

Western States Water Council
Strategic Direction for 2025-2028

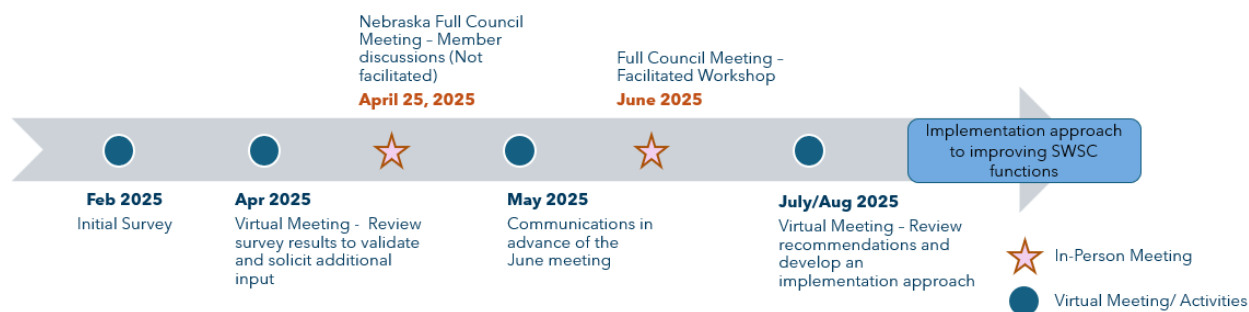
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APPROACH TO DEVELOPING STRATEGIC DIRECTION

During 2025, the Western States Water Council (WSWC/Council) engaged in a strategic process to chart a clear path forward with actionable goals and targeted strategies to advance its mission and expand its influence. Engagement activities included a survey, virtual meetings, and in-person facilitated discussions to promote full membership participation and gather thoughtful input.

Strategic Direction Timeline



WSWC PURPOSE, MISSION, FUNCTIONS, AND STRATEGIC GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The goals and related activities outlined in this document are intended to be appropriately aligned with the organization’s Purpose, Mission, and Functions as stated in the Rules of Organization. The Strategic Guiding Principles below are based on member input and outline the objectives and direction for advancing the goals.

WSWC PURPOSE

The purpose of the Western States Water Council shall be to accomplish effective cooperation among western states in matters relating to the planning, conservation, development, management, and protection of their water resources, in order to ensure that the West has an adequate, sustainable supply of water of suitable quality to meet its diverse economic and environmental needs now and in the future.

WSWC MISSION

Ensure that the West has an adequate, secure, and sustainable supply of water of suitable quality to meet its diverse economic and environmental needs now and in the future.

WSWC FUNCTIONS

Investigate and review water related matters of interest to the Western States, and advise Council member states and governors as appropriate. | Express policy positions regarding proposed federal laws, rules and regulations and other matters affecting the planning, conservation, development, management, and protection of water resources in Western States. | Sponsor and encourage activities to enhance exchange of ideas and information and to promote dialogue regarding optimum management of western water resources. | Authorize preparation of amicus briefs to assist western states in presenting positions on issues of common interest in cases before federal and state courts. | Encourage collaboration

among federal, state, tribal and local governments, public and private water resources associations and water-related non-governmental organizations.

STRATEGIC GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Inclusive Collaboration: Foster strong relationships among the Council, individual states, and federal agencies, finding common ground on complex water issues while honoring the unique perspectives and priorities of each state.

Adaptability: Remain responsive to changing conditions and be willing to pivot as needed to ensure the Council's work stays relevant and effective.

Collective Power: Recognize that members can achieve more together than individually, especially regarding water quantity, water quality, and Western water laws, where combined efforts create meaningful collective impact.

Evaluation and Adaptation: Embrace collective exploration of new ideas and initiatives, committing to learn from these efforts and evaluating them together to inform broader alignment and shared progress.

Organizational Capacity: Align planned activities with the Council's available resources and scope, setting realistic priorities to ensure sustainable progress.

2025-2028 STRATEGIC GOALS OVERVIEW

The Council membership has identified a series of goals and activities as the focus for the next three years, with the intent to update the goals and activities on an annual basis. Goals are the outcomes the WSWC aims to achieve in support of its mission, while strategic activities are the key steps needed to advance those goals.

Council staff will work with members through its three committees, the Water Resources Committee, the Water Quality Committee and the Legal Committee, to further refine the prioritized activities and explore ways to leverage the organization's strengths, including:

- Internal learning and collaboration - partnerships, friendships, collaboration, information sharing, and mutual learning
- Outward-facing engagement - federal-level advocacy and policy development
- Regulatory and legal analysis - examining effective regulations, agreements, and litigation
- Research and knowledge-building - identifying beneficial research, gaps in research, and collaborative approaches to address them

Staff, in coordination with members, will implement actions to advance the goals, monitor progress, and adapt activities as needed to ensure impact. The five goals are:

Goal 1. Create efficient, collaborative meetings that facilitate timely knowledge exchange among members

Goal 2. Foster interstate networking and strengthen member connections

- Goal 3.** Provide clear, consistent communication through briefings, newsletters, and updates
- Goal 4.** Strengthen collective advocacy to advance western water priorities and share interests
- Goal 5.** Improve internal capacity and operations

PROPOSED ACTIVITIES TO MEET STRATEGIC GOALS

This section outlines the Council’s strategic pathway for advancing its five key goals. Additional details from members on how to follow up on these activities are provided in the accompanying appendices.

GOAL 1: CREATE EFFICIENT, COLLABORATIVE MEETINGS THAT FACILITATE TIMELY KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Key Activities:

- Determine whether to adjust the meeting schedule and format:
 - Update meeting agendas to promote efficient use of time and member engagement – see *Appendix A* for some sample options for discussion
 - Determine whether the members desire to shift one of the three annual meetings to an all-virtual, no-state-host meeting, and what the format and focus of such meetings would be
 - If speakers are to be moved to webinars between meetings, with the intent to discuss the topics further at the next meeting, determine the process for selecting webinar topics and speakers.
- Engage on member-identified key topics (*See Appendix B*).
- Reconsider or rework committee structure and functions (*See Appendix C*).

GOAL 2: FOSTER NETWORKING AND STRENGTHEN MEMBER CONNECTIONS

Key Activities:

- Each state provide a one-page summary of their water agencies, fostering internal member education (e.g., which state agency would be most likely to have information on a topic of importance to another state)
- New Members
 - Develop a mentoring program for new members to interact with existing members.
 - Improve onboarding through orientation documents and member videos on the website.
- Consider a digital forum or other mechanism for members to interact, share information, ask questions, and engage in discussions in between meetings that is more user-friendly

than email chains, and that can be archived and accessible over time to new members with similar or recurring questions

- Balance online and in-person interactions to preserve and maximize the value of limited in-person time together.

GOAL 3: PROVIDE CLEAR, CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION ABOUT WESTERN STATES WATER

Key Activities:

- Develop documents that can easily be shared:
 - Workshop summary reports
 - Survey reports
 - One-page summaries showcasing Western states' experiences, laws, challenges, etc. (e.g., related to a policy position, what is Oklahoma's experience, in a format that can be handed to Oklahoma members of Congress to help support that policy)
- Newsletter
 - Determine the best frequency for the newsletter.
 - Shift more time-sensitive notifications to the website with optional weekly emails (upcoming webinars, rulemaking comment periods, etc.)
 - Propose new newsletter format for approval.
 - In the past, occasionally a state has expressed an interest in writing an opinion piece from their agency's or governor's perspective on a controversial topic. Determine whether the WSW Newsletter is the appropriate vehicle for direct articles from states, and whether there should be any limitations.
 - Make newsletter articles more searchable.
- Website: Develop the Topical Resources pages that access information across the website. <https://westernstateswater.org/topical-resources/>
- Social Media - WSWC accounts on LinkedIn and Facebook. In the past, the WSWC has had almost zero social media presence. If the WSWC social media presence is increased, determine what parameters or limits should be set in terms of sharing announcements, activities, meetings, perspectives.

GOAL 4: STRENGTHEN COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY TO ADVANCE WESTERN WATER PRIORITIES AND SHARE INTERESTS

Key Activities:

- Revisit and update the Resolution Process (*See Appendix D*).
- Lean in more on the Council's Superpowers - emphasize the Council's unique position on the water quality/quantity nexus, prior appropriations laws, and abundance of federal agencies managing land and resources across the West.

- Congress
 - Increase direct engagement with congressional staff.
 - Prioritize legislative updates on high-priority bills via the Council website.
 - Improve tracking of congressional legislation and bill markups, and let members know so they can prepare and engage with their state delegations
- Improve coordination with State Governors.
- Continue engagement with WestFAST.

GOAL 5: IMPROVE INTERNAL CAPACITY AND OPERATIONS

Key Activities:

- Clarify internal engagement processes and communicate organizational operations more clearly.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS – TO BE DEVELOPED FOR EACH GOAL

As part of implementation of activities, staff and members should address the following key considerations:

- Timeline: Indicate when activities will start, any milestones, and what marks the end of those activities (optional).
- Roles & Responsibilities: Who leads or supports each activity (staff, members, subcommittees).
- Monitoring & Evaluation: How progress will be tracked, reported, modified as needed.
- Member Involvement: How input will be gathered and incorporated into the activity over time.

APPENDICES

- **Appendix A**: Member Suggestions for Meeting Agenda Format
- **Appendix B**: Key Topics Engagement Roadmap
- **Appendix C**: Committee Structure Suggestions
- **Appendix D**: Resolution Process Suggestions
- **Appendix E**: Survey Questions
- **Appendix F**: Survey Responses
- **Appendix G**: Nebraska Strategic Directions Discussion
- **Appendix H**: Utah Strategic Directions Discussion

APPENDIX A. MEMBER SUGGESTIONS FOR MEETING AGENDA FORMAT

Suggestions for improvements:

1. Fewer presentations/speakers – more time for interactive state discussions in person
2. Roundtable of state reports earlier in the meetings instead of at the end
3. Move presentations to a virtual setting (recorded webinars) to allow more time for in depth presentations online, and set aside time during the in-person meetings for further discussion on those topics
4. Dedicate some time annually to discuss the most pressing topics and develop the topics for the coming year – key goals to proactively pursue rather than reacting to issues
5. Wrap-up at the end of each meeting – action items, assignments, feedback, track progress

Suggested Agenda formats

Option I:

- Maintain the current meeting structure
 - Day 1: a four-hour Water Resources Committee meeting, a two-hour Water Quality Committee meeting, and a two-hour Legal Committee meeting.
 - Day 2: Full Council Meeting
 - Field Trip by the host state
 - Workshops (as directed)
- Committee business: Approve minutes, wordsmith and approve or recommend sunset policy positions, review the workplans, and hear from several speakers selected by staff, with limited time for Q&A or state-to-state discussion or information sharing.
- State Reports (sharing state updates) at the end of the meetings (during the Full Council meeting).

Option II:

- Preparation prior to (in between) meetings
 - Webinars with speakers on selected topics of interest to share information with members
 - For positions scheduled to sunset at the next meeting: Subcommittees wrap up any remaining policy position wordsmithing and send to states for pre-meeting approval (or edits)
 - Other tasks assigned to staff or members
- Create a new meeting structure with more time for discussions
 - Day 1: Morning discussion on a deep dive topic(s) (selected annually or modified at the previous meeting); short afternoon Committee meetings
 - Day 2: Full Council Meeting
 - Field Trip by the host state
 - Workshops (as directed)

- Committee business: discuss next meeting's positions, state updates relevant to that committee (i.e., state water resources updates in the Water Resources Committee, state water quality updates in the Water Quality Committee, state legal updates in the Legal Committee), identifying topics of mutual interest for the Committee/Council to pursue further
- Full Council: pro-forma approval of sunseting positions already wordsmithed and reviewed by states, any policy discussions (e.g., specific outreach, new policy development), discuss and assign specific tasks for staff and members, review of previously assigned/completed tasks with feedback, select or review priority topics for upcoming webinars and deep dive discussions, other next steps

Option III:

- Shorter in-person meetings
- One Day:
 - Deep dive topic(s)
 - Full Council business and state reports
- Committee work done virtually prior to the meeting (e.g., discussions on topics of mutual interest, policy position work, webinar speakers)
- Field trip

APPENDIX B: KEY TOPICS ENGAGEMENT ROADMAP

Below is a list of topics identified by members for focus in the coming year. These topics were gathered as part of the survey to states with the question: ***Please provide three topics that you are interested in seeing addressed by the Council in the near future.*** The responses were grouped together under 17 categories. (Two categories were later merged together under Data, and one new category was added.)

Information gathered through the survey is shown in black text, while additions from the June meeting are shown in *green italic* text. Members then voted for their top three priorities for FY25-26, with the number of votes shown in parentheses next to each topic. Based on the voting results, the top five topics prioritized above the others this year are:

- a. Funding (13 votes)
- b. Data (12 votes)
- c. Groundwater (7 votes)
- d. Water reuse and reclamation (4 votes)
- e. State water planning (3 votes)

The underlying assumption is that all of these topics are important to our states and deserve ongoing awareness and attention. However, for the purposes of deep dive discussions at our upcoming meetings in 2025-2026, in order for the members to prepare in advance to participate in the discussion, the priority topics identified will help guide the meeting preparation. These topics and priorities can be reassessed on a continual or annual basis.

List of Topics

How do all of these topics relate to one another? To the hydrologic cycle? To the science, the laws and regulations, to public policy, to institutional/agency capacity?

FUNDING (13 votes)

- Federal funding strategies
- Agency funding streams (fees, water use fees, federal funds, etc.)
- Impact of federal cuts on state water priorities and needs
- Federal funding to state primacy/delegated programs
- Reduction in federal support services from USEPA

Added notes:

- *What types of funding? Be specific – state programs, infrastructure, planning, engineering.*
- *What states are providing grant funding/programs for water development?*
- *How are states prioritizing water projects if providing state \$?*
- *How to plan for future funding uncertainty for data collection programs?*

- *How are states being successful in getting legislators to support water data investment for collection and sharing out to public.*

DATA

SURFACE WATER AND GROUNDWATER MONITORING (12 votes)

- Maintaining base federal programs and resources for water data collection (e.g., USGS stream gaging, NRCS SNOTEL, and LandSat),
- Stream gages
- Making federal snowpack data programs more efficient/sustainable
- Impact of federal cuts on water data collection programs.
- Water data information
- Surface water data collection improvements

Added notes:

- *Yes, to the points above. In collaboration with states*
- *Lots of overlap with funding topic*
- *Need better modeling/data to characterize/quantify SW and GW connection*
- *3 lens approach*
- *Continued funds for data collection systems that states can use for analysis – not funds for Fed analysis*
- *How to ensure shepherding of water to end use*
- *Need to include water quality*
- *Need to advocate for ongoing federal capacity (funding + staff) to support data collection*

ATMOSPHERIC MONITORING BY FEDERAL AGENCIES

- Impacts from staff reductions
- Making NOAA responsive to water agencies

Added notes:

- *Is this all monitoring (snowpack, etc.)? Need forecasting and analysis too.*

GROUNDWATER (7 Votes)

- Use of injection wells for managed aquifer recharge
 - *How to overcome public misinformation*
- Reduction in groundwater use programs
- Groundwater protection strategies
 - *How do we coordinate groundwater protection when use is controlled by State Engineer?*
 - *Sharing successful state programs (Because it's a voluntary area)*
 - *Identification of challenges so states share how they've overcome them*
- Conjunctive Management of surface/groundwater
 - *How does quality for different uses affect decisions?*

- *Emerging issue: What does the regulatory/statutory framework look like?*
- *How to better model/quantify relationship between surface water and groundwater?*
- GW quantity availability
- Ground water quantification
 - *How to improve groundwater production data when there are fears of metering or reporting?*
 - *How to support updating science and data?*
- Groundwater management in various states
 - *How to better manage/restrict groundwater when is a private property right?*

Added notes:

- *Including water quality*
- *3 lens approach*

WATER REUSE AND RECLAMATION (4 votes)

- Water and wastewater reuse
- wastewater reuse
- reclaimed water

Added notes:

- *Water reuse as part of an IWRM Plan at a basin scale*
- *How is reuse approached in each state?*
- *3 lens approach*
- *How do we expand reuse in small systems?*

STATE WATER PLANNING (3 votes)

- Permitting efficiency efforts
- Flexible water management
 - *Consistency (and leveraging) across state planning efforts and documents including: Hazard mitigation, SRF IUPs, State Forest Plan, Fish and Wildlife Plan, State Water Plan, etc.*
 - *Who is the audience?*
 - *How to make it actionable?*
- Emerging issues at state level
 - *Interested in exploring the utility of state water planning and learning from other western states' experiences - Focus on lessons learned and overall benefit of the plan*
 - *Is it more than a shelf queen?*
 - *How to plan for unknown future demand? (e.g., data centers, AI, hydropower generation)*
 - *Managing rural/urban tensions and rural to urban water supply transition?*
- Sharing of new laws and regulations

- *Sharing of successful BMPs*

FEDERAL RELATED ISSUES (2 votes)

- Rulemaking – ongoing discussions (whiplash management into the future)
 - *Share good news, where it is working!*
- Federal policy changes under the new administration, federal budget changes, water/energy nexus issues
 - *Freezing of nonpartisan water project funding through IRA B2E*
 - *How to accelerate FERC permitting for pumped hydro?*
- Emerging issues at federal level
- Opportunities to emphasize cooperative federalism and EPA's definitions of "oversight" with this administration
 - *Not just EPA*
 - *Challenges of state vs. federal timelines*
 - *What about tribal reserved rights?*

Added notes:

- *Share state reg structures that fill a gap or clarify Fed Act programs to meet state needs beyond Fed structure*
- *How is the council preparing/positioning itself to weigh in effectively on a timely basis to Federal proposals; Laws, Regs, Funding of water data*

RESERVOIR STORAGE (2 votes)

- Protecting the integrity of reservoir storage to meet water needs

Added notes:

- *What about dam safety?*
- *What are the funding solutions?*
- *Reservoir sedimentation*
- *Strategies for determining remaining lake yield, sedimentation for aging reservoirs – important for managing floods and droughts*
- *Conflicts over the flood/conservation pool flexibility for flood control vs water supply*
- *Are new dams a thing of the past?*
- *Aging infrastructure*

WATER RIGHTS ISSUES (1 Vote)

- Adjudication and federal Indian water right settlements
- Updates to state water laws
- Over appropriation
- Conjunctive management
- Contested case and adjudication streamlining

- Water right transfers review criteria
- Flexibility/innovations in moving existing water right around without injury

Added Notes:

- *How to adapt to modern water rights issues while adhering to the fundamental principles of water law?*
- *Adjudication - streamlining efforts, efficiencies, what's worked well/less well*
- *Regular report outs of new state laws affecting water law/prior appropriation to learn from other states*
- *Federal Indian Settlement processes*
- *Federal reserved water rights?*
- *New energy water needs*

WATER QUALITY

- Nutrients
 - *Nutrient criteria for recreational water*
 - *How can we address water contaminants in small communities who can't afford to treat?*
- PFAS occurrence/ management
 - *Water quality-quantity nexus*
- Updates on recent water quality legal cases
 - *San Francisco, Sackett, Maui*
- EPA direction with water quality rulemaking
- Federal WQ regulatory changes

CLIMATE ADAPTATION

- What states are doing to adapt to climate change
- Impact of climate initiative rollbacks
- Climate change/changing water supply
- Climate change modeling
- Planning in various states

Added notes:

- *Need to talk about climate impacts*
- *How to discuss and plan ahead with political sensitivities in mind?*
- *States taking a greater role?*

DROUGHT RESPONSE

Added notes:

- *Should be more than just response – need planning and implementation before drought occurs.*
- *How to get people to care in your state?*
- *What does a drought declaration do in your state, what tools does it unpack?*
- *Need hands-on support for small and rural communities.*
- *Need emergency response capability for small systems.*

ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

- Working with stakeholders to adopt new ideas

Added notes:

- *Tips and tricks for changing hearts and minds*
- *How to build consensus among diverse perspectives*
- *How to identify “stakeholders”*
- *How to translate dense and nuanced topics to the public?*
- *How to build and sustain relationships, not just when you need them?*
- *Who has state-funded public outreach programs? Successes? Priority topics?*
- *How to improve communications to debunk myths and misinformation, and navigate politics and NIMBY concerns*

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

- Environmental management of intermittent and ephemeral waters
 - *Identify and communicate on the value and function of different types of flow regimes*
- Functional flows determinations
- EPA Regulatory Reform
- Impacts of Sackett decision
 - *How to get EPA to follow the S. Ct. ruling?*
- Stream flow forecasting
 - *Good Data = Good Models*

Added notes:

- *Effect of San Francisco case on narrative standards*
- *Improved S2S*

WORKFORCE CAPACITY

- Onboarding, training and retention
- Impacts from staff reductions

Added Notes:

- *Difficult to recruit, retain new water professionals*

- *Funding qualified operators for small systems*
- *We should leverage the work of ECOS, other associations that have looked at this issue*
- *Engineering expertise needed at all levels*
- *Growing gap between the public/private sector*

WOTUS/WOTS

- *Still important, but there's fatigue from regulatory whiplash across multiple Administrations*

INTEGRATING AI FOR EFFICIENCIES (ADDED TOPIC)

- Members would like clarification about the roles and responsibilities of the Committees.

Staff note: Committee jurisdiction over topics and tasks includes:

- **Executive:** WSWC budget; staffing; rotation of host state responsibilities; coordination with WGA and WestFAST; communicating policy positions to Congress and Administration officials; provide any feedback to staff on the weekly newsletter (and related awareness of policy issues impacting Western water) as well as the related Annual Report that compiles information from the various WSWC meetings, reports, and select newsletter articles; direction for various workshops and Symposia (Indian Water Rights, Water Infrastructure, S2S, Groundwater, Water Management, etc.)
- **Water Resources:** water data programs across multiple federal agencies (USGS, NOAA, NASA, Reclamation, USDA, DOE, etc.); western water infrastructure projects and program funding, including rural needs; USDA conservation program funding; dam safety and aging infrastructure; Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO); S2S workshops and Congressional advocacy; research to operations (R2O) technology transfers; NIDIS, droughts and extreme weather; probable maximum precipitation standards; groundwater recharge project programs and policies; energy-water nexus; hydropower development; federalism concerns with rules, regulations, orders, and policies; use of the Reclamation Fund for its intended purpose; cautious support for transfers of federal water and power projects on the less complex end of the spectrum; Reclamation implementation of the SECURE Water Act;
- **Water Quality:** Clean Water Act (SRFs; §404 assumption; §401 state certifications; WOTUS rulemaking and litigation; state development of rules protecting waters of the state; Good Sam and abandoned mines; tribal treatment as states, baseline water quality standards, and reserved treaty rights); water reuse; state nutrient reduction strategies; water quality-quantity nexus (workshops, presentation, webinars); water transfers and NPDES permits; extension of NPDES permits; PFAS; state primacy over groundwater quality protection; *Maui* decision and discharge permits to groundwater; state groundwater regulations; hydraulic fracturing (groundwater quality regulation)
- **Legal:** water rights; opposing any federal legislation that preempts state prior appropriation laws; state primacy over groundwater; intersection of water rights with ESA and migratory bird issues; federal tribal and non-tribal reserved water rights; adjudications and federal participation (filing fees, *de minimis* uses, McCarren Amendment); settlements; state and federal court cases; judicial education and supporting the Dividing the Waters program; Congressional legislation updates; Non-Tribal Federal Water Rights Workgroup (quarterly calls and regular workshops to exchange state-federal information); Ad Hoc Group on Indian Water Rights (Symposium, DC Visits,

other advocacy for settlements); WOTUS jurisdiction; WRDA/Corps policies such as the impact of policies on state water rights and natural flows, and the withdrawn Water Supply Rule; Western Water Cooperative Committee participation; case law development related to federal reserved water rights applied to groundwater; state groundwater regulations; survey of state permitting laws, calls and curtailments, well construction rules, state engineer agency structure

- Are members who are not assigned to a committee still allowed to speak up and raise concerns, share state experiences, or ask questions?
- It would be great to see the Committees lead more impactful initiatives besides policy positions.
- We don't seem to have a true workplan for advancing issues we jointly want to pursue
- As an alternative to Committees, we could have specific meeting topics throughout the day.
- Would like to see more policy-oriented discussions during the meetings, fewer speaker presentations (especially from consultants and federal agencies), and more discussions or presentations from states on topics relevant to state needs.
- Would rather function as a Council, a committee of the whole, and use temporary workgroups or subcommittees to accomplish specific tasks on issues of interest.
- Could legal issues be absorbed into the other committees, or does the Legal Committee play a specific role that needs to be separate from the other committees?

APPENDIX D: POLICY POSITION RESOLUTION PROCESS SUGGESTIONS

The Council currently maintains approximately 50 policy positions on various topics affecting Western water issues. While some of the positions have overlapping language, most were written to address specific concerns when they were initially drafted. The large number of positions results in significant Council time each meeting focused on reviewing, wordsmithing, and approving policy positions.

Members noted that the process of renewing sunseting positions each meeting is cumbersome, time-consuming, and not always clear. They also wanted more information about how the positions are used, and how they influence policy decisions.

During the survey, some members made some suggestions about streamlining the resolution process: (1) consolidate the resolution review cycles so all resolutions start and end at the same time to avoid continuous updates; (2) review the positions during virtual meetings to optimize members' time for in-person meetings; (3) leverage staff time for the drafting and editing; (4) establish internal guidelines to finalize resolutions efficiently; and (5) establish criteria for allowing positions to sunset.

The Council's current resolution process is laid out in the table below. Some of this resolution process was established by the Rules of Organization. In 2004, the Council passed an internal resolution intended to clarify the resolution process and address concerns that had been raised over time (see 2005 Annual Report, p.103; also copied below).

Rules of Organization, Article IV, 3:

Express policy positions regarding proposed federal laws, rules and regulations and other matters affecting the planning, conservation, development, management, and protection of water resources in Western States.

Current Resolution Process
Proposed Resolution
Members may recommend a new resolution at any time. They are generally considered at the next Council meeting; we do have emergency notice provisions between meetings.
Resolution Development
Sometimes a temporary subcommittee composed of interested states is formed to meet virtually in between meetings to vet/wordsmith a proposed/sunseting resolution.
Members may offer some proposed language of their own, or request that staff prepare draft language within some general guidelines.
Resolution Notice <i>(as prescribed by Rules of Organization)</i>
Ten-day notice to members (prior to the 30-day notice) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides notice of sunseting positions to be considered for renewal at the upcoming meeting• A reminder that any new positions need to be included with the 30-day notice.
30-day notice to Governors and members (30 days in advance of the Full Council meeting)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides advance notice of all external policy positions, including sunseting and any newly proposed positions.
Resolution Review (pre-meeting/meeting)
<u>Executive Committee</u> : After the 30-day notice goes out to the members, but before the in-person meetings, the Executive Committee meets virtually to discuss initial concerns with the position and any suggested language from various states.
<u>Staff</u> : Incorporate Executive Committee suggestions
<u>Briefing Materials</u> : Edited positions are included in the briefing materials that are sent to the members a week prior to the meetings.
<u>Committee Review</u> : The positions are assigned to one of the Water Resources, Water Quality, Legal Committees at the time they are first proposed, and that Committee retains the assignment. During the meetings, the positions are further discussed to review suggested edits and address any further concerns. The Committees vote to recommend the position to the Full Council for consideration.
Resolution Approval
During the Full Council meeting, the Committee Chairs provide a summary of any proposed changes to the positions and make their respective motions for the Full Council to vote on whether to approve the positions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May recommend approval with (or without) further edits, for the next three years May alternatively recommend that an existing position sunset, or that a new position be held back for further editing/discussion among concerned states
Resolution Sunseting
Members may determine that the position is no longer necessary and allow it to sunset.
Staff retain a list of all positions that have sunset, included in the briefing book for each meeting.

During the June meeting, members discussed some potential changes.

Defining the criteria for sunseting (see list of sunsetted position at the end of this Appendix)

- Develop criteria for determining when a resolution is ready to be retired. The goal is to establish a consistent process that allows consensus-based discussion.
- There should be an “off-ramp” for positions, such as whether any states are willing to advocate for keeping a position.
- Are current resolutions tied to specific, time-sensitive legislation or court cases?
- Develop a new framing for resolutions that are tied to time-sensitive legislative or court outcomes
- Caution against dropping certain resolutions, even if they seem less relevant now, as they can become relevant again, and wordsmithing for 18 states can be tricky.

Developing alternatives to the current resolutions

- Recommend combining resolutions into topical areas. This would allow states to tailor policies to their specific needs, and reduce the number of resolutions discussed in meetings, freeing up time for information sharing and advocacy.
 - staff review existing positions to identify potential consolidations

- Categorize policy positions and assign them to specific committees (e.g., Water Quality, Legal) so they can be managed directly without constant back-and-forth with the Executive Committee.
 - Staff note: the policy positions are assigned to specific committees; the practice of meeting with the Executive Committee prior to the meetings was instituted in 2004 by an internal policy position:

POLICY REGARDING
PROPOSED POLICY POSITIONS
OF THE
WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL
JULY 16, 2004

Introduction

The following policy is designed to improve the process by which the Western States Water Council considers and adopts external policy positions. It augments, but it does not supplant, existing procedures established in the Council's by-laws.

As soon as practicable following distribution of the "30-day Notice" containing proposed policy positions for consideration by the Council, the staff, after consultation with the Chairman, will organize a conference call. Participants in the conference call will include members of the Executive Committee, other Council representatives as deemed appropriate by the Chair who are associated with the proposed policy positions, as well as the chairpersons of the standing committees that will consider the positions at the Council meeting. The purpose of this conference call will be to discuss the issues raised by any proposed policy positions and to identify problem areas that may require further exploration and discussion to achieve consensus. The Chairman will designate individuals to take the lead in this effort, so that any differences may be resolved prior to the Council meeting.

Credentials

Whenever a person who is not a Council representative is attending on behalf of a Council member at a regular or special meeting of the Council, either in person or via conference call, a written notification to this effect must be provided to the Council offices to assure that the person is serving in the appropriate capacity. Since delegations to the Council from each state consist of more than one person, but each state has only one vote, the Executive Committee member for each state shall be responsible as an internal state matter for coordinating and communicating the official position of the state relative to voting on proposed policy positions.

Council Committee Chairs

The standing committees of the Council will be the primary forum for discussion and debate of policy issues prior to consideration by the Full Council. The respective chairs of the standing committees of the Council shall have the responsibility to attempt to resolve any remaining differences that surface during the discussion of proposed policy positions at the respective committee meeting. While this will not always be possible, additional efforts to reconcile opposing views and attempt to reach compromise will improve the chances for consensus when the matter is brought before the full Council.

10 Day Review

The by-laws require a ten (10) day review period by the Western Governors' Association for proposed external policy positions that were not included in the 30-day Notice. In order to comply with the spirit of this policy, external positions that are included in the 30-day Notice, but then are substantially revised at the Council meetings prior to adoption, shall also be subject to a 10-day review by the Western Governors' Association. Further, the Council Chair at his or her discretion, and in consultation with WGA staff, may choose to provide a 10-day review period for any policy positions which do not result from total consensus at the Council meeting.

Using resolutions for advocacy

- Resolutions are not effective for advocacy due to their length
 - Examples of resolution formats members find more effective:
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1NEDGU1Ji0PyGOM-CnjrlgRwJzfHtenQA?usp=sharing>
- Consider the need to rewrite them in a more user-friendly way for various purposes, especially since staff currently hand them out to congressional offices.
- Resolutions are the background for WSWC letters and testimony if they are asked to be a witness at a congressional hearing. This background helps in building testimony and allows for more pointed advocacy (with language that has already been pre-vetted by states).
- States could take a more prominent role by converting policy and position statements into one-page summaries for their delegations. These one-pagers could address general topics with greater specificity.
- Policies should be more concise and immediately convey their main points.
- What are the ongoing advocacy efforts for the resolutions from staff and members?
- Are the resolutions simply posted on the WSWC website for informational purposes?

WGA Review Process

- Does every policy statement go before the WGA for approval, or should we have specific criteria for what gets reviewed?
 - Staff note: Governor review ensures that we are not presenting westwide policy positions to Federal agencies and Congress that are contrary to that Governor's policies. While we send letters with the positions directly to the governors' offices, and rely on members to separately forward positions to their governors as appropriate, WGA provides another layer of review as they work more directly with the governors and their staff than do WSWC staff. While WGA rarely pushes on the brakes with caution, they frequently appreciate the elevated awareness of the topics our members consider important, and will sometimes incorporate our positions directly into their policy advocacy work, relying on our members as the experts.

Policy Positions that have been allowed to sunset (2008-2025)

2008

#262 Support for the U.S. Geological Survey's Cooperative Water Program (CWP) and opposes any effort to force the privatization of related USGS services. (separately updated)

#268 The WSWC endorses policy resolutions adopted by the Western Governors' Association, and will allow these policies to guide the Council in matters relevant to implementation and potential reauthorization of the Clean Water Act. (deferred to WGA resolution)

#269 Water Efficiency Standards for Plumbing Products. (subsequently enacted)

#270 Reauthorization of the Farm Bill. (reauthorized)

#271 Support for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Landsat Data Continuity Mission and calling for continued funding to include a thermal infrared sensor. (superceded by 2009 WSWC Position No. 283)

#273 Support for the Nonpoint Source Grant program administered by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency under Section 319 of the Clean Water Act. (outdated)

2009

#276 Urging the Congress and Administration to Continue to Recognize State Primacy Regarding Water Rights and Water Quality Certification in the Federal Licensing of Hydroelectric Projects. (supplanted by WGA resolution)

#277 Letter commending the American Indian Environmental Office of EPA for its efforts in establishing the Tribal Water Program Council and expressing a hope that it would "offer an ongoing opportunity for state-tribal cooperation on issues of mutual interest." (outdated)

#279 Support for legislation (S. 2751 and H.R. 5136) to create a National Integrated Drought Information System within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (authority enacted)

#280 Strong support for federal legislation, the National Drought Preparedness Act, to establish a national policy for drought and coordinate "proactive measures at all levels of government to plan, prepare and mitigate the serious impacts of drought." (deferred to WGA resolution)

#281 Support for Reclamation's Water Conservation Field Services Program and "Bridging-the-Headgate" Partnerships. (outdated)

#282 Regarding Federal Non-Tribal Fees in General Adjudications asking the Congress to pass legislation requiring the Federal government, when a party to a general water rights adjudication, to pay fees for costs imposed by the state to conduct the proceedings to the same extent as all other users. (deferred to WGA resolution)

#283 Reiterating strong support for maintaining a thermal band as part of the Landsat Data Continuity Mission, and the necessary funding. (separately updated)

2010

#287 Setting forth the Council's past perspectives on a proposed "Twenty-First Century Water Commission." (outdated - see #301)

#289 Support of the proposed Water Conservation, Efficiency and Management Act, to specifically authorize the Bureau of Reclamation's water conservation programs. (separately authorized)

#290 Concern over the Administration's decision to zero out funding for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Technical Assistance to States (TATS) Program. (outdated)

#291/#292 Regarding the proposed Agricultural Water Enhancement Program. (enacted)

#295 Concern over budget request for federal funding for water and wastewater treatment, specifically EPA's State Revolving Fund (SRF) Capitalization Grants. (combined with #296 and replaced with #330 - Apr 15, 2011)

#296 Concern with OMB directive to EPA disallowing the use of SRF revenues to repay bonds. (combined with #295 and replaced with #330 - Apr 15, 2011)

2011

#297 Strong support for legislation to establish a National Drought Council to improve national drought preparedness, mitigation, and response efforts. (There is no current legislation)

#298 In cooperation with the Interstate Council on Water Policy expressing strong support for increased funding for the Cooperative Water Program and the National Streamflow Information Program. (superceded by more recent position statements and letters)

#299 Supporting S. 2842, the Aging Water Infrastructure and Maintenance Act. (enacted)

#300 Regarding introduction of the Cooperative Watershed Management Act of 2008 (S. 3085). (enacted)

#301 Commenting on H.R. 135, the "21st Century Water Commission," specifically declaring that the WSWC be involved in the selection of members and that it include State and Native American involvement. (Bill has not been reintroduced)

#302 Supporting the enactment of S. 895 to provide the Bureau of Reclamation with authority to assess rural water supply needs and for sufficient funding. (enacted)

#303 Revised resolution in support of the Weather Modification Research and Technology Transfer Act. (No federal research program or legislation has been reintroduced)

#306 Urging support for full funding of the USGS National Streamflow Information Program (NSIP) and sufficient funding for the Cooperative Water Program to match non-USGS contributions. (outdated)

#307 Letter to Senator Bingaman, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, expressing interest in S. 3231, the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act. (outdated)

#311 Letter to Steve Stockton offering assistance to the Corps in their water planning initiative. (outdated)

2012

#313 Letter Regarding National Water Research and Development Initiative Act. (There is no current legislation)

#315 Letter to House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee leaders raising concerns regarding a draft bill entitled the Sustainable Watershed Planning Act. (outdated, not reintroduced)

#317 Supporting the Bureau of Reclamation's Field Services Program. (outdated)

#318 Offering general comments to CEQ on the Principles and Guidelines. (outdated)

#319 Describing principles that are important to the Western states in considering a “national vision” for water policy. (superceded by more recent position)

2013

#323 A Shared Vision on Water Planning and Policy. (superceded by a permanent mission statement, A Vision of Water)

2015

#338 Energy and Water Integration Act of 2011. (outdated)

#341 Letter regarding concerns with the Bureau of Reclamation’s proposed changes to the Reclamation Manual. (outdated)

2016

#359 Opposing requiring pesticide applications for National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) discharge permits. (outdated)

2017

#373 Letter commenting on the proposed rule developed by the EPA and the USACE to clarify the scope of Clean Water Act jurisdiction. (proposed rule became the 2015 Clean Water Rule)

#372 Letter sending comments on the USFS Proposed Directive on Groundwater Resource Management, Forest Service Manual 2560. (Forest Service has withdrawn their activity)

#370 The Interpretive Rule Regarding Applicability of the Exemption from Permitting under Section 404(f)(1)(A) of the Clean Water Act to Certain Agricultural Conservation Practices. (proposed rule was withdrawn)

2019

#394 Urging Congress to authorize and the Administration to complete a comprehensive study of the Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System’s authorized purposes and related benefits before addressing an appropriate balance and mix of uses. (outdated)

#389 Urging Congress and the Administration to prioritize federal programs that provide the translation function between basic scientific research on climate and weather extremes to water resources management actions. (positions more recently adopted)

2020

#410 Acknowledges state authority over “waters of the State” and called for recognizable limits to federal Clean Water Act jurisdiction. (superseded by more recent position)

2022

#472 Regarding Clean Water Act Jurisdiction (superseded by more recent position)

APPENDIX E: SURVEY QUESTIONS

These questions were formulated from comments made by various members, particularly from the Executive Committee, and by Council staff. The survey was sent out on March 7, 2025. We received 26 responses from 15 states. (Responses to the questions are included in Appendix F.)

Section I: Membership Role

1. Who do you represent, and what is your role (e.g., at your state agency)?
2. What do you see as the primary purpose or value of the Council?
3. How does your participation with the Council advance the organization that you represent and its interests?
4. How would you rate your engagement in Council activities and discussions?

Section II: Membership Engagement and Participation

Improving efficiency and efficacy

A. Committee Structure (Executive, Water Resources, Water Quality, and Legal Committees)

5. How effective is the Committee structure in advancing the Council purpose and goals?
6. If responded with other than highly effective: What improvements or alternatives to the committee structure should the Council consider?

B. Process for developing, modifying, and renewing policy positions

7. How effective is the current policy resolution adoption process?
8. If responded with other than highly effective: What improvements or alternatives to the resolution adoption process should the Council consider?

C. Meeting attendance and participation

9. Why do you attend Council meetings?

Check all that apply

- ☐ I attend to represent my agency/state
- ☐ Advocacy - opportunities to weigh in on key issues and policies (state/federal)
- ☐ Interaction-discussion with members from other states
- ☐ Interaction-discussion with representatives of federal agencies
- ☐ Information sharing - presentations on state programs and issues
- ☐ Information sharing - presentations on federal programs and issues
- ☐ Information sharing - presentations on data/technology applications
- ☐ Other: _____

D. Meeting preparation and briefing book

10. How effective is the 10-Day Notice/30-Day Notice in helping you prepare for meetings?
11. How effective is the briefing book in helping you prepare for meetings?
12. If responded with other than highly effective: What improvements or alternatives to the notices and the briefing book should be considered to help you prepare for the Council meetings?

E. Interstate relationships

13. How effective is the current meeting structure in promoting members' relationships and improving understanding of other states' programs, policies, laws, innovations, and challenges?
14. What additional opportunities or alternatives can be instituted to facilitate members' relationships and understanding of other states?

F. Internal engagement format

Methods of sharing information

15. Recognizing that varying engagement formats are advantageous to meet members' needs, what are you interested in?

- In-person Council meetings
- Hybrid (in-person and virtual) meetings
- Virtual meetings(interactive discussions)
- Virtual presentations (webinars)
- Topic specific workshops
- Weekly Newsletters
- Email Communications

Other engagement formats you are interested in?

16. How should we balance our in-person meeting time relative to our current practices?

Keep the same | Spend more time | Spend less time | More efficient use of this time

- Council business (minutes, policy positions, workplans)
- Speaker presentations
- Roundtable discussions
- Host State presentation
- Host State field trip
- Reception
- Breaks for informal conversations
- Committee reports to the Full Council
- State reports

Further thoughts on how we balance our in-person meeting time?

G. Meeting rotation and locations

Rules of Organization: "The Council shall hold regular meetings three times each year at times and places to be decided by the Chair, upon 30 days written notice."

17. Should we continue to hold our meetings every other Spring in Washington, D.C.to promote engagement with the federal government?

If the response is no, why?

If the response is yes, how would you prefer to engage as a group with the Congress/Administration?

18. Should we continue to hold in-person meetings rotating between our 18 states every Spring, Summer, and Fall?

If the response is no, what alternative would you suggest?

Section III: Member Priorities

Council staff typically use the policy positions, workplan tasks, and meeting discussions captured in the minutes to identify the topics of greatest interest to the Council members to guide them in writing newsletter articles, inviting speakers to present at meetings, and developing webinars and workshops.

A. Please provide three topics that you are interested in seeing addressed by the Council in the near future.

B. Given the Council's finite resources, **what should staff focus on** to effectively advance the Council's priorities?

Check all that apply.

- Council meetings

- In-person government-to-government communication (“lobbying”)
- Writing comment letters on proposed rules to federal agencies
- Submitting written testimony on Congressional hearings
- Support running/advancing WADE/WestDAAT
- Leveraging WestFAST relationships to assist at the state/local level
- Engagement with sister organizations
- Public/media education and outreach

Other priorities?

C. Other communications, external engagement, and advocacy

Feedback to assist our small staff with limited resources

Newsletter

Staff spend significant time developing content and preparing the weekly newsletter.

19. How effective is the newsletter in its current format?
20. How important is the newsletter in supporting your work?
21. Are there topics you would like to see emphasized more (or less) in newsletter articles?
22. What can be done to improve the newsletter to meet your needs?

External Advocacy

Given limited resources, how can staff best support advocacy efforts?

23. How effective is the Council’s advocacy effort with Congress/Administration? If other than highly effective: What suggestions do you have to improve advocacy with Congress/Administration?
24. Is Council advocacy for Western water with the media/general public important to your agency? If so, why?
25. How can the Council effectively communicate Western water policy and complexity with the media/general public?

Section V: Your vision for the future

26. What will the Western water future look like in your state, and how can the Council be better positioned to engage effectively?

Section I: Membership Role

2. What do you see as the primary purpose or value of the Council?

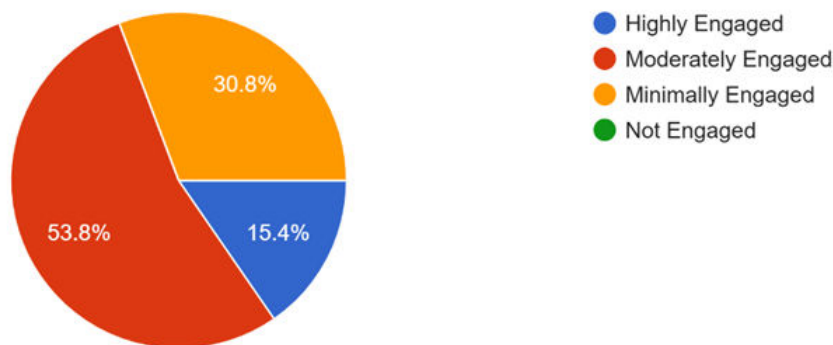
- As the means by which the western state can **collaborate** with each other in order to agree upon **joint water policies, positions and proposed legislation**.
- Developing **positions on proposed federal rulemakings** is an important purpose. Working with conterminous state and federal agencies and on **common water resource issues** is another important purpose.
- Creates a forum for various states to **coordinate and discussion policy similarities and differences**.
- **Information sharing**, tracking **major policy matters, networking** amongst state colleagues
- **Raising awareness** of similar water resource management issues faced by other western states.
- **Exchange of perspectives, ideas and challenges** among States grappling with administering Federal environmental laws
- **Coordination, Information-sharing, advocacy, federal lobbying and engagement** on shared western water issues.
- Good opportunity to **share information** among states, **advocate** for western water issues and **learn from other states'** experiences
- **Information sharing** on state/federal programs
- **Information sharing**; opportunity to **support common policy/interests**
- **Advocating** for Western States to congress on water issues; **coordinating** states **networking** on western states' water priorities; **advising states on national water legislative matters**
- **Information sharing on highlights/challenges** for Prior Appropriation States; opportunity to **learn from one another on the policy-side**; resource from federal level activities
- **Networking** among states. Would be good if it could develop some **lobbying capability**.
- **Learning from** and **networking** with other state and federal water officials.
- **"Share information and coordinate on Federal Activities.**
- **Share best practices and lessons learned** on state water management challenges and solutions; help state agencies **modernize their laws and policies."**
- **Networking** with colleagues from other states
- **Voice of the western states** water agencies into the federal government to develop positions that assist in **shaping water policy**. The discussions and relationships enriched from these meetings is important, inviting, and **provides unity amongst the West.**
- **Finding common ground on issues** at the federal level and **promoting cooperative federalism with states.**
- **Information sharing, networking/ building strength** with colleagues, having a resource for Western-level coordination and it's fit in a National perspective
- **Communicating and advocating for western states' perspectives on federal laws and regulations**; promoting **information sharing** and **interstate communication**; helping establish productive working relationships with federal agencies.
- Coordination of prior appropriation states about western water issues
- Coordinating our responses on critical water issues that we share
- Shared Ideas
- **Connections** with other states, **advocating** for common issues
- Building relationships and **sharing information** and ideas with western states
- Coordination and collaboration of western states on water issues.

3. How does your participation with the Council advance the organization that you represent and its interests?

- **I bring my years of experience** in water rights, transactions and needs in furtherance of the purpose of the Council
- Alaska is a bit different in its' water resource issues, but **topics on data acquisition, data presentation are helpful.**
- It helps me **understand other states laws, policies, and issues they face.**
- Streamlines information gathering on **major federal policy matters** and provides **voice with other western states to express policy positions and statements** on emerging federal policy
- It informs me about **water resource management issues or opportunities** that I can apply in Idaho.
- Provides a **benchmark of State approaches** on water quality matters to assess Kansas strategy
- The Council is an **effective coordination body** that allows states to efficiently **learn from one another and coordinate positions to advance a unified message to the federal government.**
- New Mexico benefits from participating in the Council and **learning from other states**
- Participation with the Council allows our organization to **understand water issues across the West** and **gain information on solutions to problems** that are also affecting our state.
- **Lessons learned**
- **Understanding concerns of other states** helps **inform our water decisions** and ability to **advise state leadership** in an efficient and coordinated manner.
- **resource from federal level activities;** resources for inquiries and gathering information from other states on specific inquiries
- It provides some contacts or support that could **help with our S2S lobbying.** Most of the Council's members are water rights agencies or Clean Water Act permitting agencies and those subjects are irrelevant for us; **we have more in common with large water utilities, either federal or local.**
- It makes us **aware of innovative things** going on within other states and federal agencies.
- The Council has potential but needs some changes to help Western States advance. With changes the council could help Western States better understand each others management frameworks and laws, contemporary and complex management issues, and to more efficiently modernize through information sharing, best practices, and lessons learned. The Council does currently provide significant information to maintain awareness of federal actions.
- **Peer networking within a smaller group can be leveraged with engagement in other organizations.** Specifically, **awareness and engagement of national issues** at a smaller level is easier to get consensus and that can be used as a platform for larger organizations like ECOS, ASDWA, ACWA, etc.
- "Provides the space and community to **discuss water related issues with neighboring states** and states in the west with similar concerns and goals.
- I don't know what role, if any, the Council has had with the **ongoing battle with the US Army Corps of Engineers and downstream states on the Missouri River.** That said, any voice the upper basin states can have in Washington D.C. advocating for states' rights in management of the river is welcomed and important. I also suspect eventually, between tribal interests, and all the states bordering the river there may be movement to try and force quantification of tribal rights and eventually a compact on the Missouri River. South Dakota will need all the help we can get because the upper basin states are out-represented in the U.S. Congress. "
- In my tenure, we have not had a specific issue advanced by WSWC that directly advances Washington State interests. I appreciate **learning how other states are tackling similar water quality problems** even though we may approach solutions differently.
- Increasing awareness and finding partner states with similar issues/concerns.

- Helping to communicate WY's voice on federal issues; learning from other states dealing with similar issues.
- Provides information about western water development; examples of how to handle developing issues; Provides uniform and heightened influence on federal water issues; provides conduit to federal agencies dealing with water; provides forum to build interstate relationships; other benefits as well
- The networking opportunities often help with solutions to problems. At this time in the United States, our ability to respond as a collective and represent and lobby for the needs of our western states has never been more critical.
- Share ideas, shared missions
- Being better informed about national issues and coordinating congressional or federal agency messaging
- Sharing of information on issues and solutions with other states.

4. How would you rate your engagement in Council activities and discussions?

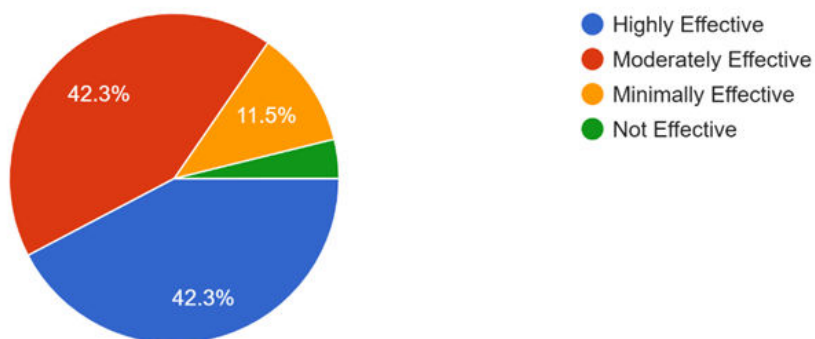


Section II: Membership Engagement and Participation

Improving efficiency and efficacy

A. Committee Structure (Executive, Water Resources, Water Quality, and Legal Committees)

5. How effective is the Committee structure in advancing the Council purpose and goals?

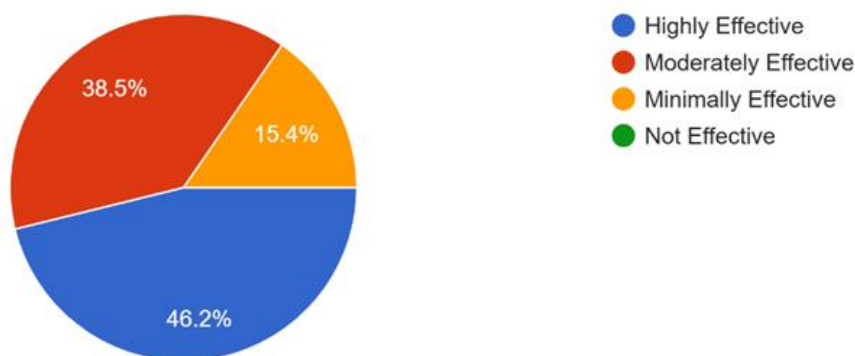


6. If responded with other than highly effective: What improvements or alternatives to the committee structure should the Council consider?

- Admittedly, we get out of it what we put into it, which is not that much. The structure seems fine.
- I think the committee structure is good. I didn't select highly effective because I am **not sure it's clear what members of each of the committees are expected to do.**
- There **is a lot of overlap between the issues** touched on in the legal committee and the purview of the water resources and water quality issues. Perhaps **this could be folded together?** Also, it is **unclear the exact role of the executive committee** and that could be better delineated and defined.
- I think the 3-committee structure is highly effective to get like-minded people together, but the execution can always grow
- More impactful initiatives besides resolutions
- A **more dynamic structure that allows for more time for discussion and information sharing**; less information presentations; **more policy-oriented topics**
- **Meet as a committee** of the whole. Can have **time blocks on the agenda organized by theme (CWA, litigation, etc) but any votes/discussion on a topic happen only once** without having another meeting just to go over what was already covered. **The current "committees" do almost nothing outside the meetings**, so let's not pretend there's a working committee structure. In the rare instances when some topic generates enough interest for work to happen outside a meeting, **an ad hoc work group can be formed.**
- **Presentations to the committees are not always relevant**; would like to **hear more from states and more relevant topics.** Sometimes feels like consultants or federal agencies are driving the topics vs the states needs.
- I do appreciate the small committee count within WSWC. I am **unclear what the mission/goals/priorities that each committee is working towards.**
- It seems like most people attend all committee meetings no matter the topic. I think more virtual committee meetings between full council meetings would be helpful. Also, often committee meetings can be dominated by federal agency reports. We don't seem to have a true workplan for advancing issues we jointly want to pursue.
- The Water Resource committee only meets at council meetings and it seems like we would make better progress if we met more than 3 times per year.

B. Process for developing, modifying, and renewing policy positions

7. How effective is the current policy resolution adoption process?



8. If responded with other than highly effective: What improvements or alternatives to the resolution adoption process should the Council consider?

- The default process seems to be to **review expiring existing positions**. There are a lot of **positions**.
- I am not sure how effective it is. In the time I've been involved it seems **pretty mechanical year after year**. I do feel this is the space where **the council should focus**. I know as a state official I don't have much bandwidth to write or edit content and hope that is a **role of the council staff**.
- I believe the process is highly effective to ascertain positions that are held by all states but it is **sometimes unclear where policy perspectives differ** and thus what the **net impact of our policy positions are in the context of other individual state lobbying efforts**.
- More **frequent work/drafting sessions**.
- Need to liberalize **opportunities to modify and update resolutions** to reflect current events and initiatives
- The committee process is good and **allows members with specific interest and expertise to take the lead on amendments and development**
- It is **unclear how these policy affect change**
- These either take up too much time or not enough time - this seems to be more of a **editing exercise than anything**.
- **Make all the resolutions start/end at the same time** so we're not spending time on them at each meeting. **Handle the resolution process off-line** (virtual meetings, e-mail) so we **don't waste in-person meeting time on them**. **Clarify the purpose/use** for the resolutions. We waste a lot of time **wordsmithing** whereas clauses that are unneeded. Internal guidance for staff doesn't need something that reads like the preamble to the Constitution.
- It is **unclear how effective the resolutions are** and **how they are used**. Seems like a lot of time is spent on these. Perhaps opinion would change if had more clarity on whether these are useful and effective and how they are actually used.
- Michelle does an exceptional job in moderating discussions and gaining consensus. **Clear deadlines and action items** would be helpful if a resolution cannot be met during in-person meetings so the resolution doesn't linger for 3-4 months.
- I think sometimes the committee meeting agendas are ambitious and **do not leave enough time for discussion** among the committee members and federal partners.
- It is **unclear the impact that the work of the committees** have. It seems that the **committees would benefit from more focus/strategic goals**.
- It would be good to have the big picture on all the resolutions we have, and how they are used. Does the Council staff use them much? Do any States (or the Council) share them with the Western Governors?
- We have too many policies that most do not pay attention to until there is a conflict. I think we need to have a discussion about **what issues we collectively** have issues care about and want to work on. Committees can be helpful in this instance as it's a better place to work on differences between states.

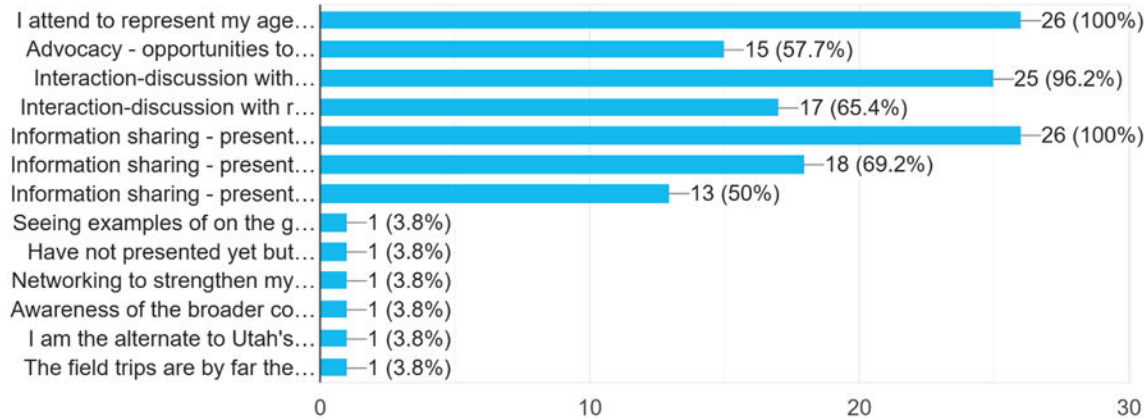
C. Meeting attendance and participation

9. Why do you attend Council meetings?

Check all that apply

- I attend to represent my agency/state (100%)
- Advocacy - opportunities to weigh in on key issues and policies (state/federal) (57.7%)
- Interaction-discussion with members from other states (96.2%)
- Interaction-discussion with representatives of federal agencies (65.4%)
- Information sharing - presentations on state programs and issues (100%)
- Information sharing - presentations on federal programs and issues (69.2%)
- Information sharing - presentations on data/technology applications (50%)

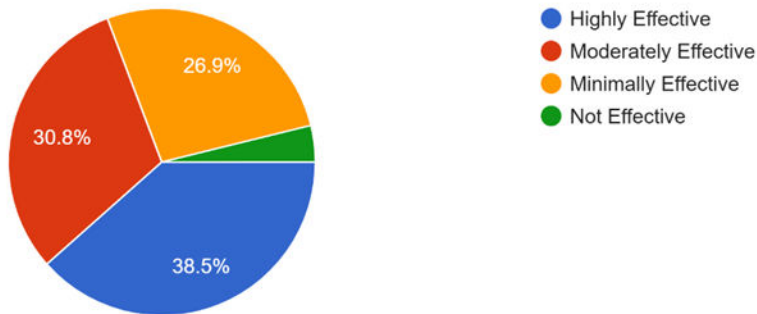
○ Other: _____



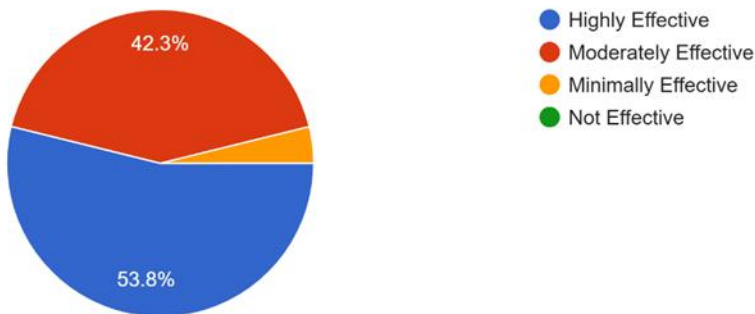
Other reasons for attending the Council meetings:

D. Meeting preparation and briefing book

10. How effective is the 10-Day Notice/30-Day Notice in helping you prepare for meetings?



11. How effective is the briefing book in helping you prepare for meetings?

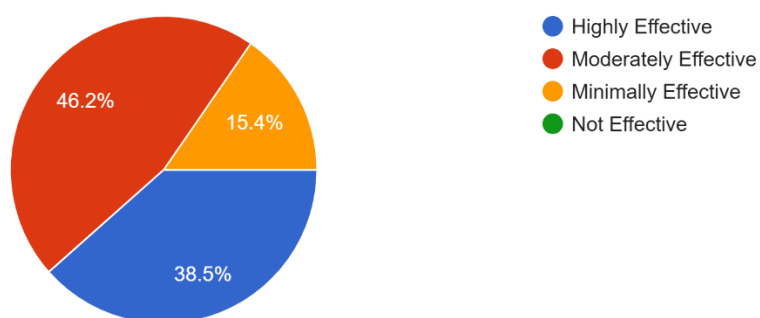


12. If responded with other than highly effective: What improvements or alternatives to the notices and the briefing book should be considered to help you prepare for the Council meetings?

- The briefing book itself is pretty good. Admittedly **there are quite a few issues, much of which don't directly apply to my state's unique issues.**
- The briefing book is helpful. I do think having the **meetings scheduled well in advance is needed.** Schedules are so tight anymore having the dates at least three to six months in advance would be great.
- The briefing documents is **extremely long, but it is helpful.**
- The notice is really just a reminder to make travel reservations. **The briefing book is far too voluminous to wade through,** and much of it is only of interest to specific people (e.g. Clean Water Act administration). Outside of things actually needed for the meeting (agenda, membership list), **just provide a set of links to the content** on your website with 1-2 sentences identifying the content.
- The **detailed agendas come out too late for the agency to effectively plan** whether to attend the meeting in person. The **briefing book is long and it is difficult to access the information** when its in one pdf that is hundreds of pages long, making it difficult to review and digest the materials.
- "Joint ICWP meeting notices are **sometimes unclear/confusing about registration requirements (fees).**
- The **briefing book is quite voluminous** and I usually **don't have sufficient time** to review all the material before the meeting, which **makes me feel unprepared** at times."
- It would be helpful to **have reminders of some notes in the briefing book of when subgroups of committees met in between the formal meetings.** For example, a subgroup of water quality met on x date to discuss revisions to policy z. I find myself scrabbling to remember what we did between meetings. A **short summary of the subgroup meetings** would help me remember as well as **bring transparency** of work done in between meetings.
- I procrastinate, that's not on you. I often read the briefing book on the plane out, which is very helpful
- The briefing books are too long. This may be a factor of too many policies.

E. Interstate relationships

13. How effective is the current meeting structure in promoting members' relationships and improving understanding of other states' programs, policies, laws, innovations, and challenges?



14. What additional opportunities or alternatives can be instituted to facilitate members' relationships and understanding of other states?

- **Updates from states seems to always be an afterthought** and crammed at the end of the meeting. **Relationships with people in other states that do similar work are very helpful.** **Knowing issues and progress other states** are making would be helpful to learn.

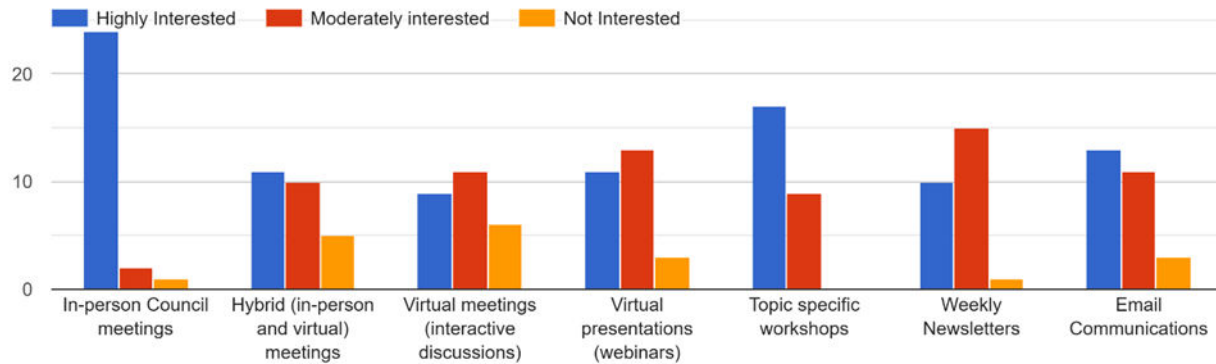
- Participation might be more robust with **fewer annual meetings**. I would like to see annual meetings **reduced from three to two**. Alternatively, and perhaps preferable, **two meetings a year in member states and one meeting a year with robust remote participation** support hosted by WSWC from its office in Salt Lake City.
- There is **not a lot of time to have dialogue around specific issues** facing western states. That dialogue is super helpful and informative. I am **interested in hearing more about what other states** are doing and learning from them. Perhaps there could be **surveys on topics of interest to states** and facilitated dialogue about the issues. This would require that the appropriate state reps were present.
- **More time in the agenda for discussion**, state roundtables, etc.
- **Focus topic discussions** and each state addresses the issue
- Webinars?
- **less formal presentations; more dialogue** in general and/or on emerging or trending issues; **panel discussions**
- More time on the agenda for **discussion among members** and less time spent on presentations by federal agencies and others just trying to sell their programs.
- Would prefer to have **more conversations that involve discussion** and **information sharing**. In person meetings are very structured with presentations versus workshop or **small group discussions to share and discuss issues**. Would like more opportunities for **semi-structured conversation**.
- The **field trips are always interesting** to see host state projects, infrastructure, etc. and network with colleagues from other states. **Agendas tend to be heavily packed** so presentations are rushed and **do not leave time for meaningful dialogue**.
- The council does a great job of this through **surveys and in person meetings**
- The meeting structure is very formal. **It can be intimidating as a new member** to engage. I would have appreciated some **welcome packet or new member briefing** when I first joined to help me navigate the organization's structure and meet the staff and people.
- The agendas need to have less items so more time can be spent in open discussion that is not rushed. We may want to rethink the 1 1/2 day meeting format?
- Building some additional networking time into the agenda; continue the optional pre- or post-meeting workshops.
- Allow more discussion at meetings
- We seem to be more focused on federal issues to **spend more time on other states approaches**. We do have some interaction that is helpful and I often learn from the presentations. I think a more **moderated discussion when we are talking specific issues** may be helpful in understanding different states and how any proposal would impact each of us.
- Ensure that there is **adequate networking opportunities and information sharing**.

F. Internal engagement format

Methods of sharing information

15. Recognizing that varying engagement formats are advantageous to meet members' needs, what are you interested in?

- In-person Council meetings
- Hybrid (in-person and virtual) meetings
- Virtual meetings(interactive discussions)
- Virtual presentations (webinars)
- Topic specific workshops
- Weekly Newsletters
- Email Communications



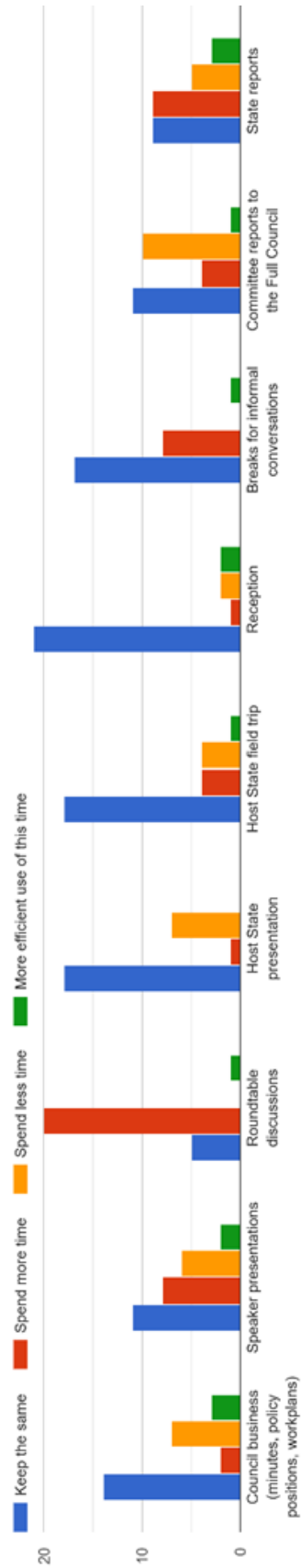
Other engagement formats you are interested in?

- With how busy schedules are and time-consuming travel can be, I really wish the council would consider just **two in-person/hybrid meetings and one all virtual meeting**. I realize the **by-laws say the council will meet three times a year**. Then we you throw in various workshops and other council conference involvement; it is just too much.
- **Hybrid and virtual participation in committee meetings is typically of poor quality**; very hard to keep up with discussions in person
- **Field trips**
- **Virtual meetings are fine for housekeeping items like resolutions**, but can't replace **in-person meetings for discussion** among members. The Council's **hybrid meetings have been poor** because you don't have the technology to pull it off. A couple of Meeting Owls in a hotel conference room make for a painful meeting for virtual participants.
- For items that we marked both as moderate and high, its going to be topic specific and whether the agenda is relevant to the agencies needs. We think that the in person meetings would provide more value if there were **interactive topic specific discussion as opposed to general networking or presentations**.
- Presenters should always be in person. In person attendance, in general should be highly encouraged
- Have appreciated WSWC's presence at other association meetings (e.g., ACWA).
- We haven't had many workshops or webinars compared to in person council meetings.

16. How should we balance our in-person meeting time relative to our current practices?

Keep the same | Spend more time | Spend less time | More efficient use of this time

- Council business (minutes, policy positions, workplans)
- Speaker presentations
- Roundtable discussions
- Host State presentation
- Host State field trip
- Reception
- Breaks for informal conversations
- Committee reports to the Full Council
- State reports



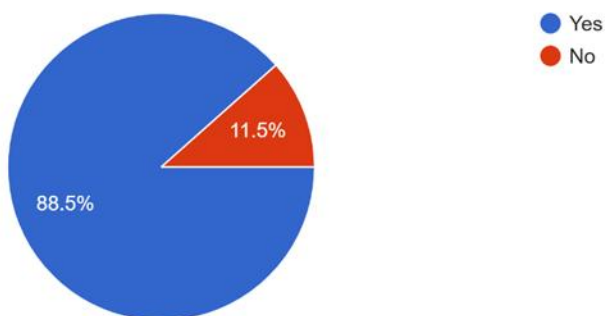
Further thoughts on how we balance our in-person meeting time?

- **Hold just two in-person meetings a year.** I think they'd be more focused and effective.
- **Field trips are nice** when they are not forced. Sometimes we end up with field trips and site visits that are not very germane to water resource management.
- **Front end load action items on committee agendas; leave informational briefings toward back end**
- If the committees were able to spend more time **on workplans**, the meetings may be more reflective of committee members wants/needs moving forward.
- focus on **promoting engagement and discussion** - get members talking
- The **meeting format needs a complete re-do, lose the committee meeting structure.**
- Would like to see **more time spent on roundtable or small-group topic specific conversations.** The reception and breaks for informal conversations would be more useful if there were **structured prompts and an encouragement for folks to break out of their silos.** The field trips are interesting but sometimes feel driven by consultants or special interests and, thus become less relevant. Speaker presentations can be great depending on the topic.
- **Fewer agenda items**, or added time for **meaningful discussion.**
- The **host state presentations could be incorporated into the committee meetings - with specific topics** by committee topic rather than at the full committee. We have some of that now and it seems the better opportunity for questions and discussion at the committee level.
- Maybe 1/2 day field trips and put one of the committee meetings in the morning of that day? See the not above re agendas with less topics crammed in, they feel rushed and by the end of the Committee meeting day, it's exhausting.
- Love the state reports, but appreciate the emphasis on sharing just 1-2 unique things that may be of interest to other states.
- More impact for fed changes
- More interactive policy discussions.

G. Meeting rotation and locations

Rules of Organization: "The Council shall hold regular meetings three times each year at times and places to be decided by the Chair, upon 30 days written notice."

17. Should we continue to hold our meetings every other Spring in Washington, D.C. to promote engagement with the federal government?



If the response is no, why?

- It's **a lot of travel for western states and the timing may or may not align with specific state lobbying needs.**
- No objection to meeting in DC, but those **meetings have been just lecture sessions by a parade of federal agencies**, and meeting jointly with ICWP further cuts down the time for any actual interaction among Council members. **Better to have 3 regular meetings a year plus a**

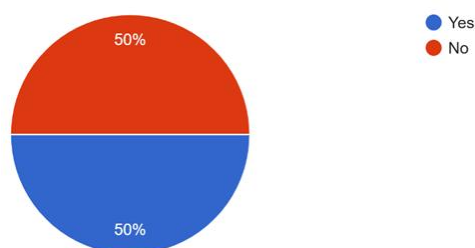
separate DC meeting focused on advocacy (not lectures by federal agencies), which is how most associations handle this.

- We think that this is **an important opportunity**, but the **timing is not ideal due to conflicts with the Oregon Legislative Session**. Would prefer to see this at other times of the year.

If the response is yes, how would you prefer to engage as a group with the Congress/ Administration?

- **Visiting congressional members is highly important and effective. Small groups with similar issues should continue to meet applicable congressional staff** together
- **Committee meeting with Administration**
- It is **helpful to hear from federal agency leaders** and to express how the **interaction on the local level is working**. Any **congressional visits should be left up to the individual states**.
- depends on key policy issues. I would suggest that the **agenda be established at prior meeting targeting key federal interests around current policy issues of the time**.
- **Discussions with congressional staff**
- **Small groups are effective**
- Develop **briefing materials that are important to all member states and set aside time for Hill visits**.
- **I see value in attending** every year. Hill day where members meet with their own delegation with **WSWC collective talking points** and a Hill day with focused on pertinent committee members for WSWC education. **Visits to federal agency offices**
- We need **more guidance and discussion** on this.
- **States should be included in CoDel discussions**. Advance notice of **talking points and leave behinds** should be provided to states well in advance.
- More engagement with Congress would be helpful with **congressional committee staff**. Also, the federal agency report outs have not had much to say about Washington State. It felt more like a **one-way report out from the federal agencies and missed an opportunity for all states to have an opportunity to share what federal support is needed in each state**.
- Being in DC at least provides for **more local HQ staff** to attend without having to travel. I value that more than congressional visits
- Having their participation in the WSWC meeting as presenters and panelists; maybe more time for roundtable breakout sessions (e.g., Water Quality Committee meets with EPA; Water Resources meets with BOR, etc.)
- Direct meetings
- The congressional staff and federal agency leadership presentations are good. I'd like for WSWC to think about **providing them questions or topics** rather than what seems to be fairly open ended topics for them to decide.
- Timely relevant topics
- There was a ton on the agenda at the last DC meeting. It would be **focus** it a bit more or maybe has **break out sessions**.

18. Should we continue to hold in-person meetings rotating between our 18 states every Spring, Summer, and Fall?



If the response is no, what alternative would you suggest?

- **Schedules are just too busy and travel is difficult.** If the organization stays with three meetings a year, at a minimum **one meeting should be moved to virtual only**. It is extremely difficult to spend this much time away from the office and be able to focus this much time on council business.
- I think **two meetings a year is probably sufficient during the years we are not visiting D.C.**
- See comments above. **Reduce in-person meetings to two a year**, with one robustly supported virtual meeting hosted by WSWC HQ.
- **Except for DC meeting, not much need for Spring meeting.** Summer and Fall are more valued
- **Suggest moving to 2 meetings: one in-person and one virtual.**
- Once or twice a year is sufficient
- **Two meetings a year in the spring and fall is sufficient.**
- 2x per year and more focused
- The 3 meetings seem crammed together. I could get equal value from 2 meetings/year. Maybe a. Occasional 3rd that is a special topic workshop or something focused. Rotating among the States is great.
- We should **continue rotating through the states**, but perhaps meeting twice a year instead of three times is adequate.
- Suggest **two in person meetings and then one virtual**. Consider more frequent topic specific virtual meetings where members can share challenges, solutions, etc. Facilitate more information sharing between states.
- twice a year is enough. Maybe a **specific workshop in between** that only those that are interested can attend. And we may be able to **get other staff involved in specific topics and provide staff development opportunities**.
- I would prefer to meet in the spring and fall in person and then **do an all virtual meeting in the summer**. I do like rotating between the 18 states.

Section III: Member Priorities

Council staff typically use the policy positions, workplan tasks, and meeting discussions captured in the minutes to identify the topics of greatest interest to the Council members to guide them in writing newsletter articles, inviting speakers to present at meetings, and developing webinars and workshops.

A. Please provide three topics that you are interested in seeing addressed by the Council in the near future.

- **Atmospheric monitoring by federal agencies**
 - Impacts from staff reductions
 - Making NOAA responsive to water agencies
- **Climate Adaptation**
 - What states are doing to adapt to climate change
 - Impact of climate initiative rollbacks
 - Climate change/changing water supply
 - Climate change modeling/planning in various states
- **Drought response**
- **Engagement and outreach**
 - Working with stakeholders to adopt new ideas
- **Environmental issues**
 - Environmental management of intermittent and ephemeral waters
 - Functional flows determinations
 - EPA Regulatory Reform
 - Impacts of Sackett decision

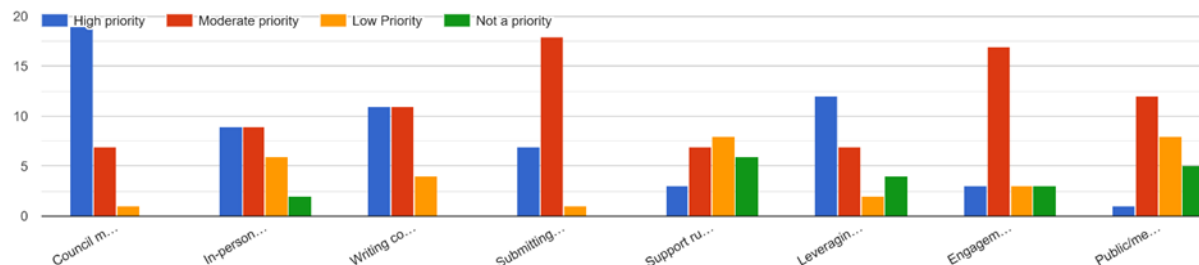
- Stream flow forecasting
- **Federal related issues**
 - Rulemaking – ongoing discussions (whiplash management into the future)
 - Federal policy changes under the new administration, federal budget changes, water/energy nexus issues
 - Emerging issues at federal level
 - Opportunities to emphasize cooperative federalism and EPA's definitions of "oversight" with this administration
 - Federal changes
- **Funding**
 - Federal funding strategies
 - Agency funding streams (fees, water use fees, federal funds, etc.)
 - Impact of federal cuts on state water priorities and needs
 - Federal funding to state primacy/delegated programs
 - Reduction in federal support services from USEPA
- **Groundwater**
 - Use of injection wells for managed aquifer recharge
 - Reduction in groundwater use programs
 - Groundwater protection strategies
 - Conjunctive surface/groundwater management
 - GW quantity availability
 - Ground water quantification
 - Groundwater management in various states
- **Reservoir storage**
 - Protecting the integrity of reservoir storage for meeting water needs
- **Reuse and reclamation**
 - Water and wastewater reuse
 - wastewater reuse
 - reclaimed water
- **Surface water monitoring and groundwater monitoring**
 - Impacts from staff reductions
 - Maintaining base federal programs and resources for water data collection (e.g., USGS stream gaging, NRCS SNOTEL, and LandSat),
 - Stream gages
 - Making federal snowpack data programs more efficient/sustainable
 - Impact of federal cuts on water data collection programs.
 - Water data information
 - Surface water data collection improvements
- **State water planning**
 - State water planning efforts
 - Permitting efficiency efforts
 - Flexible water management
 - Emerging issues at state level
 - State sharing of new laws and regulations they've passed and why
 - State Water Planning efforts
- **Water quality**
 - pfas
 - Nutrients
 - PFAS occurrence and management.
 - Updates on recent water quality legal cases
 - Where EPA is going with water quality rulemaking
 - Federal WQ regulatory changes
- **Water rights issues**

- Adjudication and federal Indian water right settlements
- Updates to state water laws
- Over appropriation
- How states are handling conjunctive management
- Contested case and adjudication streamlining
- Water right transfer review criteria and flexibility/innovations in moving existing water right around without injury.
- **Workforce capacity**
 - onboarding, training and retention
- **WOTUS/WOTS**
 - WOTUS

B. Given the Council's finite resources, what should staff focus on to effectively advance the Council's priorities?

Check all that apply.

- Council meetings
- In-person government-to-government communication ("lobbying")
- Writing comment letters on proposed rules to federal agencies
- Submitting written testimony on Congressional hearings
- Support running/advancing WADE/WestDAAT
- Leveraging WestFAST relationships to assist at the state/local level
- Engagement with sister organizations
- Public/media education and outreach



Other priorities?

- The council should be **wary of mission creep**.
- Comment -- the Council should **focus its advocacy/outreach** time on things that are **specific to member states' interests and aren't already being covered by others**. For example, any change in CWA regulations will draw thousands of comment letters and there's no need for the Council to do a comment letter just to say me too. Something like USACE saying that only it controls water in a Missouri River mainstem reservoir is the kind of niche issue where the Council should weigh in.
- It's long past time for the Council to **offload WADE/WestDAAT** on someone else or just pull the plug. It's been a **big drain on staff resources** and wasn't what the Council was established to do.
- **Conducting research on western water topics as requested by committees; facilitating information sharing** among states.
- The organization could focus on **issues specific to Western States** - and **not pursue issues that are already covered at the national level within other organizations such as ECOS**. There can be a bit of redundancy and tracking to make sure the organizations are not saying completely different things and taking different positions.

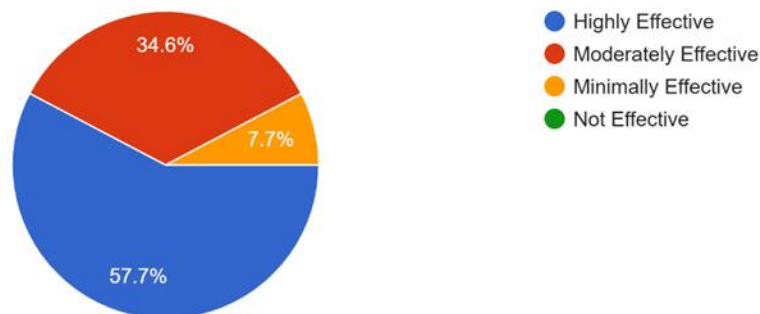
C. Other communications, external engagement, and advocacy

Feedback to assist our small staff with limited resources

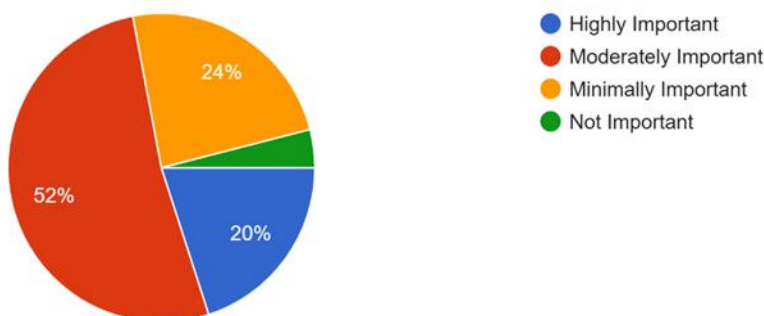
Newsletter

Staff spend significant time developing content and preparing the weekly newsletter.

19. How effective is the newsletter in its current format?



20. How important is the newsletter in supporting your work?



21. Are there topics you would like to see emphasized more (or less) in newsletter articles?

- About the same.
- I think the **newsletter is helpful**.
- no
- **More emphasis on water resource management state issues.**
- No, always a **good balance between Federal and State news**
- There are many subscription-based newsletters that cover court decisions, ESA and NEPA regs, CWA regs, etc, and odds are that many state agencies already get those. It would reduce your writing time if you **just provided heads-up links to things like Fed Reg notices, congressional hearings, court rulings etc**, and people interested in those specific items could follow up on their own. Please **stop writing about WGA meetings and governors' state of the state addresses, those are irrelevant to the Council** -- people can look at WGA's website if they want to.
- Federal topics.
- nothing to add
- **I appreciate the summaries of things happening in DC like congressional committee hearings, federal legislation introduced, and court rulings** including when there are special reports of significant issues.
- I admit I don't read it enough to speak fully on it, but when I do, it seems to be heavy on legal. Maybe that's why I don't prioritize reading it?
- Good balance of topics

- If it's taking significant time, maybe it's linking other sources more often rather writing your own. Categorizing the topics or linking back to WSWC topics.

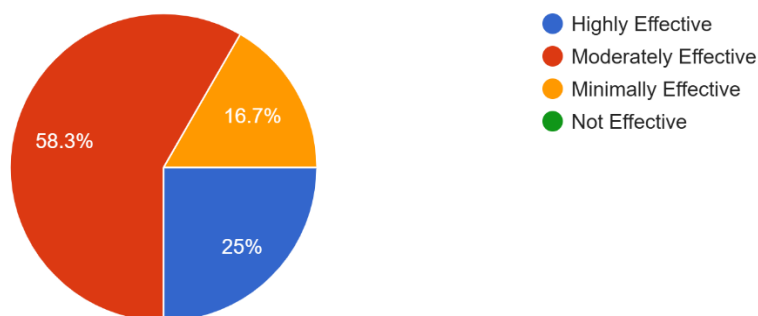
22. What can be done to improve the newsletter to meet your needs?

- Can't think of anything
- Nothing. It is helpful in highlighting items that may be of interest.
- no comments
- There has been less discussion of how federal or state grant money is spent. I'm more **interested in resource management issues and impactful litigation.**
- **less text, more bullet points of summary**
- **searchable database**- does this exist?
- See above. Given that there's the internet and anything really significant will quickly show up there, you could **reduce your workload by going to biweekly.**
- **A monthly or bi-weekly newsletter** of about the same length that captures the most significant highlights would be adequate from my perspective. **It is hard to devote the time to thoroughly digest a weekly newsletter.** If it is hard for me to find the time, I'm certain many other members find it even more difficult.
- Format: Would like to see it **more bullet points/takeways and then links** to more detailed information if have time interest. Don't often need all of the details provided. Focus on what the key takeways are; this could reduce WSWC staff time while meeting the goals of keeping us aware of federal activities.
- Nothing. I appreciate that **the newsletter is brief and timely**, making it a quick and relevant read.
- nothing to add
- I'm **not sure how to track the topics that go in the newsletter.** Could **members be more engaged with sharing current events** in the newsletter?
- Add an hour to my week so I can get to reading it.
- I enjoy the newsletter. Usually I quickly scan for articles of interest. The summaries of recent legal cases or summaries of western states' comments on a particular rule or other issue are especially helpful and I'll refer back to these. I would be OK with a lesser frequency of the newsletter if it helped ease WSWC staff workloads

External Advocacy

Given limited resources, how can staff best support advocacy efforts?

23. How effective is the Council's advocacy effort with Congress/Administration?



If other than highly effective: What suggestions do you have to improve advocacy with Congress/ Administration?

- **Advocacy is hard to measure.** Clearly the various states have different opinions on certain positions.

- I think **the level of advocacy is good**. The council should be careful to not distract from a **state's need to coordinate directly with their representatives**.
- **More direct communication**.
- **Engage/invite congressional staff** in host state to WSWC meetings
- I don't have enough information to provide an answer, so answered "moderately effective"
- **More communication to states on advocacy actions and materials** on how states can assist/take the lead in advocacy.
- Unaware of if it is effective or actions taken
- Personal opinion is **resolutions are too broad. Boil down to 3 key points that make them digestible and memorable**.
- Many membership organizations do an annual DC fly-in and send position statements to their elected -- this is a feel-good thing for their membership but **doesn't generate results**. Effective advocacy means **identifying a manageable number of very specific and measurable outcomes** (in budgets, statutes, or regulations) and working the **legislative or regulatory process to achieve those**. Just **dropping congressional offices to say hi doesn't do anything**, there needs to be a **very specific ask for the visit**. It's great to be invited to testify at hearings, but the testimony needs to be tied to a specific ask. Also, the Council needs to develop **effective outreach materials for its asks** -- our **position statements are horrible for that purpose and should never be handouts**.
- We **don't know**. We don't get enough information to know what advocacy WSWC is doing and whether WSWC has asked for it. We think its an important role, but don't have enough info to rate.
- Consider **hiring a lobbyist** to further council priorities who can provide **consistent** and regular CoDel engagement.
- I'm not really sure how and when WSWC advocacy efforts occur. Maybe this is a **good topic for the newsletter** - sharing more information about **what WSWC is working on**.
- When the Council members are passionate on a topic, I think we have a reasonable and respected voice. How strong is our connection to WGA? Our purpose is to advise our Governors on Water policy, right? Does WGA reach out to WSWC as they prep their positions?
- We may need to **partner with other water organizations** to support professional lobbying staff to keep us up to date. WSWC seems to be well respected at the federal level. How much of that is organization and how much of that is current leadership. We need to make sure we have a **transition plan** that ensures we don't lose standing or influence with Exec Director change.
- I am **unsure of the outcome** from these efforts.

24. Is Council advocacy for Western water with the media/general public important to your agency? If so, why?

- It seems that when there is a question as to western water, everyone wants to know the position the Council has taken. **It seems to be the "last word" in western water**.
- No so much, due to Alaska's unique location.
- **I am not sure**. There are so many water councils, I think the **media/general public can't tell them apart**.
- no. messaging can be very nuanced and would be **preferred to be handled by states**.
- Yes. Because the **public lacks awareness about issues** such as prior appropriation doctrine, effectiveness of cloud seeding, or diminishment of water resources.
- not so much, much of the media impetus in water quality comes from the east
- **Advancing state-specific water resources positions to the federal government is important**.
- It does not seem like there is much media or general public interest in the WSWC but the Congressional and agency support is great
- No.

- perhaps if targeted
- Not so much for water quality agenda
- No. **You don't have the resources to do it, at all , let alone do it well.** Many state and most larger local agencies (and NGOs for that matter) already expend resources to do this. CDWR has about 50 staff in its public affairs office.
- I haven't seen much interaction with the media, but I could see this being very beneficial.
- No.
- No
- Yes, **water related issues and policy can be difficult to understand and implement**, so keeping the public and lawmakers educated on this subject is beneficial on the state and federal levels.
- No. **We have our own media and general public communications efforts.**
- No. We have not cited Council documents with the media, maybe we should?
- Yes. Western water issues often aren't well represented; east/west coast perspectives tend to prevail if
- western states don't actively participate.
- Yes. Hearing concerns voiced by third parties that is complimentary to our stances is more readily received by our legislators and the public.
- No. Most of the media that we are involved with or interest in needs to be **coordinated within our state's administration.** WSWC shouldn't be a media entity itself.
- Yes, it coveys water issues in the western states that are unique and not well understood.
- No. **We do a lot of this work**

25. How can the Council effectively communicate Western water policy and complexity with the media/general public?

- Don't have a good answer but recognize that **more communication with the public the better**
- It seems communication to the media/general public is **better on a local level.**
- **not very interested in this role.**
- Good question.
- put out **quarterly newsletter a la the Family Farm Alliance**
- More **coordination with State communication offices** may be helpful
- More **graphically rich content**
- yes they should, no suggestions on how
- **This isn't the Council's role**
- If this was universally important to member agencies, the council could help facilitate **more media interviews and interactions.**
- In general this should be **left to the states or coordinate with the states to lead.**
- nothing to add
- We would need to identify the **common issues and messaging** that would benefit all the states.
- Maybe there is an opportunity for the Council to collaborate on press 1-pagers or other resources for our PIOs when something is heating up?
- I think WSWC's communication with decision makers is the most important audience right now, rather than dedicating WSWC staff time to general media and public outreach. But I think it would be beneficial if media had a better understanding that WSWC is a good resource on western water issues. I.e., we don't actively need to pursue the media, but I think it would be helpful if media had a better understanding they could reach out to WSWC for information.
- It seems like council members are not always aware of this advocacy either before or after it happens.
- **Brief policy statements on website or in media interviews.**
- No suggestions

Section V: Your vision for the future

26. What will the Western water future look like in your state, and how can the Council be better positioned to engage effectively?

- I can't see my state needing the Council any less than it needs it now. Most likely, more so.
- Probably a little **more emphasis on virtual meetings over in-person would help with our state's engagement**. I think **WSWC staff do an excellent job on the newsletters and include topics relevant to all the states**.
- "I understand the purpose of the council, but I do **worry that mission creep had diluted the value and involvement**.
- Two questions I'd like to have addressed: **How is the council different from all the other various councils and associations that are working in this same space? How can the council stand out to be the premier council for western water policy?"**
- Concerns over water/energy are very integrated and limited supplies of both are going to increase **resource management challenges**. Additionally, **water quality in agricultural areas is an every increasing concern**, particularly as considered with drinking water (SRF programs).
- More people, less resources. WSWC could **increase public awareness of these issues and carry out research on topics** (e.g., quantitative cloud seeding effectiveness) that benefit western states.
- **Water reuse will become the newest tool** in the water supply portfolio; the Council can initiate several policy discussions on minimum considerations for facilitating reuse.
- New Mexico is prioritizing efforts to **modernize our agencies, ensure compliance with interstate compacts and plan for a hotter, drier future**. New Mexico appreciated the opportunity to highlight our work through the **integrated water financing plan**. Thank you!
- **Drier**. Get the governors and lieutenants of meeting states to the table.
- **complex** from a resource management perspective, given the policy framework and current water law framework, coupled with finite water resources
- Given the current political circumstances, in the near-term it would be useful for the Council to be **keeping track of federal staff and budget cuts and general blow-ups**. It's likely that **states will have to step in and fix things the federal administration has broken**.
- Things are becoming **more complicated** and the Council is a valuable entity to help navigate the issues that are coming our way. Chances are, other states have already experiences the same challenges and **we can learn valuable lessons from them**.
- We need to **modernize and we need help in not having to reinvent the wheel** if other states have modernized and found a better way. **We need more information sharing among the states**. If other states have already spent the resources to modernize a policy, or a data system, etc we should be sharing that and seeing how we can all **leverage each others efforts**. There is not enough resources so we must maximize and leverage.
- "South Dakota is in good condition with current water resources and population. This can change given **growth in the state**. We have a few (three) fully appropriated glacial outwash aquifers in Eastern South Dakota with a few nearing full appropriation (~ten). **As an anti-groundwater mining state**, no additional water is allowed to be appropriated from these aquifers. Where development is occurring in the state, isn't where water is readily available, so future use reservations are being applied for and rural water systems are developing/improving to try and alleviate some of this concern.
- Water levels in the aquifers are monitored through manual, seasonal, measurements in a network of observation wells (~1,600 active being measured in state) - in the future, **more E-readers may be installed in these wells** (E readers exist currently in the fully appropriated aquifer observation wells for more real time measurements) and each year more observation wells are drilled into areas of concern and in **aquifers needing more data**.

- We will see **development/use of more efficient irrigation systems in an attempt to add more acres of irrigation in fully appropriated aquifer areas**. As well as, development of **poor to very poor suitability water for irrigation** without real concern for the long term impacts to the irrigator's land. We have seen requests for this but not widespread adoption yet. These issues **may lead to legislation or rule changes to how water is appropriated or managed for irrigation purposes as well**. Around **80% of SD water rights are for irrigation**; however, a little less than 1 million acres are being irrigated in SD compared to neighboring southern states (~7 to 8 million acres).
- I did not receive a response from SD DANR- Water Quality Program in time for this survey - but the **WQ program operates an in-state water quality monitoring network** (~153 active monitoring sites) along various surface water sources and the SD Geological Survey operates a groundwater quality monitoring network. I anticipate **more water quality networking sites** are planned for the future. "
- Drought, **increasing contamination of groundwater and drinking water, nonpoint pollution, ocean energy and hydropower demands, sale of water to out of state interests**
- **Industry and residential growth is still booming**. Being a resource for emerging tech and deploying it safely, effectively, and with an eye to conservation is a tricky balance. Helping the States be nimble in changing times could be a smart move.
- Effective **regulations and policies that balance water quality protection with economic/industry needs for current and future generations. Effective cooperative federalism** and a true coregulator relationship with EPA, rather than a parent-child relationship.
- New Mexico is struggling with the **extended drought and is experiencing the loss of ground water resources that are the primary sources of water in the state**. We are working to **pursue alternative sources** including brackish water, reclaimed waste water, reclaimed industrial waste water including produced water from oil and gas. New Mexico is expected to see a 25% reduction in available fresh water in the next 10 years.
- More impactful engagement
- **Less water availability** as we continue to deplete sources and deal with climate change. We need to have open discussions with people that can provide information about what the future will look like so we can make better informed decisions.
- Current trends point toward **uncertainty and inadequate water supplies**. Continue to meet and share common experiences and solutions.
- It is going to be **tricky with population growth, climate change and all the disruption to in the federal government**. Through continued collaboration and coordination between the western states can help to see the issues and work toward shared understanding and solutions.

APPENDIX G: NEBRASKA STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS DISCUSSION

Michelle: As you are all aware, we're currently focusing on strategic directions for the WSWC. We sent out a survey back in February and received valuable responses from 15 of our states. Orit, our facilitator, unfortunately couldn't be here today. However, she has provided guidance to help us dig deeper into the feedback we received from the survey. To do this, we've set up four stations around the room and created corresponding online breakout rooms, each focusing on a different area:

*Meeting Agendas: This station is for discussing our meeting agendas. This includes both our individual committee meetings and our multi-day meetings, like the one we just concluded this week.

*Policy Resolutions: We'd like your input on our policy resolution process, including any suggestions on how we might consolidate them or any other comments you have on the resolutions themselves.

*Effective Advocacy: This group will be discussing our advocacy efforts - what we aim to achieve, what it should look like, and how we can best prepare for it.

*Value Added: This station is for exploring what makes the WSWC distinct from other organizations, the unique value we provide, and how we can best focus on and deliver this value to our individual states and in our external engagements.

Please feel free to self-select the station that interests you most. If you have thoughts on multiple areas, please feel free to move between them. We'll have about half an hour for this activity. There are handouts on the back table for each of the four topics, so please grab one if you haven't already. You can take it with you and add your thoughts later if you wish. We will gather all of this input and share it with Orit, who will help us with the next steps. When we meet in June, we will dedicate a half-day to further discussion on these topics. This session is designed to help us prepare for that in-person discussion. We anticipate discussing other items in June as well. In August, we plan to consolidate all of this feedback and identify specific actions the WSWC recommends. We will likely vote on any proposed changes at our fall meetings. We will now spend the next 30 minutes in these four groups. I will set a timer. Please do join one of the groups and provide specific details and suggestions rather than general comments. After 30 minutes, we will reconvene for about five minutes to hear key takeaways from each of the four groups, both from those in the room and online.

After 30 minutes, the group reconvened to discuss the key takeaways from each of the four groups. Meeting agendas was the first topic discussed.

Joaquin Esquivel: We think it would be beneficial to dedicate some time annually to discuss the most pressing topics facing the WSWC. Perhaps identify a few key themes or issues that we can collectively focus on throughout the year. Make it a little more interactive.

Candice: There's a general feeling that the agendas are quite full, which unfortunately leaves limited time for meaningful state discussions. This can sometimes lead to a sense of rushing through important points or not having an adequate opportunity to ask questions. I think it would be beneficial to explore ways to incorporate more time for state discussions. Some ideas might include reducing the number of agenda topics or allocating more time to each item. Finding balance that would accommodate all these considerations. I would love to see more state discussions, or workshops on particular topics. There have also been discussions about potentially reducing travel, perhaps through virtual meetings.

Julie: I really enjoyed that Groundwater Workshop. I really appreciated that we had ample time for everyone to share their thoughts. I took a lot of notes and found the discussion time to be very valuable.

Christina: We discussed the importance of including a wrap-up in our meeting agendas. This would ideally summarize action items and clearly identify who is responsible for each, as well as track progress on these items between our discussions.

Julie: What about the timing of our meetings? I recall Christina mentioning that it was 5:00 am her time. I am open to starting our meetings a bit later, though we would need to adjust the agenda accordingly to stay within our time constraints. It also might be beneficial to explore options for

consolidating our meetings. For example, could we schedule Committee meetings in the morning and then have the Full Council meeting in the afternoon on a single day.

Michelle: As WSWC Staff have discussed, this is a hard meeting to run, especially hybrid. We were thinking we could schedule the business items, such as reviewing minutes and discussing positions, in the morning. Then, the afternoon could be dedicated to speakers, open to all attendees. We've also encountered some challenges in determining the most appropriate committee for certain topics and speakers due to overlapping interests, and the structure of the Executive Committee's business meetings don't accommodate speakers. By having a dedicated speaker session in the afternoon, it could simplify scheduling and allow everyone to attend presentations of interest, as most members tend to participate in all sessions anyway. This approach could make the meetings more manageable for us as staff, especially as we continue with hybrid formats.

Tony: Regarding the meeting formats we've used in the past, we've tried a few different approaches. At one point, we had a "three committee meeting" format where our group met before the other committees convened. We've also had overlapping meetings, which proved to be difficult at times, as some states could only send a single representative who then couldn't participate in all the discussions across the various committees. We've also organized separate workshops. Additionally, we've held several subcommittee meetings on the day before the main committee meetings.

Julie: So do we like the speakers interjected, you know, interspersed in those meetings?

Sara Gibson: For me, in my ever-shrinking attention span, I don't know that I would want to have just a whole afternoon of speakers.

Michelle: Maybe an afternoon with some speakers and some discussions, which would also address the issue of having additional state discussions.

Earl Lewis: I'd like to suggest we consider having fewer speakers during our meetings. It often feels like we move from one presentation to the next without much opportunity for discussion. While I value the information shared by the speakers, I personally find benefits in more interactive discussions. Perhaps some of the presentations could be moved to an online format or shared beforehand, allowing for more in-depth conversations during our meeting time. This approach might also help keep participants more engaged between meetings if we're sharing different topics leading up to a state discussion. Ultimately, I believe greater emphasis on discussion rather than back-to-back presentations would be more beneficial.

Trevor Watson: I second that. I think the suggestion of shifting the format from three in-person meetings to two in-person meetings and one online session each year was to potentially structure the online meeting as more of a presentation-focused event, rather than expecting in-depth discussion. This would allow the in-person sessions to be dedicated to fostering robust communication, ensuring a clear understanding of everyone's contributions, and creating valuable feedback loops. The in-person format would be ideal for interactions where direct engagement and feedback are most beneficial.

Julie: What about the federal updates? There's a lot of federal agencies that come in - is that something we need to be more kind of pointed with?

Michelle: We've had hour-long WestFAST webinars as a part of series or individual topics that have allowed the speakers to talk longer about a certain program or what their agencies were doing. Maybe there's a potential to shift more federal updates to a webinar format.

Jennifer Verleger: I think the federal updates are good. However, the federal government also moves so slowly that maybe we don't have to have updates at every meeting.

Julie: So maybe when they're surer of their money situation, invite them back and inform us.

Tony: I think something we have talked about, and Michelle is working on incorporating into her testimony, but I think it would be beneficial to emphasize our consistent support for SRF funding through the various letters we've joined, which highlights its fundamental importance to our work. We've heard reports of staffing losses at Reclamation, USGS, and NOAA. Given this, it might be helpful to build on the testimony Michelle is presenting to the House, especially concerning WestFAST, and I think in cooperation with WGA, we want to emphasize that certain aspects of this federal work are foundational and essential for us to complete our state work. I don't think we want to start running the snow survey program as a state program.

Jerry Rigby: When WestFAST first got kicked off and really got going, we experienced significantly higher levels of active participation from our federal agency members. This was invaluable, especially considering the initial discussions where federal entities expressed interest in council membership. As we clarified, the Council is state-driven. However, the input and expertise of our federal partners are highly valued and have been instrumental in WestFAST's progress. I think the COVID pandemic may have shifted engagement somewhat, but some individuals have continued to be key contributors. Moving forward, I believe it would be beneficial to understand from our federal agency representatives what steps we could take to encourage greater participation.

Jennifer Carr: As for the value WestFAST brings, I'm happy to discuss our perspective on that a bit later, but I had my hand up earlier in regard to the meeting agenda topic that I wanted to share some feedback. I think it would be beneficial if the presentations were structured to introduce topics and then lead into more in-depth discussions. Perhaps a format where we have a shorter presentation, say around ten minutes, followed by a more substantial discussion period, taking up the majority of the allotted time. I absolutely agree with all of the comments about wanting fewer presentations and more time to share state perspectives.

Trevor Watson: There's been a lot of talk about renewing membership, or lack of participation, or how much we learn every time we show up. I know for Montana, we are now in our legislation, but prior to that we built a one-page document on What Does Water Resources Do? I think it would be beneficial to have similar documents from all participating states to understand the fundamental responsibilities of each state's water resources entities, which would provide a great foundation. This shared understanding could lead to more focused and productive conversations. We could easily add a section outlining the top five strategic priorities for the current year. It feels like we're moving towards a more strategic approach, shifting from constantly reacting to immediate issues to proactively addressing key goals. Even if it's a simple matrix outlining key aspects like groundwater and surface water management, adjudication processes, or current stages of implementation across states could be valuable. This visual tool would allow us to quickly identify states working on similar issues, fostering more targeted discussions and the sharing of relevant experiences. Perhaps such information already exists, and I need to do a bit more digging beforehand. However, many of the topics discussed have highlighted potential areas for self-study and a better understanding of where each state stands in relation to others.

Jennifer Verleger: Following up on that, some of you may recall I raised a point about the evolving membership of our organization during the Groundwater Workshop. Given potential shifts due to political factors and increased job mobility, which could lead to less long-term longevity, I believe it would be beneficial for our group to do kind of what you're saying, to incorporate more state-by-state comparison. I also talked about the draft report that I'm going to be sending out to you. Compiling that report and observing the subtle yet significant differences in our approaches was quite revealing. I think expanding on this type of comparative analysis could be very valuable. Similar to Montana, North Dakota has a campaign targeting legislators where a monthly email on a specific topic is sent out. It would be insightful to learn about similar public information initiatives in other states. I believe we can gain valuable ideas by understanding different states' practices, which could be particularly helpful for newer members who may not have the extensive history with the Council that longer-term members possess.

Candice: I really like this idea. It might also be helpful to have a summary report created after workshops, such as the groundwater workshop for example, that could be a good starting point for this by capturing key information. Mark and I were also discussing the potential benefits of a clear onboard process for new members, especially with membership turnover. This could include an overview of our mission, activities, and a guide to our website where resources like past resolutions can be easily found. We think this would be valuable in bringing new members up to speed.

Sara: In regard to orientation - when we orient new board members, we give them our one-page descriptor. This could be a valuable resource for both new members and new congressional members, highlighting the Council as an information resource, alongside state agencies. Maybe a matrix that outlines how other states divide up similar responsibilities.

Jennifer Verleger: Maybe we could have a mentorship program. I still can recall when I came to my first meeting, I was completely overwhelmed! Jerry actually took me under his wing and explained how things were done, how things worked. He also introduced me to people, which was really helpful. Maybe at someone's first meeting, they could get paired up with somebody to do something similar.

Michelle: I think that has happened more organically in the past, when there's been that longevity -Jerry has been around for a while! - from the members just naturally undertaking that effort themselves. Given the current rate of turnover we might need a more formal approach. We talked about creating a short introductory video for our website, which I can do, but I wonder about the possibility of including current members in the video sharing their experiences and highlighting the value of the Council. To do this, we might need to allocate some time in an upcoming meeting.

Julie: I think that's a great idea. Even something as simple as having a group to go out to dinner with when you're new, right? I think we can do a better job at group dinners as well.

Jojo La: I had a quick question regarding the state report. It reminded me of my first experience. Tony asked if I knew about the state report, and I had no idea what it was and so I ended up creating one from scratch in my hotel room. I'm just curious to understand what aspects of the report are beneficial to everyone and if there are any suggestions for making it more effective.

Julie: We try to squeeze in the state reports. For me, there's value in learning what others do. There's a lot of water legislation these days, and hearing what's successful from the other states, I think hearing just high level at least gets you a point of contact in. You don't realize who does the State Revolving Fund, or floodplain management for example.

Sara: I think with all the other comments about more state interaction time, maybe fewer presentations during the Full Council meeting, and more time hearing state reports.

Tony: We have in the past asked for written reports to put in the briefing materials, and some states did provide one for a while.

Lauren Ris: I appreciate this conversation. I do think that an orientation of some sorts would help because I felt a little bit lost as a new member too. I like the idea of a video. I think that would be cool, especially if you could have somebody from each committee explain what their role and purpose is, as well as the Full Council.

Christina: Going back to state reports, I appreciate the dialog, and maybe if we're talking about shifting to more of like a plenary session with presentations, perhaps we could move state reports as part of our introductions so that we all go into these meetings knowing kind of who we are, whether we're quality or quantity and what our issues are. I think that would help encourage interactions and informal engagement with other meeting attendees rather than trying to rush it at the very end, when everybody's trying to get out the door to get to the airport.

Julie: That's a great idea.

Michelle: Next we're going to talk about the policy resolution process. For those who were interested in this topic, any thoughts on that?

Jojo: Our group had a question of clarification. Has it been identified as an issue that we need to consolidate the resolutions as a high priority? Could you describe a little bit more about that.

Michelle: This arose from comments in our recent survey responses. We currently have a lot of resolutions, around fifty, which sunset on a rotating basis. This has led to a situation where some committees, like the Legal Committee for example, for our next meeting, has no resolutions to review, which is quite unusual. In contrast, the Water Resources Committee has a significant number, which can consume a considerable amount of meeting time that could otherwise be used for presentations and discussions. While many of these positions address specific issues, there are some areas of overlap. In the past, there have been discussions among the Council members about potentially consolidating some of these. There was also a suggestion in the survey responses referencing the way WGA does their positions, to have broader positions like a single water quality position encompassing all related matters, and another for all water resources. While this might simplify things, it could also be problematic for our organization. With our current structure, where positions address specific issues, it allows us to communicate with Congress and the Administration as specific issues arise. When we engage with them through letters or other means, we adhere closely to the agreed-upon language, which has been carefully reviewed by all members. This process allows our states to present a unified voice on key issues.

There have also been questions raised about our lengthy review process, which involves the Executive Committee, and sometimes subcommittees, meeting virtually before our Council meetings to propose and vet certain language, then a review at our Council meetings by the committees the position was assigned to when it originated (Water Resources, Water Quality, and Legal), and then finally the position is forwarded to the Full Council for approval. Not everybody loves this process because it is time consuming, but it does ensure thoroughly vetted language that all our states can agree on, allowing us to advocate effectively with Congress. However, there may be a more efficient way to consider how to manage our resolutions while ensuring that each state retains the ability to provide specific input, as precise wording can be crucial for achieving consensus among our diverse membership.

Sara: If you as Council Staff find the policy position statements helpful in the way they currently exist, because you guys are the ones writing the letters, then great. There may be a way to make the process better however. Perhaps, maybe each committee could set up a policy subcommittee that reviews them and makes amendments prior to the meeting. Maybe even the committee could meet prior if it's an especially delicate position. I don't know. I don't understand though why the Executive Committee needs to see them first.

Tony: The process we follow before our meetings is designed to prevent potential issues regarding state representation and conflicting opinions. We've had instances where multiple members from the same state attended a meeting and held differing views on a resolution. This raised questions about who the officially appointed member was and who was able to cast the state's single vote. We now proactively address any divisions within state delegations through the Executive Committee call beforehand to ensure a unified state vote. This process is also in place due to a past experience with another interstate organization where a governor and the organization presented conflicting testimony at the same meeting. Understandably, the governor was not pleased by this from an organization he was part of. To avoid such situations, when we issue the 30-day notice, we also send it to WGA and encourage communication on any potential concerns or desired changes. Michelle mentioned that some WGA resolutions, particularly those on water quality and water resources can be quite lengthy. The WGA has specifically discussed the length of these resolutions as an issue. Given our coordinating role, it's crucial that our positions don't contradict those of the governors. If you recall, adopting a position requires a two-thirds majority vote from our members. We usually achieve consensus, but on a rare occasion when there isn't full agreement, members may abstain. For example, during discussions on fracking, a member from Washington (a state without fracking) abstained, acknowledging their lack of direct stake in the issue. WOTUS was a unique situation. We reached a consensus as a Council, but the governors did not. Due to the timing of the comment period relative to our regular Council meetings, we adopted our position through the Executive Committee. Generally, for emergency resolutions like that one, they are shared with the governors for their input before wider distribution. In the case of WOTUS, we didn't receive explicit approval or disapproval from the governors. Working with their staff, the understanding was that if we didn't hear otherwise, we were able to proceed with distributing our position. While WOTUS was a significant issue for both us and the governors, we ultimately reached our own consensus. This situation was somewhat unusual, but it was resolved when the EPA extended the comment period, allowing us to inform the governors of our position in the usual manner with our 30-day notice, and subsequently readopt it based on the Executive Committee's work between meetings. This remains the only instance I recall where we faced such a challenge

Jerry: I understand that the current vetting process is extensive, but I believe it is crucial that we maintain it. When we do go back to DC with those policies and can say that 18 states have agreed upon this policy, that means something. Tony's effectiveness in engaging with Congress has always been strengthened by this unified policy stance. It carries significant weight. He's established credibility built on the consensus of the western states. They'll call Tony when they have some issues. Looking ahead, as Tony will be retiring, it will be important for us to proactively engage our congressional delegations when relevant issues arise by ensuring they are aware of the agreed-upon policies of the western states and that we can continue to speak with a collective voice. I think that's still a process we can't overlook or shortcut.

Michelle: Any thoughts about the policy resolution process from those who are online?

Roger Gorke: From a federal perspective, I think I can speak for all of us at the federal level that we appreciate at least the Council's consideration of our thoughts and input.

Jennifer Carr: There wasn't anyone in the Breakout Room for that. I would just observe that as painful as some people think it to be, it's the same at ECOS, but the same value is also coming out of that process. For me personally, I need to do a better job of engaging earlier, whether that be during the committee meeting where the positions are being discussed, or just think about them more ahead of time, and potentially provide feedback to either staff, or during some other process before we actually get to the meeting.

Michelle: I know we send out a 10-day notice, which is 10-days before our required 30-day notice to let you know about the positions, among other related information. However, maybe there's a better way that we can help facilitate that awareness of upcoming positions earlier.

Jennifer Verleger: This transition might be a bit challenging initially, but I was wondering if we could adjust our meeting agenda slightly to make it smoother. Perhaps we could handle the items that are sunseting at our current meeting in a more pro-forma manner, assuming we've already discussed them. This would allow us to dedicate the discussion and detailed drafting to the items that are sunseting at the subsequent meeting. This would give us the necessary time between meetings to thoroughly discuss these later items with the relevant folks in your state, such as your governors or other key individuals. By the time we reach the meeting where adoption is required, we would have already had these important conversations. Again, the transition period might be a bit difficult, but I believe this adjustment could be beneficial in the long run.

Michelle: Is there any feedback on more effective policy advocacy: How do we prepare for it? What do we do with it? Any ideas on how we may do it better so that you have better understanding as to what staff are doing?

Sara: I know you prepare the litigation/legislation reports, which are amazing. I think we as an agency would benefit from hearing "this legislation is going to mark up! Call your legislator now! Here's the Council's position statement." I think we should continue to be available for congressional testimony, whether we're sending a staff person or a representative from a member state to present policy. In Oklahoma, we got used to having Senator Jim Inhofe call us when something important was happening. Unfortunately, we don't have that anymore. Not to mention, we have eastern congressional delegates running natural resources.

Michelle: Elysse does our legislation update.

Elysse Campbell: We were going wait to introduce this, but I've restructured the legislation update to incorporate a new tag system, which I hope will make it easier to keep current. While the most recent update will likely still reflect the last meeting, our goal is to provide a more accessible way for everyone to stay informed. Given the high volume of legislative activity, it's been challenging to track every bill, especially regarding committee assignments. To address this, I've developed a system to track WSWC priorities more effectively. If there are specific bills you'd like to follow, please submit them to me. We can then tag these priority bills, monitor their progress more closely, and keep interested parties updated on any developments.

Michelle: Just to clarify, we can't do that for all of the water-related legislation, but with priorities in place we can keep a closer eye on a few of them.

Tony: I would just mention that obviously, when we are invited to testify, we try to spend a couple extra days while we're on the hill. We might stop at 20-30 offices or more. Maybe not as often as we should, but we should let you know whose office we were in and who we talked to. We try to keep a running list, particularly of Congressional committees that are of interest.

Jennifer Carr: I'm interested in other members' thoughts about the idea of hiring a lobbying firm. While I personally don't see the benefit of this expenditure, I'm curious to hear other members' perspectives on this when we meet again in Utah. I was also wondering if there's a possibility of utilizing the lobbying contracts held by WGA if a specific issue requires attention and we are unable to send a representative?

Tony: We have piggybacked on some issues in the past. We have also been used to help support some of the efforts in California on the S2S. They work with a lobbyist that's paid for by I think Sonoma

County. We do take that opportunity when we can. I think direct engagement with a congressional office, ideally alongside one of you, proves to be significantly more impactful than solely relying on a lobbyist.

Tom Stiles: I wanted to share some thoughts on advocacy, particularly as it relates to organizations like ACWA. It's important to remember that advocacy efforts extend beyond just Congress and the administration to include engagement with other key organizations. In the case of ACWA, given that a significant portion of its membership is based in the east, southeast, or midwest, there can be a lack of deep understanding regarding the unique challenges and perspectives of the western states. As such, I've been actively encouraging ACWA to increase its engagement with the western states - as this is where the WSWC operates. The foundational approach to advocacy in the west has distinct characteristics. ACWA was initially formed through the vision of state engineers who recognized the value of appropriation states coming together. This core group inherently understands states' rights. The addition of a Water Quality Committee brought a new dimension to the organization. As Tony has often pointed out, while consensus is generally the norm within this group, we've encountered instances where achieving it on water quality issues has been challenging. The experiences with Miccosukee and water transfers led to the forceful adoption of a position that caused considerable concern among some members. When I revisited this, despite the initial passage, it became clear that there was no real consensus. It's crucial for everyone to grasp the inherent friction that exists between state rights, water rights, and the federal delegation of authority under the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act. This organization provides a vital and perhaps unique forum where we can openly discuss these complex issues and work through them. I believe we should broaden our advocacy efforts regarding WOTUS to include organizations like ACWA and ASDWA, as well as state wetland managers. During our previous discussions, achieving consensus on the definition of WOTUS proved challenging. We began to find common ground when we acknowledged the unique characteristics of the West and the need for regional approaches to implementation. Further progress was made when we emphasized the necessity for federal agencies to collaborate with us and provide states with the tools required to define federal jurisdiction effectively. However, our initial debates on topics such as the status of ephemeral streams under WOTUS, while ultimately not leading to agreement, did foster a greater understanding of different perspectives. For instance, I gained insight into Colorado's concerns, which highlighted the importance of these discussions. Our primary advocacy message should consistently emphasize the distinct nature of the west and the crucial role of water rights in water management, which water quality regulations must accommodate. It's essential to move away from a top-down mandate from the EPA through state agencies. We must remember the foundational principles that led to the creation of the WSWC, as they remain our strongest asset. The initiative to broaden our mission to include water quality aspects is commendable, as it has been vital in educating the EPA on the complexities of water management in the western states. While testifying is valuable, actively engaging congressional staff, whether through direct meetings or during visits to Capitol Hill, to educate them on the specific challenges and considerations of the West would be invaluable.

Michelle: That does slide us right into that unique role in value added. I know in the online breakout room they had a robust discussion. Do you guys want to weigh in on that?

Jennifer Carr: Roger and I were in the value-add group. We touched on a couple of key areas. We affirmed that the overall value of the WSWC is just helping us all do our respective jobs better by engaging with information, sharing ideas and building partnerships. This collaborative approach allows us to stay informed about the work of our peers and leverage each other's expertise for collective benefit. Regarding onboarding and orientation, I appreciate the suggestion of highlighting for our new members the resources available on our website. This ties directly into a point Roger and I discussed about effectively conveying the value of our work, products, and relationships with future team members. Strong onboarding and orientation are crucial in this regard. For example, we were putting together our WOTUS docket comments this week, and some of my staff were unaware of the valuable white paper Erica Gaddis spearheaded a few years ago. This paper offered insights into potential tools, moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach by considering different hydrographic similarities across the country and alternative frameworks for WOTUS. Upon sharing this document, my staff recognized its significance immediately. This experience underscores the importance of ensuring that our successors understand the wealth of knowledge and resources available and how we can facilitate this knowledge

transfer as we transition roles or retire. This leads me to the considerable value that WestFAST brings, particularly given the current reductions being enforced and organizational changes. I see immense benefits in WestFAST serving as a consistent and reliable point of contact within the federal government. Their ability to connect us with their counterparts in federal agencies is invaluable. In my experience, the first time you reach out to WestFAST to help resolve a project bottleneck or overcome a frustrating challenge, you realize its true impact. We have consistently collaborated with Roger, Chris, and others through WestFAST to achieve breakthroughs that might not have been possible otherwise. The connections facilitated by WestFAST and the WSWC are instrumental in overcoming these obstacles. Further, WestFAST is actively involved in critical areas such as drought and resiliency, undertaking projects that have brought significant resources to various states, including Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. Their efforts provide our utilities and other stakeholders with access to expert advice and resources that we haven't been able to do. In fact, WestFAST once connected me with our own Division of Emergency Management – an agency located nearby, but one with whom I hadn't previously engaged on a particular issue. This connection within my own state highlights WestFAST's ability to facilitate collaboration on cross-media issues. The work being done on abandoned mine lands through the Good Samaritan initiative offers another excellent example. This involves cross-media coordination with their Land and Emergency Management offices, water quality divisions, enforcement teams, and various other stakeholders, helping us to connect with colleagues, even outside of traditional water management, to address complex challenges. I believe these examples clearly demonstrate the significant contributions WestFAST makes, both within our individual states and across the region on critical water issues.

Roger: To clarify the value that WestFAST brings to the states, while our contributions during council meetings are important, I believe our real strength lies in the work we do in between those meetings, when specific issues or questions arise. It's in this ongoing support that we provide significant value to the states, both in terms of quality and the amount of assistance we can offer. Our ability to help connect different aspects within a state is crucial. I recall Duane mentioning back in 2007 when WestFAST was in formation at a meeting where Steve Johnson (former EPA Administrator) was speaking and I specifically remember him saying, states are as bifurcated as the federal government is in terms of siloing different agencies within the state. We've been successful in bridging some of those gaps, as Jennifer highlighted with the Good Samaritan and abandoned mines initiatives. I hope states will consider our successes in fostering collaboration in Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah as examples of what we can achieve together. It's not about the individual WestFAST members like Travis from Reclamation, or Paula with BLM directly providing the solutions. Instead, their value lies in their ability to connect you with the right people within those federal agencies in your state, helping to facilitate progress. We can offer technical input during Council meetings, but our strength, especially now, is in navigating the complexities of the federal government, particularly given the recent changes in contacts within various agencies. I'm happy to discuss specific examples of our collaborations and how we can further support states. Perhaps this could even be a topic for a future webinar, showcasing how we can be a resource and partner to states, rather than simply perceived as a federal entity adding more hurdles. We've seen positive outcomes when federal and state entities work together effectively, such as with the National Estuary Program, the Urban Waters program, and our Great Waterbodies Programs. Could similar models be expanded in the West? Tom even mentioned the idea of WestFAST for Kansas. Ultimately, my hope is that more states will utilize the resources and connections that WestFAST can provide.

Tony: Roger, I was also thinking about the opposite approach, and it's a good point that you're our contact for involving the states and forestry. I actually have a call scheduled with Tim Newman this afternoon to discuss Landsat. Given the current situation at the federal level, I believe we have an opportunity to make a difference by supporting our federal partners and the programs that are important to us.

Roger: Michelle brought up a good example yesterday about the WOTUS listening sessions (or a similar discussion). EPA has now included the WSWC in the group that I believe we previously referred to as the "Big 10" of aquatic and wetland organizations, encompassing various state-level environmental entities. The Council wasn't initially part of this group. I strongly advocated internally for their inclusion, recognizing the valuable and distinct perspective they bring. This aligns with what Tom mentioned

earlier about the importance of including specific organizations to gather targeted information and ensure diverse viewpoints are represented.

Forrest: Reflecting on my time working with WestFAST, it was clear that everyone involved was genuinely dedicated to ensuring their agency effectively served the state partners. Building on that, as the Council identifies shared challenges, it could be beneficial to summarize and relay our top priorities back to WestFAST. Highlighting our key needs for the year – whether they involve technical assistance, addressing data and information gaps, or navigating policy challenges – would likely be well-received. My sense is that WestFAST partners would be very willing to collaborate across agencies to help address these clearly defined priorities from the Council. As you consider a potentially more discussion-based format, I encourage you to keep this in mind. Identifying those common challenges where federal agencies could offer the most support in addressing our top priorities would be particularly valuable. Given the likelihood of resource and staffing constraints in the near future, having these focused priorities will help us direct our colleagues, efforts, and funding programs to best meet your needs. Thank you, Roger, for your continued advocacy, leadership, and coordination for WestFAST.

Roger: Regarding the value of WestFAST, the example of Forrest’s attendance at the Council meeting, which we learned about through Tony and Michelle, highlights the benefit of the relationships built through this collaboration. While his involvement has shifted as he’s taken on other responsibilities, Stephanie is now the NASA WestFAST representative and is actively participating. The connections established with specific individuals within federal agencies are invaluable to the states. We do have concerns whether you think WestFAST is of value to your specific state or not. Also, about our capacity to continue our involvement as members, given that for most of us, participation is an additional duty to our primary job responsibilities.

Michelle: Thank you, Roger. We still want you around and will certainly emphasize our continued interest in your involvement as we communicate with the federal government. We’ll now close this section of our discussion. Just to let you know, we have recorded everything, so we’ll be able to document it thoroughly. Orit, our facilitator, will receive all of this information. Additionally, as staff, we will begin by compiling lists of the points discussed, which will also be included in our meeting minutes for your reference. We will also start to process this information. Given the amount of information we’ve covered, it likely won’t be fully implemented by our next meeting. However, over the coming year, we will work towards incorporating as many of these ideas as possible. If we have questions about the best approach, we may reach out to you for further feedback.

Julie: That was very good! I thought the input was great. Perhaps if we had done this on the first day, the energy might have been a little higher, but we definitely got some good conversations started. Michelle, thank you so much for facilitating. I know it’s a significant amount of work to organize these sessions and then go through all the comments, but I think we gathered some excellent feedback very quickly.

APPENDIX H: UTAH STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS DISCUSSION

Michelle noted that they had distilled the feedback from the members’ survey responses and the conversation in Nebraska into eight key areas. The full details of the conversation are available in the Nebraska Strategic Directions Discussion (Appendix G).

- (1) Fewer Presentations, More Interactive Discussions: There’s a strong desire for more interactive state discussions during in-person meetings. A suggestion was to move presentations to recorded virtual webinar, allowing for asynchronous viewing and in-depth Q&A sessions outside of in-person meetings. This would free up in-person time for further discussion.
- (2) Earlier Roundtable for State Reports: It was suggested to move the state reports roundtable earlier in the Full Council meeting instead of at the end. We’ve started testing this in recent committee meetings and are open to feedback as we refine this.
- (3) Select Key Themes for Annual Focus: The idea is to annually select a few key themes for in-depth discussion and development. This would allow for dedicated time to address pressing

topics for the coming year, potentially aligning with our fiscal year. We would revisit and develop these themes annually.

(4) Meeting Wrap-ups with Action Items: Each meeting would conclude with action items for staff and members, tracking progress to ensure goals are met and work is completed rather than open-ended.

(5) Adjustments to Meeting Schedule and Format: Feedback included the desire for one all-virtual meeting annually to reduce travel burdens, potentially requiring a change in our rules of organization. There was also support for retaining in-person components, perhaps making the spring meeting virtual due to state legislative sessions. Other suggestions included condensing the meeting portion to a single day and later start times.

(6) Mentoring New Members: Developing a process for mentoring new members was discussed, including assigning mentors to help new members acclimate to our culture and creating orientation documentation. Some documentation would be staff-created, while members could provide state-specific insights. A video showcasing the value of the Council for new members was also suggested.

(7) Documents and Reports:

Comparative Documents: A suggestion was made to create documents (like Montana's one-page description of their water agency and priorities) that compare Western State experiences, practices, and laws. This would help members understand other states' structures and identify key contacts.

Summary Reports: We intend to produce summary reports after workshops (like the ongoing groundwater workshop) and surveys. These require both staff time and member engagement.

Policy Positions: It was suggested to start discussing policy positions at the meeting prior to their sunset date. This would allow for initial engagement, state agency and governor's office consultations, and potentially a pre-meeting for drafting language. The goal is for the subsequent meeting to be a pro forma sign-off.

(8) Policy Advocacy:

Congressional Legislation: There's interest in better tracking congressional legislation, specifically knowing when bills go to markup, to enable state agencies to communicate with their delegations. Our website now includes a legislative update, and we can prioritize updates on specific high-priority bills if informed.

Advocacy Among Sister Organizations: The unique position of the Council in considering the nexus of water quality and quantity, and the impact of water rights on management, was highlighted. We should emphasize this uniqueness and engage with organizations that focus on only one component to inform them about Western state nuances.

Engagement with Congressional Staff: We aim to more actively engage with congressional staff to educate them on the specific challenges and considerations in the West.

Please let Michelle know if you recall anything from our last meeting that wasn't covered in this list.

The discussion then turned to a discussion about what the members value about the WSWC, followed by a discussion about selecting some key topics for staff to focus on for "deep dive topics" at regular Council meetings in the coming year. One member raised the concern of whether we need to create space to be nimble amidst our longer-term plans and goals.

Orit Kalman emphasized the importance of pivoting to remain relevant. This adaptability can be incorporated into our discussions, allowing us to evolve as we work. Our plans are not static, and we must respond to changing conditions. We also began considering a strategic planning question: "If, five years from now, the Council is strong and successful in its mission and purpose, what might be a key factor that contributed to its success?"

Another member noted that a key reason for organizations like the Council is our ability to achieve more collectively than individually, especially regarding water quantity. He used the analogy of

a pie: if we don't know the size of the pie, we can't effectively divide it. Data is essential but often elusive. While some are hesitant to fund data collection, it's critical because our actions are limited by the accuracy of available data. This led to the question: what can the Council achieve that couldn't be done individually?

Orit tied this back to the "me to we" concept, where individual efforts combine to create collective power. Data will undoubtedly be a significant topic for future discussions.

One member noted the importance for the Council to have a clear purpose and efficient processes that support that purpose. We need to ensure we don't alienate any state as we move forward and that we clearly understand why we are doing what we are doing as the Council, and how we can best operate.

Another member highlighted the need to finalize the upcoming year's budget quickly. This involves determining the number of meetings per year, focusing on specific topics, and other logistical details. The goal is to leave this meeting with enough information to promptly finalize the budget.

Orit affirmed that discussions would cover "how" to achieve goals, not just "what." Also clarified that focusing on three key topics for deep dives doesn't prevent the Council from discussing other issues. This approach aims to structure the coming year's work without consuming all Council's activities.

One speaker highlighted the significant benefit of the Council having dedicated and respected paid staff, particularly the executive director. They noted that staff can be more agile, respond quickly, and foster relationships with congressional representatives, which ideally allows the Council to speak with a unified voice through the executive director. They also expressed that some new members might not fully grasp the extensive work accomplished by the paid staff between meetings.

Orit mentioned that some of this information will be incorporated into the roadmap to provide a clear engagement process and a deeper understanding of the organization's operations. Attendees were asked to discuss the value of the Council with a neighbor for five minutes. Long-standing Council members were encouraged to share significant accomplishments or identify challenges, while new members were invited to share what they are excited about as part of the Council. After the discussion, a few key takeaways were reported.

The group broke into smaller discussions.

Orit returned everyone to the large group discussion by inviting attendees to share new things they learned, comments, or discussions about their successes and challenges, now that everyone was back in their seats. Starting from the back of the room, she asked if anyone had discussed particular successes with the Council.

One member highlighted the networking component of the Council as a truly powerful aspect. They agreed with their state engineer on this point and emphasized the importance of balancing online and in-person interactions to maintain the value of in-person networking, even with the creation of online opportunities.

Orit noted that networking has frequently come up in the survey and in today's conversations.

Another member built on a previous point, mentioning that a lot of work happens behind the scenes between meetings, leading to significant successes in the past couple of years, particularly regarding abandoned mines. They acknowledged the Council's crucial role in developing that narrative and praised Michelle for drafting excellent letters based on the Council's policy resolutions. They also noted good engagement opportunities with WOTUS in recent years, suggesting a need to revisit ongoing collaborative work.

Orit invited online participants to share any successes or challenges they had overcome.

One member highlighted the interstate network and the idea that the Western States Water Council serves as a unified voice for Western States on water issues in D.C. As a new director, they found it incredibly helpful to rely on the Council as a valuable resource when political leaders in their state approached them about issues outside their state boundaries.

Other members had discussed the significant impact of the relationships between the Council, individual states, and the collective federal agencies. They also pointed out that the Council even drafted a letter on WOTUS when the Western Governors themselves couldn't, demonstrating the Council's ability to find common ground on water issues without losing the nuances of each state.

Orit emphasized that hearing from members and others connected to the Council is crucial as we consider our strategic direction. Understanding these connections presents important opportunities. Is there anything new that you haven't heard yet that you'd like to share?

One member celebrated that water quality interests have gained prominence among our quantity partners, who previously felt like the primary focus of Western states. Moving forward, we want to be intentional about the nexus between water quality and quantity and how they are intertwined. This will help us avoid siloing into different committees and find ways for these two committees to overlap and collaborate more effectively.

Orit acknowledged that even though the water topics posted around the room have their own pages, it's clear they are all interconnected. We'll now pivot to focusing on these connections, as you rightly emphasized their importance. Any final comments before we move forward?

Some members had discussed reflecting on the structural underpinnings of the Council, specifically its mission, vision, and values. As we develop a strategic plan, it's worth revisiting these. They may be fine as they are, but it's important to be intentional and strategic in setting direction and to revisit these at regular intervals.

Two other recommendations for the committee moving forward are to perhaps reimagine the Legal Committee. For Washington State, our attorneys represent my agency, so I wouldn't want an attorney representing Washington State on the Legal Committee if their voice differs from our water resources perspective. Many Legal Committee topics are either water resources or water quality, so integrating those into those two committees could bring efficiency and benefit to both. Lastly, as we look ahead to work plans and topics, it's critical that individual committee work plans accurately reflect the priorities of Council members. I hope we can be more intentional in developing these work plans and create space to do so with purpose.

A new member shared that while he didn't have much to add about the Council's accomplishments, he's heard positive feedback. He noted that his Texas-based bosses are engaged, even though they couldn't attend today. He found it very interesting to hear about the common challenges faced across states, particularly the connection with antiquated laws that he had discussed with another member here. He expressed that everything discussed resonated with him due to similar challenges in his own work and appreciated knowing there's a network of experts to rely on. He mentioned that mine shaft drainage was a new topic for him, as it's not an issue in Texas. Finally, he expressed interest in a new member orientation, as it's rare for him to attend a water conference without knowing anyone. He would appreciate formal introductions and networking opportunities.

Shaun McGrath noted that he worked for the WGA for 14 years, collaborating with the Council during that time. Afterwards, he managed a couple of state environment parks in Colorado and Montana, providing him with a broad history with the Council. He then offered to share a couple of thoughts. He reflected on the conversation and what has truly contributed to the Council's success. One is the historical context of why the governors initially supported the Council's creation: the commonalities of Western water law and the difficulty of getting congressional representatives from riparian states to understand these issues. The Council's ability to speak with one voice led to greater success in Congress and at the national level. Second is a strong commitment to principles. The Council has clearly articulated the underlying principles that drive its policy, such as Western water law, state policy on water rights, and the importance of proactive actions on natural disasters like drought to mitigate or avoid impacts. A key principle is the importance of science in underpinning our decisions and the need to fund science. Roger, you rightly raised the coordination issue with federal agencies. Recognizing the federal government's authority under the Clean Water Act and Drinking Water Act, it's incumbent upon states to coordinate closely with the federal government. Next is the importance of coordination with the governors. It's one thing for the Council to take positions, but then when you engage with Congress, calls to the governor's office start happening. So, it's crucial for Council members to coordinate with their governor's offices to ensure they understand the Council's

positions and principles. Finally, the policy resolution process is vital for clearly stating positions and demonstrating strong support across the Western states for those policies, along with an ongoing commitment to their effective implementation. These, I believe, are key to the Western States Water Council's success. Also, would like to give a shout out to Tony on his retirement.

Orit thanked everyone for joining and for highlighting important aspects of the Council's purpose. Orit then moved into the working session, introducing topics posted around the room, identified through the survey question in March that asked for the three most valuable areas for Council work. The headline topics were presented with related sub-topics and were written out around the room for review. Blank paper was provided for new ideas not already captured. Participants were given about half an hour to consider which topics to focus on before a vote and discussion.

Everyone then returned to their seats.

Orit noted that one of the suggestions that has come out of the strategic directions exercise is to include a deep-dive topic at Council meetings, alongside the regular committees and Council business. Given the limited time and only three meetings a year, the goal today is to choose three priority topics to address in the coming year. She asked for feedback from the members on the difficulty of this selection, especially since staff find it challenging to prepare meaningfully for discussions on every single topic. They emphasized the need for council members to prioritize topics for deeper engagement during meetings, and thoughtful preparation prior to meetings.

One member commented that many topics are "hot" for different states. While the Council excels at facilitating discussion, distilling information, and seeking consensus, selecting just three topics for staff and members to work on this year felt overwhelming, likening it to being constantly bombarded with tasks in daily life.

Orit acknowledged the challenge of picking a focus when the goal is to move from a general overview to a deep dive, noting it's a very important decision that would need to be revisited.

Other members expressed a struggle with understanding how to address the topics and the unclear outcomes or objectives, which made gauging the task's daunting nature difficult. They brought up the earlier concern about the distinction between water quality and water resources. In response to staff concerns, council members with particular interest in a topic could lead it. They referenced reliance on host states for field trip preparations and asked about ways other members could take on more ownership to reduce staff burden and regain some of the agency they are looking for at meetings.

Orit suggested that explaining the intention behind selecting from these topics, as part of developing a roadmap or work plan, might be helpful before revisiting the conversation. The vision is that three (or so) important topics chosen for the coming year would be discussed in parallel throughout the year:

- Goals: For a given topic, what do you hope to achieve within the year? There are various ways to approach this, which I can elaborate on.
- Alignment: Ensure the approach aligns with the council's purpose and function. I can go into more detail about the council's functions if we get to that.
- Engagement: Consider how to engage with the topic, including the roles of the council versus staff in advancing it.
- Activities: Determine what activities will be part of this work (e.g., committee work, general Council meetings, special subcommittees, surveys).
- Communication: How will this be communicated to the broader group?
- Evaluation: Will we need to continue working on it? What did we learn? Was this the right way to address it? This evaluative piece would circle back.

These are the elements that would be involved once a topic is chosen and a plan for engagement and work is developed.

Michelle used the recent groundwater workshop as an example of how this might work in practice. We organized a workshop, separate from our regular meeting, specifically on groundwater. Our goal, set by a subcommittee, was for states to exchange information. We also aimed to generate a report, which we're currently working on, and potentially develop a policy position based on that report, identifying any gaps in our current policy. We also considered using the information to educate the public and federal government, and supporting funding for relevant programs, such as research, though the exact follow-up on these was less defined. We ensured this aligned with the Western States Water Council's mission and purpose, which is to provide a forum for member states to exchange views, perspectives, and experiences. So, there's a clear meaning and purpose behind our actions. For the process and milestones, we started with a discussion-based workshop, ensuring members and agency staff with relevant knowledge on specific topics attended. We covered conjunctive management, groundwater resource allocation, aquifer science, and groundwater laws, policies, and programs. The feedback we received from the first workshop was that it was a "nice groundwater potpourri." It covered a wide range of topics but lacked focus. The suggestion was to narrow the focus to a single sub-topic, perhaps through webinars where state agency staff knowledgeable about specific topics could learn from each other. Our next step is to transition to these more focused webinars. This cyclical process would continue, where we'd do the webinars with state agency staff and then revisit the topics.

Orit discussed the adaptive process for selecting focus topics. The process involves identifying a topic, ensuring it aligns with the organization's purpose and the needs of the states, determining the benefits, outlining the approach, and then evaluating, revisiting, and refining it. This process can be short or long, depending on the topic. The survey and our conversations highlighted interest in specific topics for council members to focus on and learn from. We recognize that it's challenging to find topics that interest everyone at the same level, so we should look for opportunities to focus on different areas throughout the year.

Sara Gibson noted the difficulty in selecting topics, as many are interconnected. For example, discussing drought often leads to discussions about state water planning, engagement, and outreach. She suggested that some of these could be sub-topics that are consistently addressed. Sara also suggested that the main meeting topics could be discussed in terms of how each state handles engagement, outreach, water planning, or their monitoring networks. She believes this approach could help focus on these topics and leave room for "hot topics" that may arise.

Orit suggested that an initial activity could be to take a topic and map its connections to other issues, understanding those linkages. Similar to the groundwater workshop, we could start broadly and then narrow the focus as we move through the process, continuing to engage on it.

Jennifer Verleger was still a bit confused about picking three topics. She questioned if it meant having three groundwater workshop-type topics for the year, which seemed more feasible than trying to focus on only three things for the entire year, which she believed was impossible.

Michelle responded that it doesn't necessarily have to be three topics. She acknowledged that the staff faces the same challenges in deciding which topics to highlight, who to invite as speakers, and how to prepare states for each meeting. We can't cover all topics in every meeting. She suggested that we can pick three, or maybe we could aim for ten topics a year, but it can't be all of them. She acknowledged that this might be frustrating in terms of what gets left out. Michelle suggested dedicating a portion of meetings for emergency topics that arise or adjusting upcoming agendas to include new topics. We need to narrow down the focus since it's not feasible for everyone to be prepared to discuss all topics in every meeting.

Jennifer suggested trying a method similar to the morning's activity, which she approved of. She proposed setting a deadline by which members could submit topics they want on the agenda, allowing the members to narrow down topics for each meeting.

Another member echoed Jennifer's point, questioning the purpose of picking three topics. Is it to develop a policy statement, or simply to talk and learn from each other? She emphasized the importance of defining the purpose of picking topics. As a new member, she wasn't sure if the primary function of the Western States Water Council is learning and sharing information among states on water quality and resources issues, and she sought clarification on this.

Orit responded that it's a good question and explained three ways groups can engage with a topic: (1) simply learn more about a specific topic, leveraging the diversity of experiences across states. For example, focusing on improving drought resilience and learning what each state is doing; (2) add value to ongoing efforts that align with the Council's purpose, potentially relating to resolution statements or advocacy; and (3) identify a specific gap or unanswered question and work towards addressing it, bringing something new to the discussion. These three levels offer different lenses through which to approach any given topic.

Connie emphasized that the organization's "superpowers" are its partnerships, friendships, collaboration, and mutual learning, as well as its collective strength and advocacy at the federal level. She noted the organization's increasing prestige and credibility, crediting the staff for this achievement. Connie suggested that all future efforts should be viewed through the lens of these two superpowers. Drawing from Kansas's frustrating experience with strategic planning that involved picking topics from a list, she proposed focusing on what the group truly needs to discuss and learn from each other. This includes examining effective regulations, agreements, and litigation, as well as identifying beneficial research, gaps in research, and how to collaboratively address them. She also highlighted the growing power of the group's unified voice in federal-level advocacy and policy development. Connie proposed a more organic approach to identifying focus areas, suggesting that members could have more buy-in and ownership. She floated the idea of committee assignments to generate topics for future meetings, acknowledging that this might take time to fully develop.

Orit appreciated Connie's willingness to shake things up, acknowledging the difficulty of prioritizing important issues within limited meeting time. She stressed the importance of ensuring that meeting time is effective and provides tangible benefits for individual states and the collective. She expressed eagerness to hear others' thoughts on Connie's proposal, noting that regardless of the approach, the discussion would guide staff in preparing for the next meeting.

Another member resonated with Connie's concept of superpowers, particularly in the context of other associations. She highlighted the unique Western perspective on issues like drinking water system consolidation, where the vast distances between communities differentiate Western needs from those in the East. She believes the group's superpower lies in its ability to convey this distinct Western perspective to broader federal discussions.

One member followed up on the theme of member engagement, stating that this organization has the least member engagement compared to others she participates in. While acknowledging that staff might be doing a lot of the work, she believes that greater member buy-in and involvement are crucial for expanding and increasing success. She cited the recent EPA categorical funding cut as an example where the Council should have been more proactive and nimble in its response.

Another member thanked Connie for her perspective and liked the idea of leveraging existing committees and work plans. She suggested that these frameworks could be used to help committees pick topics and become more engaged in the work plan.

One member built on the previous comments, strongly advocating for more engagement and empowerment of member states, along with co-creation of topical focuses for committee agendas and work plans. She emphasized understanding the organization's budget, as it reflects priorities, and aligning staff work with committee focuses and the overall vision. She stressed that a foundational structure of committees and needs, integrated into functional work plans and supported by the budget, would lead to an organization empowered by its member states.

Another member added that the Council is unique among associations because its members are appointed by their governors, giving them a direct line to political staff. This creates a powerful bipartisan voice that can align with governors' offices, making a significant difference at the federal level.

Orit asked if we have anyone online who wants to weigh in on our conversation about how to set an agenda?

Mat Weaver couldn't hear everything through the exercise in the room, but engaging in this process in good faith, noted that if each state identifies their top three priorities, we're more likely to

focus the Council on areas of greatest consensus and identified need. So, on that topic, I'll share my top three:

- **Monitoring:** This is a huge issue right now. As an engineer administering Idaho's resources, I can't do my job without good data - satellite-based atmospheric, snowpack, and streamgaging data. These programs are too big for states to handle alone. We need federal initiative and resources. It's critical that this agency advocates for at least maintaining, but ideally growing and improving, our existing baselines in these programs. This is one of the most important things this group could do.
- **Water Supply Augmentation:** Idaho's population and needs are growing, but our water supplies aren't, except through recharge, cloud seeding, and maintaining/building reservoirs. This seems like a real need for this group to focus on advocating, collaborating, and informing each other.
- **Groundwater Management and Use:** In Idaho, it's always important to consider groundwater management and use, as a huge amount of irrigation relies on it.

Regarding state empowerment and engagement that I've heard mentioned, this isn't my full-time job, and I have other commitments. The Western States Water Council has done a good job of balancing support and resources for states with getting feedback, without overburdening participants.

Orit mentioned that Mat effectively connected identifying key topics with recognizing the Council's "superpower." This was framed as advocating for these important topics, which provides a good framework for shaping the Council's agenda. We'd appreciate hearing from anyone else online who would like to contribute their thoughts.

Texas shared some of their priorities online, which include drought response, funding strategies, groundwater management/conjunctive use, reuse and reclamation, and workforce capacity. Several members highlighted the challenge of selecting only three topics.

One member mentioned the internal (education) and external (advocacy) purposes of meetings. Many other associations and conferences already address internal networking and learning needs. While this group shouldn't abandon that, it seems the true value of this organization, especially with the governors' support, lies in its voice in federal conversations, a unique strength among associations. Our "superpower" is advocacy - all Western states speaking with one voice. It's challenging to choose just three topics, but one approach is to identify "low-hanging fruit" non-partisan issues we can quickly agree on and advocate for, similar to what was mentioned by Idaho. There's no shortage of urgent federal issues requiring our input, such as funding delays for infrastructure and public health projects. I believe staff can assist us in easily identifying these agreeable issues.

Tom Stiles also talked about what makes us unique. We are the West, prior appropriation states. Our water management inevitably creates a quantity-quality nexus that the East doesn't understand. Concepts like reuse and reclamation, the "one water" notion, often originate here out of necessity and due to our institutional arrangements and state-federal relationships. The federal government is the largest landowner in the West, and our state laws interplay with those land holdings. Unlike the East, we have agencies like the Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Reclamation. All topics discussed here should be viewed through the lens of what the Western States Water Council can do for a state. For water quality, I can go to ACWA. But for reuse or groundwater, I'd come here because you understand the nexus between states and feds, and between quality and quantity agencies. Finally, regarding advocacy, the East doesn't understand SNOTEL, real ET, consumptive use, or atmospheric rivers. Our data needs revolve around how we gain and lose water. It's unique for us to position ourselves so the federal government helps us build a data collection network and analytical tools to reconcile with atmospheric dynamics. It's not about what we can do for Western States, but what Western States can do for us. That defines our mission and subsequent meetings. Roundtables can discuss topics like PFAS, but the Council's role isn't to change my course on PFAS. However, discussing direct or indirect potable reuse with Nevada, for example, is a valuable conversation. This is an appropriate way to frame our role.

Orit highlighted that a key principle we discussed is our connection to other associations, organizations, and resources. Given that we're taking notes, we should focus on what is unique to the Council that we can't get elsewhere, as this can help drive our discussions.

Jerry Rigby found it interesting that Mat's three topics were the same ones he was discussing with his neighbors in the room. He noted that even within a state, people have their own topics, yet he and Matt arrived at similar ones. He suggested that it's impossible to pick just three topics, even if we sent out a list for ranking. He found the Nebraska groundwater meeting insightful, and felt we were all involved and contributing by discussing what happens in our states. He believes these are the kinds of discussions we should start with before delving into more detailed aspects.

Orit then asked whether staff should decide which topics to focus on, or if the Council members want to take ownership and work through a process to identify those topics.

Sara Gibson mentioned that she hasn't read the rules of the organization, but finds these discussions very helpful. She feels these discussions align more with her view of what the Council does than the current vision statement. She offered some process thoughts: while issues might be prioritized differently, they are largely the same for most states. She suggested that state updates and reports could drive topics, with states giving reports in each committee and then drilling down into focus topics through the lens of state water planning, engagement and outreach, or monitoring and data. She also proposed a "hot topic" section and consistent next steps, such as needed state-level engagement with administrations or federal engagement (e.g., a letter from Western states or each state). She wondered if WestFAST or other Administration people could do a roundtable with states on these issues, as we often miss this due to time constraints in committee meetings.

Orit asked for more thoughts on important topics, the lens through which to view them, or the "superpower" the Council should focus on.

One member emphasized that good decisions require quality information. They highlighted the crucial importance of data collection in Water Resources and Water Quality Management, noting that once data collection stops, it cannot be recovered. This should be a foundational topic for the Council: how can the Council help develop and maintain federal programs for data collection and utilization to support informed decisions?

Another member who considered himself a scientist and "data guy," stressed that the value of data and its translation into actionable information relies heavily on relationships with federal partners, which are currently chaotic and put many programs and long-term data trends at risk of defunding. He suggested synthesizing the value of data and its role in decision-making with the importance of maintaining federal partnerships and cooperation to preserve data networks and datasets.

Orit asked for any final ideas or principles as the discussion concluded, stating that staff would review the roadmap and discuss any questions that require further answers to help move forward.

Earl Lewis reflected on the initial discussion in Lawrence, Kansas, which started with Tony's retirement and the Council's future direction, noting that defining the Council's purpose has been a core struggle. As Vice Chair, he admitted he hasn't read the Council's organizational documents. He believes that helping to share the load and get people more engaged could alleviate staff's feeling of being overwhelmed with all that we try to accomplish. He expressed frustration with meetings where work plans are approved without sufficient discussion among members about what they want to accomplish. He emphasized the need to consider where members and staff should allocate their time, especially given limited resources. Finally, he mentioned the upcoming discussion about the next executive director and their role in setting the purpose and direction of the Council. The goal is to ensure the Council provides value to every member state and to make current processes more consistent in delivering that value.

Michelle illustrated two potential end-member approaches for our next meeting in California, and suggested that we might want something somewhere in between. One approach is maintaining the current meeting structure: a four-hour Water Resources Committee meeting, a two-hour Water Quality Committee meeting, and a two-hour Legal Committee meeting. This structure includes approving minutes and hearing from speakers, which leaves little or no time for discussion. The other is having no agenda and engaging in open discussions among states on whatever topics are relevant and top of mind in the moment. I believe some middle ground would be preferable – one that

incorporates some structure. Perhaps continuing with the existing Water Resources, Water Quality, and Legal Committee structures. To facilitate more productive discussions, she proposed incorporating state roundtables within committee meetings - 20 minutes is probably insufficient for these roundtables as we learned this morning, so perhaps we need 45-60 minutes for each committee. During these roundtables, committee members could share updates from their respective state. This would allow for focused discussions within each committee (e.g., water quality-related discussions among Water Quality Committee members) rather than broad updates each state provides during the Full Council meeting on Friday morning, which can be overwhelming. That state roundtable could cover up to one hour of each Committee meeting. Under our current format for the Legal and Water Quality Committee meetings we would have one hour remaining, and that leaves some questions for consideration:

- * Should we discuss a specific topic that everyone has prepared for?
- * Do we want to invite any state, federal, other speakers to address that topic?
- * Should we cover one, two, or three topics?

The purpose of narrowing down topics is to allow members to come prepared to discuss at least one specific item. This focused engagement is crucial for state participation. The discussion topics could be anything from specific data or drought issues to advocacy steps or the impact of federal government changes. The key is to narrow the focus so that members can prepare thoroughly before the meetings and then contribute intelligently, confidently, and succinctly.

Orit agreed with the need for balance between process and content. While the process is important, the discussion should eventually lead to substantive content. Topics can be viewed through different lenses, particularly when considering advocacy efforts.

Tony provided a perspective on the fundamental purpose of the Council, which is to advise the governors. He highlighted that this advisory role makes the Council unique. He recalled the Council's involvement in drafting governors' resolutions on water quality and water resources and noted the evolving relationship with the WGA. shared an anecdote about a conversation with a former Executive Director of the WGA, where the Director acknowledged the Council's role as a "one-two punch" alongside the governors. Tony stressed the importance of aligning the Council's actions with the governors' positions. He cited tribal water rights as an example where the governors have deferred leadership to the Council. He also mentioned that council members were involved in putting together recent water-related resolutions with WGA staff, demonstrating the Council's significant influence on those policies. Tony concluded by reiterating that all Council activities should be consistent with the governors' objectives.

Members indicated that they would like to more fully understand the Council's current relationship with WGA and with governors and their staff.

Following this discussion, each state was given three red dot stickers to vote on which of the topics posted around the room were the most significant in terms of setting the Council's group discussion priorities for the coming year.

Break for members to select priority topics.

Orit welcomed everyone back and stated there are a couple more things that we wanted to cover. One is the resolution process, and the other is on leadership. Earlier today, during your meetings, the idea of sunseting irrelevant resolutions and making the process more efficient came up. We reviewed the resolution process during the April meeting. We also wanted to gather your thoughts on the criteria for determining when a resolution is ready to be retired. The goal is to establish a consistent process that allows for consensus-based discussion.

Michelle provided an overview of how the resolutions process currently works. Resolutions originate from a member, multiple members, or a committee identifying a topic of importance to western states. The wording is typically developed in a subcommittee, often with staff drafting language and committee members providing key principles. We strive for multi-state representation in subcommittees to ensure broad acceptance. Following this, we solicit additional input. Our Rules of Organization require a 10-day notice to members, preceding a 30-day notice. This 10-day window

allows for new resolutions to be submitted, as new and sunseting positions must be communicated 30 days before our meeting. This information is also shared with the governors' staff and the WGA. Before the Council meetings, the Executive Committee convenes to discuss the sunseting positions. They address any immediate concerns, and staff refines the language based on their feedback. These edited versions are included in the briefing materials, ideally distributed at least a week before the meeting. Resolutions are assigned to individual committees (usually the committee from which the position originated), which become the owners of that position. This means they are responsible for wordsmithing and ensuring their committee's approval and recommendation before it goes to the Full Council. When committees approve a resolution, they are confirming that the language is suitable for the Full Council to vote on. The Executive Committee members for each state ultimately cast the final vote. Our resolutions sunset every three years, a timeframe that aligns with WGA practices and allows incoming governors to review policy positions during their tenure. While our rules of organization specify a three-year lifespan unless renewed, they do not include a formal process for deciding that a position is no longer needed. We do maintain a list of sunsetted positions, which is included in our briefing books. Currently, we have about 50 resolutions, and we are considering whether to continue accumulating more or if there should be an "off-ramp" for positions. It's important to note that sunseting a position means we are no longer empowered to advocate on that specific issue. For example, we couldn't discuss 10-year extensions for NPDES permits until a new position was established. However, sunseting a position doesn't mean it can never be revisited; it just requires a new resolution process.

The discussion is focused on developing criteria for sunseting resolutions. This includes considering whether to retain positions indefinitely or to move less critical issues to a work plan for staff to monitor in the background. While we cannot advocate on a sunsetted position, we can still stay informed about the issue, similar to how we track issues like PFAS without having a formal position.

Orit discussed two separate conversation points: criteria for sunseting a resolution, and what to do with sunset resolutions. She suggested we start by defining the criteria. This brought to mind resolutions that were recently suggested for sunseting, and the speaker encouraged thinking about the reasons behind those suggestions to help develop criteria.

One member categorized current resolutions into those tied to specific, time-sensitive legislation or court cases. They noted that if a bill dies, our position could become "stranded" after three years. They agreed with Michelle's point about still wanting to discuss a topic even if a specific bill is no longer relevant, suggesting a new framing for resolutions tied to legislative or court outcomes, which would address the sunseting issue.

Orit clarified that this would be an alternative to sunseting a resolution.

Another member raised the question about the advocacy efforts for more general resolutions, asking if it involves staff advocating with federal legislators, or if Tony (the Executive Director) is involved. They also wondered if the resolutions are simply posted on the Western States Water Council website for informational purposes.

Orit interpreted this as a question about how resolutions are used as a tool.

Another member brought up the advocacy aspect of resolutions, noting that most are not effective for advocacy due to their length (e.g., multiple paragraphs of "whereas" clauses). They emphasized the need to rewrite them in a more user-friendly way for various purposes, especially since staff currently hand them out to congressional offices. Otherwise, staff may need to find alternative materials.

Another member added that these policy statements can serve as a background for Western States Water Council if they are asked to be a witness at a congressional hearing. This background helps in building testimony and allows for more pointed advocacy.

Michelle confirmed that when making comments on rulemaking or submitting written testimony, policy positions are always attached, usually with a more reader-friendly cover letter.

One member commented that during the Legal Committee the consideration of new sunseting provision of the federal government to pay general stream adjudications is entirely new to Utah. It would be helpful to understand its origin and purpose when we review these provisions.

Sara Gibson suggested that states could take a more prominent role by converting policy and position statements into one-page summaries for their delegations. These one-pagers could address general topics with greater specificity. She noted that it is challenging to disseminate information to some representatives, so if states adopted these one-pagers, they could detail their specific needs, such as adequate funding levels. She also suggested that staff could combine these one-pagers and distribute them to delegations or committees that may not be fully aware of Western states' interests.

Earl made two points. First, he agreed with Jeanine's comment that if a cover letter is needed to explain a policy position, the position itself may not be well-organized. He believes a well-organized policy position would allow states like Oklahoma or Kansas to tailor it to their specific needs. Second, from a process standpoint, he feels there are too many steps involved with the Executive Committee. He suggested categorizing policy positions and assigning them to specific committees (e.g., Water Quality, Legal) so they can be managed directly without constant back-and-forth with the Executive Committee.

One member noted that their executive branch has changed how they write internal briefing memos and one-pagers to prioritize putting the bottom line up front. This is to address the "too long to read" (TLTR) issue. While they don't necessarily want to restructure all policies, the consensus is that policies should be more concise and immediately convey their main points. This also applies to how policies are used and transmitted, including whether a cover letter is needed. They also suggested discussing policies that will sunset at the next meeting during the current meeting, or at least setting them up for discussion. This would allow more time for deliberation, questions, and concerns regarding their existence or wording.

Another speaker agreed with the need to streamline the process, especially since many members serve on both the committee and the Executive Committee. They also echoed the confusion regarding how policies are written and asked if they could be combined into topical areas. This would allow states to tailor policies to their specific needs, as Sara suggested, and reduce the number of resolutions discussed in meetings, freeing up time for information sharing and advocacy.

Orit asked for clarification from staff on the current format and process for policies and whether there are opportunities for adaptation.

Tony clarified that many resolutions are written for specific legislative or agency issues, which leads to their siloed nature due to congressional or agency jurisdiction. He gave an example of a proposed national groundwater policy by the EPA, which raised concerns among states about federal overreach into groundwater regulation. This is why different positions, while addressing common interests, are often directed toward a specific audience.

Michelle shared two ideas for improving policy management. First, she suggested that staff review existing positions to identify potential consolidations, not for immediate approval, but for discussion and feedback at the next meeting. Second, she requested that everyone send her examples of resolution formats they find effective. She emphasized that this is an assignment, and she needs these examples to avoid creating a new format from scratch. The goal is to bring these examples together for discussion at the next meeting to decide on a readable and understandable format that can be better used for advocacy. Once a format is decided, future positions can be adapted accordingly. She stressed the importance of this assignment to avoid a lengthy process of her trying to guess everyone's preferences.

Orit asked for further clarification on the Council process.

Tony explained that when the 30-day notice with sunset positions is sent, it is also sent to WGA. He emphasized the importance of discussing these with staff council members to ensure consistency with the governors' collective positions. He noted that their sunset period aligns with the governors' three-year sunset. He also described a process agreed upon with the governors: if a resolution is adopted between meetings without a 30-day notice, it requires a 10-day review period by the governors. He recalled an instance with the WOTUS resolution where the governors did not respond, and it was ultimately decided that if there's no response, the resolution can be distributed, but they always try to avoid conflicts with the governors. If staff doesn't receive any feedback from WGA on certain issues, it can feel like it's in limbo and they're unsure how to proceed. He noted that

with the initial WOTUS position developed between meetings, a 90-day extension to the rulemaking comment period allowed us to discuss and adopt our position before the next Council meeting.

One member asked about the process for combining existing policy positions to address a new issue in between meetings. Michelle noted that we let the members know in case there are concerns. Tony added that, if advocacy is needed, a letter based on existing positions can be sent.

One member suggested adding criteria for creating and maintaining policy positions, potentially based on the “origin story” of the position. As an example, they mentioned the radio frequency policy: while not important to Washington, it’s crucial for other states. This suggests that the importance to other states, perhaps a quorum of states, should be a criterion. They also advocated for a process to “off-ramp” positions that are no longer relevant by cataloging them as “sunset positions.” This would allow the language to be drawn upon if needed in the future, without consuming Council time revisiting outdated policies.

One member brought up a question about the process. Does every policy statement go before the WGA for approval, or should we have specific criteria for what gets reviewed? Tony clarified that once we send the 30-day notice, we assume the governor’s office has reviewed the resolution, and any concerns from the governors would be raised through their appointed members. Tony explained that the Council has had a closer working relationship with the WGA in the past, including weekly calls. We still have monthly staff calls, and our Rules of Organization require us to send proposed resolutions to the governor and report to the governor’s office after every meeting. While responses are rare, they do happen, suggesting the letters are being read. He also noted that some members have a closer relationship with their governors, which can be beneficial.

One member expressed a preference for having the discretion to decide if a governor would care about a particular issue and then escalate it, rather than every item going through the WGA for a “thumbs up or down.” However, it seems like the current process involves that WGA review.

Michelle added that members have sometimes informed us that their governor’s office cannot support a resolution as written, which is helpful feedback for our meetings. She emphasized that the ability of governor-appointed members to maintain engagement with their respective governor’s offices is a “superpower” for the Council.

Tony gave examples of resolutions where states have abstained, due to political positions of the governors. He also mentioned that in most cases, members have either chosen to abstain or, in rare instances, voted against a resolution. Our process requires a two-thirds majority, but decisions are generally by consensus.

One member shared an anecdote about how their engagement with the governor’s office liaison is relationship-based. They mentioned how they communicate about resolutions, especially those that are informational, and how they plan to inform the liaison about potential concerns before meetings.

Earl built on this, acknowledging that connecting with governors strengthens the organization. However, he stressed that members are appointed to represent their states’ interests and aren’t necessarily governor’s office staff. He believes they should have a good idea of potential “hot button” issues and communicate those back to the governor’s office beforehand. He also noted that for Kansas, it’s not reasonable to expect the governor’s office to be well-informed without direct, informal communication channels.

Jerry Rigby expressed concern about sunseting any of the resolutions, arguing that they can be revisited and changed if needed. He values the collaborative process that has led to consensus on challenging issues, such as the discussion around “climate variability” versus “climate change.” He also cautioned against dropping resolutions, even if they seem less relevant now, as they can become relevant again.

Tony responded to Jerry, mentioning that “hydrologic non-stationarity” was a compromise term, leading to a call from the Department of Ecology director who perceived it as climate denial, but it was the “lowest common denominator” between states.

Another member suggested that when formatting resolutions, especially with the increasing use of AI, we should consider how a staffer might summarize them. They advised including desired formatting and conclusions at the beginning to ensure consistency in language.

Orit concluded with a request for everyone to share beneficial resolution examples. The next topic will be input on leadership, and the recording will be stopped for that discussion.

Other Comments (Full Council Meeting)

Tom Stiles said WSWC has been very important to him in his work on water management policy. He expressed gratitude to Karl Dreher for creating the Water Quality Committee, acknowledging the initial challenges of integrating water quality discussions into an organization built on consensus among state engineers and water rights. Tom emphasized the unique strength of the West and encouraged the Council members to embrace this identity as their superpower. He noted the strong Eastern U.S. influence in other organizations he's been involved with but highlighted that this Council has always maintained a clear vision. He urged them to preserve that focus and pride in their Western identity as the Council and its leadership evolve.

Jennifer Carr: In regard to the Council, I view the recent discussions as a course correction rather than a complete restart. The Council's primary strength lies in its ability to bring people together, and this won't change regardless of how we conduct meetings. The New Mexico project we heard about today is a testament to this collaborative power. I want to express my gratitude to both current and former team members for their hard work. We are not far from where we need to be; it's a matter of integrating the experience of tenured members with the perspectives of newer colleagues. Technology, like AI, could be a valuable tool for our future direction, and this Council provides a crucial space for these discussions. I'm eager to see how these conversations unfold and to demonstrate the fruits of our collaborative labor. Beyond the New Mexico project we heard about today, I want to highlight another powerful example of the Council's collaboration, particularly for our newer members. WestFAST organized a series of webinars on the nexus between wildfire and water quality. Through this, we learned from New Mexico that State Revolving Fund money can be used for watershed work, such as fuels reduction, to protect water supplies. This initiative, heavily supported by the Forest Service, was incredibly effective. During the last round of WOTUS discussions, we pressed EPA for regional rules instead of national ones. Erica, who was Council staff at the time, spearheaded an amazing white paper that explored various methods of measuring flow regimes, eco-regions, and other tools. This comprehensive investigation informed our discussions with EPA. My staff recently rediscovered this paper, finding it incredibly helpful in understanding the regionalization of the WOTUS rule. It's another excellent example of the Council's impactful collaborative work.