



**WESTERN  
GOVERNORS'**  
ASSOCIATION



**WORKING LANDS,  
WORKING COMMUNITIES  
INITIATIVE**



**The Initiative of Idaho Gov. Brad Little**

## Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I had the good fortune to be raised in the West. Both my family and Teresa's have managed sheep and cattle ranching operations for generations. I continue to spend time on the ranch whenever I can, and I have had the tremendous pleasure of watching my children and grandchildren take that same journey. They are now continuing our family legacy of being good stewards of the land and part of rural Idaho.

I've witnessed a great deal of change since the time I was a young boy, including changes in farming and ranching practices, how businesses operate, and changes in the land itself. But some things don't change – the value of hard work, the importance of neighbors, and the need for good stewardship of our resources to ensure a prosperous future for our children and future generations.

Like all western states, Idaho faces a lot of challenges on the landscape today. Uncharacteristic wildfires, drought, and the potential spread of invasive species among other factors are changing our landscapes and threaten the vitality of western communities.

When I took over as chair of the Western Governors' Association, I wanted to focus on how we can better equip government and communities to manage our increasingly complex landscape. This led to the creation of the *Working Lands, Working Communities* initiative.

The initiative examined the interrelationship between our natural resources and the communities that depend on them. In the West, this relationship often focuses on our forests and the need to actively manage them through mechanical treatments, prescribed burning, and other methods. Ultimately, when we utilize these strategies, we will improve habitat for fish and wildlife, protect valuable water sources, and increase the overall health of forests. Active management, when responsibly conducted, also provides a stable, resilient base for rural economies.

Rural communities also face unique workforce challenges. In many places, the existing workforce is nearing retirement age. Housing costs and lack of career opportunities make it difficult to attract and retain new employees. Workforce development – education and training for the jobs and careers that exist in rural economies – remains at the top of the priority list and is critical to preserving rural vitality and our capacity to tackle these landscape initiatives. This is also true for local governments that need to be able to hire and retain a workforce that is tasked with planning local infrastructure, education, and other services rural communities rely on.

The *Working Lands, Working Communities Initiative* is shining light on many of the challenges we face in the West. I am hopeful that land managers and communities will find the recommendations emerging from the initiative to be a useful guide on steps we can take to address ecosystem threats, improve landscape resilience, and build healthy communities in the West.

I want to thank everyone who made the *Working Lands, Working Communities* initiative possible, and I extend a special thank you to the people who generously gave their time and expertise to contribute to the conversations at the initiative's workshops, webinars, and podcasts. We may approach these challenges from different philosophies or points on the political spectrum, but we are more closely tied by our similarities than our differences.

We are all united in our desire to preserve our lands for future generations of westerners, both for the health of the landscape as well as for the economic prosperity of the people who call these communities home. Through our work on the initiative as a foundation, we will achieve our goal.



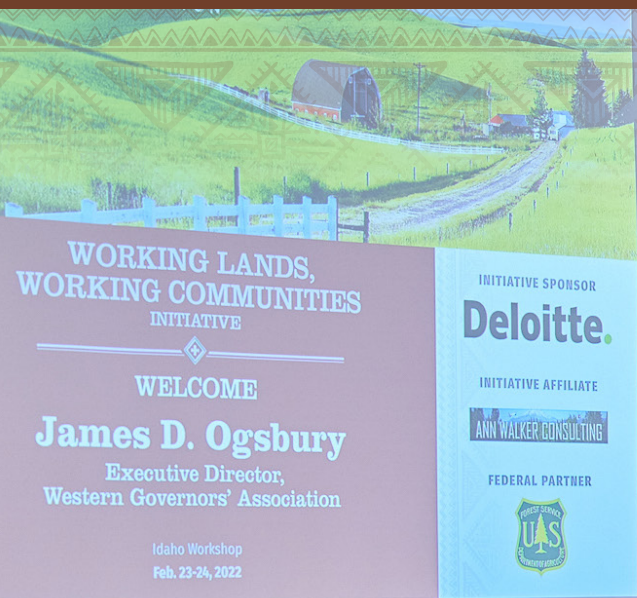
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brad Little'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue horizontal line.

Brad Little

Governor of Idaho

WGA Chair 2021-2022



## Dear Friend of the West,

This Land is Your Land, the iconic folk song composed by Woody Guthrie in 1940, speaks of an entire nation blessed with the natural treasures of redwood forests, golden valleys, and diamond deserts. Nowhere, however, is the theme of the anthem – or the title itself – more resonant than in the American West, where the federal government owns 47 percent of all land. In some of our western states, the federal government owns and controls a majority of land.

The West's sweeping landscapes, extraordinary waters, and rich natural resources – both public and private – are breathtaking and unique to our region. Our lands provide food, fiber, fuel, and minerals, and they offer unparalleled beauty. Stewardship of this landscape is a complex undertaking due to the manifold interconnections between people, geography, and ecosystems. Sound management can simultaneously improve the health of the land and the communities who rely upon it.

To critically examine the interdependent relationships between western communities and state and federal land and resource managers, Idaho Governor Brad Little, Chair of the Western Governors' Association, launched the *Working Lands, Working Communities* initiative in September 2021. Throughout the course of the initiative, WGA has closely examined the integral role that local communities play in successful land planning and management. The results of this examination are setting the stage for more and better collaborative work on cross-boundary, cross-jurisdictional natural resource issues. Through this forum for developing bipartisan public policy, WGA has

highlighted the leadership and innovation of western states in the arena of natural resource and land management. This initiative has also demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt that a collaborative approach to complex management challenges is the right way to go.

A distinguishing characteristic of WGA Chair initiatives is that they drive to action. If all we did with these projects was organize great minds to explore critical issues facing the West, identify best practices, and share a dynamic exchange of ideas, then that would represent a valuable investment of time. But clearly, that is not all we do – not by a long shot. Rather, the tremendous wisdom captured through these initiatives is digested and synthesized to produce meaningful activities, projects, and policies that can positively affect the West for generations to come. We are confident that Chair Little's initiative will have exactly this effect.

If you have paid attention to the work of WGA, you've likely noticed that Western Governors are a different breed of political animal. They favor pragmatism over politics and results over partisanship. In that vein, I hope you find the ideas in this report to be as thought-provoking as they are powerful and practical. The Western Governors' Association looks forward to putting these ideas into practice in 2023 and beyond.

James D. Ogsbury,  
WGA Executive Director

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Idaho Governor Brad Little, Chair of the Western Governors' Association, launched the *Working Lands, Working Communities* initiative in September 2021 to examine the interdependent relationships between western communities and state and federal resource management entities, and the role local communities play in successful planning and management processes.

There are many difficult issues facing western landscapes. The threat of uncharacteristic wildfire, the water quality and quantity ramifications of persistent drought, the presence and spread of invasive species, and the need to improve overall forest and rangeland health and resilience are just a few of the interrelated challenges on our lands.

Communities in the West also face a variety of challenges as they attempt to address these issues. Workforce capacity constraints at all levels of government affect the implementation of projects to address wildfire fuels, attack invasives, or make habitat improvements at a significant scale. In many communities, inadequate land management infrastructure inhibits the ability to undertake land management projects at all. Markets for forest and rangeland products, or incentives to undertake work, are often underdeveloped or non-existent.

"It's important that we continue to look at improving how we make our communities more resilient," Governor Little said at the final workshop in Boise, Idaho. "Everybody says we want healthier watersheds, we want less catastrophic fire, we want (better management of) invasive species.

Those overarching goals need to have legs under them – policies, recommendations, where to best invest the next available dollar."

