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Addressing water needs and strategies for a sustainable future.

WESTERN STATES WATER

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WESTERN GOVERNORS
WGA/FEMA/USFS

On June 30-July 2, Governor Spencer Cox (R-UT) hosted the Western Governors' Association in Deer Valley, Utah[1]. During a panel discussion on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), emergency management leaders from Utah, New Mexico, and California expressed concerns regarding the current federal framework. They argued that FEMA's policies remain overly focused on East Coast, hurricane-centric models. They noted that the "one-size-fits-all" bureaucratic approach fails to accommodate the unique hazards of the West, such as wildfires, drought, and seismic events. There is a significant disconnect in how drought is explained to and understood by federal agencies. Western states struggle to secure federal assistance for drought-related agricultural impacts and failing water infrastructure. Wildfire disaster timelines extend far beyond the fire itself.

Panelists emphasized moving away from relying on post-disaster reimbursement and toward proactive, funded mitigation. Post-fire risks, such as debris flows and flooding, require immediate mitigation support. This includes activities like cleaning streams and creating fire breaks, which can significantly reduce the long-term impact on water and property. Currently, federal delays in releasing mitigation funding hinder the ability to manage these persistent threats. Administrative requirements can be counterproductive for rural communities. For example, insisting on grid-tied utilities can disqualify off-grid water systems or independent infrastructure from receiving support, even when that infrastructure is vital to community resilience.

The discussion emphasized that states and local jurisdictions are often the primary responders to disasters, yet they face restrictive federal procurement rules, delayed reimbursement, and a lack of adequate Western representation in federal decision-making. When asked by the governors what collective actions might have the greatest impact, the panelists recommended advocating with a unified voice for the decentralization of disaster management, increased regional decision-making authority, and the creation of wildfire-specific federal support systems to ensure more effective, locally responsive recovery efforts.

During another panel discussion regarding Western wildfire management and forest health, Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz and regional leaders highlighted the critical importance of "shared stewardship" to the effective management of cross-jurisdictional landscapes. Addressing the challenges of historic drought, excessive heat, and the tragic loss of wildland firefighters, speakers emphasized that wildfires ignore jurisdictional boundaries, necessitating integrated management strategies that go beyond mechanized treatments, timber management, and prescribed fires. There is an environmental urgency to prevent post-fire "moonscape" conditions, where massive sediment runoff clogs water systems and destroys downstream water quality. The discussion underscored that, while federal and state partnerships are improving through tools like Good Neighbor Authority and long-term stewardship agreements, there remains a pressing need for increased funding, more efficient regulatory processes, and greater certainty for the forest products industry (such as agreements with 20-year terms and a more steady supply to encourage investments in mills) to restore healthy growth rates and protect Western communities from catastrophic fire events.

Chief Schultz described cooperative federalism as delegating primacy to states to manage lands where they have the expertise and opportunity to step up, moving beyond traditional suppression to active landscape management. States and nonprofits are increasingly managing recreation on federal lands. He noted that the U.S. Forest Service manages 193 million acres of National Forest System lands. Only about 25% of that total land base is currently available for active management. Of that 25% available land, the Forest Service manages approximately 1%

annually. Every national forest has a formal forest plan; however, the agency is currently performing about half of the work identified in those existing plans. Passive management is insufficient. Many Western forests are currently "emitting more CO2 than we are storing" due to high mortality rates and poor forest health.

The Forest Service is transitioning from a regional structure to a state-based organizational model, with 15 state directors who will oversee operations and provide leadership for forest supervisors. The goal of this reorganization is to drive decision-making to the "lowest level" possible, allowing local leaders to make decisions in collaboration with community members. Forest plans are widely viewed as too slow, with revisions taking 5-6 years despite an expectation of updating every 15 years. There was a strong consensus that the agency must become more "nimble" and reduce the regulatory burdens that slow down responsiveness. The Forest Service is also moving toward utilizing "third-party NEPA" to help accelerate the review process without reducing environmental standards.

ADMINISTRATION/WATER QUALITY

EPA/PFAS

On July 6, EPA published draft guidance to help wastewater utilities, landowners, and the public reduce risk from perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) in biosolids, beginning a 60-day public comment period (Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OW-2026-2509). The draft guidance does not establish a legally binding rule or regulation, but EPA says it is seeking public comment anyway, aiming for a "radically transparent approach."[2]

Bulk land appliers are encouraged to prioritize the cultivation of lower-risk crops not intended for direct human consumption, such as grain, fiber, or corn grown for ethanol, while avoiding land applications near fishable waterways, drinking water reservoirs, or areas accessible to children under the age of five. Similarly, the EPA recommends that the general public research their soil suppliers and avoid using biosolids-based commercial soil products in residential areas, schools, playgrounds, or home garden beds intended for high-uptake produce like leafy greens and root vegetables.

