



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

682 East Vine Street / Suite 7 / Murray, UT 84107 / (801) 685-2555 / Fax 685-2559 / www.westernstateswater.org

Chair - Jennifer Verleger; Executive Director - Tony Willardson; Editor - Michelle Bushman; Subscriptions - Julie Groat

WESTERN GOVERNORS/CONGRESS

WRDA/Infrastructure

On March 23, Western Governors' Association (WGA) sent two letters in support of water infrastructure to the leadership of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water and Environment, and to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power, in advance of hearings.

The House Subcommittee hearing was titled "The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2020: Status of Essential Provisions" and focused on how the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) was implementing WRDA. Subcommittee Chair Representative Grace Napolitano (D-CA) said: "We want to know the Corps implements the law expeditiously, as Congress intended, and ensure the Corps remains responsible to national, regional, and local priorities and to the changing climate with the proper budget to address this issue." WGA said: "The Western Governors appreciate your oversight of this important legislation, which helps support water infrastructure construction and maintenance, as well as invasive species management, across the West." The WGA letter referenced WGA's two water policy resolutions, 2018-08: Water Resource Management in the West and 2018-12: Water Quality in the West, as well as 2019-06: Biosecurity and Invasive Species Management. https://westgov.org/images/editor/House_TI_WRDA_hearing_WGA_submittal.pdf

The Senate Subcommittee hearing focused on examining the "viability of incorporating natural infrastructure in western water management and policy to support economic development, protect watershed health, and build more resilient communities," specifically for the Bureau of Reclamation. WGA's letter included the resolutions listed above, as well as 2021-03: National Forest and Range Management. The letter stated: "These WGA policy resolutions address water policy and infrastructure management, interactions between natural resource management and watershed health, and the effects of terrestrial and aquatic invasive species on water quality and quantity across the West." https://westgov.org/images/editor/SENRR_Water_Infra_hearing_WGA_submittal.pdf

ADMINISTRATION/WATER RESOURCES

USGS/Streamgages

On March 2, the Congressional Research Service published the "U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Streamgaging Network: Overview and Issues for Congress." The report summarized the current status of the network, the funding structure, and implementation of the SECURE Water Act of 2009 (Title IX, Subtitle F of PL 111-11), as well as an overview of streamgages and their importance for managing the nation's water resources.

"USGS funding has not met the SECURE Water Act of 2009 mandate for an entirely federally funded suite of no fewer than 4,700 streamgaging sites. In FY2020, 35% of [federal priority streamgages] (FPS) were funded solely by USGS FPS program funds. The USGS relies on other federal agencies or nonfederal partners to fund the rest of the FPS. In FY2020, 25% of gages were funded by a combination of FPS and non-FPS funds and 40% were funded entirely by non-FPS funds. Specific funding sources for the operation of FPS gages include FPS appropriated funds (about 42%), [Cooperative Matching Funds] (CMF) (about 9%), federal agencies other than the USGS (about 23%), and nonfederal partners (about 26%). For the entire USGS Streamgaging Network, the nonfederal cost-share contribution has increased from approximately 50% in the early 1990s to an average of approximately 69% in FY2020."

Funding considerations for Congress included maintaining, increasing, or decreasing the size of the network, restoring streamgages that have been damaged by flood or other natural hazards, and updating the network through increased investments in modernized telemetry systems and related information infrastructure, as well as for the Next Generation Water Observing System (NGWOS) that uses modern models and computational methods to estimate streamflow.

Policy considerations included: (1) pursuing both the FPS mandate of funding 4,700 streamgages across the country and the NGWOS; (2) amending the SECURE Water Act of 2009 to facilitate completion of the FPS; and (3) replacing the FPS Network with the NGWOS by

authorizing the NGWOS as a pilot program or broader program, similar to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) pilot program for commercial weather data directed in the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act of 2017 (PL 115-25). <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45695>

NOAA/Weather Forecasting

On March 22, NOAA released a new version of their flagship global weather model, the Global Forecast System (GFS), with significant upgrades. These include: (1) improved modeling for snowfall location; (2) heavy rainfall forecasts; (3) hurricane genesis forecasting; and (4) better overall model performance.

