



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

682 East Vine Street / Suite 7 / Murray, UT 84107 / (801) 685-2555 / Fax 685-2559 / www.westernstateswater.org

Chair - Julie Cunningham; Executive Director - Tony Willardson; Editor - Michelle Bushman

WESTERN GOVERNORS

WGA Annual Meeting – Santa Fe

The Western Governors' Association (WGA) met in historic Santa Fe, New Mexico on June 23-24, hosted by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, WGA Chair. Other Governors attending included WGwLA's Vice Chair, Utah Governor Spencer Cox, Colorado Governor Jared Polis, the Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Arnold Palacios, North Dakota Governor Kelly Armstrong, South Dakota Governor Larry Rhoden, and Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon. Five U.S. Cabinet Secretaries joined the Governors for two days of robust, bipartisan discussions on some of the region's most pressing issues.

The Governors opened the meetings by adopting four updated resolutions addressing mineral production, radioactive materials management, biosecurity and invasive species, and recreation and tourism on public lands. "We are probably the most robust Governors' association in terms of bipartisan efforts at passing policy resolutions," Governor Lujan Grisham noted. Western Governors are problem-solvers, working hard to set the tone for the Nation through regional collaboration and cooperation. She added sometimes "governments make things too difficult." Governor Cox specifically called out challenges regarding infrastructure, housing and water.

Former North Dakota Governor and current Secretary of the Department of the Interior Doug Burgum said WGA is "...one of the most productive organizations in the country for advancing bipartisan, smart policy that affects everyone in the West." He noted the department manages some 500 million acres of land in the West or about 20% of the United States. These are not "snow globe" states, but rather they are vital to the Nation for energy and food security, which he equated with defense and national security. He said, "The West is a complete powerhouse of abundance and innovation," leading the Nation in developing energy and rare earths, while balancing our responsibility to protect the land and resources. He added, we can "solve any problem we have," cleaner and smarter than our global competitors. He emphasized the future universal

impacts of artificial intelligence, with software and technology bettering the human condition. He concluded saying, "States created the federal government, and not the other way round."

Governor Lujan Grisham released WGA's report on her BRAND West initiative, "Building Resilient and Affordable New Developments in the West," with actionable recommendations to tackle the Nation's housing crisis. She added, "The BRAND housing report offers a roadmap to help public and private sector leaders develop new housing stock...not only putting the American Dream of homeownership within reach for more Americans but also providing housing for the workforce of the future."

U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Brook Rollins suggested States' innovation is inhibited by federal regulations. She announced the U.S. Forest Service will rescind the 2001 Roadless Rule prohibiting road construction, reconstruction, and timber harvesting on 58.5 million acres of National Forest System lands. She declared the rule had decimated the U.S. forest industry and resulted in less forest treatment and more acres burnt, some 60 million acres. She noted some 3,800 communities rely on federal lands for water. She referred to a Presidential Action calling for the Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production and Addressing the Threat to National Security from Imports of Timber, Lumber issued on March 1, 2025. She cited a National Forest Emergency on 110 acres of land and ten current projects designed to treat 1.7 million acres. Governor Cox observed, "A good forest is like a garden, you need to prune it and take care of it." Gov. Gordon cited USDA's Good Neighbor authority and the efforts with landowners adjacent to Yellowstone National Park to mitigate impacts on wildlife of wildfire. Governor Lujan Grisham stated the biggest threat to forests is climate change. Governor Polis raised the threat of invasive species.

Lee Zeldin, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator, noted delegation partnerships with States for implementing the Clean Water Act (CWA). He said, by working together, EPA and the States can both protect the environment and grow the economy. The nation can

have clean air and water for all Americans. EPA can help with permitting reform and cooperative regulation. Zeldin noted the creation of the National Energy Dominance Council, chaired by Secretary Burgum, to expand reliable and affordable energy production, driving economic growth. He turned to rewriting the Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule as an EPA priority, given the “new world post-Sackett,” with the Supreme Court’s simple prescriptive language. EPA is seeking one definition for the entire country that is so durable it will withstand the test of time, recognizing the past “ping pong” regulatory environment. He also referred to the Supreme Court’s *Loper-Bright* decision, which abolished the *Chevron* Doctrine. “I would say to Congress, the most durable solution is for Congress to debate and enact laws.... Agencies shouldn’t create what we want the law to say.” EPA will follow the law.

