Introduction to the Water for America Initiative within the U.S. Geological Survey

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The 21st Century brings a new set of water resource challenges. Water shortage and use conflict have become more commonplace in many areas of the United States – even in normal water years – for irrigation of crops, for growing cities and communities, for energy production, and for the environment and species protected under the law. Much has changed since the last overall assessment of water resources for the Nation was published by the Water Resources Council in 1978. In response to a request from Congress, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) released a report in 2002 entitled, Concepts for National Assessment of Water Availability and Use, Circular 1223. The circular outlines a broad framework by which a national assessment could take place and advocates using 21 Water Resources Regions for the study units. In 2005, USGS embarked on a pilot study of water availability in the Great Lakes Basin. The pilot focuses on understanding the dynamics of the water resources in the basin in terms of the flows and yields of both ground and surface water and demonstrates the importance of water-use data to quantifying water availability. The proposed steps to building a comprehensive water availability initiative for America will be presented.

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