

Western States Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST) is a collaboration between 13 Federal agencies with water 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 issues.

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WestFAST News

September 2016

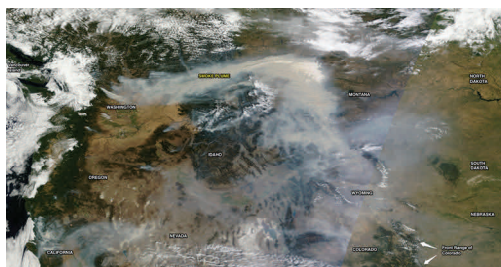
Wildfire Season is Raging Across the West *(WGA/WestFAST 09/01/16)*

As of August 29, 2016, the West had 32 active large fires that have burned more than a half million acres in eight states, with the largest fires burning in California, Idaho, and Oregon. This year to date, 39,734 fires have burned 4.47 million acres in the United States.



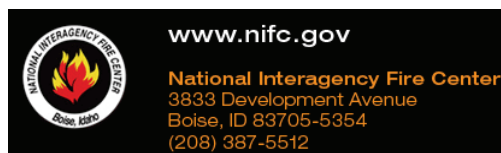
Wildfire 2016 (feed.mathewkeys.net)

The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) reports that the total acres burned, actually are lower than last year, which saw nearly 8 million acres scorched by this time in the fire season. NIFC's roots trace back to 1965, when the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Weather Service agreed to collaborate on nation-



Smoke Plumes (Discovery Magazine)

al fire planning and operations. The National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have since joined. Article adapted from Western Governor's and NIFC's webpages. For more see: [National Inter-agency Fire Center](http://www.nifc.gov).



USDA's Largest Conservation Program to Change

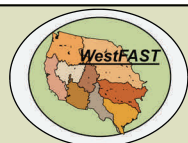
(NRCS 09/19/16)

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announces changes are on the horizon for the nation's biggest conservation program, the [Conservation Stewardship Program](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-stewardship-program) (CSP). "With a lot of review and input from producers, partners and other stakeholders, we are making important changes to CSP," says NRCS Chief Jason Weller. "We want to make sure there is every opportunity for America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to take their conservation efforts to the next level. Since 2010, farmers and ranchers have enrolled 70 million acres in CSP, of which 4.7 million acres have been enrolled in Oklahoma.

Through the CSP, agricultural producers and forest landowners earn payments for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities like cover crops, rotational grazing, ecologically-based pest management, buffer strips, and pollinator and beneficial insect habitat — all while maintaining active agriculture production on their land.

The most popular CSP conservation enhancements among Oklahoma producers include upgraded chemical spray nozzles and GPS targeting systems to improve air quality, improved grazing management practices to promote plant health, and enhanced fertilizing and grazing systems to improve water quality.

Changes that producers can expect to see when the program is offered in Fiscal Year 2017 include greater flexibility at the local



level to prioritize resource concerns and conservation approaches, more enhancements and almost double the conservation practices offered, and better reporting tools to tell producers the results of their conservation efforts on their land.

“This expanded conservation activity list offers Oklahoma farmers and ranchers more options to address natural resource challenges,” said Oklahoma State Conservationist Gary O’Neill. “New conservation activities include new options for nutrient management, several new soil health options, and enhancements to improve stream health as well as activities that benefit wildlife and pollinator habitat.”

CSP is for producers who are already established conservation stewards, helping them to deliver multiple conservation benefits on working lands, including improved water and soil quality and enhanced wildlife habitat.

The program will be offered in FY17 (Oct. 1-Sept. 30, 2017). Producers interested in the program can find more at www.nrcs.usda.gov/csp or visit a local USDA Service Center.

EPA Tool Helps Communities Prepare for Climate Change *(EPA 09/29/2016)*

As part of the Obama Administration’s commitment to strengthen America’s climate resilience, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has released an updated online climate change risk assessment tool that assists users in designing adaptation plans based on the types of threats confronting their communities. [EPA’s Climate Resilience Evaluation and Awareness Tool \(CREAT\)](#), is designed for water utilities.



