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December 19, 2023

The Honorable Tom Tiffany  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
Committee on Natural Resources  
House of Representatives  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joe Neguse  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
Committee on Natural Resources  
House of Representatives  
1332 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member Neguse:

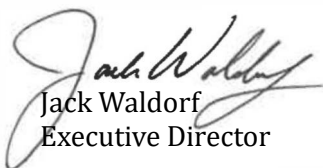
With respect to the Subcommittee's December 5, 2023, hearing, Examining Opportunities to Promote and Enhance Tribal Forest Management, attached please find Western Governors' Association policy resolutions 2024-02, National Forest and Rangeland Management and 2023-01, Working Lands, Working Communities.

Both resolutions closely align with many of the policy priorities that were discussed during the hearing. Wildfire risk reduction and improving forest health are of great importance to Western Governors and the communities they represent. Western Governors support efforts to improve a broad range of pre-fire mitigation practices. Policy Resolution 2024-02 expresses Western Governors' policy that traditional Native American tribal ecological knowledge and practices such as cultural burning can contribute significantly to improved forest management in the West and should be incorporated more effectively into federal and state planning management processes.

To that end, Western Governors support the creation of mechanisms to identify and enhance cross-boundary collaborative work. One of the mechanisms discussed at the hearing is Good Neighbor Authority (GNA). During his remarks, Bureau of Indian Affairs Deputy Regional Director Bodie Shaw underscored that tribes, in contrast to other eligible partners, are precluded from retaining revenues generated from timber sales executed under GNA. This has been a major deterrent for tribal participation in collaborative forest management under the authority, and Western Governors encourage Congress to consider authorizing tribes and county governments to retain GNA timber sale revenue.

I request that you include this document in the permanent record of the hearing, as it articulates Western Governors' collective and bipartisan policy positions and recommendations on tribal forest management. Thank you for your consideration, and please contact me if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,



Jack Waldorf  
Executive Director

Attachments (2)



## Policy Resolution 2024-02

### National Forest and Rangeland Management

#### A. **BACKGROUND**

Western states contain over 75 percent of the national forest and grassland system, and communities in the West depend upon forests and rangelands for jobs, recreation, and quality of life. Conversely, effective natural resource management is only possible if rural and resource-dependent communities are healthy, vibrant, and prosperous. These forests and rangelands provide a number of important ecosystem services that drive local economic activities including grazing, forest products, and recreation. The majority of surface water in the West originates in National Forests as well, and western water security is directly tied to the health of western forests. Both natural disturbances and management decisions have the potential to fundamentally alter the complex, interdependent relationship between communities and land. Climate change can accelerate these dynamics by increasing the frequency and severity of fire, altering hydrologic patterns, and expanding the potential range of invasive species. Furthermore, states have a unique interest in active land management and improving lands' resilience against disturbances because state governments have trust authority over water, wildlife, and forest resources, along with primary authority and expertise to protect community health and safety.

#### B. **GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT**

1. Western Governors support sound forest and rangeland management policies that maintain and promote ecologic, economic, and social balance and sustainability.
2. Western Governors support the creation of mechanisms to identify and enhance cross-boundary collaborative work.
3. Western Governors point to the Western Governors' Association (WGA) – U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as an example of an effective framework to establish shared state-federal priorities for forest and rangeland management and encourage the development of similar MOUs with other Executive Branch agencies for other areas of natural resource management.
4. Effective forest and rangeland management is only possible through coordination between federal, state, local, and tribal land management agencies. These agencies should strive to find new ways to collaborate on forest and rangeland management projects, as well as to explore ways to improve state-federal coordination on existing management projects. Shared Stewardship Agreements between states and USDA are a good example. Federal agencies should look to local communities as a source of strength, knowledge, and support during the planning and implementation of forest and rangeland management projects and should be encouraged to work with local communities while planning forest and rangeland management projects. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) could achieve this by developing regional and cross-boundary collaboratives to facilitate cooperation on

ecosystem-level land management challenges and water source protection. Federal land management agencies should consider investing in facilitation capacity and training for agency personnel and partner organizations involved with collaboratives.

