

Western States Water Council

Strategic Direction



Strategic Direction Process

Overall Process Purpose: Refocus on the WSWC mission and define actionable goals and approach to advance the WSWC mission.



Meeting objectives:

1. Identify three priority topics to focus on in the coming year
2. Inform the development of an annual road map and process

Agenda



- Welcoming and Setting Intention
- Recap of Members Input on Strategic Direction and Next Steps
- Members Sharing: WSWC Impacts
- Developing WSWC Strategic Direction for 2025-26
- Short Break
- Implementation Considerations
- The Resolution Process
- Planning for a New Leadership
- Next Steps and Reflections

Components of Strategic Planning



Strategic Planning Considerations

OPPORTUNITIES: Recognize the diversity of perspectives and needs across member states. Seek common ground on areas for collective exploration and alignment with the broader membership. Acknowledge that some members are open to trying new approaches that others may not support—can we pilot, learn, and evaluate together?

VISION: Balance short-term priorities with a long-term vision. Identify what can realistically be achieved in the short term (within an annual planning cycle) while contributing to longer-term goals.

CAPACITY: Ensure that next steps and planned activities align with WSWC's available resources and scope.

OTHERS?



Looking into the future (five years?), if the WSWC is successful in advancing its purpose and mission, what is one thing that was instrumental in getting us there?

Recap of Members Input and Next Steps

Michelle Bushman, Deputy Director and General Counsel

- 1. Fewer presentations/speakers – more time for interactive state discussions in person**
 - a. Roundtable of state reports earlier in the meetings instead of at the end
 - b. Move presentations to a virtual setting (recorded webinars) to allow more time for in depth presentations online, and set aside time during the in-person meetings for further discussion on those topics
- 2. Select a few key themes to focus on for the year**
 - a. Dedicate some time annually to discuss the most pressing topics and develop the topics for the coming year – key goals to proactively pursue rather than reacting to issues
 - b. Wrap-up at the end of each meeting – action items, assignments, feedback, track progress
- 3. Adjustments to meeting schedule/format**
 - a. Hold at least one all-virtual meeting each year to reduce travel
 - b. Can we fit the meeting portion to a single day? (Adjacent days for field trip, occasional workshops) (later start time?)
- 4. Mentoring our new members**
 - a. Assign mentors – introductions to other members, orientation to WSWC meeting culture, dinner
 - b. Orientation documents on the website; one-pager in person
 - c. Make a video of members talking about the value/purpose of/interest in the WSWC, roles and responsibilities

Recap of Members Input and Next Steps

Michelle Bushman, Deputy Director and General Counsel

5. Documents/reports comparing western state experiences/practices/laws

- a. States: one-page description of what each participating water agency does (What Does Montana Water Resources Do?) and their top five priorities
- b. Summary reports after workshops; reports on surveys
- c. WSWC repository of useful information for incoming state agency staff

6. Policy Positions

- a. Start work on a position the meeting before they are due to sunset, set aside time to discuss and consider what changes might be needed, time for internal discussions back home
- b. Continue subcommittees to wordsmith positions in between meetings as needed; vetting language across 18 states still matters

