



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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ADMINISTRATION

EPA/Drinking Water

On May 15, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a total of \$24.9M in funding for the Small, Underserved, and Disadvantaged Communities (SUDC) Grant Program which provides non-competitive grants to States and territories to support water infrastructure improvements, compliance with National Primary Drinking Water Regulations (NPDWRs), and effective administration of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). EPA is waiving the 10% cost share requirement for all grant applicants. Allotments were made to Alaska (\$583,000); Arizona (\$498,000); California (\$1.5M); Colorado (\$477,000); Idaho (\$329,000); Kansas (\$385,000); Montana (\$331,000); Nebraska (\$284,000); Nevada (\$288,000); New Mexico (\$401,000); North Dakota (\$209,000); Oklahoma, (\$506,000); Oregon (\$434,000); South Dakota (\$236,000); Texas, (\$1.9M); Utah (\$304,000); Washington, (\$598,000); and Wyoming (\$262,000).

CONGRESS

House/Appropriations/Department of Interior

On May 20, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Environment held a hearing to discuss the FY26 Department of Interior (DOI) budget request with Secretary Doug Burgum. Full Committee Chair Tom Cole (R-OK) and Subcommittee Chair Mike Simpson (R-ID) both expressed support for the Administration's efficiency goals but raised concerns about the proposed budget's impact on tribal nations. Subcommittee Ranking Member Chellie Pingree (D-ME) strongly opposed the proposed 30% budget cut for DOI. "That budget eviscerates the U.S. Geological Survey [USGS] with a proposed \$564M cut, targeting scientific research on natural hazards, ecosystems, water, and earth mapping.... They strengthen our assessment of groundwater and surface water systems.... Without these programs, our communities will be left vulnerable to natural disasters and deprived of the scientific data that guides responsible land management."

Rep. Celeste Maloy (R-UT) asked whether DOI would work with Utah and other States in efforts to

conserve water and fund shovel-ready water projects. Burgum confirmed that DOI prioritizes collaboration with States, especially those that have significant federal lands, such as Utah, Nevada, Idaho, and Alaska. He noted Colorado River negotiations and highlighted the appointment of Andrea Travnicek to head Water and Science. He described her as highly qualified with understanding of both upstream and downstream concerns, particularly with international challenges. He stated she will be a key partner in mediating between the seven Colorado River States once she is confirmed.

Rep. Mark Amodei (R-NV) of Nevada mentioned a situation with a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for a hydro project on BLM land. Amodei said the Ely District Office had failed to contact the State Engineer in making a determination. He emphasized the importance of acknowledging the State's authority and consulting with the State Engineer on matters involving groundwater, especially given the high percentage of federal land in Nevada.

House/Army Corps/Bureau of Reclamation

On May 21, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development held a hearing on the FY26 budget request for the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation. Chairman Chuck Fleischman (R-TN) highlighted significant proposed cuts—\$2 billion (23%) for the Corps of Engineers and \$609 million (35%) for the Bureau of Reclamation. Fleischmann voiced concern that the Reclamation budget may fall short in addressing urgent water needs in the West, particularly for Indian Water Rights Settlements. "Upholding our nation's treaty and trust responsibilities is among the DOI's highest priorities, and we cannot afford to fail in delivering access to safe and reliable water supplies across Indian Country."

Ranking Member Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) noted the Corps has a return on investment of over 200 to one in terms of economic benefits for every dollar invested. "In this time of unprecedented drought and water stress, we must bolster, not diminish, Reclamation's capacity to invest in sustainable water systems and innovative

conservation technologies.... We must provide these agencies with the resources they need to protect our growing population, strengthen our economy and safeguard our environment for generations to come.”

Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA) criticized the FY25 Army Corps work plan for allegedly redistributing over \$250M away from construction projects in “blue states” like California and Washington to “red states.” Pointing to the March Continuing Resolution (CR), which he argued gave full budget discretion to the Administration and removed Congress’s ability to direct funds, he asked if the Corps should operate in a non-partisan manner (WSW #2654). Robyn Colosimo, acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works said the Corps should always be non-political and aim to put forth the best projects. She said the reduced funding of the CR meant the Administration had to make hard choices.

Chairman Fleischman asked Scott Cameron, Senior Advisor at Reclamation, about Indian water rights settlements. Cameron confirmed meeting legal deadlines for tribal commitments as a top priority, followed by collaborative water negotiations. When asked about Colorado River operating guidelines, Cameron confirmed a strong focus on a consensus-based approach, noting recent encouraging progress in negotiations. “I’m quite optimistic that working with the seven States will end up getting to a good place on a timely basis. And I believe all seven States are negotiating with each other and with Reclamation in very good faith. They all want a solution, and they all agree that it is much better for them to come to a deal than have the Interior Secretary impose a deal.” He could not confirm specific budget details but expressed confidence that FY25 WaterSMART grant funding opportunities remain forthcoming.

Senate/Weather Research

On May 21, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation advanced the Water Research Optimization Act of 2025 (S.1523), introduced by Senator Katie Britt (R-AL), which aims to integrate water research more effectively into the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Weather Service (NWS) by establishing the National Water Center as the primary coordination hub for federal water research and operational activities. It would also incorporate advanced water modeling into the unified forecast system and supervising River Forecast Centers and related cooperative institutes.

Sen. Britt said: “The National Water Center has been instrumental to NOAA’s efforts to strengthen America’s water forecasting capabilities, improve weather preparedness, and modernize water research technologies. I’m proud of the Center’s world-class

capabilities, and I have no doubt this legislation will further enhance critical research and applied sciences that benefit our entire nation.”

WATER RESOURCES

S2S Precipitation Forecasting

On May 7-9, the WSWC and California Department of Water Resources (CDWR) co-hosted a workshop on Improving Subseasonal to Seasonal (S2S) Precipitation Forecasting. The workshop highlighted extensive efforts across academia, federal agencies, and Congress to advance subseasonal to seasonal (S2S) forecasting for improved water and drought management. Jeanine Jones emphasized the importance of forecast lead times and congressional support for S2S via the stalled Weather Act reauthorization. Other presenters showcased research on drought outlooks, atmospheric river forecasting (including the role of the Madden-Julian Oscillation), machine learning applications, and research on Earth system predictability. Others provided updates on congressional efforts and pilot project implementation. Forecast applications were discussed in regions such as Arizona, California, and Utah. A full report on the workshop will be available at <https://westernstateswater.org/topical-resources/s2s/>.

S2S precipitation forecasts help support water project operations, drought preparedness and response, and innovative water management strategies such as forecast-informed reservoir operations (FIRO). NOAA submitted a report to the Congress, required under P.L. 115-25, recommending a number of pilot projects to improve S2S precipitation forecasting. Projects were to be selected “...based on the existence of major climate phenomena that have huge economic impacts and for which current S2S predictive skill is too low to be effectively used by many stakeholders.” See www.s2sforecasting.org.

A S2S coalition of agencies and organizations is asking for support for a \$15M increase in Fiscal Year 2026 for the U.S. Weather Research Program line item within NOAA’s Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR) to address development of reliable S2S forecasting to provide water managers with longer lead times and critical data to operate infrastructure more efficiently and allocate resources. The \$15M would include \$3M for academic research grants, \$4M for NOAA Labs for product development, \$2M to the NWS for product evaluation and implementation, \$2M for the NWS Environmental Modeling Center (EMC) for implementation and evaluation of model improvements, and \$4 million for computing resources. A letter of support to House and Senate appropriators is circulating. Members wishing to sign on may contact Jordan Smith, jas@vnf.com.

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.