



# Western States Water

## Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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### **WESTERN GOVERNORS/WATER RESOURCES** **Water Supply Outlook/Snowpack/Flooding/Drought**

A historic spring storm blew across much of the West on March 11-15. By March 12, Governor Pete Ricketts had declared much of eastern Nebraska under a state of emergency, trying to cope with historic flooding. On March 13, Spencer Dam on the Niobrara River in northeast Nebraska failed, causing severe flooding downstream. The rushing water caused significant damage downstream, washing out parts of U.S. 281, other roads and bridges, as well as parts of the runway at Offutt Air Force Base. With the river raging, there were mandatory evacuations in Boyd and Knox Counties. (March 14, [sandhillsexpress.com](http://sandhillsexpress.com))

Governor Ricketts surveyed the historic flooding and damage with the Nebraska National Guard, and the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), to gauge the total damage from the severe weather. The Red Cross, community centers and churches helped displaced persons and families with food, water and shelter, working with local, state and federal officials to provide assistance. (<https://governor.nebraska.gov/>)

Jessica Blunden, with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI), reported March 14, that December 2018–February 2019 was the wettest winter on record for the contiguous U.S. as a whole. March storms continued to bring heavy snow and rain, “piling on snowpack and filling reservoirs in the West.” Heavy snows fell across high elevations from California to the Rockies and beyond across the Plains States into the Upper Great Lakes, with heavy rains from Southern California to the Tennessee Valley. Some small pockets of drought persisted, primarily in northwest New Mexico. Reservoir storage as a percent of average is well below average in New Mexico for March 1, and below average in Arizona, Colorado, Oregon and Washington. (USDA Water and Climate Update, March 14, 2019)

NOAA’s Office of Water Prediction maps showed high elevated snow depths at 100 – nearly 200 inches across much of the Cascades and Sierra Nevada ranges and the Rockies. Northwest snows have erased severe to extreme drought across Washington and Idaho, with

some moderate drought remaining in Oregon. For 2019, through March 13, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture had recognized drought designations in 56 counties across Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Oregon, as well as 82 contiguous counties, including some in Idaho and Texas. The Drought Monitor shows only 6% of the U.S. experiencing moderate to exceptional drought.

The National Weather Service reported 4.2 inches of snow fell March 12 at the Ely Airport in Nevada's White Pine County breaking the old record of 4 inches set in 1898. A winter weather advisory was in effect through March 14, for much of north-central Utah and the southern Wasatch Front, with 1 to 3 inches of snow along the I-15 corridor.

On March 13, along the Front Range in Colorado, a “bomb cyclone” unleashed 80-mile per hour (mph) winds, equivalent to a Category 1 hurricane, shutting down Denver International Airport and leading to the cancellation of hundreds of flights March 14. Schools closed, accidents snarled traffic along I-25, and thousands of homes lost power. A 97-mph wind gust equivalent to a Category 2 hurricane was recorded in Colorado Springs. Such storms intensify very quickly, a process called bombogenesis, with barometric pressure falling rapidly. (USA Today, Coloradoan)

The massive early spring storm stretched across Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, North and South Dakota, and Nebraska with between 1-2 feet of snow and blowing blizzard conditions. Heavy rain, snow melt, and ice jams on rivers produced widespread flooding across the Upper Midwest.

### **ADMINISTRATION** **FY2020 Budget**

On March 11, the President released the FY2020 Budget. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) requests \$4.8B, a \$2.2B or 31% decrease from the 2019 enacted level. This includes \$1.93B for operation and maintenance, \$1.17B for construction, \$200M for the regulatory program to protect the nation's waters and wetlands and provide efficiency in permit processing, and \$77M for investigations. The budget moves dam safety