The initiative: examined the current relationships between rural communities and their natural resources and working lands; identified barriers to cross-boundary land management; and assessed the local capacity to address ecological challenges. Regional experts at all levels of government and the private sector assembled to discuss strategies, share success stories, and develop bipartisan solutions to the challenges faced by landscapes and communities of the West.

As the initiative progressed, four key themes emerged:

- The importance of collaboration
- The need for market innovation and incentives
- The promise of infrastructure investment
- The challenges of workforce development

The effort was enhanced by the active participation of Western Governors, who invested time and effort to host workshops in their states. WGA is especially indebted to workshop hosts **Governor**

**Spencer Cox** of Utah; **Governor Jared Polis** of Colorado; **Governor Mike Dunleavy** of Alaska; and **Governor Brad Little** of Idaho.

The initiative's reach was extended through livestreamed regional workshop sessions, which are available for download at WGA's YouTube page. WGA also hosted five webinars, six podcasts, and one work session addressing discrete issues in land management and community engagement.

Based on input from state and federal land managers, private landowners, local governments, businesses, and non-governmental organizations, WGA endeavored to identify best practices and offer recommendations to put western states on a path toward healthier, more resilient landscapes and support diverse economic opportunities for western communities.

The efforts of the Working Lands, Working Communities initiative provide a solid foundation for recommendations to address some of the most difficult challenges facing western communities and landscapes. Western Governors encourage land managers and partners to consider applying these recommendations to their management activities, and they urge Congress to adopt the legislative reforms produced by the initiative.



Lake Powell

# BACKGROUND

## The State of the West

The past few years have presented Western Governors with a challenging array of social, economic, and environmental developments. Uncharacteristic wildfires continue to threaten rural and urban communities, invasive annual species are encroaching on America's ecosystems, global supply chains are in crisis, and persistent drought has yet to release its grip on western states.

Adding to the challenge of these circumstances, the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be profoundly disruptive of many of the processes critical to effective land management. The pandemic affected governments, businesses, and social structures in significant ways. It hampered progress on nearly every aspect of land management, from the ability to gather stakeholders in decision-making processes, to the restrictions and workforce constraints that affected

businesses attempting to execute projects on western lands.

While many of these challenges are not new, they have been exacerbated in recent years. Catastrophic wildfires are at the forefront of many westerners' minds and have burned 87 million acres in the past decade – an area larger than the entire state of New Mexico. Water levels at Lake Powell are at their lowest point since the reservoir was first filled, and housing is becoming prohibitively expensive in many western states where the median home price has increased faster than ever before.

The response to wildfire threats alone illustrates the difficulties faced by communities, local governments, tribes, territories, states, and the federal government. For example, in 1995, 16 percent of the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) budget was dedicated

to fire suppression. Today, USFS routinely spends half its budget on suppression activities. As a result, there is insufficient staff and funding available to support activities designed to reduce the risks of uncharacteristic wildfire in the first place.

Wildland fire suppression is just one of the points on the continuum of efforts to address landscape health and resilience. Fire suppression attempts to address the threats presented by wildfire: the immediate threat to human life and structures; the far-reaching effects on air quality; and the long-term effects on water quality and fish and wildlife habitat.

The initial point on the continuum is mitigation: those activities designed to improve ecosystem health. This includes hazardous fuels reduction through manual and mechanical treatments, invasive



species management, and wildlife and fish habitat improvements that would improve overall forest and rangeland health. Active management of our western landscapes will result in wildfire returning to its historic role as a vital contributor of landscape resilience by reducing underbrush, eliminating overcrowding, providing soil nourishment, providing new habitat for species, killing diseases and insects that prey on trees, and contributing to the regeneration of fire-dependent tree and plant species.

The final point of the landscape health continuum is the restoration of landscapes that have been negatively affected by wildfire, invasive species, or other factors. In areas where uncharacteristic wildfire has devastated a landscape, for example, there is an immediate and mid-term risk of post-fire flooding that affects human structures, water quality, and fish habitat. Reconstruction of homes and infrastructure is a near-term and expensive need in these communities. Long-term, it may take hundreds of years for the land to recover to its natural state and provide its pre-fire environmental benefits.

Drought is another significant concern for western states. Many western communities are experiencing devastating effects from ongoing drought, including increased feed prices and the need to reduce or eliminate existing agricultural production due to lack of available water. Some ranchers and farmers are considering the elimination of livestock and agricultural production entirely. Localities reliant on the recreational economies developed around large reservoirs in western states are also being significantly affected, as is the habitat quality for fish and wildlife. Without substantial assistance, rural



economies in western states that rely heavily on agriculture, natural resources, and recreation will take years to recover from the effects of devastating drought.

The drought is also having downstream effects on food security and fiber and energy production, both regionally and nationally. Those effects include low or dried up reservoirs, increased algal blooms, a decrease in hydroelectric power, and the potential of hydroelectric dams being shuttered due to low water levels. Some drought-affected communities are already facing drinking water supply constraints, a situation that could become much more widespread with prolonged drought.

Because the fabric of many western communities is tightly interwoven with the working lands and ecosystems which they steward and rely upon, the need to address these challenges cannot be overstated. Integral to the success of land management endeavors is the local knowledge and support of the communities affected by these activities. Governor Spencer Cox spoke to this dynamic during his remarks at the Salt Lake City workshop, imploring federal

partners to, “listen to the people who are close to the land,” as they craft solutions and deploy historic levels of funding.

An important aspect of this community involvement is the capacity to engage in the management activities needed to improve forest and rangeland health. Private landowners on working lands are valuable contributors to this process, as are the federal, state, and territorial programs that facilitate landowners’ involvement in responsible land management activities. On public lands, community involvement in land planning processes is key to project success, as are adequate governmental resources to engage in environmental reviews and project management. In many cases, however, there is simply not enough workforce capacity to meet these needs, nor is there sufficient physical infrastructure or workforce in local communities to complete projects once they are approved. Building and maintaining the capacity of the land management economy across all sectors and addressing the capacity constraints of federal agencies is foundational to meeting the challenges before us.

# Initiative Objectives

Five objectives guided the initiative's work:

## Objective 1:

Examine rural communities' relationships with natural resources and working lands. The initiative examined the interdependence of healthy rural communities, healthy natural resources, and effective land management. The effort focused on the unique relationship between rural communities and working lands, and how to sustain and strengthen that relationship.

## Objective 2:

Identify barriers to cross-boundary collaborative land management. The initiative identified obstacles that western communities face when participating in collaborative land management planning processes, as well as how to break down those obstacles and cultivate more effective partnerships.

## Objective 3:

Assess local capacity, expertise, and resources to address ecological challenges. The initiative assessed how local capacities, including technical expertise, workforce, and available infrastructure, affect the ability to conduct responsible management on surrounding lands, as well as community adaptability and sustainability.

## Objective 4:

Explore tools and innovations for rural communities to adapt to changing economic, environmental, or technological conditions, and expand markets that support active management of western working lands. The initiative explored a suite of tools and innovations available for rural communities to anticipate and respond to changing economic and environmental conditions and identified ways for rural communities to utilize those tools in active forest and rangeland management.

## Objective 5:

Develop statutory and regulatory recommendations to promote more sustainable western communities and working lands. At every stage of this initiative, it was apparent that certain statutory or regulatory changes were required to build sustainable rural communities and resilient working lands. The initiative examined existing statutory and regulatory structures and considered how modifications could improve ecological and economic outcomes in rural communities. The results of this effort are included in the recommendations section of this report.

# Initiative Themes

As the initiative progressed, four key focal areas emerged.

