



# Western States Water

## Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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### **WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL Washington DC Spring Meetings and Roundtable**

The Western States Water Council (WSWC) held its Spring 2018 meetings in Arlington, Virginia on March 14, in conjunction with the meetings of the Interstate Council on Water Policy (ICWP). Abbreviated WSWC Committee meetings were held consecutively, addressing newly proposed and sunset policy positions, followed the same day by the Full Council meeting. The Council readopted a position presenting numerous considerations for integrating western water and energy planning and policy. Another position, revised and readopted, supports state and federal applied research and hydroclimate data collection programs, to assist water agencies and all levels of government to make sound scientific decisions and adapt to climate variability. Similarly, a position statement emphasizing State primacy over groundwater was readopted with few changes that declares States have exclusive authority over the allocation and administration of rights to the use of groundwater, and States are primarily responsible for protecting and managing groundwater.

Three new positions were approved. The first supports the development and use of forecast informed reservoir operations (FIRO) using innovative technologies to maximize the effective and efficient use of existing and future water resources infrastructure to meet myriad and growing economic needs for water, as well as balance and protect public health, safety and the environment. The second addresses the urgent need to invest in water-related infrastructure at the federal state and local level, to meet both water supply and water quality challenges, while also seeking assistance from the private sector. It notes the need for leadership at all levels to establish water infrastructure investments as a public policy priority, as well as streamline permitting processes, coordinate environmental and other regulatory reviews, and eliminate duplicative requirements to reduce costs and promote timely project completion, maintenance and relicensing. The third new position recognizes the importance of weather station networks, many under-funded and in eminent danger of failure. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Agrimet network is one example. These network observations of

temperature, precipitation, wind, and other parameters are critical in estimating crop water needs and evapotranspiration, which in turn are the foundation for better management and conservation of water resources, as well as warning of extreme events and protecting public health and safety.

Other topics discussed in the Committee meetings included improving state-federal relations, with updates on WGA's State Federal Relationship Summit and EPA's State outreach efforts. The federal agencies were reminded to treat states as government partners rather than stakeholders. Federal agencies should make a concerted effort to consult with states in substantive ways. States can provide meaningful information and use their respective authorities and regulations. Both sides must learn how they can work together to achieve common goals with limited government resources.

The Committees were provided brief summaries of recent workshops on water information management, earth system prediction capabilities, and seasonal to sub-seasonal precipitation forecasting. Upcoming workshops are being planned for the Summer and Fall Council meetings on the water quality-quantity nexus, grazing and water rights, respectively. Plans for an Infrastructure Symposium were also discussed.

WSWC and ICWP met jointly on March 14-15, for a Water Planners' Conference and Roundtable with multiple federal agency representatives, and also hosted a reception for Congressional staff.

The Department of the Interior (DOI) roundtable discussion included: Tim Petty, Assistant Secretary for Water and Science; Brenda Burman, Commissioner for the Bureau of Reclamation; and William Werkheiser, Acting Director for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). They emphasized efforts to streamline the permitting process, the significant interest in new surface water storage projects, and concerns about drought and limited budgets. Discussions included: the impact of renewable energy policies on hydropower costs and contracts; the critical importance of the upcoming Landsat 9 launch; streamgage monitoring; and identifying ways to work with states on projects to store water underground. DOI also addressed the importance of Indian water rights

settlements and renegotiation of the Columbia River Treaty.

During the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' roundtable discussion, Ryan Fisher, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) talked about working with EPA on developing a new Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) rule, meeting with states and tribes and focusing on not only protecting water, but also recognizing state primacy. Edward Belk, Chief of Civil Works Programs Integration, described the backlog of authorized infrastructure, the mission of the Corps, and the struggle to keep water at the forefront of the Administration's Infrastructure Initiative. They addressed concerns about inconsistencies between Corps districts, noting the challenges of becoming more agile in decisionmaking, and delegating authorities, while ensuring internal accountability and clarity regarding Corps policies and rules.

Craig McClean, Assistant Administrator for Oceanic and Atmospheric Research provided a historical update on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and improvements to forecast models. He pointed out that it is a time of great promise with the confluence of technologies and Nation's working together.

David Ross, Assistant Administrator for Water, Environmental Protection Agency, spoke about the engagement with the states as they work to define a new WOTUS rule. Mr. Ross also addressed a variety of topics ranging from infrastructure needs related to water quality, EPA's water transfers rule, nutrients and non-point source pollution (perhaps the greatest remaining threat), and EPA's lead and copper rule.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) roundtable discussion included: Mark Brusberg, Chief Meteorologist, Office of the Chief Economist/World Agricultural Outlook Board; Chris Carlson, Assistant Director, Water and Aquatic Resources, U.S. Forest Service; and Astor Boozer, Regional Conservationist, Western Region, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). They addressed interagency partnerships such as the National Drought Resilience Partnership and National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), as well as joint efforts with NOAA to develop soil moisture data. They discussed intra-agency efforts to work together to address wildfire, data and information sharing, and water conservation.

Bradley Doorn, Water Resources Program Manager at the Earth Science Division led the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) roundtable discussion. He talked about their mission to integrate data and make it better not only for states, but also the other federal agencies, to improve decisionmaking. He addressed international efforts to

improve satellite data, and recent success with airborne snow observation programs.

During the Water Planners' Conference, a data and information management panel addressed USGS visualization tools and data organization; the National Groundwater Monitoring Network; USDA's NRCS SNOTEL sites; maintenance and staff challenges in managing databases; and NASA's efforts to ensure that data from its robust system of earth observation satellites is routinely available to meet the needs of western water managers.

A panel on groundwater management noted that models have improved in their capability and utility. Groundwater models are now able to provide answers in real time, and are used to determine whether new wells can be developed in an aquifer. Properly formatting data from satellites and other quality sources of water information has been key to obtaining meaningful output.

A water supply panel discussed efforts to improve the accuracy and timescale of drought forecasting in an integrated way that cuts across agencies, as well as identifying authorities to manage water operations in response to those forecasts. A landscape conservation panel addressed the importance of healthy watersheds, headwaters areas and restoration efforts, invasive species, and the need to better manage hazardous fuels ahead of wildfires.

On infrastructure, the Corps, Reclamation and EPA addressed funding challenges to maintain aging infrastructure, as well as build vital new projects. They discussed efforts to change policies on federally-owned infrastructure, and creative financing and cost-sharing to improve project delivery and operations.

A panel on farm policy talked about the role of water and conservation in food security, and crop insurance programs, noting that most crop losses are weather-based.

A Congressional staff panel provided updates on legislative efforts on infrastructure, water supply, drought resilience, Indian water rights settlements, streamlining the regulatory process, and budget priorities addressing western water needs. Surface water storage projects and desalination are solutions on the table, but the challenge is funding. Streamgaging is one of those quiet issues that needs to be regularly brought to the forefront.

On March 16, the WSWC met with the WestFAST Principals. This year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary since WestFAST was created.

The WSWC Summer (187th) Council Meetings will be held in Newport, Oregon on August 1- 3.

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**The WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL is an organization of representatives appointed by the Governors of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.**