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# WestFAST News

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Chair – Roger Gorke; Federal Liaison Officer – Heather Hofman

## USDA Announces \$503 Million to Improve Outdoor Recreation and Conservation on National Forests

USFS 6/6/22



NORTH BEND, Wash

Today, Deputy Agriculture Secretary Dr. Jewel Bronaugh announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture is investing more than half a billion dollars through the Great American Outdoors Act to address deferred maintenance, improve infrastructure, increase user access and support rural economies while also meeting conservation goals.

Dr. Bronaugh made the announcement near the Denny Creek and Franklin Falls trailheads, both popular recreation sites along the I-90 corridor and part of the Mountains to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area. The area is part of the Mountains to Sound Greenway Project, which received more than \$14 million from the Great American Outdoors Act in Fiscal Year 2021. Dr. Bronaugh announced that this fiscal year, the area would receive an additional \$7.1 million to upgrade failing infrastructure and improve experiences for the more than 1.5 million visitors that come to the site every year.

“Projects like the one here on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest have incredible impacts on how visitors experience their national forests and grasslands,” said Dr. Bronaugh. “The Great American Outdoors Act and President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law are betting on America -- our special places, our communities and our people. Even beyond improved access, facilities and infrastructure, these investments create economic opportunity and good jobs where projects like this have the most impact.”

Total funding for the Great American Outdoors Act is split between the **Legacy Restoration Fund** and the **Land and Water Conservation Fund**.

“Thanks to the Great American Outdoors Act, we have already seen tremendous impact on our ability to enhance visitor access and land conservation efforts through the Legacy Restoration Fund and Land and Water Conservation Fund projects,” said Forest Service Chief Randy Moore. “Repairing and enhancing the infrastructure on the national forests and grasslands and expanding forest conservation ensures that the Forest Service continues to meet the need for outdoor recreation for current and future generations.”

The **Legacy Restoration Fund** focuses on addressing the backlog of deferred maintenance on federally managed public lands and is providing \$285 million for 450 projects in 38 states and Puerto Rico. In addition to the work on the Mountains to Sound Greenway Project, examples include improving campgrounds on the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia and

rebuilding roads leading to popular trails, campgrounds and wilderness areas on the Gila National Forest in New Mexico. More information on these and other Legacy Restoration Fund programs can be found on this [user-friendly online dashboard](#).

**The Land and Water Conservation Fund** received permanent funding through the Great American Outdoors Act, and expands Forest Service conservation efforts on national, state and private lands through voluntary land acquisition. This fiscal year, the Forest Service is investing \$218 million into these programs, launching 25 new projects to open up new fishing, hunting and recreation opportunities across tens of thousands of acres nationwide. One example is the Montana Great Outdoors Conservation Project, a \$20 million investment to improve public access to forests in Montana for hiking, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, berry picking and more. The project both improves access to previously disconnected lands and protects the land from non-forest uses, which is home to many species of concern, including grizzly bears, Canada lynx, gray wolves, and several fish species.

Learn more about the work the USDA Forest Service is doing through the Great American Outdoors Act at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/gaoa>.

## Department of the Interior Proposes Expanding Conservation Technique as Climate Change Threatens Greater Species Extinction

FWS 6/6/22



Endangered black-footed ferret kits.

In the first Endangered Species Act (ESA) interpretive rule produced under the Biden-Harris administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to revise [section 10\(j\) regulations](#) under the ESA to better facilitate recovery by allowing for the introduction of listed species to suitable habitats outside of their historical ranges. The proposed change will help improve the conservation and recovery of imperiled ESA-listed species in the coming decades, as growing impacts from climate change and invasive species cause habitats within their historical ranges to shift and become unsuitable.

Reintroducing species of plants and animals back into areas where they have disappeared has been a regularly used technique in wildlife conservation for decades, and federal agencies were authorized by Congress to create experimental populations to aid in that effort in 1982.

