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GOVERNOR OF NEW MEXICO  
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JACK WALDORF  
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September 3, 2024

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-221 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-230 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Joe Manchin  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Barrasso  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Chairman Manchin, and Ranking Member Barrasso:

On behalf of Western Governors, we are writing to express our support for provisions within S. 873, America's Outdoor Recreation Act of 2023, and H.R. 6492, the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act, which the House of Representatives passed in April. These bills reflect many of the priorities within Western Governors' Association (WGA) Policy Resolution 2022-12, Recreation and Tourism on Public Lands (attached). The West's world-class outdoor recreation destinations draw increasing numbers of visitors each year. However, those areas need support, infrastructure, and tools to manage increasing levels of recreation while maintaining these resources for the enjoyment of all, and for future generations. We urge the Senate to pass comprehensive outdoor recreation legislation to address these challenges.

Although the maintenance of public land recreation facilities is first and foremost a federal responsibility, Western Governors support the use of public-private partnerships to improve, modernize, and expand visitor services and facilities and to provide for the maintenance and operation of other critical public land infrastructure that supports both land management and visitation. The bills contain several similar provisions that authorize or encourage federal land management agencies to enter into and participate in public-private partnerships, which would help land management agencies ensure that recreation facilities and services are maintained and expanded in line with their growing use.

Strategies that reduce the concentration of visitors rather than limit the total number of visitors are also needed to improve visitor experiences while maintaining access to public lands for all. Western Governors have urged federal land management agencies to use technology and real-time data sharing to help visitors avoid congestion. The Real-time Data Pilot Program, included in both bills, is a step toward achieving this goal across the West's many popular destinations.

Additionally, Western Governors have called for streamlined recreational special use permitting processes for outfitters and guides, and coordination across federal land management agencies to provide users with 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. Western Governors appreciate Congress' efforts to address special use permitting reform in both bills.

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Western Governors emphasize the importance of consulting and coordinating with states and local communities. Management decisions made within federal boundaries shape regional economic development and tourism, and particularly gateway communities, whose economies are highly reliant on tourism. Western Governors appreciate the provisions that direct agencies to coordinate with gateway communities to identify needs and economic effects on gateway communities.

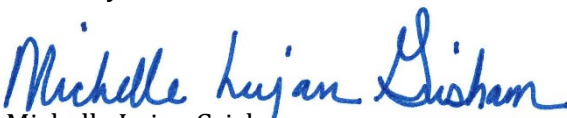
Western Governors also support language providing clear authority for federal land management agencies to inspect and decontaminate vessels leaving federal water bodies. WGA Policy Resolution 2022-11, Biosecurity and Invasive Species Management (attached), urges Congress and the Administration to support state, territorial, and tribal invasive species prevention, control, and management programs and redouble efforts on federal lands.

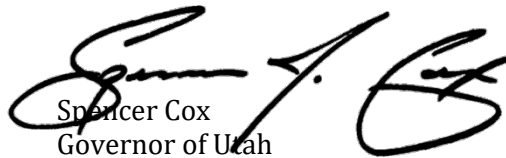
Improving federal, state, and territorial land management capabilities is a key focus for Western Governors, and our collective, bipartisan land management policies are contained in WGA Policy Resolution 2024-02, National Forest and Rangeland Management (attached). Western Governors strongly support efforts to expand the use of cross-boundary management projects by extending and expanding the use of Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), among other strategies. The House bill contains a provision (Section 351, Good Neighbor Authority for Recreation) that would allow states, tribes, and counties to use GNA agreements to carry out recreation services. Western Governors encourage you to consider including this helpful provision in any outdoor recreation package approved in the Senate.

Western Governors also endorse provisions in the House bill to allow federal land management agencies to bolster housing availability for the land management workforce, and to grow the land management workforce by hiring more veterans. Successful implementation of the policies and programs envisioned in both bills will depend on the agencies' ability to fully staff its workforce; Western Governors therefore emphasize the importance of addressing the causes of workforce shortages, such as housing availability and affordability, in the Senate bill as well.

The West has always welcomed visitors who flock to its iconic landscapes. Increased visitation puts additional pressure on the entire recreation system, from infrastructure needs to maintenance backlog to the amenities and services provided by local communities. Western Governors look forward to working with you to ensure that outdoor recreation remains a vibrant part of our local communities. Do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance as you consider this legislation.

