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WestFAST News

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Biden-Harris Administration Invests Up to \$400 Million to Address Drought, Conserve Water through Production of Water-Saving Commodities

USDA also announces record \$2.3 billion investments under the Western Water Framework; Funding builds on Administration's historic water conservation efforts, which have stabilized short-term western water supply and are investing in long-term solutions.

USDA August 1, 2024



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will invest \$400 million with at least 18 irrigation districts to help farmers continue commodity production while also conserving water across the West. This funding – which will support irrigation districts and producers in using innovative water savings technologies and farming practices while producing water-saving commodities in the face of continued drought – is expected to conserve up to 50,000 acre-feet in water use across 250,000 acres of irrigated

land in production, while expanding and creating new, sustainable market opportunities.

This historic funding builds on the Biden-Harris Administration's work to conserve water, increase the efficiency of water use, upgrade existing infrastructure, and overall strengthen water security in the West. With historic water conservation enabled by President Biden's Investing in America agenda, the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation announced in May 2024 it had **staved off the immediate possibility** of the Colorado River System's reservoirs from falling to critically low elevations that would threaten water deliveries and power production. Due to record conservation investments as well as improved hydrology, Lake Mead levels today, at elevation 1075 feet, are the highest since May 2021, when they were at 1073 feet. The Administration is now working to ensure the long-term sustainability and resilience by focusing on long-term water conservation in several basins across the west.

Agricultural producers are the backbone of rural communities across the West and many of them are struggling under prolonged drought conditions," Vilsack said. "USDA is taking an 'all hands' approach to help address this challenge, including these new partnerships with irrigation districts to support producers. We want to scale up the tools available to keep farmers farming, while also voluntarily conserving water and expanding markets for water-saving commodities."

Partnering with Irrigation Districts to Support Water Conservation, Produce Water-Saving Commodities

USDA worked to select irrigation districts based on several commodity production and water management-related criteria in order to maximize the ability to achieve program objectives, leveraging available data from the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation to ensure close alignment and partnership. USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) provided data and analysis to support the preliminary selections. Districts that have been preliminarily selected for potential inclusion in this program include:

- Black Canyon Irrigation District, Idaho
- Brooklyn Canal Company, Utah
- Central Oregon Irrigation District, Ore.
- Central Arizona Irrigation and Drainage District, Ariz.
- Corcoran Irrigation District, Calif.
- East Columbia Basin Irrigation District, Wash.
- Elephant Butte Irrigation District, N.M.
- Glenn – Colusa Irrigation District, Calif.
- Greybull Valley Irrigation District, Wyo.
- Hidalgo & Cameron Counties Irrigation District 9, Texas
- Huntley Project Irrigation District, Mont.
- Imperial Irrigation District, Calif.
- Maricopa – Stanfield Irrigation and Drainage District, Ariz.
- Palisade Irrigation District, Colo.
- Quincy Columbia Basin Irrigation District, Wash.
- Solano Irrigation District, Calif.
- Sutter Mutual Water Company, Calif.
- Truckee-Carson Irrigation District, Nev.

The preliminary selected districts may receive up to \$15 million each in the awards and will enter into sub-agreements with the producers participating within the district. Depending on available funding, awards to additional districts may be possible.

Producers who participate will receive payments for voluntarily reducing water consumption while maintaining commodity production. The needs of producers will determine the specific strategies for water conservation, including irrigation

improvements, shifts in management practices, shifts in cropping systems, and other innovative strategies. USDA will learn from the diversity of strategies used and identify additional opportunities to maintain and expand water-saving commodity production in the future.

Participating producers and irrigation districts will commit to ensuring continued commodity production in the areas where water consumption is reduced. USDA is working to finalize agreements with the preliminarily selected districts, which will include the details of each individual district's water-saving strategies, commodities to be produced, and specific budgets. Following the finalization of those awards, producers within the participating districts will work directly through their irrigation districts to participate. USDA and the preliminarily selected districts will provide more details on the agreements and opportunities for producers to directly enroll.

“Maricopa-Stanfield Irrigation and Drainage District is pleased to be working with USDA to implement practices and projects that save water and improve efficiencies at a time when the historic drought in the southwest has put so much pressure on our agricultural producers. Investing in agriculture is an investment in America,” the District said.

“Quincy-Columbia Basin Irrigation District is excited to enter into partnership with USDA to help bring Federal dollars to local growers. Our top priority is providing efficient and dependable irrigation water to our constituents, and we look forward to working with USDA to explore new water-efficient practices in the Columbia Basin,” the District said.

