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OFFICE OF WATER

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TO: National Water Program Managers and Staff

FROM: Benjamin H. Grumbles /s/
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SUBJ: *National Water Program Guidance* and Priorities: FY 2005

The development over the past year of a new *Strategic Plan* for the Environmental Protection Agency provided a chance for all of us working to improve the quality of the Nation's waters to think about new and better ways of getting this critical job done. Some of the questions we worked on were:

- How to express clear and measurable environmental and public health goals for clean and safe water, rather than programmatic “beans,” and then hold ourselves accountable for progress toward these goals?
- How to build stronger working relationships among EPA, States, Tribes, local governments, and nongovernmental sectors and a stronger consensus about program priorities?
- How to identify and promote innovative approaches to meeting water quality goals, especially voluntary and incentive-driven programs?
- How to promote better coordination among core water programs, especially between clean water and safe drinking water programs?
- How to build better partnerships among the range of other Federal agencies implementing programs that benefit water quality and drinking water?

The new EPA *Strategic Plan* offers no silver bullets for these tough questions, but it does present the best of the ideas and innovations we heard from program managers and staff at Federal, State and local governments and from stakeholders and citizens.

BASICS

This *National Program Guidance for FY 2005* builds on the new *Strategic Plan* to provide general direction for the management of water programs over the next several years, especially fiscal year 2005. As you read the *Guidance*, I hope you will keep the following three fundamental ideas in mind:

- **Public Health and Environmental Results:** The National Water Program **must** define its mission in terms of delivering improvements in public health and the environment, rather than program activities. All of us need to agree on the specific improvements we are trying to accomplish and the strategies most likely to get us there. Most important, we actually have to go there – we must change our programs and priorities as needed to implement results-oriented strategies.

The *Strategic Plan* started this process by defining objectives and subobjectives that express public health and environmental improvements to be made by 2008. This *National Water Program Guidance* takes another step by framing the activities that support these objectives for fiscal year 2005. The next step is for all of us – HQ, Regions, States and Tribes – to use this *Guidance* to define operational plans for FY 05 that tailor resource allocations to support defined environmental and public health results for each State and Tribe.

- **Setting National Priorities that Recognize State and Tribal Needs:** We need to manage with public health and environmental goals in mind, but water program managers at all levels also need to work with a common set of key program tools. This *Guidance* describes a core set of Program Activity Measures (PAMs) that were developed in a cooperative process with States and Tribes over the past year. The *Guidance* defines expectations for progress in these programs by 2005 and 2008 at Regional and national levels. And, it provides a sense of the relative priority of each measure at the national level.

Although this *Guidance* defines activities, expectations, and priorities, it also provides flexibility for each State and Tribe to allocate resources among activities in the way that is most likely to result in public health and environmental improvement given the conditions in that State or Tribe.

- **The Road to Higher Performance:** The National Water Program has a strong record of accomplishment and continues to perform well – but we can do better. Over the coming year, we need to assess our progress, identify what is working, and fine-tune our program efforts to deliver the best results. This *Guidance* defines this adaptive management approach to higher performance.

PRIORITIES

Based on my own experience in the U.S. Congress and EPA, and lessons from our State and Tribal partners, I became more convinced than ever of the common themes and critical needs between Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act programs. As we work together to integrate efforts and develop workplans for FY 2005, I hope you will keep in mind three key areas of critical importance to both the clean water and drinking water programs.

- 1) **Monitoring Water:** We must do a better job of understanding both the condition of the Nation's waters and the safety of the Nation's drinking water.

In the case of surface water, we have relied for years on information that is useful for some program management purposes but does not form a sufficient basis for the range of increasingly complex decisions we now face at the waterbody, watershed, and national levels. Work is now underway to build a broad consensus on how to improve surface water monitoring and it is critical that we promptly complete this work and implement a new monitoring approach.

In the case of drinking water, there is growing evidence that information on the compliance of drinking water systems with safety standards is not as reliable as it needs to be. Here, too, critical work is underway by Federal, State and local program managers to assess problems and design needed changes.

Establishing or improving monitoring networks will help ensure water is not only clean and safe, but secure, as well.

- 2) **Conserving, Sustaining and Securing Water Infrastructure:** Steady population growth and the ravages of time have combined to put the integrity of the Nation's water clean water and drinking infrastructure in jeopardy at the same time that the security of this infrastructure is at greater risk.

Over the past several years, we have recognized the seriousness of this problem and taken some steps toward defining solutions. Many of these solutions apply to both clean water and drinking water infrastructure. We know the usefulness of tools like asset management, full cost pricing, and voluntary water conservation. Advancing a "water star" program, including voluntary labeling of water efficient products will remain a priority. We have also taken key first steps to improve the security of water infrastructure. Now we must bring these tools together and deliver them more widely to drinking water and wastewater systems.

- 3) **Restoring and Protecting Watersheds and Source Waters:** We can make better decisions about managing water when we think more comprehensively about the resource, from surface water to ground water and wetlands to tributaries.

In the case of the clean water program, we are increasingly making decisions about individual waterbodies in the context of the larger watershed. Water quality trading and watershed based permitting will continue to offer innovative, efficient and effective approaches to runoff and other wet weather flows that challenge communities and their budgets.

In the case of the drinking water program, we are increasingly complementing the water treatment that assures compliance with drinking water regulations with efforts to protect the quality of the source of the water.

Ensuring not net loss of wetlands will remain a priority, not only to meet Clean Water Act goals and requirements, but to advance source water protection.

Finally, any preface to the work that the National Water Program will do in FY 2005 would not be complete without mention of the important decisions to be made in response to the report of the National Oceans Commission this fall. Coastal and ocean waters are among the most important of our water resources in ecological and economic terms and they are under significant pressure. Later this year, the Oceans Commission will issue a final report recommending steps to protect this vital resource, prompting discussion and debate on a wide range of coastal and ocean issues integrating issues and programs under the Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, and Ocean Dumping Act. The Administration will also be preparing a comprehensive, multi-Agency response. I hope that managers throughout the National Water Program will join me in active participation in these discussions and will help to define effective responses that complement the work we are doing.

Thank you for the outstanding work you have done to continue thirty years of progress toward cleaner and safer water for all Americans. Special thanks also go to Tim Fontaine, Jeff Peterson, and Mike Shapiro for their hard work and leadership on the *National Program Guidance*. I look forward to working with you all over the coming months as we continue this vital mission.

ATTACHMENT:

-- *National Water Program Guidance: FY 2005*