



**WESTERN
GOVERNORS'**
ASSOCIATION

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



Dear Friends and Colleagues,



Life moves so fast these days that it can be difficult to find time for reflection. That said, it's important to carve out the time to reflect on the past to help build toward the future. Maya Angelou once wrote that "you can't really know where you're going until you know where you have been." That sound advice is especially true when it comes

to acknowledging and celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Western Governors' Association (WGA) in 2024.

This year presented an ideal opportunity to shine a light on the bipartisan – and in most cases, nonpartisan – cooperation of Western Governors and the meaningful policy that has been developed as a result. It also lent itself to some creative thinking about how we can continue to build on the Association's proud legacy for the next 40 years.

Over the past year, the WGA team has gone through old records, documents, and photos that have been compiled into an online repository to showcase WGA's historical work, and I can tell you one thing for sure: Western Governors are an incredibly dynamic group of leaders. It's amazing to see how much the Association has evolved over the years to meet the changing needs of the region while staying true to its core principles.

This year, in addition to updating and renewing several key policy resolutions, including water, species conservation, and disaster preparedness and response, among others, the Governors also approved an entirely new resolution to address the growing opioid crisis plaguing western communities. This new resolution reflects the importance of the Governors working together to address a shared regional challenge. It also highlights how the Governors have expanded WGA's policy portfolio beyond the traditional natural resource issues that originally brought them together back in 1984.

Under the leadership of WGA's 2024 Chair, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, WGA developed a new report to explore the potential for carbon removal technologies and natural carbon sequestration. The Governors also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to expand the scope of the shared stewardship agreement they originally pioneered back in 2018.

While WGA's convening power on natural resource issues

is well documented, WGA's foray into other issues such as economic development, health care, broadband, and others has really come into its own in recent years.

At the 2024 Western Prosperity Forum in Phoenix, Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs sat down with Deputy Secretary of Commerce Don Graves to discuss state strategies to leverage investments from the federal government to drive innovation, spur growth, and support the development of a modern workforce.

Along with Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, WGA's marquee events this year also featured keynotes from Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Shalanda Young.

The fact that the Governors have chosen a bipartisan organization like WGA to address these complex and often contentious issues speaks to the health of the Association moving forward and fills me with confidence that we will continue to rise above the growing partisan divide this country is currently facing.

Hearing Governor Gordon and former WGA Chairs speak at the 40th anniversary celebration in Olympic Valley, California, about the power of bipartisanship further cemented this belief.

The following report, which highlights the numerous WGA convenings, as well as the many policy victories that Western Governors and their staff helped bring about this year through bipartisan cooperation, is a testament to their commitment to moving the needle on issues of importance to the West.

As we enter a new fiscal year here at WGA, I look forward to working alongside you all under the leadership of our new Chair, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, to advance these shared principles and to chart a path for continued success here at WGA.

Thank you for your support and I look forward to seeing you at WGA's 2024 Winter Meeting in Las Vegas on December 9 and 10!


Jack Waldorf
WGA Executive Director



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Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon released the Decarbonizing the West initiative report at WGA's 2024 Annual Meeting in Olympic Valley, California. "Importantly," he told the crowd at the Everline Resort and Spa, "[this report] is about building, not so much damping down."

DECARBONIZING THE WEST INITIATIVE

Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, Chair of the Western Governors' Association (WGA), launched the Decarbonizing the West initiative in 2023 to examine how decarbonization strategies can position western states at the forefront of innovation and reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere.

The initiative explored a wide range of engineered decarbonization approaches, as well as natural sequestration through enhanced land and agriculture management practices, all of which present enormous opportunities for western states.

The report is the culmination of an extensive stakeholder process that engaged experts from across a range of states, industry sectors, and levels of government. This process was facilitated with the leadership and support of other Western Governors, who hosted a series of regional workshops to highlight the growing need and diverse set of approaches to decarbonize the West.

The initiative examined federal policy recommendations in three focal areas that offer the greatest opportunities for near-term deployment of strategies to reduce the CO₂ in the atmosphere: carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS); engineered carbon dioxide removal (CDR); natural sequestration; and cross-cutting and regional opportunities.

Recommendations for CCUS and engineered carbon dioxide removal include:

- Support large-scale technology development
- Create regulatory certainty for removal, transportation, and storage
- Catalyze market development
- Enable market expansion
- Invest in the next generation of CDR

Recommendations for natural sequestration include:

- Innovate funding mechanisms to support land management projects
- Improve access to federal dollars for small farmers and landowners
- Expand opportunities for biomass sourcing
- Ensure a market for forest products

Cross-cutting and regional opportunities include:

- Engage communities early and often to promote awareness of, and support for, decarbonization projects
- Support regional and collaborative decarbonization efforts
- Ensure fair and transparent voluntary carbon markets
- Promote baseline standards for monitoring, reporting, and verification of carbon removal projects

WESTERN LANDSCAPES



WILDFIRE AND DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Even though the West experienced a relatively mild wildfire season in 2023, with roughly 60 percent less acreage burned compared to the 10-year average, mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfires and post-fire disasters remained a top priority for Western Governors.

Their continued advocacy to expand wildfire and disaster assistance led to several reforms over the past year that will create more resilient western communities by improving interagency coordination and increasing funding for pre-fire mitigation, active fire response, and post-fire recovery.

Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission Report

In September 2023, the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission issued its final report, which contained 148 consensus-driven policy recommendations to address nearly every facet of the wildfire crisis – many of which mirror the recommendations outlined in WGA policy resolutions.

The Governors' shared policy recommendations from WGA Policy Resolution 2021-06, Disaster Preparedness and Response, are reflected in the Commission's calls for integrating recovery funds and increasing the flexibility of those funds. The Commission calls for integrating federal wildfire management actions, streamlining the process for deploying



At WGA's 2024 Annual Meeting, experts from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Nevada Division of Emergency Management, the Small Business Administration, and McKinsey & Company spoke about opportunities to reduce bureaucratic burdens on disaster survivors and accelerate recovery efforts to build more resilient communities.

recovery funds, and increasing the flexibility of those funds.

The report also encourages Congress to create incentives for improving land use planning, increasing investment in fuel reduction treatments, developing a strategic plan to expand the use of prescribed fire, improving interagency smoke management, and expanding the use of biomass. These policy proposals were derived, in part, from WGA Policy Resolution 2024-02, National Forest and Rangeland Management.

Disaster Assistance

WGA promoted these same policy resolutions in Congress to advocate for

expanded disaster assistance programs, especially for rural and underserved areas.

In 2023 and 2024, WGA correspondence with Congressional offices and committees supported reassessing the structure and allocation of federal disaster funding and developing a unified disaster intake system. Additional correspondence highlighted the need to reform federal disaster assistance programs to make them more flexible and accessible to individuals affected by natural disasters.

Congress responded by providing direction in the 2024 Consolidated



Appropriations Act for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to use mitigation grant funds for natural infrastructure projects and other nature-based strategies that protect against natural threats.

The 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act also encouraged FEMA to adjust the cost share for persistent poverty counties involved in disasters and make disaster case workers available

to residents if FEMA Individual Assistance funding is denied. Additional rulemaking processes are now underway that align with the policy goals promoted in WGA policy resolutions.

Collaborative Wildfire Risk Reduction Program

The Governors were also pleased to see their recommendations recognized by the U.S. Forest Service

when the agency announced that the Collaborative Wildfire Risk Reduction Program will receive an additional \$100 million from the Inflation Reduction Act in 2024 to expand pre-fire mitigation work outside the 21 designated Wildfire Crisis Strategy landscapes with a focus on non-traditional partners that represent underserved and minority-based communities.



FOREST AND RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Having developed an effective framework for cooperative land management agreements over the last five years, much of Western Governors' recent advocacy on forest and rangeland management has focused on building upon the success of programs like Shared Stewardship and Good Neighbor Authority (GNA).

Shared Stewardship

Western Governors signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) at WGA's 2024 Annual Meeting to expand the scope of a previous Shared Stewardship MOU that the two groups signed in 2018. That 2018 MOU was the first of its kind, and since then, 34 additional agreements have been signed.

"I will forgive you if you say, 'Okay, what's the point of another MOU?'" USDA Deputy Secretary Xochitl Torres Small said at WGA's Annual Meeting. "But the one we signed today will... mark a new beginning for better integration when it comes to how forest and rangeland restoration projects are prioritized across different land ownerships. It creates new opportunities for us to work more closely with you on important issues,



Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Xochitl Torres Small signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Western Governors at the 2024 Annual Meeting to expand the scope of a previous Shared Stewardship MOU that the two groups signed in 2018.

such as expanding rural high-speed internet and enhancing our support for farming and ranching communities."

In line with this agreement, Torres Small announced an investment of \$12 million from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) for 22 GNA projects across 13 states, including Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

She also announced \$54.6 million for 41 Joint Chiefs Landscape Scale Restoration Partner projects, a program created through the IIJA to reduce wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protect water quality and supply, and improve wildlife habitat for at-risk species.

Good Neighbor Authority

With millions of acres of forest and rangeland to treat, Western Governors

are always looking for new partners with whom they can effectively manage large swaths of land across multiple jurisdictions.

The Congressional authorization granted in the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act for both the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to enter into Good Neighbor Agreements for conducting cross-boundary forest health projects was therefore an important victory for Western Governors this year.

This authorization was made all the more important when the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) announced that it is

investing more than \$20 million into GNA projects that reduce wildfire risk and restore healthy forests.

“The work accomplished through the Good Neighbor Authority demonstrates what we can achieve when we work with partners to leverage capacity, funding, and knowledge,” USFS Chief Randy Moore said. “Co-stewardship with the states, tribes, and counties increases capacity and allows for greater opportunities and resources for us all to do the critical management work needed to keep our forest healthy and productive.”

In total, there are 15 GNA projects

across 8 western states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, and Wyoming) using existing collaborative and Good Neighbor Agreements.

In hopes of expanding GNA even further, Western Governors also voiced their bipartisan support for the Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors Act and its inclusion in the Farm Bill. As Congress considers Farm Bill reauthorization, it is encouraging that both the House and Senate draft bills include this helpful expansion of the program.



SPECIES CONSERVATION

Biodiversity is key to maintaining the West’s complex and varied ecosystems. Species conservation efforts, however, often require cross-jurisdiction coordination. To address this issue, Western Governors have often relied on the convening power of WGA.

Greater Sage Grouse

This past year, the Task Force on Collaborative Conservation, which was formed through a 2022 joint agreement between WGA, the Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, continued its Greater Sage Grouse Working Group to facilitate conversations between the states and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The group has been successful in providing early input to BLM’s resource management plan amendment process, culminating in the release of a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to “analyze potential amendments to specific Greater Sage Grouse goals, objectives, and management actions contained in 77 existing Resource Management Plans to enhance Greater Sage Grouse conservation through



management of Greater Sage Grouse habitats on BLM-administered lands.”

The Working Group will continue to meet with BLM to discuss comments received on the draft EIS and support

implementation of the amendment in a manner that supports state priorities and creates a durable Greater Sage Grouse Management Plan amendment.



In Other Advocacy

Western Governors urged Congress to consider long-term funding for transportation infrastructure projects that support critical fish and wildlife crossings.

Additionally, the Governors encouraged the federal government to advance voluntary, incentive-based, and locally driven initiatives to conserve key wildlife corridors and habitats.

“Western Governors believe funding

and economic incentives for proactive, voluntary conservation efforts are essential,” the letter read. “Additional incentives for willing private landowners to participate in voluntary conservation efforts are likely to achieve more efficient and cost-effective results.”



INVASIVE SPECIES



The World Economic Forum released a report in September 2023 that estimated the costs incurred each year due to invasive species are at least \$423 billion. It also reported that invasive species play a key role in 60 percent of recorded plant and animal extinctions.

Western Governors have a long history of effectively working together to stop the spread of invasives, especially since former Hawaii Governor David Ige led a WGA Chair Initiative in 2018 focused on biosecurity and invasive species.

This year was no different as Western Governors continued to work together on issues related to invasive species.

European Green Crab

Even though European Green Crabs were not discovered on the West Coast until 1980, they have quickly become a major concern for fisheries and coastal habitat managers in the Pacific Northwest as they pose a threat to native eelgrass, shellfish, and estuary habitats critical to salmon and other species.

While California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska have already dedicated significant resources to the detection and removal of these crabs, additional federal resources are needed to effectively respond to new outbreaks, especially in areas of Alaska where increased detection resources are needed.

Western Governors were pleased to see Congress allocate \$1.5 million in the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act to manage invasive European Green Crab populations in the Pacific Northwest.

Under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Department of the Interior also created a Rapid Response Fund for Aquatic Invasive Species and invested \$1 million, with an additional \$1 million planned through 2026, to improve detection capacity. This investment is part of the broader National Early Detection and Rapid Response Framework being developed by the Department.



ENERGY AND MINING

Western Governors have always played a critical role in managing the nation’s mineral development and power generation. As technological advancements create opportunities to develop new energy and mineral resources in the West, Western Governors worked closely with their federal partners this year to streamline the permitting process for energy projects while also protecting the environment.

Geothermal Energy

Colorado Governor Jared Polis’ WGA Chair initiative, *The Heat Beneath Our Feet*, which concluded in June 2023, highlighted a variety of policies that Congress and the federal government could implement to accelerate the deployment of geothermal energy.

On April 15, the Bureau of Land Management announced that it would start providing categorical exclusions for geothermal exploration – a recommendation explicitly called for in the *Heat Beneath Our Feet* initiative report.

Made possible by the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023, federal agencies can now adopt applicable categorical exclusions in another agency’s National Environmental Policy Act procedures without a rulemaking.

Good Samaritans

Western Governors also voiced their support for the Good Samaritan Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act and the pilot program proposed in the bill that would protect Good Samaritans from liability exposure.

However, instead of granting the Environmental Protection Agency the authority to determine an organization’s Good Samaritan eligibility, Western



To kick off his WGA Chair initiative, *Decarbonizing the West*, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon hosted a tour of the Wyoming Integrated Test Center, one of the world’s only test centers for carbon capture and utilization technologies using actual coal-based flue gas from an operating coal-fired powered plant. The project in this picture, operated by Kawasaki Heavy Industries and the Japan Carbon Frontier Organization, will demonstrate a novel CO2 separation and recovery technology using solid absorbents.

Governors called for that power to be vested in the states.

“Many states have agencies that administer the Clean Water Act, regulate and require financial assurance for reclamation of hardrock mines, remediate affected waters, and implement abandoned mine programs,” read the letter, signed by WGA Chair, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, and Vice Chair, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham. “These functions demonstrate that states are qualified to review and determine

the adequacy of Good Samaritan reclamation plans and should be allowed to do so.”

Western Governors followed up on this work by approving WGA Policy Resolution 2024-08, *Cleaning Up Abandoned Hardrock Mines in the West*, at the 2024 Annual Meeting, which calls on Congress to protect Good Samaritans from potential liability and emphasizes that states are best suited to determine Good Samaritan eligibility and manage hardrock mine reclamation plans.



WESTERN PROSPERITY



WESTERN PROSPERITY FORUM

This year's Western Prosperity Forum focused on strategies to leverage modern opportunities, foster resilience, and achieve sustainable and equitable economic growth. Sessions highlighted issues related to digital equity, workforce development, extreme heat, and wildfire mitigation.

Especially noteworthy were the fireside chats between Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs, Deputy Secretary of Commerce Don Graves, and Dr. Homer Wilkes, the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

With Deputy Secretary Graves, Governor Hobbs spoke about how states can leverage investments from the federal government to drive innovation, spur growth, and support the development of a modern workforce.

"The world is at an inflection point as we deal with the vast changes that we see going on in technology and industrial development all around the globe," Deputy Secretary Graves said. "It's changing jobs and the direction of economies everywhere."

While the Governor's discussion with Under Secretary Wilkes switched gears to focus on wildfire mitigation and forest restoration, the theme of collaboration rang true throughout.

"Wildfires don't care if they're on state, federal, or private land," Governor Hobbs said, "so it is essential that we



Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs hosted the 2024 Western Prosperity Forum at Arizona State University's Thunderbird School of Management in downtown Phoenix.

work in partnership to mitigate and manage the risk."

Not only are these partnerships key to mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfires across the jurisdictional jigsaw puzzle that is the West, but they also help reduce the costs of post-disaster

recovery and better protect critical infrastructure.

"I'm here to tell you that partnership is very important to us at the USDA," Under Secretary Wilkes said. "The work that needs to take place is too big for any particular entity or organization."



At the 2024 Western Prosperity Forum, Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs spoke with the Deputy Secretary of Commerce, Don Graves, about the importance of working with industry and higher education systems to modernize workforce development programs.



RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Prosperous and vibrant rural communities are critical to the nation's economy. While changing demographics, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, have exacerbated long-standing challenges in many of these rural areas, they have also created exciting new opportunities.

To ensure that communities have the necessary resources to take advantage of these changes, Western Governors urged Congress to support rural development programs that benefit small businesses, entrepreneurs, and agricultural cooperatives by providing training and technical assistance.

Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT)

With most of the nation's public lands encompassed in western states, the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program offsets losses in property taxes by reimbursing local governments based on their population and the amount of federal land within their county. The funds are often used to

help local governments carry out vital services, such as firefighting and police protection, construction of public schools and roads, and search-and-rescue operations.

Thanks to Western Governors' continued advocacy that PILT be fully funded, Congress provided \$515 million for PILT in the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act.

Child Care and Development Block Grant

Western Governors also worked with Congress to emphasize the importance of child care, which has become increasingly difficult to procure in rural areas.

Western Governors were happy to see Congress increase support for child care in the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act, including a \$725 million increase for the Child Care and Development Block Grant and a \$275 million increase for the Head Start Program compared to 2023.

In Other Advocacy

While the programs referenced above are critical to the success of rural communities, there are many more that small rural communities in the West would benefit from. A lack of capacity and resources, however, greatly limits their ability to successfully apply for grants.

In correspondence with Congress, Western Governors expressed concern that too many burdensome requirements exist for those looking to access federal funds – especially for those applicants from rural and underserved communities.

To reduce the barriers that exist for those applying, Western Governors encouraged the Office of Management and Budget and other federal agencies to expand federal rural development programs in a way that recognizes the limited resources and grant writing capacity of rural applicants.





CONNECTIVITY

Reliable broadband connectivity is a vital aspect of modern life. Many rural western communities, however, lack an internet connection robust enough to support basic functions such as video conferencing, digital education, and telehealth.

Though rugged terrain and long distances between communities have traditionally caused broadband to spread slowly across the West, an influx of federal funding has provided an opportunity for Western Governors to address the unique challenges in each of their states and connect underserved and unserved areas.

“Federal funding represents a historic opportunity to close the digital divide and should help states and territories reach areas in most need of assistance,” WGA Policy Resolution 2023-07, Broadband Connectivity, reads. “To do so, Western Governors urge the [Federal Communications Commission], [National Telecommunications and Information Administration], [U.S. Department of Agriculture], and other federal agencies involved in broadband deployment to work closely with Governors and state and territorial agencies and respond to and address their needs and concerns.”



At the 2024 Western Prosperity Forum, experts from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, the Utah Governor’s Office of Economic Opportunity, the Arizona Commerce Authority, AMERIND Critical Infrastructure, and The Pew Charitable Trusts explored efforts to promote digital equity and connect western residents to economic opportunities through Digital Equity Act Programs, particularly in rural and tribal areas.

Broadband Speeds

Western Governors also worked to ensure that the broadband being deployed corresponds to the upload and download speeds required to support business, education, and health care needs.

To do so, Western Governors encouraged the federal government to adopt a standard of at least 100/20 Mbps and

allow for it to be scaled to 100/100 Mbps.

Some of the Governors’ recommendations were reflected in the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act, which specified that projects receiving funding should be built to 100/20 Mbps and that 90 percent of recipient households should be in rural areas.



FENTANYL AND OPIOIDS

The opioid crisis has become one of the nation’s deadliest public health crises. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 1999 and 2021, 645,000 people died from an overdose involving opioids.

Western Governors developed a new policy resolution in 2023 that recommends addressing the opioid

crisis by identifying and mitigating emerging threats, curbing the supply and distribution of illicit opioids, and providing access to a full range of effective prevention, treatment, and recovery approaches.

“Combating the opioid crisis requires a comprehensive approach that reflects the complexity of the problem – from

the potency and availability of these drugs to the social and economic damage that they impose – across all levels of government and the continuum of care,” WGA Policy Resolution 2024-04, Combating the Opioid Crisis, reads.

Fentanyl Trafficking

In line with the Governors’ recommendations, the 2024 National



North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum spoke with panelists at the 2024 Annual Meeting before a roundtable discussion about strategies for combating the opioid crisis. “We’ve got this crisis, it’s bigger than ever, but we’ve still got these outdated models,” he said. “What are your thoughts or perspectives on how we as Governors might turn that around?”

Defense Authorization Act included a provision that requires the Secretary of Defense to develop a strategy that targets, disrupts, or degrades threats to national security caused by fentanyl trafficking.

The section also recognized that the opioid crisis and the threat from fentanyl demands a whole-of-government approach and improved interagency command, control, communications, and intelligence, which Governors emphasize in WGA Policy Resolution 2024-04, Combating the Opioid Crisis.

Overdose Prevention and Treatment

Western Governors advocated for federal investments in harm reduction strategies

to limit deaths resulting from the use of opioids, including potentially life-saving opioid antagonists like naloxone, commonly known as Narcan. In addition, the Governors supported efforts to increase access to medication-assisted treatment for patients with substance use disorder, which improves health outcomes and reduces mortality.

Congress responded by including recommendations in the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act to ensure that the purchase of all Food and Drug Administration-approved medications for opioid use disorder and overdose reversal is an allowable use of funding.

To reduce the quickly growing rates of teen overdoses involving opioids, Western Governors also requested that Congress expand upstream prevention approaches and awareness and education programs for teens experimenting with substances.

The 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act addressed the Governors’ priorities in a few ways. It directed the Office of National Drug Control Policy to submit a report on targeted prevention and awareness efforts. It also directed the Drug Enforcement Administration to report on how it educates students at public institutions of higher learning on the dangers of fentanyl and provides funding for youth mentoring grants.





HEALTH CARE

While improving access to high-quality, affordable health care is always a priority for Western Governors, this year the Governors' advocacy was particularly focused on addressing shortcomings in behavioral health care.

"Western Governors believe patients should have the same access to behavioral health care as they have for physical health care, including prevention and early intervention services and supports for chronic conditions like mental illness," reads WGA's Policy Resolution 2022-07, Physical and Behavioral Health Care in Western States.

Mental Health

The Governors' advocacy was reflected in several important reforms this year.

First, the SUPPORT Act of 2018 was amended to permanently make states eligible to receive federal matching funds for substance use disorder treatment. Prior to the passage of the SUPPORT Act of 2018, Medicaid's Institutions for Mental Diseases Exclusion prevented states from receiving Medicaid payments for many behavioral health care services.

In addition, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Office for Civil Rights issued a final ruling to improve treatment and reduce the stigma around substance use disorder by updating regulations for the Confidentiality of Substance Use Disorder Patient Records.

Smoke Exposure

With increasing numbers of catastrophic wildfires each year, Western Governors called on the federal government to help states mitigate the public health risks of wildfire smoke.



Xavier Becerra, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, joined Western Governors at the 2024 Annual Meeting. Their discussion, in part, focused on how the federal government can help states address growing rates of mental health issues.



At the 2023 Winter Meeting, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and Utah Governor Spencer Cox hosted a breakout session focused on behavioral health challenges across the rural West. They were joined by Tom Morris, the Associate Administrator for Rural Health Policy at the Health Resources and Services Administration, and Cicely Burrows-McElwain, the Director of the Technical Assistance Resource Center for Community-Based Interventions at the Department of Veterans Affairs' Office of Suicide Prevention.

Congress responded by including direction in the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to improve wildfire smoke monitoring and reduce smoke exposure during

wildfires. EPA was also tasked with awarding \$7 million in grants to states, tribes, and educational institutions to address the health risks of wildfire smoke in public buildings.



CYBERSECURITY

In recent years, cyberattacks have risen sharply in the U.S. The number of attacks more than doubled between 2018 and 2022. In 2022 alone, cybercrime caused more than \$10 billion in economic losses across the country.

To address this issue, Western Governors have continued to advocate for the federal government to provide states with additional resources

and training – including technical assistance for cybersecurity research and development, and real-world simulations.

Election Security

Western Governors called on the federal government “to work cooperatively with states in developing election security legislation and mandates, and to fully fund implementation.”

The Governors’ advocacy helped influence Congress to fully fund the requested budget for expanding the number of election infrastructure exercises overseen by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. Congress even allocated an additional \$1 million towards the effort.



INFRASTRUCTURE PERMITTING

Permitting has become a hot topic in recent years as the nation looks to modernize its infrastructure. With large swaths of public lands and a jigsaw puzzle of jurisdictions, western states have been at the forefront of this debate.

WGA’s Chair, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, and its Vice Chair, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, spoke at the 2023 Winter Meeting about how National Environmental Policy Act processes can be improved to streamline permitting, especially for much-needed energy transmission lines.

According to a 2023 study from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, between 1,400 and 10,100 miles of new high voltage transmission lines, or roughly 1.3 to 2.9 times the nation’s current capacity, will be needed annually to achieve net zero power sector emissions in 2035.

“If we as a country have any hope of achieving a net zero goal, we need massive deployment,” Governor Gordon said. “It won’t be achievable if we hold things back.”

CHIPS and Science Act

While much of their discussion at the 2023 Winter Meeting focused on



“If we’re not willing to take on controversial ideas that are provocative, then we aren’t going to solve problems,” New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham said during a panel discussion at the 2023 Winter Meeting that was focused on permitting challenges for critical infrastructure and land management projects.

transmission lines, Governors Gordon and Lujan Grisham also submitted testimony to Senate leadership in which they voiced the Governors’ bipartisan support for measures in the Building Chips in America Act.

These measures would streamline the environmental review process for projects receiving funding under the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, while protecting environmental resources, ensuring public participation, and facilitating timely decision making.

Western Governors also encouraged Congress to work on comprehensive permitting reforms that increase transparency, accessibility, and agency accountability for all projects.

“This,” the letter read, “is critical to increasing the pace and scale of land management projects, including those for wildfire mitigation, ecosystem resilience, habitat restoration, invasive species management, addressing infrastructure needs, and decreasing our reliance on foreign sources of critical minerals.”





VETERANS

With one-third of the nation's veteran population residing in the West, veterans' affairs have always been a priority for Western Governors. This year, to better focus their collective advocacy efforts, they formalized their bipartisan policy positions in WGA Policy Resolution 2023-08, Veterans – the first WGA policy resolution dedicated to veterans' affairs.

With suicide rates among veterans continuing to increase, much of this resolution highlighted the need to expand suicide prevention programs, especially in rural and remote areas.

More specifically, Western Governors called on Congress to allow veterans more flexibility in their choice of health care providers. Governors also support expanding the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Community Care and Vet Centers, and the telehealth services they provide.

Suicide Prevention

The Governors' advocacy was reflected in an allocation of \$3 billion for suicide prevention outreach and treatment in the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act, a significant increase of \$2.5 billion over the previous year's budget.

Furthermore, Congress directed VA to focus this funding on areas with high veteran suicide rates and a lack of Veteran Services Officers.

Western Governors were also pleased to see that the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act included \$300 million for the Veterans Crisis Line to enable geolocation for faster crisis response. The legislation also enhanced the resources available to Suicide Prevention Coordinators at VA Medical Centers by integrating real-time technologies with tools to improve situational awareness, patient safety, and adherence to VA Suicide Risk Identification Strategy policies.



Telehealth

The Governors' requests outlined in WGA Policy Resolution 2023-08, Veterans, were also fulfilled in a significant increase in year-over-year funding for Telehealth and Connected Care services for veterans.

The \$5.1 million allocation in the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act is \$5 million above the funding levels for the previous fiscal year. The increased funding can be used to enhance technological infrastructure, expand service availability, and train health care providers to effectively deliver telehealth services.

Accessing Benefits

While accessing services is always a critical concern for veterans, making sure that veterans are aware of the benefits they have earned can often be just as challenging.

To this end, Western Governors called on Congress to ensure that transitioning service members receive comprehensive information about VA benefits at least twelve months before they transition to civilian life.

Western Governors also endorsed offering service members the opportunity to receive credit or

professional credentials for their military training, facilitating a smoother transition into civilian careers.

Medical Training

Even when veterans receive timely care, it can be difficult to find people trained in military-specific health concerns.

Congress addressed this issue in two different ways, both of which were explicitly advocated for by Western Governors.

First, the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act encouraged VA to improve the Compensation and Pension (C&P) Claims and Medical Exams process by training health care providers on veteran-specific issues like toxic exposures and military sexual trauma.

Secondly, the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act mandated that VA establish an annual process for analyzing the training needs of staff processing post-traumatic stress disorder disability (PTSD) claims.

This process seeks to minimize error trends in claim processing and includes studies on key areas like military PTSD stressors and decision making. The goal is to enhance claim processing accuracy and efficiency for veterans with PTSD.



MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS PERSONS

For decades, Native American and Alaska Native communities have struggled with high rates of assault, abduction, and the murder of tribal members. Due to a lack of investigative resources, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) estimates that there are approximately 4,200 missing and murdered indigenous persons (MMIP) cases that have gone unsolved.

With most Native American lands located in the West, Western Governors have made a concerted effort in recent years to bring attention to the MMIP crisis and increase investigative resources for BIA officers.

To further leverage their individual efforts, Western Governors approved WGA Policy Resolution 2023-09, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons, at the 2023 Annual Meeting in Boulder, Colorado. The Governors also held a breakout session on the MMIP crisis at WGA's 2023 Winter Meeting in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

"Western Governors support an increase in the pace of hiring for BIA tribal officers, equivalent funding for direct tribal police forces, and sufficient funding for tribal court and justice systems" the resolution reads. "Western Governors also support funding for BIA victim service advocates to ensure that victims and their families can navigate complex bureaucratic systems."