Finally, the draft guidance provides operational strategies for wastewater treatment plants and sewage sludge generators to manage chemical contamination before and during disposal. Utilities are encouraged to implement industrial pretreatment and source-identification programs to prevent PFAS from entering the sewer system entirely. For disposal methods, the EPA suggests adding composite liners to surface disposal units, or monofills, to minimize the risk of groundwater infiltration, as well as conducting performance testing on sewage sludge incinerators to monitor for hazardous emissions caused by incomplete chemical combustion.

The EPA acknowledged that managing PFAS in sewage sludge can be an expensive undertaking for water systems. To help offset these management costs and assist utilities in implementing the draft guidance, the EPA highlighted that utilities can leverage federal funding opportunities available through both the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) program and the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program.

EPA/WOTUS

On June 30, the EPA submitted a regulatory action for its "Updated Definition of 'Waters of the United States'" rule to the White House for review[3]. The fresh review indicates the agency is preparing a substantial adjustment to the draft rule currently published in the Federal Register.

Jess Kramer, EPA's assistant administrator for water, said: "EPA and the Army are on a path to finalize a durable definition of 'waters of the United States' that fully adheres to the Supreme Court's direction in *Sackett*, cuts bureaucratic red tape, and protects water quality while recognizing that states and Tribes know their water resources best… By preparing a proposed supplemental rulemaking to gather further input on specific aspects of the 2025 proposal, the agencies are strengthening the foundation of practical, real-world expertise that is informing the final rule, while ensuring all valuable stakeholder perspectives are closely considered."[4]

WATER RESOURCES

Drought and Wildfire in Western States, Summer 2026

Compounding precipitation deficits and a historically warm 2025–26 winter have triggered a severe snow drought across the Western United States. Unusually high spring temperatures compounded the crisis by prompting an early snowpack melt-out. This escalating strain on municipal water grids, agricultural hubs, and volatile, dry natural landscapes has pushed many

Western governors to issue formal statewide and widespread county-level emergency declarations.

By the second week of July, the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) had already escalated the National Preparedness Level to 4 (out of 5). Nationwide, nearly 38,000 wildfires have scorched over 3.4 million acres so far in 2026–more than 150% of the 10-year average for this point in the season. Drought percentages are sourced from the NOAA NIDIS Drought Monitor and are consistently dated July 7 unless otherwise noted.

Statewide Emergency or Drought Declarations

Colorado

On June 4, Governor Jared Polis (D-CO) activated Phase 3 of Colorado's Drought Response Plan and issued a statewide Drought Emergency Declaration in response to worsening drought conditions driven by record-low snowpack and prolonged warm temperatures across the state. Phase 2 of the state's plan was activated in March, formally convening the statewide Drought Task Force which ultimately recommended the emergency declaration. Governor Polis said: "With every county in the state experiencing drought conditions, activating Phase 3 of our Drought Response Plan allows us to better coordinate agencies, prepare for worsening conditions, and support Colorado communities, agriculture, water users, and our environment. State agencies will do their part to reduce water usage at state facilities and I encourage every Coloradan to use water wisely."[5] Drought affected 91.1% of Colorado, with 81.6% in severe drought or worse.

As wildfires expanded in June and early July, Governor Polis declared individual state disaster emergencies for five active wildfires — the Ferris, Aspen Acres, Willow, Gold Mountain, and Snyder Mesa fires. Colorado also received fast-tracked FEMA Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG) covering the Willow, Gold Mountain, and Aspen Acres fires. As of July 8, Colorado wildfires are approximated to have burned 190,000 acres for the year.

Idaho

On April 16, Governor Brad Little (R-ID) signed a statewide emergency drought declaration covering all 44 of Idaho's counties[6]. The declaration cited an extraordinary and historically warm winter, with the Idaho Department of Water Resources noting that the state had not seen a winter this warm since 1934. To mitigate this, the emergency order allowed for the expedited transfer of water rights for the remainder of the year. This administrative flexibility enables owners, such as canal companies and farmers, to consolidate and redirect limited water flows to crop fields without the usual required paperwork. Drought affected 80.9% of Idaho, with 53.7% in severe drought or worse.

