



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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ADMINISTRATION

EPA/PFAS

On May 14, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced it will keep the current National Primary Drinking Water Regulations for perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS). EPA plans to rescind and reconsider the regulations for PFHxS, PFNA, HFPO-DA (commonly known as GenX), and the Hazard Index mixture of these three plus PFBS, to ensure that the determinations and any resulting regulation follow the legal process in the Safe Drinking Water Act. EPA also intends to extend compliance deadlines for PFOA and PFOS, establish a federal exemption framework, and initiate enhanced outreach to water systems, especially in rural and small communities.

CONGRESS

Appropriations/Agriculture

On May 6, the Senate Appropriations Committee held a hearing to review the FY26 budget request for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with Secretary Brooke Rollins. The House also convened a USDA appropriations meeting the same week. Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Susan Collins (R-ME) detailed her concerns over USDA's delay in releasing program funds, noting that such delays create uncertainty for growers. Secretary Rollins said "We are working around the clock, going line, by line, by line. We're down to the final \$5B out of, I believe, almost \$20B of frozen funds.... Some of the funding that we have pulled back and then reopened, we've asked for re-applications to realign around this President's priorities."

Lawmakers from both parties in the House and Senate asked Rollins about understaffing and potential closures of Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) county offices, emphasizing the need for local, in-person access. Rollins said "I don't know, at least at USDA, if there's any role more important than those frontline FSA offices, and those remain a priority." She continually requested specific locations of closed or understaffed offices and

mentioned the agency's intention to move service online to reduce reliance on field offices. Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) asked for assurance that agricultural research in Oregon will continue, despite proposed budget cuts. Secretary Rollins committed to continuing cutting-edge research at USDA, stating that the budget only cuts the research titles by 7% and is focused on eliminating outdated facilities.

Appropriations/Energy and Water

On May 7, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development held a hearing to discuss the President's FY26 Budget request for the Department of Energy (DOE) with Secretary Chris Wright. Representative Dan Newhouse (R-WA) discussed the Lower Snake River dams, highlighting their importance for hydroelectric power, irrigation, flood control, and transportation. Secretary Wright expressed strong support for these dams, emphasizing their value in providing reliable, high-value electricity. He stated that hydroelectric dams are critical infrastructure that can flexibly generate power based on demand. Wright said: "I am passionately in support of those dams staying in place.... I am fully aligned to work with you, and so is this administration, to think first about the American taxpayers and the American citizens that need it.... [I am] also passionate about fish and the outdoors and animals and clean air and clean water and all that. And as you said, they go together. They are not always in opposition."

Appropriations/EPA

On May 14, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Environment held a hearing to review the FY26 EPA budget request with Administrator Lee Zeldin. Subcommittee Chair Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) expressed appreciation for some of Zeldin's actions, such as reviewing the WOTUS rule, reconsidering power plant and vehicle emissions rules, and focusing on permitting. However, she expressed concerns regarding funding and transparency concerns, as well as the reorganization to eliminate the Office of Atmospheric Programs and the Office of Research and Development. She said the EPA has not adhered to

reprogramming guidelines or provided rationale for the changes. "I'm looking at it, not only through the lens of Alaskans, but really all Americans who...benefit from its data-driven decision making, the remediation efforts and the mission to protect human health and the environment. I give a lot of leeway for an incoming administration's prerogative to implement changes in support of the policies and priorities, but it also has to be done with clear articulation of the goals against which such changes will be measured."

Senator Murkowski questioned the proposed 88% reduction in SRF funding, calling it "unserious" given the program's essential nature and bipartisan support. She said SRFs are clearly "one of the most essential programs that the agency administers." Zeldin noted the impact of earmarks on SRFs saying, "It would be helpful to have a conversation about the SRFs and the use of earmarks and how that has been reducing the funding through the years.... The SRF is not zeroed out in the skinny budget, and in fact, it has hundreds of millions of dollars there in it.... I look forward to more conversations about the SRFs and I'm sure members of the House and the Senate will be having conversations amongst yourselves as to what you believe to be the appropriate funding level for SRFs, as well as the future of the program, and whether or not earmarks will continue to be used to reduce that balance." Multiple Senators expressed concern about canceled grants, citing specific cancellations in their States. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) criticized the proposed elimination of 16 of 19 categorical grant programs, citing concerns from the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) that it would "incapacitate state environmental programs." Zeldin stated "Every aspect of this skinny budget was done deliberately, as a result of a lot of thoughtful conversation." Murray questioned whether conversation had included the States. Zeldin replied: "States are absolutely included as it relates to conversations that take place about our priorities."

On May 15, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Environment also held a hearing on the EPA budget. Committee Chairman Tom Cole (R-OK) supported Zeldin's actions to reduce regulatory burdens and rightsize EPA, but noted "important functions" he is concerned about. He highlighted the Kerr Environmental Research Center in Ada, OK as a leader for research on groundwater, aquifer recharge, and agricultural soil health. Cole was in support of the budget's strong funding for tribal water infrastructure and asked Zeldin how he intends to build relationships with state and local authorities and tribal nations. Zeldin pointed out the third pillar in EPA's "Great American Comeback" initiative is advancing cooperative federalism, and affirmed his commitment to maintaining a working relationship, treating tribes as another government.

Subcommittee Ranking Member Chellie Pingree (D-ME) criticized the administration's assertions that categorical grants "have become a crutch for states at the expense of taxpayers, many of whom receive no benefit," and that "States and local governments should be capable and empowered to fund their own programs in order to comply with the law." She said, "In truth, states carry out more than 90% of the nation's federal environmental programs.... In fact, States are doing this work because the EPA has delegated the authority to them because it would be too much for federal government to handle." She asked Zeldin how EPA planned to handle the workload if States return program implementation to EPA. Zeldin pointed to the high number of primacy applications and state implementation plans, stating that "the momentum is for States to grab more primacy, not less."

Pingree expressed concerns over EPA's plans to rescind certain PFAS regulations, expand exemptions, and extend compliance deadlines. Zeldin explained a procedural error in the prior administration, where the steps of preliminary regulatory determination and proposed rule were combined. He said the correction process may result in more stringent standards. He said the consideration of exemptions and deadline extensions was to reduce the costs passed to drinking water customers, who are passive receivers, and address challenges local systems face in meeting compliance deadlines. He mentioned the EPA can provide technical assistance and is seeing new technologies emerge that could lower cleanup costs.

WATER RESOURCES **Reclamation/Colorado River**

On May 7, the Department of Interior announced the extension of eighteen short-term water conservation agreements with tribal, municipal and agricultural water users in Arizona and California. The agreements, part of the more than three million acre-feet Lower Basin commitment, are expected to result in an additional 321,000 acre-feet in Lake Mead storage through 2026 (WSW #2631). Reclamation is also working with water entitlement holders in the Lower Colorado River Basin to negotiate water conservation agreements for additional projects. Reclamation Acting Commissioner David Palumbo said: "These agreements represent the continued collaboration within the Colorado River Basin as we all look to secure the needed near-term water supplies. Reclamation is committed to securing the future viability of Colorado River water supplies in the near-term and we work with all of our basin partners on long-term actions in the Post-2026 Operating Guidelines." <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-secures-18-short-term-agreements-boost-colorado-river-conservation>

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