Tribal Law Enforcement

In response to this issue, Congress allocated \$555 million in the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act to increase the number of officers and investigators performing crucial public safety services on a 24/7 basis in Indian Country.



At the 2023 Winter Meeting, Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo and Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs led a breakout session with Lynn Trujillo, the Senior Counselor to the Secretary of the Interior, and Mike Farnworth, the Deputy Premier of British Columbia, that was focused on how states can engage in culturally responsive solutions to address the ongoing crisis of missing and murdered indigenous persons.

While this funding is a critical first step, Western Governors also voiced their support for the BADGES for Native Communities Act to address the significant law enforcement shortages across the West.

In Other Advocacy

WGA continued to host quarterly meetings of the Western Governors' State Tribal Liaison Network, which connects state tribal liaisons across the West.

The quarterly meetings provide an opportunity for states to share priorities on issues related to opioid response, housing shortages, and the MMIP crisis.

At a recent meeting, U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development presented to the Network on its housing programs, and members were given the opportunity to provide input about how these programs are working for the tribal communities they engage with.

The Network also hosted a call with state MMIP coordinators to discuss opportunities for addressing the crisis through both state and federal actions.

Moving forward, the Network will seek to engage with BIA and other federal agencies to increase state-federal coordination.





HOUSING

New data from the Census Bureau shows that the West has been the fastest-growing region in the country over the last 23 years, encompassing all five of the fastest-growing states – Nevada (58%) Utah (52%), Idaho (51%), Texas, (51%), and Arizona (44%).

While this immense growth has allowed states to expand and diversify their economies, it has also created significant housing challenges that threaten states' ongoing economic growth.

To address this issue, Western Governors deployed a wide array of strategies, including federal advocacy focused on the need to increase housing resources for low-income, rural, and military families. New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham also announced that housing will be the focus of her 2024 WGA Chair initiative.

Housing Production and Preservation

The Governors' continued advocacy was rewarded in the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act, which allocated \$100 million to state and local governments "for the identification and removal of barriers to affordable housing production and preservation."

Housing for Military Families

The 2024 National Defense Authorization Act made changes to the Basic Needs Allowances for military members, which will change how cost-of-living expenses are calculated to offer more personalized financial support to military families.

These changes closely align with WGA Policy Resolution 2023-04, Housing is Foundational to the Success of the West, and they further support military members and their families.



At the 2023 Winter Meeting, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon and Colorado Governor Jared Polis hosted a breakout session focused on affordable housing. "Housing, of course, first and foremost is a roof over your head, but it's also the main pathway to middle class and wealth in our country," Governor Polis said. "Too many people are cut off from that if they are just relegated to subsidized units at rent only."

In the resolution, Western Governors "urge Congress and the Department of Defense to consider how housing costs affect recruiting, retention, and quality of life for military personnel and civilians. This should include adjusting the formula and process for determining the cost of housing on and near military installations; the process and frequency of adjusting locality pay, housing allowance... and other adjustments that could improve the affordability of housing and quality of life for both civilian and uniformed personnel."

In Other Advocacy

Western Governors strongly supported the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act (AHCIA) of 2023, which would expand allocations of the 9 percent Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and allow states to better leverage their bond authority for housing by lowering the Private Activity Bond financing threshold from 50 to 25 percent.

"LIHTC is a vital tool to encourage the development and rehabilitation of

affordable housing," the Governors wrote in a letter to the Senate Committee on Finance and the House Committee on Ways and Means. "As the need for affordable housing has grown, state Housing Credit allocations have not kept pace."

To further enhance the efficiency of these programs, Western Governors also shared recommendations to reduce the administrative burden associated with federal housing programs and streamline operations to expedite affordable housing development using the Department of the Treasury's administration of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program as a model.

As part of this push to rapidly increase supply, Western Governors also suggested the federal government consider funding more manufactured and modular housing and acknowledge the vital role they can play in providing affordable and accessible housing options, particularly in rural areas.



OUTDOOR RECREATION

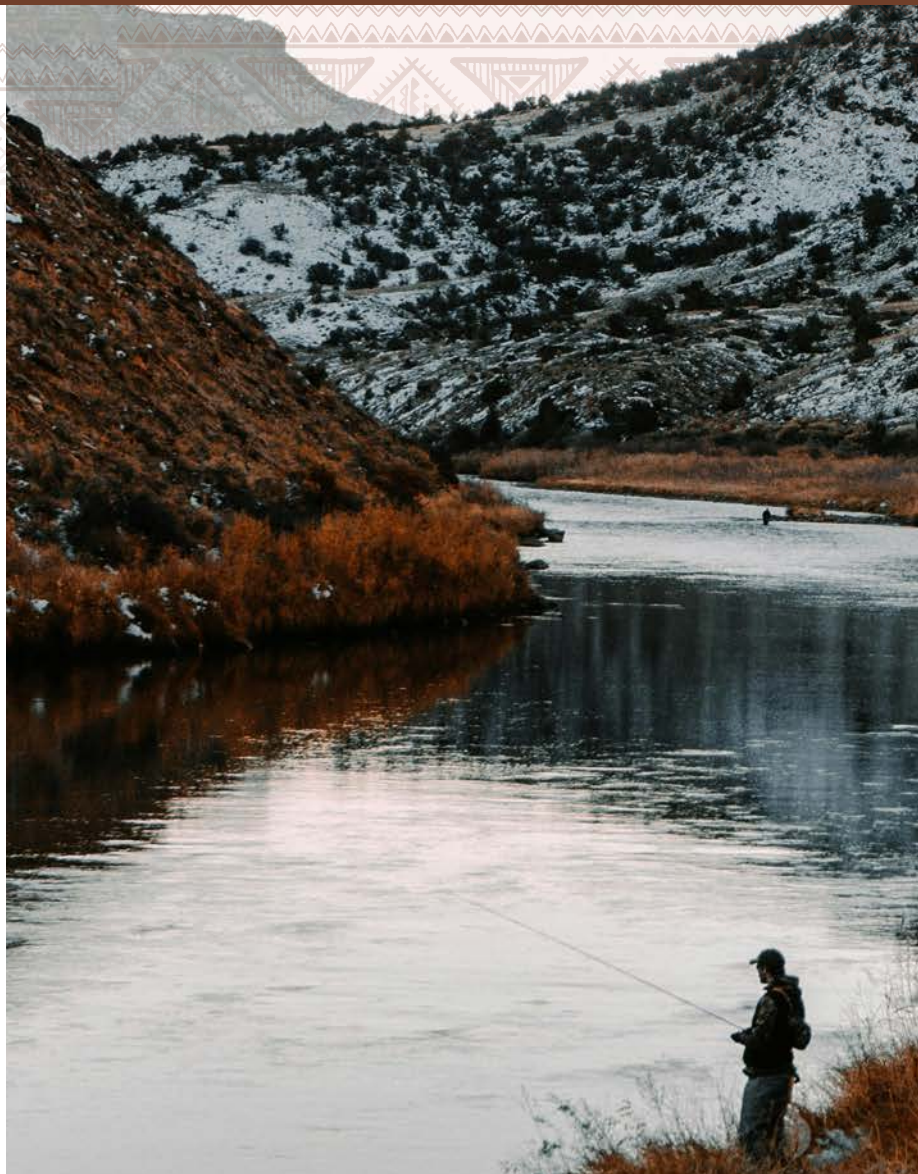
Outdoor recreation has become a significant economic driver for western states, accounting for an average of 2.8 percent of western states' total gross domestic product, according to the latest available data from 2022.

