



MEMORANDUM

TO: SAN LUIS & DELTA-MENDOTA WATER AUTHORITY BOARD
FROM: DAN KEPPEL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: UPDATE REPORT
DATE: OCTOBER 7, 2024

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 carrying out our farmer lobbyist trip to D.C., monitoring and engaging in Western water legislative negotiations, public and media outreach, and important organizational administrative matters. These issues and other matters important to our members are further discussed in this memo.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

As election day nears, the White House is hosting a “Farmers and Ranchers in Action” event on October 8. The lineup is slated to feature U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative’s Chief Ag Negotiator Doug McKalip and White House policy adviser Neera Tanden at the White House. Those officials will discuss the administration’s key ag investments and hold Q&A sessions with attendees. The event, scheduled just under a month before Election Day, is the latest step by Democrats to shore up rural support and tout USDA’s work under President Joe Biden. Leaders in the Biden-Harris Administration continue to distribute hundreds of millions of dollars of funding provided by massive spending bills passed by Congress in 2021 and 2022. The Biden administration is ramping up rollout of Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) ag funds, with a historic \$7.7 billion investment for climate-smart agriculture funding announced last week. USDA also allocated \$1.3 billion last week in rural energy funding. Those investments come as GOP leaders like Speaker Mike Johnson have reasserted plans to roll back the IRA and other Biden-era climate support if Republicans win in November.

1. Recent Ag/Water Federal Spending Announcements

Many of the recently announced funds will benefit Western efforts to bolster drought resilience as one of the hottest records on summer recedes. President Biden signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) into law in 2021, which provides a total of \$8.3 billion to the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) over five years for water infrastructure projects, including rural water, water storage, conservation and conveyance, nature-based solutions, dam safety, water purification and reuse, and desalination. Since the IIJA was signed in November 2021, Reclamation has announced more than \$4.1 billion for more than 537 projects. The IIJA—also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – also provided \$50 billion for drinking water infrastructure investments to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Less than one year after the IIJA was signed into law, President Biden on August 16, 2022 signed the \$459 billion IRA – a massive health care, climate and tax bill – into law. The legislation provided \$4 billion of funding for Reclamation, intended to address the Western drought crisis, and another \$20 billion to the USDA to provide farmers and ranchers climate-smart agriculture tools they need to address the climate crisis. The IRA also provided \$4.9 billion in additional funding available to the Forest Service to protect communities from wildfire and invest in climate smart forestry. For example, the IRA provided \$1.2 billion to reduce hazardous fuels and wildfire risk to communities, critical infrastructure, and natural resources across the country. Another \$170 million is provided to help conserve private forest lands.

The Family Farm Alliance was part of a five-organization steering committee that led over 220 water and agriculture organizations who played a critical role in securing the IIJA and IRA funding for Western water infrastructure and drought mitigation efforts. Both the IIJA and IRA laws collectively provided a once in a generation level of federal funding to support water infrastructure and drought needs in the West. In response to a request we made during our DC fly-in last month (*see related discussion, Item 17*), Reclamation is working on hosting an aging infrastructure webinar to provide an update on where and how the IIJA / IRA funds are being spent. September was marked by several IIJA and IRA funding announcements by Reclamation and IRA investments by USDA. Other important IIJA and IRA funding investments were made by USDA and Interior to address wildfire and forest health challenges in the West.

a. Climate-Smart Practices on Agricultural Lands

USDA recently announced up to \$7.7 billion in assistance for fiscal year 2025 to help agricultural and forestry producers adopt conservation practices on working lands. This includes up to \$5.7 billion for climate-smart practices, made possible by the IRA and \$2 billion in Farm Bill funding. This is more than double the amount available last year and the most conservation assistance made available in a single year in U.S. history for popular USDA conservation programs. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) received more than 156,485 applications for its conservation programs in fiscal year 2024. While NRCS accepts applications year-round, interested agricultural producers can now apply for fiscal year 2025 funding through NRCS at their

local USDA Service Center. NRCS recently released an updated list of [Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Mitigation Activities](#) eligible for IRA funding in fiscal year 2025, which includes 14 new activities. NRCS also released the [NRCS Conservation Practices and Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Information dashboard](#) sharing the expected mitigation benefits and science-based estimation approach for listed practices. These in-demand activities are expected to [reduce greenhouse gas emissions or increase carbon sequestration](#), as well as provide other significant benefits to natural resources like soil health, water quality, pollinator and wildlife habitat and air quality. In response to feedback received from conservation partners, producers and NRCS staff across the country, NRCS considered and evaluated activities based on scientific literature demonstrating expected climate change mitigation benefits.

