

**The Academy of Natural Sciences ♦ American Rivers ♦ American Society of Agronomy ♦ American Water Works Association ♦ Association of American State Geologists ♦ Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies ♦ Association of State and Interstate Water Pollution Control Administrators ♦ Clean Water Action ♦ Clean Water Network ♦ Crop Science Society of America ♦ Environmental and Energy Study Institute ♦ Environmental Working Group ♦ Geo-Institute of the American Society of Civil Engineers ♦ Interstate Council on Water Policy ♦ Izaak Walton League of America ♦ The H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment ♦ National Association of Clean Water Agencies ♦ National Biological Information Infrastructure ♦ National Catholic Rural Life Conference ♦ National Council for Science and the Environment ♦ National Ground Water Association ♦ Natural Resources Defense Council ♦ Sierra Club ♦ Soil and Water Conservation Society ♦ Soil Science Society of America ♦ Sustainable Agriculture Coalition ♦ Water and Wastewater Equipment Manufacturers Association, Inc. ♦
Water Environment Federation**

April 7, 2008

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

The Honorable Wayne Allard
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 FY09 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill

Dear Chairwoman Feinstein and Ranking Member Allard:

We are writing to urge you to provide \$70 million for the National Water-Quality Assessment Program (NAWQA) within the U.S. Geological Survey's FY09 appropriations. The President's budget calls for \$54.1 million for the Program – a 15 percent cut from the FY 2008 enacted level of \$63.9 million. We request that you reject the 15 percent cut and include an inflationary increase plus an additional \$4 million to begin to restore the integrity of this program that has diminished without cost-of-living increases for 11 of the past 12 years.

Congress established NAWQA to provide long-term, nationally consistent information on water-quality conditions and ecosystem health at the regional and national scale. 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 Austin, Texas uncovered a direct link between increased mortality of aquatic life and contaminated storm water run-off caused by polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) found in parking lot and driveway pavement sealants. As a result, Austin has banned coal-tar based sealants. 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.

If enacted, the President's budget would stop monitoring and assessments of 250, mostly unregulated, chemicals in sources of drinking water and treated water for major metropolitan areas. For example, source and treated drinking water assessments would not be conducted in the Los Angeles, Orange County, California area. It would end long-term data collection in 10 of the Nation's 20 major aquifers currently studied by NAWQA, including the Denver Basin aquifer system and aquifers in the Puget Sound area and central western Washington. The cut would also end studies on priority national issues such as the bioaccumulation of mercury in fish. Tens of thousands of chemical, physical and biological measurements in streams and wells would not be collected in 29 states. Proposed cuts would also mean staff reductions throughout the nation, with the largest impacts in California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin. Along with a reduction in funding for the Toxic Substances Hydrology Program, the President's cut to NAWQA would severely impede the ability of policymakers to address emerging contaminants.

Because NAWQA funding has not kept pace with the cost of living for over a decade, the scope of its work has significantly decreased. 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 not sampled at all. All work in Alaska and Hawaii has stopped. In light of these concerns, we request that you halt NAWQA's decline by not accepting the President's budget cuts and that instead you begin to reverse it by adding \$4 million. This \$4 million would allow all 113 sites to be monitored every year to better assess water-quality trends during this period of rapidly changing climate and chemical use.

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.

For all these reasons and others, we urge you to support \$70 million for NAWQA in the FY 09 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,

William Brown, President & CEO, The Academy of Natural Sciences
Peter Raabe, Policy Director for Budget Appropriations, American Rivers
Ellen Bergfeld, Executive Vice President, American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, Soil Science Society of America
Tom Curtis, Deputy Director for Government Affairs, American Water Works Association
Chacko J. John, President, Association of American State Geologists
Diane VanDe Hei, Executive Director, Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies
Linda Eichmiller, Executive Director, Association of State and Interstate Water Pollution Control Administrators
Paul Schwartz, Executive Director, Clean Water Action
Natalie Roy, Executive Director, Clean Water Network
Carol Werner, Executive Director, Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Ken Cook, President, Environmental Working Group
Arthur G. Hoffmann, President, Geo-Institute of the American Society of Civil Engineers
Thomas Beauduy, Chairman, Interstate Council on Water Policy
Leah Miller, Director, Watershed Programs, Izaak Walton League of America
Robin O'Malley, Director, Environmental Reporting Program, The H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and Environment
Ken Kirk, Executive Director, National Association of Clean Water Agencies
Catriona Macdonald, National Biological Information Infrastructure
Timothy Kautza, Executive Director, National Catholic Rural Life Conference
Peter Saundry, Executive Director, National Council for Science and the Environment
Christine Reimer, Director, Government Affairs, National Ground Water Association
Heather Taylor-Miesle, Deputy Legislative Director, Natural Resources Defense Council
Ed Hopkins, Director, Environmental Quality Program, Sierra Club
Craig Cox, Executive Director, Soil and Water Conservation Society
Martha L. Noble, Senior Policy Associate, Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Dawn Kristof Champeny, President, Water and Wastewater Equipment Manufacturers Association, Inc.
William Bertera, Executive Director, Water Environment Federation

CC: The Honorable Norman D. Dicks, Chairman, Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
The Honorable Todd Tiahrt, Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies