

Monthly Briefing

A Summary of the Alliance's Recent and Upcoming Activities and Important Water News

President Trump Inaugurated – New Executive Orders Follow

On January 20, 2025, President Donald J. Trump was sworn in as the 47th President of the United States.

Like all presidents before him, President Trump signed numerous executive actions on Inauguration Day and throughout the first week of his presidency, aimed at overturning the policies of the Biden-Harris Administration and delivering on some of his campaign promises.

"Every radical and foolish executive order of the Biden administration will be repealed within hours of when I take the oath of office," the incoming president said on the eve of his inauguration.

Of the record-setting number of executive actions taken by the Trump administration, there are more than 50 Executive Orders (EOs), and dozens of Presidential Memoranda, Administrative Orders, Presidential Proclamations, and pardons or commutations.

Among other activities, President Trump also took action to initiate the process to remove the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement, halt new offshore wind projects, and rescind environmental justice initiatives.



President Donald J. Trump
(www.whitehouse.gov)

These actions significantly alter U.S. policies on energy, water, and the environment. Notably, the president issued an EO on California water management that was welcomed by some Golden State water organizations (*see related story, Page 3*). Other executive actions have important ramifications for natural resources managers across the West.

A National Energy Emergency

President Trump on Day 1 of his presidency signed an EO to expedite the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure and production, including accelerating permits for energy projects and lifting restrictions on energy exploration in areas like Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge using presidential emergency powers.

"Caused by the harmful and shortsighted policies of the previous administration, our Nation's inadequate energy supply and infrastructure causes and makes worse the high energy prices that devastate Americans, particularly those living on low- and fixed-incomes," the declaration states.

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President Trump's Executive Orders (*Cont'd from Pg. 1*)

10-for-1 Deregulation

President Trump has signed an executive order to require 10 rules be rescinded for every one issued by federal agencies. The EO also revoked the Biden Administration's revised cost-benefit analysis guidance, Circular A-4, which had been used to justify aggressive environmental regulations, including climate policies.

"Overregulation stops American entrepreneurship, crushes small business, reduces consumer choice, discourages innovation, and infringes on the liberties of American citizens," stated a related fact sheet released by the White House.

President Trump's executive order rescinds a 2023 circular and reinstates the 2003 version, which conservatives argue is more neutral and less politicized. The change affects whether and how agencies can calculate the social cost of carbon and other economic impacts of regulations in their analysis.

Environmental advocates viewed this as a setback for climate policy, while free-market proponents praised the return to prior standards.

Critics of the EO, including former Biden regulatory official Richard Revesz, warn that reverting to outdated methodology weakens environmental protections and makes new regulations vulnerable to legal challenges.

"If a subsequent administration wants to depart from the best understanding, the regulations that rely on their new circular are definitely going to get challenged on the grounds that they rely on shoddy science and economics," Mr. Revesz said.

"Revoking the 2023 circular was the right thing to do," said Susan Dudley, who led the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs during the George W. Bush administration.

Unleashing American Energy

This EO unleashes energy production in the U.S. and revokes many climate-related policies. It also pauses disbursement of federal funding authorized by the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), specifically calling out EV auto credits and subsidies and requiring federal agencies to prepare a report in 90 days to ensure approved funding is lawful and consistent with the EO directives.

Federal Funding "Pause"

A federal judge quickly moved to block the Trump Administration's attempt to freeze funding at Interior, EPA, and other federal agencies, ruling that the move violated the Constitution and key statutes. Judge John McConnell of the U.S. District Court for Rhode Island issued a temporary restraining order (TRO), arguing that the executive branch cannot unilaterally pause congressionally appropriated funds without approval.

The next day, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released a two-sentence memo, rescinding the original memo published by the office two days earlier.

"If you have questions about implementing the President's Executive Orders, please contact your agency General Counsel," the new memo stated.

Despite the White House's claim that President Trump's EOs remain in effect, the court found that affected agencies were still enforcing the now-withdrawn OMB directive to pause disbursements, which was also subject to a DC federal court ordered stay. The court's order blocked further implementation of the funding freeze.

Judge McConnell on February 6 extended the TRO for at least another 14 days as the case continues to progress through court.

"I don't like a temporary restraining order sitting out there indefinitely, obviously, and I don't think the parties do, either," Judge McConnell said.

According to White House Secretary Karoline Leavitt, the move to rescind the OMB memo is an effort to end the confusion and legal challenges that ensued.

"This action should effectively end the court case and allow the government to focus on enforcing the President's orders on controlling federal spending," Ms. Leavitt said. "In the coming weeks and months, more executive action will continue to end the egregious waste of federal funding."

These executive orders, in part, pause the use of funds for certain project activities - primarily those focused on energy and equity-related activities - funded through the IRA and IIJA.

Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OREGON) said the funding pause order suggests that President Trump plans to bypass Congress' spending powers.

"The law is very clear that he has to do what has been passed by Congress," said Senator Merkley, the ranking member on the Senate Budget Committee. "He is not a king. ... I call on him to abide by the law."

While these recent actions halt the implementation of the directives included in the OMB Memo, the administration will continue to conduct a comprehensive review of programs and awards to ensure alignment with its policies and priorities under last week's EO's.

Questions Abound

The "shock and awe" associated with the rapid-fire release of President Trump's recent executive actions and the resulting federal policy shifts have created uncertainty for many Family Farm Alliance members, particularly local governments and public agencies who have IIJA - and IRA-funded construction projects ongoing or in the queue.

