Alliance Supports Western Drought Resiliency and Water Supply Bill

The Family Farm Alliance earlier this month supported a bipartisan Western drought and water supply bill introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Martha McSally (R-AZ) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ). The Drought Resiliency and Water Supply Infrastructure Act builds on Senator Feinstein’s 2016 California drought legislation that was included in the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act.

“ Longer and more severe droughts will change the face of our state, undermine our economy, result in more wildfires, devastate our agriculture sector and require draconian water restrictions,” said Senator Feinstein. “To counter this, we must act now, and this bill will help toward that goal.”

Lake Mead, behind Hoover Dam, near Las Vegas.
(Photo courtesy of Arizona Public Media)

The new legislation extends funding under the WIIN Act for an additional five years, including $670 million for surface and groundwater storage projects, and supporting conveyance; $100 million for water recycling projects; and $60 million for desalination projects. It creates a new loan program for water agencies at 30-year Treasury rates (currently about 2.6 percent) to spur investment in new water supply projects. Repayment can be deferred until five years after completion of the project. It also authorizes $140 million for habitat restoration and environmental compliance projects, including forest, meadow and watershed restoration and projects that benefit threatened and endangered species.

“In Colorado and the West, combating drought requires a comprehensive approach. Storage and conservation are key parts of our water resource management,” said Senator Gardner. “Tens of millions of people in the western United States rely on Colorado rivers to provide water for agricultural, municipal and consumptive use, as well as support for our growing recreation economy. In the face of these challenges, I’m proud to be joining this bipartisan legislation that will aid efforts to prevent severe water shortages.”

The legislation offsets new costs in two ways. First, it extends existing WIIN Act provisions allowing water districts to prepay their outstanding capital debts and convert to indefinite length water supply contracts to bring in additional revenue within the next 10 years. It also creates a process to deauthorize inactive water recycling project authorizations.

In March, the Alliance – working with the California Farm Bureau Federation and Western Growers Associa-
Commissioner Burman Takes Action to Improve CVP hydropower

New directives support one of the Central Valley Project’s key resources

Bureau of Reclamation Press Release—Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Brenda Burman earlier this month established new policy to improve the long-term viability of Central Valley Project (CVP) hydropower. The policy direction—focused on cost stability, lost production opportunities, improving the value of the resources and customer service—is a result of a customer initiative started last year.

“CVP hydropower provides value to California with emissions free, cost-competitive electricity that allows savings to be passed onto retail customers in local communities,” said Reclamation Commissioner Burman. “Today we are signaling our commitment to improving the value of hydropower.”

In October 2018, Reclamation kicked off its CVP Power Initiative to provide power customers with certainty for future costs, while looking for new opportunities to generate power when it is most valuable to customers. Like many Reclamation projects, the CVP relies on hydropower energy to move water supplies. Surplus energy sales fund project construction and operating costs, including tens of millions of dollars per year for habitat restoration activities.

“We have a long history of providing power to California’s not-for-profit, community-owned power utilities. We want to ensure that our hydropower continues to be a cost-competitive, value-adding resource into the future,” said Reclamation’s Mid Pacific Region Director Ernest Conant.

Reclamation has been delivering reliable, low-cost hydropower throughout the West for more than a century. Today, Reclamation owns 76 hydropower facilities that generate electricity to power farms and communities throughout the West. Reclamation continues its long history of managing the West’s water and power supplies in an environmentally and economically sound manner. As energy markets continue to evolve, it will be critical for Reclamation to work with customers and stakeholders to define the role of hydropower for the next century.

For more information on Reclamation’s hydropower program: https://www.usbr.gov/power/

Western Drought Legislation (Continued from Page 1)

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) Subcommittee on Water and Power this month also held a legislative hearing to consider the following Western water bills:

- S. 325, by Sens. John Hoeven (R-ND) and Kevin Cramer (R-ND), would transfer title to the Oakes Test Area, an irrigation research area, from the Bureau of Reclamation to the Dickey-Sargent Irrigation District;
- S. 860, by Sen. Cory Gardner, would adjust the payment schedule and cost sharing of the Jackson Gulch Rehabilitation Project;
- S. 990, by Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY) and co-sponsored by Sens. Cory Gardner (R-CO), Deb Fischer (R-NE), Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Mike Enzi (R-WY), would extend the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program through Dec. 31, 2032;
- S. 1305, by Sens. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Steve Daines (R-MT), would create a cost-sharing plan for the Milk River water project;
- S. 1758, by Sen. Gardner, would allow the commissioner of Reclamation to extend its repayment schedule with the Purgatoire River Water Conservancy District; and
- S. 1882, by Sen. Daines, would make available the continued use of Pick-Sloan Missouri River Basin project power by the Kinsey Irrigation Co. and the Sidney Water Users Irrigation District.

Western Water Bills Teed Up at Senate ENR
Climate Change Policy and Agriculture: 
News from Home and Abroad

Agriculture advocates earlier this month traveled to Germany to share their vision for how farmers and ranchers can be part of the climate change solution instead of shouldering the blame for alleged global climate instability. Closer to home, the Trump Administration’s Department of Agriculture (USDA) is catching heat for allegedly stifling the dissemination of climate change research.

NACSSA Reps in Bonn for World Climate Talks

North America Climate Smart Agriculture (NACSSA) representatives participated at United Nations talks in Bonn, Germany earlier this month to push the message that agriculture is a major solution platform for achieving global climate stability and sustainable development goals.

The ag-related Koronivia Joint Work Agreement (KJWA) sessions in Bonn focused on adaptive management strategies and soil health - two areas where farmers, ranchers, forestland owners and their many partners in developed countries have extensive experience to share with developing countries.

Attending the talks were NACSSA Chairman Fred Yoder, a corn, soybean and wheat producer from Plain City, OH and past president of the National Corn Growers Association; A.G. Kawamura, a produce/specialty crop grower and shipper from Newport Beach (CALIFORNIA); and Ernie Shea, president of Solutions from the Land, NACSSA's sponsoring organization.

“We intervened on behalf of NACSSA during the closing KJWA work session advocating for addressing climate challenges using the full range of technologies, partnerships and systems that all forms of agriculture can offer,” said Mr. Shea. “It helped rebalance the conversation and positioned ag in the developed world as a willing, capable and important partner. That said, we have a lot more work to do”.

Mr. Kawamura, a former secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), delivered the keynote speech for the opening session of the Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture (GACSA), which met prior to the UN Climate Change Conference, also in Bonn. Mr. Kawamura outlined how agriculture can be a global solution platform for meeting climate and sustainable development objectives.

“Successful agriculture sustains humanity,” he told the audience.

Also attending the global conference were Karen Ross, the current CDFA Secretary and a NACSSA ally who addressed the delegates to the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture.

NACSSA representatives advanced their submission with country negotiators, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) subsidiary body experts and official observer parties. The submission includes guiding principles that should shape the KJWA. Methods and approaches for assessing adaptation, adaptation co-benefits and resilience were addressed. Pathways for improved soil carbon, soil health and soil fertility were also identified. Delegates to the UN conference sought ways in which off-grid and decentralized energy solutions could be deployed for smart energy and water use in the agriculture-food chain.

Subsequent submissions will be developed and advanced on water management, nutrient use and manure management towards sustainable and resilient agricultural systems, livestock management and bioenergy.

NACSSA provides platforms for engagement, dialogue, knowledge sharing and application of climate science to the agriculture and forestry sectors. The Family Farm Alliance is represented by Executive Director Dan Keppen on the NACSSA Steering Committee.

USDA Stifling Sharing of Climate Change Research?

Back in the United States, Democrats in Congress want answers to questions after POLITICO alleged that the USDA...
Reclamation and Water Managers Continue Discussions on Draft Transferred Facilities D&S

Western water users and Bureau of Reclamation leadership continue to address concerns associated with Reclamation’s proposed Directive and Standard (D&S) intended to improve collaboration and consistency between Reclamation and non-Federal entities responsible for operations and maintenance (O&M) of transferred works.

“Overall, there appears to be strong reservations among our membership regarding the proposed D&S,” said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen.

Transferred works are defined as those Reclamation-owned project facilities where the O&M of that facility is carried out by a non-Federal entity under the provisions of a formal O&M transfer contract.

At times, uncoordinated changes between Reclamation and the non-Federal entity have resulted in adverse consequences. Reclamation's draft D&S was intended to improve collaboration and provide a more consistent approach on these matters in the future. However, many Western interests responsible for operating and maintaining transferred works have expressed serious concerns with the proposed D&S, which they see as being too broad, open-ended and subjective.

In late May, Alliance and National Water Resources Association representatives and several Western water managers participated in a conference call with senior level Reclamation appointees to discuss this matter. Reclamation at that time expressed a willingness to pause/suspend the public comment period. Earlier this month, Reclamation hosted a two-hour teleconference call for interested stakeholders on the proposed D&S.

On the call, Reclamation leadership explained the reasoning and rationale used to develop the draft D&S. Transferred works operators and others expressed concerns and, in some cases, provided alternative language and conceptual ideas for a revised D&S.

The Q&A session on the June 6 call lasted nearly 90 minutes. Key concerns expressed by participants revolved around the potential need for additional funding for new staff and added time constraints on commencing such work due to the proposal, the definition of "substantial change", potential conflicts with the draft D&S and existing contracts, and other unintended consequences.

“The primary intent of the D&S is to require and ensure a defined communication process,” said Reclamation Deputy Commissioner David Palumbo. “Reclamation is responsible for building these processes at the Area Office level.”

Both the Commissioner's office and Reclamation leaders out of Denver agreed that Reclamation does not want to fix what is not broken or add more bureaucracy; the intent is to not negatively affect good working relationships.

“Reclamation leadership appears to be committed to finding a more surgical, precise solution in areas where there are communication problems between area offices and operators of transferred facilities,” said Mr. Keppen. “I believe we really are fortunate to have such practical, solution-oriented, and collaborative leaders in the upper echelons of Reclamation right now.”

In the meantime, the public comment period has been suspended so the D&S can either be improved, or some other acceptable approach can be developed in the coming months. This might include targeting only areas with problems which can probably be tied to either contract deficiencies or failures to implement correctly existing contracts.

“We'll keep our members apprised and continue to coordinate with our interested member organization on this matter,” said Mr. Keppen.

Climate Change Policy and Agriculture (Cont’d from Pg 3)

has refused to publicize dozens of government-funded studies highlighting the risks climate change poses to farmers and consumers. Presidential Democrat primary candidates Sen. Amy Klobuchar (MN), Sen. Kamala Harris (CA), Sen. Cory Booker (NJ), Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (NY), Senate Agriculture Committee member Michael Bennet and tech entrepreneur Andrew Yang all weighed in with public criticism of USDA’s actions.

In a letter to the USDA’s Office of the Inspector General, Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), Senate Agriculture ranking member Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) and 17 other senators asked the department's internal watchdog to look into “potential instances of suppression and alteration of scientific reports, documents, or communications” produced by USDA. (POLITICO June 27, 2019)

A spokesperson for USDA said there have been no directives within the department that discouraged the dissemination of climate-related science (POLITICO June 23, 2019).

“USDA has several thousand scientists and over 100,000 employees who work on myriad topics and issues; not every single finding or piece of work solicits a government press release,” the spokesperson said in an e-mail.

USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue briefly addressed the POLITICO report in a CNN interview.

"I'm not aware of any time there's been any discussion," Secretary Perdue said. "I'd love to see the evidence there... If you call yourself a facts-based, data-driven decision maker, you get a choice, you get a chance to talk about what ought to be studied, but you don't get a chance to determine the facts, and that's what we want. That's what we want our researchers to do."
Upper Colorado Basin State Irrigators Ramp up Engagement

Family Farm Alliance representatives and member organizations in the Upper Colorado River states have been active in the past month, as Basin states move towards implementing Drought Contingency Plans (DCPs) and other management initiatives.

President Donald Trump signed the basin-wide DCP in April. However, California missed the deadline from the federal government to join the other states. Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming have all written to the Colorado River Board of California strongly advocating that the Golden State unite with them in seeking authorization from Congress for the drought plans.

West Slope Basin Roundtable Meeting

Alliance President Patrick O’Toole (WYOMING) and Don Schwindt (COLORADO) - in addition to several Family Farm Alliance members - participated in a joint meeting of the four West Slope Basin Roundtables at the Ute Water Conservancy District in Grand Junction (COLORADO) earlier this month. They were joined by over 150 water leaders from across Colorado in a standing room – only, 5-hour meeting to discuss the past, present, and especially – the future – of the Colorado River.

“The reason this meeting is so well-attended...is that we have a study with findings that are going to tell people how much the Front Range is responsible for the potential shortage on the Colorado River,” said Kathleen Curry, Chair of the Gunnison Basin Roundtable, prior to the meeting.

