

SUPPORT FOR USGS WATER DATA & SCIENCE PROGRAMS

Senator Jack Reed, Chairman
Senator Lisa Murkowski, Ranking Member

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Room S-128, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

February 8, 2011

Regarding: WATER DATA & SCIENCE PROGRAM FUNDING
Interior Department Appropriations for FY-2012

Dear Senators Reed and Murkowski:

We 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-2012 and to restore the USGS capacity to fully match non-federal cost-share investments in the **Cooperative Water Program (CWP)**. Full implementation of the NSIP will require \$117 million annually (substantially more than the \$27.7 million available last year). With a fully functioning NSIP, the USGS would also need approximately \$95 million for the CWP to match state, tribal and other non-federal investments in water resources data collection and interpretive investigations (the budget for last year included only \$65.5 million).

Members of our organizations rely on the water data and science that these two programs produce and many are active, cost-share partners (“Cooperators”) in the Cooperative Water Program. America’s need for streamflow, groundwater, tidal surge, precipitation and water quality data increases every year in relation to the land use and economic development needs in our states, and our infrastructure planning and ecological commitments magnify those needs. Unfortunately, the NSIP and CWP budgets have not kept up with our members’ needs (or with the annual cost-share contributions of over 1,500 Cooperators, which has been approximately \$160 million/year).

The NSIP and CWP are proven sources of reliable scientific information that we need on a regular basis to support good decision making for both the public and private sectors in a wide variety of analytical, planning, design and management functions, 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 water supply, irrigation, hydropower, environmental and navigation uses;
- monitoring and protecting water quality, fisheries, wetlands and endangered species;
- providing safety information for boating and other water-based 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 designed and authorized to operate as a federally-funded “backbone” network supporting approximately 4,750 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 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 4,750 streamgages needed to meet those five national purposes, more than 330 have not been installed yet, about 770 need to be reactivated and 88% (3,077) of the 3,465 active NSIP gages still depend upon CWP funds.

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 2009, USGS operated a network of about 7,825 active streamgages nationwide, but more than 890 have been “discontinued” due to inadequate funding since 2001. Many of those streamgages had over 50 years of

continuous record, which makes their loss much more serious. Another 273 streamgages in 37 states are currently identified as being at risk or have already been recently discontinued.

While our nation is adjusting to recession impacts and budget corrections, reliable science has never been more important in protecting American communities, businesses and infrastructure investments, and in planning to reduce our vulnerability to floods and droughts that have caused so much damage and required so many expensive disaster response appropriations.

The Committee should enable the USGS to fully implement the NSIP plan as soon as possible and we urge you to appropriate \$117 million in FY-2012 for that purpose. Full implementation of the NSIP would help to reverse the loss of long-term streamgages and provide the data needed to assess water quality and climate change, to forecast floods (including storm surge) and droughts and to 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 water data 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 in line with the long-standing tradition of a 50:50 partnership is especially important now, as state, tribal and local agencies confront recession-driven fiscal challenges.

The provision for full implementation of these programs 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 and the CWP. It would also be consistent with the National Governor's Association's addition to its position statement NR-03 on Water Resource Management adopted in July 2010.

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



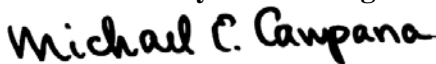
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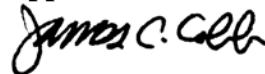
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Copies to:

Appropriations Committee Members

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Jacob Lew, Director, Office of Management and Budget