
January 14, 2026

The Honorable Harriet Hageman
Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife,
and Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
House of Representatives
1522 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Val Hoyle
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife,
and Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
House of Representatives
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Hageman and Ranking Member Hoyle:

In light of the Subcommittee's January 13, 2026, hearing, Hunting and Fishing Access in the Great American Outdoors, please find attached Western Governors' Association (WGA) policy resolutions 2025-09, Recreation and Tourism on Public Lands, 2024-03, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act, and 2024-02, National Forest and Rangeland Management.

In policy resolutions 2025-09, Recreation and Tourism on Public Lands, and 2024-02, National Forest and Rangeland Management, Western Governors support the expansion of the Good Neighbor Authority and Stewardship Contracting Authority to improve management of federal lands.

In Policy Resolution 2024-03, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act, Western Governors call for the funding and delivery of programs which support outdoor education for younger generations, as well as the recruitment, retention, and reactivation of hunters and anglers in order to support license-based activities that contribute to healthy wildlife populations and habitats.

I request that you include this document in the permanent record of the hearing, as it articulates Western Governors' collective and bipartisan policy on this important issue.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please contact me if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,



Jack Waldorf
Executive Director

Attachments



Policy Resolution 2025-09

Recreation and Tourism on Public Lands

A. BACKGROUND

Public lands are integral to the cultural, economic, and social vitality of the West. They preserve iconic landscapes and offer abundant tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities that draw millions of annual visitors – stimulating local and state economies while offering social and health benefits to western residents.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), and National Park Service (NPS) all manage recreation and access on federal public lands. Each agency has distinct management objectives: BLM and USFS oversee multiple-use lands, FWS focuses on wildlife conservation, USBR partners with state and federal entities, and NPS preserves unique resources for current and future public enjoyment.

Tourism and local population growth put pressure on agency resources, infrastructure, and staffing, leading to overcrowding, environmental degradation, and threats to tribal treaty and cultural resource rights. Federal agencies already struggle to maintain existing infrastructure; for example, NPS has reported a more than \$23 billion existing maintenance backlog. Investment in visitor facilities and other infrastructure, cooperative management with states, tribal governments, and territories, and public-private partnerships could address these challenges.

Federal government shutdowns, such as those in 2013 and 2018-2019, as well as even the prospect of a shutdown, have had severe consequences on state and local budgets. For example, shutdowns and potential shutdowns disrupt agency operations causing natural resource harm, pre-emptive tourism cancellations, and damage tourism-dependent rural economies. During past shutdowns, states and territories incurred unreimbursed costs to keep national parks open.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Western Governors understand that not every state or territory approaches public land management in the same way. However, Western Governors recognize the role of our system of public lands in economic development and development of social values, while providing ecological, recreational, and health benefits for western citizens, the region, nation, and world.
2. Western Governors support efforts to provide public access to and at the same time protect iconic public land features, venues, resources, and landmarks while actively promoting the stewardship of natural resources and minimizing environmental impact. This is essential to ensure and maintain their respective economic, cultural, historic, and ecological values for present and future generations. Western Governors recognize that the long-term economic vitality of recreation and tourism is intrinsically linked to the health and preservation of these natural assets.

3. Consultation and coordination between federal land managers and Governors' offices is needed to improve cross-boundary management of ecological, economic, and cultural resources and to increase sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities.
4. Western Governors encourage BLM, USFS, FWS, and NPS to partner with Governor's offices and relevant state entities to improve outcomes and efficiencies related to expanded visitor services, resource protection, cost-sharing, staff training, educational programming, and other shared goals. Western Governors encourage federal partners to defer to state, territorial, and local leaders and land managers to ensure that federal efforts are consistent with state and local development and implementation of sustainable tourism practices and conservation initiatives that benefit the entire region. Western Governors also recommend that federal agencies include language in agreements that enables flexible, direct collaboration with local municipalities. This could include a standardized memorandum of understanding, developed at the federal level and adapted for local use, to streamline recreation and tourism coordination across jurisdictions.
5. Western Governors encourage federal land management agencies to explicitly integrate state management and planning for wildlife, habitat connectivity, and overall ecosystem health into recreation and tourism planning and management decisions. This includes employing best available science and considering the cumulative impacts of recreational activities across the landscape.
6. Western Governors recognize the broad array of multiple uses experienced by many of our public lands, including traditional and renewable energy, recreation and tourism, agriculture, conservation, and state wildlife management. Western Governors urge federal agencies to engage early and often with states, territories, local governments, and stakeholder groups to identify early opportunities to avoid potential areas of conflict among individual user groups or proposed land uses.
7. Western Governors support the development of programs that incentivize and recognize outdoor recreation businesses operating on federal lands that demonstrate a commitment to environmental sustainability, responsible tourism practices, customer service orientation, and active contributions to the protection of the natural landscapes they utilize. This could include initiatives around waste reduction, energy efficiency, habitat preservation, and visitor education programs relevant to the unique ecosystems of the West.
8. Western Governors request that federal agencies use tools like Good Neighbor Authority, which allows USFS, NPS, and BLM to enter into agreements with states and territories to improve management of popular outdoor recreation areas on federal lands that do not have adequate infrastructure, services, and staff. Congress should ensure that FWS is authorized to enter such agreements for outdoor recreation management.
9. Western Governors urge Congress to authorize federal agencies to enter into cooperative management agreements with states and territories, such as existing agreements between USBR and states, and encourage agencies to engage with states and territories on these opportunities.
10. Western Governors urge Congress, the Department of the Interior, and the Department of Agriculture to explore additional strategies to responsibly accommodate increased

