

2022 ANNUAL REPORT



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Western Governors' Policy on Wildfire, Water, and Other Western Priorities

Working Lands Roudtable

Western Prosperity Roundtable



**WESTERN
GOVERNORS'**
ASSOCIATION

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Western states are facing unprecedented challenges related to flooding, drought, wildfire, and invasive species. Only by working together will we be able to address these landscape-wide issues and propel the region into a safer and more resilient future.

With this in mind, I launched Working Lands, Working Communities as my WGA Chair initiative last fall. The goal was to develop bipartisan strategies that support western communities seeking to improve cross-boundary management of lands, wildfire mitigation, and ecosystem restoration.

Over the past year, WGA convened regional experts to discuss these issues at workshops hosted by Utah Gov. Spencer Cox in Salt Lake City, Colorado Gov. Jared Polis in Denver, Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy in Ketchikan, and by me, in Boise. WGA also hosted a series of webinars and podcasts that fostered further conservation on these important topics.

As a result of this extensive work, WGA developed a special report that shares best practices and policy recommendations to support cross-boundary land and natural resource management. The full report can be found on the WGA website (westgov.org).

In service to the goals of the Working Lands, Working Communities Initiative, and building upon the previous work of WGA to develop shared stewardship programs, my fellow western Governors and I signed an agreement this year with the U.S. Departments of the Agriculture (USDA) and Interior (DOI) to create the Task Force on Collaborative Conservation.

The task force will serve as a forum for federal, state, and territorial representatives to collaboratively and effectively respond to the landscape, water, and wildlife challenges facing western states through shared expertise and dialogue, strategic resource and capacity coordination, information and data sharing, and joint problem-solving.

Of course, WGA's policy work extends far beyond the bounds of natural resource issues. The Western Prosperity Roundtable Forum, WGA's platform for developing policies that advance western Governors' shared vision for expanded prosperity throughout the West, hosted its first in-person meeting this year.

The two-day meeting focused on opportunities to leverage federal funding in service to rural economic development. It featured a discussion between Xochitl Torres Small, the Undersecretary for Rural Development at USDA, and Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt. A full report of the meeting can be found on the WGA website.

The WGA also made significant progress advocating for western priorities in Congress. Funding for expanded access to health care, broadband, data sharing, workforce development programs, and electric vehicle charging infrastructure were all approved this year. Investments in fire mitigation and recovery, water infrastructure, clean energy production, and the clean-up of abandoned mines also earned approval. An overview of that work is included in this annual report.

It has been a great year for WGA, and I've truly enjoyed my time as chairman. For the betterment of all western states, I hope to make continued progress on the recommendations surrounding my Working Lands, Working Communities initiative as well as the many important topics within this annual report.

To all involved, thank you for a wonderful year chairing this important, collaborative, beneficial association. It's been a pleasure.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brad Little', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Brad Little
Governor of Idaho
WGA Chairman 2021-2022



Dear Friend of the West,

As another successful program year for WGA draws to a close, I am proud to observe that Western Governors remain the most collegial, effective, and bipartisan group of elected officials that I have ever had the pleasure to serve. Visionary, cooperative and committed to improving life in the West, the Governors produce and pursue bipartisan policy that is distinguished by its substantive detail and motivated by a fierce desire to effect positive change for our region.

Policy resolutions duly adopted by the Governors are far more than academic statements of principles. Rather, they represent the marching orders for WGA's advocacy efforts, and the Governors expect results. Such results were delivered in spades over the past year, as documented throughout the following report.

Every year brings new challenges and offers new opportunities, and WGA responds to both with new initiatives and projects. *Working Lands, Working Communities*, an initiative of WGA Chair **Brad Little** of Idaho, involved an indepth examination of the interdependent relationships between western communities and land managers, and it focused on the role that local communities can play in successful resource management. To read a full summary of the project, including the policy recommendations generated by the initiative, I commend your attention to *Working Lands, Working Communities: Special Report*.

WGA was proud to host the first in-person workshop of its Western Prosperity Roundtable, the Association's platform to help realize the Governors' collective vision to expand economic opportunity throughout the West. WGA also served as the Governors' vehicle for collective action on federal policies affecting the region, working directly with the Administration and Congress on critical issues such as wildfire response and western drought. In performing substantive research to support the Governors' work, WGA

generated a wealth of rich policy content through panel discussions, webinar and podcast production, stakeholder surveys, focused work sessions and other channels of original research. Much of this content is available for review and download at westgov.org.

One of the Governors' legacy projects that is really hitting its stride is the Western Governors' Foundation. For decades, the foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, existed solely as a passive financial arm of WGA. In late 2018, it was reinvented as an authentic philanthropic arm of the Association. The foundation, which recently held its seventh annual Cele-brate the West high school art competition, also launched the Western Governors' Leadership Institute. The institute is designed to reward and encourage the exercise of leadership by young adults in the West. For more information about the Foundation, see the Western Governors Foundation 2022 Annual Report.

WGA is grateful to Chair Little for his outstanding leadership and longstanding commitment to the Association. We are confident that, under the stewardship of incoming Chair **Jared Polis** of Colorado, WGA will continue its record of success and the legacy of Western Governors will be further secured.

I have often asserted that WGA is the most effective bipartisan association of elected officials in the country. I was wrong. It is the most effective such association in the world.

Happy Trails!

James D. Ogsbury,
WGA Executive Director





WORKING LANDS ROUNDTABLE

The Working Lands Roundtable is WGA’s platform for natural resource policy work. It focuses on cross-boundary and multi-disciplinary resource management issues in the West, as well as strategies to enhance the resiliency of western working landscapes and the communities they support.



WORKING LANDS, WORKING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

Idaho Governor **Brad Little**, Chair of the Western Governors’ Association, launched the *Working Lands, Working Communities initiative* in September 2021 to examine the interdependent relationships between western communities and resource management entities, as well as the role that local communities play in successful land planning and management processes.

Many difficult issues face western landscapes. The threat of uncharacteristic wildfire, the water quality and quantity ramifications of persistent drought, the presence and spread of invasive species, and the need to improve overall forest and rangeland health are just a few of the interrelated challenges on our lands.

Communities in the West also confront a variety of challenges. Workforce capacity constraints at all levels of government affect the implementation of projects to address wildfire fuels, attack invasives, or effect habitat improvements at a significant scale. In many communities, inadequate land management infrastructure inhibits the ability to undertake land management projects. Markets for forest and rangeland products are underdeveloped.

“It’s important that we continue to look at improving how we make our



Idaho Gov. Brad Little.

communities more resilient,” Governor Little said at the final workshop in Boise, Idaho. “Everybody says we want healthier watersheds, we want less catastrophic fire, we want [better management of] invasive species. Those overarching goals need to have legs under them –policies, recommendations, where to best invest the next available dollar.”

In pursuit of these goals, the initiative: examined the current relationships between rural communities and their natural resources and working lands; identified barriers to cross-boundary land management; and assessed the local capacity to address ecological challenges. Regional experts assembled to discuss strategies, share success stories, and develop bipartisan strategies to address these issues.

As the initiative progressed, four key themes emerged:

- The importance of collaboration
- The need for market innovation and incentives
- The promise of infrastructure investment
- The challenges of workforce development

The effort’s importance was highlighted by the active participation of Western Governors. WGA is especially indebted to those Governors who hosted workshops in their states: Utah Governor Spencer Cox in Salt Lake City; Colorado Governor Jared Polis in Denver; Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy in Ketchikan; and Idaho Governor Brad Little in Boise.

The initiative’s reach was extended through livestreamed regional workshop sessions, which are available for download on WGA’s YouTube page. WGA also hosted five webinars, six podcasts, and one work session that addressed discrete issues in land management and community engagement.

Learn more about the Initiative and read the full set of policy recommendations in the *Working Lands, Working Communities Initiative Report*.



CROSS BOUNDARY, CROSS JURISDICTION COLLABORATION

The patchwork of ownership rights across western landscapes greatly complicates the environmental challenges facing the region. As the effects of drought, wildfire, and flooding bleed across boundaries, inter-governmental collaboration and coordination have become integral aspects of the Governors’ environmental policy.

Creation of an environment in which governments can effectively collaborate is one of the primary objectives of the Western Governors’ Association. This year, that priority was reflected in the launch of the Task Force on Collaborative Conservation and the expanded use of Shared Stewardship agreements.

Task Force on Collaborative Conservation

WGA signed an agreement with the U.S. Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture (USDA) to enhance collaboration across federal, state, and local jurisdictions. The agreement provides for the activation of the Task Force on Collaborative Conservation to coordinate responses to natural resource challenges and improve environmental outcomes.

“This Task Force,” according to Secretary of Agriculture **Tom Vilsack**, “will be an important vehicle for enhancing cooperation between the Departments of Agriculture and Interior and our Western partners on the conservation challenges impacting the region, as well as coordinating critical funding like the investments secured in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that will make a real difference for communities across the West.”

Shared Stewardship

WGA has continued to promote mechanisms to help wildfire-affected communities address post-fire restoration needs. Under the WGA-USDA Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding, WGA has worked with the Wildland Fire Leadership Council and state and federal agencies to develop tools and increase interagency cooperation to help communities affected by wildfire.



“It is our responsibility to empower local communities to implement these mitigation actions, practice preparedness year-round, and work together to implement climate mitigation plans that are equitable for all communities,” FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell said at the 2021 WGA Winter Meeting.



WILDFIRE

With an unprecedented build-up of hazardous fuels in western forests, wildfires have become bigger and more destructive than ever. Western Governors worked tirelessly to secure new funding mechanisms to help states coordinate and implement pre-fire mitigation and post-fire restoration projects.

Current drought conditions across the West have exacerbated water scarcity and wildfires. To address these issues, WGA engaged with congressional committees and organized meetings with several executive agencies and offices, including the White House, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). These discussions were designed to enhance collaboration

on wildfire mitigation, response, and restoration.

Western Governors scored multiple policy victories with enactment of the FY22 Omnibus Appropriations package:

- Direction to FEMA to increase the federal share of the cost of disaster recovery from 75 percent to at least 90 percent for emergencies in 2020 and 2021.

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- Authority for DOI to enter into grants and cooperative agreements with various forms of firefighting groups – such as rural fire protection districts and rangeland fire protection associations – to pay for equipment and training.
- Funding for research to improve suppression of wildfires in the wildland urban interface.
- Establishment of the Center for Wildfire Smoke Research and Practice to study the effects of wildfire smoke on public health and provide insight as to how smoke migrates during a wildfire.
- Language urging timely and transparent Cooperator Letter decisions from DOI and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to help states respond to regional wildfires.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act also includes a number of victories for Western Governors:

- \$3.4 billion to DOI and USFS for wildfire risk reduction through community wildfire defense grants, mechanical thinning, controlled burns, the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program, and firefighting.
- \$2.1 billion for DOI and USFS to restore the ecological health of land and water through voluntary efforts.
- Establishment of a commission to study and recommend improvements to federal policies related to wildland fire prevention, mitigation, suppression, management, and land rehabilitation.

Direction to USDA and DOI to develop a system that ranks the need for ecological restoration involving vegetation removal

on federal land. For federal land units that are designated as “high” or “very high” priority, the agencies are directed to provide financial assistance to entities seeking to establish or improve sawmills or other wood-processing facilities in close proximity to those units.

- Direction to USFS and NRCS to establish a “Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership Program” to improve the health and resilience of forest landscapes across various ownership types. \$90 million is authorized for fiscal years 2022 and 2023 to carry out the program.
- Inclusion of wildfire damage as an authorized expenditure of the U.S. Department of Transportation for the repair or reconstruction of highways, roads, and trails.





 **FOREST AND RANGELAND MANAGEMENT**

Whether coordinating forest treatments, restoring ecosystems, or developing new product markets, Western Governors are committed to building more resilient communities by improving forest and rangeland management.

Identifying means for more effective forest and rangeland management across the West has been a central objective of Working Lands, Working Communities. Included among the many topics explored over the past year are:

- The effect of Farm Bill tools like Good Neighbor Authority and Shared Stewardship Contracting on the pace and scale of active management in western landscapes.
- Challenges that land managers and communities face in deploying funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) for wildfire management and ecosystem restoration due to diminished forest management capacity.
- Forest management projects that successfully protect western communities from potentially catastrophic wildfires and insect infestations.
- The need for a thriving wood and woody biomass product market to support critical forest management work.
- The need for a broad range of mitigation strategies, including pre-wildfire mitigation and traditional Indigenous burning practices.
- Improvement of community capacity and federal programs to enhance the implementation of both pre-fire mitigation and post-fire restoration work.

In other advocacy

- WGA communicated Western Governors’ priorities to congressional committees with Farm Bill jurisdiction. The forestry title of the Farm Bill is important to the West, where public land timber is of key importance to the agricultural economy. Western Governors shared their perspectives on the region’s

ecological challenges, federal voluntary conservation programs, and opportunities to promote cohesive cross-boundary land management efforts.

- Western Governors expressed concerns to the U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Agriculture about ambiguous thresholds for formal consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. These consultation requirements could interfere with the implementation of forest management projects authorized by the IIJA.
- Western Governors expressed support to the Senate for certain components of the FEMA Improvement Reform and Efficiency Act of 2021 (FIRE Act) to improve federal emergency response and wildfire preparedness.





CONSERVATION AND SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Western Governors often speak about the importance of local knowledge when coordinating conservation efforts. As the Biden Administration enacts policies related to its America the Beautiful Initiative, Western Governors were in close communication with federal agencies this year to ensure that western priorities are reflected in federal conservation decisions.

Conservation and restoration of landscapes were a focus of the Working Lands, Working Communities initiative, which explored opportunities to create conservation-oriented market incentives and alternative income streams on working agricultural, ranching, and forest lands in the West.

It also examined emerging planning and collaboration tools to assist resource managers in achieving cross-boundary solutions to resource challenges at a landscape scale.

America the Beautiful

Western Governors repeatedly emphasized to the Biden Administration the importance of ongoing state consultation with respect to its initiative, *Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful*. The Governors seek to ensure that western state, local, and private land conservation efforts are properly recognized in any effort to quantify conservation efforts under the initiative.

Sage Grouse

WGA urged the Bureau of Land Management to collaborate on a multi-jurisdictional basis concerning the management of Greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat on public lands. The Governors specifically highlighted the Shared Stewardship Strategy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a means of fostering coordination.



INVASIVE SPECIES

In accordance with WGA Policy Resolution 2022-11, Biosecurity and Invasive Species Management, Western Governors worked to stop the spread of invasive species – especially with respect to quagga and zebra mussels.

Aquatic Invasive Species

The spread of quagga and zebra mussels has significantly affected the region's waterways and caused billions of dollars in economic losses. Consequently, Western Governors emphatically communicated the urgency of the threat to Congress and the Executive Branch.

In response to an April 2021 letter from Western Governors, Interior Secretary **Deb Haaland**, Agriculture Secretary **Tom Vilsack**, and Assistant Secretary of the Army **Michael Connor** reaffirmed the importance of working with states on invasive species response and mitigation. The U.S.

Department of the Interior, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also committed to expanding invasive mussel training exercises to Missouri River Basin states.

In an attempt to further expand prevention and mitigation efforts for aquatic invasive species, Western Governors supported two major pieces of legislation to close gaps in federal authorities inhibiting the fight against zebra and quagga mussels:

- The Stop the Spread of Invasive Mussels Act of 2021, which would enable state and federal agencies to more effectively combat the spread of aquatic nuisance species in western waters.
- Language in the pending Outdoor Recreation Act to support more effective management of aquatic nuisance species.

WGA also assisted in the coordination of several states' response to invasive mussel-infested aquarium moss balls and dedicated an episode of its Out West podcast to the topic.

Terrestrial Invasive Species

Terrestrial invasive species – especially invasive annual grasses – received a good deal of attention from the *Working Lands, Working Communities* initiative. Experts discussed tools and strategies to effectively manage these invasives. Learn more about these efforts in the *Working Lands, Working Communities Initiative Report*.



 **DATA**

Quality data is a critical component of any modern-day decision-making process. As western states seek to tackle landscape-wide environmental issues like wildfire, drought, and invasive species, improving the data collection and sharing capabilities at all levels of government was a key area of focus for Western Governors.

The availability and coordination of data collection and use among local communities, counties, states, and federal agencies was a major theme of the Working Lands, Working Communities initiative. Of particular interest was how data from local and county resource planning programs can be better integrated into cross-boundary land management efforts – an issue addressed in WGA Policy Resolution 2021-02, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making.

Read about specific recommendations for improving data use for cross-boundary land management in the Working Lands, Working Communities Initiative Report.

FY22 Appropriations

Western Governors scored two victories for the increased use of local data in land use decision making in the FY22 Omnibus Appropriations package approved by Congress:

- Direction to the Bureau of Land Management to create a framework for collecting and analyzing socioeconomic data on how public land management decisions affect individuals and communities, and how to use this framework to inform management decisions.
- Direction to the Federal Highway Administration to conduct a National Highway Geospatial Data Standards Development Feasibility Study, which will examine geospatial data standards in all 50 states.

 **ENERGY**

The West and its Governors play a critical role in diversifying America’s energy portfolio. The Governors made significant progress in pursuing an “all of the above” approach to power generation and use in accordance with WGA Policy Resolution 2022-01, Energy in the West.

Electric Vehicles

Early in FY22, WGA completed its work on the *Electric Vehicle Roadmap Initiative* of immediate past Chair, Oregon **Governor Kate Brown**, who was featured in a WGA Out West podcast episode on the outcomes of the initiative. WGA promoted the initiative’s recommendations throughout the year by:

- Sharing EV policy priorities with the U.S. Department of Transportation to aid in its development of a Research, Development, and Technology Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2022–2026. The Governors highlighted various EV infrastructure issues unique to western states, including the need to upgrade rural electric grid infrastructure to accommodate certain EV charging technologies.
- Encouraging various congressional committees to support the expansion

of EV infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. These efforts were rewarded in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which includes funding for EV charging infrastructure.

- Urging the Federal Highway Administration to consider WGA’s Electric Vehicles Roadmap Initiative Report and policy resolution, Transportation Infrastructure in the Western United States, as the agency develops guidance to implement the electric vehicle provisions of the IIJA.

Clean Hydrogen

Western Governors forcefully recommended that the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) focus on the implementation of a provision of the IIJA that directs the department to develop regional clean hydrogen hubs.



Specifically, the Governors recommended the department make use of the region’s diverse mix of energy resources, robust energy transport infrastructure, the presence of multiple national labs, and a high concentration of energy sector workers to support the development of multiple hydrogen hubs. “Western Governors stand ready to work in partnership with DOE to leverage the IIJA and support the development of hydrogen and other advanced energy technologies,” the Governors wrote in correspondence with the DOE.





MINERALS POLICY

Critical minerals are an essential component for carbon-free power generation and advanced technology. Developing a robust, domestic supply of these rare earth materials is a matter of great importance for Western Governors. Learn more about the Governors’ proposed national minerals policy in WGA Policy Resolution 2022-08, National Minerals Policy.

Critical Minerals

Noting the importance of critical mineral supply chains to clean energy technology and consumer goods, WGA emphasized the need for Congress, in consultation with states, to develop a viable national minerals policy that, “enables mineral exploration and development in a manner that balances the nation’s industrial and security needs with adequate protection of natural resources and the environment.”

Abandoned Hardrock Mines

Western Governors supported the Good Samaritan Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act, which limits the legal liability of Good Samaritans who help with abandoned hardrock mine cleanup.

According to the Governors, “the proposed pilot program has the potential to fully unlock the power of the Hardrock Mine Reclamation Fund established by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.” It would also, “help pave the way for a comprehensive and permanent mechanism to address the 22,500 mines that the Government Accountability Office deems hazardous to the environment.”



WATER

As states possess authority for water management and allocation, Western Governors are the tip of the spear when it comes to addressing drought. With the effects of drought affecting every corner of the region, Western Governors are coordinating a regional response and working with the federal government to allocate funding for updating water infrastructure.

Water Infrastructure

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) includes multiple provisions that align with Governors’ water policy as outlined in WGA Policy Resolution 2021-08, Water Resource Management in the West, and WGA Policy Resolution 2021-10, Water Quality in the West:

- \$55 billion in new spending to address water infrastructure needs and replenish EPA’s State Revolving Loan Funds.
- \$8 billion to the U.S. Department of the Interior in fiscal years 2022–2026 to support water storage and conveyance projects and address needs associated with aging infrastructure. These resources will fund regional rural water projects, WaterSMART drought resiliency projects, water recycling and reuse projects, and water desalination projects.
- Authority for Sanitary Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse municipal grants and

requirements to allocate at least 25 percent of funding to systems serving rural or disadvantaged communities.

- \$50 million annually through FY26 for the existing Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act Loan Program, which provides low-cost loans for a variety of water infrastructure projects.

FY22 Appropriations

The FY22 Omnibus Appropriations package also funds several key priorities of Western Governors:

- \$9.5 million for the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Snow Survey and Water Forecasting program.
- \$109 million for grants and studies administered by the Bureau of Reclamation’s WaterSMART program.
- \$9 million for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Planning Assistance to States program.



WESTERN PROSPERITY ROUNDTABLE

The Western Prosperity Roundtable is a platform for WGA's work on policies that advance Western Governors' vision for expanded prosperity throughout the West. The Roundtable assembles community members, policymakers, and experts on interrelated issues affecting opportunity and quality of life to discuss strategies to promote vibrant communities and thriving local economies.

This spring, Oklahoma Governor **Kevin Stitt** hosted the Roundtable's first in-person forum in Oklahoma City. It featured a conversation with Xochitl Torres Small, the Under Secretary for Rural Development at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as roundtable discussions on the implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, broadband expansion, building rural capacity, new energy technologies, and modernizing rural economic development.

Governor Stitt opened the 2022 Western Prosperity Roundtable by touting the recent growth of his state's economy and highlighting significant economic opportunities throughout the region, including manufacture of electric vehicles, production of hydrogen fuel and critical minerals, and expansion of broadband access.

"Everybody wants the best opportunity for wage growth, everybody wants the best opportunity for our kids coming out of college," he said. "So, we're pushing economic development and getting our economy going... it helps education, it helps infrastructure, it helps health care."

See highlights and watch recordings of all the event's roundtable discussions on WGA's website.



Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt.



RURAL PROSPERITY

WGA made significant progress in the past year to elevate the issues rural western communities face with respect to economic development. Outreach focused on the need to remove barriers that rural communities confront in accessing federal resources and ensuring that federal programs are designed to meet the needs of the rural West.

Economic Equity

Throughout the year, WGA engaged with a variety of federal agencies to ensure that rural communities are a major consideration in the Biden Administration's efforts to improve equity:

- Western Governors provided material to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA-RD) to inform the agency's review of barriers that underserved communities face in accessing programs and services.
- WGA convened Region VIII representatives of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Small Business Administration, and USDA-RD, to collaborate on improving access to economic development assistance by resource-constrained communities.
- Western Governors highlighted the importance of ensuring that the rural West can take advantage of the opportunities created by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). This was a focus of the Western Prosperity Roundtable Forum, at which federal agencies (including USDA-RD, EDA, and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration) participated in discussions with state policymakers on rural equity in federal programs, broadband funding in the IIJA, and modernization of economic development strategies.



Rural Capacity

The IIJA includes several provisions that align with Western Governors' rural economic policy, including:

- Expanded funding for technical assistance to small, rural, and underserved communities, including substantial increases to the Assistance for Small and Disadvantaged Communities Drinking Water Grant program, which helps public water systems meet Safe Drinking Water Act requirements.
- Funding specific to rural areas, including 50 percent of the \$7.5 billion for a new Local and Regional Project Assistance program, which provides for capital investments in surface transportation infrastructure.
- Provisions to help rural communities navigate federal programs, including the Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES) Initiative.

FY22 Appropriations

The FY22 Omnibus Appropriations package includes several rural

development victories for Western Governors:

- Increased funding for technical assistance and capacity building through EDA and USDA-RD, including a new Rural Community Development Initiative specifically focused on developing the capacity of community organizations to undertake economic development projects.
- Increased flexibility for states and local governments to meet federal match requirements, including provisions to permit other federal funds to be used as matching funds.
- Establishment of a minimum percentage of funding to be directed to rural areas for certain programs.

In other advocacy

WGA communicated Western Governors' policy priorities to various congressional committees with Farm Bill jurisdiction. The rural development title of the Act authorizes several programs of particular value to the West, the most rural region in the country.



HEALTH CARE

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed shortcomings in the region's health care systems – especially in terms of access to mental, behavioral, and substance misuse services. In response, Western Governors mobilized to meet the growing demand for services by expanding access to telehealth and developing programs to address the shortage of health care workers.

Telehealth

The COVID-19 pandemic generated significant changes to health care access, especially concerning the expanded use of telehealth services. Telehealth was a major policy priority of Western Governors over the past year. Their leadership was exhibited through:

- Adoption of an updated health care resolution, 2022-07, Physical and Behavioral Health Care in Western States, expanding gubernatorial telehealth policy.
- Development of extensive recommendations for a robust telehealth system to benefit rural communities and underserved citizens throughout the West.

Mental and Behavioral Health

Western Governors are also focused on the need for better and more expansive mental and behavioral health tools and policies.

WGA engaged with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to help inform the Department's work on a national strategy to address mental health and combat substance misuse. The Association hosted a briefing with HHS, states, and territories to discuss challenges and strategies for implementation of a national 988 suicide hotline and other crisis care initiatives.

WGA advanced the Governors' priorities for enhancing mental and behavioral health care with Congress. The Governors' policy highlights the need to expand opportunities for early

intervention and law enforcement diversion, as well as the need for transitional and permanent supportive housing with coordinated health and social services.

FY22 Appropriations

The FY22 Omnibus Appropriations package includes provisions aligning with Western Governors' health care priorities:

- \$2 billion to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for mental health programs, including substantial increases for the implementation of 988, the new Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
- Increased funding for public health infrastructure investment, including a new funding stream to build the capacity of public health partners.





CONNECTIVITY

Western Governors have long advocated for the federal government to help expand broadband access in rural areas and on tribal lands. These efforts were redoubled as the need for high-speed internet has become an essential tool for doing business.

Broadband was a key topic at WGA's Western Prosperity Roundtable Forum this spring, as experts examined challenges and opportunities that states and stakeholders face in leveraging Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funding through National Telecommunications and Information Administration programs.

Learn more by reading the special report from the 2022 Western Prosperity Roundtable Forum, or watch recordings of each session on WGA's YouTube Page.

The Governors also regularly submitted testimony to congressional committees and federal agencies about the need to expand broadband funding and accelerate broadband infrastructure projects in rural and underserved areas.

