



MEMORANDUM

TO: SAN LUIS & DELTA-MENDOTA WATER AUTHORITY DIRECTORS
FROM: DAN KEPPEL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: UPDATE REPORT
DATE: SEPTEMBER 8, 2025

This memo is intended to keep you apprised as to what is happening regarding policy issues the Family Farm Alliance (Alliance) is engaged in. In the past month, much of our efforts have focused on monitoring the executive actions coming out of the Trump administration, preparing comments on Trump administration proposed rulemaking efforts, assembling recommendations for Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) agency realignment, planning for our upcoming farmer lobbyist trip to D.C. and annual conference, and beginning transition activities associated with our incoming executive director, Samantha Barncastle, who officially joined our contracting team in a 3-month transition role on August 1. These issues and other matters important to our members are further discussed in this memo.

TRUMP 47 ADMINISTRATION

1. Appointments

The Senate left for its August recess, but without a deal to confirm President Trump's nominees, leaving a backlog of 145 awaiting floor action. Senate Republicans, frustrated with Democratic delays, are moving to streamline the confirmation process by allowing en bloc votes on multiple nominees, excluding Cabinet officials, Supreme Court justices, and appeals court judges. The proposal, which could be implemented by September 19, reflects President Trump's push to accelerate confirmations and has sparked debate over whether to include district court nominees. In the meantime, new appointees have been nominated for positions important to the West.

a. Tim Petty Appointed to Key Position Overseeing NOAA Fisheries

President Trump has nominated Dr. Timothy Petty as the next Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere of the U.S. Department of Commerce. This position also serves as the Deputy Administrator position of NOAA. As you are aware, NOAA Fisheries is responsible for the stewardship of the nation's ocean resources and habitat. Many Western irrigators – especially those who operate in watersheds that provide habitat for anadromous fish, like salmon and steelhead trout that spend part of their lives in marine environments– are significantly impacted by ESA-related decisions made by NOAA Fisheries. Thus, this position is critically important to our organization and our Western membership. We’ve worked with Dr. Petty for years; he’s a strong leader; a well-respected professional and a person with vision, common sense and high ethical standards. Last month, we sent a letter to the Senate that expresses formal support for his nomination.

b. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Water DAA

Caitlin McHale, a former attorney for the National Mining Association (NMA), has joined the EPA’s Office of Water as a Deputy Assistant Administrator (DAA). Ms. McHale, who spent six years at NMA advocating for coal and critical minerals industries, previously led the group’s engagement on high-profile water regulations, including efforts to narrow the scope of the Clean Water Act (CWA) through changes to the “waters of the U.S.” (WOTUS) rule. Her appointment comes as EPA prepares to release a revised WOTUS rule by year’s end (*see Item 5, below*), a change expected to ease permitting for our members across the West.

c. USFS Nominee named acting Interior Assistant Secretary PMB

Michael Boren, a wealthy businessman awaiting Senate confirmation to lead the Forest Service, has been named acting assistant secretary at the Department of Interior (DOI) by Secretary Doug Burgum. He will oversee policy and budget functions while facing scrutiny over ties to disputes near the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. His appointment overlaps with Tyler Hassen, a former oil executive criticized by Democrats for broad authority without Senate confirmation or financial disclosures. Lawmakers, led by Reps. Jared Huffman (D-CALIFORNIA) and Maxine Dexter (D-OREGON), demand transparency on conflicts of interest. Secretary Burgum defends the reorganization, emphasizing workforce shifts toward frontline roles like rangers and biologists.

2. New Executive Order Tightens Oversight of Federal Grants

On August 7, President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order titled “Improving Oversight of Federal Grantmaking,” introducing sweeping changes to how agencies design and approve grant opportunities. The order requires each agency to designate a senior political appointee responsible for reviewing new Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs) and discretionary grants in coordination with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The appointed officials must ensure NOFOs include only essential requirements for evaluating applications, are written in plain

language, and align with administration policies. The order also directs appointees to conduct pre-issuance and annual reviews of discretionary awards to avoid redundancy, favor applicants with lower indirect costs, and broaden the pool of recipients.

