

APRIL 2022



# WestFAST News

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Chair – Roger Gorke; Federal Liaison Officer – Heather Hofman

## A warm, dry March worsened record drought conditions in the West. Severe weather battered parts of the U.S.

NOAA 4/8/22



Tumbleweeds collect on the banks of Lake Powell on March 28, 2022 in Page, Arizona. As severe drought grips parts of the Western United States, water levels at Lake Powell have dropped to their lowest levels since the lake was created by damming the Colorado River in 1963. Lake Powell is currently at 25% of capacity, a historic low, and has also lost at least 7% of its total capacity. The Colorado River Basin connects Lake Powell and Lake Mead and supplies water to 40 million people in seven western states. (Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

March 2022 marked the third month in a row where precipitation was below average across the contiguous U.S., which led to an expanding drought and areas of record dryness throughout the West. March also brought several rounds of severe weather that pounded parts of the nation.

Below are more takeaways from NOAA's latest monthly U.S. climate report:

Climate by the numbers

### Year to date (January through March 2022)

The average contiguous U.S. temperature for the year to date was 36.3 degrees F (1.2 degrees above average), which ranks in the middle third of the record.

The year-to-date average rainfall was 5.66 inches — 1.30 inches below average — ranking as the seventh-driest January-March period for the U.S. on record.

The current multi-year drought across the western U.S. is the most extensive and intense drought in the 22-year history of the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#). Across some parts of the West, precipitation for the first three months of 2022 was at or near record-low levels.

During March, drought coverage across the contiguous U.S. reached 61% — the largest observed extent of drought since fall of 2012. With below-average snow cover and critically low reservoirs in some places, concerns are mounting that the western drought will continue to intensify and strain water supplies.

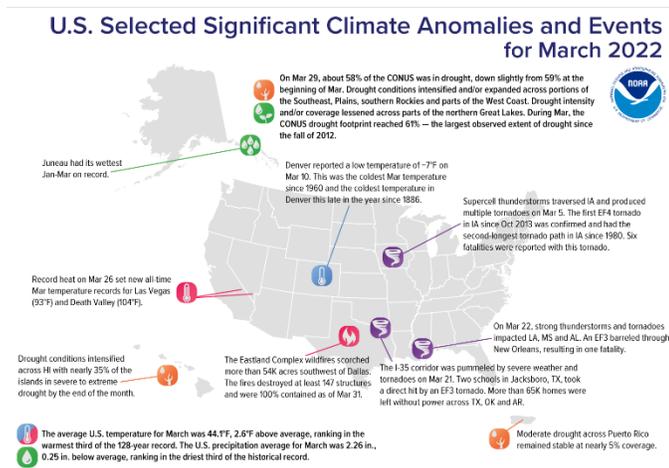
### March 2022

The average monthly temperature across the contiguous U.S. was 44.1 degrees F (2.6 degrees above the 20th-century average) and ranked in the warmest third of the 128-year climate record. Temperatures for the month were warmer than average across much of the West, and from the Midwest to the East Coast. Alaska also saw above-average temperatures across much of the state, with

Anchorage and Talkeetna both reporting a top-10 warm March.

The average precipitation in the contiguous U.S. last month was 2.26 inches (0.25 of an inch below average), ranking in the driest third of the climate record.

Precipitation was below average across much of the West, northern and southern Plains, and from the Tennessee Valley to the Mid-Atlantic and parts of the Northeast. Above-average precipitation fell from the central Plains to the Great Lakes, as well as across parts of the Deep South and Southeast. North Dakota saw its seventh-driest March on record, while Michigan had its eighth wettest.



A map of the United States plotted with significant climate events that occurred during March 2022. Please see the story below as well as the full climate report highlights at <http://bit.ly/USClimate202203offsite> link. (NOAA NCEI)

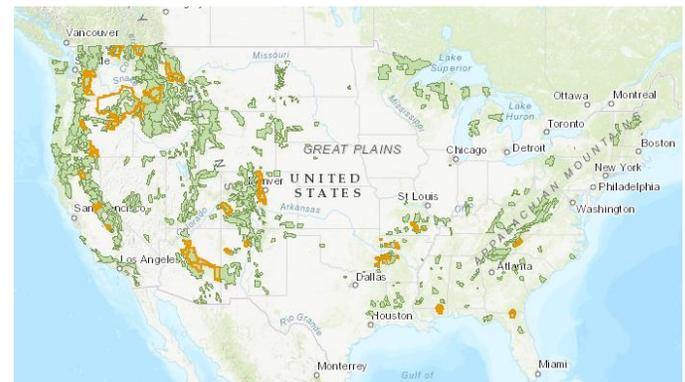
### Other notable climate events in March

