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# WestFAST News

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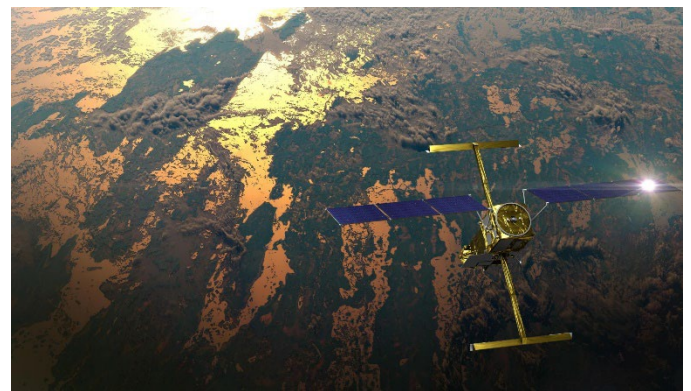
## Google's 'A Passage of Water' Brings NASA's Water Data to Life

NASA 11/30/23

As part of the long-standing partnership between NASA and Google, NASA worked with Google Arts & Culture and artist Yiyun Kang to create an interactive digital experience around global freshwater resources titled "A Passage of Water." This immersive experience leverages data from the [Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment \(GRACE\)](#) satellites and new high-resolution data from the [Surface Water and Ocean Topography \(SWOT\) mission](#) to illustrate how climate change is impacting Earth's water cycle.

A digital version of "A Passage of Water" will be released online on Thursday, Nov. 30, ahead of the beginning of the United Nations' Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP 28) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Google also will host a physical installation of the visualization project in the Blue Zone at COP 28.

"NASA is the U.S. space agency that provides end-to-end research about our home planet, and it is our job to inform the world about what we learn," said Kate Calvin, NASA's chief scientist and senior climate advisor in Washington. "Highlighting our Earth science data in the installation of 'A Passage of Water' is a unique way to share information, in a digestible way, around the important connection between climate change and the Earth's water cycle."



The international Surface Water and Ocean Topography (SWOT) satellite, as shown in this illustration, is the first global mission surveying Earth's surface water. SWOT's high-resolution data helps scientists measure how Earth's bodies of water change over time. Credit: CNES.

For six decades, NASA has been collecting data on Earth's land, water, air, and climate. This data is used to inform decision-makers on ways to mitigate, adapt and respond to climate change. All of NASA's Earth science data is available for scientists and the public to access in a variety of ways.

"NASA studies our home planet and its interconnected systems more than any other planet in our universe," said Karen St. Germain, director of NASA's Earth Science Division. "'A Passage of Water' provides an opportunity to highlight the public availability of SWOT data and other NASA Earth science data to tell meaningful stories, improve awareness, and help everyday people who have to make real decisions in their homes, businesses, and communities."

A collaboration between NASA and the French space agency CNES (Centre National d'Études

Spatiales), SWOT is measuring the height of **nearly all water** on Earth's surface, providing one of the most detailed, comprehensive views yet of the planet's freshwater bodies. SWOT provides insights into how the ocean influences climate change and how a warming world affects lakes, rivers, and reservoirs.

"NASA studies our home planet and its interconnected systems more than any other planet in our universe.

"The detail that SWOT is providing on the world's oceans and fresh water is game-changing. We're only just getting started with respect to data from this satellite and I'm looking forward to seeing where the information takes us," said Ben Hamlington, a research scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Southern California.

The Google project also uses data from the GRACE and GRACE Follow-On missions --the former is a joint effort between NASA and the German Aerospace Center (DLR), while the latter is a collaboration between NASA and the German Research Centre for Geosciences (GFZ). GRACE tracked localized changes to Earth's mass distribution, caused by phenomena including the movement of water across the planet from 2002 to 2017. GRACE-FO came online in 2018 and is currently in operation.