Broadband

The Western Governors' sustained advocacy for improved connectivity in the rural West bore fruit this year as several of their recommendations were adopted by Congress and the Administration.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) ReConnect Program 2022 Funding Opportunity Announcement adopted gubernatorial recommendations on program eligibility and speed requirements, modifying the definition of unserved areas to more realistically reflect service needs.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act also includes NTIA funding for tribal connectivity, as well as significant amounts for states, especially through the \$42 billion



Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program.

The Federal Highway Administration's Broadband Infrastructure Deployment Rule provides for the installation of broadband alongside other utilities during road construction projects to obviate the need for further excavation in the future. These are referred to as "dig once" projects. The rule also provides for the identification of state broadband utility coordinators to facilitate broadband right-of-way efforts.

FY22 Appropriations

The FY22 Omnibus Appropriations package includes language:

- Encouraging the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

to prioritize the establishment of a user-friendly process for consumers, states, and others to challenge the accuracy of coverage maps and information submitted by broadband service providers about the availability of service.

- Encouraging the FCC to prioritize rural broadband projects in unserved and underserved areas and support deployment of last-mile broadband infrastructure to underserved areas.
- Appropriating \$536 million for the expansion of broadband service, including \$436.6 million for the USDA's ReConnect program, for which Western Governors have expressed strong support.

 **DATA**

Improving data-sharing capabilities across local, state, tribal, and federal governments is key to the effective implementation of policy and distribution of federal aid. With historic levels of funding in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and American Rescue Plan, streamlining the region’s data sharing is a priority of Western Governors as expressed in WGA resolution 2021-02, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision-Making.

WGA produced a significant body of work this year to improve state-federal coordination on data development and sharing, including:

- Mapping analysis of federal efforts around the implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act of 2018.
- State consultation and coordination related to federal data and datasets through the organization of WGA’s

Intergovernmental Data Sharing Project’s State Chief Data Officer Working Group.

- Correspondence to federal entities highlighting the importance of using state data in federal decision-making and the need to improve the nation’s data-sharing capacities to encourage more robust collaboration.

Many of the Governors’ data-related policy objectives are also reflected in

the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which:

- Creates the Prioritization Process Pilot program to support data-driven approaches to infrastructure planning.
- Authorizes a U.S. Department of Transportation work plan for the review, update, and development of data analysis to assist local communities with infrastructure investment decisions.



 **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Following the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Western Governors worked closely with federal agencies to ensure that western priorities were reflected in how the funding is allocated and for what projects.

Having facilitated discussions between the U.S. Department of Transportation and interested states on the implementation of transportation programs in the IIJA, Western Governors scored a number of infrastructure victories in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), including:

- Substantial funding for highways, mass transit, bridges, and the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation program.
- Funding for electric vehicle infrastructure, including \$2.5 billion for charging and fueling infrastructure grants.
- Codification of the “One Federal Decision,” designed to limit environmental reviews for infrastructure projects to two years and 200 pages.

WGA also participated in a number of meetings with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and facilitated discussions between CEQ and interested states regarding proposed National Environmental Policy Act regulations.





WORKFORCE

Workforce shortages slowed the region's economic recovery in the wake of COVID-19. The need for employees, however, also represents an opportunity for those looking to change industries or up-skill and secure a better-paying job. The Governors seized upon that opportunity by working with the federal government to expand apprenticeship programs and other workforce development programs.

Western Governors continued to support state registered apprenticeship programs and successfully advocated for federal programs and policies that will help workers and jobseekers acquire in-demand skills:

- Western Governors encouraged Congress to increase access to short-term education and skills training by expanding the Federal Pell Grant program.
- Western Governors supported increased funding for registered apprenticeships in the FY22 Omnibus Appropriations package.
- Western Governors supported the U.S. Department of Labor's proposed rescission of the Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Rule (IRAP) after previously communicating concerns that the creation of IRAPs in sectors outside the jurisdiction of the state apprenticeship agencies may cause confusion and undermine the significant time and effort that states have invested in registered apprenticeships.
- Western Governors amplified strategies for helping people get the training they need for jobs in specific sectors of importance to the West, including agriculture, forestry, and cybersecurity. Western Governors also highlighted training and employment opportunities in in-demand sectors for people with disabilities.





RESOLUTIONS

In FY22, the Governors approved 12 policy resolutions. They include:

Policy Resolution 2022-01, Energy in the West: In this resolution, Western Governors communicate their collective energy policy priorities for the West and offer policy recommendations on grid modernization and resilience, energy innovation and technology, and economic and workforce development. The resolution recognizes the significant energy resources provided by western states and discusses the importance of creating an effective state-federal relationship to support energy development, land management, and environmental protection in the West.

Policy Resolution 2022-02, Air Quality Protection and Management: In this resolution, Western Governors communicate the importance of cooperative federalism in air quality management. The resolution provides recommendations to improve state-federal cooperation in the regulation of air quality, ozone and particulate matter, exceptional events, regional haze, wildfire, and methane and hydrofluorocarbon emissions. The Governors encourage the use of

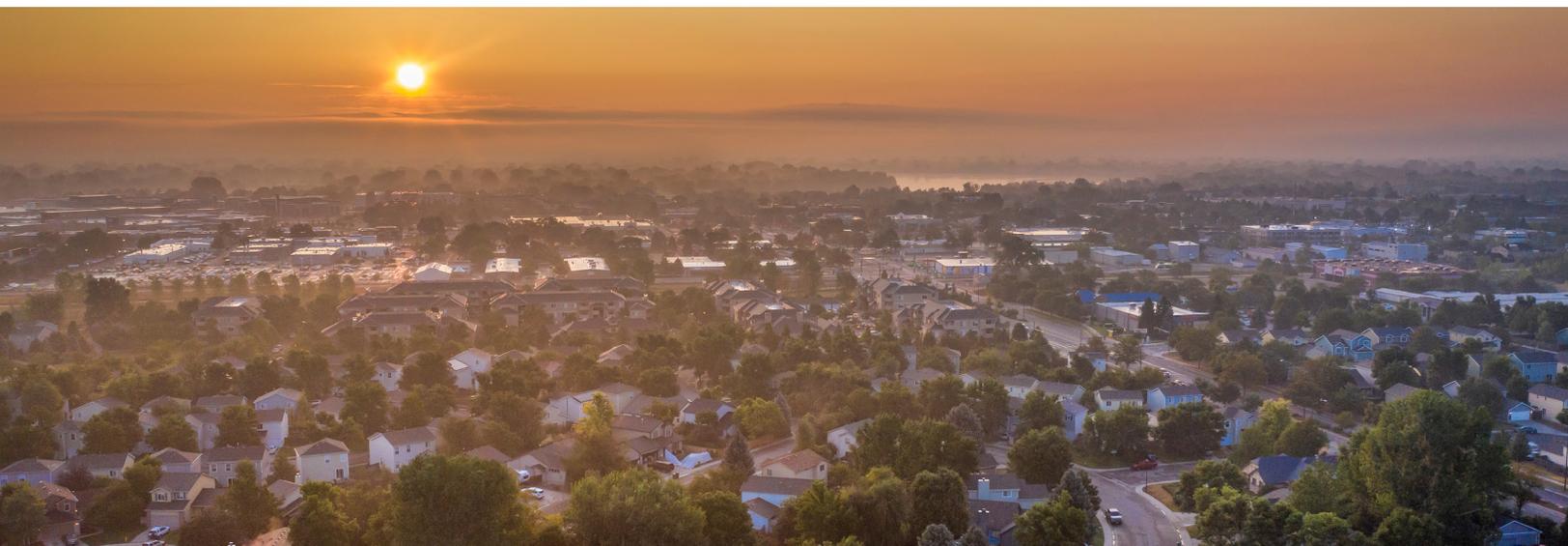
prescribed fire, which is managed as part of state air quality programs, to reduce the air quality effects of uncharacteristic wildfire in the West.