According to the White House, the goal is to increase transparency and accountability in federal grantmaking while aligning awards more closely with national priorities. Still, some in the grants community are voicing concerns. The Ferguson Group (TFG) – the Family Farm Alliance’s advocate in Washington, D.C. - is closely monitoring implementation of the order. In its *Special Report*, TFG advises clients to review their current grant portfolios for compliance and begin preparing strategies to address the new priorities, including demonstrating cost efficiency and cultivating partnerships that align with agency missions. TFG will continue to provide us with updates and practical guidance as the grantmaking process evolves under this new framework.

3. Department of Health and Human Services: MAHA Commission Report Delayed

The second Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission report, expected to chart a new course for U.S. food and health policy, has been delayed — though the commission quietly delivered it to President Donald Trump on Aug. 12. The MAHA Commission is chaired by Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. A leaked draft, however, offers some insight into what’s coming. Consistent with conversations between the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA) and the White House, the draft emphasizes whole, healthy foods like fruits and vegetables as central to reducing chronic disease. The draft’s industry-friendly tone has drawn mixed reactions. Some environmental advocates criticized the report as too vague on pesticides and ultra-processed foods. Others highlighted opportunities in the report’s call for soil health programs. The bottom line is that the draft MAHA strategy appears to lean toward pragmatism, favoring incremental, research-backed reforms rather than sweeping regulatory shifts.

4. EPA: WOTUS Rulemaking

EPA has sent a proposed CWA rule to revise the definition of WOTUS to the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for interagency review following a series of EPA listening sessions and public comments, aiming to finalize the new WOTUS rule by the end of the year. The update seeks to align CWA regulations with the Supreme Court’s *Sackett v. EPA* decision, which limited federal jurisdiction to wetlands with a “relatively permanent” surface connection to other regulated waters. The proposal aims to clarify jurisdictional boundaries, reduce permitting costs, and provide consistency for states, farmers, developers, and other stakeholders. EPA says the rule will also respect state and local authorities while accounting for regional hydrologic differences, such as prairie potholes and ephemeral washes. We have been working closely with Corps leadership and the EPA Office of Water to advance our long-held position on jurisdictional issues related to drainage and irrigation ditches in the West.

5. DOI: Reclamation

a. Using AI to Improve Short Term Water Forecasts

Reclamation is contracting with Upstream Tech to pilot its *HydroForecast* artificial intelligence technology, aiming to improve short-term water forecasts for reservoirs across the West. The two-year project will enhance 10-day streamflow predictions, helping water managers better manage water, plan reservoir releases, and prepare for floods or droughts. *HydroForecast*, which won Reclamation's 2020–2021 "Streamflow Forecast Rodeo," uses a machine-learning model trained across numerous basins to incorporate a wide range of data, such as satellite snowpack imagery and weather forecasts. The pilot will cover diverse sites in regions including the California-Great Basin, Colorado River basins, and the Columbia-Pacific Northwest, though some researchers note that better long-term forecasting will still be needed to address chronic shortages in some systems.

b. Reclamation Manual Website Update

Reclamation has announced that the Reclamation Manual website has been updated for improved navigability. The Reclamation Manual is the Reclamation's official system of policies and directives that governs how the agency conducts its work. It serves as Reclamation's internal "rulebook," covering everything from water and power operations to environmental compliance, financial management, and employee conduct. You may notice some changes to the way the information is organized and displayed but there have been no changes made to the content of the information available. To access the Reclamation Manual website, visit <https://www.usbr.gov/recman/index.html>

c. Small Storage Program

Reclamation's Small Storage Program was authorized by sections 40901(1) and 40903 of the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) (IIJA) to promote Federal assistance to enhance water storage opportunities for future generations in support of DOI's priorities. This was part of the package that the Alliance and other organizations successfully lobbied for back in 2021. In accordance with the IIJA, as amended by P.L. 117-328 (another Alliance-supported endeavor), projects must have a water storage capacity of not less than 200 acre-feet and not more than 30,000 acre-feet. The Fiscal Year 2025 and 2026 [funding opportunity](#) opened in July 2025. The funding opportunity makes approximately \$43.5 million available. Reclamation is accepting feasibility study submissions at any time from eligible non-Federal entities. Reclamation encourages non-Federal entities to submit their feasibility studies as soon as practicable for review and to determine eligibility under the funding opportunity.

