

**Written Testimony of James D. Ogsbury, Executive Director
Western Governors' Association**

**Submitted to the United States House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
April 20, 2021**

Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations

Chairman Cartwright, Ranking Member Aderholt, and Members of the Subcommittee, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on two items within the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, both of which relate to the U.S. Department of Commerce. WGA is an independent organization representing the Governors of the 22 westernmost states and territories. The Association is an instrument of the Governors for bipartisan policy development, information-sharing and collective action on issues of critical importance to the western United States.

Western Governors support adequate and dedicated funding for the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) program under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). WGA is well-acquainted with the significant environmental, economic, and social effects of drought on the West and its communities. Drought contributes to the incidence of forest and rangeland wildfire, impairs ecosystems and wildlife habitat, degrades agricultural productivity, and poses threats to municipal and industrial water supplies. A growing population's dependence on limited water resources creates challenges for water management across the West, from the Great Plains to the Intermountain West to the coastal, estuarine and marine environments of the Pacific states and islands. Planning for an adequate, reliable and clean water supply requires accurate and complete water and weather information.

NIDIS promotes a coordinated and integrated approach to managing future drought. This approach involves improved forecasting and monitoring to provide the kind of authoritative, objective and timely drought information that farmers, water managers, decision-makers, and local governments require for effective drought preparation and response. Through NIDIS, NOAA is building a network of early warning systems for drought while working with local resource managers to identify and address unique regional drought information needs.

Western Governors value the approach used to build and improve NIDIS. Rather than creating a new NIDIS bureaucracy, the system draws from existing capacity in states, universities and multiple federal agencies, as called for in the original authorizing legislation. Given our shared fiscal challenges, WGA regards this as a model for federal-state collaboration in shared information services.

Water users throughout the West – including farmers, ranchers, tribes, land managers, business owners, recreationalists, wildlife managers, and decision-makers at all levels of government – must be able to assess the risks of drought before its onset to make informed

decisions and implement effective mitigation measures. For these reasons, Western Governors request continued support and adequate funding for the National Weather Service River Forecast Centers and Weather Forecast Offices and the NIDIS program, which perform a valuable role in western water management and drought response.

Many western communities, especially tribal communities, lack access to broadband internet due to the high cost of infrastructure and the economic realities of serving low customer densities in potential service areas. This has left many rural businesses at a competitive disadvantage and citizens without access to telework, telemedicine and distance learning opportunities. Consequently, Western Governors support opportunities to improve connectivity on rural and tribal lands and efforts to leverage state expertise through state block grants. The Governors appreciate the increased funding allocated to tribal and state projects within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) last fiscal year, including funding to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and the new Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program. The Governors look forward to engaging with NTIA on this funding and stand ready to implement projects for the benefit of rural and tribal communities,

Deployment of broadband infrastructure to these underserved and unserved communities requires an accurate picture of nationwide broadband availability. Western Governors applaud recent efforts to address the accuracy of broadband data coverage measurements through the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Broadband Data Task Force and the Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability Act, known as the Broadband DATA Act, and support continued investment in these efforts. WGA also encourages coordination of data collection strategies among the Federal Communications Commission, U.S. Department of Agriculture and other agencies involved in broadband mapping and deployment.

Western Governors recognize the enormous challenge you have in balancing competing funding priorities, and we appreciate the difficulty of the decisions the Subcommittee must make. These recommendations are offered in a spirit of cooperation and respect, and WGA is prepared to assist you as the Subcommittee discharges its critical and challenging responsibilities.