



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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WESTERN GOVERNORS/ADMINISTRATION State-Federal Relations/Invasive Species

On April 12, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) sent a letter to Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior, Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture, and Taylor Ferrell, Acting Assistant Secretary for the Army (Civil Works) regarding aquatic invasive species and the threats they pose to western waters. The letter stated, "Western Governors were encouraged by the release of the November 2020 Interagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to Support Rapid Response Actions for Invasive Zebra and Quagga Mussels in the Western Waters of the United States. The MOU helps to address Governors' priorities on rapid response to new detections of invasive mussels in western states. It works to improve data sharing and federal, state and tribal coordination, communication and collaboration. We encourage the new Administration to fully implement the MOU and to consider Western Governors as a partner in its implementation."

The letter highlighted the importance of state-federal collaboration and made several suggestions on how to implement the MOU. These included: (1) identifying opportunities or capacity gaps for providing federal financial or in-kind support for the development and implementation of rapid response plans at national, regional, state or local scales; (2) encouraging federal employees involved in aquatic invasive species rapid response actions to maintain the necessary skills and training in National Incident Management System (NIMS) approaches and protocols; (3) encouraging support of table-top and field preparedness exercises for rapid response actions and the participation of federal employees in those exercises; and (4) supporting basin-wide coordination for state, federal and tribal rapid response actions, as appropriate (e.g., Columbia River Basin, Upper Colorado River Basin, Lower Colorado River Basin, Upper Missouri River Basin, Arkansas River Basin).

They also encouraged MOU signatories to clarify the roles and responsibilities of federal and state agencies during rapid response efforts, to create a single federal authority overseeing aquatic invasive species treatment permitting, and to create a single federal point of contact for reporting new mussel detections.

Throughout March, WGA also sent letters to the newly-appointed heads of several federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Interior (DOI), Department of Agriculture (USDA), and Department of Defense (DOD). The letters outlined Western Governors' policy priorities specific to each agencies' jurisdiction, and encouraged a "close and productive working relationship." Each letter stated, "One of Western Governors' foundational policy statements is WGA Policy Resolution 2021-01, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship. The resolution notes that '[e]ach Executive department and agency should have a clear and accountable process to provide each state - through its Governor or their designees - with early, meaningful, substantive, and ongoing consultation in the development of federal policies that affect states.' We submit that such consultation should commence immediately, both with respect to departmental policies under review and those under development." See westgov.org/letters.

Each agency received a high-level overview of policy statements relevant to their jurisdiction, many of which detailed several of the following water-related policy priorities as applicable: (1) water infrastructure and the importance of streamlining infrastructure planning; (2) environmental review processes; (3) managing water resources; (4) addressing drought; (5) local watershed planning; (6) federal water data programs; (7) snow survey and weather forecasting; (8) wildfire management; (9) Clean Water Act jurisdiction and implementation; (10) collaboration between states and federal agencies; (11) invasive species; (12) importance of state data in federal decision-making; and (13) water conservation.

ADMINISTRATION/WATER RESOURCES Bureau of Reclamation/San Juan-Chama Project

On March 25, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) celebrated the 50th anniversary of the San Juan-Chama Project, a regional water transfer project that crosses two states and two major river basins. The project delivers part of New Mexico's share of Colorado River water to New Mexico from Colorado, within the Rio Grande basin, primarily benefitting Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and those served by the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD). Other entities that

receive portions of the supply include several tribes and smaller municipalities throughout New Mexico.

The press release stated, "The San Juan-Chama Project consists of a series of three diversion dams and three tunnels that divert water from the Navajo, Little Navajo, and Rio Blanco in southern Colorado to Heron Reservoir in northern New Mexico.... The storage feature of the project is Heron Reservoir, just off the Rio Chama upstream from El Vado Reservoir, in northern New Mexico." Reclamation has released 750,000 acre-feet of water over the past 20 years to supplement flows to the Middle Rio Grande. Jennifer Faler, USBR Albuquerque Area Manager, said: "At times during the summers of 2018 and 2020, water from this project made up the majority of the water flowing through the Rio Grande in Albuquerque.... As drought continues to grip the Southwest, this supplemental water supply is ever more important."