6. DOI, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS): 'Blanket' Rule for ESA Threatened Species

FWS is pausing its long-standing "blanket 4(d) rule" under the ESA, which automatically gave "threatened" species the same protections as "endangered" ones. Instead, FWS will create species-

specific 4(d) rules for any future listings, tailoring protections and exemptions to each species' needs. The pause, which could last until October 31, 2026, is part of a rulemaking process to formally rescind the blanket rule, a practice dating back to the 1970s. Supporters, including the Alliance, argue this change encourages private landowners to restore habitat by allowing more flexible regulations. Critics, including the Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife, warn the move will strain an already under-resourced FWS workforce and weaken ESA protections, potentially harming species recovery. The change follows years of political back-and-forth: the rule was rescinded under the Trump 45 Administration in 2019 and reinstated by the Biden Administration.

7. U.S. Department of Agriculture

a. Agency Reorganization

The USDA has quietly extended the public comment period for its controversial reorganization plan from the original 30 days to September 30—a full doubling of the feedback window. The reorganization, announced July 24 and initially slated to run through August 31, would shift approximately 2,600 Washington-area employees to regional hubs in Raleigh, Kansas City, Indianapolis, Fort Collins, and Salt Lake City, leaving just 2,000 staff near D.C. The change was not widely publicized, prompting criticism that USDA failed to follow more formal procedures, such as posting the proposal in the Federal Register. Meanwhile, the plan is drawing bipartisan concern over its potential to disrupt institutional knowledge and program delivery even without official layoffs.

b. Forest Health Resiliency Projects

USDA announced more than \$8 million for five new projects to reduce wildfire risk, protect water quality, and improve forest health across the nation. Three of the five new projects are in the West:

- COLORADO AND WYOMING - Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest “Headwaters of the Colorado” (*This is being spearheaded by Alliance Director Ea'mon O'Toole's family, and Ladder Ranch*).
- MONTANA - Lolo National Forest “Blackfoot River Valley Landscape Mosaic”
- OREGON – Mt. Hood National Forest “Hood River Wildfire and Watershed Resilience”

The [Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership Program](#) is a collaborative effort between USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Forest Service to work across public-private boundaries and at a landscape scale. The \$8 million investment in new projects is in addition to \$32 million for 24 existing three-year-long Joint Chiefs' projects.

c. New Forest Service Roadless Policy

Agriculture Secretary Rollins last month announced that USDA is beginning the public comment

process to rescind the 2001 Roadless Rule, which restricts road construction and logging on nearly 60 million acres of national forest lands. The proposal would remove protections from about 45 million acres, excluding state-specific rules in Colorado and Idaho, and is framed by the administration as a move toward “common-sense management” that restores local decision-making, supports wildfire mitigation, and promotes rural economic growth. Supporters argue the rescission will reduce wildfire risk and regulatory burdens, particularly in Alaska’s Tongass National Forest, while opponents warn it could undermine habitat protections, recreation opportunities, and public trust. Public comments are open until September 19, 2025, and will guide the development of an environmental impact statement before a final decision is made.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 119TH CONGRESS

8. Congress Returns to DC With Few Days Left to Prevent a Government Shutdown

Congress returned from its August recess facing a packed September agenda, with government funding looming as the most urgent priority. Lawmakers have just 11 legislative days to negotiate and pass appropriations bills before funding lapses on October 1, risking a federal shutdown. The challenge is compounded by political divisions: Senate Democrats insist on bipartisanship while warning Republicans against going it alone, and Republicans will need at least seven Democratic votes to overcome a filibuster. Tensions have risen further following the Trump administration’s decision to cancel \$4.9 billion in previously approved foreign aid, a move criticized across party lines for undermining congressional authority. To buy more time, House Appropriations Chair Tom Cole has proposed a stopgap continuing resolution that could extend government funding until mid- or late November, possibly coupled with the Senate’s previously passed minibuss package covering Agriculture-Rural Development, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction-Veterans Affairs.

Progress on appropriations has been mixed. The Senate passed its minibuss in early August and has advanced several other bills through committee, while the House has cleared three appropriations bills on the floor—Military Construction-VA, Defense, and Energy-Water Development—and marked up seven more at the committee level. However, with all twelve FY 2026 bills still unfinished and differences between chambers yet to be reconciled, significant work remains before a shutdown can be averted. Beyond spending bills, Congress faces a wide range of legislative and oversight tasks in September. These include confirmation of Trump administration nominees, consideration of legislation on crime, stock trading reforms, and housing, as well as mounting demands for transparency around the “Epstein Files.” Overall, Congress faces both a compressed timeline and heightened political tensions as it seeks to manage funding deadlines and broader legislative priorities.

