



# 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](http://www.westernstateswater.org)

Chair - Jon Niermann; Executive Director - Tony Willardson; Editor - Michelle Bushman; Subscriptions - Julie Groat

### **WESTERN GOVERNORS/CONGRESS** **Republican Governors Association**

On January 7, a coalition of 25 Republican governors sent a letter to U.S. Senate leaders, urging the swift confirmation of Governor Doug Burgum (R-ND) to serve as Secretary of the Department of Interior (DOI). Signatories included Governors Mike Dunleavy (AK), Brad Little (ID), Greg Gianforte (MT), Jim Pillen (NE), Joe Lombardo (NV), Kelly Armstrong (ND), Kevin Stitt (OK), Kristi Noem (SD), Greg Abbott (TX), Spencer Cox (UT), and Mark Gordon (WY). The governors wrote: "We have absolute confidence in Governor Burgum's ability to solve complex problems, maximize responsible use of America's natural resources, and promote innovation over regulation to achieve energy dominance. During his time in North Dakota's executive office, Governor Burgum leveraged his small-town upbringing and collaborative style to earn great victories for the state that he will replicate at the federal level: becoming a national leader in energy production, significantly reducing red tape regulations, and focusing on state-tribal relations. These qualities will serve him well at the Department of the Interior, where Governor Burgum will also bring his experience as both Governor and Chairman of the North Dakota Land Board for bringing together a wide variety of stakeholders to find mutual understanding and compromise." <https://www.rga.org/news/>

### **ADMINISTRATION/CONGRESS** **Senate Confirmation Hearings**

On January 16, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) Committee on held a hearing to consider the nomination of Doug Burgum to be the DOI Secretary. Chair Mike Lee (R-UT) noted that 1/5 of the land in the U.S. is under the jurisdiction of DOI, with the percentage much higher in western states. "The decisions made in Washington ripple through our economy and our communities in ways that are unmistakable and not always positive." He spoke of responsible resource development, prioritizing forest management strategies that mitigate wildfires, supporting states as they negotiate the future of the Colorado River, and the misuse of the Endangered Species Act to halt development projects and undermine state authority.

Ranking Member Martin Heinrich (D-NM) said: "As the relentless pace of climate change brings bigger floods, hotter summers, higher winds as we've seen in California, and diminished snowpack which we are experiencing in New Mexico, it's also driving the long term aridification of the western United States. Over the next 50 years, it's expected that New Mexico will have 25% less water than we have had historically, and we're not alone in that. The Colorado River provides drinking water for 40 million people, irrigates billions of dollars worth of crops, provides essential habitat for fish and wildlife, and will likely never return to those early 20th century flows that we used to be able to expect. Through the Bureau of Reclamation, the Department of the Interior must play an active role in helping the West transition to that new water reality."

On January 16, the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee considered Lee Zeldin to be the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Senator John Barasso (R-WY) introduced Congressman Zeldin, and said: "He knows firsthand how important it is for the federal government to be a partner to states, rather than an out-of-touch regulator. This is the dedication and understanding he will bring to the EPA. His experience shows that he knows how to balance multiple priorities. He understands that we must be good stewards of the environment without crippling our economy."

Chairman Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) said: "I believe the EPA must return to its core missions. The EPA also should better manage taxpayers' dollars by doing more with the vast funding that Congress provides. That means reducing, of course, bureaucratic red tape so the state agencies responsible for protecting our nation's air, land, and water can do so without Washington, D.C. getting into the way. Doing so will lead to those state agencies efficiently improving our drinking water systems and issuing relevant air, land, and water permits. It also means prioritizing the EPA's attention towards issues that will help Americans in their daily lives." Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) showed a map of his state with the anticipated future effects of climate change and expressed concern in his opening statements as to whether Zeldin would "follow

the science and economics and protect our air, water, and climate.”