## The Importance of Collaboration

Collaboration was widely recognized as one of the key elements of successful planning and the execution of responsible and durable land management activities. Collaboration includes coordination between federal agencies and state, territorial, local, and tribal governments. It also includes interaction and cooperation between governments, landowners, community residents, and other stakeholders.

This collaboration is essential to addressing ecosystem-wide challenges. Environmental threats such as wildfire, drought, or invasive species don't recognize ownership boundaries. Effective cross-boundary management, therefore, requires that all landowners – the federal government, states, territories, local governments, tribes, and private landholders – are working cooperatively to address these threats.

New and diverse partnerships are emerging across land ownerships to help improve the health and resilience of western landscapes, but more can be done to strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of these collaborative endeavors. Sustaining and building upon this progress in the face of unprecedented threats to forests and rangelands requires collective attention and action.

Related to this is the need for improved tools to facilitate decision making. Integrating data streams into models is a challenge. The problem, however, is not data: there is plenty of data being generated by various government programs. Making this data available and presenting it in a way that can be easily understood by land managers and the public is an issue worthy of additional attention.



## The Need for Market Innovation and Incentives

Many of the forest and rangeland products generated by wildfire mitigation or habitat improvement projects do not have economically viable markets. For example, the costs of transporting timber to the nearest available processing facility alone often renders a project economically unviable. There are innovations in the wood products market, including the growing use of mass timber such as CLT (cross laminated timber) in building construction, that could provide substantial markets for traditionally low value wood. Lumber from beetle kill pine, with its unique blue stain, has become a profitable commodity for home flooring and furniture.

In healthier ecosystems, the appropriate use of prescribed fire is one of the most cost-effective tools to removing woody biomass and producing positive environmental results on soils and landscapes. In degraded environments, the buildup of this dead biomass contributes to uncharacteristic wildfire. Developing markets for this low-value forest and rangeland biomass would be a significant step forward to improving overall ecosystem health. Additional research into the use of woody biomass as a potential source of raw material for energy generation, small wood products, or mulch for erosion control products, is warranted.

Where viable markets do not exist for forest and rangeland products, the role of incentives should be considered. The out-of-pocket cost of incentives to reduce wildfire risk may be high, but they are far lower than the environmental devastation of uncharacteristic wildfire and the financial cost of post-fire restoration activities.

## The Promise of Infrastructure Investment

The physical infrastructure to implement land management projects is far smaller today than it was 50 years ago. The West has lost scores of sawmills, while countless others have significantly curtailed operations. Sustaining and strengthening the infrastructure to process forest and rangeland products is integral to addressing the ecological challenges facing western landscapes. As an initiative participant stated: “Forest infrastructure is how you get work done. You can come up with ideas all day long, but unless you have companies and infrastructure to do that work, they’re just ideas.”

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides a significant opportunity to address infrastructure needs, including investments in forest and rangeland product processing capacity. It also provides an avenue to address virtual infrastructure needs, such as data sharing systems. Responsibly deploying IIJA funds to address these needs will require close consultation between federal agencies and state and territorial governments.

Infrastructure needs, however, are not limited to wood and woody biomass processing. The West has a significant backlog of needed maintenance on the roads and bridges that are needed to access the lands that require hazardous fuels reduction or habitat improvement projects. Outdoor recreation infrastructure also suffers from a serious maintenance backlog. Prioritizing and funding these infrastructure improvements is an important aspect of addressing the challenges facing western communities.

## The Challenges of Workforce Development

Workforce constraints can affect every stage of environmental mitigation and restoration efforts. Communities need to be involved in land use decision-making processes, which are usually conducted on a volunteer basis through venues like collaboratives. At federal, state, and territorial agencies, a skilled workforce is needed to plan projects and conduct required environmental reviews. Agencies must have a qualified contract management workforce to ensure taxpayer dollars are being wisely spent. Finally, a trained workforce must be available to implement mitigation and restoration projects on the ground.

Increasing workforce capacity at all of these stages is a great need. Collaboratives are a critical tool to promote understanding of landscape needs and add local expertise to land use decisions. The commitment of these volunteers is admirable, but their effectiveness would be augmented by additional investments to build additional local capacity. This is especially important in resource-constrained communities, whose residents may not have the skills or training to effectively participate in a forest collaborative. Initiative participants discussed innovative solutions to this problem, including the shared use of personnel and integration of state and territorial analyses into federal decision documents.

Finally, communities must be supported in their efforts to attract new workers, retain existing ones, and develop the skills needed to address the challenges facing our forests and rangelands. One element of this support is providing a clear pathway for businesses to know that their expenditures on infrastructure and workforce will be rewarded with sustainable, long term economic opportunities.





## Western Governors' Engagement

The Working Lands, Working Communities initiative builds upon WGA's long history of engaging on cross-boundary land and resource management issues. Prior WGA efforts — such as Reimagining the Rural West, the Western Governors' Biosecurity and Invasive Species Initiative, and the Western Governors' National Forest and Rangeland Management Initiative — have addressed many of the same topics. As Jim Ogsbury, Executive Director of the Western Governors' Association, noted at the Alaska workshop, "working lands are not a passing interest or secondary issue to Western Governors."

The initiative presented an ideal opportunity for WGA to do what it does best: drive to action by facilitating meaningful, cross-cutting conversations between states, territories, federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and others. Throughout this initiative's workshops, webinars, podcasts, and work sessions, initiative participants have engaged in thought-provoking dialogue, highlighted opportunities for collaboration, and provided successful models of cross-boundary management with the ultimate goal of developing bipartisan policy reform and improving outcomes on all of our cherished western lands.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The Western Governors' *Working Lands, Working Communities* initiative examined the role that rural communities play in cross-boundary land and natural resource management, and developed recommendations to strengthen this role and improve the health of working lands. Under the leadership of WGA Chair, Idaho Governor Brad Little, WGA conducted a thorough research process consisting of scoping, fact-finding, and consultation with topical experts and agencies, and facilitating cross-cutting discussions about urgent management challenges.

An array of diverse perspectives is reflected in this process. The input that participants provided throughout the initiative was synthesized into legislative and administrative policy recommendations that are included in this section. The recommendations are organized into four topical categories: collaboration, infrastructure, markets, and workforce development. The collaboration category is further divided into the following subcategories: planning, funding and capacity, agency culture, and data.

## Collaboration

### Subcategory: Planning

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) should consider developing regional and cross-boundary collaboratives to facilitate cooperation on ecosystem-level land management challenges. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provides an opportunity for communities to engage in difficult conversations on land use, but communities should be engaged earlier, and at a broader level, to ensure full benefit of the NEPA process.

Local collaboratives can be too near-sighted, focusing solely on wildfire mitigation. Land management agencies should consider educational opportunities for collaborative members on broader ecosystem effects of forest and rangeland management (e.g., wildlife habitat, water quality, invasives), which would assist communities seeking to improve overall ecosystem health and resilience.

Planning tools like the Shared Wildfire Risk Mitigation system (SWRM) are invaluable in helping communities understand management needs and the effects of land use and wildfire mitigation decisions. These tools help alleviate capacity issues for communities and promote better decision making. Western Governors encourage federal land managers to make SWRM and similar tools widely available to communities and decisionmakers.

Land managers should integrate small private landowners into ecosystem planning processes and responsible land management practices. Private industry has looked at U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) climate smart credits as a mechanism to spur

engagement, but additional methods of gaining small landowner participation and engagement should be explored. Such methods include greater participation in local collaboratives, increased partnerships with Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and involvement in shared stewardship agreement processes.

County governments have a positive influence on land use planning and resource management through the development of county plans. These county plans can be helpful in crafting state plans, ensuring local views are taken into consideration, and they can be persuasive when collaborating with federal agencies on land use planning. State and federal land managers should take steps to ensure that these county resource management and other plans are integrated into their planning processes.

