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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

ADMINISTRATION
FY26 Appropriations

On May 2, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released President Trump's FY26 discretionary funding recommendations, proposing a $163B (22.6%) cut to non-defense spending while maintaining support for homeland security, veterans, seniors, law enforcement, and infrastructure.

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) drinking water programs would receive $124M (an increase of $9M), $31M for the Indian Reservation Drinking Water program (an increase of $27M). Clean and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRFs) would drop by $2.4B (89%) to $305M. The Administration said the original intent of SRFs has been bypassed by Congressional earmarks, and that SRFs are duplicative of the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Water and Wastewater Loan and Grant program.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) CWIFP program would be eliminated with a $7M cut. The Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) Central Utah Project would receive $1.2B, a decrease of $609M. The Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) conservation technical assistance funding would be eliminated through a $754M cut to Private Lands Conservation Operations. The National Oceanic and Atomospheric Administration (NOAA) would see a $1.3B reduction in its Operations, Research and Grants title, and a $209M cut to satellite acquisition and infrastructure funding. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Earth Science title would be cut by $1.6B.

EPA/Restructuring

On May 2, EPA Administrator, Lee Zeldin announced changes to the personnel structure that will impact the Offices of the Administrator; Air and Radiation; Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention; and Water. EPA leadership told Office of Research and Development staff to expect cuts in the coming weeks and encouraged staff to apply for the roughly 500 new positions created in the reorganization. The announcement said: "Changes to the Office of Water will better align the development of regulations, guidance, and policy with the science that underpins it. EPA is also elevating issues of cybersecurity, emergency response, and water reuse and conservation to ensure they are receiving appropriate resources to address today's pressing water issues…. In this reorganization, the agency is shifting its scientific expertise and research efforts to program offices to tackle statutory obligations and mission essential functions. This includes the creation of the Office of Applied Science and Environmental Solutions (OASES) in the Office of the Administrator to align research and put science at the forefront of the agency's rulemakings and technical assistance to states."

Administrator Zeldin said: "With these organizational improvements, we recommit to fulfilling all of our statutory obligations and exceptionally delivering on EPA's core mission of protecting human health and the environment. This reorganization will bring much needed efficiencies to incorporate science into our rulemakings and sharply focus our work on providing the cleanest air, land, and water for our communities. It will also save at least $300 million annually for the American people." https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/

USDA

On April 23, the USDA Agricultural Research Service announced a progress review for its Water Availability and Watershed Management National Program (NP211) and released a Story Map to highlight research accomplishments during the 2021-2025 cycle. The Story Map addresses each of the four components of the 2021-2025 Action Plan, including: (1) Effective Water Management in Agriculture; (2) Erosion, Sedimentation, and Water Quality Protection; (3) Conservation Practices in Agricultural Watersheds; and (4) Watershed Management to Improve Agroecosystem Services. Throughout May, ARS will conduct stakeholder listening sessions to review the 2021-2025 research period and collect stakeholder guidance to develop the next 5-year Action Plan. Listening Sessions will be taking place virtually on May 7, 9, and 15, 2025. https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/c8d44146c55644b48cfaf0955a6b778f

CONGRESS
Senate/Nominations

On April 30, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a full committee hearing to consider the nomination of Dr. Andrea Travnicek as Assistant Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Water and Science. Travnicek highlighted her experience with 2011 North Dakota flooding events and her commitment to collaborative, timely, and common-sense approaches to management decisions. Chairman Hoeven asked what her top three priorities would be if confirmed. Travnicek responded that her priorities would be Colorado River negotiations, updating the critical minerals list, and addressing drought by modernizing infrastructure and advancing aquifer recharge, water reuse, and wastewater management. She said: "[The] Colorado River is going to be front and center. If confirmed, it will be one of my top priorities to hit the ground running on right away. We know that we've got to work with the seven basin States. It needs to be consensus driven, state-led. We don't want this to be decided by a judge."

Travnicek received questions regarding her understanding of, priorities for, and commitment to: (1) continued tribal consultation in light of streamlined NEPA guidelines; (2) continued assistance to rural communities; (3) advancing the Milk River Project and Fort Belknap Indian Community water rights settlement; (5) drought funding freezes at the Bureau of Reclamation; (6) and advancing the Northeastern Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement Act. Travnicek responded with commitments to working on key issues within the purview of the position and investigating the concerns raised by the Committee.

CONGRESS/WATER RESOURCES
House/Water and Hydropower Development

On April 30, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries held a hearing on Advancing Federal Water and Hydropower Development. Michelle Bushman testified on behalf of WSWC. She voiced WSWC's support for "reasonable hydropower projects and programs that enhance our electric generation capacity and promote economic development, through efficient permitting processes," while respecting state authority, interstate compacts, and rights of water users. Bushman also called for integrated water-energy planning. She urged the federal government to engage States in early and meaningful coordination to help streamline permitting processes and environmental reviews.

Bushman noted the Reclamation Fund's growing unobligated balance, projected to exceed $25.2B this fiscal year, and recommended Congress consider converting it to a true revolving trust fund. She noted the backlog of maintenance for federal dams alone exceeds $50B. She urged stronger investment in new and aging water infrastructure. Bushman stressed the challenges of small rural water systems, advocating for shared technical, managerial, and financial support and continued funding for Reclamation and USDA rural programs. She affirmed WSWC's support for Indian water rights settlements as a means of improving water security in the West, and acknowledged that settlements may require federal water projects. She called for increased federal investment without cutting other tribal or Interior funding.

Bushman advocated for federal investment in water data and detailed States' reliance on the data these programs produce, and warned that recent staffing cuts and local office closures threaten the continuity of data and water-decision support tools. She also described WestFAST's role in facilitating federal-state coordination.

Patrick Sigl, Director, Water and Natural Resources Law, Salt River Project (SRP) outlined future projects to meet growing demands, including a pumped storage project to enhance grid reliability and a sediment mitigation project to restore and potentially increase water storage capacity in Verde River reservoirs. Sigl supported streamlining the federal permitting process and stressed the importance of developing all available resources, including hydropower, to meet future energy demands.

Jim Webb, President/CEO, Lower Valley Energy, highlighted the essential role of hydropower, particularly from the Columbia River System. He voiced strong opposition to proposals to breach the Lower Snake River dams, citing their vital contribution to energy supply. Jonathan Haswell, Chief Operating Officer, OceanWell, introduced their deep-ocean desalination technology as a scalable and sustainable method to combat water scarcity. By utilizing hydrostatic pressure from the deep ocean, the system significantly reduces energy consumption and environmental impacts compared to traditional desalination.

MEETINGS
WSWC - Summer Meetings/60th Anniversary

The WSWC 2025 Summer Meetings and 60th Anniversary will be held in Snowbird, Utah on June 10-12, at the Cliff Lodge. **A room block is being held through May 14** in the name of the WSWC, with a guest room rate of $142.00 plus tax and fees. For further information, see: https://westernstateswater.org/events/2025-wswc-summer-207th-meetings-and-60th-anniversary-snowbird-utah/.