

*Washington, DC* - Troubled by the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) recent decision to eliminate more than 50 streamgages in New York that help monitor potential flooding from local bodies of water, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today urged the agency to reconsider its decision. The congressman expressed particular concern over the discontinuation of streamgages in the Susquehanna, Delaware, Esopus, and Walkkill River Basins.

In a letter sent today to USGS Acting Director Suzette M. Kimball, Hinchey acknowledged that the funding mechanism for streamgages, which involves the federal government relying on local partners to pay for the monitoring of the local bodies of water, is problematic. A number of local partners have recently indicated they are withdrawing financial support for the streamgages due to budget cuts. Hinchey, who is a member of the House Appropriations Committee, which funds the USGS, wrote to Kimball that he would work to allocate additional federal resources to the streamgage program so that the agency is not dependent upon local entities to provide funding. The congressman intends to pursue this issue further with USGS as part of the Fiscal Year 2010 appropriations process, which is just now underway.

The full text of Hinchey's letter to Kimball follows:

March 19, 2009

Suzette M. Kimball, Acting Director  
U.S. Geological Survey  
12201 Sunrise Valley Drive  
Reston, VA 20192

Dear Ms. Kimball:

I am writing regarding the recent USGS announcement that data collection at more than fifty streamgages in New York will be discontinued over the next two years. I am particularly concerned by the prospective loss of streamgage information in the Susquehanna, Delaware, Esopus and Walkkill River Basins, and I urge USGS to reconsider its proposal to eliminate these streamgages.

Information collected from most of these streamgages is vital to the safety and well-being of communities throughout these three watersheds. All of these river basins have experienced severe and repeated flooding in recent years, making the data from many of these streamgages critically important for developing flood warning systems, considering flood mitigation measures, and in some cases, providing information to the National Weather Service for forecasting and modeling purposes. Like many others in the region, I am alarmed at the loss of this important local information and the negative impacts this loss will have on our collective efforts to protect local communities from flooding.

I understand that USGS currently relies on partners to fund streamgage information collection and that a number of these entities are phasing out their financial support for this data collection due to budgetary cuts. I am very interested in working with your agency so that in the long-term, USGS no longer has to rely on local partners to fund such critical data collection activities. However, I also urge USGS to continue data collection at these streamgages using economic stimulus funding. As you know, the recently passed American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 contains \$140 million in funding for the repair, construction, and restoration of USGS streamgages. The relatively small investment required to continue data collection at the threatened streamgages is certainly justified and necessary in light of the importance of this information to public safety and the environment.

I appreciate your consideration of this important issue and look forward to working with you to resolve this matter.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey