

Coalition Support for USGS Streamgauge Networks and Modernization

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

February 23, 2024

RE: WATER DATA & SCIENCE PROGRAM FUNDING
Interior Department Appropriations for FY2025

Summary of Coalition's Requests for FY2025:
Federal Priorities Streamgages = \$33.0 M
Cooperative Matching Funds Program = \$68M
(includes \$33M streamgauge support and studies)
NGWOS/data modernization = \$35M

Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

Our coalition of 99 water management and use stakeholders requests your support to sufficiently fund the United States Geological Survey's (USGS) Federal Priorities Streamgauge network and related programs for the upcoming Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 budget appropriation.

Our organizations rely heavily on these streamgages to make critical decisions about public safety, respond to extreme weather events, conservation and to support the nation's economy. The information they provide is extensive and invaluable for managing, protecting, and planning to support and improve the resilience of the nation's important water resource infrastructure. Funding for the network needs to keep pace with inflation so that the information from this network continues to be available for many different purposes.

Our coalition's funding request is summarized below. The final section of this letter explains in more detail why we as a nation need to adequately fund the network of streamgages.

Summary of funding request

Our broad coalition of state agencies, interstate commissions, associations, universities, non-governmental organizations, and private industry submit the FY 2025 USGS budget appropriation request as follows: **\$33M** dedicated to Federal Priorities Streamgages, **\$68M** for the Cooperative Matching Funds Program (including \$33M for streamgauge support) and **\$35M** for Next Generation Water Observing System and data delivery modernization.

Supporting details

Federal Priority Streamgages (FPS) -- \$33M

Operational costs of the FPS network nationwide have grown by an average of approximately 5 percent per year since 2016, totaling \$3M. With further inflation expected, operational costs are estimated to increase at least another 5-7 percent. As a result, the increased costs associated with the operation and physical maintenance and data services and distribution have resulted in a \$1M per year shortfall since 2022. Our request for FY 2025 FPS funding of \$33M covers the costs of existing gages, precludes the loss of any streamgage sites, offsets the impact of inflation and allows for the installation of 30 new FPS sites to close the gap in streamflow data where they are crucially needed (see next section).

Cooperative Matching Funds (CMF) Program -- \$68M

The USGS works with more than 1,400 partners nationwide (federal, state, tribal, local and non-governmental organizations) using CMF to jointly support additional streamgages that cannot be funded through the FPS. This matching program began as a 50/50 cost share but has seen the federal contributions decrease to less than 30 percent over time. Our request of \$68 M for FY 2025 stands firm with last year's request.¹ These funds are needed to provide the required cooperative matching funds. Of that, \$33M is dedicated for the protection of the approximately 5,275 CMF-supported streamgages, already established and functioning nationwide.

Next Generation Water Observing System (NGWOS) - \$35M

Our coalition appreciates Congress' support of the Next Generation Water Observation System (NGWOS) at the same level as the past two years of \$35M to allow to continue the NGWOS program as intended. Funding at this level for FY2025 would allow USGS to continue development of Integrated Water Science (IWS) tools and science, applicable nationwide, in the fifth of ten planned demonstration water basins.

Why are USGS Streamgage network data especially important now?

It is more important than ever for Congress to ensure adequate funding for the USGS Streamgage Program. Short duration high intensity precipitation events are increasing in occurrence and volume creating flooding issues across the country and adding unpredictability to communities' abilities to plan for and fund water infrastructure investments. Extreme events such as flooding, drought and sea level rise in coastal regions

¹ See USGS FY2024 Streamgage Support Letter dated February 28, 2023: https://icwp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/USGS-Streamgage-Letter-FY2024_Senate-Approps_2.28.23.pdf

are reasons why a robust streamgage network is an essential resource for water managers to plan and act under pressing conditions.

Without increased funding to maintain the current network of USGS streamgage sites, we are less equipped to make informed decisions pertaining to navigation, flood and hurricane risk predictions, drought determinations, and water supply forecasts. Streamgage data are crucial for use in decision making tools to provide critical life and property saving information. They augment research management decisions, maintain water dependent infrastructure, and provide essential public health and environmental condition information. Insufficient funding seriously compromises our national ability to address federal, state, tribal, local socioeconomic issues, including international treaty obligations.

The 2022 USGS Streamflow Monitoring Network analysis determined priority areas to maintain or improve coverage, resolution, and representation throughout the United States.² This analysis identified gaps in network coverage that, if further built out by establishing new streamgage sites, would enhance resilience to extreme weather events. These areas include coastal watersheds to reduce flood risk, regions in 39 states that lack streamflow information to assess how local climate is affecting floods and droughts, and areas of the U.S. where water supply is vulnerable due to reduced snowpack conditions.

Conclusion

With your help and continued support, Congress can enable the USGS to fulfill its Water Resources Mission Area goals by adequately funding the Federal Priority Streamgages network, Cooperative Matching Funds program, and NGWOS to move water science into the 21st century.

We are happy to answer your questions. For more background information about funding and the utility of the national streamflow information program from stakeholders' perspectives, visit ICWP's website: <https://icwp.org/streamgage-support/>.

Please contact any of us or Beth Callaway at the Interstate Council on Water Policy at: beth@icwp.org or (307) 772-1999.

CC:

Appropriations Subcommittee Members
Secretary of the Interior
Director, Office of Management and Budget
Director, US Geological Survey

² Konrad, C.P., Anderson, S.W., Restivo, D.E., and David, J.E., 2022, Network Analysis of USGS Streamflow Gages: U.S. Geological Survey data release, <https://doi.org/10.5066/P9C8NYTO>.

Organizations Signing on to FY 2025 Streamgage Support Letter (February 23, 2024)

Organization	Name
Alabama Office of Water Resources	Tom Littlepage
America's Watershed Initiative	Kimberly A. Lutz
American Fisheries Society	Douglas Austen
American Rivers	Ted Illston
American Society of Civil Engineers	Thomas W Smith
American Water Resources Assn.	Dresden Farrand
American Water Works Assn.	G. Tracy Mehan, III ED
American Whitewater	Mark Singleton, ED
Appalachian Mountain Club	Susan Arnold
Assoc of American State Geologists	James Faulds
Assoc of Calif Water Agencies	Ian Lyle
Assoc of Clean Water Administrators	Mary Anne Nelson
Assoc of Fish & Wildlife Agencies	Kurt Thiede
Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies	Tom Dobbins
Assoc of State Dam Safety Officials	Lori Spragens
Assoc of State Flood Plain Managers	Chad Berginnis
Bear River Commission	Don Barnett
Big Hole Watershed Committee	Pedro Marques
Big Horn River Alliance	Anne Marie Emery
Calif Sportfishing Protection Alliance	Bill Jennings
Cascade Water Alliance	Ray Hoffman
CDM Smith	Timothy Feather
Cobb County Marietta Water Authority	Cole Blackwell
Colo Riv Basin Salinity Control Forum	Don Barnett
Colorado Lake & Reservoir Management Assn.	Suresh Niraula
Delaware River Basin Commission	Steve Tambini
Environmental Defense Fund	Steve Cochran
Fly Fishers International	Patrick Berry
Freshwater Mollusk Conservation Society	Steve McMurray
Great Lakes Commission	Erika Jensen
Great Lakes Observing System	Kelli Paige
Hawaii Commission on Water Resource Management	Kaleo Manuel
Henry's Fork Foundation	Brandon Hoffner
Hoopa Tribal Land Management/Environmental Protection Agency	Ken Norton

Hydrological Services America	Peter Ward
Idaho Rivers United/Hydropower Reform Coalition	Nic Nelson
Idaho Water Users Assoc	Paul Arrington
Interstate Comm Potomac River Basin	Michael Nardolilli
Interstate Council on Water Policy	Matt Unruh
Kansas Water Office	Connie Owen
Kansas-Oklahoma Arkansas River Compact Commission	Earnie Gilder
KISTERS No. America	Becca Emery
Madison River Foundation	Johnathan Malovich
Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District	Katherine Zitsch
Mile High Flood District	Colin Haggerty
Minnesota DNR	Katie Smith
Missouri DNR	Erin Fanning
Montana Department of Environmental Quality	Lindsey Krywaruchka
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation	Anna Pakenham-Stevenson
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	Bill Schenk
Montana Trout Unlimited	David Brooks
Montana Watershed Coordination Council	Ethan Kunard
National Assoc of Flood & Stormwater Mgm't Agencies	Sunny Simpkins
National Assoc State Boating Law Admin	John Fetterman
National Audubon Society	Julie Hill-Gabriel
National Drought Mitigation Center	Mark Svoboda
National Ground Water Association	Terry Morse
National Hydrologic Warning Council	Bruce Rindahl
National Hydropower Association	Malcolm Woolf
National Society of Professional Surveyors	Tim Burch
National Water Resources Association	Dale Nellor
National Water Supply Alliance	Dave Mitamura
National Wildlife Federation	Abby Tinsley
Nebraska Department of Natural Resources	Thomas Riley
NEIWPC	Susan J. Sullivan
North American Lake Management Society	Kellie Merrell

North Dakota Department of Water Resources	Andrea Travnicek
Ohio Riv Valley Water Sanitation Comm	Richard Harrison
Oklahoma Water Resources Board	Julie Cunningham
Oregon Water Resources Congress	April Snell
Phycological Society of America	Eric Linton
Red River Compact Administration	Sue Lowry
Republican Riv Compact Administration	Thomas Riley
Rivers Alliance of Connecticut	Alicea Charamut
Society of Wetland Scientists	Loretta Battaglia
Southeast Kansas Groundwater Management Dist 3	Mark Rude
Southwest Tribal Fisheries Commission	Adam Ringia
Susquehanna River Basin Commission	Andrew Dehoff
Tacoma Water	Scott Dewhirst
The Nature Conservancy	Jimmy Hague
Three Rivers QUEST	Melissa O'Neal
Tri-State Water Resource Coalition	Gail Melgren
Trout Unlimited	Kate Miller
University of Georgia River Basin Center	Sechindra Vallury/ Seth Wenger
Upper Colo River Commission	Chuck Collum
Upper Miss River Basin Assoc	Kirsten Wallace
Upper Missouri Watershed Alliance	Sherry Meador
Virginia Dept. of Environmental Quality, Office of Water Supply	William Cloe
Washington St Water Resource Assoc	Tom Myrum
Water Environment Federation	Walter Marlowe
West Virginia Rivers Coalition	Angie Rosser
West Virginia Water Research Institute	Paul Ziemkiewicz
Western Landowners Alliance	Leslie Allison
Western States Water Council	Tony Willardson
Wild Salmon Center	Jessica Helsley
Wyoming State Engineer's Office	Brandon Gebhart
Wyoming Water Association	Andrew Strike
Wyoming Water Development Office	Jason Mead
Xylem Analytics North America	Randy Hadland
Yellowstone River Commission	Brandon Gebhart