

**MINUTES  
of the  
195<sup>th</sup> COUNCIL MEETING  
Virtual Spring Meeting  
(due to COVID-19)  
March 25, 2021**

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195<sup>th</sup> COUNCIL MEETING  
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March 25, 2021**

**MEMBERS AND ALTERNATES PRESENT**

**ALASKA**

**ARIZONA**

Trevor Baggiore  
Kyle Miller  
Ayesha Vohra

**CALIFORNIA**

Jeanine Jones

**COLORADO**

Rebecca Mitchell  
Jeremy Neustifter  
Scott Steinbrecher

**IDAHO**

**KANSAS**

Connie Owens  
Kenneth Titus  
Tom Stiles

**MONTANA**

Jay Weiner

**NEBRASKA**

Tom Riley

**NEVADA**

Jennifer Carr  
Micheline Fairbank

**NEW MEXICO**

John D'Antonio  
Greg Ridgley

**NORTH DAKOTA**

Jennifer Verleger  
John Paczkowski

**OKLAHOMA**

Julie Cunningham  
Sara Gibson

**OREGON**

Tom Byler

**SOUTH DAKOTA**

Kent Woodmansey

**TEXAS**

Jon Niermann

**UTAH**

Norm Johnson  
Todd Stonely

**WASHINGTON**

Mary Verner  
Buck Smith

**WYOMING**

Chris Brown  
Kevin Frederick  
Steve Wolff

**GUESTS**

Matt Unruh, Kansas Water Office  
Lucas Stephens, Internet of Water  
Tracy Streeter, Burns and McDonnell  
Stephen Bartell, U.S. Department of Justice  
Bidtah Becker, Navajo Tribal Utility Authority  
Tanya Trujillo, U.S. Department of the Interior  
Christopher Estes, Chalk Board Enterprises, LLC  
Peter Colohan, Internet of Water, Duke University  
Kathleen Ligon, Texas Water Development Board  
Mary Schooley, Oklahoma Water Resources Board  
Jacqueline Tinetti, Council of State Governments-West  
Jim Rizk, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
Earl Lott, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
Lauren Vernon, House Committee on Natural Resources  
Amanda Long, Arizona Department of Water Resources  
Nat Chakeres, New Mexico Office of the State Engineer  
Weir Labatt, Central Texas Regional Supply Corporation  
Jill Csekitz, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
Kelly Mills, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
Erin Chancellor, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
Kevin McCalla, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
Loreal Stepney, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
Kathy Alexander, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
Kimberly Nygren, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
John-Cody Stalsby, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
Kara Valentine, Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy  
Jennifer Zygmunt, Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality  
Teresa Wilhelmsen, Division of Water Rights /State Engineer's Office

Anne Castle, Getches-Wilkinson Center, University of Colorado Law School  
Nakaila Steen, South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources

### **WESTFAST**

Indrani Graczyk, NASA JPL  
Heather Hofman, USDA/NRCS  
Lauren Dempsey, US Air Force  
Kevin Werner, NOAA Fisheries  
Patrick Lambert, U.S. Geological Survey  
Christopher Carlson, USDA Forest Service  
Roger Gorke, Environmental Protection Agency

### **STAFF**

Tony Willardson  
Michelle Bushman  
Cheryl Redding  
Jessica Reimer  
Adel Abdallah  
James Ryan

### **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

WSWC Chair Jennifer Verleger welcomed everyone. She is currently the Acting WSWC Chair since Tim Davis accepted a position in Utah. Jen read through a resolution of appreciation for Tim. There was a motion, a second, and it was unanimously approved by acclamation.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the virtual meeting held on October 15, 2020 were unanimously approved.

### **DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR UPDATE**

Tanya Trujillo, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, Department of the Interior (DOI), and a former WSWC member, said she was happy to be presenting and meeting with everyone today. Her responsibilities at DOI include the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), both of which have quite a few initiatives going on right now. She has lived in three of the western states over the last ten years and has a

very strong appreciation and respect for the role that states play with respect to water management. She understands the need for coordination between states and the federal agencies, especially when dealing with huge challenging circumstances like we are now with the significant drought. She thinks it would be great to partner up and brainstorm to try to figure out how to support the various activities in the states experiencing drought.