Sincerely,

  
Michelle Lujan Grisham  
Governor of New Mexico  
Chair, WGA

  
Spencer Cox  
Governor of Utah  
Vice Chair, WGA

Attachments



## Policy Resolution 2022-12

### Recreation and Tourism on Public Lands

#### A. **BACKGROUND**

1. Federal lands are concentrated in western states and are primarily managed by four agencies: the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Park Service (NPS).
2. These public lands are integral to the cultural, economic and social vitality of the West. They also preserve iconic landscapes and offer abundant outdoor recreation opportunities that draw millions of annual visitors, stimulate local and state economies, and provide social and health benefits.
3. Congress created the federal land management agencies for different purposes and missions. BLM and USFS are directed to manage for sustained yield and multiple uses, which can include recreation. Land administered by FWS is managed for the conservation, management and restoration of fish, wildlife and plant species, and recreation that is compatible to that mission is permissible. The mission of NPS is to preserve unique resources and to provide for their enjoyment by the public.
4. Federal lands are critical to all-lands management efforts that seek to provide for public recreation opportunities and conserve landscapes across federal, state, and private ownership boundaries. Management decisions made within federal boundaries can have effects on regional economic development and tourism, wildlife habitat and connectivity, cultural resource preservation, and other areas of interest to states.
5. In recent years, and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, visitation at the most popular national parks has broken records and expanded into what was traditionally considered the off-season. Visitation and recreational use of BLM, USFS and FWS lands, which had been increasing in recent years, also surged in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. BLM reported 73.1 million visits in fiscal year 2020, an increase of more than 2.3 million over 2019.<sup>1</sup> This increase occurred even with pandemic-related closures for part of the year. Similarly, USFS estimates that national forests and grasslands received 168 million visits in 2020, an increase of 18 million when compared to 2019. USFS reported that visits to dispersed recreation sites and wilderness areas, which do not provide facilities such as bathrooms or fire rings, increased by 25 percent.<sup>2</sup>
7. Given their different management mandates, USFS, BLM and FWS units may not have the resources or staff in place to manage increased visitation and outdoor recreation uses.

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<sup>1</sup> BLM Public Land Statistics, 2020 Report. <https://www.blm.gov/about/data/public-land-statistics>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Forest Service National Visitor Use Monitoring Report 2020.

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/news/releases/new-data-shows-visits-soared-across-national-forests-2020>

8. Public-private partnership authorities are available to the federal land management agencies to attract private investment to improve, modernize, and expand visitor facilities to meet the increasing demand for quality visitor experiences.
9. Without the necessary visitor facility investment, infrastructure, staffing, and management planning, increased visitation can lead to overcrowding, damage to natural and cultural resources and tribal sacred places, and threaten tribal treaty rights. This diminishes visitor experience and jeopardizes the enjoyment for all, and for future generations, of these resources.
10. Increased visitation at destination parks is inspiring visitors to consider visiting traditionally less popular areas. While this distribution of visitors is allowing greater overall visitation, it should be coupled with increased investment in visitor facilities and associated infrastructure to minimize impacts to local water systems, wildfire risk, and other resources of local communities and states, including resources for search and rescue and emergency response.
11. In 2020, the four federal land management agencies had an estimated \$25.87 billion backlog in deferred maintenance projects for roads, bridges, visitor centers, historic buildings, trails, campgrounds, and other critical infrastructure needs. NPS accounts for the largest portion, at \$14.37 billion in 2020.<sup>3</sup> Aging facilities, and limited resources have resulted in this backlog of deferred maintenance. The failure to timely maintain existing facilities and infrastructure combined with limited investment in new and expanded visitor facilities has negative effects on the visitor experience and economic activity in gateway communities.
12. 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 for offshore oil and gas drilling operations in federal waters.
13. The extended shutdowns of the federal government in 2013 and 2018-2019 caused millions of dollars of lost revenue for gateway communities, which are mostly rural and whose economies are highly reliant on tourism. These shutdowns also caused significant harm directly to the NPS system through staff furloughs, diminished revenue, lost recreational and educational opportunities, and damage to natural resources. During these shutdowns, some states entered into agreements with the U.S. Department of the Interior to keep certain national parks open and lost millions of dollars that were never recouped.

