



MEMORANDUM

TO: SAN LUIS & DELTA-MENDOTA WATER AUTHORITY DIRECTORS
FROM: SAMANTHA BARNCASTLE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: UPDATE REPORT
DATE: NOVEMBER 3, 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 2025 annual conference in Reno last week, creating workgroups to advance recommendations for Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) agency realignment, and wrapping up transition activities associated with my new role as Alliance executive director. I took over the helm on October 31, after long-time executive director Dan Keppen stepped down in Reno (last week). Please know that I am fully committed to transparent communication, responsiveness, and delivering results in service of our membership and mission. I look forward to working collaboratively with each of you – your expertise, insight and dedication are essential to our success. If at any time you have suggestions, questions or ideas, please feel free to reach out.

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

The U.S. government shutdown has stretched into its sixth week, with no signs of a resolution. The House has passed a “clean” continuing resolution to fund operations through late November, but the Senate remains gridlocked, unable to reach the 60 votes needed to advance the measure. Partisan disputes—particularly over health care and spending priorities—have hardened, as both sides blame the other for the stalemate. Democrats, led by Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, are focused on preserving Affordable Care Act subsidies and resisting proposed restrictions on auto-enrollment, while Republicans, under pressure from former President Trump, are pushing for Senate rule changes and their own health care revisions. Efforts to address the crisis have repeatedly failed: the Senate has voted over a dozen times (13 in total) on funding bills without success and competing proposals to pay federal workers and servicemembers during the shutdown have also been blocked.

The consequences of the impasse are spreading nationwide. Over 700,000 federal employees are furloughed, while many essential workers, including military personnel, TSA agents, and air traffic controllers, continue to work without pay—causing growing disruptions at major airports. Federal workers have missed their first full paycheck, and millions of Americans are on the verge of losing food assistance through programs like SNAP and WIC as contingency funds run dry. Farmers are also feeling the strain, even as the Agriculture Department (USDA) reopens limited offices to distribute emergency aid. With the shutdown now the second-longest in U.S. history, set to be the longest in history if it goes beyond November 5 (which is almost inevitable at this point), both parties face mounting public pressure to act, yet neither has advanced a viable plan to reopen the government. The Senate is expected to take additional votes on limited relief bills, but a comprehensive funding agreement remains out of reach. There is also the issue of the short duration of the CR passed by the House – which was set to expire in late November.

Some believe the shutdown may persist in earnest for a while, though I am almost convinced we will see movement immediately following the elections around the country this Tuesday, November 4. Both parties are looking for reasons to motivate voters, and banking on them blaming the opposite party for the shutdown, so I expect to see movement after election day.

1. Courts Grant Pauses in Some Federal Environmental Cases

During the government shutdown, most federal courts are granting Department of Justice (DOJ) requests to pause or extend deadlines in Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - and agency-related cases because furloughed attorneys can work only on critical functions. The 9th Circuit issued a blanket stay of filing deadlines for cases with federal counsel (excluding oral arguments), and the 2nd Circuit extended some government filing deadlines; other courts are approving stays case by case. High-profile matters put on hold include challenges to EPA rules on methane, PFAS drinking water limits, and strengthened particulate standards, along with multiple district-court suits over grant funding and enforcement. Some proceedings continue despite the shutdown—judges denied stays in cases over federal union rights, agency reorganizations/layoffs, and an offshore wind approval, and one environmental-justice grants case was expedited on appeal. Courts remain open using separate funds, but a prolonged lapse could curtail civil operations.

2. Army Corps Halts \$11B in Projects Amid Federal Shutdown

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) is pausing more than \$11 billion in public works projects as the government shutdown stretches on, according to White House budget chief Russell Vought. The halted “lower priority” projects span major cities including New York, San Francisco, Boston, and Baltimore. Mr. Vought, a key architect of Project 2025, said the shutdown has “drained” the Corps’ capacity to manage project funding. The move follows earlier freezes on infrastructure and climate funds, as the Administration continues to push workforce cuts during the shutdown, but are now temporarily blocked by a federal court order.

