

WestFAST

Western States Federal Agency Support Team

5296 South Commerce Drive, Suite 202, Murray, Utah 84107

Phone: (801) 685-2555 Fax: (801) 685-2559

WestFAST Agencies

Calendar Year 2011 Accomplishments

February 2012

Agencies/Members

U.S. FOREST SERVICE
JEAN THOMAS
CHAIR

U.S. BUREAU OF
LAND MANAGEMENT
ROBERT BOYD

NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION
SERVICE
MICHAEL STROBEL

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
ENERGY
CRAIG ZAMUDA

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF
ENGINEERS
MICHAEL FALLON, PE
VICE-CHAIR

U.S. BUREAU OF
RECLAMATION
KIRA FINKLER
BECKY FULKERSON

NATIONAL OCEANIC &
ATMOSPHERIC
ADMINISTRATION
ROGER PULWARTY

U.S. GEOLOGICAL
SURVEY
PIXIE HAMILTON

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION AGENCY
ROGER GORKE,
CHAIR

U.S. FISH &
WILDLIFE SERVICE
JANET BAIR

NASA
BRAD DOORN

FEDERAL LIAISON
OFFICER
DWANE YOUNG

This page intentionally left blank

1.0 Introduction

The Western States Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST) is a collaboration between 11 Federal agencies with water resource 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. WestFAST was formed in 2008 in response to Western Governors' Association report titled: [Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future: Next Steps Report](#) (*Next Steps Report*). WestFAST was formed to support the WSWC in the implementation of the *Next Steps Report*. Some of the areas that the report identifies for federal/state collaboration include: 1) Water policy, 2) Water to meet future demands, 3) Water infrastructure, 4) Indian water rights, 5) Climate change, and 6) Endangered species. In 2011, WestFAST targeted a number of specific recommendations in the *Next Steps Report*, with particular focus on areas related to evapotranspiration and drought, climate, and data interoperability.

Additionally, WestFAST was formed to promote interagency collaboration. In 2011, WestFAST focused on a number of emerging federal initiatives and promoted communication between federal agencies. The WestFAST team shared information on issues ranging from the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) to sedimentation behind dams.

2011 Highlights:

- **WestFAST made progress on six of the recommendations from the *Next Steps Report*:** One of the core purposes of WestFAST is to support the WSWC in the implementation of the recommendations in the *Next Steps Report*. WestFAST made significant advancements on several of these recommendations.
- **Water Use Data Exchange:** WestFAST collaborated with the WSWC to kick-off a new project that will seek to improve how water availability, water use, and water allocation data are shared. This project will support the states in their planning efforts as well as support national studies like the Water Census.
- **WestFAST gave 21 presentations at the 3 WSWC meetings**
- **WestFAST hosted a ½-day workgroup on data management for the WSWC**
- **The WestFAST Newsletter is now received by 126 federal, state, and private sector recipients**

2.0 Supporting the Goals of the WSWC and Assisting in the Implementation of the *Next Steps Report*

In 2011, WestFAST supported the WSWC in several key areas. To help promote collaboration, and to answer questions about existing issues or initiatives, the WestFAST team provided 21 presentations at WSWC meetings and hosted a ½-day workshop to inform the WSWC on current water data management practices. Additionally, WestFAST developed materials, held conferences, and initiated projects in direct support of the *Next Steps Report*. Some highlights from these activities are described below.

Activities in Support of the *Next Steps Report*

In 2011, WestFAST collaborated with the WSWC to address 6 objectives from the *Next Steps Report*. Of particular note, WestFAST initiated the Water Use Data Exchange project which seeks to improve the way state and federal agencies share water information. Some of the highlights from WestFAST activities in support of the *Next Steps Report* are below. The language from the *Next Steps* objectives are included to provide background for the activities performed in support of those objectives.

Objective 5. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) should immediately begin preparing a request for proposals (RFP) and take other steps needed to ensure [the Thermal Infrared Sensor] TIR is included in Landsat 8, and request supplemental and future funding sufficient to minimize any necessary delay in the scheduled launch. (*Next Steps 2008, page III*)

Activities: NASA has continued to press forward on preparing LandSAT 8 for launch. They have also included the TIR on LandSAT 8. NASA is currently on schedule to launch in early 2013.

