NEWEA Position Paper

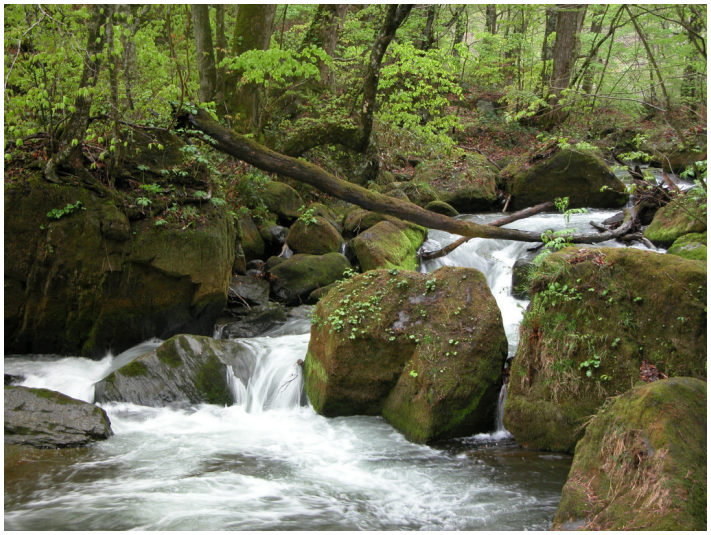
Support for the US Geological Survey's Cooperative Water Program (CWP) and National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP)

Ratified April 1, 2009/Updated March 9, 2010/Updated November 18, 2010
by the New England Water Environment Association

NEWEA supports the US Geological Survey's Cooperative Water Program (CWP) and National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP) and we urge Congress' support to enable the USGS to fully implement its design for the NSIP and to restore the capacity for USGS to match nonfederal cost-share investments in the CWP on a 50:50 basis.

NEWEA members rely extensively on the trustworthy data and science that these two programs produce and many are active, financial partners ("Cooperators") in the Cooperative Water Program. Nationwide, our need for a well-informed understanding of streamflow, groundwater, tidal surge, precipitation and climate change implications continues to increase every year in relation to our growing population, economic development, changing land uses and ecological awareness.

The NSIP and CWP have proven to be a reliable source for scientific information concerning America's water resources, information that is required by decision makers in both the public and private sectors for a wide variety of planning, design and implementation functions. Unfortunately, the USGS capacity has not kept up with America's growing needs despite the strong, national cost-share partnership with over 1,500 Cooperators.



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NSIP and CWP data and science are needed on a regular basis by many federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies, and by many businesses, landowners, public interest organizations and individuals for a wide variety of essential decisions, including:

- Monitoring compliance with federal treaty, 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 and management of hydropower generation, environmental and navigation releases from reservoirs
- Monitoring and protecting water quality, fisheries, wetlands and endangered species
- Providing for public recreation safety
- Adapting to climate change; and
- Projecting future water needs and the availability supplies for agricultural, municipal, and industrial uses

The NSIP and CWP inform and guide vital programs and diverse interests in all the New England states but, unfortunately, they do not have sufficient capacity to support future water resource and infrastructure decisions necessary to keep our communities and businesses safe and prosperous. Since 2001, when the Congress first provided funding to the NSIP, more than 80% of the NSIP streamgages have been supported by the CWP cost-share partners and the stability that NSIP was designed to provide remains elusive.

The CWP has served America well for more than 110 years as a federal/non-federal partnership funded through 50/50 cost-share agreements. Today, however, USGS is able to support less than 1/3 of the cost. From the combined network of about 7,550 active streamgages nationwide, more than 780 have been "discontinued" in the last 10 years

due to inadequate funding; many of those discontinued streamgages had over 50 years of continuous record, which gives their loss even greater significance.

Concern for the long-term continuity and reliability of our national streamgaging data led the USGS to propose the NSIP in 1999. Unlike the CWP, the NSIP was designed as a federally funded "backbone," supporting a national communications framework and the subset of approximately 4,770 streamgages and tidal gages necessary to fulfill five specific national needs. The National Research Council's Committee on Water Resources Research evaluated the NSIP design in 2004 and concluded that it will provide "a sound, well-conceived program that meets the nation's needs for streamflow measurement, interpretation, and information delivery." However, of the 4,770 streamgages needed to sustain those five national needs, at least 425 have never been installed, more than 970 need to be reactivated and approximately 2,725 are funded (wholly or partially) with CWP funds; most of them still need to be "flood hardened" and updated with real-time communications equipment in order to provide reliable flood forecast data. In light of the severe flooding and drought that have recently caused so much loss of life and damage to property in the New England states, and with climate change implications to understand and integrate in our planning, reliable sources of data and science has never been more important in protecting New England communities and infrastructure investments.

As such, NEWEA urges Congress to enable the USGS to fully implement the NSIP plan as soon as possible and we encourage you to appropriate $110 million in FY-2012 for that purpose. This represents a very reasonablen investment, considering the magnitude of our ongoing disaster emergency expenses and the federal responsibilities and programs that depend on information from the NSIP streamgages. Full funding for the NSIP would 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.

If the NSIP is fully implemented, following its approved design, federal funding for the USGS share of the CWP data collection and investigations of at least $95 million will be necessary to sustain the planning, water rights administration, project operation and flow forecasting capabilities that so many people, businesses, communities and agencies depend upon nationwide. Federal support for the CWP has been far less than the $163 million invested by non-federal Cooperators.

We urge your support to enable the USGS to fully implement its design for the NSIP and to restore the USGS capability to match non-federal cost share investments in the CWP on a 50:50 basis, as was the practice for most of the past 110 years.

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