3. EPA Hiring Freeze Extended, Political Screening Added to Hiring Practices

An October 15 Executive Order, *Ensuring Continued Accountability in Federal Hiring*, indefinitely extends the federal hiring freeze and creates agency “Strategic Hiring Committees” to vet every hire against Administration priorities. At EPA, the panel will include Deputy Administrator David Fotouhi and Chief of Staff Eric Amidon and hiring must follow a May 29 Office of Personnel Management (OPM) memo emphasizing “patriotic” loyalty and ending diversity considerations. OPM and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) must also produce annual staffing plans aligned to White House priorities, signaling further workforce cuts even after the Administration’s 25% reductions at EPA in the past nine months. Critics warn the Executive Order—issued with no sunset—could further politicize civil service hirings.

4. TFG Special Report

Mark Limbaugh and the team at The Ferguson Group (TFG) has released a [Special Report](#) outlining how this shutdown may impact local communities, and will continue to provide policy updates from Capitol Hill. The policy landscape remains fluid, but the TFG Special Report provides a key resource for understanding how these developments may affect sectors most critical to our organization’s mission.

TRUMP 47 ADMINISTRATION

5. Administration’s Expedited Permitting Agenda Moves Forward

The Trump administration is pushing ahead with its fast-track permitting agenda despite the government shutdown, emphasizing continued progress on energy, infrastructure, and technology projects under the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council. Backed by Environmental Improvement Fund resources, the council is maintaining work on FAST-41 projects—ranging from mining and broadband to AI and semiconductor facilities—through coordinated and transparent approval timelines. The Department of the Interior’s (DOI’s) contingency plans also keep essential leasing and permitting operations running for oil, gas, and coal, using carryover funding to sustain priority reviews. While industry groups warn the shutdown could hinder development, agencies insist that critical permitting continues uninterrupted. Critics, however, argue that the administration’s expedited process undercuts environmental safeguards, and the EPA is simultaneously exploring measures like nationwide CWA permits to speed approvals for water-intensive AI data centers.

a. OMB Letter Spurs Agencies to Step Up Deregulation Efforts

OMB recently issued new guidance urging federal agencies to accelerate President Trump’s deregulation agenda, citing slow progress in repealing existing rules. The memo instructs agencies to more aggressively implement Trump’s executive orders, including repealing 10 regulations for every new one issued and eliminating rules deemed “unlawful” under recent Supreme Court

decisions. The directive shortens review periods — 28 days for deregulatory actions and 14 days for “facially unlawful” rules — and encourages agencies to skip public notice and comment using the Administrative Procedure Act’s “good cause” exception. It also advises agencies to limit consultations with state or tribal governments and streamline cost-benefit analyses to speed up rollbacks. The OMB memo reflects growing White House frustration that agencies are not fully utilizing their authority to dismantle regulations. It also pushes agencies to justify rollbacks by citing benefits such as expanded “private freedom” and economic growth, though many experts dismiss this rationale as politically driven and lacking legal foundation.

b. NGA Letter to Congress

Meanwhile, a bipartisan coalition of governors, led by National Governors Association (NGA) Chair Kevin Stitt and Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, sent a letter to congressional committee leaders urging comprehensive, technology-neutral reforms to federal energy permitting to speed project approvals and modernize infrastructure amid surging power demand. The governors call for streamlined, AI-enabled, and well-staffed federal review processes; targeted reforms to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), including shorter review timelines, expanded categorical exclusions for low-impact energy projects, and clearer judicial limits; and stronger coordination on interstate transmission and nuclear licensing. They also advocate for improved state-federal alignment under the Clean Water Act (CWA), flexibility on permit durations, and reimbursement for states with delegated responsibilities. The letter emphasizes that predictable, apolitical, and efficient permitting is essential to ensure energy reliability, affordability, and innovation across diverse energy types, presenting the proposals as a bipartisan package to accelerate investment while maintaining environmental safeguards.

6. OMB Notice of Filing of Agency Declarations

The federal government recently provided agency declarations submitted in response to a federal court’s modified Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) concerning government Reductions-in-Force (RIFs) during the 2025 federal shutdown. The declarations provide detailed “accountings” of planned or initiated RIFs that were halted under the injunction. These filings emphasize compliance with the court’s orders, confirm that RIFs were initiated before the government funding lapse, and commit to suspending any further personnel actions affecting unionized employees while the TRO remains in force.

DOI plans to eliminate over 2,000 jobs across its agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Reclamation, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), National Park Service (NPS), and the Office of the Secretary. The plans were disclosed as part of a federal court case after a judge temporarily blocked the Trump Administration from issuing layoffs to unionized federal workers during the ongoing government shutdown. DOI officials have paused action on the reductions until the court lifts its restraining order. DOI’s layoff plan targets 89 competitive areas—groups of jobs with similar duties and locations—covering about 14,000 employees, though roughly 4,800 union members are protected by the court order, halting the process for now.

