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WATER FACT SHEET

U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL WATER INFORMATION CLEARINGHOUSE

BACKGROUND

In 1988, Congress directed the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to study and report on the establishment of a national ground-water information clearinghouse that would disseminate information to all levels of government and interested organizations and individuals on ground-water issues, including ground-water and surface-water relations.

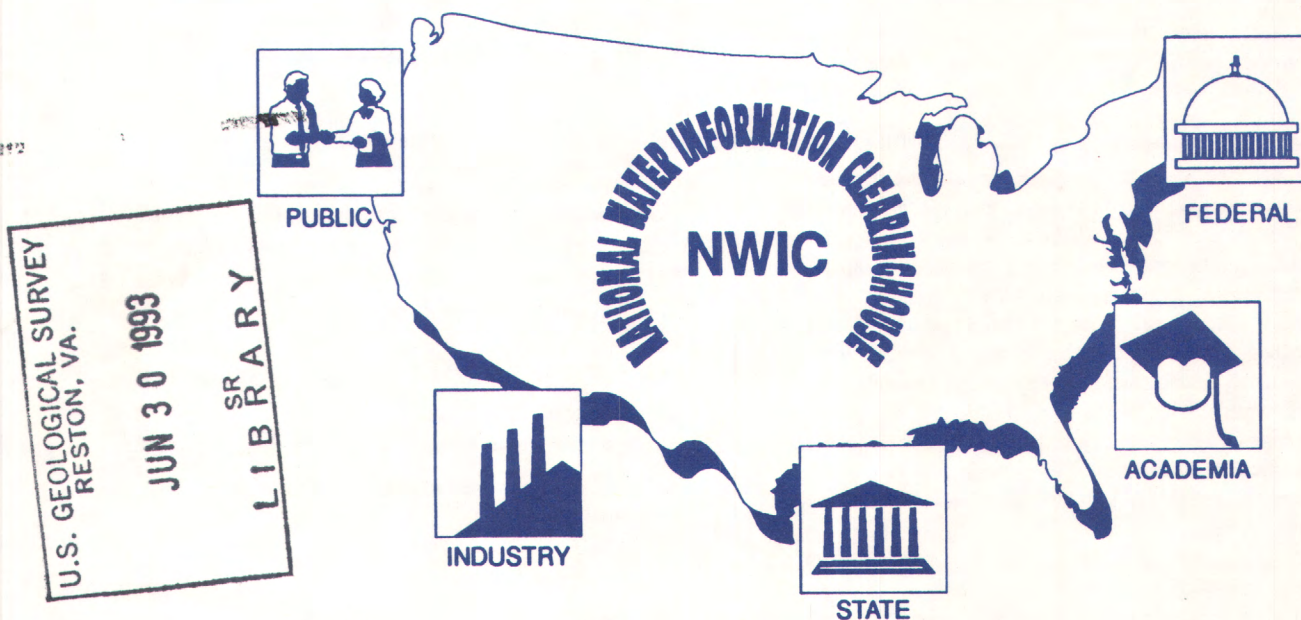
In March 1989, the USGS issued a report to Congress that identified objectives to be fulfilled by a National Water Information Clearinghouse: to improve access to Federal, State, and local information systems and to provide referral services to the public. The report recommended that both surface- and ground-water quantity and quality information should be accessible through the Clearinghouse.

The USGS 1989 report to Congress listed a number of operational alternatives and suggested that the Clearinghouse not be a repository of other Federal agency data but have the capability to access such data. The report also recommended conducting field-level workshops and seminars with Federal, State, and local agencies to refine plans and priorities related to the scope of Clearinghouse activities.

As a result, the USGS, in cooperation with the Interstate Council on Water Policy (ICWP), held a series of four regional National Water Information Clearinghouse workshops for Federal, State, regional, and local organizations and individuals that collect, manage, use, and disseminate water information and data. The workshops were held in Chapel Hill, N.C., and Kansas City, Mo., in September, 1990, and in Sacramento, Calif., and San Antonio, Tex., in April and May, 1991, respectively.

