

XIII.



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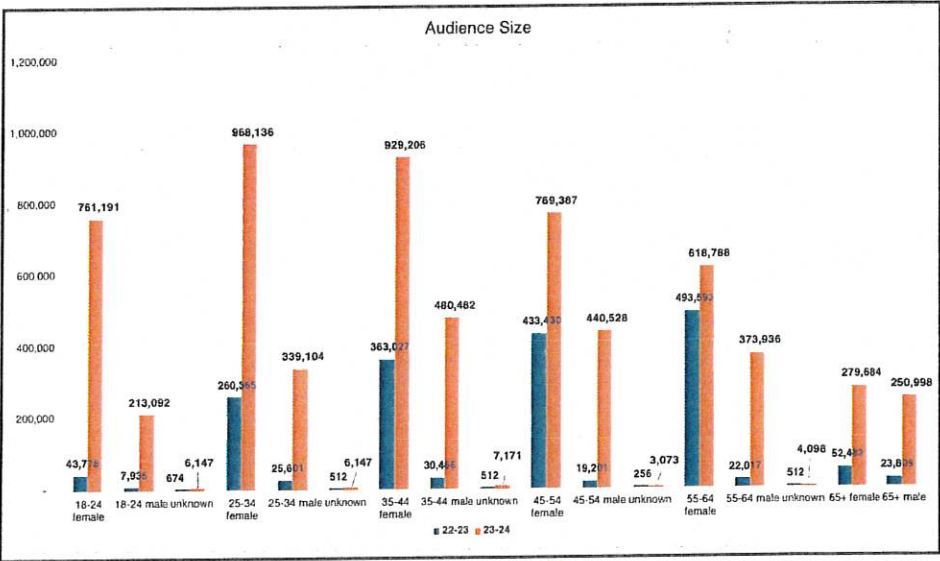
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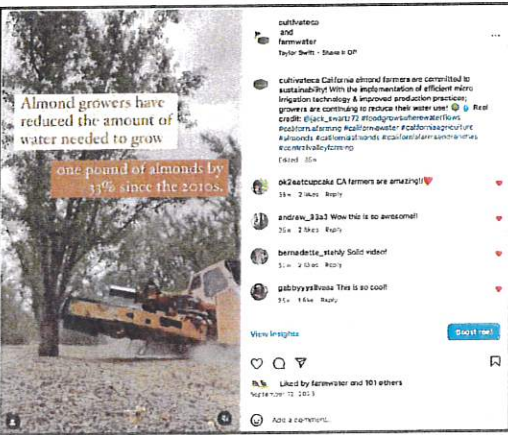
Executive Director
Michael Wade

TO: San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority Board of Directors
FROM: Mike Wade, Executive Director
DATE: June 3, 2024
RE: Program and Activities Update

Cultivate California is an ongoing public education program that was formed during the 2012-16 drought
In 2014, agricultural water leaders gathered in Sacramento to organize a long-term, consistent, public education program that would keep positive agricultural messages in front of the public. What grew out of the effort was the Cultivate California Program an ongoing, public education effort that maintains a positive image of California agriculture designed to insulate the industry against negative attacks. Long-term educational efforts are crucial in building and maintaining public support. Continuous engagement helps sustain momentum and ensures that these causes remain a priority for both the public and policymakers.



Analytics summary
~ 200 ads and posts
38 million Impressions
6.4 million Reach, 262% growth
30,000 clicks on program content



Cultivate California
Sponsored

Crunch into National Lettuce Month with these delicious Chicken Lettuce Wraps! Packed with flavor and freshness, they're the perfect way to celebrate this leafy green veggie all month long. It takes water to grow the food we love, and farming is pivotal to our state's health and stability. Explore recipes that include the fresh and healthy foods produced for you right here in the Golden State.

cultivatecalifornia.com
Keep the state on your plate! [Learn more](#)

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X III.

Leadership Farm Bureau

Ag Issues Tour: Stanislaus and Tuolumne Counties

Wednesday, May 22, 2024

Dress code: Nice Casual

- 9:00 a.m. Breakfast with Stanislaus County
Caitie Diemel, Executive Director Stanislaus & Tuolumne Counties
- 10:00 a.m. Modesto Junior College Agriculture Driving Tour
- 11:00 a.m. West Stanislaus Irrigation District
Bobby Pierce
- 12:30 p.m. Lunch - Almond Wood
- 1:30 p.m. Del Puerto Water District
Adam Scheuber
- 3:30 p.m. Bays Ranch
Daniel Bays
- 4:45 p.m. Depart for Hotel
- 6:30 p.m. Dinner - ChurchKey

Thursday, May 23, 2024

Dress code: Nice Casual

Breakfast before we leave

- 8:15 a.m. Depart Hotel
- 9:00 a.m. Oakdale Irrigation District and Tour
Tom Orvis
- 10:30 a.m. Depart to Sonora

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- 12:00 a.m. Arrive to Beardsley / Lunch
- 12:30 a.m. Crook Logging, Inc. Tour
Shaun Crook
- 1:30 p.m. Depart for Standard Mill
- 2:30 p.m. Standard Mill Tour
Steve Kafka
- 4:00 p.m. Indigeny Reserve
- 6:30 p.m. Dinner at Emberz with Tuolumne FB

Friday, May 24, 2024

Dress code: Casual

Breakfast at hotel

- 8:00 a.m. Depart Hotel
- 10:00 a.m. Yosemite Valley Visitors Center / Lower Falls Hike
- 11:30 a.m. Working Lunch / Session Debrief
Curry Village
- 1:00 p.m. Depart for Modesto
- 3:00 p.m. Arrive to Modesto and head home

**All times are tentative and subject to change based on conversations and discussions on topics.*

XIII.

Monthly Briefing

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

House Ag Committee Advances 2024 Farm Bill

The GOP-led House Agriculture Committee just before the holiday weekend conducted a marathon markup on its 2024 farm bill that started at 11:00 a.m. on May 23 and didn't wrap up until after midnight, May 24.

By the time the dust settled, the bill passed the committee by a 33-21 vote, with four Democrats – Reps. Bishop (GA), Caraveo (COLORADO), Davis (KANSAS) and Sorensen (IL) - joining all of the committee Republicans to advance the bill to a House floor vote.

“Critics have wasted a lot of breath telling me what can't be done, and last night the House Committee on Agriculture proved them wrong,” said Committee Chairman GT Thompson (R-Penn) in a statement following the hearing. “I want to commend Reps. Caraveo, Davis, Sorensen, and Bishop for their willingness to see through the hyperbolic partisan rhetoric and help advance the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024.”

The House's \$1.5 trillion Farm Bill spans 677 pages and

covers various programs, including nutrition assistance and conservation efforts.



A view of the House Ag Committee during the 2024 Farm Bill markup. Courtesy of the House Committee on Agriculture.

Key Contentious Issues

Most of the contentious debate occurred during the discussion of the nutrition title and changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. There are wide disagreements between the Congressional Budget Office and House leadership over how much money the proposed changes to SNAP in the House bill would actually save. The GOP proposes making SNAP cost-neutral, which

Democrats argue could effectively cut \$30 billion in benefits over a decade.

“I have heard my colleagues say that this is not a SNAP cut,” said Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-CALIFORNIA). “But dozens of outside experts disagree.”

The bill also limits updates to the Thrifty Food Plan based on the cost of living.

