
March 3, 2021

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

On behalf of the Western Governors' Association (WGA), we are writing to congratulate you on your confirmation to serve as the Secretary of Agriculture. We look forward to working with you in your new capacity as the chief agriculture and forestry officer of the United States.

WGA represents the Governors of the 22 westernmost states and U.S. territories. 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.

WGA is deeply interested in, and has adopted substantive and detailed policies regarding, activities within the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture (USDA). The purpose of this communication is to introduce you to those policies and to encourage a close and productive working relationship. Western states are eager to work closely with you as authentic partners in the design and execution of programs and policies that affect our constituents and implicate state authority.

Western Governors find great value in USDA's Shared Stewardship strategy, which promotes state-federal collaboration to address land management challenges faced in the states. WGA was the first entity to sign a Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding with the Department in 2018. Since that time, 25 individual states – 15 in the WGA footprint – have signed Shared Stewardship agreements with USDA. The Shared Stewardship strategy shows great promise as a tool to collaboratively identify priorities and address management needs in our states.

We also appreciate USDA's leadership in the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC), an intergovernmental committee dedicated to the consistent implementation of wildland fire policies, goals, and management activities. WFLC's goals are to ensure effective and efficient wildfire management, promote fire-adapted communities and create resilient landscapes to achieve long-range benefits for society and nature. It also provides leadership and oversight for the implementation of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, a national vision for wildland fire management in the United States. WFLC has proved an effective platform to bring together multiple federal agencies, states, Tribes, and local governments to discuss the challenges of wildfire restoration coordination and address the needs of wildfire affected communities.

The attachment to this letter presents a high-level summary of select gubernatorial priorities within your jurisdiction. We hope you will take time to review this information and remember that Western Governors are enthusiastic partners with respect to these and other issues. Moreover, we

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expect to be consulted throughout the decision making and rulemaking processes of the Department.

One of Western Governors' foundational policy statements is WGA Policy Resolution 2021-01, *Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship* (attached). The resolution notes that "[e]ach Executive department and agency should have a clear and accountable process to provide each state – through its Governor or their designees – with *early, meaningful, substantive, and ongoing consultation* in the development of federal policies that affect states." (emphasis added). We submit that such consultation should commence immediately, both with respect to departmental policies under review and those under development.

Congratulations again on your appointment. We look forward to working with you to realign the state-federal relationship to better serve our common constituencies.

Sincerely,



Kate Brown
Governor of Oregon
Chair, WGA



Brad Little
Governor of Idaho
Vice Chair, WGA

Attachments