visitation and improve visitor experiences in coordination and collaboration with states and territories. Such strategies should include evaluating the concentration of visitors rather than limiting the total number of visitors in order to protect resources and visitor experience while maintaining public lands for all.

11. Western Governors urge federal agencies to consult with states regarding hotspot management planning, including options to redirect overflow to state managed recreation areas, state parks, or suitable lesser-known recreation sites. Per the EXPLORE Act (Pub. L. 118-234), federal agencies are directed to assess impacts and needs in gateway communities while also assessing the potential ecological impacts of redirecting visitors and ensuring appropriate resources are in place to protect these alternative sites throughout the western region.
12. Western Governors urge federal agencies to collaborate with states throughout the visitor management planning process. This includes sharing current and historical visitation data for increased transparency, cooperation, and understanding of capacities. Western Governors urge federal land managers to coordinate with gateway communities and tourism offices to develop plans for sustainable visitation, taking into account local and state-wide population dynamics.
13. Western Governors urge improving, modernizing, and expanding visitor facilities, attracting investment to create new visitor destinations, using technology and real-time and historical data sharing to diffuse overcrowding issues with traffic and parking, and exploring the expanded use of public transit and shuttles, bike and e-bike rentals, and other efforts to decrease vehicle congestion while maintaining visitor access.
14. Western Governors urge land management agencies to give direct hiring authority to local agency leadership, especially in the case of seasonal hiring, to increase hiring pace and reduce bottlenecks at regional or local offices. Western Governors encourage federal land management agencies to introduce tools to provide for the cross-training of employees, specifically those that are visitor facing.
15. Western Governors encourage NPS to promote an agency culture that is welcoming, customer service oriented, and reflective of the agency's mission to preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources of the National Park System, and provide for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of the public.
16. Public land access is critically important in the West. The special use permitting process should be streamlined and coordinated across federal land management agencies to provide users, especially nonprofits, schools, and colleges, a faster and more accessible experience. Reforming the complex permitting system for guides and outfitters would also better support small businesses in gateway communities and rural areas.
17. Western Governors urge Congress to appropriately fund federal agencies to provide for the routine maintenance and operation costs of important visitor infrastructure, particularly roads and utility systems, and to find innovative ways to attract private investment for improving, modernizing and expanding visitor facilities.
18. In 2020, Congress passed the Great American Outdoors Act (Pub. L. 116-152) to provide up to \$1.9 billion a year through 2025 for deferred maintenance needs across NPS, USFS, FWS

and BLM lands through the establishment of the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund, funded primarily by fees and royalties from offshore oil and gas drilling operations in federal waters. Western Governors urge Congress to extend funding for the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund beyond 2025 and to examine longer term solutions to the deferred maintenance backlog. Western Governors urge Congress to continue to support the Federal Highway Administration's Recreational Trails Program. Western Governors also urge Congress to continue supporting the allocated "financial assistance to states" as part of the Land and Water Conservation Fund and urge federal agencies to consult with state officials and state and local resource management plans when acquiring federal lands under the "federal purposes" appropriation.

