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# WestFAST News

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Chair – Roger Gorke; Federal Liaison Officer – Madeline Franklin

## **Biden-Harris Administration's Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission Releases Report Outlining Comprehensive Recommendations to Change the Nation's Relationship with Wildfire**

USDA 9/27/23.

Today, the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission released [its report](#) outlining a comprehensive, consensus-based set of recommendations to Congress to address the nation's wildfire crisis.

The Commission, created by President Biden's [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#) and announced in December 2021, was charged with making recommendations to Congress to improve federal policies related to the mitigation, suppression and management of wildland fires in the United States, and the rehabilitation of land devastated by wildland fires. Composed of representatives from federal agencies, state, local and Tribal governments, and representatives from the private sector, the Commission has met monthly over the last year to discuss and craft these recommendations.

According to the terms of [the statute](#) in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the commission is co-chaired by the Department of Agriculture, Department of the Interior, and Federal Emergency Management Agency. The 50 commission members have a broad range of expertise with wildfire,

including firefighting, prescribed fire, cultural burning, watershed restoration, pre-fire mitigation, research, public health, post-fire recovery and more.

The Commission's comprehensive and holistic recommendations provide strategies for transforming our wildland fire response approach from reactive to proactive, building sustainable and long-term solutions, and creating communities and landscapes that are more resilient and adaptable to wildfire as a fundamental part of our world. Proposed solutions also strongly support increased collaboration and coordination across scales and jurisdictions, and greater inclusion of all entities within the wildfire system. Taken together, these recommendations are intended to help lead the nation toward a different relationship and experience with wildfire.

The Biden-Harris Administration is using every tool available to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire across the nation's forests and to strengthen our wildfire preparedness, response, and recovery efforts to protect communities, critical infrastructure, and natural resources and restore fire-adapted ecosystems, while taking better care of the people serving on the frontlines," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "We are thankful for the commission's diligent work to prepare a comprehensive set of recommendations that will help drive future solutions in confronting our nation's wildfire crisis and setting up our workforce for success."

"As climate change drives longer, more intense and more dangerous wildfires, every community across

the country is experiencing the impacts—whether from smoke-filled skies or catastrophic losses,” said Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland. “Under the leadership of President Biden, the Commission’s report will chart a new path forward for the nation on wildland fire mitigation and management, helping to ensure we are building the workforce, resiliency and collaborative approaches needed for the future.”

“The increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires is a threat to our homeland security,” said Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas. “The whole of government approach to wildfire prevention, combined with the strategic investments in our workforce recommended by this commission, will ensure DHS personnel remain prepared to go anywhere, anytime extreme weather impacts communities. We are investing over \$684 million this year to give local fire departments the personnel, tools, training, and resources to meet these challenges and we look forward to continuing this work with our federal partners in the years to come.”

“The recent disaster on Maui is a tragic reminder of the growing risks of wildfires to communities and the heartbreaking losses they leave behind,” said Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Criswell. “The detailed recommendations provided by this Commission emphasize the urgent need to work across jurisdictions and disciplines to protect our nation’s residents, communities, and natural resources from fire. Together, we will pave a bold new path to wildfire resilience nationwide.”

Recommendations outlined in the report can be summarized by seven key themes:

- **Urgent New Approaches:** Historically and institutionally addressed as a land management problem, wildfire -- and the crisis it has become -- spans jurisdictions and ecosystems and threatens critical infrastructure, built environment, public health, and public safety. As such, collective, holistic, cross-boundary action is critical to address the present challenges. Some of the report’s suggestions in this theme include establishing a Community Wildfire Risk Reduction Program to

proactively address risk, change financial incentives and change agency metrics to better focus on performance of ecological health over acres treated.

