

Remote Sensing License Tiering

Q1 2022

Per 15 CFR 960.6, the NOAA Commercial Remote Sensing Regulatory Affairs (CRSRA) office categorizes each private space-based remote sensing system it licenses based on an analysis of whether the system produces or is capable of producing unenhanced data already available from other entities.

- A system with the capability to collect unenhanced data substantially the same as unenhanced data already available from entities or individuals not licensed under this part, such as foreign entities, is categorized as Tier 1;
- A system with the capability to collect unenhanced data substantially the same as unenhanced data already available, but only from entities or individuals licensed by CRSRA, is categorized as Tier 2; and
- A system with the capability to collect unenhanced data not substantially the same as unenhanced data already available from any domestic or foreign entity or individual is categorized as Tier 3.

Currently, CRSRA has:

- 66 Tier 1 licenses
- 8 Tier 2 licenses
- 21 Tier 3 licenses

When determining whether unenhanced data are substantially the same as other unenhanced data, factors include but are not limited to: spatial resolution, spectral bandwidth, number of imaging bands, temporal resolution, persistence of imaging, local time of imaging, geographic or other restrictions imposed by foreign governments, and all applicable technical system factors listed in Appendix A of 15 C.F.R. Part 960 and Part D of a NOAA license. The list and table below outline certain foreign systems and their known capabilities that make available the finest unenhanced data across various types of imagery. Therefore, CRSRA currently uses the below systems as a starting point to differentiate Tier 1 licenses from Tier 2 licenses for several common sensor types.

These parameters are derived exclusively from open-source research, and reflect data that are *available*, as the term is defined at 15 CFR 960.4.

This information is provided as a reference for the public and CRSRA intends to provide regular updates. However, CRSRA continually evaluates the availability from foreign and other CRSRA-licensed systems and uses that analysis and considers all applicable factors (not only those listed here) when categorizing any system.

Metric values for the best/novel US systems currently operating are also provided in the table as a guide, but not an exclusive one, to Tier 2-Tier 3 categorization for applicants.

The following foreign data was found to be available.

- Panchromatic (PAN) Imagery with;
 - 0.30 meters spatial resolution
 - 24 hours (approximately) average revisit rate
- Multispectral Imagery (MSI) with;
 - 0.7 meters spatial resolution and
 - TBD (approximately) average revisit rate
- Video Imagery with;
 - 0.9 meters spatial resolution
 - TBD average revisit rate
- Hyperspectral Imagery (HSI) with;
 - 10 meters spatial resolution
 - 2.5-15 nm spectral bandwidth
 - 24 hours (approximately) average revisit rate
- Short Wave Infrared (SWIR) Data with;
 - 30 meter spatial resolution
 - spectral coverage to 2500 nm with 12 nm bandwidth
 - 7 day revisit
- Long Wave Infrared (LWIR) Data with;
 - 80 meter spatial resolution
 - Approx. weekly revisit
- Night-Time Image (NTI) Data with;
 - 0.70 meter spatial resolution
 - > 24 hour revisit time
- Non-Earth-Imaging (NEI) VIS, VNIR Data with;
 - 0.50 – 0.05 meter spatial resolution
- Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) imagery (X-band) with;
 - 59 (bits/m²) (Information density)
 - 24 hours average revisit rate.
- Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) imagery (C-band) with;
 - 6.1 (bits/m²) (Information density)
 - 24 hours average revisit rate.
- Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) imagery (L-band) with;
 - 2.7 (bits/m²) (Information density)
 - 14 days average revisit rate.
- LIDAR Data with;
 - .004 m to 0.25 m vertical resolution
 - 17 m horizontal resolution
 - 91 days average revisit rate.

