



MEMORANDUM

TO: SLDMWA BOARD OF DIRECTORS
FROM: DAN KEPPEL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT
DATE: OCTOBER 3, 2021

This memo is intended to keep you apprised as to what is happening behind the scenes on policy issues the Family Farm Alliance is engaged in. In the past month, much of our efforts have focused on engaging in Biden Administration rulemaking efforts, tracking and influencing water legislative developments in Congress, working on drought messaging and public outreach, and influencing Western water infrastructure provisions in Congress. These issues and other matters important to our members are further discussed in this memo.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION DEVELOPMENTS

1. Appointments

Members from both sides of the political aisle on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee (ENR) last month voiced support for President Biden's nominee to serve as the Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. Ms. Camille Touton, a longtime water policy adviser to Hill Democrats, appears headed towards being the first Filipino American to lead Reclamation after her confirmation hearing. In addition to her time working on Congressional water committees, Ms. Touton also worked at the Interior Department on water and science issues during the Obama Administration. She is currently the Deputy Commissioner at Reclamation. The Family Farm Alliance earlier this year sent a letter support for Ms. Touton's nomination to the Senate ENR Committee.

The ENR Committee also heard from Ms. Laura Daniel-Davis, nominee for the Department of the Interior's Assistant Secretary for Lands and Minerals Management, and Ms. Sara Bronin, nominee to chair the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The committee will vote on Ms. Touton's

nomination in a future meeting, which has not been announced. If approved by a majority of the panel's members, her nomination will proceed to a final vote in the full Senate.

In related news, another Biden appointee – Robert Anderson – was confirmed by a Senate voice vote last month as the Solicitor of the Department of Interior. And, Reclamation has selected Levi Brekke, Ph.D., as the senior advisor for research and development. The newly established position provides executive oversight of all aspects of the research and development office and data management activities for Reclamation's workforce of nearly 6,000 federal employees.

2. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): Maui Guidance

EPA's Office of Water contacted me last month and reported that EPA is rescinding the recently issued guidance document entitled "Applying the Supreme Court's *County of Maui v. Hawaii Wildlife Fund* decision in the Clean Water Act Section 402 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit Program," which was signed on January 14, 2021. Recall that, in April 2020, the Supreme Court held that discharges to groundwater require an NPDES permit if the pollutants eventually reach a WOTUS and they are the "functional equivalent" of a direct surface discharge. The Court identified seven factors to determine a functional equivalent discharge. The Trump guidance is being rescinded because it was determined to be inconsistent with the Clean Water Act and the *Maui* decision.

Last June, a small group of Alliance representatives participated in a ZOOM meeting hosted by EPA on this topic. We were one of three national agricultural groups invited to participate in this "listening session". On that call, we emphasized the need to avoid undermining or eliminating the threshold conditions required to trigger the need for an NPDES permit, as well as protecting existing exemptions from the NPDES permitting program. Norm emphasized that we do not believe that the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Maui* impacted either the threshold NPDES requirements or existing exemptions, and that it was appropriate for EPA to provide guidance that includes these matters; clarity is important for the regulated community to understand the requirements. We encouraged EPA to retain the existing *Maui* guidance and perhaps consider modifying it to include specific reference to the existing NPDES exemptions, which are important to agriculture. EPA obviously chose to go in a different direction. For more information visit <https://www.epa.gov/npdes/releases-point-source-groundwater>.

3. White House: Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful ("30 x 30") Initiative

Throughout the transition and early months of the Biden-Harris Administration, the Family Farm Alliance has worked with other Western landowner groups and Members of Congress to monitor and seek to influence the development of the Administration's "Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful" initiative. The Biden Administration noted that its interim report, released earlier this year, was only the starting point on the path to fulfilling the president's conservation vision. In the past month, the Alliance signed on to a letter providing guidance to the

Administration on collaboratively engaging with Western farmers and ranchers to implement the Biden conservation vision.

a. Western Landowners Alliance Letter

The Alliance, along with 7 other organizations representing farmers, ranchers and landowners on hundreds of millions of acres across the West, signed on to a September 10 letter addressed to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, spearheaded by the Western Landowners Alliance. The letter proposed a collaborative engagement process with the administration to identify solutions intended to keep working landscapes whole and healthy for the benefit of people, wildlife and ecosystems. This process would include a series of professionally facilitated work sessions, hosted by the signatory organizations and attended by federal officials from relevant agencies, state agency officials, conservation NGOs and other interested organizations. In addition to the outlining the proposed process, the letter identifies seven questions that could be addressed through the structured engagement process:

