



SOUTHERN UTE INDIAN TRIBE

January 14, 2014

Congressman Ken Calvert, Chairman
Congressman James P. Moran, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies
2363 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: WATER DATA & SCIENCE PROGRAM FUNDING
Interior Department Appropriations for FY-2015

Dear Congressman Calvert and Congressman Moran:

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-2015 and to restore the USGS capacity to fully match non-federal cost-share investments in the **Cooperative Water Program (CWP)**.

The members of our organizations rely on the water data and science that these two USGS 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 our public safety, land use and economic development needs, and our infrastructure planning and ecological commitments magnify those needs. Unfortunately, the Interior/USGS budgets for the NSIP and CWP have not kept up with our nation's needs (or with the approximately \$80 million contributed annually by over 800 Cooperators to maintain USGS streamgages).

Together, the NSIP and CWP serve the federal need and provide the benchmark for an integrated monitoring network and a proven source of reliable scientific information that we need to support well-informed decision making in both the public and private sectors across a wide variety of water resource planning, design and operational functions, including:

- monitoring compliance with federal compact and Native American trust responsibilities;
- designing bridges, dams, levees, 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;
- protecting 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 trends and evaluating community and regional 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. The NSIP was designed and authorized by Congress to operate as a federally-funded “backbone” network supporting approximately 4,750 streamgages and tidal gages necessary to fulfill 5 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.” Unfortunately, over 20% of the 4,750 NSIP streamgages were installed and then disconnected due to insufficient funds; another 6% have yet to be installed. Of the 3,500 active NSIP streamgages, 90% do not have reliable federal funding, and their operation depends upon a patchwork of other agencies budgets.

The CWP streamgages have served America well for almost 120 years, and this partnership with state, tribal, interstate and local agencies sustains the rest of the national need for surface water measurement that isn’t covered by NSIP funding. USGS can barely support 30% of the CWP streamgages today, compared with 50% in the past. As a result, a disproportionate share of the financial burden for this federal responsibility has shifted onto the non-federal partners and the sustainability of this partnership is increasingly at risk.

We recognize that our federal budget needs to adapt to recession impacts and deficit concerns, but the repetition of storm damage, flooding and drought impacts that our nation faces, but reliable data and science have never been more essential in protecting our communities, businesses and infrastructure investments. The coordinated NSIP and CWP monitoring programs serve as the stethoscope on America’s rivers and water supplies, and the USGS must lead America’s water community in water data and science, providing the essential standards and communication to assure reliable water information is accessible to all Americans when and where it is needed. Providing for full implementation of these programs is a reasonable federal investment in the data and science needed to support the full set of federal responsibilities while reducing disaster impacts, enhancing the sustainability of our communities, our economies and our ecosystems.

Congress needs this water data and science, too: to evaluate the implementation of the Clean Water Act, numerous tribal settlement agreements and international treaties, the Safe Drinking Water Act, Endangered Species Act, *etc.*

We hope that Congress will enable the USGS to fully implement the NSIP as directed in PL 111-11, and match the non-federal investment in the USGS monitoring network, to reverse the loss of long-term streamgages and to sustain the streamgages needed to understand water quality and climate trends, to forecast floods, storm surge and droughts, and to provide emergency warnings, manage interstate water supplies and to monitor compliance with federal treaties, compacts and Native American trust responsibilities.

We are happy to answer your questions or 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,



Jimmy R. Newton, Jr., Chairman
Southern Ute Indian Tribal Council