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House Ag Committee Farm Bill Markup (*Cont'd from Page 1*)

Republicans also rejected a Democrat-led effort to preserve conservation programs' focus on farming practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions (*E&E Daily*).

Democrats want to maintain climate-focused restrictions. Republicans aim to rescind conservation funding from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and redirect it to locally led conservation efforts.

"We have some really good things that are not eligible under IRA climate-smart policy," said Rep. Doug LaMalfa (R-CALIFORNIA).

The use of Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) Program is also a divisive issue. The House bill limits discretionary spending by the CCC to operations authorized by Congress, reallocating savings to commodity and crop insurance programs. Senate Democrats are proposing a 15-day notice for CCC spending and extending its authority to support conservation programs.

Reaction from Industry and Non-Farm Interests

Following the introduction of the *Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024*, many industry and stakeholder groups came out in support of the legislation.

"We are very pleased with the Farm Bill framework released by House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn 'GT' Thompson," said Ethan Lane, Vice President of Government Affairs, National Cattlemen's Beef Association. "We are especially pleased by the Chairman's focus on voluntary conservation programs that are increasingly popular with cattle producers, animal health provisions that protect the U.S. cattle herd, and investments in food security that support our broader national security."

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) also expressed appreciation to Chairman Thompson for his committee's work in drafting a "new, modernized" farm bill.

"America's farmers and ranchers need the stability that the farm bill provides so they can withstand the unforeseen challenges of growing the food, fuel and fiber America's families rely on," said Zippy Duvall, AFBF President. "We hope to see the Senate Agriculture Committee's version soon so we can move forward with getting the farm bill passed. It's too important to wait."

Other NGOs with climate and animal rights priorities are lining up against the House farm bill.

"US producers, conservationists, and communities expect a bill that provides sound investments to reverse the conversion of critical ecosystems, halt food loss and waste, and conserve biodiversity and advance nature-based climate solutions," said World Wildlife Fund (WWF) senior vice president Alejandro Pérez. "WWF urges Congress to find common ground and pass a bipartisan Farm Bill."

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) opposes the House version because they object to the inclusion of the EATS Act language, which would target state regulations on "covered livestock," including the meat and dairy industries.

"If this language stays in the Farm Bill, millions of farm animals will be forced back into inhumane cages while thousands of independent, higher-welfare farmers will be further disadvantaged in an already incredibly consolidated market-

place unfairly dominated by factory farming," ASPCA said in a May 24 press release.

Alliance Farm Bill Priorities

The Family Farm Alliance for the past three farm bills has worked with its partners in the Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition (WACC) to advocate primarily on the conservation programs authorized in Title 2 of the Farm Bill, like the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (P.L.566).

The Alliance and its agricultural partners have also advocated for removal of income limitations to participate in Title 2 programs and for provisions that encourage more active management of the West's drying and dying forests.

Two important contracting and procurement provisions are included in the House bill: 1) Direction to USDA to streamline RCPP partnership agreements and set various timelines for administrative actions and decisions; and 2) Allowance for up to 10% of the funds for an RCPP partnership agreement to reimburse the partner for administrative expenses related to the project.

"The new language would put things more in line with traditional federal funding," said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen.

The PL-566 provisions in the conservation title raise concerns, since they appear to prioritize flood control dam rehabilitation projects over watershed activities that address drought and water conservation. However, the House Farm Bill would provide \$150 million more per year for the program.

The House farm bill eliminates the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limitation for all conservation programs in Title 1 and Title 2. Current AGI limitations preclude many family-owned operations from participating in voluntary conservation programs and compromise producers' ability to avail themselves of much-needed disaster programs. The bill removes the AGI limitations (which is currently \$900,000) for program participants that earn 75% or more of their income from agriculture.

"This represents a win for the WACC, and for many American producers who want to do more conservation work," said Mr. Keppen.

The forestry title in the House bill would authorize expanded use of categorical exclusions for certain forest health treatments up to 10,000 acres for insect and disease, wildfire resilience, and fuel breaks. Among other things, it also reauthorizes and improves the Water Source Protection Program, which a diverse coalition that included the Alliance asked for earlier this year.

Next Steps for the WACC

House Ag Committee Chair GT Thompson said after the markup that he expects the House will handle appropriations bills first and that he wouldn't object to waiting until September to get the farm bill to the floor for a vote (*E&E Daily*).

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ALFALFA 101: The Alliance's new educational web page

As Western farmers struggle to find adequate water supplies, competing interests are pressuring the federal government to cut the water supply producers are using to grow domestic-produced food, including alfalfa, which is a foundational food chain crop.

"Alfalfa is important to rural communities, and it is grown throughout the West for good reasons," said Dan Keppen, Family Farm Alliance Executive Director.

The mainstream media in the past two years has been obsessed with the amount of water that goes to producing alfalfa and other important forage crops in the West. The Colorado River right now is a favorite topic of environmental journalists, as state, federal and tribal decision-makers are scrambling to negotiate a long-term river operating agreement to replace the current one that expires in 2026.

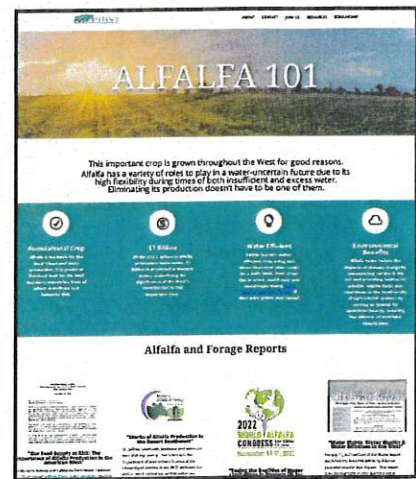
"Over the past two years, we've witnessed a steady stream of media coverage, essentially carrying a similar message: Growing less hay is the only way to keep the Colorado River's water system from collapsing," Mr. Keppen recently wrote in a blog.

With the growing disconnect between the consumers, farmers, and the agricultural processes that sustain the world, the Alliance believes there is a need to bridge this knowledge gap and enlighten the public about the significance of farm water in American food production – including alfalfa and forage crops.

Towards that end, the Alliance has developed a new webpage – www.familyfarmalliance.org/alfalfa/ - to help the public, policy makers and journalists better understand the rest of the story about alfalfa and forage production in the Colorado River Basin and other parts of the American West.

This new resource features facts, reports, opinion pieces and other information generated by the Alliance, academia, and our allies in the West, including the California Farm Water Coalition.

"We encourage our members to check it out and let us know if you have good alfalfa stories that you'd like us to share," said Mr. Keppen.



Ag Committee Farm Bill Markup (Cont'd from Pg. 2)

That would give him more time to negotiate details, he said.

Looking back at previous farm bill progress in the House, floor votes have been taken up between 2-4 weeks after committee passage.

"Just in case that pattern is replicated this year, the WACC will begin putting together a letter to Congressional leaders that outlines what we like and don't like in the House bill," said Mr. Keppen.

Next Steps on Capitol Hill

The Senate's farm bill framework, still being finalized, will require bipartisan support to move in the Senate and ensure the bill's passage before the deadline this fall.

"I'm glad that Chairman Thompson is working to move

the process forward so that we can complete our work on the 2024 Farm Bill this year," said Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Chairwoman of the Senate Ag Committee, in a press release. "Despite areas of common ground, it is now clear that key parts of the House bill split the Farm Bill coalition in a way that makes it impossible to achieve the votes to become law. And it is also clear that we do not have time to waste on proposals that cannot meet that goal."