- **Supporting Collaboration:** Successfully meeting the challenge of wildfire mitigation and management requires approaches that better involve all relevant entities and every scale of society.
- **Shifting from Reactive to Proactive:** Only by putting significantly more focus and resources toward proactive pre-fire and post-fire planning and mitigation can we break the current cycle of increasingly severe wildfire risk, damages, and losses.
- **Enabling Beneficial Fire:** The need to expand beneficial fire, such as prescribed and cultural burning, must be balanced with the public health threats associated with smoke and reduced air quality produced through beneficial fire and implemented through pre-fire planning that helps share decision-making, enable mutual understanding, and facilitate the consideration of tradeoffs associated with various fire response and management decisions.
- **Supporting and Expanding the Workforce:** Federal investment is urgently needed to create a cross-trained year-round workforce that is focused on and tailored to mitigation, planning, and post-fire response and recovery, with strategies in place for recruitment and retention.
- **Modernizing Tools for Informed Decision-making:** The Commission recommends a number of measures that would better coordinate, integrate, and strategically align fire-related science, data, and technology.
- **Investing in Resilience:** There is a need for increased funding that is more sustained and predictable, keeps pace with the escalating crisis, and includes a focus on the mitigation of risk and impacts both before and after wildfire is critical and will reduce costs in the long run.

This is the second report to be released by the Commission. The [first report](#), which focused on

aerial equipment and a strategy to meet equipment needs through 2030, was released in February.

While the Commission's focus in this report was on federal legislative action, the solutions proposed are also relevant to state, local, Tribal and territorial governments, the nonprofit, private and academic sectors, and the public at large.

The Commission's recommendations recognize the urgency and importance of providing increase pay and benefits for federal wildland firefighters and address a number of related workforce needs. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law supported temporary [landmark pay increases](#) for federal wildland firefighters, which aim to bring federal firefighter pay in alignment with their state and local counterparts, while aiding in recruitment and retention of a more permanent and stable wildland firefighting force across the federal government.

The Commission's recommendations were informed by the Department of the Interior's "[Five-Year Monitoring, Maintenance, and Treatment Plan](#)," which provides a roadmap for addressing wildfire risk on Department of the Interior-managed and Tribal lands. They were also informed by USDA Forest Service's "[Confronting the Wildfire Crisis](#)" strategy, which aims to treat 20 million acres of national forests and grasslands and 30 million acres of state, local, Tribal and private lands over the next 10 years to reduce wildfire risk where it matters most. These plans help facilitate the collaborative work between the two Departments. In total, President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act include over \$7 billion in funding across the interagency to enhance our ability to mitigate and respond to wildfires.

The Commission's work builds on existing interagency federal efforts, such as the Wildland Fire Leadership Council and the White House Wildfire Resilience Interagency Working Group. The Biden-Harris administration will continue to pursue an all-of-government approach to wildfire risk reduction and resilience.

For more information visit the commission website or email [wildlandfirecommission@usda.gov](mailto:wildlandfirecommission@usda.gov).

## \$7.5 billion federal credit program opens for dam safety projects

USACE 9/20/23

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is accepting applications for a new \$7.5 billion credit assistance program, the Corps Water Infrastructure Financing Program (CWIFP), for dam safety projects. By providing low-cost, long-term, flexible loans for dam safety projects, the CWIFP will accelerate non-federal investment in the nation's dam infrastructure.

The CWIFP has opened its inaugural 90-day application period at [www.usace.army.mil/CWIFP](http://www.usace.army.mil/CWIFP). The Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) was posted in the Federal Register today at <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2023-20286>. The NOFA formally opens the program and provides interested borrowers with instructions on the application process.

"Aging infrastructure causes significant challenges to all levels of government, in particular dam infrastructure. This program will have a huge impact on the nation's dam infrastructure and will help save local ratepayers and taxpayers by providing long-term, low-cost financing," said Lt. Gen. Scott A. Spellmon, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers commanding general.

"Today's posting of the Notice of Funding Availability for the Corps Water Infrastructure Financing Program provides a new and significant tool that can be used to keep the nation's infrastructure resilient and dependable for multiple generations," said Mr. Michael Connor, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works. "As we deal with unprecedented climate challenges that require robust and effective infrastructure, this new financing program will enable continued investment by our local communities in their infrastructure."

The program will provide approximately \$7.5 billion in total project financing and support up to \$15 billion of infrastructure investment nationwide. More information about the CWIFP, including how to apply, can be found at <https://www.usace.army.mil/CWIFP>.