The Office of the Secretary would face the deepest cuts (around 770 jobs), including positions in IT, communications, and the DOI Business Center. The BLM would lose 474 positions, mostly in state offices such as Oregon/Washington (95) and Utah (93). The USGS would cut over 330 jobs across multiple research centers, and the NPS would lose around 270 positions, primarily in its regional offices. Reclamation would lose around 30 positions throughout various regional and area offices.

Separately, EPA disclosed plans to eliminate 27 additional jobs, including positions in recycling and pollution prevention programs. The agency has already experienced significant workforce reductions through reorganization and voluntary resignations, with over 2,300 employees leaving under a “deferred resignation” program.

7. EPA: WOTUS Rulemaking

Industry groups are urging the Trump EPA and OMB to ensure any new “waters of the United States” (WOTUS) rule adheres strictly to the Supreme Court’s Sackett decision, which limits federal jurisdiction to traditional navigable waters, “relatively permanent” waters, and only those adjacent wetlands that are indistinguishable from such waters via a continuous surface connection (allowing temporary interruptions). In September meetings before the shutdown, the Federal Water Quality Coalition—representing sectors from chemicals and petroleum to homebuilding—pressed for a durable, CWA-authorized rule with clear exclusions and exemptions to provide permitting certainty, including restoring the 2020 prior converted cropland exclusion and clarifying/broadening the waste-treatment-system exclusion to cover natural and engineered features and storage/equalization activities. Internal EPA slides reportedly indicate the draft will define “relatively permanent” and “continuous surface connection” explicitly and may drop limiting language on certain exclusions, potentially widening them, though the proposal’s release timing is uncertain amid the ongoing shutdown.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 119TH CONGRESS

8. Senate Advances Second Package of Trump Nominees

On October 7, the Senate confirmed 108 of President Trump’s nominees en bloc under the new rules allowing bulk confirmations of lower-level executive-branch nominees. The package included Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) nominees Laura Swett and David LaCerte, as well as Neil Jacobs for NOAA, Timothy Walsh for Energy’s environmental management office, Lanny Erdos for the Office of Surface Mining, Ned Mamula for the U.S. Geological Survey, and several others. Some nominees, such as Audrey Robertson for DOE’s renewables office and Michael Boren for USDA Undersecretary over the Forest Service, face Democratic criticism over ties to oil, gas, or past agency dealings.

The push comes after Senate Republicans lifted their “holds” on Treasury nominees following new guidance on renewable energy tax credits, though Sen. Ted Budd’s (R-NC) protest over FEMA

aid delays continues to block Homeland Security picks. Meanwhile, the Judiciary Committee is advancing more federal court nominees, and the Banking Committee plans votes on HUD and Treasury posts. However, the timing for floor consideration of Majority Leader Thune's nominee package remains uncertain.

9. *Fix Our Forests Act* Passes Senate Committee

A bipartisan Senate committee vote advanced the "*Fix Our Forests Act*" (S. 1462), legislation aimed at speeding up environmental reviews and limiting lawsuits that delay forest management and wildfire prevention projects. The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee approved the bill 18–5, with six Democrats joining Republicans in support. The measure now moves to the Senate floor after the House passed a similar version earlier this year. Sponsored by Sens. John Curtis (R-UTAH), Alex Padilla (D-CALIFORNIA), Tim Sheehy (R-MONTANA), and John Hickenlooper (D-COLORADO), the bill would expand NEPA categorical exclusions for forest thinning and logging from 3,000 to 10,000 acres and restrict court injunctions that could delay projects. It also establishes a multi-agency board to identify high-risk "firesheds" and promotes prescribed burns, fire-safe construction, and community wildfire programs, though no new funding is provided for these initiatives.

Supporters – including the Family Farm Alliance - say the bill will help reduce wildfire risks and promote faster, more efficient restoration, while critics warn it weakens environmental safeguards and favors the timber industry. The Alliance earlier this year came out in strong support of the House -passed version of this bill. Several Democrats, including Sens. Michael Bennet (D-COLORADO), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Dick Durbin (D-IL), and Adam Schiff (D-CALIFORNIA), opposed the bill, citing concerns about insufficient funding, limited tribal consultation, and restricted public participation. Environmental groups remain deeply divided, with some supporting the bill's goals but others, like the Center for Biological Diversity, arguing it prioritizes industry interests over meaningful wildfire resilience.