Senate Ag Committee Ranking Member John Boozman (R-AR) commended the members of the House Ag Committee that voted in support of advancing legislation.

"This is the first real progress toward a new farm bill becoming law," said Senator Boozman in a press statement. "My colleagues and I on the Republican side of the committee are committed to moving the process forward."

Alliance Representative Testifies on Hydropower Bill

Central Oregon's Craig Horrell Delivers in D.C.

A Family Farm Alliance representative from Central Oregon last month testified on a recently introduced Western hydropower bill at a House of Representatives committee legislative hearing in Washington, D.C.

Craig Horrell, managing director of Central Oregon Irrigation District, represented the Alliance and the Deschutes Basin Board of Control (DBBC) at the May 22 House Water, Wildlife and Fisheries (WWF) Subcommittee hearing, chaired by Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-OREGON).

Mr. Horrell was invited to testify on H.R. 8263, sponsored by Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-COLORADO).

"This bill expands the concept of legislation the Family Farm Alliance helped advance in the 113th Congress," said Mr. Horrell. "The current bill is intended to encourage non-Federal hydropower development with respect to Bureau of Reclamation projects."

The Alliance over ten years ago helped drive the passage of legislation similar to a bill that was on the hearing docket. That earlier bill – the *Bureau of Reclamation Small Conduit Hydropower Development and Rural Jobs Act* – was signed into law by then-President Obama in 2013.

H.R. 8263 would also streamline burdensome and unnecessary federal regulations and rules encountered by many irrigation water districts and electric utilities that seek to develop hydropower on Reclamation infrastructure.

"The Alliance and DBBC agree that clarifying jurisdiction about which federal agency approves certain hydro projects and reducing red tape for non-federal development of hydropower will produce a win-win solution that benefits water users and western communities," said Mr. Horrell.

Mr. Horrell currently serves as President of the DBBC and is a member of the Family Farm Alliance Advisory Committee, along with over fifty other district managers, association executives, attorneys and engineers from across the West.

DBBC members are aggressively pursuing modernization of their irrigation facilities. In addition to conserving water, these projects will add renewable hydropower and reduce on-farm energy use by delivering pressurized water.

"Irrigation districts in the Deschutes Basin are a great example of how renewable energy can be integrated with water operations," said Mr. Horrell. "Overall, our districts have identified over 12 MW of hydro potential associated with modernization projects. That's on top of the significant exist-

ing hydro generation detailed in our written testimony."

The Family Farm Alliance is still receiving feedback on the introduced version of this legislation and intends to work further with the Subcommittee to address technical components of the bill.

"Those technical matters deal primarily with ensuring that water operations and existing Reclamation projects where hydropower is an authorized purpose are protected," said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen, of Klamath Falls. "We also have ongoing concerns about how compliance with environmental and historic preservation laws, and other federal requirements have resulted in a lengthy, complicated and expensive approval process."

Mr. Horrell's appearance before the Subcommittee was the 99th time since 2005 that Family Farm Alliance representatives have testified before Congress.

The WWF Subcommittee at its legislative hearing reviewed three other bills aimed at im-



Craig Horrell. Photo courtesy of Central Oregon ID

proving the operations of Western water and hydropower infrastructure.

H.R. 7776, the *Help Hoover Dam Act* from Rep. Susie Lee (D-NEVADA) would allocate \$45 million from an unused account to support operations at Hoover Dam. The account was originally intended for post-retirement benefits of Western Area Power Administration and Reclamation employees but has remained unused for over two decades.

H.R. 7872, the *Colorado River Salinity Control Fix Act*, introduced by Rep. John Curtis (R-UTAH) would amend a 1974 law to increase non-reimbursable federal funding for programs aimed at reducing salinity in the Colorado River, which affects infrastructure and agricultural productivity.

H.R. 7938, the *Klamath Basin Water Agreement Support Act of 2024* was introduced by Chairman Bentz earlier this spring. Among other provisions, this bill seeks to protect farmers on the Klamath Irrigation Project from costs associated with the removal of four dams on the Lower Klamath River, part of an effort to restore salmon populations.

"The four bills considered by the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries today are an important part of our commitment to improve water infrastructure and to enhance access to water resources across the 17 Reclamation states," Chairman Bentz said after the hearing. "These four bills will modify cost shares and clarify the authority and obligations of Interior and Reclamation for critical water projects in the West."

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Biden Administration Ramps Up Environmental Rulemaking

The Biden administration in recent months has taken aggressive action to advance environmental rules to avoid facing possible nullification if Republicans win control of Congress and the White House next year.

The *Federal Register* has published numerous proposed agency regulations this spring – particularly from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - a necessary step for the measures to take effect and to start the review period on Capitol Hill under the Congressional Review Act (CRA).

Last month, Vicki Arroyo, the head of EPA's policy office, discussed the CRA at an environmental law conference held by the American Law Institute's Continuing Legal Education.

"It's something that we're very focused on," said Ms. Arroyo, referring to the deadline.

EPA has begun formal publication of a slew of newly completed rules governing power plant pollution, chemical uses, "forever chemical" cleanups and other issues.

The Congressional Review Act

The CRA allows Congress to review "major" rules issued by federal agencies before the rules take effect. It provides the House with 60 legislative days and the Senate with 60 session days to introduce a joint resolution of disapproval to overturn the rule.

To overturn a rule, both houses of Congress must pass a joint resolution of disapproval, and it must be signed by the President.

These procedures have special importance for federal agencies in an election year. If a rule is submitted to Congress within 60 days before adjournment, the CRA's "lookback provision" allows the 60-day timeline to introduce a CRA resolution to start over in the next session of Congress.

Experts have said final rules this year need to be published in the *Register* by around mid-May to avoid being subject to CRA attacks next year - under a potential Republican-led Congress with a new Republican president that would sign such measures (*InsideEPA.com*).

Federal Regulatory Challenges for Western Irrigated Ag

The Family Farm Alliance every year engages in agency rulemaking efforts, primarily those associated with implementation of federal environmental laws like the Clean Water Act (CWA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

"At the top of the list of the challenges confronting Western family farmers and ranchers is the daunting number of federal regulatory policy initiatives they face," said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen. "Top-down federal water resource policies and regulatory practices developed in faraway places can potentially undermine the economic foundations of rural communities in the arid West by making farming and ranching increasingly more difficult."

The Biden Administration recently finalized NEPA and ESA regulations that are concerning to the Alliance and other producers in the American West.

White House CEQ Finalizes Permitting Action Plan

The White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) is finalizing the Bipartisan Permitting Reform Implementation Rule, intended to simplify and modernize the federal environmental review process while implementing the new efficiencies

Congress passed last year in the *Fiscal Responsibility Act* (FRA). CEQ on May 1 issued the NEPA regulations.

CEQ describes these changes as enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of environmental reviews while striving for regulatory certainty.

"Together, these reforms will help accelerate America's clean energy future, rebuild our nation's infrastructure, strengthen our nation's energy security, and deliver on the President's Investing in America agenda," the White House said in a public statement.

The Final Rule implements the significant changes that require agencies to identify an environmentally preferable alternative and undertake additional consideration of climate change and environmental justice in environmental analyses.

