



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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WESTERN GOVERNORS WGA Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Western Governors' Association (WGA) was held in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho on July 26-28. "Effective partnerships and collaboration... are indicative of how we work to resolve problems in the West," Idaho Gov. Brad Little said in his opening statements. "Today, we're seeing the evidence of the incredible progress we're making of getting more work done on the ground level."

On day one, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced the launch of a new \$1B competitive Community Wildfire Defense Grant program funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to assist at-risk communities, including tribal communities, non-profit organizations, state forestry agencies, and Alaska Native corporations with planning for and mitigating wildfire risks.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough, and Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg also engaged in a dialogue with the Governors.

Sessions with the Governors and experts covered drought, wildfire, cybersecurity and supply chain issues. North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum said: "The cybersecurity threat is not just a theoretical concept. There is a moral and financial responsibility to protect data at the state level... States are stakeholders in protecting every aspect of a person's life from a data standpoint." Jason Hoyt, Operational Technologies Manager, Central Utah Water Conservancy District, observed: "Some of these water utilities only have two people (staffers), and most of them don't have any knowledge of computers. There are a lot of resources out there, but these smaller utilities need help."

A roundtable on Restoring Burned Landscapes, led by Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, featured three special guests. Laura McCarthy, State Forester, State of New Mexico observed: "The ratio of burned lands to green lands is increasing, and that's a problem for all of us. I appreciate that the Working Lands, Working

Communities Initiative has given us a roadmap.... We are united across the west in the commitment to scaling up the restoration work. If we don't, we are going to lose our forests."

Randy Moore, Chief, U.S. Forest Service, said: "Million-acre fires are becoming more common, fire seasons are turning into fire years, and our tools and teams just aren't designed for this scale of work. We need to scale up...." In response to a question, he added, "There is nothing that would please me more than seeing longer-term agreements for restoration." Homer Wilkes, USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, remarked: "Fire doesn't know boundaries, so we have to make sure we address the resource concern after a fire.... The tool that's most utilized for that is the Good Neighbor Authority."

A panel on Drought in Western States featured Michael Connor, Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), U.S. Department of the Army. He said: "The overall objective of our effort is to educate ourselves as well as other agencies, states, and local communities as to how we can work with them." He announced a new directive for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to use its authority to maximize flexibility to combat drought, including the use of forecast informed reservoir operations (FIRO).

Morgan Gratz-Weiser, Deputy Natural Resources Policy Advisor and Legislative Coordinator for Oregon Gov. Kate Brown stated: "Regional water planning is a very hot topic, we know that each of our basins are unique, to make communities resilient we need to be bringing people together to make new plans for each basin."

Gloria Montañó Greene, USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, declared: "There is a demand and need to provide resources to farmers and ranchers in the riskiest business as they adapt and modify [operations to mitigate drought conditions]."

Tanya Trujillo, Assistant Secretary of Interior for Water and Science, highlighted the fact that with regard

to low water levels and reservoir operations: “We are literally operating under circumstances that our engineers have never seen before, that is the precise challenge we are facing in western states.”

Newly elected WGA Chair Colorado Gov. Jared Polis announced his The Heat Beneath Our Feet initiative, which is designed to jump-start geothermal energy generation in the West. “Geothermal energy is an opportunity to save people money, boost local economies, and help us achieve 100% renewable energy in Colorado by 2040,” Gov Polis said. “I look forward to making progress towards clean, lower-cost power through the Heat Beneath Our Feet initiative and the strong bipartisan partnership of the WGA that will lead geothermal energy innovation.”

The Governors also approved a new policy resolution, Working Lands, Working Communities, which outlines the Governors’ collective policy on land planning and management processes.

ADMINISTRATION **Corps/Drought**

On July 28, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Michael Connor directed the Army Corps of Engineers to effectively use its authorities and existing infrastructure capabilities to address extreme drought as part of the Drought Resilience Interagency Working Group.

The press release said: “The Corps’ Civil Works Program has responsibilities throughout the nation’s watersheds from peak to shore. It supports drought resilience through a range of actions, including its operations of existing water infrastructure; management of water resources for navigation, hydropower, and recreation along with municipal and agricultural uses; and development of climate data and tools. The broad scope of the Corps’ mission and assets – including major water infrastructure, wide-ranging water management responsibilities, and deep data and expertise – enables the agency to work with federal and non-federal partners across the nation to help build resilience in the face of unprecedented challenges posed by extreme drought and heat. For example, while meeting the primary purpose of flood-risk reduction at many of its reservoirs, the Corps also operates its existing facilities to support local water needs. The Corps has partnered with academia and federal, state and local agencies, to apply advanced weather and streamflow forecasts to modify reservoir operations in a manner that does not increase flood risk while also improving water availability and ecosystem benefits.”

The memo highlighted forecast informed reservoir operations and other operation deviations and projects

to ensure water supply. “In some cases, water availability may be significantly increased on an annual basis for less than 5% of the cost of new infrastructure investments on a dollar per af basis.” See https://www.army.mil/article/258848/army_corps_of_engineers_support_of_drought_resilient_communities

CONGRESS **WRDA 2022**

On July 28, the Senate passed the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) (H.R. 7776) by a vote of 93-1. The amended bill will need to be reconciled with the House, which passed their version of the bill on June 8 by a vote of 384-37.

Senate Environment and Public Works Chair Tom Carper (D-DE) said: “It’s a good day in the United States Senate when we pass bipartisan legislation that invests in our nation’s water infrastructure....Enacting WRDA 2022 will keep our economy moving, restore critical ecosystems, and protect communities big and small from the worsening impacts of climate change. I am grateful to our colleagues in the Senate for their support of this critical legislation, and I look forward to working with our counterparts in the House to finalize a bill that we can soon send to President Biden’s desk.”

House Transportation and Infrastructure Chair Peter DeFazio (D-OR) said: “This legislation shares many similarities with the House-passed WRDA bill – which was approved in June on an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote – with its focus on climate, resiliency and affordability for Corps projects, as well as addressing pending Corps of Engineers’ projects and studies awaiting Congressional authorization. I thank Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chair Tom Carper and Ranking Member Shelley Moore Capito for their leadership in moving this critical legislation and I look forward to working with them to pass the 5th biennial and bipartisan WRDA bill in a row.”

PEOPLE

Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy has appointed the following State of Alaska employees to be the designated official delegates/representatives to the WSWC and the pertinent WSWC Committees: **Emma Pokon**, Deputy Commissioner, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Executive Committee; **Julie Pack**, Assistant Attorney General, Alaska Department of Law, Legal Committee; **Randy Bates**, Director, Division of Water, AK DEC, Water Quality Committee; and **Tom Barrett**, Chief, Water Resources Section, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Water Resources Committee. We congratulate Emma, Julie, Randy, and Tom on their appointments and look forward to working with them.

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.