## **ADMINISTRATION/WATER RESOURCES**

### **Bureau of Reclamation/Water Recycling**

On January 14, the Bureau of Reclamation announced \$223M from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) for water recycling and desalination projects aimed at addressing the impacts of drought. The selected projects are expected to result in a total of 305,936 acre-feet of annual recycled water. Three projects in Arizona, with a total investment of \$44M, are expected to produce a combined 80,212 acre-feet per year (AFY) of recycled water. Seven projects in California (\$92.7M) are expected to produce 169,234 AFY. Other western States with selected projects include: (1) Idaho, \$2M expected to deliver up to 12,439 AFY for irrigation; (2) New Mexico, \$5.3M expected to provide an additional 10,503 AFY of water supply; (3) Oklahoma, \$7.6M; (4) four projects in Texas, with a total investment of \$53.2M, are expected to produce 20,822 AFY; and (5) Washington, \$14M expected to produce 5,204 AFY.

DOI Secretary Deb Haaland said: “Access to clean and reliable water is essential for feeding families and communities, growing crops, sustaining wildlife and the environment, and powering agricultural businesses. The Biden-Harris administration has brought every resource to bear to ensure that we both minimize the impacts of climate-fueled drought and develop a long-term plan to build resilience and facilitate water conservation.”

## **CONGRESS**

### **House Committee Leadership**

On January 14, Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) announced that the House Democratic Caucus had approved Committee appointments for the 119th Congress. House Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA) had announced the Republican Steering Committee’s recommendations for committee Chairs in December. Rep. Glenn Thompson (R-PA) was selected to chair the Agriculture Committee with Rep. Angie Craig (D-MN) as Ranking Member. Rep. Brett Guthrie (R-KY) succeeded Rep. Cathay McMorris Rodger (R-WA) to chair Energy and Commerce, with Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) as Ranking Member. Leading Natural Resources, Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-AL) as Chair with Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA) succeeding Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ) as Ranking Member. Rep. Brian Babin (R-TX) was selected to chair Science, Space, and Technology, succeeding Rep. Frank Lucas (R-OK), with Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) as Ranking Member. Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO) was selected to lead Transportation and Infrastructure with Rep. Rick Larsen (D-WA) as Ranking Member.

## **Senate Committee Leadership**

On December 20, Senate Republican Leader John Thune (R-SD) announced the Senate Republican Conference committee assignments for the 119th Congress. On January 2, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) announced committee assignments for the Democratic Caucus. John Boozman (R-AR) succeeded Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) as Chair of Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Boozman was succeeded as Ranking Member by Amy Klobuchar (D-MN). Ted Cruz (R-TX), now Chair, swapped positions with Maria Cantwell (D-WA) to lead Commerce, Science, and Transportation (CST). Mike Lee succeeded Joe Manchin (I-WV) as the ENR Chair. Martin Heinrich (D-NM) succeeded John Barrasso (R-WY) as Ranking Member. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) succeeded Tom Carper (D-DE) as Chair of the EPW, and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) succeeded Capito as Ranking Member.

Water-related committee assignments for new Senators from western States include: Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) to ENR; Adam Schiff (D-CA) to EPW and Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry; Tim Sheehy (R-MT) to CST; and John Curtis (R-UT) to CST and EPW.

## **WATER RESOURCES**

### **California/Wildfire**

On January 7, Governor Gavin Newsom proclaimed a state of emergency in response to the Palisades Fire ignited in Los Angeles County, California, and announced the procurement of three Fire Management Assistant Grant (FMAG) for the Palisades, Eaton, and Hurst Fires through the President’s Disaster Relief Fund. It allows agencies to apply for 75% reimbursement of their eligible fire suppression costs. President Biden approved Newsom’s request for a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration to support response efforts. Newsom issued an executive order to direct fast action on debris removal work and to mitigate the potential for mudslides and flooding in burned areas. Fire containment is still in progress, hindered by dry fuels, and supported by firefighting resources mobilized from outside the area. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and parts of Los Angeles County have issued “do not drink” and “do not boil” notices to residents in the Palisades and Eaton Fire areas, and cited that burned city structures combined with loss of water pressure indicate risk of harmful contaminants, including benzene and other volatile organic chemicals (VOCs). As of January 17, the National Interagency Fire Center reported a total of four large fires under full suppression strategies, including the three in California, and one in Arizona, covering a total of 46, 975 acres.

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**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.**