As with GRACE before it, the GRACE-FO mission monitors changes in ice sheets and glaciers, near-surface and underground water storage, the amount of water in large lakes and rivers, as well as changes in sea level and ocean currents, providing an integrated view of how Earth's water cycle and energy balance are evolving.

"A Passage of Water" is the most recent digital experience created under NASA's Space Act Agreement with Google, with resulting content to be made widely available to the public free of charge on Google's web platforms. This collaboration is part of a six-project agreement series that aims to share NASA's content with audiences in new and engaging ways.

Learn more about SWOT, GRACE, GRACE-FO, and NASA's Earth Science missions at:

<https://science.nasa.gov/earth>

To learn more about NASA Partnerships, visit:

<https://www.nasa.gov/partnerships>

## **FACT SHEET: USDA Streamlines Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Invests Unprecedented \$1 Billion in 81 Conservation Projects**

NRCS 11/1/23



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is making historic investments to the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and streamlining the program to make it work better for producers and partners. This combination will deliver conservation at a scale never before achieved through RCPP. This year, more than \$1 billion is being invested to advance partner-driven solutions to conservation on agricultural land through 81 projects.

RCPP leverages a voluntary approach to conservation that expands the reach of conservation efforts and climate-smart agriculture through public-private partnerships. Historic funding is made possible by both the Inflation Reduction Act, part of President Biden's Investing in America agenda, and the Farm Bill.

### **RCPP Improvements**

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has identified ways to streamline and simplify RCPP, ease the burden on employees and partners, and help maximize flexibility for partners to leverage their investments with NRCS resources and capabilities.

Through a concerted effort over the past eight months, using guidance, feedback and expertise from partners, employees, leadership and stakeholders, NRCS has identified several improvements that the agency will implement in the

months and years ahead.

Improvements include:

- Streamlining RCPP agreements for fiscal year 2023 awards and moving to one programmatic agreement to begin implementing the RCPP projects awarded under the fiscal year 2024 notice of funding opportunity. This will allow partners to more quickly begin implementation of their RCPP projects.
- Entrusting program management and negotiation to the State Conservationists, who lead NRCS programs in each state, further encouraging the locally led process and ensuring the necessary technical needs and costs were realized before project proposal submission.
- Establishing parameters and expectations for easement negotiations, including availability of easement deed templates and established program processes to reduce partnership agreement negotiation and implementation timeframes.
- Improving RCPP guidance and training, ensuring RCPP policies and procedures are communicated in a uniform and consistent manner.
- Enhancing existing business tools to improve the user experience while beginning development of new business tools that, through integration and automation, will reduce the time required for agreement negotiation, processing obligations and making payments to partners.

For the full list of RCPP improvements NRCS has identified for future implementation, [visit our website](#).

Once improvements have been implemented, NRCS estimated that the negotiation time of RCPP agreements with U.S.-held easement activities will be reduced from 15 months to three months, and from 19 months to three months with entity-held easement activities.

The RCPP improvements are coming at a critical time, as they will strengthen NRCS' ability to implement the Inflation Reduction Act, which provided \$4.95 billion in additional funding for the program over five years.

## Unprecedented RCPP Funding

The Farm Bill and Inflation Reduction Act provided funding for this year's RCPP projects. With this more than \$1 billion investment, NRCS has more than doubled the initial allocation for 2023 to capitalize on the unprecedented demand for RCPP and ensure project partners have the maximum amount of time to successfully implement conservation activities before funds expire in fiscal year 2031.

Of the awarded projects:

- 77 climate-focus projects (\$1.02 billion in funding).
- Twenty-two projects focused on water quantity and conservation (more than \$338 million in funding).
- Three RCPP Classic projects are led by Tribes (more than \$58 million in funding).
- Sixteen projects support the protection and restoration of wildlife corridors (\$216 million in funding).
- Ten projects focus on urban agriculture (\$123 million in funding).

For a full list of selected projects [visit our website](#).

