



# Western States Water

## Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

682 East Vine Street / Suite 7 / Murray, UT 84107 / (801) 685-2555 / Fax 685-2559 / [www.westernstateswater.org](http://www.westernstateswater.org)

Chairwoman - Jeanine Jones; Executive Director - Tony Willardson; Editor - Michelle Bushman; Subscriptions - Julie Groat

### **ADMINISTRATION** **State of the Union**

On February 4, 2020, President Trump addressed Congress and the Nation on the State of the Union. "Three years ago, we launched the great American comeback. Tonight, I stand before you to share the incredible results. Jobs are booming, incomes are soaring, poverty is plummeting, crime is falling, confidence is surging, and our country is thriving and highly respected again. America's enemies are on the run, America's fortunes are on the rise, and America's future is blazing bright.... To protect the environment, days ago I announced that the United States will join the One Trillion Trees Initiative, an ambitious effort to bring together government and the private sector to plant new trees in America and all around the world. We must also rebuild America's infrastructure. I ask you to pass Senator John Barrasso's highway bill to invest in new roads, bridges, and tunnels all across our land." The President also mentioned levees.

### **Corps/Reclamation/Infrastructure**

On February 3, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) released a joint report on the status of water infrastructure managed by the two agencies. The news release noted that: "National water-related infrastructure provides water supply, hydroelectric power generation, navigation, flood control, recreation and other benefits. Combined, the Army Corps and Reclamation oversee and manage more than 1,200 dams, 153 hydroelectric power plants, over 5,000 recreation areas, 25,000 miles of navigable waterways and tens of thousands of miles of canals and other water conveyance infrastructure. Those facilities provide enough water for 130 million people and irrigation for 10 million acres of farmland. And, combined hydroelectric power plants generate renewable electricity for 10 million homes."

The 24-page report summarized the infrastructure strengths and challenges of dams, hydropower facilities, navigation systems, canals and pipelines, recreation facilities, related bridges and roads, and levees. It also addresses concerns about keeping communities safe

through dam safety programs, protecting and restoring the environment, and facility security.

When it comes to protecting investments and planning for the future, the report noted the following water supply challenges for the agencies: (1) increasing populations in the West have increased the need to access and use available water supply storage in reservoirs; (2) droughts have made water supply operations and revenues more variable for Reclamation, requiring more resources to meet partner needs and maintain public health and safety; (3) water storage availability can be limited by siltation issues and dam safety restrictions; and (4) continued coordination with partners and stakeholders is necessary to balance the costs associated with project rehabilitation and the operation and maintenance of facilities.

Tim Petty, Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, said: "This partnership is important; it helps us coordinate attention and resources to ensure that infrastructure is robust and well-maintained. I appreciate the partnership between Reclamation and the Army Corps and look forward to continued success moving forward."

R.D. James, Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), said: "This report provides visibility to the public on the vast and diverse federal portfolio of water-related infrastructure our agencies maintain and their value to the safety and economic prosperity of the nation. This is a great example of how the Army Corps' partners and collaborates with other agencies on water-related infrastructure by sharing challenges, best practices and strategies to utilize resources to most efficiently and effectively maintain this critical infrastructure." See <https://www.publications.usace.army.mil/Portals/76/Users/182/86/2486/EP%2025-1-117.pdf?ver=2020-02-03-104720-787>.

### **ADMINISTRATION/WATER QUALITY** **Environmental Protection Agency/WIFIA**

On February 6, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released its first-ever Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program annual

report. Through 2019, the WIFIA program financed more than \$3.5 billion in loans, which saved borrowers \$1.2 billion dollars, helping improve water quality for more than 20 million Americans.

“The WIFIA program’s success is a key component of President Trump’s efforts to modernize our nation’s aging infrastructure, strengthen public health protections, and create jobs,” said EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler. “I have seen first-hand the impact this program has had on local communities in just a short amount of time. The WIFIA program has proven to be a tremendous tool in achieving environmental protections and fostering economic growth in communities across the country.”

In 2014, Congress created the federal loan and guarantee program focused on helping meet the growing water infrastructure needs in communities across the country. The program provides long-term, low-cost supplemental credit assistance to creditworthy drinking water and wastewater projects of national and regional significance. WIFIA loans can finance a wide range of drinking water and wastewater projects, including traditional drinking water and wastewater treatment plants and conveyance systems, water recycling and desalination plants, drought prevention and mitigation projects, stormwater management, green infrastructure, non-point source pollution control and source-water protection. Eligible WIFIA borrowers include; (1) local, state, tribal, and federal government entities; (2) partnerships and joint ventures; (3) corporations and trusts; and (4) State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs.

Through 2019, the WIFIA program has closed 14 loans ranging in size from \$20.7 million to \$699 million. Together, WIFIA has provided \$3.5 billion in loans to help finance more than \$8 billion for water infrastructure projects while creating more than 15,000 jobs. Of those projects, 57 percent directly support Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act compliance.

In 2019, EPA invited 38 new projects to apply for WIFIA loans, totaling approximately \$6 billion to help finance over \$12 billion in water infrastructure investments. These projects support key agency priorities, including reducing lead and emerging contaminants and developing water reuse and recycling capacity. Together, the selected projects will improve water quality for 24 million people in 18 states. For more information on the WIFIA program and to read the WIFIA annual report, visit: <https://www.epa.gov/wifia>.

## **WATER QUALITY** **New Mexico/EPA/WOTUS**

On January 23, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM) and New Mexico Environment Department

Secretary James Kenney released statements regarding the EPA’s final Navigable Waters Protection Rule defining Waters of the United States (WOTUS). Grisham said: “Trump’s new rule is an absolute disaster for the state’s water resources. No other natural resource in New Mexico has greater significance to our people than our water: environmentally, culturally, economically, recreationally. Stripping federal protections from our rivers and streams is an affront to all who call New Mexico home. My administration is committed to protecting New Mexico’s precious waters and will consider all legal options to prevent this rule from going into effect. This is far from over.”

Kenney said: “The EPA failed to consult with my Department after we submitted extensive comments on the draft rule despite their repeated assurances to engage. This federal administration’s self-proclaimed deregulatory agenda ignores sound science, states’ rights and most troubling, the EPA’s own mission to protect public health and the environment.” See <https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2020/01/23/governor-environment-secretary-issue-statement-on-disastrous-federal-rollback-of-clean-water-act-protections/>.

## **PEOPLE**

Governor Jay Inslee has named **Laura Watson**, Director of the Washington State Department of Ecology. She replaces **Maia Bellon**, who joined the firm of Cascadia Law Group this month (see WSW#2382). Laura was the Senior Assistant Attorney General in the Ecology Division of the Attorney General’s Office. We congratulate Laura on her new position and look forward to working with her.

The WSWC is pleased to announce the hiring of **Jessica Reimer** as a Policy Analyst. She will be taking the lead on water quality issues and will working closely with the Executive Director and Legal Counsel on additional policy work. She has a broad background in environmental policy, ranging from marine conservation to air quality and climate, and is eager to dive into the world of western water.

Jessica holds a BS in biology and environmental science from Santa Clara University and a MS in Integrative Biology from Oregon State University, where she also worked with Dr. Jane Lubchenco on global marine policy and science issues. Most recently, Jessica has worked collaboratively with decisionmakers, organizational and industrial partners, and members of the public to develop and implement policies that improve local air quality in Utah. She is excited to bring that experience to the Council to help address the complex water issues that we face in the West. We welcome Jessica to our staff and look forward to working with her.

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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.**