10. Senate ENR Committee Holds Oversight Hearing on Historic Preservation Law

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) Committee last week held an oversight hearing this week to review the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), a 1966 law designed to protect historic and archaeological sites across the U.S. The hearing will focus on Section 106, which requires federal agencies to assess and consider public input on how federally funded projects may affect historic properties. The NHPA's role in the federal permitting process, including water and energy infrastructure projects, makes it relevant to ongoing bipartisan talks about permitting reform. NHPA implementation is a long-time, serious concern of many Alliance members. Committee Chair Sen. Mike Lee (R-UTAH), a critic of regulatory delays, highlighted the consultation process as an example of excessive bureaucracy. The hearing was streamed [via webcast](#).

11. Senate Committee Hearing on Nomination of Dr. Tim Petty for NOAA Post

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee last week questioned Dr. Timothy Petty, President Trump's nominee for Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, where he would oversee NOAA Fisheries. Dr. Petty is a former DOI official with experience in water and science policy in both Bush 43 and Trump 45 Administrations and would help implement the Trump 47 Administration's directive to boost U.S. seafood competitiveness by easing environmental restrictions and tightening enforcement on illegal fishing. He could also be tasked with implementing the Administration's proposal to move NOAA's Endangered Species Act (ESA) functions to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) at DOI. Though backed by agriculture and irrigation interests, he faces scrutiny for his lack of fisheries experience and concerns from environmental groups about deregulation. In a Wednesday hearing before the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, Mr. Petty pledged to kick-start stalled surveys and other research necessary to set fundamental fishing regulations — including annual catch limits, the length of fishing seasons, fishing area closures, and restrictions on activities that could harm the overall health of fish and other marine life. The Alliance earlier this year formally endorsed his nomination and sent a support letter to the Committee stating that.

12. Senate ENR Chair Mike Lee Revives Push to Move Forest Service to DOI

Senate ENR Chairman Mike Lee is drafting legislation to shift the U.S. Forest Service from the USDA to DOI, reversing a structure in place since 1905. The proposal, titled the "*Forest Service Reorganization Act of 2025*," would also make the Chief of the Forest Service a Senate-confirmed political appointee, create a new wildland fire agency within DOI, and lift overtime pay caps for wildland firefighters. Supporters argue the change could align federal land management under one department, while critics warn it would disrupt operations and weaken the Forest Service's longstanding partnerships with state and local governments. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) previously found similar reorganization efforts could reduce collaboration with agricultural and forestry stakeholders. Chairman Lee's draft comes amid the Trump Administration's efforts to prioritize timber production and forest health within the agency.

IN THE COURTS

13. Nebraska v Colorado

On October 15, 2025, Colorado filed its response to Nebraska's Supreme Court complaint under the 1923 South Platte River Compact, urging the Court to dismiss the case as "speculative and premature." Nebraska's lawsuit accuses Colorado of failing to deliver its guaranteed 120 cubic feet per second (cfs) of irrigation-season water and of obstructing construction of the Perkins County Canal (PCC), authorized to divert up to 500 cfs of non-irrigation season flows from Colorado. Nebraska claims it has lost 1.3 million acre-feet over the past decade and that Colorado's augmentation plans unlawfully allow junior users to divert out of priority. Colorado counters that Nebraska's entitlement is conditional and fully honored, asserting the Compact grants Colorado

control over Upper Section waters and that Nebraska has not pursued canal construction or condemnation actions for nearly a century. The two states also disagree over jurisdiction for eminent domain actions—federal versus Colorado state court. Nebraska officials, including Attorney General Mike Hilgers and Governor Jim Pillen, framed the lawsuit as critical to securing the state’s water future, while Colorado leaders, including Governor Jared Polis and State Engineer Jason Ullmann, defended the state’s compliance and expressed disappointment, calling for renewed cooperation between the states.