Since inception, RCPP has made 717 awards involving over 4,000 partner organizations.

## Inflation Reduction Act Boosts Voluntary Conservation Programs

Through the Inflation Reduction Act, USDA has enrolled more farmers and more acres in voluntary conservation programs than at any point in history, following a backlog that has existed for years. In 2023, USDA enrolled nearly 5,300 additional producers in conservation programs across all 50 states (above what otherwise would have been possible through Farm Bill and appropriations funding), which will provide significant climate mitigation benefits. This includes:

- \$100 million through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP);
- \$250 million through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP); and
- \$250 million through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

## **Biden-Harris Administration Announces \$2 Billion to Fund Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grants as Part of Investing in America Agenda**

*EPA's Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights announces the largest single investment in environmental justice in history, funded by President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act*

EPA 11/21/23

Today, the Biden-Harris administration announced approximately \$2 billion in funding available to support community-driven projects that deploy clean energy, strengthen climate resilience, and build capacity for communities to tackle environmental and climate justice challenges. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Community Change Grants are the single largest investment in environmental justice going directly to communities in history, and will advance collaborative efforts to achieve a healthier, safer, and more prosperous future for all. These funds, part of President Biden's Investing in America agenda, are made possible by the President's Inflation Reduction Act—the biggest-ever investment in clean energy and climate action.

“Throughout my Journey to Justice tour, I've heard from residents and advocates calling for resources to support local solutions in communities that have long been overlooked and forgotten,” said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan. “Today, thanks to President Biden's commitment to investing in communities that have long struggled to access federal funding, we are delivering on these calls to action. This historic, unprecedented funding has the promise to turn disadvantaged and overburdened areas into healthy, resilient, and thriving communities for current and future generations.”

“For far too long, communities that have borne the brunt of power plant and industrial pollution have been left out and left behind,” said John Podesta, Senior Advisor to the President for Clean Energy Innovation and Implementation. “The Inflation Reduction Act and President Biden's Justice40 initiative change that by bringing new investment,

clean energy, and good-paying jobs to disadvantaged communities.”

“President Biden is leading a whole-of-government effort to confront longstanding environmental injustices and inequities,” said White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Brenda Mallory. “Thanks to this historic funding covered under the President's Justice40 Initiative, we are investing in locally-driven solutions to make a positive difference for communities that have suffered from pollution, underinvestment, and decades of disproportionate environmental impacts. Investments like these show how we are delivering on the President's ambitious environmental justice agenda and his commitment to build more equitable and resilient communities for generations to come.”

The Community Change Grants deliver on President Biden's historic commitment to advance equity and justice, including his [Justice40 Initiative](#). The Community Change Grants will deliver 100 percent of the benefits of this program to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution. This program also dedicates \$200 million of Inflation Reduction Act funding to provide technical assistance to applicants and grant recipients, which will enhance the ability of disadvantaged communities to access resources for environmental and climate justice activities.

The activities to be performed under the grants are expected to fall under the following categories:

- Climate resiliency and adaptation.
- Mitigating climate and health risks from urban heat islands, extreme heat, wood heater emissions, and wildfire events.
- Community-led air and other (including water and waste) pollution monitoring, prevention, and remediation.
- Investments in low- and zero-emission and resilient technologies and related infrastructure.
- Workforce development that supports the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollutants.
- Reducing indoor toxics and indoor air pollution.

- Facilitating the engagement of disadvantaged communities in state and federal advisory groups, workshops, rulemakings, and other public processes.