- Tornadoes took a toll: Several severe weather outbreaks produced strong and damaging tornadoes last month. On March 5, supercell thunderstorms produced at least 13 confirmed tornadoes across Iowa, including a confirmed EF4 tornado in Winterset. From March 21-22, severe weather and tornadoes were reported from Texas to Alabama, including an EF3 tornado that substantially damaged two schools in Jacksboro, Texas; an EF3 tornado that ripped through the New Orleans metro area; and a severe weather outbreak impacted the Gulf Coast states from March 30-31, with at least 14 tornadoes and two fatalities.
- Billion-dollar disasters update: So far in 2022, no [billion-dollar weather and climate](#)

[disasters](#) have been confirmed, although several events are currently being evaluated. An [updated](#) analysis based on a 2022 Consumer Price Index adjustment calculates that the U.S. has sustained 323 separate weather and climate disasters since 1980, where overall damages and costs reached or exceeded \$1 billion. The total cost of these 323 events exceeds \$2.195 trillion.

## Biden-Harris Administration, USDA Forest Service Invest more than \$31 Million in 15 Landscape Restoration Projects

USFS 4/18/22



The Biden-Harris Administration and U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service today announced \$31.1 million for 15 projects funded through the [Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program](#) (CFLRP) that, with partnership support, aim to reduce the risk of severe wildfires, support local economies, create jobs and enhance forest and watershed health in eight states. These funds were made available through a combination of funding from the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#) and annual appropriations. The selected projects are in Arkansas, California, Colorado, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon and Washington.

“Programs like this show just how much we can accomplish across a shared landscape, when we work together,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “Under President Biden’s Leadership, the Department of Agriculture is leveraging partnerships and seeking new opportunities to

protect our communities, natural resources, and support and create jobs where they are needed most.”

“The selected projects will enhance the work already accomplished through the program. Together, they highlight the widespread support of the work to improve the nation’s natural resources for the benefit of everyone,” said Forest Service Chief Randy Moore. “The infusion of funding augments the work we do with other governments and partners around other important work such as improvements to infrastructure and the [10-year wildfire strategy](#). The Collaborative Forest Restoration Program is working for all Americans.”

Started in 2009, the 24 funded landscape projects advanced treatments to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire on more than 4.5 million acres -- the size of Connecticut and Rhode Island combined. The projects also supported more than \$2.3 billion in total labor income and engaged more than 420 organizations in local collaborative work alongside landowners and interested individuals. These landscape restoration activities established 224,000 acres of forest vegetation by planting, seeding, and natural regeneration while also reducing or eradicating invasive plants across 210,000 acres. Restoration also enhanced more than 1,760 miles of stream habitat. The multi-year funding commitment and collaborative capacity are key enabling conditions for these results.

The projects selected for FY22 investments include three that received funding in previous years:

- **Oregon:**

**\$3 million to Northern Blues Forest Restoration**, a 10.4-million-acre project to reduce wildfire risk and prepare the landscape to safely manage fire. The area has a strong history of successful cross-boundary, all-lands restoration collaboration.

**\$673,000 to the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project** includes 258,000 acres of high-value landscape with a broad array of collaborative support. Previously funded with \$6.7 million, the additional funding will keep the project going for another five years. Efforts focus on reducing high-severity wildfire in the wildland-urban interface, protecting watersheds, preserving recreation areas, and providing jobs and wood products.

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- **California:**

**\$757,000 to Dinkey Collaborative**, a 154,000-acre project that sits in the epicenter of unprecedented fuel loading due to the Southern Sierran tree mortality that to date has received \$7.6 million in CFLRP funding.

The 12 newly funded projects are:

- **Arkansas/Oklahoma:**

**\$1.1 million on 569,000 acres** for the large-scale restoration of the shortleaf pine- bluestem grass communities. Restoration includes reducing density with thinning and prescribed burns to promote healthier growth, improving habitat for federally listed species such as the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and providing economic benefits to the community.

- **Colorado/New Mexico:**

**\$3 million to Rio Chama**, a 3.8-million-acre project that spans lands managed by Tribes, states, the Bureau of Land Management and private landowners. This collective vision to reduce wildfire risk has galvanized communities in this landscape. The project will increase resilience to catastrophic wildfire and other natural disturbance events, sustaining healthy forests and watersheds for future generations.