14. PCFFA v Nickels

As previously reported, on September 5, 2025, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit (9th Cir.) issued its decision in *Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations v. Nickels*, affirming summary judgment for the defendants and holding that the CWA’s irrigation-return-flow exemption applies so long as the return flows do not contain additional point-source discharges from activities unrelated to crop production. In the decision, the court clarified that commingled nonpoint source pollution (such as road runoff, windblown dust, or groundwater seepage) does *not* automatically disqualify the exemption, so long as any added point-source pollutants are tied to crop production. Last week, environmental groups filed a petition asking the full Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals to rehear a case concerning the irrigation return flow exemption, following a previous panel decision unfavorable to them.

The Alliance participated in an amicus brief in support of Reclamation, SLDMWA, and other water users. Alliance General Counsel Norm Semanko noted that such en banc rehearings are rarely granted—only about 2% of requests succeed—and advised that the next step is to wait for the judges to decide whether to reconsider the case. He also pointed out that, if denied, the environmental groups could appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, though the likelihood of review there is even lower, around 1%. Norm will keep us apprised as this further develops.

15. Enviros Seek ESA Protection for Two Oregon–California Fish

The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) has petitioned the FWS to list two small minnows — the Umpqua chub and the northern roach — under the ESA, citing steep population declines from habitat loss, pollution, and invasive species. The Umpqua chub, limited to Oregon’s Umpqua River Basin, has been hit by dam construction and water pollution, while the northern roach, once widespread across northern California and southern Oregon, has largely vanished from its historic range due to agricultural runoff, fires, and nonnative predators. Conservationists say protecting these fish would also help safeguard regional water quality and river ecosystems.

16. Environmental Litigation Industry Aim to Limit Trump ESA rules

As the Trump administration prepares to issue modernized ESA regulations, environmental groups are seeking a federal court ruling to limit the scope of those changes, arguing the law mandates strong conservation measures. The CBD and other litigators hope the court will affirm that federal

agencies must take meaningful action to protect species and habitats amid the global extinction crisis. Meanwhile, agricultural and industry groups—led by the American Farm Bureau Federation—are challenging the Biden-era ESA rules for being overly restrictive, claiming they unlawfully expand “critical habitat” designations and automatically protect threatened species. The outcome of these competing lawsuits could determine how far the Trump administration can go in rolling back ESA protections.

17. Denver Water, Environmental Plaintiff Ordered to Mediation Over Gross Dam Expansion

The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has ordered Denver Water and Save the Colorado into mediation on October 30 over the disputed \$531 million Gross Reservoir expansion in Boulder County. A lower court earlier found that Army Corps permits violated environmental laws, citing failures to consider climate and drought impacts, though construction later resumed for safety reasons. Denver Water says the project is vital to increase storage for 1 million metro customers, while environmental groups argue it harms the Colorado River basin and local ecosystems. The mediation aims to explore a potential settlement at a time when related Colorado water projects, like the \$2.7 billion Northern Integrated Supply Project, also face increased costs and environmental challenges.

ALLIANCE INITIATIVES

18. 2025 Annual Meeting and Conference

The Family Farm Alliance’s 2025 Annual Meeting and Conference took place October 30-31 in Reno, Nevada. With the theme *Flowing Forward: Shaping the Future of Western Water*, this year’s gathering was one of the most pivotal in the Alliance’s history—bringing together farmers, ranchers, policymakers, and water managers to tackle urgent challenges facing irrigated agriculture in the West. The reports from attendees so far have been glowing; we’re working on a special conference “Monthly Briefing” that we’ll issue later this month. Stay tuned for further conference stories, photos and details!

The 2025 Family Farm Alliance Annual Report - which highlights a pivotal year of leadership transition and continued advocacy for Western irrigated agriculture – was shared with all attendees of the annual conference last week. The report details the Alliance’s federal policy influence, major initiatives like the Lower Snake River Tour, and responses to political and environmental shifts under the Trump 47 Administration and the 119th Congress, as well as providing background information on those who make this organization really tick – our members, like you. The new report is now live on the website as a flipbook on both the Home & Resources pages, and as a download on the Resource page (underneath the flip book):

<https://www.familyfarmalliance.org/2025-family-farm-alliance-annual-report/>

19. Executive Director Transition

I assumed the role as executive director at the end of the annual conference general session. On October 16, I delivered the keynote address at the [2025 Water Sustainability Summit](#), hosted by our friend Mauricio Guardado and his team at United Water Conservation District in Ventura County, California. I also moderated a panel that included attorney Paul Simmons and Mike Wade (California Farm Water Coalition). I look forward to making it out to California more often going forward. The only way to effectively advocate is starting from the ground level in our boots and learning about the issues in real life! I look forward to meeting you in person soon, but in the meantime, please feel free to reach out to me at my official new email address at any time: samantha@familyfarmalliance.org.

20. Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition

The Alliance has been closely involved with the Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition (WACC) since its early days, serving on WACC's Steering Committee for more than a decade. WACC attendees at the Family Farm Alliance conference in Reno last week met to discuss progress on a draft "Skinny Farm Bill" letter the group is working on, potential opportunities related to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and farm bill measures, ways to better utilize the Natural Resources Conservation Service Western Water and Working Lands Framework, and updates on the impacts of the ongoing government shutdown. The group also discussed WACC's future priorities—such as member recruitment, outreach activities, and administrative matters—and followed things up with an informal social gathering for continued discussion.

WESTERN WATER “HOT SPOTS”

21. Water Outlook Improves: Unpredictable Winter Ahead

California's water outlook has dramatically improved as Lake Shasta, the state's largest reservoir, rose above full capacity in mid-2025 — a stunning reversal from its drought-stricken 2021 lows. A series of powerful Pacific storms since January, fueled by a volatile jet stream pattern, have replenished reservoirs across the state, even as meteorologists warn that shifting ocean and atmospheric conditions could soon alter weather trends. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's 2025–2026 winter forecast calls for a colder, wetter winter in the northern U.S. due to a developing weak La Niña, but a persistent marine heat wave off the Pacific Northwest coast may dampen those effects. This unusual overlap of La Niña cooling and coastal warming underscores growing uncertainty in seasonal forecasts — leaving both California and the broader Northwest balancing renewed water abundance with unpredictable climate dynamics heading into winter.

22. Columbia, Snake and Yakima River Basins (ID/OR/MT/WA)

Following President Trump’s June 12, 2025 Presidential Memorandum “Stopping Radical Environmentalism to Generate Power for the Columbia River Basin,” which revoked President Biden’s 2023 directive to restore salmon populations and withdrew the U.S. from a 2023 settlement agreement in the Columbia River System litigation, long-standing court battles over dam operations have reignited. Federal defendants sought to pause proceedings due to the government shutdown, but Judge Simon denied the motion, ordering the preliminary injunction process to proceed. The National Wildlife Federation and allied plaintiffs, now joined by the State of Washington, have filed motions seeking emergency protections for endangered fish, with responses due December 15. Meanwhile, Oregon and Washington governors criticized the administration’s withdrawal from the 2023 *Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement*, blaming it for renewed litigation, while dam and power industry groups placed a full-page ad urging cooperation instead of lawsuits. The dispute now pits environmental and tribal groups advocating salmon recovery against power and navigation interests defending hydropower reliability—signaling a major new phase in the decades-long Columbia Basin water and fish conflict.

Outside of the courtroom, the Washington Department of Ecology ordered a full halt to surface water use in the Yakima Basin from October 6 through the end of the month due to critically low reservoir storage and streamflows following three consecutive years of drought—the most severe in over three decades. The curtailment, affecting more than 1,500 water rights holders including senior rights users in the Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District and the Wapato Irrigation Project, marks the earliest shutdown on record and aims to preserve minimal river flows for fish and senior entitlements. The unprecedented cutoff highlights the limits of existing drought resilience measures in the Yakima Basin, signaling potential carryover impacts into 2026 and underscoring the urgent need for additional investments in water security, drought planning, and storage capacity across south-central Washington.

23. Colorado River Basin (AZ/CA/CO/NE/NM/UT/WY)

Negotiations over the future of the Colorado River Basin have stalled just weeks before a critical November 11, 2025 deadline for the seven basin states to present a unified framework to Reclamation for post-2026 operations. The river—strained by decades of drought, climate change, and over-allocation—faces the potential of federal intervention if states cannot agree. The Upper Basin states (Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming) are already bearing heavy cuts, with farmers, tribes, and ranchers enduring deep water shortages, prompting state-led conservation and infrastructure programs to strengthen drought resilience. Meanwhile, Lower Basin states (Arizona, California, Nevada) continue to clash with their upstream neighbors over how to equitably share reductions, as reservoir levels hover near crisis thresholds. Environmental groups warn that without major, transparent reforms—including reduced water use and operational changes at Glen Canyon Dam—the river system risks ecological and economic collapse.

