

SUPPORTING STATEMENT
U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Geological Survey
USGS Generic Clearance for Water Availability Data Collections
OMB Control No. 1028-NEW

SUPPORTING STATEMENT PART A

Abstract

Water information is fundamental to national and local economic well-being, protection of life and property, and effective management of the Nation's water resources. The USGS works with partners to monitor, assess, conduct targeted research, and deliver information on a wide range of water resources and conditions, as mandated by the SECURE Water Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-11, Title IX, Subtitle F of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009). This legislation emphasizes the need for updated, reliable data to support water resource planning and management, and specifically directs USGS to improve assessments and forecasts of water availability, defined as "the balance between water supply and demand, as determined using a set of core components of water quality, quantity, and use." This generic clearance will centralize administration of USGS public data collections in the topic area of water availability – encompassing both the supply and demand aspects, as well as water quality, access, and usage patterns – and allow for more systematic and timely collections that will benefit new and ongoing research programs within the Water Resources Mission Area.

USGS plans a variety of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods under this clearance, which may include surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The exact nature of the instruments and samples is dependent on each individual project and details will be provided for each individual information collection request submitted, following OMB requirements. The bureau commits to ensuring that all collections are voluntary, minimally burdensome, noncontroversial, and only conducted with informed participant consent. All data collected will protect respondent privacy to the extent permitted by law, with a particular emphasis on protecting personally identifiable information (PII). Any information collected will not be used to directly influence policy decisions and will only be disseminated in aggregated or anonymized formats, adhering to strict guidelines for scientific integrity and privacy. Respondents will be informed of all planned data uses. Measures will be taken to minimize public burden to the greatest extent possible, including review and pre-testing of instruments to ensure clarity and relevance, and using electronic collection means whenever possible.

The research anticipated under this request will be used to advance both the scientific understanding of our socio-hydrological system, and bureau priorities to integrate social science, decision science, and human-centered design more fully into Water Resources Mission Area projects in a strategic, rigorous, and consistent way. Collection of this information supports the USGS by improving both national and regional assessments of water quantity, quality, and use, advancing scientific understanding related to the human dimensions of water availability,

informing product development to maximize the utility and usability of USGS water data, and framing future and ongoing research efforts within the Bureau. Outputs are likely to reduce costs and improve outcomes for both the bureau and the public by ensuring our science is conducted efficiently, effectively, and is serving its intended purpose.

Justification

- 1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify any legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection. Attach a copy of the appropriate section of each statute and regulation mandating or authorizing the collection of information.**

In accordance with the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) regulations at 5 CFR 1320 – implementing the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA), Executive Order 12862 - Setting Customer Service Standards, the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 (PL 111-352), and its mission to

“provide unbiased knowledge of the Nation's water resources to support human well-being, healthy ecosystems, economic prosperity, and anticipate and help resolve impending water-resource conflicts and emergencies,”

the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), a non-regulatory bureau within the Department of Interior, proposes to conduct a variety of qualitative and quantitative data collections related to the topic areas of water availability (quantity and quality), access, and use, under this generic clearance.

Water information is fundamental to national and local economic well-being, protection of life and property, and effective management of the Nation's water resources. The USGS works with partners to monitor, assess, conduct targeted research, and deliver information on a wide range of water resources and conditions, as mandated by the SECURE Water Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-11, Title IX, Subtitle F of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009). This legislation emphasizes the need for updated, reliable data to support water resource planning and management, and specifically directs USGS to improve assessments and forecasts of water availability, defined as “the balance between water supply and demand, as determined using a set of core components of water quality, quantity, and use.” Collecting qualitative and quantitative data from our non-Federal partners, stakeholders, and the general public is critical to advancing our understanding of how human perceptions, attitudes, motivations, beliefs, and behaviors intersect with water supply and management to influence resource demands. The research anticipated under this request advances both the scientific understanding of our socio-hydrological system, and bureau priorities to conduct regional and national integrated water availability assessments that include examinations of the human intersections with water quality, quantity, and use.