## International report confirms record-high greenhouse gases, global sea levels in 2022

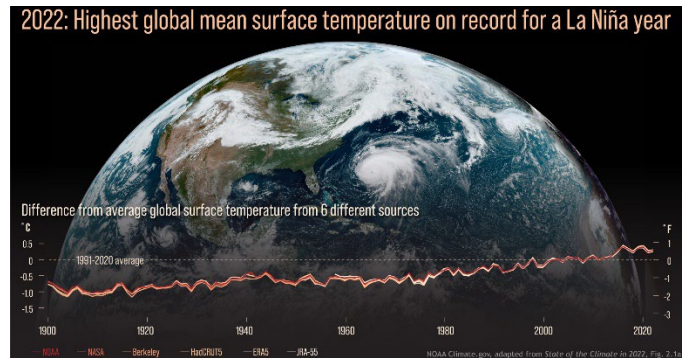
NOAA 9/6/23



An aerial view of a property surrounded by flood water on December 9, 2022, in Louth, Australia. Prolonged flooding along the Barwon-Darling River and its tributaries due to unseasonably high rainfall turned vast swaths of the Western Plains into islands, cut off from road access. 2022 was the warmest La Niña year on record as increasingly extreme and changing conditions impacted the globe. (Image credit: Getty)

Greenhouse gas concentrations, global sea level and ocean heat content reached record highs in 2022, according to the 33rd annual [State of the Climate Report](#).

The international annual review of the world's climate, led by scientists from NOAA's [National Centers for Environmental Information](#) (NCEI) and published by the [Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society](#) (AMS), is based on contributions from more than 570 scientists in over 60 countries. It provides the most comprehensive update on Earth's climate indicators, notable weather events and other data collected by environmental monitoring stations and instruments located on land, water, ice and in space.



Graphs of yearly global surface temperature compared to the 1991-2020 average for each year from 1900 to 2022, from 6 data records, overlaid on a GOES-16 satellite image from September 22, 2022. (Image credit: NOAA Climate.gov)

“This report is a truly international effort to more fully understand climate conditions around the globe and our capacity to observe them,” said NCEI Director Derek Arndt. “It is like an annual physical of the Earth system, and it serves present and future generations by documenting and sharing data that indicate increasingly extreme and changing conditions in our warming world.”

“People are causing the largest known change in global climate since our transition to agriculture thousands of years ago,” said Paul Higgins, associate executive director of the American Meteorological Society. “The State of the Climate in 2022 report — an ongoing collaboration between NOAA and AMS — helps us understand the climate system, the impact people are having on climate and the potential consequences. The report can help inform the decisions needed to enable humanity and all life to thrive for generations to come.”

Notable findings from the international report include:

- **Earth's greenhouse gas concentrations were the highest on record.** Carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide — Earth's major atmospheric [greenhouse gases](#) — once again reached record high concentrations in 2022. The global annual average atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration was 417.1 parts per million (ppm). This was 50% greater than the pre-industrial level, 2.4 ppm greater than the 2021 amount, and the highest measured amount in the modern observational records

as well as in paleoclimatic records dating back as far as 800,000 years.

The annual atmospheric methane concentration also reached a record high, which was a 165% increase compared to its pre-industrial level and an increase of about 14 parts per billion (ppb) from 2021. The annual increase of 1.3 ppb for nitrous oxide in 2022, which was similar to the high growth rates in 2020 and 2021, was higher than the average increase during 2010–2019 ( $1.0 \pm 0.2$  ppb) and suggests increased nitrous oxide emissions in recent years.

- **Warming trends continued across the globe.** A range of scientific analyses indicate that the annual global surface temperature was 0.45 to 0.54 of a degree F (0.25 to 0.30 of a degree C) above the 1991–2020 average. This places 2022 among the six warmest years since records began in the mid-to-late 1800s. Even though the year ranked among the six warmest years on record, the presence of La Nina in the Pacific Ocean had a cooling effect on the 2022 global temperatures in comparison to years characterized by El Nino or neutral El Nino–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) conditions.

Nonetheless, 2022 was the warmest La Nina year on record, surpassing the previous record set in 2021. With the re-emergence of El Nino in 2023, globally-averaged temperatures this year are expected to exceed those observed in 2022. All six major global temperature datasets used for analysis in the report agree that the last eight years (2015–2022) were the eighth warmest on record. The annual global mean surface temperature has increased at an average rate of 0.14 to 0.16 of a degree F (0.08 to 0.09 of a degree C) per decade since 1880, and at a rate more than twice as high since 1981.