John Carron, with Hydros Consulting, presented the third phase of an analysis being conducted for West Slope water entities of risk arising from possible future water supply and demand levels. Upper Colorado River Basin water users are the most vulnerable on the Western Slope in the event of a call required by an interstate compact to curtail use, with much of that vulnerability resting with entities that divert water from that basin to the Front Range (Transmountain Diversions, or TMDs), the new analysis shows (see figure, above).

A compact call is of most concern to those with water rights junior to 1922, when the interstate river compact was finalized. About 532,000 acre-feet of the post-compact depletions within the upper Colorado basin are attributable to TMDs, or about 57 percent of total post-compact depletions in the state, according to the report.

Upper Basin DCP Developments

The Grand Junction meeting also provided an overview of the Upper Basin DCP, the primary goal of which is to take proactive measures to always have a storage cushion in Lake Powell. The theory is that as long as the Upper Basin has some storage available, it will have the water on hand to meet its downstream commitments. Maintaining Lake Powell levels also has major side benefits for hydropower production at Glen Canyon Dam.

The Upper Basin DCP includes three basic elements: 1) drought operations of the Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP) storage reservoirs upstream of Lake Powell – Blue Mesa, Navajo and Flaming Gorge Reservoirs – where additional releases will be made to help maintain Lake Powell above critical levels; 2) system augmentation, consisting of cloud seeding and non-native vegetation control of phreatophytes (a plant with a deep root system that draws its water supply from near the water table); and 3) demand management, where programs to reduce consumptive uses will be investigated as a means of avoiding Lake Powell storage from dropping below critical levels.

None of the states, including Colorado, has made a formal decision to implement demand management. The commitment is only to study the feasibility of demand management. However, many West Slope residents who are owners of agricultural water rights and their neighbors concerned with third party impacts are actively discussing and sharing their concerns with the demand management concept.

Don Schwindt and his wife Jody started farming in their home community in Southwest Colorado in 1975 producing irrigated hay. He and other interested West Slope parties do not want their current economies to be negatively impacted by reduction of agricultural water use. Mr. Schwindt believes there are many people like him who are engaged and are not content to merely participate in the ongoing discussions. They also want to help shape the outcomes.

Who is Impacted by Curtailment of all Post-Compact Rights?

<table>
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<th>Post-Compact</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
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<tr>
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<td>11,887</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</tbody>
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All Results Presented Herein are Preliminary and Subject to Change
Action in Upper Colorado River States (Cont’d from Page 5)

“The risks associated with developing a workable demand management program outweigh any of the benefits I envision in the future for which I am ready to specifically plan,” said Mr. Schwint. “However, thoroughly exploring the concept should help all of us to better understand both the potential benefits and possible mitigation options for the risks, which will help us prepare to make decisions that we collectively face as users of this scarce resource.”

Demand Management Workgroups Established

Prior to the Grand Junction meeting, Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) staff announced the creation of several Demand Management Feasibility Investigation Workgroups. The purpose of these workgroups is to help CWCB staff identify and frame the complex issues associated with demand management feasibility for public and Board consideration. Several Family Farm Alliance members and/or organizations have been appointed to these workgroups.

Other Upper Basin Developments

The day after the Grand Junction meeting, President O’Toole and Advisory Committee member Larry Hicks (WYOMING) participated in a demand management meeting hosted by the Upper Colorado River Commission and the Upper Basin States (Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming) in Salt Lake City. In the Upper Basin, demand management and supply enhancement actions are both being eyed by various interests as tools to address Colorado River challenges.

As part of the new DCP agreement, Upper Basin states like Wyoming are looking at now to store as much as 500,000 acre-feet of conserved water in Lake Powell. A pilot “Systems Conservation Program” that began four years ago to pay ranchers to not irrigate in late summer to conserve water has come to an end. Challenges identified with that program include finding better ways to determine how much water was saved and to better shepherd that water to its intended destination: Lake Powell.

"There needs to be more data collection as far as determining if what we did actually sent more water to the river or not," Chad Espenscheid, a rancher and water engineer from Big Piney (WYOMING) told Wyoming Public Radio.

