

COALITION SUPPORTING THE USGS NATIONAL WATER MONITORING NETWORK

Senator Lisa Murkowski, Chair
Senator Tom Udall, Ranking Member

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

17 March 2016

Regarding: WATER DATA & SCIENCE PROGRAM FUNDING
Interior Department Appropriations for FY-2017

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

As leaders in the organizations represented below, we urge your support to enable the US Geological Survey (USGS) to fully implement its design for National Streamflow Network (formerly known as the National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP) and Cooperative Water Program). This vital network is now wholly-managed within the USGS National Groundwater and Streamflow Information Program (GWSIP) and serves the Nation with continuous streamflow information at over 8,100 locations. The members of our organizations rely on the streamgauge data and science that USGS produces and many are active, cost-share partners in funding the data collection that Congress and the federal agencies need.

We all benefit from the reliable data and science that USGS has provided, but the National Streamflow Network is vital in the management of federal lands, design and operation of federal reservoirs and navigation infrastructure. The National Streamflow Network provides critical information to other bureaus of the Interior Department and to the Corps of Engineers, NOAA, EPA, USDA, and other federal agencies. The National Streamflow Network is essential to Congressional oversight and revision of many federal laws, including the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, and many interstate compacts and international treaties.

The federal objectives for the NSIP, as authorized by Congress in the 2009 SECURE Water Act, are: to operate and maintain a stable “federal backbone” network of streamgages (4,774 within NSIP) to meet five specific federal needs for streamflow information at (1) interstate and international boundaries, (2) National Weather Service flood forecast sites, (3) outflows of major river basins, (4) “sentinel watersheds,” needed to evaluate and anticipate the potential consequences of ongoing changes in American land use, water use, climate etc., and (5) national priority water-quality monitoring sites. The National Research Council's Committee on Water Resources Research evaluated the NSIP design and concluded that it would provide “a sound, well-conceived program that meets the nation's needs for streamflow measurement, interpretation, and information delivery.”

Unfortunately, the federal funds appropriated to Interior/USGS for the National Streamflow Network have not been sufficient to meet the federal need (even with the approximately \$85 million contributed by nearly 850 non-federal cost-share partners (“Cooperators”). Currently, the USGS National Streamflow Network operates on a budget of about \$170M; about 21% represents USGS funding for the federal-needs network; 14% is USGS cooperative matching funds; 45% is provided by States, localities and tribes; 12% is provided by the Army Corps of Engineers; 5% is by other federal agencies.

In 2015, approximately 3,100 of the 4,774 streamgages (authorized as the former NSIP streamgages), were in operation. These gages continue to be funded by a blend of appropriated federal funds and cost-share partners in state and local government. Today, more than 1/3 of the NSIP gages are not in operation yet. USGS cannot complete the NSIP component of the national network by 2019, as Congress directed, without additional funding. For the other 5,000 streamgages in the National Streamflow Network, the non-federal cost-share contribution has increased from 50% to an average of about 70%.

America's need to understand and anticipate water resource availability is increasing every year in relation to our planning public safety, land use and economic development. Our infrastructure planning and ecological commitments magnify those needs. USGS participation in cost-shared water resource investigations also keeps USGS scientists on the cutting edge of the Nation's needs and provides an unparalleled opportunity for innovation that comes from working elbow-to-elbow with state and local agencies to understand our hydrologic systems and current uses, and to evaluate/enhance available forecasting and management models, databases, etc. With your help, we hope that Congress will enable the USGS to fulfill its Water Resources Mission Area, including full implementation of National Streamflow Network and development of reliable national assessments of our water use, our groundwater resources and our protection of water quality.

We are happy to answer your questions or provide additional information; please contact any of us or Ryan Mueller at the Interstate Council on Water Policy (rpmueller1@mchsi.com or 573-303-6644).

Sincerely,



Cindy Lowry, Executive Director
Alabama Rivers Alliance



Wade Blackwood, Executive Director
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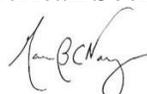
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Jim Bradley, Sr. Director of Government Relations
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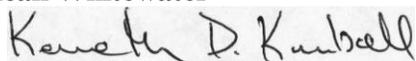
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