- **Ocean heat and global sea level were the highest on record.** Over the past half-century, the ocean has stored more than 90% of the excess energy trapped in Earth’s system by greenhouse gases and other factors. The global ocean heat content, measured from the ocean’s surface to a depth of 2,000 meters (approximately 6,561 ft), continued to increase and reached new

record highs in 2022. Global mean sea level was record high for the 11th-consecutive year, reaching about 101.2 mm (4.0 inches) above the 1993 average when satellite altimetry measurements began.

- **La Nina conditions moderated sea surface temperatures.** La Nina conditions in the equatorial Pacific Ocean that began in mid-2020, with a short break in 2021, continued through all of 2022. The three consecutive years of La Nina conditions — an unusual “triple-dip” — had widespread effects on the ocean and climate in 2022. The mean annual global sea-surface temperature in 2022 equaled 2018 as sixth highest on record but was lower than both 2019 and 2020 due in part to the long-lasting La Nina. Approximately 58% of the ocean surface experienced at least one marine heatwave in 2022, which is defined as sea-surface temperatures in the warmest 10% of all recorded data in a particular location for at least five days.
- **Heatwaves shattered temperature records across the planet.** In July, a 14-day heatwave swept through western Europe. A weather station in England recorded a temperature of 104 degrees F (40 degrees C) for the first time ever, over 100 stations in France broke all-time temperature records and stations in at least six other European countries set all-time heat records. The extreme high summer temperatures over Europe resulted in unprecedented melting of glaciers in the Alps, with over 6% of their volume — a record loss — lost in Switzerland in 2022 alone. Record-breaking summer heat in central and eastern Asia, particularly in the Yangtze River basin, led to a devastating drought that affected more than 38 million people and caused a direct economic loss of \$4.75 billion U.S. dollars.
- **The Arctic was warm and wet.** The Arctic had its fifth-warmest year in the 123-year record. 2022 marked the ninth-consecutive year that Arctic temperature anomalies were higher than the global mean anomalies, providing more evidence of the process known as Arctic amplification, when

physical processes cause the Arctic to warm more quickly than the rest of the planet. The seasonal Arctic minimum sea-ice extent, typically reached in September, was the 11th-smallest in the 43-year record. The amount of multiyear ice — ice that survives at least one summer melt season — remaining in the Arctic continued to decline. Since 2012, the Arctic has been nearly devoid of ice that is more than four years old. Annual average Arctic precipitation for 2022 was the third-highest total since 1950, and three seasons (winter, summer, and autumn) ranked among the 10 wettest for their respective season.

- **Although tropical cyclone activity was near average, storms brought devastation to many areas across the globe.** There were 85 named tropical storms during the Northern and Southern Hemisphere storm seasons last year, which was near the 1991–2020 average of 87. Three tropical cyclones reached Category 5 intensity on the Saffir–Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale, which was the fewest Category 5 storms globally since 2017. The accumulated cyclone energy for the globe was the lowest since reliable records began in 1981. Despite this, several storms caused massive damage. In the North Atlantic, Hurricane Fiona became the most intense and most destructive tropical or post-tropical cyclone in Atlantic Canada’s history. Hurricane Ian, a major hurricane, killed more than 100 people and became the third costliest disaster in the U.S., with damage estimated at \$113 billion U.S. dollars. In the South Indian Ocean, Tropical Cyclone Batsirai dropped 2,044 mm of rain at Commerson Crater in Réunion. The storm also led to 121 fatalities in Madagascar.

The State of the Climate report is a peer-reviewed series published annually as a special supplement to the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society. The journal makes the [full report openly available](#). NCEI’s [high-level overview report](#) is also available online.

## Lake Walcott Closes Early to Watercrafts to Prevent the Spread of Invasive Quagga Mussels

FWS 9/29/23.

Lake Walcott, part of Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge, will be closed as of Sept. 29 to prevent the spread of invasive quagga mussels. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is closing the lake early after the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) recently confirmed the presence of quagga mussel in its larval life stages in nearby Centennial Waterfront Park along the Snake River. The lake usually closes to watercraft on Oct. 31 and reopens April 1.

Quagga mussels are easily spread via watercraft and temporary closures are necessary to minimize further spread. The introduction of invasive quagga mussels poses a major threat to ecosystems and infrastructure, damaging native fish populations and wildlife habitat as well as pipes and water delivery systems. Once established, these mussels are highly competitive and devastate diverse biological landscapes, including invertebrate species listed on the Endangered Species Act. State and federal agencies are implementing a rapid response plan including containment measures, surveys, and a control strategy.