- 2. Indicate how, by whom, and for what purpose the information is to be used. Except for a new collection, indicate the actual use the agency has made of the information received from the current collection.**

USGS proposes a number of data collection efforts in support of strategic priorities for the USGS Water Mission Area (WMA) to understand how human activity affects water availability, and

provide data and decision support tools to partners and stakeholders in practical ways. Information collections submitted under the terms of this generic clearance may be qualitative, quantitative, or may consist of mixed methods. Data may be collected via a variety of means, including but not limited to electronic or social media, direct or indirect observation (i.e., in person, video and audio collections), interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups. The frequency of data collection efforts will be on an as-needed basis. The surveys and other empirical data collections may include involvement from the following members of the public: individuals or households; first responders; weather forecasters; members of the media; water, power, transportation, and communications infrastructure operators; business or other for profit organizations; not-for-profit institutions; education institutions; medical institutions; Regional; State, Local or Tribal Government; Federal government; standards-making bodies; and professional associations.

USGS will only submit collections for approval under this generic clearance that meet the following conditions:

- The collections are voluntary,
- The collections are low burden for participants (based on considerations of total burden hours, total number of participants, or burden hours per participant) and are low cost for both the participants and the Federal Government,
- The collections are noncontroversial,
- Personally identifiable information (PII) is collected only to the extent necessary and is not retained,
- Information gathered will not be used for substantially informing influential policy decisions.

Collections that fall outside these categories will be submitted to OMB for approval through the normal information collection request process, in accordance with the PRA. Information collected under this clearance will not be directly disseminated to the public in raw form, but aspects or portions of the information collected may be consolidated, formatted, and anonymized for publication or use supporting research publications in journals, reports, or conference proceedings, or for development and improvement of USGS water data products and delivery tools. Information collection and dissemination will comply with all USGS Fundamental Science Practices. Quality will be ensured and established at all levels including pre-dissemination review in accordance with the USGS Office of Science Quality and Integrity and the OMB 2004 directive “Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review.” All Privacy Act requirements will be met prior to publication in any form.

To obtain approval for a collection that meets the conditions of this generic clearance, requesters will submit the collection instrument, related supporting documents (e.g., letters, emails to respondents, scripts, etc.), and responses to the following:

1. Describe the research questions and goals of the study. Explain who the proposed participants are for this information collection and why this group’s involvement will contribute to achieving these objectives.

2. Discuss the methods used to ensure this data collection is not duplicative. Include sources (both internal and external), summarize findings, and address why any existing information cannot be used for the purposes of this study.
3. Explain how the collection methods/instrument were developed including consultation with interested parties and subject-matter experts, pretesting, and responses to suggestions for improvement.
4. Explain how the collection will be conducted, including the methods for sampling, expected response rate, and plan to address issues related to nonresponse. As appropriate, provide the name and contact information of the statistician consulted in the development of this collection plan.
5. Describe how the information collected will be analyzed and used to generate scientific conclusions. Address why this information can or cannot be used to make statistical inference about a larger population and how, in the absence of generalizability, the information is useful.
6. Address any potential privacy concerns and steps taken to minimize them.
7. Discuss how the information collected will be used, stored, reviewed, and disseminated including specific plans for scientific products, presentations, or reports.

The information collected will help fulfill the requirements of the SECURE Water Act by providing up-to-date, comprehensive data on water availability and usage. This will support USGS efforts to meet legislative mandates, enhance water monitoring networks, and contribute to national water resource management efforts. In addition, these collections respond to recommendations made by the National Academy of Sciences in their 2018 report to the USGS WMA on Future Water Priorities for the Nation. Specific areas of focus may include:

- Long-term trends in water availability and use,
- Impacts of human activities on water resources,
- Indicators of human and ecological system vulnerability to water shortages,
- Factors that have caused or may cause conflict over limited water resources,
- Stakeholder needs and preferences related to water data delivery,
- Perceptions, beliefs, behaviors, and experiences of water-related hazards including floods, drought, post-wildfire debris flows, and hurricanes.

This generic clearance is intended to maximize benefits for existing WMA programs such as the Integrated Water Availability Assessments (IWAAs), Hazards, Drought, and Social and Economic Drivers. Ongoing, phased projects within WMA such as the National IWAAs reports, the Regional Integrated Methods for Base Evaluation, Integrated Water Science Basins, and the National Drought Prediction Program, will particularly benefit from the ability to solicit and incorporate information from stakeholders and constituents early and iteratively. Results of data collections under this clearance will be used to advance socio-hydrologic science within USGS, enhance the usability and utility of USGS water data, and direct future bureau research towards meaningful areas of critical inquiry. Results will not be used to directly inform policy decisions.