CEQ officials have retained elements of the 2020 Trump-era overhaul, though it appears that most of the retained provisions were required by the FRA. These include page- and time-limits for Environmental Assessments (EAs) and Environmental Impact Statements (EISs), language to strengthen the role of lead agencies, and language allowing agencies to adopt other agencies' categorical exclusions (CEs).

"Given the history of NEPA litigation, and the significant changes in the Final Rule, it is likely that these changes will open new pathways for litigation and require courts to interpret the changes before providing regulatory certainty," attorneys for Stoel-Rives, a Portland (OREGON) law firm predicted in a recent blog post.

Congress Reacts to New NEPA Rule

Currently, President Biden's efforts to streamline the federal environmental permitting process through changes to NEPA have been met with bipartisan opposition in Congress.

Last year's FRA contained a number of provisions from Trump-era NEPA regulations that legislatively compelled CEQ to include in their regulations.

Prominent House Republicans believe CEQ ignored the statute and reinterpreted other provisions away from congressional intent.

"In pursuing Biden's radical environmental agenda, CEQ has managed to ignore statutory changes, making an already convoluted process even more wrapped up in red tape," said House Committee on Natural Resources Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.). "This rule could have been a huge win for America had CEQ followed congressional intent. Instead, this rule furthers the administration's America-last agenda."

One of the most powerful Democrats in the Senate is also unhappy with the new NEPA rule.

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Congress Reacts to New NEPA Rule (Cont'd from Pg 5)

“This undermines the bipartisan deal the Administration made with the *Fiscal Responsibility Act* and will increase costs and red tape for critical projects that, despite being needed for national security and prosperity, aren’t favored by the radical left,” said Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV).

Senator Manchin, Rep. Garret Graves (R-LA), and Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK), recently announced plans to use a CRA resolution to overturn the NEPA revisions, arguing that the changes would slow down the permitting process rather than expedite it.

The CRA resolution, requiring a simple majority in both chambers and presidential approval, is unlikely to be enacted due to the expected veto from President Biden.

Western Ag Groups Raise Concerns with NEPA Rule

Western agriculture groups argue that instead of reducing regulatory burdens as intended, the rule makes the NEPA process more burdensome for producers.

“The Biden Administration largely ignored the requirements Congress passed in the *Fiscal Responsibility Act* that would streamline NEPA processes,” said Kaitlynn Glover, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association Director of Natural Resources said. “Instead, this final rule changes the focus of NEPA, making it more ambiguous, less targeted, and nearly impossible to navigate.”

The Alliance last September submitted significant, detailed comments to CEQ outlining its concerns with its revised draft NEPA rule.

“While we respect that the Biden Administration might move in a different direction from the Trump Administration on issues like environmental regulations, climate change, and environmental justice, we cannot support a wholesale revision of the NEPA regulations that will thwart efforts to improve the law’s efficiency and effectiveness,” the Alliance letter stated.

“Many more hours may be needed to continue this important work and work to educate key policymakers on the importance of the current rules and regulations to Western water managers,” the Alliance letter predicts.

Republicans File ESA CRA Resolutions

Senate and House Republicans have introduced resolutions to reverse recent Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and NOAA Fisheries rulemaking that restored ESA protections eliminated during the Trump Administration.

The three resolutions, sponsored by Senate Western Caucus Chair Cynthia Lummis (R-WYOMING), Vice Chair Dan Sullivan (R-AK), and Sen. Pete Ricketts (R-NEBRASKA), seek to reinstate Trump-era revisions that they argue improved public participation and the ESA’s efficiency.

In 2019, The Trump Administration finalized key changes to the ESA that added more flexibility for affected stakeholders while also ensuring species’ recovery plans take a tailored and targeted approach. In March 2024, the Biden Administration overturned these revisions, including the “blanket rule” that automatically gave threatened species the strictest ESA protections.

Sen. Lummis criticized the Biden Administration for undoing these effective measures and emphasized the need for collaboration with Western stakeholders.

“Instead of working with stakeholders out west to improve the ESA, the Biden administration chose to undo what worked and double down on what did

not,” said Senator Lummis. “Instead of placating to radical activists, the Biden administration needs to work with landowners, businesses and workers in Wyoming and throughout the west who will be hurt the most by this big government mandate.”

The resolutions have 12 Republican co-sponsors. Despite the likelihood of a presidential veto, these resolutions reflect ongoing Republican efforts to reform the ESA, celebrating its 50th anniversary last year.

Reps. Dan Newhouse (WASHINGTON), Harriet Hageman (WYOMING) and John Duarte (CALIFORNIA) introduced CRA resolutions to remove three ESA Rules in the House of Representatives.

“These rules take species conservation in the wrong direction and punish our landowners,” said Rep. Hageman. As such I’ve introduced these CRA resolutions to prevent these ill-designed rules from taking effect.”



U.S. Representative Harriet Hageman (R-WYOMING).
Photo source: Office of Rep. Hageman.

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Biden Administration Spreads Funds Across the West Recent Spending Announcements Surpass \$1 Billion

Senior leaders in the Biden Administration in the past month continued their tour of key blue and swing states in the Western U.S., promoting their initiatives – and funding – in this important election year, touting efforts to revitalize aging water infrastructure, strengthen drought resilience, and reduce wildfire risk.

One seven-day stretch last month was dubbed “Infrastructure Week” by the Biden Administration, with high-level White House officials touring the U.S. to promote the massive investments the Administration has made in infrastructure.

“While ‘Infrastructure Week’ became an empty punchline during the prior Administration, President Biden is delivering an ‘Infrastructure Decade’ that will benefit communities for generations to come,” a White House fact sheet claims.

Their message aims to showcase the significant funding provided by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) directed towards roads, clean energy, water, and broadband.

However, according to recent polls, the public remains largely unaware of the impact of the overall investments provided by these two statutes and two other stimulus laws passed during the pandemic, totaling \$1.6 trillion. And with only a fraction of the congressionally allocated funds spent – mostly due to federal bureaucratic processes involved in disbursing such substantial amounts of funding, – actual on-the-ground results have been a bit underwhelming considering the Administration’s massive checkbook.

Recent POLITICO Analysis Shows Less Than 17% of Funds Have Been Spent

According to a *POLITICO* analysis of public data, only a small portion of that money has been spent. *POLITICO*’s assessment found:

- Less than 17 percent of the \$1.1 trillion those laws provided for direct investments on climate, energy and infrastructure has been spent as of April, nearly two years after President Biden signed the last of the statutes.
- Out of \$145 billion in direct spending on energy and climate programs in the IRA, the administration has announced roughly \$60 billion in tentative funding decisions as of April 11.
- And only \$125 billion has been spent from the \$884 billion provided by the IIJA and the pandemic law, both of which the president signed in 2021. Roughly \$300 billion of that won’t be legally available to spend until the next two fiscal years.

The bottom line: even an agency’s announcement that it has tentatively awarded millions of dollars to a project doesn’t mean the recipient will necessarily get it quickly — or at all.

For much of this money, *POLITICO* found that the government does not provide a centralized, easily accessible way for the public to see how much has been formally awarded or spent.

For the West, the Department of the Interior (Interior) last year launched an interactive map and database, intended to track Interior-wide funding invested to date from the IIJA.

“It includes Bureau of Reclamation projects, and the map of the various Western drought projects receiving IIJA funds is impressive,” said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen of the map and database.

