

**Written Testimony of James D. Ogsbury, Executive Director
Western Governors' Association**

**Submitted to the United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
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Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Shaheen, and Members of the Subcommittee, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on two items within the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, both of which relate to the U.S. Department of Commerce. WGA is an independent organization representing the Governors of 19 western states and 3 U.S territories in the Pacific. The Association is an instrument of the Governors for bipartisan policy development, information-sharing and collective action on issues of critical importance to the western United States.

Western Governors support adequate funding of the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) program under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). We are well-acquainted with the significant environmental, economic, and social effects of drought on the West and its communities. The cyclical nature of drought conditions, as well as increased populations and their dependence on limited water resources, keep drought at the forefront of western water issues. Drought contributes to the incidence of forest and rangeland wildfire, impairs ecosystems and wildlife habitat, degrades agricultural productivity, and poses threats to municipal and industrial water supplies. A growing population creates challenges for water management across the West – from the Great Plains to the Intermountain West to the coastal, estuarine and marine environments of the Pacific states and islands. Planning for an adequate, reliable and clean water supply requires accurate and complete water and weather information.

NIDIS promotes a coordinated and integrated approach to managing future drought. This approach involves improved forecasting and monitoring which provides the kind of authoritative, objective and timely drought information that farmers, water managers, decision-makers, and local governments require for effective drought preparation and response. Through NIDIS, NOAA is building a network of early warning systems for drought while working with local resource managers to identify and address unique regional drought information needs.

Western Governors value the approach used to build and improve NIDIS. Rather than creating a new NIDIS bureaucracy, the system draws from existing capacity in states, universities and multiple federal agencies, as called for in the original authorizing legislation. Given our shared fiscal challenges, we regard this as a model for federal-state collaboration in shared information services.

Water users throughout the West – including farmers, ranchers, tribes, land managers, business owners, recreationalists, wildlife managers, and decision-makers at all levels of government –

must be able to assess the risks of drought before its onset in order to make informed decisions and implement effective mitigation measures. For these reasons, Western Governors request continued support and adequate funding of the National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center precipitation forecasts and the NIDIS program, as they perform a valuable role in western water management and drought response.

Western Governors also support adequate funding for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to improve the accuracy and granularity of measuring broadband data coverage. Many western communities lack access to broadband internet due to the high cost of infrastructure and the low number of customers in potential service areas. This has left many rural businesses at a competitive disadvantage and citizens without access to telework, telemedicine and distance learning opportunities. Deployment of broadband infrastructure to these underserved and unserved communities requires an accurate picture of broadband availability nationwide. Unfortunately, broadband coverage is often overstated in rural western communities due to reporting measures based on census blocks. NTIA can provide a valuable service by improving our understanding of broadband infrastructure in rural communities. We also encourage coordination of data collection strategies among the Federal Communications Commission, U.S. Department of Agriculture and other agencies involved in broadband mapping and deployment.

Western Governors recognize the enormous challenge you have in balancing competing funding priorities, and we appreciate the difficulty of the decisions the Subcommittee must make. These recommendations are offered in a spirit of cooperation and respect, and WGA is prepared to assist you in discharging these critical and challenging responsibilities.