Secretary of Education Linda McMahon and Secretary of Labor Lori Chavez-DeRemer also addressed the Governors. [See https://westgov.org/meetings/details/2025-annual-meeting](https://westgov.org/meetings/details/2025-annual-meeting).

Texas

On June 18, Governor Greg Abbott (R-TX) signed SB 7 and House Joint Resolution 7 into law. SB 7 assigns the Texas Water Development Board the responsibility to coordinate water supply conveyance, expands the uses of the new Water Supply for Texas Fund, and dedicates funding to finance water supply and infrastructure projects. House Joint Resolution 7 is a constitutional amendment, which Texans will vote on in November, dedicating \$1B of the State’s sales and use taxes annually to the Water Fund and allowing the allocation and use of the revenue.

Governor Abbott said the “Texas-sized” water investment would help address the needs of Texans throughout the State. He noted that the new laws would allow the State to address outdated water infrastructure and tap into new water sources. “Water is a critical need for all Texas. In my State of the State Address, I called on the Texas legislature to make the largest investment in water in Texas history. This law... does just that, providing a \$20B generational investment for both new water supply and for the repairing of existing infrastructure. With this law, we will secure Texas’ water future for generations to come.”

WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL **Instream Flow Council**

On June 20, the WSWC submitted a letter to the Instream Flow Council and American Fisheries Society Project Steering Committee, endorsing the creation of the National Center for Ecologically Sustainable Water

Conservation and Management. The WSWC acknowledged the increasing scarcity of water in the West and emphasized the need for a skilled workforce trained in science and water law to address these challenges. The WSWC highlighted the importance of aligning education and job opportunities. It emphasized the need for training in hydrological data and forecasting tools to manage water resources effectively, including for fish and wildlife.

Landsat Next

On June 20, WSWC sent a letter to DOI Secretary Doug Burgum and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Acting Administrator Janet Petro, urging them to maintain full funding for Landsat Next as designed under the first Trump Administration, with an early 2030s launch date.

WSWC expressed concern over the federal budget’s proposed restructuring of the Landsat Next mission, noting that any delays or loss of capability “would threaten Western States’ effective future management of our water and other natural resources, and harm our economies and the resilience of our farms, towns, and cities.” WSWC highlighted a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) study that valued Landsat imagery’s contribution to the public and private sectors at \$25B in 2023. Data used from the Landsat Next mission is expected to generate over \$33B annually.

The letter highlighted the crucial role Landsat data play in water management tasks, including mapping irrigation, evaluating water rights, managing interstate compacts, and monitoring agricultural water use at the field level. WSWC emphasized the need for accelerated Landsat Next deployment to ensure imagery continuity and certainty for water managers. WSWC described its collaboration with NASA, USGS, and OpenET to use Landsat data to track evapotranspiration to measure agricultural water use and facilitate voluntary, compensated, water conservation programs.

“Simply put, there is no more important satellite mission for water, land, and natural resource management than the Landsat series. Any interruption or degradation of their capabilities would cause Western States, and the Nation, serious societal harm.... Its benefit-cost ratio is roughly 16.5:1 – a considerable annual economic return on taxpayer investment over the mission’s lifetime. Moreover, no other private or public source can replace these benefits now or in the foreseeable future. An Aesop’s fable comes to mind about the farmer that ‘killed the goose that laid the golden eggs.’ Any short-term budgetary gain from restructuring Landsat Next would greatly imperil the long-term economic and environmental benefits to our Nation.”

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.