5. Western Governors support improvements to interagency communication, fire response capability, and coordination, including the sharing of firefighting resources. Fire management activities should support fire prevention, rapid response capabilities, full suppression strategies where appropriate and management of wildfire for resource benefits. Local government and volunteer fire associations play a critical role in wildfire response and mitigation, and state and federal agencies should look for ways to further incorporate these groups into regional wildfire dispatch and coordination centers. Additionally, it is critical that improvements are made to simplify the fire billing adjudication process to ensure more timely reimbursements in line with agreement standards.
6. Federal agencies should examine funding match requirements and consider reducing or eliminating these requirements when the public benefit outweighs the cost of the funding match. Federal agencies are encouraged to work with western states to ensure that communities' access to these grants is as efficient and streamlined as possible.
7. Federal agencies should facilitate the participation of state, local, and tribal governments in federal decision making by dedicating staff to develop and provide technical assistance and enhance communications across local, tribal, state, and federal partners. Federal agencies should also take steps to assist resource-constrained communities in developing needed capacities such as grant writing or conducting environmental analyses.
8. States may be the conveners of collaborative interagency forest and rangeland management efforts, such as in the case of Good Neighbor Agreements. When this occurs, federal agencies should provide funding and support to states for the cost incurred during any convening role. Congress and federal agencies should also provide opportunities for expanded cooperation, particularly where states are working to help their federal partners to improve management of federal lands through the contribution of state expertise and resources.
9. Effective forest and rangeland management requires a network of forest and rangeland infrastructure to manage, maintain, and restore western forests and rangelands. Federal and state agencies should strive to find ways to support and expand critical forest and rangeland management infrastructure, including mills, biomass facilities, livestock watering systems, and roads. Federal agencies should also examine the need for market incentives to encourage sustainable nursery markets and facilitate the development of additional nursery capacity. The federal government should take steps to address equipment shortages as part of its implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).
10. Federal and state agencies should look for ways to grow the workforce needed to support and operate forest and rangeland management infrastructure. These agencies should explore the expanded use of youth, veterans, inmate crews, and conservation corps to provide cost-effective capacity to support forest and rangeland restoration. The federal government and employers should also consider work experience and other non-traditional credentials in hiring to ensure adequate capacity for land management project implementation. The federal government, states, and territories should examine standards on hiring persons with criminal backgrounds to promote employment opportunities for qualified applicants that present

minimal risk for future criminal behavior. The federal government should focus attention on housing needs and assist communities seeking to attract and retain workforce.

11. Western Governors support the expansion of restoration projects in forest and rangelands, including repair or removal of culverts and other barriers to fish passage. Federal and state agencies should strive to find ways to support and expand cost-effective means of supplying restoration projects, such as with large woody material from adjacent overstocked forests, which in turn supports the rural workforce needed to implement large-scale watershed and stream restoration efforts.
12. A thriving forest products industry is essential to support critical forest management infrastructure. Western Governors support the expansion of markets for forest products. Federal agencies should expand opportunities and incentives for existing USDA, Economic Development Administration, and Small Business Administration programs and financing to support forest products business development and infrastructure. USFS Research and Development, State and Private Forestry, and National Forest System should work collaboratively to support existing and emerging forest products technologies, including the work of the National Forest Products Laboratory, with the goal of expanding markets to maximize restoration activity.
13. Congress should pass legislation to promote forest and rangeland product markets and technologies and expand funding for the Community Wood Energy Program. Federal agencies are encouraged to continue research and development efforts to find viable markets for low-value biomass and prioritize the utilization of low-value biomass for thermal, electric, and liquid-fuel energy. Rural electric cooperatives, public utilities, community facility managers, and other partners should contribute to the research, testing and deployment of new and modified heat and electric generation projects and liquid-fuel facilities from hazardous fuels reduction, conifer removal, and other forest and rangeland restoration efforts.
14. Federal land managers should work to ensure that forest products producers have increased certainty of supply, as well as a broader suite of outlets, in addition to traditional sawmills and existing biomass facilities. States can also work with USFS and other federal land managers to establish more long-term stewardship agreements to ensure a long-term feedstock supply. Federal resources and partnerships should support efforts beyond federal lands given the critical role of cross-boundary work.
15. Authorities granted in past Farm Bills such as Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and Stewardship Contracting Authority (SCA) are powerful tools to boost forest and rangeland management, promote collaboration, and limit the effects of administrative objections and litigation. Congress should extend both authorities to all federal land management agencies and authorize those entities to increase the flexibility of GNA and SCA. Federal agencies should modify GNA guidance for all eligible partners to allow 20-year contracts, retention of timber sale revenue, a broader set of authorized restoration services, and the expenditure of project revenue on non-federal lands.
16. Western Governors believe clear, coordinated, and consistent application of federal vegetation management practices is integral to maintaining the health of western forests, preventing dangerous and damaging wildfires, and maintaining grid reliability. The Governors support effective and efficient cross-jurisdictional coordination that enables utilities to undertake necessary vegetation management actions on federal transmission rights-of-way.

