



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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CONGRESS/WATER RIGHTS

Arizona/Indian Water Rights

On March 12, Arizona legislators reintroduced the Northeastern Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement Act (NAISWRSA). The bipartisan legislation ratifies and funds the agreement, resolving one of Arizona's longest-running water disputes and securing water rights for the Navajo Nation, the Hopi Tribe, and the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe (WSW #2637, #2618). The act was introduced in the House by Representatives Juan Ciscomani (R-AZ), Greg Stanton (D-AZ), David Schweikert (R-AZ), Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ), Eli Crane (R-AZ) and in the Senate by Senators Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and Ruben Gallego (D-AZ). Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren said: "NAIW RSA is about life. NAIW RSA is about our future. I also appreciate the work of the seven Colorado River Basin States for diligently working towards a consensus letter to pave the way for the 119th Congress to act this year. I am confident the seven Basin States will reach consensus soon."

House Natural Resources

On February 12, the House Committee on Natural Resources held a full committee markup and favorably reported eight bills. The Committee advanced by unanimous consent the Colorado River Basin System Conservation Extension Act of 2025 (H.R. 231), introduced by Rep. Harriet Hageman (R-WY), which would extend through FY2026 the Bureau of Reclamation's pilot projects to increase water levels in the Upper Colorado River Basin and Lake Mead. The Committee also advanced, in a 22-16 vote, the Water Rights Protection Act 2025 (H.R.302), introduced by Rep. Celeste Maloy (R-UT), which seeks to uphold State primacy over water rights determinations by: (1) forbidding the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture from mandating water users transfer water rights to the United States or purchase water rights in the name of the United States as a condition of any permit, lease, or other use agreement; (2) preventing unlawful seizures of groundwater; (3) recognizing state water law and requiring coordination with States. Other bills that were advanced include: H.R. 331, introduced by Rep. Russ Fulcher (R-ID), which would amend the Aquifer

Recharge Flexibility Act to clarify and streamline the process for transporting water for aquifer recharge projects across federal land; H.R. 1001, introduced by Rep. Hageman, which would allow the Western Area Power Administration to address the impacts of the recent record of decision to allow flow experiments at Glen Canyon Dam on the Upper Colorado River Basin Fund; H.R. 1044, introduced by Rep. David Valadao (R-CA), which would authorize the renewal of a special use permit in the Sequoia National Park for the ongoing operation of a hydroelectric project; and H.R. 1110, introduced by Rep. Doug LaMalfa (R-CA.), which would direct the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to expand the use of proactive, targeted grazing in fuels management programs to lower wildfire risk (an identical provision was included in the House-passed, Fix Our Forests Act.)

Committee Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR) said "Today our committee is advancing solutions for Americans across the country. Whether you rely on crucial Western water resources or support streamlining of permits for vital lands projects, the House Committee on Natural Resources is working to move legislative solutions forward."

WATER RESOURCES

California/USBR

On February 25, fourteen California irrigation districts, water, and canal companies wrote DOI Secretary Doug Burgum regarding the termination of Reclamation staff. "It is important to note that elimination of Reclamation staff will not further the goal of achieving significant cost savings to the American people. Unlike many other federal agencies, Reclamation is a service organization, predominantly funded not by the taxpayers, but instead by its water and power customers. Pursuant to federal statutes, including the Reclamation Reform Act signed into law by President Reagan in 1986, the water and power contractors pay into the Treasury to fund the benefits they receive. As such, the elimination of Reclamation's staff would merely compromise its ability to fulfill its mission of delivering water and power without significantly promoting the goal of increasing the federal coffers."

The letter expressed appreciation for the Trump Administration's interest in maximizing California water supply, indicated a desire to collaborate with DOI to implement the President's policies, and emphasized the value of Reclamation staff. "Reclamation's employees in this region have critical knowledge of the many quirks of our aged infrastructure. This knowledge is absolutely essential to assuring the continued safe and reliable delivery of water throughout the state – thereby allowing Reclamation to fulfill its fundamental Mission.... Finally, a reduction in force that eliminates Reclamation employees with the specialized knowledge needed to manage, operate, and maintain our aging infrastructure could negatively impact our water delivery system and threaten public health and safety...."

