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Mr. Robert M. Hirsch
Associate Director for Water
US Geological Survey
409 National Center
Reston, VA 20192

Mr. Glenn G. Patterson
Coordinator, Cooperative Water Program

Regarding **COOPERATIVE WATER PROGRAM, Roundtable Recommendations**

Dear Mr. Hirsch and Mr. Patterson,

We are pleased to present recommendations for future management improvements in the Cooperative Water Program on behalf of the broader group of non-federal Cooperators and with the benefit of ideas and priorities developed during the 2nd National Stakeholders' Roundtable in January 2006. These recommendations were selected and refined through discussion with a leadership team representing many of the Cooperators and consisting of representatives of the Western States Water Council, National Water Resources Association, National Wildlife Federation, National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies, Interstate Council on Water Policy, Association of State and Interstate Water Pollution Control Administrators and Association of State Flood Plain Managers.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide recommendations and we accept the challenge of helping to shape a more capable Cooperative Water Program (CWP) in the coming years. We are convinced that significant efforts to assure and demonstrate that CWP funds are being applied as intelligently and efficiently as possible must go hand-in-hand with efforts to bring additional resources into the CWP and the National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP). Communication among the non-federal Cooperators indicates a willingness to engage as a reliable partner in both efforts. Given the cost-share character of the CWP, the substantial investment made by the Cooperators and their dependence upon the results, your willingness to consider greater participation by the non-federal Cooperators is greatly appreciated.

Our first recommendation is that the USGS should engage the Cooperators more directly and more consistently in CWP decisions, especially those concerning use of cost-shared funds. Based upon the reaction of many Cooperators (federal as well as non-federal) and USGS staff, we believe that this should involve meeting periodically with Cooperators to enable them to learn about and help guide CWP policies and priorities at the national and regional levels, working together toward more efficient use of resources and reduced program cost. We hope you will agree that the two national Cooperators' Roundtable meetings held in 2005 and 2006 present solid prospects for future success.

In light of the national scope of the first two Cooperators' Roundtables, we believe that a series of regional meetings should be designed to cultivate a significantly greater sense of connection and appreciation for the management challenges facing USGS, its Water Science Centers and the Cooperative Water Program. Engaging the Cooperators at a regional or watershed scale should help connect individual Cooperators with the larger management decisions related to the allocation of cost-share funds

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and the priorities that drive the selection of stations and investigations for continuation, improvement, etc. If we build that awareness and appreciation for the larger aspects of the CWP, more Cooperators will have the ability to contribute ideas and identify opportunities for extending our mutual capabilities in support of a strong national water science framework.

We have also developed several cost-containment recommendations. First, we believe that the cost-comparison workgroup you established can provide a very helpful response to Cooperators' concerns that the cost of some CWP elements and activities is too high. CWP stakeholder have raised these concerns during the past several years and they require understanding, not just answers. We appreciate the time, expertise and effort you have dedicated to the collection and organization of appropriate data from three Cooperators and your presentation of preliminary results to the Cooperators at several recent meetings. However, the Cooperators' assessment of those preliminary results indicates significant reservations about the data and the preliminary results. Therefore, we believe that consultation between your cost-comparison workgroup and the contributing Cooperators is necessary before the comparison proceeds; toward that end, representatives of the Washington Department of Environmental Quality, Colorado Division of Water Resources and Lower Colorado River Authority are willing and prepared to meet with your workgroup this summer.

Once the cost comparison is completed with a reasonable level of agreement between the USGS and the Cooperators, we believe the results should provide an excellent foundation for further exploration of potential improvements that would help extend the CWP capabilities and benefits of the CWP and NSIP. That cost comparison should provide the basis for understanding the major differences between USGS and Cooperator programs and to examine options for constraining the largest expense categories in the CWP budget. These options should, as we have discussed, include potential tiering of stations within the CWP to collect separate sets of measured parameters and meet different levels of data quality. As acknowledged during the Austin meeting, it seems very logical to include Cooperators and equipment suppliers in the exploration and development of those options.

We are recommending a collaborative development of effective ways to extend the capabilities of CWP and Cooperator data collection efforts that should eventually include opportunities to avoid duplication of efforts, understand and agree on priorities for selecting stations and investigations, and expand in-kind contributions (including the provisions for "furnished records") to the CWP while assuring that the overall quality, consistency and accessibility of the resulting information will meet appropriate, long-term, national standards.

With regard to funding, we continue to be very concerned by the level of federal support available to the NSIP and CWP. The NSIP budget still provides only a small fraction of the necessary support, which seems to require the redirection of funds designated for the CWP. The non-federal Cooperators indicated a high level of priority should be placed on efforts to secure better federal funding for the NSIP and the CWP to recover the capacity lost in recent years and restore the CWP cost share to the traditional 50:50 partnership that Cooperators and the USGS supported for so many decades.

We would also like to extend our discussions with you and with key federal Cooperators into the exploration of effective arrangements that would enable more federal Cooperators and other stakeholders to contribute their fair share. In the meantime, we believe it will be necessary to give still greater priority to data collection over interpretive studies while CWP capability is limited by funding, to minimize gaps in important monitoring records.

To summarize, our recommendations are:

Strengthen Partnership with Stakeholders

- Engage the Cooperators more directly and more consistently in CWP and NSIP decisions, especially those concerning use of cost-shared funds; this should involve meeting regularly with Cooperators

(federal and non-federal) to enable them to learn and help guide program policies, capabilities and priorities at the national and regional levels.

Improve Funding, Funding Base & Cost Containment

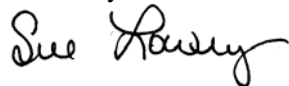
- Continue to seek full federal funding for the NSIP as a way to bring CWP closer to a 50-50 cost-share;
- Expand opportunities for in-kind contributions within the CWP to expand the data collection network while assuring quality, consistency and accessibility of data meet appropriate national standards;
- Focus initially on constraining the three largest expense categories in reducing cost of CWP; include Cooperators and equipment suppliers in evaluation; and
- Make provision for more federal Cooperators and other stakeholders to contribute their fair share.

Fund Data Collection First

- Give higher priority to data collection (over interpretive studies) while CWP capability is limited by funding, to minimize gaps in important monitoring records.

We recognize that these recommendations will require continued time, attention and effort on your part and on the part of Water Science Center managers. The Cooperators wouldn't expect or ask so much if the communities we serve weren't so dependent upon the good science that the CWP and NSIP produce. We are prepared to match our expectations for these programs with hard work and accountability and look forward to continuing the productive, professional relationship with you and the rest of your team.

Sincerely,



Sue Lowry, Chair
Interstate Council on Water Policy

On behalf of:

Larry Larson
Association of State Flood Plain Managers

Sue Lowry
Interstate Council on Water Policy

Susan Gilson
National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies

David Conrad
National Wildlife Federation

Dale Swensen
National Water Resources Association

Tony Willardson
Western States Water Council