

# Estimated Benefits of a Fully Implemented U.S. Geological Survey National Streamflow Information Program in California

## ... from the National Streamflow Information Program

This Fact Sheet is one in a series that highlights information or recent research findings from the USGS National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP). The investigations and scientific results reported in this series require a nationally consistent streamgaging network with stable long-term monitoring sites and a rigorous program of data collection, quality assurance, management, archiving, and synthesis. NSIP produces multipurpose, unbiased surface-water information that is readily accessible to all.

One goal of the U.S. Geological Survey's National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP) is to provide a national 'backbone' streamgauge network with about 4,780 federally funded streamgages selected to provide streamflow information to meet national needs. In California, there will be 225 of these planned federally-funded streamgages. These national-need streamgages would be supplemented with partnership-funded streamgages to help fulfill the need for local, state, and regional streamflow-information. National streamflow-information needs are defined in NSIP as follows:

- Streamflow forecast locations of the National Weather Service (NWS) and the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS);
- Interstate compacts, court decrees, international treaties, and major national and state-line crossings;
- Major river basin outflows to downstream basins, estuaries, oceans, and Great Lakes;
- Watersheds mostly unaffected by diversion and regulation to evaluate the responses to climate, land, and water use; and
- USGS major water-quality programs.

To fully implement NSIP in California only would require \$5.86M in one-time costs and \$5.11M annually (in 2006 dollars). These one-time costs include reactivating 56 discontinued streamgages, installing 16 new streamgages, flood hardening streamgages used by the NWS for flood forecasts, and updating real-time telemetry on all streamgages in California. The annual costs are for operation and maintenance of the 225 NSIP federal-goal streamgages, to cover the fixed costs of the entire network in California, regional assessments of streamflow information, additional data collection and analysis during and following floods and droughts, improved streamflow-information delivery, and development of new equipment and techniques to measure streamflow more accurately, reliably, and at less cost.

### **Savings to Current Streamgaging Partners in California**

The USGS currently (2007) operates 448 continuous-record streamgages in California, of which 128 were selected to be part of the NSIP federal-goal streamgauge network. Currently, 109 of these 128 streamgages are funded through the Cooperative Water Program (CWP) and 19 are fully funded by NSIP. If NSIP were fully funded in California, all 128 of these streamgages would be completely federally funded (as would 97 additional streamgages in California not currently operated by the USGS). In addition, for the 320 existing streamgages (and for any future/new streamgages) in California that would remain funded through the CWP, the cost of operation would be about 40 percent less than the current costs because NSIP would cover the infrastructure costs of all streamgages operated in the Nation. These infrastructure costs are costs of the streamgaging network that are for the most part

independent of the number of streamgages operated and cover such items as salary for management and supervision of the California network, maintenance and updates of the database, and administrative support of the program. These changes would translate into a savings to current funding partners in California of about \$1,516,844 per year for full federal funding of the 109 existing NSIP national needs streamgages not already NSIP funded and \$1,988,054 per year savings due to the infrastructure costs being covered for the 320 streamgages that would remain cooperatively funded for a total savings to funding partners in California of about \$3,504,898 per year (accounts for the USGS CWP contribution in existing funding – see Appendix for computations).

### **Additional Benefits to California of a fully implemented NSIP**

In addition to the fiscal benefits discussed above, users of streamflow information in California also will benefit from NSIP based on the other enhancements the program will provide. These enhancements will include the following:

1. A total of 225 streamgages would be operated and maintained in California funded entirely by federal funds (total network in California is now 448 streamgages; an equivalent of 29 are fully funded by NSIP). Many, if not all, of the existing (and future new) streamgages not funded by NSIP would remain funded through the Cooperative Water Program at a 50-50 cost share, but at a cost approximately 40 percent less than today.
2. Developments in data input and analyses techniques, as well as investments in other new software and hardware for the National Water Information System (NWIS) database will enhance data delivery to provide more accurate and timely streamflow information.
3. Enhanced data acquisition and analyses during and after floods and droughts will provide a better understanding of these hydrologic extremes for better predictions in the future.
4. Regional assessments of the streamflow information will provide better estimates of streamflow at locations distant from streamgages and also information as to where to place new streamgages to optimize the streamgaging network. This information will also be central to the NSIP goal of being able to predict streamflow characteristics at any point on any stream in the nation. These assessments will also provide insight to any trends in streamflow caused by changes in land use, water use, or climate.
5. Research and development will provide better equipment and techniques to measure and understand streamflow.

## Appendix — Computations for California Partner Savings from USGS NSIP

### 1. Full Federal funding for existing NSIP streamgages not already funded by NSIP:

109 streamgages X \$19,600 = \$2,136,400 per year; USGS partners currently (2007) pay about 71 percent to the USGS's 29 percent —  $\$2,136,400 \times 0.71 =$  **\$1,516,844/year partner savings**

### 2. Reduced cost per streamgage because infrastructure costs covered:

\$19,600/streamgage X 0.40 = \$7,840 reduction in per streamgage costs;  
Cooperative Water Program partners currently pay 71 percent, so their share of these savings =  $0.71 \times \$7,840 = \$5,566$ . Savings = 229 CWP streamgages X \$5,566 = **\$1,274,614 per year**; OFA's get no match, 91 OFA streamgages X \$7,840 = **\$713,440**  
**\$1,274,614 + \$713,440 = 1,988,054**

3. **Total savings** = \$1,516,844 + \$1,988,054 = **\$3,504,898 per year**