



# Western States Water

## Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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### **ADMINISTRATION/WATER RESOURCES**

#### **Bureau of Reclamation/Water Reuse/Water Supply**

On May 30, the Department of the Interior's (DOI) Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) announced a \$242M investment to expand western water storage and conveyance through five projects in California, Colorado, and Washington, as well as a feasibility study in Arizona. The projects are expected to add at least 1.6 million acre-feet of additional water storage capacity across the West. Projects include: the Verde Reservoirs Sediment Mitigation Project in Arizona (\$8.5M); the B.F. Sisk Dam Raise and Reservoir Expansion Project in California (\$75M); the Sites Reservoir Project in California (\$67.5M); the Arkansas Valley Conduit in Colorado (\$90M); and the Cle Elum Pool Raise Project in Washington (\$1M). Projects include infrastructure to improve off-stream storage capabilities, rural water supply connectivity, and reservoir capacity.

"In the wake of severe drought across the West, the Interior Department is putting funding from President Biden's Investing in America agenda to work to provide clean, reliable drinking water to families, farmers and Tribes throughout the West," said Secretary Deb Haaland. "Through the investments we're announcing today, we will expedite essential water storage projects and provide increased water security to Western communities." "As drought conditions continue to grip the West, the need for these projects is increasingly evident," said USBR Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton. "These investments will advance projects that bring reliable drinking and agricultural water to residents in need, provide ecosystem benefits, and increase overall water storage."

On May 28, USBR also announced a \$179M investment for innovative water reuse and drought resilience projects. The funding is part of the DOI's new Large-Scale Water Recycling Program, launched in 2023. Commissioner Touton made the announcement during a visit to the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, which is receiving \$99M for large-scale water recycling planning and design for the Pure Water Southern California facility. Additional projects funded in the announcement include: the City of

Buenaventura's Ventura Water Pure Program (\$30M); the Los Angeles Groundwater Replenishment Project (\$30M); and the Washington County Water Conservancy District (\$20.5M) in Utah.

Touton said: "These historic investments will add a significant tool to our toolbox to bolster drought resilience in communities across the country. The projects being funded from President Biden's Investing in America agenda will diversify our water supplies by taking these currently unusable water sources and turning them into new supplies to help meet growing water needs." <https://www.usbr.gov/newsroom/>

### **ADMINISTRATION/WATER QUALITY**

#### **EPA/Water Quality Standards**

On June 3, the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) final rule, Water Quality Standards (WQS) Regulator Revisions to Protect Tribal Reserved Rights, went into effect. The revised WQS regulation at 40 CFR part 131 addresses how the EPA and States must consider tribal reserved rights, defined as "rights to Clean Water Act-protected aquatic and/or aquative-dependent resources reserved to tribes through treaties, statutes, or executive orders." Tribes must assert these rights for consideration.

If a tribe asserts a tribal reserved right in writing to a State and EPA for consideration in establishment of WQS, the state must, to the extent supported by available data and information: (1) consider the use and value of its waters for protecting the tribal reserved right in adopting or revising designated uses; (2) consider the anticipated future exercise of the tribal reserved right unsuppressed by water quality in establishing relevant WQS; (3) where the state has adopted designated uses, the state must establish water quality criteria that either expressly protect or encompass the tribal reserved right. In such cases, the state must develop criteria to protect right holders using at least the same risk level as the state would otherwise use to develop criteria to protect the state's general population.

The rule requires that EPA: (1) provide assistance with evaluating tribal reserved rights upon request by

states or right holders; (2) review WQS adopted by states and authorized by tribes to determine whether they appropriately considered applicable tribal reserved rights; (3) initiate the tribal consultation process with the right holders to inform this review.

EPA Administrator Michael Regan said: "With this action, EPA is establishing clear rules of the road that will support healthier Tribal communities. We look forward to partnering with Tribes and our state co-regulators to implement Clean Water Act protections consistent with Tribal treaty and reserved rights."