3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other

forms of information technology, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses, and the basis for the decision for adopting this means of collection. Also describe any consideration of using information technology to reduce burden.

The use of computer-assisted information technology methods to administer data collection helps reduce burden on respondents, expands accessibility for participants who face challenges completing written surveys or attending in-person interviews and meetings, and substantially improves response rates. These benefits also extend to USGS by reducing information collection costs associated with postage, travel, salary, and on-site logistics. Therefore, whenever possible and appropriate, USGS will use information technology to reduce collection burden by offering electronic response options via online survey platforms and mobile devices, or by utilizing online interview or focus group options.

4. Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purposes described in Item 2, above.

USGS is establishing an internal review process that will examine each data collection effort conducted under this generic clearance to prevent internal duplication of effort and to ensure that appropriate data collection instruments are developed. Currently, information collection requests applicable to water availability are submitted by individuals or teams of researchers on a project-by-project basis. While there will likely still be some data collections subject of separate clearance requests, combining the bulk of these requests under the umbrella of this generic clearance allows the Water Resources Mission Area, to the greatest extent possible, to centralize the administration of its public data collections. This will provide for a consistent and comprehensive approach that greatly decreases the potential for duplication with WMA-directed research.

Additionally, many of these collection requests will be focused within geographic areas where USGS has existing relationships with partner agencies (federal, state, and local), industry representatives, and other relevant organizations. The ongoing, collaborative work already being conducted in many of these locations gives USGS a better understanding of where existing efforts may conflict with, or complement, new requests.

5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities, describe any methods used to minimize burden.

Small businesses, or other small entities, may be involved in efforts related to collections of information approved under this clearance. USGS will minimize the effect and burden on them by sampling appropriately, asking for information on a strictly voluntary basis, and only collecting the minimum amount of information needed to achieve research or product delivery objectives.

6. Describe the consequence to Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently, as well as any technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden.

Information collection efforts under this generic clearance are required to fulfill the Congressionally mandated and funded objectives and technical requirements of the Water Resources Mission Area. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used to provide deeper understanding of concepts or phenomenon by accessing individuals with first-hand knowledge relevant to the research topic. These studies may reveal trends that are representative of larger populations or provide insights into the lived experiences of specific groups or localized communities. Collection of this information supports the USGS by improving both national and regional assessments of water quantity, quality, and use, advancing scientific understanding of how human activity impacts water availability in different ways, informing product development to maximize the utility and usability of USGS water data, and framing future and ongoing research efforts within the Bureau. Outputs are likely to reduce costs and improve outcomes for both the bureau and the public by ensuring our science is conducted efficiently, effectively, and is serving its intended purpose.

As a bureau, our understanding of issues related to water availability is greatly diminished when information collection is not systematic, robust, and timely. Integrating knowledge about the hydrologic and human systems is critical to help our partners manage resources in a way that is equitable and sustainable; however, the human component is often sacrificed by USGS researchers due to timeline incongruities in the project life cycle and the regular PRA approval process. When human facets of water availability are explored, they are often greatly reduced in scope or make use of more general question banks that have been pre-approved by OMB. As a result, USGS lacks critical information that is needed for advancing integrated socio-hydrologic modeling methods and improving forecasts, understanding the drivers and impacts of water-related hazards to help inform local mitigation and response, and developing decision-support tools that meet the needs of decision-makers at multiple scales. Ongoing failure to collect this information, or conducting collections less frequently, compromises USGS's ability to fulfill its mission as it relates to assessing and forecasting availability of the Nation's water resources "to support human well-being, healthy ecosystems, economic prosperity, and anticipate and help resolve impending water-resource conflicts and emergencies." This reduces the relevance of USGS science, diminishes our effectiveness as a Bureau, and leads to the inefficient use of Congressionally appropriated resources.

7. Explain any special circumstances that would cause an information collection to be conducted in a manner: requiring respondents to report information to the agency more often than quarterly; requiring respondents to prepare a written response to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it; requiring respondents to submit more than an original and two copies of any document; requiring respondents to retain records, other than health, medical, government contract; grant-in-aid, or tax records, for more than three years; in connection with a statistical survey, that is not designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study; requiring the use of a statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and approved by OMB; that includes a pledge of confidentiality that is not supported by authority established in statute or regulation, that is not supported by disclosure and data security policies that are consistent with the pledge, or which unnecessarily impedes sharing of data with other agencies for compatible confidential use; or requiring respondents to submit proprietary trade secrets, or other confidential information unless the agency can demonstrate that it

has instituted procedures to protect the information's confidentiality to the extent permitted by law.

