



MEMORANDUM

TO: SAN LUIS & DELTA-MENDOTA WATER AUTHORITY DIRECTORS
FROM: DAN KEPPEL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: UPDATE REPORT
DATE: AUGUST 4, 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 conducting our tour of the Lower Snake River Dams, monitoring the executive actions coming out of the Trump administration, engaging with Congress on new legislation, preparing comments on Trump administration proposed rulemaking efforts, assembling recommendations for Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) agency realignment, 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

Judge Stephen Alexander Vaden last month was sworn in as the Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Judge Vaden previously served as General Counsel to USDA during President Trump's first term. In 2020, President Trump appointed Judge Vaden to serve on the United States Court of International Trade. He is a native of Union City, Tennessee, and he continues to help manage his family farm.

The Senate confirmed Brian Nesvik as director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in a 54-43 vote, despite controversy over his past efforts to weaken the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and support for fossil fuel interests. A retired brigadier general and former Wyoming Game and Fish director, Mr. Nesvik will oversee over 500 wildlife refuges and endangered species listings.

His confirmation was praised by agricultural groups (including the Alliance, which sent a formal support letter for him into the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee earlier this year) but criticized by environmental advocates who fear he will undermine wildlife protections.

Meanwhile, many other of President Trump's nominees continue working in unofficial or behind-the-scenes roles while awaiting confirmation. Lane Dickson reports that some, like Andrea Travnicek at the Department of the Interior (DOI) and Jessica Cramer at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), are active in advisory capacities but steer clear of the areas they are nominated to lead to avoid conflict-of-interest concerns. Others, particularly those coming from Capitol Hill, like Dudley Hoskins, continue in their existing roles since their prior work doesn't raise recusal issues. These unofficial arrangements vary widely and often fly under the radar, as pending nominees are rarely listed publicly or seen visibly in departmental functions.

2. SCOTUS Ruling Clears the Way for Federal Workforce Cuts

The Trump Administration's broad initiative to overhaul federal agencies and significantly downsize the federal workforce advanced after an 8-1 Supreme Court ruling lifted a lower court's injunction. This decision allows the administration to proceed with mass layoffs and restructuring plans, even as the legality of the executive order authorizing the changes is still under review by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. Seventeen federal agencies, including the EPA, DOI, and USDA, are targeted for reorganization, potentially affecting tens of thousands of employees. While critics argue the moves could impair key public services, administration officials claim they are necessary to address inefficiencies, reduce costs, and modernize operations.

One of the most contentious plans involves the USDA's proposed relocation of thousands of D.C.-based employees to regional hubs, prompting bipartisan concern in Congress over lack of consultation and potential disruption. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced last Friday the opening of a 30-day public comment period for stakeholders to provide feedback on USDA's reorganization plan. The comment period is open through August 26, 2025. Simultaneously, DOI is preparing deeper staff cuts, expanding layoff eligibility across more than 1,400 categories, while the EPA faces restructuring that includes dissolving its Office of Research and Development. These changes have sparked backlash from environmental and public health advocates, though agency leaders assert that core functions will be preserved. Despite legal uncertainties, the restructuring has already led to the departure of over 148,000 federal workers, raising questions with some about the long-term impact and reversibility of the administration's sweeping reforms.

3. White House: Data Center Executive Orders

The White House last month released the , which outlines over 90 planned federal policy actions the Trump administration plans to implement to speed up artificial intelligence development nationwide. Issued alongside the administration's *Winning the Race: America's AI Action Plan*, the order defines data center projects as those requiring more than 100 megawatts of new electrical

load and directs multiple federal agencies to ease permitting requirements. Key provisions include directing the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to develop new categorical exclusions under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), instructing EPA to expedite permitting under the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act (CWA), and requiring DOI and Department of Energy (DOE) to preemptively consult on common construction activities under the ESA .

While Western water resources per se weren't singled out in reviews of the AI Action Plan, the water-intensive nature of data center infrastructure and the proposed NEPA rollbacks and regulatory exemptions triggered significant concern. Critics—particularly Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA)—highlighted that hyperscale AI data centers consume massive volumes of water for cooling, which may strain local water supplies and lead to interstate competition and conflict. Similarly, environmental advocates and commentators noted that building out data centers at scale could draw heavily on groundwater or municipal supply, raising red flags in water scarce regions, particularly in the West. I've been hitting this issue more frequently in presentations, as well.