Western Governors urged Congress to increase funding for federal land management agencies to accommodate increased visitation, improve visitor experience, support local economies, and maintain public lands for multiple uses.

Strategic Action Plans

In response to the growing popularity of outdoor recreation, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) began developing new agency-wide outdoor recreation strategies this year.

Throughout the development process, WGA engaged with both agencies and hosted a call with BLM, USFS, and the state offices of outdoor recreation to discuss the implementation of these new strategies.



At the 2023 Winter Meeting, Cam Sholly, the Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, and Chip Jenkins, the Superintendent of Grand Teton National Park, spoke with the Governors, including Mark Gordon of Wyoming and Spencer Cox of Utah, about how states can work with the National Park Service to address the deferred maintenance backlog and ensure that parks are equipped to manage growing visitation.





RESOLUTIONS

Western Governors formally approved nine policy resolutions in FY24. The resolutions represent the Governors' collective policy on a broad range of issues affecting the region.

WGA Policy Resolution 2024-01, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship

Improving state-federal communication and coordination is among the Western Governors' highest priorities. In the absence of a Constitutional delegation of authority to the federal government, state authority should be presumed sovereign. Each executive department and agency should have a clear and accountable process to provide states with early, meaningful, and substantive input in the development of federal regulatory policies. Where authority

has been delegated by the federal government to the states, states should be granted the maximum administrative discretion possible and should be treated as partners and co-regulators.

WGA Policy Resolution 2024-02, National Forest and Rangeland Management

Western states contain over 75 percent of the national forest and grassland system, and communities in the West depend upon forests and rangelands for jobs, recreation, and quality of life. This resolution addresses a variety

of national forest and rangeland challenges, emphasizing that effective management is only possible through coordination between federal, state, local, and tribal land management agencies, including collaborative, cross-boundary management strategies. The resolution articulates Western Governors' policy recommendations relating to wildfire mitigation, suppression, and recovery. It also addresses major land management topics such as workforce development, infrastructure for active forest management, grazing administration, and forest products.



WGA Policy Resolution 2024-03, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act

This resolution updates Western Governors' policy positions on species management and conservation issues. It expresses the Governors' support for increased voluntary and proactive management efforts and use of best available science, while acknowledging the variability in state approaches to wildlife and habitat conservation. The resolution also contains Western Governors' policy on wildlife migration corridors and habitat.

WGA Policy Resolution 2024-04, Combating the Opioid Crisis

The opioid epidemic has become one of the nation's most devastating and lethal public health and safety crises. This new resolution highlights the challenges posed by the potency and availability of these drugs and the social and economic damage they inflict on communities and contains Western Governors' policy related to combating rising rates of opioid use disorders, overdoses, and deaths. The Governors support efforts to identify and mitigate emerging threats, curb the supply and distribution of illicit opioids and the inappropriate use of prescriptions, and provide access to a full range of effective prevention, treatment, and recovery approaches.

WGA Policy Resolution 2024-05, Disaster Preparedness and Response

The resolution recognizes the role Governors have in coordinating the four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. It also highlights federal agencies' roles and emphasizes the need for cooperation and clear communication between all levels of government and members of the

public. In any disaster or emergency situation, good communication is key to developing and executing an effective response, promoting public confidence in that response, and empowering citizens to make informed decisions about their safety and welfare.

WGA Policy Resolution 2024-06, Transportation Infrastructure in the Western United States

The resolution addresses surface transportation needs in the West. Western Governors emphasize their support for a long-term federal funding mechanism for the maintenance and expansion of both surface transportation networks and ports. The resolution highlights the need for flexible and accessible funding that allows states to optimize infrastructure investment alongside efficient processes and waivers to ensure timely deployment of funding. It also outlines the unique air service needs of rural communities, and the need for state-federal collaboration when planning and siting electric vehicle infrastructure.

WGA Policy Resolution 2024-07, Water Resource Management in the West

The resolution addresses the management of water resources in the West, highlighting states' sovereign authority over the allocation of water within their boundaries. It also emphasizes the importance of federal infrastructure investment in delivering clean and reliable water to communities throughout the West. Governors support federal programs and the role they play in managing water resources including programs under the Bureau of Reclamation, Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Geological Survey, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The resolution also addresses emerging cybersecurity threats.

WGA Policy Resolution 2024-08, Cleaning Up Abandoned Hardrock Mines in the West

"Good Samaritans" are entities that voluntarily clean up abandoned mine sites. These Good Samaritans face potential liability under the Clean Water Act (CWA), the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), despite not having owned or operated the mine. In the resolution, Western Governors call on Congress to enact legislation to protect Good Samaritans from potential liabilities under CWA, CERCLA, and RCRA. Western Governors support pilot projects, including projects under state-led programs, to address site-specific liabilities if comprehensive legislation addressing these issues is not possible in the short term. The resolution also emphasizes that states are best suited to determine Good Samaritan eligibility and manage reclamation plans and calls for full appropriations for the Abandoned Hardrock Mine Reclamation Program to address the backlog of abandoned hardrock mine inventory.

WGA Policy Resolution 2024-09, Water Quality in the West

Clean water is essential to strong economies, healthy ecosystems, and quality of life in the West. In this resolution, Governors emphasize states' role as co-regulators in the implementation of the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. It also conveys Western Governors' shared perspective on the role of federal assistance in meeting federal water quality standards, including technical assistance and funding for the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds.



Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo, North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, and Idaho Governor Brad Little.



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.

WGA 40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of WGA's founding, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon joined seven former Western Governors in Olympic Valley, California, to discuss the importance of bipartisanship as the country works to overcome the historic challenges it faces.

Their conversation was moderated by Judy Woodruff, the former anchor and managing editor of the PBS NewsHour.

"I wanted to see firsthand how bipartisanship is playing out among Western Governors at a time when Washington, D.C., and so much of the rest of the country, is struggling to find common ground," she said. "I think all

of us who care about this country should think it's important enough to be looking at this, looking clear-eyed at it, and trying to understand it so that we can even begin to have a hope for how we will come together."

To address the growing partisan divide in this country, the Governors said the country must stop relying so heavily on Washington, D.C., to solve problems. Instead, they suggested more influence should be given to the states themselves.

"We look too much to Washington, D.C., which is compounding the problems," former Utah Governor Gary Herbert said. "They're not in



touch and are playing this kind of the hill game... I think we can look more to the states for our solutions. We're much more nimble. We're more efficient, more effective, and we're closer to people."

Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon echoed the need for states to work together to tackle tough issues.



Former Montana Governor Steve Bullock cracks a joke at WGA’s 40th Anniversary celebration. He was joined by Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon and former WGA Chairs David Ige of Hawaii, Butch Otter of Idaho, Steve Bullock of Montana, Gary Herbert of Utah, Bob Miller and Brian Sandoval of Nevada, and Matt Mead of Wyoming. Together they discussed the importance of bipartisanship in politics.

“This group of bipartisan governors, and I’ve worked with many of them, really have a terrific perspective on how to get things done,” he said. “You can’t afford to be partisan about this. You’ve got to drill down to the issue, move it forward, and work with your colleagues.”

In addition to the Governors’ panel, WGA also hosted panel discussions with the Association’s current and former Executive Directors (Pam Inmann, James Maddy, Jim Ogsbury, James Souby, and Jack Waldorf), as well as current and former members of WGA’s Staff Advisory Council (John Chatburn (Idaho), Jessica Crowder (Wyoming), Lori Faeth (Arizona), Katie Mathews (California), Courtney Kerster (New Mexico) and Mark Rupp (Washington).

