



2025



ANNUAL REPORT



**WESTERN
GOVERNORS'**
ASSOCIATION

Dear Friends and Colleagues,



I've now proudly served as Executive Director of the Western Governors' Association (WGA) for more than two years. With each passing year, I'm increasingly inspired by the bipartisan work of Western Governors and the community they have fostered at WGA.

It's one thing to talk about bipartisanship, it's another to watch it in action. I consider myself incredibly privileged to witness this group of Governors and their staff work through issues in a civil and bipartisan fashion.

With no shortage of challenges, Western Governors continue to find ways to work together and move the region forward. Their work is not dominated by zero-sum thinking. Instead, they are motivated by their unique ability to tackle the big issues facing our region. This willingness to put politics aside and focus on bipartisan solutions on nonpartisan issues is reflected in the many policy victories highlighted in this report.

But while it's the victories that get celebrated, I want to take a moment to reflect on the hard work that goes into every enacted policy. Not only do the Governors take time out of their busy schedules to meet with one another twice a year at WGA's Annual and Winter Meetings, but they also host workshops in support of the WGA Chair initiative and convene in Washington, D.C., to collectively advocate for western priorities.

These in-person meetings are meaningful. They open channels of communication, improve coordination, and even build friendships, but perhaps most importantly, they lead to the formation of durable policy that improves the lives of all Westerners.

This year, thanks in part to the Governors' bipartisan advocacy, Congress approved the Good Samaritan Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act of 2024, the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act, the Water Resources Development Act, the Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act of 2025, and the Economic Development Reauthorization Act of 2024. All of these bills contained provisions that put Western Governors' policy into action.

The Bureau of Land Management also finalized Resource

Management Plans to protect sage grouse, the Environmental Protection Agency announced its intention to amend the exceptional events rule to allow for more prescribed fires, and President Trump signed an executive order to upskill the country's workforce by expanding apprenticeship programs – all of which Western Governors explicitly advocated for.

Western Governors, however, are not keen to rest on their laurels. While successfully advocating for these different pieces of legislation and running their respective states, they updated nine policy resolutions this year to ensure their positions reflect the latest developments and anticipate future challenges.

They also produced the BRAND West initiative report, which outlines bipartisan policy recommendations for addressing the country's housing crisis.

The report is the culmination of New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham's WGA Chair initiative, Building Resilient and Affordable New Developments in the West (BRAND West). It is a testament to her vision and leadership as it offers timely and critical policy recommendations at a time when many western states are grappling with housing shortages.

We at WGA are grateful for Governor Lujan Grisham's incredible leadership over the past year, as well as appreciate her unique sense of humor and unwavering passion to serve the West and to advocate for Westerners of all ages and abilities. I'm also thrilled to continue WGA's mission with Utah Governor Spencer Cox as WGA's newly elected Chair. His thoughtful and action-oriented approach to solving problems will undoubtedly drive his WGA Chair initiative, Energy Superabundance: Unlocking Prosperity in the West, to incredible heights.

Thank you for supporting WGA and its mission to drive collective action on issues of critical importance to the West. We hope you remain involved, and I look forward to seeing you at WGA's 2025 Winter Meeting in Scottsdale, Arizona, on November 20 and 21.

Jack Waldorf
WGA Executive Director



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Building Resilient and Affordable New Developments in the West Initiative

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, Chair of WGA, launched the BRAND West initiative in July 2024 to explore the actions needed to expand access to housing in western states and territories. Over the past year, the initiative examined strategies and policies to address housing availability and affordability and promote smart and sustainable development in communities throughout the West.



Housing shortages across the nation have reached a tipping point, driving costs to untenable levels in many communities and leaving affordable housing out of reach for a growing number of Americans. However, this crisis did not occur overnight.

Western Governors recognize that communities need quick and affordable solutions that are tailored to the West, while the region needs a whole-of-government approach to relieve short-term housing pressures and address fundamental structural issues prevalent in the housing market. In each area

of focus, the BRAND West report elevates best practices and case studies across western states and territories and provides actionable recommendations for Congress and the federal government. The initiative is organized under four key pillars of housing access:



- **Simplifying and streamlining housing development.** Best practices from our western states include the modernization of land use regulations, expedited plan and permit review processes, and support for manufactured and modular homes. The federal government can advance these efforts by expanding programs like the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Pathways to Removing Obstacles to Housing (PRO Housing) Program, revisiting requirements for federally funded infill housing projects, and eliminating outdated regulations that hinder the adoption of manufactured and modular housing.

- **Reducing the costs of homebuilding.** Western states and territories have shown leadership in this area by creating targeted tax credit and funding programs. The federal government can contribute to this goal by expanding and creating tax incentives and evaluating the costs of federal housing regulations.

- **Supporting families through initiatives that help renters and homebuyers.** Western states and territories have instituted a number of programs to increase access to rental homes and support homeownership. The federal government's role may include improving rental assistance and enhancing programs that provide pathways to homeownership.

- **Investing in strategic, innovative, and data-informed initiatives across the housing ecosystem.** Recognizing that housing challenges do not exist in a bubble, initiatives in western states and territories are focusing on capacity-building and workforce development programs, sustainability and resilience efforts, enhanced cooperation, and expanded access to publicly owned parcels of land. The federal government can support these efforts by strengthening the skilled construction workforce, funding community resilience programs, promoting interagency coordination, and increasing opportunities for the smart and responsible development of appropriate federal parcels.



New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham released the special report of her WGA Chair initiative, **BRAND West**, alongside her fellow Western Governors at WGA's 2025 Annual Meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The work by Western Governors highlighted in the **BRAND West** report illustrates the unique nature of the challenges each community is facing and, as a result, how critical it is that the solutions are tailored appropriately. As the federal government considers the following recommendations, we encourage Congress and federal agencies to recognize these differences and provide maximum flexibility to allow states, territories, and localities to implement housing and workforce solutions in the ways that best meet the needs of their communities.

The **BRAND West** report is the culmination of an extensive partner engagement process with participation from experts across the region, industry sectors, and levels of government. With the leadership and support of Western

Governors Spencer Cox and Tina Kotek, WGA convened regional workshops and facilitated tours of innovative housing developments in Salt Lake City, Utah, and Bend, Oregon. The WGA 2024 Winter Meeting included panel discussions on housing issues, and WGA hosted a virtual webinar and state and territorial work session in support of the initiative. WGA also conducted a public survey to gather additional information on housing challenges and solutions. These events brought together local, state, and federal decision-makers; investors and financiers; developers; companies; think tanks; advocacy groups; and community-based organizations whose expertise and input were crucial to developing the findings and recommendations contained in the **BRAND West** report.



WESTERN LANDSCAPES



ENERGY AND MINING

Energy and mining are central to the economies, identities, and policy priorities of western states. Western Governors play a key role in shaping federal land use, permitting, and environmental policies affecting these sectors. Their leadership reflects a commitment to balancing economic development with environmental stewardship.

Good Samaritans

For more than 25 years, Western Governors have advocated for the protection of entities that voluntarily clean up abandoned mine sites — often referred to as Good Samaritans — against 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).

In 2024, the Good Samaritan Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act was passed into law, marking a monumental step in addressing liability concerns for Good Samaritans and accelerating the pace of mine reclamation through the establishment of a pilot program that will allow for the cleanup of 15 abandoned mine sites and features, the work for which is expected to begin by 2028. Western Governors have long supported the creation of such a program in WGA's policy

resolution, Cleaning Up Abandoned Hardrock Mines in the West.

