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WestFAST News

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Biden-Harris Administration Announces $2 Billion in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Funding to States and Territories to Address Emerging Contaminants like PFAS in Drinking Water

EPA 2/13/23

Today, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Michael S. Regan announced the availability of $2 billion from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to address emerging contaminants, like Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) in drinking water across the country. This investment, which is allocated to states and territories, will be made available to communities as grants through EPA's Emerging Contaminants in Small or Disadvantaged Communities (EC-SDC) Grant Program and will promote access to safe and clean water in small, rural, and disadvantaged communities while supporting local economies. Administrator Regan announced the water infrastructure investments in Maysville, North Carolina while holding a community roundtable with North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Elizabeth S. Biser and other state and local leaders.

"Too many American communities, especially those that are small, rural, or underserved, are suffering from exposure to PFAS and other harmful contaminants in their drinking water," said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan**.** "Thanks to President Biden's leadership, we are investing in America and providing billions of dollars to strengthen our nation's water infrastructure while safeguarding people's health and boosting local economies. These grants build on EPA's PFAS Strategic Roadmap and will help protect our smallest and most vulnerable communities from these persistent and dangerous chemicals."

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law invests $5 billion over five years to help communities that are on the frontlines of PFAS contamination reduce PFAS in drinking water. This initial allotment of $2 billion to states and territories can be used to prioritize infrastructure and source water treatment for pollutants, like PFAS and other emerging contaminants, and to conduct water quality testing.

EPA is also releasing the *Emerging Contaminants in Small or Disadvantaged Communities Grant Implementation* document. The implementation document provides states and communities with the information necessary to use this funding to address local water quality and public health challenges. These grants will enable communities to improve local water infrastructure and reduce emerging contaminants in drinking water by implementing solutions such as installing necessary treatment solutions.

Today's actions represent a significant milestone within the Biden-Harris Administration's commitments to combat PFAS pollution and safeguard drinking water, and specifically EPA's October 2021 PFAS Strategic Roadmap. Under the Roadmap, EPA is working

across the Agency to protect the public from the health impacts of PFAS. EPA has taken a number of actions to deliver progress on PFAS including:

- **Proposing to designate two PFAS as CERCLA hazardous substances**. If finalized, this will be a critical step toward increasing transparency around releases of PFAS and holding polluters accountable for cleaning up their contamination.
- **Releasing drinking water health advisories**. Acting in accordance with EPA's mission to protect public health and keep communities and public health authorities informed when new science becomes available, the Agency issued drinking water health advisories for four PFAS.
- **Laying the foundation to enhance data on PFAS**. This included an order under EPA's National PFAS Testing Strategy requiring companies to conduct PFAS testing, and nationwide sampling through the Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule for 29 PFAS in public drinking water systems.
- **Expanding the scientific understanding of PFAS**. The Agency issued more than 30 scientific publications by EPA researchers and released EPA's PFAS Thermal Treatment Database.
- **Translating the latest science into EPA's cross-agency PFAS efforts**. This included updating EPA's contaminated site cleanup tables, developing new PFAS methods and conducting toxicity assessments, and issuing draft national recommended water quality criteria to protect aquatic life.
- **Continuing engagement with the public**. EPA's PFAS work was informed by public webinars, stakeholder meetings, Congressional testimony, and engagement with EPA's federal advisory committees.

In addition to this new grant, EPA is also working to propose a PFAS National Primary Drinking Water Regulations (NPDWR) in the coming weeks. The draft proposed rule is currently undergoing interagency review and EPA will issue the proposed rule for public comment when it clears the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The Agency anticipates finalizing the rule by the end of 2023. Together, with today's announcement, these actions highlight EPA's commitments outlined in the PFAS Strategic Roadmap to protect public health and the environment from the impacts of PFAS. They also illustrate the benefits of investing in water—protecting public health and the environment, addressing key challenges facing communities, and creating jobs.

Visit EPA's website for more information.

Biden-Harris Administration Delivers $728 Million in Historic Investments to Address Western Drought, Improve Climate Resilience

Critical infrastructure investments under President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act to provide clean, reliable drinking water to communities and support water conservation in the Upper Colorado River Basin

DOI 2/13/23

As part of the Biden-Harris administration's commitment to enhance the resilience of the West to drought and climate change, the Department of the Interior today announced a $728 million investment to deliver clean, reliable drinking water to rural and Tribal communities, support water conservation in the Upper Colorado River Basin, and complete projects to improve water supply reliability. This historic funding from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 supplements unprecedented investments to protect the stability and sustainability of the Colorado River System now and into the future.

Funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, seven authorized rural water projects under construction in Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, and South Dakota will receive $278 million. These investments build on the allocation of $420 million for rural water construction activities in fiscal year 2022. The funding is helping projects complete construction of water treatment plants and intakes, supporting work related to pipeline connections, pump systems, and reservoir construction, and advancing other efforts to provide potable water to rural and Tribal communities.

The Bureau of Reclamation is also making available up to $125 million to support the relaunch of a System Conservation Pilot Program in the Upper Colorado River Basin. The renewed program – funded with an initial allocation through the Inflation Reduction Act – will help support water management and conservation efforts to improve water efficiency and ultimately protect the short-term sustainability of the Colorado River System.

This is in addition to the over $325 million in fiscal year 2023 funding that Reclamation has allocated for ongoing work on drought resilience projects across the country. Separately, this week the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced $25 million in WaterSMART funds to help Western farmers and ranchers conserve water through a partnership with Reclamation and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"The Biden-Harris administration is committed to making communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change -- this includes making the Colorado River Basin and the diverse communities that rely on it more resilient to the ongoing drought in the West," said **Secretary Deb Haaland**. "We are investing historic resources through the President's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act to provide clean, reliable drinking water to rural and Tribal communities, protect the stability and sustainability of the Colorado River System, and increase water efficiency across the West."

"The Bureau of Reclamation is committed to ensuring the continued availability of water across the West, while at the same time enhancing the resiliency of our communities to a changing climate. As we move forward with these urgent priorities, we are doing so in close collaboration with Basin states, Tribes, water managers, farmers, irrigators, and other stakeholders,"
said Reclamation Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton**.** "This historic funding underscores how proactive efforts from the Biden-Harris administration are helping increase water efficiency and conservation across the West."

Overall, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides Reclamation with $8.3 billion over five years for water infrastructure projects to advance drought resilience and expand access to clean water for families, farmers, and wildlife. The Inflation Reduction Act is investing an additional $4.6 billion to address the worsening drought crisis and plan for the hydrology of today and into the future. Combined, these laws represent the largest investments in climate resilience in the nation's history.

Historic Investments for Rural Water

Funding in fiscal year 2023 from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will enable significant advances of rural water systems and associated features:

- **$77.56 million for the Rocky Boys / North Central Montana Rural Water System** in Montana for core pipeline construction on segments 7 and 8, continued construction progress of a water treatment plant, as well as construction for segments associated with Havre, Chester, and Shelby Hub service areas.
- **$62.11 million for the Eastern New Mexico Rural Water System** in New Mexico for the construction of approximately 26 miles of raw water transmission pipeline.
- **$60 million for the Lewis & Clark Rural Water System** in Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota to support a water treatment plant, construction associated with the Sibley service area, and to reimburse states for related costs.
- **$26.33 million for the Garrison-Diversion Unit of the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program** in North Dakota for efforts associated with construction of water treatment plants, as well as efforts to support service on the Spirit Lake, Standing Rock, and Fort Berthold Reservations.
- **$25 million for the recently authorized Musselshell-Judith Rural Water System** in Montana for substantial completion of phases 3 and 4 of rural water construction activities.
- **$15 million for the Fort Peck Reservation – Dry Prairie Rural Water System** in Montana to support substantial completion of the project.
- **$12 million for the Jicarilla Apache Rural Water System** in New Mexico to support progress toward water treatment plant upgrades.

Detailed information on the fiscal year 2023 spend plan is available on Reclamation's website.

Upper Basin System Conservation Pilot Program

Up to $125 million in funding from the Inflation Reduction Act will enable Reclamation, in partnership with the Upper Colorado River Commission, to immediately move forward to implement the System Conservation Pilot Program. From 2015 to 2018, the Upper Basin System Conservation Pilot Program successfully tested new approaches to conserve water on the Colorado River and proved these measures are an effective approach to temporarily increase water efficiency and mitigate the impacts of drought.

The program is cooperatively managed by Reclamation and the Upper Division States of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming acting through the Upper Colorado River Commission.

This program supplements additional investments from the Biden-Harris administration to help increase water conservation, improve water efficiency, and prevent the System's reservoirs from falling to critically low elevations that would threaten water deliveries and power production. Reclamation is currently reviewing applications for a similar program in the Lower Colorado River Basin and expects to make additional announcements in the coming months to support water conservation and address the ongoing drought.