“Greybull Valley Irrigation District (GVID) is extremely excited to explore water conservation efforts with the USDA Water-Saving Commodities team, this is a great opportunity for the District and their producers. GVID is always looking for ways to conserve water while supplying their producers with a steady flow for their crops, livestock, underground pipelines, and pivots. The District is looking forward to discovering other conservation measures that would be very beneficial for all GVID members,” GVID said.

Investing in Water Conservation in Tribal Communities and Acequias

In addition to the preliminarily selected districts announced today, USDA is also announcing a Tribal set-aside within the program, targeting up to \$40 million in funding for additional awards within Indian Country. USDA will work with the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Tribes, and Tribal producers to reduce water consumption and maintain land in agricultural production – supporting the production of water-saving commodities. USDA is partnering with BIA to use available data and ensure meaningful engagement with Tribes to establish selection criteria that reflect the specific needs and water management systems within Indian Country. Additional information for further engagement and selections will be provided in the weeks ahead.

USDA will also include targeted assistance to support water-saving commodity production for acequias, recognizing that many irrigators in the Southwest are formed under the community-based acequia model instead of the irrigation district model. Additional information regarding targeted assistance to acequias that reflects the historical nature of their water distribution structure will follow.

Additional information for further engagement with Tribes and acequias will be provided in the weeks ahead.

Historic Investments in Western Water Complement Water-Saving Commodities Program

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is working to help producers and communities conserve water, manage and prepare for the effects of climate change and build drought resilience in the West through its [Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action](#) (Western Water Framework), which was launched in 2023. The Western Water Framework describes how NRCS assistance is used to address water resource related issues in 17 states in the West. In fiscal year 2023, NRCS provided \$2.3 billion in conservation investments that help producers and communities in Western states better steward water resources, including investments that

also support climate change mitigation. This total includes a boost of 9.7 percent or \$213.3 million from the Inflation Reduction Act.

The Western Water Framework includes key NRCS conservation programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Within EQIP NRCS has created a WaterSMART Initiative (WSI), to coordinate investments with the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART investments in priority areas.

For Fiscal Year 2024, NRCS selected 9 new priority areas and is continuing to offer funding in 36 prior approved areas, making \$29.7 million in EQIP funding available through the WSI across 16 states. EQIP and CSP provide conservation planning and funding to help with implementation of conservation practices. Practices like irrigation water management improve irrigation efficiency and mitigate climate change. Meanwhile, practices like conservation crop rotation, cover crop, residue and tillage management, no-till, and nutrient management help producers build resilience to future drought. ACEP gives producers and landowners tools to protect wetlands, grasslands and agricultural lands which can be used to conserve water.

Together, these efforts by FSA and NRCS advance USDA's efforts to create more, new, and better market opportunities, [sustainably grow agricultural productivity](#) to feed a growing population, and help farmers and natural resource managers [manage and prepare for the effects of climate change](#).

[Learn more about the Western Water Framework.](#)

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the

Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit usda.gov.

DOE Announces \$10 Million to Support Climate Resilience Centers Across America

University-led Projects Will Share Data, Strengthen and Build Relationships Between DOE and Communities Bearing the Brunt of Climate Change.

DOE August 15, 2024.

To support vulnerable communities responding to continued and extreme climate effects, the Department of Energy (DOE) today announced \$10 million in funding for innovative Climate Resilience Centers (CRCs) in 10 different states. University-led research teams will leverage the world class modeling, data and research capabilities from DOE national laboratories customized for their local regions with a focus on climate prediction of weather hazard risks to better prepare communities. The CRCs are part of the Biden-Harris Administration's [Justice40 Initiative](#) and are designed to ensure that all Americans are benefitting from scientific research.

“Every pocket of the country has experienced the impact of extreme weather events that are exacerbated by climate change, and disadvantaged communities often feel the brunt of that impact,” said U.S. Secretary of Energy Jennifer M. Granholm. “The projects announced today will leverage the world class expertise and scientific research capacities of DOE’s national laboratories to develop the tools communities will need to inform future decisions for building resiliency.

Each of the CRCs are led by Minority Serving Institutions and Emerging Research Institutions. Most are also collaborations with DOE national labs, other federal agencies, academic institutions, state and municipal agencies, or community organizations.

Projects were selected by a peer-review panel, and selections focused on a diversity of topics, regions,

and institutions across the country. These projects also build on [prior awards](#) to CRCs made in 2023.

The CRCs will help form a nucleus for a diverse group of young scientists, engineers, and technicians to further their scientific research and work on scientific teams. The CRCs will also foster capacity at the regional and local level by connecting with affected communities and stakeholders to enable them to translate basic research into actionable science to enhance climate resilience, as well as to identify potential future research opportunities.