"Hardrock mine reclamation is vitally important to the health of western communities and ecosystems," WGA Executive Director Jack Waldorf said. "The pilot program proposed in the bill would remove one of the main impediments preventing Good Samaritans, such as state agencies, local governments, nonprofit organizations, and industry partners, from cleaning up abandoned mine sites."

Categorical Exclusions

As part of the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023, a federal agency can adopt a categorical exclusion listed in another agency's procedures to implement the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). This year, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) adopted several categorical exclusions that reflected Western Governors' policy on streamlined permitting processes.

For instance, DOI adopted categorical exclusions for additions and modifications to transmission facilities; upgrading and rebuilding existing power lines; constructing and operating electrochemical battery or flywheel energy storage systems; the maintenance, repair, and repurposing of existing well facilities; and the installation of solar photovoltaic systems.

Geothermal energy

WGA continues to advocate on behalf of the Governors for an "all-of-the-above" approach to energy. This year, WGA Executive Director Jack Waldorf participated in a panel discussion entitled "Geothermal: Unlocking America's Untapped Energy Potential" at the Atlantic Council's Global Energy Center in Washington, D.C.



Jeremy Harrell, Chief Executive Officer, ClearPath; Joel Pedersen, Chief Executive Officer, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership; and Jill Springer, Senior Policy Advisor for Permitting, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, spoke with the Governors at WGA's 2024 Winter Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada, about strategies for improving permitting processes for critical projects.

The discussion focused on geothermal energy advancements and policy pathways for accelerating its deployment. Waldorf spoke about the strong bipartisan support for

geothermal energy and the importance of cross-industry collaboration to advance the geothermal sector.

"I go back to the power of the partnership," he said when asked how states can best develop a capable geothermal workforce. "It's making sure academia and industry are talking, it's making sure that government is providing the right programs, pathways, incentives, or in some cases letting the market do its thing. So, everyone has a role to play, but it doesn't happen without clear communication and conversations like this."



WGA Executive Director Jack Waldorf spoke at the Atlantic Council in February about the growing bipartisan support for geothermal energy use.

Continued Advocacy

At the close of the 2025 Annual Meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham passed the WGA leadership gavel to Utah Governor Spencer Cox, at which point he announced his WGA Chair initiative for Fiscal Year 2026. Titled, *Energy Superabundance: Unlocking Prosperity in the West*, it will explore opportunities to expand production, transmission, and storage options to achieve energy abundance across the West.

“It’s been about 50 years since we’ve had a moment like this, where there was incredible demand for energy, where there was capital available to build new energy sources and new energy transmission, and a willingness amongst politicians to actually get the job done,” Governor Cox said. “When we act regionally on these issues, the collaboration, the scale goes up in ways that really are meaningful and allow us to compete on a global scale for the best innovation and the best energy resources.”



At WGA's Annual Meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Utah Governor Spencer Cox announced his WGA Chair initiative for Fiscal Year 2026, entitled *Energy Superabundance: Unlocking Prosperity in the West*.



WATER

In the face of growing demand and intensifying drought, Western Governors have continued their strong advocacy for collaborative, cross-jurisdictional policymaking regarding water management, including strategic investments in water infrastructure and support for science-based conservation practices.

Water Data

Western Governors have long championed the collection, analysis, and public dissemination of national water data. WGA was instrumental in creating the National Integrated Drought System (NIDIS) in 1995. Ever since, the Governors have voiced their bipartisan support for the creation and expansion of similar programs.

This year, Congress passed the Water Monitoring and Tracking Essential Resources Data Improvement Act, which reauthorizes the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Federal Priority Streamgage Network (FPS) and its National Groundwater Monitoring Network (NGWMN) through fiscal year 2028.

“As drought is anticipated to increase in frequency and severity across the West,

these two programs are critical resources for water management and widely used by both public and private water managers.” Western Governors wrote in correspondence with the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

The FPS Network, previously known as the National Streamflow Information Program, operates



3,500 streamgages that monitor the amount of water flowing through streams and rivers across the country at any time. This data is used by public and private users, including utilities, environmental agencies, and government agencies responsible for water management and emergency response.

The NGWMN facilitates collaboration among federal, state, tribal, and local agencies to make groundwater data from nearly 20,000 wells publicly available.

Water Infrastructure

Western Governors' water policy was also reflected in the Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development

Act of 2024, which authorizes various water resource projects and feasibility studies by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps).

Key provisions explicitly supported by Western Governors include reauthorizing the National Dam Safety Program through 2028; mitigating the environmental effects of emerging contaminants like cyanotoxins; and updating the National Coastal Mapping program.

Western Water Cooperative Committee

To improve communication between western states and the Corps, Western Governors advocated for establishing The Western Water

Cooperative Committee in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023.

In particular, the Committee was designed to ensure the Corps' management of flood control projects is consistent with Congressional intent and defers to western states on matters of water allocation.

This year, the Committee was officially chartered by the Secretary of Defense. Moving forward, WGA will assist with identifying gubernatorial appointees for the Committee to ensure all western states included on the Committee have a Governor-appointed representative at the table.



WILDFIRE AND FOREST MANAGEMENT

With longer, more intense fire seasons, Western Governors are leading efforts to improve forest health, increase the pace and scale of active management, and coordinate cross-boundary wildfire response. Through investments in prevention, prescribed burns, workforce development, and community resilience, Western Governors are committed to advancing sustainable, science-based forest stewardship.

Shared Stewardship

Shared stewardship has become one of the Governors' most effective tools for managing the region's forests and mitigating fire risk. Western Governors helped pioneer the Shared Stewardship Strategy when they signed the first Shared

Stewardship Agreement in 2018 with then-Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue. Since then, the U.S. Forest Service has signed agreements with 47 states, the District of Columbia, and three U.S. territories.

To help optimize these agreements, the current Secretary of Agriculture,

Brooke Rollins, established an Emergency Situation Determination that includes direction for the Forest Service "to proactively update and expand Shared Stewardship Agreements to bring the full power of our partners to help address this emergency."





At WGA's 2024 Winter Meeting, Western Governors led a discussion about insuring homes against wildfire. They were joined by Danielle Smith, Premier of Alberta; RJ Simpson, Premier of the Northwest Territories; Dr. Anne Cope, Chief Engineer at the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety; Dean Cameron, Director of the Idaho Department of Insurance; Frank Frievalt, Director of the Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Institute at California Polytechnic State University; and Karen Collins, Vice President of Property and Environment at the American Property Casualty Insurance Association.

Last June, at WGA's Annual Meeting in Olympic Valley, California, Western Governors signed a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to expand the scope of a previous Shared Stewardship MOU that USDA signed with WGA in 2018.

Prescribed Fire

Prescribed fire is also a vital component of Western Governors' land management strategy, prompting strong advocacy for its expanded use.

In January, WGA hosted a webinar with representatives from the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI),

USDA, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to identify pathways for increasing the use of prescribed fire while minimizing public health risks from smoke exposure.

In February, WGA staff met with officials from the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs to underscore the urgent need for regulatory reforms to facilitate the broader application of prescribed fire.

In March, EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin directed the agency to reexamine several of its regulations related to prescribed fire and ensure that it can

be incorporated into State and Tribal Implementation Plans. As part of this review, EPA is reconsidering its Exceptional Events rule to determine whether smoke from prescribed fires should be excluded from counting against national air quality standards.

