



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

682 East Vine Street / Suite 7 / Murray, UT 84107 / (801) 685-2555 / Fax 685-2559 / www.westernstateswater.org

Chair - Jon Niermann; Executive Director - Tony Willardson; Editor - Michelle Bushman; Subscriptions - Julie Groat

WESTERN GOVERNORS/WATER QUALITY Clean Water Act/Safe Drinking Water Act/SRFs

On September 27, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) submitted policy recommendations to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, urging Congress to assist states in addressing water infrastructure needs and complying with federal water quality requirements by adequately funding State Revolving Funds (SRF) for the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act. The letter, signed by WGA Executive Director Jack Waldorf, also encouraged Congress to provide greater flexibility and fewer restrictions on state SRF management. "The Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act have been the cornerstone of ensuring that Americans can access reliable and clean water," the letter read. "Investments in water delivery and wastewater infrastructure are essential to our nation's continued prosperity and environmental protection." For a full copy of the letter see <https://westgov.org/letters/>.

ADMINISTRATION/WATER RESOURCES USBR/Desalination

On September 27, the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) announced \$28.97M to fund 31 water recycling and desalination projects in California, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah. This WaterSMART program financial assistance is aimed at bolstering water supplies in both urban and agricultural regions, and reducing vulnerability to droughts and climate change. The funding leverages a cost-share contributions of \$64.7M, resulting in a total investment of \$93.7M. The funding is intended to support planning efforts such as feasibility studies, preliminary project design, and environmental compliance activities. These projects fall under key programs such as the Desalination Construction Program, Title XVI Water Reclamation and Reuse Program, and Large-Scale Water Recycling Program.

Deputy Commissioner David Palumbo said: "These projects currently under development will supplement existing freshwater supplies in urban and agricultural areas in the Western United States.... The funding announced today will provide needed assistance to

communities and entities as they undertake the development of feasibility studies and other planning necessary to facilitate project development." <https://www.usbr.gov/newsroom/news-release/4639>

USBR/Water Supply Forecasting/Snow Surveys

On September 28, the USBR announced it is awarding \$11M for 15 projects to support the advancement of snow monitoring technologies for water supply forecasting, with an addition \$6.2M in non-federal cost sharing. Reclamation's Research and Development Office sought proposals for projects that demonstrate and/or deploy technologies in emerging snow monitoring, deploy existing snow monitoring technologies in underserved areas, or improve the use of snow monitoring data to enhance water supply forecasts.

Project awards cover: (1) mapping snow water equivalent with weather radar; (2) integrating field, remote sensing, and physics-based models to improve water supply forecasts in wildfire-impacted basins in the Western United States; (3) cosmic-ray snow gauges for monitoring snow water equivalent; (4) emerging UAV gamma-ray and LiDAR snow observations for improved water supply modeling; (5) airborne snow surveys for water supply forecasting; (6) adapting blended snow water equivalent (SWE) and snow albedo products; (7) developing a Cooperative Snow Temperature Survey; (8) the use of gridded snowpack data to improve water supply forecasting; (9) improving the skill of reservoir inflow forecasts using high-resolution snow monitoring data and Explainable Artificial intelligence (AI) models; and (10) guiding seasonal forecasts with climatic oscillation using non-Gaussian information metrics.

Entities awarded funding include: (1) Applied Research Team, Inc.; (2) the Colorado River Authority of Utah; (3) Colorado State University; (4) Hydroinnova LLC; (5) Montana State University; (6) Mountain Hydrology LLC; (7) the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District; (8) the Desert Research Institute; (9) the University of Colorado; (10) the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District; (11) the University of Arizona; (12) the University of Oklahoma; and (13) the University of Wyoming. <https://www.usbr.gov/newsroom/news-release/4644>

USBR's Snow Water Supply Forecast Program aims to enhance snow monitoring and advance emerging technologies to improve water supply forecasting and build climate change resilience by enabling improved water management. For further information on each project visit www.usbr.gov/research/snow.html.