### **CONGRESS/ADMINISTRATION** **House/NOAA/FY25 Budget**

On June 4, the House Committee on Science Space and Technology, Environment Subcommittee held an overview hearing on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) FY25 budget. Committee members questioned NOAA Administrator, Dr. Rick Spinrad on cuts to weather research.

In his opening statement, Subcommittee Chairman Max Miller (R-OH) noted the President's request for \$6.5B for NOAA's FY25 budget (an increase of \$242M from FY24), and the additional \$2.6B NOAA received as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). He expressed support for the increases for the Office of Marine and Aviation Operations and the National Weather Service (NWS) saying: "These two offices are at the forefront of innovation and extreme weather prediction that can indeed save lives." He expressed concern over cuts to the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), which he pointed out is responsible for developing next-generation radar. He said: "Cutting funding in this office means cutting our investment in the future and accurate weather forecasting."

Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-OK) expressed similar concerns regarding funding for weather programs for OAR and Weather and Air Chemistry Research Programs. He also highlighted decreased funding request for the National Mesonet Program (NMP), as well as continued flat funding for Commercial Data Purchases (CDP). He said: "These two programs are golden examples of how NOAA can supplement and even improve their weather data inventory with cheaper, flexible industry efforts. Instead of supporting these programs, NOAA is requesting significant increases to the National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NESDIS) in order to build out federal satellite constellations. While that is an admirable goal, and I support ensuring our next generation of satellites avoid gaps that could affect NOAA's ability in weather forecasting, it shouldn't come at the cost of decreasing commercial data.... It would

seem logical to annually bolster programs like the NMP and CDP and use one-time influxes for keeping large projects on budget and on schedule."

When asked about potential funding cliffs for weather and tsunami prediction programs, Spinrad said that the level of funding for such programs reflect difficult decisions the agency had to make due, in part, to the constraints of the Fiscal Responsibility Act and NOAA's commitment to sustain current activity including keeping the next generation of satellites in place and maintaining mission essential functions. Rep. Doug Collins (R-GA) asked Spinrad: "How has [the FY25 budget] improved upon existing partnerships with private and public weather data to improve our forecasting models?" Spinrad responded "Our reliance on the private sector and, in fact, the development of the commercial data buys is something that I have as a very important both personal and professional priority.... Over the last several years, we've engaged in some initial data buys with the private sector that give us thousands of profiles of vertical temperature and humidity. This is, in my opinion, a successful pilot program. It is my intent to increase our capability for incorporation of private data into our portfolio of weather service products."

### **CONGRESS/WATER RESOURCES** **S2S Precipitation Forecasting**

On May 31, Rep. Grace Napolitano (D-CA) released an op-ed for The Hill in support of improving and expanding precipitation forecasting in the Western United States. She argued for increased agency collaboration, devoted agency time, and robust funding to improve sub-seasonal to seasonal precipitation forecasting (S2S). She argued that decision-makers need improved precipitation forecasts, at lead times longer than seven days, in order to take effective actions. She highlighted the extreme fluctuations between drought and flooding that Western States experience. She pointed out that the NWS 16-day forecasts diminish in accuracy significantly after seven days. Their prediction skill for S2S periods is also minimal. Napolitano said that, NOAA has reported a need for a S2S winter precipitation pilot project, but has yet to implement or request funding.

She said: "The federal government unquestionably needs to provide robust and continuous investments into expanding beyond our current forecasting limitations, particularly sub-seasonal to seasonal forecasting. The U.S. is notably behind on our predictive precipitation skills, and as climate change continues to ramp up its unpredictability, now more than ever, NOAA, NWS and other agencies must collaborate and devote their time to funding efforts to continue to improve and expand our forecasting tools." <https://thehill.com/opinion/congress-blog/4693749-the-nations-weather-forecasting-must-rise-to-the-challenges-of-climate-change/>

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