**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, development of social values, positive

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<sup>3</sup> Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY2011-FY2020 Estimates and Issues. Congressional Research Service. November 30, 2021. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43997>

health benefits, and recreational opportunities, which benefit our 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 and landmarks so as to ensure and maintain their economic, cultural and historic values.
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 the BLM, USFS, FWS and NPS to partner with State Parks and appropriate Offices of Outdoor Recreation to improve outcomes and efficiencies related to expanded visitor services, resource protection, cost-sharing, staff training, educational programming, and other shared goals.
5. Western Governors request that Congress and the federal agencies consider whether tools like Good Neighbor Authority, which allows USFS and BLM to enter into agreements with states to do critical forest management work, could be utilized to improve management of popular outdoor recreation areas on federal lands that do not have adequate infrastructure, services and staff. Congress should ensure that BLM, USFS, FWS and NPS are provided the necessary authority to enter such agreements with states.
6. Western Governors urge Congress, the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture to explore additional strategies to accommodate increased visitation and improve visitor experiences. Strategies that reduce the concentration of visitors rather than limit the total number of visitors are needed to protect visitor experience while maintaining public lands for all. Western Governors particularly urge improving, modernizing and expanding visitor facilities, attracting investment to create new visitor destinations, using technology and real-time 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.
7. Western Governors encourage NPS to promote an agency culture that is welcoming, customer service oriented, and reflective of the agency's mission to provide for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of the public.
8. Western Governors urge federal land managers to coordinate with gateway communities and tourism offices to develop plans for sustainable visitation.
9. Public land access is critically important in the West. The permitting process should be streamlined and coordinated across federal land management agencies to provide users 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.
10. Western Governors urge Congress to appropriately fund federal land management 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.

11. Western Governors urge Congress to extend funding for the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund beyond 2025 and examine longer term solutions to the deferred maintenance backlog.
12. Congress and the land management agencies should also address workforce housing needs where they are unable to recruit and retain employees due to the exorbitant cost of living or acute housing shortages.
13. 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.
14. 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.
15. 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 within the states and major tourist attractions in the West.
16. During any lapse in funding, Western Governors recommend the federal government work collaboratively with states and 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 2025. 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 2022-11

### Biosecurity and Invasive Species Management

#### A. BACKGROUND

1. Per Executive Order 13751, “invasive species” means “with regard to a particular ecosystem, a non-native organism whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human, animal, or plant health.” This definition can include aquatic and terrestrial plants and animals, forest and agricultural pests, and pathogens.
2. The introduction and spread of invasive species follow ecological conditions, not political boundaries, but questions of jurisdiction should not be ignored. Although effective management requires effective communications and collaborations between the political jurisdictions across those ecological conditions – including local, state, tribal, territorial, and federal entities – political boundaries should not be ignored in favor of a one-size-fits-all approach.
3. The 2017-2027 Hawai’i Interagency Biosecurity Plan defines biosecurity as “the set of measures taken to manage the risk from invasive species to the economy, environment, and health and lifestyle of the people.” This includes pre-border measures, border measures, post-border measures, and measures that increase public awareness about invasive species.
4. The Plant Protection Act of 2000 (Pub. L. 106–224) defines “biological control” (biocontrol) as the use of biological control organisms as an “enemy, antagonist, or competitor used to control a plant pest or noxious weed.” When used properly, biocontrol is one tool that may be effective in efforts to manage and eradicate invasive pests.
5. States, tribes, territorial, and federal agencies may have different definitions of biosecurity, biological control and invasive species. They also may use regulatory and nonregulatory terms that are related to, but not synonymous with, the term invasive species, including pest, nuisance species, noxious weed, and injurious wildlife.
6. Invasive species have substantial negative effects on ecosystems, economies, and communities in the West. Studies have found that invasive species cost the U.S. more than \$120 billion every year, and the National Wildlife Federation estimates that 42 percent of threatened or endangered species are at risk due to invasive species. Invasive annual grasses such as cheatgrass, medusahead, fountain grass, and ventenata pose a major threat to western rangelands by increasing the risk of wildfire, outcompeting native grasses, and diminishing soil and water quality. Aquatic nuisance species, including invasive quagga and zebra mussels, decrease water quantity and quality, impair native wildlife, harm hydroelectric and irrigation systems, and can impede maritime transport by fouling vessel hulls. Invasive pathogens such as Sudden Oak Death affect human welfare and health, and invasive species, can vector human diseases (e.g., Asian tiger mosquito). Invasive species damage multiple types of environments, from virgin forests to tidal marshes. Invasive