In a press release, NOAA National Weather Service Director Louis Uccellini said the upgrades to supercomputing capacity would advance weather forecasting and establish "a strong foundation for further planned enhancements that will allow for the assimilation of even more data into the model." Vijay Tallapragada, Chief, Modeling and Data Assimilation Branch, NOAA's Environmental Modeling Center, highlighted the model's advances for extreme weather. He said the model predicted a "significant weather event" one to two days in advance of the operational model and modeled more precise information on the location, magnitude, density and timing of snow forecasts (*E&E News*, 3/23/21). It was also able to outperform other models (from Canada, Europe, Britain, U.S. Navy, and other NOAA models) for eight days in a row during the last 31 days.

NOAA is also modernizing the Global Data Assimilation System (GDAS), which will allow the model to take in more data from geostationary and polar-orbiting satellites, as well as flight-level wind, temperature and moisture observations from aircraft. <https://www.noaa.gov/media-release/noaa-upgrades-flagship-us-global-weather-model>.

CONGRESS/WATER QUALITY

Drinking Water/Infrastructure/Wastewater

On March 17, Shellie Chard, Water Quality Division Director, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and a WSWC member, testified before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, Fisheries, Water and Wildlife Subcommittee. Her testimony examined the challenges facing drinking water and wastewater infrastructure projects.

Chard highlighted six themes important to state water agencies: (1) water and wastewater systems must become more resilient to significant weather event and changes in climate; (2) innovation and flexibility in implementation of water policy and regulation is important; (3) funding for research and development for

cost effective treatment technologies must be expanded; (4) workforce training is needed; (5) funding for infrastructure programs must be increased; and (6) funding for public water supply supervision must be increased. <https://www.epw.senate.gov>

CONGRESS/WATER RESOURCES

Water for Conservation and Farming Act

On March 23, Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) introduced the Water for Conservation and Farming Act "...to provide for drought preparedness and improved water supply reliability." The bill has two titles focused on infrastructure development and ecosystem protection and restoration.

The legislation: (1) creates a Bureau of Reclamation Infrastructure Fund with \$300M to support water recycling projects, water-use efficiency projects and dam safety projects; (2) establishes a grant program for any Reclamation States and others to complete habitat restoration projects that improve watershed health and mitigate climate change; (3) expands the WaterSMART program to increase water supply reliability by funding infrastructure and conservation projects that conserve water, increase efficiency and improve the condition of natural water recharge infrastructure; (4) establishes a \$3.5M waterbird and shorebird habitat program to provide incentives to farmers to create temporary habitat for bird migration; (5) authorizes \$40M for the Department of the Interior's Cooperative Watershed Management Program for water and conservation projects that support disadvantaged communities and generate environmental benefits to fisheries, wildlife and habitats; (6) improves drought preparedness by requiring federal agency plans to sustain critically important fisheries during drought; and (7) authorizes \$25M through 2027 for projects under the Fisheries Restoration and Irrigation Mitigation Act (P.L. 106-502) to support voluntary fish screen and passage projects in Idaho, California, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.

On March 24, during a Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources' Subcommittee on Water and Power hearing on water infrastructure, Senator Wyden said: "My legislation instructs the Bureau of Reclamation to start expanding their tool box.... The Bureau of Reclamation has to be creative using natural infrastructure to reduce water conflicts, prioritize projects with multiple benefits - water, recreation, habitat; and the bill creates new ways for the Bureau to work with farmers to plan irrigation seasons and also address issues like migratory birds and endangered fish." He went on to say, "Investing in water conservation infrastructure will pay dividends in reducing the demand for water, improving biodiversity and helping farmers and ranchers better plan and prepare for droughts." <https://www.wyden.senate.gov>

The WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL is a government entity 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.