New Mexico

On May 20, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM) issued Executive Order 2026-0520, declaring statewide drought and severe fire conditions[7]. New Mexico's snowpack hit historic lows over the winter, which, when paired with record-shattering spring temperatures, caused an abnormally early, weak runoff that left river flows far below average. The executive order strictly forbade campfires and open burning on state-managed lands and directly urged local municipalities and counties to pass emergency firework bans and enact localized water conservation measures. The New Mexico Drought Task Force was also activated to coordinate inter-agency water protection efforts and launch the state's new monitoring portal. Drought affected 93.6% of New Mexico, with 80.8% in severe drought or worse. As of July 9, the New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department reported 945 fires impacting 148,900 acres since the start of 2026.

Oregon

On June 24, Governor Tina Kotek (D-OR) issued an updated Executive Order 2026-11, extending a rolling drought emergency to reach a total 19 of Oregon's 36 counties[8]. Oregon's 2025–2026 winter tied with 1934 as the warmest on record, causing a rapid early melt. The executive order authorized the Oregon Water Resources Department to expedite emergency water permits, approved temporary water-right transfers, and altered water delivery priorities to preserve critical livestock and crops. Drought affected 88.3% of Oregon, with 57.8% in severe drought or worse.

The 2026 wildfire season started much earlier than usual, prompting Governor Kotek to declare a statewide state of emergency by mid-June[9]. Governor Kotek stated that the emergency declaration ensures that all available resources–including firefighting crews, aerial support, ground resources, and emergency personnel–are

prepared for deployment to protect people, property, and natural landscapes. She urged residents to be alert, follow emergency officials' instructions, subscribe to alerts on ORAlert.gov, and prepare an evacuation plan. With approximately 70% of wildfires in Oregon being human-caused, Governor Kotek stressed that prevention starts with every Oregonian at home, at work, and while enjoying the state.

Texas

On June 16, Governor Greg Abbott (R-TX) updated a rolling drought declaration to include 49 counties[10]. Texas is battling the tail-end of exceptional, multi-year drought conditions that have gripped the state since 2022. The proclamation authorizes the Texas Division of Emergency Management to allocate all available state government resources to assist political subdivisions. High summer heat indices combined with persistent seasonal dryness have created highly volatile fuel loads, severely elevating wildfire risks across central and western Texas. On July 1, the Texas Division of Emergency Management announced it had deployed state emergency personnel to support wildfire response efforts in Colorado. Drought affected 30.9% of Texas, with 9.5% in severe drought or worse. As of July 4, 11 counties in Texas were under a wildfire Disaster Declaration. Texas has formally tracked 15 significant wildfires responsible for 76,553 burned acres.

Utah

On May 21, Governor Spencer Cox (R-UT) issued Executive Order 2026-0521, declaring a statewide state of emergency due to compounding drought pressures and escalating fire dangers[11]. Utah had the warmest winter in its recorded history, which caused mountain snowpack to peak roughly three weeks ahead of schedule at just 53% of the normal level. The order directed state agencies to curb non-essential water usage at all state facilities, activated the State Emergency Operations Plan, and granted the Division of Water Resources additional administrative flexibility to manage strained storage structures. In response to the executive order, local water providers statewide have enacted strict mandatory outdoor watering schedules, generally limiting households to two days per week during cooler evening or early morning windows. Drought affected 100% of Utah, with 94.4% in severe drought or worse.

On June 25, Governor Cox ordered a second statewide state of emergency due to the imminent threat of a fire disaster caused by the July fireworks season[12]. To help manage this rapidly escalating wildfire season, FEMA has approved multiple Fire Management Assistance Grants for Utah, including declarations for the Cherry, Cottonwood, and Iron fires in late June. Since the beginning of 2026, 439 wildfires impacting 362,173 acres have burned more area than the last five, relatively mild, seasons combined.

Targeted State Action

Nebraska

While Nebraska does not have a statewide drought declaration, Governor Jim Pillen (R-NE) has issued a series of targeted emergency declarations and readiness orders in response to the compounding effects of the drought, specifically regarding extreme wildfires. These include the June 10 orders addressing the 39,000-acre South Fork, Ash Pole, and Clay Creek fires; an April 20 order deploying National Guard aviation support; and, most recently, the Log Road Fire Proclamation signed July 1, 2026. All five orders remained open to manage ongoing state funding, infrastructure repairs, and seasonal fire suppression. Concurrently, Executive Orders 26-07 and 26-09 remained active to waive commercial shipping restrictions and accelerate the transport of vital hay, water, and livestock feed into fire-scarred zones. Drought affected 74.17% of Nebraska, with 60.76% in severe drought or worse.