Climate Change Image by OMICS International

“Water utilities operate on the front lines of climate change and face the challenges of increased drought, flooding and sea level rise. EPA is working to strengthen America’s communities by providing climate preparedness tools like CREAT

that local leaders can use to make smart decisions,” said Joel Beauvais, Deputy Assistant Administrator for EPA’s Office of Water.

In its updated version, CREAT presents information in a series of intuitive modules, provides climate change projection data, and presents monetized risk results. CREAT’s climate projection [map](#) illustrates future climate scenarios including precipitation intensity for a 100-year storm or the number of days per year with temperatures above 100°F. With this powerful information, utility owners and operators can better prepare for the impacts of climate change.



Daily Express-UK

CREAT was built and updated in consultation with drinking water and wastewater utilities, water sector associations, climate science and risk assessment experts, and multiple federal partners. The tool has been used by a number of communities in their adaptation planning efforts. For example, Manchester-by-the-Sea, Mass. used CREAT to better understand the vulnerability of its wastewater infrastructure and operations while the city of Houston, Texas used the tool to better understand the vulnerability of its surface water supplies.

Click the following links to see videos that show how CREAT has benefitted utilities such as [Camden, N.J.](#) and [Faribault, Minn.](#)



Pacific Waves Crashing on the Coast (LA Times)

To access CREAT, or to learn more about water sector climate readiness, visit [EPA’s Climate Ready Water Utilities initiative](#).



Reclamation's First AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer

(BOR 09/26/16)

With the first rays of morning light, New Mexico's Upper Chama watershed reveals itself. The valley extends south from Cumbres Pass, winding its way over ridgelines and through meadows. Dropping in elevation, forests of mixed conifer slowly change to tall Ponderosa Pines and then rolling plains of juniper and grasslands. Twenty-six miles to the south lie the cliffs overlooking Heron Reservoir, a resting place for supplemental water on its way to the homes, farms and people of central New Mexico, as well as the El Vado Reservoir, which provides water for irrigated agriculture in the Middle Rio Grande valley.



The view from Cumbres Pass does little to convey the fragility of this region. Changing precipitation patterns, rising temperatures and decades of fire suppression point towards an uncertain future for the adjacent Chama and San Juan watersheds; a future dominated by the risks of catastrophic wildfire, excessive sedimentation and loss of an important source of clean reliable water for the region.

In May 2016, the Bureau of Reclamation sponsored its first AmeriCorps Volunteer under the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program. AmeriCorps VISTA is a federal program designed to provide nonprofits with the organizational capacity to tackle issues of poverty reduction in all of its forms, from early childhood education, to veteran support and environmental stewardship. Reclamation's VISTA Volunteer, Will Donahoo, lives in Chama, New Mexico. He works as Reclamation's representative in partnership with the Chama Peak Land Alliance (CPLA), a nonprofit organization of conservation-minded landowners who promote ecologically and economically sustainable land and forest management practices

on over 1.4 million acres. Will assists by meeting with landowners on whose lands forest thinning and treatments are planned. He organizes public events and makes public presentations to describe forest treatment work and its objectives.

In addition to stewardship and outreach efforts, CPLA conducts forest thinning and prescribed fire treatments in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. The work of CPLA to protect private forest lands directly benefits Reclamation and its efforts to maintain a clean, reliable water supply for its projects in New Mexico. CPLA's outreach and forest treatment work focuses on the Rio Chama watershed, which serves Reclamation's Middle Rio Grande Project. Additionally, the Navajo, Little Navajo and Rio Blanco watersheds provide critical supplemental water resources to central New Mexico through Reclamation's San Juan-Chama Project.