19. Working with states and localities like gateway communities, Congress and land management agencies should address workforce housing needs where they are unable to recruit and retain employees due to the exorbitant cost of living or acute housing shortages.
20. Western Governors believe maintenance of national parks and other public land recreation facilities is first and foremost a federal responsibility. However, Western Governors support the federal government pursuing public-private partnerships to improve, modernize and expand visitor services and visitor facilities and to provide for the maintenance and operation of other critical public land infrastructure that supports land management and visitation. Western Governors also support federal agencies engaging with states through tools like Shared Stewardship, Good Neighbor Authority, or other innovative state-federal partnerships that support advancements in resource protection and outdoor recreation management and infrastructure.
21. Western Governors recognize the troubling trend of intentional and unintentional damage of indigenous and other historical and cultural sites. As many of the sites are located on federally managed lands, Western Governors support additional resources to protect and promote awareness of stewardship of these sensitive cultural resources. Western Governors affirm the importance of robust and meaningful consultation between federal agencies and tribes.
22. Western Governors recommend the federal government take all necessary action to avoid lapses in funding and potential harmful impacts to federal lands, particularly NPS units and major tourist attractions in the West. Congress and agencies should consider pathways for keeping parks and major attractions open and properly managed, through existing revenue or through state and nonprofit partnerships.
23. Federal shutdowns, the threat of a shutdown, or any disruption in federal funding has an immediate impact across western states and specifically on gateway communities, and clear communication can help mitigate economic impact on gateway communities and avoid further disruption to tribal access and management responsibilities. Western Governors urge federal agencies, in the case of any future potential government shutdown, to clearly communicate contingency plans and provide clear direction to regional and local land managers, communities, and state tourism offices as early as possible, including essential services determinations.
24. During any lapse in funding, Western Governors recommend the federal government work collaboratively with states and territories to follow through on any commitments it makes to those that undertake extraordinary measures to support their national parks and other

public land recreation resources.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with Congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

This resolution will expire in June 2028. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult <http://www.westgov.org/resolutions> for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.



Policy Resolution 2024-03

Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act

A. BACKGROUND

1. Through broad trustee, statutory, and police powers, states have primary management authority over fish and wildlife. This system of wildlife and habitat management is grounded in the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and has enabled western states to become leaders in the conservation and recovery of numerous threatened, endangered, and species of concern. Continued cooperative relationships between federal, state, and tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, and private stakeholders are essential to the successful management of all species and their habitats. Where voluntary, incentive-based conservation activities have been effective, they have precluded the need to list species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Western Governors have a vested interest in utilizing these tools to effectively manage wildlife and habitat for a balance of uses.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

Species Conservation

1. Western Governors support all reasonable proactive management efforts to conserve species and the ecosystems upon which they depend to sustain populations of diverse wildlife and habitats, recover species before they are so imperiled they need ESA protection, and retain the West's wildlife legacy for future generations. Western Governors also support initiatives that engage state and tribal governments as well as stakeholders to develop incentives for early, voluntary conservation measures to address multiple threats to species while preserving and enhancing western working landscapes.
2. Western Governors believe states should be full partners in listing, critical habitat designations, recovery planning, recovery efforts, and delisting decisions. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (collectively, the Services), working with the states, should establish consistent criteria to assess modeling related to projected scientific information and other factors in their scientific review. In these circumstances, federal agencies should partner with states and management authorities with expertise over the given model to develop and utilize mutually acceptable predictive techniques and consensus-based metrics that are grounded in science and measurable outcomes.
3. Western Governors believe that ESA decisions should be based on the best available science. State agencies often have the best available science, expertise and other scientific and institutional resources such as mapping capabilities, biological inventories, biological management goals, state wildlife action plans and other important data. The Services should utilize state expertise and resources whenever possible. All listing, recovery, and delisting decisions should utilize objective, peer-reviewed scientific literature, and scientific observations. When making a listing decision for a species where state or multi-state

conservation plans employing the best available science have been primarily used in the management of that species, upon review, consultation, and endorsement, the Services should give careful consideration to those management activities. A review of the scientific and management provisions contained within listing, recovery, and de-listing decisions by acknowledged independent experts is important to ensure the public that decisions are well-reasoned and scientifically based. Scientific and management review committees, as well as the scope and extent of the appropriate scientific and management review, should be agreed upon by the Services and the affected states. Federal agencies should, when appropriate, delegate their responsibility to name these review committees and determine the scope of review to states in order to enhance state ownership of the committee's decision.

4. Western Governors believe that states need clear, concrete guidance from the Services about the requirements of state and multi-state conservation plans in meeting species and habitat conservation goals and objectives that would lead to stable or increasing populations, address perceived threats to the species, and eliminate the need for listing. Western Governors also encourage the pursuit of all efforts to reduce regulatory burdens on state and tribal governments as well as stakeholders that are not necessary to achieve species conservation and biodiversity goals and objectives.
5. The Services should acknowledge that variability in state approaches for conservation of species is acceptable, particularly for species with a wide geographic range, as long as established conservation goals and objectives are met.
6. The Services should explore employment options, including revised Government Schedule requirements, expanded use of detail positions, and shared staff between nongovernmental partners, state agencies, and federal agencies to increase interagency coordination and familiarity with processes. These types of well-rounded personnel can then more effectively serve as conveners and facilitators for multiagency actions.
7. Governors support legislative initiatives, court rulings, petitions, or regulatory measures which allow local, state, federal and private conservation efforts adequate time to be implemented and demonstrate their efficacy while also avoiding excessive delay protecting and recovering imperiled species. Governors believe there should be no delays in delisting recovered species which meet statutory requirements for delisting due to excessive, costly and resource-intensive litigation. States can help local efforts achieve success by supporting them with tools for assessing and stabilizing priority habitats and species.
8. Western Governors believe funding and economic incentives for proactive, voluntary conservation efforts are essential. Such efforts may lead to rapid conservation outcomes and even obviate the need to list a species in the first instance. Additional incentives for willing private landowners to participate in voluntary conservation efforts are likely to achieve more efficient and cost-effective results. Funded and incentivized activities should include:
 - Restoration of native habitat on public and private lands;
 - Amelioration of threats to species populations;
 - Long-term management activities for conservation-reliant species;