However, other than project identification and location, the only other additional information provided are the names and amounts of IIJA funds obligated to the listed projects.

Despite the slow pace of fund deployment, Administration officials continue to communicate about the long-term benefits of these investments.

“The agencies absolutely know whether the money’s been obligated,” White House senior clean energy adviser John Podesta told *POLITICO*. “What we’re focused on at the White House is that the programs are being created, that fair competitions are being set up, they’re being done with high levels of integrity, that the money is being awarded appropriately.”

IIJA and IRA Funding for Western Water

Both the IIJA and IRA laws collectively provided a “once in a generation” level of federal funding to support water infrastructure and drought needs in the West.

The Family Farm 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 IIJA and IRA funding for Western water infrastructure and drought mitigation efforts.

Through the IIJA, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) is investing a total of \$8.3 billion over five years for water infrastructure projects, including rural water, water storage, conservation and conveyance, nature-based solutions, dam safety, water purification and reuse, and desalination. Since the IIJA was signed into law in November 2021, Reclamation has announced almost \$3 billion for 440 projects.

“Thirty months have passed since the IIJA was signed into law,” said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen. “A lot of funding Reclamation has provided has been obligated but not yet spent. Increasingly, our members are concerned about how quickly those dollars are actually materializing into projects on-the-ground.”

The first project funded by the IIJA in Reclamation’s California-Great Basin Region was repair of the Truckee Canal, which provides water to the Truckee Division near Reno (NEVADA). That project was completed last month, and the canal is now fully operational. The \$35 million loan in funding was provided by the aging water infrastructure account and will be completely repaid by Truckee-Carson Irrigation District.

The IRA includes \$4 billion in funding specifically for water management and conservation efforts in the Colorado River Basin and other areas experiencing similar levels of

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IIJA and IRA Funding for Water (Cont'd from Page 8)

long-term drought. To date, Reclamation has announced 202 system conservation agreements under the IRA for an estimated 1.7 million acre-feet of Colorado River system conservation through 2026, totaling \$716 million.

Additional promising funding announcements and obligations in other parts of the West continue.

\$520M for Water Infrastructure and Drought Resilience

Acting Deputy Secretary of the Interior Laura Daniel-Davis last month in Albuquerque (NEW MEXICO) announced more than \$520 million to support 57 projects across all six regions served by Reclamation to improve water conveyance and storage, increase safety, improve hydropower generation, and provide water treatment.

Ms. Daniel-Davis made the announcement while visiting the Middle Rio Grande in New Mexico. Five projects in New Mexico are receiving a total of \$14.7 million in funding for aging infrastructure. More than \$10 million of the funding is for a realignment project of the Rio Grande channel to improve water conveyance, critical habitat and sedimentation control in an area south of Albuquerque near the Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge. To date, Interior has announced \$318.8 million from the IIJA and \$69.5 million from the IRA for projects in New Mexico.

"President Biden's Investing in America agenda is making historic investments to provide clean, reliable water to families, farmers and Tribes and to make western communities more resilient to drought and climate change," said Acting Deputy Secretary Laura Daniel-Davis. "These investments in our aging water infrastructure will conserve community water supplies and revitalize water delivery systems building reliability and sustainability for generations to come."

Ms. Daniel-Davis's visit followed Interior Secretary Deb Haaland's announcement one week earlier of a \$60 million investment from the IRA for water conservation and drought resilience in the Rio Grande Basin. These resources are intended to ensure greater climate resiliency and water security for communities below Elephant Butte Reservoir and into Texas. The annual water savings from the proposed projects are anticipated to be in the tens of thousands of acre-feet.

"We are the first ones outside of the Colorado River to get IRA money," said Samantha Salopek, an attorney who works with New Mexico water users and who serves on the Family Farm Alliance Advisory Committee. "Lots of hard work 'paid' off, literally!"

\$147M for Drought Resiliency, Water Supply Reliability

Interior last month in Durango (COLORADO) announced a \$147.6 million investment to help communities prepare and respond to water reliability challenges due to drought and other water scarcity concerns. The funding will support 42 projects in ten states.

Reclamation Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton, joined by Senator Michael Bennet (D-COLORADO), made the announcement during a visit with the Southern Ute Tribe in southwestern Colorado. The Tribe was awarded a \$2.3 million grant to upgrade their water system to provide reliable water levels during various water flow periods. This will allow the Southern Ute Tribe to divert its full allocation of water during times of lower flows.

"With new resources provided through President Biden's Investing in America agenda, we are investing in locally led projects to help build drought resilience," said Commissioner

Touton. "These projects focus on improving water management strategies, infrastructure and efficiency to mitigate the impacts of drought on communities, agriculture and ecosystems."

The funding announced today comes from the IIJA, IRA and annual appropriations. Awards will support projects that build new infrastructure or upgrade existing infrastructure, recharge aquifers, advance water recycling and treatment, and strengthen innovative technologies to address water scarcity challenges for water users.

For a portion of the projects, Reclamation is using funding from the IRA to help reduce the

cost-share for domestic water supplies projects that support disadvantaged communities.

\$250M to Reduce Wildfire Risk to Communities

Deputy USDA Secretary Xochitl Torres Small last month in Tacoma (WASHINGTON) announced \$250 million to help at-risk communities protect their homes, businesses and infrastructure from catastrophic wildfire, made worse by the climate crisis.

Made possible by the IIJA, the announcement through the Community Wildfire Defense Grant program will fund 158 projects to help communities in 31 States, two Territories and 11 Tribes develop community wildfire protection plans and remove overgrown vegetation that can fuel fires that threaten lives, livelihoods, and resources.

Reclamation to Hold June 6 Listening Sessions On Infrastructure Spending

Reclamation has announced a virtual information update session on funding opportunities and implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The listening sessions are expected to run one hour.

Tribes: Thursday, June 6, 11 a.m. (Eastern). Join by phone: 1-202-640-1187 passcode, 710 227 736#, or via [Teams Link](#).

Stakeholders: Thursday, June 6, 2 p.m. (Eastern). Join by phone: 1-202-640-1187 passcode, 769 011 765#, or via [Teams Link](#).

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Senate EPW Committee Releases 2024 WRDA

Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee members have introduced their biennial Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2024, which authorizes the Army Corps to study and construct numerous water infrastructure and environmental restoration projects nationwide.

The Senate WRDA bill, spearheaded by Senate EPW Chairman Tom Carper (D-DE), focuses on flood and drought protection and enhancing economic activities at ports. It prioritizes initiatives for disadvantaged communities and mandates the completion of certain previously authorized projects.

“With strong, bipartisan support of WRDA 2024, the EPW Committee has come together to address the diverse water infrastructure needs of the American people,” said Chairman Carper. “I look forward to the work ahead to get this important legislation to the President’s desk.”