4. Trump Administration Elevates Ag as National Security Priority

The Trump Administration recently introduced the National Farm Security Action Plan, positioning U.S. agriculture as a key component of national security. Led by Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, the plan aims to limit foreign ownership of American farmland, bolster supply chain resilience, and protect agricultural infrastructure from foreign threats. Prompted in part by a high-profile agroterrorism case involving smuggled pathogens, the initiative highlights vulnerabilities in the food system. Key provisions include tighter oversight of foreign land purchases, harsher penalties for violations, expanded investment in domestic agricultural production, and enhanced cybersecurity and biosecurity measures.

In a move to strengthen enforcement, Secretary Rollins launched a Foreign Farm Land Purchases database and an anonymous reporting portal, while also securing USDA representation in the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States for agriculture-related matters. The plan has garnered strong Republican backing, though some farmers, Democrats, and environmentalists caution against potential overreach and a narrow focus that may neglect broader challenges like climate change and labor shortages. The USDA intends to deepen cooperation with state and federal partners as it further integrates agriculture into national defense strategy.

5. NEPA Administration

a. White House reviewing NEPA plans across agencies

The Trump Administration is reviewing draft procedures from multiple federal agencies—such as the Departments of Energy, Interior, and Defense—aimed at changing how they implement NEPA. Critics, including environmental groups, worry that this is part of a broader effort to weaken NEPA and fast-track energy and infrastructure projects without thorough environmental review. These proposed "interim final rules," submitted to the White House Office of Management and Budget,

follow earlier moves by the Administration to dismantle long-standing NEPA regulations and replace them with vague, voluntary guidance. The administration's overhaul follows longstanding questions over CEQ's authority to issue binding NEPA rules. The U.S. Supreme Court's May 29, 2025, decision in *Seven County Infrastructure v. Eagle County* reinforced the administration's approach, ruling that NEPA is strictly procedural and granting agencies broader discretion in how they conduct reviews. Environmental groups sharply disagree. They argue the changes undermine the core purpose of NEPA by narrowing the types of impacts that must be considered, limiting public input, and exempting large categories of projects from review.

b. Federal Agencies Propose Revamped Procedures for NEPA Reviews

At least five federal agencies—including the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Energy, and Interior—are moving to significantly scale back their NEPA procedures, many doing so without formally codifying the changes or seeking public comment. These rollbacks rely on President Trump's directives, recent NEPA amendments in the Fiscal Responsibility Act, and a Supreme Court ruling narrowing NEPA reviews. Examples include DOI shifting most NEPA rules into a handbook outside the Code of Federal Regulations, the Defense Department limiting environmental impact statements (EIS) to 150 pages and not requiring mitigation, and the Air Force immediately rescinding its NEPA rules while taking comments. DOE similarly removed NEPA procedures tied to Presidential permits for projects on the border. Environmental groups warn these moves dramatically weaken long-standing protections, limit public participation, and sideline climate and environmental justice considerations. Meanwhile, related provisions in the just-passed reconciliation bill could further speed reviews via new fees and strict deadlines, signaling broader efforts to overhaul federal permitting.

c. Alliance Actions

Todd Ungerecht led the Alliance's effort to develop two detailed comment letters – one to USDA, and one to DOI – on those department's proposed interim NEPA rules. The USDA letter can be viewed on [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) using our Comment Tracking Number: mdq-6ipn-15ej. We'll have the DOI letter wrapped up and transmitted later today. Both letters offer strong support and some specific ideas for improvement to each interim rule. We were also approached by the House Natural Resources Committee staff to weigh in on new NEPA legislation (*see related discussion under "DEVELOPMENTS IN CONGRESS, below"*).

6. DOI, FWS: Critical Habitat for Yellow-legged Frog

A coalition of California water, agriculture, and rural community organizations, including the Family Farm Alliance, is challenging a FWS proposal to designate 760,071 acres as critical habitat for four populations of the foothill yellow-legged frog listed under the ESA. The proposed designation spans 17 counties, with more than 363,000 acres of the affected land privately owned. In comments submitted to FWS on July 28, the coalition, led by the California Farm Bureau (CFB), raised alarm about the potential effects on private landowners and resource management. The

coalition argued that the proposal could restrict agricultural practices, water management, and wildfire mitigation efforts. We also urged FWS to better coordinate with existing state laws and regulations and to recognize the role of grazing and forestry in reducing wildfire risk. Thanks to Erin Huston and our friends at CFB for doing the heavy lifting on the final letter, which I shared with you last week.