On March 6, Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA) and Adam Schiff (D-CA) wrote DOI and Reclamation leadership regarding terminations at Reclamation in California and the recent Office of Personnel Management (OPM) memo calling for workforce reductions. "On March 3, 2025, it was reported that Reclamation is set to lose about 100 employees in California, which is 10 percent of its regional staff." They requested further information about the reductions and that additional cuts not impact the "already lean agency that delivers water to more than 31 million Americans and 10 million acres of farmland that produce 60% of the nation's vegetables and 25% of its fruits and nuts." They noted highly technical and closely coordinated water projects, such as the Klamath and Central Valley Projects, and Hoover Dam. Finally, they urged OPM to reconsider the terminations and halt further workforce reductions at Reclamation.

Colorado/Groundwater

On March 5, the Colorado State Engineer officially designated the White River Basin above the Taylor Draw Power Conduit at Taylor Draw Reservoir, in northwest Colorado, as over-appropriated. The change will be effective May 1, 2025. Water rights owners made calls on the White River (part of the Colorado River basin) in 2022 and 2023, leading the Colorado Division of Water Resources (DWR) to evaluate the basin and request the new designation. New, non-exempt well permits above the Taylor Draw Power Conduit will require an augmentation plan. Jason Ullmann, Colorado State Engineer and Director said: "This designation is part of the unfortunate story we're seeing play out across the Upper Colorado River Basin. Extended drought and hotter temperatures, made worse by climate change, means there's less water to go around. Even very senior water rights holders aren't getting their full supply. Designating the White River as over-appropriated will help ensure senior water rights are protected and not harmed by additional groundwater pumping, which can impact surface water supplies."

PEOPLE

On March 13, Rep. **Raúl M. Grijalva** (D-AZ) passed away due to complications of his cancer treatments. Grijalva served over two decades in Congress. He is celebrated for championing permanent funding for land and water conservation programs, permanent protections for the Grand Canyon, and clean water access for Tribes. Grijalva served as Ranking Member, and past Chair, of the House Natural Resources Committee. Governor Katie Hobbs (D) has set the special election for Grijalva's seat for September 23.

Governor Spencer Cox (R-UT) has appointed **Tim Davis** as the Executive Director of the Utah Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), pending approval by the Utah State Senate. The Senate Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Confirmation Committee voted unanimously to recommend him favorably. Davis currently serves as Deputy Great Salt Lake Commissioner. Previously, he served as the Director of Utah's Division of Drinking Water and Chair of WSWC.

MEETINGS

Western States Water Council - Spring Meetings

The WSWC will hold its regular meetings on April 22-25, in Lincoln, Nebraska preceded by a Groundwater Workshop on April 22, and a full day field trip on April 23. A block of rooms is being held at the Courtyard by Marriott Lincoln Downtown in the name of the WSWC at a rate of \$116.00 per night, plus tax, for single/double occupancy. **The room block deadline is March 31.** There is no registration fee to attend the WSWC meetings (including the workshop and field trip) but all individuals, regardless of in person or virtual attendance, should register in advance. Please See: <https://westernstateswater.org/events/2025-wswc-spring-206th-meetings-in-lincoln-nebraska/>.

Schedule of Meetings

Tuesday, April 22 (Central Daylight Time)
8:00 am Groundwater Workshop

Thursday, April 24
8:00 am Host State Presentation
8:45 am Water Resources Committee Meeting
12:00 pm Executive Committee (over lunch)
1:30 pm Water Quality Committee Meeting
3:30 pm Legal Committee Meeting
6:00 pm Reception

Friday, April 25
8:00 am Full Council (206th) Meeting

The WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL is a government entity 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.