Land management agencies should be focused on outcome-based, rather than acre-based, metrics for success. While simply counting acres can provide useful information, agencies should examine how other performance metrics, including the shift of funding over time from suppression activity to mitigation

and restoration activities, provides tangible evidence of the value of land management activities.

Land managers should prioritize post-wildfire water quality effects in mitigation planning and execution. Post-fire flooding can have a dramatic effect on infrastructure and water quality in downstream communities, and it is the cause of many avoidable post-fire deaths in affected areas. Integrating water supply and quality considerations into mitigation work could significantly reduce the cost of post-fire restoration in burned areas.

Western Governors encourage land managers to incorporate the effects of drought into land use planning and community sustainability efforts. Drought has impacts on wildfire threat, wildlife and fish habitat, agricultural and ranching productivity, recreational opportunity, power generation, and drinking water availability, all of which threaten community sustainability. Mitigating these effects, to the extent feasible, is critical to ensuring the future vitality of many western communities.

Land managers should evaluate the use of area-wide plans under NEPA; this would allow planning for cross-boundary landscapes under a single NEPA process and produce multiple resource benefits.

States, tribes, and counties can use Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) to facilitate management activities on federal lands. Federal agencies should take steps to ensure that various GNA projects integrate with each other to achieve desired outcomes and provide opportunities to increase collaboration and increase cross-boundary cooperation with these governmental units.

Congress should codify and direct funding to the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Program to facilitate continued partnership and investment between USFS and the Natural



Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to support restoration projects where federal and private land ownership and management goals intersect.

Western Governors recognize that prescribed fire is both an important tool for fuels reduction and ecosystem resilience and underused in the West. Prescribed fire has overall air quality benefits, eliminates low- or no-value woody biomass in forest and rangeland environments, and contributes to soil health. Educating the public and creating social license to use the tool is critical; recent events, however, have also shown that land managers must put greater effort into: coordinating prescribed fire with other mitigation activities; updating models, tools and practices for safe burning; and emphasizing post-burn preparation and monitoring to reduce the potential for escaped burns.

In many cases, different state, territorial, and federal agencies manage the planning and authorization for prescribed fire. This diffuse authority can add delays to implementing prescribed burns or

cause managers to entirely miss opportunities to use the tool. Land managers should consider greater collaboration for prescribed fire activities to increase deployment. Traditional Native American cultural burning and tribal practices are an important part of forest management in the West and may be incorporated more effectively into federal and state planning management processes. Additionally, land managers should have adequate liability insurance to protect individuals and landowners affected by escaped prescribed fires.

### Subcategory: **Funding and Capacity**

Financial support for local collaboratives is important to achieving community engagement, subject matter expertise, and long-term success. Federal agencies should examine structures to improve local collaborative capacity.

The transition from active wildfire suppression activity to post-wildfire community responsibilities can be abrupt at the community level. Wildfire affected communities, especially in





resource-constrained communities, need subject matter expertise on post-fire restoration and risk management to guide them through recovery. Federal agencies should collaborate with states to designate and train post-fire coordinators to manage post-fire recovery. Establishing a post-fire master agreement would also improve the processes involving incident management and post-fire handoff to local authorities.

In many cases, wildfire affected communities must provide a funding match to access restoration programs and resources. Match requirements negatively affect resource-constrained communities' ability to access funds, especially in underserved communities that often lack the personnel or other capacity to administer these programs due to small annual operating budgets. This contributes to inadequate post-fire response, reduced landscape resilience, and

suboptimal ecosystem recovery. Federal agencies should examine funding match requirements and consider reducing or eliminating these requirements when the public benefit outweighs the cost of the funding match.

Congress should extend the authorization for states to retain revenues from timber sales under GNA, which may then be used to "carry out authorized restoration services on Federal land under the good neighbor agreement," and if excess funds are available, "to carry out authorized restoration services on Federal land within the State under other good neighbor agreements." This authority is statutorily scheduled to terminate on October 1, 2023. Congress should also consider extending retained receipt authority to county governments and tribes.

Congress should increase flexibility in the GNA program: 1) on road

construction/reconstruction; 2) for recreation improvements and forest and rangeland restoration planning and implementation activities; and 3) to support better prioritization of GNA projects across larger geographies.

Integrated Pest Management, which combines prevention, avoidance, monitoring, and suppression, needs to be incorporated into all management planning. Invasive grasses are integral to critical habitat concerns and wildfire risk: integrated response is crucial to reducing invasives and mitigating wildfire potential.

Land managers and decision makers must ensure that invasive species considerations are integrated into post-wildfire response. Seed strategy and nursery capacity are important to restoring fire-affected landscapes.

### Subcategory: **Agency Culture**

Forestry and land management agencies, including the Department of the Interior (DOI) and USDA, have separated fire management from land management. Western Governors recognize there needs to be integration of these functions to ensure that: mitigation efforts produce wildfire-resilient landscapes and communities; suppression activities orient toward restoration needs; and restoration work addresses community needs and future landscape resilience.

Federal land management agencies should consider investing in facilitation capacity and training for agency personnel and partner organizations involved with collaboratives and wildfire-affected communities. Facilitation skills are an essential element in helping resolve conflict and achieving consensus on mitigation and restoration decisions.

## Subcategory: **Data**

The federal government and states should consider collaboratively developing interagency data hubs to: reduce overall operating costs; increase the shareability of data (i.e., establishing data standards and formats that are useable and sharable); and facilitate public access to the data.

States, territories, and federal agencies should consider establishing coordinators for data collection, transfer, and assimilation to ensure that data is shareable and useable between platforms. Western Governors encourage agencies to consider standardizing and simplifying data collection protocols, which include robust landowner privacy standards and protections, for federal agencies, states, counties and tribes.

Federal agencies should incorporate socioeconomic data into the decision-making process. In places with complex economic foundations (agriculture, mining, oil, and gas), an economic assessment is key to quantifying and understanding the implications of land use decisions.

Western Governors recognize that many local governments do not have the capacity or budget to keep datasets current. Federal agencies should consider implementing a model or framework to share resources to address these capacity and budget issues.

Federal, state, and territorial land managers should collaborate on developing integrated methods and processes for visitor data collection and analysis. This would help track where visitors are recreating, the activities they are participating in, and assist in placing tourism infrastructure and addressing other tourism infrastructure-related needs. It would also provide important data to inform needs to shift visitation from overused to less-trafficked areas, sustain tourism if federal land closures are needed, and improve recreational experiences for visitors.

## **Infrastructure**

Forest and rangeland management access and infrastructure in much of the West is woefully inadequate to address land management needs. Access is critical to perform management activities for wildfire mitigation, habitat improvement, water quality improvements, invasive species management, and post-fire restoration. Western Governors encourage federal agencies to ensure that appropriate access and infrastructure, in appropriate locations, exists to achieve land management objectives. Repairing and replacing range improvements, particularly fencing, in a timely manner should be a priority for federal land management agencies in wildfire-affected areas.

Western Governors encourage federal agencies to integrate infrastructure needs into planning processes and provide long-term, sustainable economic opportunities for communities. Federal agencies should also recognize that regulatory certainty is an important element of enabling infrastructure deployment. Consistency in permitting and policy is key to attracting and maintaining infrastructure investments.

Federal agencies should consider integration of permitting processes to establish single point permitting for its permittees. Streamlining permitting processes would provide benefits for land managers, project implementers, and the tourism and recreation industry.

