



# Western States Water

## Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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### **WESTERN GOVERNORS**

#### **WGA Annual Meeting**

The Western Governors' Association's (WGA) annual meeting was held in Jackson, Wyoming on June 5-7, with Governors Doug Ducey (AZ), John Hickenlooper (CO), Butch Otter (ID), Steve Bullock (MT), Brian Sandoval (NV), Jack Dalrymple (ND), Dennis Daugaard (SD), Gary Herbert (UT) and Matt Mead (WY), WGA Chairman, participating. Governor Mead hosted the meeting, and opened with remarks noting that WGA's common theme is bipartisan efforts to address policies that affect the West.

Governor Jay Nixon of Missouri was invited as the keynote speaker, focusing on promoting outdoor recreation. However, he briefly remarked on the long-standing disputes over the Missouri River, stating that Missouri was just "holding our own with some of you here on the stand" with respect to water rights.

Another guest speaker, Dayton Duncan (author and filmmaker), celebrated the National Parks System calling it America's best idea. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Protection Act in 1864, and President Ulysses S. Grant signing legislation in 1872 creating Yellowstone, the first national park in the world. He mentioned the construction of the [Hetch Hetchy] dam in Yosemite as an example of threats to our national treasures, which now include over visitation.

U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz declared, "We are on the pathway to significant change." Low natural gas prices are displacing coal for thermal electric generation, and some ask if prices will "drive out renewables." He added that all energy resources have a place, stating that fossil fuels, nuclear, renewables and conservation are all part of the solution. Without getting into the climate science, he said the big news was the Paris agreement, noting the challenges, but also the opportunities.

Sally Jewell, Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, flatly stated regarding the Paris accords: "We are not going back. We have to go forward." She referred to drought, wildfire, early snowmelt runoff and other indicators of change. She addressed sustainable water management goals, WaterSMART grants to help local communities, and water recycling. She also

highlighted Interior's new Natural Resources Investment Center and work with private sector partners. Other topics she covered included the economic value of the National Parks, investments in public lands, energy reforms and charting a federal path forward for coal, as well as fixing the broken wildfire budget, noting 10M acres burned in 2015.

A panel on Innovations in the West included by Matt McKinney, General Manager of the Bently Ranch in Nevada. He noted, "Soil and water are our most important resources." While drought is pervasive, they have been able to manage both their water supplies and uses. They have diversified cropping to include not only alfalfa, but barley, corn, hops, oats, rye and wheat, as well as lavender and other aromatics. They feed their own beef, which is marketed directly locally and they are starting their own brewery. They compost waste for use as fertilizer, and can also precisely apply herbicides and pesticides directly through 37 center-pivot systems. Using an automated SCADA system, workers can dial in daily crop water needs and turn water on and off on their phone, saving water and time. In response to a question from Governor Sandoval, he replied that they are using 30-35% less water on alfalfa, and 25% less on their grain crops. Last year, with limited water they got four cuttings of hay.

The Western Governors formally approved seven new policy resolutions on federal-state land exchanges, invasive species, wildland fire management, cleaning up abandoned mines, species conservation, energy transmission, and the National Parks. Federal-State Land Exchanges and Purchases (#2016-04) calls on Congress to simplify and expedite the federal-state land exchange, sale and conveyance processes to simplify the checkerboard land ownership issue and resource management. Combating Invasive Species (#2016-05) supports coordinate management to ensure that actions result in more on-the-ground prevention, management and eradication, and the creation of a west-wide species inventory. Wildland Fire Management and Resilient Landscapes (#2015-06) calls on Congress and the Administration to address mitigation of wildfire danger, promote healthy forests and rangelands, and "fire borrowing," and take advantage of current authorities to expedite projects to improve western ecosystems and reduce extreme wildfire danger.

Cleaning Up Abandoned Mines in the West (#2016-07) calls on Congress to protect parties that volunteer to remediate and clean up mines, including local and state governments, from legal liability under §301(a) and §402 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) for any continuing discharges. They also call on Congress and Federal agencies to consider legislative and administrative remedies to address potential Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) and Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) liabilities.

Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act (#2016-08) recognizes the value of partnerships with federal, state and local governments and stakeholders, and articulates seven broad goals the Governors believe should drive improvements. Energy and Transmission (#2016-09) adopts the WGA "10-Year Energy Vision for the West," recognizing there is no one-size-fits-all solution, but with a commitment to states developing policies that use their energy endowments to the maximum benefit of their citizens, the region, and the nation. National Parks and the West (#2016-10) recognizes the importance of National Parks in preserving unique natural treasures, providing recreational opportunities, and contributing to local and state economies throughout the United States.

## **CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE**

### **Seasonal Forecasting**

On May 9, the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee reported the Seasonal Forecasting Improvement Act (S. 1331, S. Rept. 114-248). Section 2 of the bill directs the National Weather Service (NWS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to (1) collect and utilize information in order to make usable, reliable, and timely forecasts of seasonal temperature and precipitation in agriculture; (2) leverage existing research and models from the academic sector to improve such forecasts; (3) determine and provide information on how such forecasted conditions may impact the number and severity of droughts, fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, heat waves, coastal inundation, winter storms, high impact weather, or other relevant disasters, snowpack, and sea ice conditions; (4) provide these forecasts and information on national and regional levels; and (5) develop an Internet clearinghouse, and provide forecasts and information on their impacts to the public.

The bill directs the Department of Commerce to consult with the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security on the highest priority seasonal forecast needs to enhance national security, and to build upon existing forecasting and assessment programs and partnerships. It would also authorize grants of up to

\$100,000 each to states and territories to appoint a forecast communication coordinator. It directs Commerce to provide matching funds to support a liaison between any state requesting assistance and NOAA and other federal departments and agencies. Section 3 would require annual reports on ongoing research projects relating to observations, weather, or seasonal-scale forecasts, and reauthorizes the weather and climate information in agriculture program through FY2020.

Section 4 directs NOAA to improve procurement practices for polar and geostationary satellites and assess operational viability of alternate observation platforms, such as microsatellite constellations and permits NOAA and NASA to acquire such satellites in order to manage the expense of ocean and environmental observations. It requires an objective, non-governmental scientific study of the future of the NOAA satellite systems. It also directs NOAA to complete the existing radio occultation program by deploying constellations of microsatellites in both the equatorial and polar orbits, integrating resulting data and research into all national operational weather forecast models. The resulting data is to be free and open to all communities. For ocean and coastal data, NOAA would integrate additional coastal and ocean observations, and other data and research from NOAA Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) into regional weather forecasts. It supports the development of real time data-sharing products and forecast products in collaboration with the IOOS regional associations, including the private sector, academia, and research institutions.

Section 5 creates a Federal Coordinator for Meteorology. Section 6 creates a Weather Commission to assess NOAA forecasts and advise the federal government on the highest priority forecast needs of the community of users. Section 7 directs the NWS to review existing research, products, and services that meet the specific needs of the urban environment, including those with the potential for improving modeling and forecasting capabilities by taking into account factors such as varying building heights, impermeable surfaces, lack of tree canopy, traffic pollution, and interbuilding wind.

Section 10 directs NOAA to maintain a National Water Center to: (1) initiate research and development activities to develop operational water resource prediction products; (2) collaborate with, and provide decision-support regarding total water prediction for the Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Geological Survey, the Environmental Protection Agency, and state water resource and emergency management agencies; and (3) develop capabilities necessary for total water predictive capacity.

Section 11 directs NOAA to improve hurricane forecasting and communication about storm surges in collaboration with NWS and appropriate weather industry and academic entities.

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**The WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL is an organization of representatives appointed by the Governors of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.**