b. Funding for Conservation Easements, EQIP and CSP

NRCS is accepting applications for its Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) for fiscal year 2025, which includes \$472 million in IRA funds for this year. ACEP helps producers conserve and protect grasslands, wetlands and farmlands. Producers interested in IRA funding through ACEP should submit their applications by the next two ranking dates, Oct. 4 or Dec. 20. Any ACEP application submitted to NRCS that was unfunded in fiscal year 2024 will be automatically re-considered during the Oct. 4 funding cycle. In addition, NRCS is also accepting ACEP applications eligible for Farm Bill funding. Application dates for fiscal year 2025 funding differ by state, and they're available on the [NRCS Ranking Dates webpage](#). NRCS accepts producer applications for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) year-round, but producers interested in fiscal year 2025 funding should apply by [their state's ranking dates](#) through NRCS at their [local USDA Service Center](#). Funding is provided through a competitive process and is an opportunity to address the unmet demand from producers who have previously sought funding for climate-smart conservation activities.

c. Wildfire and Forest Health Funding

USDA last month announced the investment of \$100 million in 21 new projects to expand work on the USDA Forest Service's Wildfire Crisis Strategy to reduce the threat of wildfire in high-risk areas across the country. The new projects span 14 states and 18 national forests and are part of the \$3.2 billion investment in this comprehensive strategy. The Collaborative Wildfire Risk Reduction Program uses hazardous fuels funds from the IRA to treat additional areas of high wildfire risk where national forests and grasslands meet homes and communities (aka the Wildland-Urban Interface). The program allows national forests, in collaboration with Tribes, communities and partners in qualifying states to build local capacity for projects to reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health. The Department of Interior (DOI) last month announced \$236 million to support wildland fire management into fiscal year 2025 across the nation. This announcement brings the total the DOI has allocated for wildland fire management from the IJA to nearly \$1.1 billion across the nation since it went into effect in fiscal year 2022.

d. Reclamation IJA Funding Announcements

Reclamation last month announced the availability of up to \$43.5 million from the IJA for small water storage projects that will create new sources of water for communities in the West. Surface water and groundwater storage are essential tools in stretching the limited water supplies worsened by a changing climate. These projects will increase water management flexibility, making water supply more reliable and communities more resilient. There is growing recognition among policy makers that water supply enhancement projects must be included in the toolbox used to tackle Western water challenges. The Small Storage Program, authorized by the IJA, funds projects with a water storage capacity between 200 acre-feet and 30,000 acre-feet. Please visit Reclamation's Small Storage Program website for more information.

Reclamation recently announced a nearly \$92 million investment for 19 projects to restore and protect aquatic ecosystems. This funding from the IJA and annual appropriations implemented by the Reclamation will be awarded to projects in six Western states for the study, design and construction of aquatic ecosystem restoration projects that will improve the health of fish, wildlife and aquatic ecosystems. These investments are part of a total \$1 billion provided by the IJA for the WaterSMART program. For a complete list of projects, [click](#) here.

e. Colorado River Actions

DOI last month marked major progress for the short and long-term health of the Colorado River.

i. Short Term Conservation Agreements

Conservation agreements signed today with the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) and Bard Water District in partnership with the Metropolitan Water District (Metropolitan) signify the final short-term agreements signed under "Bucket 1" of the Lower Basin System Conservation and Efficiency Program with funding from the IRA. The agreement with IID is the largest from the Bucket 1 effort, expected to provide up to 700,000 acre-feet of system conservation water to Lake Mead between 2024-2026 with a total investment of approximately \$589.2 million. The agreement with the Bard Water District in partnership with Metropolitan conserves up to 17,100 acre-feet of water during the same time period at a cost of about \$6.8 million. This water will remain in Lake Mead in an effort to benefit the Colorado River System and its users. Reclamation has now executed 25 agreements that are projected to conserve more than 2.28 million acre-feet of water. The agreements are part of the three million acre-feet of system conservation commitments made by the Lower Basin states.