Federal agencies should evaluate the use of regional recreation partnerships to address infrastructure and repair needs for tourism-related infrastructure. A GIS tool to identify trails and assess visitation effects would assist land managers in addressing trail degradation and the need for new trail development.

Western Governors recognize that additional nursery capacity is needed

to address post-wildfire restoration needs. Federal agencies should examine the need for market incentives to encourage sustainable nursery markets and facilitate the development of additional nursery capacity.

Western Governors recognize that harvest cost is a significant issue for producers. Economies of scale have affected the packing industry, and in many cases small packing houses are booked months in advance due to lack of capacity. USDA should consider how communities can develop additional small packing capacity to ensure access for producers and improve national food security.

The supply chain for basic land management equipment, such as vehicles and chainsaws, is integral to implementing management plans authorized by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The federal government should take steps to address equipment shortages as part of its implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

## **Markets**

Predictable, long-term supply assurances are needed to attract private infrastructure investment and improve overall forest and rangeland management capacity. DOI and USDA should consider how its annual timber harvesting targets can ensure adequate long-term supply. USFS and BLM should modify GNA guidance to allow 20-year contracts, versus the current limit of 10 years, to provide additional supply stability.

Congress should expand GNA and Stewardship Contracting Authority (SCA) to other federal land managers; such authority is currently limited to USFS and BLM. Land and facilities owned by the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would also benefit from projects implemented under GNA and SCA.



Many mitigation projects have high treatment costs with low or little opportunity to recoup those costs. This requires a broader view of investments in wildfire mitigation. Western Governors encourage federal agencies to include cost metrics — such as the avoided cost of uncharacteristic wildfire, smoke effects on populations, and benefits to water supply systems and downstream communities — when assessing the merits of mitigation projects.

Different federal agencies use different strategies to achieve land management outcomes. For example, USFS strategy primarily relies on a “payments for product” model, while NRCS primarily uses a “payments for practice” strategy to achieve land management objectives. Agencies should consider lessons learned from these different strategies and how different payment models could be used to improve management outcomes.

Given the importance of the tourism economy, statewide strategic tourism plans, developed in collaboration with federal agencies, can improve coordination between tourism operators on federal lands.

A significant barrier to producer investments in soil health and restoration is the cost of equipment to test new practices. Federal agencies should consider incentives to purchase equipment, participate in new processes, or expand markets to encourage deploying new conservation practices.

Federal agencies should examine the grazing effects different ruminants have on ecosystems and encourage the targeted deployment of ruminants (i.e., cattle, sheep, and goats) to achieve restoration and land management goals, including wildlife habitat improvements, drought and wildfire mitigation,

surface water quality, watershed health, soil health management, promotion of perennial plant health, and control of invasive species such as cheatgrass.

Federal agencies should promote grazing allotment flexibility on federal lands, within BLM’s permitting system and across ownership boundaries, to respond to changing range conditions and environmental considerations.

Federal agencies should continue to explore strategies for the use of low or no value biomass, removal of which is needed to achieve wildfire mitigation needs, including market incentives for these materials. Biomass power at utility scale may present such an opportunity, but there is market failure to represent the true value of a bioenergy supply chain. Western Governors encourage DOI, USDA and the Department of Energy to continue research and development efforts to find viable markets for low and no value biomass.

Western Governors recognize that market interventions can affect land management decision making. Market incentives for one desired outcome may negatively affect overall ecosystem health and resilience. Federal agencies should take steps to eliminate counterproductive ecosystem outcomes that may arise from different market incentives. Agencies should consider holistic approaches that incorporate ecosystem health, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, water supply, and quality and other factors.

Federal agencies should expand opportunities for existing USDA Rural Development, U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and Small Business Administration (SBA) programs and financing to support wood product business development and infrastructure.

USFS Research and Development, State and Private Forestry, and National Forest System should work collaboratively to support existing and emerging wood products technologies, including the work of the National Forest Products Laboratory, with the goal of expanding markets to maximize restoration activity. Research, development and deployment should be focused on commercially ready technologies with high potential to contribute to current and emerging restoration objectives. These efforts should be aligned with the work of industry partners, and should actively pursue public-private partnerships to advance market growth, with the goal of providing sustainable economic development opportunities for rural communities.

Western Governors encourage federal agencies to identify initiatives to support markets that can achieve restoration goals and foster near-term opportunities for economic development in rural communities. These opportunities include advancing the use of mass timber in building construction through research and demonstration projects. Expanding utilization of low-value woody biomass for thermal, electric, and liquid-fuel energy should also be a priority. Rural electric cooperatives, public utilities, community facility managers, and other partners should contribute to the research, testing and deployment of new and modified heat and electric generation projects and liquid-fuel facilities from hazardous fuels reduction, conifer removal, and other forest and rangeland restoration efforts. Finally, agencies should explore opportunities to support new and diversified rangeland products, markets, and processing infrastructure, such as mobile meat processing, renewable energy production, local and regional food hubs, and recreation.

Congress should pass legislation to promote forest and rangeland product markets and technologies, and expand funding for the Community Wood Energy Program. Western Governors support the use of program funds to create and incentivize state, federal, and tribal partnerships in support of these objectives.

## Workforce Development

Capacity is a significant need in resource-constrained communities. These communities are often not able to invest in basic processes, including writing grant applications and conducting environmental analyses needed to address landscape needs. Federal agencies should take steps to assist resource-constrained communities in developing these needed capacities.

Western Governors recognize that housing costs impede the ability to attract and retain workers in many rural areas. Forest and rangeland management work is inherently place based, making local housing affordability a high priority to retain a workforce capable of planning and executing land management activities. Housing and recruitment are significantly greater challenges in rural communities compared to urban areas. The federal government should focus attention on housing needs and assist communities seeking to attract and retain workforce.

Federal capacity to complete NEPA processes in a timely manner is a significant bottleneck to project implementation on federal lands. Western Governors recognize that the workforce responsible for NEPA processes is specialized and encourages federal land management agencies to bolster this capacity to ensure that management projects are implemented on a timely basis.



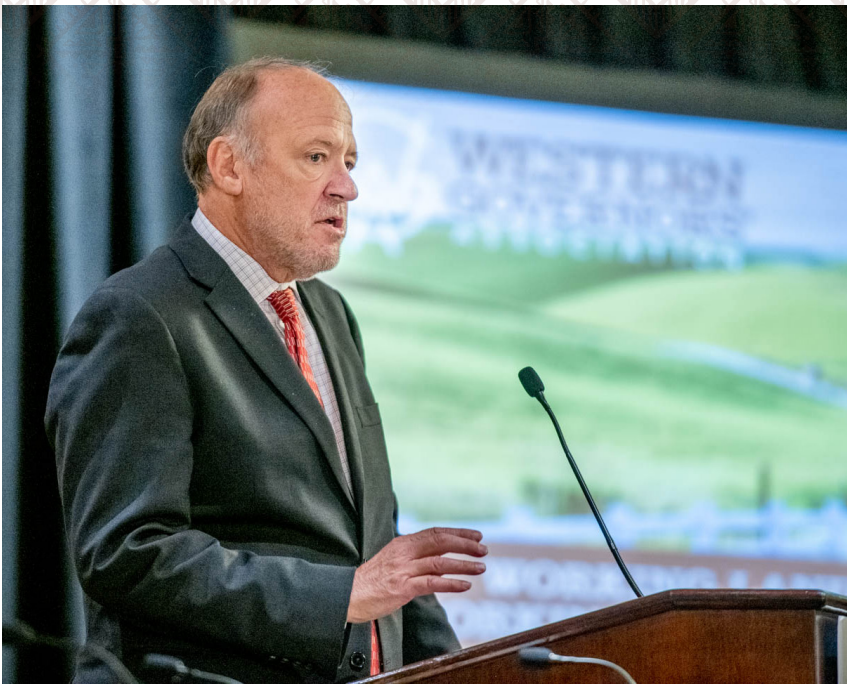
Federal agencies should consider how interagency shared positions can create regulatory efficiencies and promote greater collaboration between federal, state, territorial, local, and tribal land managers pursuant to traditional understandings of jurisdictions.