17. Congress should direct funding to the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Program to facilitate continued partnership and investment between USFS, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and state foresters to support restoration projects.
18. The USFS business model can be improved by identifying business practice barriers to cross-boundary projects, developing training on state and federal contracting procedures, utilizing Service First authorities, streamlining and consolidating agency processes with partners, and establishing multi-agency pilot projects, which can suggest models for subsequent formal agreement.
19. Western Governors encourage effective deployment of IIA programs, including programs that provide incentives to purchase equipment, participate in new processes, or expand markets to encourage deploying new conservation practices to aid in forest and soil health and restoration.
20. Western Governors support efforts to improve the effectiveness of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in a forest and rangeland management context, including the use of area-wide plans and specialized teams to bolster NEPA capacity. Federal agencies should engage with Governors and states in early, meaningful, and substantive consultation throughout the NEPA process. Western Governors support allowing federal agencies to analyze only the action and no-action alternatives when a project is collaboratively developed, unless a third alternative is proposed during scoping and meets the purpose and need of the project. Federal agencies should consider how interagency shared positions can create regulatory efficiencies and promote greater collaboration between federal, state, territorial, local, and tribal land managers.
21. State, tribal, and federal agencies should look to expand the training for and use of prescribed fire and should look for ways to reduce the statutory, regulatory, and economic barriers to its expanded use on western forests and rangelands.
22. Federal agencies seeking to deploy prescribed fire should work to educate the public about the utility and necessity of prescribed burns to increase cultural acceptance of the practice. Federal agencies should also coordinate with state air quality specialists on prescribed burns, put greater effort into coordinating prescribed fire with mechanical treatments; updating models, tools, and practices for safe burning; and putting a greater emphasis on post-burn preparation. State and federal air quality specialists should work together to identify reforms that reduce barriers to prescribed fire, reduce overall health impacts from smoke, improve interagency use of smoke management best practices, and examine liability protection for fire managers and compensation for private property owners negatively affected by escaped prescribed burns.
23. Land managers across the West should strive to increase workforce capacity for science-based vegetation management activities, oversight, and planning.
24. Traditional Native American cultural burning and tribal ecological knowledge and practices can contribute significantly to improved forest management in the West and should be incorporated more effectively into federal and state planning management processes.

25. Western Governors support efforts to improve a broad range of pre-fire mitigation practices. State and federal agencies should work to develop tools to support mechanical hazardous fuels reduction, especially the removal of underbrush and understory, which are economically unviable in many instances. Land managers should work to further integrate invasive species data and management practices into hazard fuels management and planning.
26. The federal government should consider additional steps to recruit and retain an effective land management and wildland firefighting workforce, including dispatchers. Federal agencies should examine their reliance on 1039 seasonal staff, shift a higher percentage of wildland fire staff from seasonal to permanent and permanent subject to furlough positions, evaluate policies related to the use of Administratively Determined emergency firefighters, and authorize hazard pay for federal firefighters performing prescribed fire operations.
27. Agencies and stakeholders should continue to seek opportunities, including revisions to forest plans, to enhance safety and reduce costs in suppression decisions while protecting communities. Incentives should be created for local governments to take voluntary actions to support the creation and expansion of fire-adapted and smoke-ready communities, including the promotion of education, fuels management projects, and improved integration of community wildfire protection plans with land use decisions when compatible with local goals. Federal land managers are encouraged to make shared wildfire risk mitigation systems (SWRM) and similar tools widely available to communities and decisionmakers.
28. Western Governors support increased attention to the challenges posed in post-wildfire landscapes and wildfire-affected communities. Federal agencies should collaborate with states to designate and train post-fire coordinators to manage post-fire recovery. Doing so would encourage better awareness of post-wildfire restoration funding opportunities available to wildfire-affected communities and more sophisticated coordination of restoration activities to achieve restoration objectives. Land managers should prioritize post-wildfire water quality effects in mitigation planning and execution.
29. Increasing the pace and scale of restoration work like prescribed fire, fuels reduction, active management, and reforestation can help reduce the effects of climate change. Western Governors support the creation and expansion of technical and financial assistance to landowners for carbon sequestration and conservation activities on forests and rangelands. Land managers should integrate small private landowners into ecosystem planning processes and responsible land management practices; additional methods of gaining small landowner participation and engagement should also be explored.
30. Federal agencies need to ensure adequate monitoring, assessment, and analysis of federal forests and rangelands, including data on wildlife, water, soil, and forage. States, territories, and federal agencies are encouraged to consider standardizing and simplifying data collection protocols for federal agencies, states, counties, and tribes which include robust landowner privacy standards and protections. Federal agencies should strive to further improve the collection of socioeconomic data related to forest and rangeland management decisions, and to further incorporate that data into management decisions.
31. The Administration should provide federal funding to develop detailed state rangeland action plans addressing invasive species, wildlife and fish habitat, and water quality and quantity as a complement to State Forest Plans. These rangeland plans should include resource analyses of

soil health, water, plants, animals, and productive capacities to inform management decision-making.

