

SUPPORT FOR USGS WATER DATA & SCIENCE PROGRAMS

Congressman Norman Dicks, Chairman
Congressman Mike Simpson, Ranking Member

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Room H-218, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

December 9, 2009

Regarding: WATER DATA & SCIENCE PROGRAM FUNDING
Interior Department Appropriations for FY-2011

Dear Chairman Dicks and Ranking Member Simpson:

The 56 undersigned organizations urge your support to enable the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to fully implement its design for the **National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP)** beginning in FY-2011 and to restore the capacity for USGS to match non-federal cost-share investments in the **Cooperative Water Program (CWP)** on a 50:50 basis. Full implementation of the NSIP will require an annual appropriation of \$110 million (\$27.7 million was enacted for FY-2010). 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-2010 budget included only \$65.5 million).

Members of our organizations rely heavily on the water data and science that these two programs produce and many are active, cost-share partners (“Cooperators”) in the Cooperative Water Program. Nationwide, our need for streamflow, groundwater, tidal surge, water quality, precipitation and other water resource data increases every year in relation to our growing populations, economic development, land uses, changing climate, ecological awareness and aging infrastructure. Unfortunately, the NSIP and CWP budgets have not kept up with America’s growing needs or the annual cost-share contributions of over 1,500 Cooperators (approximately \$163 million).

The NSIP and CWP are proven, reliable sources of sound scientific information required by decision makers in both the public and private sectors for a wide variety of analytical, planning, design and management functions. The data and science are used on a regular basis by federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies, and by many businesses, landowners, public interest organizations and individuals for many essential decisions, including:

- monitoring compliance with federal compact and Native American trust responsibilities;
- designing bridges, dams and other infrastructure;
- forecasting 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;
- managing reservoir releases for hydropower, environmental and navigation uses;
- monitoring and protecting water quality, fisheries, wetlands and endangered species;
- providing for safe public recreation;
- analyzing climate change and evaluating response options; and
- projecting future water needs and availability for agricultural, municipal and industrial uses.

Concern for the long-term continuity and reliability of our national streamgaging data led the Congress to ask USGS for a solution and USGS proposed the NSIP in 1999. NSIP was intended to operate as a federally-funded “backbone,” supporting a national streamgaging framework of approximately 4,770 streamgages and tidal gages necessary to fulfill five specific national purposes. 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 that are necessary to sustain those five national purposes, more than 425 have not been installed yet, more than 970 need to be reactivated and more than 2,700 active NSIP

gages are funded (wholly or partially) with CWP funds. Furthermore, most of those streamgages still need to be “flood hardened” and updated for real-time communications in order to provide reliable and timely flood forecast information.

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 NSIP has not provided the stability that is needed. While the CWP has served America well for over 110 years, USGS is now able to support less than 1/3 of its cost. In 2008, USGS operated a network of about 7,663 active streamgages nationwide, but more than 965 have been “discontinued” since 2001 due to inadequate funding. Many of those had over 50 years of continuous record, which gives their loss much greater significance. Another 277 streamgages in 31 states are currently identified as being at risk or have already been recently discontinued.

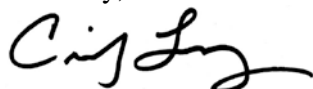
Reliable sources of data and science have never been more important in protecting American communities, businesses, infrastructure investments while we recover in many states from the severe flooding and droughts that have caused so much damage and adapt to the consequences of climate change.

We believe that 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-2011 for that purpose. Full implementation of the NSIP would help 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.

By itself, however, the NSIP cannot meet our national need for the data and science required to manage water resources in a sustainable manner and federal funding for the USGS share of the CWP data collection and investigations of at least \$95 million will be necessary. Re-balancing the CWP cost-share to the long-standing tradition of a 50:50 partnership is especially important now, as state, tribal and local agencies confront recession-driven fiscal challenges.