The [Community Change Grants Notice of Funding Opportunity \(NOFO\)](#), administered through the [Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights \(OEJECR\)](#), has several unique characteristics to advance environmental and climate justice, many of which are responsive to feedback and input the agency has heard from communities. These include:

- **Rolling Applications:** The NOFO will be open for a year, closing on November 21, 2024, and EPA will review applications on a rolling basis. This allows applicants to utilize technical assistance and possibly resubmit a new application if not initially selected. EPA encourages applicants to apply as early as possible.
- **Two-track Submission Processes:** Applications can be submitted under two separate tracks depending on the project scope and funding requested.
  - Track I, Community-Driven Investments for Change, is expected to award approximately \$1.96 billion for 150 projects for \$10-20 million each.
  - Track II, Meaningful Engagement for Equitable Governance, is expected to award approximately \$40 million for 20 projects for \$1-3 million each.
- **Oral Presentations:** Track I applicants may also be invited to participate in an oral presentation. These oral presentations will enable EPA reviewers to hear directly from the applicants and their partners to learn more about community priorities, desired outcomes, and plans for long-term sustainability. This new format is responsive to community requests to engage with EPA in more accessible ways.
- **Target Investment Areas:** Out of the \$2 billion in funding, EPA has identified five Target Investment Areas (TIA) to help ensure that communities with unique circumstances, geography, and needs can equitably compete for funding. These are:

- **Tribes in Alaska:** \$150 million for projects benefitting Indian Tribes in Alaska including funds for cleanup of contaminated lands.
- **Tribes:** \$300 million for projects benefitting Tribal communities in the other states.
- **Territories:** \$50 million for projects benefitting disadvantaged communities in the United States' territories of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands.
- **Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities:** \$50 million for projects benefitting small and rural areas that lack fixed, legally determined geographic boundaries, such as Colonias.
- **U.S.-Southern Border Communities:** Consistent with EPA's longstanding commitment to addressing transborder pollution challenges, \$100 million for projects benefitting non-Tribal disadvantaged communities within 100 kilometers north of the U.S.-Mexico border.
- **Technical Assistance:** The \$200 million for technical assistance is available in direct response to feedback from communities and environmental justice leaders who have long called for capacity building support for communities and their partners as they work to access critical federal resources. With this funding, there are two TA programs dedicated for the Community Change Grants. Applicants can learn more about, and express interest in, the technical assistance on [EPA's Community Change Grants Technical Assistance webpage](#).

### Read the Community Change Grants NOFO.

OEJECR will also host multiple informational webinars while the NOFO is open, with the first being held on December 7, 2023. These webinars will address questions, and some may facilitate the formation of partnerships and information sharing. More information on upcoming webinars can be found on [EPA's Inflation Reduction Act Community Change Grants Program webpage](#).

[Learn more about environmental justice at EPA](#)

[Learn more about Inflation Reduction funding at EPA](#)

For up-to-date information about the NOFO, including information on the webinars, subscribe to the Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights' listserv by sending a blank email to: [join-epa-ej@lists.epa.gov](mailto:join-epa-ej@lists.epa.gov). Follow OEJECR on X (formerly Twitter): [@EPAEnvJustice](https://twitter.com/EPAEnvJustice).

## Background

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) created the Environmental and Climate Justice Program, the largest investment in environmental and climate justice in U.S. history when it was signed into law by President Biden on August 16, 2022. Under this program, EPA was provided \$3 billion to award grants and fund related technical assistance to benefit disadvantaged communities.

Earlier in 2023, EPA issued a [Request for Information](#), held a dedicated consultation with EPA's National Environmental Justice Advisory Council, and hosted multiple webinars to gain public input on innovative strategies and approaches for competition design, community engagement, equitable distribution of financial resources, grantee eligibility for funding, capacity-building and outreach, and more. This feedback was crucial in designing key elements of the Community Change Grants and this NOFO, including the Target Investment Areas, incorporating oral presentations, the rolling application period, and more. EPA thanks everyone for their incredibly valuable time and input, which ensured the creation of a more inclusive and accessible grant program.