- How do we define conservation and measure success?
- How do we define “community”, what is meant by “locally led”, and how can community-led and/or locally led conservation be better integrated and supported in policy?
- In addition to funding for short-term conservation and restoration work, how do we pay for ongoing ecological stewardship?
- How can we improve federal funding programs and delivery, and how can groups with direct experience and local relationships help guide federal funding allocations?
- How can we improve public lands management and agency/landowner relationships?
- How can we remove regulatory barriers to conservation?
- How can we support working lands stewardship as a strategy to deliver natural climate solutions and improve community and landscape climate resiliency?

The letter commends the Administration for committing to use science as a guide in implementing the Initiative. At the same time, the co-signers believe that it is essential in designing carbon markets that a range of benefits beyond just carbon sequestration are considered. Ranchers who use Western public lands for cattle, horses, goats and sheep received some good news late this month when top officials with the Interior and Agriculture departments said that millions of acres of public lands leased for grazing livestock should be counted toward the Biden administration's conservation target.

b. 30x30 Working Group Established, Holds Inaugural Meeting

The White House last month announced the establishment and inaugural meeting of the 25-member “America the Beautiful Interagency Working Group.” Co-chaired by Council on Environmental Quality Chair Brenda Mallory, Interior Sec. Deb Haaland, Agriculture Sec. Tom Vilsack, and Commerce Sec. Gina Raimondo, the group was created to coordinate federal efforts

to implement the Biden administration's initiative. The Working Group discussed several issues at its initial meeting, including efforts underway to collaborate and engage stakeholders on voluntary, locally-driven efforts on private and working lands. Discussion also focused on conservation-related elements of the bipartisan infrastructure bill (*see related discussion, below*). The Working Group will meet quarterly, with current agency. The White House noted that membership will expand further in order to achieve "an all-of-government approach."

c. Foundations Announce \$5B Pledge to Further 30x30

Nine foundations last month launched the "Protecting Our Planet Challenge", calling for additional private and public funding and pledging \$5 billion over the next 10 years to support the creation, expansion, management, and monitoring of protected and conserved lands, inland waters, and seas. The contributing foundations include Arcadia, Bezos Earth Fund, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, Re:wild, Nia Tero, Rainforest Trust, Rob and Melani Walton Foundation, and the Wyss Foundation. As part of the commitments, Bezos Earth Fund announced last month that it will contribute \$1 billion, with a focus on the tropical Pacific Ocean, Congo Basin, and tropical Andes. The Bezos Earth Fund is Jeff Bezos's \$10 billion commitment to fund scientists, activists, NGOs, and other actors that will drive climate and nature solutions.

4. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Turmoil

Department of Interior (DOI) Secretary Deb Haaland's decision to move the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) headquarters back to Washington and to designate the current headquarters in Grand Junction, Colorado as a Western hub did little to satisfy congressional leaders from both parties. BLM is an agency responsible for administering federal lands. With oversight over 247.3 million acres- most of it in the West - it governs one eighth of the country's landmass. Republicans are critical of land management policy decisions made by D.C.-based bureaucrats hundreds of miles away from the lands and stakeholders affected. Colorado's Democratic Senators bemoaned the move away from their home state as disappointing, even though the newly designated Western hub would remain in Grand Junction.

Last month's announcement ended months of speculation over the fate of the Robert F. Burford Bureau of Land Management Headquarters in Grand Junction. BLM completed the move there last year under the Trump Administration. That decision was largely based in the fact that 99 percent of the lands managed by the BLM are located west of the Mississippi River and 97 percent of BLM employees already lived in the western United States. Of the 328 positions reassigned to Grand Junction or state offices in the West, only 41 chose to move. A total of 287 employees, or 87 percent of those reassigned out of Washington, left BLM rather than move. Currently, Interior plans to move only the BLM Director and other unspecified "key leadership positions" back to Washington DC.

Meanwhile, Senate Democrat Leader Chuck Schumer snuck in a Senate vote late Thursday night to confirm President Biden's Bureau of Land Management nominee, Tracy Stone-Manning, who some Western GOP Members of Congress have tagged as “an ecoterrorist collaborator”.