These measures would represent 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. 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,



Cindy Lowry, Executive Director
Alabama Rivers Alliance



Wade Blackwood, Executive Director
American Canoe Association



Andrew Fahlund, VP for Conservation
American Rivers



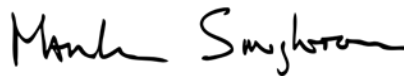
Patrick J. Natale, Executive Director
American Society of Civil Engineers



Gerald Sehlke, President
American Water Resources Association



Tom Curtis, Deputy Executive Director
American Water Works Association



Mark Singleton, Executive Director
American Whitewater



Kenneth D. Kimball, Director of Research
Appalachian Mountain Club



David R. Wunsch, President
Association of American State Geologists

Timothy H. Quinn, Executive Director
Association of California Water Agencies

Diane VanDe Hei, Executive Director
Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies

Lori C. Spragens, Executive Director
Association of State Dam Safety Officials

Larry A. Larson, Executive Director
Association of State Floodplain Managers

Linda Eichmiller, Executive Director
**Association of State & Interstate Water
Pollution Control Administrators**

Jack A. Barnett, Executive Director
Bear River Commission

Bill Jennings, Chairman
California Sportfishing Protection Alliance

Kristen M. Fletcher, Executive Director
Coastal States Organization

Jack A. Barnett, Executive Director
Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum

Doug Kemper, Executive Director
Colorado Water Congress

Carol R. Collier, Executive Director
Delaware River Basin Commission

Mary E. Kelly, VP for Rivers & Deltas
Environmental Defense Fund

Phillip Greenlee, President/ Chairman of the Board
Federation of Flyfishers

Joseph A. Hankins, Director
**The Freshwater Institute &
Vice President, The Conservation Fund**

Tim Eder, Executive Director
Great Lakes Commission

Jennifer Read, Executive Director
Great Lakes Observing System

John Seebach, Chair
Hydropower Reform Coalition

Bill Sedivy, Executive Director
Idaho Rivers United

Joseph K. Hoffman, Executive Director
**Interstate Commission on the Potomac River
Basin**


Susan Sullivan, Chairman
Interstate Council on Water Policy

Ross Brady, Executive Director
Interstate Environmental Commission

Deborah M. Hamlin, Executive Director
Irrigation Association



David L. Pope, Executive Director
Missouri River Association of States & Tribes



Ken Kirk, Executive Director
National Association of Clean Water Agencies



Susan Gilson, Executive Director
National Association of Flood & Stormwater Management Agencies



John M. Johnson, Executive Director
National Association of State Boating Law Administrators



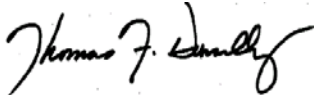
Jacqueline Johnson Pata, Executive Director
National Congress of American Indians



Michael J. Hayes, Executive Director
National Drought Mitigation Center



Leila A. Taha, President
National Flood Determination Association



Thomas F. Donnelly, Executive Director
National Water Resources Association



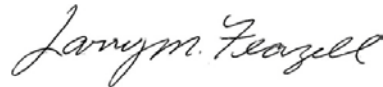
David R. Conrad, Sr. Water Resources Specialist
National Wildlife Federation



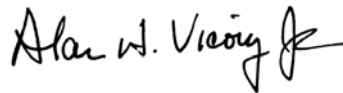
Brian Richter, Co-Leader, Global Freshwater Team
The Nature Conservancy



Ron Poltak, Executive Director
New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission



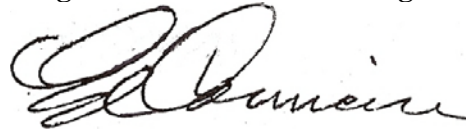
Larry M. Feazell, Executive Director
Ohio River Basin Water Resources Association



Alan H. Vicory, Jr., Executive Director
Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission



Anita Winkler, Executive Director
Oregon Water Resources Congress



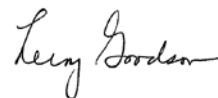
Ed Council, Chief Executive Officer
Paddlesports Industry Association



Margaret Miner, Executive Director
River Alliance of Connecticut



Paul O. Swartz, Executive Director
Susquehanna River Basin Commission



Leroy Goodson, Executive Director
Texas Water Conservation Association



Charles Gauvin, President & Chief Executive Officer
Trout Unlimited



Don A. Ostler, Executive Director
Upper Colorado River Compact Commission



Barb Naramore, Executive Director
Upper Mississippi River Basin Association



Tom Myrum, Executive Director
**Washington State Water Resources
Association**



Tim Williams, Managing Director for Government
Affairs
Water Environment Federation



Garland Erbele, Chairman
Western States Water Council



Mary Sexton, Montana Commissioner



Patrick T. Tyrell, Wyoming Commissioner
Yellowstone River Compact Commission

Copies to:

House Appropriations Committee Members

Ken Salazar, Secretary, US Department of the Interior

Marcia McNutt, Director, US Geological Survey

Peter Orszag, Director, Office of Management and Budget