

SUPPORT FOR USGS STREAMGAGING PROGRAMS

Congressman Norman Dicks, Chairman
Congressman Mike Simpson, Ranking Member

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
2362 B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 3, 2009

Regarding: WATER DATA & SCIENCE PROGRAM FUNDING
Interior Department Appropriations for FY-2010

Dear Congressman Dicks and Congressman Simpson:

The 53 undersigned organizations support the US Geological Survey's **Cooperative Water Program (CWP)** and **National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP)**. We urge your support to enable the USGS to fully implement its design for the NSIP beginning in FY-2009 and to restore the capacity for USGS to match non-federal cost-share investments in the CWP on a 50:50 basis. Full implementation of the NSIP will require an annual appropriation of \$110 million, substantially more than the \$20 million enacted for FY-2008). With a fully functioning NSIP, the USGS will also need approximately \$95 million for the CWP to restore its capacity to fully match state, tribal and other non-federal investments in data collection and interpretive investigations (the FY-2008 budget included only \$62.8 million).

Members of the undersigned organizations rely extensively on the trustworthy data and science that these two programs produce and many are active, financial partners ("Cooperators") in the Cooperative Water Program. Nationwide, our need for a well-informed understanding of streamflow, groundwater, tidal surge, precipitation and other water resource attributes continues to increase every year in relation to our growing population, economic development, changing land uses and ecological awareness.

The NSIP and CWP have proven to be a source for reliable, scientific information concerning America's water resources, information that is required by decision makers in both the public and private sectors for a wide variety of planning, design and management functions. Unfortunately, the USGS capacity has not kept up with America's growing needs despite the strong, national cost-share partnership with over 1,500 Cooperators.

NSIP and CWP data and science are needed on a regular basis by many federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies, and by many businesses, landowners, public interest organizations and individuals for many essential decisions, including the:

- monitoring compliance with federal treaty, compact and Native American trust responsibilities;
- designing of bridges, dams and other infrastructure;
- forecasting of storm surge, flood and drought conditions and issuing emergency advisories;
- identifying flood-prone areas to protect lives and property and reduce disaster relief expenses;
- administration of water rights and management of hydropower generation, environmental and navigation releases from reservoirs;
- monitoring and protecting water quality, fisheries, wetlands and endangered species;
- providing for public recreation safety;
- analysis of climate change; and
- projecting future water needs and availability for agricultural, municipal, and industrial uses.

The NSIP and CWP inform and guide vital programs and diverse interests in all 50 states but, unfortunately, they do not have sufficient capacity to support future water resource and infrastructure decisions necessary to keep our communities and businesses safe and prosperous. Since 2001, when the Congress first provided funding to the NSIP, more than 80% of the NSIP streamgages have been supported by the CWP cost-share partners and the stability that NSIP was designed to provide remains elusive.

The CWP has served America very well for more than 110 years as a federal/non-federal partnership funded through 50/50 cost-share agreements. Today, however, USGS is able to support less than 1/3 of the cost. From the combined network of about 7,550 active streamgages nationwide, more than 780 have been “discontinued” in the last 10 years due to inadequate funding; many of them had over 50 years of continuous record, which gives their loss even greater significance. More than 175 streamgages were discontinued between 2004 and 2005 and another 258 streamgages in 33 states are currently identified as being at risk or recently discontinued.

Concern for the long-term continuity and reliability of our national streamgaging data led the USGS to propose the NSIP in 1999. Unlike the CWP, the NSIP was designed as a federally funded “backbone,” supporting a national communications framework and the subset of approximately 4,770 streamgages and tidal gages necessary to fulfill five specific national needs. The National Research Council’s Committee on Water Resources Research evaluated the NSIP design in 2004 and concluded that it will provide “a sound, well-conceived program that meets the nation’s needs for streamflow measurement, interpretation, and information delivery.” However, of the 4,770 streamgages needed to sustain those five national needs, at least 425 have never been installed, more than 970 need to be reactivated and approximately 2,725 are funded (wholly or partially) with CWP funds; most of them still need to be “flood hardened” and updated with real-time communications equipment in order to provide reliable flood forecast data.

In light of the severe flooding and drought that have recently caused so much loss of life and damage to property in so many states, and with climate change implications to understand and integrate in our planning, reliable sources of data and science has never been more important in protecting American communities and infrastructure investments.

The Committee should enable the USGS to fully implement the NSIP plan as soon as possible and we urge you to appropriate \$110 million in FY-2009 for that purpose. This represents a very reasonable investment, considering the magnitude of our ongoing disaster emergency expenses and the federal responsibilities and programs that depend on information from the NSIP streamgages. Full funding for the NSIP would reverse the loss of long-term streamgages and provide essential information needed to assess water quality and climate change, forecast floods (including storm surge) and droughts and provide emergency warnings, manage interstate water supplies and monitor compliance with federal treaty, compact and Native American trust responsibilities.

If the NSIP is fully implemented, following its approved design, federal funding for the USGS share of the CWP data collection and investigations of at least \$95 million will be necessary to sustain the planning, water rights administration, project operation and flow forecasting capabilities that so many people, businesses, communities and agencies depend upon nationwide. Federal support for the CWP has been far less than the \$163 million invested by non-federal Cooperators.

We urge your support to enable the USGS to fully implement its design for the NSIP and to restore the USGS capability to match non-federal cost share investments in the CWP on a 50:50 basis, as was the practice for most of the past 110 years. If we can provide additional information, please contact any of us or Peter Evans at the Interstate Council on Water Policy (phe@riverswork.com or 703-243-7383).

Sincerely,



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