

**Statement for the Record
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife**

Legislative Hearing

June 16, 2022

The Department of the Interior (Department), through the U.S. Geological Survey, appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record on H.R. 7792, the Water Data Act.

H.R. 7792, Water Data Act

H.R. 7792, the Water Data Act, would create a national water data framework for sharing, integrating, and utilizing water data while supporting the development of innovative water data technologies and tools.

H.R. 7792 tasks the Department to identify and prioritize key water data needed to support water resources management and planning, to develop and adopt common national water data standards, and to ensure federal water data is made accessible and interoperable, amongst other purposes.

Furthermore, this bill establishes the creation of an interagency Water Data Council (Council) to support the development and implementation of the National Water Data Framework. The Council would be chaired by the Secretary of the Interior with members from across the federal government.

H.R. 7792 also establishes an advisory committee, known as the “Advisory Committee on Water Information,” within the Department to advise the Secretary and the Council on the development and implementation of the National Water Data Framework. This advisory committee would be composed of a balanced representation from various entities involved in water related activities including, but not limited to, States, Indian Tribes, water agencies, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, local governments, private sector entities, and other stakeholders.

Analysis

The Department supports the intent of H.R. 7792, as it: (1) aligns with existing activities within the Department and its bureaus, such as the modernization of the National Water Information System to support the Next Generation Water Observing System, (2) establishes a National Water Census information infrastructure to support data collection from diverse data holders, integrated modelling and assessments, and dissemination to all interested water data stakeholders, and (3) develops a next-generation foundational geospatial framework to achieve the needs outlined in the hydrography requirements and benefits study. Historically, the Department has led activities in line with those outlined in this bill, but this legislation would allow the Department to take a more holistic federal lead in the development of a national water data framework.

We would also welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee on some technical aspects of the bill. Section 5 of this bill references an advisory committee within the Department known as the “Advisory Committee on Water Information (ACWI),” comprised of various government and non-governmental entities involved in water-related activities. The Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) has previously been utilized to establish and manage the services of federal advisory committees such as ACWI and therefore we welcome the opportunity to continue the use of existing authorities with respect to federal advisory committees.

Section 4 of the bill establishes a new interagency council known as the Water Data Council, chaired by the Secretary of the Interior, to support the development and implementation of the National Water Data Framework. The members and duties of this Council would have significant overlap with the provisions in Executive Order (EO) 13956 titled, “Modernizing America's Water Resource Management and Water Infrastructure,” which formally established an interagency Water Subcabinet to increase coordination among federal agencies with respect to managing America’s water resources and with other existing inter-agency efforts to coordinate water management authorities in the context of drought and climate change. The Department would like to work with the committee to further discuss these possible redundancies.

The Department supports the intent of H.R. 7792 and would like to work with the Committee to address these issues.