7. DOI, Bureau of Reclamation: 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.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 119TH CONGRESS

8. Senate Advances Spending Bills as House Leaves for Recess, Showdown Looms

As the House departed for its six-week August recess, the Senate pushed ahead on several of its fiscal year (FY) 2026 appropriations bills, though partisan disputes over spending levels and policy riders threatened to derail progress. Lawmakers on both sides of the Capitol acknowledged that a stopgap continuing resolution (CR) would likely be necessary to avoid a government shutdown when the new fiscal year begins October 1. In the final days before the recess, the Senate Appropriations Committee marked up its Defense and Labor-HHS-Education funding bills and advanced its first package, which included Military Construction–VA, Agriculture–FDA, and Commerce-Justice-Science. Committee leaders repeatedly emphasized the need for a bipartisan path forward. But that message met resistance from some Republican members. Sen. John Kennedy (R-LA), who chairs the Energy-Water Appropriations Subcommittee, held up his panel's bill over its top-line funding level. Committee leaders had struck a bipartisan deal to increase the bill's budget by 3% to \$59.9 billion, but Kennedy demanded a 3% cut instead, largely targeting clean energy initiatives. Murray and Ranking Member Susan Collins (R-ME) argued that Mr. Kennedy's move could jeopardize funding for core programs at the DOE and the Army Corps.

The dispute reflected broader partisan divides that slowed the appropriations process. In the House, Republicans had already passed their Defense and Military Construction–VA bills largely along party lines, in alignment with Trump Administration priorities, and moved a sweeping \$38 billion Interior-Environment spending bill that slashed the Environmental Protection Agency's budget by

23%. The House bill also includes conservative policy riders aimed at rolling back Biden-era regulations, limiting ESA listings, and promoting conventional energy and critical minerals development. Democrats on the committee blasted the measure, noting it eliminated funding for key environmental programs and imposed conservative policy riders rolling back Biden-era regulations. By contrast, the Senate Appropriations Committee advanced a \$41.5 billion bipartisan Interior-Environment bill that rejected the House's deep cuts.

The Agriculture Appropriations bill, one of the few bright spots for bipartisan cooperation, passed the Senate committee unanimously on July 10 and cleared the Senate floor by an 87-9 vote last Friday. The Senate Committee bill's Conservation Operations title includes \$895M for Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to support America's working lands, the same as last year. There is \$52M for Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations. But differences remained with the House Agriculture plan, which reduced discretionary spending by 4.2% and targeted climate and conservation programs for cuts. With just two months left before the end of the fiscal year, leaders on both sides privately acknowledged that negotiations would likely stretch into the fall.

9. House Advances Bills to Tackle Western Resources Challenges Before August Recess

In the final days leading up to the August congressional recess, the U.S. House of Representatives and its committees moved forward with a series of bipartisan bills aimed at addressing critical Western water, forestry, and wildlife management issues. From advancing species management reforms to improving storm forecasting, lawmakers across the aisle pushed through legislation designed to provide practical solutions for communities and ecosystems across the country. Several high-profile bills cleared the House floor with strong bipartisan support. Among them was the *Finish the Arkansas Valley Conduit Act*, introduced by Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-COLORADO), which will reduce cost-prohibitive interest payments for Pueblo, Colorado communities working to complete a vital water infrastructure project. The House also passed bills codifying executive orders and expanding energy development, including H.R. 1044 by Rep. David Valadao (R-CALIFORNIA), which extends the Kaweah Project hydroelectric permit for 40 years, and H.R. 4297, the *Bolts Ditch Act*, introduced by Rep. Joe Neguse (D-COLORADO), which enables more local entities to maintain and repair the Bolts Ditch headgate.

The full House Natural Resources Committee advanced three key bills on July 23:

- *The Put Out Fire Act* (H.R. 178) directs DOI and FWS to take immediate suppression action on high-risk land.
- *The Proven Forest Management Act of 2025* (H.R. 179) expands categorical exclusions for forest management projects up to 10,000 acres across federal lands, including the Tahoe Basin.
- *The Utah Wildlife Research Institute Act* (H.R. 1045) creates a research center dedicated to wildfire prevention technologies.