species, including the Cotton Seed Bug, Spotted Lanternfly, and European and Asian Gypsy Moths harm a wide variety of economies dependent on natural resources, including agriculture, ranching, tourism, energy production and transmission, and forest products. Invasive species threaten many native plants central to western life and the cultures of Native Americans, Native Hawai'ians, Alaska Natives, and other indigenous peoples.

7. Particular invasive species, especially plant species such as Tamarisk and Russian olive, contribute to drought and the overstressing of ecosystem services. These invasive species reduce flow rates, water quality, the availability of water, nutrients and habitat for native plants, and alter water temperature affecting native fish species, including native species which are threatened and endangered.
8. The spread of invasive species results from a combination of human activities, susceptibility of invaded environments, climate change, biology of the invading species, and dispersal. These characteristics are not dictated by geopolitical boundaries, but rather by ecosystem-level factors, which cross state and national borders. Continued warming of habitats, especially in coastal regions and areas with transitional ecoregions, will lead to further expansion of highly adaptable invasive species and reduction in native biodiversity levels. Scientists, private landowners, and state and federal land managers across the West have expressed the need to develop a more aggressive and cohesive strategy for invasive species management that includes prevention, monitoring, control, and eradication.
9. Direct, short-term impacts by invasive species stemming from human activities such as the overuse of recreation areas, an absence of responsible recreation practices, lack of education and signage, or poor watercraft decontamination compliance affect ecosystem health differently than long-term effects generated by climate change and should be addressed separately.
10. The impacts of invasive species on natural resources and human health and welfare are similar in scope and intensity to the threats posed by wildfire. Wildfire management on federal, state, tribal, and local land is coordinated through a sophisticated planning and response network, which includes the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), the National Incident Management Organization of the US Forest Service, and the Wildland Fire Leadership Council.
11. The proliferation of invasive annual grasses which outcompete native species to form monoculture habitats contribute to the increased severity, intensity, and frequency of destructive wildfires in the West. The cyclical nature of invasive annual grass fueled wildfires followed by invasions of burned landscapes – especially working lands, rangelands, and the wildland-urban interface – place at greater risk human health and safety, ecological stability, and western productivity. Wildfires fueled by invasive annual grasses especially impact sagebrush and bunchgrass ecosystems, and place at greater risk numerous threatened and endangered species including the Greater Sage Grouse, increasing the burden for state and federal resource managers.
12. Many invasive species were introduced, or their distribution was expanded, due to inadequate or antiquated federal and state regulations dealing with interstate transport, international trade and interstate commerce, a lack of communication and coordination



between land management agencies, and inadequate management of naturalized species which disturb intact native ecosystems.

13. Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) is a coordinated set of actions to find and eradicate potential invasive species in a specific location before they spread and cause harm. When early detection identifies a high-risk species, such as zebra or quagga mussels, use of an Incident Command System (ICS) is warranted. ICS is a management system designed to enable effective and efficient incident management, including invasive species rapid response, by integrating a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure.
14. In the West, biosecurity and invasive species management is the responsibility of a wide network of state, federal, tribal, and local agencies. Federal agencies manage invasive species on federal lands and waters under a complex system of mandates and authorities.
15. Cooperative agreements, grants, and procurement contracts between federal agencies and state, tribal, and local invasive species management authorities are effective in establishing structured partnerships for collaborative invasive species management. The use of cooperative agreements lessens the burden on lead jurisdictions, while increasing the efficiency of invasive species management programs utilizing local collaborative goal setting. Additionally, cooperative agreements simplify project-based contracting utilizing the authorities of state and local government agencies. This can be extremely useful, especially where infestations extend across multiple landownerships or EDRR is the management objective.
16. Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) allows states to enter into agreements with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) or Bureau of Land Management (BLM), permitting them to perform various land management activities on federal lands. These tools have been successfully used by forest and rangeland managers to achieve various land management objectives across federal, state and local government, and privately-owned lands.
17. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulation of interstate movement of commodities via airlines is focused on the protection of agricultural industries in the contiguous United States. This is particularly evident in Hawai'i, where baggage destined for the U.S. mainland is subject to federal inspection, while baggage moving from the mainland to Hawai'i is not.
18. Environmental DNA (eDNA) is DNA present in an environmental sample, as differentiated from traditional sampling of DNA directly from an intact organism. eDNA frequently is thought of as DNA in tissue and cells that have been shed by an organism but can also refer to DNA within an intact organism, if that organism is collected in the environmental sample. eDNA can be used to detect a wide range of organisms, including those that are endangered or invasive, and be used for both research and monitoring purposes. Detection of eDNA does not, in and of itself, constitute proof of detection that a water body contains live dreissenid mussels, but rather an indicator of likelihood that a water body was exposed to some level of live or dead dreissenid mussel eDNA (biological matter). The distinction between exposure to eDNA and the actual presence of a live organism is critical for resource managers both for communication of results and when determining when to initiate any response.

