

SUPPORT FOR USGS STREAMGAGING PROGRAMS

Senator Diane Feinstein, Chair
Senator Wayne Allard, Ranking Member

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
131 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

February 25, 2008

Regarding: STREAMGAGE PROGRAM FUNDING
Interior Department Appropriations for FY-2009

Dear Senator Feinstein and Senator Allard:

The undersigned organizations support the US Geological Survey's **Cooperative Water Program (CWP)** and **National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP)**. We urge your support for full implementation of the NSIP beginning in FY-2009 and for funding of the CWP at \$70 million, approximately 10% more than the \$62.3 million requested by the President (\$62.8 million was enacted for FY-2008). Full implementation of the NSIP in FY-2009 requires approximately \$110 million, substantially more than the \$23.8 million requested by the President (\$20 million was enacted for FY-2008).

Our members 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 as a function of our growing population, economy, 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, their capacity has not kept up with America's growing needs despite the strong, national cost-share partnership with over 1,400 Cooperators.

NSIP and CWP data 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 they do not have the capacity to support future water resource and infrastructure decisions necessary to keep our communities and businesses safe and prosperous. Since 2001, when the NSIP was authorized by Congress, the USGS streamgaging network has depended for more than 80% of its operation and maintenance on funds appropriated for the CWP, which has a distinct and highly valuable role to serve.

The CWP has served us well for more than 110 years as a federal/non-federal partnership funded through 50/50 cost-share agreements. Today, however, less than one-third of the cost is borne by the USGS because of the need to sustain the NSIP. From the combined network of about 7,400 streamgages nationwide, more than 775 have been "discontinued" in the last 10 years due to inadequate funding; many of them had over 30 years of continuous record, which gives their loss even greater significance. More than 175 streamgages were

discontinued between 2004 and 2005 and another 174 gages in 24 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 meet 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 needed to meet the specified national goals, at least 425 have never been installed, more than 970 need to be reactivated and approximately 2,550 are funded (wholly or partially) with CWP funds; most of them need to be “flood hardened” and updated with real-time communications equipment in order to provide reliable flow forecast data.

With severe flooding and drought recently causing loss of life and property affecting so many states, including Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Indiana, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin and Wyoming, reliable science to support sustainable water resource management has never been more important.

As the NSIP is fully implemented, funding for the CWP streamgages and investigations at \$70 million (about 10% more than FY-2007) will be necessary to reverse the decade of erosion that deficient federal support has caused and to restore the planning, water rights administration, project operation and flow forecasting capabilities that so many people, businesses and agencies depend upon nationwide. Federal support has been far less than the \$138 million contributed annually by Cooperators since FY-2004 and cutting funds from the CWP budget to enhance the NSIP has not helped.

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 an appropriate increase, 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.

We urge you to increase federal support for the CWP with an appropriation of \$70 million in FY-09 and to give a higher priority to both these vital programs until both the NSIP and CWP are fully implemented and the cost-share agreements are fully matched. If we can provide additional information, please contact Peter Evans at the Interstate Council on Water Policy (phe@riverswork.com or 703-243-7383).

Sincerely,



Martin A. Bartels, Executive Director
American Canoe Association



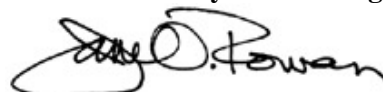
Antonius Laenen, President
American Institute of Hydrology



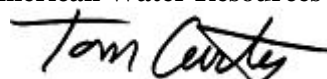
Andrew Fahlund, VP for Conservation
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Jane Rowan, President
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Tom Curtis, Deputy Executive Director
American Water Works Association



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Carol R. Collier, Executive Director
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Mary E. Kelly, Co-Director, Land, Water and Wildlife
Environmental Defense



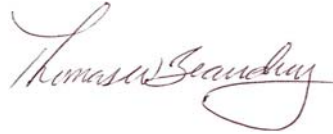
R.P. VanGytenbeek, CEO
Federation of Flyfishers



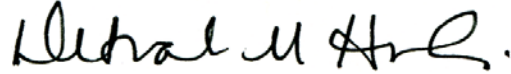
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Hydropower Reform Coalition



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



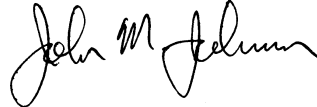
Thomas Beauduy, Chair
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Deborah Hamlin, Executive Director
Irrigation Association



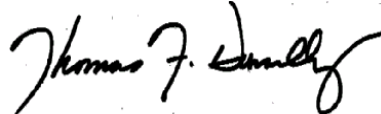
Derek Guthrie, President
National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies



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



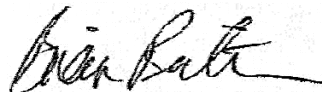
Leila A. Taha, President
National Flood Determination Association



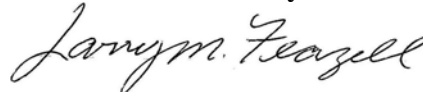
Thomas F. Donnelly, Executive Vice President
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David R. Conrad, Sr. Water Resources Specialist
National Wildlife Federation



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



Larry M. Feazell, Executive Director
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Don Elder, President/CEO
River Network



Paul O. Swartz, Executive Director
Susquehanna River Basin Commission



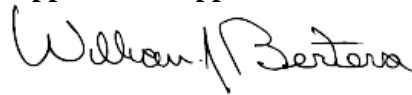
Jack E. Williams, Ph.D., Sr. Scientist
Trout Unlimited



Don Ostler, Executive Director
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Holly Stoerker, Executive Director
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William Bertera, Executive Director
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Duane Smith, Chairman
Western States Water Council

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