- **Colorado:**

**\$3 million to the Southwest Colorado Restoration Initiative**, a 1.9-million-acre project that spans private, municipal, state and federal lands. The project aims to promote resilience, enabling the area to adapt to future disturbance while retaining ecosystem function, productivity and ecosystem services. The strategy is to enhance the resilience of critical watersheds, wildlife and aquatic habitats, community infrastructure, economic drivers and forest conditions.

- **California:**

**\$3 million to the Western Klamath Mountains Fire and Fire Resiliency Project**, a 1.2-million-acre project to prepare the landscape for frequent, yet smaller, lower-intensity wildfires to protect communities and critical transportation routes. This work will increase watershed health and ecosystem resilience that includes areas traditionally managed by the Karuk Tribe. The work will also prepare the land for traditional burning.

**\$3 million in the North Yuba River watershed** across 356,000 acres. The watershed provides clean water for homes, communities, businesses and ecosystems. There is an urgent need to address high wildfire hazard potential and areas

more susceptible to insects, disease and drought. Treatments will promote forest conditions that are more resilient, while restoring watershed health and native biodiversity.

- **New Mexico:**

**\$1 million to the Zuni Mountains** to extend the project on 253,000 acres to increase resilience to climate change, uncharacteristic crown fires, and support healthy communities and wildlife habitat. This project provides a long-term supply of wood for businesses and creates a suite of restoration-oriented businesses.

- **Oregon:**

**\$2 million to the Lakeview Stewardship** project on 859,000 acres important to rural communities for recreation and forestry sector jobs. The goal is to create a healthy, resilient and functional forest landscape maintained with fire to mitigate the threat of high-severity wildfires to dry forests, habitat, water quality and communities.

**\$3 million to the Southern Blues Restoration Coalition** for a million acres that suffer from departed fire regimes, species composition, and forest stand densities that threaten to destroy key habitat, old growth, important aquatic resources and private property due to uncharacteristic wildfires and effects of a changing climate. The overarching goal is restoration at a scale that will help native wildlife thrive, create forests that are resilient to climate change, and support the health, safety, and prosperity of local communities.

**\$3 million to the Rogue Basin Landscape Restoration Project** across 4.6 million acres. The proposed work will accelerate urgently needed restoration treatments to meet long-term, collaboratively developed strategic goals of wildfire risk reduction, landscape resiliency, improved wildlife habitat, watershed protection, adaptation, and social and economic resilience.

- **Missouri:**

**\$180,000 to the Missouri Pine Oak Woodlands** for 445,000 acres that contain Missouri's largest contiguous forest and designated scenic riverways with important conservation implications for the long-term survival of birds and aquatic life.

- **Washington:**

**\$1.4 million to treat 1.1 million acres** to align with the state's 20-year Forest Health Action Plan. The approach strategically places treatment to reduce wildfire risk for some of the most vulnerable cities and communities in the Pacific Northwest so that

multiple tools and tactics can be used to manage the fires safely and appropriately. Work will include fuels treatments, stream and fisheries improvements, and wildlife habitat restoration. **\$3 million to Northeast Washington Forest Vision 2020** on 916,000 acres to align with the state's 20-year Forest Health Action Plan. The project restores forested landscapes and watersheds to prepare for future wildfires and the effects of climate change. The overarching goals are to restore forests and habitats, reduce hazardous fuels, use woody biomass and small-diameter trees, and reduce the costs of treatments and wildfire management.

## **President Biden, USDA Announce \$420 Million Investment in Watershed Infrastructure Projects to Benefit Rural and Historically Underserved Communities**

**NRCS 4/21/22**

ALBANY, Georgia, April 21, 2022 – Today, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack was joined by White House Infrastructure Coordinator Mitch Landrieu and Congressman Sanford Bishop (GA-2) to announce the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will invest \$420 million in 132 infrastructure projects in 31 states, including rehabilitating dams, flood prevention, and watershed restoration projects. Today's investments are funded by President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and build on a \$166 million investment announced earlier this year.

Secretary Vilsack and Mitch Landrieu made the announcement in Albany, Georgia, as part of the Building a Better America Rural Infrastructure Tour. There, NRCS is helping improve the flow of Radium Springs. Radium Springs does not flow consistently and is highly dependent on underground water. Funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) will be used to implement strategies that blend efficient irrigation methods with better resource management to ensure consistent flow to support agriculture, provide wildlife habitat, improve water quantity and quality, and improve the recreational value within the

existing public park. Over \$69 million will go towards eight projects that will provide relief for flood related watershed concerns.