More about the implementation of the 2023 System Conservation Pilot Program can be found on the Upper Colorado River Commission website.

Investments from the Consolidated Appropriations Act:

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 provides an additional $325 million in funding for work in five categories within the Water and Related Resources account, including:

- Over $229 million for Water Conservation and Delivery;
- $50 million for Rural Water;
- $31 million for Environmental Restoration or Compliance;
- $11 million for Fish Passage and Fish Screens; and
- $4 million for Facilities Operation, Maintenance, and Rehabilitation.

This funding will go to construction and preconstruction activities where environmental compliance has been completed and the project will improve water supply reliability, improve water deliveries, enhance economic development, promote job growth, advance Tribal and non-Tribal water studies and activities, or address critical backlog maintenance and rehabilitation activities. More information on this funding can be found in Reclamation's Fiscal Year 2023 Distribution of Additional Funds for Ongoing Work list.

USDA Unveils Strategic Approach and New Investments for Addressing Water Supply Challenges for Producers in the West

USDA 2/13/23

As part of the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to making Western communities more resilient to the impacts of drought and climate change, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced new investments and strategies to help farmers and ranchers conserve water, address climate change and build drought resilience in the West, supported in part by funding from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

The Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action is a comprehensive, multi-state strategy under USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to address key water and land management challenges across 17 Western States. This is the latest NRCS-issued Framework for Conservation Action, all of which provide direction, support, and coordination to address resource concerns and threats across state boundaries and leverage new scientific tools to guide strategic program implementation on the ground. The Framework includes guidelines for identifying vulnerable agricultural landscapes and 13 strategies to help NRCS state leaders, water resource managers, and producers respond to priority challenges.

Guided by this new framework, the WaterSMART Initiative will invest $25 million in three new priority areas and 37 existing priority areas, assisting communities and producers in the West.

"Climate change is taking an enormous toll on farmers and ranchers in the West. Record breaking drought and exhausted water supplies are hurting agricultural operations and entire communities," said NRCS Chief Terry Cosby. "WaterSMART investments are being directed where they can have the most impact, and the new Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action lays the foundation for helping producers and communities address pressing climate challenges and build resiliency for the future. Complemented by investments from the Inflation Reduction Act, USDA is utilizing this framework and all available tools to deliver assistance that the severity of the water supply challenges in the West demand."

NRCS leveraged stakeholder feedback from a public listening session, input from the field and the latest scientific data to shape and inform the framework.

NRCS Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action

Agricultural producers steward more than two thirds of the nation's land resources. Water flows through these lands into reservoirs that supply communities with water. In many areas of the dry West, producers are struggling to irrigate their crops due to inadequate precipitation. Water supply in these areas is impacted by drought, increasing demand, and climate change.

NRCS has identified six major water and working land management challenges resulting from threats to water supply in the West:

1. Forecasting water supply.
2. Sustaining agricultural productivity.
3. Protecting groundwater availability.
4. Protecting surface water availability.
5. Managing and restoring rangelands and forestlands.
6. Responding to disruptions from catastrophic events.

For each of these major management challenges, opportunities exist to help individuals, entities and communities better manage water and working lands, conserve natural resources and build resilience to drought and climate change. Strategies include:

1. Improve reliability of water supply forecasts.
2. Improve soil moisture and irrigation water management.
3. Improve water and nutrient management in crop fields and pastures.
4. Modernize water infrastructure.
5. Improve community water supply by completing watershed projects.
6. Increase reuse of wastewater for agriculture and conservation.
7. Prolong aquifer life.
8. Complete managed aquifer recharge projects.
9. Reduce surface water withdrawals.
10. Install conservation systems that protect water quality.
11. Restore and protect streams and wetlands.
12. Manage and restore rangelands and forestlands.
13. Increase resilience during disaster recovery.

NRCS will use this framework to set comparable goals for effective program delivery and coordinate and track progress on helping individuals, entities and communities across the West address their management, conservation and resiliency needs.

From 2020 to 2022, more than $410 million of annual conservation assistance NRCS provided to producers helped address drought in the West. Now, with the new Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action in place, NRCS can further leverage the tools and coordination to build upon these investments and expand support by advancing innovative targeting at the state, local and regional levels, while also utilizing additional funds from the Inflation Reduction Act that advance both climate mitigation and Western water priorities.