32. Western Governors urge Congress and the Administration to support the research needed for responsible and effective forest and rangeland management in the West. Federal agencies conducting research should also work to ensure that public research projects are focused on research that supports on the ground management needs. Western Governors urge Congress and the Administration to support USFS Research Stations, which play a key role in forest and rangeland management in the West.
33. Federal agencies are encouraged to include cost metrics such as the avoided cost of uncharacteristic wildfire, smoke effects on populations, excessive carbon emissions, and damage to water supply systems and downstream communities when assessing the merits of mitigation projects.
34. The outbreak of the COVID virus in 2020 posed a significant challenge to those working to manage the West's forests and rangelands, particularly wildland firefighters. State, federal, and local wildland fire managers should be encouraged to learn from the pandemic response and, as appropriate, implement effective new management principles developed during that pandemic into permanent practice. Efforts should be made to ensure that emergency response personnel are prepared for similar situations in the future, as well as other potential risks.
35. Mature and old growth forest characteristics should be considered when actively managing forest ecosystems but should not impede the ability to actively manage and restore forest ecosystems. Ecosystem resiliency is, in part, dependent on having a range of various tree age classifications within a forested ecosystem. Mapping tools should be used generically to identify where mature and old growth forests may be present and management actions should be based on locally verified ecosystem resiliency factors and ground truthing.
36. Western Governors support the continued responsible use of federal lands for grazing and increased funding for grazing management, monitoring, and permit condition compliance. Repairing and replacing range improvements, particularly fencing, in a timely manner should be a priority for federal land management agencies in wildfire-affected areas.
37. We support sound, science-based management decisions for federal lands – including adaptive management – and believe these decisions should be based upon flexible policies that take into account local ecological conditions and state planning decisions for fish and wildlife and other human needs.
38. Federal and state land managers should identify opportunities to improve flexibility and integration of grazing management and targeted grazing as tools to achieve restoration and land management goals, including fish and wildlife habitat improvements, drought and wildfire mitigation and resilience, water quality and watershed health, soil health management, promotion of perennial plant health, and control of invasive species such as cheatgrass. They should also promote grazing allotment flexibility on federal lands, within USFS and BLM permitting systems and across ownership boundaries, to respond to changing rangeland conditions and environmental considerations. Western Governors also encourage measures of successful grazing be based in ecological outcomes showing upward trends.

39. Livestock grazing on federal lands is compatible with recreation and wildlife management and fulfills the multiple use and sustained yield mission of both the USFS and BLM. Policies, analyses, or planning decisions that lead to closing allotments must be based on science, documented threats, and causal factors consistent with state policies and programs as well as federal multiple use missions. It should also be taken into consideration that grazing suspensions and closures after wildfire allow for the onset of invasive grasses causing a quicker fire return interval, which can exacerbate the threat of wildfire.
40. Decisions to reduce or suspend grazing should only be made when supported by an appropriate quantitative assessment of long- and short-term trends in rangeland conditions on specific allotments, risk of spread of invasive weeds, diseases to wildlife, or other documented fish or wildlife impacts. Forage use from wild ungulates should be assessed using rigorous quantitative methods when identifying the causal factors that affect range conditions, and those wild ungulates should be managed for their proportional impact. If after consultation with the state, the federal agency decides to reduce, suspend, close, or modify an allotment due to documented harmful wildlife impacts, an alternative allotment, properly authorized pursuant to NEPA, if a suitable alternative allotment exists, must be made available to the displaced operator prior to adjustment of the original allotment. In order to fully implement this policy, the BLM and USFS must have alternative allotments properly authorized under relevant planning documents. This ensures that suspensions or modification of grazing permits will not result in a net loss of Animal Unit Months and that appropriate alternative allotments are available.
41. Grazing permit renewal decisions should be assisted by current site-specific, quantitative data. Federal agencies should engage in meaningful consultation, coordination, and cooperation with livestock grazing permittees, state and local governments, tribes, and stakeholders, prior to initiation and throughout the entire permit renewal process.
42. Federal land management agencies' decisions to reduce or close allotments should only be based upon completion of a full administrative review and analysis, including a thorough review under the provisions of NEPA. The decision process must include opportunities for states, livestock grazing permittees, and other stakeholders to provide input. Allotments should not be closed due to a pending NEPA review without allowing authorized use of the allotment pending a final decision, or the use of an equivalent amount of forage at reasonably equivalent cost to compliant operators.
43. Federal rangeland specialists should have an understanding of the economics and management of ranching operations dependent upon federal lands and should receive the necessary training to comprehensively monitor rangelands, conduct objective analysis, and write sound environmental documents.
44. Clear directives and accountability throughout all levels of the USFS and BLM should be required so that interpretation and implementation is practical and predictable from office to office and individual to individual and informed by an understanding of localized rangeland and ecological conditions, and economic health of ranch operations. BLM should engage collaboratively with livestock grazing permittees when developing Annual Operating Instructions and aim to minimize economic burdens to permittees.
45. Federal land management agencies must give interested state agencies an opportunity to fully participate in or provide input to grazing permit actions – prior to their initiation – including



generalized review of livestock operations on federal lands, any assessment of grazing conditions as part of a federal planning process, review of past compliance of the operator with grazing allotment conditions, and individual allotment reviews. Grazing permit decisions should not be finalized until after this opportunity for meaningful consultation with the states, local governments, and the affected permittees.

46. Governors possess primary decision-making authority for management of state resources. States also have knowledge and experience that are necessary for the development of effective plans. Accordingly, it is essential that Governors have a substantive role in federal agencies' planning processes and an opportunity to review new, revised, or amended federal land management plans for consistency with existing state plans. Federal agencies should provide Governors with sufficient time for a complete state review of federal land management plans, especially when federal plans affect multiple planning areas or resources.
47. The federal government should be a responsible landowner and neighbor and should work diligently to improve the health of federal lands in the West. Federal actions or failures to act on federal lands affect adjacent state and privately-owned lands, as well as state-managed natural resources.
48. Congress and federal agencies should provide opportunities for expanded cooperation, particularly where states are working to help their federal partners to improve management of federal lands through the contribution of state expertise and resources.
49. Western Governors support efforts to examine rural communities' relationships with natural resources, such as forests, rangelands, croplands, wildlife, and source water, as well as the important role that rural communities play in the management of these resources. Policymakers in the West should be encouraged to identify barriers to growth and sustainability in western communities, including a lack of restoration infrastructure, disaster mitigation challenges, dependence upon a single natural resource, and issues related to local capacity, expertise, and funding, and identify best practices to help rural communities overcome these barriers.

