

March 8, 2006

Senator Conrad Burns, Chairman
Senator Byron Dorgan, Ranking Member
US Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies
132 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Regarding: STREAMGAGE FUNDING REQUEST
Interior Department Appropriation for FY-2007

Dear Senator Burns and Senator Dorgan:

The undersigned organizations seek your help to increase funding in the federal FY-2007 budget sufficient to restore the U.S. Geological Survey's Cooperative Water Program (CWP) and National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP) to at least FY-2003 levels of capability. Restoring this capacity requires an appropriation of at least \$74 million for the CWP (rather than the \$62.171 million in the President's request) and \$16.764 million for the NSIP (as requested by the President).

Many of our members are active, financial partners in the Cooperative Water Program. All of us rely on the streamflow data collected and disseminated by these two important programs.

Together, these two programs comprise a critical national system of water resource monitoring. The USGS operates and maintains these networks with extensive cooperation from state agencies, interstate organizations, tribal and local governments and many non-governmental organizations.

The Nation's need for accurate streamflow data continues to increase along with our population. This information is used by federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies, by public utilities, private businesses, non-profit organizations and individuals, on a regular basis to forecast flooding and drought events, to plan and protect water supplies for agricultural, municipal, and industrial uses, to design bridges, manage hydropower production, schedule recreation activities, evaluate dam safety and to integrate ecological protection of wetlands, fish and wildlife management and for endangered species conservation with our other priorities.

Although these data collection and science programs benefit so many interests, their funding has been allowed to erode to the point that the quantity and quality of the basic data are threatened, with significant adverse consequences to a growing and diverse number of decision makers and stakeholders. Years of inadequate federal funding threatens the availability of critical data regarding stream flows, lake levels, groundwater levels and water quality, which are the basis for many essential public and private decisions. The President's request for the CWP will continue a pattern of steady erosion of federal support and the elimination or obsolescence of many long-term gages, undermining our planning, design, forecasting and emergency warning capabilities.

In 1998, Congress' concern about streamgaging led the USGS to create the National Streamflow Information Program. Unlike the Cooperative Water Program (which is funded in large part by non-federal Cooperators), Congress determined that the NSIP should be funded entirely with federal appropriations. In November 2004, the National Research Council's Committee on Water Resources Research completed its assessment of the USGS plans for the NSIP: "Overall, the Committee concludes that the National Streamflow Information Program is a sound, well-conceived program that meets the nation's needs for streamflow measurement, interpretation, and information delivery."

The NSIP has been severely under funded and we urge your support for the President's request to increase its appropriation to \$16.764 million for FY-2007 in order to restore program capability to its FY-2003 level. The NSIP is currently able to fund less than 15% of the gages listed in the plan approved by the National Research Council. In future years, another \$100 million will be needed to reactivate and add streamgages, upgrade the system, and realize the full vision of the NSIP. A fully funded NSIP averts the loss of long-term gages that are critical for analysis of trends, floods, and water supply. A strong federal investment in the NSIP is needed to reverse the current trend of annually shutting down streamgages that provide the basis for flood warnings and info for water resource management.

The President's request for the Cooperative Water Program in FY-2007 (\$62.171M) represents a cut of \$2M and will exacerbate the decline in CWP capability. For over 100 years, the CWP has been maintained as a federal/non-federal partnership, funded through 50%-50% cost-share agreements. Today, roughly 70% of the funding is from non-USGS sources.

For FY-2007, we ask that you appropriate at least \$74 million for the Cooperative Water Program to restore its ability to its FY-2003 level, as we urged in our August 12, 2005 letter to Interior Secretary Norton and OMB Associate Director Anderson. This amount is still well below the \$138 million contributed by Cooperators annually since FY-2004. We will continue asking Interior, OMB and the President to increase their annual requests to match the Cooperators' level of support over the next few years. In the meantime, we seek your help.

Our recent experience with the prediction of catastrophic storms and the design of adequate safeguards proves that timely and accurate information needed for water resources management has never been more important.