- Management of invasive species adversely affecting species and habitat, including research programs;
- Management of public lands in a way that supports multiple uses, including the minimization of human-wildlife and livestock-wildlife conflict; and
- Monitoring and enforcement to ensure species and habitat conservation goals and activities are being met.

9. Governors believe adequate post-listing funding of species management, monitoring, and conservation is necessary as state and federal agencies increasingly assume ESA management activities and embrace ecosystem and multi-species management strategies. Funding for ESA-related activities, especially recovery plans and recovery efforts, should be enhanced to address the growing list of threatened and endangered species. A broad range of programs, from the Farm Bill to the Water Resources Development Act, should be reviewed for opportunities to assist communities and landowners in their efforts to conserve listed species in a manner that respects water and property rights. The Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund authorized under ESA Section 6 should also be funded and managed as a block grant, with state discretion on spending priorities.

10. Western Governors support funding for wildlife conservation education and recreation programs to help better connect people with their natural surroundings and experience wildlife in their natural habitat. Funding for educational and community-based programs can encourage younger generations to learn about fish and wildlife conservation early and obtain the skills to partake in outdoor activities themselves.

11. Western Governors support the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and the associated user-pay structure that enables state agency management activities with funding from license sales. Western Governors also recognize that continued engagement in license-based activities is necessary for healthy wildlife populations and habitat. The recruitment, retention, and reactivation of hunters and anglers is essential to these goals, and programs which support this engagement should be funded and delivered to all Americans.

Wildlife Migration Corridors and Habitat

12. Western Governors believe that federal land management agencies should allow states and tribes to lead in identifying key wildlife migration corridors and habitat in the West, acknowledge the value of multiple-use landscapes, and engage in early and substantive consultation with Governors prior to the promulgation of any policy pertaining to the management of wildlife corridors and habitat. Western Governors believe in applying the best-available state-led science and models for precise, data-driven decision making. Western Governors also encourage federal land management agencies to take proactive steps to ensure that management plans and projects are consistent with and supportive of state wildlife migration priorities, programs, and policies.

13. Western Governors urge federal land management agencies and non-governmental organizations – in coordination with state fish and wildlife agencies – to work with private landowners and local communities to identify monetary and non-monetary incentives to encourage voluntary corridor and habitat conservation efforts. Western Governors encourage

dialogue among relevant partners in the West to identify collaborative solutions to wildlife corridor and habitat conservation across land ownerships.

14. Western Governors encourage Congress and the Executive Branch to maintain a financial investment in research and habitat improvement projects to conserve migration corridors through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big Game and Migration Corridors Program and the USFWS Migratory Bird Program.
15. Western Governors commend the considerable efforts already underway to increase coordination between state fish and wildlife agencies and state departments of transportation to integrate consideration of wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity into transportation infrastructure planning and development. Western Governors urge the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Department of Transportation to cooperate in a similar manner on projects under their jurisdiction and support intra-state efforts when appropriate. The Governors also support development of best practices to expand federal and state agency coordination.
16. The Governors support proactive planning on public lands that seeks to direct future development actions with due consideration for large tracts of intact wildlife habitat and connectivity corridors.
17. Western Governors believe that any federal efforts to identify and conserve wildlife migration corridors through administrative or legislative action must rely upon proactive coordination and consultation with states and should advance voluntary, incentive-based, and locally driven initiatives to conserve key wildlife corridors and habitat. Governors further encourage Congress and the Administration to support collaborative and locally developed initiatives through financial and technical assistance.
18. Governors appreciate federal support for habitat connectivity and urge Congress to include long-term funding and provisions in its next reauthorization of federal surface transportation programs for state-supported transportation infrastructure projects that support fish and wildlife crossings and habitat connectivity.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

This resolution will expire in December 2026. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult <http://www.westgov.org/resolutions> for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.



