



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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ENVIRONMENT

Climate Change/Regional Climate Models

On January 6, the WSWC sent a letter to the National Science Foundation (NSF), urging it to establish a fund to provide grants to universities, laboratories, and other academic institutions for the development of regional climate models. The NSF provides funding for federally supported basic research and the letter said the agency should establish the fund because regional climate models are "...emerging as the promising next generation of climate models, and they are the first that will be widely applicable by public and private decision makers including states, communities, businesses, and households."

The letter also pointed out that regional impacts of climate change are becoming more apparent and significant, but warned that "...not enough is known about the impacts of climate change and variability, especially on the high-resolution temporal and spatial scales that are relevant to decision makers. Uncertainties are keeping Americans in the dark about the real risks of climate change, and as a result decision makers have no doubt put many needed adaptation efforts on the back burner."

The letter further said, "Water utility managers, water rights administrators, water quality managers, and other key decision makers, are increasingly demanding clearer, more detailed information about how the changing climate will affect their areas of responsibility. The development of regional climate models and downscaled climate model data sets are an integral part of the sound science they need to succeed and to the success of the entire national adaptation effort, because regional models are the only way to get accurate detail about future climate and weather when and where it is most needed. For the same reasons, regional climate models will serve as the central sources of data and information for any National Climate Service."

Of note, the letter said "...a competitive regional climate modeling program should improve the scientific understanding and capability for modeling climate change impacts, including water resources related impacts, within the United States. Models should be designed to interface with standard operational water resources models, and there should be complete

regional coverage of the United States. We suggest that \$25 million annually be invested to be distributed for 3 years through a competitive process." Please contact the WSWC's offices for a copy of the letter.

WATER QUALITY

Stormwater

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will hold five listening sessions to provide information to the public about a potential rule that would strengthen stormwater regulations and establish a comprehensive program to reduce stormwater from new development and redevelopment. EPA believes these potential regulations would help reduce stormwater discharges which can harm the water quality of waterways.

EPA is seeking input on the following preliminary regulatory considerations: (1) "expand the area subject to federal stormwater regulations;" (2) "establish specific requirements to control stormwater discharges from new development and redevelopment;" (3) "develop a single set of consistent stormwater requirements for all municipal separate storm sewer systems;" (4) "require those sewer systems to address stormwater discharges in areas of existing development through retrofitting the sewer system or drainage area with improved stormwater control measures;" and (5) "explore specific provisions to protect sensitive areas."

Western listening sessions include: San Francisco, California on January 20; Denver, Colorado on January 25; and Dallas, Texas on January 26. EPA will also accept written comments until February 26. For more information on the sessions or submit written comments, see: <http://www.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater/rulemaking> (WSW #1852).

WATER RESOURCES

Energy-Water Nexus/Stimulus/Nevada

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has guaranteed to fast track the environmental analysis and public comments associated with a number of renewable energy projects across the West. Fast-track projects are those where the companies involved have demonstrated to the BLM that they have made sufficient progress to formally start the environmental review and public participation process. These projects are also

advanced enough in the permitting process that they could potentially be cleared for approval by December 2010, making them eligible for Stimulus funding.

Some of the projects include measures to limit water demands. For example, in Nevada, projects like Solar Millennium's solar thermal power plant in the Amargosa Valley have proposed using a dry-cooled system, while NexLight's Silver State solar arrays near Primm would use a photovoltaic system that does not use water to generate electricity. Other projects, like SolarReserve's Crescent Dunes solar thermal with heat storage array near Tonopah would utilize a power-tower/heliostat system, which uses molten salt instead of water to generate steam.

Nevertheless, these and other projects like them will still require some water and concerns about hydrologic and environmental impacts exist. Although the projects have been fast-tracked, BLM Director Bob Abbey said the process "...is about focusing our staff and resources on the most promising renewable energy projects, not about cutting corners, especially when it comes to environmental analyses or opportunities for public participation." The BLM also said it will subject all renewable energy projects to the full environmental review required by the National Environmental Policy Act and will be subject to the same opportunities for public involvement for all other land-use decision making. See <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/info/newsroom/2009/december/0.html>.

Water Supply Outlook/Drought

The Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Snowpack/Drought Monitor Update for the week of January 7 reported that most of the West is "at or below normal values" despite above normal snow water equivalent (SWE) over much of the Southwest. NRCS also said many basins are running at 60-75% of normal. The only exceptions were southwest and southeast Utah, Arizona's high country, parts of New Mexico, and central Montana.

As for drought, a favorable storm trend has led to the removal of abnormally dry conditions in extreme northwest North Dakota and eastern Montana. Likewise, recent precipitation in and around the Shasta-Trinity Forest in northern California has led to a slight reduction in the northwestern area of severe drought. However, extreme and severe drought blanketed Arizona, while severe and moderate drought persisted throughout California, the western half of Nevada, southern Texas, and northcentral Washington. Moderate drought also expanded in southwestern Wyoming and emerged to the north of the Bitterroot Range along the Montana and Idaho borders. Similarly, abnormally dry conditions expanded in western Wyoming, northeastern Utah, eastern/southeastern

Idaho, and western/southwestern Montana. For more information, please see, <ftp://ftp.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/support/drought/dmrpt-20100107.pdf>.

Yakima River Basin Study/Reclamation/Washington

The Bureau of Reclamation and the Washington State Department of Ecology recently announced that the Yakima River Basin Study will build on previous efforts performed as part of the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project (YRBWEP.) Reclamation and Ecology will jointly conduct the study under the U.S. Department of the Interior's Water Conservation Initiative Basin Study Program. This one-year comprehensive study seeks to further define future options for water supply development, while improving conditions for anadromous fish. The study, which will be cost-shared on a 50/50 basis between Reclamation and Ecology, will also evaluate the potential impacts of climate change on water supplies and demands.

A YRBWEP Workgroup – comprised of state and federal agencies, county commissioners from the three Yakima Basin counties, the City of Yakima, the Yakima Nation, irrigation districts, fisheries managers, and American Rivers – will collaborate on the study. The workgroup has also developed a preliminary outline aimed at developing new water supplies, storage, and improving habitat and passage for fish in the basin.

The Yakima Basin Study Program aims to incorporate the latest science, engineering technology, climate models, and innovation. Desired outcomes include basin-specific plans that recommend collaboratively-developed solutions to meet water demands and foster sustainable development. For more information, please see: www.usbr.gov/wci/basin.html (WSW 1844).

WATER RIGHTS

Indian Water Rights/Navajo Nation Projects

On January 5, the Bureau of Reclamation's Western Colorado Area Office announced the fourth round of negotiations with the Navajo Nation on a proposed contract to provide water deliveries to tribal users from three Reclamation projects will take place on January 12 in Farmington, New Mexico. The Animas-La Plata Project, the Navajo Irrigation Project, and the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project are identified in the Northwest New Mexico Rural Water Projects Act of 2009, which authorized the settlement of Navajo Nation water rights in New Mexico's San Juan River Basin. If agreed to, the contract would provide terms and conditions that would govern the storage and delivery of water from the three projects. The contract would also address operation, maintenance, and replacement responsibilities. See <http://www.usbr.gov/uc/wcao>.

The WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL is an organization of representatives appointed by the Governors of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.