CONGRESS/ADMINISTRATION **U.S. Department of Agriculture**

On April 14, the House Committee on Appropriations Agriculture Subcommittee held a hearing on USDA's budget request and plans for the coming year. Secretary Vilsack testified, welcomed by Chairman Sanford Bishop Jr. (D-GA). During opening statements, Ranking Member Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) focused on the future of farming, the use of technology, and advancing environmental science. He discussed the importance of conservation and of being a good steward of our natural resources. "The question becomes then, how can we use our conservation programs for a couple of outcomes - enhanced environmental gains combined with healthy harvesting and enhanced revenue to the farmer to meet the real possibility of sustainability, which is both regenerative and valuable at the same time. Sustainability is those two things - regeneration and return - and as we all know and celebrate farmers and ranchers are the first stewards of the land."

Secretary Vilsack discussed four "big ideas" to help carry out the American Rescue Plan, the pending American Jobs Plan, and the forthcoming mandatory budget and American Families Plan: (1) climate change represents an opportunity to bring profitability back to farming and rural communities to create jobs; (2) root out systemic barriers that exist in agency programs that have affected access to resources and recognize the cumulative, long-term impacts of past discrimination; (3) profitability and resiliency in farming are as important as productivity; and (4) nutrition insecurity is as important as food insecurity, looking at how to leverage agency programs to improve access to nutritious food for children and adults. He ended with, "These big ideas will result in significant paradigm shifts, greater equity, and greater opportunity in rural places."

WATER RESOURCES

Drought/Wildfire

On March 17, Utah Governor Spencer Cox issued a statewide drought declaration, the first for the state since 2018. Winter snowpack in Utah is 70% of average, and soil moisture is at a record low since monitoring began in 2006, absorbing precipitation runoff that typically fills reservoirs, lakes, and streams. On March 31, Oregon Governor Kate Brown signed a drought declaration for Klamath County and noted the need for long-term solutions. She said: "The Klamath Basin faces one of the most difficult water years in recent memory.... There is too little water to go around, and as the climate changes we are experiencing hotter, drier summers. After last year's wildfire season, we are closely monitoring drought conditions in the Klamath Basin and statewide."

On April 8, Secretary Haaland and Secretary Vilsack released a joint statement: "Unfortunately, drought conditions in the West continue to worsen, including in areas like the Klamath River Basin, leading to the potential for historically low water allocations. The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture recognize the urgency of this crisis and its impacts on farmers, Tribes, and communities, and are committed to an all-hands-on-deck approach that both minimizes the impacts of the drought and develops a long-term plan to facilitate conservation and economic growth. Our agencies are actively working with Oregon, California and other western states to coordinate resources and identify immediate financial and technical assistance for impacted irrigators and Tribes. We are also committed to robust and continued engagement with state, local, and Tribal governments to develop longer term measures to respond to climate change and improve water security."

On April 8, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) reported widespread dry conditions in the West and the potential for a severe 2021 wildfire season. More than half of the large wildfires are in Oklahoma, and North Dakota declared a state of emergency due to wildfires and wildfire risk. The National Interagency Fire Center reported large fires are also burning in Arizona, Colorado, Montana, and Texas. The U.S. Drought Monitor shows 58.4% of the U.S. is at least "abnormally dry," with 37.6% in moderate to exceptional drought. NRCS noted that most western mountain snowpacks are near peak accumulation, with many southwest regions reporting below normal snowpack on top of persistent drought conditions from last year. "The lowest snowpack percentage is in Arizona and New Mexico, where conditions are much below normal. In contrast, the Cascade Mountains of northern Oregon and Washington, and some areas of the Eastern Rockies, register above-normal snow conditions. Most of central and southern Alaska is also reporting an above-normal snowpack."

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.