"The funding freeze raised many questions that we are working to address," said Mark Limbaugh with The Ferguson Group, the Family Farm Alliance's representative in Washington, D.C. "We are monitoring this issue and will provide additional context about the rescission and focus on any remaining outstanding questions."

President Trump Enters California Water Arena with a Splash

Four days after his inauguration, President Trump visited Southern California, where he was greeted on the airport tarmac by California Governor Gavin Newsom. Following a tour of the fire-ravaged communities, he participated in a forum with local elected officials, where the topic of water was discussed at length.

The next day, he signed an executive order that, among other things, addresses management of Central Valley Project water and seeks to advance new storage projects.

"In particular, the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Commerce shall immediately take actions to override existing activities that unduly burden efforts to maximize water deliveries," President Trump's order reads.

Supporters and Detractors

Supporters, including many agricultural water districts, welcome the move as a step toward addressing longstanding water supply challenges in the region.

"We thank the President for his continued focus on highlighting issues of water supply reliability for the people and communities in California," said Federico Barajas, Executive Director of the San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority. "We look forward to working with the Administration on a path forward to implement the Order in a way that will improve water supply reliability for the communities, farms, and ecosystems reliant on water from the Water Authority's member agencies."

The Friant Water Authority publicly thanked President Trump for his focus on California's water.

"For too long, outdated regulations and misaligned priorities have left our fields dry and our communities struggling," the Authority said in a press statement. "President Trump's announcement in Southern California underscores his dedication to fixing these issues and delivering durable solutions for the hardworking families and agricultural communities who are the backbone of California's economy."

The order targets water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and directs federal agencies to identify regulatory barriers to water projects within 30 days. Critics, including California officials, conservation groups, and Democratic lawmakers, argued the order misrepresents the relationship between water management and wildfire prevention.

"It's sickening to see this pointless attack on California's water management. And it's disgusting that Trump is still threatening to hold desperately needed relief funds hostage," said Kieran Suckling, executive director of the litigious Center for Biological Diversity, in a statement. This order allows the lead Project 2025 author and incoming director of the Office of Management and Budget to potentially indefinitely withhold all federal financial assistance to California over

perceived disagreements on immigration policies or other extreme MAGA ideas."

Critics claim the order prioritizes agricultural and urban water interests over environmental and local community needs while disregarding scientific and legal frameworks.

Trump Water Tweet Goes Viral

President Trump days later raised the bar with California over water policy with a 1:00 a.m. tweet suggesting U.S. military troops had arrived in the state to turn on pumps and send more

water flowing.

In his January 27th post on Truth Social, President Trump wrote: "The United States Military just entered the Great State of California and, under Emergency Powers, TURNED ON THE WATER flowing abundantly from the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. The days of putting a Fake Environmental argument, over the PEOPLE, are OVER. Enjoy the water, California!!!"

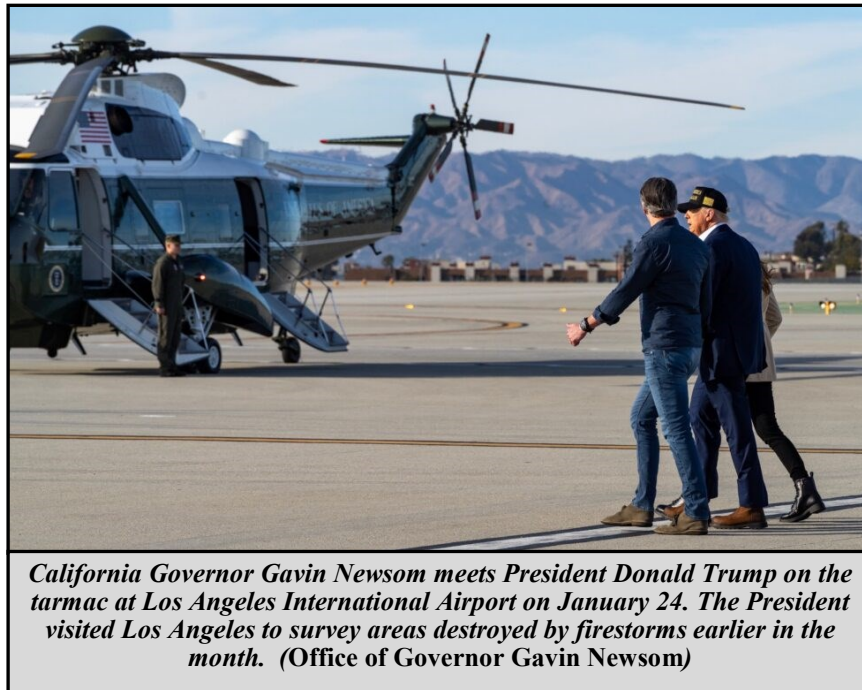
A firestorm of controversy erupted on social media and in the legacy media as scientists, water managers, state leaders, and various "experts" throughout the state called out the Trump administration's "misinformation" campaign on water management in California.

Gov. Newsom's office fired back at President Trump later in that day in a post on the social media site X.

"The only thing fishy are Trump's facts," Gov. Newsom's press office wrote. "California pumps as much water now as it could under prior Trump-era policies. And there is no shortage of water in Southern California."

Gov. Newsom Issues Executive Order on Water

Despite the rebuke, Governor Newsom three days later signed his own executive order that he said was intended to



California Governor Gavin Newsom meets President Donald Trump on the tarmac at Los Angeles International Airport on January 24. The President visited Los Angeles to survey areas destroyed by firestorms earlier in the month. (Office of Governor Gavin Newsom)

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Confirmation of Trump Cabinet Nominees Proceeds Rapidly

Senate Republicans have made good progress pushing for quick confirmation of President Donald Trump’s nominees for cabinet positions. Western farmers and ranchers have been keeping a close eye on those nominees who hold sway over federal matters important to their unique interests.

Department of the Interior

The Senate on January 30 confirmed Gov. Doug Burgum as Interior Secretary with broad bipartisan support, including 26 Democrats joining all Republicans in a 79-18 vote.

The Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) Committee vote was similarly bipartisan.

During his confirmation hearing, Mr. Burgum stated, "The American people have clearly placed their confidence in President Trump to achieve energy dominance, and by energy dominance, that's the foundation of American prosperity."

On January 16, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) Committee held a hearing to consider the nomination of Doug Burgum to be the DOI Secretary. Chair Mike Lee (R-UT) noted that 1/5 of the land in the U.S. is under the jurisdiction of DOI, with the percentage much higher in western states. "The decisions made in Washington ripple through our economy and our communities in ways that are unmistakable and not always positive."

Dozens of Democrats crossed the aisle to support President Donald Trump's nominee.

The Interior Department is the most important Federal department from the standpoint of water management and energy production in the Western U.S.

Mr. Burgum, a former North Dakota governor, will be tasked with carrying out President Trump’s “energy dominance” agenda, which prioritizes fossil fuel production over renewables.

Katherine (Kate) MacGregor has been appointed Deputy Secretary of the Interior, the position she held under the previous Trump administration. In a statement, President Trump said MacGregor, who is currently vice president of environmental services at electric utility group NextEra Energy, “helped us in our quest to make our Nation Energy DOMINANT.”

The Trump White House earlier this month announced the following nominations for positions in the Department of the Interior:

- Leslie Beyer, of Texas, to be an Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Land and Minerals Management
- William L. Doffermyre, of Texas, to be Solicitor of the Department of the Interior
- William Kirkland, of Georgia, to be an Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs
- Andrea Travnicek, of North Dakota, to be an Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Water and Science (ASWS)

“The ASWS position oversees the Bureau of Reclamation and USGS,” said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen. “Andrea Travnicek worked in several deputy positions at Interior in the first Trump Administration and is a known commodity to many of us in Western water.”

Most recently, Ms. Travnicek served as the head of the North Dakota state water resources agency.

Prior to Mr. Burgum’s Senate confirmation, acting Interior Secretary Walter Cruickshank last month issued a secretarial order temporarily suspending the authority of Interior agencies to take significant actions, such as approving offshore wind leases and resource management plans. These decisions now require top leadership approval, with the order in effect for 60 days unless updated or revoked.

“This move is similar to a Biden-era order in 2021 and is aimed at ensuring alignment with President Donald Trump’s policy priorities,” said Mark Limbaugh, the Family Farm Alliance’s representative in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Cruickshank also appointed more than a dozen acting leaders to key Interior roles under the Federal Vacancies Reform Act. Notable appointments include Karen Hawbecker as acting solicitor, Paul Souza as acting Fish and Wildlife Service director, Jon Raby as acting Bureau of Land Management (BLM) director, and David Palumbo as acting Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation.

Scott Cameron will serve as a senior adviser to the secretary and fill multiple acting roles, including Assistant Secretary for Water and Science.

USDA

President Trump’s Agriculture Secretary pick Brooke Rollins took a key step towards confirmation on February 3 as Senate Agriculture Committee lawmakers unanimously voted to advance her nomination.

“My role is to defend, honor and elevate our entire ag community in the oval office ... to ensure that every decision made has that front of mind,” she stated at her confirmation hearing.

Ms. Rollins, a former White House aide in Trump’s first administration, will be a key figure in farm bill negotiations this year if she is confirmed. She will be challenged to balance advancing Trump’s policy agenda against agriculture industry concerns over some of his immigration and tariff proposals.

The Family Farm Alliance works closely with USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, which draws on a long history of helping people help the land. For nearly 90 years, NRCS and its predecessor agencies have worked in close partnerships with farmers and ranchers, local and state governments, and other federal agencies to maintain healthy and productive working landscapes.

“Farm Bill conservation programs administered by NRCS can provide useful tools for Western farmers and ranchers,”

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House Passes Wildfire Legislation

The House of Representatives last month passed the *Fix Our Forests Act of 2025* (H.R. 471) - legislation co-sponsored by Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.) and Rep. Scott Peters (D-CALIFORNIA) and supported by the Family Farm Alliance - with a strong, bipartisan vote of 279-141.

"The House passed the Fix Our Forests Act because good leaders prepare for emergencies," said House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) "Thanks to the leadership of Rep. Westerman, the House is governing by common sense so we can restore the health of our forests and make communities more resilient to these disasters."

Across the United States, 44 million homes are at risk of wildfires in the wildland-urban interface.

"Our bill will help us protect where nature meets homes, pre-position fire-trucks and other resources in high-risk areas, and build homes more resistant to fire," said Rep. Peters. "I implore my colleagues in the Senate to quickly take up this bill."

The recent wildfires in California demonstrate the need to take immediate action to prevent future devastation.

"The current California leadership failed to prepare for the ongoing wildfires and chose to prioritize far-left climate policies over efficient forest management and wildfire prevention," said Speaker Johnson.

This comprehensive legislation increases resiliency to catastrophic wildfires by simplifying and expediting environ-

mental reviews, coordinating resources for communities, and reducing frivolous lawsuits that delay forest management projects.

The House Natural Resources Committee issued a press release that mentions a coalition letter that the Alliance signed on to in support of this bill.



Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.) - the author of the Fix our Forests Act—discusses Western forest health and wildfires with Family Farm Alliance representatives on the balcony of the House Speaker's office at the Capitol, September 2024.

"We represent a broad coalition of stakeholders that includes water providers, farmers, utilities, forestry professionals, and local governmental entities," the coalition letter stated. "We support the *Fix Our Forests Act* and its comprehensive approach to improving forest and watershed health."

Other signatories to the letter included American Farm Bureau Federation, American Forest Resource Council, Association of California Water Agencies, California Farm Bureau Federation, and National Association of Counties.

The Alliance previously supported the Fix Our Forests Act in the 118th Congress,

where it passed the House by a bipartisan vote of 268-151, but did not see action in the Senate.

Rep. Tom Tiffany's (R-WI) bill, H.R. 204, the *Accurately Counting Risk Elimination Solutions (ACRES) Act*, also passed the House. This legislation would mandate the Secretaries of USDA and Interior to submit an annual report detailing the number of acres treated for hazardous fuels during the previous year.

GOP Legislation Would Authorize Dam Protections

Lawmakers from the Pacific Northwest have introduced the "Northwest Energy Security Act" (H.R. 1762/S. 966) to protect the four Lower Snake River dams amid debates over their future.

Led by Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-WASHINGTON) and Sen. Jim Risch (R-IDAHO), the legislation seeks to ensure the continued operation of the dams—Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose, and Lower Granite—citing their importance for clean, affordable hydropower and important transportation routes in the region.

"This legislation upholds the Lower Snake River dams as vital pieces of infrastructure for Central Washington and the Pacific Northwest," said Rep. Newhouse. "I am proud to lead this legislation alongside Senator Risch as we strengthen the coalition to protect our region's clean and affordable sources

of baseload power.

The bill counters ongoing efforts to remove the dams to aid endangered salmon and steelhead populations, a key focus of the Biden Administration's "Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement" from 2023. That \$1 billion settlement prompted studies on the ecological and economic impacts of dam removal.

Nonetheless, Congress holds the ultimate authority to decide the fate of these federal dams.

"The Lower Snake River dams are indispensable to the northwest, and efforts to breach them are profoundly misguided," said Senator Risch. "My Northwest Energy Security Act protects our region's federal dams so that they continue to power Idaho's homes and economy for generations."

Subcommittee Considers Western Water Bills

The House Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries on January 23 held a legislative hearing on four bills including combatting the effects of drought in the West and reauthorizing an important conservation program.

“Today, I convened the first hearing as Chair of the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries to consider vital legislation, such as my bill extending the System Conservation Pilot Program,” said Rep. Harriet Hageman (R-WYOMING). “It’s a privilege to guide discussions on issues that directly impact our communities and resources.”

H.R. 231, the *Colorado River Basin System Conservation Extension Act of 2025*, introduced by Rep. Hageman, will reauthorize the Colorado River Basin Conservation Pilot Program (SCPP) through FY 2026.

The SCPP allows the Interior Department to provide grants 1) to public entities for water conservation pilot projects if the entity uses water from the Colorado River Basin for municipal purposes; and 2) for new water conservation agreements or for renewing or implementing water conservation agreements.

“This is legislation that the Alliance conditionally supported in the last Congress,” said Family Farm Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen. “Our long-stated concerns remain regarding the emphasis some people place on ‘demand management’ in agriculture as a solution to the supply challenges of the Colorado River.”

Chair Hageman made a similar point at the hearing.

“To be clear this program is not and should not be viewed as a permanent solution to addressing the drought conditions in the basin,” she said. “However, at this time it is a tool that the Upper Basin States can use to reduce risk to test new innovative water management strategies.”

H.R. 331, introduced by U.S. Rep. Russ Fulcher (R-IDAHO) is supported by the Alliance. It would amend the *Aquifer Recharge Flexibility Act* to clarify and streamline the process for transporting water for aquifer recharge projects across federal land, such as that owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

“The BLM right-of-way process can be onerous and will add significant time to the development of recharge projects,” said Wesley Hipke of the Idaho Department of Water Resources at the hearing, noting that, if not addressed, could severely hamper Idaho’s ability to reach the goals of recovery and stabilizing the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer.

“The Alliance supports this legislation,” said Mr. Keppen.

H.R. 635, the *WaterSMART Access for Tribes Act*, introduced by U.S. Rep. Melanie Stansbury (D-NEW MEXICO), will allow the Secretary of the Interior to reduce or waive cost-share requirements for tribal governments under Reclamation’s WaterSMART program.

Most WaterSMART projects require at least 50 percent cost sharing to leverage non-federal financial resources. In the 116th Congress, WaterSMART was amended to allow Reclamation to contribute up to 75 percent of the cost of certain projects that are focused on environmental benefits.

Alliance Leads Colo. River Coalition Letter on Bay-Delta Water Plan

The Family Farm Alliance at the beginning of the new year helped lead a coalition of nearly 20 Colorado River Basin farm and water organizations who weighed in on a pending California state regulatory decision with potential impacts to the Colorado River Basin and other regions of the West.

The California State Water Board’s proposed water quality control plan for the Bay-Delta includes a staff recommendation that would impose a 55% unimpaired flow on the Sacramento River and other tributaries to the Bay-Delta.

