

**Written Testimony of James D. Ogsbury, Executive Director  
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**Submitted to the United States Senate  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
April 6, 2022**

**Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations**

Chair Merkley, Ranking Member Murkowski, and Members of the Subcommittee, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) appreciates the opportunity to provide written testimony on the appropriations and activities of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). WGA is an independent organization representing the Governors of the 22 westernmost states and territories. 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.

The agencies within the Subcommittee's jurisdiction wield significant influence over vast areas of the American West. Ninety-four percent of all federal lands are located in the western states, and the federal government owns over 46 percent of the land within active WGA states. The work of this Subcommittee is of vital importance to Western Governors, as it affects public lands management and federal agency interaction with other levels of government and the public.

There is a natural tension between state and federal governments that is embedded in the fabric of the U.S. Constitution. These sovereign governments must have a close and productive working relationship to promote efficiency and maximize returns on taxpayer investments. Improving the partnership between states and the federal government is central to the mission of WGA and is reflected in WGA Policy Resolution 2021-01, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship.

In last year's House committee report accompanying the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 appropriations bill (H. Rpt. 117-83), the federal agencies funded by the Interior bill were directed to provide appropriate feedback on tribal input received by agencies through meaningful consultation in their decision-making processes. Similar direction to federal agencies for government-to-government consultation with states, which is required pursuant to Executive Order 13132, Federalism, would improve the co-sovereign relationship between states and the federal government.

Federal agencies should provide state, territorial, local, and tribal government officials with accessible and clear information on available federal resources and programs and the most effective utilization of those resources in disaster recovery. WGA has worked with federal partners to improve interagency coordination on post-wildfire restoration work, including a roadmap of assistance available to communities affected by wildfire and identification of "navigators" to help communities prioritize post-wildfire restoration needs. Western Governors

urge the federal government to prioritize the funding of these important efforts, as they should have a positive effect on maximizing the value of restoration work and, more importantly, addressing the needs of communities affected by wildfire.

Western Governors are proud of the 2018 Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between WGA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The MOU has led to collaborative engagement on several cross-boundary, cross-jurisdictional issues, including post-wildfire interagency coordination, cheatgrass infestations, and vegetation management in utility corridors. It has also led to positive engagement between individual states and the Department: USDA has now executed Shared Stewardship agreements with 28 states, 15 of which are within the WGA footprint. These agreements provide states a useful tool to discuss land management priorities and coordinate on priority land management projects.

Responsible land management can only occur when federal, state and local stakeholders collaborate to improve the health and resilience of our lands. Likewise, proactive fish and wildlife conservation is most effective when leveraging the cooperative efforts of state and federal officials across multiple disciplines. To this end, Western Governors support all reasonable proactive management efforts to conserve species, including engaging stakeholders to implement early, voluntary conservation measures. WGA also believes the Services should explore expanded use of detail positions and shared staff between state and federal agencies to increase interagency coordination.

States possess primary authority to manage most fish and wildlife within their borders, and they receive economic benefits associated with healthy species and ecosystems. At the same time, species listings can dramatically affect the efforts of western states to promote economic development, accommodate population growth, and maintain and expand infrastructure. Western Governors believe that states should be full partners in listing, critical habitat designations, recovery planning, recovery efforts, and delisting decisions. State agencies often have the best available science, expertise and other scientific and institutional resources such as mapping capabilities, biological inventories, biological management goals, state wildlife action plans and other important data. All listing, recovery and delisting decisions made by the federal government should recognize, consult, and employ these vast state resources and utilize objective, peer-reviewed scientific literature and scientific observations.

Fish and wildlife migration corridors and habitat are necessary to maintain healthy populations of species in the West. Western Governors applaud the additional funding for federal agencies to advance state-supported programs and projects promoting voluntary migration corridor and habitat conservation and request that you continue to appropriate these funds. Governors note that any federal efforts to identify, regulate or conserve wildlife migration corridors through administrative or legislative action must involve coordination and consultation with states and should advance collaborative, locally driven initiatives to conserve key wildlife corridors and habitat.

WGA applauds the full funding for the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program administered by the Department of the Interior for FY21 and recommends the enactment of a permanent and stable funding mechanism for the program. PILT funding does not represent a

gift to local jurisdictions; rather it provides important compensation for the disproportionate measure of non-taxable federal lands in the West. Similarly, payments under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS) compensate communities whose timber industries have been negatively affected by actions and acquisitions of the federal government. Western Governors request that you continue to appropriate full funding annually for both PILT and SRS in the future.

