



# Western States Water

## Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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### **ADMINISTRATION**

#### **Biden Transition/EPA/Interior**

The Biden transition teams are taking shape, mostly staffed by volunteers, though the recent General Services Administration's decision to recognize the President-Elect has released resources.

For the Department of the Interior, Kevin Washburn is the Team Lead. Most recently he was employed by the University of Iowa, but he is a former Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs. Other team members and their most recent employment include: Bob Anderson, Harvard Law School; Bret Birdsong, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Boyd School of Law; Shannon Estenoz, the Everglades Foundation; Chris Goranson, Carnegie Mellon University, The Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy; Janie Hipp, Native American Agriculture Fund; Kate Kelly, Center for American Progress; Elizabeth Klein, New York University, School of Law, State Energy & Environmental Impact Center; Amanda Leiter, American University, Washington College of Law; Molly McUsic, Wyass Foundation; Clara Pratte, Strongbow Strategies; Maggie Thomas, Evergreen Action; and Tanya Trujillo, Colorado River Sustainability Campaign.

With respect to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Patrice Simms is the Team Lead from Earth Justice. Other team members are: Amanda, Aguirre, Blue Crab Strategies; Ann Dunkin, Dell Technologies; Matt Fritz, Lathan & Watkins LLP; Lisa Garcia, Grist Magazine, Inc.; Cynthia Giles, Harvard Environmental and Energy Law Program; Joseph Goffman, Harvard Law School; Ken Kopocis, American University, Washington College of Law (and a former nominee for Assistant Administrator for Water); Michael McCabe, self-employed; Billie McGrane, Pennsylvania Democratic Party; Alejandra Nunez, Sierra Club; and Luseni Pieh, self employed. <https://buildbackbetter.gov/the-transition/agency-review-teams/>

#### **ADMINISTRATION/WATER QUALITY EPA/WIFIA**

On November 19, the EPA announced that it received 67 letters of interest in response to its 2020

Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) Notice of Funding Availability. The agency is offering \$5B in WIFIA loans to help finance \$10 billion in water infrastructure projects. Prospective borrowers include municipalities, corporations, and public-private partnerships in California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Oregon, Texas, and Utah, covering wastewater, drinking water, stormwater, desalination, and other infrastructure needs. EPA will evaluate the proposed projects for eligibility in the coming weeks and invite selected entities to submit formal applications. Since 2014, EPA has closed 40 WIFIA loans totaling \$7.7 billion in credit assistance to help finance \$16.6 billion for water infrastructure projects and create 38,000 jobs. <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-receives-67-new-requests-wifia-financing-totaling-over-9-billion>

### **CONGRESS**

#### **FY21 Appropriations**

On November 10, the Senate Appropriations Committee released its version of the FY21 appropriations bills. Chair Richard Shelby (R-AL) noted that the bills were largely a product of bipartisan cooperation, and said he looks forward to conferencing with the House to resolve the differences. Vice Chair Patrick Leahy (D-VT) said he agreed with Shelby on the importance of completing the twelve bills before the continuing resolution expires on December 11, but said he was disappointed that the Committee canceled the markups and consideration by the full Senate, "eliminating the ability of members to offer amendments. This is an important part of the process when developing legislation. It would have given all members a chance to weigh in and publicly debate these bills." <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/>

### **WATER RESOURCES**

#### **Colorado/Infrastructure Financing**

On November 3, over 70% of voters within the 15-county region of the Colorado River Water Conservation District passed a ballot measure to increase property taxes, raising an additional \$5 million annually for the water district. Most of that increase (86%) is intended to fund water projects approved by roundtables and local communities in five categories: productive agriculture,

infrastructure, healthy rivers, watershed health and water quality, and conservation and efficiency. [https://www.gjsentinel.com/news/western\\_colorado/district-plan-offers-ideas-for-spending-on-water-projects-after-tax-passage/article\\_223f1fc6-2056-11eb-a333-fb241bc373c1.html](https://www.gjsentinel.com/news/western_colorado/district-plan-offers-ideas-for-spending-on-water-projects-after-tax-passage/article_223f1fc6-2056-11eb-a333-fb241bc373c1.html)