Policy Resolution 2024-02

National Forest and Rangeland Management

A. BACKGROUND

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. Conversely, effective natural resource management is only possible if rural and resource-dependent communities are healthy, vibrant, and prosperous. These forests and rangelands provide a number of important ecosystem services that drive local economic activities including grazing, forest products, and recreation. The majority of surface water in the West originates in National Forests as well, and western water security is directly tied to the health of western forests. Both natural disturbances and management decisions have the potential to fundamentally alter the complex, interdependent relationship between communities and land. Climate change can accelerate these dynamics by increasing the frequency and severity of fire, altering hydrologic patterns, and expanding the potential range of invasive species. Furthermore, states have a unique interest in active land management and improving lands' resilience against disturbances because state governments have trust authority over water, wildlife, and forest resources, along with primary authority and expertise to protect community health and safety.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Western Governors support sound forest and rangeland management policies that maintain and promote ecologic, economic, and social balance and sustainability.
2. Western Governors support the creation of mechanisms to identify and enhance cross-boundary collaborative work.
3. Western Governors point to the Western Governors' Association (WGA) – U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as an example of an effective framework to establish shared state-federal priorities for forest and rangeland management and encourage the development of similar MOUs with other Executive Branch agencies for other areas of natural resource management.
4. Effective forest and rangeland management is only possible through coordination between federal, state, local, and tribal land management agencies. These agencies should strive to find new ways to collaborate on forest and rangeland management projects, as well as to explore ways to improve state-federal coordination on existing management projects. Shared Stewardship Agreements between states and USDA are a good example. Federal agencies should look to local communities as a source of strength, knowledge, and support during the planning and implementation of forest and rangeland management projects and should be encouraged to work with local communities while planning forest and rangeland management projects. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) could achieve this by developing regional and cross-boundary collaboratives to facilitate cooperation on

ecosystem-level land management challenges and water source protection. Federal land management agencies should consider investing in facilitation capacity and training for agency personnel and partner organizations involved with collaboratives.

5. Western Governors support improvements to interagency communication, fire response capability, and coordination, including the sharing of firefighting resources. Fire management activities should support fire prevention, rapid response capabilities, full suppression strategies where appropriate and management of wildfire for resource benefits. Local government and volunteer fire associations play a critical role in wildfire response and mitigation, and state and federal agencies should look for ways to further incorporate these groups into regional wildfire dispatch and coordination centers. Additionally, it is critical that improvements are made to simplify the fire billing adjudication process to ensure more timely reimbursements in line with agreement standards.
6. Federal agencies should examine funding match requirements and consider reducing or eliminating these requirements when the public benefit outweighs the cost of the funding match. Federal agencies are encouraged to work with western states to ensure that communities' access to these grants is as efficient and streamlined as possible.
7. Federal agencies should facilitate the participation of state, local, and tribal governments in federal decision making by dedicating staff to develop and provide technical assistance and enhance communications across local, tribal, state, and federal partners. Federal agencies should also take steps to assist resource-constrained communities in developing needed capacities such as grant writing or conducting environmental analyses.
8. States may be the conveners of collaborative interagency forest and rangeland management efforts, such as in the case of Good Neighbor Agreements. When this occurs, federal agencies should provide funding and support to states for the cost incurred during any convening role. Congress and federal agencies should also provide opportunities for expanded cooperation, particularly where states are working to help their federal partners to improve management of federal lands through the contribution of state expertise and resources.
9. Effective forest and rangeland management requires a network of forest and rangeland infrastructure to manage, maintain, and restore western forests and rangelands. Federal and state agencies should strive to find ways to support and expand critical forest and rangeland management infrastructure, including mills, biomass facilities, livestock watering systems, and roads. Federal agencies should also examine the need for market incentives to encourage sustainable nursery markets and facilitate the development of additional nursery capacity. The federal government should take steps to address equipment shortages as part of its implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).
10. Federal and state agencies should look for ways to grow the workforce needed to support and operate forest and rangeland management infrastructure. These agencies should explore the expanded use of youth, veterans, inmate crews, and conservation corps to provide cost-effective capacity to support forest and rangeland restoration. The federal government and employers should also consider work experience and other non-traditional credentials in hiring to ensure adequate capacity for land management project implementation. The federal government, states, and territories should examine standards on hiring persons with criminal backgrounds to promote employment opportunities for qualified applicants that present

minimal risk for future criminal behavior. The federal government should focus attention on housing needs and assist communities seeking to attract and retain workforce.

