initial effort to pull together approximately six million in funding to begin this initiative but the overall cost of the project will be closer to $48 million.

Current Alaska mapping priorities include, but are not limited to:

- Aviation safety
- Coastal resources and Alaska Coastal Management Program and spill response shore zone mapping
- Emergency response
- Fire hazard mapping for critical and high value protection areas
- Forest resource mapping in southeast, northern, and south central regions
- Gas line routing and permit support
- Global warming studies and response planning

- Land cover and terrain for major state parks
- Land planning; corridor analysis and statewide land sales program
- Land use permit authorizations with commercial recreation permits
- Oil and gas infrastructure management and monitoring
- Coastal erosion monitoring

In addition to the USGS, the other federal agencies that are stakeholders in this initiative include the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Reclamation, the National Park Service and other Department of Interior agencies; the U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources and Conservation Service, other agencies within the Department of Agriculture; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; the Federal Aviation Administration and other agencies within the Department of Transportation; NorthCom and other Department of Defense interests; various agencies within the Department of Homeland Security; and National Aeronautics and Space Administration, among others.

At the State level the agencies most directly in need of these maps include the Departments of Transportation, Public Safety, Fish and Game, Environmental Conservation, Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, Labor, Health and Social Services, and any other department using location based services to meet its mission. The State of Alaska has already provided six million for its share of this data collection and has pledged matching funds representing its 27% interest in State of Alaska lands under state control.

The only way we will coordinate the efforts of all federal agencies is to have the White House convene a meeting of all federal stakeholders and develop a strategy by which each agency contributes a portion of the overall cost. No single agency has sufficient funds to finance this program. Quite simply, we need the leadership and support of the White House to develop a plan that provides for the funding needed for this initiative and with a data set that meets the requirements of every federal agency.

We urge you to convene a meeting of representatives of every affected agency at the White House. We hope that you will be able to coordinate the efforts and assist in identifying discretionary funding within each agency that can help cover the cost of this critical initiative. We thank you for your attention to this issue and hope that we can work together for a successful outcome.

Sincerely,

Senator Lisa Murkowski | Senator Mark Begich | Congressman Don Young

cc: Cecilia Muñoz, Director, White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs
Letitia Long, Director, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
The Honorable Marcia McNutt, Director, U.S. Geological Survey