Colorado's nine basin roundtables were established in 2005 to facilitate discussions on water management issues and encourage locally-driven solutions. The diversity of basin roundtable membership is intended to broaden the range of participating stakeholders that have a voice in Colorado's water management decisions. <https://cwcb.colorado.gov/about-us/basin-roundtables>

### **Oklahoma/Infrastructure**

On November 10, the Oklahoma Water Resources Board (OWRB) approved \$42 million in Financial Assistance Program (FAP) and Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) loans and Rural Economic Action Plan (REAP) grants for infrastructure projects in nine communities. Projects include water supply and wastewater system improvements, and refinancing for sewer system improvements. OWRB approves project financing throughout the year, and since January has approved 56 projects for various types of funding. <http://www.owrb.ok.gov/news/pressreleases/2020.php>

OWRB's FAP is a long-term, low interest (based on OWRB's AAA credit rating) revenue bond loan program that offers a variable interest rate with a fixed rate conversion option. The REAP Grant Program is a point-based program designed to assist smaller communities that lack sufficient fiscal capacity. Towns with populations under 1,750 and rural water/sewer districts with fewer than 525 non-pasture customers are given priority. OWRB also offers several emergency and drought grants, including Water for 2020 Drought Grants for eligible entities with projects that demonstrate water efficiency and drought resiliency. Oklahoma established a statewide goal in 2012 of consuming no more water in 2060 than today, and the Oklahoma Comprehensive Water Plan identified conservation as the most immediate and effective way to prevent future water shortages. Eligible projects include the addition of water meters and leak detection technology, water audits and conservation plans that lead to capital projects, recycling and water reuse projects, and more efficient irrigation systems. <http://www.owrb.ok.gov/financing/index.php>

### **WATER RIGHTS/WATER RESOURCES** **Idaho/Bear River Basin Adjudication**

On November 20, the State of Idaho filed a petition in its 5<sup>th</sup> District Court to commence the Bear River Basin Adjudication, the second adjudication petition in two

months. The Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) press release said: "The Bear River follows an arch-shaped course from Utah, into Wyoming and Idaho, and then back into Utah, terminating in the Great Salt Lake. It enters Idaho from Wyoming, supplying water to Mud Lake and Bear Lake, then flows north past Montpelier, Georgetown and Soda Springs, then south past Grace and Preston, and flows into Utah near the town of Cornish. The Bear River Adjudication also will include the waters of the Malad River Valley, which flow south into Utah and are ultimately tributary to the Bear River, as well as the Curlew Valley which includes the Deep Creek drainage, a tributary stream that flows into the Great Salt Lake."

IDWR has 4,700 water rights currently on record in the Bear River Basin, the Malad River Valley, and the Curlew Valley, and anticipates that 14,000 water rights claims may be filed in the adjudication. <https://idwr.idaho.gov/files/news-release/20201120-news-release-2020-11.PDF>

### **ORGANIZATIONS/MEETINGS**

#### **WestFAST/Salinity in the Western United States**

On Tuesday, December 8, at 1:00 pm MST, WestFAST will host a webinar on Salinity in the Western United States.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), oceans hold over 96.5 percent of all Earth's water. The USGS also tells us that almost all the water that people can access is saline. Saline water is not just in the oceans. There is an extensive amount of very salty water in the ground in the western United States. In its raw state, saline water cannot be used for many purposes, including drinking water, irrigation, and many industrial uses.

This webinar brings together salinity experts who will share their knowledge and experiences addressing salinity in the western United States. Presenters include: Dr. Daniel Deeds, Regional Water Quality Coordinator, and Kib Jacobson, Program Manager, Bureau of Reclamation; Robert Boyd, Chief, Assessment and Monitoring Branch, Bureau of Land Management; Mike Abate, Chief of Civil Works, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Patrick Lambert, Southwest Region Associate Director, and Carlton Bern, Research Soil Scientist, U.S. Geological Survey; Don Barnett, Executive Director, Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum; Erika Mancha, Manager, Innovative Water Technologies, Texas Water Development Board; and Zhuping Sheng, Sheng Consulting. For further information please see: <https://www.westernstateswater.org/westfast/westfastwebinars/>.

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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.**