Objective 7. State and federal water resource agencies should work together to provide universal access to water-related data collected by all state, local, and federal agencies, as well as tools and models that better enable the synthesis, visualization, and evaluation of water related data, including that to be shared with local governments. (*Next Steps 2008, page III*)

Activities:

- WestFAST hosted a ½-day workshop at the Spring WSWC meeting. The focus of this workshop was to explore the various issues surrounding water information sharing, with particular focus on water resources data.
- WestFAST prepared a Data Strategy for the WSWC to help guide them in activities that they could undertake to better enable the exchange of data.
- In October 2011, WestFAST assisted the WSWC in developing a Water Use Data Exchange Project Plan. This plan outlined activities through 2013 to implement a process to exchange water allocation, water use, and water availability data between the states and with other partners.
- WestFAST has worked with the WSWC's Water Information and Data Subcommittee to begin implementation of the Water Use Data Exchange. More information on the Water Use Data Exchange can be found at: <http://www.westgov.org/wswc/wateruse/>.
- The Colorado River Basin Forecast Center (part of the National Weather Service under NOAA) provided an informational meeting to the WSWC to help them better understand the forecast center's capabilities in providing water supply forecasts and other information.
- WestFAST participated in several national forums to discuss information sharing, including EPA's Exchange Network, the Consortium of Universities for the Advancement of Hydrologic Sciences (CUAHSI), and the Subcommittee on Water Availability and Quality (SWAQ).
- NASA hosted three meetings on evapotranspiration and one meeting on drought. The purpose of these meetings was to better understand the needs of the water community for remote sensing data and science and how to best provide that science and data to the water community.

Objective 8(b)(c). Federal agencies with long range water supply planning responsibilities should: b) Support the implementation of the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) and c) Ensure there is an accurate assessment of the Nation's water availability and water demands, with the goal of integrating the information into state water resources planning, recognizing that a truly national assessment must begin at the state and local level with

appropriate technical and financial support from the federal government. (*Next Steps 2008, page IV*)

Activities:

- WestFAST has continued to support NIDIS. Additionally, through the Water Use Data Exchange activities described above, WestFAST has begun the engagement with the federal agencies regarding the sharing of data that supports state water plans.
- USACE, NOAA, and USGS entered into an MOU to collaborate on sharing information via the Federal Toolbox and Integrated Water Resources Sciences and Services (IWRSS).
- NOAA has entered into an MOU with the WGA to better collaborate on providing information for climate prediction.
- The Subcommittee on Water Availability and Quality (SWAQ), under the leadership of the USGS, has commissioned a subgroup to begin looking at ways to improve information sharing across the federal agencies.
- USGS has begun the process of scoping out the Water Census.

All of these activities are related, and are pushing towards the same goal of developing water information and data in such a way that promotes interoperability across all of the water data holders, and will help with the sustainability of NIDIS. WestFAST has been engaged in all of these efforts, and continues to encourage these efforts to a common endpoint. The Water Use Data Exchange will provide a unique opportunity for WestFAST and the WSWC to demonstrate how this interoperability could be done, and to provide an example that can inform these other initiatives.

Objectives 24, 25, 26. Under the Water Resources section of the Next Steps Report, ‘...identify and prioritize anticipated future water resources infrastructure needs as a component of the western state water plans...’ (24); ‘federal agencies should...identify necessary studies, data, and projects...’ (25); and ‘With federal technical and financial assistance, states should identify, restore and preserve high value watersheds...that provide ecological services...and that may minimize the need for structural alternatives.’ (26) (*Next Steps 2008, page VI*)

Activities: The WaterSMART initiative, Climate Science Centers (CSCs), and Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) are collaborative DOI efforts with the DOI agencies playing key roles. The agencies are developing science to support decision makers on the potential impacts of climate change, developing strategies for mitigating those impacts, and promoting basin wide, holistic approaches to resource management. In 2011, WestFAST coordinated with the DOI agencies on these efforts. Through WestFAST, DOI has also been able to better inform the WSWC on these initiatives, and help them understand the relationship between these initiatives and other federal initiatives.

Providing Information on Federal Programs

WestFAST members provided a total of 21 presentations at the three WSWC meetings in 2011. Additionally, WestFAST hosted a ½-day workshop at the Spring WSWC meeting to discuss water information data management. These presentations were very beneficial to both the WSWC and the federal agencies, in that they provided a forum for discussion on a number of these issues. Some of the highlights from these presentations include discussions of:

- Reclamation activities around WaterSMART and the LCCs
- EPA Pesticides and Stormwater regulation
- USACE Federal Toolbox and NOAA's Integrated Water Resources Sciences and Services (IWRSS)
- National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS)
- Observing and predicting atmospheric rivers
- The water supply outlook for 2012
- NASA capabilities in support of water resources management
- The Water Census and the Colorado River Basin Focus Area Study
- USFS water quality activities
- EPA Region 10 Nutrient TMDL issues and forest roads issues
- Reclamation restoration activities
- DOI activities: WaterSMART, LandSAT, America's Great Outdoors
- EPA's policies on nutrients

3.0 Promoting Interagency Collaboration

One of the goals of WestFAST is to promote interagency coordination. WestFAST is in a unique position to foster interagency discussion among various topics related to water management. Through WestFAST, the team has shared information on pressing issues that were relevant to all of the federal agencies, participated in cross-agency groups or committees, and reached out to numerous stakeholders on the purpose and value of WestFAST.

