



June 26, 2013

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
 Chairman
 Committee on Appropriations
 U.S. Senate
 Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Thad Cochran
 Ranking Member
 Committee on Appropriations
 U.S. Senate
 Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Jack Reed
 Chairman
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
 and Related Agencies
 U.S. Senate
 Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
 Ranking Member
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
 and Related Agencies
 U.S. Senate
 Washington, D.C.

RE: FY2014 Funding for the National Water Quality Assessment program (NAWQA) of the U.S. Geological Survey

Dear Chairman Mikulski, Chairman Reed, Senator Shelby, and Senator Murkowski:

In order to provide critical scientific information to guide governmental and private actions to protect the Nation's water resources, we urge the Senate Appropriations Committee to fund the National Water Quality Assessment

program (NAWQA) of the U.S. Geological Survey at the FY2010 funding level of \$66.5 million. The Administration's proposed FY2014 budget of \$62.1 million includes a redirection of \$5 million, bringing the net NAWQA proposed funding to \$57.1 million, a reduction of \$9.4 million or 14%. A cut of this magnitude is unwarranted and unwise. The data and analysis provided through the NAWQA program is critical to help make wise choices about how to invest limited federal, state, and local resources.

Twenty-two years ago Congress established NAWQA to provide long-term, nationally consistent data and information on water-quality conditions, to measure and assess the causes of changes over time, and to determine the impacts of changes in water quality on aquatic life. NAWQA is the only federal program with this mission, and it has the proven capability to accomplish it. NAWQA's findings have and continue to be used by national, regional, State, and local governments and the private sector to develop more effective, science-based policies and actions to protect and restore water quality even as population and threats to water quality grow and change. Its findings target actions that can achieve the greatest water quality benefits and can determine whether the billions of dollars invested in pollution control are actually having the anticipated results.

The NAWQA program has been instrumental in identifying and remedying a variety of major past and present water quality problems in our Nation. NAWQA information and models are used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to determine priority areas for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. To help combat hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico, the state of Tennessee successfully completed and is implementing its nutrient pollution prevention plans by using NAWQA's SPARROW model. Other states in the Mississippi River basin are now also using the SPARROW model to develop their plans to reduce of nitrogen and phosphorous loadings in the basin. NAWQA monitoring nationwide uncovered the existence of Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether (MTBE) in groundwater which alerted the public and policy makers to unintended consequences of the compound designed to enable gasoline to burn cleaner. Congress and states then acted to remove MTBE from fuel.

Recent reductions in funding threaten NAWQA's ability to collect enough data to adequately monitor the Nation's streams and groundwater, much less to conduct the assessments necessary to turn data into information that decision makers and managers can use. FY 2013 funding was only able to support 100 surface water monitoring sites, compared to the 495 sampled when NAWQA began, and to support only 660 well sites, compared to 5,047 at its outset. Identifying and reducing nutrient sources within the Mississippi River watershed is a national priority, but only 38 monitoring sites collect data today for reduction models that were developed to use data from 435 sites.

To fully restore NAWQA's monitoring and assessment activities to levels comparable to 20 years ago would require a budget about four times that of the proposed \$62.1 million FY 2014 level, excluding the \$5 million redirection. We recognize that those funding levels are unattainable in today's budget climate, but any further cuts to the NAWQA program below the FY2010 level will undermine the program's effectiveness. The cuts, including, the redirection, to a net \$57.1 million (FY'14 requested amount) would:

- Cause a net loss of about 30 percent of the national long-term quality monitoring sites for streams and rivers since 2012 and 80 percent over the past 18 years.
- Halt development of one of four regional nutrient stream models and decision support tools, such as those currently being used to guide investments in high priority areas in the Mississippi River Basin and Chesapeake Bay watersheds.
- Cause an 8 percent reduction in ground-water trends monitoring in CT, CO, IL, MN, OR, and WA for three large aquifer systems that supply drinking water to more than 42 million residents.
- Halt development of one of four groundwater-quality models used by water-supply managers to assess the amount and quality of drinking water that is available and to forecast changes in water quality resulting from alternative actions. The four aquifer systems to be modeled are the Mississippi Embayment, the California Central Valley, glacial aquifers in the northern United States, and the North Atlantic Coastal Plain (which includes the Chesapeake Bay area).

- Reduce collaborative efforts with numerous local, state, and Federal partners to better understand the impacts of management actions on the movement of nutrients, sediment, and other contaminants, and their effects on stream aquatic life in watersheds such as the Potomac, Yazoo, Iowa, and Yakima River basins.

The data collected through the NAWQA program is vital to protecting public health, aquatic life, and our economic well-being. Despite our current fiscal challenges, we must continue to collect this data to ensure that our past investments are paying off, our current water quality is protected, and the future investments local, state and federal agencies make are wise and targeted at the area of need. We strongly urge you to fund the NAWQA program at \$66.5 million in FY2014.

Best regards,

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