Apprenticeship and internship programs can reduce costs associated with building expertise within a workforce. Western Governors recognize that four-year college degree programs are not needed for many forest and rangeland careers and that a focus on trades training provides better workforce outcomes. The federal government and employers should consider work experience and other non-traditional credentials in hiring and promotions and avoid credential creep to ensure adequate capacity for land management project implementation.

Western Governors recognize that federal agencies are struggling with recruitment and retention of a qualified workforce. Workforce that could be used for mitigation or restoration work may be deployed to fight wildland fire for a significant portion of the year.

Within the wildland firefighting workforce, increased wildfire activity, low salaries, and mental fatigue contribute to workforce loss. Congress and federal agencies have taken steps to address these challenges, but the federal government should consider additional steps to recruit and retain an effective land management and wildland firefighting workforce.

Federal agencies should collaborate with states to explore the expanded use of youth, veterans, inmate crews, and conservation corps to provide cost-effective capacity to support forest and rangeland restoration work across various land ownerships. Congress should enact legislation, such as the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Act, to make it easier for young people and veterans to complete quality, cost-effective maintenance and improvement projects on public and tribal lands and waters across the country. The federal government, states, and territories should also examine standards on hiring persons with criminal backgrounds to promote employment opportunities for qualified applicants that present minimal risk for future criminal behavior.



# Online Resources

A key goal of this initiative was to facilitate cross-cutting discussions about the interdependent relationships between western communities and resource management agencies. In pursuit of this goal, WGA hosted four hybrid in-person/livestream workshops at locations around the region. It also gathered subject-specific input through a variety of webinars, teleconferences, work sessions, and podcast conversations.

WGA has archived video and summaries of the public events (workshops, webinars, and podcasts) on its website and YouTube channel. Also available on the website is an Appendix for the initiative, which documents and organizes participant contributions to the initiative.

**Find the Initiative online resources and join the conversation at [westgov.org](http://westgov.org) or [youtube.com/westgov](https://youtube.com/westgov)**

## Workshops

Over 150 in-person attendees and 375 livestream participants took part in workshops as part of the Working Lands, Working Communities initiative. The four workshops were hosted by Governor Cox in Utah, Governor Polis in Colorado, Governor Dunleavy in Alaska, and Governor Little in Idaho. To date, these important conversations have garnered over 5,000 views on YouTube.



## Webinars

The webinar series is also available online and features distinguished experts exploring topics such as invasive annual grasses management, forest investments in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, conservation markets in the West, and land management planning and collaboration tools.



## Podcasts

WGA policy advisors sat down with workshop panelists to take a deeper dive into the critical natural resource issues covered in the initiative. Podcast topics include “Fixing America’s Forests,” “Post-Wildfire Restoration Challenges,” “Supporting Cross-Boundary Conservation,” and “Agricultural Workforce in the West.” Listen to episodes of our “Out West” podcast series on our website or popular podcast platforms like Spotify.





# Panelist and Speaker Acknowledgments

## Salt Lake City, Utah Workshop

September 29-30, 2021

The Honorable Spencer Cox,  
Governor of Utah

Bruce Adams, Commissioner,  
San Juan County, Utah

Laura Ault, Shared Stewardship  
Coordinator, Utah Department  
of Natural Resources

Jamie Barnes, State Forester, Utah  
Department of Natural Resources

Craig Buttars, Commissioner, Utah  
Department of Agriculture and Food

Valerie Deppe, Chief, Compliance  
and Water Resources Group,  
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Bergen Eskildsen, Wood Utilization  
Coordinator, Utah Department of  
Natural Resources

Emily Fife, State Conservationist,  
USDA Natural Resources  
Conservation Service

Troy Forrest, Division Director,  
Utah Grazing Improvement Program

Pitt Grewe, Director, Utah Office  
of Outdoor Recreation

Chris Haller, Off-Highway Vehicle  
Program Coordinator, Utah Division  
of Parks and Recreation

Candice Hasenyager, Director, Utah  
Department of Water Resources

Redge Johnson, Executive Director,  
Utah Public Lands Policy and  
Coordinating Office

Clif Koontz, Executive Director,  
Ride with Respect

Gordon Larsen, Policy Director,  
Utah Governor Spencer Cox

Terry Messmer, Director, Utah's  
Community-Based Conservation  
Program

Jim Ogsbury, Executive Director,  
Western Governors' Association

Natalie Randall, Executive Director,  
Utah Tourism Industry Association

Jeff Rasmussen, Director,  
Utah Parks and Recreation

## UTAH WORKSHOP

The workshop series for the Working Lands, Working Communities initiative kicked off in Salt Lake City, Utah, where Governor Spencer Cox urged the federal government to work closely with states and territories on the pressing land management issues facing the West: "I strongly believe that there is a unique window of opportunity right now for Western Governors to work with our federal counterparts to lower the risk of catastrophic wildfire and improve the hydrology, wildlife habitat, and economies of the West, but there has to be, at the heart of this, a recognition that the way we've been doing things for the past 50 years is not the right way to do things."

He called attention to a pilot project that the Utah Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Forest Service led on Monroe Mountain in the Fish Lake National Forest. With the help of local stakeholders and landowners, the project successfully thinned thousands of acres of forest that had been overrun by invasive conifer trees using prescribed fire and mechanical treatments. In just a few short years, the native aspen stand had been revived,



Utah Gov. Spencer Cox

providing food for the local wildlife populations and allowing water and sunlight to reach the understory where native grasses were rejuvenated. "It's nothing short of a miracle what has occurred down there, and there's absolutely no reason we can't do this everywhere in the West," said Governor Cox.

The two-day workshop included roundtable conversations about innovations in forest products like biochar and cross laminated timber, and strategies for building workforce capacity in communities that want to coordinate and sustain successful rangeland conservation efforts. Roundtable participants reiterated the need for close collaboration to address the region's landscape level challenges.

Gene Shawcroft, General Manager,  
Central Utah Water Conservancy  
District

Greg Sheehan, Utah State Director,  
U.S. Bureau of Land Management

Mike Siaperis, Owner, 106 Restoration

Brian Steed, Executive Director, Utah  
Department of Natural Resources

Tyler Thompson,  
Watershed Program Director,  
Utah Department  
of Natural Resources

Vicki Varela, Managing Director,  
Utah Office of Tourism

Tony Willardson, Executive Director,  
Western States Water Council



## Denver, Colorado Workshop

October 7-8, 2021

The Honorable Jared Polis,  
Governor of Colorado

Lesli Allison, Executive Director,  
Western Landowners Alliance

Nate Anderson, Research Forester,  
U.S. Forest Service

Melina Cep, Vice President, Natural  
Solutions and Working Lands,  
National Audubon Society

Brad Crowell, Director, Nevada  
Department of Conservation and  
Natural Resources

Nada Culver, Deputy Director  
of Policy and Programs,  
U.S. Bureau of Land Management

Dustin Downey, Conservation  
Ranching Coordinator,  
National Audubon Society

Clint Evans, Colorado State  
Conservationist, USDA Natural  
Resources Conservation Service

Jonas Feinstein, State Conservation  
Forester, USDA Natural Resources  
Conservation Service