The severity of the state's early-season fires also led to a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration approved on June 30, unlocking sweeping FEMA Public Assistance funding to help repair or replace infrastructure and facilities damaged during the widespread spring blazes that tore through Arthur, Garden, Grant, Lincoln, and Morrill counties. Separately, on June 2, 2026, the USDA formally designated Keya Paha, Logan, and Rock counties as primary natural disaster areas following weeks of severe to extreme drought.

Wyoming

On May 5, Governor Mark Gordon (R-WY) issued a Livestock Water Rights Emergency, giving ranchers greater regulatory flexibility with livestock water rights. Separately, the USDA has recognized severe to exceptional drought conditions in 13 Wyoming counties. Drought affected 99.65% of Wyoming, with 83.65% in severe drought or worse. Year-to-date, Wyoming

has recorded 486 wildfires that have burned approximately 23,100 acres.

Kansas

On April 30, Governor Laura Kelly (D-KS) signed a proclamation approving updated drought declarations for Kansas counties, placing 51 counties into watch status, 47 into warning status, and 7 into emergency status. While nearly 70% of the state was locked in drought conditions during peak spring shortages in May, repeated rounds of summer thunderstorms have since pushed conditions back–the highest drought-free percentage logged since late February. By July 7 drought affected 26.76% of the state with 7.04% in severe drought or worse.

Oklahoma

In mid-February, parched fuels and high winds triggered the state's largest blaze of the year, the Ranger Road Fire, which scorched over 283,000 total acres across the Oklahoma-Kansas border. Governor Kevin Stitt (R-OK) signed Executive Order 2026-09, declaring a state of emergency in Beaver, Texas, and Woodward counties. As the dry season progressed into summer, the state's Emergency Drought Committee and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission deployed an active 80% cost-share Emergency Drought Assistance Program to help farm operators fund emergency water wells, pipelines, and pond cleanouts. Heavy early-summer downpours provided significant relief, but by July drought still affected 64.5% of Oklahoma, with 35.33% in severe drought or worse.

Federal Action

Arizona

On June 3, the USDA Secretary officially designated five primary Arizona counties as natural disaster zones–Apache, Graham, Greenlee, Navajo, and Pima–following at least eight consecutive weeks of severe (D2) to exceptional (D4) drought. The Navajo Nation Commission on Emergency Management officially declared a State of Emergency in early June due to severe drought strains on water supplies and infrastructure. Drought affected 89.4% of Arizona, with 62.5% in severe drought or worse. As of mid-June, 941 wildfires had burned 169,069 acres throughout the state.

Nevada

In late April, the USDA designated Elko, Lincoln, and White Pine counties as primary natural disaster areas due to sustained severe drought conditions. Compounding dry conditions and elevated fire risks also prompted the Bureau of Land Management to issue a Fire Prevention Order in May covering 63% of the state, while Stage 1 Fire Restrictions were implemented across Southern Nevada. Drought affected 75.36% of Nevada, with 45.45% in severe drought or worse.

Montana

On May 22, 2026, the USDA officially designated 10 Montana counties as primary natural disaster areas due to severe-to-extreme drought. On July 8, 2026, FEMA approved emergency hazard mitigation funds to help the state proactively manage wildfire risk, clear high-hazard brush fuels, and secure local infrastructure resilience. Drought affected 52.91% of Montana, with 20.58% in severe drought or worse.

LITIGATION

Oregon/*City of Salem v. USACE*

On July 8, the City of Salem, Oregon filed a complaint challenging an endangered species reservoir drawdown in order to prevent a public health emergency. (*City of Salem v. U.S. and Army Corps of Engineers*, 6:26-cv-01381, U.S. District Court of Oregon.)