Satellite or Constellation	Country	Resolution (type) ¹ Spectral or Other Information	Number of Satellites (advertised revisit rate) ²
PANCHROMATIC (PAN)^{3,4}			
Pleides Neo-3, -4 ⁵	France	0.30 meter (m) (spatial)	2 (~24 hours)
KOMPSAT-3A ⁶	S. Korea	0.40 m (spatial) ⁷ (0.54 m raw)	1 (7 days <20° off nadir)
KOMPSAT-3 ⁸	S. Korea	0.50 m (spatial) ⁹ (0.7 m raw)	1 (5.5 days <20° off nadir)
SuperView	China	0.50 m (spatial)	4 (24 hours)
Pléiades-HR 1A/1B	France	0.50 m (spatial) (0.7 m raw)	2 (24 hours)
Jilin-1 Optical	China	0.5–1.06 m (spatial)	23 (4 hours) ¹⁰
Best US ¹¹	US	0.25 m (spatial)	4 (<1 day)

¹ Resolution types listed in this column refer to spatial resolution, measured in meters (m), spectral resolution, measured in nanometers (nm), thermal accuracy or resolution, and measured in Kelvin (K). As other types of resolution become relevant to the listed capabilities, they will be added to this column.

² CRSRA currently reports revisit rates as advertised by the constellation operators or, in absence of operator information, as advertised by resellers.

³ India's Cartosat-3 satellite collects PAN imagery with up to 0.25 m resolution and MSI at 1.1 m but does not meet the criterion for availability (data access is "very constrained") therefore it cannot be used as a commercial benchmark. Source: <http://database.eohandbook.com/database/instrumentsummary.aspx?instrumentID=917>

⁴ TripleSat (DMC3, SSTL S1-4) was removed. Although SSTL S1-4, the fourth satellite in the constellation, was initially launched in 2018 into a lower (580 km) orbit versus DMC3A/B/C (645 x 670 km orbit) the overall performance of the constellation is advertised as 0.80 – 1.0 meter. At 80 cm, it is no longer benchmark level.

⁵ Airbus Pleiades Neo-3 and -4 entered operations in Nov and Dec 2021: How to order Pléiades Neo Imagery (intelligence-airbusds.com) Retrieved 22 Dec 2021.

⁶ Source: Apollo Mapping: [Buy 40-cm KOMPSAT-3A Satellite Imagery - Apollo Mapping](#)

⁷ Kompsat-3A is equipped with a 80 cm aperture AEISS camera and 8.6 m focal length telescope. 528km altitude. Native resolution is 54 cm and the oversampled data is processed to produce 40 cm resolution at nadir. Source: ESA EO Portal. Retrieved 22 Sept 2021

⁸ Source: Apollo Mapping [Buy 70-cm KOMPSAT-3 Satellite Imagery - Apollo Mapping](#)

⁹ Kompsat-3 is equipped with 80 cm aperture AEISS camera and 8.6 m focal length telescope. 625km orbit. Native resolution is 70 cm, the oversampled data is processed to 50 cm resolution at nadir. Source: ESA EO Portal Retrieved 22 Sept 2021

¹⁰ The Jilin constellation operated by Charming Globe contains a variety of satellite types, including, as of 4 March 2021, 11 high-resolution optical, 12 video, and 2 hyperspectral. The values here are as reported by Charming Globe and Apollo Mapping. The revisit rate for Jilin-1 varies by product.

¹¹ For *Best U.S.* systems, the licensed resolution parameters are shown, not actual performance, which may be less.

MULTISPECTRAL (MSI)			
Aleph-1	Argentina	0.7-1.0 meters (m) (spatial) 5 bands between 400–900 nm	27 (varies)
Pleides Neo-3, -4	France	1.2 m (spatial) 6 Bands between 400-880 nm	2 (~24 hours)
KOMPSAT-3A	S. Korea	1.6 m (spatial) ¹² (2.0 m raw) 4 bands between 450–900 nm	1 (7 days < 20° off nadir)
Superview-1	China	2.0 m (spatial) 4 bands between 450–890 nm	4 (daily)
Jilin-1 GP01/02	China	5.0 m (spatial) 16 bands between 400–900 nm 7.5+ nm (spectral)	2 (2–3 days)
Best US	US	0.62 m (spatial) 4 bands between 380-1200 nm	19 (3-7 hours)
COLOR and VIDEO			
Zhuhai-1 OVS-2, 3	China	0.9 meters (m) (spatial, video)	4 (-)
Jilin-1 Video 1LQ, SP01-8, F03C01-3	China	0.92–1.1 m (spatial, RGB color and video)	13 (-)
CE-SAT-I	Japan	1.0 m (spatial, color)	1 (>1 day)
Best US	US	0.5 m (spatial, PAN video)	19 (3-7 hours)

¹² Revised figures reflect reprocessed oversampled imagery.