Farley Green, Marketing Manager,  
Conservation Ranching, National  
Audubon Society

Sarah Greenberger,  
Associate Deputy Secretary,  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Ch'aska Huayhuaca, Research  
Associate, Colorado Forest  
Restoration Institute, Colorado  
State University

Julie Keniry, Program Manager,  
Rural Engagement and Vitality  
Center

Aaron Kimple, Director of Forest  
Programs, Mountain Studies  
Institute

Adrienne Larrew, Corner Post Meats

Paige Lewis, Deputy State Director  
and Director of Conservation  
Programs, The Nature Conservancy  
in Colorado

Joel Lisonbee, Regional Drought  
Coordinator for the Intermountain  
West Region, NOAA National  
Integrated Drought Information  
System

Tim Mauck, Deputy Director,  
Colorado Department of Natural  
Resources

Dallas May, May Ranch

Jim Neiman, President and CEO,  
Neiman Enterprises

Jim Ogsbury, Executive Director,  
Western Governors' Association

Emily Olsen, Rocky Mountain Region  
Director, National Forest Foundation

Molly Pitts, Executive Director,  
Colorado Timber Association

Tim Reader, Program Specialist,  
Wood Products Utilization and  
Marketing, Colorado State Forest  
Service

Rebecca Samulski, Executive  
Director, Fire Adapted Colorado

Laura Schweitzer, Executive  
Director, Council of Western State  
Foresters

Jonathan Shuffield, Associate  
Legislative Director, Public Lands,  
National Association of Counties

Troy Timmons, Policy Director,  
Western Governors' Association

Ben Wudtke, Executive Director,  
Intermountain Forest Association

Teal Wyckoff, Technical Services  
Manager and Associate Research  
Scientist, Wyoming Geographical  
Information Science Center

Mike Zupko, Executive Director,  
Wildland Fire Leadership Council

### COLORADO WORKSHOP

On the opening day of the Working Lands, Working Communities initiative workshop in Denver, Colorado, Governor Jared Polis highlighted the importance of regional collaboration to battle the destructive wildfires, drought, and mudslides that have become, "less of an anomaly, and more the norm."

Governor Polis profiled a number of initiatives launched by Colorado to address these issues, including forestry workforce development programs, long-term funding for wildfire mitigation and restoration projects on Colorado's public lands, and the creation of the Drought and Climate Resilience Office. He emphasized, though, that the best way to confront these issues is through regional collaboration.

"We are in the process of taking major steps forward

to think about our lands, our communities, about resiliency as part of a holistic system," he said. "Despite all these efforts, we know we can't tackle (these issues) alone. No state can. We're all interconnected and collaboration with our federal partners, with our neighboring states, with our local jurisdictions, with private landowners, is critical. It is through forums like this that we can get to the bottom of some of the most challenging issues we face while learning from one another about how we can move forward together."

Panelists echoed the Governor's call for regional collaboration during the workshop roundtables, which included discussions on collaborative capacity, post-fire restoration needs, and workforce development and land management infrastructure. The workshop also featured a discussion on collaborative conservation and a look at conservation ranching practices.



## Ketchikan, Alaska Workshop

November 2, 2021

The Honorable Mike Dunleavy,  
Governor of Alaska

Trey Acteson, CEO,  
Southeast Alaska Power Agency

Tessa Axelson, Executive Director,  
Alaska Forest Association

Jason Brune, Commissioner,  
Alaska Department of Environmental  
Conservation

Ed Cushing, Division Manager,  
KPU Telecommunications

Helge Eng, Alaska State Forester

Kristi Harper, Acting National Tribal  
Liaison Officer, USDA Natural Resources  
Conservation Service

Sarah Leonard, President and CEO,  
Alaska Travel Industry Association

Travis Million, CEO, Copper Valley  
Electric Association

Kyle Moselle, Executive Director,  
Office of Project Management and  
Permitting, Alaska Department of  
Natural Resources

Michelle O'Brien, Executive Director,  
Ketchikan Chamber of Commerce

### ALASKA WORKSHOP

In opening remarks at the workshop in Ketchikan, Alaska, Governor Mike Dunleavy emphasized the importance of sustainable resource development to the future of Alaska and the rest of the West.

Governor Dunleavy called on the federal government to streamline permitting processes so that states can effectively leverage their natural resources for community benefit and avoid outsourcing production to foreign countries as the world transitions to new forms of energy and production.

"Resources have always been the cornerstone of this great country," he said. "America could be the country that underwrites the new energy economy because of our massive amount of strategic metals... If you want to make sure the environment remains intact, you don't push your industries over to foreign countries that don't have the environmental regulations that Alaska and the United States have."

The workshop also included conversations about rural workforce capacity, tourism, water quality, fisheries, and building a long-term resilient timber supply.

Jim Ogsbury, Executive Director,  
Western Governors' Association

Dan Robinson, Research Chief,  
Alaska Department of Labor

Mike Satre, Director, Governmental  
Affairs, Hecla Mining

Laura Schweitzer, Executive Director,  
Council of Western State Foresters

Sonya Skan, Deputy Director,  
Education and Training Department,  
Ketchikan Indian Community

Robert Venables, Executive Director,  
Southeast Conference

Doug Vincent-Lang, Commissioner,  
Alaska Department of Fish and  
Game

## Work Session With Western Counties

**Data Challenges in Resource Management Planning**  
An initiative work session led by WGA Policy Advisor Kevin Doran examined how data can better serve western communities. The session included representatives from Colorado, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming, and examined how federal, state, and local data collection and sharing plays an integral part in resource planning processes and the determination of funding priorities. There are many challenges to integrating data into

decision-making processes: the use of data formats that are incompatible across platforms, regulatory or agency cultural hurdles to the sharing of data, and development of capacity to analyze raw data into operational information. Session participants highlighted these challenges and offered strategies on how to better implement data-based resource planning programs and achieve positive outcomes at the county, state, and federal levels.

## Boise, Idaho Workshop

February 23-24, 2022

The Honorable Brad Little,  
Governor of Idaho

Ara Andrea, Shared Stewardship  
Coordinator, Idaho Department  
of Lands

Merrill Beyeler, Board Member, Idaho  
Rangeland Resource Commission

Jarod Blades, Resources and Science  
Branch Chief, U.S. Bureau of Land  
Management

Marc Brinkmeyer, Chairman,  
Idaho Forest Group

Tawnya Brummett, Forest  
Supervisor, Boise National Forest,  
U.S. Forest Service

Patt Dorsey, Director of  
Conservation Operations,  
National Wild Turkey Federation

Sam Eaton, Policy Director,  
Idaho Governor Brad Little

Jim Elbin, Trust Land Division  
Administrator, Idaho Department  
of Lands

Curtis Elke, Idaho State  
Conservationist, USDA Natural  
Resources Conservation Service

Mike Guerry, Chair, Three Creek  
Rangeland Fire Protection  
Association

Melissa Hamilton, Associate  
Extension Professor, University  
of Idaho

Darcy Helmick, Land Manager,  
Simplot Livestock Company

Bob Howard, Marketing Partner,  
Desert Mountain Grass-Fed Beef

Brad Johnson, Agriculture Strategy  
Manager, The Nature Conservancy

Karen Launchbaugh, Professor of  
Rangeland Ecology and Director of  
the University of Idaho Rangeland  
Center

Trevor McConchie, Federal Lands  
Assistant Division Manager,  
Washington Department of Natural  
Resources

Brent Meisinger, Fire Management  
Officer, U.S. Bureau of Land  
Management

### IDAHO WORKSHOP

At the Boise, Idaho, workshop, Idaho Governor Brad Little stressed the need for collaborative land management to continue the region's economic growth and develop more resilient western communities for generations to come.