Western Governors have strongly supported this policy shift, noting that it would empower their states — and the partners working within them — to use prescribed fire more broadly. Doing so, they say, will improve their ability to reduce hazardous fuel loads, enhance forest health, and ultimately mitigate the risk of future catastrophic wildfires.

Community Wildfire Defense Grants

Community Wildfire Defense Grants are another tool that states rely on to mitigate the risk of wildfire. As of May 2025, the U.S. Forest Service awarded over \$420 million through the Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program to support wildfire risk reduction efforts across the United States. These funds have been allocated to 257 projects in 36 states, 2 territories, and 18 tribes.

Following a brief pause in funding, Secretary of Agriculture Rollins restored the Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program shortly after she met with Western Governors at WGA's Annual Cabinet Breakfast in Washington, D.C. The continued dissemination of these funds is a noteworthy victory for Western Governors that will directly benefit western communities.

Invasive Grasses

In the National Defense Authorization Act of 2024, the Governors' wildfire policies were reflected in a provision aimed at preventing the spread of invasive species, particularly those that exacerbate the risk of wildfire. The initiative directs the Secretary of Defense to brief Congress on the advisability of the Department of Defense enhancing efforts to control the spread of invasive species, including those that pose a fire risk. This aligns closely with Western Governors' policy, which calls for integrating invasive species management and hazardous fuels management across all levels of government.

Continued Advocacy

To further improve the region's fire preparedness, Western Governors have expressed their bipartisan support for the Fire Ready Nation



Collin Haffey, Post-Fire Recovery Program Manager with the Washington Department of Natural Resources, and Jeremy Klass, Mitigation and Recovery Bureau Chief with the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, speak with Utah Governor Spencer Cox following the Flood After Fire panel at WGA's 2025 Annual Meeting.

Act, which would establish a Fire Weather Services Program under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The program would be responsible for improving fire weather forecasting, smoke management, and other weather-related analytical services essential to fire management.

Western Governors have also expressed support for certain provisions in the Fix Our Forests Act – especially the bill's expansion of Good Neighbor Authority and Shared Stewardship. These cross-boundary land management strategies are integral for states and federal land agencies to identify and address shared management priorities. Similarly, the bill provides tools to improve vegetation management, prescribed fire, and targeted grazing – all of which are necessary to increase the pace and scale of wildfire risk reduction.

Of course, in today's wildfire regime, mitigating the risk of post-fire

disasters is almost as important as the fires themselves. To address concerns about post-wildfire flooding, Western Governors spoke with experts from the U.S. Geological Survey, Washington Department of Natural Resources, and the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management at WGA's 2025 Annual Meeting.

Their discussion focused on strategies for enhancing safety and promoting recovery in post-fire landscapes, including watershed protection, native seed production, vegetation recovery, and state-federal coordination on mitigation and recovery.

The panelists also discussed the need for interstate collaboration to improve flood safety in post-fire landscapes and asked the Governors about how to best implement this kind of collaboration.

"We think it's WGA," Utah Governor Spencer Cox said in response. "So, we'll get to work on that."



SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Whether it's through collaborative habitat restoration, voluntary conservation agreements, or regional partnerships, Western Governors are committed to proactive species management that ensures healthy ecosystems and thriving communities across the West.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program provides free technical and financial assistance to landowners interested in improving wildlife habitat. Since 1987, it has helped more than 30,000 landowners complete more than 50,000 projects that have restored more than six million acres of forest, prairie, wetland, and stream habitat.

Western Governors have long recognized and advocated for the critical role that private landowners play in wildlife conservation. Congressional reauthorization of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program through 2029 was celebrated by

Western Governors as a win for fish and wildlife resources throughout the West.

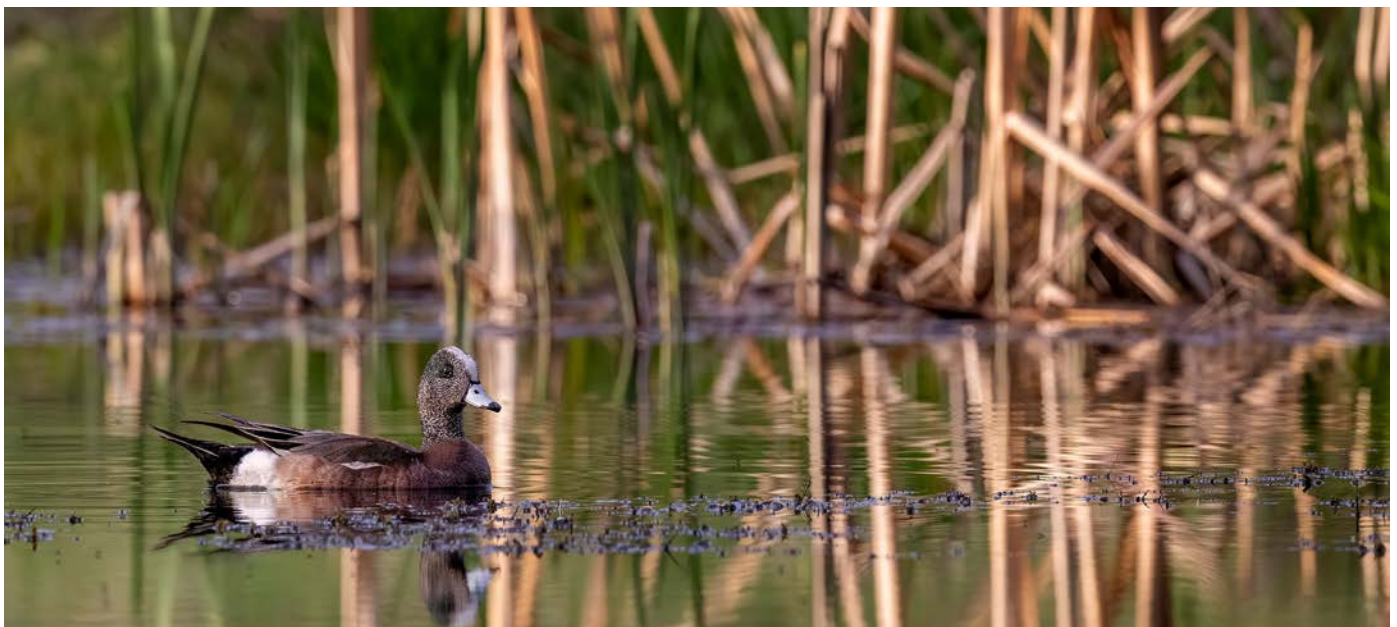
Sage Grouse

Western Governors also celebrated the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) finalizing Resource Management Plans for Colorado and Oregon. These plans represent an important step towards reversing serious declines in greater sage-grouse populations across the West.

Developed in part through WGA's Sage-grouse Task Force, a branch of the Task Force on Collaborative Conservation that was established in 2022 by WGA, DOI, and USDA to

enhance collaboration across federal, state, and local jurisdictions, these Resource Management Plans will hopefully become a model for other states to follow in the near future.

"The BLM process engaged Coloradans from across the range of the greater sage-grouse, and we thank the agency for their collaboration," Colorado Governor Jared Polis said. "The bipartisan Western Governors' Association Sage-grouse Task Force has been involved since 2023, which led to comprehensive discussions during this plan's development. Colorado's partnership with the BLM was key to ensuring we have the best plan available to protect this keystone species of our sagebrush ecosystems."