The data collections to be conducted under this generic clearance will be completed in accordance with the guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.5

8. If applicable, provide a copy and identify the date and page number of publication in the Federal Register of the agency's notice, required by 5 CFR 1320.8(d), soliciting comments on the information collection prior to submission to OMB. Summarize public comments received in response to that notice and describe actions taken by the agency in response to these comments. Describe efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported. Consultation with representatives of those from whom information is to be obtained or those who must compile records should occur at least once every 3 years - even if the collection of information activity is the same as in prior periods. There may be circumstances that may preclude consultation in a specific situation. These circumstances should be explained.

A 60-day Federal Register Notice (FRN) soliciting public comments was published on Thursday, November 7, 2024 (89 FR 88302). No comments were received.

In drafting this generic clearance request, we also consulted with a number of subject matter experts both within the USGS and in other Federal agencies to ensure its completeness and clarity. The titles of those individuals and summary of the revisions made based on their feedback is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Subject-matter expert reviewers of this ICR and summary of subsequent revisions

Reviewer Position and Title	Revisions Recommended
U.S. Geological Survey, Natural Hazards Mission Area Research Social Scientist	Adjusted estimated burden hours to show expected annual burden more clearly for each collection and respondent type
National Institute of Standards and Technology Research Social Science	Revised some of the wording in Sections 2 and 17 in response to small, editorial suggestions
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency, National Weather Service Social Scientist	No revisions suggested
Department of Interior, Office of Policy Analysis Economist	No revisions suggested

9. Explain any decision to provide any payment or gift to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

We will not provide payments or gifts to respondents.

10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy. If the collection requires a systems of records notice (SORN) or privacy impact assessment (PIA), those should be cited and described here.

The USGS does not provide a guarantee of confidentiality. However, respondents will remain anonymous beyond the research team and assurance of confidentiality to the extent permitted by law (including the Freedom of Information Act [FOIA]) will be provided on each collection. Submissions under this generic clearance may propose collection of non-sensitive personally identifiable information (PII) subject to the provisions of the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. § 552a). An initial Privacy Threshold Analysis (PTA) was conducted for this generic clearance describing the kinds of non-sensitive PII that may be included in collections submitted under this request. If any instrument under this request proposes collecting additional non-sensitive PII that was not included on the original PTA, a separate PTA will be conducted for that collection. Collections proposed under this clearance will not generate or contribute to individual records that are associated with a unique, personal identifier and, therefore, will not require a Systems of Records Notice (SORN).

11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private. This justification should include the reasons why the agency considers the questions necessary, the specific uses to be made of the information, the explanation to be given to persons from whom the information is requested, and any steps to be taken to obtain their consent.

Respondents will not be asked questions of a sensitive nature.

12. Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information.

A variety of instruments and platforms will be used to collect information from participants under the umbrella of this generic clearance. Average hours per response will vary depending upon collection method but will typically range from 15 minutes to complete a survey or questionnaire to 3 hours for a large group or townhall-type meeting. Based on previous collections, we expect our respondents to represent a combination of state, local, or Tribal government officials and members of the general public. If approved for the full 3-year term, we estimate the generic clearance will result in approximately 10,000 burden hours. Table 2a illustrates the anticipated break-down of the 10,000 burden hours for each collection type, based on the number of collections we expect to conduct over the requested time frame for this clearance. Actual response counts for each participant group and instrument type may vary from what is provided below, but the overall cap of hours will remain the same. Table 2b provides the estimated annualized participant burden for each participant group and collection type. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics *Employer Costs for Employee Compensation*, USDLE-24-1172, published March 2024, was used to determine the dollar value for burden hours. Public respondents (private industry) were assessed at \$43.78/hour and state, local or Tribal government respondents were assessed at \$61.27/hour.

Table 2a. Estimated burden hours for information collection participants.

