
September 17, 2025

The Honorable Gary Palmer
Chairman
Subcommittee on Environment
Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Paul Tonko
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Environment
Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Palmer and Ranking Member Tonko:

In light of the Subcommittee's September 16, 2025, hearing, From Gridlock to Growth: Permitting Reform Under the Clean Air Act, attached please find Western Governors' Association (WGA) policy resolutions 2025-02, Air Quality Protection and Management, 2024-02, National Forest and Rangeland Management, and 2023-10, Infrastructure Permitting.

The air quality resolution communicates Governors' policy recommendations for addressing air quality management challenges, including pollution transport and exceptional events. The land management resolution calls for reducing the regulatory barriers to the expanded use of prescribed fire. In the permitting resolution, Western Governors urge Congress to streamline the review of critical infrastructure projects and land management activities, where appropriate.

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 2025-02

Air Quality Protection and Management

A. **BACKGROUND**

Clean air is essential for strong communities and superior quality of life. Western states' air quality is influenced by many human activities and natural phenomena. To manage air quality, the Clean Air Act (CAA) established a system of cooperative federalism between states and the federal government. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and states as co-regulators need to consider the unique factors in the West that influence air quality management, such as high elevations, extreme variations in topography, vast landscapes, and international emissions transport. Policies from western states have generated significant emissions reductions over the last 50 years since the CAA was passed. However, the remaining types and number of emissions controllable by states are somewhat limited. Only by working together to understand and address air quality challenges in the West will states and federal partners make improvements to air quality.

B. **GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT**

Co-Regulation

1. Western Governors value cooperative federalism in air quality management and believe its application can and should be improved. In some cases, federal agencies disregard state expertise and authority over air quality and/or do not solicit timely, valuable input from states. Limited availability of financial resources exacerbates these tensions.
2. EPA should recognize state authority under the CAA and accord states sufficient flexibility to create air quality and emissions programs tailored to individual state needs, industries, and economies. In its timely review of state plans, EPA should focus on the circumstances facing the individual state. EPA should not reject reasonable state policy choices based solely on national consistency, fear of being legally challenged, or on concerns that such choices might not be appropriate for all states.
3. Federal agencies should communicate, consult, and engage early and often with Governors and state air quality agencies as co-regulators. EPA should work with states to clarify responsibilities and procedures to improve coordination and consultation among state agencies, EPA, and federal land managers.
4. EPA rules and guidance should be clear, prompt, and supported by best available science and data. EPA should consult with states throughout the drafting process before a potential rule, rule revision, policy or guidance becomes public. EPA should also provide states with timely implementation guidance when new and revised regulations or standards are published.
5. States require certainty and consistency from Congress and EPA to implement their CAA programs. Congress and EPA should prioritize regulations addressing federally regulated

sources, including mobile, aviation, and marine sources. EPA should consult with states to ensure adequate and effective implementation of federal programs relied on by states for their CAA programs.

6. State CAA programs require financial and technical support from EPA and Congress, including performance partnership grants. Federal partners must provide sufficient resources to carry out actions authorized under section 103 and section 105 of the CAA.
7. Under current rules and guidance, states must monitor National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) throughout a 20-year maintenance period, even when there is no threat of an exceedance and/or the standard has been superseded by a more stringent or different standard. States should be allowed to reduce monitoring in maintenance areas that have appropriately demonstrated air quality in the area is below the NAAQS. This allowance will free resources to address pollutants that remain a concern.

Ozone and Particulate Matter

8. Uncontrollable events and conditions (such as wildfire, lightning, biogenic and geogenic emissions, stratospheric ozone intrusion, and transported ozone from international and interstate sources) result in elevated levels of particulate matter (PM) and background ozone. Western Governors have significant concerns about the lack of CAA tools available to account for PM and ozone exceedances resulting from factors outside state control.
9. The West needs additional and ongoing research on background, interstate, and international ozone. This research should be transparent, comprehensive, and coordinated with state air quality agencies and regional organizations. With this new information, EPA should reconsider the one percent threshold for significant contribution for interstate ozone transport obligations.
10. Congress should provide dedicated funding for analysis of background and transported ozone in the West, as it has historically done for the eastern United States. Congress should also provide a mechanism for which factors, such as international transport and background that are beyond states' control, are factored out of an ozone attainment determination.

Exceptional Events

11. Exceptional event demonstrations are resource intensive, costly, and place a significant burden on strained state resources, especially when EPA does not accept, review, or approve these state submissions in a timely manner. EPA should consider the resource burden placed on state and local air quality agencies to complete exceptional event demonstrations. Western Governors are encouraged by attempts from EPA to provide CAA demonstrations and tools to demonstrate exceptional events and look forward to continued collaboration with states.
12. EPA should streamline the process for exceptional event demonstrations, provide additional technical assistance, grants, and funding for state personnel, and allocate resources to review state demonstrations regardless of regulatory significance status.