“Climate change and the rapid spread of invasive species pose an ever-increasing threat to native biodiversity. The time to act – and use every tool at our disposal – is now,” said **Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland**. “The growing extinction crisis highlights the importance of the Endangered Species Act and efforts to conserve species before declines become irreversible. This effort to update proven conservation tools will help ensure species on the cusp of extinction can recover and thrive for generations to come.”

Foundational conservation policy must keep pace with corresponding science, which has shown that climate change and invasive species are pushing plants and animals into completely new geographic areas for the habitat needed for their continued survival. Improving the ESA’s experimental population regulations will prevent more species from becoming stranded when conditions change in their current habitat and help establish them in more suitable habitats given these rising threats.

“Recovering species and preventing their extinction will require innovative, proactive, science-based policies and conservation actions that address the growing impacts from climate change and invasive species before it is too late,” said **Martha Williams, Service Director**. “The Service remains committed to working with our diverse state, local and Tribal partners to meet these growing

challenges, and appreciates how vital locally driven, partnership-based solutions will be in the coming years.”

The Service uses experimental populations as a recovery tool when there is a need to establish a new population of an ESA listed species outside of its current range. This tool furthers the conservation of the species by establishing more populations, while also providing fewer regulatory restrictions for affected partners. Establishment of an experimental population requires a rulemaking process, including publishing the rule in the Federal Register and providing the public an opportunity to review and submit comments. Experimental populations have been used to help advance the recovery of numerous listed species including but not limited to, California condors, whooping cranes, and Sonoran pronghorns. In addition, we are considering introducing the Guam kingfisher outside its historical range. The species currently cannot be reintroduced to its former habitat on Guam because of the presence of brown tree snakes.

Stemming this extinction crisis is a central component of the Biden-Harris administration’s [America the Beautiful](#) initiative. This locally led and voluntary effort aims to conserve, connect and restore 30 percent of lands and waters in the U.S. by 2030, while enhancing wildlife habitat and improving biodiversity. Under today’s proposed revisions, the Service would be able to introduce an experimental population of an ESA threatened or endangered species into suitable habitat outside of its current range and probable historical range. The revised regulation will not change the rulemaking process for designating a 10(j) experimental population or require reevaluation of existing experimental populations.

Scientists have already observed wildlife [responding to the effects of climate change](#), with some species and ecosystems losing habitat due to increased temperatures, altered rain and snow patterns, sea level rise, and greater frequency and intensity of drought and wildfires. These species include the Mt. Rainier ptarmigan in Washington state, Montana stoneflies and the emperor penguin, found in the Antarctic.

Climate change has also exacerbated existing threats to plants and wildlife, such as greater threats from disease and invasive species. In Hawaii, increased temperatures are driving the spread of avian malaria among some of the world’s most endangered birds, as mosquitoes move upslope. At [Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Maryland, coastal wetlands are being overtaken by the invasive grass phragmites -- a problem made worse by sea level rise -- causing the loss of habitat for imperiled species such as the saltmarsh sparrow.

The Service is also proposing other minor changes to provide more clarity in the regulations. We will accept comments from all interested parties until August 8, 2022. Please note that if you are using the Federal eRulemaking Portal, the deadline for submitting an electronic comment is 11:59 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on this date (<https://www.regulations.gov>). In the Search box, enter FWS-HQ-ES-2021-0033).

## May 2022 was warm and wet across the U.S. Wildfires raged, drought conditions improved slightly

NOAA 6/8/22



The Silver City Hotshots conduct firing operations along Highway 518 west of Holman, New Mexico, on May 9, 2022, during the Hermits Peak Fire. The fire became New Mexico's largest wildfire in state history in May 2022, scorching more than 315,000 acres. (Inciweb)

May was warm and wet across the Lower 48, according to scientists from NOAA’s National Centers for Environmental Information. The month also wrapped up a warm spring as wildfires continued to burn across the nation. Below are highlights from NOAA’s U.S. monthly climate report for May 2022:

## Climate by the numbers

### May 2022

The average May temperature across the contiguous U.S. was 61.9 degrees F (1.7 degrees above the 20th-century average), ranking in the warmest third of the 128-year record.

