



**POSITION
of the
WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL
regarding
USDA CONSERVATION PROGRAMS
and
WATER RESOURCES**

**Anchorage, Alaska
September 14, 2023**

WHEREAS, water is the lifeblood of the West and this is most apparent in the agricultural sector, which accounts for the predominant share of consumptive water use westwide; and

WHEREAS, agriculture sustains many rural economies and provides important employment opportunities both directly and indirectly; and

WHEREAS, increasing demands on often scarce water resources and periodic drought threaten the West and its agricultural base and the communities built on that base; and

WHEREAS, many agricultural producers in the West rely on irrigation surface water delivery systems that are shared among multiple producers and operated by an irrigation district, canal company, mutual ditch company, or acequia while others rely on overdrafted and or overallocated groundwater basins; and

WHEREAS, maintaining a sustainable agricultural economy in the West requires promoting efficient water use and achieving net water savings, while maximizing production and in some cases assisting in the transition from irrigated to dryland farming; and

WHEREAS, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation programs focus on conservation of ground and surface water resources, as well as reductions in nonpoint source pollution, including nutrients, sediment, pesticides and salinity; and

WHEREAS, many agricultural producers in the West voluntarily participate in USDA programs to implement conservation practices that improve water use efficiency, water quality and wildlife habitat; and

WHEREAS, the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Rural Development (RD), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and National Water and Climate Center (NWCC) administer many water-related programs; and

WHEREAS, multiple USDA farm financial assistance programs are particularly important to producers and rural communities, water users and water quality managers, including the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Emergency Watershed Protection Program

(EWPP), Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP) and its Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) and Colorado River Salinity Control Program (CRSCP), and Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and others such as watershed protection and planning programs; and

WHEREAS, special EQIP funding also covers a number of initiatives, including the Drought, Ogallala Aquifer, National Water Quality, Resiliency to Climate Change, and WaterSMART Initiatives; and

WHEREAS, the Western States Water Council (WSWC) supports USDA Conservation Program funding levels based on need rather than baseline budget targets; and

WHEREAS, the WSWC supports collaborative, targeted and voluntary conservation actions to address locally identified farm, range, forest and water resource concerns on private and public lands; and

WHEREAS, the WSWC supports actions to address secure water supplies, improved water quality, and drought and wildfire resilience, as well as wildlife habitat conservation and invasive species threats; and

WHEREAS, the WSWC supports the role of Conservation Title Programs in providing solutions to resolve water supply reliability, water quality impairments, groundwater recharge, and other water resource concerns facing agricultural water users and agricultural producers; and

WHEREAS, the WSWC supports the continued efforts of Rural Development to provide financial assistance for drinking water, wastewater facilities and other services to rural communities.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Western States Water Council strongly supports USDA Conservation Programs, and urges the Administration and the Congress to provide sufficient funding to address water conservation, flood protection and water quality remediation needs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the WSWC supports regional cooperative agricultural programs such as EQIP Initiatives, the Colorado River Salinity Control Project, and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the WSWC supports the work done by Rural Development to bring clean, safe drinking water and sanitation to rural communities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the WSWC supports investment in voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs, including when appropriate assisting in the transition from irrigated to dryland farming, that are implemented in coordination with state and local governmental partners, while providing the maximum flexibility possible and opportunity for innovation to create efficiencies, coordinate funding and achieve real water savings.

Revised and Readopted
(See also Position #413 adopted Oct. 20, 2017 and #455, Oct. 15, 2020)