



Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 11-7

Water Resource Management in the West

A. BACKGROUND

1. In the arid West, water is a precious resource that must be managed with sensitivity to social, environmental and economic values and needs. Clean, reliable water supplies are essential for communities throughout the West and the Nation to maintain or improve their citizens' quality of life. Strong state and national economies require sufficient supplies of good quality water, which in turn depend on protection of water supply sources and the environment and adequate infrastructure for water and wastewater. Investments in water infrastructure also provide jobs and a foundation for long-term economic growth in communities throughout the West.
2. Challenges are mounting. Supplies are nearly fully allocated in many basins across the West. The cost to maintain and repair aging infrastructure is increasing. Demands for population, industry, energy, the environment and recreation are increasing. And we face greater variability in terms of future water supply.
3. States have the pivotal role in allocating, administering, protecting, and developing water resources, and they are primarily responsible for water supply planning within their boundaries. Western Governors, through their Association and its affiliate, the Western States Water Council, have worked for decades to improve resource management and to secure reliable, clean water for their citizens. The WGA and WSWC reports titled *Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future* (2006, 2008, and 2010) provide a road map for water resource management in the West.
4. Partnerships are critical to sound water resource management. Federal agencies have a role in Western resource management, and collaboration between the states and federal agencies is essential. The Western Governors appreciate the efforts of the federal government to collaborate with Western states through the Western Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST). Tribal governments and Western states also share common water resource management challenges, and the WGA and WSWC have a long and productive partnership working with tribes to resolve water rights claims and promote economic development on and off the reservation. Local water utilities and water users, recreation and conservation interests, and private citizens must also be engaged in the effort to manage water resources in the West.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

Water Resource Information

Western Governors encourage continued investment in the nation's *water measurement and monitoring data networks* and the development of information services that promote

collaboration between the research and management communities to ensure relevant information is developed and shared with decision-makers. Basic information on the status, trends and projections of our water resources is essential to sound water management.

1. **Basic Water Data:** Western Governors support several federal programs that are particularly critical in this regard, including but not limited to the USGS Cooperative Water Program and National Streamflow Information System, the NRCS Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting Program, and the NASA Landsat Program with its thermal infrared sensor (TIRS). Western Governors are concerned about declines in federal spending for these and other programs that provide important water supply information and believe that such programs should be fully funded by Congress and implemented by the federal agencies. Moreover, a general lack of comprehensive and coordinated programs for measuring and monitoring water use at all levels of government contributes to unacceptable uncertainty on the demand side of the equation, and Western Governors support recent federal efforts to address this need. They also support federal efforts to coordinate water data gathering and information programs across multiple agencies.
2. **Forecasts and Models:** Western Governors call on the federal government to work with Western states to develop tools and models that better enable the synthesis, visualization and evaluation of water-related data. This includes the development of climate models that provide useful information for state water resource managers, utilities and decision-makers in the Western states. Western Governors recommend the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration take the lead in improving forecasts on multiple geographic and temporal scales.
3. **Information Services:** Western Governors encourage federal agencies to partner with states in the gathering, coordination and effective dissemination of water-related data between the federal government and states. The National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) is a successful model of state-federal collaboration in the development of information services. Western Governors support the development of other important information services, designed in conjunction with the states, including a national climate service that would incorporate and coordinate existing climate and water data collection and analysis programs and services. They further support collaborative management and adaptation programs, such as the Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments.

Water Resource Planning

Western Governors believe solutions to water resources challenges require an integrated approach and greater partnership among state, tribal, local and federal agencies. Water resource planning should consider collectively the full range of water resource needs; develop from the bottom up effective solutions that are complementary rather than conflicting; and provide direction for specific solutions and the most appropriate entities to implement them based primarily on a watershed approach.