Completed in 1976, the San Juan-Chama Project is a series of diversion structures, tunnels and a reservoir that divert, store, and release water for the benefit of Project contractors under the Colorado River Compact. Check dams, located at the base of three tributaries of the San Juan River (the Navajo, Little Navajo and Rio Blanco) in southern Colorado near Pagosa Springs, divert water through tunnels, which together carry runoff 26 miles under the Continental Divide from the Colorado River watershed to the Rio Chama, in the Rio Grande watershed. The total allocation of the San Juan-Chama Project is divided between 9 municipalities, 6 pueblos and 2 counties, with the city of Albuquerque being by far the largest recipient, receiving over 50 percent of diverted waters. Within Bernalillo County alone, the San Juan-Chama Project provides 90 percent of the drinking water for over 600,000 residents.

A fire within the upland forests, above the San Juan-Chama diversion could have a substantial impact on the ability to provide the quality and quantity of water required by downstream users. In addition, a fire within the Chama watershed could impact the quality and quantity of water available to irrigators served by Reclamation's Middle Rio Grande Project.

Laid bare by fire, soils become prone to erosion, leading to increased runoff, sedimentation and water quality degradation. Fire-damaged watersheds have a reduced capacity to store water in the form of snowpack, leading to water supply shortages during hot summer months.



U.S. Forest Service Photo

Fire-damaged watersheds also generate increased runoff during storm events, which can lead to downstream flooding. Limits on the amount of water that can be directed at any given time through the San Juan-Chama



diversion means that the total amount available on an annual basis to downstream communities such as Albuquerque could be reduced. Additionally, increased runoff would dislodge debris created by wildfire, requiring removal at diversion structures and potentially inhibiting their operation for days, weeks or longer.

Catastrophic wildfire outside the range of natural variation would forever alter the characteristics and economy of the region, but wide-scale forest treatments have the potential to reduce this risk. Even small acreages of thinned forests exhibit different characteristics when fire passes through the landscape than those exhibited by untreated forests. Reduced fuels mean fire burns at a lower intensity and has less opportunity to spread between neighboring trees. Research in conjunction with The Nature Conservancy's Rio Grande Water Fund estimates the cost of thinning one acre of forest at \$700, versus a potential economic impact of \$2,150 if the same acre is damaged by wildfire.



Over time, Reclamation's mission of managing water in the West has become more about preserving, improving and balancing the resources already available, ensuring the resiliency of our water infrastructure to meet future needs. Through partnerships with the CPLA and many others, along with the first generation of VISTA Volunteers, Reclamation is working to protect the San Juan-Chama Project and the water supply to its Middle Rio Grande Project by supporting the direct management of upland forests. This is accomplished by informing stakeholders of the importance of the watersheds above the diversions and reservoirs, and promoting a local economy that can utilize natural resources, including water and forest products, for the benefit of the local community, as well as downstream users. These actions, which together help reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire in the Chama region, protect the infrastructure and water supply that Reclamation uses to serve its contractors and project beneficiaries.

EPA Issues Notice on Harmful Algal Bloom (EPA 09/29/16)

The EPA issued a notice requesting public comments on a proposed mandatory census of information on Publicly Owned

Treatment Works (POTWs) for a national study of nutrient removal and secondary technologies. Current databases contain incomplete information on various subsets of treatment facilities. EPA seeks to obtain an accurate, national profile of POTWs using mandatory authority under the Clean Water Act (CWA) §308 (33 USC §1318(a)), and will solicit basic facility identification, characterization, and technical information.

The initial census will form the basis of a subsequent study, which is intended to provide statistically representative information on improved nutrient removal by secondary treatment plants resulting from changes in operation and maintenance.



Harmful Algal Bloom - NOAA

The notice states: "Nutrient pollution remains the single greatest challenge to our Nation's water quality, and presents a growing threat to public health and local economies – contributing to toxic harmful algal blooms, contamination of drinking water sources, and costly impacts on recreation, tourism and fisheries." The results of the multi-phase study are intended to assist states and POTWs to agree to and set well-informed and realistic nutrient load reduction targets for wastewater treatment facilities, including data on time and costs necessary to make enhancements in operation and maintenance procedures.