7. Policy Advocacy

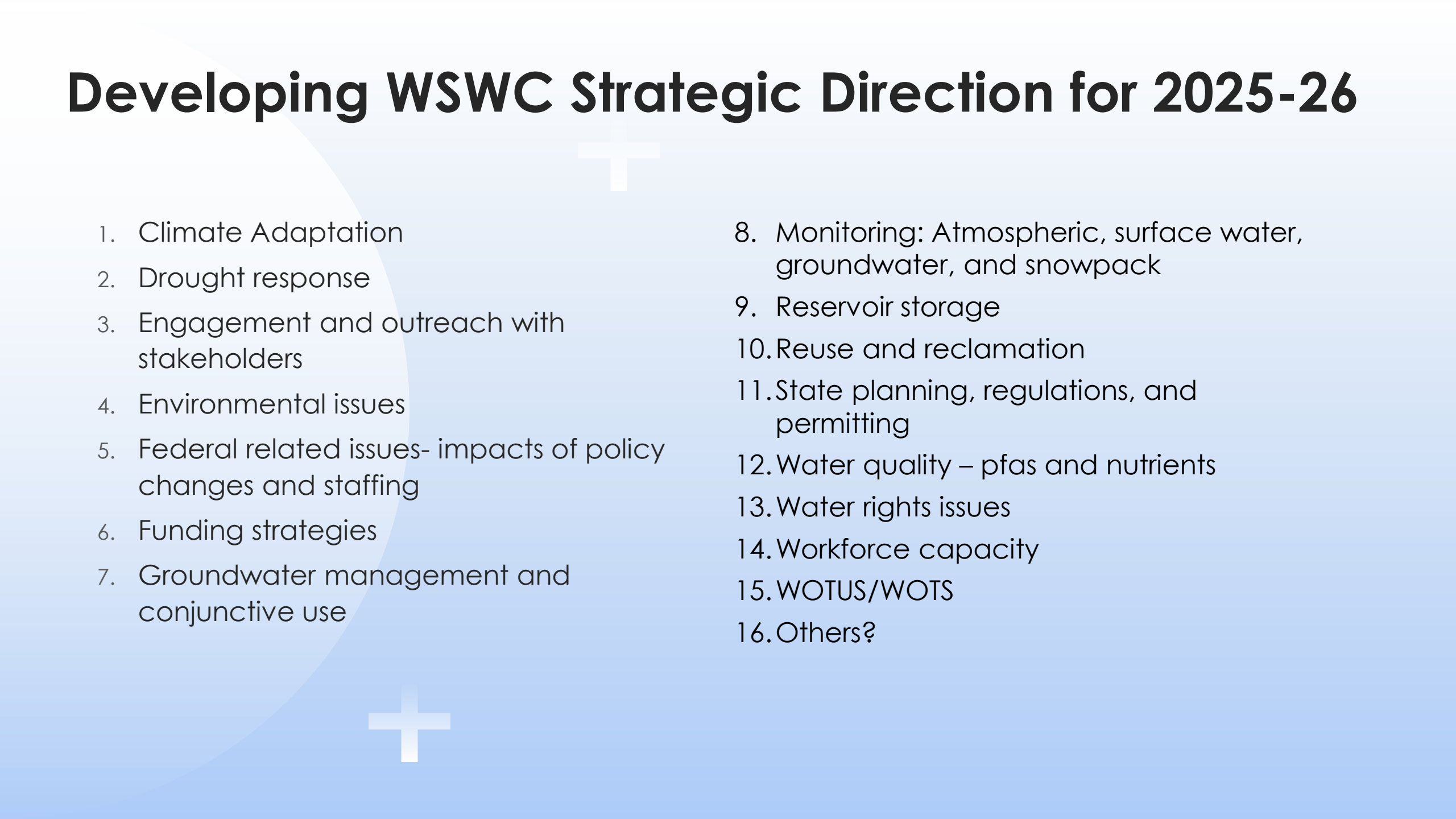
- a. Staying on top of Congressional legislation – would be helpful to know when bills are going to markup and could use support from state agencies to their state delegations (talking points, copy of relevant WSWC position(s) to share)
- b. Advocacy among sister organizations: WSWC is unique in considering the complexity of the quality-quantity nexus, the impact of water rights on water resource management
- c. Actively engage with Congressional staff, education on the specific challenges and considerations in the West

Members Sharing: WSWC Impacts



- **Celebrating:** What are some of WSWC's accomplishments that have made a significant impact in the water world?
- **Overcoming challenges:** What are some of the challenges that the Council had to overcome in the past that we can learn from?
- **Path ahead:** What are important opportunities to consider as we develop a strategic direction?

Developing WSWC Strategic Direction for 2025-26

- 
1. Climate Adaptation
 2. Drought response
 3. Engagement and outreach with stakeholders
 4. Environmental issues
 5. Federal related issues- impacts of policy changes and staffing
 6. Funding strategies
 7. Groundwater management and conjunctive use
 8. Monitoring: Atmospheric, surface water, groundwater, and snowpack
 9. Reservoir storage
 10. Reuse and reclamation
 11. State planning, regulations, and permitting
 12. Water quality – pfas and nutrients
 13. Water rights issues
 14. Workforce capacity
 15. WOTUS/WOTS
 16. Others?