In 2024, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued its Biological Opinion (BiOp), directing the Corps to implement annual deep drawdowns of the Detroit Reservoir to an elevation of 1,395 feet to facilitate juvenile fish passage. Salem's downstream water facility relies on a slow sand filtration system designed for raw water under 10 Nephelometric Turbidity Units (NTU). The City argued that drawing the reservoir down to a historically low elevation of 1,395 feet will mobilize massive amounts of fine sediment, causing downstream turbidity levels to spike well over 50 NTU, which will clog filters, reduce water production capacity, and potentially cause a complete shutdown of the regional drinking water supply that serves 220,000 residents. Congress directed the Corps in the 2024 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) to deliver a comprehensive turbidity impact report within a year, which was never submitted to Congress. In June 2025, the City of Salem proactively submitted a technical memorandum to the Corps warning of severe sand filtration vulnerabilities and requesting alternative operational strategies.

The Corps completed its Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS), retaining the deep drawdown parameters while acknowledging Salem's public water supply concerns in a generalized qualitative manner. On June 23, 2026, the Corps published its formal Record of Decision (ROD), officially approving and authorizing the Willamette Valley System operational revisions.

The City of Salem asserted several causes of action under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), claiming the Corps violated federal law by (1) failing to take a quantitative "hard look" at downstream water impacts under NEPA; (2) failing to evaluate reasonable alternatives (such as turbidity-based operational triggers); (3) ignoring substantive public comments; (4) proceeding without a mandatory turbidity report required by WRDA; and (5) failing to comply with state numeric and narrative water quality standards under the Clean Water Act. The City seeks declaratory and injunctive relief to vacate the Corps' ROD and postpone the late 2026 drawdown until the agency fully complies with federal laws and establishes definitive water safety safeguards.

South Platte/*Nebraska v. Colorado*

On June 29, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear Nebraska v. Colorado (No. 22O161), a dispute over the 1923 South Platte River Compact. Nebraska claims that Colorado's water management has cost them over one million acre-feet of water. Specifically, Nebraska alleges that Colorado has: (1) allowed junior groundwater diversions that cause summer flows to drop below Nebraska 's guaranteed 120 cubic feet per second, and subsequently failed to curtail those junior users or make up the resulting shortfalls within 72 hours when the drops occurred ; (2) administered complex groundwater augmentation plans that are not easily measurable or subject to objective verification, violating the Compact's requirement that the agreement be simple and "self-executing"; (3) actively interfered with Nebraska's Compact-given right to acquire land and build the Perkins County Canal for winter flow collection. (WSW #2683).

Nebraska Governor Jim Pillen said: "Nebraska is determined to preserve and protect every drop of water to which it is entitled under the Perkins County Canal Compact. Today's order from the U.S. Supreme Court makes clear that Nebraskans will have a venue for these important claims. I have been a strong champion of the Perkins County Canal project from my first day as Governor. In my first budget I added significant extra funding to expand its capacity to benefit western Nebraska farmers and producers, and am glad to see this progress on the legal front."[13]

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser said: "Colorado is complying with the South Platte River Compact and not interfering with Nebraska's efforts to build the Perkins County Canal. Today's court decision merely opens the door for Nebraska to bring its claims against Colorado. Nebraska's burden to prove those claims is incredibly high and we will vigorously defend Colorado's full entitlements under the compact."

In its press release, the Colorado Attorney General's office said: "The compact provides Nebraska a priority to some water, if available, during the irrigation season. Nebraska could secure rights to water in the non-irrigation season if it built the Perkins County Canal, which is allowed under the compact. But for about 100 years, Nebraska hasn't built the canal because the project poses significant technical and financial risks. Recently, Nebraska officials have begun the process to seek a federal permit for the project, but numerous steps lie ahead during which Nebraska, and others who might be affected by the project, will identify, refine, and resolve potential issues."[14]

WEBINARS

WestFAST/ DOJ/ Water Rights Litigation

On July 9, Stephen Bartell, Assistant Section Chief at the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), provided a comprehensive update on water rights litigation and adjudications across the Western United States. Bartell clarified the differences between federal reserved water rights and state law-based water rights, emphasizing that the United States fully complies with state water laws while securing water necessary for essential federal lands and programs.

The core of Bartell's presentation was a state-by-state "road trip" summarizing active federal water litigation. He highlighted unique legal structures and challenges, such as Colorado's continuous annual adjudications, Montana's legislative deadlines to adjudicate every basin, and a century-old ongoing federal case in Nevada. He also discussed complex, large-scale disputes involving the Colorado River, the Klamath Basin in Oregon, and federal military installations in highly arid regions like California and Arizona.