## Biden-Harris Administration Announces Nearly \$64 Million for New Water Conservation Agreements to Protect the Colorado River System

*President Biden's Investing in America agenda is helping protect the long-term sustainability of the Colorado River System*

*New Arizona agreements will conserve up to 162,710-acre feet of water in Lake Mead through 2026*

DOI 11/3/23

The Biden-Harris administration today announced \$63.4 million in new investments as part of President Biden's Investing in America agenda for water conservation, water efficiency, and protection of critical environmental resources in the Colorado River System. The investments, which will improve and protect the stability and sustainability of the Colorado River System now and into the future, are administered through the Lower Colorado River Basin System Conservation and Efficiency Program and funded by the Inflation Reduction Act, the largest climate investment in history.

Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton joined federal, Tribal and state leaders in Phoenix today to announce the execution of seven new system conservation agreements in Arizona, which will conserve up to 162,710-acre feet of water in Lake Mead through 2026. The conservation agreements will help finance voluntary system conservation to protect Colorado River reservoir storage volumes amid persistent drought conditions driven by climate change.

The new conservation agreements build on the Biden-Harris Administration's announcement of a historic [consensus-based proposal](#) to conserve at least 3 million-acre feet of Colorado River System water through the end of 2026, when the current operating guidelines are set to expire.

"Thanks to President Biden's Investing in America agenda, the Lower Colorado River Basin System Conservation and Efficiency Program is helping address, improve and protect the long-term stability of the Colorado River System," said Secretary Deb Haaland. "The Biden-Harris administration is using every tool and resource at our disposal to continue our sustained, collaborative progress in increasing water conservation across the West."

"Addressing the drought crisis requires an all-hands-on-deck moment, and close collaboration among federal, state, Tribal and local communities. We are excited to see so many Arizona entities committing to system conservation and partnership," said Commissioner Touton. "Together, we can come together to find solutions to meet the challenges of these unprecedented drought conditions."

## New Conservation Agreements

The System Conservation Implementation Agreements announced today will commit water entities in Arizona to conserving water in the Colorado River System. Water entities entering into these agreements include:

Contractor	Annual Conservation Volumes (Acre-Feet)*			
	2023	2024	2025	Total
Yuma Mesa Irrigation and Drainage District	23,197	24,640	24,640	72,477
Mohave Valley Irrigation and Drainage District	12,819	14,742	14,742	42,303
San Carlos Apache Tribe	23,275	-	-	23,275
Hopi Tribe	3,059	3,059	3,059	9,177
Cibola Valley Irrigation and Drainage District	2,700	2,700	2,700	8,100
Spanish Trails Water **	-	2,400	2,400	7,200
Cathcart Farms	57	61	61	178

\*Volumes are "up to" annual volumes in AF

\*\*Term of this agreement runs from 2024-2026, with up to 2,400 acre-feet committed each year.

## Historic Funding from Investing in America Agenda

President Biden's [Investing in America agenda](#) is integral to these efforts to increase near-term water conservation, build long term system efficiency, and prevent the Colorado River System's reservoirs from falling to critically low elevations that would threaten water deliveries and power production. Because of this funding, conservation efforts have already benefited the system this year.

The seven new agreements announced today join eleven [previously announced contracts](#) in Arizona. In total, the 18 agreements executed in Arizona will commit water entities across the state to conserve up to 348,680-acre feet of water in Lake Mead in 2023, and up to 984,429-acre feet through 2026. Reclamation is working with its partners to finalize additional agreements. These agreements are part of the 3 million acre-feet of system conservation commitments made by the Lower Basin states, 2.3 million acre-feet of which will be compensated through funding from the Inflation Reduction Act, which invests a total of \$4.6 billion to address the historic drought across the West.

Through the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#), Reclamation is also investing another \$8.3 billion over five years for water infrastructure projects, including water purification and reuse, water storage and conveyance, desalination and dam safety.