Policy Resolution 2022-03, Workforce Development in the Western United States: Western Governors support expansion of work-based learning, high-quality career and technical education, and lifelong learning through workforce development policies. Governors also emphasize the need for flexibility in workforce system funding to help states anticipate and respond to changing economic conditions with creative solutions. In addition to increased investment in state data infrastructure, the resolution encourages better alignment across federal workforce, housing, human services, and education programs to improve delivery of services.

Policy Resolution 2022-04, Foreign Visitor Preclearance: Governors support the expanded use of air preclearance operations at foreign airports to streamline international travel, protect the safety and security

of travelers, and ease burdens placed on small or rural airports that accept a significant number of international travelers. The resolution describes the need to expand safety protocols for travel during the COVID-19 pandemic and urges Customs and Border Protection to comply with federal and state health guidance.

Policy Resolution 2022-05, Cybersecurity: The cybersecurity of their states and the nation is a high priority of Western Governors. In this resolution, Western Governors encourage Congress and the Administration to fully fund state election security measures and to work cooperatively with states in implementing the newly created state and local cybersecurity grant program. It also provides recommendations for increasing the cybersecurity workforce, addressing threats to critical infrastructure and supply chains, and improving cyber literacy. Furthermore, it addresses cross-agency and cross-sector coordination, mitigation and prevention of cybercrime, and incentives for information sharing and innovation.



Policy Resolution 2022-06,

Compensatory Mitigation: Mitigation plays an important role in wildlife management and conservation, and Western Governors use mitigation programs and policies in developing and executing species conservation strategies. In this resolution, Western Governors call on federal agencies to adopt and implement state-supported compensatory mitigation programs and policies that highlight the states' various compensatory mitigation guidelines.

Policy Resolution 2022-07, Physical and Behavioral Health Care in Western States:

Access to quality physical and behavioral health care services is an important factor in maintaining and enhancing the quality of life in western states. This resolution identifies health care challenges affecting the West, including those that have grown increasingly pronounced due to COVID-19, such as personnel shortages in the health care industry and limited access to behavioral health and substance misuse services. The resolution also outlines the Governors' recommendations to address these challenges, including: federal regulatory changes to create an environment that is conducive to the use of telehealth; investment in public health infrastructure; and strong state-federal collaboration to ensure that all levels of government are working together to promote the best interests of western citizens.

Policy Resolution 2022-08, National

Minerals Policy: Western Governors support building on the 1970 Mining and Minerals Policy Act with legislation and policies that unlock our domestic mineral potential and ensure access to

metals critical to U.S. economic and national security. The Governors emphasize the need to address the critical issue of permitting delays and the timely processing of mining permit applications. The resolution also discusses the state-federal relationship in the context of mine permitting processes and recognizes that an increased supply of domestically produced minerals is essential to the growth of alternative energy technologies.

Policy Resolution 2022-09, Radioactive Materials Management:

The resolution establishes Western Governors' policy on radioactive materials management. Specifically, the resolution supports the U.S. Department of Energy's safe and uneventful transportation of transuranic waste through western states to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant disposal site in New Mexico. It notes the need for ongoing compliance with federal radioactive waste transport safety requirements and early coordination and effective communication with state, tribal and local governments. The resolution also affirms that no radioactive waste storage or disposal facility should be located within the geographic boundaries of a western state or U.S. territory without the written consent of the current Governor.

Policy Resolution 2022-10, Federal-State Land Exchanges and Purchases:

Federally owned lands are widespread throughout western states and are often interspersed with state, tribal, county, municipal, and private lands. This ownership pattern complicates various land management activities, including wildfire mitigation, habitat

conservation, and watershed protection. In this resolution, Western Governors call on Congress to simplify and expedite federal-state land exchange, sale and conveyance processes to help address checkerboard land ownership challenges in the West. The resolution also encourages the Bureau of Land Management to fully leverage its authority to dispose of public land parcels for other public purposes.

Policy Resolution 2022-11, Biosecurity and Invasive Species

Management: This resolution addresses invasive species management and includes: a call to address the destructive relationship between invasive grasses and wildfires; support for mechanisms to enhance regional invasive species research, planning and coordination; and recommendations to Congress and federal agencies to improve invasive species management on federal lands and support state-led management efforts.

Policy Resolution 2022-12, Recreation and Tourism on Public Lands:

This resolution articulates Western Governors' policy on the management of recreation and tourism on public lands. Governors support public access and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities while protecting ecological, economic and cultural resources. The resolution recommends actions the federal government should take to ensure that federal land management agencies have the resources needed to accommodate increased visitation, improve visitor experience, support local economies, and maintain public lands for multiple uses.

Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semi-annual basis. All of WGA's current resolutions can be found at westgov.org/resolutions/



MEETINGS AND OUTREACH

During the past year, Western Governors convened regional policymakers and thought leaders, including several Cabinet Secretaries, to address critical issues facing the West. WGA meetings feature in-depth policy conversations and promote the development of collaborative relationships throughout the region.

2021 Annual Meeting

June 30 – July 1

The 2021 Annual Meeting virtually convened 16 Western Governors and five Cabinet members for public discussions on the future of energy, shared stewardship, land management, environmental policy, and the economic recovery from COVID-19.

PARTICIPATING GOVERNORS: WGA Chair **Kate Brown** (Oregon), WGA Vice Chair **Brad Little** (Idaho), **Mike Dunleavy** (Alaska), **Doug Ducey** (Arizona), **Gavin Newsom** (California), **Jared Polis** (Colorado), **Lou Guerrero** (Guam), **David Ige** (Hawaii), **Steve Sisolak** (Nevada), **Michelle Lujan Grisham** (New Mexico), **Doug Burgum** (North Dakota), **Ralph Torres** (Northern Mariana Islands), **Kevin Stitt** (Oklahoma), **Kristi Noem** (South Dakota), **Spencer Cox** (Utah), and **Mark Gordon** (Wyoming).

