

**Statement of
Peter H. Evans, Executive Director
Interstate Council on Water Policy
Before
The House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies
In the
Public Witness Hearings
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The streamgages and ground water monitoring wells operated by the US Geological Survey (USGS) serve as the “stethoscope” for America’s rivers and water supplies. The members of the Interstate Council on Water Policy (ICWP) and many other organizations depend upon USGS streamgage programs to provide measurements and interpretive science that are essential in the development and implementation of water plans and in the operation of water projects (structural and nonstructural). We were pleased to help bring you the endorsement of 55 other organizations last December on a letter urging full implementation of 2 streamgaging programs operated by USGS and that is what we would like to address today.

The Interstate Council on Water Policy

The Interstate Council on Water Policy was established in 1959 to provide a forum for state and local water officials to help each other improve water planning and management capabilities and speak as a group to the need for federal policy and assistance on specific issues. Over the years, many states recognized the advantage of organizing across state lines to address water issues involving more than one state, and the ICWP membership now includes many interstate water organizations. What our members have in common is the responsibility for developing policy, managing programs and implementing projects that reduce the risk of flood and drought and balance the needs of human communities with the protection of water quality, wetlands and riparian areas and the species that depend upon them. We will be meeting in Washington on March 23-25 with members of the Western States Water Council and leaders of many federal agencies to discuss our priorities, our needs and the best opportunities for working together.

Supporting Water Data & Science Deserves Greater Priority

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony this year especially, because the President's budget request for FY-2011 proposes to reduce support for two vital, national water science programs and we believe this Subcommittee should correct that mistake. America faces many water-related challenges, and the President's budget includes new funding to address many of the infrastructure improvement and environmental restoration needs across the country. However, without detracting from the worthiness of other important initiatives, we find it unreasonable to invest so much new support in those programs and projects without first investing in the water data and science needed for their design, implementation and adaptive management.

The President and several Cabinet members have pledged to restore science to its rightful place in resource management and these two USGS programs, the Cooperative Water Program (CWP) and the National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP) provide the

foundation for policy, program and project decisions by many federal, state, tribal and local agencies –as well as many businesses and citizens.

Cooperative Water Program (CWP) Background

The USGS Cooperative Water Program was started more than 110 years ago as a 50:50 cost-share partnership with state and local agencies. The basic value proposition that justifies the federal investment in this program has been that, in exchange for an equivalent investment of local and state funds to support good science at key locations identified by those local and state agencies for water planning and management decisions, the USGS provides a high level of expertise, superb quality control and nationwide consistency and the nation gets a reliable, public database capable of supporting national and regional assessments and decision making.

Over the years, the USGS has developed strong collaborative relationships with over 1600 state, municipal and tribal water agencies that depend on streamgauge data and interpretive science to fulfill their responsibilities. Instead of recording just the low-flow measurements or the average daily flow measurements, the USGS measures and reports a full set of standard environmental parameters in real time with a high degree of accuracy and consistency. It is very helpful that the nation's premier water science agency also participates on a limited basis and in partnership with state and local agencies in the extension and refinement of the interpretive sciences that water managers and policy makers need as the management and protection of America's water resources becomes increasingly complicated. These interpretive studies, like the streamgauge data collection, have been supported through 50:50 cost-share agreements in all of the 50 states.

Today, the USGS operates a network of approximately 7,660 streamgages nationwide, of which more than 300 are presently threatened with “discontinuation” due to budget limitations. This means they will be turned off and the record of good measurements will be interrupted, unless the USGS or a state or local agency is able to provide additional funding. Since 2001, the USGS has dropped approximately 1000 streamgages due to budget limitations and the cost-share burden for state and local agencies has increased to almost 70% of the cost.

National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP) Background

In the 1980-90s, the statistical value of long-term streamgauge records in the design of engineered structures (e.g., dams, bridges, flood levees) became an issue because long-term data collection was being interrupted at too many key locations to accommodate legitimate state and local budget and decision-making priorities. The Congress raised concern, the USGS was asked to design a solution and the National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP) was initiated in 2001.

