Reinvest in the nation’s water infrastructure

Actions Requested:

- Provide fully authorized funding in fiscal year 2020 for
  - the drinking water state revolving loan fund (SRF) program at $1.3 billion
  - the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program at $50 million
- Begin discussions for reauthorization of the drinking water and wastewater SRF programs and of WIFIA
- Maintain fully authorized funding for conservation programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, particularly the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) at $300 million in FY2020

The SRF and WIFIA

The nation’s need to reinvest in its water infrastructure is already well documented and understood. AWWA deeply appreciates Congress reauthorizing the drinking water SRF program for three years and WIFIA for two years in S. 3021 in the last session of Congress. Those authorized levels of funding do a lot toward helping the nation rebuild and upgrade its water infrastructure.

However, as noted, those reauthorizations were relatively short term. We urge Congress to reauthorize WIFIA in the current session of Congress for a longer period of time. WIFIA is virtually budget neutral and leverages modest federal outlays to a tremendous degree. For example, $50 million in authorizations in FY2018 is expected to result in about $5 billion in loans to 39 projects in 16 states. Because WIFIA funds up to 49 percent of a project’s costs, that means about $10 billion in water infrastructure work being done.

S. 3021 reauthorized the drinking water SRF for the first time since 2003. This program has been a great aid, particularly to small to medium-sized projects across the country. With the current authorization expiring after FY2021, it is not too early for the House Committee on Energy and Commerce and Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works to begin discussions on this.

Other programs in S. 3021

S. 3021 (PL 115-270) created a number of new programs to help protect and improve the
nation’s drinking water, and reauthorized an existing program for states. We support fully authorized funding for the following programs:

- $125 million in FY2020 and 2021 for the Public Water System Supervision program which assists states in administering the federal Safe Drinking Water Act
- $25 million for 2020 and 2021 for grants for technical assistance to identify sources of lead contamination in schools, and for identifying other sources of assistance
- $5 million authorized for 2020 and 2021 for grants for schools to replace fountains installed before 1988
- $10 million for 2020 for grants to accelerate the development and deployment of innovative technology that address pressing drinking water supply, quality, treatment or security challenges of public water systems or source waters
- $4 million in 2020 for a Drinking Water System Infrastructure Resilience and Sustainability Program, under which EPA authorizes grants for eligible entities to help them increase resilience to natural hazards
- $1 million competitive grant program in 2019 and 2020 to develop innovative activities relative to workforce development and increase public awareness of utilities

Conservation programs
We are grateful to Congress for enactment of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, in the previous session. The farm bill took a giant leap forward in helping agricultural producers and local water providers work cooperatively on projects that help protect sources of drinking water.

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (PL 115-334) contains the following:

- Protection of sources of drinking water as an explicit goal of the conservation title of the 2018 Farm Bill
- An increase in incentives for agricultural producers to implement practices that benefit source water protection
- Authorization for community water systems to work with state technical committees for agricultural programs to identify local priority areas for source water protection.
- A dedication of at least 10 percent of funds in conservation programs going to projects that protect sources of drinking water, which could amount to $4 billion over 10 years
- An increase in authorized funding for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to $300 million a year, plus some streamlining of program administrative processes. The RCPP, as the name implies, authorizes partnerships among agricultural producers, USDA and non-agricultural entities, such as water utilities.

While these important provisions are provided mandatory funding through the farm bill, its important for Congress to maintain that funding at the levels authorized by the new farm bill. Providing fully authorized funding to programs in the conservation title will not only help address algal blooms, nutrient overloading and pesticide exposure in source waters, but also facilitate farmers and ranchers and community water systems working cooperatively on such projects.

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