Part of her job is translating the Biden Administration priorities and promises into the world of water and science. One of the key priorities is a commitment to address climate change and to improve our scientific decisionmaking and infrastructure capabilities. Reclamation has several science and water data initiatives. Our energy and water policies are interconnected. The Federal Secure Water Act and the WaterSMART programs are important for our communities and are a great example of how the federal government can support ongoing efforts in the various states. Water efficiency grants support conservation and improved water management, and additional funding for watershed restoration efforts will be important. The basin study program enables non-federal partners to work with Reclamation, such as Washington and the Yakima Basin study, and New Mexico with the Middle Rio Grande Basin study, which include opportunities to evolve into additional rounds of program assistance. We will work to try to increase funding for those popular effective programs.

The USGS is a central partner in the work we do, conducting research on coasts, geologic hazards, water resources, endangered species and economic scenarios. They are a central partner in a lot of the ongoing discussions. Their Water Resources Availability program supports our national water census. The national water dashboard has online tools for particular communities and is fun to play with. I know you all have significant efforts ongoing in water data initiatives and the Internet of Water programs. Streamgaging programs are essential. There is potential demand for more streamgage sites.

The Landsat program has a few updates. This year 2021 is an exciting year because if all goes well, we are going to be launching the Landsat 9 satellite probably in September. I get routine briefings on the status of that program. The folks at USGS and NASA are also working on the planning for the next mission. We appreciate the WSWC's support for these missions. Landsat's next mission will be broader and better. These issues are popular with congressional delegations as well. It is cool to be working with the space team.

The wildland fire science programs are also important. There is considerable overlap between drought conditions and fire management and the programs to address both issues. Western states recognize the need to be very attentive to how we are dealing with the wildfire conditions. USGS released their recent wildfire science strategy plan, which includes post-fire forest restoration, forestry work in advance of fires, and real time management during the wildfire season, which could now be all year round. There's also quite a bit of attention on the impact of post fire conditions with landslides, remanagement and revegetation efforts. The USGS folks are really essential to a lot of those issues and obviously intersect with other agencies such as the Forest Service.

An additional element of the Biden Harris Administration priorities is ensuring equity for our communities. That will include addressing tribal water needs, and rural and urban water programs and technical assistance. There's no shortage of work to be done.

We have a longstanding history on promoting Indian water right settlements over litigation. We have been successful in negotiating and implementing settlements, but there are many, many more to do. Secretary Holland, and others in the DOI will be tracking these programs very closely. We are still putting together our teams for Indian water rights settlements and I know working to prioritize those issues is going to be of high importance. A related area is Reclamation programs to provide technical assistance to tribes. There's a big demand that far exceeds the amount of funding that's been historically available. That technical assistance feeds into the general program that can enable some of those settlement discussions to be effective and move more quickly. President Biden issued an executive memorandum on strengthening the tribal nation relationships and confirming the requirements for meaningful tribal consultation between the federal agencies and tribes prior to moving forward with federal actions. Congress passed the American Rescue Plan, which has some tribal components affecting DOI responsibilities.

We are also looking forward to seeing additional infrastructure and stimulus proposals, maybe as early as next week, from the White House. Hopefully, we will see quite a few water infrastructure provisions in efforts to promote continued resilience among the programs and the sectors that we are working with.

One of the continued initiatives from the prior Administration is what is known as the Water Subcabinet, which is a commitment from several different federal agencies who have water resource missions and responsibilities. The goal of the Water Subcabinet is to ensure that we are effectively serving communities in the various states.

All of these issues involve partnering, and I look forward to working with you on these issues. We would love to have some communication with state folks about how we might be able to work effectively together.

### **Questions/Comments:**

Tony: Tanya, we express our appreciation not only for your participation today, but also for reaching out to us as part of the transition team early on, to discuss some of our WSWC priorities. We would like to reiterate our support for the Water Subcabinet and for our WestFAST team.

Greg Ridgley: With respect to Indian water rights settlements, are there any plans yet for increased resources, or other ways to build capacity at the Secretary's Indian Water Rights Office?

Tanya: I hope there will be strong support in the budget for Indian water rights settlements. Within DOI, we haven't filled the political slot that oversees the Indian water rights settlements office. Pam Williams is still there. This is an area of interest to me, so I will be communicating with folks on these programs.

Tony: Tanya, as you mentioned, you're aware of our Water Data Exchange (WaDE), and also the work being done with the Internet of Water. We hope in the next week or two, we could provide a presentation to show you what we've been able to do. We can work with your folks to see if we can schedule that. You asked about drought and drought declarations and I'm sure some of our state's may want to comment.