“This would have a massive impact on contractors from Redding all the way to San Diego,” said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen. “This will also have an impact on Southern California’s interest in the Colorado River, since their State Water Project (SWP) supplies out of the Delta would be significantly impacted. Additionally, the reoperation of California’s reservoirs to accommodate minimum carryover storage targets has implications for West-wide power production.”

So, there is a connection to the Colorado River and others served by the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) grid, and eighteen organizations from 4 Colorado River Basin states agreed to share their concerns with the State Board.

“This action in California has the potential to impact the Colorado River basin negotiations and WAPA power production in a substantial way,” the coalition letter stated.

Restrictions on northern Sierra water supplies - what might otherwise appear as a non-connected water source - can increase southern California’s reliance on the Colorado River and subsequently reduce water management options and flexibility in the Lower Basin, when the SWP and Colorado River are operating under drought or shortage conditions.

The coalition letter was completed and submitted before the deadline for the public comment period ended on January 10. The letter expresses support for amending the Bay Delta Plan by approving the Voluntary Agreements - also known as Healthy Rivers and Landscapes - proposed in March 2022 by a diverse group of stakeholders.

“We believe these stakeholders have specific expertise in managing and operating California’s water systems, which includes numerous state agencies, the Bureau of Reclamation, and numerous public water agencies,” the coalition letter stated. “This will require visionary leadership and a firm commitment to a balanced, workable policy.”

Biden Admin. Exits, Announcing Millions for Western Water Projects

A stream of continuous federal infrastructure announcements came to an end as the Biden Administration headed out the door on January 20. Outgoing President Joe Biden delivered a Farewell Address to the nation on January 15 where he reflected on his legacy, including historic investments in energy and infrastructure and to fight climate change.

“Instead of losing their jobs to an economic crisis that we inherited, millions of Americans now have the dignity of work,” President Biden said in his farewell address. “And together, we have launched a new era of American possibilities: one of the greatest modernizations of infrastructure in our entire history, from new roads, bridges, clean water, affordable high-speed internet for every American.

A 2024 *POLITICO* review of President Biden's four signature laws found that out of \$1.1 trillion for direct investments in energy and infrastructure, less than 17% of the funds at that time had been spent.

Water users across the West in recent months were notified that they would benefit from once-in-a-generation levels of infrastructure funding that the Family Farm Alliance and other agricultural and water organizations fought to secure in 2021-2022.

Recent DOI and Reclamation Funding Announcements

The Alliance was part of a five-organization steering committee that led over 220 water and agriculture organizations who played a critical role in securing the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding for Western water infrastructure and drought mitigation efforts.

In the past three years, the Bureau of Reclamation has announced more than \$5.8 billion from the IIJA for more than 674 projects. More than \$3.2 billion from the IRA has gone to 229 drought mitigation projects, 40 domestic water supply projects, seven emergency relief projects for Tribal communities and four canal improvement projects.

The IRA also includes \$550 million for Reclamation to implement domestic water supply projects and \$4 billion for water conservation and ecosystem projects in the Colorado River Basin and other basins experiencing similar levels of long-term drought.

Last month, Reclamation announced:

- \$223 million for water recycling and desalination projects aimed at addressing the impacts of drought. The funding from the IIJA and annual appropriations is being awarded to 18 projects in eight states through the Title XVI Programs.
- A \$514 million investment intended to bring clean, reliable drinking water to communities across the West through five water storage and conveyance projects.
- More than \$41 million investment from the IIJA for 21 projects to bolster water resources, advance ecosystem health, and support resilience in communities facing drought and other climate change impacts.

- A \$121 million investment from the Department of the Interior (DOI) to help Tribal communities prepare for the most severe climate-related environmental threats to their homelands.
- A \$50 million investment from the IRA for Reclamation and water users to fund drought resiliency projects in the Klamath Basin.

Family Farm Alliance members throughout the Western U.S. have benefited from the historic investments provided by the IIJA and IRA in recent years, including several projects that were further funded in the last month of the Biden-Harris Administration.

B.F. Fisk Dam Raise and Reservoir Expansion

Reclamation and the San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority (SLDMWA) on January 17 signed a cost share agreement for the B.F. Sisk Dam Raise and Reservoir Expansion Project, advancing water supply reliability in California's Central Valley.

“This project advances our goal to improve our communities’ access to clean drinking water for residents, improve water reliability to continue to feed America, and to support the health of the habitat upon which our native species and migratory waterfowl on the Pacific Flyway depend,” said SLDMWA Board Chair Cannon Michael, who also serves on the Family Farm Alliance board of directors. “We value the funding contributions and working relationship with our federal partners in the Bureau of Reclamation and look forward to advancing this important water storage project.”

The joint project creates an additional 130,000 acre-feet of storage space in San Luis Reservoir, the nation's largest off-stream reservoir, producing additional water supply for two million people, over one million acres of farmland and 135,000 acres of Pacific Flyway wetlands and critical wildlife habitat. This water would meet existing contractual obligations and not serve any new demands.

A \$125 million investment in the project under the IIJA was announced earlier in January. The project thus far has received a total of \$295 million in federal contributions to date in construction costs.

Shoshone Water Rights Preservation Project

Reclamation last month announced \$388.3 million in funding awards including \$40 million for the Shoshone Water Rights Preservation project.

This investment supports efforts of the Colorado River District, the state of Colorado and a coalition of West Slope governments and water users to secure Western Colorado's top water priority: the permanent protection of the water rights associated with the Shoshone Power Plant in Glenwood Canyon.