13. Specific guidance and additional EPA resources could help address these challenges. In addition, EPA should develop a database with information on air quality impacts that affect the West (e.g., wildfires, dust storms, volcanic activity, etc.) and provide a clearinghouse with tools that states can use for exceptional event demonstrations.
14. Western Governors believe the states and EPA would benefit from the following approaches to exceptional events demonstrations: (1) aggregation of multiple factors contributing to air quality to prove a single exceptional event exceedance demonstration; (2) regional exceptional event demonstrations; and (3) reference to previously submitted and approved exceptional events demonstrations for repeated event types.

Regional Haze

15. Good visibility in the 122 western Regional Haze Program Class 1 Areas, which include many of the crown jewels of the West's national parks and wilderness areas, positively affects western states' economies. The profound effects of fire and smoke on visibility in Class I areas in the West should be recognized in the Regional Haze Guidance and Rule.
16. Prior to developing a new rulemaking or guidance on regional haze, EPA should provide states with the opportunity to collaborate and maintain transparency between EPA and state decision making and permitting regarding regional haze.
17. While the Regional Haze program has seen great successes in improving visibility in the West, implementing this program continues to be time and resource intensive. EPA should allow states adequate time to complete Regional Haze state implementation plans (SIPs), including extending deadlines if needed.
18. Given the importance of improved visibility in the West, federal partners should provide funding and resources to states throughout the planning and implementation process. This includes funding through the Western Regional Air Partnership that assists states in completing monitoring and analysis.

Wildfire and Prescribed Fire

19. More frequent and intense wildfires are steadily reducing the West's gains in air quality improvement. Smoke from wildfires can cause air quality to exceed the NAAQS for particulate matter and ozone, affecting public health, safety, and transportation. The presence of smoke in western states is increasingly persistent and seasonal in nature, which can further exacerbate public health effects, especially for vulnerable populations.
20. Effective forest management techniques, including mechanical thinning of forests and prescribed fires, can dramatically reduce the size and severity of wildfires and their corresponding effect on air quality.
21. Western Governors support the increased use of prescribed fire, when and where it is safe, to reduce the air quality effects of uncharacteristic wildfire in the West. Federal and state land managers should have the ability to use prescribed fires when local air quality, weather, and site conditions are appropriate and public health is protected.

22. Prescribed fire practices should include smoke management planning coordinated between state land managers, state air agencies, state health departments, EPA, other federal agencies, and federal land managers. State or regional prescribed fire councils can help facilitate this coordination.
23. Western Governors call on EPA and federal land managers to improve existing air quality tools and create additional air quality tools for states to encourage the use of prescribed fire. These should include simplified exceptional events guidance for prescribed fire, and tools to address the air quality effects from wildfire in the West.
24. Western Governors emphasize that fire management and smoke effects cross state lines, and request that EPA work with the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and other public land management agencies to develop a framework for proposing, reviewing, and approving prescribed fire events across interstate, regional areas, and entities.
25. Western Governors encourage EPA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other federal public health agencies to continue researching interactions between smoke and public health. Such research will inform western states' efforts to expand the use of prescribed fire as a wildfire mitigation tool. Western Governors appreciate efforts to quantify the effects of wildfire and prescribed fire such as EPA's Comparative Assessment of the Impacts of Prescribed Fire Versus Wildfire (CAIF) and establishing a multi-agency memorandum of understanding on Wildland Fire and Air Quality Coordination.

Methane Emissions

26. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas emitted from a variety of sources, including oil and gas operations, coal mines, landfills, agriculture, wastewater facilities, and natural sources. There are environmental and economic benefits of reducing methane emissions and opportunities for the beneficial use of this natural resource.
27. Many western states – in cooperation with industry in those states – have already implemented regulatory strategies that reduce methane emissions from oil and gas operations, while expanding the use and sale of methane.
28. In any federal methane regulation, federal agencies should: (1) ensure that the capture, commoditization, and sale of methane is supported; (2) give states the flexibility to integrate a variety of technologies and tools to achieve methane emission reduction standards; (3) recognize co-beneficial methane emissions reductions that result from existing state regulation of volatile organic compounds; (4) ensure federal rules are coordinated with states to ensure alignment of federal and state regulatory structures; and (5) work with states to ensure the consistent use of a single, clear method of quantifying methane emissions.
29. In regulating methane emissions, BLM and EPA should adequately consider states' environmental and economic concerns. Consultation between state and federal partners on rules regulating methane emissions is essential to the co-regulator relationship needed to improve air quality for our states.

Hydrofluorocarbon Emissions

30. Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) are a category of gases used in refrigeration and industrial applications that have the potential to significantly contribute to climate change. The federal American Innovation and Manufacturing Act of 2020 established federal restrictions on HFC production and consumption and will lead to a significant phasedown by 2036, but more action is needed. Any action taken by federal partners on refrigerant management should include consultation with states to ensure alignment of federal and state regulations.
31. Federal agencies should promote and fund research, development, and deployment of refrigerant alternatives to aid manufacturers, lower costs, and incentivize industry transitions to products compliant with state HFC restrictions. This includes updating federal building codes to safely allow the use of alternative refrigerants.