WESTERN PROSPERITY



OUTDOOR RECREATION

Outdoor recreation continues to grow as a substantial economic driver for western communities, with states like Montana and Hawaii leaning on outdoor recreation for 4.6% and 6.3% of their GDP, respectively.

To further leverage the growing popularity of outdoor recreation without overcrowding western communities, Western Governors advocated for the federal government to provide additional support for managing increased visitation at the West's world-class outdoor recreation destinations.

EXPLORE Act

Many of the Governors' policy priorities on outdoor recreation were reflected in the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act, which was signed into law on January 5, 2025.

The final version of the EXPLORE Act included important provisions that align closely with Western Governors' bipartisan policy. They include authorizing public-private partnerships to increase parking opportunities and modernize infrastructure; creating a Real-time Data Pilot Program to help improve visitor management; and streamlining the permitting process for outfitters and guides.

"The West has always welcomed visitors who flock to its iconic landscapes," Western Governors wrote in a letter to Senate leadership in September. "Increased visitation puts additional pressure on the entire recreation system, from infrastructure needs and the maintenance backlog to amenities and services provided by local communities. Western Governors look forward to working with you to ensure that outdoor recreation remains a vibrant part of our local communities."

Continued Advocacy

As part of these efforts, WGA Executive Director Jack Waldorf participated in the inaugural National Leadership Forum on Rural Development through Outdoor Recreation. Hosted by the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable in October 2024, the Forum brought together 70 leaders in rural development, outdoor recreation, and conservation to share experiences and identify how to continue to support rural communities through outdoor recreation.



Dustin Berg, CEO of GO Unlimited; Tracy Meier, Chief Program and Education Officer at the National Ability Center; and Zach Taylor, Park Manager with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, spoke with Western Governors at WGA's 2025 Annual Meeting about the economic benefits of increasing opportunities for outdoor recreation.

The conversation continued at WGA's 2025 Annual Meeting where experts from GO Unlimited, the National Ability Center, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife joined Western Governors for a discussion about how to improve access to outdoor recreation for those with all levels of abilities.

"We talk about dignity and risk, and just because you have a disability,

it doesn't mean that you should not have the same opportunities," said Tracy Meier, Chief Program and Education Officer at the National Ability Center. "So that is our job as a community, to make sure that people have education and the resources so that we can provide those opportunities."



RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Limited local capacity has hindered the ability of rural western communities to access critical resources that improve their economic vitality. To address this issue, Western Governors advocated for reforms to key programs related to expanded broadband access, economic development grants, and disaster response.

Economic Development Administration

Congress adopted many of the policy recommendations Western Governors sent to congressional leadership in the Economic Development Reauthorization Act of 2024, which passed as part of the Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024.

Along with officially reauthorizing the Economic Development Administration for the first time since

2004, the Act increased resources for building local economic development capacity; expanded the criteria by which a project can receive increased federal cost share; created the High-Speed Broadband Development Initiative; and established the Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience.

“The Economic Development Administration (EDA) provides critical support for western communities to invest in rural development, support workforce development, and

expand broadband access,” reads a Western Governors’ letter sent to congressional leaders in November 2024. “Reauthorizing EDA while modernizing and improving its economic development programs would advance many of the bipartisan policy recommendations included in Western Governors’ Association policy resolutions Rural Development, Broadband Connectivity, and Workforce Development in the Western United States.”



Representative Vikki Breese-Iverson of the Oregon House of Representatives; Seth Leonard, Program Manager at the Center for Multifamily Housing Preservation at the Housing Assistance Council; Jill Rees, Deputy State Director for USDA Rural Development in Oregon; and Lisa O’Brien, Executive Director of Taos Housing Partnership spoke about overcoming barriers to building rural housing at the BRAND West initiative workshop in Bend, Oregon, which was hosted by Oregon Governor Tina Kotek.





WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Workforce development is essential to the economic vitality and long-term competitiveness of the region. With rapidly evolving industries, shifting labor demands, and persistent workforce shortages — particularly in rural areas — Western Governors are focused on building a skilled, adaptable workforce that meets the needs of employers and communities alike.

Apprenticeship

Western Governors believe that an important piece of developing a skilled, adaptable workforce starts with strong apprenticeship and technical education programs. This year, an Executive Order (EO), Preparing Americans for High-Paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future, called for changes that align closely with Western Governors' bipartisan policy on workforce development.

The EO outlines a plan to upskill the country's workforce to meet the demands of rapidly evolving industries by expanding apprenticeship programs by one million active new apprenticeships and integrating apprenticeship programs with educational institutions, among other policy prescriptions that mirror a Western Governors' policy resolution on workforce development, which was updated and adopted this year.

"Western Governors recognize that there are many pathways that students can take to a successful career, including post-secondary education and skills training or work-based learning programs such as registered apprenticeships," reads the policy resolution.

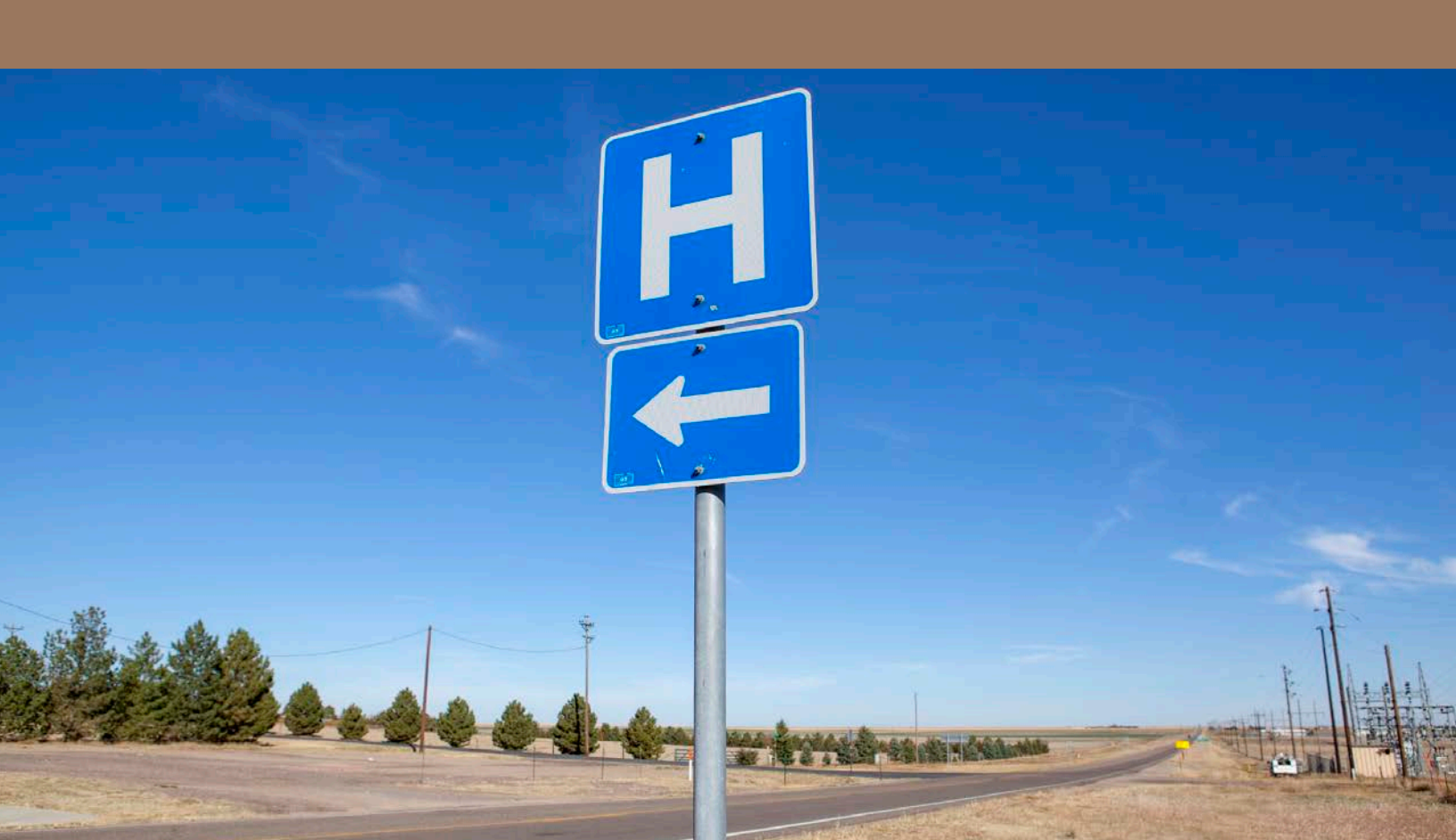
Registered apprenticeships in the United States have risen sharply in recent years, climbing from approximately 360,000 in 2015 to nearly 680,000 in 2024, according to data from the U.S. Department of Labor.



