



May 13, 2019

The Honorable Jared Huffman, Chair
US House Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
1527 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: FY18 Budget for U.S. Geological Survey Programs Supporting Water Quality and Water Resources in the California Bay-Delta

Dear Chair Huffman:

The Bay Area Clean Water Agencies (BACWA) respectfully submits this letter in advance of the May 16 hearing of the House Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife titled “Examining the President’s Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Proposal for the Bureau of Reclamation and the United States Geological Survey”, to encourage support for USGS’s San Francisco Bay Water Quality Program. BACWA is a joint powers agency whose members own and operate publicly-owned treatment works (POTWs) and sanitary sewer collection systems that collectively provide sanitary services to over 7.1 million people in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.

BACWA Members are public agencies, governed by elected officials and managed by professionals who protect the environment and public health. BACWA members believe the basis of environmental regulations rests on sound scientific investigations. We actively support programs that provide scientific data essential to a science-based regulatory process. Accordingly, our members are alarmed by the decision of the USGS Water Mission Area to cease support for the 40-year monitoring program critical to shaping management responses in one of the most heavily managed estuaries in the world.

The USGS’s Bay Water Quality Program carries out the only federally-supported water quality monitoring work conducted on San Francisco Bay. The decision to substantially cut funding from the Program arose from restructuring decisions within the USGS Water Mission Area, without broader input from other interested parties (regional, state, national) who have come to rely on this rigorous, long-term monitoring program. Beginning in 1992, regional funds began contributing \$115k to the USGS program, which more than tripled in 2013 to maintain core activities in the face of flat budgets and shortfalls. In 2016, local programs contributed an additional \$200,000 toward a new USGS research vessel, when the program’s workhorse research vessel became inutile. In addition to losing the USGS as a partner, the region also stands to lose this good-faith investment when the program shuts down.

There remains a strong commitment within the region to continue this joint funding arrangement indefinitely. However, the top leadership of USGS must also demonstrate a substantial commitment to enable the on-going investment of rate payer funds towards this program. If the current USGS decision stands, all work ceases at the end of August 2019.



Estuary Magazine recently detailed the consequences of ending this critical program.¹ The article highlights how multi-billion dollar decisions, involving wastewater upgrades, allotment of upstream water resources, and management of regional fisheries, count on data collected through this program. The region's rich assemblage of scientists and regulators leverage this data many times over, with local and state funding, to make critical decisions.

Data and discoveries from this long-term monitoring program motivated and measured outcomes of numerous policies at the regional and national scale. They provided a rationale for establishing California's Marine Invasive Species Act. They documented remarkable improvements in water quality after the implementation of the Clean Water Act. They guide and measure outcomes of habitat restoration actions, including the most extensive program of wetland restoration in the western U.S. Finally, they inform the establishment of water quality standards to ensure the on-going protection of San Francisco Bay from the harmful public health and economic consequences that can result from nutrient pollution including toxic algal blooms. In 2016, a toxic algal bloom resulted in the closure of commercial fisheries along the entire West Coast.

Monitoring the water quality in the California Bay-Delta is a critical element of the USGS portfolio, with national and international importance. Increased investment in one of the nation's most respected agencies is easily justified, versus the retraction reflected in the proposed FY20 budget which will further erode the institutional capacity of USGS locally and nationally.

The California Bay-Delta is the largest estuary on the U.S. West Coast. Conditions in the Bay-Delta are essential for the water supply for 40 million people and irrigation for agricultural production. Nearly 50% of the exports from the Port of Oakland are food products grown in California. The Bay-Delta serves as a bellwether for coastal management in West Coast states from California to Alaska. The USGS has been monitoring the Bay-Delta for 40 years, which makes it one of a handful of places in the world with a long enough record to be useful for understanding how coastal ecosystems are changing in the face of many stressors.

There remains strong regional commitment among Bay Area stakeholders for continued collaboration with USGS on water quality monitoring in San Francisco Bay. We hope that USGS, in its on-going discussions, will see the value in maintaining current - and even increasing - funding levels to the Bay Water Quality Research Program, allowing it to be a cost-effective approach for conducting high-quality long-term monitoring.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David R. Williams".

David R. Williams P.E.
Executive Director

¹ Estuary News. March 2019. "Feds Coastal Research Crew Bucks Headwinds". <https://www.sfestuary.org/estuary-news-feds-coastal-research-crew-bucks-headwinds/>