



WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL

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Web Page: www.westernstateswater.org

October 1, 2024

The Honorable Melanie Stansbury
U.S. House of Representatives
1421 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Stansbury,

The Western States Water Council (WSWC) welcomes the reintroduction of the Water Data Act and supports leveraging state and federal resources to build a national water data framework for sharing, integrating, and utilizing water data and supporting the development of innovative water data technologies and tools. Water and water-related data must be recognized as a critical public policy priority given the importance of the resource to our public health, economy, food security, environment, and western way of life. WSWC appreciates language in Section 3, directing consultation with States, Indian Tribes, Territories, and local governments.

All levels of government must prioritize the collection, analysis, and open sharing of reliable data regarding water availability, quality, and usage given its importance to research for sound science and data-driven decision making. Developing common standards will help expand and unlock existing and future data, leading to further innovation and the creation of new tools to empower water users, managers, and administrators.

Critical and vital information is gathered and disseminated through a number of important federal programs. The WSWC has a long history of support for federal data-related observation, analysis, assessment, and dissemination efforts. Further, the WSWC has worked for decades in concert with state and federal agencies to make state water rights and water use data available, leveraging federal and philanthropic resources. More needs to be done.

The Water Data Act would be a catalyst to organize and direct federal agencies that generate and use water data to work together, as well as support non-federal consultation, coordination, and partnerships. Establishing a new grant program under the Department of the Interior to invest in improving water data in partnership with state, local, and other organizations is an important step. Permanently authorizing the Advisory Committee on Water Information, of which the WSWC was a member, will also encourage the development of next-generation water data observations, technologies, and tools to transform water management.

In the West, water is a vital resource, and sound decision-making demands accurate and timely data on precipitation, temperature, evapotranspiration, soil moisture, snow depth, snow water content,

streamflow, groundwater, water quality, water rights, water use, and similar information. The demands for water related data continue to increase, for use by federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies, as well as myriad public and private entities and individuals. Without timely and accurate information, human life, health, welfare, property, and environmental and natural resources are at considerably greater risk of loss.

State-of-the-art technology has been developed to provide historic and real- or near real-time data in formats that can be shared and used by different computer programs with the potential to vastly improve information available to decisionmakers in natural resources and emergency management, and thus better protect the public safety, welfare, and the environment.

There is a serious need for adequate and consistent federal funding to maintain, restore, modernize, and upgrade federal water, weather, and climate observation programs, not only to avoid the loss or further erosion of critical information and data, but also to address new emerging needs, with a primary focus on coordinated data collection and dissemination. One example of important funding sources is the USGS' Water-Use Data and Research (WUDR) Program. WUDR provides grants to State water resources agencies to assist in developing water use and availability datasets. WUDR programs provide vital water data that States and other public and private entities and individuals rely on to make day-to-day planning and management decisions.

The WSWC supports efforts to enhance and expand the availability of and access to consistent and comprehensive water supply, demand, and water use data and information. WSWC looks forward to the enactment of this legislation and subsequent collaboration with federal agencies to promote Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reuseable (FAIR) water data.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tony Willardson".

Tony Willardson
Executive Director