U.S. Secretary of Labor Lori Chavez-DeRemer spoke with Western Governors at WGA's 2025 Annual Meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico, about the need to promote job growth, streamline regulations, and prepare the workforce for emerging technologies like artificial intelligence. To do so, she outlined efforts to expand apprenticeships, increase flexibility in workforce training, and empower state-led innovation.



U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon spoke with Western Governors at WGA's 2025 Annual Meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico, about her department's efforts to promote apprenticeships and short-term credential programs for high school graduates, along with more traditional options like four-year colleges.



HEALTH CARE

Ensuring access to affordable, high-quality health care – especially in rural and underserved communities – is always a priority for Western Governors. This year, their advocacy focused on strengthening emergency response systems and leveraging innovation like telehealth to close gaps in care.

Medicare Ambulance Services

In response to a letter Western Governors sent to Chiquita Brooks-LaSure, the Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Congress extended temporary add-on payments for Medicare ambulance services within the Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025. The 2% increase for urban areas, 3% for rural areas, and 22.6% for super-rural areas were extended until October 1, 2025.

“EMS providers serve as a lifeline

in rural communities where residents are typically older and face more pronounced barriers to accessing health care than their urban counterparts,” the letter read. “We believe that... adjustments to Medicare reimbursement could help the viability of rural EMS and more accurately reflect the ways in which personnel provide care in these communities.”

Telehealth Extension

The Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025, also extended flexibilities for Medicare telehealth

through September 30, 2025. These flexibilities include the removal of geographic and originating site restrictions, an increase in the number of practitioners who are eligible to provide telehealth services, reimbursement for audio-only care, and the expansion of telehealth services for federally qualified health centers and rural health centers. All these reforms closely track with Western Governors’ policy recommendations in a WGA policy resolution titled, Physical and Behavioral Health Care in the Western United States.



Opioids

Despite the recent expansion of telehealth services, many barriers still exist for people who need medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) and other lifesaving interventions. In WGA's policy resolution, Combating the Opioid Crisis, Western Governors advocate for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to enact permanent regulations permitting the use of telemedicine for both buprenorphine inductions and ongoing medication management now that COVID-19 flexibilities have expired.

This year, DEA amended its regulations to expand the circumstances under which practitioners can provide their patients with remote access to buprenorphine, a medicine used to treat opioid use disorder. The change allows patients to receive a six-month supply of buprenorphine through telephone consultation with a provider.

In addition to improving treatment options, Western Governors also advocated for more aggressively pursuing the suppliers of illegal drugs. WGA policy advises the Administration and Congress to use "all available tools, including sanctions, against individuals and groups involved in the illicit production and distribution of fentanyl and other drugs."

In line with the Governors' recommendation, President Trump issued an Executive Order on January 20, 2025, that designated eight cartels and other organizations as foreign terrorist organizations and specially designated global terrorists. Subsequently, The Office of Foreign Assets Control blocked all their



Janessa Graves, Director of WWAMI Rural Health Research Center; Joe Theine, CEO of the Southwest Health System; and Christina Campos, former CEO of Guadalupe County Hospital, joined Western Governors at WGA's 2025 Annual Meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for a discussion about policy solutions that can help strengthen the rural health workforce and improve access to care.

property in the United States and prohibited U.S. citizens from engaging in transactions with them. Foreign financial institutions that knowingly facilitate a transaction or provide financial services for any of these entities could also be subject to U.S. sanctions.

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the United States recorded 30,000 fewer drug overdose deaths in 2024 compared to the year before, marking the biggest one-year decline in over four decades of tracking. Health officials and researchers are not certain what caused the sharp drop, but several developments are believed to have played a role, including wider access to naloxone, the overdose-reversing drug that is now available over-the-counter, expanded addiction treatment programs, changes in drug use patterns, a growing public awareness, and significant investments from opioid lawsuit settlements that are being used to fund prevention, harm reduction, and recovery efforts.

Continued Advocacy

At WGA's 2025 Annual Meeting, Western Governors spoke with experts from the WWAMI Rural Health Research Center, Southwest Health System, and Guadalupe County Hospital about strategies for supporting rural hospitals.

The Governors discussed challenges faced by rural health care systems and ways to improve access to care through improved funding mechanisms, rural workforce development, and more.

"When we think of rural health care, we think of doctors and nurses," said North Dakota Governor Kelly Armstrong. "And one thing we learned [from COVID] – whether it was a long-term care facility or a rural hospital – if you don't have janitors and cooks and the people to run the ecosystem, you don't have a health care facility. And oftentimes we concentrate on the professional positions you need. But if you don't have the other ones, you don't have anything."



Western Governors announced the bipartisan approval of five policy resolutions at WGA's 2024 Winter Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada (pictured). Another four policy resolutions were approved at WGA's 2025 Annual Meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



RESOLUTIONS

Western Governors formally approved nine policy resolutions in Fiscal Year 2025. The resolutions represent the Governors' collective policy on a broad range of issues affecting the region including critical minerals, radioactive materials management, biosecurity and invasive species management, recreation and tourism on public lands, and much more.

Policy Resolution 2025-01, Energy in the West

Western energy production and delivery infrastructure are indispensable to meeting our nation's energy demand, and the energy sector is a significant contributor to the economic success of many western communities. The effects of extreme weather events, the integration of clean energy resources, increasing demand from

data centers, the electrification of vehicles and buildings, and the retirement of traditional energy generating assets are all contributing to fundamental shifts in the energy and electricity sectors. This resolution expresses Western Governors' collective priorities and recommendations for energy in the West, including grid modernization and resilience, innovation and technology, and economic and

workforce development, while recognizing that energy priorities, use, and development vary widely among western states and territories. The resolution also incorporates the recommendations emerging from two recent WGA Chair initiatives: the *Heat Beneath Our Feet* initiative of Colorado Governor Jared Polis, and the *Decarbonizing the West* initiative of Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon.