Despite much of the public attention being paid to demand management in the Upper Basin, other water development projects are also on the table. For example, Utah interests continue to move forward with the 140-mile Lake Powell Pipeline, a diversion project that would draw about 86,000 acre-feet a year from the lake. Upper Basin proponents say projects like these will allow them to capture what they were promised under the 1922 Colorado River Compact. They claim the Lower Basin states of Arizona, Nevada and California have been using that water downstream for nearly a century.

“What they need to do — the lower states — is use their right that's allocated to them, and we will use our right that’s allocated to us,” Mike Styler recently told KUER (UTAH). Mr. Styler retired recently after 14 years as director of the Utah Department of Natural Resources.

The Denver Post also recently reported on multiple new Colorado water-development projects in the works, including a proposed reservoir near Rangely that would capture 40,000 to 200,000 acre-feet from the White River, for recreational tourism purposes.

Recent Positive Colorado River Hydrology

April-July runoff volume forecasts for the Colorado River Basin range from near 115 to 250 percent of average. Only a few northern headwater basins of the Green River Basin in Wyoming have forecasts below average for the 2019 season. The Bureau of Reclamation predicts levels at Lake Powell will go up 55 feet before the end of the year, and officials anticipate they will release nine million acre-feet downstream for the fifth year in a row. The release from Lake Powell and increased flows from tributaries downstream will likely mean Lake Mead goes up by about four feet, keeping it above emergency levels.

“It looks good at this moment that we won’t be declaring shortage on the river,” said Bureau spokesman Patti Aaron. “That determination is made in the middle of August each year for the next year, but it looks good right now.”

Family Farm Alliance Actions

The Family Farm Alliance strives to facilitate the delivery of accurate and timely information to Congress, regulatory agencies and our members on issues which impact Western irrigators, through a variety of media forums. The Alliance is currently working on a Water Review edition that will focus on several of its Colorado River members and the issues and actions they are involved with at the local level regarding the DCPs.

“The current situation on the Colorado River is increasingly bringing the general public into the policy discussion,” said Mr. O’Toole. “Agricultural water users are more engaged than ever. They need - and want - to be helping to shape their future, instead of relying upon others to design their future for them. Ag water users are a major audience for the upcoming edition of the Water Review.”

The Colorado River Water Review edition (or editions) will feature interviews with roughly a dozen farmers, ranchers, water managers and attorneys from the Upper and Lower Basins, Front Range and West Slope. It is intended to provide Alliance members and policy makers with a sense of the complexity and diverse views associated with the Colorado River and the DCPs.

“We are hoping that the upcoming edition of the Water Review can help to tell the story, with an emphasis on impacts and consequences to agriculture,” said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen.
Alliance Joins Other Interests to Voice Support for New Ocean Policy

Marking the 1-year anniversary of the establishment of the nation's new ocean policy to advance U.S. economic, security, and environmental interests, the Family Farm Alliance earlier this month joined other commercial and recreational groups from around the country and issued statements of continued support for this effort.

"A year ago, the President removed a burden on Western businesses and citizens by vacating the 2010 National Ocean Policy (NOP) Executive Order. The previous policy set forth yet another level of federal management and oversight that could have impacted family farmers in the mostly inland West, not just ocean and coastal communities," said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen. "We continue to strongly support this new policy, which minimizes the potential for negative impacts on the Western interests we represent."

The Alliance was one of over 60 groups who signed on to a June 19, 2017 letter to President Trump requesting that the 2010 NOP be vacated.

"For years, a poorly designed national ocean policy kept US commercial fishermen, the nation’s oldest industry, from having true input at the table," said Bonnie Brady, Executive Director of the Long Island Commercial Fishing Association. "That is why we remain strongly supportive of the new policy established last year, which is a breath of fresh air that promotes engagement with industries like ours for whom the ocean is our place of work."

Other agricultural groups expressed support for the new ocean policy, as well, including the Agricultural Retailers Association (ARA).

"ARA continues to strongly support the federal government’s efforts to implement the nation’s new ocean policy, which is helping to promote a more streamlined process for coordination with states and private industry," said Richard Gupton, ARA Senior Vice-President. "ARA has long supported protecting our inland waterways, oceans and coastlines in a more a cooperative manner, as this approach will ensure a clean, healthy ocean while allowing agricultural retailers to maintain a profitable business environment, adapt to a changing world, and preserve their freedom to operate."

Mr. Keppen represented the Alliance and testified before two Congressional committees in 2017 on the state of the 2010 NOP and the program's interaction with existing laws and regulations for ocean management.