9. House Passes Energy and Water Appropriations Bill

The House of Representatives narrowly passed H.R. 4553, the FY25 Energy and Water Appropriations Act, by one vote. The bill advances Republican priorities on energy, water, and

infrastructure, emphasizing nuclear and geothermal development, cybersecurity for the electric grid, and domestic critical mineral production to reduce foreign reliance. It also allocates an additional \$201 million for water storage projects under the WIIN Act, including Sites Reservoir, while prohibiting Strategic Petroleum Reserve sales to China. A proposed floor amendment by Rep. David Schweikert (R-ARIZONA) sought to reduce funding across water programs by billions of dollars, potentially undermining irrigation, municipal supply, conservation, and Reclamation partnerships across the West. Ultimately, the amendment was soundly defeated by a bipartisan 351–76 vote.

10. Senate EPW Committee Takes Up Top Environment Nominees

The Senate last week processed President Donald Trump’s nominees for key energy and environmental positions, including seats at EPA and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). On September 3, the committee held a business meeting where it advanced Katherine Scarlett’s nomination to lead CEQ. With bipartisan support, the committee voted 12–7 to report her nomination favorably to the full Senate. Committee Chair Shelley Capito praised Scarlett’s experience, including her current role as CEQ Chief of Staff, her work implementing the Fiscal Responsibility Act, modernizing NEPA procedures, and supporting permitting reforms through technology initiatives. The EPW vote on Jeffrey Hall’s nomination to lead EPA’s Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance was listed but postponed and not acted on at that meeting.

11. House Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Subcommittee Conducts Legislative Hearing

The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries held a legislative hearing on five bills addressing hydropower, wildlife management, drought resilience, and coastal community support. The most debated measure was Rep. Dan Newhouse’s H.R. 2073, the *Defending Our Dams Act*, which would prohibit the use of federal funds to study or pursue breaching of the four Lower Snake River dams. Republican lawmakers argued that the bill is necessary to protect critical hydropower and infrastructure, pointing to President Trump’s withdrawal from a \$1 billion settlement agreement over dam operations. Proponents emphasized energy reliability and multipurpose benefits, while tribal leaders and conservation advocates countered that blocking research jeopardizes endangered salmon and tribal fishing rights.

The panel also examined Rep. Paul Gosar’s H.R. 4255, to delist the Mexican wolf from the Endangered Species Act (ESA); Rep. Doug LaMalfa’s H.R. 4970, to facilitate water transfers from California’s Orland Project; Rep. Seth Moulton’s H.R. 3692, to extend the Young Fisherman’s Development Act; and Rep. Dave Min’s H.R. 4256, to reauthorize NOAA’s Digital Coast Program. Witnesses included federal officials, tribal representatives, and industry groups. The discussion highlighted sharp divisions between those prioritizing infrastructure certainty and energy production, and those calling for more flexibility to protect fisheries and ecosystems.

12. “Skinny” Farm Bill

Lawmakers are under pressure to assemble a slimmed-down farm bill before year’s end, but negotiations remain slow and uncertain, with staff still “a little bit behind” in drafting. Farmers and industry groups are lobbying hard for new policies, especially as record crop yields this fall risk driving down prices, but many expect talks may slip into next year. Bipartisan tensions persist, particularly over cuts to nutrition programs, which Democrats argue jeopardize the traditional farm bill coalition. Other unresolved issues include California’s Proposition 12 on animal welfare, hemp regulations, and pesticide provisions, all of which could complicate progress. While House Ag Chair G.T. Thompson hopes to move a bill out of committee soon, farm groups are planning aggressive advocacy campaigns to keep pressure on Congress to complete a full reauthorization. There is no public draft or formal markup of a skinny farm bill in the Senate yet. Discussions and concept development are still in early stages.

IN THE COURTS

13. PCFFA v Nickels

Last week, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a long-anticipated 30-page opinion affirming the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California’s conclusion that the irrigation return flow exemption in the CWA applies to the Grassland Bypass Project in California’s Central Valley. The panel held that the irrigated agriculture exemption applies where return flows do not contain additional point source discharges unrelated to crop production. The decision is a significant victory for irrigated agriculture, providing clarity that pollutants entering such return flows via nonpoint sources or point sources tied to crop production remain exempt under the CWA.