Policy Resolution 2025-02, Air Quality Protection and Management

Clean air is essential for strong communities and quality of life. Air quality is influenced by many human activities and natural phenomena. Western states have generated significant emissions reductions since the Clean Air Act was originally passed in 1963. Only by working together to understand and address air quality challenges in the West will states and federal partners make further improvements to air quality. This resolution presents Western Governors' recommendations to improve state-federal cooperation in the regulation of air quality, ozone and particulate matter, exceptional events, regional haze, methane, and hydrofluorocarbon emissions. The resolution also expresses support for the increased use of prescribed fire to reduce the air quality effects of uncharacteristic wildfire in the West, and encourages greater state-federal collaboration on smoke management planning and other tools to facilitate the use of prescribed fire where appropriate.

Policy Resolution 2025-03, Workforce Development in the Western United States

Education and workforce training that is aligned with industry demand

creates opportunity for students and workers to secure good jobs and builds a skilled workforce that can support economic growth. Western Governors call for expanding work-based learning, supporting high-quality career and technical education, and facilitating lifelong learning through workforce development policies. Governors also emphasize the need for flexibility in workforce system funding to help states anticipate and respond to changing economic conditions with creative solutions. The Governors support increased investment in state data infrastructure and better alignment across federal workforce, housing, human services, and education programs to improve the delivery of services.

Policy Resolution 2025-04, Compensatory Mitigation

Compensatory mitigation plays an important role in wildlife management and conservation, offsetting the loss of wetland and aquatic resource functions in a watershed affected by development activities. This resolution conveys the Governors' policy on compensatory mitigation and federal deference to state regulatory policies. It highlights the Governors'

support for the federal government adhering to state mitigation policies and recognizing and incorporating the mitigation hierarchy into federal planning processes, and using adaptive management practices to avoid rigid mitigation requirements and formal regulations.

Policy Resolution 2025-05, Physical and Behavioral Health Care in Western States

Access to high-quality physical and behavioral health care services is a cornerstone for maintaining and enhancing the quality of life in western states. However, the West faces unique challenges that can hinder the ability to provide comprehensive health care to western residents. The resolution outlines Western Governors' policies and recommendations to address a wide range of health care challenges, including growing rates of behavioral health conditions, workforce shortages across the health care industry, social and economic conditions that affect health outcomes, and barriers to care in rural, frontier, and tribal communities. The Governors also acknowledge the importance of strong state-federal collaboration to ensure that all levels of government are working together to promote the health of the West's citizens.

Policy Resolution 2025-06, National Minerals Policy

Western Governors recognize the importance of strengthening domestic mineral supply chains to support energy, economic, and national security through policies and legislation that unlock our domestic mineral potential and ensure access to critical minerals. The resolution calls for a national minerals policy that enables mineral exploration and development by, in part, addressing federal permitting complexities that create uncertainty or extensive delays. The resolution supports addressing litigation risks and streamlining federal permitting processes through the use of mechanisms like categorical exclusions. It also supports non-extractive mining operations such as processing, recycling, and reuse, which are also vital elements of a stable and secure domestic mineral supply chain.

Policy Resolution 2025-07, Radioactive Materials Management

The resolution establishes Western Governors' policy on radioactive materials management. Specifically, the resolution supports DOE's safe

and uneventful transportation of transuranic waste through western states to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant disposal site in New Mexico. It notes the need for ongoing compliance with federal radioactive waste transport safety requirements and early coordination and effective communication with state, tribal and local governments. The resolution also affirms that no radioactive waste storage or disposal facility should be located within the geographic boundaries of a western state or U.S. territory without the written consent of the current Governor.

Policy Resolution 2025-08, Biosecurity and Invasive Species Management

This resolution addresses invasive species management in western states and territories, including: a call to address the destructive relationship between invasive grasses and wildfires; mechanisms to enhance regional invasive species research, planning, and coordination; and recommendations to Congress and federal agencies on improving invasive species management on federal lands and supporting state-led management efforts.

Policy Resolution 2025-09, Recreation and Tourism on Public Lands

This resolution articulates Western Governors' policy on the management of recreation and tourism on public lands. Governors support public access and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities while protecting ecological, economic, and cultural resources, and encourage federal agencies to coordinate and collaborate with states and local stakeholders. The resolution recommends actions that the federal government should take to ensure federal land management agencies have the necessary resources to accommodate increased visitation, enhance the visitor experience, support local economies, and maintain public lands for multiple uses. The resolution also encourages the federal government to clearly communicate contingency plans and provide clear direction to regional and local land managers, communities, and state tourism offices in the case of future potential federal government shutdowns to minimize negative impacts to communities and tourists.





MEETINGS AND OUTREACH

2025 ANNUAL MEETING

The 2025 Annual Meeting of the Western Governors' Association, hosted in New Mexico's historic capital city of Santa Fe by WGA Chair, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, brought together seven Western Governors and five U.S. Cabinet Secretaries for two days of robust, bipartisan discussions on the region's most urgent issues.

In attendance were WGA's Chair, **New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham**, WGA's Vice Chair, **Utah Governor Spencer Cox**, **Colorado Governor Jared Polis**, **Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Arnold Palacios**, **North Dakota Governor Kelly Armstrong**, **South Dakota Governor Larry Rhoden**, and **Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon**.

Governor Lujan Grisham kicked off the meeting by announcing the

bipartisan approval of four WGA policy resolutions. These updated resolutions outline the Governors' shared policy positions on mineral production, radioactive materials management, biosecurity and invasive species, and recreation and tourism on public lands.

Governor Lujan Grisham also unveiled the BRAND West initiative report. The culmination of her WGA Chair initiative, the report outlines

2025 Annual Meeting attendees from left to right: North Dakota Governor Kelly Armstrong, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, Colorado Governor Jared Polis, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, Utah Governor Spencer Cox, South Dakota Governor Larry Rhoden, and Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Arnold Palacios. Idaho Governor Brad Little attended but is not pictured.

best practices being employed by states throughout the region as well as actionable federal policy recommendations to tackle the nation's housing crisis.

"The BRAND housing report offers a roadmap to help public and private sector leaders develop new housing stock across the West, not only putting the American Dream of homeownership within reach for more Americans but also providing housing for the workforce of the future. I want to thank all who participated in creating this important and useful document," said Governor Lujan Grisham.

Of course, the Annual Meeting also featured in-depth policy discussions with national thought leaders.

Keynotes were delivered by former North Dakota Governor and current Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins, Secretary of Labor Lori Chavez-DeRemer, Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin.

Reflecting on his time as Governor and his involvement with WGA, Secretary Burgum remarked, "One of the great joys of being a Governor was participating in the Western Governors' Association. It's one of the most productive organizations in the country for advancing bipartisan, smart policy that affects everyone in the West."

In addition to the keynotes, the attending Governors led panel discussions on post-fire flooding, affordable housing, outdoor recreation, and rural health care.

The meeting concluded with Governor Lujan Grisham passing the WGA leadership gavel to Governor



2024 Winter Meeting attendees from left to right: Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, Utah Governor Spencer Cox, Colorado Governor Jared Polis, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo, and Hawaii Governor Josh Green. Idaho Governor Brad Little attended but is not pictured.

Cox. She also announced that Hawaii Governor Josh Green will serve as Vice Chair.

