



Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition

January 28, 2021

The Honorable Ms. Deb Haaland
Nominee for Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

Re: Introduction of the Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition — Western Water, Grazing and ESA Priorities

Dear Honorable Deb Haaland;

The Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition (WACC) urges the Biden-Harris Administration to invest in western water and natural resource policies that support our working lands, rivers, and wildlife conservation. Our group has been working together for almost 10 years to develop such policies we believe meet the needs of diverse stakeholders and that will be durable through the passage of time. We look forward to working with you and the Department to create and implement effective solutions to the significant issues of extended drought and water scarcity for both agricultural producers and the natural systems on which they and our native fish and wildlife depend.

The WACC was formed in February 2012 to support the common interests of agriculture, conservation, and others who rely on natural resources and seek to promote an economically viable and ecologically sustainable rural West. No other national coalition combines industry and conservation interests to advocate for resource sustainability in the rural West. We believe

that unless agricultural producers and conservation come together, the public policies and resource management strategies necessary to maintain a viable and sustainable rural West will be impossible to achieve. Below, we expand on our policy priorities for your consideration.

1. Maintain the Water Subcabinet.

The WACC supports the continuation of the Water Subcabinet, an initiative begun under the Trump Administration. As implemented, the Water Subcabinet includes senior officials (Assistant Secretary or equivalent officer) level participation, which we believe is imperative to its success. The WACC supports the coordination and agency leadership provided by the Water Subcabinet to address pressing issues of extended drought, water scarcity and water quality.

2. Increase Investments in Multi-Benefit Irrigation Infrastructure.

WACC members have successfully advocated for increased funding for the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART program. WACC members use WaterSMART programs to implement multi-benefit irrigation infrastructure projects through the Water and Energy Efficiency grant program and participate in drought planning. We particularly want to draw your attention to three important WaterSMART programs that facilitate planning at the basin scale: the Basin Study Program, the Cooperative Watershed Management Program, and [Drought Contingency Planning](#). The latter is designed "to encourage an open and inclusive planning effort that employs a proactive approach to build long-term resiliency to drought." In addition, we recommend that Reclamation support multi-benefit project planning investments through the WaterSMART program, to help irrigation districts and conservation organizations develop robust conservation co-benefits as part of irrigation infrastructure upgrades, in order for them to qualify for the recently authorized increased federal cost share for such multi-benefit projects.

3. Grazing on Public Lands

WACC members support well-managed livestock grazing on public lands. We urge the Department to continue to recognize the multiple use mandate under which livestock producers are authorized to seek permits and the long history of productive relationships among permittees, agency officials, and other key stakeholders – many of whom are represented by members of this coalition. Further, we urge the Department to work with WACC and permittees to explore opportunities to use managed livestock grazing as a tool to achieve specific resource management objectives, including to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and support long-term landscape resiliency.

4. Endangered Species Act

Even prior to the enactment of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1973, many WACC member organizations were committed to wildlife conservation and the promotion of healthy habitat. The coalition urges implementation of the ESA in a manner that promotes and recognizes the value of voluntary conservation and supports a cooperative approach to native species management. In all places, every effort should be made to implement the law in a collaborative manner that minimizes conflict related to private property rights and agricultural and recreational activities.

Conclusion

The WACC is particularly well-suited to help the new Administration develop widely-supported management approaches for working lands and water resources in the West. We are eager to meet with the Department of the Interior team to discuss opportunities for collaborative engagement.

The WACC Director, Jeff Eisenberg, will be in contact to schedule meetings. He can be reached at jeffeisenberg@rockspringrs.com, and 571-355-3073.

Yours Truly,

CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION
CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION
ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND
FAMILY FARM ALLIANCE
FARMERS CONSERVATION ALLIANCE
IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION
MONTANA STOCKGROWERS ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY
OREGON WATER RESOURCES CONGRESS
PUBLIC LANDS COUNCIL
THE NATURE CONSERVANCY
TROUT UNLIMITED
WESTERN GROWERS
WYOMING STOCKGROWERS ASSOCIATION

cc: Ms. Shannon Estenoz, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
Ms. Laura Daniel Davis, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land and Mineral Management
Ms. Tanya Trujillo, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Water and Science
Ms. Camille Touton, Deputy Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation
Ms. Martha Williams, Principal Deputy Director, Fish and Wildlife Service