EPA is soliciting comments on simplifying the census format, and on EPA's approach to developing the mailing list for an estimated 16,000 entities. A draft of the questionnaire is available on Docket No. EPA-HQ-OW-2016-0404 at www.regulations.gov.

STATE NEWS (WSWC/WestFAST 9/16)

Washington/Wildfires: In August, Washington Governor Jay Inslee proclaimed a state of emergency for 20 counties in response to multiple wildfires in Eastern Washington threatening homes, businesses, public infrastructure and natural resources.



Idaho/Wildfires: In August, Idaho Governor Butch Otter signed a disaster declaration due to the Henry's Creek Fire, which started August 21 and consumed over 57,000 acres in four days. FEMA also approved Idaho's request for a Fire Management Assistance Grants.

California/Drought: August 29, California Governor Jerry Brown signed legislation (SB 814) into law that requires urban retail water suppliers to develop the necessary tools to identify and curb excessive residential water use by their customers during a state or local drought emergency or water shortage.

Colorado/EPA/Gold King Mine: On September 7, EPA added the Bonita Peak Mining District in Colorado, including the Gold King Mine and 47 other sites, to the Superfund priority list of those eligible to receive funding for cleanup. EPA approved the addition following a request by the local county and a letter from Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper. (WSW #2187)

Other sites added to the priority list include: California's Argonaut Mine; Montana's Anaconda Aluminum Cos Columbia Falls Reduction Plant; and Texas' Eldorado Chemical Co. Inc. EPA proposed an additional eight sights for the National Priorities List, including Nebraska's Old Highway 275 and North 288th Street; Nevada's Anaconda Copper Mine; and Texas' Highway 18 Ground Water.

National Water Supply Alliance: The National Water Supply Alliance (NWSA) is circulating a letter addressed to House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bill Schuster (R-PA) and Ranking Member Peter DeFazio (D-OR) supporting the provisions of the House Water Resources Development Act bill that encourage local and private investment in water resources, and allow states to partner with the federal government to address water resource challenges. To be added to the list of organizations in support of the letter, please contact Kelly Andrews, kelly@hlstrategy.com.

Federal News

9/1: [BLM Issues Guidance for Implementing Greater Sage-Grouse Plans](#)

9/2: [National Park Service Publishes Final Environmental Impact Statement Supporting the Non-federal Oil and Gas Regulation Revision, 36 CFR Part 9, Subpart B \("9B Regulations"\)](#)

09/07: [Bureau of Reclamation Launches American River Basin Study in Northern California](#)

09/09: [Arrowrock Dam Recognized as Historic Civil Engineering Landmark](#)

09/13 [After Strong El Niño Winter, NASA Model Sees Return to Normal](#)

09/14: [3D Intelligent Model of Glen Canyon Dam](#)

09/21: [USGS-NASA Pecora Award Recognizes Excellence in Earth Observation](#)

9/21 [Secretary Jewell, Governor Hickenlooper Celebrate Unprecedented Collaborative Conservation Effort for Greater Sage-Grouse](#)

09/23: [NASA Scientist to Discuss "A Space Weather Report" at Library of Congress Lecture](#)

09/23: [Forest Service Encourages Participation in National Public Lands Day](#)

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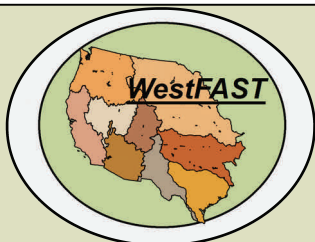
9/23: [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers launches second year of Every Kid in a Park program](#)

9/29: [National Park Service Report Highlights \\$9.4 Billion in Private Investment in Historic Preservation across America](#)

9/30: [Federal agencies begin scoping process for Columbia River System Operations EIS](#)

Meetings:

The Western States Water Council (WSWC) held its 182nd meetings, September 28-30, 2016 in St. George, Utah.



WestFAST News is published monthly. To get an Agency Announcement published or to get added to the WestFAST News distribution list contact:

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