DEVELOPMENTS IN CONGRESS

As expected, the Senate last week easily passed, 65-35, a bill to fund the government through December 3, extend expiring surface transportation programs and provide \$26.6 billion in emergency disaster aid, including \$200M for Reclamation drought emergency activities as determined by the Secretary. The House followed quickly, approving the measure 254-175, and President Biden signed the Continuing Resolution (CR) into law before the government ran out of funding. The CR did not include a debt ceiling suspension or the Israeli “Iron Dome” funding.

5. Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill

As previously reported, the Senate in August passed the 2,702-page, five-year *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, which includes a full surface transportation reauthorization bill, in addition to funding for the electric grid, broadband, water infrastructure, resiliency and western water storage, environmental remediation, and more. The Western Water Title in the infrastructure bill passed by the Senate includes \$8.3 billion for Reclamation, including \$3.2 billion for aging infrastructure, \$1.15 billion for new storage and conveyance, \$100 million for small scale storage projects, \$250 million for ecosystem restoration, \$100 million for multi-benefit watershed projects and \$400 million for WaterSMART, including \$100 million for natural infrastructure projects.

Importantly, the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* aligns with the solutions advanced by a Western water coalition that collectively represents thousands of Western farmers, ranchers, water providers, businesses and communities who help provide \$120 billion of agricultural production on millions of acres of productive land. The coalition is led by a steering committee comprised of the Alliance, Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), California Farm Bureau, National Water Resources Association (NWRA) and Western Growers.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CALIFORNIA) last week continued her path to a House vote on the package that was passed by the Senate earlier this year despite House progressives holding the line on moving forward on the bill without agreement on the reconciliation package. Late Thursday House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) announced that there would be no vote on the infrastructure bill because Democrats have still been unable to reach a deal between moderates and progressives. The House is currently in recess subject to the call of the Chair while Speaker Pelosi tries to strike a deal with Senate moderates Joe Manchin (D-WV) and Kirsten Sinema (D-ARIZONA), the House progressives caucus, a handful of House moderates on the size and substance of a budget reconciliation bill that can pass both chambers and allow the infrastructure bill to move in the House.

She may have to court some Republicans who are supportive of the bipartisan Senate infrastructure bill to try to offset a handful of hardline progressives who want to hold the bill hostage until they can pass the full \$3.5 trillion Biden agenda through Congress. Sen. Manchin was quoted several times last week as being supportive of a scaled down version of the \$3.5 trillion tax and spending bill, and has indicated his top line to be around \$1.5 trillion, a potential non-starter for many House progressives and the White House.

6. Reconciliation

Individual House committees last month worked on the various bills that parsed out the \$3.5 trillion reconciliation proposal, and completed that work during the last week of September. Getting our Reclamation provisions included in the Senate-passed bipartisan infrastructure bill was huge. Our coalition efforts in the past month have focused on using the reconciliation process to fill in the gaps behind our \$30 billion forest health and \$4 billion PL-566 asks. We've also updated our broader coalition and encouraged them to contact their House Members to express support for the water provisions of the Senate bipartisan infrastructure bill. Our steering committee has also had numerous calls this summer with key Western House Member staffers.

The House Natural Resources Committee approved a \$31 billion reconciliation package on a party-line vote, which includes a \$3 billion investment in the creation of a Civilian Climate Corps. There is also \$1 billion for Bureau of Reclamation Western irrigation and tribal drought mitigation activities. And, there's hundreds of millions of dollars for tribal settlements, ecosystem restoration, snow surveys, conveyance repairs, large scale water reuse grants, and research.

The House Agriculture Committee proposal includes billions of dollars for USDA to manage national forests, increase rural development, upgrade biofuel infrastructure and conduct climate research. Notably, it did not include provisions related to conservation and farm debt relief. The final reconciliation bill passed developed by the House Budget Committee includes \$28 billion out of the \$94 billion total devoted to agriculture. As reported in POLITICO, the reconciliation package includes:

- \$5 billion for direct payments to producers who establish cover crops totaling \$25 per-acre, up to 1,000 acres per producer.
- \$9 billion for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.
- \$4 billion for the Conservation Stewardship Program through fiscal year 2026.
- \$1.5 billion for the Agricultural Conservation Easements Program through fiscal year 2026.
- \$7.5 billion for the Regional Conservation Partnerships Program.
- \$200 million for Natural Resources Conservation Service technical assistance.
- \$650 million for climate change adaptation through regional climate hubs and carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emissions quantification through NRCS.

