



**RESOLUTION  
of the  
WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL  
in support of  
STATE CWA SECTION 401 CERTIFICATION AUTHORITY**

**Deadwood, South Dakota  
September 16, 2021**

**WHEREAS**, States have responsibly exercised their delegated authority under the Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 401 and under state water quality statutes to protect water quality, and must consider proposed activities and discharges in light of the states' designated water uses and related water quality standards; and

**WHEREAS**, the Council supports a balanced and integrated approach to achieve water and energy policy goals that plans for the future in sustainable ways, and recognizes legitimate state water and water quality management, protection and planning authorities to balance competing water uses; and

**WHEREAS**, the western states strongly support the planning and development of critical infrastructure and streamlined permitting processes, but such efforts should not come at the expense of states' authority to allocate, manage, and protect their water resources; and

**WHEREAS**, the development of hydropower and other federally permitted and licensed projects involving activities that may impact states' water quality standards should be appropriately undertaken in compliance with substantive and procedural state water law and delegated authority under CWA Section 401; and

**WHEREAS**, CWA Section 101(b) supports the states' critical role in protecting water quality by stating: "It is the policy of Congress to recognize, preserve, and protect the primary responsibilities and rights of States to prevent, reduce, and eliminate pollution."; and

**WHEREAS**, CWA Section 101(g) of the CWA further provides that it is the primary and exclusive authority of each state to "allocate quantities of water within its jurisdiction shall not be superseded, abrogated, or otherwise impaired by this Act"; and

**WHEREAS**, Section 27 of the Federal Power Act declares: "That nothing herein contained shall be construed as affecting or intending to affect or in any way to interfere with the laws of the respective States relating to the control, appropriation, use, or distribution of water used in irrigation or for municipal or other uses, or any vested right acquired therein."; and

**WHEREAS**, the Supreme Court has narrowly interpreted the Federal Power Act (16 U.S.C. 791a et seq.) reading Section 27 (16 U.S.C. 821) to limit state authority to set streamflow requirements on federally permitted and licensed projects, holding in *First Iowa Hydro-Electric Cooperative v. Federal Power Commission*, 328 U.S. 152 (1946) and in *California v. FERC*, 495 U.S. 490 (1990) that federal requirements preempted any state requirements, including efforts to establish minimum stream flows, noting that "...Congress remains free to alter what we have done"; and

**WHEREAS**, these rulings eroded state authority over state resources, and the Council has supported federal legislation to restore states' primary authority for regulating streamflows and water use and clarifying Congressional intent under the Federal Power Act; and

**WHEREAS**, in *P.U.D. No. 1 of Jefferson County v. Washington Department of Ecology*, 511 U.S. 700 (1994), the Supreme Court upheld a state's delegated authority to impose minimum stream flow conditions under

the CWA Section 401 certification process where necessary to protect a designated use for fish habitat, expressly rejecting any implied limitations on Section 401 certifications based on the *First Iowa* interpretation of the Federal Power Act; and

**WHEREAS**, an overly narrow reading of Section 401 would deprive the states of the ability to maintain the very beneficial uses that the Clean Water Act was designed to protect, and threaten the existing partnership between states and federal agencies based on cooperative federalism; and

**WHEREAS**, the vast majority of Section 401 certification requests are processed within 90 days, well within the one year allowed by current law, with relatively little if any backlog of certification actions; and

**WHEREAS**, most delays are typically due to submission of an incomplete application, applicants' non-responsiveness to requests for additional information, the completion of necessary study requirements, the size and complexity of some projects (and related impacts), substantive changes to the proposed project requiring further review, or constraints on state resources; and

**WHEREAS**, CWA Section 401 certification denials by states are rare and carefully considered, and are not examples of the failure of the system, as the process has been historically well-understood, reliable and supported by case law that provides certainty for both the states, federal agencies, and the regulated community; and

**WHEREAS**, recent actions taken by the federal government under the 2020 CWA Section 401 Certification Rule have caused some western states to issue an increased number of denials, due to inflexible deadlines that do not accommodate state public engagement laws or allow sufficient time to gather adequate information on project impacts; and

**WHEREAS**, the rule revision has also recently led to federal agencies waiving reopener conditions in nationwide permits imposed on federal projects by states under CWA Section 401, inconsistent with CWA Sections 101(b) and 101(g), Section 27 of the Federal Power Act, and the Supreme Court ruling under *P.U.D. No. 1 of Jefferson County v. Washington Department of Ecology*; and

**WHEREAS**, substantial and recurring changes to regulatory definitions, policies, and programs between federal Administrations create uncertainty for co-regulators and the regulated community, often leading to unreliable results, indecision, inconsistency, and lawsuits.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Western States Water Council supports any changes that strengthen the deference to state water laws and do not diminish the primary state authority and responsibility for the appropriation, allocation, development, conservation, and protection of their water resources, including minimum streamflows, and the protection of water quality and designated uses.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Western States Water Council strongly supports early state engagement in federal permitting and licensing actions and the coordination of state and federal environmental requirements and review processes for critical infrastructure without diminishing state authority.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Western States Water Council supports a mechanism in any rule development process for a representative number of states, as co-regulators with diverse perspectives and regions, to engage actively with EPA staff to provide direct and effective feedback on the implementability of a proposed rule.