4. **State Integrated Water Resource Planning:** Western Governors support *integrated water resource management* and encourage the development of comprehensive water

plans with state leadership and federal assistance. Plans should be developed in cooperation with tribes, federal agencies, water utilities, conservation and recreation groups, and private citizens. Specifically, plans should:

- a. Identify and prioritize anticipated future infrastructure needs for water resources;
 - b. Identify necessary studies, data and projects;
 - c. Projections of future water needs; and
 - d. Be used to develop national water policies and priorities that align federal agency support to states and that inform decision making regarding regional water issues. Specific federal programs, such as the Bureau of Reclamation Basin Studies and USGS Water Census, should carefully consider state water planning efforts and complement and support state water plans and processes, rather than supplant state water plans.
5. **Water and Growth:** In order to better integrate water and land use planning, states should promote policies that facilitate cooperation between water managers and local planning agencies in making decisions about new growth.
6. **Local Watershed Planning:** Western Governors encourage federal agencies and Congress to provide funding, shared personnel and other resources. States should offer technical and financial support for watershed groups dealing with local water issues associated with water quality, growth and land management and ensure these groups are sufficiently empowered to deal effectively with these issues.
7. **Drought Planning:** Western Governors believe a comprehensive, integrated response to drought emergencies, including mitigation planning, is critical to the social, environmental and economic well-being of the West.
 - a. Governors support a comprehensive national policy that promotes a coordinated and integrated approach to future drought, including improved forecasting and monitoring, drought preparedness and planning, and efficient delivery of drought programs.
 - b. Governors encourage states to work with federal agencies and local communities to develop proactive drought preparedness and contingency plans.
 - c. Governors recommend the continued development of the NIDIS program, particularly with respect to implementation of regional drought early warning systems.
8. **Climate Planning:** Western Governors recognize the significant potential impacts of climate variability and change on water supplies. Potential changes may include declines in precipitation and runoff, increases in severe weather events and storms, changes in the timing of water availability, and increases in water demands. Western Governors urge Congress and the Administration to work closely with states and other resource managers to improve predictive and adaptive capabilities for climate change and related impacts at regional scales. Federal programs should be responsive to the research priorities and resource needs of state water managers as they pertain to climate change, including the NOAA Climate Service, DOI Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, U.S. Geological Survey's Climate Science Centers, and the National Climate Assessment.

9. **Energy Development:** Western Governors recognize that energy development and electricity generation may be a significant driver of future water demands. Western Governors recommend increased coordination across the energy and water management communities and support on-going work to assess the interconnection of energy and water through the Regional Transmission Expansion Planning Project for the Western interconnection and similar efforts.
10. **Intergovernmental Cooperation:** Western Governors recognize the important role of federal agencies in supporting sound water resource management in the Western states. Governors appreciate the efforts of federal agencies to coordinate water-related activities with the Western states through the ‘Western States Federal Agency Support Team’ (WestFAST) and recommend the continuation of this key state-federal partnership.

Water Resource Solutions

Western Governors recognize that there is no “silver bullet” solution to water resource challenges and support a mix of efficient and cost-effective strategies that account for the full range of water supply and environmental needs.

11. **Infrastructure:** Western Governors support investment in water supply and water quality infrastructure. Infrastructure investments are essential to our nation’s continued economic prosperity and environmental improvements, and they assist state and local entities in meeting federally mandated standards. Infrastructure investment is particularly critical now, as much of the water infrastructure that has served the West for decades is aging and in dire need of repair. Specifically:
 - a. As the economy recovers, all levels of government should be encouraged to increase their investment in water infrastructure and adopt adequate life-cycle asset management practices that include pricing policies, project prioritization and sufficient revenues to cover the costs of service.
 - b. To help states address water infrastructure needs, Congress should provide stable and continuing federal appropriations, increased by a construction inflation index, to the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act State Revolving Funds. Further, Congress should increase appropriations from the Reclamation Fund for authorized purposes to match average annual fund receipts. Congress should pass the Corps of Engineer’s Water Resource Development Act (WRDA) legislation on a regular schedule and increase funding levels so all projects and studies authorized in WRDA can be completed in a timely manner. Congress also should consider facilitating greater investment in water infrastructure, such as through an infrastructure bank or water trust fund.
 - c. Congress should remove the state volume caps for private activity bonds used for water and wastewater projects, provide guaranteed tax-exempt status for bonds issued by state or local agencies to finance water infrastructure, provide loan guarantees, and otherwise support and encourage alternatives to direct federal investment of limited general funds.