“President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rebuild our infrastructure, create good-paying jobs and build new economic opportunity,” Vilsack said. “Our watershed programs help communities rebuild after natural disasters and prepare for future events. This includes communities that we’ve historically underserved. The President believes we will grow the economy from the bottom up and middle out and this will occur in partnership with rural communities. That’s what Building A Better America is all about.”

Vilsack added: “The President believes that when rural communities thrive, America thrives. Building A Better America means that no community is left behind. These projects exemplify why this historic investment in our watersheds was needed and the adeptness of our agency to act swiftly.”

Today’s infrastructure announcement includes funding through two programs: the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program provides technical and financial assistance for new watershed infrastructure, and the Watershed Rehabilitation Program (REHAB) upgrades existing USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) dams.

The Albany project is funded through WFPO. Additional examples of WFPO projects funded through the investment announced today include:

- **The City of Pine Bluff, Arkansas:** Over the past five years, flooding has caused significant problems for both humans and property in Pine Bluff. Funding will be used to explore solutions, from design to construction, that will eliminate flooding issues that have impacted the safety, health and quality of life of its citizens.
- **Tumalo, Owyhee and East Fork Irrigation Districts Modernization Projects, Oregon:** Modernization provides a climate resilient solution to offset the impact of drought throughout the regions of Deschutes River, Tumalo Creek, Snake River, and Hood River watersheds. Open irrigation canals will be converted to pipe delivering water in a more efficient manner

and preserving water where it is needed to restore critical habitat for designated trout and salmon species. Pipe conveyance conserves water by reducing loss from evaporation and seepage, diverts less water from rivers, and increases flow downstream.

Examples of REHAB projects include:

- **Settingdown Creek Dam 54 & 56 – Forsyth County, Georgia:** Both earthen dam structures serve Forsyth County as part of the Coosa River Watershed and were built in 1954 to provide flood control to the surrounding community. The area has seen substantial urban growth within the drainage area and breach zones making both dams no longer compliant with federal or state safety laws. Funds are needed to extend the service life of the dams and bring them to current NRCS design safety criteria and performance standards.
- **Jewell Brook Watershed, Ludlow, Vermont - Sites #1, #2, #3, and #5:** The dams have outlived their design life span and three dams in the watershed experienced erosion during Hurricane Irene. Action is needed to reduce the risk of loss of life in the event of a potential breach and to reduce the risk of flood damage within the downstream flood zones to homes, businesses, infrastructure and agriculture. Funding will be used to rehabilitate the dam to current design safety criteria and performance standards.

In total, NRCS received \$918 million of BIL funding to allocate through its watershed programs. In addition to WFPO and REHAB, this includes funds for Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) to help communities recover from natural disasters. NRCS will continue to assist communities as it receives disaster requests.

A full list of projects is available on [NRCS’ Bipartisan Infrastructure Law webpage](#).

### **How Communities Can Get Help**

NRCS encourages communities to engage with their local project sponsors, participate in developing a sound conservation plan that serves to protect and preserve local watersheds, and connect with

their [local NRCS office](#) to learn more about Watershed Program assistance. NRCS will continue to review additional requests and compile a third round of BIL watershed funding as funds are available.

### More Information

Since 1948, NRCS' watershed programs have designed and built 11,850 dams, constructed water storage structures, flood management systems, stabilized streambanks, relocated residences, redirected stream flows, re-established wildlife habitat and more to save lives and protect watersheds.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [usda.gov](https://www.usda.gov).

## Secretary Haaland Announces \$95 Million for Wetland Conservation Projects and National Wildlife Refuges

**Funding will help conserve or restore more than 300,000 acres of wetland**

FWS 4/27/22



A greater sandhill crane reacts to the approach of a bald eagle. The bald eagle is closing in on a sandhill crane colt (juvenile) hidden nearby. Tom Koerner/USFWS

WASHINGTON – Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland today announced that \$95 million in funding has been approved by the [Migratory Bird Conservation Commission](#), which will provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its partners the ability to help conserve or restore more than 300,000 acres of wetland and associated upland habitats for waterfowl, songbirds and other birds across North America – including Canada and Mexico.

\$78 million in grants, made through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), will be matched by more than \$116 million in partner funds. In addition, the Commission approved \$17 million from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to conserve land in San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge in Texas for public use and hunt programs.

“The North American Wetlands Conservation Act is one of the most effective tools we have for migratory bird conservation around the country and across our northern and southern borders,” said Secretary Haaland. “The investments the Commission made today for these locally led wetlands and conservation projects will help ensure that birds continue to flourish for the next hundred years and beyond.”