Information Sharing

All of the WestFAST agencies have a number of high-priority initiatives that can benefit from coordination with the other federal agencies. WestFAST provides a forum for these agencies to discuss these initiatives, and to allow for the agencies to better understand how they can better work together. To help facilitate this discussion, WestFAST undertook a new project in 2011 to begin cataloging the initiatives from each of the federal agencies. This catalog will be made available on the WestFAST web site, and will be maintained by the WestFAST members. WestFAST plans to make this catalog available in 2012. In addition to this, WestFAST held informational meetings on the following topics:

- **Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs):** In addition to holding an informational meeting on this topic, WestFAST attended LCC meetings, found agency representatives for the LCCs, and coordinated with the WSWC on the LCCs throughout the west.
- **Sedimentation:** WestFAST held calls to discuss sedimentation behind dams and discussed WestFAST's role.

- **EPA/USACE Clean Water Act Jurisdiction Guidance (Waters of the U.S.):** EPA led a presentation and discussion on EPA/USACE Waters of the U.S. Guidance.

Participation in Cross-Agency Groups and Committees

In 2011, WestFAST participated in several cross-agency groups and committees. Part of WestFAST's role in this participation was to provide a western perspective, and to provide input based on interactions with the western states. By WestFAST's participation in these groups, we were able to provide additional linkages to other federal agencies, other groups, and other committees that may not have otherwise occurred. Some examples of the groups that WestFAST participated in include:

- **USGS Water Census:** The Water Census is a new initiative being led by the USGS. Its goal is to gain a better understanding of water use and availability throughout the U.S. The WSWC has expressed a lot of interest in the Water Census.
- **Western Regional Partnership:** The Western Regional Partnership (WRP) is a Department of Defense led collaboration between federal, state, and tribal interests. They are working on issues in the southwestern U.S. In 2011, WestFAST engaged in discussion with the WRP, attended their meetings, gave presentations, and have had a continued dialogue with them regarding water issues.
- **Subcommittee on Groundwater (SOGW):** This group is a subcommittee under the Advisory Committee on Water Information (ACWI). WestFAST participated in SOGW calls and arranged for SOGW presentations to the WSWC.
- **Hydrologic Information Sharing Subgroup under the Subcommittee on Water Availability and Quality (SWAQ):** This group is exploring ways for federal agencies to better share hydrologic information. WestFAST is a member of this group and is providing linkages from this group to the western states.

Outreach

WestFAST is a relatively new organization. Since its original formation in 2008, efforts have been made to improve WestFAST visibility. This is primarily done via the WestFAST web site (<http://www.westgov.org/wswc/WestFAST.htm>) as well as through the WestFAST newsletter. In 2011, improvements were made to both of these outreach methods. First, improvements to the WestFAST web site now provide more information on WestFAST, give better access to WestFAST reports and documents, and provide a Real Simple Syndication (RSS) feed for all WestFAST agency news releases. A Google search for WestFAST now has WestFAST in the top three hits. Prior to 2011, a Google search didn't return any results relative to WestFAST. Second, significant improvements were made to the WestFAST newsletter. The overall look-and-feel was changed as well as the timing of when the newsletters were released. The newsletter is now released monthly (prior to 2011, it was released quarterly). This change alone has had a significant impact on the overall visibility of WestFAST. The newsletter currently reaches 126 recipients throughout federal and state agencies, as well as in the private sector.

This improved visibility is expanding state and federal collaborative capacity. The WestFAST – WSWC approach to problem solving is beginning to be recognized and applied at the federal field office - state office level. A pilot demonstration was initiated in 2011 to embed a USACE employee part time in the Kansas Water Office. This pilot has already demonstrated benefits to both the state and USACE. In 2011, some of the benefits included improved mutual understanding and cooperation in operation of projects, drought - emergency water supply procedures, cost saving due to cooperation and data sharing in GIS, and scoping of future planning assistance partnerships. A long-term goal of this project is that an embedded employee will eventually assist the state as a facilitator and liaison with a number of federal natural resource agencies, not just USACE.

WestFAST also serves as a vehicle to transfer information on regional programs to local member agency field offices. One result of this outreach is the development of a new strategic initiative, associated with the newly established DOI South Central CSC. One of the goals of this new initiative is to engage WestFAST member agency field offices in upcoming activities and identify opportunities to leverage the resources of multiple organizations. WestFAST has served as a starting point for discussion, allowing for further collaboration to happen.