Participating Governors

WGA’s Chair, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, was joined by former Governors – and former WGA Chairs – David Ige of Hawaii, Butch Otter of Idaho, Steve Bullock of Montana, Gary Herbert of Utah, Bob Miller and Brian Sandoval of Nevada, and Matt Mead of Wyoming.

2024 ANNUAL MEETING

June 11-12, 2024

Following WGA’s 40th anniversary celebration, during which California Governor Gavin Newsom welcomed his fellow Western Governors to Olympic Valley, California, WGA’s Chair, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, kicked off the Association’s two-day Annual Meeting by announcing the release of the Decarbonizing the West initiative report.

Representing the culmination of his WGA Chair initiative, the report outlines several policy recommendations for advancing carbon capture, utilization, and storage technologies, as well as maximizing the region’s capacity for natural carbon sequestration through enhanced land and agricultural management practices.

“I am very happy to say today America has demonstrated yet again that innovation will trump regulation and that we can move forward in a future which is beneficial to all of us,” Governor Gordon said. “If we can continue to work together, there is so much that we can accomplish.”

To this end, the meeting’s first keynote address featured Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Xochitl Torres Small, who signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Western Governors to expand the scope of a previous shared stewardship MOU that the U.S. Department of Agriculture signed with WGA in 2018.

While much of the Annual Meeting was focused on environmental issues – as Governor Gordon said, “When we look at this wonderful picture of Lake Tahoe, what could be more important than to remember what our responsibilities are for our environment?” – it also included in-depth policy discussions on health care, including a conversation with Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra.

Participating Governors

WGA’s Chair, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, was joined by WGA Vice Chair, New Mexico Governor Lujan Grisham, as well as Idaho Governor Brad Little, Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo, and North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum.

Special Guests

The Governors engaged in discussions with Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra; Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Xochitl Torres Small; and Acting Deputy Secretary of the Interior Laura Daniel-Davis.

Resolutions

Western Governors approved five bipartisan policy resolutions at the 2024 Annual Meeting:

- WGA Policy Resolution 2024-05, Disaster Preparedness and Response
- WGA Policy Resolution 2024-06, Transportation Infrastructure in the Western United States
- WGA Policy Resolution 2024-07, Water Resource Management in the West
- WGA Policy Resolution 2024-08, Cleaning Up Abandoned Hardrock Mines in the West
- WGA Policy Resolution 2024-09, Water Quality in the West





From left to right: Colorado Governor Jared Polis, Idaho Governor Brad Little, Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo, and Utah Governor Spencer Cox.

2023 WINTER MEETING

November 6-8, 2023

The 2023 Winter Meeting, hosted in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, by WGA's Chair, Governor Mark Gordon, convened seven Western Governors alongside several senior administration officials and industry experts.

In line with his Chair initiative, Decarbonizing the West, Governor Gordon opened the meeting by discussing the importance of collaboration when addressing the region's energy and environmental challenges.

"I want to point out that the majority of minerals in the nation, most of the energy, many of the water issues, and many of the natural resource issues are represented on this panel of Governors," Governor Gordon said. "It has been my distinct honor to work with each of them and to collaborate on really useful solutions that make a difference for our country."

Governor Gordon and his colleagues expanded upon the need for continued collaboration with their partners in the federal government during a conversation with Secretary of the Interior Deb

Haaland and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Shalanda Young.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack also provided an in-depth keynote presentation about the threats the agriculture industry faces and outlined innovative strategies for supporting farming and ranching in rural communities.

The meeting's final keynote presentation featured Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, who spoke with the Governors about the opportunity to reimagine education in the post-pandemic world by providing students with more career options and reducing the cost of higher education.

Participating Governors

WGA's Chair, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon was joined by WGA Vice Chair, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs, Colorado Governor Jared Polis, Idaho Governor Brad Little, Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo, and Utah Governor Spencer Cox.

Special Guests

The Governors engaged in discussions with Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland; Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack; Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona; Office of Management and Budget Director Shalanda Young; and Under Secretary of Agriculture for Farm Production and Conservation Robert Bonnie.

Resolutions

Western Governors approved four bipartisan policy resolutions at the 2023 Winter Meeting:

- WGA Policy Resolution 2024-01, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship
- WGA Policy Resolution 2024-02, National Forest and Rangeland Management
- WGA Policy Resolution 2024-03, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act
- WGA Policy Resolution 2024-04, Combating the Opioid Crisis

CABINET SECRETARY BREAKFAST

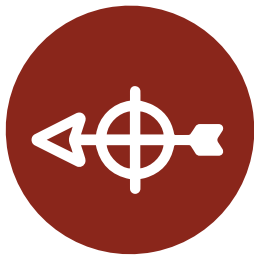
Each winter, WGA hosts a breakfast with Cabinet Secretaries in Washington, D.C. This year, the breakfast was attended by nine Western Governors and three senior Administration officials: Secretary

of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dennis McDonough, and Administrator of the Small Business Administration Isabel Casillas Guzman.

While they were in the nation's capital, WGA's staff also met with 19 Senate offices from 11 western states to talk about the Governors' priorities and upcoming Congressional activity.



From left to right: Utah Governor Spencer Cox, Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, Colorado Governor Jared Polis, Administrator of the Small Business Administration Isabel Casillas Guzman, Hawaii Governor Josh Green, Idaho Governor Brad Little, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs, Oregon Governor Tina Kotek, and North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum.



LOOKING AHEAD

At the conclusion of WGA's 2024 Annual Meeting, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon officially handed the reins as Chair of the Western Governors' Association to New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham.

The Governors also announced the election of Utah Governor Spencer Cox as WGA's new Vice Chair.

For her Chair initiative, Governor Lujan Grisham will focus on affordable housing.

"Too many working-class families lack access to housing that meets their

needs, and it diminishes quality of life and threatens our vibrant economic growth," said Governor Lujan Grisham. "We are laser focused on removing obstacles, reducing development costs, and putting new resources and public land in play to deliver this badly needed housing."

An update of Governor Lujan Grisham's initiative will be provided at WGA's 2024 Winter Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada, on December 9-10. Initiative findings will be memorialized in an initiative report to be released in conjunction with WGA's 2025 Annual Meeting.



In his last act as Chair of WGA, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon announced the election of New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham as the Association's Chair for FY25. "Good friend, great governor," he said. "I look forward to working with you over the next year."





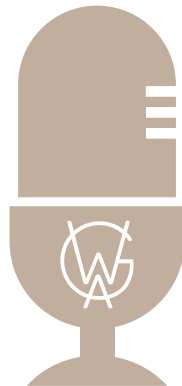
North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum joined Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon and New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham for a press conference at WGA's 2024 Annual Meeting, the media coverage for which was syndicated in over 150 publications including *USA Today* and *The New York Times*.

MEDIA COVERAGE

WGA continued to earn significant media exposure thanks to its important bipartisan policy work. Over the last year, the Western Governors' Association and its policy work were mentioned in 2,260 articles. Topics included WGA's work on carbon capture, utilization, and storage through the Decarbonizing the West initiative, the Western Prosperity Roundtable, affordable housing, mental health, wildfire, and much more.

PODCASTS

WGA published two episodes of its Out West podcast in FY24 – “The Heat Beneath Our Feet: Exploring the Potential of Geothermal Energy with Colorado Governor Jared Polis,” and “A Conversation with WGA Chair, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, and WGA Executive Director, Jack Waldorf.” In total, Out West episodes were downloaded 1,300 times in FY24. Since it was launched in 2020, Out West episodes have amassed 8,000 downloads. Check out the full Out West archive on Apple podcasts or Spotify.



VIDEO

Video content from the 2024 Western Prosperity Roundtable and the Decarbonizing the West initiative workshops and webinars were viewed 7,000 times for a total of 800 hours this year.