Last month, the Environmental Defense Fund, Irrigation Association, The Freshwater Trust, and Trout Unlimited joined the steering committee of the Western Water Infrastructure Coalition in a

letter to Congressional leadership calling out funding gaps that remain in areas critical to counteracting the historic drought and wildfire currently gripping the West. The coalition steering committee includes the Family Farm Alliance, Association of California Water Agencies, California Farm Bureau, National Water Resources Association and Western Growers Association. The coalition letter identified additional funding needs for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) to accelerate the pace and scale of restoration that improves ecosystem resiliency, reduces the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire, deploys water technology, boosts conservation programs, and responds to the ongoing drought emergency.

7. Inside Baseball on the Hill: The “Two-Track Process”

The battle over the \$1.2 trillion “hard” infrastructure bill has been linked to what happens with the Democrats’ \$3.5 trillion “human infrastructure” reconciliation package. Speaker Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, President Joe Biden and many Democrats initially embraced tying the two pieces of legislation together using the so-called “two-track process.” House leadership was planning on bringing their \$3.5 trillion reconciliation bill to the floor for a vote during the week of September 27th after a rare weekend markup of the almost 2,500-page reconciliation bill by the House Budget Committee. Speaker Pelosi touted the Budget Committee markup, while noting that the package will change before she brings it to a floor vote as "negotiations continue with the Senate."

The Senate-passed bipartisan \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package was scheduled to get the House vote on September 30, pushed back from the original September 27 target date that was promised to a handful of moderate House Democrats who had wanted a vote on the package before a budget resolution and reconciliation could proceed. The House infrastructure vote has now been delayed. House progressives say they won’t vote for the bipartisan Senate infrastructure bill until the Senate also votes on the completely partisan, reconciliation measure. Democrats in both Chambers are facing slim majorities and can’t afford to lose 3 votes in the House and 1 vote in the Senate to pass the White House agenda. House Republicans remain in lock step against both infrastructure and reconciliation packages.

Senator Manchin earlier in September told Democrats that they should “hit the pause button” on the \$3.5 T budget reconciliation package. He says he still has problems with the massive reconciliation package, including some of the progressives’ favorite climate provisions. He will not vote in favor of the package as currently envisioned, which would essentially doom it in the Senate. Senator Sinema has also weighed in against the price tag. Other moderate House Democrats are raising concerns. House majority leaders are trying to downplay their caucus differences. But – they’re also starting to talk about a smaller package coming out of the Senate to satisfy Sen. Manchin and get a positive Senate vote (50-50 with Vice-President Harris breaking the tie) on reconciliation. They’re figuring that half a loaf is better than no loaf.

8. Recent Developments: Progressives Prevail

Senior White House adviser Cedric Richmond today expressed confidence about passing both the bipartisan infrastructure bill and the larger reconciliation package, saying, "We know what we're doing." Progressive Reps. Pramila Jayapal (D-WASHINGTON) and Ro Khanna (D-CALIFORNIA) said they are confident the House could still pass both a bipartisan infrastructure bill and a Democratic-only reconciliation package despite both measures being stalled last week. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) said Sunday it's possible that progressives could compromise on fully funding certain programs for fewer years in an effort to lower the reconciliation bill's price tag.

Republican Senator John Barrasso (WYOMING) on *Fox News* today said "Far-left Democrats are driving the bus and Joe Biden is just along for the ride". Referencing President Biden's visit to Capitol Hill on Friday in an effort to reach a Democrat compromise, Senator Barrasso said "instead he surrendered to the radical wing of his party and now you have this big government, socialism, reckless spending bill being basically used to hold hostage the things that the American people want: our roads and bridges, highways, all of those things."

It now appears that President Biden is fully embracing the concept that infrastructure and reconciliation are connected - after Democrats had avoided that linkage for some time. It will be incumbent now upon the White House, Speaker Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer to craft a reconciliation bill that can pass muster with Sens. Sinema, Manchin, Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

9. Debt Ceiling

The Senate plans to vote on the House-passed debt limit suspension this week, but passage is unlikely. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) said that he plans to call for the procedural vote next week (60-votes needed) on the House-passed bill that would suspend the debt limit into December of 2022, but Senate Republicans remain in lock-step to not help the Democrats raise or suspend the debt ceiling while they push the multi-trillion social spending bill through the budget reconciliation process, which bypasses the need for GOP support. Democrats will need to address how the debt ceiling issue will get resolved. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has notified congressional leaders that the federal government will reach its borrowing limit sometime near October 18.