Tanya: That sounds great. I'm sure there are some proper protocols, but you can always just call or email me directly.

Becky Mitchell: Colorado is definitely in a drought situation and has been in the recovery from wildfire on top of that. So we're definitely going to need the federal partnerships as we move forward to recover from all of that. In terms of the goals of the Water Subcabinet and the Biden Administration, they are closely aligned with some of the goals that are in our new position on Universal Access for Clean and Safe Water for federally recognized tribes, tribes and Alaskan Native communities. Thank you for the efforts and the leadership on the federal side.

Peter Colohan: I'm curious if there has been any action with the National Drought Resiliency Project?

Tanya: It is definitely one of the programs that's on my list of water sub-topics.

John D'Antonio: The USDA was not part of the Water Subcabinet. It seems like there is a big push to start doing some fallowing and some federal funding programs to help with fallowing. I would suggest that the new Administration pull the USDA into WestFAST and to the Water Subcabinet.

Tanya: USDA is part of the Water Subcabinet. I agree that is an important partnership. There are some legislative proposals as well.

### **SAN ANTONIO'S VISTA RIDGE PIPELINE PROJECT**

Jen Verleger introduced Weir Labatt, who has worked on water policy issues very actively over the past 34 year. He was a member of the WSWC from 2002 to 2012, and was the Chair in 2011 and 2012. Weir expressed that he has treasured his relationship with the WSWC very much and that it was an outstanding 10 and a half years. His wife Laura remembers it so very fondly as well.

Weir shared a powerpoint presentation on San Antonio's Vista Ridge pipeline project, something he's worked on for the past five years. Very few people in San Antonio know the

story behind the Vista Ridge Water Supply Project and the Central Texas Regional Water Supply Corporation (Water Supply Corporation). On March 30, 2016, I volunteered to become a board member of the Corporation and that same day, I was elected president. It is a nonprofit corporation formed, and existing, under the laws of the State of Texas, the Texas Water Code, and the Texas Business Organization Code. Its sole purpose was to purchase the right-of-way and build and operate a regional water supply system that would bring water to the City of San Antonio. It was to be financed through private banks. In June 2016, there was only \$744.27 in the bank and we had no office. We did have a post office box and we had only one paid employee. With that, we orchestrated the acquisition of 142 miles of right-of-way, including 513 parcels from different landowners that were negotiated voluntarily without going to the district court. The construction of a \$604 million pipeline project vital to the future of San Antonio and the surrounding region began. The project was completed within budget and on time.

This is truly a miracle story. Before the story is told some background is necessary. Our region relied on the Edwards Aquifer, the sole source of water. The water has been plentiful, reliable, and clean, but increased pumpage in the 1950's through today has threatened the aquifer and many spring flows in the region. Some of the springs have dried out - primarily Comal and San Marcos Springs. It was obvious that the region had to find alternative sources. Several projects were proposed, but none were accepted, either by the courts, the political leadership, or the voters in San Antonio. You can see from slide two, we had numerous opportunities for additional supplies. Anything we did would cost more money and so there was no will to go forward. We started the Applewhite Reservoir Project in 1990, which went two and a half years and spent \$40 million, and was rejected twice by voters. In 1991, the Sierra Club filed a lawsuit in federal court claiming that the City of San Antonio was in violation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) related to groundwater pumping and the declining spring flows. The 1992 federal decision ruled in favor of the Sierra Club, and that led to state legislation that resulted in a remarkable settlement over about a 15-year period. The San Antonio Water System (SAWS) began to implement a number of alternative strategies: (1) water conservation; (2) reducing our consumption per person per day; (3) recycled water; (4) a very large aquifer storage and recovery facility; and (5) a brackish desalination plant. We had a lot of alternative strategies, but we still didn't have the large project needed.

The idea of the Vista Ridge pipeline project originated in the 1990s then resurfaced again in the 2000s. The project starts in Burleson County and travels 142 miles south through seven different counties to Bexar County. The pipeline was completely underground. The project faced opposition throughout the region, particularly from Bexar County and the local chapter of the Sierra Club. The project survived. The Garney Construction Company out of Kansas City was doing some work for SAWS, and they agreed to purchase 80% of the project. We had three new board members. As mentioned, I was elected president and two former City and SAWS employees joined me on that board. In 2019, two others were added.

