



Policy Resolution 2018-12

Water Quality in the West

A. BACKGROUND

1. Clean water is essential to strong economies and quality of life. In most of the West, water is a scarce resource that must be managed with sensitivity to social, environmental, and economic values and needs. Because of their unique understanding of these needs, states are in the best position to manage the water within their borders.
2. States have federally-recognized authority to manage and allocate water within their boundaries. The Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 101(g) expressly says that “the authority of each state to allocate quantities of water within its jurisdiction shall not be superseded, abrogated, or otherwise impaired by this Act.”
3. States and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) work together as co-regulators under the CWA and the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). Congress has delegated to states, by statute, the authority to obtain approval to implement certain federal program responsibilities. When a state has been approved to implement a program and the state is meeting minimum program requirements, the role of federal agencies like EPA should be funding, technical assistance, and research support. States should be free to develop, implement, and enforce those requirements using an approach that makes sense in their specific jurisdiction, subject to the minimum requirements of the federal acts.
4. The CWA was last reauthorized in 1987; attempts to reauthorize the Act since then have failed. Current federal regulations, guidance, and programs pertaining to the CWA do not always recognize the specific conditions and needs of most of the West, where water is scarce and even wastewater becomes a valuable resource to both humans and the environment. The West includes a variety of waters; small ephemeral washes, large perennial rivers, effluent-dependent streams, and wild and scenic rivers. In addition to natural rivers, streams and lakes, there are numerous man-made reservoirs, waterways and water conveyance structures. States need more flexibility to determine how to best manage these varying resources.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

Clean Water Act (CWA)

1. **State Authority and Implementation of CWA:** States have jurisdiction over water resource allocation decisions and are responsible for how to balance state water resource needs within CWA objectives. New regulations, rulemaking, and guidance should recognize this state authority.
 - a) **CWA Jurisdiction:** Western Governors urge EPA and the Corps to engage the states as co-regulators and ensure that state water managers have a robust and meaningful voice in the development of any rule regarding CWA jurisdiction, particularly in the early stages of development before irreversible momentum precludes effective state participation.

- b) **Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)/Adaptive Management:** States should have the flexibility to adopt water quality standards and set total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) that are tailored to the specific characteristics of Western water bodies, including variances for unique state and local conditions.
 - c) **Anti-degradation:** CWA Section 303 gives states the primary responsibility to establish water quality standards (WQS) subject to EPA oversight. Given the states' primary role in establishing WQS, EPA should directly involve the states in the rulemaking process for any proposed changes to its existing regulations. Before imposing new anti-degradation policies or implementation requirements, EPA should document the need for new requirements and strive to ensure that new requirements do not interfere with sound existing practices.
 - d) **Groundwater:** States have exclusive authority over the allocation and administration of rights to use groundwater located within their borders and are primarily responsible for allocating, protecting, managing, and otherwise controlling the resource. The regulatory reach of the CWA was not intended to, and should not, be applied to the management and protection of groundwater resources. The federal government should not develop a groundwater quality strategy; instead, it must recognize and respect state primacy, reflect a true state-federal partnership, and comply with current federal statutory authorities.
2. **Permitting:** Actions taken by EPA in its CWA permitting processes should not impinge upon state authority over water management or the states' responsibility to implement CWA provisions.
- a) **State Water Quality Certification:** Section 401 of the CWA requires applicants for a federal license to secure state certification that potential discharges from their activities will not violate state water quality standards. Section 401 is operating as it should, and states' mandatory conditioning authority should be retained without amendment.
 - b) **General Permits:** Reauthorization of the CWA must reconcile the continuing administrative need for general permits with their site-specific permitting requirements under the CWA. EPA should promulgate rules and guidance that better support the use of general permits where it is more effective to permit groups of dischargers rather than individual dischargers.
 - c) **Water Transfers:** Water transfers that do not involve the addition of a pollutant have not been subject to the permitting requirements of the CWA's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). States already have authority to address the water quality issues associated with transfers. Western Governors believe that transporting water through constructed conveyances to supply beneficial uses should not trigger NPDES permit requirements simply because the source and receiving water contain different chemical concentrations and physical constituents. Western Governors support EPA's current Water Transfers Rule, which exempts water transfers between waters of the United States from NPDES permitting requirements.
 - d) **Pesticides:** Western Governors generally support the primary role of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) in regulating agriculture and public

health related pesticide applications to waters of the U.S. and will seek state-based solutions that complement rather than duplicate FIFRA in protecting water supplies.

3. **Nonpoint Source Pollution:** Nonpoint source pollution requires state watershed-oriented water quality management plans, and federal agencies should collaborate with states to carry out the objectives of these plans. The CWA should not supersede other ongoing federal, state, and local nonpoint source programs. Federal water policies must recognize that state programs enhanced by federal efforts could provide a firm foundation for a national nonpoint source policy that maintains the non-regulatory and voluntary nature of the program. In general, the use of point source solutions to control nonpoint source pollution is also ill-advised.

a) **Forest Roads:** Stormwater runoff from forest roads has been managed as a nonpoint source of pollution under EPA regulation and state law since enactment of the CWA. Western Governors support solutions that are consistent with the long-established treatment of forest roads as nonpoint sources, provided that forest roads are treated equally across ownership within each state.

b) **Nutrient Pollution:** Nitrogen and phosphorus (nutrient) pollution is a significant cause of water quality impairment across the nation, and continued cooperation between states and EPA is needed. However, nutrients produced by non-point sources fall outside of NPDES jurisdiction and should not be treated like other pollutants that have clear and consistent thresholds over a broad range of aquatic systems and conditions.

