January 19, 2010

The Honorable Frank R. Lautenberg
United States Senator, New Jersey
Hart Senate Office Building
Suite 324
Washington, DC 20510

Subject: Support for USGS Programs in FY-2011

Dear Senator Lautenberg:

The New Jersey Association for Floodplain Management (NJAFM)\(^1\) urges you to support the U.S. Geological Survey to fully implement the National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP) plan as detailed herein and the Congressional efforts to appropriate $110 million in FY-2011 for that purpose. Full implementation of the NSIP would help reverse the loss of long-term streamgages and provide essential information needed to assess water quality and climate change, forecast floods (including storm surge) and droughts and provide emergency warnings, manage interstate water supplies and monitor compliance with federal treaty, compact and Native American trust responsibilities.

In New Jersey and nationwide, our need for reliable historical streamflow information is critical to reducing vulnerabilities to Natural Disasters. Data from the nation’s streamgages are vital to local, State and Federal officials in order to forecast floods and coordinate flood-response activities, including use of the networks by first-responders for evacuation and saving lives. In addition, data from long-term streamgages is necessary to predict future flooding events, which is important for community planning and future infrastructure design. Furthermore, the requirement for streamflow data in addition to groundwater, tidal surge, water quality, precipitation and other water resource data increases every year in relation to our growing populations, increased economic development, changing land uses, on-going climate concerns, better ecological awareness, and aging and deteriorating infrastructure.

In our state, the United States Geological Survey New Jersey Water Science Center (USGS NJWSC) operates 30 National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP) streamgages. Operation and maintenance of 25 of these gage sites is funded entirely by other sources; 24 gages are funded by federal, state, and

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\(^1\) The New Jersey Association for Floodplain Management is a six-year-old non-profit organization dedicated to reducing loss of life and property damage resulting from floods (website: www.njafm.org). NJAFM is one of 26 chapters of the national Association of State Floodplain Managers (website: www.floods.org), comprising 14,000 individual and chapter members.
county agencies and water authorities while one (1) gage is funded by the USGS Office of the Delaware River Master.

The USGS NJWSC will receive a total of $118,310 from the USGS NSIP for work in New Jersey in FY2010. This is approximately 25% of the funds needed to fully fund all 30 gages as continuous-record discharge gages. These funds will support only three (3) continuous-record discharge gages and two (2) continuous-record stage gages with annual peak stage and flow published. In addition, these funds will be used for database work, such as maintaining the peakflow file which is important to maintaining accurate flood predictions. The NSIP funding needed to fully fund the 30 designated gages in New Jersey is $460,160. To fully fund all 30 gages as continuous-record discharge gages it would cost $474,000.

Numerous agencies and organizations rely heavily on the water data and science as detailed below that the US Geological Survey’s NSIP and the Cooperative Water Program (CWP) produce and many are active, cost-share partners (“Cooperators”) in the CWP. Unfortunately, the NSIP and CWP budgets have not kept up with America’s growing needs or the annual cost-share contributions of over 1,500 Cooperators (approximately $163 million).

The NSIP and CWP are proven, reliable sources of sound scientific information required by decision makers in both the public and private sectors for a wide variety of analytical, planning, design and management functions. The data and science are used on a regular basis by federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies, and by many businesses, landowners, public interest organizations and individuals for many essential decisions, including:

- monitoring compliance with federal compact and Native American trust responsibilities;
- designing bridges, dams and other infrastructure;
- forecasting storm surge, flood and drought conditions and issuing emergency advisories;
- identifying flood-prone areas to protect lives and property and reduce disaster relief expenses;
- administration of water rights;
- managing reservoir releases for hydropower, environmental and navigation uses;
- monitoring and protecting water quality, fisheries, wetlands and endangered species;
- providing for safe public recreation;
- analyzing climate change and evaluating response options; and
- projecting future water needs and availability for agricultural, municipal and industrial uses.

The NSIP, proposed by Congress in 1999, was intended to provide multipurpose, unbiased surface-water information and to operate as a national “backbone,” supporting a streamgaging framework of approximately 4,780 federally funded streamgages and tidal gages necessary to fulfill the nation’s needs for streamflow measurement, analysis and information delivery.

While the CWP has served America well for over 110 years, USGS is now able to support less than 1/3 of its cost. In 2008, USGS operated a network of about 7,663 active streamgages nationwide, but more than 965 have been “discontinued” since 2001 due to inadequate funding. Many of those had over 50 years of continuous record, which gives their loss much greater significance. Another 277 streamgages in 31 states are currently identified as being at risk or have already been recently discontinued.
By itself, however, the NSIP cannot meet our national need for the data and science required to manage water resources in a sustainable manner and federal funding for the USGS share of the CWP data collection and investigations of at least $95 million will be necessary. Re-balancing the CWP cost-share to the long-standing tradition of a 50:50 partnership is especially important now, as state, tribal and local agencies confront recession-driven fiscal challenges.

These measures would represent a very reasonable investment, considering the magnitude of our ongoing disaster emergency expenses and the federal responsibilities and programs that depend on information from the NSIP streamgages.

The NJAFM urges your support to enable the U.S. Geological Survey to fully implement the NSIP plan as soon as possible and we urge you to support Congressional efforts to appropriate $110 million in FY-2011 for that purpose.

As Chair of NJAFM, if I can provide additional information, please feel free to contact me at chair@njafm.org, or contact Larry Larson, Executive Director of the Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM), at larry@floods.org.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph Ruggeri, P.E., CFM
NJAFM Chair

John Miller, P.E., CFM
NJAFM Legislative Committee

cc: NJAFM Board by email
Richard Kropp, P.E., Director, USGS NJ Water Science Center