Contributing to this outcome was the active participation of Alliance, which, along with other agricultural groups, filed an influential amicus curiae brief in support of Reclamation, San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority, and the Grassland Water District. The Court explicitly rejected the argument that any commingling with non-agricultural pollution forecloses the exemption, reasoning that such a position would effectively nullify Congress’s intent to protect irrigated agriculture. Reaffirming its broad interpretation of “irrigated agriculture” to include all activities related to crop production, the Court offered concrete examples of permissible nonpoint sources—such as windblown dust, roadway runoff, groundwater seepage, sediment intrusion, and runoff from retired farmland converted to solar projects—that do not compromise the exemption. By underscoring both statutory purpose and practical agricultural realities, the ruling, bolstered by the Alliance’s engagement, reinforces a legal framework that protects Western agriculture’s reliance on large-scale drainage infrastructure.

14. D.C. Circuit Applies High Court’s NEPA Decision for First Time

The D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals has issued its first ruling applying the Supreme Court’s recent *Seven County* decision, significantly strengthening judicial deference to federal agencies

conducting environmental reviews under NEPA. In *Sierra Club and Public Citizen v. FERC*, the court upheld the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC's) NEPA review of a short natural gas pipeline segment at the U.S.-Mexico border, rejecting claims that the agency should have considered broader upstream impacts. The decision found FERC's review fell within a "broad zone of reasonableness" and that federal agencies are not required to analyze impacts outside their control or jurisdiction. Industry attorneys say this raises the bar for environmental challenges in the D.C. Circuit — long a favored venue for such lawsuits — and could streamline approvals for energy and infrastructure projects by narrowing the scope of required reviews. Environmental advocates warn the shift could make it harder to contest projects with significant indirect environmental effects.

ALLIANCE INITIATIVES

15. 2025 Annual Meeting and Conference

The 2025 Family Farm Alliance Annual Conference will take place October 30-31 at the Silver Legacy Resort and Casino in Reno (NEVADA). Here's a hint of what's on tap:

- **Reclamation Roundtable** –we've invited the Acting Interior Assistant Secretary and Acting Commissioner, as well as other key Reclamation leaders to focus on agency realignment and our work with them in the coming months.
- **"The View from Capitol Hill"** – key committee staffers from Senate and House water, energy, natural resources and ag committees.
- **"Then and Now: The Evolution and Vision of the Family Farm Alliance"** – We're working with Doug Kemper (past and long-time executive director of the Colorado Water Congress) on coordinating a 2-hour session that will take a look back at the first 30 years of the Alliance and then pivot to the present and outlook for the future. Gary Sawyers – longtime past general counsel and one of the founders of the Alliance – is helping with the first panel. Other panelists include Gary Esslinger (NEW MEXICO) and Californians Jason Peltier and Dick Moss (past Advisory Committee chairs), Mark Limbaugh (past Alliance president), and President Orme. The second panel will focus on Samantha and some of our newest Alliance members, including our new board president.
- **Monarch Butterfly Recovery** – I'm working on this with Jessica Fox, one of the top monarch researchers in the country and a past recipient of the U.S. Water Award. FWS Regional Director Paul Souza has confirmed his participation, and key representatives from the ag, energy and pollinator sectors will join him to discuss the huge implications associated with the listing and proposed recovery of the monarch butterfly.
- **Groundwater / Shallow Groundwater / Upper Watershed Hydrology Panel** –Sam Barncastle is taking the lead to assemble a panel of experts to discuss data gaps, new

technology, and the need to better understand the relationship between ground cover, ET, and the relationship between precipitation, runoff, shallow groundwater movement and aquifers in parts of the West.

- **Snake River Water Quality Partnership** – Working with our friends at The Freshwater Trust (TFT), we'll have a panel consisting of representatives of Idaho Power Company, Oregon NRCS, EPA Region 10, and an irrigation supplier to discuss this partnership, which blends hydropower mitigation, data-driven restoration, irrigation modernization, and stakeholder coordination to revitalize the mid-Snake River.
- **Bridging the Currents: Farms, Fish, and the Future of the Columbia River System** - This panel brings together irrigation leaders and Native American tribal representatives for an honest look at the issues shaping the Columbia River and its key tributaries. Moderated by Paul Arrington (Idaho Water Users Association), this session dives into the heart of the Northwest's water, energy, and fisheries conflicts. This timely discussion will address the possibilities and trade-offs shaping one of the region's most pressing water challenges.