"It's important that we continue to look at improving how we make our communities more resilient," Governor Little said. "Everybody says we want healthier watersheds, we want less catastrophic fire, we want (better management of) invasive species. Those overarching goals need to have legs under them – policies, recommendations, where to best invest the next available dollar – and that's what we expect as a result of these panels."

The Governor emphasized the opportunities provided by the Infrastructure and Jobs Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to fund projects that advance these priorities:



Idaho Gov. Brad Little

"The states do have the good fortune of having a significant increase in resources, whether it be the infrastructure bill or ARPA, but how do we get that money deployed and not waste it and really move the needle on water infrastructure, on sewer, on maximizing recreational opportunity?"

During the two-day workshop, regional experts from local, state, and federal agencies, along with private landowners, sought to answer that question with roundtable discussions on rangeland fire protection associations, invasive species management, sustainable rangeland markets, and forest management infrastructure.

Cameron Mulroy,  
Executive Vice President,  
Idaho Cattle Association

Caroline Nash, Principal,  
CK Blueshift and Trout Unlimited

Jim Ogsbury, Executive Director,  
Western Governors' Association

Cheryl Probert, Forest Supervisor,  
Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest

Brenda Richards, Coordinator, Idaho  
Rangeland Conservation Partnership

Knute Sandahl, State Fire Marshall,  
Idaho Department of Insurance

Josh Sawislak, Managing Director,  
Deloitte Consulting LLP

Jon Songster, Good Neighbor  
Authority Bureau Chief,  
Idaho Department of Lands

Peter Stegner, Principal,  
Riley Stegner and Associates

Troy Timmons, Policy Director,  
Western Governors' Association

Liz Wilder, Executive  
Director, Idaho Wool Growers  
Association

Mike Zupko, Executive Director,  
Wildland Fire Leadership  
Council





## Webinars

### Working Lands, Working Communities Launch

WGA Chair and Idaho Governor Brad Little led a discussion with Sonya Germann, Montana State Forester; Lesli Allison, Executive Director, Western Landowners Alliance; and Tom Schultz, Director of Resources and Government Affairs, Idaho Forest Group. The broad-ranging conversation highlighted several of the land management challenges on western landscapes, and the importance of local community and landowner involvement in planning processes.

### Collaboration Tools Across Ownerships

WGA welcomed Jonas Feinstein, the West Regional Conservation Forester at the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Conrad Wright, President and Founder of Alchemy Analytics; and Lowell Ballard, the Director of Geospatial Solutions at the Timmons Group, to examine accessible tools that can inform local land use and wildfire risk mitigation. Panelists profiled online tools that can help communities prioritize management activities related to wildfire risk, water quality, and land and community resilience.

### Invasive Annual Grasses Management

Invasive annual grasses pose ecological and economic challenges for invasive species managers and agricultural producers across the West. Stas Burgiel, Executive Director of the National Invasive Species Council, moderated a discussion with Matt Baur, Director of the Western Integrated Pest Management Center; Slade Franklin, Weed and Pest Coordinator for the Wyoming Department of Agriculture; and Jeremy Maestas, Wildlife Biologist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Speakers shared case studies of effective cheatgrass, medusahead, and ventenata management. They also explored opportunities to leverage Farm Bill programs to address the spread of invasive annual grasses and discussed how high-quality species data informs effective invasive species management partnerships.

### Implementing Forest Investments in the Infrastructure Bill

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provides an increase in funding for wildfire management and ecosystem restoration on both federal and private lands, but implementation will require capacity to plan and approve projects as well as the infrastructure,

equipment, workers, and contractors to do the work. In this webinar, Jason Kuiken, Deputy Team Leader for the Wildfire Risk Reduction Infrastructure Team with the U.S. Forest Service; Craig Foss, Idaho State Forester; Kacey KC, State Forester and Firewarden for the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; and Nick Goulette, Executive Director of the Watershed Research and Training Center, discussed the challenges land managers and communities face in deploying these funds in light of diminished forest management capacity.

### Conservation Markets in the West

This webinar featured RaeAnn Dubay, Assistant State Conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Tom Fry, Director of Western Forest Conservation for the American Forest Foundation; and Zach Bodhane, Policy Director at the Western Landowners Alliance, in a discussion of opportunities for private landowners to leverage conservation-oriented market incentives and alternative income streams to bolster their operations. Panelists discussed Conservation Incentive Contracts offered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service and successful habitat leasing models in the West.



# Out West Podcasts

## Moss Balls and Emergency Invasive Species Responses

The episode of WGA's Out West podcast, Moss Balls and Emergency Invasive Species Responses, explores the collaborative efforts of western states and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to address the discovery that Marimo moss balls, which are often used in aquariums and sold in pet stores nationwide, harbor invasive zebra mussels. WGA Policy Advisor Laura Cutlip spoke with Brian Nesvik, Director of Wyoming Game and Fish, Joshua Leonard, Statewide Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator for Wyoming Game and Fish, and Eric Anderson, an officer with the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, about the strategies they developed to meet this surprising threat and the importance of effective state-federal partnerships in the rapid response to invasive species management.

## Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship

This episode of Out West examines the work western states and organizations are undertaking to strengthen and rebalance the states' relationship with the federal government. WGA Senior Policy Advisor Kevin Doran moderated the conversation with Matt Morrison, CEO of the Pacific Northwest Economic Region Foundation, Edgar Ruiz, Director of the Council of State Governments West, Jonathan Shuffield, Associate Legislative Director for Public Lands and Liaison to the Western Interstate Region for the National Association of Counties, and WGA Executive Director Jim Ogsbury, about their collective work to protect and promote state authority.

## Supporting Cross-Boundary Conservation

Cross-boundary land management is critical to healthy and productive working lands, but it can also be extremely expensive and complex. This episode of Out West explores how programs overseen by the USDA National Resource Conservation Service can help unify various management activities across public and private lands. WGA Policy Advisor Kevin Moss sat down with Emily Fife, Utah State Conservationist for the NRCS, to discuss opportunities for landowners to leverage NRCS programs that support species conservation, how NRCS works with western communities on landscape planning, and why current drought and wildfire stressors require coordinated responses across ownership boundaries.

## Fixing America's Forests

WGA Policy Advisor Jonah Seifer and Ben Wudtke, Executive Director of the Intermountain Forest Association, examine recent forest management projects that successfully protected western communities from potentially catastrophic wildfires and insect infestations. Ben and Jonah discuss how collaborative, all-lands interventions can effectively protect communities and build long-term resilience in our forests – especially as resources become available as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the U.S. Forest Services' 10-year fire strategy.

## Post-Fire Restoration Challenges

This podcast explores the challenges that wildfire-affected communities face and the available resources to help them recover. WGA Policy Director, Troy Timmons spoke with the Founder and CEO of Coalitions & Collaboratives, Inc., Carol Ekarius, about improving community capacity to address restoration needs, federal programs that offer assistance, and opportunities to enhance the implementation of both pre-fire mitigation and post-fire restoration work.

## Agricultural Workforce in the West

WGA Policy Advisor Kevin Moss spoke with Kate Greenberg, Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture, and Sarah Wenzel-Fisher, Executive Director of the Quivira Coalition, a non-profit organization based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, that is dedicated to building economic and ecological resilience on western working landscapes. Together they discuss effective workforce training programs and partnerships that can help young people develop the necessary tools for a successful career in agriculture. The discussion explores the challenges communities face as more agricultural workers retire, the barriers that young people face when attempting to start a career in the industry, and opportunities to expand apprenticeship programs on family farms and ranches.





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