



# Western States Water

## Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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### **WESTERN GOVERNORS** **NOAA/NIDIS/Drought**

On August 29, the Western Governors Association (WGA) sent a letter to the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, expressing its support for reauthorization of the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The letter notes similar support for Senate reauthorization of NIDIS in S. 2200. "Western Governors were instrumental in the creation of NIDIS in 2006, and WGA has since worked with NOAA and other partners to champion the system's implementation. The NIDIS program represents a vital tool in western water management, promoting a coordinated and integrated approach to coping with future drought."

The letter describes several of the benefits the NIDIS program has provided, with its forecasting and monitoring activities, its drought portal to provide information from state, federal, and academic partners, and its network of early drought warning systems. "Federal authorization should further strengthen NIDIS with increased focus on soil moisture retention and sub-seasonal forecasting, critical factors in understanding and predicting drought conditions as identified by the Western Governors' Drought Forum."

NIDIS is a cost-effective model for federal-state collaboration, WGA says, and provides decision-makers with necessary information to assess the risks of drought in advance and implement effective mitigation measures. See [http://westgov.org/images/editor/NIDIS\\_House\\_Reauthorization\\_FINAL.pdf](http://westgov.org/images/editor/NIDIS_House_Reauthorization_FINAL.pdf).

### **ADMINISTRATION/CONGRESS** **Department of the Interior - Reorganization**

On August 28, House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rob Bishop (R-UT) hosted a roundtable discussion in Ogden, Utah on Interior's reorganization efforts. Governor Gary Herbert, and Interior (DOI) Assistant Secretary Susan Combs participated.

The Trump Administration is exploring organizational efficiency and effectiveness through Executive Order 13781, which required the submission of reorganization plans to the President. DOI submitted proposals to the Office of Management and Budget in September of 2017. A key element of the plan contemplates establishing 12 unified regional boundaries. DOI currently has eight bureaus and 49 regions, each operating with unique regional boundaries. This disparate geographic focus inhibits the sharing of resources and resulting in operational and administrative inefficiencies.

Unifying all bureaus within a common region will: (1) reduce administrative redundancy; (2) clarify jurisdictional and organizational barriers to citizen service; (3) facilitate resource sharing, joint problem solving, and efficient decision-making; (4) devote a greater percentage of DOI's budget to the field; (5) improve coordination among federal, state and local agencies; and (6) delegate decisionmaking authority to the regions.

As envisioned, with input from western governors, local government and other interests, Interior's agencies would be reorganized around major watersheds (HUC-2) and State boundaries. In the West, there would be eight regions, by number from West to East: (12) Pacific Islands; (11) Alaska; (10) California-Great Basin including northern and central California, Nevada and part of Oregon; (9) Columbia-Pacific Northwest, covering Idaho, Oregon and Washington; and part of Montana; (8) Lower Colorado Basin covering Arizona, Southern California and Southern Nevada; (7) Upper Colorado Basin along statelines, including Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming; (6) Arkansas-Rio Grande-Texas Gulf, covering Oklahoma and Texas; and (5) Missouri Basin, with Kansas, most of Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota. For the map, See <https://www.doi.gov/employees/reorg/unified-regional-boundaries>.

In the East, there would be four unified regions: (1) North Atlantic-Appalachian; (2) South Atlantic-Gulf; (3) Great Lakes; and (4) Mississippi Basin.

In an August 29 notice to employees, Secretary Ryan Zinke said, "In the next few months, many of our senior executives will be working in each Unified Region and focusing on and designing core elements of its operations, depending on the actual circumstances on the ground. The implementation of these new Unified Regions will be a thoughtful, Department-wide effort driven by leadership and employees in the field. This ground-up approach will tap into the expertise and experience of you – our most dedicated career civil servants. With these changes, we fully expect to be able to deliver our services more efficiently and effectively."

Zinke concluded, "I want to reassure you that there will not be any office or personnel relocations during the initial implementation of our new Unified Regions, and your reporting structure is unchanged during the initial implementation phase. Thank you for your continued service. Your hard work and dedication enables us to.... serve the American people."

### **WATER QUALITY** **Clean Water Act/WOTUS**

On August 29, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provided an update on litigation and the status of the 2015 Waters of the United States (WOTUS) Rule, following the decision of the U.S. District Court for South Carolina (See WSW #2309). The 2015 Rule is now in effect in 26 states, including California, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, and Washington. Although EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers have filed motions appealing the order and seeking a stay of the district court's decision, the agencies are complying with the order. Implementation issues are being handled on a case-by-case basis. "The agencies recognize the uncertainty this decision has created and are committed to working closely with states and stakeholders to provide updated information on an ongoing basis regarding which rules are in place in which states." For further information, see <https://www.epa.gov/wotus-rule/definition-waters-united-states-rule-status-and-litigation-update>.

### **WATER RESOURCES** **Farm Bill**

On August 30, the WSWC sent a letter to the Farm Bill conference supporting important water-related provisions of the House and Senate versions of the 2018 Farm Bill. "The WSWC supports investment in voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs that are implemented in coordination with state and local governmental partners, while providing the maximum flexibility possible and opportunity for innovation to create

efficiencies, coordinate funding and achieve real water savings. Agriculture sustains many rural economies and communities in the West. Water scarcity and periodic drought impact all water users across the West, but particularly threaten the agricultural sector, which accounts for the predominant share of consumptive water use westwide."

The letter supports conservation and rural development programs, including financial and technical assistance to producers, rural communities, water users, and water quality managers. Programs of particular interest include: the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP); Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP); Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP); Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP) and its Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) and Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (CRBSCP), and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP); watershed protection and planning programs; the National Water and Climate Center's water supply forecasting, snow surveys, and soil climate analyses; the Rural Water and Wastewater Circuit Rider Program; rural water and wastewater technical assistance; and raising the maximum amount of project financing available for water, waste disposal, and wastewater facility grants.

The WSWC further notes, "A sustainable agricultural economy requires promoting efficient water use and achieving net water savings, given overdrafted groundwater aquifers and increasingly stressed surface streamflows. In some cases, assisting in the transition from irrigated to dryland farming may be necessary, while striving to maximize production. It is also important to address other concerns including non-point source pollution, fish and wildlife habitat, endangered and invasive species, drought and wildfire resilience. Locally-identified concerns should be addressed on a voluntary basis, across public and private lands, in targeted and collaborative ways." For a copy of the letter, see <http://www.westernstateswater.org/letters/>.

### **MEETINGS** **Western States Water Council - Fall Meetings**

The WSWC Fall (188<sup>th</sup>) Council Meetings will be held in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho on October 23-26. Our Idaho hosts have arranged for a half-day afternoon field trip on Wednesday, October 24 to tour the Bunker Hill Mining and Metallurgical Complex Superfund Site in the Coeur d'Alene River Watershed and the Coeur d'Alene Lake. For further information, please see <http://www.westernstateswater.org/upcoming-meetings/>.

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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.**