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**40 years of Landsat images: What we learned about science and politics**

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The first Landsat (then called ERTS – Earth Resources Technology Satellite) launched in 1972. Landsat 8 launched in February 2013. The 40+ years of images have yielded a remarkable history of changes in Earth’s land surface, and the program has accomplished significant technological achievements. However, the sustained long-term record owes more to luck than careful program planning, and especially benefitted from the remarkable 27-year life of Landsat 5. Recommendations for the future center mainly on making the program a real Program with a commitment to sustaining it, as well as some ideas to reduce cost and improve effectiveness.