Across the 10 selectees, research projects include ways to predict and protect communities from coastal flooding and extreme storms; analyzing the impacts of drought on Tribal and agricultural communities; and improving water quality.

Selected Project Descriptions:

The 10 projects were selected under the DOE Funding Opportunity Announcement for Climate Resilience Centers DE-FOA-0003181.

1. The Advancing Development and Climate-Resilient Adaptation Practices via Community-Driven Urban Transformation in St. Louis, Missouri, establishes a CRC at Saint Louis University with the goal of building regional resilience to heat islands. Heat islands are urban areas that experience extreme high temperatures due to the built environment. Researchers will connect with local communities to define the impacts of climate risk; increase awareness of climate change effects; and empower communities with data to support resilience projects and green infrastructure development. The goal is improved public health, increased economic stability, and a greener infrastructure.
2. In the Climate Lighthouse project, City College of New York City will lead the effort partnering with the DOE’s Brookhaven National Laboratory to help residents better cope with extreme heat. The focus will be on translating DOE climate data into useable tools to improve NYC residents’ resilience. Information will be communicated to the public through

community partnerships in Manhattan (Harlem) and Brooklyn. The team will work closely with community partners to improve tools so they can serve to build actionable knowledge among the public.

3. The goal of the CRC in Tribal communities along the Missouri River Basin is to build climate resilience capacity for Native American communities. The team effort will be led by the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Tribal nations, US Geological Survey, and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL). The team will develop user-friendly planning tools to translate existing climate projections into site-specific drought and flood risks, mitigation recommendations, associated costs, and uncertainties. Educational workshops organized by the consortium will demonstrate research results.
4. Communities in the Texas Coastal Bend along the Gulf of Mexico face multiple water-related threats, including floods and droughts. In the Coastal Bend Climate Resilience Project, a partnership with University of Texas-Arlington and Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, the focus is on improving the predictions of events. The Coastal Bend CRC will use data and modeling from the DOE for adapting and planning for climate extremes. A critical part of the program is building short- and long-term capacity in communities to ensure local and community leaders can leverage climate science to inform resilience-building efforts, particularly among vulnerable groups.
5. The Midwest Climate Resilience Center in Clark County, Ohio, will address high risk from extreme rain and flooding and the consequential effects on drinking water quality. Central State University will partner with Ohio State University and PNNL to assess the impact of climate stressors on soil system processes in watersheds with varied land uses. The group will develop scale-appropriate targeted climate solutions for local communities and train the next generation of climate scientists from underrepresented student communities.
6. The Climate Resilience Center for Alaska brings together researchers from the

University of Alaska Fairbanks with Los Alamos National Laboratory. As Alaska experiences transformational change due to climate warming, this funding will enhance communication with Alaska communities about existing DOE science, develop meaningful collaborations between communities and the DOE, and incorporate DOE science into educational pathways and opportunities. This project will also conduct pilot research specifically focused on southwest Alaska to demonstrate the Center's role. Much of the research will involve graduate students supported by the Center, acting as a conduit to recruit the next generation of climate investigators, with an emphasis on rural, traditionally underserved communities.

7. Space Coast RESCUE (Resilience Solutions for Climate, Urbanization, and Environment) is an effort by researchers at the Florida Institute of Technology collaborating with the DOE's Argonne National Laboratory. The Florida Space Coast, which borders the Atlantic Ocean, faces climate resilience challenges, and risks that are multifaceted and representative of the problems faced by many coastal communities throughout the nation. Hazards include heat stress, extreme precipitation, tropical cyclone-induced high winds and surge, flooding, and coastal erosion, as well as inland flooding due to extreme precipitation and stormwater runoff that negatively affects water quality and human health.
8. Planning for extreme weather is a cornerstone of the Building Predictive Capacity to Enhance Stormwater Infrastructure and Flood Resilience project led by Central Michigan University. The project aims to produce data and tools that will help communities plan for and become more resilient to climate change in collaboration with communities in three pilot watersheds in Michigan: the Chippewa River, Lower Grand River, and Rouge River. The project will use downscaling of climate model projections to develop local precipitation models to simulate future risks of floods and torrential rains.