19. The West includes a number of highly important seaports on the U.S. mainland and across the Pacific region. Maritime vessels represent a primary pathway for the movement of aquatic invasive species. With the passage of the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act (VIDA) in 2018, regulations regarding ballast water and other discharges are centralized under Section 312 of the Clean Water Act with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in coordination with states, setting environmental standards, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), in coordination with states, setting vessel requirements to meet those standards, and the USCG and interested states enforcing those requirements. In addition, states have authority to petition the EPA and the USCG to issue an emergency order or review any standard, regulation, or policy issued under VIDA.
20. State invasive species councils and invasive plant councils provide policy level direction, planning, and coordination for state-level biosecurity and invasive species prevention and management actions in the West. Councils are led by state agencies, non-profit organizations, industry, private landowners, and public-private partnerships. These groups empower those engaged in the prevention, detection, and eradication of invasive species, and serve as forums for invasive species education, communication, and strategic planning. Invasive species councils can collaborate on regional-level issues and benefit from mechanisms that help them to coordinate and solve cross-boundary, cross-jurisdictional challenges.
21. The eradication, control, or containment of invasive species is necessary for the preservation of ecosystem integrity, public health, and economic productivity across the west. While proactive management and the preservation of undisturbed habitat are preferable to post-invasion, resource-intensive activities, restoration efforts using native species are encouraged following management actions in order to prevent the reestablishment of invasive species and restore ecosystem services.
22. Prevention is a more cost-effective approach in defending areas of intact and unaltered native ecosystems than engaging in eradication control, or containment activities in habitats which have invasive species. Especially where terrestrial plant species are of concern, emphasis on the proactive maintenance of defensible cores is more viable than reactive efforts.

**B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT**

1. Western Governors intend to continue the charter of the Western Invasive Species Council (WISC) to help enhance coordination between existing state invasive species councils, improve communication and collaboration on regional biosecurity and invasive species control efforts, and to advocate for regional needs at the federal level. The WISC should be initially coordinated through the Western Governors' Association and should work to address cross-boundary and cross-jurisdictional challenges identified in this resolution.
2. Western Governors urge Congress and the Administration to support state, territorial, and tribal invasive species prevention, control and management programs and redouble efforts on federal lands. This should be accomplished through accountability and oversight of programs administered by the USDA, the U.S. Department of the Interior, the U.S. Department of Defense, the USCG, the EPA, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. These programs provide valuable services in the prevention, detection and

elimination of invasive species, as well as coordination, public outreach, and communication.