The workshops provided a forum for participants to identify their needs for a National Water Information Clearinghouse that would disseminate water-resources information. All four workshops featured speaker panels and breakout sessions on data and information issues, identification of users and their needs, and the structure, function, and services of a Clearinghouse.

Two executive reports have been published that contain recommendations from the four workshops on the design, operation, services, and products of the National Water Information Clearinghouse. The first report details findings from the first two workshops and the second report details the findings of the third and fourth workshops and summarizes recommendations from all four workshops.



This illustration depicts some of the linkages with the National Water Information Clearinghouse



CURRENT ACTIVITIES

The National Water Information Clearinghouse is designed to serve as a focus for the dissemination of water-resources information to all levels of government, academia, the private sector, and the general public. Important Clearinghouse activities include program design, outreach and training, information dissemination, and data-systems modernization efforts. These are described as follows:

Program Design

The Clearinghouse is designed to:

- Provide the linkage between collectors and users of water data and information.
- Provide multiple and easy access to water data/information for a spectrum of users including Federal, State, and local decision and policy makers and the general public.
- Develop and widely disseminate education outreach products.
- Identify information gaps and research needs.

Plans are being developed that will merge components of existing USGS water data and information programs into the Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse will be decentralized with centers located across the country. It will not be a data repository but will operate primarily as a referral center to other Federal and State data and information systems. When practical, however, the Clearinghouse will provide information directly to requestors so as to streamline the exchange of information. A Federal and non-Federal advisory committee is being established to provide guidance relative to Clearinghouse services.

Outreach and Training

- Two Clearinghouse pilot centers are currently (1992) operational. The Reston, Va., pilot center is focusing on developing linkages with Federal agencies and the technical community in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area in order to define approaches to best serve the agencies' information needs. In addition, outreach products for general audiences such as touch-screen access to USGS information will be tested. The Sacramento, Calif., pilot center is focusing on 1) developing a computerized interface with State and local water agencies; 2) preparing general interest and educational products related to California; and 3) developing an automated tracking system for responding to calls to the Clearinghouse.
- As an initial step toward the operation of the Clearinghouse, the USGS has established a nationwide toll-free number, **1-800-H2O-9000 (1-800-426-9000)**, to provide easy access for users.
- Efforts are underway with the Universities Council on Water Resources to establish a Clearinghouse center to provide more direct service to the academic community.

Information Dissemination

- A data base and directory of water-resources organizations in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area are being developed and will be used to assist in responding to information requests at the Reston, Va., pilot center. Plans also call for the directory to be provided to the public as a reference guide.
- In 1992, more than 10,000 abstracts of the world's water-resources literature is being published and will be made available on optical discs (CD-ROM) for use with personal computers (PCs).
- The USGS has received about 80,000 requests for information and data nationwide in 1992. The Clearinghouse is developing an automated system to track such requests to help ensure that responses are provided.
- The Clearinghouse will be able to provide linkages to a number of water-related data bases available through commercial systems.
- General-interest publications and computer-oriented displays are planned for both school-age children as well as the general public.

Modernization

- The Clearinghouse as well as other WRD offices will have streamlined access to the Survey's National Water Information System (NWIS-II), a new and modern computerized water data base. The first phase of NWIS-II will be operational in April 1993. Furthermore, state-of-the-art workstations are being installed throughout WRD and at the Clearinghouse pilot centers. This system will provide the Clearinghouse with enhanced capabilities to access and retrieve data and information.
- A prototype "easy access" system was developed that provides USGS users with easier and quicker access to the USGS Water Storage and Retrieval System (WATSTORE) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Storage and Retrieval System (STORET). The Water Data Sources Directory has been modified for use with microcomputers and now includes more than 2,000 water-related organizations.

FUTURE PLANS

Information being gathered from the two Clearinghouse pilot centers will be incorporated in the final Clearinghouse design. In 1993, data modernization efforts related to NWIS-II will be nearing completion, which will provide the Clearinghouse with streamlined access to USGS water data. If sufficient program funding is available, the USGS would formally establish the Clearinghouse structure in 1994.

For information about Clearinghouse activities, write to:

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