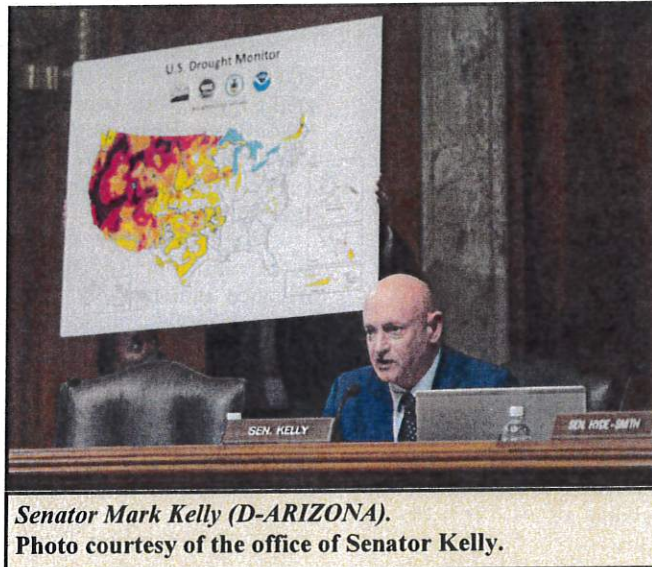
Key provisions include provisions to help communities respond to drought in the arid West and establishing pilot program through which Native American tribes could “directly carry out” eligible water projects.

The bill authorizes 81 feasibility studies and eight new or modified construction projects, including projects for flood risk management, ecosystem restoration, and water supply in Arizona, California, Colorado, Kansas, Nevada, Texas, and Washington. It also directs the Corps to expedite the completion of several ongoing studies and projects from past WRDAs including projects in Arizona and California.

“I’m particularly glad to have included provisions that will expedite critical infrastructure and flood control projects in Arizona,” said Senator Kelly (D-ARIZONA), Chair of the Senate EPW Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure. “Now, let’s get this passed and signed into law to better secure Arizona’s water future.”

Additionally, the bill emphasizes improving the permitting and environmental review processes and tackling invasive species. It would also establish an emergency drought operations pilot program, allowing the Corps to modify dam operations in drought-stricken regions.

“The House of Representatives’ WRDA text is expected to be released in the next few weeks,” said Mark Limbaugh with The Ferguson Group, the Family Farm Alliance’s representative in Washington, D.C.



Senator Mark Kelly (D-ARIZONA).
Photo courtesy of the office of Senator Kelly.

Funding to Reduce Wildfire Risk (Cont'd from Pg. 8)

“Last year, over two million Americans across the country were displaced by extreme weather and climate-fueled disasters, including wildfires,” said Assistant to the President and National Climate Advisor Ali Zaidi. “Under President Biden, we are making the largest-ever investment to tackle the climate crisis, while reducing the risks of catastrophic fires and making communities safer, stronger, and more resilient.”

Now in its second year, the Community Wildfire Defense Grant program helps communities in the wildland-urban interface maintain resilient landscapes, create fire-adapted communities, and ensure safe, effective wildfire response.

Drought and wildfire in the U.S. West grassland-forest ecology are challenges that ranchers have had to cope with and manage over centuries. Wildfire smoke covered as much as 70 percent of California in recent years — wreaking havoc not only on land, but also in the state’s vast freshwater ecosystems, according to a study published last month in *Communications: Earth & Environment*.

Many of the announced projects are located in the West. Wasco County (OREGON) is receiving nearly \$6 million to create fuel breaks and defensible space to protect Maupin,

Pine Grove, Tygh Valley and other communities. The Nature Conservancy will use nearly \$9.9 million to protect communities in Archuleta County (COLORADO) and watersheds that provide irrigation and drinking water to downstream users in Santa Fe and Albuquerque, New Mexico, which get 50% and 90% of their clean water is from these watersheds, respectively.

In total, the program is investing \$1 billion over five years to assist at-risk communities through grants to local and Tribal communities, non-profit organizations, state forestry agencies, and Alaska Native Corporations, with planning for and mitigating wildfire risks on lands not managed by federal agencies.

“We recognize the difference this program is already having on reducing wildfire risk. This second round of investments will help communities develop community wildfire protection plans, which serve as roadmaps for addressing local wildfire risks,” said Forest Service Chief Randy Moore. “They also will fund projects to lower wildfire risk on non-federal land in communities that already have a community wildfire protection plan in place.”

Navajo Nation Approves Large Colorado River Water Rights Settlement

Three Native American Tribes last month signed off on a proposed water rights settlement which is the most expensive of its kind. The Navajo, Hopi, and San Juan Southern Paiute tribal councils in May approved the proposed settlement, which aims to address longstanding exclusion from the 1922 Colorado River Compact, which divided water among seven Western states but omitted tribal nations.

"Thank you for helping make history today," Navajo Council Speaker Crystalne Curley told her fellow delegates last month as they stood and clapped after casting a unanimous vote.

Both the Hopi tribe and the San Juan Southern Paiute councils also approved the settlement in May. Congress will have the final say.

The settlement seeks over \$5 billion, surpassing all previously approved tribal agreements, with about \$1.75 billion funding a pipeline from Lake Powell to deliver water to remote tribal communities.

The tribes will receive water from the Colorado River, Little Colorado River, and local aquifers. The Navajo and Hopi tribes are allocated around 47,000 acre-feet from the Upper Basin and an additional 9,500 acre-feet per year from the Lower Basin. The Navajo would also draw 40,780 acre-feet from the Little Colorado River.

Nearly one-third of Navajo Nation homes lack running water, and many Hopi homes face similar issues. The tribes are pushing for a swift approval of the proposed settlement under the Biden Administration.

The Navajo Nation voted on the measure in a special session, with additional approvals needed, culminating in one from Congress.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the federal government is not obliged to secure water for the Navajo Nation. The proposed settlement seeks to rectify historical exclusions and provide economic opportunities for tribal members.

CRIT Agreement Signed

Further down the river, Arizona's state and tribal leaders in late April joined top federal officials in signing documents implementing another agreement allowing the tribes to market portions of their Colorado River allocation to water users off-reservation.

The signing event represents a critical step to implement the *Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT) Water Resiliency Act of 2022*.

Present at the event to execute the agreements at the Blue-water Resort on the CRIT reservation near Parker were Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs, U.S. Senator Mark Kelly of Arizona, as well as Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton and Tom Buschatzke, Director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources.

Both Governor Hobbs and Director Buschatzke participated in the signing ceremony.

"The celebration today is the beginning of a new chapter for tribal sovereignty and self-determination, where tribal leaders have the freedom to manage their resources, and by extension, their futures," said Governor Hobbs.

Recent Alliance Engagement With Colorado River Basin Tribes

Anne Castle, who served as Assistant Secretary for Water and Science in President Obama's Interior Department, moderated a high-profile panel of tribal representatives from the Colorado River Basin at the 2024 Family Farm Alliance annual conference in Reno last February.

One of those panelists was Joshua Moore, the Farm Manager for CRIT.

"We have enough water in our community to farm 100,000 acres, mostly in Arizona, but also in California," he told the Alliance audience. Mr. Moore later referenced Will Rogers, who once said "farmers are optimists, or they wouldn't be farmers".

He said the tribes have been in the Southwest for a very long time. He expects this to continue. The Spanish came and they are no longer there. The Mexicans came and they are no longer there.

"The tribes are still there," he said.

Precipitation May Brighten Colorado River's Future

Currently, the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Reclamation believe the Colorado River is oversubscribed and negatively impacted by climate change.

However, widespread claims of impending aridification in the American Southwest may have been checked by a new study from researchers at the University of Colorado, Boulder, which reveals that precipitation, not temperature, will keep the Colorado River fuller than previous research had indicated.

"It's a sort of nuanced message," said Balaji Rajagopalan, co-author of the study. "Yes, the temperature is warming, but that's not the full story—you add precipitation and you get a fuller picture."

