July 11, 2025

Chairman Tom Cole
House Appropriations Committee
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro
House Appropriations Committee
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairwoman Susan Collins
Senate Appropriations Committee
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Vice Chair Patty Murray
Senate Appropriations Committee
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

RE: NOAA and USGS Appropriations

Chairwoman Collins, Vice Chair Murray, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

Recently proposed cuts to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) appropriations threaten critical understaffing that will compromise the essential functions of NOAA, USGS, and our members' ability to serve the public.[1] Therefore, the Western Urban Water Coalition (WUWC), a coalition of twenty-one of the largest western water utilities,[2] urges Congress to provide full funding of sufficient appropriations to preserve essential NOAA and USGS services. The 2026 Budget request for USGS is $891.6 million, with $223.8 million devoted to water resources.[3] NOAA's 2026 Budget request is $4.515 billion.[4]

[1] *See* Letter from Russell Vought, Director, Office of Management and Budget, to The Honorable Susan Collins, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations (May 2, 2025), https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Fiscal-Year-2026-Discretionary-Budget-Request.pdf (proposing a $564 million dollar cut to USGS funding compared to 2025 and $209 million dollar cut to NOAA's procurement of weather satellites and infrastructure compared to 2025.).

[2] WUWC was established in 1992 to address the West's unique water supply and water quality challenges, and consists of the following members: ***Arizona*** (Central Arizona Project, City of Phoenix and Salt River Project); ***California*** (Eastern Municipal Water District, East Bay Municipal Utility District, City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, San Diego County Water Authority, Santa Clara Valley Water District, and City and County of San Francisco Public Utilities Commission); ***Colorado*** (Aurora Water, Colorado Springs Utilities, and Denver Water); ***Idaho*** (City of Boise); ***Nevada*** (Las Vegas Valley Water District, Southern Nevada Water Authority, and Truckee Meadows Water Authority); ***New Mexico*** (Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority); ***Utah*** (Salt Lake City Public Utilities and Washington County Water Conservancy District); and ***Washington*** (Seattle Public Utilities).

[3] *See* U.S. Geological Survey, *Bureau Highlights*, https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2025-06/fy26bibusgs508.pdf.

[4] *See* Nat'l Oceanic and Atmospheric Admin., *Budget Estimates: Fiscal Year 2026*, https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-06/NOAA%20FY26%20Congressional%20Justification.pdf.

WUWC members are public utilities dedicated to providing a reliable, high-quality urban water supply for present and future generations. Our members serve over forty million water consumers in major metropolitan areas of eight western states. Our members rely on the high-quality data provided by the USGS and NOAA to meet public demand for water supply. This data is critical for our members to effectively operate their systems. USGS and NOAA should be funded at no less than FY24 funding levels[5] in order to maintain their essential services.

I. NOAA and USGS provide essential data resources for ensuring adequate water management across the western United States.

NOAA and USGS maintain several datasets that are crucial for integrated water resource management to balance municipal, agricultural, and industrial water needs in the western United States.[6] The following are examples of the datasets that our members rely upon:

a. Streamflow Data and Forecasting

NOAA's River Basin Forecast Centers annual volumetric and daily streamflow forecasts are frequently used by WUWC members for reservoir operations, water supply planning, drought early warning, and flood flow mitigation.[7] Additionally, streamflow data from USGS allows water managers to understand current and historical river conditions as well as forecast water supply from rivers and reservoirs, critical for managing municipal water supply at all time horizons.[8] Real-time streamflow and precipitation data enable early warning alarm systems for flash floods, especially in mountainous and wildfire-affected areas. Stream gauge data also supports the safe operation of diversion structures, dams, and intake systems. Our members heavily rely on this monitoring data provided by NOAA; without the monitoring data, public safety is put at risk.

b. Snowpack and Snowmelt Data

The majority of the water in the western United States comes from snowmelt. Snowmelt accounts for more than half of the total runoff in the West, but changes in the timing, magnitude, and duration of snowmelt can have large impacts on downstream water availability. [9] A "snow drought"

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[5] *See* Consolidated Appropriations Act, Pub. L. No. 118-42, 138 Stat. 25 (Mar. 9, 2024) (appropriating $6.72 billion to NOAA and $1.455 billion to USGS).

[6] *See id.* ("The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is an agency in the Department of Commerce whose mission is to understand and predict changes in climate, weather, oceans, and coasts; ***share that information***; and conserve and manage coastal and marine ecosystems and resources.") (emphasis added); *see also* Testimony of the Western States Water Council (Apr. 30, 2025), https://www.congress.gov/119/meeting/house/118170/witnesses/HHRG-119-II13-Wstate-BushmanM-20250430-U2.pdf ("The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Weather Service, Climate Programs Office, Office of Atmospheric Research (OAR), National Environmental Satellite Data and Information Service (NESDIS), National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI), and National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), another program specifically supported by WGA, all conduct research and provide forecasting data, supporting water management and preparation for the extremes of drought and flooding.").

[7] *See* National Water Prediction Service, River Forecast Centers, https://water.noaa.gov/about/rfc.

[8] *See* Water Resources Mission Area, *USGS National Streamgaging Network* (October 31, 2024), https://www.usgs.gov/mission-areas/water-resources/science/usgs-national-streamgaging-network.