The project was refinanced in November of 2016 and the cost was below \$600 million. The 30- year loan was collateralized by a commitment from SAWS and supported by future water rate increases approved by the San Antonio City Council. It was a take-or-pay contract. SAWS paid for the water only after it was received at their facility in northern Bexar County.

They did not have to deal with the politically sensitive issue of the use of eminent domain for right-of-way acquisition, nor did they have to put any debt as a liability on their balance sheet. The Public Private Partnership (P3) agreement transferred all of the risks to the Water Supply Corporation. Our race began in June 2016 to meet our target date of April 16, 2020. We had less than four years to take care of 513 parcels of land. We hired a law firm in San Antonio and 100% of the right-of-way was secured by December 3, 2019. We offered a premium price and worked closely with the landowners to meet their desires. We figured that it was cheaper to pay more to the landowners than it was to go to court and pay a lot of lawyer fees. None of the landowners went to court and all were settled voluntarily. Understanding that we had the power of eminent domain, the landowners probably saw the situation differently. We had three endangered species affecting the project: the Houston Toad, the golden cheek warbler, and karst invertebrates. We spent about \$2.4 million on environmental mitigation.

The Vista Ridge Water Project will supply 20% of San Antonio's water demand. SAWS has about three viable options left: (1) increase our programs to conserve water, and to improve and enhance our water ethic; (2) expand a brackish water desalination plant; or (3) begin plans for a large seawater desalination plant on the Gulf Coast. It will be in tandem and located next to an electrical power plant. Most of the cities in the United States, particularly those that are not located next to a coast do not have such an option.

Looking at our water supply diversification going from a single source back 25 years ago when we lost the lawsuit under the ESA, I must tell you that I didn't like the ESA when that verdict was handed down by a federal judge. But, I began to understand as I was involved in all those steps that without the hammer of the ESA, we would not have ever come to a settlement. I have become a great believer in the value of that act and what it did to help us in our region to solve a problem that had been going on for 15 years. We spent a lot of money. We spent \$603 million on the pipeline, and \$224 million on the interface. We will have water for 30 years from this alternative source, and I hope to have it longer than that. The water future in San Antonio is very bright. The Vista Ridge Pipeline has been a great success.

### **Questions/Comments:**

John D'Antonio: I was wondering about the permitting aspect of the pipeline project itself and applying for that water to change its location. How long did it take? Were there permits necessary?

Weir Labatt: They had to go through a local groundwater conservation district for approval and they could show the hydrology. It wasn't going to hurt the local community at all. We were dealing with one entity. There were permits from various entities.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **A. Water Resources Committee**

Tony filled in for Mary, who was called to the State Legislature. We had a full agenda with the Water Resources Committee. The Committee addressed five different positions: Position No. 417, which supports forecast informed reservoir operations and innovations; Position No. 418, supports weather station networks; Position No. 419, supports water infrastructure funding; Position No. 420, regarding integrating water and energy planning and policy; and Position No. 421, supports federal research on climate adaptation. There were no further changes to the revisions discussed by the Executive Committee, which were included in the briefing materials.

There were a number of items on the agenda that related to those positions, including presentations from: Camille Touton, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Deputy Commissioner, and a longtime friend of the WSWC; and Bill McCormack, President, Association of State Dam Safety Officials. We had a representative from the American Society of Civil Engineers, who talked about their report card on infrastructure. We've improved to a C- from what in most areas has generally been a D. Aaron Snyder talked about the Corps of Engineers alternative financing efforts. Kathleen Ligon, Texas Water Development Board, talked about state financing, particularly flood mapping and financing. Kevin Moss talked about the Western Governors' Association's policy resolution on water resource management in the West. Jeanine Jones talked about recent subseasonal to seasonal (S2S) research efforts. Adel and Ryan demonstrated our WaDE program and prototype dashboard.

Jen sought motions on the sunseting positions. Steve Wolff moved for an approval. John D'Antonio seconded. With no further discussion or opposition, these positions were approved by the Full Council.

