



## 2010 COOPERATIVE WATER PROGRAM STAKEHOLDERS' STRATEGY CONFERENCE

L'ENFANT PLAZA HOTEL, WASHINGTON, DC  
MARCH 25, 2010

In cooperation with the US Geological Survey (USGS), the Interstate Council on Water Policy and Western States Water Council organized this conference to review the results of nine regional "Cooperators' Roundtable" meetings. The objective was to review these results with a broad cross section of water community leaders and determine what future actions (if any) are most needed to assure that the USGS Cooperative Water Program (CWP) will continue to serve its mission adequately and that the non-federal cost-share partners ("Cooperators") get the maximum value (in terms of the water data and science they need to support their planning, program decisions and project management) for their investment in this national program.

This was the third national meeting organized in support of the CWP and the needs of its many "customers," and was intended to report back on the progress made since the earlier meetings (held in March 2005 and January 2006). The results of those two national meetings and the nine regional meetings are available and can be downloaded from the ICWP website. In this meeting (and in most previous roundtable meetings), we were supported by generous contributions from both Hach and YSI, whose representatives also contributed useful perceptions and suggestions to the discussion.

A synopsis of the recommendations from all of the previous meetings was provided at the conference, which was attended by approximately 50 active participants<sup>1</sup>. The meeting was facilitated by Linda Manning (of The Council Oak) and opened with two panel presentations: one that provided three perspectives from Cooperators<sup>2</sup> who have attended one or more of the regional roundtables and one that provided the perspective of three USGS Water Science Center Directors<sup>3</sup> and the CWP National Coordinator who attended the regional roundtables. After a lunch break, the group was briefed on relevant policy, program and budget developments at the Interior Department by John Tubbs, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science. We spent the balance of the afternoon discussing water management and science concerns and (with Linda Manning's help) developing the following list of recommendations for future action.



<sup>1</sup> The participants represented (at least the following) states of CA, IL, MO, ND, TX, UT, VA & WY, the Delaware River Basin Commission, Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin, Upper Mississippi River Basin Association, Missouri River Association of States & Tribes, Council of Great Lakes Governors, Hach, YSI, PBS&J, the River Network, and USGS, EPA, Bureau of reclamation and the Department of Interior.

<sup>2</sup> The Cooperators on the first panel were: **Arlan Juhl**, Manager, Division of Planning, Illinois DNR Office of Water Resources; **Scott Kudlas**, Director, Office of Surface & Groundwater Supply Planning, Virginia DEQ; and **Sue Lowry**, Interstate Streams Administrator, Wyoming State Engineer's Office.

<sup>3</sup> The USGS panel participants were: **Cindi Barton**, Director, USGS Water Science Center in Washington State; **Bob Joseph**, Director, USGS Water Science Center in Texas; **Ward Staubitz**, National Coordinator, USGS Cooperative Water Program; and **Bob Swanson**, Director, USGS Water Science Center in Nebraska

# **ACTIONS RECOMMENDED TO ENHANCE THE CWP CAPABILITY TO SUSTAIN BETTER WATER PLANNING, OPERATION & MANAGEMENT DECISIONS**

- The need for a stronger CWP is widely accepted among federal and non-federal experts, but has not been clearly presented to policy makers or to the public. The connection between insufficient data and the impairment of water supplies, flood protection, environmental protection/restoration, infrastructure capacity, recreation safety and navigation needs to be made more effectively.
  - Not just a responsibility of the USGS, we all need to take the initiative.
  - Develop specific examples to illustrate the local, regional and national consequences.
  - Articulate the importance in relation to climate change and the fiscal consequences to both USGS and the Cooperators; also in terms of national economic competitiveness.
  - Keep the message simple and direct (1 page with appropriate contact information).
  - Take advantage of 2009 Secure Water Act provisions (PL 111-11, Subtitle F, Sections 9501-9509).
  - Include assessment of budget constraints facing state, tribal and local agencies in relation to the recent shift of the financial burden in their direction.
  - Articulate the rationale for the 50/50 cost-share tradition.
  - Brief the USGS Director ASAP.
- The potential value of combining datasets collected by USGS and by many other agencies is believed to be substantial and growing, especially if more Cooperators and other federal agencies continue redirecting more of their budgets toward their own, independent data programs. Water community leaders need to understand the potential consequences of this fragmentation and develop more effective means (organizations, protocols, etc.) to characterize and enhance) the compatibility of data collected and maintained by different agencies.
  - Inventory existing monitoring sites and assess the need for data that isn't being collected.
  - Develop the means for "optimizing" the collective investment in data for increase/maximum the regional and national benefit.
- Much of the water data collected (at public expense) by other agencies (federal and non-federal) is difficult to find, understand and utilize in models and other decision support tools. Existing examples of data sharing, links and portals (e.g., in Texas and for the Bear River) need to be identified and studied.
  - Attribution of credit to the collecting agency(s) is always important.
  - The federal Advisory Committee on Water Information (ACWI, which is convened by the Interior Department and plans to meet next on July 13-14, 2010) may provide an appropriate forum for pursuing this set of opportunities.
  - Initiating pilot projects may be the best way to demonstrate the capabilities and value and to work through the difficulties.
  - Establishing the criteria for data collection and exchange (i.e., a "good streamgaging seal of approval") would be helpful.
- There are many examples of collaboration between Cooperators and their USGS Water Science Centers resulting in substantial cost savings and efficiency improvements in the collection and management of water data and in the development of interpretive science needed to support planning, management and policy decisions. Several states have water monitoring/streamgauge coordination councils and the Cooperators (and USGS) in more states should consider their potential benefits.