9. Powering just and resilient cities is the goal of the Gateway Cities Climate Resilience Center led by the University of Massachusetts Lowell in partnership with PNNL. The objective is to work with the community to use DOE science and tools to provide local projections of extreme temperature events. The project will assess vulnerability of residential heating and cooling power demand and potential mitigation measures in terms of urban tree cover and green spaces. Graduate students will be trained in community-engaged climate and energy-modeling research.
10. This project, led by Lehigh University in partnership with PNNL, will examine the impact of regional climate action plans on the response to extreme water events like floods and droughts in Eastern Pennsylvania. The team plans to work closely with the three-city coalition of Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton to address multiple climate change impacts. Community workshops will be hosted with Community Action Lehigh Valley.

Total funding for all of the projects is \$10 million for Fiscal Year 2024 dollars for projects lasting three years in duration. A list of all Biological and Environmental Research (BER) projects and funding, including Climate Resilience Centers, can be found at science.osti.gov/ber.

Selection for award negotiations is not a commitment by DOE to issue an award or provide funding. Before funding is issued, DOE and the applicants will undergo a negotiation process, and DOE may cancel negotiations and rescind the selection for any reason during that time.

Can Agriculture Improve Water Quality? With Data-Driven Voluntary Conservation, the Answer is Yes.

NRCS August 1, 2024

This blog by Chief Terry Cosby details some of the key ways USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service supports producers and conservation partners in improving water quality and strengthening agricultural operations through voluntary conservation.



All life depends on clean water, and how we manage our land affects surrounding waterbodies. With nearly 40% of U.S. land in farms, agriculture offers a major potential to support water quality improvements nationwide. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) delivers science and data, one-on-one technical support, and cost share opportunities to ensure this potential is realized. Here's how we support agricultural producers and conservation partners in achieving wins for water quality and working lands.

We provide strategies to improve cropland nutrient management on a field-by-field basis.

When farmers effectively manage nutrients from commercial fertilizer, manure, and other inputs, they minimize the losses of those nutrients from their fields into local waterbodies. While all crops need nutrients to grow and thrive, effective nutrient management is not one-size-fits-all. NRCS works with farmers to achieve [SMART Nutrient Management](#).

A SMART Nutrient Management Plan includes the four Rs of nutrient stewardship we've used for years – the right Source, or type of nutrients; the right Method for applying them; the right Rate at which they're applied; and the right Timing of application – while additionally emphasizing the need for a comprehensive Assessment of site-specific conditions. No two fields have identical histories or plans for production. When farmers work with NRCS to develop a SMART Nutrient Management Plan, our conservationists assess site-specific risks for nutrient and soil loss and offer opportunities to address those risks, all through voluntary measures.

This provides a way to boost crop yields, bottom lines, and water quality benefits all at once. In fact, [farmers on average save \\$30 per acre](#) on land currently receiving excess nutrients by implementing a SMART Nutrient Management Plan with NRCS. [This Conservation Outcomes Webinar recording](#) offers a detailed overview of SMART Nutrient Management and the science behind this approach.



Soybeans sprout through terminated cereal rye and corn residue in a no-till field. From before planting to after harvest, farmers can work with NRCS to develop site-specific, data-driven SMART Nutrient Management Plans to maximize yields and minimize nutrient losses. Photo Credit: Jason Johnson, NRCS

We build the science base needed to effectively address nutrients across agricultural landscapes.

Managing nutrients as they're applied is just one step in supporting water quality improvements. While this is vital, we must also understand and address nutrients that were previously not used by crops. These legacy nutrients may persist for decades in cropland soils and surrounding waterbodies.

Legacy nutrients present a major water quality challenge that can't be fixed through SMART Nutrient Management alone. Improving conservation outcomes requires targeted, data-driven efforts at multiple scales – within fields, beyond the edges of fields, and across watersheds – to effectively address both current and legacy nutrient sources. Our [Conservation Effects Assessment Project \(CEAP\)](#) plays a key role here.

Through [CEAP Watershed Assessments](#), NRCS works with producers and partners to quantify the outcomes of voluntary conservation in select watersheds nationwide. [This blog explains how](#). CEAP provides data-driven insights to inform delivery of our conservation programs and

initiatives and the systems of practices we plan with landowners to manage both current and legacy nutrients in-field and beyond.

Our [new USDA Legacy Phosphorus Assessment Project webpage](#) highlights a key example of CEAP efforts to advance the science behind legacy nutrient mitigation to support effective conservation strategies. Legacy phosphorus will be the focus of our next Conservation Outcomes Webinar, scheduled for 2:00 p.m. eastern on August 22. This free, one-hour webinar is open to all and will provide insights that producers and other landowners, conservationists, and researchers may use to more effectively manage for legacy phosphorus to improve water quality nationwide. [Visit our Webinar Series webpage](#) for additional details and instructions to join.