Alliance Colorado River Initiative

Efforts continue across the Colorado River Basin to find ways to stabilize water storage volumes in Lakes Powell and Mead.

"Despite the diversity of Colorado River policy opinions within our membership, the Alliance board of directors in 2015 and again in 2022 adopted principles and recommendations intended to guide state and federal decision-makers as they negotiate a long-term operating agreement on the Colorado River," said Alliance First VP Don Schwindt (COLORADO).

The 2022 policy paper – which has also been adopted by several water agencies served by the Colorado River – has as its top principle the need to "recognize that Western irrigated agriculture is a strategic and irreplaceable national resource".

Election Year Attention on the San Joaquin Valley

The 2024 election is well underway across the nation, state and California’s San Joaquin Valley, where one of the nation’s most closely watched Congressional races is unfolding.

Republican Rep. David Valadao and Democrat Rudy Salas are vying for California’s 22nd House District seat, which the *Cook Political Report* lists as one of its “Republican toss-up” races. The Democratic party has zeroed in on the race as one of the 17 priority districts it hopes to flip.

Central Valley Project (CVP) water is the lifeblood of the local agricultural economy, which includes several of the top farm-production counties in the nation. In the past month, water-related actions driven by national leaders from both political parties drew attention to the region.

Biden Administration Announces \$81 Million for Drought Resilience

The Department of the Interior last month announced \$81 million for water conservation and drought resilience south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta in the San Joaquin Valley.

Acting Deputy Secretary Laura Daniel-Davis, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science Sarah Krakoff, and Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton joined federal and state leaders and CVP water agencies at the Stewart Lee Udall building to announce the funding and sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining a new long-term drought plan for the region.

“Access to clean and reliable water is essential for feeding families, growing crops, sustaining wildlife and the environment and powering agricultural businesses. It also creates incredible potential for economic opportunity and job creation,” said Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science Sarah Krakoff. “This new drought plan will help provide critical water supplies to refugees and cities, save permanent crops from being fallowed in drought years, and keep water in the San Joaquin River in the worst of drought years.”

The MOU between Reclamation and the CVP South-of-Delta contractors – including the San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority, San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority (SJRECWA) and Friant Water Authority

(FWA) – identifies a framework, long-term drought plan, and a 2024 Pilot Program, including a “drought pool,” to build drought resiliency in the region.

This partnership establishes a program and advances projects that increase regional climate resilience in the San Joaquin Valley, and its implementation is being advanced through funding provided by the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (“IIJA”) and the Inflation Reduction Act (“IRA”), which nearly doubled the annual funding provided to Reclamation over eight years.

Key components of the Framework include:

- The development and implementation of a Drought Plan that allows participating entities to voluntarily conserve and securely store or exchange a portion of their CVP south of Delta deliveries for use in future years with lower supplies, in addition to supporting the advancement of the San Joaquin River Restoration Program.
- Allocation of Costs for Large Extraordinary Maintenance (XM) Projects, including the Delta-Mendota Canal Subsidence Correction Project.
- Commitment by Reclamation and SJRECWA to develop processes to ensure that the San Joaquin River Restoration Program can provide specific flows past Sack Dam via the San Joaquin River to Mendota Pool.
- Resolution on the Del Puerto Canyon Reservoir Project by FWA and the SJRECWA to ensure it supports the objectives outlined in the Drought Plan.



From left to right: Chris White, San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority Executive Director; Jason Phillips, Friant Water Authority Chief Executive Officer; Federico Barajas, San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority Board Executive Director; Reclamation Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton. Photo courtesy of USBR.

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Focus on San Joaquin Valley (Cont'd from Page 11)

40 Percent Allocation After a Wet Year

CVP water deliveries south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta are dependent on Reclamation's ability to pump water from the Delta, San Luis Reservoir water storage, and conveyance through Central Valley Project canals. In recent decades, operational flexibility has worsened, and regulatory uncertainty has increased for many CVP users, especially those with agricultural service contracts. These impacts are further exacerbated during drought years.

The last update from Reclamation increased the allocation for South of Delta agricultural contractors, including Westlands Water District, to 40 percent of the total water contract, despite a wet year that substantially boosted statewide reservoir and groundwater levels (*see related story, Page 13*).

"This year's low allocation after a wet year and a relatively good winter that filled the state's reservoirs, and the state officially out of drought conditions, demonstrates the critical and urgent need to improve water management transparency and accountability," said Allison Febbo, Westlands GM.

Rep. Valadao Hosts Ag and Water Field Tour

Members of the GOP Congressional Western Caucus and their staff attended an agriculture and water field tour in Bakersfield last month.

The field tour was hosted by Rep. David Valadao (R-CALIFORNIA), with participation from fellow California Republican Reps. Jay Obernolte and John Duarte, as well as Reps. Burgess Owens (UTAH) and Russ Fulcher (IDAHO).

Members and staff toured Tasteful Selections to learn more about their production agriculture operations in the Central Valley.

Immediately following the tour, Western Caucus Members saw firsthand the production facility of the world's largest grower, producer, and shipper of carrots, Grimmway Farms.

To wrap up the field tour, the group was briefed by staff from the Friant Water Authority about water access, storage, and management in the Central Valley.

Northwest Republicans Introduce Bills to Protect Snake River Dams

Congressman Dan Newhouse (R-WASHINGTON) and his GOP colleagues from the Pacific Northwest have introduced a package of nine bills in the House of Representatives to protect the four Lower Snake River Dams.

This latest response from Columbia River Basin Republicans follows the release of the final package of actions and commitments in the Columbia River System Operations (CRSO) mediation, which they believe undermines dam operations.

"I have consistently reminded the Biden Administration that the authority over the Lower Snake River Dams remains in the hands of Congress," said Congressman Dan Newhouse. This package is not only a staunch reinforcement of that fact, but a testament to our commitment to protect these critical pieces of infrastructure."

The package contains nine bills aimed at reversing specific provisions in the final package of actions and commitments in the CRSO mediation. They are cosponsored by multiple members from the Pacific Northwest and supported by a variety of organizations with stakes in the Columbia River System.

For example, the *Abandoning Inconsistent and Rash Environmental Solutions (ACRES) Act* – cosponsored by Reps. Russ Fulcher (IDAHO), Cliff Bentz (OREGON), Ryan Zinke (MONTANA), and Matt Rosendale (MONTANA) would prohibit the breaching of federally operated dams if such breach would result in the replacement energy resource occupying additional acreage of more than 5 percent.

The *QUERIES Act* – cosponsored by Reps. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WASHINGTON), Fulcher, Bentz and Zinke would direct the Comptroller General of the United States to submit to Congress an updated report on the roles, responsibilities, and practices of the Council on Environmental Quality, which helped drive the CRSO mediation.

Consequences of removing the lower Snake River Dams

Northwest irrigators, power users and shipping interests believe the Biden Administration initiative exploring the potential to remove the four lower Snake River Dams would have significant consequences on their sectors.

Dam removal would severely affect irrigation, impacting more than 400,000 acres of highly productive farmland. Removing many of the hydroelectric dams that power the region would also drive up utility costs.

The Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA) says that dam removal would halt barging operations on the Columbia, diverting the transportation of goods to trains and trucks.

"This shift would impact about 10% of all U.S. wheat exports that rely on the lower Snake River dams to reach Portland/Vancouver barges," PNWA states on its website. "Shifting from river to overland transportation along the Columbia River would greatly increase the carbon footprint of wheat production, resulting in emissions surging by more than 1.25 million tons per year."