Upon receiving the gavel, Governor Cox announced his WGA Chair initiative, Energy Superabundance: Unlocking Prosperity in the West, which will focus on expanding the region's energy infrastructure to meet rising demand. The initiative will convene experts to explore ways to unlock more reliable, secure, and affordable energy to achieve energy abundance across the West.

"Governor Lujan Grisham has been a tremendous Chair, showing real leadership in uniting us to tackle the housing crisis," Governor Cox said. "Now, we're turning to energy—a bold and urgently needed focus. It's been nearly 50 years since we've had this kind of moment: rising demand, available capital, and the political will to build. And that's exactly what we intend to do."

2024 WINTER MEETING

The camaraderie among Western Governors was on full display at WGA's Winter Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada, on December 9 and 10, 2024.

Their interactions highlighted the strong relationships they've built with one another while developing effective bipartisan solutions for many of the region's most critical issues.

In attendance was WGA's Chair, **New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham**, WGA's Vice Chair, **Utah Governor Spencer Cox**, as well as **Colorado Governor Jared Polis**, **Hawaii Governor Josh Green**, **Idaho Governor Brad Little**, **Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo**, and **Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon**.

"This organization operates in what I would argue, isn't really bipartisan anymore, it's nonpartisan," Governor Lujan Grisham said. "We are having

constructive conversations with experts from across the country, engaging both public and private sector individuals and organizations. We ask tough questions and work together to find meaningful solutions to these problems.”

The effectiveness of their collaboration was evident in the Governors’ approval of five bipartisan policy resolutions focused on air quality, compensatory mitigation, energy, health care, and workforce development.

“As we know, if we act independently instead of together, our voices are often unheard [in Washington, D.C.],” Governor Lombardo said. “But together, we have the momentum to

create change in the western United States and address the issues we face in common.”

Over the course of the two-day meeting, the Governors continued their bipartisan work during public policy discussions about permitting reform, the use of public lands for housing developments, and insuring homes against wildfire.

“If I may offer a word of mahalo, which is a word for thanks, from Hawaii to these good Governors, and all of you who stepped up when we had our wildfire back about 15 months ago,” Governor Green said. “I learned a lot from the Governors who have wrestled with wildfires... It made a big difference to have mentors instructing

us how to best begin to recover.”

The Governors also discussed strategies for improving access to health care in rural areas and addressing health concerns related to natural disasters with then-Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra.

Finally, the Governors spoke with Steve Inskeep, the host of NPR’s Morning Edition and First Up, as well as the author of the recent book *Differ We Must: How Lincoln Succeeded in a Divided America*, about what lessons they could take from President Lincoln – especially as it relates to healing this country’s partisan divide and overcoming political disagreements.



Cabinet Breakfast attendees from left to right: North Dakota Governor Kelly Armstrong, EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon, Utah Governor Spencer Cox, Governor of American Samoa Pulaali'i Nikolao Pula, Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, Oregon Governor Tina Kotek, South Dakota Governor Larry Rhoden, Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum, Secretary of Energy Chris Wright, Montana Governor Greg Gianforte, Guam Governor Lou Leon Guerrero, Idaho Governor Brad Little, and Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Arnold Palacios. Colorado Governor Jared Polis attended but is not pictured.

CABINET BREAKFAST

At the invitation of Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, the former Governor of North Dakota, the Western Governors' Association hosted this year's Cabinet Breakfast at the headquarters of the U.S. Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C.

This year's breakfast included 13 Western Governors – WGA's Chair, **New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham**, WGA's Vice Chair, **Utah Governor Spencer Cox**, **Governor of American Samoa Pulaali'i Nikolao Pula**, **Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy**, **Colorado Governor Jared Polis**, **Governor of Guam Lou Leon Guerrero**, **Idaho Governor Brad Little**, **Montana Governor Greg Gianforte**, **North Dakota Governor Kelly Armstrong**, **Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Governor Arnold Palacios**, **Oregon Governor Tina Kotek**, **South Dakota Governor Larry Rhoden**, and **Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon**.

The breakfast afforded them the opportunity to meet with several members of President Trump's Cabinet, including Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins, Secretary of Energy Chris Wright, and Lee Zeldin, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

While WGA staff were in our nation's capital, they also discussed western policy priorities with 22 Congressional offices and the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.

"It's always great to be in our Nation's capital advocating for western priorities," WGA Executive Director Jack Waldorf said. "This year's Cabinet Breakfast at the Department of the Interior was a particularly productive discussion, and one that we look forward to continuing with our federal partners at WGA's Annual Meeting in Santa Fe this June."

MEDIA

Media Coverage

WGA continued to earn significant media exposure thanks to its important bipartisan policy work. Over the last year, WGA and its policy work were mentioned in 3,600 news articles and broadcasts. Publications included The Washington Post, Associated Press, NPR, The Hill, The Washington Examiner, Forbes, Bloomberg, Newsweek, and many more.

Out West Podcast

WGA's *Out West* podcast was downloaded 3,000 times in Fiscal Year 2025. This year's episodes included "Leave it to Beaver: How Nature's Engineers Help Mitigate Disasters;" "Decarbonizing the West;" and "Fighting Invasive Mussels in Western States with Idaho Governor Brad Little."



Video

This year, video content from the BRAND West initiative and WGA's 40th Anniversary celebration was viewed 7,500 times on WGA's YouTube channel for a total of 675 hours. The most viewed videos were an interview with former Governors Matt Mead and Steve Bullock titled, "How to Work with Others While Staying True to Your Values," a highlight video from WGA's 2024 Annual Meeting, and the BRAND West workshop in Bend, Oregon.

Website and Social Media

WGA's website (westgov.org) attracted over 70,000 users, accounting for 160,000 page views this year. On social media, WGA's content generated hundreds of thousands of impressions and shares, bringing the Governors' work to a wider audience. In total, WGA's social media content across X, LinkedIn, and Facebook produced an 80% increase in impressions and a 14% increase in shares throughout the year.



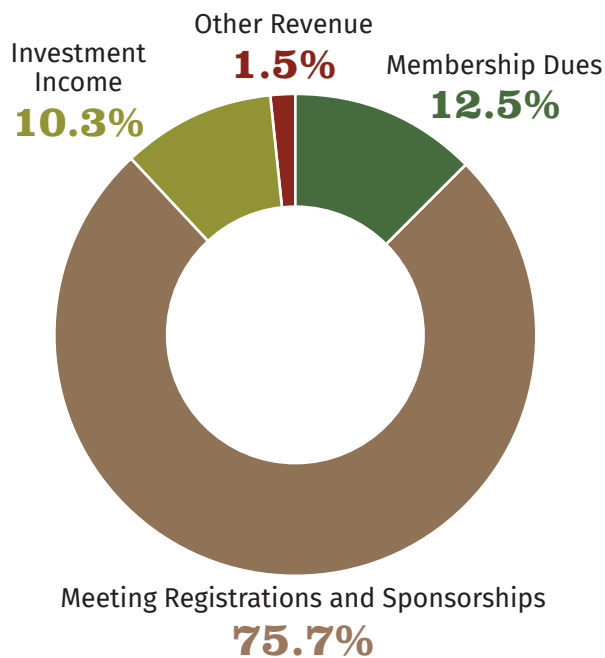


FINANCES

WGA's income is derived from Western Governors' annual dues, sponsor contributions, meeting registration fees, investment income, and other sources. WGA's net income totaled \$1,345,682 for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2025. The figures presented below are unaudited and an independent CPA firm has not yet expressed an opinion on them.

Revenue

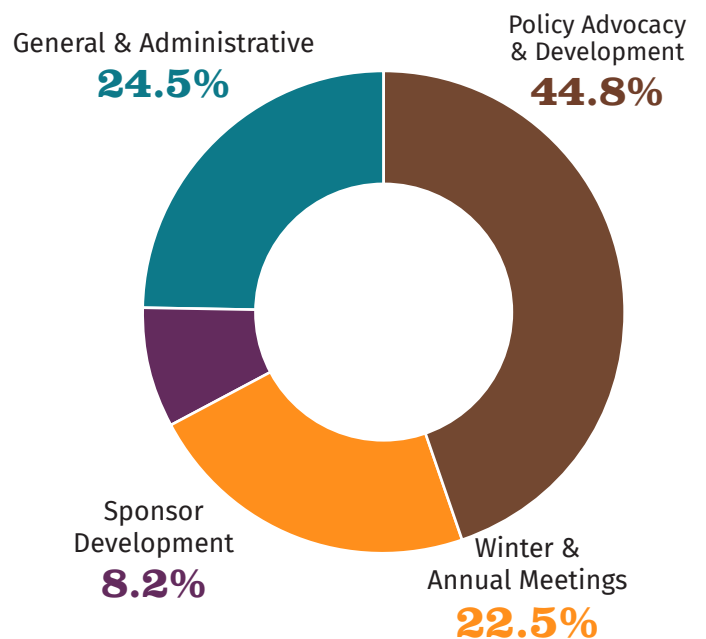
July 1, 2024—June 30, 2025



Membership Dues	\$693,000
Meeting Registrations & Sponsorships	\$4,188,550
Investment Income	\$570,146
Other Revenue	\$84,813
Total	\$5,536,509

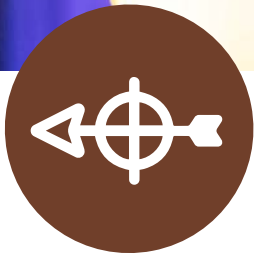
Expenses

July 1, 2024—June 30, 2025



Public Advocacy & Policy Development	\$1,879,735
Winter and Annual Meetings	\$944,012
Sponsor Development	\$341,770
General & Administrative	\$1,025,310
Total	\$4,190,827

Net Income: **\$1,345,682**



LOOKING AHEAD

2026 WGA CHAIR INITIATIVE

Governor Cox announced that his year-long Chair's initiative will focus on ways to meet the growing demand for energy in the West.

Titled Energy Superabundance: Unlocking Prosperity in the West, Governor Cox's initiative will examine challenges and opportunities for expanding production, transmission, and storage options across the energy spectrum to unlock more reliable, secure, and affordable energy to meet growing demand and achieve energy abundance across the West.

"Governor Lujan Grisham has been a tremendous Chair, showing real leadership in uniting us around addressing the housing crisis," said Governor Cox. "Our new focus on energy is bold—and urgently needed. It's been nearly 50 years since we've had this kind of moment: rising demand, available capital, and the political will to build. And that's exactly what we intend to do."

Above: WGA's Chair, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, hugs Utah Governor Spencer Cox after she announced him as the Association's next Chair.



2025 WINTER MEETING

The 2025 Winter Meeting will be held at the Omni Scottsdale Resort & Spa at Montelucia in **Scottsdale, Arizona**, on November 20 and 21.

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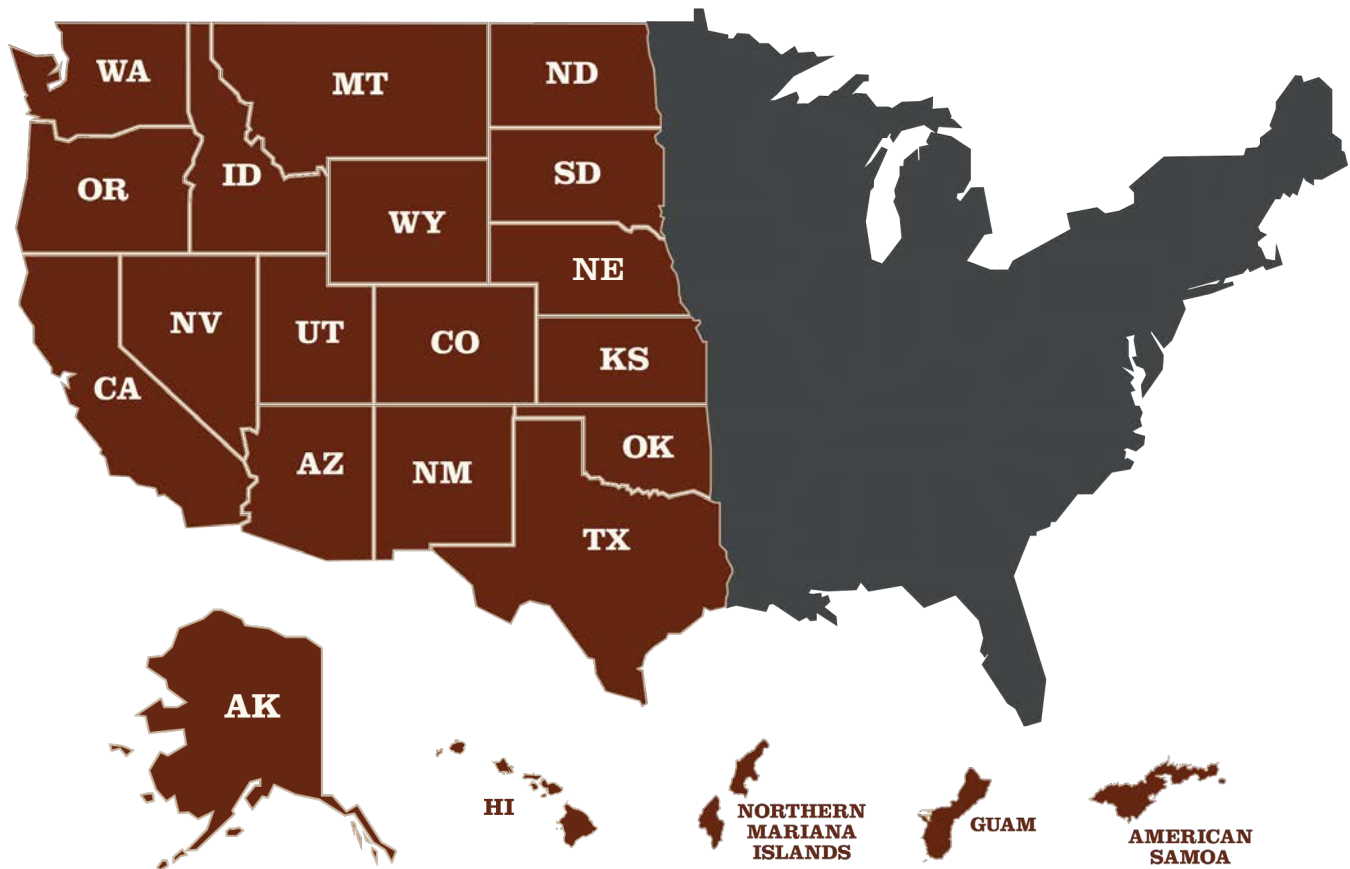
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