3. Western Governors support research as needed to provide understanding of invasive species life potential range distribution, and to develop geographically-appropriate control measures. Western Governors urge Congress and the Administration to support much-needed research on biosecurity and invasive species, including programs under the National Institute of Food and Agriculture and to facilitate funding mechanisms that enable land grant universities to conduct research and development of new pesticides. Institutions conducting research on biosecurity, biocontrol and invasive species control methods should look for opportunities to pool funding resources and exchange information across administrative lines. Invasive species managers and policymakers should be encouraged to develop new decision-making tools and economic analyses, as well as build and improve upon the decision-making tools and analyses currently in use. Invasive species managers should strive to incorporate economic analyses and regional-level, science-based decision-making tools into management decisions.
4. Western Governors strongly encourage expansion and creation of partnerships – such as invasive species councils with representation from local weed and pest districts, conservation districts, county governments, non-profit and industry organizations, local stakeholders, state, territorial, tribal, federal, regional and international groups and agencies – committed to preventing the spread of invasive species, averting new unauthorized introductions, responding rapidly to new introductions, and working together to find creative regional approaches for protecting and restoring natural, agriculture, power and water conveyance infrastructure, and recreational and cultural resources. Federal agencies, in coordination with associated states, territories, and tribes, should build a more sophisticated and centralized biosecurity and invasive species management network, including a National Biosecurity and Invasive Species Management Center based on the model of the NIFC.
5. Congress and the federal government should ensure that invasive species funding, including support for emergency response, is sustainable, timely, flexible and able to be maximized by federal, state, territorial, tribal, and local agencies with pooled resources and collaborative funding mechanisms. Federal funding, cooperative agreements grants, and procurement contracts for state and local biosecurity and invasive species management should be structured in a deliberate and transparent way that allows for the greatest amount of flexibility and long-term planning. When possible, federal agencies should look for collaborative projects and funding opportunities that multiply state resources and support jurisdiction-led biosecurity and invasive species management projects.
6. Western Governors call upon Congress to promote jurisdiction-directed programs to combat invasive species. Regional leadership and jurisdiction-directed programs provide place-based solutions tailored to unique regional or local conditions in land and aquatic ecosystems. The federal role should be one of partnership and policy-making that strengthen jurisdiction' on-the-ground efforts and mitigates risks associated with the movement of invasive species between jurisdictions.
7. Federal agencies are encouraged to expand the use of cooperative agreements with state territorial, tribal, and local governments and should ensure that they are approved in a

timely manner and in collaboration with implementing jurisdictional agencies. Federal agencies can also support invasive species management efforts by encouraging contract recipients to coordinate with state, territorial, tribal, and local invasive species management agencies, regulatory programs, and cooperative weed and invasive species management areas. State invasive species managers should consider using Good Neighbor Authority on USFS and BLM lands for cross-boundary collaborative invasive species control, management and eradication programs.

8. Federal actions should support jurisdictional biosecurity and invasive species management efforts by ensuring the timely approval of jurisdictional permits for biosecurity, quarantine, biocontrol, and rapid response actions. Federal agencies should consult with Governors early and substantively regarding biosecurity or invasive species management decisions that affect state resources and state actions.
9. Federal agencies should identify individuals within district and region offices that can be contacted and assist in the planning and implementation of local cross-boundary invasive species management programs.
10. The threats that invasive species pose to western landscapes and communities are serious and should be met with a sophisticated and coordinated response commensurate with the level of their impacts.
11. Prevention is the most efficient and cost-effective method of invasive species management. Effective biosecurity, prevention, and containment methods can mitigate the need for more expensive and burdensome control and eradication programs. Prevention strategies should be coordinated across state, national, and international lines. Jurisdictions should increase the use of innovative biosecurity prevention and detection programs, including increased use of electronic manifesting in interstate shipments for the purposes of inspection, and the use of canine detection resources.
12. Western Governors support the EDRR framework as a method to limit or eliminate new introductions and existing species expansion. Programs for the containment, control and/or eradication of invasive species must result in more on-the-ground prevention, management and eradication. The ICS should be strongly considered for use in instances of fast-spreading invasives and used as part of rapid response; state, territorial, tribal, federal, and local agencies should opt to practice and implement the ICS as part of rapid response. The Federal Emergency Management Agency can support these efforts by working with western states to create an ICS training module for invasive species rapid response. The Executive Branch can support jurisdiction-led rapid response programs by: 1) increasing federal funding for jurisdiction-led aquatic invasive species rapid response programs, including those that provide mechanisms for flexible, long-term support of jurisdictional early detection and rapid response efforts; 2) streamlining federal permitting and approval processes for treatment and management actions for new mussel detections; 3) creating a single federal authority for aquatic invasive species treatment permitting and approval in freshwater systems; and 4) simplifying reporting on new invasive mussel infestations by creating a single federal point of contact for new mussel detections.
13. Federal agencies should support state, territory, and tribal efforts to identify, study and approve the use of biological control organisms. Federal permitting models should be

structured to ensure biocontrol can be utilized by jurisdictional entities in a safe and timely manner. Biocontrol research is encouraged at a regional level, with biocontrol research information being encouraged to move freely between institutions and across state lines. Invasive species managers in the West would benefit from the creation of a new, state-of-the-art biological control facility, as well as a collaborative, multi-agency plan for maintaining and staffing new biocontrol facilities at a level that more adequately meets the expanding needs of the region. Furthermore, effective biocontrol, biosecurity, and invasive species research depends upon a highly skilled workforce. Jurisdictional entities should collaborate with universities to support programs essential to biosecurity and invasive species management, such as botany, zoology, plant pathology, taxonomy, systematics, and related fields.