The Committee last month also advanced H.R. 435, the Direct Hire to Fight Fires, authored by Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CALIFORNIA), which gives the Secretaries of Agriculture and the DOI permanent authority to quickly hire qualified wildland firefighters. Another key bill, H.R. 831, the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program Amendment Act, introduced by Rep. Ken Calvert (R-CALIFORNIA), allows non-federal program funds to accrue interest, helping offset inflation without additional taxpayer costs.

The House Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries held a legislative hearing on six bills and a discussion draft aimed at improving species management and reforming the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Subcommittee Chair Harriet Hageman (R-WYOMING) emphasized the need for more practical approaches. Key proposals included Rep. Nick Begich's (R-Alaska) discussion draft to reduce regulatory uncertainty under the MMPA and Rep. McClintock's Endangered Species Transparency and Reasonableness Act of 2025 (H.R. 180), which would require federal agencies to publish all scientific data underlying endangered species listing and habitat designations. The bill also places caps on attorneys' fees for lawsuits filed under the ESA.

On July 14, the Improving Atmospheric River Forecasts Act (H.R. 4302) was reintroduced by Rep. Jay Obernolte (R-CALIFORNIA) and a bipartisan group of lawmakers. The measure would create an atmospheric river forecast improvement program at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to better predict severe storm events. As Congress returns from recess, all of the above bills are expected to continue advancing through the legislative process.

10. Coalition Support for WaterSMART Funding

On June 27, a coalition of 104 stakeholders—including the Family Farm Alliance—sent a letter to House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Energy and Water Development, urging continued FY2026 funding for the WaterSMART program at FY24 levels. The letter emphasized the importance of cost-share projects that enhance water availability, drought planning, energy security, habitat restoration, irrigation modernization, and fish passage in the western U.S. Specific funding support included \$15M for basin studies, \$8M for watershed management, \$30M each for drought response and water reuse, \$6.5M for aquatic restoration, and \$54M for WaterSMART grants. The coalition highlighted the program's role in water security, ecosystem health, wildfire preparedness, and rural job creation, stressing that federal support is essential given the infrastructure funding gap faced by state and local governments.

11. Farm Bill Faces Uncertain Fall Amid Budget, Nominee Fights

As Congress heads into its August recess, the outlook for passing even a scaled-down farm bill this fall remains uncertain, with partisan tensions running high over recent budget maneuvers. House Agriculture Committee Chair G.T. Thompson (R-Pa.) has floated the idea of a farm bill, but Democrats remain incensed by GOP-backed cuts to nutrition programs included in the reconciliation package. House Agriculture ranking member Angie Craig (D-Minn.) warned that those cuts—nearly \$200 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program —could

undermine the bipartisan coalition historically needed to pass farm bills. Chairman Thompson, meanwhile, must balance Democratic wariness with pushback from GOP fiscal hardliners skeptical of additional farm spending. Lawmakers will need to bridge those divides when they return to Washington on September 2.

12. Senate Confirmation Process Bogs Down

The Senate has confirmed Adam Telle as Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works by a 72–22 vote, amid broader political tension over the backlog of President Trump’s nominees. Despite efforts to negotiate a bipartisan deal to advance more nominations before the August recess, Senate Republicans and Democrats failed to reach an agreement. As a result, the Senate proceeded with individual roll call votes on a few less controversial nominees but left a large number of appointments unresolved. Republican leaders, frustrated with Democratic obstruction tactics, are considering procedural rule changes when they return in September to streamline the confirmation process.

13. *SPEED Act* Introduced

Last month, House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.) and U.S. Rep. Jared Golden (D-Maine) introduced the *Standardizing Permitting and Expediting Economic Development Act*, otherwise known as the SPEED Act. This legislation will modernize NEPA to help streamline the permitting process and return the law to its intended purpose. The bill will shorten permitting timelines and reduce the frequency of frivolous litigation, allowing much needed projects to move forward. The bill will also clarify when NEPA is triggered by clarifying the definition of “Major Federal Action.” We support this bill and provided a related quote for the Committee’s press release on this.

14. Snow Water Supply Forecast Program Reauthorization

Senator John Hickenlooper’s (D-COLORADO) office reached out to us last month with a request to support legislation that will be introduced later this week to reauthorize the Bureau of Reclamation’s [Snow Water Supply Forecast Program](#). As you likely know, this program supports projects that advance snowpack monitoring technologies as a means to improve water supply forecasting. Senator Curtis (R-UTAH) and Reps. Hurd (R-COLORADO) and Neguse (D-COLORADO) lead the House companion bill. The bill will reauthorize the program at \$6.5 million per year for 5 years, up from the previous level of \$3 million per year. The bill also includes some technical updates to reflect input from stakeholders. The Senate text is somewhat different from the House bill, but not dramatically so. Because this legislation is similar to previous efforts we’ve supported in the past, we advised the Hickenlooper shop that we’d support this legislation and provided them with a quote for their press release.