To date, the Interior Department has announced the following investments for Colorado River Basin states, which will yield hundreds of thousands of acre-feet of water savings each year once funded projects are complete:

- \$281 million for [21 water recycling projects](#) that are expected to increase annual water capacity by 127,000 acre-feet annually;
- Up to \$233 million in [water conservation funding](#) for the Gila River Indian Community, including \$83 million for a water pipeline project and an additional \$50 million from the Inflation Reduction Act through the [Lower Colorado River Basin System Conservation and Efficiency Program](#), which will also provide similar investments in 2024 and 2025;
- Over \$73 million for infrastructure repairs on water delivery systems; \$19.3 million in [fiscal year 2022](#) and another \$54 million [announced in April 2023](#);
- \$71 million for [32 drought resiliency projects](#) to expand access to water through groundwater storage, rainwater harvesting, aquifer recharge and water treatment;
- \$50 million over the next five years to [improve key water infrastructure](#) and enhance drought-related data collection across the Upper Colorado River Basin; and
- \$20 million in new [small surface and groundwater storage](#) projects.

## Upcoming Meetings and Webinars

[WestFAST Webinar: Stream Restoration and Water Rights in Nebraska and California](#)  
December 12<sup>th</sup> at 10am MT, Virtual

[2024 WSWC Spring \(203rd\) Meetings and Washington Roundtable](#)  
March 13 & 14, Washington DC

## Other Federal News

[BLM 11/20/23. BLM to Analyze Potential Changes to West-wide Energy Corridors as Part of President Biden's Investing in America Agenda](#)

DOI 11/9/23. Interior Department Signs Agreement with Mexico, Canada to Continue Trilateral Collaboration on Conservation Efforts

DOI 11/9/23. Biden-Harris Administration Agencies Sign Interagency Agreement to Address Wildfire Risk and Protect Communities from Smoke

DOI 11/13/23. Interior Department Takes Steps to Strengthen Environmental Justice Initiatives

DOI 11/14/23. Biden-Harris Administration, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Announce Over \$140 Million in Grants from the America the Beautiful Challenge to Restore Lands and Waters

DOI 11/14/23. President Biden's Investing in America Agenda Provides \$50 Million for Water and Energy Efficiency Projects

DOI 11/15/23. Biden-Harris Administration Announces \$51 Million from Investing in America Agenda for Water Resources and Ecosystem Health

DOI 11/30/23. President Biden's Investing in America Agenda Devotes More Than \$468 Million to Advance Wildfire Resilience Across the Country

DOJ 11/2/23. Responsible Parties Reach Settlement for More Than \$33 Million to Restore Natural Resources in Portland Harbor

EPA 11/1/23. EPA Launches New Community-based Initiative to Help People Access Unprecedented Resources for Local Climate and Environmental Justice Solutions

EPA 11/2/23. Biden-Harris Administration Announces State and Tribal Allocations for \$48 Million Grant Program to Protect Groundwater Resources and Tackle Climate Change

EPA 11/30/23. Biden-Harris Administration Proposes to Strengthen the Lead and Copper Rule to Protect All Communities in America from Lead in Drinking Water

FWS 11/3/23. Upper Klamath NWR wetlands on path to restoration, reconnection

FWS 11/14/23. The Interagency Fish Passage Task Force

NASA 11/14/23. Trailblazing New Earth Satellite Put to Test in Preparation for Launch

NOAA 11/30/23. Biden-Harris Administration awards \$7.2 million to improve climate projections of extreme weather through the Investing in America agenda

Reclamation 11/2/23. Reclamation and Sites Project Authority finalize plans to create new water storage in Northern California

USDA 11/14/23. USDA Contributes to the Fifth National Climate Assessment, Highlighting Impacts on Agriculture, Forests and Rural Communities and Adaptation Needs

USDA 11/15/23. FACT SHEET: Year Two of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law at USDA

USGS 11/29/23. Three Historic USGS Streamgages Recognized by New World Meteorological Organization Designation

The Western States Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST) is a collaboration between 13 Federal agencies with water management responsibilities in the West. WestFAST was established to support the Western States Water Council (WSWC), and the Western Governors Association in coordinating Federal efforts regarding water resources.