ii. Long Term Conservation Agreements

An initial [\\$700 million investment](#) from the IRA was announced in June to support long-term conservation in the system. Today's agreements with the Gila River Indian Community represent the first agreements signed under this investment. The agreements invest approximately \$107

million into three projects with the potential to create system conservation of over 73,000 acre-feet within the next 10 years. Reclamation is also working with Southern Nevada Water Authority, Metropolitan, Coachella Valley Water District, City of Tucson, San Diego County Water Authority, Town of Gilbert, Salt River Valley Water Users' Association & Salt River Project Agricultural Improvement and Power District and City of Phoenix in the Lower Colorado Basin to negotiate water conservation contracts for up to 10 additional proposed projects. Overall, the funding for long-term water conservation initiatives in the Lower Basin is expected to save more than 1 million-acre-feet of water, putting the Colorado River Basin on a path to a more resilient and sustainable water future.

iii. Post-2026 Operations NEPA Process

The lifeblood of the American West, the Colorado River Basin provides water for more than 40 million people and fuels hydropower resources in seven U.S. states. It is a crucial resource for 30 Tribal Nations and two states in Mexico and supports 5.5 million acres of agriculture and agricultural communities across the West, in addition to important ecosystems and endangered species. It is currently experiencing the longest and worst drought on record, driven by hotter temperatures under climate change. Reclamation will hold an informational webinar on Thursday, October 10, 2024, from 1:00-2:00 p.m. MDT to provide a status update on the Post-2026 Colorado River Operations National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process, including an overview of the ongoing work to develop NEPA alternatives. Meeting interpretation will be available in Spanish. [Register to attend the webinar here.](#) To join the webinar via telephone, please use the following call-in information: Dial-in option: (253) 205-0468 or (720) 707-2699; Webinar ID: 882 9018 8032.

2. Meeting with Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack

Family Farm Alliance President Paul Orme joined Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego and other local stakeholders last month at Salt River Project headquarters for a meeting with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. The Secretary was in Arizona to highlight USDA investments that protect communities and natural resources from wildfire and drought, expand access to clean energy and create jobs, and build stronger, more resilient communities. During the roundtable, the Secretary highlighted several investments made to increase wildfire resilience and water savings in Western states, including Arizona.

The roundtable discussion in Tempe provided an opportunity for Mr. Orme and local stakeholders to share with the Secretary their firsthand experiences with the devastating impacts of extreme heat, wildfire, long-term drought and water scarcity. The Alliance has been working to increase funding for critical USDA programs and having discussions about how to ensure its programs work for farmers and ranchers on the ground. Mr. Orme concluded his remarks by emphasizing that, now more than ever, it is essential that we protect American agriculture and build a climate resilient food supply chain.

3. White House: “America’s Groundwater Challenges”

Western House Republicans have sent a letter to the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) in response to the Council’s request for public input on America’s groundwater challenges. Recall that the Alliance sent a letter to PCAST last summer, stating that groundwater should remain regulated by states and local interests, not the federal government. The Congressional letter was signed by Rep. Dan Newhouse (WASHINGTON), Cliff Bentz (OREGON), Andy Biggs (ARIZONA), Jake Ellzey (TEXAS), Russ Fulcher (IDAHO) and Mike Simpson (IDAHO). Full text of the letter can be found [here](#). In a related matter, the *Chicago Tribune* last month ran another scare piece – [No, American West, You Can’t Have Our Great Lakes Water](#) - driven by a similar op/ed written earlier by Arizona State University professor Jay Famiglietti in the *New York Times*. Mike Wade (California Farm Water Coalition) responded with a good letter to the editor, which the *Tribune* published the following week.

4. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): WIFIA Funding Announcement

EPA has announced the availability of \$7.5 billion in funding through the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program to support critical water infrastructure projects. These long-term loans will help communities protect public health, improve environmental outcomes, create over 60,000 jobs, and bolster local economies. The WIFIA program offers flexible financing options, allowing communities to accelerate projects related to lead pipe replacement, PFAS pollution reduction, and climate resilience. The Biden-Harris EPA has prioritized investments in disadvantaged communities, addressing emerging contaminants, and promoting water sector innovation. The WIFIA program has already financed over \$44 billion in projects nationwide. On Capitol Hill, we are working with Rep. Schrier (D-WASHINGTON) in support of efforts to introduce the “WIFIA Amendments of 2023”, which would broaden WIFIA funding and financing eligibility to state and federal projects and entities. This includes state-led water storage projects, transferred works of Reclamation, and congressionally authorized Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) projects.

5. State Control of Wetlands Permitting

The Biden Administration is preparing to finalize an update to the process for states and tribes to assume control of wetlands permitting, a process that hasn’t been revised in 30 years. The new proposed rule, currently under review by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), could make it easier for states and tribes to manage wetlands permits, which are typically issued by the Corps under the Clean Water Act (CWA). Currently, only Michigan and New Jersey have been granted this authority, though Florida was controversially allowed to handle its own permitting under the Trump Administration—a decision later ruled to violate the Endangered Species Act (ESA). More states may seek control following a Supreme Court ruling in *Sackett v. EPA*, which reduced federal protections for wetlands. The EPA’s proposed changes aim to clarify the permitting takeover process and strengthen partnerships with states, but environmental groups

are pushing back, arguing that stricter guardrails are needed to ensure environmental protections. The proposed rule is expected by November 1, 2024.

DEVELOPMENTS IN CONGRESS

6. Congress Passes CR to December 20

Last month, Congress passed a continuing resolution (CR) funding bill to keep federal agencies open until December 20 but failed to include billions of dollars in requested supplemental disaster funding. Following the vote, lawmakers left town for a month-long October recess, returning after the general election with just 20 legislative days to pass a long-term solution to government funding. The [bipartisan continuing resolution](#) passed the House on a 341-82 vote and hours later passed the Senate on a 78-18 vote, which maintains funding at current levels for FEMA. But many lawmakers, particularly from disaster-prone states, were upset that relief funds were excluded.

The decision to leave out the disaster funding came despite urgent pleas for aid as Hurricane Helene hit Florida and the Southeast and wildfires ravage the West. FEMA's disaster relief fund is already facing a significant deficit, and the stopgap measure will only sustain operations for a limited time. Lawmakers on both sides have expressed frustration with the decision, while discussions continue about addressing the funding gap in December when Congress returns after the election. However, President Biden has indicated that he may call Congress back into session if the situation worsens following Hurricane Helene's impact. Also, the CR did not extend the farm bill beyond its current extension through September 30 (*see related discussion, below*).

7. Farm Bill

The farm bill – which historically has passed about every five years - expired at the end of last month, after already being extended an extra year in 2023. Rep. David Scott (D-GA), the Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee, listed a deal on the \$1.5 trillion bill as a top priority in the lame-duck session, while House Democratic and Republican coalitions wrote letters pressing leadership to prioritize it. Most House Republicans, including Agriculture Committee Chair Glenn Thompson (R-PA), are urging GOP leadership to prioritize the 2024 farm bill after the November elections, stressing that farmers can't afford to wait due to rising production costs and falling commodity prices. The farm bill faces delays due to partisan disagreements over climate and nutrition programs, and a \$30 billion budget gap. Chairman Thompson believes a compromise can be reached, but a mix of Democratic votes will be needed to pass the bill on the House floor.

With the one-year extension of the 2018 Farm Bill ending, some important farm programs have stopped. Without action from Congress, more programs will shut down by the end of the year, leaving farmers in a tough spot. Programs that are ending now include the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), EQIP, Grassland Conservation, and programs that help promote U.S. farm exports, like the Market Access Program (MAP) and Foreign Market Development (FMD). Other affected programs include funding for bioenergy, specialty crop grants, organic certification help,

and support for new farmers. If Congress doesn't pass a new farm bill or extend the current one by January 1st, outdated laws will kick in, driving up prices on commodities like milk and honey, and hurting the market. Uncertainty about the farm bill makes it harder for farmers to get loans from banks. If banks are unsure about the future, they may lend less or offer worse loan terms, putting farmers at even more risk.

We work with the Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition (WACC) to drive many of our farm bill initiatives. Our position has been that the climate sideboards established by the IRA for spending \$20 billion of "climate smart" agriculture projects should be removed (as the House farm bill does) or significantly loosened. We need to make sure water projects get funded with no hassles. Although USDA has written administrative rules that make some of our members' projects eligible for "climate smart", we'd also like to see a statutory change to make sure.

