May X, 2023

Deb Haaland

Secretary

Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20240

Dave Applegate

Director

United States Geological Survey

12201 Sunrise Valley Drive

Reston, VA 20192

**Re: Restoring the National Pesticide Use Map Database**

Dear Secretary Haaland and Director Applegate,

We write to you on behalf of the undersigned [groups, scientists] to express our extreme concern that the United States Geological Survey (“USGS”) is adhering to a Trump-era directive that has gutted and may terminate the National Pesticide Use Map database[[1]](#footnote-1) – one of the most vital tools for monitoring pesticide use and estimating water pollution nationwide.

Since 1991, the USGS National Water Quality Assessment (“NAWQA”) has been a key tool in measuring the quality of our Nation’s streams and groundwater, how conditions are changing over time, and how human activities are affecting these vital resources. An extremely important component of NAWQA has always been the National Pesticide Use Map database, which has produced highly sophisticated pesticide use estimates throughout every single watershed in the country.

Pesticide use estimates have been generated for every agricultural pesticide annually since 1992, which have been essential for the design of USGS water-quality studies. In many cases these important data have been used to predict concentrations of pesticides in streams and groundwater, implicate atmospheric transport of pesticides that are detected in air and rain samples far from sites of application, and predict changes in local water quality based on temporal and spatial variations in pesticide use over time.

While the National Pesticide Use Map database has been an invaluable resource to the federal government, perhaps the greatest benefit has been to scientists, state and local public health officials, and environmental health advocates, as it provides vital information and tracks trends that are not available anywhere else. The pesticide use data produced by the USGS have been used in the development of over 500 peer-reviewed scientific papers, including some of the most highly cited and seminal works in the field. It is information vital to understanding water pollution and landscape-level impacts associated with pesticides.

After accumulating valuable data for a quarter century, the National Pesticide Use Map database is now in danger of termination, as it continues to follow Trump administration directives that restructured the USGS and devalued important data sources.[[2]](#footnote-2) Once providing data for around 540 agricultural pesticides that are used and can contaminate water throughout the country, beginning in 2019 the Pesticide Use Mapping Project now only follows just over 70 pesticides – an 87% reduction. For those 70 pesticides, plans are only in place to update the numbers once more in 2024. After that there are no definite plans to continue the program and, given the recent trajectory, without action and course correction the National Pesticide Use Map database may cease to be updated indefinitely.

We use over 1.2 billion pounds of pesticides each year in the United States – a number we know only because of the National Pesticide Use Map database. Total pesticide use in the U.S. is up 47% since 1970. Chemical mixtures of pesticides have never been more prevalent in the environment since pesticide use began in earnest in the 1950s.

We need credible sources of data to be able to study and understand what this widespread pesticide use means to the health of people and the environment. There is not a single data source that can even come close to replacing the USGS National Pesticide Use Map database. Data from the USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, for example, is intermittently collected, only for a specific subset of crops in a limited number of states, and is not in a user-friendly format. Water quality facilities, agricultural extension offices, farmworker healthcare clinics and countless other services will suffer harm in their ability to carry out their vital efforts by the loss of the Pesticide Use Mapping Project.

We implore the USGS to:

1. Provide use estimates for *all* agricultural pesticides by restoring the scope of the program to its pre-2019 level;
2. Retroactively calculate estimates for all pesticides that lapsed during the recent program cuts; and
3. Continue adding new agricultural pesticides to the database as they gain EPA-approval

Following a Trump-era directive and eliminating this dataset would profoundly undermine our understanding of pesticide pollution nationwide.

Thank you for your consideration of our request,

1. <https://water.usgs.gov/nawqa/pnsp/usage/maps/index.php> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. USGS, New Water Quality Directions (2019) <https://www.usgs.gov/mission-areas/water-resources/science/new-water-quality-directions> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)