



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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ADMINISTRATION

ACUS/Federal-State Collaboration

On July 28, the Administrative Conference of the United States (ACUS) concluded its public comment period for its Federal Register notice (90 FR 22224) on Federal Agency Collaboration with State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Governments (SLTTGs). The notice solicited input on federal agency approaches and processes for collaboration, noting that 81% of federal statutes include provisions that contemplate formal or informal collaboration with SLTTGs. "When governments collaborate, they work together to produce more public value than they could produce on their own, promoting greater accountability, transparency, and innovation in the administration of Federal programs."

Congress created ACUS in 1964 (5 U.S. Code § 593) as a permanent, independent federal agency "to promote improvements in the efficiency, adequacy, and fairness of the procedures by which federal agencies conduct regulatory programs." It allows federal agencies to cooperatively study mutual problems, exchange information, and develop recommendations for action that protect private rights and expeditiously carry out regulatory activities and federal responsibilities.

The notice provided several examples of federal agencies partnering with SLTTGs to deliver public services, but noted that research on how they work together is limited. "Through this project, ACUS is seeking to learn more about the laws and policies that govern and shape intergovernmental partnerships; the frequency and scale of Federal collaboration with SLTTGs; practical considerations that policymakers evaluate in structuring, implementing, and maintaining such partnerships; and challenges that administrators face in managing them. The project will result in a set of recommended best practices that Federal agencies can use to coordinate and collaborate more effectively with SLTTG partners."

The Western Governors Association (WGA) and WSWC engaged in conversations with ACUS about state-federal collaboration. WGA also submitted written comments on July 24, attaching their Resolution

2024-01, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship, articulating the "Western Governors' bipartisan vision for a more effective and functional relationship between states and federal offices."

The WGA letter emphasized that States are sovereign, and that "a good faith partnership between states and the federal government will result in more efficient, economic, effective, and durable policy, benefitting...shared constituents and resulting in a nation that is stronger, more resilient, and more united." See <https://www.acus.gov/projects/federal-agency-collaboration-state-local-tribal-and-territorial-governments>.

Data Centers/AI

On July 23, President Trump signed an Executive Order (EO) to facilitate the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) data centers and related infrastructure such as transmission lines and power generation. The order directs agencies to streamline environmental reviews and expedite permitting under the FAST-41 framework. It promotes infrastructure development on Brownfield and Superfund sites, and construction of data centers on federal lands. The EO directs the Secretary of Commerce to launch a financial initiative to support qualifying projects for facilities that require greater than 100 Megawatts of energy dedicated to AI inference, training, simulation, or synthetic data generation. See <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/07/accelerating-federal-permitting-of-data-center-infrastructure/>.

CONGRESS/ORGANIZATIONS

FY26 Appropriations/WaterSMART

On June 27, a coalition of 104 stakeholders representing water management, agriculture, recreation, conservation, and other organizations sent a letter to House and Senate leaders of the Appropriations Subcommittees on Energy and Water Development in support of FY2026 WaterSMART funding. They noted that the cost-share projects funded by WaterSMART support "water availability and conservation, drought planning and response, energy security, habitat restoration, irrigation modernization, and improved fish

passage...as well as other similar projects that help address the most pressing water challenges in the western United States.”

The letter expressed support for continued funding at FY24 levels, including \$15M for basin studies; \$8M for cooperative watershed management; \$30M for drought response and comprehensive drought plans; \$30M for water recycling and reuse; \$6.5M for the aquatic ecosystem restoration program, and \$54M for WaterSMART grants. They noted that these projects provide water savings and water security, ecosystem benefits, drought resilience, wildfire preparedness, and jobs in rural communities, resulting in a high return on the investment. “These federal funds are also crucial in addressing the immense need for water infrastructure investments in the West, which exceeds the capacity of states and local governments to finance on their own.” Among the stakeholders signing the letter were the Colorado River Board of California, the Family Farm Alliance, the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, the National Water Resources Association, the Southern Nevada Water Authority, the Utah Division of Water Resources, and the Western Landowners Alliance.

WATER RESOURCES

Great Salt Lake/Water Conservation

On July 23, the Utah Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner announced up to \$53M in grant funding for projects aimed at raising Great Salt Lake water levels through; (1) voluntary compensated temporary or multiyear reductions in diversions of water or consumptive water use; (2) system conservation projects that reduce consumptive water losses through improvements to water distribution infrastructure; and (3) ecosystem and habitat restoration projects to address issues directly caused by drought.

The Office, led by Brian Steed, oversees the implementation of a strategic plan to address the Lake’s declining levels and is responsible for coordinating efforts to protect and enhance its ecosystem. The Commission, in coordination with the Utah Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is providing \$50M, with \$2M from the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, and \$1M from the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust. Grant applications are due by October 24. See <https://www.gslwatertrust.org/wetland-grants>.

“The abundance and diversity of funding available through this multi-organizational partnership will give project managers the opportunity to apply for the funding that will best fit their needs,” said Steed.

“This coordinated funding effort presents unprecedented opportunities to support projects that will enhance Great Salt Lake’s habitats, reduce water consumption, and deliver water to the lake and wetlands benefiting the overall health of Great Salt Lake. Partnership and collective efforts are essential to preserving Great Salt Lake,” said Marcelle Shoop, Executive Director of the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust. (*Deseret News*, 7/25/25).

WATER RESOURCES/ORGANIZATIONS

Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER)

On July 20-23, the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) held its 2025 Annual Summit in Bellevue, Washington. PNWER is a statutory public/private non-profit created in 1991 by the States of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Washington, and the Canadian Provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest and Yukon Territories to promote greater regional collaboration to increase the economic well-being and quality of life for all citizens of the region, while maintaining and enhancing the natural environment. The Summit included a session on Technology and the Future of Water, moderated by Idaho State Representative Britt Raybould.

The panel included: WSWC Executive Director Tony Willardson; OpenET Chief Executive Officer Sara Larsen; Norm Semanko, with Parsons Behle & Latimer (a former WSWC member); Roylene Comes At Night, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington State Conservationist; and the Honorable Grant Hunter, Associate Minister of Environment and Protected Areas, Government of Alberta.

Tony presented briefly on the Council’s Water Data Exchange and the development of both the Western Water Data Access and Analysis Tool (WestDAAT 2.0) and Western Water Conservation Application Tool (WestCAT), while Sara explained the capabilities of OpenET (measuring evapotranspiration). The panelists addressed a number of general questions related to current innovations in water management and water policy, emerging industry standards, and on the ground impacts for individuals and organizations, particularly related to the interaction with existing laws.

Questions from the audience related to how data and technology can help resolve growing water resources challenges, the accessibility of water rights data, water leasing, cloud seeding, messaging and overcoming misconceptions about big data, and potential legal challenges. Considerable interest was generated related to OpenET and the WSWC’s open data tools. One questioner asked about the likelihood of survival for the Great Salt Lake considering population growth in Utah.

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.