Since 1991, \$2 billion in funds, matched by \$4 billion in partner funds, have been approved by the Commission, totaling \$6 billion for wetland conservation.

Wetlands provide many economic, ecological and social benefits to species and the surrounding communities. They are also important protections from the effects of climate change such as flooding and rising seas. NAWCA grants conserve bird populations and wetland habitat while supporting local economies and outdoor recreational opportunities, such as hunting, fishing and birdwatching. Partners in NAWCA projects include private landowners, states, local governments, conservation organizations, sportsmen's groups, Tribes, land trusts and corporations.

These efforts also help support the [America the Beautiful initiative](#), a locally led and voluntary campaign to protect, conserve, and restore America's lands and waters for the benefit of current and future generations.

In addition to grants approved by the Commission, funding to expand the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge was derived primarily from the sale of [Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps](#), commonly known as Duck Stamps, and import duties on imported arms and ammunition. Since 1934, the Federal Duck Stamp Program has provided more than \$1.1 billion for habitat conservation in the [National Wildlife Refuge System](#).

The funds will be used to purchase waterfowl habitat at the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. This acquisition of 5,641 acres will connect to an existing 4,800 acres of refuge lands. The combined area of more than 10,000 acres will be the largest protected piece of Columbia Bottomlands in Brazoria and Matagorda counties.

“The acquisition for the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge is a testament to the ongoing value of the Duck Stamp and funding support for the protection of wetland habitat for waterfowl and numerous other species in the National Wildlife Refuge System,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Martha Williams. “This new area will provide increased public opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing and wildlife observation, in this urban national wildlife refuge .”

[NAWCA](#) is the only federal grant program dedicated to the conservation of wetland habitats for migratory birds. Since 1989, funding has advanced the conservation of wetland habitats and their wildlife in all 50 U.S. states, Canada and Mexico, while engaging more than 6,600 partners in over 3,200 projects. Through NAWCA, federal funds are typically leveraged at twice the legally required dollar-for-dollar non-federal match-to-grant ratio.

A [complete list](#) of the approved U.S., Canada and Mexico NAWCA projects is available online.

Additional information about North American wetlands and migratory bird conservation can be found [online](#), where waterfowl enthusiasts, biologists and agency managers can find the most up-to-date waterfowl habitat and population information.

## Upcoming Meetings and Webinars

[WestFAST Webinars](#): WestFAST is hosting a series of webinars to discuss the importance of water resources related to wildfire prevention, reduction, recovery, and rehabilitation:

[Workshop on Improving Sub-seasonal to Seasonal Precipitation Forecasting to Support Water Management](#), May 17-19, 2022

[2022 WSWC Summer Meetings – Polson, MT – KwaTaqNuk Resort-Casino](#), Aug 02 - 05 2022

[Save the Date! 2022 National Water Use Data Workshop in Salt Lake City](#), Aug 16 - 18 2022

## Other Federal News

DOI 4/7/22. [Secretary Haaland Takes Action to Restore Tribal Authority to Adopt Water Laws](#)

USDA 4/11/22. [Biden Administration Announces Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Wildfire Mitigation Investments in Colorado](#)

EPA 4/14/22. [EPA Announces \\$524 Million Investment to Improve Health of Waterways and Oceans as Biden-Harris Administration Celebrates Earth Week](#)

NOAA 4/14/22. [March 2022, year to date rank as Earth's 5th warmest](#)

DOI 4/14/22. [Biden-Harris Administration Announces \\$38 Million from Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to Protect Aquatic Species and Habitats](#)

EPA 4/18/22. EPA Releases Equity Action Plan Alongside Federal Partners to Advance Environmental Justice and Civil Rights

EPA 4/18/22. EPA Announces \$524 Million Investment to Improve Health of Waterways and Oceans as Biden-Harris Administration Celebrates Earth Week

FWS 4/22/22. States Receive \$56 Million to Advance Conservation Efforts and Protect Vulnerable Wildlife

USDA 4/28/22 Secretary Vilsack Highlights \$39 Million Investment in Watershed Infrastructure Projects on Rural Infrastructure Tour

USBR 4/28/22. Reclamation announces Guardians of the Reservoir phase two winners

## People

USDA 4/18/22. U.S. Department of Agriculture Announces Key Staff Appointments

DOI 4/21/22. Interior Department Announces Additional Biden-Harris Appointees

The Western States Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST) is a collaboration between 13 Federal agencies with water management responsibilities in the West. WestFAST was established to support the Western States Water Council (WSWC), and the Western Governors Association in coordinating Federal efforts regarding water resources.