14. The containment of invasive quagga and zebra mussels at infested waters in the West depends upon the collaboration and mutual effort of federal, state, tribal and local agencies. Many jurisdiction-led management programs benefit from federal cooperation and funding, and jurisdictions should be encouraged to sustain and expand these effective partnerships as necessary. However, to adequately protect the West from the movement of aquatic invasive species, federal agencies must be able to act as full partners in invasive species containment efforts and must have the funding and authorities necessary to contain invasive species within lands and waters under their jurisdiction. To this end, federal agencies, including the National Park Service and BLM, should be vested with clear authority to manage watercraft upon their departure from infested waterbodies under federal jurisdiction.
15. Integrated pest management, biocontrol, outcome-based grazing, and targeted grazing can be effective tools to control the spread of invasive annual grasses. Federal, state, territorial, tribal and local agencies should view invasive annual grasses as a regional threat and strive to identify and implement cross-boundary projects to control invasive annual grasses at a regional level. Such projects should include those utilizing alternative management techniques such as outcome-based grazing.
16. Agricultural industries in the Pacific states and territories need to be similarly protected from the risk of interstate movement of invasive species from the contiguous U.S. mainland. USDA quarantines and commodity inspections should incorporate the priorities of the West, including non-contiguous states and territorial islands in the western region. This includes maintaining federal quarantines on pests that have not yet reached the West, like the emerald ash borer, and adopting policies that adequately protect Pacific states and territories, such as inspection of baggage moving from the contiguous U.S. to non-contiguous areas.
17. Detection of eDNA, in and of itself, is insufficient to meet detection standards for classifying a water body for the presence of dreissenid mussels. States should respond to and share eDNA results as they deem appropriate. Additionally, state, federal and local agencies and regional coordinating groups should develop and implement a set of best practices for conducting eDNA monitoring and incorporating positive detection results into rapid response strategies.
18. To effectively prevent, contain, and control invasive species, federal, state, territorial, tribal, and local invasive species managers need federal laws that support on-the-ground action.

Western Governors support a states-led review of federal biosecurity and invasive species statutes, including the Lacey Act and the National Invasive Species Act, to evaluate how they support on-the-ground management, identify any gaps in their application, and ensure that their structure and implementation are able to address 21<sup>st</sup> century biosecurity and invasive species challenges. Of particular interest are opportunities to expand the taxonomic scope of the Lacey Act to benefit U.S. biosecurity.

19. As directed by the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection Agency shall consult with Western Governors and work closely and collaboratively with states on the implementation of that act to ensure that state and regional aquatic invasive species and water quality resource protection needs are met across the West and the Pacific. The U.S. Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection Agency shall consult and collaborate with interested states on the development of evidence-based risk assessments and shall work together to assess the efficacy of policies and tools that may be used in mitigating the impact of various types of vessel discharges. Western Governors believe that protecting the diversity of marine habitats in western states and Pacific territories is best accomplished by working with states that have the greatest knowledge of their ecosystems and invasive risks.
20. Accurate, standardized, and accessible geospatial data is essential to biosecurity and invasive species management in the West. Western Governors support efforts to standardize and centralize invasive species occurrence data, streamline the exchange of data between the nation's major invasive species data aggregators, and increase the accessibility of data to federal, state, territorial, tribal, and local land and resource managers.
21. The proliferation of invasive annual grasses which outcompete native species to form monoculture habitats contribute to the increased severity, intensity, and frequency of destructive wildfires in the West. Western Governors support proactive and adaptive management, including landscape scale approaches, fuel treatments, and defensive prevention of intact cores as critical components of invasive annual grass management regimes.

**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 2025. 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 IIA 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.

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