Our Process

[30 min] Review and Refinement of Proposed Topics

- Consider the topics that you are most interested in
- Review the topics/subtopics and add comments, questions, and additional ideas to explore
- Engage other members in informal conversation to develop the topic

[5 min] Voting on Priority Topics

- Use the provided sticky dots to share your preferences for topics to be addressed by the Council

[20 min] Discussion and Final Selection

- Together we will review the polling results to identify and further discuss emerging priorities and finalize the list of topics for the coming year



What do you think are the most important, timely, and relevant topics that should be the focus of the Council in the coming year?



Short Break

Developing a Roadmap

Objective: Develop a strategy to support engagement and address the three identified priority topics

Implementation Considerations:

1. Goals and Related Actions
2. Alignment and Added Value
3. Process and Milestones
4. Evaluation and Adaptation

Implementation Considerations

1. Goals and Related Actions: What do we hope to accomplish within one year related to the identified topics?

Inform: Focus on learning. Promote information sharing and discussion of what others already have underway.

Complement: Identify opportunities for WSWC to support coordination, building on already ongoing efforts. Contribute actions that fill a targeted gap in current efforts.

Lead: Lead a collaborative effort to address a problem that is not well addressed today.

Implementation Considerations

2. Alignment and Added Value: How does each topic align with the broader purpose of WSWC? Interest of the states?

The purposes of the Council are (Rules of Organization Article II, reworded):

- to accomplish **effective cooperation** among western states in the conservation, development and management of water resources;
- to **maintain vital state prerogatives**, while identifying ways to accommodate legitimate federal interests;
- to provide a forum for the **exchange of views, perspectives, and experiences** among member states; and
- to provide analysis of federal and state developments in order to assist member states in **evaluating impacts of federal laws and programs and the effectiveness of state laws and policies**.

...Also, network and learning from other states' experience

Our mission is to ensure that the West has an adequate, secure, and sustainable supply of water of suitable quality to meet its diverse economic and environmental needs now and in the future.

Implementation Considerations

3. Process and Milestones: How can we use the three upcoming meetings to make tangible progress on each topic? What process or framework will guide our advancement?

Engagement:

- Who needs to be involved to ensure effective progress?
- Who can bring relevant expertise, experience, or information?
- How can staff best support members on this topic?

Activities:

- What activities would be most effective in advancing this topic?
- What is the role of state representatives in contributing and advancing this topic?

Communication and Feedback:

- How will the Council communicate about this work with states, federal partners, and other stakeholders?
- What feedback mechanisms will be in place?

Implementation Considerations

4. Evaluation and Adaptation: What parameters or indicators will we track to evaluate the effectiveness of this process—from topic selection through follow-up? How will we adapt based on what we learn?

Implementation Development – An Example

Goals and Related Actions

The subcommittee's primary interest is overwhelmingly for states to share information with each other. Related: generate a report, consider policy position, use information to help educate public/federal government, support funding for useful programs

Alignment and Added Value

These workshops/webinars will provide a forum for member states to exchange views, perspectives, experiences

State Groundwater
Information-Sharing
Workshops/Webinars

The first workshop was a nice groundwater potpourri, but it would be good to narrow the focus to a single subtopic per webinar and bring in relevant agency staff to share and learn

Evaluation and Adaptation

Discussion-based first workshop. Members and agency staff to attend with relevant knowledge re: conjunctive management, allocation, aquifer science, groundwater laws/policies/ programs

Process and Milestones

Implementation Development Template

Goals and Related Actions

What do we hope to accomplish within one year related to the identified topics? (Inform, Complement, Lead)

Alignment and Added Value

How does each topic align with the broader purpose of WSWC? Interest of the states?

PRIORITY TOPIC

What parameters or indicators will we track to evaluate the effectiveness of this process—from topic selection through follow-up? How will we adapt based on what we learn?

Evaluation and Adaptation

How can we use the three upcoming meetings to make tangible progress on each topic? What process or framework will guide our advancement?

Process and Milestones



Priority Topics Report Out

Resolution Process



What criteria is needed for sunseting a resolution?

- Members may determine that the position is no longer necessary and allow it to sunset.
- Staff retain a list of all positions that have sunset, included in the briefing book for each meeting. Each position is in effect for approximately three years.

Planning for a New Leadership



- How can a new Executive Director best support the strategic direction developed through this process?
- How would you like the ED to engage with you and remain responsive to state needs?
- What qualities and priorities should WSWC consider when selecting a new Executive Director? Identify key attributes, experience, and leadership approach desired in the next ED.



Closing and Reflections

Thank you