

Western Governors Working Together

The Western Governors' Association was established in 1984 through a merger of the Western Governors' Policy Office and the Western Governors Conference. Western Governors, however, have been working together for more than a century. The following timeline shares highlights of their collaboration and the work of WGA since its formation.



1891: The **Trans-Mississippi Congress** convenes in Denver. Governors of the 24 states and territories west of the Mississippi River appoint delegates.

1910: Western Governors meet as a group for the first time in Salt Lake City to discuss their participation in the **Conservation Congress** held that year in Minnesota.

1912: The first annual meeting of the Western Governors is held in Boise, Idaho, with 14 Governors attending. Similar gatherings are held the next three years in Salt Lake City, Denver and Seattle.

1947: The **Western Regional Conference of the Council of State Governments (CSG)** is organized and convenes its first meeting in San Francisco. Later renamed **CSG-WEST**, the organization focuses on western state legislatures and the legislative process.

1953: The **Western Governors Conference**, created in 1947 under the umbrella of CSG, approves creation of the **Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education**. The Commission partners with states, territories, and postsecondary institutions to develop innovative solutions to challenges in higher education.

1965: The **Western States Water Council**, consisting of representatives appointed by the governors of 18 western states, is created through adoption of a resolution by the Western Governors Conference. The Council supports western states in water resource management and provides a forum for the exchange of information and ideas.

1977: Western governors form the **Western Governors' Policy Office** to address the "fast track" development of energy projects and other issues.

1984: The **Western Governors' Association** is created through a merger of the Western Governors Conference and the Western Governors Policy Office, with headquarters in Denver.

1989: WGA establishes a Technical Advisory Group of representatives from western states to help ensure the "safe and uneventful" shipment of radioactive waste to the **Waste Isolation Pilot Plant**, a deep geologic disposal site in New Mexico.

1996: Western Governors launch **Western Governors University**, one of the first internet-based education alternatives. WGU, which pioneers the innovative learning model of competency-based education, is later established as an independent entity.

1998: Thanks to the work of the **Western Drought Coordination Council**, formed by WGA in 1997 through a memorandum of understanding with federal agencies, Congress enacts the National Drought Policy Act to change the way the U.S. prepares for and responds to drought.

2006: After years of collaboration, during which WGA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration partner to develop recommendations for improved drought monitoring, the **National Integrated Drought Information System Act** is enacted into law.

2011: Western Governors launch the **Sage Grouse Task Force** with the Bureau of Land Management to coordinate sage grouse conservation across the West. Governors **Matt Mead** of Wyoming and **John Hickenlooper** of Colorado co-chair the task force with BLM Director Bob Abbey. The Western Governors' work leads to the 2015 decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to not list the greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act.

2012: **James Ogsbury** is named WGA's fifth Executive Director, following: **James Maddy** (1984-85), **Paul Cunningham** (1985-1990), **James Souby** (1990-2004), and **Pam Inmann** (2004-12).

2013: The Governors unveil the **Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT)**, a cooperative effort of 16 Western states that provides a high-level overview of "crucial habitat" across the West. In 2015, WGA turns over management of CHAT to the Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies.

2014: The Governors release the **Regulatory and Permitting Information Desktop (RAPID)** online toolkit, culminating a multi-year effort to tackle the challenge of transmission line siting and permitting in the West.

2016: WGA launches **Celebrate the West**, an annual art competition that challenges high school students in the West to create works inspired by their state. The annual contest attracts hundreds of entries vying for state finalist honors and cash prizes.

2018: The Governors and the U.S. Department of Agriculture sign a **Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding** to advance collaboration between the U.S. Forest Service and WGA in addressing challenges facing western landscapes.

2019: Western Governors launch the **Western Invasive Species Council** to coordinate regional efforts to control invasive species. The Governors also create the **Center of Excellence for Improving the State-Federal Relationship**, an online repository of research and resources on federalism issues. The **Western Governors' Foundation** is reinvented as the philanthropic arm of WGA to promote the welfare of Western citizens.