IN THE COURTS

15. *United Water Conservation District v United States*

The Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) last month transmitted its *amicus* brief in support of the United Water Conservation District's petition, which I've previously reported on. Joining the Alliance on the brief were the California Special Districts Association, Modesto Irrigation District, Rowland Water District, South San Joaquin Irrigation District, Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency, and Turlock Irrigation District. Alliance General Counsel Norm Semanko and I think the brief is a good one, and we're glad we were able to join. This is a critical issue impacting California's water rights system and public water agencies across the Western United States.

16. *Court Sets ESA Listing Deadlines for Pacific Chinook Salmon*

A federal judge has ordered NOAA Fisheries to decide by November 3 whether two populations of Pacific Coast chinook salmon in Oregon and Northern California deserve protection under the ESA, and by January 2, 2026, for a third population in Washington. The deadlines come from a settlement with environmental groups that sued NOAA for missing legal deadlines. Advocates say the threatened spring-run chinook runs are critical to Pacific Northwest ecosystems but face dangers from habitat loss, water diversions, overfishing, and dams. NOAA declined to comment on the ongoing regulatory process.

17. *New Idaho Wetland Jurisdictional Challenge Grows after Sackett Ruling*

A new wetlands dispute in Idaho is challenging the federal government's interpretation of the Supreme Court's 2023 *Sackett v. EPA* decision, which limited CWA protections to wetlands with a continuous surface connection to navigable waters. The Pacific Legal Foundation, which won the *Sackett* case, is representing a couple in Bonner County in northern Idaho whose 4.7-acre property has been deemed to contain federally regulated wetlands by the Army Corps, despite similarities to the *Sackett* property. The plaintiffs argue the Army Corps is using the same reasoning the Supreme Court rejected, citing subsurface connections and proximity to a tributary. If the Army Corps does not reverse its determination through the administrative appeal, the couple may file a lawsuit. The case comes as the Trump Administration prepares new rules that could further narrow the CWA's reach.

ALLIANCE INITIATIVES

18. *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). We made a bunch of progress in recent weeks on planning efforts for this event. Here's a hint of what's on tap:

- **Reclamation Roundtable** –we’ll invite ASWS Andrea Travnicek, the new Commissioner, and 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 the House Natural Resources Committee, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and Senate and House 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. 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. Josh blasted out the “early bird registration” announcement last Friday. If you didn’t get that in your inbox, let me know, and I’ll send you that info. I predict that this year’s conference – due in part to our new October timeline – will be our best attended yet. So – save the date! And remember, our internal board and Advisory Committee meetings are scheduled for Wednesday, October 29.

19. 2025 Farmer Lobbyist Trip

OK – August is the time when we really start nailing down the schedule and itinerary for our September D.C. 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 participants confirmed from California’s Central Valley, northern California, Klamath Basin, Central Oregon, Idaho and New Mexico. If you are thinking about joining us, please let me know ASAP, so Mark Limbaugh and the team at The Ferguson Group can start scheduling Hill visits with your Congressional delegation.

20. Lower Snake River Dam Tour

The Alliance – partnering with the Idaho Water Users Association (IWUA) – last month wrapped up a tour that brought over 50 participants to the Lewis-Clark Valley to learn first-hand about the national importance of the Lower Snake River Dams and the broader Columbia River system. The tour brought together a diverse group, including farmers, tribal leaders, conservationists, port officials, and water advocates, for a firsthand look at critical infrastructure, including Dworshak Dam, the third highest dam in the U.S. These on-the-ground experiences are central to the Alliance’s mission: building understanding, strengthening relationships, and advocating for practical solutions that preserve irrigated agriculture in the West.

Josh Rolph blasted out an *Issue Alert* that hit the high spots and included some photos from the tour. Kudos to Paul Arrington and Kathryn Scott at IWUA and to Jane Townsend for putting together one of the best tours I’ve ever been involved with! Thanks also to East Columbia Basin ID for helping to sponsor the event. And - major kudos to Clinton Pline, Lorri Gray and the Nampa-Meridian crew who put together an impressive reception for our incoming Executive Director Samantha Barncastle and her husband Rett in Nampa on Sunday night.