10. The Watershed Results Act

The Family Farm Alliance last month publicly supported *The Watershed Results Act*, introduced by Senator Ron Wyden (D-OREGON). This legislation would use the best scientific and data analysis to identify the most effective acres where watershed restoration work would generate the greatest environmental results at the best value for taxpayers. The Interior Department, Agriculture Department and Environmental Protection Agency would coordinate to establish several

watershed restoration programs across the country. I was quoted in Senator Wyden’s press release announcing the introduction of his legislation. The Family Farm Alliance has long advocated for collaborative solutions to water challenges that employ the best available technology and yield measurable results. Farmers play a critical role in ensuring the resiliency of our watersheds. We are supportive of this legislation because it encourages collaboration among all those funding and working with and on behalf of water.

THE 2021 WESTERN DROUGHT

Fall ushered in wetter weather in many areas of the Western United States, but overall, the region continues to reel from the unprecedented drought of 2021. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, heavy rain clipped some eastern sections of the High Plains, but many areas remain dry, or nearly so. A surge of heat in advance of a cold front, peaking on September 18, resulted in unusually high temperatures, followed by cooler conditions. Still, drought conditions in many parts of the High Plains have modestly improved in recent weeks. Due to that beneficial rain, the “exceptional drought” designation was removed from central North Dakota. A few other areas also noted drought improvements, as moisture generally increased for newly planted winter wheat—and some pastureland has begun to respond.

Even with the rain, some rangeland and pastures in the Dakotas and Wyoming continue to feel the effects from drought that appears to have peaked earlier in the year. The situation is dire with very little feed, especially in the northern tier states of the Dakotas, Montana, Washington and Oregon, as well as Nebraska, Wyoming and Utah. Arizona and Nevada conditions are worse than normal, and California -as you know too well - is experiencing its worst drought in memory.

11. Livestock Producers are Hard-Hit

As the region-wide drought and tight water supplies continue to shrink the amount of hay grown this year, it’s hurting the farmers who grow it — and the ranchers and dairy operators who depend on the crop to feed their livestock, according to the *Capital Press*. Nationwide, alfalfa hay production is expected to be down 12% this year on 16.1 million acres, a decline of 107,000 acres compared to 2020. Production of other hay is expected to be down 4% on 35.4 million acres, a decline of 594,000 acres. Nationwide, ranchers are fearing it will be difficult to meet expected long-term demand hikes with commensurate supply, as reported in the September 15 edition of *SLATE Magazine*.

12. SoCal Lags in Water Conservation

Despite an appeal by Gov. Gavin Newsom for all Californians to voluntarily cut water use by 15%, Southern California has trailed in conservation efforts and water usage actually slightly increased in Los Angeles and San Diego, according to figures released by the State Water Resources Control Board. On average, Californians reduced water use by just 1.8% statewide during July as compared to the same month last year. Across much of Southern California, however, water use dropped by

just 0.1% overall, and rose by 0.7% in Los Angeles and 1.3% in San Diego. Meanwhile, California farmers and ranchers— many of whom had their Central Valley Project surface water supplies completely curtailed this year – saw their hopes for critical water infrastructure scrapped by the California Legislature.

13. Energy Production Impacts

The extreme and exceptional drought conditions in California and states in the Pacific Northwest are impacting the region which is home to the majority of U.S. hydropower capacity. The U.S. Energy Information Administration’s latest Short-Term Energy Outlook (STEO) forecasts that electricity generation from U.S. hydropower plants will be 14% lower in 2021 than it was in 2020. The latest STEO expects hydropower generation in the Northwest electricity region, which includes the Columbia River Basin and parts of other Rocky Mountain states, to be 12% less than in 2020. Hydropower generation in the California electricity region is expected to be 49% lower in 2021 than in 2020. Last month, four temporary mobile emergency power generating units totaling 120 megawatts were deployed by the Department of Water Resources to support California's energy grid in times of extreme stress on the grid.

14. Government Response

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on September 29 announced a comprehensive set of investments to address challenges facing America’s agricultural producers. These include assistance to address challenges and costs associated with drought. USDA is preparing \$3 billion in investments that will support drought resilience and response, animal disease prevention, market disruption relief, and purchase of food for school nutrition programs. Of this amount, \$500 million of this package will be used to support drought recovery and encourage the adoption of water-smart management practices.