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 2027. 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 IJA 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.



Policy Resolution 2023-10 Infrastructure Permitting

A. **BACKGROUND**

Western states and territories face a host of challenges in balancing the protection of human health and the environment with the many needs of growing populations. Robust permitting processes help achieve that balance by ensuring environmental protection and public participation. Current permitting processes governing land management activities and infrastructure development can negatively affect the pace and scale of critically important projects: to provide wildfire mitigation and habitat improvements, to ensure safe roads and bridges, to build drinking water and wastewater capacity, to improve energy systems including transmission and distribution, to construct and place broadband and other telecommunications infrastructure, and to address supply chain shortages. These review processes can be improved and streamlined while still providing meaningful opportunities for public input and promoting a safe and healthy environment for our citizens.

B. **GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT**

1. A clear, consistent, focused, and effective environmental review process is essential to protect environmental resources, ensure public participation, and facilitate timely decision making in the design, financing and execution of critical infrastructure and land management projects. Western Governors urge Congress and the Administration to streamline the review of critical infrastructure projects and land management activities, where appropriate, to achieve the goals of federal legislation that invests in improving infrastructure and enhancing ecosystem function.
2. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to integrate environmental considerations into their decision-making processes, which have been defined through regulations and guidance issued by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). Federal agencies' NEPA review processes should seek to comply with CEQ requirements as efficiently and effectively as possible. Litigation risk should not cause agencies to take an overly cautious approach to the permitting process. Instead, federal agencies should fully utilize existing mechanisms to streamline the environmental review process, such as any available categorical exclusions, where appropriate, while ensuring that robust consideration of environmental factors remains integral to the process.
3. CEQ should revise its guidance to direct agencies to consider only those impacts that are reasonably foreseeable and have a proximate relationship to the proposed action and also include robust socioeconomic analysis.
4. Western Governors believe Congress and the Administration should take steps to mitigate the risk of excessive project delays associated with legal challenges. Judicial review of federal decisions can significantly delay project implementation and can cause significant cost increases due to the rising cost of materials and labor. Agencies should initiate tribal, state, and county consultation in the earliest stages of the review process.

5. Federal permitting policies and efforts to streamline permitting processes should be flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of local communities. While significant investment in energy generation and transmission, transportation infrastructure, and land and water management is needed across the West, the specific types of projects pursued within each municipality, state, territory and tribe will differ based on factors including geography, geology, economy, climate, as well as the differing policy goals of each jurisdiction. Creating a robust federal permitting framework that is accommodating of the diverse natural and political landscape of the West is essential for the success of the region as a whole.
6. Western Governors are concerned that lengthy reviews in federal permitting processes are impeding states' ability to invest federal funding that would provide environmental or conservation benefits and for which individual projects are typically similar in scope, such as construction of wildlife crossings on highways or fiber for wildfire monitoring cameras. CEQ should consider how best to streamline review processes for similar projects delivering an environmental or conservation outcome to ensure that federal funds are invested effectively.
7. The Administration and Congress, in continuing to evaluate permitting processes, should consider how to make these processes more accessible to underserved or historically disadvantaged communities, small and rural communities, and recipients of smaller awards to ensure that it is cost-effective for these groups to access federal funding. For example, small communities often choose not to apply for federal funding for transportation and infrastructure improvements because of the complexity and cost of the federal permitting process as well as the cost of compliance with federal requirements.
8. Western Governors recognize the value of interagency reviews, such as reviews under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, which authorizes the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to review all federal actions affecting the quality of the environment, but urge Congress and federal agencies to evaluate and address steps that may cause undue delays in permitting, including by improving coordination of federal agency activities.
9. Western Governors recognize the importance of highly qualified staff in local agency field offices that evaluate and process permitting applications. Governors are concerned by shortages of realty specialists in local field offices, especially as many staff responsible for permitting at these agencies are becoming eligible for retirement. Significant federal investment in infrastructure and land management projects increases the workload on agency staff, exacerbating existing shortages. It also increases the need for technical assistance for local communities and states applying to use federal funds. Federal land management agencies that receive funding for staffing to implement federal investments should prioritize hiring qualified permitting staff in local field offices to ensure permits are processed in a timely manner and technical assistance needs are met.
10. The Federal Infrastructure Permitting Dashboard operated by the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council (FPISC) adds transparency, accessibility, and agency accountability to the permitting process. The Administration and Congress should continue to empower and support the FPISC in its efforts to improve the federal permitting process. However, the FPISC, which is limited to select projects that qualify for inclusion, is only a temporary solution while comprehensive permitting reforms are developed and implemented. Fundamentally, Congress and the Administration must pursue

comprehensive reforms that increase transparency, accessibility, and agency accountability for all projects.

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 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.