WaterSMART Initiative

The $25 million investment in three new priority areas and 37 existing priority areas in the West is the result of a collaboration with NRCS and the Department of Interior's (DOI) WaterSMART Initiative to help farmers and ranchers conserve water and build drought resilience in their communities. These investments complement projects led by irrigation districts, water suppliers and other organizations receiving WaterSMART program funds from the Department of Interior's

Bureau of Reclamation. NRCS works with the Bureau of Reclamation to coordinate investments in the same community to accelerate water conservation and drought resilience and make a bigger impact where it is most needed.

The three new priority areas include:

- **California:** Madera Irrigation District Area (Funding amount: $1.5 million)
- **Hawaii:** Kohala Watershed Partnership Area (Funding amount: $345,000)
- **Washington:** Quincy Columbia Basin Irrigation District West Canal Area (Funding amount: $1.8 million)

Today's WaterSMART announcements compliment ongoing efforts across the Biden-Harris Administration to increase water conservation and address the historic drought conditions in the West. This week, the Department of Interior Bureau of Reclamation also announced $728 million in new investments for water conservation measures in the West.

Inflation Reduction Act and Climate-Smart Practices

Assistance delivered through the Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action and the WaterSMART Initiative also help build resilience to climate-change impacts such as droughts, wildfires and floods. Many of the resilience-focused activities and systems are also Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry mitigation activities, which support carbon sequestration or greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Climate-smart mitigation activities are supported by the additional investments available from the Inflation Reduction Act.

The Inflation Reduction Act is supporting investments in these and other mitigation activities in concert with NRCS's ongoing work to help producers and communities improve their operations and protect our natural resources in the face of global challenges. NRCS also announced today $850 million in fiscal year 2023 funding opportunities for producers in Western states and across the nation who want to participate in NRCS conservation programs and adopt climate-smart practices. This is part of a $19.5 billion investment through the Inflation Reduction Act for climate smart agriculture.

More Information

Farmers, ranchers, irrigation districts, groundwater management entities, municipalities, tribes, and others across the West are working together to secure clean and available water supplies, healthy soils, resilient landscapes and thriving agricultural communities, now and in the future. NRCS is working to assist them and accelerate voluntary conservation of water and working lands resources.

Visit the NRCS website for more information on the WaterSMART Initiative and to read the Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In 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.

January 2023 was Nation's 6th Warmest on Record

Month marked by atmospheric rivers, numerous tornadoes

NOAA 2/8/13

The new year started off on a very warm note across the U.S., with the nation seeing its sixth-warmest January on record, according to scientists from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI).

The month was also plagued by a series of atmospheric rivers that brought historic rainfall and

snow to the West, as numerous tornadoes struck other parts of the country.

Below are highlights from NOAA's U.S. climate report for January 2023:

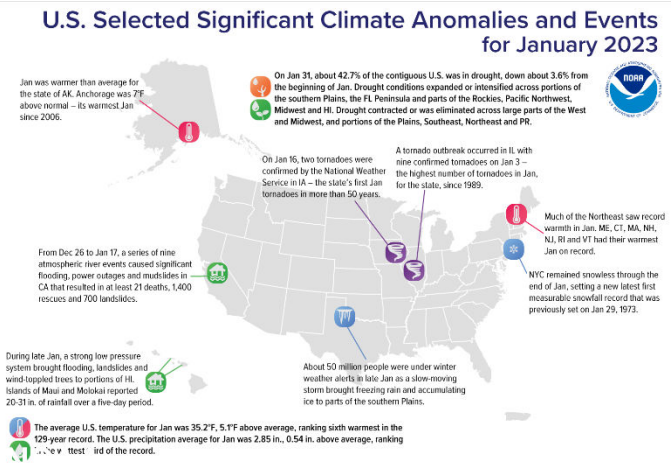
Climate by the numbers

The average January temperature across the contiguous U.S. was 35.2 degrees F (5.1 degrees above average), ranking as the sixth-warmest January on record.

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Vermont each had their warmest Januarys on record. Indiana, New York, and Pennsylvania saw their second-warmest Januarys on record, with 17 additional states experiencing a top-10 warmest January.

The nation's average precipitation across the contiguous U.S was 2.85 inches (0.54 of an inch above average), ranking among the wettest third of Januarys on record.

Nebraska saw its third-wettest January on record, with Massachusetts ranking fourth wettest and Rhode Island ranking seventh. Colorado, Iowa, New Hampshire, and Utah each had a top-10 wettest January on record.



