



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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WESTERN GOVERNORS/WATER RESOURCES

Colorado

On April 14, Colorado Governor Jared Polis spoke at a University of Denver law symposium titled Water Fluency: Experience Leads to Innovation in the Rocky Mountain West. Polis defended future population growth despite shrinking water supplies across the West, arguing that the solution lies in incorporating water policies into planning processes. He also vowed to protect Colorado's share of the Colorado River. "It's not just about housing, which we need. It's also about protecting our way of life: Housing policy is water policy; housing policy is climate policy." He talked about the More Housing Now bill (SB23-213) introduced in the state legislature in March. The measure aims to ease the way for higher-density housing, while also requiring local governments to incorporate water conservation strategies into their master planning efforts, or the rules and regulations that governing things like zoning and subdivisions of property. "This is a small but very important part of our work to support our water resources," said Polis. In a separate presentation on the State of the Colorado Water Plan, Russ Sands, Colorado Water Conservation Board, said the state couldn't simply heed calls to "stop growth." Sands said, "I don't think we can do that. That shuts down the economy, How are we going to grow better is often on my mind." (*E&E News*, 4/14/23)

ADMINISTRATION/WATER RESOURCES

Klamath River

On April 13, the Bureau of Reclamation announced the 2023 reduced water supply allocations for Klamath Project contractors: 215,000 acre-feet from Upper Klamath Lake; 35,000 from Gerber Reservoir; and 35,000 from Clear Lake Reservoir. Reclamation is also committing \$13M to support drought resiliency programs and ecosystem enhancement projects, with \$9.85M for contractors receiving reduced allocations, \$3M for technical assistance to tribes, and \$150,000 for groundwater monitoring. Reclamation Regional Director Ernest Conant noted that winter storms brought near-normal precipitation to Klamath Basin, but inflows remain below average. www.usbr.gov/newsroom

CONGRESS/WATER RESOURCES

House/OpenET

On March 30, Representatives Susie Lee (D-NV), Jared Huffman (D-CA), Chris Stewart (R-UT) and Burgess Owens (R-UT) introduced the Open Access Evapotranspiration (OpenET) Data Act (H.R. 2429), and Senators Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) and John Hickenlooper (D-CO) introduced the companion bill (S. 1118). The bill authorizes the OpenET Data Program (\$23M a year for FY24-28) under the U.S. Geological Survey to deliver operational satellite-based ET data to advance the quantification of ET and consumptive water use. It would provide data users with estimates across large landscapes, with a priority for the Landsat scale of 30-100 meters.

Among other activities, the program would refine the application of ET data available to state, tribes, and federal agencies, through the USGS Water Availability and Use Science Program, National Water Census, Integrated Water Availability Assessments, National Land Imaging Program, Land Change Science Program, and Science Analytics and Synthesis Program. It authorizes the coordination of data analyses, use, and collection efforts through existing organizations, and specifically names the WSWC and the Western States Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST). The bill directs the Department of the Interior to submit a report to Congress after five years with an update on how the data have been incorporated into modeling, water planning, and reporting efforts of relevant federal agencies, and additional beneficial uses by program partners.

WATER RESOURCES

Water Supply Outlook/Drought

On April 6, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Water and Climate Update reported widespread improvements on the drought map across the western U.S., including California, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho, and Utah. A series of storms boosted mountain snowpack to record or near-record levels at numerous NRCS SNOTEL monitoring stations. The areal extent of drought

in the West dropped from 73% at the beginning of the Water Year in early October down to 31% by April 1. "In California, the statewide snowpack was 243% of normal (April 5), with the Northern Sierra at 198%, Central Sierra at 242%, and Southern Sierra at 302%. The California Department of Water Resources reported that the 2022-23 season will go down as one of the largest snowpacks on record in California.

In Nevada and Utah, current median SWE percentages for select basins are as follows: "Central Lahontan 273%, Central Nevada Desert Basins 267%, Great Salt Lake 224%, Lower Green 202%, Upper Colorado-Dolores 207%, and Upper Colorado-Dirty Devil 219%, according to the NRCS SNOTEL network." The NRCS Utah Snow Survey office reported: "As of March 24th, Utah's statewide snow water equivalent (SWE) measured at our SNOTEL weather stations broke the 1983 record, making this the snowiest winter since the SNOTEL network was installed in 1980." By April 4, Utah had also broken its 1952 record based on historical manual, monthly measurements going back to 1930.

The NRCS update said: "In Arizona and New Mexico, snowpack levels are above normal, especially in the ranges of northern and central Arizona. In Arizona, the total reservoir system (Salt and Verde River system) is currently 100% full as compared to 72% full at the same time last year, according to the Salt River Project. For the Colorado River system, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is reporting (April 4) Lake Mead at 28% full and Lake Powell at 23% full." The High Plains region (North Dakota and South Dakota) experienced repeated "blizzard-like conditions and moderate to heavy snowfall accumulations...."

In contrast, "Areas of the South (Texas) and the Southern Plains (Kansas, Oklahoma) saw further degradations on the [drought] map in response to a combination of short and long-term dry conditions, very low streamflow and reservoir levels, and reported impacts in the agricultural sector."

ORGANIZATIONS/MEETINGS **ICWP/NWSA**

On April 4-5, the Interstate Council on Water Policy (ICWP) and National Water Supply Alliance (NWSA) held a joint Roundtable and Water Policy Summit in Washington, DC. During the Federal Water Resource Program Roundtable discussions, participants heard from: Annalise Blum, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science for the Department of the Interior, Don Cline, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Associate Director for Water Resources; Robyn Colosimo, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Project Planning and Review; Thomas Graziano, Director of the Office of Water Prediction for the National Weather Service

(NWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); and Veva Deheza, NOAA's National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) Executive Director, among others.

Federal speakers addressed budgets and appropriations, program updates, priorities, challenges, and rulemaking. The USGS will lose 17 streamgages this year due to small funding increases in FY23. The FY24 budget request would add 30 gages back to the network and keep the other gages operational. USGS is working on aligning 3D hydrography data with the 3D elevation data, and incorporating data from NRCS, the U.S. Forest Service, and states. Landsat Next will involve commercial, institutional, and international partnerships. The NIDIS reauthorization efforts are focused on modernizing tools to prepare for the acceleration of drought. NASA recently launched the surface water ocean topography (SWOT) mission. The Army Corps of Engineers is re-evaluating its authorities and ability to transition from traditional infrastructure solutions to address new weather extremes norms. The Corps is also working to increase resilience by meeting demands in a prioritized way, anticipating extreme events, and communicating risk to broader communities. They are preparing to publish the final rule on the Corps Water Infrastructure Financing Program (CWIFP) and the guidance for the 2022 Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA).

The Water Policy Summit included three panels of organizations working on water policy issues. Participants took a deeper look at the various roles water resource management plays in advancing climate resilience, including: (1) water data and science; (2) water infrastructure; and (3) water resources planning.

During the Congressional Panel, staffers from the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment talked about: (1) recent bills introduced and passed; (2) priorities such as water supply and levees in the 2024 WRDA; and (3) with half of the Committee comprised of incoming freshmen members, the significant educational effort to ensure that WRDA stays on a 2-year cycle. <https://icwp.org/news/2023springroundtable/>

PEOPLE

Utah Governor Spencer Cox has appointed **Sarah Shechter**, Assistant Attorney General, Natural Resources Division, as an alternate member to the WSWC. Washington Governor Jay Inslee has appointed **Ria Berns**, Deputy Water Resources Program Manager, Washington Department of Ecology, to the WSWC.

We congratulate Sarah and Ria 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.