Although the new initiative seeks salmon recovery, the complexity of other environmental factors that affect salmon survival rate prevents any guarantee that dam removal would lead to recovery of salmon populations.

Complications such as warming oceans and delayed mortality make it impossible for current science to predict the effects of dam removal on salmon survival.

"Currently, there are varied projections" for delayed mortality, said Michael Milstein, public affairs officer for NOAA Fisheries. "If there is high delayed mortality, then there may be a greater effect from breaching."

Is La Niña on the Way? Wet El Niño Year Has Benefited California Hydrology

Australian scientists in the past month declared that the Pacific Ocean is no longer in an El Niño state and has returned to "neutral."

American scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have been more hesitant, but they estimate that there is an 85% chance that the Pacific will enter a neutral state in the next two months and a 60% chance that a La Niña event will begin by August.

During La Nina, the jet stream tends to be farther north, causing drier conditions across the U.S. Southwest and wetter conditions in the Pacific Northwest.

"What it ends up doing is shifting where the jet stream sets up across the mid-latitudes where we live," Tom DiLiberato, climate scientist at NOAA, recently told NPR. "The jet stream acts like this storm highway and if you change where the jet stream goes, you change where the storms go."

California Drought Conditions At Lowest Level in 13 years

After another wet winter, record rainfall has replenished California's reservoirs, which had been critically low during the worst days of the drought.

For the first time in more than four years, all of Northern California is free of drought or abnormally dry conditions, according to recent U.S. Drought Monitor data. California now has its lowest amount of drought conditions since 2011.

Lake Oroville – the crown jewel of California's State Water Project - is completely full. It's the second year in a row after another wet winter. Lake Oroville is the second largest reservoir in the state, and it holds 3.5 million acre-feet of water.

Golden State Aquifer Recovery on the Upswing

California's groundwater supplies greatly benefited from last year's historically wet rainy season, according to a new report from the Department of Water Resources (DWR).

DWR recently released the latest Semi-Annual Groundwater Conditions report, and the data show that California achieved 4.1 million acre-feet of managed groundwater recharge during Water Year 2023, which is nearly the water storage capacity of Shasta Lake.

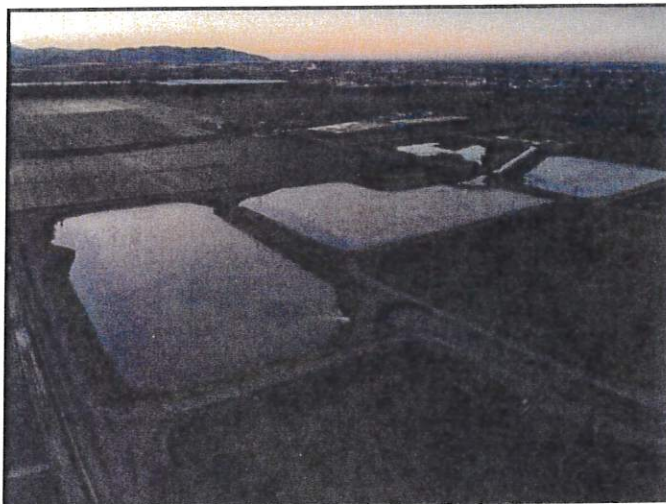
The report also details an increase in groundwater storage of 8.7 million acre-feet.

"California is invested in preparing for weather extremes by maximizing the wet years to store as much water as possible in preparation for the dry years," said Paul Gosselin, deputy director of sustainable water management for DWR, in a statement.

The DWR report found that the highest reported managed recharge per area occurred in the Oxnard, Tule, and Kern County subbasins, with recharge of 1.92, 1.46, and 1.02 acre-feet per acre, respectively.

"We have some great news for our farmers and ranchers – being Number One in the entire state of California for groundwater recharge per acre," said Mauricio Guardado, general manager of United Water Conservation District, which conjunctively manages groundwater in the Oxnard subbasin. "We're experiencing artesian conditions in several wells downstream of operations which haven't been observed for 25 years. Our Lake Piru is currently completely full."

Mr. Guardado serves on the Advisory Committee for the Family Farm Alliance.



The Oxnard groundwater basin spans 57,888 acres, and during the 2023 Water Year (WY 2023) UWCD managed to resupply 111,254 acre-feet of water – or more than 36 billion gallons, resulting in a best-in-State recharge rate per area of 1.92 acre-feet per acre. Despite being a smaller basin, it also managed to rank sixth in the state in total groundwater recharge volume. This was largely due to United's recharge operations in the Forebay area. Photo courtesy of United Water Conservation District.

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Biden, Newsom race to cement Calif. water grab ahead of potential Trump victory

New federal rules that govern the Central Valley's water supply are on track to be codified before a change of power in the event of a potential Biden defeat in November.



BY DANIEL GLIGICH

JUNE 6, 2024

2 MINUTE READ



President Joe Biden is planning to cement new, strenuous rules governing how California's water is managed by the end of the year, completing a four-year fight to shred a water boost for Valley farmers and southern California instituted under President Trump.

According to a federal agency schedule published by POLITICO, the Biden administration plans to have new biological opinions in place by Dec. 6 to

pare back how water flows via the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project.

The backstory: The 2019 biological opinions put in place by the Trump administration were developed with an eye toward cutting edge science driving adaptive water management in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to help boost water supplies to farmers in the Central Valley and southern California communities.

The biological opinions themselves were the result of an eleventh hour mad scramble by the Obama administration to bracket more sweeping changes by the incoming Trump administration in late 2016.

- The resulting legislation, the 2016 Water Infrastructure and Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act, was brokered by the late Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and then-House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Bakersfield) with significant input from his neighbor, Rep. David Valadao (R-Hanford).
- The WIIN Act would launch the process of updating the 2008/2009 biological opinions for the Central Valley Project and State Water Project, which were considered grossly outdated and too rigid to adequately supply water to human populations in the San Joaquin Valley and southern California.
- Environmentalists and Democrats have vigorously fought against the resulting 2019 environmental rules by renewing a push that endangered – some possibly extinct – fish would be affected by increased pumping from the Delta.
- Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration and environmental groups sued to stop the 2019 biological opinions from being used, and the Central Valley Plan has been operated under temporary plans that reduced those lofty flows developed by the Trump administration for the last few years.

The big picture: If the Biden administration is able to push through new rules before Trump potentially returns to the White House, it would give

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Newsom and Democrats in California a stronger legal defense to keep them in place and fend off any attempts from Trump to institute another set of new biological opinions.

- Karla Nemeth, the Director of the California Department of Water Resources, told POLITICO that the goal is to get the opinions done by the end of Biden's first – and possibly only – term in office.
- “It seems likely that a different federal administration would reopen things and take another look,” Nemeth told the publication. “We would still have our California permit, so that then becomes the driver.”
- As it stands, the half-step environmental rules currently governing the flow of water through the Delta have come under attack by water users across the state, largely due to the overwhelming amount of water being stored in reservoirs across northern California and paltry water supplies being pushed south through the Delta.

The other side: Republicans, including Rep. David Valadao (R–Hanford), are pushing back.

- “Obviously, they’re being rushed for political purposes,” Valadao told POLITICO. “They know that it’s not going to be good. So that’s why they’re being so secretive.”

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