Type of Collection	No. of State, Local, or Tribal Respondents	No. of Public Respondents	Average Burden Per Response	Total Hours for Instrument
Survey	1,500	1,500	0.25 (15 minutes)	750
Individual Interview, Long – Structured or Semi-structured	100	100	1.5 (90 minutes)	300
Individual Interview, Short – Structured or Semi-structured	225	225	1 (60 minutes)	450
Focus Groups/Small Group Discussion	500	500	2	2,000
Total Responses by Participant Group:	2,325	2,325	Total Burden Hours:	3,500

Table 2b. Annualized Cost Burden

Participants	Type of Collection	Total Burden Hours	Average Rate	Total Cost
State, Local, or Tribal Government Respondent	Survey	375	\$61.27	\$22,976.25
	Individual Interview, Long – Structured or Semi-structured	150	\$61.27	\$9,190.50
	Individual Interview, Short – Structured or Semi-structured	225	\$61.27	\$13,785.75
	Focus Groups/Small Group Discussion	1000	\$61.27	\$61,270.00
General Public Respondent	Survey	375	\$43.78	\$16,417.50
	Individual Interview, Long – Structured or Semi-structured	150	\$43.78	\$6,567.00
	Individual Interview, Short – Structured or Semi-structured	225	\$43.78	\$9,850.50
	Focus Groups/Small Group Discussion	1000	\$43.78	\$43,780.00
TOTAL		3500		\$183,837.50

13. Provide an estimate for the total annual cost burden to respondents or record keepers resulting from the collection of information. (Do not include the cost of any hour burden already reflected on the burden worksheet).

There are no capital, start-up, operating, or maintenance costs associated with this information collection request.

14. Provide estimates of annualized costs to the Federal government. Also, provide a description of the method used to estimate cost, which should include quantification of hours, operational expenses (such as equipment, overhead, printing, and support staff), and any other expense that would not have been incurred without this collection of information. Agencies may also aggregate cost estimates from Items 12, 13, and 14 in a single table.

This is a generic clearance that will potentially be used across the Water Resources Mission Area. A GS-12 social scientist will be responsible for management of this clearance, including any submissions under it, during the initial three-year approval. A portion of that FTE's time (roughly 10% or 208 hours) will be devoted to plan, coordinate, administer, monitor, and report on the overall types of individual information collections to be conducted. In 2024, the hourly wage for a GS-12, Step 4 employee in locality RUS was \$45.83. With the addition of benefits and overhead, USGS estimates an annual of \$20,000.00 per year.

Individual cost estimates and descriptions for each information collection request submitted under this generic clearance will be provided by USGS. This will include estimates for USGS employee salary and other costs as applicable including overhead, other operational expenses, publishing fees, travel, and contractors.

15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments reported on the burden worksheet.

This is a new information collection request, therefore USGS is establishing a baseline burden. There are no program changes or adjustments to report at this time, but should there be a need in the future, updates will be made accordingly.

16. For collections of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulation and publication. Address any complex analytical techniques that will be used. Provide the time schedule for the entire project, including beginning and ending dates of the collection of information, completion of report, publication dates, and other actions.

Information collections under this generic clearance may be either quantitative or qualitative. Sampling design may yield data that can be analyzed using inferential statistics or may yield data for which statistical analysis and generalization beyond the sample is inappropriate. Sampling and analytical methods will be determined on the basis of individual study objectives and all of the analyses will be done in the context of understanding the strengths and limitations of those methods. For each collection, USGS will describe the timeline and plans for tabulation, analysis, and, if applicable, publication of the data.

Results from the information collections under this generic clearance may be used in papers published in research journals and presented at conferences. Findings may also be published in books, compendiums, and USGS publications. Results may be disseminated internally to USGS staff and leadership, or externally to key policy and management officials and both public and private stakeholders. There will be no attribution to individuals in the analyzed data. In all final products, USGS will clearly describe the collection and analytical methods used, as well as the limitations of the data based on those methods.

17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.

All written and electronic material will display the OMB Control # and current expiration date of the OMB approval. All written and electronic surveys (with the exception of transactional surveys in the form of business reply cards where space will not permit) will display the following notification:

OMB Control #1028-xxxx
Expiration date: ADD DATE

This collection of information contains Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) requirements approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Notwithstanding any other provisions of the law, no person is required to respond to, nor shall any person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the PRA unless that collection of information displays a currently valid OMB control number. Public reporting burden for this collection is estimated to be between X minutes [*based on instrument*] per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to:

[Name of Study Principal Investigator and USGS Generic Clearance Coordinator]

18. Explain each exception to the topics of the certification statement identified in “Certification or Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions.”

Not applicable. USGS does not require any exceptions to the certification statement.