Temperatures across the Northwest and northern Rockies were below average, with much of the Southwest, Deep South and locations east of the Mississippi River above average. Triple-digit heat scorched portions of the South throughout the month, setting a number of temperature records across Texas. Texas had its second-warmest May on record, while Washington state saw its eighth coldest.

The average precipitation for May was 3.17 inches (0.26 of an inch above average), which ranked in the wettest third of the record.

Precipitation was above average across portions of the Northwest, northern and central Plains, Upper Mississippi Valley, Ohio Valley, eastern Gulf of Mexico and the Appalachians. Precipitation was below average from California to Texas and across portions of the Northeast. A dry month across the Southwest resulted in Arizona seeing its fifth-driest May on record, while above-average precipitation gave Washington state its eighth-wettest May.

### Meteorological spring (March through May 2022) | Year to date

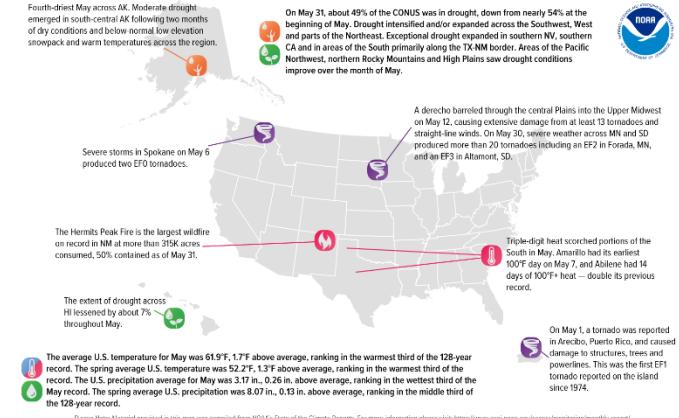
The average temperature for the contiguous U.S. during meteorological spring was 52.2 degrees F (1.3 degrees F above average), which ranked in the warmest third of the record. Rhode Island ranked fourth warmest while nine additional states — Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico and Texas — ranked among their ten-warmest spring seasons on record.

The spring precipitation total of 8.07 inches (0.13 of an inch above average) placed it in the middle third of the record. North Dakota ranked fourth wettest while New Mexico saw its sixth-driest spring.

The average U.S. temperature for the year to date (YTD, January through May) was 44.3 degrees F, 1.0 degree F above average, ranking in the warmest third of the record. The first five months of 2022 were also quite dry, with a precipitation total of

11.48 inches, 0.91 of an inch below average, and ranking in the driest third of the record. California saw its driest such YTD on record while Arizona, Nevada and Utah ranked third driest for this five-month period. Meanwhile, North Dakota saw its fourth-wettest YTD.

### U.S. Selected Significant Climate Anomalies and Events for May and Spring 2022



Please Note: Material provided in this map was compiled from NOAA's State of the Climate Reports. For more information please visit: <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/monthly-report/>

A map of the United States plotted with significant climate events that occurred during May 2022. Please see the story below as well as the full climate report highlights at <http://bit.ly/USClimate202205offsite> link. (NOAA/NCEI)

### Other notable highlights from the report

**Wildfires roared across the landscape:** As of May 31, the largest fire in New Mexico history, the Hermits Peak Fire, had consumed more than 315,000 acres and was 50% contained. Across all 50 states, 1.9 million acres have burned from January 1 through June 2 — more than twice the average for this time of year.

**Drought improved overall, with exceptions:** According to the May 31 [U.S. Drought Monitor report offsite link](#), 49.3% of the contiguous U.S. was in drought, down about 4.5% from the beginning of May. Areas of the Pacific Northwest, northern Rocky Mountains and High Plains saw drought conditions improve over the month of May while drought intensified or expanded across the Southwest, West and parts of the Northeast.

**A stormy May with fewer tornadoes:** Several rounds of severe weather hit the U.S. during May, producing 196 preliminary tornado reports. This is 71% of the 1991-2010 average for tornadoes for the month of May (276). On May 4, severe storms formed across the central Plains and produced several tornadoes including an EF3 tornado near Lockett, Texas. A line of severe storms, also known as a derecho, barreled across the central Plains into the Upper Midwest on May 12, causing extensive

damage from at least 13 tornadoes and straight-line winds. [More > Access NOAA's latest climate report and download the images.](#)

## EPA Announces \$6.5 Billion in New Funding Available for Water Infrastructure Projects

EPA 6/13/22



WASHINGTON – Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced the 2022 notices of funding availability for the agency's Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program and the State Infrastructure Financing Authority WIFIA (SWIFIA) program. This year's funding will provide up to \$6.5 billion in total funding to support \$13 billion in water infrastructure projects while creating more than 40,000 jobs.

"Water infrastructure provides the foundation for healthy and vibrant communities by delivering safe drinking water and returning our treated wastewater to the environment," said **EPA Assistant Administrator for Water Radhika Fox**. "In too many communities, these essential pipes and pumps are decades old and need to be upgraded. That's why EPA is providing \$6.5 billion in low-cost financing through WIFIA and SWIFIA that can help revitalize our water systems while creating good paying jobs and delivering significant economic benefits, especially in underserved and overburdened communities."

The notices of funding availability include \$5.5 billion for the WIFIA program and an additional \$1 billion for the SWIFIA program. This round of funding will prioritize funding in four areas:

- Increasing investment in economically stressed communities.
- Making rapid progress on lead service line replacement.
- Addressing PFAS and emerging contaminants.

- Supporting one water innovation and resilience.

By prioritizing investment in underserved communities, EPA is considering prospective WIFIA borrowers consistent with the goals of President Biden's Justice40 initiative. This initiative intends to ensure that federal agencies deliver at least 40% of benefits from certain investments, including water and wastewater infrastructure, to underserved communities.

To make WIFIA funding more adaptive to ongoing community needs, EPA is changing the way it accepts letters of interest from prospective borrowers. Letters of interest may be submitted by prospective borrowers and received by EPA at any time on or after September 6, 2022. The submission period will close when all available funds are committed to prospective borrowers. A rolling selection process allows EPA to provide year-round access to WIFIA funding, quicker selection decisions to prospective borrowers, and technical assistance to prospective borrowers. Since letters of interest will be evaluated when they are received, EPA encourages submissions at the beginning of the availability period.

EPA's WIFIA loan program is delivering the benefits of water infrastructure improvements nationwide. To date, EPA has closed 88 WIFIA loans that are providing over \$15 billion in credit assistance to help finance nearly \$33 billion for water infrastructure while creating nearly 100,000 jobs and saving ratepayers over \$5 billion. For more information about WIFIA and this funding announcement, visit: <https://www.epa.gov/wifia>.

### Background

Established by the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act of 2014, the WIFIA program is a federal loan and guarantee program at EPA that aims to accelerate investment in the nation's water infrastructure by providing long-term, low-cost supplemental loans for regionally and nationally significant projects.

WIFIA credit assistance can be used for a wide range of projects, including:

- Drinking water treatment and distribution projects.

- Wastewater conveyance and treatment projects.
- Nonpoint source pollution management program.
- Management, reduction, treatment, or recapture of stormwater.
- National estuary program projects.
- Enhanced energy efficiency projects at drinking water and wastewater facilities.
- Desalination, aquifer recharge, alternative water supply, and water recycling projects.
- Drought prevention, reduction, or mitigation projects.

## President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to Provide \$25.5 Million for Water Efficiency Projects in Eight Western States

*Investments will fund water efficiency and drought resilience projects in California, Colorado, Idaho, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wyoming*

BOR 6/21/22



A canal running through central Washington. Fourteen projects in eight states will receive \$25.5 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding.

**WASHINGTON** – The Department of the Interior today announced \$25.5 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds for WaterSMART Water and Energy Efficiency Grants to safeguard local water supplies in the face of severe western drought.

Fourteen projects in eight western states will be awarded funding to help local communities improve water use efficiency by lining canals, upgrading

water meters, installing automated gates to control water flow and making other infrastructure improvements. The projects are anticipated to save more than 12 billion gallons of water annually – enough to fill over roughly 880,000 swimming pools—through reductions in residential water use and improvements to increase irrigation efficiency. Two of the projects will also receive funding for solar energy installations to power the affiliated water facility and water district buildings. Including non-federal funding contributions, the projects represent more than \$130 million in water management improvements.

"Through President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we are making a historic investment in drought resilience and water infrastructure to help more families, farmers and Tribes gain access to clean water," said **Assistant Secretary for Water and Science Tanya Trujillo**. "The WaterSMART Water and Energy Efficiency Grants will help communities conserve and use water more efficiently, increase the production of hydropower and help us tackle historic drought." "Delivering water more efficiently is key to helping Western communities become more resilient to drought. These community-led projects are an example of how the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law supports our work to minimize drought impacts and develop long-term solutions to facilitate water conservation and economic growth," said **Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton**. "These grants represent a once in a generation opportunity to meet the long-term adaptation for drought and a changing climate."

President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law allocates \$8.3 billion for Bureau of Reclamation water infrastructure projects to repair aging water delivery systems, secure dams, complete rural water projects, protect aquatic ecosystems and fulfill Indian Water Rights Settlements. The funding announced today is part of the \$160 million in WaterSMART grants provided by the Law in 2022. Local governments in eight states set to receive funding must complete their project within three years.

## Upcoming Meetings and Webinars

**WestFAST Webinars:** WestFAST is hosting a series of webinars to discuss the importance of water resources and community engagement related to wildfire prevention, reduction, recovery, and rehabilitation

### Drought Prediction: Water Use Information - End User Listening Session

July 14, 2022, 1:00 pm - 3:30 pm EDT

### **For Borrowers: Resources to Help Utilities Recover in the Aftermath of a Disaster**

Disaster Response II: Tuesday, July 19, 1:00 - 3:00 pm (ET)

**Watch Disaster Response I:** Held Thursday, May 12, 1:00 – 2:30 pm (ET)

Get Prepared to Help Communities Recover More Quickly from a Disaster

**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

USFS 6/3/22. **USDA Seeks Proposals for Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership**

NRCS 6/9/22 **USDA, Army Corps of Engineers Renew Partnership on Infrastructure, Natural Resource Planning**

NOAA 6/15/22. **May 2022 among Earth's top-10 warmest**

NPS 6/16/22. **Statement from National Park Service Director Chuck Sams on flooding emergency in Yellowstone National Park**

USGS 6/17/21 - **Next Generation of USGS Water Data for the Nation**

BOR 6/23/22. **Reclamation welcomes public input on development of future Colorado River operations during historic drought**

USFS 6/23/22. **Secretary Vilsack Directs USDA Forest Service to Take Bold Action to Restore Forests, Improve Resilience, and Curb Climate Change**

FWS 6/23/22. **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries Rescind Regulatory Definition of "Habitat" Under the Endangered Species Act**

EPA 6/23/22. **EPA and Army Host West-Focused Virtual Regional WOTUS Roundtable**

EPA 6/24/22. **EPA Announces \$18 Million for Training and Technical Assistance for Small, Rural, and Tribal Wastewater Improvements**

NOAA 6/28/22. **U.S. supercomputers for weather and climate forecasts get major bump**

NOAA 6/28/22. **NASA DEVELOP Team Assesses Water Availability in the Sonoran Desert**

## People

NOAA 6/7/22. **Kenneth Graham selected as next director of NOAA's National Weather Service**

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.