We urge you to give a higher priority to these vital programs in FY2007 and then increase future appropriations until the Cooperators' matching contributions are fully met and the nation's water monitoring system is fully stabilized. In this regard, the funding levels we are requesting should be viewed as the minimum needed to maintain existing capabilities, while even greater funding would hasten the restoration and completion of a National Streamgaging System that we depend on in making water supply and emergency management decisions.

Sincerely,



S. Elizabeth Birnbaum
Vice President for Government Affairs
American Rivers



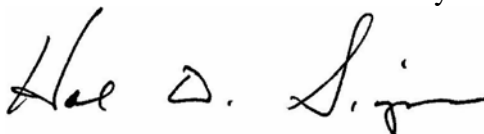
Karen Gautreaux, President
Association of State and Interstate
Water Pollution Control Administrators



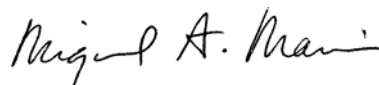
Peter Evans, Executive Director
Interstate Council on Water Policy



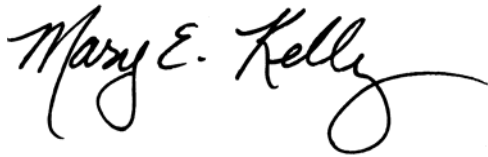
Peter A. Scholle, President
Association of American State Geologists



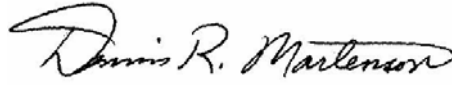
Harold D. Simpson, Chairman
Western States Water Council



Dr. Miguel A. Marino, President
American Institute of Hydrology



Mary E. Kelly
Program Director, Ecosystems Program
Environmental Defense



Dennis R. Martenson, P.E., DEE, F. ASCE
President, American Society of Civil Engineers



J. Michael Read, President
Water Environment Federation



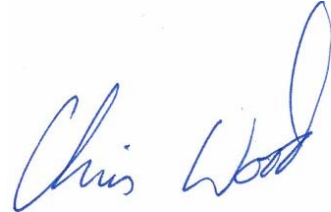
R. P. "Van" Gytenbeek, Executive Director
Federation of Flyfishers



Pamela S. Dillon, Executive Director
American Canoe Association



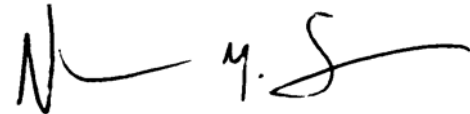
Pamela Mayer Pogue, Chair
Association of State Flood Plain Managers



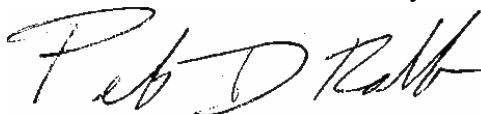
Chris Wood, Vice President for Conservation
Trout Unlimited



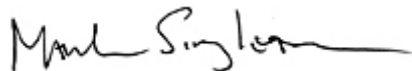
Lori C. Spragens, Executive Director
Association of State Dam Safety Officials



Norm Semanko, President
National Water Resources Association



Peter Rabbon, President
National Association of Flood and
Stormwater Management Agencies



Mark Singleton, Executive Director
American Whitewater



John Baughman, Executive Vice-President
International Assoc of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

Copies to:

Members, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies

The Honorable Ted Stevens (AK)
The Honorable Thad Cochran (MS)
The Honorable Pete Domenici (NM)
The Honorable Robert Bennett (UT)
The Honorable Judd Gregg (NH)
The Honorable Larry Craig (ID)
The Honorable Wayne Allard (CO)

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd (WV)
The Honorable Patrick Leahy (VT)
The Honorable Harry Reid (NV)
The Honorable Dianne Feinstein (CA)
The Honorable Barbara Mikulski (MD)
The Honorable Herb Kohl (WI)