



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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WESTERN GOVERNORS

WGA/Wildfire

On November 24, Oregon Governor Kate Brown, Chair of the Western Governors' Association (WGA), and Idaho Governor Brad Little, WGA Vice Chair, wrote a letter regarding the impacts of wildfires to Jim Hubbard, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and James Cason, Associate Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior. Hubbard and Cason are co-Chairs of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC), an intergovernmental committee dedicated to the consistent implementation of wildland fire policies, goals, and management activities. The Governors declared, "Western Governors stand ready to work with you in addressing post-wildfire effects on local communities and ecosystems. We are also committed to shifting the focus from wildfire suppression to both short- and long-term activities that will produce safer, fire adapted communities and landscapes that are healthy and resilient."

The letter states, "Under the Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding signed between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Western Governors' Association (WGA) in December 2018, Western Governors have engaged with WFLC to improve interagency coordination in post-wildfire restoration work. Through your leadership, WFLC has proved an effective platform to bring together multiple federal agencies, states, Tribes, and local governments to discuss the challenges of restoration coordination and address the needs of wildfire affected communities."

The letter explains, "Wildfire is an important and natural component of western landscapes. The presence of uncharacteristic wildfire on those landscapes, however, presents a significant threat to the public, communities and related infrastructure, timber resources, wildlife habitat, livestock forage, water quality and other values of our forest and prairie ecosystems...due to many complex variables, including past land management practices, the effects of climate and drought, and the proliferation of non-native invasive species. Similarly, the expansion of urban populations into the wildland urban interface affects the use of

prescribed fire and other tools to reduce wildfire risk and puts additional pressure on wildland firefighters to save structures and reduce impacts on wildfire affected communities and increases the likelihood of human-caused ignitions. We appreciate the difficult land management decisions faced by the U.S. Forest Service and Department of the Interior agencies."

"The Western Governors' National Forest and Rangeland Management Initiative examined many of the challenges confronted by land managers and focused a great deal of attention on the importance of restoration activities. Western Governors also understand that an effective emphasis on mitigation activities and the restoration of wildfire affected ecosystems is critical to promoting long-term ecosystem resilience. This is a long-term endeavor, but it will reduce the reliance on suppression infrastructure, shift the focus to land management activities, and result in sustainable resilient ecosystems and safer communities. We encourage you to take steps to ensure that restoration activities receive the same management priority as mitigation and suppression work, especially when allocating funding to these activities." <https://westgov.org/letters/>

ADMINISTRATION

Biden Transition/Wildfire Commission

The Biden transition team for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) includes Robert Bonnie as the Team Lead. A volunteer now with Duke University's Bipartisan Policy Center, Bonnie was formerly USDA Undersecretary for Natural resources and the Environment in the Obama Administration, and joining him is Meryl Harrell, a former senior adviser currently employed by Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards. Bonnie and Harrell (along with Leslie Jones, former USDA Deputy Undersecretary) have authored a memo, a part of a Climate 21 Project, that recommends setting up a Climate Strike Team comprised of USDA's Secretary and the heads of the U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Services Agency, among others. In the first 100 days, the Climate 21 team suggests establishing a "Wildfire Commission," co-chaired by the Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary of the Interior and a Democratic and Republican governor to offer recommendations to dramatically increase the

pace and scale of forest restoration on federal, state, tribal and private forest lands, and to modernize firefighting response prioritizing restoration of the highest risk acres and addressing the need for additional resources from Congress. On an ongoing basis, the Commission would work with governors and local communities on addressing new development in the wildland-urban interface and better fire-proofing existing houses and other buildings. Some of the goals are to improve watershed health, maintain long-term carbon sequestration on Forest Service lands and "significantly" increase prescribed burning, as well as creating a market for hazardous fuels as an incentive for private landowners to clean up forest floors. This might include having USDA promote biomass energy as a market for low-value timber and wood residues. <https://climate21.org/usda>

The USDA transition team includes: Nicholas Anthis, University of California; Sanah Baig, The Good Food Institute; Brooke Barron, Office of the Speaker, Maine State Legislature; Kumar Chandran, FoodCorps; Jonathan Coppess, University of Illinois; Andrea Delgado, UFW Foundation; Debra Eschmeyer, Arizona State University; LaQuita Honeysucker, The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union; Will McIntee a paid Biden for President Transition team member; Bianca Oden, National Resources Defense Council; John Padalino, Bandera Electric Cooperative; Gregory Parham, USDA (Retired); Lisa Pino, State of New York, Department of Health; Amy Pitelka, Barker Pitelka PLLC; Jeffrey Prieto, Los Angeles Community College District; Audrey Rowe, self-employed; Mike Schmidt, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry; and Corey Then, Moneta Group.

ADMINISTRATION/WATER QUALITY **EPA/PFAS**

On November 30, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Assistant Administrator for Water, David Ross, released a memo to all ten EPA regions detailing a voluntary strategy to address per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) using National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits. The memo highlighted recommendations from a workgroup that consisted of regional representatives whose goal was to conduct a thorough review of NPDES permitting to integrate PFAS, including "examining authorities and permit writing practices to understand where unregulated contaminants, like PFAS, may fit into the permit development process; analyzing existing state-issued NPDES permits with PFAS monitoring requirements...and obtaining input and perspectives from state partners."

Recommendations from the workgroup included: (1) permit requirements for phased-in monitoring and best

management practices, as appropriate, taking into consideration when PFAS are expected to be present in point source wastewater discharges; (2) permit requirements for phased-in monitoring and stormwater pollutant control, as appropriate, taking into consideration when PFAS are expected to be present in stormwater discharges; and (3) information sharing on permitting practices and the development of a permitting compendium, an information sharing platform, and continuation of the workgroup. The PFAS permitting compendia would help states learn about practices being adopted to address PFAS in NPDES permits across the nation, while the information platform would take advantage of EPA's NPDES Permit Writers' Clearinghouse to share specific information on permitting PFAS, such as existing permits, permit templates, and webinars.

The workgroup's next tasks include building out these tools, hosting quarterly meetings of the Regional Coordinators workgroup, broadcasting two webinars for states and EPA regions on relevant PFAS topics, and working with the Association of Clean Water Administrators (ACWA) to organize a second state listening session.

In a press release, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler said: "Better understanding and addressing PFAS is a top priority for EPA, and the agency is continuing to develop needed research and policies. For the first time in EPA's history, we are utilizing all of our program offices to address a singular, cross-cutting contaminant and the agency's efforts are critical to supporting our state and local partners."

Ross said: "Managing and mitigating PFAS in water is a priority for the Office of Water as we continue our focus on meeting 21st century challenges. These actions mark important steps in developing the underlying science and permitting techniques to address PFAS in wastewater where the discharge of these chemicals may be of concern." https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-11/documents/pfas_npdes_interim_strategy_november_2020_signed.pdf

MEETINGS **WGA Winter Meeting**

On December 10, the Western Governors Association (WGA) will host its 2020 Winter Meeting virtually. WGA Chair Kate Brown (D-OR) will discuss progress on her Electric Vehicles Roadmap Initiative. Other topics will include wildfire responses in the West, technology changes during the pandemic, and remote health care. Registration is available at: <https://westgov.org/meetings/details/2020-winter-meeting>.

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.