



June 26, 2012

The Honorable Daniel Inouye
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.

Dear Chairman Inouye, Chairman Reed, Senator Cochran, 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 you to fund the National Water Quality Assessment program (NAWQA) of the U.S. Geological Survey at the FY2010 funding level of \$66.5 million. We find the Administrations proposed FY2013 cuts to the program unwarranted and unwise. The FY 2012

appropriation was \$62.6 and the President's proposed FY2013 budget calls for \$56.3 million for the Program.¹ – a total of \$10.2 million, or over 15 per cent, in reductions since FY2010.

Twenty-one years ago Congress established NAWQA to provide long-term, nationally consistent data and information on water-quality conditions and ecosystem health nationwide, to measure changes over time, and to determine how natural features and human actions affect water quality. 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.

For example, 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. 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. 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.

As early as 2005, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that NAWQA's abilities were significantly diminished due to funding constraints. Now, continuing erosion of funding is threatening NAWQA's ability to collect enough data to 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.

During its first decade, NAWQA sampled 495 stream sites and 5,000 wells to provide the long term data necessary to describe current conditions and assess trends. For the past decade, NAWQA could only monitor 113 of the stream sites, with most sites only monitored every fourth year, and only 12 monitored every year in the entire Nation. Only about 40 sites are monitored in any one year nationwide. The impacts of the reduction are significant. For example, information for the water quality models of the Mississippi River and other watersheds that identify nutrient sources and loadings were developed with data from 435 sites. Today, only 38 of these sites continue to be monitored.

FY 2013 will be the first year of a new decade of monitoring and assessments for the NAWQA Program. To meet the priority water-quality information needs of the next decade, the National Research Council and the organizations and individuals signing this letter have strongly recommended that NAWQA restore and enhance its monitoring networks as its essential first order of business. At least 313 sites, each actively monitored each year, have been proposed to enable assessments of critical short-term changes as well as long term trends in nutrients, pesticides, sediment, and other contaminants. This data is also essential to assess runoff to local streams and to more distant receiving waters, such as in the Great Lakes, Gulf of Mexico, Chesapeake Bay, and San Francisco Bay.

¹ The President's FY 2013 budget proposes \$56.3 million for NAWQA plus an additional \$5 million to be reallocated for support of the Interior Department's WaterSMART and USGS Priority Ecosystems.

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 \$62.6 million FY 2012 level. 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. Of concern would be the cuts in the proposed FY 2013 budget of \$56.3 million which would:

- Support only 85 of the 313 recommended stream, river, and drinking water supply monitoring sites in the NAWQA surface-water monitoring network.
- Support sampling of 375 (30 percent) of the 1,200 wells in aquifer systems that are the most important sources of drinking water for the Nation.
- Delay the development and use of new laboratory methods to assess the occurrence of new pesticides and unregulated contaminants, including many pharmaceuticals, hormones, antibiotics, and high production volume chemicals that could impact streams and groundwater.
- Eliminate or reduce a collaborative study with other federal and State agencies to assess the causes of ecosystem degradation in streams and rivers of the Midwest.
- Slow the development and application of predictive models, such as those currently being used to guide conservation investments to high priority areas in the Mississippi River Basin and Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Considering the importance of the Nation's water resources to public health, aquatic life, and our economic well-being, it is critical that we have the sound scientific evidence necessary for wise decisions. NAWQA funding is miniscule compared to the billions spent to control pollution. We need to make sure those billions are well spent. We strongly urge you to restore our national water quality monitoring and assessment capabilities and start NAWQA's third decade with a \$66.5 million budget.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

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