Western Governors continue to be concerned about the number of wild horses and burros on BLM lands. This number is presently estimated to be more than triple the current Appropriate Management Level (AML). Overpopulation has resulted in the degradation of rangeland, negatively affecting wildlife and domestic livestock as well as the habitat of threatened and endangered species. WGA supports a process to establish, monitor and adjust AMLs for wild horses and burros that is transparent to stakeholders, supported by scientific information (including state data), and amenable to adaptation with new information and environmental and social change. Western Governors recognize BLM's 2019 Path Forward for Management of BLM's Wild Horses and Burros and 2020 Analysis of Achieving a Sustainable Wild Horse and Burro Program as examples of sensible alternatives to current wild horse and burro management practices. WGA encourages the Subcommittee to continue funding the BLM's implementation of the recommendations contained in these proposals.

WGA remains concerned about the spread of invasive mussels in the West and has highlighted this issue through the Western Governors' Biosecurity and Invasive Species Initiative. Of particular concern are invasive quagga and zebra mussels, which continue to be a major threat to western water resources. To combat this threat, Western Governors request that the BLM, FWS and NPS continue to be provided with the resources necessary to implement mandatory inspection of all high-risk watercraft and decontamination of watercraft infested with quagga and zebra mussels leaving waterbodies under their jurisdiction. Outside the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee but relevant to this matter, Western Governors support legislation that would clarify federal authority to conduct inspection and decontamination procedures and manage invasive species on lands and waters under their jurisdiction.

Western Governors applaud NPS for its efforts to preserve iconic landscapes, habitats and cultural resources. WGA is concerned, however, about the significant maintenance backlog affecting National Parks. WGA appreciates the funding authorized by the Great American Outdoors Act for priority deferred maintenance projects administered by federal land management agencies and supports ongoing NPS operations to address critical infrastructure needs.

Data for water management and drought response planning is critical to western states. Western Governors request continued funding for the Groundwater and Streamflow Information Program administered by the U.S. Geological Survey. The data generated by the program is integral to water supply management decisions of states, utilities, reservoir operators and farmers. It is also essential for risk management, disaster mitigation, and drought and flood forecasting throughout the West.

Infrastructure management is another crucial element of drought response, and federal investments in our nation's aging water and wastewater facilities are essential to our nation's continued economic prosperity and environmental protection. EPA'S Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRFs) provide necessary support for communities to maintain and enhance their water infrastructure. Western Governors' Policy Resolution 2021-10, Water Quality in the West, encourages adequate funding for SRFs. Western Governors appreciate the SRF appropriations and authorizations included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and encourage the Subcommittee to strongly support these programs. Western Governors similarly support the funding of federal programs that promote non-federal water infrastructure investment, such as the Water Infrastructure Finance Innovation Act program. This important program provides flexible long-term, low-cost supplemental credit assistance for projects of national and regional significance.

States have exclusive authority over the allocation and administration of rights to groundwater located within their borders and are primarily responsible for protecting, managing, and otherwise controlling the resource. The regulatory reach of the federal government was not intended to, and should not, be applied to the management and control of groundwater resources. WGA encourages Congress to include express and unambiguous language protecting states' authority over groundwater resources in any water-related legislation, as well as clear direction to administrative agencies to respect such authority. WGA appreciates the language included by the Subcommittee in prior Appropriations Acts addressing existing statutory authorities for groundwater protection. Federal agencies should work within existing state authorities to address their groundwater-related needs and concerns. WGA urges you to ensure that federal efforts involving groundwater recognize and respect state primacy and comply with all statutory authorities.

States also possess delegated authority from EPA to manage air quality within their borders. Congress and EPA should recognize state authority under the Clean Air Act (CAA) and accord states sufficient flexibility to create air quality and emissions programs tailored to individual state needs, industries and economies. State CAA programs require financial support from Congress, yet funding has declined since the CAA's enactment. In addition, given the unique character of the West and the region's attainment challenges, funding should be appropriated for EPA to assist western states in research on background, interstate and transported ozone. This is especially critical as more frequent and intense wildfires are steadily reducing the West's gains in air quality improvement. Smoke from wildfires causes exceedances under National Ambient Air Quality Standards for particulate matter and ozone, negatively affecting public health, safety and transportation. Prescribed fire can reduce these effects but is currently underused in many areas due to concerns about how it may affect compliance with CAA State Implementation Plans.

Western Governors and federal land management agencies deal with a complex web of interrelated natural resource issues. It is an enormous challenge to judiciously balance competing needs in this environment, and Western Governors appreciate the difficulty of the decisions this Subcommittee must make. The foregoing recommendations are offered in a spirit of cooperation and respect, and WGA is prepared to assist you in discharging these critical and challenging responsibilities.