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Millions for Western Water Projects (Cont'd from Page 7)

“Securing the Shoshone water rights has been a priority of West Slope water entities and local governments for over eighty years,” said Colorado River District Board President, Kathy Chandler-Henry. “This funding award is a huge step forward in what is a continuing effort, and we are thankful for the leadership shown by the Bureau of Reclamation in bringing these critical funds to West Slope communities.”

These funds, awarded through the IRA, are dedicated to projects which will mitigate the impacts of drought and support ecosystems throughout the Colorado River Basin. The federal DOI funding builds on more than \$56 million raised by state and local organizations.

Reclamation’s announcement also included significant awards for 15 other Western Slope water projects totaling almost \$95. These projects, along with Shoshone, are selected to move on to the next phase to execute a funding agreement and complete necessary reviews.

The Shoshone water rights, some of the largest and most senior non-consumptive water rights on the Colorado River, are vital to maintaining flows that support a wide range of interests across Western Colorado.

The River District in December 2023 reached a landmark \$99 million purchase and sale agreement with Public Service Company of Colorado, a subsidiary of Xcel Energy, to transfer ownership of those water rights. Representing a broad-based coalition, the Colorado River District is working to permanently secure these flows in partnership with the State of Colorado to ensure they remain in the Colorado River.

“Permanent protection of the Shoshone water rights is a multi-generational investment in our farms and ranches, and our thriving rural economies,” said Colorado State Senator Marc Catlin, a past member of the Alliance Advisory Committee. “Today’s announcement builds upon decades of work by our predecessors to protect the river as we have known it for more than a century.”

Klamath Basin Drought Programs

Reclamation on January 27 announced a \$50 million investment from the IRA in drought resiliency projects in the Klamath Basin.

“These historic investments through President Biden’s Investing in America agenda will help the Klamath River Basin support agricultural production and improve climate resiliency,” said former Reclamation Senior Counselor John Watts. “These projects will demonstrate the effectiveness of new tools for sustainable water management and benefit fish species.”

The Klamath Water User Association and Drought Response Agency (DRA) are to utilize the funding to deliver or manage water for fish and wildlife benefits and implement a voluntary program reducing water use or demonstrating innovative cropping patterns over multi-year periods.

Funding will also benefit anadromous and resident fish species by planning and implementing pro-

jects at Keno and Link River Dams and will implement a voluntary, competitive program in consultation with water users to eliminate water demand for irrigated land where it makes sense to do so.

“We expect the program will include three-to-five-year contracts with producers for voluntary land idling, but with the ability to rotate the idled land in an operation,” said DRA President Marc Staunton. “We will also offer incentives for modified practices like fall planting of grain, that would reduce and shift water demand.”

Arkansas Valley Conduit

Camille Calimlim Touton, Commissioner of Reclamation, traveled to Pueblo (COLORADO) on January 8 to announce an additional \$250 million for construction of the Arkansas Valley Conduit (AVC).



Reclamation Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton greets several members of the Southeastern District Board, from left, Bill Long, Kevin Karney, Howard “Bub” Miller, Andy Colosimo and Justin DiSanti. The Commissioner traveled to Pueblo (COLORADO) to announce \$250 million for construction of the Arkansas Valley Conduit. (Photo courtesy of Southeastern District)

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Millions for Western Water Projects (Cont'd from Page 8)

“We are proud to see the work underway because of President Biden’s Investing in America agenda,” Commissioner Touton said. “But there’s much more work to be done and we are again investing in this important project to bring safe drinking water to an estimated 50,000 people in 39 rural communities along the Arkansas River.”

The \$250 million is funded through the IJA. The additional funding brings the total federal investment in the AVC to almost \$590 million since 2020, along with state funding guarantees of \$90 million in loans and \$30 million in grants.

The Southeastern Water Conservancy District is the sponsor for the AVC, which is part of the 1962 Frypan-Arkansas Project Act.

“After 25 years, I still almost can’t believe it’s happening, but I drive by and can see it with my own eyes,” Southeastern Water Conservancy District President Bill Long told Commissioner Touton. “There are so many people who have worked

so hard who would be so proud to see it being built. This money will get us to the area that has seen the most problems.”

Reflections at Hoover Dam

Commissioner Camille Touton – who helped steer implementation of billions of federal dollars towards water infrastructure and drought resilience projects over the past 3-plus years - spent a portion of her last days at Reclamation visiting Hoover Dam, just outside her hometown of Las Vegas, Nevada.

“I am grateful to have spent some of my final moments as Commissioner at the place that first inspired a little girl to dream BIG—the Hoover Dam,” she posted on LinkedIn. “To the incredible team at Bureau of Reclamation, it has been an absolute honor to serve alongside each and every one of you. I leave with a thankful heart and boundless optimism for our shared future.”

Trump v Newsom on CA Water (Cont'd from Page 3)

“maximize” the capture of water during winter storms that were forecast to hit the state over the following weekend.

The order also calls for state agencies to “identify any obstacles that would hinder efforts to maximize diversions” and to promptly report on any “statutory or regulatory barriers that should be considered for suspension.”

Environmental and fishing groups ripped Governor Newsom’s order, claiming his approach threatens to harm vulnerable fish species and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta ecosystem.

“This order reads as though it was written by President Trump,” said Barry Nelson, a policy representative for the fishing group Golden State Salmon Association.

From Strange to Stranger

Things went from strange to stranger as the week wore on.

