United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, D.C. 20240

NOV 6 2012

Dear Members of the Advisory Committee on Water Information:

The Advisory Committee on Water Information (ACWI) has long provided important advice to the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and the Secretary of the Interior, the Director of USGS, and I all value that advice very much.

In the face of growing demands for streamflow information and recognizing the likely constraints on Federal resources in the coming years, I am asking for advice from ACWI on approaches and options that might be implemented by USGS and Interior leadership in order to sustain and enhance water monitoring and related science for the Nation.

I intend for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to continue and strengthen its leadership of water resource monitoring networks, assessments, and research necessary to understand, protect, and sustainably utilize our nationwide water supplies for current and future needs. I also recognize that Federal budgets are likely to continue to be severely constrained and possibly declining for the foreseeable future, requiring that USGS (with help from its stakeholders) clearly articulate its science and service priorities in order to increase efficiency, collaboration, and focus in providing essential data and interpretive expertise.

With these facts in mind, I ask that ACWI provide advice and recommendations within the next ten months to help USGS and Interior leadership continue to provide high quality water monitoring and related science within the framework of constrained financial resources, recognizing that the options available will involve difficult choices and the support of water community leaders will be required and gratefully appreciated.

I request ACWI's advice to assist us in identifying, evaluating, and prioritizing options for achieving the objectives of the USGS water data and science programs, including mechanisms through which:

- USGS can explore funding sources of all sorts and models, especially focusing on program drivers and non-traditional, non-Federal sources including the private sector, National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, and utilities;
- USGS can collaborate and leverage activities and funds across stakeholder boundaries (Federal, State, tribal, other) and possibly delegate some activities to funding partners or State and regional monitoring councils;
- USGS can take full advantage of new and emerging technology to obtain more comprehensive and better quality water data and drive down costs;
- USGS can prioritize monitoring locations, data parameters, and interpretive studies;
- USGS and others can improve the utility of geospatial data and statistical analysis to improve our understanding of non-gaged streams and sections of streams;

- USGS can reduce costs for water monitoring;
- USGS can collect, manage, and deliver data (surface water, groundwater, and water quality) and applications for public use.

ACWI should also consider any other reasonable options that can be developed for avoiding the loss of essential science and services due to shrinking budgets. These issues should be considered in the context of the Federal role in monitoring the Nation's water resources and in maintaining a national database in which data are comparable and readily available to all.

An evaluation of the USGS streamgaging program was undertaken by an ACWI-sponsored Streamgaging Task Force about 10 years ago (http://acwi.gov/streams/SF-ReportAug29-03.pdf). ACWI also sponsored reviews of the Cooperative Water Program in 1999 and 2004 (http://acwi.gov/coop/index.html and http://acwi.gov/coop2004/index.html). As a result, ACWI should consider the events of the intervening decade, including:

- the current Federal role that these national monitoring networks fulfill (remembering that USGS has no regulatory or resource management responsibilities);
- the steps USGS already has taken to achieve efficiencies in its monitoring networks, and the results of those measures;
- the status of the recommendations contained in the 2004 report –
    - which recommendations were adopted and what was the result;
    - which recommendations were not adopted and what were the impediments to adoption.

I would like to have meaningful input, even if a final report is not complete, by the next ACWI annual meeting in July 2013. USGS leadership and I will provide assistance as necessary, but I am looking for an independent report from the Advisory Committee.

I thank ACWI members for their tireless service on behalf of the water resources community, and I look forward to your advice and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Anne J. Castle
Assistant Secretary
for Water and Science