8. Energy/ Natural Resources Bills Passed

As Congress left town to campaign in the final stretch before the elections, both the House and Senate passed a series of energy, environment, and natural resources bills. The House passed the following Western water legislation:

- [H.R. 4094](#), the "*Great Salt Lake Stewardship Act*," from Rep. John Curtis (R-UTAH), to designate unused funding from the Central Utah Project Completion Act toward water conservation projects in the Great Salt Lake basin.
- [H.R. 4596](#), the "*Upper Colorado and San Juan River Basins Endangered Fish Recovery Programs Reauthorization Act*," from Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-COLORADO), to reauthorize funding for two Colorado River Basin fish recovery programs.
- [S. 612](#), the "*Lake Tahoe Reauthorization Act*," from Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NEVADA), to extend Lake Tahoe restoration efforts.

Additionally, the Senate passed an amended wildlife conservation bill, [H.R. 5009](#), by Rep. David Joyce (R-OH), to reauthorize the *Wildlife Innovation and Longevity Driver Act*. The bill, as passed by the House earlier this year, would extend the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (a program long supported by the Alliance). Because the Senate amended the House passed bill, it must return to the House for further approval.

9. Committee to Hold Hearing on Pacific NW Water Issues

Tomorrow (Tuesday, Oct. 8) Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Chairman Cliff Bentz (R-OREGON) and U.S. Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer (R-OREGON) will hold an oversight hearing in Central Oregon titled, "*It All Depends on Water: Examining Efforts to Improve and Protect Central Oregon's Water Supply*." The hearing will examine the importance of collaboration in the Deschutes Basin and its impact on agriculture and species recovery. The Alliance has strong representation in Central Oregon, where Deschutes River irrigation districts are working together and with constructive conservation groups, local cities, and government

agencies to balance the Deschutes so there is water for all river beneficiaries, including farms. The field hearing is scheduled to begin at 10:00 a.m. (PDT) at the Deschutes County Fairgrounds and Expo Center, located at 3800 SW Airport Way in Redmond, Oregon. Also participating in the field hearing are U.S. Reps. Jerry Carl (R-Ala.), Doug LaMalfa (R-CALIFORNIA), Celeste Maloy (R-UTAH) and Dan Newhouse (R-WASHINGTON). Additional Members may also attend. Witnesses are by invitation only. The hearing is open to the public and will be streamed live [here](#). We are sending out an *Issue Alert* later today to help publicize this hearing, which Lane Dickson is helping to coordinate.

10. Senate ENR Subcommittee Legislative Hearing

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) Subcommittee on Water and Power on September 11 held a legislative hearing to consider 16 bills. We submitted written testimony for the hearing record that addressed 11 of those bills. Here's the ones we support:

- [S. 4016](#), to amend the Boulder Canyon Project Act to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to expend amounts in the Colorado River Dam fund, and for other purposes (Sinema);
- [S. 4242/H.R. 4385](#), to extend the authorization of the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991, and for other purposes (Hickenlooper/Lummis);
- [S. 4458](#), to reauthorize the Reclamation Rural Water Supply Act of 2006, and for other purposes (Rounds/Klobuchar);
- [S. ____](#), to amend the Aquifer Recharge Flexibility Act to clarify a provision relating to conveyances for aquifer recharge purposes (Risch);
- [S. ____](#), to authorize additional funding for the San Joaquin River Restoration Settlement Program (Padilla);
- [S. ____](#), to establish an interest-bearing account for the non-Federal contributions to the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (Padilla);
- [S. ____](#), to establish the Integrated Water Management Federal Leadership Committee and to provide for improved drought resilience and dam safety (Padilla);
- [S. ____](#), to make certain modifications to the repayment period and payment of interest for the Fryingpan-Arkansas project in the State of Colorado (Bennet);
- [S. ____](#), to prohibit the use of amounts from the Upper Colorado River Basin Fund to implement a certain record of decision (Lee); and

Our testimony expresses support for [S. 4576](#), the Colorado River Basin System Conservation Extension Act, co-sponsored by Senators Barrasso (WYOMING) and Hickenlooper (COLORADO), while also expressing concerns with the federal implementation of this program. We do not support the [Water Project Navigators Act](#) proposed by Senator Hickenlooper and have previously corresponded with his office to that effect.

11. Urban Canal Safety and ESA Modernization Bills Clear House Committee

The House Committee on Natural Resources on September 19th held a full committee markup and

favorably reported 16 bills. H.R. 6107, the *Urban Canal Modernization Act*, introduced by Rep. Mike Simpson (R-IDAHO), categorizes maintenance work on urban canals of concern and allows Reclamation to assist in covering project costs. The Alliance supports this legislation, as well as [H.R. 9533](#), the *Endangered Species Act Amendments Act of 2024*, introduced by House Committee on Natural Resources Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.). This legislation will incentivize the recovery of listed species, promote species conservation on private and public lands, and create greater transparency and accountability in the ESA regulatory process. It faced strong Democratic opposition. The Alliance reviewed and provided input on earlier drafts of this legislation. Full bill text can be found [here](#).