WGA Chairs, Initiatives and Sites of Annual Meetings

HI Gov. George Ariyoshi (1985)
The Pacific
Honolulu, Hawaii

CO Gov. Richard Lamm (1986)
The Western Agenda: International Competitiveness, Water Efficiency, Economic Research Center
Colorado Springs, Colorado

UT Gov. Norman Bangerter (1987)
Efficiency in Government, Economic Development, Education
Snowbird, Utah

WA Gov. Booth Gardner (1988)
Sharpening the Competitive Edge
Seattle, Washington

CA Gov. George Deukmejian (1989)
Going Global
Long Beach, California

ND Gov. George Sinner (1990)
Cherishing Our Past, Shaping Our Future
Fargo, North Dakota

SD Gov. George S. Mickelson (1991)
The West on Our Terms
Rapid City, South Dakota

WY Gov. Mike Sullivan (1992)
Pioneering New Solutions: Directing Our Destiny
Jackson Hole, Wyoming

AZ Gov. Fife Symington (1993)
Our Lands: New Strategies for Protecting the West
Tucson, Arizona

NV Gov. Bob Miller (1994)
Making Government Work Better in and for the West
South Lake Tahoe, Nevada

UT Gov. Mike Leavitt (1995)
A Stronger Voice, a Better Balance, a West That Works
Park City, Utah

NE Gov. Ben Nelson (1996)
The West: Forging Opportunity Through Change
Omaha, Nebraska

ND Gov. Ed Schafer (1997)
Common Interests: Commanding Our Own Destiny
Medora, North Dakota

AK Gov. Tony Knowles (1998)
Doing It Right: Partners for Tomorrow's West
Girdwood, Alaska



WY Gov. Dave Freudenthal (2008)
Energy, Climate Change, Water & Wildlife
Jackson Hole, Wyoming

UT Gov. Jon Huntsman, Jr. (2009)
Energy, Climate Change, Water & International Cooperation
Park City, Utah

MT Gov. Brian Schweitzer (2010)
Energizing the West
Whitefish, Montana

Hawaii Gov. David Ige signs a Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding between WGA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2018 as Secretary Sonny Perdue looks on.

WY Gov. Jim Geringer (1999)
Marshaling the Energy of the Western Community
Jackson Hole, Wyoming

HI Gov. Benjamin Cayetano (2000)
Growth on the Cutting Edge - New State Economic Strategies for the Next Century
Honolulu, Hawaii

ID Gov. Dirk Kempthorne (2001)
The Power of Partnering (wildfire, energy)
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

AZ Gov. Jane Hull (2002)
An Energized West
Phoenix, Arizona

MT Gov. Judy Martz (2003)
Blazing New Trails
Big Sky, Montana

NM Gov. Bill Richardson (2004)
Focus of Chairmanship was on energy, water, relations with tribes and Mexico
Santa Fe, New Mexico

CO Gov. Bill Owens (2005)
Western Leadership in the Global Economy
Breckenridge, Colorado

AZ Gov. Janet Napolitano (2006)
Building a Sustainable West
Sedona, Arizona

SD Gov. Mike Rounds (2007)
Making the West the Best
Deadwood, South Dakota

ID Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter (2011)
Educational and Career Opportunities for Veterans; Restoring & Managing the Health of Forests in the West; Reducing Energy Demand by Improving Energy Efficiency
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

WA Gov. Christine Gregoire (2012)
Get Out West (Outdoor Recreation-Conservation-Tourism-Volunteerism)
Cle Elum, Washington

UT Gov. Gary Herbert (2013)
Ten-Year Energy Vision for the West
Park City, Utah

CO Gov. John Hickenlooper (2014)
We Go Altogether
Colorado Springs, Colorado

NV Gov. Brian Sandoval (2015)
Western Governors' Drought Forum
Lake Tahoe, Nevada

WY Gov. Matt Mead (2016)
Species Conservation and Endangered Species Act
Jackson Hole, Wyoming

MT Gov. Steve Bullock (2017)
National Forest and Rangeland Management
Whitefish, Montana

SD Gov. Dennis Daugaard (2018)
Workforce Development
Rapid City, South Dakota

HI Gov. David Ige (2019)
Biosecurity and Invasive Species
Vail, Colorado

ND Gov. Doug Burgum (2020)
Reimagining the Rural West
North Dakota

OR Gov. Kate Brown (2021)
Electric Vehicles Roadmap
Sunriver, Oregon