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

With rich content produced in connection with Governor Mark Gordon's WGA Chair initiative, Decarbonizing the West, traffic on WGA's website nearly doubled in FY24. That same content drove a significant increase in followers and engagements on WGA's Twitter account, as well as its LinkedIn and Facebook pages.

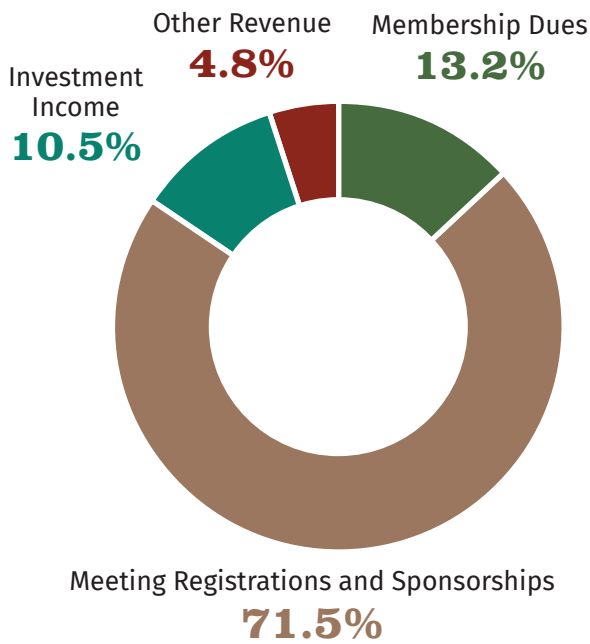


FINANCES

WGA income is derived from Western Governors’ annual dues, sponsor contributions, meeting registration fees, investment income, and other sources. WGA’s net income totaled \$774,943 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. The figures presented below are unaudited and an independent CPA firm has not yet expressed an opinion on them.

Revenues

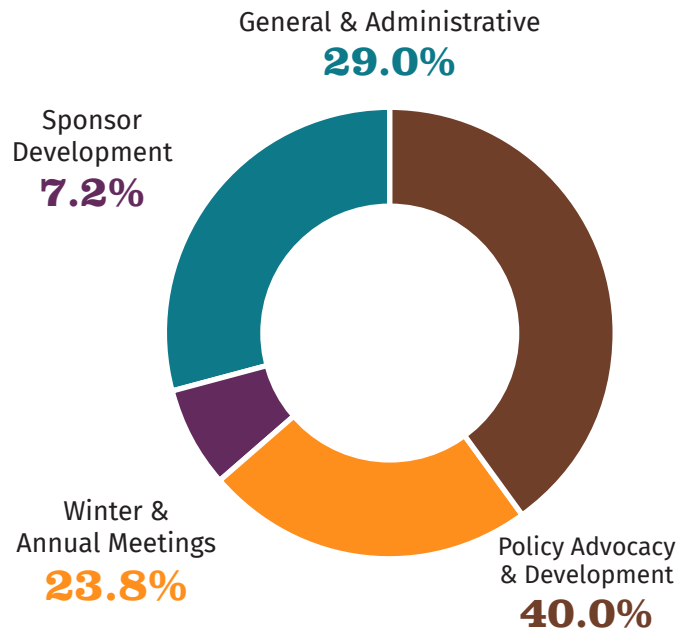
July 1, 2023—June 30, 2024



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| Membership Dues | \$693,000 |
| Meeting Registrations & Sponsorships | \$3,750,000 |
| Investment Income | \$550,000 |
| Other Revenue | \$250,000 |
| Total | \$5,243,000.00 |

Expenses

July 1, 2023—June 30, 2024



| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Public Advocacy & Policy Development | \$1,783,223 |
| Winter and Annual Meetings | \$1,063,722 |
| Sponsor Development | \$324,222 |
| General & Administrative | \$1,296,890 |
| Total | \$4,468,057.00 |

Net Income: **\$774,943**



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Wyoming
WGA Chair



Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham
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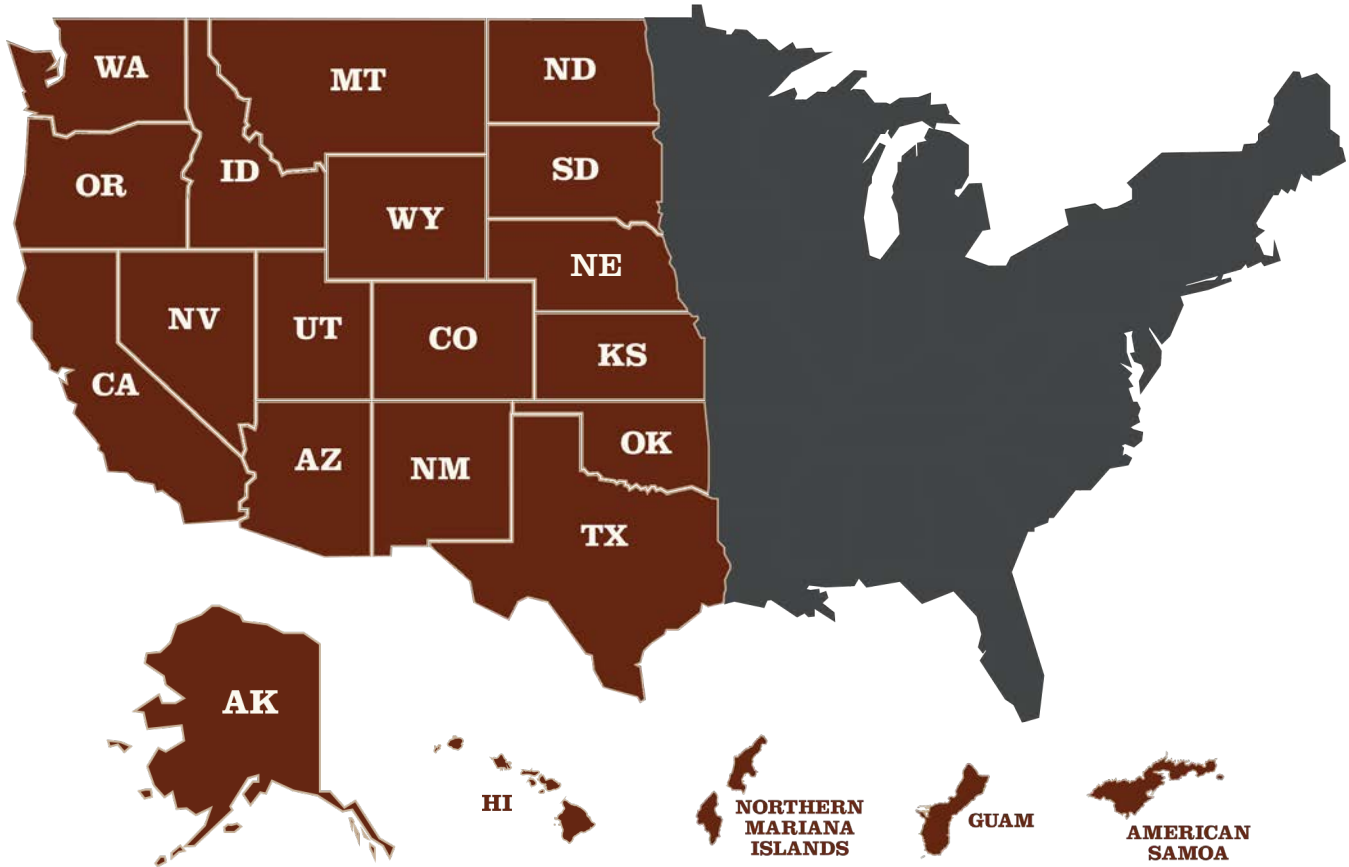
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