Following his presentation, Bartell answered questions from attendees. He addressed audience inquiries about early state-federal communication, specifically praising Washington State for its proactive outreach to federal agencies prior to initiating new adjudications. He also explained the DOJ's internal coordination process when multiple federal agencies have conflicting water needs, and he outlined the DOJ's strategic reasoning for holding water rights on federal grazing allotments to protect the land for future permittees.

WestFAST/NASA/Water Resources Program/Snow Drought

On June 16, the Western States Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST) held a webinar on NASA's Water Resources Program, featuring Perry Oddo, Program Coordinator, and Sean Fleming, Program Scientist for the NASA Western Water Action Office (WWAO). Program Manager Erin Urquhart also joined for the question-and-answer portion. The presentation goals were to introduce NASA's applied capabilities to unfamiliar stakeholders, walk through a case study regarding the recent 2026 western snow drought, and identify upcoming paths for collaboration.

Oddo opened with a programmatic orientation, situating the Water Resources Program within NASA's Earth Action division, the applied-science arm of the agency's Earth Science Division. Oddo outlined the NASA Water Resources Program's three core operational pillars: (1) a Science to Action research portfolio that funds project-based science for public use; (2) the Western Water Action Office (WWAO), a regional branch focused entirely on the American West's severe water crises; and (3) Water for Impact, a framework built around systemic, long-term partnerships with other federal agencies and private industries. These pillars support critical focus areas including drought resilience, water quality, infrastructure management, sustainable water use, adaptive risk assessment, and transboundary water management. Utilizing satellites like GRACE-FO, NASA provides essential data to address water scarcity, monitor pollution, and guide water management across borders.

Oddo pointed to a string of recent and upcoming satellite launches feeding the program's work: (1) the Surface Water and Ocean Topography (SWOT) mission, which launched in December 2022; (2) the PACE hyperspectral mission, launched February 2024; (3) NISAR, launched July 2025; and (4) the GRACE-Continuity mission, targeted for no earlier than 2028. He noted that the NASA Water Resources team will travel west at the end of August for its annual team meeting at the Idaho State Museum in Boise, and invited local stakeholders to coordinate face-to-face meetings.

Sean Fleming opened his presentation with an in-depth look at the historic 2026 western snow drought. Unseasonable winter warmth and a March heat wave drove April 1 snow water equivalents (SWE) to historic lows. Fleming showed how NASA data bridges ground-station knowledge gaps, highlighting a new deep-learning model from the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center that provides continuous, watershed-wide snowpack observations. He described NASA's broader support around five linked areas: (1) spatially complete snow mapping; (2) forecasting inputs; (3) broader hydrologic context from tools like GRACE and forthcoming NISAR soil moisture data; (4) drought response tools such as OpenET; and (5) future R&D tied to missions including Eagle, Falcon, and GRACE-C.

Oddo then outlined the Earth Observation (EO) Humanitarian Decision-Maker Guide which helps decision-makers to determine if introducing Earth Observation (EO) data fits their operational needs, resolution thresholds, and ethical guidelines. He introduced a flexible "partnership spectrum," emphasizing that collaboration is modular and scalable rather than an all-or-nothing proposition. Partnerships can begin as simply as an email requesting ad-hoc technical advice on a local basin problem, or by enrolling staff in free remote-sensing data training programs.

As an agency's technical comfort level grows, these initial touchpoints can naturally scale into student internships, co-developed software solutions, and ultimately, formal Space Act or Interagency Agreements. By offering this tiered framework, NASA seeks to lower the barrier to entry, inviting western water directors to engage at whatever operational scale fits their current budget and needs. Oddo promoted NASA's Applied Remote Sensing Training Program (ARSET). ARSET delivers free, multi-language data training courses specifically designed to bridge the gap between satellite capabilities and real-world execution.

The Q&A portion established that NASA provides detailed impact reports of its state partnerships. Urquhart added that the agency is actively compiling a searchable catalog of two-

page use-case summaries across its 30-plus projects, allowing directors to easily see how a tool built for one region can be adapted and scaled to meet their own local needs.

PEOPLE

Trevor Baggiore accepted a new role at the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality as the Mission Partners Division Director. **Randy Matas** replaces him in his role as Water Quality Division (WQD) Interim Director.

Karla Nemeth stepped down as Director of California Department of Water Resources (DWR), accepting a new role as the Executive Director of the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA). Governor Gavin Newsom (D-CA) appointed **Thomas Gibson** as Director of DWR.

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