11. Western Governors support the expansion of restoration projects in forest and rangelands, including repair or removal of culverts and other barriers to fish passage. Federal and state agencies should strive to find ways to support and expand cost-effective means of supplying restoration projects, such as with large woody material from adjacent overstocked forests, which in turn supports the rural workforce needed to implement large-scale watershed and stream restoration efforts.
12. A thriving forest products industry is essential to support critical forest management infrastructure. Western Governors support the expansion of markets for forest products. Federal agencies should expand opportunities and incentives for existing USDA, Economic Development Administration, and Small Business Administration programs and financing to support forest products business development and infrastructure. USFS Research and Development, State and Private Forestry, and National Forest System should work collaboratively to support existing and emerging forest products technologies, including the work of the National Forest Products Laboratory, with the goal of expanding markets to maximize restoration activity.
13. Congress should pass legislation to promote forest and rangeland product markets and technologies and expand funding for the Community Wood Energy Program. Federal agencies are encouraged to continue research and development efforts to find viable markets for low-value biomass and prioritize the utilization of low-value biomass for thermal, electric, and liquid-fuel energy. Rural electric cooperatives, public utilities, community facility managers, and other partners should contribute to the research, testing and deployment of new and modified heat and electric generation projects and liquid-fuel facilities from hazardous fuels reduction, conifer removal, and other forest and rangeland restoration efforts.
14. Federal land managers should work to ensure that forest products producers have increased certainty of supply, as well as a broader suite of outlets, in addition to traditional sawmills and existing biomass facilities. States can also work with USFS and other federal land managers to establish more long-term stewardship agreements to ensure a long-term feedstock supply. Federal resources and partnerships should support efforts beyond federal lands given the critical role of cross-boundary work.
15. Authorities granted in past Farm Bills such as Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and Stewardship Contracting Authority (SCA) are powerful tools to boost forest and rangeland management, promote collaboration, and limit the effects of administrative objections and litigation. Congress should extend both authorities to all federal land management agencies and authorize those entities to increase the flexibility of GNA and SCA. Federal agencies should modify GNA guidance for all eligible partners to allow 20-year contracts, retention of timber sale revenue, a broader set of authorized restoration services, and the expenditure of project revenue on non-federal lands.
16. Western Governors believe clear, coordinated, and consistent application of federal vegetation management practices is integral to maintaining the health of western forests, preventing dangerous and damaging wildfires, and maintaining grid reliability. The Governors support effective and efficient cross-jurisdictional coordination that enables utilities to undertake necessary vegetation management actions on federal transmission rights-of-way.

17. Congress should direct funding to the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Program to facilitate continued partnership and investment between USFS, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and state foresters to support restoration projects.
18. The USFS business model can be improved by identifying business practice barriers to cross-boundary projects, developing training on state and federal contracting procedures, utilizing Service First authorities, streamlining and consolidating agency processes with partners, and establishing multi-agency pilot projects, which can suggest models for subsequent formal agreement.
19. Western Governors encourage effective deployment of IIJA programs, including programs that provide incentives to purchase equipment, participate in new processes, or expand markets to encourage deploying new conservation practices to aid in forest and soil health and restoration.
20. Western Governors support efforts to improve the effectiveness of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in a forest and rangeland management context, including the use of area-wide plans and specialized teams to bolster NEPA capacity. Federal agencies should engage with Governors and states in early, meaningful, and substantive consultation throughout the NEPA process. Western Governors support allowing federal agencies to analyze only the action and no-action alternatives when a project is collaboratively developed, unless a third alternative is proposed during scoping and meets the purpose and need of the project. Federal agencies should consider how interagency shared positions can create regulatory efficiencies and promote greater collaboration between federal, state, territorial, local, and tribal land managers.
21. State, tribal, and federal agencies should look to expand the training for and use of prescribed fire and should look for ways to reduce the statutory, regulatory, and economic barriers to its expanded use on western forests and rangelands.
22. Federal agencies seeking to deploy prescribed fire should work to educate the public about the utility and necessity of prescribed burns to increase cultural acceptance of the practice. Federal agencies should also coordinate with state air quality specialists on prescribed burns, put greater effort into coordinating prescribed fire with mechanical treatments; updating models, tools, and practices for safe burning; and putting a greater emphasis on post-burn preparation. State and federal air quality specialists should work together to identify reforms that reduce barriers to prescribed fire, reduce overall health impacts from smoke, improve interagency use of smoke management best practices, and examine liability protection for fire managers and compensation for private property owners negatively affected by escaped prescribed burns.
23. Land managers across the West should strive to increase workforce capacity for science-based vegetation management activities, oversight, and planning.
24. Traditional Native American cultural burning and tribal ecological knowledge and practices can contribute significantly to improved forest management in the West and should be incorporated more effectively into federal and state planning management processes.