Salton Sea Legislation Passes House

The Salton Sea was re-created in 1905 when high spring flooding on the Colorado River crashed the canal gates leading into the developing Imperial Valley. By the time engineers were finally able to stop the breaching water in 1907, the Salton Sea had been born at 45 miles long and 20 miles wide.

Today, the Salton Sea faces a crisis. In recent years, it has developed increasing salinity and other water quality problems that have made it inhospitable to wildlife, recreation and other human uses. The sea elevation has also been receding due to reduced inflows resulting from changing hydrological conditions on the Colorado River system.

The U.S. House of Representatives earlier this month passed H.R. 2740, an appropriations bill that supports a federal agreement committing $30 million to projects addressing the environmental and public health crisis at the Salton Sea. The bill also includes an amendment offered by Representative Raul Ruiz (D-CA) directing the Bureau of Reclamation to dedicate an additional $2 million to projects that mitigate the Sea’s decline.

The Salton Sea is the largest inland lake in California, totaling more than 375 square miles in Imperial and Riverside counties. The sea supports a diverse wildlife habitat for over 400 species of birds and serves as a critical link on the 5,000-mile international Pacific Flyway for bird migration.

"This bill reflects the all-hands-on-deck approach we must take to mitigate and manage the decline of the Salton Sea by investing in our local environment and the health of our children, seniors, and families," said Rep. Ruiz. "By working together, federal, state, and county governments, businesses, and tribes can deliver real, pragmatic results to protect the health and economy of our local communities."
Alliance Engages in Water Funder Initiative Roundtable  
“The Future of Water in the West” event held in Vail

The Family Farm Alliance participated in a Leadership Roundtable meeting hosted by the Water Funder Initiative (WFI) earlier this month in Vail (COLORADO). Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen was invited to this year’s meeting to speak during the “Reimaging the Rural West” session, where he was joined by Colorado Agriculture Commissioner Kate Greenberg, Ann Mills of the Agua Foundation, and Chris Shaffner from COBank.

“I encouraged the group to help agriculture tell its message and underscore the importance of collaborative conservation projects that benefit the environment and agriculture,” said Mr. Keppen.

Former Deputy Interior Secretary Mike Connor moderated the panel, which was introduced by North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum, the new chairman of the Western Governors Association (WGA). The governor’s WGA initiative “Reimaging the Rural West” is defined by “opportunity, connectivity and community” and built on healthy and resilient rivers, forests, farms, families and economies.

WFI’s Leadership Roundtable involved a number of philanthropic partners, as well as several invited guests. More than 75 people representing over 50 organizations and 10 states participated in Roundtable events. This group of foundations has committed more than $100 million to water solutions, and are seeking a total of $150 million aimed at leveraging multiples of that funding from other private and public partners.

“The Water Leadership Roundtable focused on how philanthropy can do more with the public and private sectors — and a wider array of funders — to increase our support for the people and organizations working to achieve a sustainable water future,” said Susan Bell, WFI’s managing director.

Much of the Roundtable discussion addressed opportunities for progress through the Colorado River Basin’s recent Drought Contingency Plan, California’s legislative action on sustainable groundwater management and clean safe drinking water, and major advancements across the West in water data, finance, governance, and communications.

WGA Meeting

The WFI meeting took place alongside the 2019 WGA meeting, attended by twelve Western governors. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt was the keynote speaker, who addressed the governors in a question and answer session. Topics ranged from the National Park Service (NPS) deferred maintenance backlog, biosecurity and invasive species, and Interior’s reorganization.

While acknowledging former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke’s bold vision, Mr. Bernhardt explained reorganization plans have evolved, including changes to the original plan to align Interior’s regional structure along watersheds (Western States Water #2353).
Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Brenda Burman earlier this month announced that 18 projects will receive a total of $9 million to prepare for drought. These projects will provide more flexibility and reliability for communities while reducing the need for emergency actions during a drought. The funding provided is part of the U.S. Department of the Interior’s WaterSMART Program, where Reclamation works cooperatively with States, Tribes, and local entities as they plan for and implement actions to increase water supply reliability through investments to modernize existing infrastructure and attention to local water conflicts.

"While the water supply in the western United States improved this year, it’s important for communities to remain proactive in building long-term resiliency to drought," Commissioner Burman said. "These projects help communities protect themselves from the next drought by increasing water supply reliability and improving operational flexibility."