Valuable soil and nutrients may be lost from cropland fields as runoff. While this is a potentially stress-inducing reality, there's cause for hope. NRCS provides the scientific understanding we need to both minimize current losses through voluntary conservation efforts and manage legacy nutrients that may persist across watersheds. Photo Credit: Chris Lee, NRCS

We work one-on-one with farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners.

As Chief of USDA's primary private lands conservation agency, I'm regularly in awe of the power of voluntary conservation to deliver lasting results for our natural resources. Farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners are among the nation's most dedicated stewards. At NRCS, we're here to serve them.

The [Conservation at Work Video Series](#) features producers and NRCS staff talking about some of our voluntary conservation practices. This includes two-minute videos on [conservation crop rotation](#), [cover crop](#), [field border](#), [filter strip](#), [grassed waterway](#), [prescribed grazing](#), [riparian](#)

forest buffer, and other practices that support water quality improvements. Systems of conservation practices used together often deliver the greatest benefit. How? This is not something producers have to figure out alone.

I encourage all producers to [connect with the NRCS office at their local USDA Service Center](#). NRCS staff can visit your operation and share one-on-one technical expertise to meet your needs. They may also provide details on our programs, like the [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) and [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#), that deliver cost share to help eligible producers implement systems of NRCS conservation practices.

From small-scale farmers like [Maigee Chang](#), who owns a 2.25-acre farm in Hawaii, to [Walt Bones](#), a retired South Dakotan whose family manages multiple operations, producers nationwide are partnering with NRCS to strengthen their working lands and keep our waters clean. Join them, and us. Together, we will deliver wins for agriculture and water quality through data-driven, voluntary conservation.



NRCS staff are available nationwide. They'll walk your land with you, learn your unique conservation and production goals, and help you develop and deliver on a plan to conserve natural resources while strengthening your operation. Photo Credit: Preston Keres, USDA

Upcoming Events

[2024 WSWC Fall Meetings](#)

October 22-23 in Lawrence, Kansas

Other Federal News

[BLM 8/8/24. BLM announces next steps to implement the Public Lands Rule](#)

[DOE 8/26/24. Biden-Harris Administration Invests \\$31 Million to Reduce Costs and Expand Clean, Renewable Geothermal Energy](#)

[DOE 8/6/24. Biden-Harris Administration Invests \\$2.2 Billion in the Nation's Grid to Protect Against Extreme Weather, Lower Costs, and Prepare For Growing Demand](#)

[DOI 8/29/24. Biden-Harris Administration Provides \\$55 Million from the President's Investing in America Agenda to Strengthen Drought Resilience](#)

[DOI 8/15/24. Strengthening Western Resilience in the Face of Drought](#)

[DOI 8/05/24. Biden-Harris Administration Delivers \\$105 Million from Investing in America Agenda for Water Conservation and Efficiency Projects](#)

[EPA 8/20/24. Biden-Harris Administration Awards \\$25.5 Million in New Grants to Combat Impact of Climate Change on Drinking Water Infrastructure](#)

[FEMA 8/15/24. FEMA Updates Application Procedures for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to Provide More Flexibility for Recovering Communities Nationwide and Protect Them Against Future Risks](#)

[FWS 8/1/24. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Promotes Public Access to Hunting and Fishing](#)

[NOAA 8/1/24. NOAA to Make \\$1.5 Million Available to Tribes for Regional Ocean Partnerships](#)

[NOAA 8/6/24. High Tide Flooding May Lessen Across the U.S., NOAA Scientists Predict](#)

[NOAA 8/15/24. Biden-Harris Administration Announces \\$34 Million to Modernize NOAA Fisheries' Data, Infrastructure and Workforce](#)

[Reclamation 8/15/24. Reclamation announces 2025 operating conditions for Lake Powell and Lake Mead](#)

USACE 8/29/24. Army Announces Civil Works Investments in Small, Disadvantaged Communities

USDA 8/9/24. What They are Saying: Biden-Harris Administration Invests Up to \$400 Million to Address Drought, Conserve Water through Production of Water-Saving Commodities

USGS 8/29/24. Reclamation Joins Innovative Water Management Partnership

USGS 8/28/24. Erosion Following Wildfire Has Increased in California Since 1984

USGS 8/29/24. U.S. Geological Survey Scientists Measure What Often Remains Invisible – Groundwater in the Southeast Puget Sound Region

USGS 8/29/24. Wildfires are Increasing Concentrations of Mercury in Pacific Northwest Headwater Streams

The Western States Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST) is a collaboration between 16 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.