**C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE**

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

*This resolution will expire in December 2026. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult <http://www.westgov.org/resolutions> for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.*



## Policy Resolution 2023-01

### Working Lands, Working Communities

#### A. BACKGROUND

1. Western states face a wide array of social, economic, and environmental challenges. More frequent and intense wildfires threaten rural and urban communities, invasive annual grasses are encroaching on America's grasslands, and persistent drought threatens the quality and quantity of water supplies.
2. The fabric of western communities is tightly interwoven with the working lands and ecosystems which they steward and rely upon for cultural, social and economic health. Rural communities have an interdependent relationship with natural resources and working lands: healthy communities can support effective land management practices and the responsible use of their natural resources for multiple purposes.
3. Western lands typically involve a complex array of ownerships, including federal, state, local and tribal governments and private landowners. Addressing land management challenges at scale requires the involvement of all these different land owners and a shared understanding of and participation in management processes, establishment of goals, and collaboratively work toward positive land management outcomes.
4. Land management involves a continuum of activities that respond to the natural cycle of western landscapes. Mitigation activity, which includes manual and mechanical treatments, prescribed fire, and invasive species treatments, is focused on creating healthy landscapes that provide quality habitat for fish and wildlife, maintain water quantity and quality attributes, and are resilient to wildfire. When a wildfire occurs, suppression activity attempts to limit environmental damage and protect human infrastructure and homes. After a wildfire, restoration activity, including salvage operations pursuant to a forest management plan, attempts to alleviate the wildfire's effect on the environment, prevent post-fire soil erosion and flooding, and reestablish landscapes.
5. Many western communities are experiencing devastating effects from ongoing drought, including increased feed prices, the need to reduce or eliminate existing agricultural products and livestock due to lack of available water, leading some producers to consider eliminating agricultural production entirely. Additional effects are being felt by local economies reliant on the recreational economies developed around large reservoirs in western states. Drought also contributes to the increased threat of more frequent and intense wildfire and degrades habitat quality for wildlife and fish. Without substantial assistance, rural economies in western states that rely heavily on agriculture and natural resources will take years to recover from the effects of this devastating drought.
6. The drought is having downstream effects on food security and fiber and energy production, both regionally and nationally. Those effects include low or dried up reservoirs, increased algal blooms, a decrease in hydroelectric power and the potential of shuttering hydroelectric dams because of low water levels. Some drought-affected communities are

already facing drinking water supply constraints, a situation that could become much more widespread with prolonged drought.

7. Data is a fundamental building block for land management planning, decision making, and accountability for outcomes. At present, data may be held by single agencies and may not be in a format accessible to other agencies, states, or the public.
8. Local capacity, including technical expertise, workforce, capital and manufacturing, affect the ability to conduct responsible management on surrounding lands and promote community adaptability and sustainability. Local land use collaboratives and coordinating capacity can have a significant role in land management processes.
9. Many western communities have suffered from the “boom and bust” economic cycles. Sustainable economic opportunities in multiple areas – from land management, extractive industries, and agriculture to recreation and tourism are critical to enabling communities that are healthy and economically resilient.
10. Economic priorities may shift in rural communities in response to market needs. Markets for products that support active management (such mass timber and woody biomass) may be underdeveloped, and environmental conditions may be altered by wildfire or other natural disasters. Adapting to changing economic, environmental, or technological conditions requires the development and use of tools and innovations for rural communities, including the expansion of markets to support management objectives.
11. Capacity constraints across multiple disciplines, from environmental processes and compliance to responsibly conducting land management activities requires a commitment to training, equipping and sustaining a workforce capable of achieving land management objectives. An aging workforce is also a concern in many rural communities. As workers in rural communities retire, additional workforce is needed to maintain the economic viability of these communities.

## **B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT**

### **Collaboration**

#### ***Planning***

1. The US Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) should consider developing regional and cross-boundary collaboratives to facilitate cooperation on ecosystem-level land management challenges. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provides an opportunity for communities to engage in difficult conversations on land use, but communities should be engaged earlier, and at a broader level, to ensure full benefit of the NEPA process.
2. Local collaboratives can be too near-sighted, focusing solely on wildfire mitigation. Land management agencies should consider educational opportunities for collaborative members on broader ecosystem effects of forest and rangeland management (*e.g.*, wildlife habitat, water quality, invasives), which would assist communities seeking to improve overall ecosystem health and resilience.