### **B. Water Quality Committee**

Erica Gaddis provided the Water Quality Committee update. The Committee had a robust discussion with a lot of engagement from the states. We heard from Roger Gorke on the Biden Administration priorities. We had several roundtable discussions including one on the Navigable Waters Protection Rule. From that conversation, we would like to send a letter to EPA asking as they move forward with reviewing the WOTUS rule, that they conduct true engagement with states. We heard an update on the progress with mapping efforts of WOTUS and heard about some good tools that have been developed by a number of states in the absence of a federal tool for distinguishing between WOTUS and non-WOTUS and related discharges. We had a roundtable discussion on §401 certifications. We had a little bit of a reminder on the *Maui* guidance, which relates to groundwater discharges that have a surface connection. That doesn't seem to have a lot of impact our states yet. We also had a presentation from David Galindo, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), who discussed their new program for regulating produced waters. That's a new program that they've recently assumed from EPA, which is always a process and so it was good to hear about that success for their state.

We had a presentation from Wendy Ridderbusch on the San Diego desalinization plant, and also from Texas on some of their desalinization program targets, which is really an important area of water quality and water quantity that overlap in our Council. Other than that, we'll be working on our work plan for this coming year.

In regard to a proposed letter on state §401 certifications, EPA passed a new rule that went into effect last fall. Many states had some objections to that rule and I think the Council also sent a comment letter in 2019. The executive order that President Biden signed on his first day includes a request that EPA review the §401 rule that was passed by the previous Administration. The old rule and the new rule are very different with respect to flexibility for states, especially the timeframe for state decisions, and it's leaving many of us in quite an area of limbo. There's a lot of confusion. The letter that we propose to send really just asks EPA to accelerate and prioritize the review of that rule so that we as states can start to implement the new rule appropriately. This letter is really meant to flag for EPA the uncertainty created by the recent executive order, which is problematic with respect to our ability to give clear guidance to our applicants and to modify our own regulations and rules to be in alignment with the federal government. We have a draft letter that a small working group in the last 24 hours has crafted. I understand that at least one state has some concerns.

Chris Brown: I would like to recognize that we appreciate the challenges with regard to the lack of clarification, or the implementation issues that some states have had. Our concern in Wyoming relates back to the relatively inflexible direction we received from our governor's office with regard to the rule itself. Considering the content of the letter with regard to asking for an expedited review, coupled with the attachment of a letter that we were explicitly directed, we could not support back in 2019 – we feel a little handcuffed at the moment until we get some direction from our governor's office with regard to this current proposed letter, which Erica explained is a little bit different than just going after the content of the rule. We feel like we're not in a position at the moment, given we just got the letter at lunch today, to try to get some review from our governor's office to make sure we're not running afoul of that fairly inflexible direction we received with regard to the rule itself. We would be happy to do the review and revisit it in June, but as we're sitting here today, we just simply can't support it.

Michelle: I would recommend that we give Wyoming the opportunity to review the letter and to try to be on board. I think that this Council has worked very well to try to be unanimous as often as possible. We do have the position to support this letter, as long as we are not referencing nationwide permits, because we do not have a position on that. This can happen in between meetings. So we can work on this over the next couple of weeks. And it could still be timely, if that's the direction you guys want to go.

Erica Gaddis: We are happy to give Wyoming some time to try to get consensus, but I don't really want to wait until June, at our next WSWC meetings because my hope was that EPA will have given us clarity by then because we are really struggling.

Steve Wolff: Wyoming appreciates the extra time. Just so you know, over our lunch break, once we got the letter, Chris already sent the letter to our governor's office and so it's in

their hands. We are involved in a legislative session for about the next 10 days so we probably won't be able to get to meet with him until after that, but we will work on it as quickly as we possibly can.

Chris Brown: Please make sure that the letter attachment is the accurate and correct letter that was sent to EPA

Erica gaddis: We don't need to attach the previous letter, if it will be problematic.

Jennifer: So we don't need to do anything on this letter. Erica, Chris and Tony are going to work something out after the meeting so we don't need to take a vote.

Roger Gorke stated that it would be valuable to get the letter to EPA irrespective of the previous letter.

### **C. Legal Committee**

Chris Brown reported on activities in the Legal Committee. We had three positions in the Legal Committee. One was sunseting, one had an amendment, and then we had a proposed position that we spent probably the bulk of the meeting discussing. We had guest presentations from Bidtah Becker, Anne Castle, and Rebecca "Becky" Mitchell from Colorado and the Council pitched in to talk about the background and needs with regard to this proposed resolution on clean water for tribal reservations and Alaskan native communities. Erin Chancellor, Office of Legal Services of TCEQ gave a presentation on Texas legal issues with impoundment permits that was very interesting. We had an update with regard to the upcoming 17th biennial Symposium on the Settlement of Reserved Indian Water Rights Claims.. We had a good roundtable discussion on water conservation and the use of saved or salvaged water, with some states that already recognize some form of a salvage water program or that are considering it, and all the different issues that are associated with that. That was the bulk of the meeting.