SPECIAL GUESTS: The Governors hosted roundtable discussions with Interior Secretary **Deb Haaland**, Energy Secretary **Jennifer Granholm**, Agriculture Secretary **Tom Vilsack**, and Commerce Secretary **Gina Raimondo**. The Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, **Michael Regan**, and Alberta Premier **Jason Kenney** also delivered presentations to the Governors.

RESOLUTIONS: At the meeting, Western Governors approved five policy resolutions on: Disaster Preparedness and Response; Transportation



Governors at the 2021 Winter Meeting in Coronado, California (from left): Gov. Mark Gordon, Wyoming; Gov. Doug Burgum, North Dakota; Gov. David Ige, Hawaii; Gov. Spencer Cox, Utah; Gov. Jared Polis, Colorado; Gov. Brad Little, Idaho; Gov. Kate Brown, Oregon.

Infrastructure in the Western United States; Water Resource Management in the West; Cleaning Up Abandoned Hardrock Mines in the West; and Water Quality in the West.

2021 Winter Meeting

Dec. 9-10

WGA hosted eight Western Governors and three Cabinet Secretaries at the 2021 Winter Meeting on Dec. 9 and 10 – the Association's first in-person meeting in two years. The two-day event in Coronado, California, featured roundtable discussions among Governors, Cabinet Secretaries, and regional experts about COVID-19 recovery, disaster response, modernization of the nation's energy infrastructure, computer chip manufacturing, missing and murdered indigenous persons, and advanced aerial mobility.

PARTICIPATING GOVERNORS: WGA Chair **Brad Little** (Idaho), WGA Vice Chair **Jared Polis** (Colorado), **Doug Ducey** (Arizona), **David Ige** (Hawaii), **Doug Burgum** (North Dakota), **Kate Brown** (Oregon), **Spencer Cox** (Utah), and **Mark Gordon** (Wyoming)

SPECIAL GUESTS: The Governors hosted roundtable discussions with Interior Secretary **Deb Haaland**, Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator **Deanne Criswell**, Chair of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission **Richard Glick**, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs for the U.S. Department of the Interior **Bryan Newland**, Chair of the Wyoming Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Task Force **Cara Chambers**, Chief Executive Officer for Micron Technology **Sanjay Mehrotra**, President of HP Federal LLC and Head of U.S. Public Sector for HP Inc. **Todd Gustafson**, renowned pollster and communications professional **Frank Luntz**, and **Cyrus Sigari**, a co-founder and managing partner at UP.Partners.

RESOLUTIONS: At the meeting, Western Governors approved seven policy resolutions on: Energy in the West; Air Quality Protection and Management; Workforce Development in the Western United States; Foreign Visitor Preclearance; Cybersecurity; Compensatory Mitigation; and Physical and Behavioral Health Care in Western States.





Cabinet Secretary Breakfast attendees (left to right): Wyoming Gov. **Mark Gordon**, Idaho Gov. **Brad Little**, North Dakota Gov. **Doug Burgum**, Secretary of the Interior **Deb Haaland**, Oklahoma Gov. **Kevin Stitt**, Colorado Gov. **Jared Polis**, Secretary of Agriculture **Tom Vilsack**, Secretary of Energy **Jennifer Granholm**, Arizona Gov. **Doug Ducey**, Secretary of Veterans Affairs **Denis McDonough**, Oregon Gov. **Kate Brown**, Hawaii Gov. **David Ige**, New Mexico Gov. **Michelle Lujan Grisham**, Utah Gov. **Spencer Cox**, and WGA executive Director **Jim Ogsbury**.

CABINET SECRETARY BREAKFAST

WGA hosted a Cabinet Secretary breakfast in December at the Marriott Marquis in Washington, D.C. Five cabinet members and ten Western Governors discussed a range of critical issues facing the West and strategies for promoting a stronger state-federal relationship.

Participating Governors: WGA Chair **Brad Little** (Idaho), WGA Vice Chair **Jared Polis** (Colorado), **Doug Ducey** (Arizona), **David Ige** (Hawaii), **Michelle Lujan Grisham** (New Mexico), **Doug Burgum** (North Dakota), **Kate Brown** (Oregon), **Kevin Stitt** (Oklahoma), **Spencer Cox** (Utah), and **Mark Gordon** (Wyoming).

PARTICIPATING CABINET SECRETARIES: Interior Secretary **Deb Haaland**, Agriculture Secretary **Tom Vilsack**, Energy Secretary **Jennifer Granholm**, Veteran Affairs Secretary **Denis McDonough**, and Health and Human Services Secretary **Xavier Becerra**.

MEDIA COVERAGE

WGA continued to earn significant media exposure thanks to its important bipartisan policy work. Over the past year, WGA was mentioned in well over 100 articles and op-eds in more than 600 publications, including POLITICO, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Hill*, CBS News, and Yahoo News. Topics included the launch of the Task Force for Collaborative Conservation, as well as WGA’s work on electric vehicle charging infrastructure, wildfire mitigation, cross-boundary land management, and rural economic development.



Utah Gov. **Spencer Cox**.

PODCASTS

WGA produced 12 episodes of its ‘Out West’ podcast in FY22, covering a range of topics, including: the economic opportunities presented by electric vehicles, diversification of the cybersecurity workforce, invasive species management, and fire mitigation. Since its launch in 2020, ‘Out West’ has garnered over 5,200 downloads, 2,100 of which in FY22. Check out the full ‘Out West’ archive on Apple podcasts or Spotify.

VIDEO

WGA’s 2021 Virtual Annual Meeting attracted 250 registrants and earned over 5,000 views on WGA’s YouTube page. Over the course of the year, WGA’s video presentations – which included webinars and workshops for Governor Brad Little’s WGA Chair Initiative, Working Lands, Working Communities – were viewed nearly 14,000 times on YouTube for a total of 1,600 hours – a 300 percent increase over the previous year.

WEBSITE, SOCIAL MEDIA

With rich content produced in connection with Governor **Brad Little**’s WGA Chair Initiative, *Working Lands*, *Working Communities*, traffic on WGA’s website increased by nearly 10 percent in FY22. That same content drove a 95 percent increase in engagements on WGA’s Twitter account, a 2,000 percent increase in visits to WGA’s LinkedIn page and generated a 5,000 percent increase in impressions on WGA’s Facebook page.

