

## American Water Resources Association Newsletter

### February 2015

<http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?ca=6476efd0-8fbd-4bd0-bff6-264ddf2801db&c=695162d0-320a-11e3-985f-d4ae52986b44&ch=6a4ba150-320a-11e3-99a9-d4ae52986b44>

### March 2015

<http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?ca=19a43293-39c6-40ec-b64f-1118d6f60da1&c=695162d0-320a-11e3-985f-d4ae52986b44&ch=6a4ba150-320a-11e3-99a9-d4ae52986b44>

### Articles of Interest in “The Newsletter”:

#### Water Issues of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress

The 114th Congress faces many water resource development, management, and protection issues. Congressional actions shape reinvestment in aging federal infrastructure (e.g., dams, locks, and levees) and federal and nonfederal investment in new infrastructure, such as water supply augmentation, hydropower projects, navigation improvements, and efforts to restore aquatic ecosystems. These issues often arise at the regional or local levels, but often have a federal connection. Ongoing issues include competition over water, drought and flood responses and policies, competitiveness and efficiency of U.S. harbors and waterways, and innovative and alternative financing approaches. The 114th Congress also may continue oversight of operations of federal infrastructure during drought and low-flow conditions, past large-scale flooding issues (e.g., Hurricane Sandy, Hurricane Katrina, Missouri and Mississippi River floods), and balancing hydropower generation, recreational use, and protection of threatened and endangered species. In addition to oversight, each Congress also provides appropriations for major federal water resource agencies, such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation).

#### Severe Drought Predicted for the U.S. Southwest

In the Southwest and Central Plains of Western North America, climate change is expected to increase drought severity in the coming decades. These regions nevertheless experienced extended Medieval-era droughts that were more persistent than any historical event, providing crucial targets in the paleoclimate record for bench-marking the severity of future drought risks. We use an empirical drought reconstruction and three soil moisture metrics from 17 state-of-the-art general circulation models to show that these models project significantly drier conditions in the latter half of the 21st century compared to the 20th century and earlier paleoclimatic intervals. This desiccation is consistent across most of the models and moisture balance variables, indicating a coherent and robust drying response to warming despite the diversity of models and metrics analyzed. Notably, future drought risk will likely exceed even the driest centuries of the Medieval Climate Anomaly (1100–1300CE) in both moderate (RCP 4.5) and high (RCP 8.5) future emissions scenarios, leading to unprecedented drought conditions during the last millennium.

#### EPA EnviroAtlas

EnviroAtlas is a collection of interactive tools and resources that allow users to explore the many benefits people receive from nature, often referred to as ecosystem services. Though critically important to human well-being, ecosystem services are often overlooked. Using EnviroAtlas, many types of users can access, view, and analyze diverse information to better understand how various decisions can affect an array of ecological and human health outcomes.

#### Wetlands One-Stop Mapping: Providing Easy Online Access to Geospatial Data on Wetlands and Soils and Related Information

The Association of State Wetland Managers in collaboration with Virginia Tech's Conservation Management Institute (CMI) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Northeast Region have created Wetlands One-Stop Mapping to provide easy online access to geospatial data on wetlands and soils produced by federal and state agencies. Because different agencies post data on their own sites, there is not a single place to go for this information. Wetlands One-Stop Mapping provides links to these and other websites. It provides online access to classification tools for adding hydrogeomorphic-type to wetland inventory data and the results of National Wetlands Inventory+ projects (maps and reports). The geospatial information is linked to aerial imagery (and topographic maps) through ESRI's ArcGIS (including ArcGIS Explorer) for easy viewing of wetlands, their characteristics, and functions for areas where NWI+ data are available.

The website also provides links to other federal and state websites that contain information on wetlands and geospatial wetland data. Among the national datasets accessible via Wetlands One-Stop Mapping are the NWI's wetlands mapper, USDA's web soil survey, USGS's national hydrography data and hydrologic units (HUCs). Links are also provided to NatureServe Explorer and the U.S. National Vegetation Classification Hierarchy Explorer along with guidance on how to extract descriptions of wetland plant communities from those sites for specific areas of interest.

**National Active and Retired Federal Employees (NARFE)  
2015 insurance premium increase lower than previous years**

<http://www.federaltimes.com/article/20141030/MGMT01/310300014/2015-insurance-premium-increase-lower-than-previous-years?odyssey=nav|head>

The 3.2 percent average health insurance premium increase facing federal employees in 2015 is the lowest since 2006 and one of the lowest over the last 25 years, according to the Office of Personnel Management.

The announced increase extends a streak of average premium increases for Federal Employees Health Benefits Program under 4 percent — down significantly from 2008 to 2010 when the average annual increase was more than 8 percent. From 2000 to 2003 the average annual premium increase topped 11 percent, according to OPM.

Part of the reason for the continued lower premium increases is the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, according to OPM Director Katherine Archuleta.

The 2015 premium increase is also in line and somewhat lower than private-sector consultants and companies. PwC pegged average premium increases at 6.8 percent, while the National Business Group on Health announced costs for large employers will reach 6.5 percent in 2015.

While the overall premium increase is not as large as in recent years, federal employees are still concerned by how much it goes up and what that means in out-of-pocket expenses, said David Snell, the benefits expert at the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association.

Higher premium increases have caused federal employees and retirees to flee more costly plans. From 2007 to 2011 nearly 300,000 employees and retirees left the three most popular high-cost health plans. And during those years nearly 500,000 signed up for the lowest-cost versions of those same plans.

But even when premiums increase, what matters for federal employees is how much they pay out of pocket, and while the government contribution is set by law, the premium increases by plan vary significantly, so some plans have higher increases while others are lower or have premiums dropping, Jones said. Federal employees must each decide how much extra costs they are willing to take on to stick with their plan.