- d. States should encourage public-private partnerships that promote investment in water infrastructure and consider mechanisms that would reduce financing costs, such as bond insurance, risk pooling, credit enhancements, and revolving water funds.
 - e. Infrastructure planning and permitting guidelines, rules and regulations should be coordinated, streamlined and sufficiently flexible to 1) allow for timely decision-making in the design, financing and construction of needed infrastructure, 2) account for regional differences, 3) balance economic and environmental considerations, and 4) minimize the cost of compliance.
 - f. Capital budgeting and asset management principles should be used to determine funding priorities, based on long-term sustainability and not annual incremental spending choices. It should be accompanied by dedicated sources of funding with appropriate financing, cost-sharing, pricing and cost recovery policies.
12. **Conservation/Efficiency:** Western Governors encourage adoption of strategies to make existing water supplies go further, including the use of water conservation, water reuse and recycling, desalination and reclamation of brackish waters, and reductions in per capita water use. The Governors encourage investment in research into promising water-saving strategies.
13. **Innovative Water Sharing:** Western Governors recognize the potential benefits of market-based water transfers, and that the predominant water use in the West is agriculture, but they are concerned about maintaining the important cultural, economic, and environmental benefits of agricultural lands and food production. Western Governors believe states should identify and promote innovative ways to allow water transfers from agricultural to other uses (including urban, energy and environmental) while avoiding or mitigating damages to agricultural economies and communities.
14. **Indian Water Settlements:** Western Governors support negotiated settlements of Indian land and water rights disputes in order to meet the nation's obligations to tribes while providing increased certainty for all Western water users. Negotiated settlements are flexible, promote sound management practices, provide a basis for partnerships between Indian and non-Indian communities, and save millions of dollars by avoiding prolonged and costly litigation. Western Governors urge the Administration to support its longstanding policy in favor of Indian land and water settlements that have a strong federal commitment to meaningful federal contributions that recognize the trust obligations of the United States government. Congress should also ensure that any land or water settlement, once authorized and approved by the President, will be funded and implemented in a timely manner without a corresponding offset to some other tribe or essential Interior program.
15. **Watershed Protection and Ecological Resilience:** Western Governors urge increased collaboration between water users and federal agencies in protecting clean water supplies recognizing the importance of high-value watersheds and natural features (such as wetlands and forests) that provide ecological services, including stormwater and flood mitigation, water quality protection and groundwater recharge.

- 16. Recreational and Ecological Values:** Western Governors believe states should strive to maintain ecological services, recreational amenities and species needs when managing and developing water resources. States and federal agencies should coordinate efforts to avoid the listing of water-dependent species under the Endangered Species Act. When ESA listings cannot be avoided, parties should promote the use of existing state tools, such as state in-stream flow protections to conserve and recover species.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. This resolution is to be posted on the Western Governors' Association Web site.
2. The Western Governors' Association and the Western States Water Council should continue to develop coordinated positions on specific water resource issues on behalf of Western states and work to communicate these positions to Congress and federal agencies.
3. Western Governors direct the Western Governors' Association and the Western States Water Council to:
 - a. Update information and compile a report on Western state water resources infrastructure financing authorities, funding sources, policies and programs.
 - b. Work with the USGS, EPA, NRCS, and other federal agencies responsible for water-related data collection, to explore the development of a consistent, systematic, state-led approach to collecting and sharing information about water supply, demand and management options that inform state water supply planning.
 - c. Develop an agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association on the delivery of climate-related information to inform water management (and other resource and management) decisions, ensuring that new services meet the needs of states and other on-the-ground resource managers.
 - d. Conduct a study of water transfers in the Western United States with a focus on developing a tool box of institutional and management strategies that states can employ as appropriate.
 - e. Examine the relationship between future energy development and water supply; identify the implications of water supply for the electric grid; and recommend policies or programs to facilitate sustainable energy development in the context of economy-wide water availability, working through the Regional Transmission Expansion Planning project.
 - f. Continue to work with the Ad Hoc Group on Indian Water Rights for purposes of advancing negotiated settlements of Indian land and water rights disputes.
 - g. Collaborate on an update to the *Water Needs and Strategies Report* for 2012 that would include a shared vision for water that recognizes the important role of state leadership and highlights the need for continued investment in water resource planning and management throughout the West and the Nation.