[9] Dongyue Li et al., *How Much Runoff Originates as Snow in the Western United States, and How Will that Change in the Future?* 44 GEOPHYSICAL RSCH. LETTERS 6163 (2017) ("[F]rom 1960 to 2005, snowmelt accounted for 53%

can have devastating social, economic, and environmental impacts.[10] As such, the snowpack and snowmelt data collected and integrated in various ways from NOAA and USGS sources[11] are essential for predicting spring streamflow runoff and reservoir recharge, which inform decisions about water supply administration.

c. Drought Monitoring

Drought monitoring using NOAA's climate data supports proactive water conservation measures and long-term planning. Since 1980, major droughts have cost the United States more than $250 billion, with an average of $9.6 billion for each drought event.[12] Drought monitoring is a critical tool in managing water resources, which are already stretched thin in the western United States.[13] Proper drought management can avert economic disaster but is only possible with sufficient data resources.

d. Weather Forecasting

NOAA weather forecasts and alerts help utilities prepare for extreme weather events that could impact infrastructure, water quality, and water quantity. Hydrologic, water quality, and meteorological data collected by USGS and NOAA help utilities assess risks and design resilient infrastructure. For example, temperature and precipitation data inform maintenance schedules and operational adjustments for treatment plants and distribution systems. However, NOAA recently announced decreases in weather balloon launches,[14] undercutting the accuracy of weather forecasting and impairing the ability of local utilities to plan for extreme weather events. Further, the Administration has retired the extreme weather events database, which provides crucial data on the costs of extreme weather events that aid in planning in the event of these major disasters.[15]

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of the total runoff over the entire West. For the three major mountain ranges in the western U.S., i.e., the Rockies, the Sierra Nevada, and the Cascades, snow comprises 74%, 73%, and 78% of the total regional runoff, respectively.").

[10] Jennifer R. Dierauer, Diana M. Allen, & Paul H. Whitfield, *Snow Drought Risk and Susceptibility in the Western United States and Southwestern Canada*, 55 WATER RESOURCES RSCH. 2076 (2019) ("In western North America, mountain snowpack fills reservoirs for agricultural, municipal, and industrial uses and sustains streamflow in summer when ecosystem needs are high. Thus, snow droughts (a lack of snow accumulation in winter) can have large social, economic, and environmental impacts.").

[11] *See, e.g.*, National Weather Service, *National Operational Hydrologic Remote Sensing Center*, https://www.nohrsc.noaa.gov/.

[12] National Integrated Drought Information System, *The High Cost of Drought* (Jan. 23, 2020), https://www.drought.gov/news/high-cost-drought.

[13] Landon T. Marston et al., *Water-Use Data in the United States: Challenges and Future Directions*, 58 J. AM. WATER RESOURCES ASS'N 485 (2022) ("As water supplies are stressed due to an increasingly variable climate, changing land-use, and growing water needs, greater consideration of the demand side of the water balance equation is essential. Data about the spatial and temporal aspects of water use for different purposes are now critical to long-term water supply planning and resource management.").

[14] Public Information Statement 25-18, Reduction of Radiosonde Observations (RAOB) to One Flight Per Day at Aberdeen, SD, Gaylord, MI, Grand Junction, CO, Green Bay, WI, North Platte, NE, and Riverton, WY (Mar. 20, 2025), https://www.weather.gov/media/notification/pdf_2025/pns25-18_Reduction_RAOB_Launches_ABR_GJT_GRB_APX_LBF_RIW.pdf.

[15] Andrew Freedman, *Trump Admin Ends Extreme Weather Database that has Tracked Cost of Disasters Since 1980*, CNN (May 8, 2025), https://www.cnn.com/2025/05/08/climate/noaa-ends-disaster-database. The data will not be updated beyond 2024. *See* National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NESDIS), *Billion*

II. NOAA and USGS data are critical for WUWC members to ensure regulatory compliance.

Hydrologic, water quality, and meteorological data collected by USGS and NOAA are often required for local, state and federal reporting for permits and regulatory compliance. For example, NOAA-maintained datasets are often critical for informing environmental compliance efforts with, for example, the Safe Drinking Water Act. Water quality monitoring data from USGS also supplements utility testing and support watershed protection efforts. Monitoring data is helpful in assessing the effectiveness of water policy and developing new policy to better protect public health and meet water supply demand.[16] For example, in Colorado USGS stream gauging funding partnerships have become essential tools in administering water rights; keeping these gauges operational through consistent federal funding is critical to support the accurate allocation of limited water supplies that rely on these monitoring partnerships.

III. NOAA and USGS data aid effective public communication by ensuring transparency.

Lastly, access to authoritative and trusted data from NOAA and USGS enhances public trust by supporting transparent communication about water availability, drought conditions, and emergency responses. Our members are public utilities charged with providing clean water to end-users and must make a variety of calculated and complex decisions that arise from that responsibility. It is essential that the public trusts its water providers to make these decisions. Transparent data ensures that the public understands the nuanced decision-making process.

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Our members are experienced, on-the-ground partners with the federal government and the states in ensuring the safety and reliability of public water supplies. Based on this experience, WUWC wants to work with Congress to address this critical issue and ensure critical datasets remain available to water utilities. WUWC implores Congress to appropriate sufficient funds to maintain, expand, and improve these federal data programs. This issue is pervasive among all water resource agencies impacted by proposed budget cuts. WUWC is particularly concerned about the potential reductions in force and funding for the Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service. Our members strongly urge Congress to provide adequate funding to ensure that all federal agencies can continue to fulfill their critical missions effectively.

Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters, NAT'L OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMIN. (May 8, 2025), https://www.nesdis.noaa.gov/about/documents-reports/notice-of-changes/2025-notice-of-changes/billion-dollar-weather-and-climate-disasters.

[16] Donna N. Myers, *Why Monitor Water Quality?* U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, https://water.usgs.gov/owq/WhyMonitorWaterQuality.pdf.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. If you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact me at 951-203-2804 or walshj@emwd.org.

Sincerely,

Jolene Walsh
WUWC Chair