A map of the U.S. plotted with some of the most significant climate events that occurred during January 2023. Please see the story below as well as more details in the report summary from NOAA NCEI at http://bit.ly/USClimate202301. (NOAA/NCEI)

Other notable climate events

- **Atmospheric rivers dropped record rain and snow:** A series of nine atmospheric rivers from late December into mid-January dumped a record amount of rain and mountain snow across parts of the western U.S., hitting California particularly hard and causing significant damage to the region, including power outages. The weeks-long deluge resulted in at least 21 deaths and prompted more than 1,400 rescues throughout the state. The San Francisco Bay area experienced its wettest three-week period in 161 years.

- **A busy month for tornadoes:** January was notable for several weather systems that brought severe thunderstorms and an unusually high number of tornadoes to portions of the U.S. More than 100 tornadoes were confirmed, marking the third time since 1950 where 100 tornadoes occurred during January.
    - January 2-4: A tornado outbreak occurred across portions of the southern Plains, Southeast and Illinois, where 61 tornadoes were confirmed by NOAA's National Weather Service. The storms also brought severe thunderstorms, hail, and significant damage to the region.
    - January 12: Severe storms and tornadoes swept through parts of the Midwest and Southeast. This outbreak included 69 confirmed tornadoes, including two EF-3 tornadoes.
    - January 16: Two tornadoes were confirmed in Iowa – the state's first instances of January tornadoes since 1967.

- **Drought conditions improved overall:** According to the January 31 U.S. Drought Monitor report, about 42.7% of the contiguous U.S. was in drought, down about 3.6% from the beginning of January.

Drought conditions expanded or intensified across portions of the southern Plains, the Florida Peninsula and parts of the Rockies, Pacific Northwest, Midwest, and Hawaii. Drought conditions improved across large parts of the West and Midwest, and portions of the Plains, Great Lakes, Southeast, Northeast and Puerto Rico.

More > Access NOAA's November climate report and download the images.

Upcoming Meetings and Webinars

WestFAST Webinar: The True Cost of Wildfire in the Western United States
March 23, 2023, 10:00 am – 11:00 am MT

WestFAST Webinar: Overview of Permitting and Processes for New Pumped Storage Hydropower Systems
Planned April 12, 2023, 10:00 am – 11:00 am MT

WSWC 2023 Spring (201st) Meetings
May 22-24, 2023, Reno, Nevada

Other Federal News

DOI 2/2/23. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Supports $580 Million Investment to Fulfill Indian Water Rights Settlements

DOI 2/8/23. Interior Department Takes Action to Strengthen Endangered Species Act

DOI 2/13/23. Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission Releases Strategy to Meet Aerial Firefighting Equipment Needs

BLM 2/7/23. BLM Adds Virtual Meetings for Public Input on Potential Changes to Solar Energy Program

EPA 2/1/23. EPA Announces Financial Capability Guidance to Support Communities and Ensure Clean, Affordable Water

EPA 2/9/23. EPA Seeks Input on Inflation Reduction Act Environmental and Climate Justice Program

EPA 2/23/23. Biden-Harris Administration Announces $550 Million to Advance Environmental Justice

EPA 2/24/23. Biden-Harris Administration Announces $2.4 Billion for Clean Water Infrastructure Upgrades Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

FWS 2/1/23. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Awards Nearly $19 Million To Help Coastal Community Resilience, Provide Economic Benefits and Protect Native Ecosystems

FWS 2/27/23. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Makes $15 Million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Funding Available for Klamath Basin Restoration Projects

NOAA 2/2/23. 50 Years of Protecting Marine Mammals

NOAA 2/14/23. Earth Had its 7th-Warmest January on Record

NOAA 2/23/23. Towering wildfire clouds have big impacts on the stratosphere

NPS 2/1/23. National park investments in 2023 will improve access and facilities across the country, enhance climate and fire resilience, further connect people with their national parks

NRCS 2/27/23. USDA Seeking Applications to Expand Conservation Assistance to Underserved Producers

Reclamation 2/16/23. Reclamation is seeking comments on updated rules regarding public access to and conduct on Reclamation lands

USDA 2/13/23. Biden-Harris Administration Announces Availability of Inflation Reduction Act Funding for Climate-Smart Agriculture Nationwide

USDA 2/21/23. USDA Invests More than $48.6 Million to Manage Risks, Combat Climate Change

USGS 2/14/23. USGS Makes $5 Million Available from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for Mine Waste Research