



# Western States Water

## Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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### **ADMINISTRATION**

#### **EPA/Cooperative Agreements**

On October 7, E&E News published that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was discontinuing its cooperative partnership with the National Association of Wetland Managers (NAWM). The cooperative agreement, a decade-long partnership, totaled \$1.2M with EPA providing \$893,890 a year and NAWM providing \$297,966. Executive Director Marla Selk has announced her resignation and elimination of three staff positions as part of an effort to stabilize the organization's finances. (E&E News, 10/07/2025)

### **CONGRESS**

#### **Senate Confirmations**

On October 7, the Senate confirmed in a 51-47 vote more than 100 nominees in the final step of a new en bloc confirmation process. The final bloc included Neil Jacobs to lead NOAA, Lanny Erdos for Director of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement and Ned Mamula to lead the U.S. Geological Survey. The picks were approved for en bloc consideration last week. See WSW #2681.

#### **Federal Permitting/Problem Solvers Caucus**

On September 17, the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus endorsed a comprehensive federal permitting reform framework aimed at modernizing and streamlining permitting. The effort was led by Representatives Scott Peters (D-CA) and Gabe Evans (R-CO), along with Co-Chairs Representatives Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Tom Suozzi (D-NY). Their recommendations intend to modernize and streamline the permitting process, increase energy production, and provide certainty for investments in America.

The Caucus proposed streamlining permitting for linear infrastructure projects (roads, railways, pipelines, and transmission lines) by removing the Presidential permit requirement, setting strict deadlines, narrowing CWA Section 401 reviews, expanding Federal Power Act (FPA) exhaustion and judicial review provisions to certain linear projects, expanding categorical exclusions, and

expediting wildfire and forest management in utility corridors. To meet growing energy demand, it recommended requiring the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to improve interregional transmission planning, advancing grid technologies, allowing simultaneous review of multiple geothermal project phases, and exempting geothermal wells on state or private lands with less than 50% federal ownership.

The Caucus recommended reforming outdated duplicative National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. Specifically they recommended Congress: (1) exempt grants and loans from NEPA when funding is the only federal action; (2) codify "functional equivalent" NEPA exemptions for projects already reviewed under functionally equivalent laws like the California Environmental Quality Act; (3) prohibit courts from halting projects unless they pose a risk of proximate, substantial environmental harm with no alternative remedy; (4) elevate multi-state infrastructure litigation to the Federal Court of Appeals; (5) restrict judicial standing to those who submitted detailed public comments; and (6) direct the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council to provide a report to advise Congress on improving early developer engagement with stakeholders.

They recommended setting clear and enforceable permitting deadlines by: (1) reducing the statute of limitations for lawsuits to one year or less, with 150-day limits for FAST-41 projects; (2) requiring agencies to begin reviews upon receipt of complete applications, and issue immediately on review completion; (3) requiring courts to set schedules with specific directions when issuing remands, allowing project sponsors to continue permitted activities while keeping remand requirements; (4) prohibiting courts from requiring new environmental documents unless the agency failed to prepare one; and (5) requiring agencies to replace paper permitting with centralized cloud platforms, shared data, strict timelines, and online portals for better coordination and transparency.

See <https://problemsolverscaucus.house.gov/media/press-releases/problem-solvers-caucus-endorses-bipartisan-permitting-reform-framework>

## **WATER RESOURCES**

### **Colorado/Colorado Water Plan**

On September 9, the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB), in partnership with the Sonoran Institute, announced the launch of the Water Secure Communities Program. The program will help communities engage collaborative regional planning by combining regional policy analyses, tailored training curricula, and technical assistance. The program aims to support communities creating actionable Water Security Roadmaps in a workshop series, where regional leaders work to identify the most important water security issues in their region. Each roadmap will identify water resources opportunities, outline community-driven strategies, and connect participants to funding and technical assistance resources. The Water Security Communities program will host the first regional kickoff in mid- to late 2026.

CWCB Director, Lauren Ris said: “At the CWCB, our mission is to conserve, develop, protect, and manage Colorado’s water for present and future generations—and that mission is at the heart of this program. This partnership advances the Colorado Water Plan’s goals by empowering regions to plan collaboratively for a water-resilient future. By investing in local leadership and cross-sector coordination, we’re laying the groundwork for long-term drought resilience and sustainable water use across Colorado.”

CWCB recently approved 56 new projects totaling nearly \$25M in funding to support implementation of the Colorado Water Plan. In the Agriculture category, the Frozen Assets project explores the effect of spreading water across lands during the winter, “storing” it for use in early spring. In the Watershed Health and Recreation category, the Bear Creek Wildfire Ready Action Plan will develop a strategy to protect water infrastructure and communities from post-fire hazards. Examples of Water Plan Grant projects already making an impact include, the Commercial Water Efficiency Challenge in Aspen and the expansion of the Yampa Basin Atmosphere and Soil Moisture Integrated Network (YBASIN). Grants also spanned the remaining Water Plan Grant categories: Water Storage & Supply, Conservation & Land Use, and Engagement & Innovation. Projects in these categories included building new water storage to support long-term water sustainability in Weld County, and improving water efficiency across school campuses.

“The overwhelming demand for Water Plan Grants this year clearly shows how critical this program is for Colorado,” said Dan Gibbs, Executive Director, Department of Natural Resources. “These grants are helping communities across the state take action towards addressing Colorado’s water challenges. I can’t wait to see how these projects benefit our environment,

watersheds and agricultural communities. See WSW #2648. <https://cwcb.colorado.gov/category/news-articles>

### **Utah/Regional Conservation Plan**

On September 8, the Washington County Water Conservancy District (WCWCD) approved a Joint Agency Regional Water Conservation Plan for eight cities sharing the same water supply. “Under state law, all Utah cities and water districts are required to submit water conservation plans every five years. Until now, Washington County’s municipalities were each on separate schedules, producing plans that sometimes conflicted or quickly became outdated.” WSWCD has reduced per capita water use by 50% since 2000. The consolidated plan is expected to reduce annual water demand by another 7.7% (5,200 acre-feet per year, afy) by 2030, emphasizing landscaping changes, new construction codes, and retrofitting properties developed before 2023. The plan includes new development standards (with reduced development impact fees) for ultra-efficient homes that use less than 0.39 afy and share community amenities. The municipalities are individually considering approval of the plan and changes to their respective city codes. In the meantime, WSWCD is drafting a water shortage response plan. (St. George News, 9/24/25)

### **Washington/Yakima Basin Curtailment**

On October 1, the Washington Department of Ecology issued a “halt to surface water use” from October 6 through the end of October. The Department noted historically low reservoir storage and streamflows after the area’s third consecutive year of drought. Although irrigation needs have reduced in the fall season, the restrictions may affect more than 1,500 water rights holders. Ria Berns, the Department’s Water Resources program manager said: “We have not experienced a drought like this in over 30 years, and it’s forcing us to take actions we’ve never done before. We know that restricting water diversions will impact communities across the Yakima Basin, but this is a necessary step to protect water for fish and senior water rights in the face of continued drought conditions.”

Water available from the Yakima Basin reservoirs is expected to run out after Oct. 6. Without that stored water, precipitation and flows from the Yakima River will not be enough to satisfy senior irrigation water rights. “For years, the Yakima Basin has been a national model for collaboration and water management,” said Casey Sixkiller, Ecology’s director. “That partnership has led to more than \$1 billion in investments. But the conditions we see today show that there is much more work still ahead of us to improve water security for the region.” <https://ecology.wa.gov/about-us/who-we-are/news/2025>

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**The WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL is a government entity of representatives appointed by the Governors of Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.**