

◆ *American Geological Institute* ◆ *American Rivers* ◆ *American Water Works Association*
◆ *Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies* ◆ *Clean Water Network* ◆ *National Association of Clean Water Agencies* ◆ *National Ground Water Association* ◆ *National Institutes for Water Resources* ◆ *National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition* ◆ *Natural Resources Defense Council* ◆ *Sierra Club* ◆ *Tennessee Clean Water Network* ◆ *Water Environment Federation* ◆ *Water and Wastewater Equipment Manufacturers Association* ◆

April 27, 2010

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Chairwoman
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment and Related
Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Support for the National Water Quality Assessment Program in the FY2011 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill

Dear Chairwoman Feinstein and Ranking Member Alexander:

We represent organizations strongly dedicated to protecting water quality. As you consider the FY2011 budget for the Department of the Interior, we strongly recommend you support increased funding for a critically important part of the Nation's effort to protect our water resources —the National Water Quality Assessment program (NAWQA) of the U.S. Geological Survey.

We urge you to provide \$70 million for NAWQA within the U.S. Geological Survey's FY2011 appropriations, an increase of \$3.5 million over the FY2010 enacted level of \$66.5 million. The President's budget calls for \$65 million for the Program – a \$1.5 million cut from the FY2010 enacted level and no adjustment for inflation.

Congress established NAWQA to provide long-term, nationally consistent information on water-quality conditions and ecosystem health. The Program provides an understanding of the status of water-quality conditions and how these conditions are changing over time, and how natural factors and human activities affect water quality. This information helps support sound management and policy decisions to safeguard our nation's water resources, better understand climate change, and assist with other critical environmental protection efforts.

Since the Program's creation in 1991, findings from NAWQA studies have aided policymakers in critical decisions to protect water resources. NAWQA assessments of nitrogen and phosphorous loadings from the Mississippi River Basin to the Gulf of Mexico are providing increasingly detailed information about the location of the specific sources of nutrients that contribute to hypoxia in the Gulf. This information allows the Environmental Protection Agency and States to develop and target nutrient pollution prevention plans to those areas. NAWQA studies conducted in the Chesapeake Bay region have established the importance of groundwater discharges as a nutrient source to the Bay, identified priority areas for restoration within the Bay watershed, and provided information to the Maryland Legislature on the impacts of pesticide and nutrient applications. NAWQA monitoring nationwide uncovered the existence of MTBE in ground water which alerted the public and policy makers to unintended consequences of the compound designed to enable gasoline to burn cleaner, and Congress and States have acted to remove MTBE from fuel. NAWQA scientists in the Puget Sound area identified the sources of nutrients to the Sound, enabling the State to target its pollution control efforts to alleviate low dissolved oxygen levels throughout the Sound.

For over a decade now, Presidential budget proposals and Congressional appropriations for NAWQA have not kept pace with inflation. Without inflationary adjustments over time, NAWQA's scope of work has been significantly curtailed. The number of stream sites monitored has been reduced from 500, during its first ten years, to only 113 over the entire country since 2001. At even these 113 sites, only 12 are monitored every year, 15 are monitored every other year, and the remaining 86 are monitored only every 4 years. Sediments in fish tissue are no longer sampled at all, so that data on levels of trace elements, pesticides, and other organic chemicals, like PAHs, in aquatic life are missing. A 2002 review of NAWQA by the National Research Council of the National Academies of Science found that substantive national coverage had been lost to previous funding reductions and that "NAWQA cannot continue to be downsized and still be considered the national water quality assessment that the nation needs."

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently examined whether funding issues or other factors would affect the ability of twenty federal data collection programs to continue to generate data comparable to quality data from past years. GAO found that NAWQA was one of two programs in jeopardy of being unable to continue to generate quality data. GAO found that NAWQA's abilities have been significantly diminished due to funding constraints.

To remain national in scope during the last ten years, NAWQA has relied on its earlier monitoring data plus selected additional monitoring of priority sites necessary to assess changing conditions and their causes. It also relied heavily on developing and using models to extrapolate to areas it could not monitor, assess trends, and make water quality predictions.

Monitoring will be further reduced with the proposed FY2011 funding cut and no inflationary adjustment. The programmatic effect of these funding reductions will be a \$2.5 million cut which is equivalent to reducing NAWQA's stream monitoring by 10 sites, a quarter of the current number of long-term sites, and eliminating 100 ground water monitoring wells.

As NAWQA plans for the future, it is essential that NAWQA begin to resume broader, national scale monitoring to assess water quality conditions in changing human and climatic environments, to verify modeling results, and to examine policy-related questions associated with issues of the next decade.

For all these reasons and others, we urge you to support \$70 million for NAWQA in the FY2011 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill. This funding would begin to rebuild NAWQA's capabilities to provide information vital to protecting our Nation's water resources.

Sincerely,

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