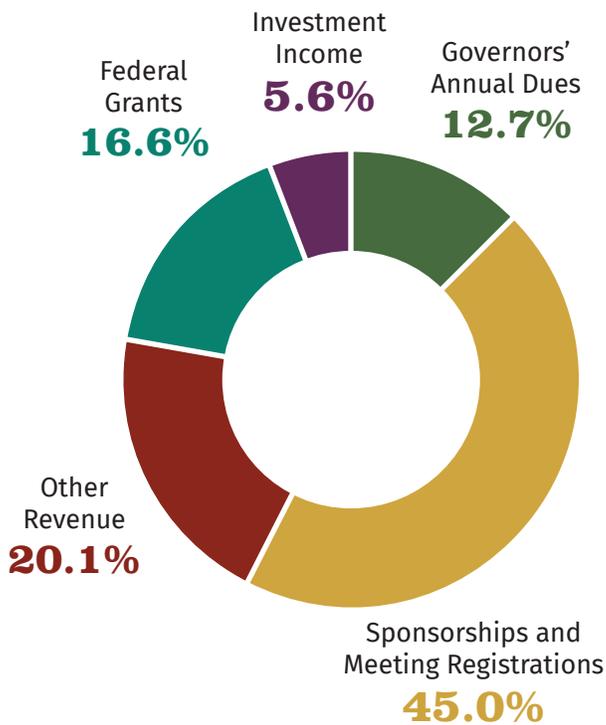


FINANCES

WGA income is derived from Western Governors’ annual dues, sponsor contributions, meeting registration fees, grants, investment income, and other sources. WGA’s income totaled \$5.4 million for the fiscal year, with approximately 20 percent of that amount received from federal agencies to provide technical assistance to states and other contractors. The following is excerpted from the audit report of JDS Professional Group, Certified Public Accountants, Consultants, and Advisors. This information is for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022.

Revenues

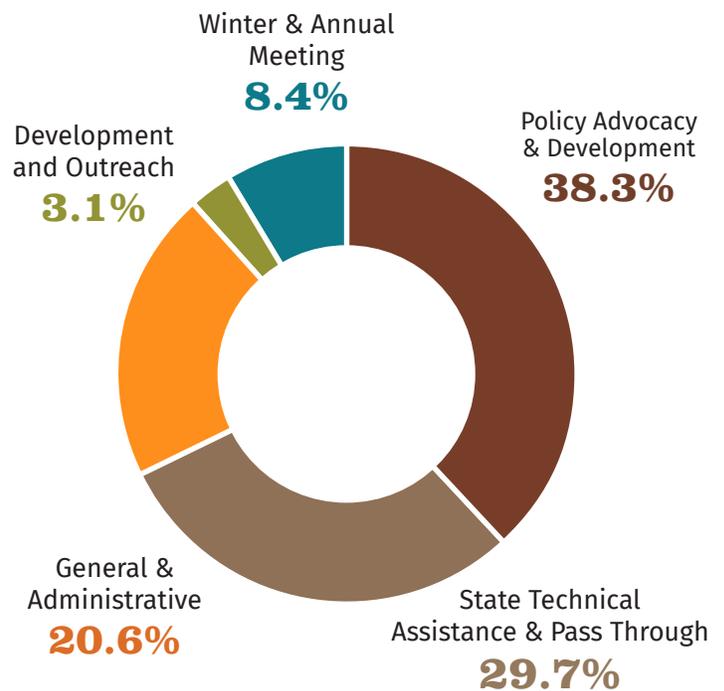
July 1, 2021—June 30, 2022



Governors' Annual Dues	\$696,600
Meeting Sponsorships and Registrations	\$2,462,910
Federal Grants	\$1,098,371
Investment Income	\$906,416
Other Revenue	\$306,828
Total	\$5,471,125

Expenses

July 1, 2021—June 30, 2022



Policy Advocacy and Development	\$1,322,915
State Technical Assistance and Pass Through Funds	\$1,024,112
General & Admin	\$709,073
Development and Outreach	\$105,523
Winter & Annual Meeting	\$288,575
Total	\$3,450,198

Net Income: **\$2,020,927**



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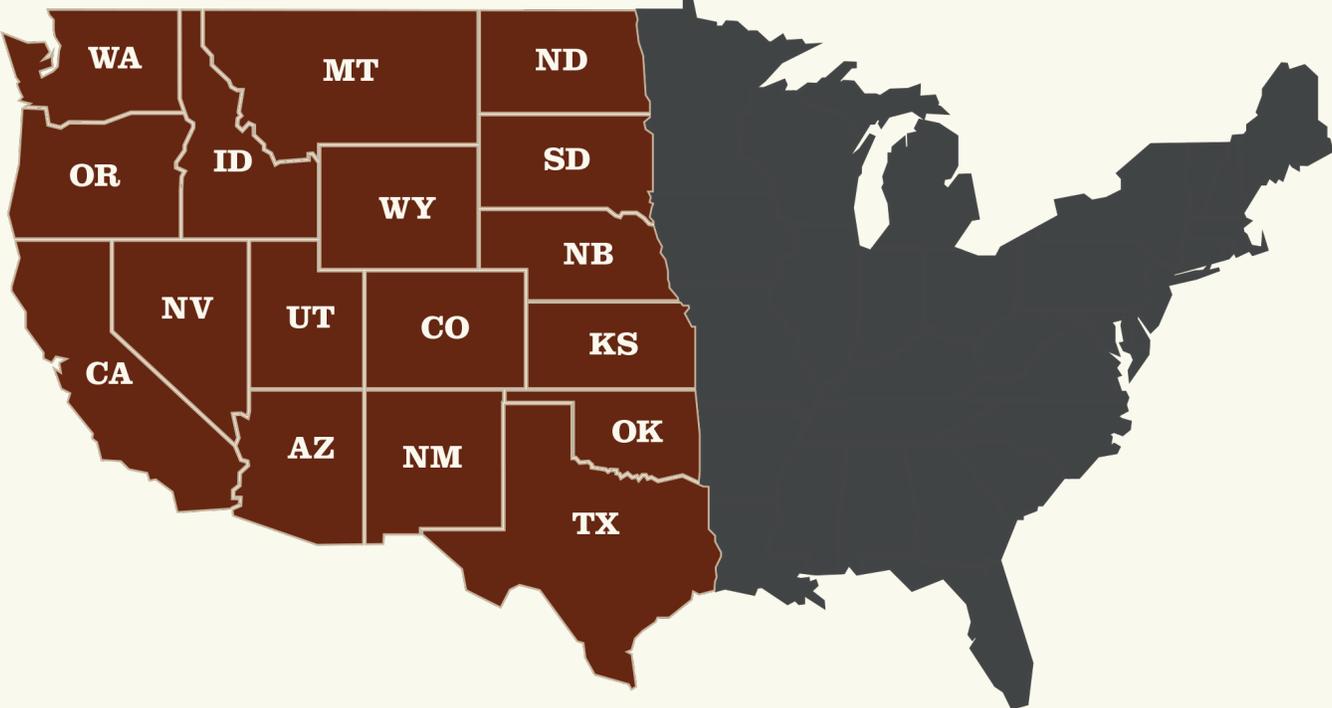
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Utah

Geoff Potter
Washington

Rob Creager
Wyoming



The Western Governors' Association Region





**WESTERN
GOVERNORS'**
ASSOCIATION

1600 Broadway, Suite 1700
Denver, CO 80202 • 303.623.9378

westgov.org