The proposed position, supporting Universal Access to Clean Water on Indian Reservations and in Alaska Native Communities, was the most complex of the positions we discussed in the Legal Committee. The Committee made some significant edits to this position in the meeting. We wanted to give everybody a chance to go ahead and take a look at it. I don't have a good roadmap for the edits that we did make, but I will tell you that a lot of the edits were just cleaning up the wording, trying to make the document internally consistent with itself – consistency with regard to how the resolution references Indian tribes and Alaska Native communities so that should be a uniform phrase throughout the document. We added the Department of the Interior to be amongst the agencies that have programs, further supporting the idea of a whole-of-government approach, supporting federal agencies working with one another across agency boundaries.

In general, I think the thrust of this proposal is simply to support expedited or current development of clean drinking water supplies for tribal communities, given the immediate COVID-19 pandemic, as well as just a historical reality that a greater percentage of our Native

American communities don't have current access to reliable clean drinking water or have systems that need attention. Becky, I don't know if there's anything additional to add, or if anyone has questions, concerns or thoughts with regard to this resolution.

Becky Mitchell: Nothing additional Chris. Really, I think the focus here is asking for a commitment – and federal funding –for a collaborative and coordinated, expedited approach to make this happen.

With no further discussion, Chris recommended the adoption of the proposed position by the Full Council. Becky Mitchell made a motion. Chris Brown seconded, and the proposed position was approved by the Full Council.

The Legal Committee considered two additional positions. Sunsetting Position No. 422, regarding state primacy over groundwater. There were no additional changes than those discussed by the Executive Committee. The other was an amended Position No. 457, which supports the Dividing the Waters Program for judges. Again, the Legal Committee did not make any additional edits to the version provided in the meeting materials. Chris recommended adoption of both of these positions. Motion by Greg Ridgley. Seconded by Becky Mitchell. With no further discussion or opposition, the positions were approved by the Full Council.

#### **D. Executive Committee**

Jon Niermann asked Tony to fill in for him. The Executive Committee met and recommended changes to the proposed and sunsetting resolutions. A budget for the upcoming fiscal year was proposed and approved. Our current Council financial position is good, as is the outlook. The Management Subcommittee has authority to make changes as needed. States can expect to see dues notices the end of April or May, as is our custom to allow you to pay dues in advance, if by chance you have extra funds in this fiscal year. Assuming that we will be meeting in June, we will have time to revised and bring to the Council a final budget for the next fiscal year. We went over a lot of what the Council has done. Jon, I think that covers everything and there is nothing to bring to the Full Council for further action.

#### **WESTFAST REPORT**

Pat Lambert, Western States Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST) Chair, began by giving an overview of WestFAST for those who were new to the Council. WestFAST is a collaboration between 12 federal agencies with water management responsibilities in the West. WestFAST was established to support the WSWC, and the Western Governors Association (and Western partners in general) in coordinating federal efforts regarding water resources. WestFAST currently has 23 members. The Executive Committee steers activities and includes Pat Lambert (USGS) , Kevin Werner (NOAA) and Roger Gorke (EPA). They engage in collaborative work facilitated by WestFAST's Liaison, Heather Hofmann (USDA). Pat reviewed WestFAST's membership list, noting that it's a pretty impressive list of people. In many cases, members are from the western states, but also have representation from folks that

are attached at the national level. These folks have significant experience, and positions that enable WestFAST to be well connected from the headquarters of these agencies to the local programs that are influential in western water. Since we met last, we've had changes to our membership. Four new incoming members: Brad Wolaver and Rachel Esralew, both from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW) and who represent the National Wildlife Refuge System in different areas; Paula Cuttilo, from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM); and then Travis Yonts, from the Bureau of Reclamation.

The WestFAST webpage has been updated recently, along with the WSWC's website update. Pat recommended that everyone take a look.

Pat provided an update on WestFAST priorities for 2021. WestFAST will continue to develop and enhance lines of communication, raise awareness of the need for and opportunities for proactive collaboration, and develop effective working relationships in areas of water planning support, drought resilience, infrastructure, and wildfire/water, as well as maintaining communication from state partners to WestFAST to WestFAST agency Principals.