There were 18 drought resiliency projects selected in 7 Western states to receive funding. They will be leveraged with local cost-share to fund $166.2 million in projects.

Several Family Farm Alliance members had projects that were among the 18 selected by Reclamation. These included Tri-County Water Conservancy District (COLORADO) and the North Unit Irrigation District (OREGON).

Alliance member A&B Irrigation District in Idaho will receive $250,000 to implement, in coordination with the Twin Falls Canal Company, the Mid-Snake Recharge Injection Wells Project near the cities of Paul and Murtaugh, Idaho. They will construct six deep injection wells to recharge the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer. The project will protect against drought for groundwater and surface water users and enhance storage availability in the Minidoka and Palisades projects.

To learn more about the projects selected, please visit Reclamation’s drought website at https://www.usbr.gov/drought.

Editor’s note-this article includes excerpts from an Interior Department press release.
Missouri River Flood Bills Seek to Prioritize People and Property over Fish and Birds

On May 21, Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) introduced two bills related to the recent flooding on the Missouri River. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Flood Control Civilian Advisory Council Act (S.1565) would establish an advisory council composed of two representatives from each of the States of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota, as well as representatives from the agriculture and river commerce industries, and any other industries as deemed appropriate. The members of the council would be appointed by the President based on recommendations of the Senators from those respective States. The advisory council is intended to last one year, and its purpose is to “develop recommendations on how to best revise the Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System Master Water Control Manual to prioritize flood control and navigation.”

“The Missouri River flooding has once again devastated our state and it’s clear something has to change,” said Senator Hawley. “People who live along the river regularly deal with catastrophic flooding, simply because the Army Corps is acting under conflicting priorities.”

The second bill is the Missouri River Flood Control Prioritization Act (S. 1571), which would remove fish and wildlife as an authorized purpose of the Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System, and would make flood control the highest priority. The bill directs the Corps to revise the Master Water Control Manual accordingly within 90 days.

Senator Hawley believes farmers feel like they have been shut out and their voices don’t matter.

“That is completely unacceptable,” he said. “By introducing these bills, we can get at the root of the problem, demand change, and ensure the Army Corps prioritizes the safety and sustainability of our communities.”

One of those farmers is Blake Hurst, president of the Missouri Farm Bureau board of directors. He is critical of government actions taken to destroy structures that once helped to keep the channel clear. Mr. Hurst questions why slow-moving areas have been developed, which cause the bottom of the river channel to fill, effectively reducing the levee heights and protection. He also believes changes in the way manage upstream reservoirs are managed has harmed the ability to hold back water during times of excess precipitation.

“We’ve made changes in river management in the recent past, changes that have lessened our ability to control high water,” Mr. Hurst recently wrote in Agri-Pulse. “None of these actions are solely responsible for the increased frequency of flooding, but all of them contribute to our vulnerability.

Many of these actions were in response to the Endangered Species Act, undertaken to improve habitat for wildlife that live along and in the river.

“None of the species have been recovered while billions of dollars have been spent attempting to recreate Eden within the confines of levees and reservoirs,” laments Mr. Hurst, who was the keynote speaker at the 2016 Family Farm Alliance annual conference. “We’ve tried to split the baby, and all we’ve managed to do is increase the danger of floods without improving the lives of the pallid sturgeon or the other endangered species.”

Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO) has introduced the House companion bill to Senator Hawley’s legislation, both of which are intended to address the kinds of concerns raised by Mr. Hurst.

“Flood control must be the main priority on the Missouri River,” said Rep. Graves. “People and property should always take precedent over fish and birds. Working together, I’m hopeful that we can properly address the management priorities on the Missouri River, saving lives and livelihoods in the process.”

Blake Hurst, president of the Missouri Farm Bureau, walks on his rain-soaked fields in Tarkio, Missouri, the United States, on June 10, 2019. (Photo courtesy of Xinhua/Liu Jie)
A Big Thank You to Our New and Supporting Members!

APRIL-MAY 2019

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Central Oregon Irrigation District  Central Oregon Seeds, Inc.
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Klamath Drainage District (OR)  Maricopa Water District (AZ)
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PacifiComm LLC (WA)  Palo Verde ID (CA)
Payette River Water Users Association (ID)  Roosevelt Irrigation District (AZ)
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Garrison Diversion Conservancy District (ND)
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