The refuge is still open to visitors, including hunters and fishers who will be able to access their activities from the bank. Ice fishing will be accessible this winter without any changes. The refuge was established in 1909 to protect native birds. About half of the refuge’s approximately 25,000 acres is open water and wetlands. In this arid landscape, these resources serve as an oasis drawing numerous wildlife species from miles around and are especially known for the waterfowl that migrate through each fall and spring.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the refuge. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation operates the dam and power plant and controls the water levels in the reservoir. The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation manages Lake Walcott State Park, a 30-acre park near the dam that offers campgrounds, picnic areas, a disc golf course,

cabins, and a boat ramp. The park is a fee area, but the refuge requires no fees.

The ISDA is asking all recreators to clean, drain and dry all items that go in the water. This includes boats, kayaks, boots, fishing gear, nets, and other items.

There are other closures taking place along the Snake River to prevent the spread of this invasive mussel. For a map, and details about how to decontaminate your boat and other items, you can visit the [ISDA quagga mussel response website](#).

## Upcoming Meetings and Webinars

[WestFAST Webinar: Stream Restoration and Water Rights in Utah and Colorado](#)  
October 18<sup>th</sup> at 10am MT, Virtual

## Other Federal News

[BIA 9/27/23. President Biden's Investing in America Agenda Invests \\$10 million in Tribal Fish Hatcheries](#)

[DOI 9/7/23. Biden-Harris Administration Launches New Large-Scale Water Recycling Program with \\$180 Million from Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#)

[DOI 9/13/23. Interior Department Announces More Than \\$50.6 Million for Wetland Conservation Projects and National Wildlife Refuges](#)

[DOI 9/28/23. Secretary Haaland Announces New Policies to Strengthen Climate Adaptation and Resilience Efforts](#)

[DOI 9/28/23. Biden-Harris Administration Makes \\$328 Million Available for Drought and Climate Resiliency Projects as Part of President's Investing in America Agenda](#)

[EPA 9/20/23. Biden-Harris Administration Announces Commitment to Advancing Water Equity and Access for All](#)

[EPA 9/21/23. Biden-Harris Administration Announces \\$7.5 Billion in Available Financing for Water Infrastructure Projects](#)

[EPA 9/21/23. EPA Awards Nearly \\$8M for Research Grants to Advance Groundwater Availability and Quality](#)

[EPA 9/25/23. Biden-Harris Administration Announces Availability of \\$20 Million in Grants to Create Career Opportunities in the Water Workforce](#)

[EPA 9/28/23. EPA Finalizes Rule to Require Reporting of PFAS Data to Better Protect Communities from Forever Chemicals](#)

[FEMA 9/29/23. FEMA Publishes a Proposed Rule for Public Comment on the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard](#)

[NASA 9/14/23. NASA Announces Summer 2023 Hottest on Record](#)

[Reclamation 9/27/23. Reclamation invests \\$28.97 million to assist with planning and feasibility study development for 31 water recycling and desalination projects](#)

[FWS 9/14/23. Interior Department Announces More Than \\$40.6 Million for Collaborative Efforts to Conserve America's Most Imperiled Species](#)

[NOAA 9/27/23. Biden-Harris Administration announces \\$80 million through Investing in America Agenda to improve flood prediction capabilities](#)

[NOAA 9/28/23. Biden-Harris Administration invests \\$3.9 million for flood and wildfire resilience through Investing in America agenda](#)

[NOAA 9/29/23. Biden-Harris Administration announces \\$100 million to bolster climate resilience in communities as part of Investing in America agenda](#)

[Reclamation 9/28/23. Reclamation awards \\$11 million for Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program](#)

[USDA 9/19/23. USDA Renews Pioneering Partnership with The Coca-Cola Company to Restore Forests, Grasslands and Watersheds](#)

USDA 9/28/23. Biden-Harris Administration Makes Available Historic \$3 Billion for Climate-Smart Practices on Agricultural Lands Through Investing in America Agenda

USGS 9/27/23. USGS Announces New Leaders for Five Regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers

The Western States Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST) is a collaboration between 13 Federal agencies with water management responsibilities in the West. WestFAST was established to support the Western States Water Council (WSWC), and the Western Governors Association in coordinating Federal efforts regarding water resources.