The *Los Angeles Times* on January 31 reported that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers — acting on President Trump’s orders — released water from the Terminus Dam at Lake Kaweah and the Schafer Dam at Lake Success, which are both in Tulare County in the San Joaquin Valley.

In a post to his official X account, Trump tweeted a “photo of beautiful water flow that I just opened in California,” writing: “Today, 1.6 billion gallons and, in 3 days, it will be 5.2 billion gallons.... Everybody should be happy about this long-fought Victory!.... I only wish they listened to me six years ago – There would have been no fire!”

An Army Corps spokesperson confirmed that the release of water from the dams was done “to ensure California has water available to respond to the wildfires.” He added that the water release was “consistent with the direction” of the presi-

dent’s January 24 EO announcing “emergency measures to provide water resources in California.”

However, water managers in Tulare County told *SJV Water* — which covers water issues in the San Joaquin Valley — that there are multiple physical and legal barriers that prevent the valley’s water from getting to Southern California.

“Every drop belongs to someone,” Kaweah River Watermaster Victor Hernandez told *SJV Water*. “The reservoir may belong to the federal government, but the water is ours.”

U.S. Senator Alex Padilla (D-CALIFORNIA), a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, wrote a letter that questioned Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth after the Army directed the unscheduled water releases.

“Unscheduled water releases require close coordination with local officials and safety personnel, as well as downstream agricultural water users, in order to reduce flood risks to communities and farms,” wrote Senator Padilla. “Based on the urgent concerns I have heard from my constituents, as well as recent reporting, it appears that gravely insufficient notification was given, recklessly endangering residents downstream.”

Meanwhile, the Golden State’s two largest reservoirs, Lake Shasta and Lake Oroville, saw water level increases in the days that followed after an atmospheric river brought heavy rain to the region. Lake Oroville is currently above 2023 and 2024 levels at this time of year. Lake Shasta is above its 2023 levels but about 4 feet below its 2024 levels as of February 3.

Reclamation is currently increasing water releases into rivers from some Central Valley Project reservoirs for flood control management.

Appointments at USDA (Continued from Page 4)

said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen.

President Trump has also named his picks for senior posts at USDA as he moves to fill out his incoming administration.

Richard Fordyce has been nominated as USDA Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation. He was formerly the Administrator of the Farm Service Agency during the first Trump administration and currently serves as Director of Ag Business for Osborn Barr Paramore.

“This position oversees the NRCS and is one that the Alliance works closely with,” said Mr. Keppen.

Mr. Trump last month also appointed Michael Boren, the founder of Boise (IDAHO)-based company Clearwater Analytics, to serve as the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the Department, another important post which oversees the U.S. Forest Service.

“Mike is the kind of innovator we need back in Washington promoting Idaho values and management practices,” said Idaho Governor Brad Little. “In Idaho, we manage our lands effectively and efficiently. I am looking forward to watching Mike bring that same mentality to the Forest Service.”

Two other officials were announced for appointments as undersecretaries at USDA, both of whom served during the first Trump administration: Dudley Hoskins as undersecretary for marketing and regulator programs and Luke Lindberg as undersecretary for trade and foreign agriculture affairs.

President Trump announced two new wildfire prevention appointments to USDA to lead the administration’s “focus on forest management.”

Kristin Sleeper will be deputy undersecretary for natural resources and environment. She previously worked as professional staff for the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the House Ag Committee. She also directed policy for the National Alliance of Forest Owners, which represents companies that own private forests.

Tom Schultz will be chief of staff at USDA for natural resources and environment. He previously was vice president of resources and government affairs, leading timber procurement, for the Idaho Forest Group.

“Our Idaho members have nothing but good things to say about Tom Schultz,” said Mr. Keppen.

USDA recently announced the names of the following individuals who will hold senior staff positions in Washington, D.C. Kailee Tkacz Buller (USDA Chief of Staff), Preston Parry (USDA Deputy Chief of Staff), Jennifer Tiller (Chief of Staff to the Deputy Secretary and Senior Advisor to the Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services), Ralph Linden (Principal Deputy General Counsel), Audra Weeks (Deputy Director of Communications) and Dominic Restuccia (White House Liaison) were all appointed.

“Many of these appointees served in the Trump 45 administration, as well,” said Mr. Keppen.

Department of Energy

Chris Wright, the Denver-based fracking CEO tapped by President Trump to lead the Department of Energy (DOE), was confirmed to the role by the Senate on February 3.

DOE oversees U.S. national energy policy and energy production, the research and development of nuclear power, the military’s nuclear weapons program, nuclear reactor production for the United States Navy, energy-related research, and energy conservation.

Senators voted 59-38 to confirm Mr. Wright, including support from some Democrats, despite opposition to his nomination from environmental groups and Democrats in the Senate who criticized his comments downplaying climate change and his ties to the oil and gas industry.

“We can’t afford to have a fossil fuel CEO like Chris Wright help the industry capture our federal agencies further for oil profits,” Senator Ed Markey (D-Mass.) said in a statement.

Senators Markey and Jeff Merkley (D-OREGON) introduced the “Banning In Government Oil Industry Lobbyists (BIG OIL) from the Cabinet Act” to prohibit fossil fuel executives and lobbyists from serving in Cabinet-level positions.

Mr. Wright has pledged to pursue an all-of-the-above energy strategy at DOE.

“There isn’t dirty energy and clean energy — all energies are different, and they have different tradeoffs,” Mr. Wright told the ENR Committee.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Lee Zeldin, the former Republican congress member, was confirmed by the Senate to be the 17th administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency by a 56-42 vote.