HYPER SPECTRAL (HSI)¹³			
Zhuhai-1 Orbita OHS-2, 3	China	10 meters (m) (spatial) 32 bands between 400–1,000 nm 2.5–15 nm ^{14,15,16} (spectral bandwidth)	8 (~24 hours)
Aleph-1	Argentina	25–30 m (spatial) Up to 600 bands between 400–900 nm ¹⁷ 5 nm FWHM (spectral bandwidth)	27 (varies)
PRISMA ¹⁸	Italy	30 m (spatial) 66 bands between 400-1010 nm 12 nm FWHM (spectral bandwidth)	1 (7 days)
Best US (spectral coverage, global coverage)	US	34.7 m (spatial) 472 bands between 400-2500 nm 4.0 nm FWHM (spectral bandwidth)	1 (7 days)
Best US (Spatial resolution, spectral resolution)	US/ Germany (DLR) ¹⁹	24 m (spatial) 235 bands between 400-1000 nm 2.55 nm FWHM (spectral bandwidth)	1 (~12-hour revisit) (ISS orbit: coverage from 55° N to 52° S latitude)
SHORT WAVE INFRARED (SWIR) 1200-3000 nm²⁰			
Sentinel-2A, 2B	European Space Agency	20 meters (m) (spatial) ²¹ 2 bands centered at 1610, 2185 nm 91 and 175 nm (spectral bandwidth)	2 (5 days)
PRISMA ²²	Italy	30 m (spatial) 171 bands between 920-2505 nm 12 nm FWHM (spectral bandwidth)	1 (7 days)
Best US	US	3.7 m (spatial) 8 bands between 1150-2400 nm 50-60 nm (typ.) (spectral bandwidth)	1 (-)
Best US (spectral coverage, spectral resolution)	US	34.7 m (spatial) 472 bands between 400-2500 nm 4.0 nm FWHM (spectral bandwidth)	1 (7 days)

¹³ GaoFen-5 AHSI Hyperspectral data unavailable as the sensor remains in calibration as of 1 March 2022 per communication from HEAD Aerospace.

¹⁴ Full Width Half Maximum (FWHM)

¹⁵ HSI spectral resolution range varies across spectral coverage and from satellite to satellite. (Sources: Apollo mapping, Zhuhai Orbita)

¹⁶ Minimum operator specified spectral resolution: <https://www.obtdata.com/en/zhuhai1.html>

¹⁷ Aleph-1 is capable of producing (filtering) up to 600 spectral bands but is constrained to acquiring just 29 bands at a time. Source Satellogic: <https://www.euspaceimaging.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Satellogic-Aleph-1-Data-sheet-final.pdf>. Accessed 26 Feb 2021.

¹⁸ ESA EO portal. <https://directory.eoportal.org/web/eoportal/satellite-missions/p/prisma-hyperspectral>

¹⁹ DLR Earth Sensing Imaging Spectrometer (DESI) on the International Space Station (ISS): [Sensors | Free Full-Text | Data Products, Quality and Validation of the DLR Earth Sensing Imaging Spectrometer \(DESI\) \(mdpi.com\)](https://www.mdpi.com/2072-4267/12/1/1)

²⁰ Jilin-1 GPO1/02 removed. 4 MSI bands with 100 m spatial and 30-80 nm spectral resolution is below benchmark.

²¹ Sentinel 2A, 2B have a 60 m spatial resolution SWIR band centered at ~1375 nm with 30 nm spectral bandwidth.