25. Western Governors support efforts to improve a broad range of pre-fire mitigation practices. State and federal agencies should work to develop tools to support mechanical hazardous fuels reduction, especially the removal of underbrush and understory, which are economically unviable in many instances. Land managers should work to further integrate invasive species data and management practices into hazard fuels management and planning.
26. The federal government should consider additional steps to recruit and retain an effective land management and wildland firefighting workforce, including dispatchers. Federal agencies should examine their reliance on 1039 seasonal staff, shift a higher percentage of wildland fire staff from seasonal to permanent and permanent subject to furlough positions, evaluate policies related to the use of Administratively Determined emergency firefighters, and authorize hazard pay for federal firefighters performing prescribed fire operations.
27. Agencies and stakeholders should continue to seek opportunities, including revisions to forest plans, to enhance safety and reduce costs in suppression decisions while protecting communities. Incentives should be created for local governments to take voluntary actions to support the creation and expansion of fire-adapted and smoke-ready communities, including the promotion of education, fuels management projects, and improved integration of community wildfire protection plans with land use decisions when compatible with local goals. Federal land managers are encouraged to make shared wildfire risk mitigation systems (SWRM) and similar tools widely available to communities and decisionmakers.
28. Western Governors support increased attention to the challenges posed in post-wildfire landscapes and wildfire-affected communities. Federal agencies should collaborate with states to designate and train post-fire coordinators to manage post-fire recovery. Doing so would encourage better awareness of post-wildfire restoration funding opportunities available to wildfire-affected communities and more sophisticated coordination of restoration activities to achieve restoration objectives. Land managers should prioritize post-wildfire water quality effects in mitigation planning and execution.
29. Increasing the pace and scale of restoration work like prescribed fire, fuels reduction, active management, and reforestation can help reduce the effects of climate change. Western Governors support the creation and expansion of technical and financial assistance to landowners for carbon sequestration and conservation activities on forests and rangelands. Land managers should integrate small private landowners into ecosystem planning processes and responsible land management practices; additional methods of gaining small landowner participation and engagement should also be explored.
30. Federal agencies need to ensure adequate monitoring, assessment, and analysis of federal forests and rangelands, including data on wildlife, water, soil, and forage. States, territories, and federal agencies are encouraged to consider standardizing and simplifying data collection protocols for federal agencies, states, counties, and tribes which include robust landowner privacy standards and protections. Federal agencies should strive to further improve the collection of socioeconomic data related to forest and rangeland management decisions, and to further incorporate that data into management decisions.
31. The Administration should provide federal funding to develop detailed state rangeland action plans addressing invasive species, wildlife and fish habitat, and water quality and quantity as a complement to State Forest Plans. These rangeland plans should include resource analyses of

soil health, water, plants, animals, and productive capacities to inform management decision-making.

32. Western Governors urge Congress and the Administration to support the research needed for responsible and effective forest and rangeland management in the West. Federal agencies conducting research should also work to ensure that public research projects are focused on research that supports on the ground management needs. Western Governors urge Congress and the Administration to support USFS Research Stations, which play a key role in forest and rangeland management in the West.
33. Federal agencies are encouraged to include cost metrics such as the avoided cost of uncharacteristic wildfire, smoke effects on populations, excessive carbon emissions, and damage to water supply systems and downstream communities when assessing the merits of mitigation projects.
34. The outbreak of the COVID virus in 2020 posed a significant challenge to those working to manage the West's forests and rangelands, particularly wildland firefighters. State, federal, and local wildland fire managers should be encouraged to learn from the pandemic response and, as appropriate, implement effective new management principles developed during that pandemic into permanent practice. Efforts should be made to ensure that emergency response personnel are prepared for similar situations in the future, as well as other potential risks.
35. Mature and old growth forest characteristics should be considered when actively managing forest ecosystems but should not impede the ability to actively manage and restore forest ecosystems. Ecosystem resiliency is, in part, dependent on having a range of various tree age classifications within a forested ecosystem. Mapping tools should be used generically to identify where mature and old growth forests may be present and management actions should be based on locally verified ecosystem resiliency factors and ground truthing.
36. Western Governors support the continued responsible use of federal lands for grazing and increased funding for grazing management, monitoring, and permit condition compliance. Repairing and replacing range improvements, particularly fencing, in a timely manner should be a priority for federal land management agencies in wildfire-affected areas.
37. We support sound, science-based management decisions for federal lands – including adaptive management – and believe these decisions should be based upon flexible policies that take into account local ecological conditions and state planning decisions for fish and wildlife and other human needs.
38. Federal and state land managers should identify opportunities to improve flexibility and integration of grazing management and targeted grazing as tools to achieve restoration and land management goals, including fish and wildlife habitat improvements, drought and wildfire mitigation and resilience, water quality and watershed health, soil health management, promotion of perennial plant health, and control of invasive species such as cheatgrass. They should also promote grazing allotment flexibility on federal lands, within USFS and BLM permitting systems and across ownership boundaries, to respond to changing rangeland conditions and environmental considerations. Western Governors also encourage measures of successful grazing be based in ecological outcomes showing upward trends.

