

# WestFAST News



The Western States Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST) is a collaboration between 12 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 (WGA) in coordinating Federal efforts regarding water resources.

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## Drought Conditions Impact Much of the United States

USDA, August 2012

The USDA [Drought Monitor](#) reports that drought conditions continue to impact many of the 17 Western States. In the intermountain west, Colorado and Wyoming experienced the warmest summer almost 120 years, and Wyoming had the driest summer on record. During August, the northwestern and northern Rockies experienced above average temperatures and below normal precipitation. In the Central and Northern Plains, states experienced below normal precipitation and above normal temperatures, with the exception of only parts of central and eastern Kansas.

Drought conditions continue to linger although some drought-stricken areas received significant precipitation. In August, precipitation was above normal in Arizona, California, and parts of the Great Basin. Areas of Arizona, Nevada, and Utah experienced more than 200 percent of normal precipitation during the last thirty days.

The drought conditions are causing concerns for agriculture. According to the USDA, more than 60 percent of the nation's hay acreage, over 70 percent of the nation's cattle acreage, and over 80 percent of the U.S. corn and soybeans are in areas experiencing drought. As a result, the USDA reported that 52 percent of U.S. corn and 38 percent of the soybeans were rated in very poor to poor condition, while 59 percent of rangeland and pastures rated very poor to poor for the fourth consecutive week. See the USDA's [news release](#).

As competition for limited water resources increases in the western United States, drought conditions make collaboration even more important between state and federal agencies. WestFAST is in the process of drafting principles of collaboration to provide a framework of guidance for inter-agency coordination.

See the [USDA website](#) for the latest information on drought conditions.



Photo: [Red Pine Lake](#), Wasatch National Forest, Utah.

## EPA Releases S.F. Bay Delta Action Plan

EPA, August 2012

As California's water resources face increasing demands, state and federal agencies are coordinating water quality programs to accelerate restoration of water quality in the San Francisco Bay Delta Watershed.

EPA's review was triggered by the plummeting numbers of salmon and other fish species over the last 10 years. One species, the Delta smelt, declined to such low levels in 2010 that fishery scientists feared it could become extinct.

The [Action Plan](#) prioritizes the following seven actions to be pursued in partnership with state and federal agencies:

- By 2013, propose a standard to curb selenium discharges;
- By 2013, achieve organophosphate pesticide water quality goals;
- By 2014, set new estuarine habitat standards, including salinity, to improve conditions for aquatic life;
- By 2017 establish a monitoring and assessment program for water quality in the Delta;
- Ensure that EPA's pesticide regulation program more fully considers the effects that pesticides have on aquatic life;
- Restore wetlands and floodplains to remove drinking water contaminants, methylmercury, and greenhouse gases; and make the Delta more resilient to floods, earthquakes, and climate change;
- Support the Bay Delta Conservation Plan.

## Extreme Weather Events Conference

San Diego, CA—July 30 - August 1, 2012

Professionals gathered from around the country to discuss the science, planning, and preparation issues regarding extreme weather events. For example, one speaker presented the challenge of determining how the federal government should distribute its limited resources for extreme weather forecasting and research. See the complete [agenda](#).

Also, presenters described how effective risk management requires monitoring and forecasting both drought and flood risks. Drought is becoming the new reality for parts of the nation. In 2010, much of the US was drought-free, including the Upper Colorado and ACF basins. In 2011, exceptional drought covered much of the south-central and southeastern US. In 2012, drought now covers much of the lower 48 states. Some areas adjacent to drought zones experienced flooding during this same period. Although an area may suffer drought conditions, it may later experience extreme precipitation events that cause flooding.

Presenters described some of the challenges to forecasting extreme weather events, which include:

- analyzing the uncertainties in models
- understanding physical processes causing forecast errors
- developing effective partnerships for data gathering
- documenting extreme events and the forecasting used

## WestFAST Liaison Transition

Salt Lake City, UT—September 10, 2012

In October 2012, the WestFAST Federal Liaison will transition from Dwane Young (EPA) to Eric Stevens (Army Corps of Engineers).

As the second liaison, Mr. Young accomplished much to improve the collaboration between state and federal agencies. For example, he developed the Water Data Exchange (WaDE), a project that enables western states and federal agencies to share water use, water allocation, and water planning data. Thank you Mr. Young for your excellent service.

Mr. Stevens is a licensed professional engineer with approximately fourteen years of experience, mostly in the private sector. He earned both bachelor and master degrees in civil and environmental engineering and later a juris doctorate. Most recently, he worked as a supervisory engineer for USACE in Little Rock, Arkansas. Welcome Mr. Stevens.

## Agency Announcements

**July 9, 2012:** Reclamation Seeks Comments on Proposed Funding Criteria, see [news release](#).

**July 18, 2012:** USDA Designates an Additional 39 Counties in 8 States as Primary Natural Disaster Areas Due to Worsening Drought, see [news release](#).

**July 24, 2012:** Obama Administration Releases Roadmap for Solar Energy Development on Public Lands, see [news release](#).

**July 24, 2012:** USDA Announces New Effort to Improve Water Quality and Public Health, see [news release](#).

**July 31, 2012:** Reclamation Awards \$5.5 Million Contract for Aging Infrastructure Upgrades in Arizona, see [news release](#).

**August 8, 2012:** US Forest Service proposes to streamline land management plan review process, see [news release](#).

**August 15, 2012:** NRCS Announcing Grants to Help Farmers, Ranchers Adapt to Drought, see [news release](#).

**August 15, 2012:** USDA Announces Low-Interest Emergency Loans Now Available to Producers in 172 Additional Counties due to Drought, see [news release](#).

**August 24, 2012:** USDA Awards \$26 Million in Conservation Innovation Grants, see [news release](#).

**August 30, 2012:** Crow Tribe, Reclamation Execute Contract under Water Rights Settlement, see [news release](#).

**NOTE: September** is National Preparedness Month, see [news release](#) to learn more.

## Upcoming Meetings/Events

- **September 24-26, 2012:** [NIDIS Workshop](#) (co-hosted by WSWC and CA DWR), San Diego, CA.
- **October 10-12, 2012:** [Fall WSWC Meeting](#), San Antonio, TX.
- **November 14-16, 2012:** Water Management Symposium on infrastructure, Phoenix, AZ.
- **December 12-14, 2012:** Colorado River Water Users Association, [Annual Conference](#), Las Vegas, NV.



WestFAST News is published monthly. To get an Agency Announcement published or to get added to the WestFAST News distribution list contact:

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