studies and dredged material management plans from O&M to investigations. The budget proposes no new construction starts, enabling the Corps to focus on completing priority projects faster and at a reduced cost, expediting community benefits. The budget provides \$150M for innovative federal-non-federal partnerships to accelerate completion of projects, and another \$150M for the Water Resources Reform and Development Act 2014, Section 1043 non-federal construction of federal projects program, proposing to extend authorization for the program beyond 2019.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requests \$6.1B, a \$2.8B or 31% decrease from the 2019 estimate. This includes \$1.98B for the State Revolving Funds, \$25M for the WIFIA program, and \$83M to begin implementation of the AWIA 2018 provisions to address drinking water and wastewater issues. EPA requests \$248M for categorical grants to support state and tribal implementation of the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act, including \$188M for the Surface Water Protection program and \$21M for the Wetlands program. The budget emphasizes cooperative federalism and shared responsibility between states, tribes, and the federal government, promoting reforms in regulations and permitting to create greater certainty and better communication.

The Department of Agriculture requests \$20.8B, a \$3.6B or 15% decrease from the 2019 estimate. This includes \$528M for rural water and wastewater grants and loans, \$2.1B for the Conservation Reserve program, \$491M for the Environmental Quality Incentives program, \$158M for the Agricultural Conservation Easement program, \$124M for the Regional Conservation Partnership program, and \$10M for snow surveys.

The Department of Commerce requests \$12.2B, a \$1B or a 9.3% increase from the 2019 estimate. This includes \$1.2B for NOAA's satellite weather observation systems. The budget includes funding to streamline permitting and leveraging commercial technologies to support future satellites and reduce lifecycle costs.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration requests \$21B, a \$283M or 1.4% increase from the 2019 estimate. The request for Earth Science programs is \$1.78B, including support for Landsat-9, and collaboration with agencies that rely on science data.

The Department of the Interior (DOI) requests \$12.5B, a \$2B or 14% decrease from the 2019 estimate. This includes \$28M for reorganization, interagency coordination, and moving DOI's headquarters west. The budget increases funding for wildfire and forest management programs, with \$300M in additional suppression resources, \$194M for fuel mitigation work, and \$172M for timber programs.

The DOI budget requests \$1.1B for the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), including \$962M for Water and Related Resources; \$60M for Policy and Administration; \$33M for the California Bay Delta account; \$144.3M for the Central Valley Project and \$54.8M for the Central Valley Project Restoration Fund; \$31.3M for the Lower Colorado River Operations program; \$92.8M for the Dam Safety program; \$2.6M for the Desalination and Water Purification Research program; and \$19.9M for the WaterSMART program.

Interior requests \$179 million for the implementation of enacted Indian water rights settlements in support of Federal trust responsibilities to Tribes, including \$69.2M for the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project; \$12.8M for the Crow Tribe Water Rights Settlement; \$8.3M for the Aamodt Litigation Settlement; and \$10M for the Blackfeet Water Rights Settlement. Other settlements include: the Nez Perce Settlement within the Columbia and Snake Rivers Salmon Recovery Project (\$5.6M); the San Carlos Apache Tribe Water Settlement Act (\$1.6 million); the Ak-Chin Indian Water Rights Settlement Act (\$15.3M); and the Colorado Ute Settlement Act and the Animas La Plata Project (\$10.2M).

Interior also requests \$194M for water-related science at the U.S. Geological Survey and the USBR to sustain and enhance ground and surface water quality and quantity research and monitoring, and to develop new technologies to respond to water resource challenges. The budget supports development of the Landsat 9 ground system, as well as research and data collection to inform sustainable energy and mineral development, responsible resource management, and natural hazard risk reduction.

## **CONGRESS/WATER RESOURCES**

### **Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act**

On March 12, the President signed into law the bipartisan John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act (S.47), a package of over 100 public lands, natural resources, and water bills. Lisa Murkowski (AK) Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee said: "This law will benefit every state and clear the deck of issues that we've been working to resolve for years. From providing access for sportsmen to creating new economic opportunities for local communities, this is a good, balanced measure. We built it through a team effort that drew strong support from both parties in both chambers."

The DOI leadership advocated for and assisted in the concepts for many of the bills. Acting Secretary David Bernhardt said: "This bill is extremely beneficial to the American people and I look forward to working with Congress and local communities to implement the many local conservation wins within the bill." (WSW #2337)