21. Colorado River Initiative

As the November deadline approaches for a long-term agreement on post-2026 Colorado River operations, the seven basin states remain in tense negotiations over how to allocate the river's

dwindling supply. The Upper Basin states—Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and New Mexico—are pushing for water use to reflect actual supply levels, while the Lower Basin states—California, Arizona, and Nevada—resist cuts they view as disproportionate. Colorado River Commissioner Becky Mitchell emphasized the need for the Lower Basin to accept reduced allocations, while Lower Basin representatives insist any reductions must be equitable. If a consensus isn't reached by February, DOI has signaled it will impose a federal plan.

The stakes are high, particularly for the agriculture sector and communities that depend on the river. Poorly balanced water policy could threaten national food security, as millions of acres of farmland rely on the river for irrigation. Meanwhile, Tribal nations, including the Navajo Nation, are also seeking a stronger voice in the allocation process, highlighting the river's importance for Indigenous water rights and long-term sustainability.

In recent op-eds, the Alliance has stressed the connection between water access and domestic food production, urging policymakers to resist shifting food reliance to foreign sources. *The Arizona Republic* two weeks ago published this [guest op/ed piece](#) co-authored by Advisory Committee member Tom Davis and I. The *Desert Sun* (Palm Springs / Coachella, CA) on Friday finally ran an op/ed piece written by California Farm Water Coalition Executive Director Mike Wade and I, pushing back on urban arguments that are critical of agricultural water use. The August 1 version is [digital](#); Sunday's edition carried it in print.

We're also tackling Colorado River challenges in the Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition (WACC), an organization the Alliance helped create nearly 15 years ago. Linked [HERE](#) is a draft letter from the WACC with Colorado River Basin priorities. We discussed this potential letter on our last WACC call as being a producer-forward effort and largely focused on useful programs at USDA and DOI. Please feel free to suggest edits.

22. Post-Wildfire Impacts on Western Water Infrastructure

I was approached last month by a reporter for *Circle of Blue*, a water news agency, who is working on a story about how wildfire and post-fire debris flows/floods impact irrigation infrastructure. I put him in touch with members in Oregon and Washington who have great recent experience in these matters. Many thanks to Justin Harter (Naches-Selah ID), Travis Oakelberry (Yakima-Tieton ID) and Jack Friend (Medford ID) for agreeing to be interviewed for this story. *Circle of Blue* last week published [“After Wildfire, Unstable Earth Pummels Irrigation Systems in the American West”](#). While the title is a bit too dramatic for my taste, the story itself is pretty good, and features exchanges with some of our members, including Travis Okelberry (Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District), Jeff Stahla (Northern Water), Jack Friend (Medford Irrigation District) and Justin Harter (Naches-Selah Irrigation District). I even got a word in, edgewise. Nice job, gents!

ADMINISTRATIVE & MISCELLANEOUS

- The Western States Water Council (WSWC) is seeking a new Executive Director with the experience and skills necessary to strategically guide the organization into the future, while building value for its members and effectively managing its operations and staff. Applications will be accepted until August 5, 2025. For further information, please see the attached announcement or visit the [WSWC website](#).
- Nearly half of California farmers are 65 and older, and many have yet to plan for what happens to their farms when they retire. For those without family heirs, that decision can be especially complex. A new set of resources from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, aims to help those producers explore [options for succession](#) so that farmland can stay in production and continue supporting local communities.
- *The Bend Bulletin* (Oregon) recently ran a FRONT-PAGE article about our long-time Advisory Committee member Mike Britton's retirement from North Unit Irrigation District. Josh Rolph promoted that story on social media last week. Congrats, Mr. Britton!
- *Farm Progress* last week published [this guest column](#), which is a shout-out I wrote as a salute to Paul Simmons, who recently stepped down from the Klamath Water Users Association, after working for over two decades for them.
- Bruno Pigott, the former acting Assistant Administrator of EPA's water office, will become executive director of the WaterReuse Association next month. The association advocates for policies and incentives to expand water recycling across industries. In his new role, Pigott will focus on educating regulators and businesses, promoting changes to restrictive state laws, and supporting federal initiatives like EPA's water reuse action plan. Water reuse has gained momentum under both the Trump and Biden Administrations, especially amid hydrologic challenges and rising water demands from industries like data centers. The WaterReuse Association is also backing legislation to provide a 30% tax credit for water reuse projects.

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.