The "Friday tour" this year will be a showing of the recent California Rangeland Trust documentary, "You Just Can't See Them From the Road", which portrays modern West Coast ranchers—invisible to and misunderstood by the rapidly modernizing society they sustain. We've reserved a theatre room in the National Bowling Stadium, where we'll serve lunch and drinks prior to and during the film. We also had a great crew of volunteers who came together to develop the selection criteria, application process, and scholarship scope for first-ever Patrick O'Toole Memorial Young Conservationist Scholarship, which is backed by over \$18,000 in donations. For more information and to apply, visit: <https://www.familyfarmalliance.org/otoole/>. I predict that this year's conference – due in part to our new October timeline – will be our best attended yet. [CLICK HERE](#) to register!

16. 2025 Farmer Lobbyist Trip

As previously reported, this year's farmer lobbyist trip will take place **September 15-18 in Washington, D.C.** Monday, 9/15 and Thursday, 9/18 (p.m.) are travel days. The bulk of our meetings will take place September 16-17 and the morning of September 18. So far, we have about 30 participants confirmed from California, Arizona, Washington State, Nebraska, the Klamath Basin, Central Oregon, Idaho and New Mexico. We're currently working on scheduling meetings with the congressional delegations from each state.

17. Executive Director Transition

Samanth Barncastle began her first day at the Alliance on August 1, joining the contracting team. I will still serve as executive director until October 31, my last day. Sam will assume the role as executive director at the end of the annual conference general session. We held an in-person

meeting earlier this month in Boise (IDAHO) to kick-off the transition period between August 1 and October 31, when I officially step down as executive director. This meeting provided a one-day forum for the executive committee, Urban Eberhart (WASHINGTON) and Scott Petersen (CALIFORNIA), and our political / legal contractors to brief Sam on how we all work together in various endeavors.

Samantha has a busy speaking and touring schedule. On August 26, she delivered the luncheon address at the Arizona Association of Women in Water & Agriculture [Colorado River Update Meeting](#) in Phoenix. Over the Labor Day weekend, she attended an Arizona Agribusiness & Water Council tour near her hometown in Hatch (NEW MEXICO). On October 16, she will be the keynote speaker at the [2025 Water Sustainability Summit](#), hosted by our friend Mauricio Guardado and his team at United Water Conservation District in Ventura County, California. Feel free to reach out and welcome Sam at her official new email address: samantha@familyfarmalliance.org.

18. Colorado River Initiative

a. Colorado Water Congress Conference

The Colorado Water Congress Summer Conference last month brought together record-breaking attendance and underscored the urgency of western water challenges. Discussions focused on post-2026 Colorado River operating guidelines, interstate conflicts like Nebraska's South Platte lawsuit, and pressing issues of drought, storage, and population growth. High-profile participation included Governor Polis, Senators Hickenlooper and Bennet, and Congressman Neguse, alongside panels on conservation tools, tribal engagement, and water-sharing innovations. States such as Arizona are already evaluating large-scale augmentation proposals, signaling a more fragmented but pragmatic approach to water resilience.

The Alliance had a prominent role at the conference, marking an important step under incoming Executive Director Samantha Barncastle's leadership. Three Alliance Board Members attended, and Eamon O'Toole represented the organization on the agricultural water panel, receiving multiple rounds of applause for his candid defense of Upper Basin agriculture and irrigation-supported wetlands. He also highlighted the critical need for new high-elevation storage. Beyond the formal agenda, Alliance voices reinforced the importance of protecting agriculture in both the Upper and Lower Colorado River Basins, continuing outreach through national media and policy commentary. In the past two months, we authored or co-authored three editorial pieces that were published, emphasizing the importance of irrigated agriculture up and down the river.

b. IID Endorses Delta Conveyance Project

Meanwhile, California's Imperial Irrigation District (IID) took the unusual step of endorsing the Delta Conveyance Project, citing the interconnectedness of the state's water systems and the need to relieve pressure on the Colorado River. This matches up with the philosophy we made in our

2015 Colorado River white paper and is the argument that drove a Colorado River water user coalition letter that we helped drive earlier this year. That letter expressed support for “Voluntary Agreements”, which would provide for more flexible Bay-Delta operations, thereby reducing strain on Southern California’s reliance on the Colorado River.

