



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

ADMINISTRATION

USGS/National Land Imaging Program

On October 12, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) announced the award of \$1.47M to AmericaView as the recipient of the National Land Remote Sensing Education, Outreach and Research Activity grant. USGS's National Land Imaging Program administers the longstanding program which has an annual renewable option after the first year with a total award not exceeding \$12M over five years, subject to the availability of funds.

AmericaView is a state-based nationwide consortium of 300 university and local members across 41 states working to advance the use of remote sensing data and technology in both the public and private sectors. It was selected through a competitive process to focus on expanding remote sensing science through education, outreach, and research.

The objectives are: (1) identifying and communicating critical information and data requirements in support of remote sensing needs at local and state levels; (2) fostering local and national strategic partnerships; (3) promoting undergraduate and graduate research and employment skills; (4) advancing education and training, technology transfer and outreach to enhance the current and future workforce; and (5) supporting the U.S. Department of the Interior Secretarial Priorities.

Projects target states' needs, assuring that all users of remotely sensed data have equal, efficient access to the data such as the extensive 50-year-plus Landsat satellite image archive, to support science research, landscape monitoring, natural resource management, climate change assessment and other uses. www.usgs.gov/news/technical-announcement/usgs-awards-competitive-remote-sensing-grant-americanview

ADMINISTRATION/WATER RESOURCES

NOAA/Corps/Upper Missouri River Basin

On October 11, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced it will invest \$26M to improve NOAA forecasts of droughts and floods through a public-private partnership. With funds

from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), NOAA will support improved monitoring of soil moisture and snow levels throughout the Upper Missouri River Basin.

The Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) will partner with NOAA on this pilot program, over four years. The National Weather Service (NWS), National Mesonet Program, and the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) will support development of a transformative federal-state-private partnership to provide improved early warning for drought, flooding, fire and other natural hazards as part of President Biden's Investing in America agenda. The funds will enable NOAA and the Corps to help communities build resilience to natural hazards that can be influenced by climate change in the States of Montana, Wyoming, the Dakotas and Nebraska, and ultimately across the nation.

"As the impact of climate change on our weather becomes clearer and more costly, improving early warning for droughts and floods is critical to saving lives and property," said U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo. "Making smart investments is a key pillar of Bidenomics, and this initiative – which brings together the expertise of NOAA, the Army Corps of Engineers and experienced state partners...."

Since 2010, the Upper Missouri River Basin has experienced a series of extreme hydrological events that were not well-forecasted, including the historic floods of 2011 and 2019, as well as the equally historic flash drought of 2017. After-action reports pointed to the need for more and better soil moisture and snowpack observation on lowland plains landscapes to improve drought and flood risk outlooks and forecasts.

Michael Morgan, Assistant Secretary for Environmental Observation and Prediction, said: "This program will dramatically increase the quantity and quality of soil and snowpack moisture observations in the region – fundamentally transforming our ability to understand how wet or dry this nationally significant watershed is. It will help our models – and meteorologists – identify potentially extreme weather risks earlier and pass that life-saving information on to decision-makers and the public."

Congress previously authorized three complementary projects through the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2020 (Pub. Law 116-260). Subsequently, \$55M was appropriated for the Corps to fund and install more than 500 soil moisture and snow monitoring stations to collect high-quality data, including precipitation, wind speed and direction, solar radiation, air temperature, relative humidity, snow depth and soil moisture, as well as soil characterization at each location. This will provide the most comprehensive set of data to support a wide range of applications.

The Mesonet Program – a national network of local weather observation networks – received \$25M from the BIL over three years to establish a pilot effort to acquire data from the new soil and snow-monitoring stations and develop a system for user-friendly, public access to quality-checked data.

NIDIS was provided \$1M over four years in BIL funds to organize an interagency study team to evaluate how enhanced soil moisture and snow levels data can improve water resource models, drought and flood risk assessments and other applications. This team will include NOAA, the Corps, Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), USGS and NASA.

It will identify, fund and monitor a series of research projects targeted at the various applications, such as NWS river and snow forecasts, Corps reservoir modeling and the U.S. Drought Monitor to demonstrate how hundreds of additional observations can improve key drought and flood products. Study findings have the potential to redefine the state-of-the-art monitoring of drought and flood conditions, as well as other climate and weather applications, across the country, a priority for the Mesonet Program. NIDIS leads the National Coordinated Soil Moisture Monitoring Network and will synthesize the individual research projects into a summary report for Congress that will include how to use what was learned to improve weather and climate monitoring nationwide. www.noaa.gov/news-release/biden-harris-administration-invests-26-million-to-improve-noaa-forecasts-of-droughts-and-floods

CONGRESS

Rural Water Systems/Disaster Preparedness

On September 26, Senator Cortez Masto (D-NV) introduced the Rural Water System Disaster Preparedness and Assistance Act (S.2917) to support rural water or wastewater systems in preparing for and responding to natural or man-made disasters.

The Act aims to assist utilities in identifying vulnerabilities, mapping water infrastructure, developing

disaster protocols, and training employees for emergency and disaster response. Senator Cortez Masto highlighted the increasing frequency of natural disasters such as wildfires and flooding, underscoring the need to equip rural water utilities. “Aging infrastructure and more frequent natural disasters have left many rural water utilities unprepared for an emergency, and I’m working to get them the training and resources they need to keep their communities safe.”

The legislation has received endorsements from the National Rural Water Association (NRWA) and Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP). Matthew Holmes, NRWA, emphasized that the Act would significantly enhance emergency assistance to rural communities for disaster preparedness and response, crucial in the face of more frequent and intense natural disasters. Olga Morales Pate, RCAP, echoed this sentiment, stressing the necessity of proactive disaster preparation for rural water systems.

Water Infrastructure Projects

On September 26, Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and Senator Kevin Cramer (R-ND) reintroduced the Water Infrastructure Subcontractor and Taxpayer Protection Act (S.2928).

The Act would require all primary contractors working on water infrastructure projects financed by federally guaranteed loans to hold a surety bond, guaranteeing the compensation of local sponsors and sub-contractors should the contractor default. Construction projects funded through the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) would receive the same payment and performance protection requirements as the TIFIA program, EPA’s SRF loans and other federally financed projects.

Senator Cramer said: “North Dakotans know just how important public-private partnerships are to large scale infrastructure projects. They can bolster and protect local communities, but taxpayers should be confident their money will not be lost.... We must work to close existing loopholes in federal law to protect not just American taxpayers, but local small business contractors and workers who make these projects possible.”

Senator Kelly said: “Local governments should not be left holding the bag when contractors don’t deliver.” In 2021, Kelly cosponsored similar legislation that required bonds for federally financed transportation projects. The bill is also supported by the National Association of Minority Contractors, and the National Association of Surety Bond Producers.

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.