12. House NR Subcommittee Considers Bill Blocking ‘BIDEH’ Wildlife Refuge Plan

The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries last month heard testimony on [H.R. 8632](#), from Rep. Glenn Grothman (R-WI), legislation aimed at blocking the Biden Administration's proposed "Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health" (BIDEH) rule, which would impact wildlife refuges across 850 million acres. The rule has faced opposition from ranchers, farmers, and sportsmen who fear the loss of grazing lands and fewer hunting and fishing opportunities. The Administration cites climate change and habitat loss as key reasons for the regulation, but critics, including some Democrats, argue that it could negatively impact land use and refuge management. The hearing also heard testimony on four other conservation-related bills. The Alliance earlier this year developed detailed comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, urging that the agency withdraw the proposed BIDEH rule. We were particularly concerned with how the proposed rule mischaracterizes the important relationship that exists between Western waterfowl populations and irrigated agriculture.

13. House Passes Act to “Fix our Forests”

The U.S. House of Representatives on September 24 passed H.R. 8790, the Fix Our Forests Act, sponsored by House Committee on Natural Resources Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.) and U.S. Rep. Scott Peters (D-CALIFORNIA). This bipartisan legislation seeks to spur active forest management in the U.S. and protect rural communities in the wildland-urban interface. Later that same day, Chairman Westerman joined Family Farm Alliance “farmer lobbyists” on the balcony of the House Speaker’s office for a reception that was also attended by House Agriculture Committee Chairman GT Thompson (R-Penn.) and Rep. David Valadao (R-CALIFORNIA). In advance of the House taking up the “Fix our Forests Act” last month, the Alliance signed on to a letter in support of the legislation. ACWA coordinated the coalition letter in the week leading up to the House vote.

Those who live in Western rural timber communities know we can restore dead and dying federal forest lands through active forest management. We appreciate ACWA’s leadership in putting together this coalition letter that supports legislation that will help do this. This bipartisan legislation would improve forest management activities and increase wildfire resiliency by

improving federal agency collaboration, authorizing targeted environmental streamlining authorities, providing litigation reform, expanding good neighbor authorities, and investing in research and technology aimed at improving forest health. As of October 1, 33,631 fires have burned 6,336,634 acres nationwide this year. Catastrophic fires threaten public health and safety, and adversely affect community resilience and infrastructure. Catastrophic fires can also impact water supplies. Almost 90% of the people served by public water systems in the Western United States rely on federal forested lands for a portion of their water.

ALLIANCE INITIATIVES

14. 2024 Farmer Lobbyist Trip

A group of Alliance members spent much of the last week in September walking the halls of Congress and downtown Washington, D.C., meeting with Biden Administration officials, Members of Congress, and Congressional staffers as part of our 2024 Farmer Lobbyist trip. As you know, the Alliance's annual Farmer Lobbyist trip is one of our "cornerstone" programs which brings family farmers and water professionals to Washington, D.C. to meet with legislators and Administration policy leaders on critical water issues. The Alliance philosophy has long held that the most effective voice in Washington DC is the individual family farmer. This year's farmer lobbyist contingent included 30 representatives from Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Wyoming. The highlight of the week for many of us was the reception put together by Bill Ball, a senior resources policy advisor to House Speaker Mike Johnson (D-Louisiana). We spent nearly two hours on the balcony of the House Speaker's office in the national capitol building, where a social event was hosted for the Alliance that included some surprise guests. While Speaker Johnson did not make an appearance, some other influential House Democrats did, including Natural Resources Committee Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.), Agriculture Committee Chairman GT Thompson (R-Penn.) and Rep. David Valadao (R-CALIFORNIA).

As noted earlier, while we were in D.C., Congress was focused on passing a short-term CR to prevent a looming government shutdown. Following the vote, lawmakers bolted out of town to go on a month-long October recess, returning after the general election with just 20 legislative days to pass a long-term solution to government funding. Committee hearings scheduled for September 26 were cancelled, as Hurricane Helene began to veer north out of the Gulf of Mexico towards Florida and the southeast, sparking fears that bad weather would complicate air travel out of DC later in the week. The Senate ENR Committee cancelled a markup it had planned, which had over 70 land and water bills on the docket, including several of interest to the Alliance. The hearing will be rescheduled when Congress returns from the election recess in early November.

