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September 21, 2023

Senator Jeff Merkley, Chair
Senator Lisa Murkowski, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment & Related Agencies
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Chair
Senator Jerry Moran, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice & Science
142 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairs Merkley and Shaheen and Ranking Members Murkowski and Moran:

Membership of the Interstate Council on Water Policy (ICWP) includes state, local, regional and interstate water resources management agencies. Our members rely upon and work closely with various federal agencies to support, co-fund, and implement important water resources management programs across the nation.

As Congress puts the finishing touches on its priorities for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 appropriations, the following funding considerations will be necessary to administer the important federal water programs that are so vital to our membership. **Please consider the following for the final FY2024 appropriations packages:**

US Geological Survey (USGS)

ICWP garnered support from our coalition of 96 water management and water use stakeholders across the nation to sufficiently fund the USGS Federal Priorities Streamgauge (FPS) network and supportive programs for the Fiscal Year 2024 budget. Our broad network of stakeholders has a vested interest in ensuring the longevity and effectiveness of these programs under USGS water mission areas. USGS relies on stakeholders like us to monitor, assess, conduct targeted research, and deliver information on a wide range of water resources and conditions including streamflow, groundwater, water quality, and water use and availability. Below is a reiteration of our coalition's request to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees from our letter dated February 28, 2023:¹

- 1) Congress must fund \$32M for the Federal Priority Streamgages (FPS) program -- (\$32M was allocated in the House Appropriations bill; no such line item in the Senate bill)*

We envision the need for a \$2M increase over our FY2023 \$30M funding request which was designed to cover the costs of existing gages and preclude any loss of sites. This request does not include a cost-share takeover for any FPS gages; it is just to keep current gages going. **Please ensure that FPS funding stays at \$32M.**

¹https://icwp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/USGS-Streamgauge-Letter-FY2024_Senate-Approps_2.28.23.pdf.

- 2) *Congress must fund \$68M for the Cooperative Matching Funds (CMF) program -- (\$66.5M in House bill; no such line item in Senate bill)*

The CMF program should be funded at \$68M to adequately support cooperative matching funds for streamgaging. Of that appropriation, \$33M for CMF-supported streamgages is needed to protect the approximately 5,275 CMF-supported streamgages that are already in place and functioning nationwide. **Please augment CMF funding to \$68M.**

- 3) *Congress must fund \$35M for Next Generation Water Observation System (NGWOS) -- (\$30.9M in House bill; \$29.5M in Senate bill)*

Our coalition appreciates Congress' support of the NGWOS. We stand by our FY2023 request for \$35M to allow for further buildout of the NGWOS program. Funding at this level for FY2024 would complete rollout for the fifth Integrated Water Science (IWS) basin and ultimately move NGWOS toward the goal of 10 IWS basins nationwide. **Please augment NGWOS funding to \$35M.**

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

NOAA provides many key resources for water managers across the country. ICWP members support NOAA's cutting-edge efforts on precipitation forecasts, climate prediction, environmental modeling, and hurricane forecasting. Below is a summary of our request from our letter dated April 18, 2023, in addition to discussion of two important details from the proposed FY2024 Presidential Budget:²

- 1) *Congress must maintain \$2.483M in funding to support the Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service*

The Advanced Hydrologic Prediction System (AHPS) is a web-based suite of accurate and information-rich forecast products, including river stage observations and forecasts that display the magnitude and uncertainty of occurrence of floods or drought. Many of our members rely on this system for local and regional forecasts. Disappointingly, the President's FY2024 budget eliminated AHPS expansion by cutting the \$2.483M line item out of NOAA's budget.³ It is unclear from the current House and Senate Appropriations bills if the AHPS cut will be carried forth in the final appropriations package.

The AHPS enables far better calibrated uncertainties and is the core driver of Forecast-Informed Observation (FIRO) forecasts, a crucial tool used by water managers to selectively retain or release water from reservoirs based on current and forecasted conditions. Cutting AHPS program funds will take away an important capability that states and water resource managers rely upon and that greatly enhance the utility of streamflow forecasts nationwide. **Please ensure that AHPS funding stays intact at \$2.483M.**

- 2) *Congress must maintain \$4.48M in funding for Cooperative Institute for Research to Operations in Hydrology (CIROH)*

² <https://icwp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/S2S-FY2024-funding-support-letter-Senate.pdf>.

³ See page 544: https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-04/NOAA_FY24_CJ.pdf.

The President's FY2024 budget proposed reducing funding to additional resources provided in the FY 2023 appropriations for the Congressionally-directed CIROH.⁴ It is unclear from the current House and Senate Appropriations bills if the CIROH budget cut will be carried forth in the final appropriations package.

CIROH is a cooperative institute between NOAA and the University of Alabama dedicated to advancing water prediction. CIROH is gaining momentum and is in the process of funding 63 research proposals for this year alone. The institute finally has resources to work with the national water community to accelerate the implementation of operational capabilities. Cutting CIROH's funding will have to curtail or abort projects finally in the process of starting and undermine NOAA's credibility by stopping and starting projects midstream. **Please ensure that CIROH funding stays intact at \$4.48M.**

3) Congress must prioritize Subseasonal to Seasonal (S2S) Forecasting at \$15M

The House sufficiently funded S2S Forecasting at the amount requested (\$15M) by ICWP and 34 national stakeholders in our letter to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science on April 18, 2023.⁵ A \$15M increase in the U.S. Weather Research Program line item within NOAA's Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR) would begin development of reliable forecasting with longer lead times. These improvements would provide water managers with critical data to operate infrastructure more efficiently and allocate resources to mitigate and manage impacts of extreme wet and dry conditions. **We respectfully request bicameral support for a \$15M appropriation for S2S.**

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

For decades, states have implemented EPA State Revolving Funds (SRFs) to provide low-cost, subsidized loans to communities and water utilities to upgrade drinking water and sewer systems and to comply with federal clean water and public health laws. The annual appropriations made by Congress to SRFs are a significant mechanism through which funding is facilitated for important water quality infrastructure projects. Below is a reiteration of our request from our letter to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies on May 2, 2023:⁶

1) Congress must end the practice of using SRF funding for earmark spending starting in FY2024.

Cutting federal funding for subsidized loans for state priorities to provide grants for congressionally selected projects undermines the successful SRF state-federal partnership. Earmarks utilizing SRF funds sidestep the structure of the program, which is based on need and state priority project lists. **Please curtail the use of earmark spending to the detriment of framework SRF accounts starting in FY2024.**

2) Congress must reduce base and IJJA SRF state match requirements from 20 percent to 10 percent starting in FY2024.

⁴ See page 577: https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-04/NOAA_FY24_CJ.pdf

⁵ <https://icwp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/S2S-FY2024-funding-support-letter-Senate.pdf>

⁶ https://icwp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ICWP-FY2024-SRF-Earmarks_Senate_050223.pdf

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The state match requirements under EPA's SRF programs can be seen as a barrier to entry for some fiscally strapped states to fully utilize the program. Some states issue state match bonds to provide the match, yet Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and base SRF program state match requirements to the general supplemental grant, which range from 10-20 percent, make bonds difficult to sustain and render it more difficult for some states to meet state match requirements. **Please reduce all SRF state match requirements to 10 percent starting in FY2024.**

Thank you for your consideration as Congress finalizes its priorities for Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations. If you have any questions, please contact me at: beth@icwp.org or 307-772-1999.

Regards,



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ICWP Executive Director

CC:

Don Cline, Associate Director for Water, US Geological Survey
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Jennifer MacLain, Director, Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water, Environmental Protection Agency