Amid this tense backdrop, the Trump administration—through DOE and Reclamation - is pressing for a deal but has taken a cautious, institutional approach under negotiator Scott Cameron, rather than the confrontational tactics some expected. State officials are scrambling to craft at least a provisional plan to avoid unilateral federal action while quietly preparing for potential litigation if talks fail. The Upper Basin emphasizes its track record of uncompensated reductions, strict water rights enforcement, and new accounting frameworks to live within hydrologic limits, positioning itself as the responsible actor. Still, with interstate distrust high and reservoir projections worsening, the clock is ticking toward 2026, when the river’s current operating rules expire and the next phase of Western water politics—and possibly federal control—will begin.

24. Klamath River Basin (CALIFORNIA / OREGON)

Following the removal of four Klamath River dams—the largest such project in U.S. history—Chinook salmon have returned to the Upper Klamath Basin for the first time in over a century, marking a major environmental milestone. However, the Klamath Water Users Association (KWUA) argues that this success has come at the expense of unfulfilled commitments to farmers and ranchers made under the Klamath Power and Facilities Agreement (KPFA) and earlier basin restoration accords. While the dam removals have reopened hundreds of miles of salmon habitat, KWUA contends that promised safeguards—such as preventing new regulatory burdens on agriculture and installing fish screens to protect irrigation infrastructure—have been neglected. The association is now urging state and federal agencies to honor these commitments to ensure that ecological restoration does not come at the cost of the Basin’s farming communities, calling for immediate action to balance fish recovery with agricultural stability.

25. GHG Guidelines Coming Soon to A State Near You

Last month, I came across a new handbook issued by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Climate Change Bureau. The *Handbook for Analyzing Greenhouse Gas Emission Reductions in Western States: Designed to Support Planning Analyses in AZ, CO, NM, OR, and WA* was developed by ICF International, Inc. with support and input from five Western states, including New Mexico. The handbook enables users to calculate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions resulting from various climate actions. What is most interesting about this document is that the source material is derived from various California versions of the same sources. The book also avoids using the word “agriculture” and instead characterizes things as “working lands” versus “natural lands”. The report emphasizes water conservation, demand reduction, and climate change impacting water supply, but not in favor of agriculture, er....“working lands”.

I shared this report with some of our ag allies in the states covered by the report, and I thought you might find it interesting, as well. You can access the handbook directly here: <https://service.web.env.nm.gov/urls/jSxfiUxB>. The handbook is posted on the Climate Change Bureau’s website here: <https://www.env.nm.gov/climate-change-bureau/greenhouse-gas-emissions-inventories/>

ADMINISTRATIVE & MISCELLANEOUS

- Amazon has been accused of under-reporting its water consumption for its data-center operations as it expands its AI infrastructure, with a leaked memo showing the company used about 105 billion gallons of water in 2021, while publicly citing just 7.7 billion gallons by excluding “secondary” water usage linked to electricity production ([TRT World](#)). Amazon says the document is outdated and misrepresents its current strategy, but critics say the discrepancy raises concerns over transparency and environmental impact as large tech firms scale up resource-intensive operations.
- The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) board unanimously appointed Shivaji Deshmukh as its next general manager, making him the agency’s 16th in its nearly 100-year history. Previously the general manager of the Inland Empire Utilities Agency since 2019, Mr. Deshmukh brings over 25 years of experience in large-scale water recycling, partnerships, and management of major water supply operations.
- The recent *Washington Post* article “[Rethinking sustainability: The untold benefits of cattle ranching in the American West](#)” argues that well-managed ranching operations in arid Western landscapes can bolster biodiversity, ecosystem health, and climate resilience—even where traditional agriculture won’t thrive. It highlights practices such as grazing to reduce wildfire fuel loads, “take half, leave half” stocking rules to protect soil and native grasses, and solar-powered water systems, showcasing ranchers’ role as land stewards.
- I have upcoming speaking engagements at the Oregon Water Resources Annual Conference (Dec 2-3) in Hood River; Washington State Water Resources Association Annual Conference (Dec 3-5) in Spokane; and the Colorado River Water Users Association Annual Conference (Dec 16-18) in Las Vegas (NEVADA). I’ll also be headed to Tucson (ARIZONA) later this week to sit in on parts of the National Water Resources Association Annual Meeting.

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 575-202-2705 or samantha@familyfarmalliance.org if you would like further information about what the Alliance is doing to protect water for Western irrigated agriculture.