



June 13, 2016

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee
Interior & Environment
United States Senate, Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall, Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee
Interior & Environment
United States Senate, Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

Representing the Mayors of Mississippi River cities and States of the Upper Mississippi River Basin, we write urging your support of three programs critical to improving water quality and achieving drinking water security for over 20 million people residing in 50 cities along the River and the Basin as a whole:

- 1) USGS Water Resources Program – Real-Time Nutrient and Sediment Tracking,
- 2) Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Program Grants, and
- 3) Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Funds

We understand that many aspects of a better life in our cities and states are tied to clean water. If we have clean water in the Mississippi River and its basin then:

- we have food security because clean water means sustainable agriculture is being practiced on the landscape and both point and nonpoint sources of water pollution are being addressed,
- we are better protected from droughts and floods because we have healthy ecological systems in place, and
- we spend less on water treatment, resulting in more affordable water for drinking and industrial uses, which also makes our economy more competitive and sustainable.

Most importantly, if we have clean water, our citizens can be assured of a sustainable water future. The programs we urge you to support here are all integral to assuring that sustainable water future.

USGS Water Resources Program—Real-Time Nutrient and Sediment Tracking

Nutrient enrichment and sediment transport and deposition are two critical water-quality issues in the Mississippi River Basin (MRB). These issues can affect drinking water supplies, aquatic ecosystem health, recreation, and navigation on the Mississippi River.

The USGS currently operates a small number of continuous nutrient and sediment water-quality sensors in the Mississippi River Basin (MRB), and the USGS National Water Quality Network (NWQN) provides an ideal foundation for building an expanded continuous monitoring network. The NWQN already collects periodic (usually monthly) discrete water-quality samples at 34 large river and several small watershed sites in the MRB, and has been the primary source of data for estimating nutrient loads delivered to the Gulf of Mexico for decades.

Adding continuous and real-time water quality sensor technology to the existing large river network, as well as twenty additional small stream sites to address the goals of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI), would greatly increase our understanding of nutrient and sediment transport in the MRB. While this proposed total of 54 sites for the network requires an investment of \$11 million above the President's FY 2017 request, this network will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of actions to improve water quality, such as state nutrient loss reduction strategies and the MRBI program.

CWA Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Program Grants

The Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Program provides grants to states for prevention and control measures that improve water quality.

We understand nutrient loading to be one of the most significant threats facing the water quality of the Mississippi River, its drinking water supplies, and all its aquatic systems that support cities' economies. We further recognize that a significant component of nutrient loading comes from nonpoint sources. Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Program Grants are the only grant within the EPA portfolio specifically intended to reduce nonpoint source pollution and are a key component of our national conservation efforts, which also include NRCS and state-based programs.

In the past several years, the states have moved forward to establish and implement nutrient reduction strategies in which Section 319 grants can play a key role. Unfortunately, since 2010, funding for Section 319 grants has declined. Therefore, at this critical juncture for strategy implementation, we ask that you restore robust funding of this important program and state flexibility so that it may work most effectively in concert with states' nutrient reduction strategies to achieve meaningful water quality improvements now and into the future.

Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Funds (SRFs)

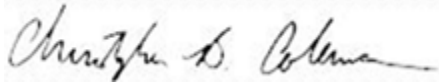
State revolving loan funds (SRFs) are an essential mechanism to assist communities in addressing the nation's well-documented challenge of aging and insufficient water infrastructure. While the President's FY 2017 request proposes an increase to the Drinking Water SRF by almost twenty percent above the FY 2016 enacted level, it simultaneously reduces the Clean Water SRF by nearly 30 percent. In FY 2015, the SRFs were funded at a combined level of

\$2.35 billion and the President's current request represents a \$350 million overall cut to combined SRF spending since FY 2015. We understand and support the goal of increased investment in drinking water infrastructure. However, we do not believe that this should be accomplished by undercutting support for the Clean Water SRF, as both elements are needed to ensure a sustainable water future.

Therefore, we ask Congress to make no cuts to the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds, and provide \$2.35 billion to the Funds, as it did in FY 2015.

We appreciate your attention to these matters which are critical to the nation's future water security. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.


Respectfully,



Chris Coleman, Co-Chair,
Mayor of St. Paul, Minnesota
Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative



Robert Stout, Chair
Upper Mississippi River Basin Association



Hiram Copeland, Co-Chair,
Mayor of Vidalia, Louisiana
Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative