



Support for Critical Western Water Infrastructure Programs and Projects

Policy Summary

The West depends on a vast, aging network of dams, reservoirs, diversions, canals, pipelines, levees, wells, pumps, treatment facilities, hydropower facilities, and related works to store, move, treat, and protect water. This infrastructure supports drinking water, irrigation, wastewater treatment, flood control, hydropower, recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, and fulfillment of interstate compacts, tribal settlements, and other legal obligations.

Federal water infrastructure programs and projects are critical to the states. They should be treated as core public health, public safety, and water management infrastructure, not as optional or intermittently funded programs.

WSWC Urges Congress and the Administration to:

1. Fully fund and use the Reclamation Fund for its intended western water purposes.

Congress and the Administration should fully appropriate annual Reclamation Fund receipts for authorized purposes and evaluate converting the Fund to a true revolving trust fund so receipts are promptly reinvested in western water infrastructure.

2. Provide stable, adequate funding for construction, maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, and replacement of critical water infrastructure.

The Nation needs reliable funding streams for major maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, dam safety, levee safety, and replacement of aging federal and non-federal water infrastructure, including Reclamation, USACE, NRCS, state, local, and other essential facilities.

3. Accelerate completion of authorized water infrastructure projects, especially those serving rural and tribal communities.

Congress and the Administration should expedite the funding, permitting, and construction of authorized rural water supply and related infrastructure projects, including projects tied to tribal trust and settlement obligations and projects needed to protect public health.

The Western States Water Council (WSWC) is a government entity representing western state water agencies with members appointed by their respective governors. The WSWC's mission is to 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.

4. Improve federal water infrastructure financing and budgeting.

Federal policy should recognize the long-term economic, public health, safety, and environmental benefits of water infrastructure investments, expand financing tools and partnerships, and reform budget scoring that undervalues these benefits and delays sound projects.

5. Strengthen cooperative federalism in all federal water infrastructure decisions.

Federal programs should work with, not around, the states by respecting state water law and regulatory authority, coordinating reviews and assistance programs, improving transparency on infrastructure risks and needs, and ensuring strong state involvement in project development, safety oversight, and any transfer of federal facilities.

Core Message

For the West, water infrastructure is not just concrete and steel. It is the physical backbone of water supply reliability, public safety, economic productivity, environmental stewardship, and community resilience. Delayed investment, deferred maintenance, and fragmented federal processes increase risks and costs over time.

What WSWC Is Asking For

1. Fully appropriate Reclamation Fund receipts for authorized western water purposes and evaluate a revolving-fund structure that keeps those revenues working in the West.
2. Provide adequate, stable, and continuing appropriations for water infrastructure construction, maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, modernization, and replacement.
3. Strengthen federal funding and cost-share support for dam safety, levee safety, watershed rehabilitation, and related hazard-mitigation programs.
4. Expedite construction of authorized rural water supply projects and ensure small, rural, and tribal communities have access to the financial and technical assistance needed to meet drinking water, wastewater, and public health needs.
5. Support federal and non-federal financing tools, grants, loans, credit enhancements, and partnerships that help close infrastructure funding gaps.
6. Reform congressional budget scoring to better account for the long-term benefits of water infrastructure investments.
7. Streamline permitting, relicensing, and regulatory review while protecting environmental resources and preserving state authority.
8. Standardize and improve federal processes for evaluating, reporting, and communicating water infrastructure maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, and safety risks.
9. Require careful, project-by-project evaluation of any federal water and power asset transfers, with strong state involvement and protections for state water laws and water rights.

Nothing in this position is intended to alter or affect the authority of western states over the allocation, administration, development, or protection of waters within their borders, or the interpretation or application of any interstate compact, court decree, international treaty, tribal settlement agreement, or state water law.

Supporting Documentation

Why This Matters

In the West, water is a vital and scarce resource. The ability to store, move, conserve, treat, and protect water depends on physical infrastructure that supports communities, agriculture, industry, energy production, environmental stewardship, and public safety.

Across the West, much of this infrastructure is aging, in many cases has exceeded its original design life, and faces growing stress from deferred maintenance, inadequate and inconsistent funding, hydrologic extremes, rising construction costs, and increasing demands on water systems. Delays in project construction, rehabilitation, and replacement increase long-term costs and risks.

Water infrastructure in the West is financed, owned, operated, and maintained through a complex mix of federal, state, tribal, local, and private arrangements. Federal investment remains essential because of longstanding federal project commitments, tribal trust and settlement obligations, flood control and public safety responsibilities, environmental mandates, and the national economic value of western water and power systems.

Small, rural, and tribal communities often face the most acute challenges. Many struggle with aging or inadequate drinking water and wastewater systems, limited technical capacity, contamination concerns, water shortages, and barriers to financing. In some places, communities still haul water over long distances or face decades-long waits for authorized project completion.

Water infrastructure investments produce substantial public benefits. They protect lives and property, support food and energy production, enable economic development, improve public health, help states meet legal and regulatory obligations, and reduce long-term risks and costs.

Priority Federal Programs and Infrastructure Needs

WSWC supports strong federal investment, partnership, and policy reform in the following categories of water infrastructure programs and needs.

A. Reclamation Fund and dedicated western water infrastructure funding

The Reclamation Fund was created to finance the conservation, development, and wise use of western water resources using receipts generated from western lands, water, and power. WSWC supports full appropriation of Reclamation Fund receipts for their intended purposes and supports evaluating whether the Fund should operate more like a revolving trust fund so annual receipts can be promptly used for authorized projects and programs.

Dedicated and reliable funding is especially important for major capital construction, dam safety, extraordinary maintenance, rehabilitation of aging facilities, rural water supply projects, and facilities constructed as part of congressionally approved tribal water rights settlements.

B. Construction, maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, and replacement of aging infrastructure

The West depends on a large inventory of aging federal and non-federal infrastructure, including Reclamation and USACE facilities, NRCS watershed dams, local treatment systems, and other works that are critical to water supply, flood control, hydropower, irrigation, and environmental management.

WSWC supports adequate and reliable federal funding for construction, maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, modernization, and replacement of critical water infrastructure, together with better asset management and long-term capital planning. Water infrastructure should be managed with life-cycle costs, planned retirement, and replacement needs in mind, rather than relying on chronic deferral of major investments.

C. Water infrastructure funding, financing, and budget reform

Federal, state, and local funding programs remain essential, but they are not sufficient on their own to meet the West's infrastructure needs. WSWC supports a broad portfolio of funding and financing tools, including grants, loans, loan guarantees, credit enhancements, cost-share programs, and public-private or federal-state-local partnerships where appropriate.

WSWC also supports reform of congressional budget scoring practices that assign full costs up front while undervaluing the long-term public health, safety, economic, and environmental benefits of water infrastructure investments. Better budgeting and scoring would improve the federal government's ability to justify and deliver sound projects in a timely manner.

D. Dam safety and rehabilitation

Safe operation and maintenance of dams and related infrastructure is critical to preventing loss of life, mass evacuation, destruction of property and public facilities, contamination, and worsening water-supply impacts.

WSWC supports continued and increased funding for dam safety programs and rehabilitation needs across federal and non-federal systems, including:

- Reclamation's dam safety program under the Reclamation Safety of Dams Act;
- FEMA's National Dam Safety Program;
- FEMA's High Hazard Potential Dam Rehabilitation Grant Program;
- FEMA hazard mitigation assistance programs;
- the USACE Corps Water Infrastructure Financing Program; and
- the NRCS Watershed Rehabilitation Program.

WSWC also supports continued coordination between federal and state dam safety programs and recognizes the essential role of state dam safety agencies in protecting non-federal dams and helping direct limited resources to the highest priorities.

E. Levee safety and related flood-risk infrastructure

Floods remain among the Nation's most frequent and costly natural hazards. WSWC supports implementation and improvement of a national levee safety program, including adequate resources for inventory, inspection, risk-informed standards, and other statutory requirements under the National Levee Safety Act, WRRDA 2014, and related authorities.

Such a program should improve the safety of levees, flood walls, and flood-water conveyance canals, while recognizing that water supply canals serving irrigation or municipal and industrial water systems should not be swept into levee safety requirements that were not designed for those facilities.

F. Standardization and transparency for infrastructure risk and MR&R needs

Congress, the Administration, states, and project partners need accurate, timely, and accessible information on maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, and safety needs in order to prioritize investments and manage long-term risk.

WSWC supports standardized federal processes for evaluating and reporting MR&R and safety needs, including facilities operated under contract. Federal agencies should provide consistent, up-to-date, understandable information regarding estimated costs, risk levels, and relative priority, and should actively exchange that information with non-federal operating entities, state policymakers, and the public.

WSWC also supports improved hazard classification, asset management criteria, and transparent reporting on dam and levee safety risks.

G. Rural water supply projects and community water infrastructure needs

Many small, rural, and tribal communities across the West face serious water supply shortages, infrastructure deterioration, water quality problems, and limited access to financing or technical expertise. WSWC supports federal and state legislative and administrative actions to authorize, fund, and implement rural water supply projects and related infrastructure improvements that enhance water supplies, protect public health, and promote economic development.

WSWC supports appropriations sufficient to undertake appraisal investigations and feasibility studies for new rural water projects, and supports streamlined permitting and financing tools that help move authorized projects forward while appropriately protecting environmental resources and taxpayers.

Because project delays sharply increase costs, WSWC strongly supports action to expedite completion of authorized rural water supply projects, especially where those projects are linked to federal trust or settlement obligations.

H. Rural water and wastewater technical and financial assistance

USDA Rural Development and its Water and Environmental Programs are critical to many small, rural, tribal, and colonia communities that cannot access private credit or other federal assistance on workable terms. These programs help communities finance drinking water, wastewater, sanitary waste disposal, stormwater, and related infrastructure, and they provide technical assistance and training that many small systems need.

WSWC supports careful federal attention to the needs of small, rural, and tribal communities and urges Congress and the Administration to ensure these communities have access to sufficient technical and financial assistance to meet public health goals and federal drinking water and wastewater mandates.

I. Cooperative federalism and state partnership

States hold primary responsibility for water resource development, administration, and protection. The federal government has a complementary role in financing and cost-sharing infrastructure, fulfilling tribal trust and treaty obligations, honoring commitments to project sponsors and water users, supporting public safety, and helping set baseline safety standards.

WSWC supports water infrastructure policies and decisions that are developed in partnership with the states, are consistent with state water law and regulatory authority, and recognize that federal and state programs must be coordinated to deliver the most efficient and effective solutions.

This is especially important when communities must secure new supplies, acquire necessary state water rights, or integrate federal project actions with state water administration and interstate compact compliance.

J. Transfer of federal water and power facilities

Some federal water and power asset transfers may offer important benefits, but many are complex and involve public interests, third-party rights, multi-purpose facilities, and longstanding repayment and operating arrangements.

WSWC supports careful, project-by-project evaluation of transfers of federal water and power assets and related facilities. Any such transfer should proceed only with strong state involvement and with protections for state water laws, water rights, existing obligations, and the public benefits of the facilities.

Closing Statement

WSWC supports a strong federal-state partnership to ensure that the West and the Nation have the water infrastructure, financing tools, safety programs, and delivery mechanisms needed to store, move, treat, and protect water reliably and safely. These investments are foundational to public health, public safety, economic security, environmental stewardship, and the long-term resilience of western communities.