²² ESA EO portal. <https://directory.eoportal.org/web/eoportal/satellite-missions/p/prisma-hyperspectral>

MID-WAVE INFRARED (MWIR) 3000-8000 nm^{23,24}			
Best US ^{25,26}	US	80 m (spatial) 1 band between 3300-5400 nm	1 (~12-hour revisit) (coverage ±53.6° latitude)
LONG WAVE INFRARED (LWIR) 8000-14000 nm			
Aleph-1	Argentina	90 meters (m) (spatial) 1 band between 8000-14000 nm	13 (weekly)
CBERS-4 IRMSS ^{27,28}	China / Brazil	80 meters (spatial) 1 band between 10400-12500 nm	1 (16 days)
Best US ²⁹	US	60 m (spatial) 1 band between 10400-12500 nm	1 (16 days)
Best US ³⁰	US	69 x 38 m (Azimuth vs Range) (spatial) 3 bands between 8500-12500 nm CF: (1) 8800, (2) 10500, (3) 12100 nm. 31-61 nm FWHM (spectral bandwidth)	1 (~12-hour revisit) (ISS orbit: coverage between ±53.6° latitude)
NIGHT-TIME-IMAGING (NTI)			
EROS B	Israel	0.70 meters (m) (spatial)	1 (3 days <30° off-nadir)
Jilin-1 SP03-8	China	0.92 m	9 (3x/day) ³¹
Best US	US	TBD	TBD
NON-EARTH-IMAGING (NEI)			
HEO Robotics	Australia	0.50 to 0.05 meters (m) (spatial) VIS, VNIR (450-900 nm)	N/A
Best US	US	TBD	N/A

²³ India's Cartosat-3 collects MWIR at 5.7 m but the data is not distributed and therefore cannot be used as a benchmark. Source: <http://database.eohandbook.com/database/instrumentsummary.aspx?instrumentID=917>

²⁴ S. Korea's KOMPSAT-3A satellite collects MWIR at 5.5 m but the data is not distributed and therefore cannot be used as a benchmark.

²⁵ Compact Thermal Imager (CTI), NASA. ISS mission 2019-2020. This is a USG system not licensed by NOAA. Sources: <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/146547/taking-temperatures-from-iss>, <https://altirs.gsfc.nasa.gov/cti.html> (Site reviewed on 2 September 2021)

²⁶ CTI has collected over 10 million images of the earth with 80-meter spatial resolution, in continuous snapshot mode (1 image/sec), alternating bands (MWIR/LWIR). "QWIPs, SLS, Landsat and the International Space Station", M. Jhabvala NASA Goddard Space Flight Center et al. Retrieved 3 September 2021: <https://ntrs.nasa.gov/api/citations/20190033892/downloads/20190033892.pdf>

²⁷ [2020 Joint Agency Commercial Imagery Evaluation—Remote Sensing Satellite Compendium \(usgs.gov\)](#)

²⁸ The HuanJing-2B (HJ-2B) IRMSS-2 CRESDA sensor program acquires MWIR/LWIR data at 48/40 meters spatial resolution but has not made this data available. See distributor SpaceWill (en.spacewillinfo.com)

²⁹ Landsat 7: [The Enhanced Thematic Mapper Plus \(ETM+\) - Landsat Science \(nasa.gov\)](#)

³⁰ NASA ECOSTRESS Mission with Prototype HypsIRI Thermal Infrared Radiometer (PHyTIR). This is a USG system not licensed by NOAA. Source: <https://ecostress.jpl.nasa.gov/instrument>

³¹ Jilin-1 night-time imagery is available from nine satellites as of 28 Feb 2022. Values reported by HEAD Aerospace.

Satellite or Constellation	Country	Resolution (type) ³² Spectral or Other Information	Slant Range /Azimuth Resolution ³³ (meters)	Number of Satellites (current advertised revisit rate) ³⁴
SYNTHETIC APERTURE RADAR (SAR)³⁵				
X-Band (9.2-10.4 GHz)				
ICEYE	Finland	23 (bits/m ²) (Information Density: ID)	0.5/0.25	>10 (3-6 hours) ³⁶
COSMO Sky MED 1 st Generation (CSK) ³⁷	Italy	33 (bits/m ²) (ID)	0.4/0.3	4 (12 hours) ³⁸
TerraSAR/TanDEM/PAZ	Germany/ Spain	39 (bits/m ²) (ID)	0.5/0.25	3 (24 hours) ³⁹
COSMO Sky MED 2 nd Generation (CSG) ⁴⁰	Italy	59 (bits/m ²) (ID)	0.17/0.3	1 (~24 hours) ⁴¹
Best US	US	1619 (bits/m ²) (ID)	0.25/0.01	44 (3-6 hours)
C-Band (5.25-5.57 GHz)				
TY-MiniSAR ⁴² (Hisea-1)	China	4.2 (bits/m ²) (ID)	1.0/1.0	1 (6-10 days)
RADARSAT-2 ⁴³	Canada	5.17 (bits/m ²) (ID)	1.6/2.8	1 (24 hours)
Gaofen-3 ⁴⁴	China	6.1 (bits/m ²) (ID)	0.9/1.0	1 (3 days)
Best US	US	TBD	TBD	TBD
L-Band (1.215-1.30 GHz)				
ALOS-2 ⁴⁵	Japan	2.7 (bits/m ²) (ID)	1.8/1.0	14 days
Best US	US	TBD	TBD	TBD