WESTERN WATER “HOT SPOTS”

19. La Niña Watch Raise Hopes for Northwest Drought Relief

The West Coast saw its first atmospheric river of the season last month, an early signal of fall-like storm systems arriving as the National Weather Service issued a La Niña watch. If La Niña develops by November, as forecasters now say is slightly more likely than not, the Pacific Northwest could see cooler, wetter conditions through the winter. That would be welcome news in a region still struggling with persistent drought. Experts caution that recovery will take time. Still, uncertainty remains. NOAA’s fall outlook predicts warmer-than-average conditions across much of the country, including California, underscoring the unpredictability of seasonal forecasts.

20. Yakima Basin (WASHINGTON)

Water shortages are forcing earlier-than-usual shutoffs for some Yakima Basin irrigators, as reservoir storage hit its lowest levels since 1971, just 20% full in early September. Non-senior water rights holders are limited to 40% of their allotment while senior holders receive full supplies, with Roza Irrigation District deliveries ending nearly a month early on Sept. 23, threatening late-season crops like apples and wine grapes. The drought, ongoing since 2023, stems from low snowpack, early runoff, and below-average rainfall. Both Roza and Kittitas districts face major challenges but stress strong communication with Reclamation and are partnering on studies of drought impacts.

21. Red River of the North (NORTH DAKOTA)

On August 7, the Red River was permanently rerouted 2,000 feet west through the new Red River Control Structure in Fargo (NORTH DAKOTA), marking a major milestone in the \$3.2 billion Fargo-Moorhead Flood Risk Management Project. The diversion enables construction of a dam embankment across the old channel and is part of a 30-mile system designed to protect more than 260,000 residents from a 100-year flood by 2027. Governor Kelly Armstrong hailed the effort as historic, comparing it to the 1953 opening of Garrison Dam, and praised the \$850 million state investment along with the unprecedented collaboration of over 50 organizations. The project also makes history as the first public-private partnership flood management initiative in North America and the Corps’ first P3 civil works project.

ADMINISTRATIVE & MISCELLANEOUS

- My touring days at the Alliance are winding down. I'm speaking on a legislative / regulatory affairs panel at the [California Agricultural Irrigation Association summer meeting](#) in Pismo Beach on September 11. I'll return to Oregon in time to jump on a plane a few days later for our 2025 farmer lobbyist trip in Washington.
- After eleven years on Capitol Hill—including the past six with the Committee on Natural Resources—our old friend, **Annick Miller**, a key staffer on water matters – left Congress for the private sector earlier this month. **Richie O'Connell** – who we've also worked with in the past– will move over from the Appropriations Committee to replace Annick.
- The Edison Electric Institute has hired **Kiel Weaver** as its new chief advocacy officer under President Drew Maloney. Kiel, an **old friend of the Family Farm Alliance**, previously served as director of environmental policy at NextEra Energy and held key water policy and advisory roles at DOI and in former House Speaker Paul Ryan's office. His experience in federal water and environmental policy is expected to shape EEI's lobbying efforts as the nation's electric utilities navigate energy and climate challenges.
- Best Best & Krieger LLP announced that **Michael Brain** and **Gary Gold**, both long-time friends of the Alliance, have joined the firm's Environmental & Natural Resources and Water practice groups.
- The National Future Farmers of America (FFA) Organization announced its membership has reached a record **1,042,245** in 2025, a 1.5% increase from last year. Growth was seen nationwide, with California rising 3.5% to 108,143 members — the second-highest in the country — while Oregon, Washington, and Idaho also posted gains, reflecting continued momentum in agricultural education and career pathways.
- The great state of Oregon came to be in 1859. That's also the title of a bi-monthly publication called *1959 Oregon's Magazine*, dedicated to exploring the people, places, history, and spirit of the entire state under the motto "Live, Think, Explore." Last month, the magazine ran a really good story that highlights the collaborative water management that is happening in Deschutes River Basin. **Craig Horrell** (Central Oregon Irrigation District GM and Alliance Advisory Committee member) and I are both quoted in this story.
- **EPA Guidance Portal Relaunched:** On August 15, EPA reopened its online Guidance Portal, a central hub for navigating program guidance documents. Originally launched under Trump, it was shut down during the Biden-Harris Administration.

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 541-892-6244 or dan@familyfarmalliance.org if you would like further information about what the Alliance is doing to protect water for Western irrigated agriculture.