3. Planning tools like the Shared Wildfire Risk Mitigation system (SWRM) are invaluable in helping communities understand management needs and the effects of land use and wildfire mitigation decisions. These tools help alleviate capacity issues for communities and promote better decision making. Western Governors encourage federal land managers to make SWRM and similar tools widely available to communities and decisionmakers.
4. Land managers should integrate small private landowners into ecosystem planning processes and responsible land management practices. Private industry has looked at US Department of Agriculture (USDA) climate smart credits as a mechanism to spur engagement, but additional methods of gaining small landowner participation and engagement should be explored, including greater participation in local collaboratives, increased partnerships with Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and involvement in shared stewardship agreement processes.
5. County governments have a positive influence on land use planning and resource management through the development of county plans. These county plans can be helpful in crafting state plans, ensuring local views are taken into consideration, and can be persuasive when collaborating with federal agencies on land use planning. State and federal land managers should take steps to ensure that these county resource management and other plans are integrated into their planning processes.
6. Land management agencies should be focused on outcome-based, rather than acre-based, metrics for success. While simply counting acres can provide useful information, agencies should examine how other performance metrics, including the shift of funding over time from suppression activity to mitigation and restoration activities, provides tangible evidence of the value of land management activities.
7. Land managers should prioritize post-wildfire water quality effects in mitigation planning and execution. Post-fire flooding can have a dramatic effect on infrastructure and water quality in downstream communities, and is the cause of many avoidable post-fire deaths in affected areas. Integrating water supply and quality considerations into mitigation work could significantly reduce the cost of post-fire restoration in burned areas.
8. Western Governors encourage land managers to incorporate the effects of drought into land use planning and community sustainability efforts. Drought, among other effects, has impacts on wildfire threat, wildlife and fish habitat, agricultural and ranching productivity, recreational opportunity, power generation, and drinking water availability, all of which threaten community sustainability. Mitigating these effects, to the extent feasible, is critical to ensuring the future vitality of many western communities.
9. Land managers should evaluate the use of area-wide plans under NEPA; this would allow planning for cross-boundary landscapes under a single NEPA process and produce multiple resource benefits.
10. States, tribes and counties can use Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) to facilitate management activities on federal lands. Federal agencies should take steps to ensure that various GNA projects integrate with each other to achieve desired outcomes and provide opportunities to increase collaboration and increase cross-boundary cooperation with these governmental units.

11. Congress should codify and direct funding to the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Program to facilitate continued partnership and investment between USFS and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to support restoration projects where federal and private land ownership and management goals intersect.
12. Western Governors recognize that prescribed fire is an important tool for fuels reduction and ecosystem resilience, but is underused in the West. Prescribed fire has overall air quality benefits, eliminates low- or no-value woody biomass in forest and rangeland environments, and contributes to soil health. Educating the public and creating social license to use the tool is critical; however, recent events have also shown that land managers must put greater effort into coordinating prescribed fire with other mitigation activities, updating models, tools and practices for safe burning, and putting a greater emphasis on post-burn preparation and monitoring to reduce the potential for escaped burns.
13. In many cases, different state, territorial and federal agencies manage the planning and authorization for prescribed fire, which can add delays to implementing prescribed burns, or cause managers to entirely miss opportunities to use the tool. Land managers should consider greater collaboration for prescribed fire activities to increase deployment. Traditional Native American cultural burning and tribal practices are an important part of forest management in the West and may be incorporated more effectively into federal and state planning management processes. Additionally, land managers should have adequate liability insurance to protect individuals and landowners affected by escaped prescribed fires.

### ***Funding and Capacity***

14. Financial support for local collaboratives is important to achieving community engagement, subject matter expertise, and long-term success. Federal agencies should examine structures to improve local collaborative capacity.
15. The transition from active wildfire suppression activity to post-wildfire community responsibilities can be abrupt at the community level. Wildfire affected communities, especially in resource-constrained communities, need subject matter expertise on post-fire restoration and risk management to guide them through recovery. Federal agencies should collaborate with states to designate and train post-fire coordinators to manage post-fire recovery. Establishing a post-fire master agreement would also improve the processes involving incident management and post-fire handoff to local authorities.
16. In many cases, wildfire affected communities must provide a funding match to access restoration programs and resources. Match requirements negatively affect resource-constrained communities' ability to access funds, especially in underserved communities that often lack the personnel or other capacity to administer these programs due to small annual operating budgets. This contributes to inadequate post-fire response, reduced landscape resilience, and suboptimal ecosystem recovery. Federal agencies should examine funding match requirements and consider reducing or eliminating these requirements when the public benefit outweighs the cost of the funding match.

17. Congress should extend the authorization for states to retain revenues from timber sales under GNA, which may then be used to “carry out authorized restoration services on Federal land under the good neighbor agreement;” and if excess funds are available, “to carry out authorized restoration services on Federal land within the State under other good neighbor agreements.” This authority is statutorily scheduled to terminate on October 1, 2023. Congress should also consider extending retained receipt authority to county governments and tribes.
18. Increase flexibility in the GNA program: 1) on road construction/reconstruction; 2) for recreation improvements and forest and rangeland restoration planning and implementation activities; and 3) to support better prioritization of GNA projects across larger geographies.

