

U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY FUNDING

REQUEST

Support full funding for the USGS Cooperative Water Program to return to a 50% federal/50% non-federal cost share in Texas. A plus up of \$2.5 million from the Administration's FY2007 budget, earmarked for Texas streamgaging, would restore the 50/50 balance. In addition, a one-time appropriation of \$700,000 would restore gage sites taken out of service due to budget cuts. Beginning in FY2008, the non-federal share for operation and maintenance of the restored gages totals \$200,000 per year.

Support full funding for the USGS National Streamflow Information Program in Texas. A plus up of \$3.5 million from the Administration's FY2007 budget, earmarked for Texas streamgaging, would ensure a core network of gages in the State.

The State of Texas enjoys a sterling reputation for comprehensive water resources planning. Planning of this importance and magnitude requires a base knowledge of the quantity and quality of the State's water resources. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) Cooperative Water Program (CWP) is a critical component to this base of knowledge, but the federal portion of funding for streamgaging under CWP has been steadily declining for the past several years.

Water resources data is critical if we are to ensure economic development, public health and environmental protection. It is vital to water resources planning, provides for flood warnings and characterization, provides flow measurements to maximize hydropower generation, helps to reduce pollutant loads and address environmental concerns. We need to increase, not decrease, our scientific understanding to assess the sustainability of our water resources at a level currently demanded by policymakers and the public at large.

In constant dollar terms, USGS funding for streamgages has remained relatively flat over the past several years. The costs of the program, however, continue to increase, primarily due to inflation and salary increases at USGS. Consequently, the full extent of the increase in costs is borne by local cooperators and states like Texas. Historically, the CWP has funded streamgages at a cost share of 50 percent federal and 50 percent non-federal. The flat funding levels by USGS, coupled with increasing costs have resulted in a current cost share of approximately 33 percent federal and 67 percent non-federal. This disparity in funding belies the fact that USGS and other federal interests receive equal, and perhaps greater benefit from the data collected from streamgages.

As a result of the reduction in the federal cost share, local and state cooperators must make the difficult choice to either: (1) disproportionately increase funding to maintain current streamgage stations, or (2) eliminate certain streamgage sites. The elimination of streamgages can be devastating, harming the data record that supports technical analysis and planning. An opportunity to collect data in one year or several years cannot be recaptured at a later time. Data used for analysis and planning is most valuable in determining trends and projections, but such benefit is diluted considerably if the data history is not complete or has gaps in it.

The devastating impact of a reduced data capability is not exclusive to local and state jurisdictions. Science at the federal level is also adversely affected. For example, emergency management personnel depend upon the accessibility and accuracy of streamflow information. During flooding events, streamgages actively measuring the flows, allowing emergency management personnel to plan and respond promptly. It is in the national interest to have a single integrated system providing real-time and historical stream flow information for all users, including water managers, emergency managers, recreational water users, engineers, and scientists. The CWP is intended to fulfill that purpose. Without an increase in funding for CWP, approximately seventy gaging stations are lost annually nationwide, at a time when such data stations should be growing, not decreasing. This continued eroding of basic data collection compromises all aspects of water supply, flood warning and environmental protection.

In addition to CWP, the National Research Council (NRC) developed the National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP) to design a base streamflow network of federally funded gages in the United States expressly to ensure long-term viability for national needs. The NRC deems stream flow data a “public good” because many national interests are served by having access to this information. NSIP is designed to ensure that a core network of gages, identified because they are of national importance, remains active and is not subject to state and local funding fluctuations. NSIP has not been fully funded in Texas or in any other state.