States should be allowed sufficient flexibility to utilize their own incentives and authorities to establish standards and control strategies to address nutrient pollution, rather than being forced to abide by one-size-fits-all federal numeric criteria. Successful tools currently in use by states include best management practices, nutrient trading, controlling other water quality parameters, and other innovative approaches.

4. **CWA Reauthorization:** The Western Governors support reauthorization of the CWA, provided that it recognizes the unique hydrology and legal framework in Western states. Further, any CWA reauthorization should include a new statement of purpose to encourage the reuse of treated wastewater to reduce water pollution and efficiently manage water resources.

5. **Good Samaritan Legislation:** Congress should enact a program to protect volunteering remediating parties who conduct authorized remediation of abandoned hardrock mines from becoming legally responsible under the CWA and/or the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act for any continuing discharges after completion of a remediation project, provided that the remediating party – or “Good Samaritan” – does not otherwise have liability for that abandoned mine or inactive mine site.

6. **Stormwater (Wet Weather) Pollution:** In the West, stormwater discharges to ephemeral streams in arid regions pose substantially different environmental risks than do the same discharges to perennial surface waters. The Western Governors emphasize the importance of state primacy in water management, including management of ephemeral streams. State water agencies are well-equipped to provide tailored approaches that reflect the unique management needs of ephemeral streams.

7. **State-Tribal Coordination:** Western Governors endorse government-to-government cooperation among the states, tribes and EPA in support of effective and consistent CWA implementation. While retaining the ability of the Governors to take a leadership role in coordination with the tribes, EPA should promote effective consultation, coordination, and dispute resolution among the governments, with emphasis on lands where tribes have treatment-as-state status under Section 518 of the CWA.

Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA)

8. **Federal Assistance in Meeting SDWA Standards:** Western Governors believe that the SDWA and its standards for drinking water contaminants have been instrumental in ensuring safe drinking water supplies for the nation. It is essential that the federal government, through EPA, provide adequate support to the states and water systems to meet federal requirements. Assistance is particularly needed for small and rural systems, which often lack the resources needed to comply with federal treatment standards.
9. **Drinking Water Standards:** Contaminants such as arsenic, chromium, perchlorate, and fluoride often occur naturally in the West. Western Governors support EPA technical assistance and research to improve both the efficiency and affordability of treatment technologies for these contaminants. In any drinking water standards that the EPA may revise or propose for these and other contaminants, including disinfection byproducts, EPA should consider the disproportionate impact that such standards may have on Western states and give special consideration to feasible technology based on the resources and needs of smaller water systems.
10. **Risk Assessments:** Analysis of the costs of treatment for drinking water contaminants should carefully determine the total costs of capital improvements, operation, and maintenance when determining feasible technology that can be applied by small systems. These costs should be balanced against the anticipated human health benefits before implementing or revising drinking water standards.
11. **Emerging Contaminants/Pharmaceuticals:** The possible health and environmental impacts of emerging contaminants and pharmaceuticals are of concern to Western Governors. Although states have existing authorities to address possible risks associated with emerging contaminants and pharmaceuticals, there is a need for more reliable science showing impacts on human health as more information regarding these contaminants becomes available.
12. **Hydraulic Fracturing:** States currently employ a range of effective programmatic elements and regulations to ensure that hydraulic fracturing does not impair water quality, including but not limited to requirements pertaining to well permitting, well construction, the handling of exploration and production waste fluids, the closure of wells, and the abandonment of well sites.

Federal efforts to study the potential impacts of hydraulic fracturing on water quality should leverage state knowledge, expertise, policies, and regulations. Such efforts should also be limited in scope, based upon sound science, and driven by the states. Western Governors oppose efforts that would diminish the primary and exclusive authority of states over the allocation of water resources necessary for hydraulic fracturing.

Compliance with Federal Water Quality and Drinking Water Requirements

13. **State Revolving Funds:** Western Governors support EPA's Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) and Drinking Water SRF as important tools that help states and local communities address related water infrastructure needs and comply with federal water quality and drinking water requirements. Western Governors also urge Congress and the Administration to ensure that the SRF Programs provide greater flexibility and fewer restrictions on state SRF management.
14. **Restoring and Maintaining Lakes and Healthy Watersheds:** Historically, the Section 314 Clean Lakes Program and the Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Program provided states with critical tools to restore and maintain water quality in lakes and watersheds. Western Governors urge the Administration and Congress to support these programs. Such support should not come at the expense of other federal watershed protection programs.
15. **EPA Support and Technical Assistance:** The federal government, through EPA, should provide states and local entities with adequate support and technical assistance to help them comply with federal water quality and drinking water requirements. EPA should also collaborate with and allow states to identify and establish priority areas, timelines, and focus on programs that provide the largest public health and environmental benefits.
16. **EPA Grant Funding for Primary Service - Rural Water Programs:** Some rural communities still lack basic water and sanitary services needed to assure safe, secure sources of water for drinking and other domestic needs. Adequate federal support, including but not limited to the Rural Utilities Service programs of the Department of Agriculture and SRFs through EPA, are necessary to augment state resources.

Water Quality Monitoring and Data Collection

17. **Water Data Needs:** Western water management is highly dependent upon the availability of data regarding both the quality and quantity of surface and ground waters. EPA should provide support to the states in developing innovative monitoring and assessment methods, including making use of biological assessments, sensors and remote sensing, as well as demonstrating the value to the states of the national probabilistic aquatic resource surveys.

B. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with Congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a bi-annual basis. Please consult www.westgov.org/policies for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.