### ***Agency Cultural Issues***

19. Forestry and land management agencies, including the Department of the Interior (DOI) and USDA, have separated fire management from land management. Western Governors recognize there needs to be integration of these functions to ensure mitigation efforts produce wildfire-resilient landscapes and communities, suppression activities orient toward restoration needs, and restoration work addresses community needs and future landscape resilience.
20. Federal land management agencies should consider investing in facilitation capacity and training for agency personnel and partner organizations involved with collaboratives and wildfire-affected communities. Facilitation skills are an essential element in helping resolve conflict and achieving consensus on mitigation and restoration decisions.

### ***Data***

21. The federal government and states should consider collaboratively developing interagency data hubs to reduce overall operating costs, increase the shareability of data (*i.e.*, establishing data standards and formats that are useable and sharable), and facilitate public access to the data.
22. States, territories and federal agencies should consider establishing coordinators for data collection, transfer and assimilation to ensure that data is shareable and useable between platforms. Western Governors encourage agencies to consider standardizing and simplifying data collection protocols for federal agencies, states, counties and tribes which include robust landowner privacy standards and protections.
23. Federal agencies should incorporate socioeconomic data into the decision-making process. In places with complex economic foundations (agriculture, mining, oil and gas), an economic assessment is key to quantifying and understanding the implications of land use decisions.
24. Western Governors recognize that many local governments do not have the capacity or budget to keep datasets current. Federal agencies should consider implementing a model or framework to share resources to address these capacity and budget issues.

25. Federal, state, and territorial land managers should collaborate on developing integrated methods and processes for visitor data collection and analysis. This would help track where visitors are recreating, the activities they are participating in, and assist in placing tourism infrastructure and addressing other tourism infrastructure-related needs. It would also provide important data to inform needs to shift visitation from overused to less-trafficked areas, sustain tourism if federal land closures are needed, and improve recreational experiences for visitors.

## **Infrastructure**

26. Forest and rangeland management access and infrastructure in much of the West is woefully inadequate to address land management needs. Access is critical to perform management activities for wildfire mitigation, habitat improvement, water quality improvements, invasive species management, and post-fire restoration. Western Governors encourage federal agencies to ensure that appropriate access and infrastructure, in appropriate locations, exists to achieve land management objectives. Repairing and replacing range improvements, particularly fencing, in a timely manner should be a priority for federal land management agencies in wildfire-affected areas.
27. Western Governors encourage federal agencies to integrate infrastructure needs into planning processes and provide long-term, sustainable economic opportunities for communities. Federal agencies should also recognize that regulatory certainty is an important element of enabling infrastructure deployment. Consistency in permitting and policy is key to attracting and maintaining infrastructure investments.
28. Federal agencies should consider integration of permitting processes to establish single point permitting for its permittees. Streamlining permitting processes would provide benefits for land managers, project implementers, and the tourism and recreation industry.
29. Federal agencies should evaluate the use of regional recreation partnerships to address infrastructure and repair needs for tourism-related infrastructure. A GIS tool to identify trails and assess visitation effects would assist land managers in addressing trail degradation and the need for new trail development.
30. Western Governors recognize that additional nursery capacity is needed to address post-wildfire restoration needs. Federal agencies should examine the need for market incentives to encourage sustainable nursery markets and facilitate the development of additional nursery capacity.
31. Western Governors recognize that harvest cost is a significant issue for producers. Economies of scale have affected the packing industry, and in many cases small packing houses are booked months in advance due to lack of capacity. USDA should consider how communities can develop additional small packing capacity to ensure access for producers and improve national food security.
32. The supply chain for basic land management equipment, such as vehicles and chainsaws, is integral to implementing management plans authorized by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The federal government should take steps to address equipment shortages as part of its implementation of the IJA.

## Markets

33. Predictable, long-term supply assurances are needed to attract private infrastructure investment and improve overall forest and rangeland management capacity. DOI and USDA should consider how its annual timber harvesting targets can ensure adequate long-term supply. USFS and BLM should modify GNA guidance to allow 20-year contracts, versus the current limit of 10 years, to provide additional supply stability.
34. Congress should expand GNA and Stewardship Contracting Authority (SCA) to other federal land managers, which is currently limited to USFS and BLM. Land and facilities owned by the National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, and US Army Corps of Engineers would also benefit from projects implemented under GNA and SCA.
35. Many mitigation projects have high treatment costs with low or little opportunity to recoup those costs. This requires a broader view of investments in wildfire mitigation. Western Governors encourage federal agencies to include cost metrics such as the avoided cost of uncharacteristic wildfire, smoke effects on populations, and benefits to water supply systems and downstream communities when assessing the merits of mitigation projects.
36. Different federal agencies use different strategies to achieve land management outcomes. For example, USFS strategy primarily relies on a “payments for product” model, while NRCS primarily uses a “payments for practice” strategy to achieve land management objectives. Agencies should consider lessons learned from these different strategies and how different payment models could be used to improve management outcomes.
37. Given the importance of the tourism economy, statewide strategic tourism plans, developed in collaboration with federal agencies, can improve coordination between tourism operators on federal lands.
38. A significant barrier to producer investments in soil health and restoration is the cost of equipment to test new practices. Federal agencies should consider incentives to purchase equipment, participate in new processes, or expand markets to encourage deploying new conservation practices.
39. Federal agencies should examine the grazing effects different ruminants have on ecosystems and encourage the targeted deployment of ruminants (*i.e.*, cattle, sheep and goats) to achieve specific land management outcomes.
40. Federal agencies should continue to explore strategies for the use of low or no value biomass, removal of which is needed to achieve wildfire mitigation needs, including market incentives for these materials. Biomass power at utility scale may present such an opportunity, but there is market failure to represent the true value of a bioenergy supply chain. Western Governors encourage DOI, USDA and the Department of Energy to continue research and development efforts to find viable markets for low and no value biomass.
41. Western Governors recognize that market interventions can affect land management decision making. Market incentives for one desired outcome may negatively affect overall ecosystem health and resilience. Federal agencies should take steps to eliminate counterproductive ecosystem outcomes that may arise from different market incentives.