³² Resolution types listed in this column refer to spatial resolution, measured in meters (m), spectral resolution, measured in nanometers (nm), thermal accuracy or resolution, and measured in Kelvin (K). As other types of resolution become relevant to the listed capabilities, they will be added to this column.

³³ Slant range and azimuth resolution figures provided for reference only.

³⁴ CRSRA currently reports revisit rates as advertised by the constellation operators or as advertised by resellers.

³⁵ The SAR primary performance characterization metric has been changed from ground range detected (GRD) square pixel resolution to Information density C (bits/m²) as defined by the Radar General Image Quality Equation (RGIQE) = $\beta \cdot \text{LOG}(1 + \text{SNR})$ where β = bandwidth per unit area on the ground at lowest acceptable grazing angle ($\beta = \text{SQ RT}(\beta_{\text{Range}} * \beta_{\text{Azimuth}})$), SNR = the signal-to-noise ratio = $1/(\text{Noise Equivalent Sigma Zero (NESZ)})$ with MNR = 0 (1 dB). Results are considered comparable if they are within 25%. Slant range resolution provided for reference only and may not represent best resolution as in some cases azimuth resolution may be superior.

³⁶ Revisit time is per ICEYE direct contact (24 September 2021).

³⁷ Published CSK/CSG commercially available resolution statistics: e-geos Price List February 22, 2021 (Pg. 6)

³⁸ e-geos advertises 4 acquisitions a day with two in the early morning and two in the late afternoon.

³⁹ Revisit time is given for the Airbus SAR constellation consisting of: TerraSAR-X, Tandem-X, and PAZ. Source: <https://www.intelligence-airbusds.com/en/8694-terrasar-x-tandem-x>.

⁴⁰ Published CSK/CSG commercially available resolution statistics: e-geos Price List February 22, 2021 (Page 6).

⁴¹ CSG-1 and -2 are in the same orbital plane as the four CSK satellites.

⁴² Sihan Xue, et al, HISEA-1: The First C-Band SAR Miniaturized Satellite for Ocean and Coastal Observation, MDPI, Remote Sens. 2021, 13, 2076. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rs13112076>

⁴³ The RCM constellation is for Government of Canada use and is not commercially available.

⁴⁴ Data disseminated through HEAD Aerospace: <https://head-aerospace.eu/eo-satellites>. Resolution is 0.9 x 1.0 m

⁴⁵ Advanced Land Observing Satellite-2: [ALOS-2 - Satellite Missions - eoPortal Directory \(esa.int\)](https://www.esa.int/Enabling_Support/Earth_Observation/Satellites/Advanced_Land_Observing_Satellite-2)

Satellite or Constellation	Country	Resolution (type) ⁴⁶ Spectral or Other Information	Number of Satellites (advertised revisit rate) ⁴⁷
LIDAR			
TBD			
Best US ⁴⁸	US	0.004 meters (m) to 0.25 m vertical, 17 meters horizontal	1 (91 days)

⁴⁶ Resolution types listed in this column refer to spatial resolution, measured in meters (m), spectral resolution, measured in nanometers (nm), thermal accuracy or resolution, and measured in Kelvin (K). As other types of resolution become relevant to the listed capabilities, they will be added to this column.

⁴⁷ CRSRA currently reports revisit rates as advertised by the constellation operators or, in absence of operator information, as advertised by resellers.

⁴⁸ NASA ICESAT-2: https://icesat-2.gsfc.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/page_files/ICESat2missionBrochureFINAL1.pdf. Viewed 7 March 2022