39. Livestock grazing on federal lands is compatible with recreation and wildlife management and fulfills the multiple use and sustained yield mission of both the USFS and BLM. Policies, analyses, or planning decisions that lead to closing allotments must be based on science, documented threats, and causal factors consistent with state policies and programs as well as federal multiple use missions. It should also be taken into consideration that grazing suspensions and closures after wildfire allow for the onset of invasive grasses causing a quicker fire return interval, which can exacerbate the threat of wildfire.
40. Decisions to reduce or suspend grazing should only be made when supported by an appropriate quantitative assessment of long- and short-term trends in rangeland conditions on specific allotments, risk of spread of invasive weeds, diseases to wildlife, or other documented fish or wildlife impacts. Forage use from wild ungulates should be assessed using rigorous quantitative methods when identifying the causal factors that affect range conditions, and those wild ungulates should be managed for their proportional impact. If after consultation with the state, the federal agency decides to reduce, suspend, close, or modify an allotment due to documented harmful wildlife impacts, an alternative allotment, properly authorized pursuant to NEPA, if a suitable alternative allotment exists, must be made available to the displaced operator prior to adjustment of the original allotment. In order to fully implement this policy, the BLM and USFS must have alternative allotments properly authorized under relevant planning documents. This ensures that suspensions or modification of grazing permits will not result in a net loss of Animal Unit Months and that appropriate alternative allotments are available.
41. Grazing permit renewal decisions should be assisted by current site-specific, quantitative data. Federal agencies should engage in meaningful consultation, coordination, and cooperation with livestock grazing permittees, state and local governments, tribes, and stakeholders, prior to initiation and throughout the entire permit renewal process.
42. Federal land management agencies' decisions to reduce or close allotments should only be based upon completion of a full administrative review and analysis, including a thorough review under the provisions of NEPA. The decision process must include opportunities for states, livestock grazing permittees, and other stakeholders to provide input. Allotments should not be closed due to a pending NEPA review without allowing authorized use of the allotment pending a final decision, or the use of an equivalent amount of forage at reasonably equivalent cost to compliant operators.
43. Federal rangeland specialists should have an understanding of the economics and management of ranching operations dependent upon federal lands and should receive the necessary training to comprehensively monitor rangelands, conduct objective analysis, and write sound environmental documents.
44. Clear directives and accountability throughout all levels of the USFS and BLM should be required so that interpretation and implementation is practical and predictable from office to office and individual to individual and informed by an understanding of localized rangeland and ecological conditions, and economic health of ranch operations. BLM should engage collaboratively with livestock grazing permittees when developing Annual Operating Instructions and aim to minimize economic burdens to permittees.
45. Federal land management agencies must give interested state agencies an opportunity to fully participate in or provide input to grazing permit actions – prior to their initiation – including

generalized review of livestock operations on federal lands, any assessment of grazing conditions as part of a federal planning process, review of past compliance of the operator with grazing allotment conditions, and individual allotment reviews. Grazing permit decisions should not be finalized until after this opportunity for meaningful consultation with the states, local governments, and the affected permittees.

46. Governors possess primary decision-making authority for management of state resources. States also have knowledge and experience that are necessary for the development of effective plans. Accordingly, it is essential that Governors have a substantive role in federal agencies' planning processes and an opportunity to review new, revised, or amended federal land management plans for consistency with existing state plans. Federal agencies should provide Governors with sufficient time for a complete state review of federal land management plans, especially when federal plans affect multiple planning areas or resources.
47. The federal government should be a responsible landowner and neighbor and should work diligently to improve the health of federal lands in the West. Federal actions or failures to act on federal lands affect adjacent state and privately-owned lands, as well as state-managed natural resources.
48. Congress and federal agencies should provide opportunities for expanded cooperation, particularly where states are working to help their federal partners to improve management of federal lands through the contribution of state expertise and resources.
49. Western Governors support efforts to examine rural communities' relationships with natural resources, such as forests, rangelands, croplands, wildlife, and source water, as well as the important role that rural communities play in the management of these resources. Policymakers in the West should be encouraged to identify barriers to growth and sustainability in western communities, including a lack of restoration infrastructure, disaster mitigation challenges, dependence upon a single natural resource, and issues related to local capacity, expertise, and funding, and identify best practices to help rural communities overcome these barriers.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

This resolution will expire in December 2026. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult <http://www.westgov.org/resolutions> for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.