Agencies should consider holistic approaches that incorporate ecosystem health, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, water supply and quality and other factors.

42. Federal agencies should expand opportunities for existing USDA Rural Development, US Economic Development Administration (EDA) and Small Business Administration (SBA) programs and financing to support wood product business development and infrastructure.
43. USFS Research and Development, State and Private Forestry, and National Forest System should work collaboratively to support existing and emerging wood products technologies, including the work of the National Forest Products Laboratory, with the goal of expanding markets to maximize restoration activity. Research, development and deployment should be focused on commercially ready technologies with high potential to contribute to current and emerging restoration objectives. These efforts should be aligned with the work of industry partners, and actively pursue public-private partnerships to advance market growth, with the goal of providing sustainable economic development opportunities for rural communities.
44. Western Governors encourage federal agencies to identify initiatives to support markets that can achieve restoration goals and foster near-term opportunities for economic development in rural communities. These opportunities include advancing the use of mass timber in building construction through research and demonstration projects. Expanding utilization of low-value woody biomass for thermal, electric and liquid-fuel energy should also be a priority. Rural electric cooperatives, public utilities, community facility managers, and other partners should contribute to the research, testing and deployment of new and modified heat and electric generation projects and liquid-fuel facilities from hazardous fuels reduction, conifer removal and other forest and rangeland restoration efforts. Finally, agencies should explore opportunities to support new and diversified rangeland products, markets and processing infrastructure, such as mobile meat processing, renewable energy production, local and regional food hubs, and recreation.
45. Congress should pass legislation to promote forest and rangeland product markets and technologies, and expand funding for the Community Wood Energy Program. Western Governors support the use of program funds to create and incentivize state, federal and tribal partnerships in support of these objectives.

### **Workforce Development**

46. Capacity is a significant need in resource-constrained communities. These communities are often not able to invest in basic processes, including writing grant applications and conducting environmental analyses, needed to address landscape needs. Federal agencies should take steps to assist resource-constrained communities in developing these needed capacities.
47. Western Governors recognize that housing costs impede the ability to attract and retain workers in many rural areas. Forest and rangeland management work is inherently place based, making local housing affordability a high priority to retain a workforce capable of planning and executing land management activities. Housing and recruitment are significantly greater challenges in rural communities compared to urban areas. The federal government should focus attention on housing needs and assist communities seeking to attract and retain workforce.

48. Federal capacity to complete NEPA processes in a timely manner is a significant bottleneck to project implementation on federal lands. Western Governors recognize that the workforce responsible for NEPA processes is specialized and encourages federal land management agencies to bolster this capacity to ensure that management projects are implemented on a timely basis.
49. Federal agencies should consider how interagency shared positions can create regulatory efficiencies and promote greater collaboration between federal, state, territorial, local and tribal land managers pursuant to traditional understandings of jurisdictions.
50. Apprenticeship and internship programs can reduce costs associated with building expertise within a workforce. Western Governors recognize that four-year college degree programs are not needed for many forest and rangeland careers and that a focus on trades training provides better workforce outcomes. The federal government and employers should consider work experience and other non-traditional credentials in hiring and promotions and avoid credential creep to ensure adequate capacity for land management project implementation.
51. Western Governors recognize that federal agencies are struggling with recruitment and retention of a qualified workforce. Workforce that could be used for mitigation or restoration work may be deployed to fight wildland fire for a significant portion of the year. Within the wildland firefighting workforce, increased wildfire activity, low salaries, and mental fatigue contribute to workforce loss. Congress and federal agencies have taken steps to address these challenges, but the federal government should consider additional steps to recruit and retain an effective land management and wildland firefighting workforce.
52. Federal agencies should collaborate with states to explore the expanded use of youth, veterans, inmate crews and conservation corps to provide cost-effective capacity to support forest and rangeland restoration work across various land ownerships. Congress should enact legislation, such as the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Act, to make it easier for young people and veterans to complete quality, cost-effective maintenance and improvement projects on public and tribal lands and waters across the country. The federal government, states, and territories should also examine standards on hiring persons with criminal backgrounds to promote employment opportunities for qualified applicants that present minimal risk for future criminal behavior.

**C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE**

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with Congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

*This resolution will expire in July 2025. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult <http://www.westgov.org/resolutions> for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.*