The NSIP design was reviewed by the National Academy of Sciences in 2004 and given a favorable appraisal. That design provided a national “backbone” of 4,744 streamgages selected strategically to assure that adequate data will be collected to support specific national objectives:

- Interstate & International Boundaries -to provide information needed in the administration and protection of international and interstate agreements for the allocation of water supplies and the protection of water quality;

- Streamflow Forecasts -to provide real -- time stage and discharge information needed to support the flood and other streamflow forecasting by the National Weather Service and other federal agencies;
- Sentinel Watersheds -to assure that we have sufficient information to identify and respond to regional and national hydrologic trends, including those associated with global climate change;
- Water Quality -to assure reliable information for detecting and controlling significant sources of pollution and assessing regional trends.

Today, the USGS operates approximately 3,340 of those 4,744 NSIP streamgages; according to the design, this leaves about 1400 gages that still need to be installed or reactivated and equipped properly. Since the NSIP has never been adequately funded, approximately 80% of the 3,340 active NSIP streamgages depend on funding from the Cooperative Water Program (CWP). This in, in turn, contributes to the rising cost-share burden imposed on local, state and tribal agencies and to the rising number of streamgages currently at risk of “discontinuation.”

Implementation Capability

The funding needed by the USGS to support the NSIP “solution” has never been requested or provided in full. The USGS design estimated the annual budget required in 2001 at \$80 million; the President’s budget requests over the past 5 years have slowly increased from \$12 million to \$27.7 million, but this year they recommend cutting it back to \$27.2 million. The USGS estimated last year, at this Subcommittee’s request, that completing the installation of the necessary data collection capability would cost approximately \$121 million over the next 5 years and that annual operation and maintenance will cost approximately \$114 million.

If the NSIP were fully implemented, this would take a considerable burden off of the Cooperative Water Program and reduce the extra share of data collection expenses imposed on local, state and tribal agencies. Assuming for now that there would be little interest in expanding the existing streamgage network, the USGS estimated last year (again, at the request of this Subcommittee) that they would need approximately \$100 million per year for the CWP in order to stop the loss of important streamgages and restore the 50-50 cost-share balance.

Repeated Efforts to Persuade the Administration

In collaboration with a growing list of organizations and state officials, we have written many letters over five years to Secretary Salazar and his predecessors to persuade the Interior Department to recognize & respond to the underfunding of USGS water data & science programs (CWP & NSIP) with very limited success. Together, these two programs provide efficient nationwide access to a highly reliable monitor on America’s rivers and water supplies. The data and science from these programs is essential in planning and monitoring the restoration programs for the Everglades, Chesapeake Bay, Long Island Sound and the Great Lakes, the planning for navigation and endangered species and the control of nutrients within the Mississippi River Basin, the resolution of interstate disputes among Alabama, Florida and Georgia and between Arkansas and Oklahoma, the balancing of water supplies and the protection of fisheries and water quality in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta. It is essential in the protection of America’s 28 National Estuaries and

the Grand Canyon. This data is required for the Interior Department's WaterSMART initiative and for the climate change adaptation studies that Interior, Agriculture, EPA, NOAA and the Corps are implementing.

The ICWP supports all of these initiatives, and many more, but it makes no sense to move ahead with so many substantial interpretive applications and restoration programs unless we also collect the water data that each of those programs require.

The Administration does not appear to be substantially concerned by the continuing loss of streamgages, or by the shift of financial responsibility for supporting data collection to state, tribal and local agencies. If it were, the President's budget request would spotlight this deficit and ask you for help bringing these programs to full capacity in the same timeframe as it is pursuing its other important priorities.

We have great respect for the leadership at the Department of the Interior, the broad range of missions that it leads, and the open and supportive relationship that the USGS, Bureau of Reclamation and the other bureaus maintain with the officials who are responsible for managing and protecting water at the state, interstate and local levels. We only mean to question whether they have given sufficient support to the data & science needed to develop, implement and monitor the diverse water plans and projects that America requires.

We urge the Subcommittee to provide a substantial increase for the NSIP, putting it on a path for full implementation over the next five years, and to restore the USGS capability for fully matching the local, state and tribal contributions to the CWP over the same timeframe.

We thank you Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Simpson, and Members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to appear before you and to provide this testimony. I will gladly answer any questions that you might have for me.

Respectfully submitted,

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