
March 4, 2019

Mr. Matthew Lohr
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 5105-A
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Chief Lohr:

On behalf of the Western Governors' Association (WGA), we are writing to congratulate you on your appointment to serve as the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). We look forward to working with you in your capacity as the chief conservation officer of the United States.

As you may be aware, WGA represents the Governors of 19 western states and 3 territories in the Pacific Ocean. The association is an instrument of the Governors for bipartisan policy development, information exchange and collective action on issues of critical importance to the western United States.

The NRCS is a critical federal partner of western states, as your conservation programs provide needed leverage for private landowners to engage in beneficial agricultural production and conservation activities. NRCS programs help landowners achieve a wide range of objectives, from water quality protection, to habitat conservation and improvement, to wildfire mitigation. Working lands conservation programs, developed through locally-led partnerships, improve soil health and drought resiliency. Conservation easement programs preserve working lands and help maintain agriculture's positive contributions to rural economies. Technical assistance helps landowners improve the efficiency and effectiveness of land management practices. The NRCS Sage Grouse Initiative continues to serve a critical purpose in conserving sage-grouse and working lands in sagebrush throughout the West.

Western Governors appreciate the dialogue and strong relationship we have enjoyed with the NRCS over many years. For example, NRCS has been a valuable partner in the Western Governors' Species Conservation and Endangered Species Act Initiative, the National Forest and Rangeland Management Initiative, and the Biosecurity and Invasive Species Initiative.

Under the management structure of your predecessor, NRCS and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) both reported to the same Under Secretary, making it relatively simple for the agencies to identify opportunities for cross-boundary cooperation. The Joint Chiefs Initiative between NRCS and USFS reinforced this collaboration. We encourage you to continue this effort or institute a similar mechanism to ensure cooperation between the agencies. We also encourage you to expand this effort beyond the U.S. Department of Agriculture to include relevant U.S. Department of the Interior agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, which has extensive land management responsibilities in western states and is a critical partner in cross-boundary activities.

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Congratulations again. Western Governors appreciate the high value that NRCS programs provide throughout the West. We look forward to strengthening the relationships between our states and NRCS, while seeking new opportunities for collaboration.

Sincerely,



David Ige
Governor of Hawai'i
Chair, WGA



Doug Burgum
Governor of North Dakota
Vice Chair, WGA