

**Statement for the Record**  
**U.S. Geological Survey**  
**Department of the Interior**  
**before**  
**Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources,**  
**Subcommittee on Water and Power**  
**on**  
**S. 1118 Open Access Evapotranspiration Data Act**

**July 19, 2023**

Chair Wyden and Ranking Member Risch, thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement on S. 1118, the Open Access Evapotranspiration Data Act.

Water supplies are under stress from both use and climate change. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) plays a critical role in improving the understanding of water availability across the United States. The USGS uses the latest science to estimate the Nation's water budget and makes that information available in a useful way to water managers, policymakers, and the public. Through Integrated Water Availability Assessments, the USGS is improving how water availability is understood, reported, and predicted. Evapotranspiration (ET), which measures a consumptive use of water that is no longer available for other uses within a watershed, is a crucial component necessary to understand the water budget. Better information on ET will improve water budget estimates and will also advance irrigation planning and management, inform negotiations for water rights settlements, including Indian water rights settlements, and support conservation and sustainability efforts by improving our long-term planning for and management of water resources to benefit both people and the environment.

S. 1118 would require the Secretary of the Interior to establish an Open ET Data Program to sustain and enhance water resources using satellite-based estimates of ET. The program would support technology and application development, integrate with relevant USGS programs, and coordinate with other Federal agencies and appropriate external stakeholders. In particular, the program would coordinate data analysis, use, and collection with the Western States Water Council and the Western States Federal Agency Support Team. The USGS is actively engaged with partners who have developed a prototype open ET data system and is working collaboratively with partners to improve that system.

Sec. 4 of the bill states that the program would be intended to sustain and enhance the water resources of the United States. However, given the differences in the availability and usefulness of ET data across regions of the Nation, we would like to work with the Subcommittee to consider language that would authorize the USGS to develop the program in two phases, first in the West and then in the East. Additionally, Sec. 4(d) references "...programs within both the Water Resources and Core Science Systems divisions of the United States Geological Survey." We recommend that these references to the Mission Areas and programs within the USGS, rather

than the agency as a whole, be stricken to avoid confusion. Lastly, Sec. 4(f) authorizes the Secretary to use cooperative agreements to provide for the administration of the program. We recommend changing the word “administration” to “implementation” to ensure that oversight of the program remains solely a responsibility of the Federal Government and not a cooperating partner.

We appreciate that Sec. 5 authorizes a report after 5 years, which we feel would provide sufficient time to develop and report on the program. Furthermore, based on a preliminary assessment, we believe that the amount authorized in Sec. 6 would be sufficient to develop the program as contemplated in the bill.

The Department of the Interior supports continuing research to improve reporting ET nationally. We would like to work with the Subcommittee to address the issues identified in this statement.