Earlier in the month, in response to the severe drought conditions in the West and Great Plains, USDA announced its plans to help cover the cost of transporting feed for livestock that rely on grazing. USDA is updating the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP) to immediately cover feed transportation costs for drought impacted ranchers. To be eligible for ELAP assistance, livestock must be intended for grazing and producers must have incurred feed transportation costs on or after Jan. 1, 2021. The deadline to file an application for payment for the 2021 program year is Jan. 31, 2022.

Meanwhile, USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance to improve irrigation efficiency and water storage in soil, helping producers build resilience to drought. In response to drought this year, NRCS targeted \$41.8 million in Arizona, California, Colorado and Oregon through Conservation Incentive Contracts, a new option available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, focused on drought practices. USDA offers a comprehensive portfolio of disaster assistance programs at [farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov).

15. Western Wildfires Draw Attention from D.C.

As the “endless summer” of 2021 came to an end, wildland firefighters continued to work toward containment goals on 63 large fires and complexes that have burned more than 3.1 million acres in the Western United States, according to the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC). So far this year, 46,121 fires in the West have charred more than 5.8 million acres, slightly lower than the 10-year average at this time of the year.

The conflagrations also drew attention from the White House and Capitol Hill. President Biden stopped at Boise’s National Interagency Fire Center (IDAHO) enroute to California last month to tout infrastructure and his \$3.5 trillion spending plan, which he said can help battle wildfires, drought and extreme weather in the West, driven by climate change. House Committee on Natural Resources Ranking Member Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.) issued a statement in response to the President’s visit to the West, criticizing “inaction” by Democrats toward Republican proposals to mitigate the scale and frequency of Western wildfires. Rep. Westerman participated in a ZOOM meeting with Family Farm Alliance leadership last month to discuss the Western wildfire situation and the status of federal forest lands. Much of the conversation focused on the deterioration of U.S. Forest Service lands in the past thirty years, and the need to undertake active forest restoration on a large scale.

Elsewhere on Capitol Hill last month, bipartisan legislation introduced in the Senate would provide carbon credits to companies and other non-federal partners in exchange for thinning trees on fire-prone forests. "America’s Revegetation and Carbon Sequestration Act," co-sponsored by Senator John Barrasso (R-WYOMING) and Joe Manchin would encourage more intensive forest management — and reforestation — through a variety of initiatives. The carbon credit idea would allow non-federal entities to be awarded carbon credits through voluntary markets in exchange for money they provide the Forest Service for projects that increase carbon sequestration. According to one Senate committee staffer who wished to remain unnamed, efforts are underway to build momentum towards larger forest management reforms in subsequent bipartisan legislation.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND MISCELLANEOUS

- Alliance President Patrick O’Toole (WYOMING) two weeks ago participated in a float down the Colorado River near Moab (UTAH), organized by Colorado Sen. Michael Bennet (D) with the goal to talk about climate change and drought in the West. Senator Bennet, Utah Sen. Mitt Romney (R) and Utah Lt. Gov. Deidre Henderson invited other state politicians, ranchers (like Pat), industry representatives and scientists to participate. Pat pushed our positions on water infrastructure and forest health during his time with the Senators.
- Pat O’Toole spoke directly with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack in Fort Collins and Boulder last week at two different Colorado River events. Pat’s message in recent months has focused on his “Western Solution Trivecta”, supported by locally-driven initiatives that encourage investment in new infrastructure, irrigated agriculture, and health forest restoration.

- President O’Toole is one of three speakers who will participate in the “*Solutions in the American West*” panel at the Water in the West Symposium, scheduled for November 3-4 at the Seawell Ballroom in downtown Denver (COLORADO). The fourth annual symposium will be hosted by Colorado State University (CSU) and sessions will be held in-person, with a virtual option available. Mr. O’Toole will be joined by Bidtah Becker (Navajo Tribal Utility Authority) and Jennifer Pitt (Colorado River Program Director, Audubon). The panel will be moderated by Brad Udall, Senior Water and Climate Research Scientist at CSU.
- I spoke in Pismo Beach last month at the California Agricultural Irrigation Association summer meeting about the drought and the infrastructure initiative. This week, I’ll be in Reno (NEVADA) for a few days, as part of the Mid-Pacific Water Users Conference planning committee, for meetings that will start putting together the January 2022 conference in Reno.

This is a quick summary of just a few of the issues the Alliance has been engaged in. Please do not hesitate to contact me at dan@familyfarmalliance.org if you would like further information about what the Alliance is doing to protect water for Western irrigated agriculture.