15. Executive Director Search

Last week, we publicly announced that I'll be stepping down from the executive director position next year. That was the lead story in this month's newsletter; we followed that up with the press

release that the board approved at our September special board meeting. Both documents are essentially the same. The public announcement regarding the launching of the job search will go out on October 15. We have developed an excellent recruitment package that we'll link to in the press release. We'll also publish our job search web page that day. Northern California Water Association (my old employer) [shared](#) our announcement and my hometown newspaper, the *Herald & News*, published a nice [article](#) that ran in Sunday's paper.

16. Webinar: Stream Restoration and Water Rights from a Landowner's Perspective

The Western States Federal Agency Support Team (WestFAST) on Wednesday, October 9 is hosting a webinar as part of a series that is exploring stream restoration and water rights. I was contacted by WestFAST and Western States Water Council representatives last spring about putting together a webinar to allow decisionmakers and the public to hear some landowner perspectives on stream restoration projects. I suggested several possible speakers, and two of them made the cut: our own Nadine Bailey (Alliance director and COO at Family Water Alliance in Northern California) and Becky Hatfield Hyde, a rancher from here in the Klamath Basin. On Wednesday's webinar (which starts at 9:00 a.m. Pacific time, including Arizona), these two will share their experiences, lessons learned, and thoughts on how federal and state agencies can better work with landowners on stream restoration projects. [CLICK HERE](#) to join the meeting (Meeting ID 246-847-946-706, Passcode 3yMTBh). Or, you can dial in by phone ([+1 202-640-1187](#), Phone conference ID 446 054 273#).

WestFAST was formally organized in 2008 in response to the Western Governors' Association's recommendation to facilitate correlation of federal activities and to develop and enhance collaborative partnerships among state and federal agencies working on priority water-resource issues. Today, WestFAST is a collaboration of more than sixteen Federal agencies with water management responsibilities in the West. WestFAST works closely with WSWC, striving to accomplish effective cooperation among western states, and their partners, in the understanding, conservation, development and management of water resources.

WESTERN WATER "HOT SPOTS"

17. Columbia / Snake / Yakima River Basins

Many of you have no doubt seen the press on President Trump's comment that the Columbia River is like a "large faucet" that can be used to solve California's water problems. [Here's a response](#) by environmental writer Rocky Barker with the *Idaho Capital Sun*.

On the ground, our members in the Yakima River basin with junior water rights ended the season receiving 52% of their normal water allotments, the worst water shortage in the Central Washington region in nearly a decade. They may get some relief this winter. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center shows a 71% chance of La Niña

conditions emerging this fall, conditions that can generally (but not always) provide more moisture to the Pacific Northwest. That also means that things may be drier further south. Over the past 100 years, 70% of La Niña years in California were dry. However, California DWR officials are warning there is a good chance that whatever precipitation the state might get will arrive via stronger storms, which, along with parched, hardened soils that dried out over the summer, increases the risk of flooding.

ADMINISTRATIVE & MISCELLANEOUS

- National Water Resources Association (NWRA) has announced that Greg Morrison will assume the role of Executive Vice President effective November 1, 2024. Greg is well-regarded and has over 30 years of experience in the Western water industry. His career includes lengthy tenures with California’s Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District, and Western Municipal Water District. Most recently, he has been serving as VP of External Relations at the Idaho Hospital Association, and currently resides in Idaho. I’ve been in touch with Greg in recent weeks and look forward to working with him in his new role.
- Last month, Mike Wade (California Farm Water Coalition) and I accepted an invitation to the Colorado Water Congress summer meeting and presented a “tag-team” Ted Talks-style speech on food security and Colorado River irrigated ag challenges. Two weeks ago, I presented again on this topic at the California Agricultural Irrigation Association’s Fall Meeting in Pismo Beach. I was back in Colorado later in the month with the same message and delivered the keynote address at the Colorado River District’s Annual Water Seminar in Grand Junction. I’ll be speaking to the Irrigation Association Fall Convention in Long Beach (CALIFORNIA) and at the Wyoming Association of Irrigation Districts in Casper early next month. I’ve also got an upcoming virtual presentation that I’ll be presenting to the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District board of directors.

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.