“We must ensure we are protecting the environment while also protecting our economy,” Mr. Zeldin said at his January 16 confirmation hearing before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

At the hearing, Senator John Barrasso (R-WYOMING) introduced Mr. Zeldin.

“He knows firsthand how important it is for the federal government to be a partner to states, rather than an out-of-touch regulator,” said Senator Barrasso. “This is the dedication and understanding he will bring to the EPA.”

EPA under President Biden drove a vigorous effort to rewrite U.S. environmental policy through administrative rule-making efforts, some of which hold potentially harmful implications for Western farmers and ranchers.

Mr. Zeldin has a mandate from President Trump to carry out an aggressive deregulatory agenda aimed at boosting domestic energy production and bolstering the increasingly power-hungry data center and artificial intelligence sectors (*POLITICO*).

Reclamation Finalizes Revisions to NEPA Categorical Exclusions

The Bureau of Reclamation has finalized revisions to seven categorical exclusions (CEs) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to help streamline environmental reviews for certain water-related projects.

A CE is a category of actions that a federal agency has determined does not significantly impact the human environment. CEs are a type of review under NEPA.

“CEs can reduce paperwork and save time and resources,” said Family Farm Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen.

The White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) in 2016 directed all federal agencies to begin regular reviews of the use of CEs, with the intent of making the NEPA process easier. The latest effort initiated by the Biden Administration marks the third time in three administrations that this effort has been undertaken.

According to Reclamation, this modernization effort updates CEs that have been in place for over 40 years, ensuring

alignment with current regulations and policies while supporting priority water infrastructure needs across the West.

Reclamation’s CE updates aim to enhance efficiency for contracting, use authorizations, financial assistance (including WaterSMART grants), loans, and funding activities. The revisions, published for public comment in June 2024, incorporated feedback from state governments, Tribal Nations, and various water organizations.

Alliance representatives met virtually with senior level Reclamation leaders from the Commissioner’s office last June, raised some questions and concerns, and suggested that a public webinar be scheduled to provide an opportunity for Reclamation water and power customers and other stakeholders to raise additional concerns in an open forum.

“Reclamation hosted a July 24 webinar on this topic,” said Mr. Keppen. “Reclamation took public comments, many of them from our organization, and it appears they incorporated many of them.”

Colorado River.....On a “Path to Success”?

Reclamation last month released the next step in a “responsible path” to guide post-2026 operations for the Colorado River, which provides critical water resources for 40 million people across 7 states and 30 Tribes across the West.

“The alternatives laid out in today’s report represent a responsible range from which to build the best and most robust path forward,” said former Reclamation Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton. “I have confidence in our partners and the Reclamation team in continuing this work to meet the needs of the river for the future.”

The alternatives for consideration, previewed in November, represent a range of actions. The report provides additional detail on the alternatives from modeling and analysis performed by Reclamation, which they claim reflects ongoing conversations with all Basin stakeholders.

Reclamation will now proceed with full analysis of these alternatives to develop a draft Environmental Impact Statement.

The Biden administration also emphasized its efforts over

the past 2 years – bolstered by over \$4 billion in IRA funding – to work with Lower Basin water users to stave off a crisis in the short-term. Now, Lake Mead is up nearly 20 feet from two years ago, and Lake Powell has rebounded 50 feet.



Lake Mead on the Colorado River.
(Photo courtesy of Bureau of Reclamation)

The lower Basin states and the Country of Mexico saved 1.6 million acre-feet by the end of 2024, an “unprecedented level of conservation” for the Colorado River Basin, supported by an unprecedented level of federal funding provided by Congress.

Reclamation last month announced initial selections under the Upper Colorado River Basin Environmental Program for a \$388.3 million investment from the IRA to improve wildlife and aquatic habitats, ecological stability and resilience against drought. Additionally, Reclamation announced approximately \$100 Million funding opportunity for the companion program in the

Lower Basin, which seeks to fund projects that provide environmental benefits in Arizona, Nevada, and California.

Continued on Page 12

Colorado River (Continued from Page 11)

While all of this funding certainly has provided a short-term band-aid to the “bleeding” of Lakes Mead and Powell, it remains to be seen how the long-term solutions will be developed, given the harsh tension exhibited between Upper Basin and Lower Basin interests at last month’s Colorado Water Users Association Annual Conference in Las Vegas.

The seven states that rely on the Colorado River for water have avoided court battles, but there’s work to do. Federal leadership on managing the river changed on January 20 when President Donald Trump returned to the White House.

Recently confirmed Interior Secretary Doug Burgum addressed his Colorado River intentions before his confirmation hearing on January 16.

“We’re going to look for a collaborative solution that serves everyone,” Mr. Burgum said about that process.



Doug Burgum
(Photo courtesy of NDDOT)

“We’re going to have to look for innovation on ways on the conservation side because we can’t make more water, but if we can use what we have wisely, that’s going to look for the best solutions for all.”

Western senators are pushing state officials in the Colorado River Basin to reach agreement on a new long-term operating plan for the drought-stricken waterway.

The lawmakers are also seeking a formal briefing on their progress.

“We recognize that development of a consensus agreement will require substantial effort and may require legislation for implementation,” states the letter, a copy of which was obtained by *POLITICO’s E&E News*. “We invite you to provide a joint briefing in the months to come to describe what a seven-state agreement could look like and to discuss any legislative action that may be necessary to put that consensus plan into action.”

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