CONGRESS

Abandoned Mines/Good Samaritan

On September 13, Senators Martin Heinrich (D-NM) and Jim Risch (R-ID) reintroduced the bipartisan Good Samaritan Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act (S. 2781), referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works. The bill authorizes a pilot program for up to 15 projects. The permits are carefully limited to ensure low risk projects and prohibit mining activities as part of the cleanup. The bill requires a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) prior to issuing permits, and prohibits the degradation of surface water quality in order to retain Good Samaritan liability protections.

Additional co-sponsors of the bill include Senators John Barrasso (R-WY), Michael Bennet (D-CO), John Boozman (R-AR), Mike Braun (R-IN), Kevin Cramer (R-ND), Mike Crapo (R-ID), John Steve Daines (R-MT), Hickenlooper (D-CO), Mark Kelly (D-AZ), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Jacky Rosen (R-NV), Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ), Dan Sullivan (R-AK), Jon Tester (D-MT), John Thune (R-SD), and Ron Wyden (D-OR).

CONGRESS/WATER RESOURCES

WaterSMART Access for Tribes Act

On September 26, Senator Lujan (D-NM) introduced the WaterSMART Access for Tribes Act to amend the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 to increase tribal access to water conservation and efficiency grants. S. 2927 would allow the Department of the Interior Secretary to reduce or waive the non-Federal cost share requirement if the Secretary determines it would create financial hardship for the awarded tribe. The bill is cosponsored by Senators Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) and John W. Hickenlooper (D-CO). The House companion bill (H.R.4356), introduced in June, is sponsored by Representative Melanie Stansbury (D-NM). See WSW #2565.

MEETINGS/ORGANIZATIONS

Interstate Council on Water Policy

On September 26-27, the Interstate Council on Water Policy (ICWP) held its annual meeting in Denver, Colorado. ICWP Chair Matt Unruh (Kansas Water Office) welcomed participants and moderated a panel of

federal agencies - including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - that provided western regional highlights on drought, wildfire, and various agency activities. Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Wyoming provided updates on state water plans, infrastructure concerns, resiliency projects, aquifer management, wildfire mitigation and source water protection, and conservation efforts.

A panel on the Colorado River provided an overview of the seven-state Colorado River Compact, discussed policy issues from an Upper Colorado River Commission perspective, and talked about ecosystem programs, endangered fish recovery, salinity control, snow monitoring, and integrated water availability assessments in the Upper Basin.

A presentation on cloud seeding provided an update on the state of the science, and tracking the increases in snow accumulation. Another presentation on state water plans noted that many of them are primarily emergency response plans for drought. A meeting summary and the presentations will be available through the ICWP Member Portal. See <https://icwp.org/news>.

Stream Restoration/WestFAST

On October 18, at 10:00 am Mountain, the WSWC's Western Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST) will host a webinar on Stream Restoration and Water Rights in Utah and Colorado. This event is the third in a series. Speakers will cover a range of topics, including relevant state statutes and policies, permitting processes, state priorities, current projects, challenges, and lessons learned. Presenters will include: Kelly Romero-Heaney, Assistant Director of Water for Colorado's Department of Natural Resources and Water Policy Advisor to Governor Polis; and Chuck Williamson, P.G., Stream Alteration Specialist for the Utah Division of Water Rights. <https://westernstateswater.org/events/westfast-webinar-stream-restoration-in-utah-and-colorado/>

PEOPLE

On September 29, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), 90, passed away at her home in Washington D.C. She was the first woman to serve as a Senator from California, serving from 1992-2023. Prior to her election to the Senate, Feinstein served as the first female Mayor of San Francisco. She chaired the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water. The President said: "Dianne made her mark on everything from national security to the environment to protecting civil liberties.... Our country will benefit from her legacy for generations." On October 1, California Governor Gavin Newsom announced his selection of Laphonza Butler to fill the vacant seat.

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.