

to the editor

Courage on a tragic story

I am delighted with Everly Driscoll's article "The bureaucratic odyssey of a space mapping camera"—and your editorial (SN: 11/27/71). I fully support an earth resources satellite concept and most aspects of the EROS Program. The primary danger I see with the ERTS-A satellite, as currently engineered, is that it promises more usable environmental data than it can possibly deliver—because of DOD restrictions on its design. The ERTS-A system will deliver mountains of imagery but how much of the imagery will contain useful environmental information is a moot point. Any failure with ERTS-A will probably set the whole concept back a decade or more—just when we desperately need environmental data to provide information for the wisest possible future decisions on the management of the resources of the United States.

I and others believe that the wise use, management, and preservation of our natural resources clearly transcends the myopic and obsolete military intelligence requirements of the Department of Defense. It may well be that our need for environmental information of our great land can only be met by use of film-return satellites—launched at frequent intervals. The answer to that question re-

sides in archival vaults of the Department of Defense—satellite photography which is effectively barred from non-military scientists—and the public. Even more serious is the preemption of such a satellite—now called "Big Bird"—by the Department of Defense, thereby preventing the use of such a satellite system by non-military agencies and organizations for a long time to come.

You and your staff have shown courage to offer the first report on a very tragic story—the full implications and environmental cost of which will not be tallied for many years if not decades. It is indeed sad that the hard work and dedication of many scientists and technical administrators has been continually and consciously thwarted by the raw and naked power wielded by the Department of Defense. Perhaps your editorial and the article by Ms. Driscoll will help "David" in his continuing contest with "Goliath."

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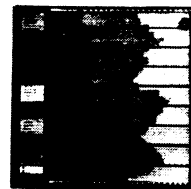
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