This year we want to see how we are supporting water planning at the state level. We began a week or so ago with a webinar reviewing our efforts in southwest Oklahoma with water and drought planning. We heard from Duane Smith, a former WSWC member, who is still very active in Oklahoma water planning. We are proposing – and we've reached out to some of the states and to Tony with the WSWC – for WestFAST to continue along the lines of the recommendations from this report. We want to conduct case studies on how we're doing as far as supporting this planning effort where appropriate, and what can we do to develop better practices. We've proposed conducting some listening sessions this spring or summer, just to better understand of how state and local planners consider, access, and utilize federal agency assets and programs in state water planning and implementation. We hope to be able to summarize these first steps into some recommendations at the state and local level and how we can do a better job with a unified front and support water planning and states.

We also hope to catalog and communicate across programs to address wildfire impacts on water resources. WestFAST would like to do a better job of understanding how the puzzle pieces are fitting, and develop better lines of communication and working relationships.

Pat mentioned that the WestFAST special topic webinar series has been very successful and introduced Heather Hofmann, to give a little background on herself, and about the seminar series and what we've got planned together.

Heather Hofmann, WestFAST Liaison, began her role as liaison with WestFAST and the WSWC in January 2021. Her background is in natural resources management and water conflict resolution. She has worked for tribes and the Department of Interior and now is with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the National Water and Climate Center.

Many WestFAST and WSWC members have attended the webinar series. If you're interested in seeing recordings of any of the previous webinars, they are on our website. She

also really appreciates hearing feedback and welcomes any suggestions for future topics. She is hoping the listening sessions that Pat mentioned will also result in topics and ideas that can help better inform and connect us in new ways. The next webinar is scheduled on April 21. They're always available to answer questions anytime and so please don't hesitate to contact us.

Pat noted how important this liaison position is for western states and the WSWC. It is the principal point of contact along with the WestFAST Chair for western states and the WSWC to engage with WestFAST. Heather's doing a great job and filling big shoes of the previous liaison's before her.

### **Questions/Comments:**

Tony asked Pat to mention the WestFAST Principals.

Pat: Another purpose of WestFAST is to allow a working link from our agencies' activities in the West to the principal leaders, who are usually at a directors level or associate directors level of the water piece of our departments and bureaus. Periodically, the WSWC and WestFAST team members will gather with those principles in Washington, D.C. Currently, that group is in a little bit of flux, with the new administration and some of the transitions that are going on. Hopefully, within the next month or so, we will have solidified our new membership of principles so the next time we have these combined meetings we will be ready to go. This is really an important part of WestFAST.

Jen Verleger: The WSWC has a resolution of appreciation for Deb Lawler, the immediate past liaison. She read a portion of the resolution and mentioned it can be taken up at the end of the meeting with the other resolutions.

### **ELECTION OF OFFICERS - Nominating Subcommittee**

Jeanine Jones noted that with Tim Davis' move into a new position in Utah, it put us in the position of needing to update our slate of officers. The Nominating Subcommittee recommend that Jennifer Verleger move up to Chair and Jon Niermann move into the position of Vice Chair, with John D'Antonio as Treasurer. Jeanine made a motion. Mary Verner seconded. With no further discussion or opposition, the newly recommend officers were elected.

### **STATE REPORTS**

State reports were skipped due to time constraints.

### **FUTURE COUNCIL MEETINGS**

There will be further discussion as to whether or not the WSWC Summer (196th) meetings scheduled for Wyoming will be held in person or not. Please complete the survey sent out by the staff.

### **SUNSETTING POSITIONS FOR SUMMER 2021 MEETINGS**

Tab XYZ of the briefing materials contains sunsetting positions for the 2021 Summer meetings. Please review them and get any changes to staff.

### **OTHER MATTERS**

Jen: We have had several people who have left the Council because of turnover in their respective states, and so we have many proposed resolutions of appreciation. In addition to the one for Deb Lawler that I previously read, we propose the following: Susan Metzger (Kansas) who served from March 2016 to February 2021; John Tubbs (Montana) who served from April 2018 to December 2020; John Stulp (Colorado) who served beginning in March of 2012; and Kent Woodmansey (South Dakota) who served since April 2013; and one for Jan Langel (Montana) who served since April 2018. I would entertain a motion on all of those resolutions and Deb's. Becky made a motion. Micheline seconded and all the resolution of appreciation's were approved by acclamation.

There being no other matters, the meeting was adjourned.