On December 5, on behalf of the Western Governors’ Association (WGA), North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum (R), Chair, and Oregon Governor Kate Brown (D), Vice Chair, wrote Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Steve Daines (R-MT) commending them for introducing S. 2975, the Stop the Spread of Invasive Mussels Act of 2019. The governors declared, “This bipartisan legislation would enable state and federal agencies to more effectively combat the spread of aquatic nuisance species (ANS) in western waters.”

The letter continued, “Western Governors have long been concerned by the threat that ANS [Aquatic Nuisance Species] pose to western ecosystems and economies. These concerns are articulated in Western Governors’ Association (WGA) Policy Resolution 2019-06, Biosecurity and Invasive Species Management, as well as the recent WGA Biosecurity and Invasive Species Initiative Special Report. Invasive quagga and zebra mussels are of particular interest, as these invaders annually result in millions of dollars in lost economic activity and cause significant environmental damage to waterbodies in the West. It is of paramount importance to prevent the spread of these species into uninfested waterways, including major headwaters and the Columbia River basin - the last major uninfested water system in the continental U.S.”

Further, the letter states: “The primary means by which these aquatic mussels spread is by traveling on the hulls and in the ballast tanks of boats leaving infested waterbodies. The application of effective inspection and decontamination practices as watercraft leave infested waters is the first line of defense against their proliferation. Federal agencies have jurisdiction over several major infested waterbodies in the West, including Lake Mead, Lake Powell and Lake Havasu. The boat inspection and decontamination policies of the agencies managing infested waterbodies - the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and the National Park Service (NPS) - are key to regional efforts to contain these species. These agencies operate several voluntary inspection and decontamination programs at these infested waterbodies, mostly at the request of, and in collaboration with, states. These programs are hampered, however, by a lack of clear statutory authority for federal agencies to manage all high-risk vessels (long-term slipped and moored watercraft) upon their departure from infested waterbodies under federal jurisdiction. The containment of invasive quagga and zebra mussels at infested waters in the West depends upon the collaboration of federal, state and local agencies. Many state-led containment programs benefit from federal cooperation and funding, and state and federal agencies should be encouraged to sustain and expand these effective partnerships.

The letter concluded: “Western Governors’ believe that to adequately protect the West from the movement of aquatic invasive species, federal agencies must be able to act as full partners in invasive species containment efforts and must have the funding and authorities necessary to contain invasive species within lands and waters under their jurisdiction. To this end, federal agencies, including BLM, BOR, and NPS, should be vested with clear authority to manage watercraft upon their departure from infested waterbodies under federal jurisdiction. S. 2975 would add BLM, BOR, and NPS as members of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force and grant all agencies on that Task Force the authority to conduct inspection and decontamination of watercraft and impound, quarantine, or otherwise prevent entry to limit the movement of aquatic nuisance species into and out of U.S. waters. It would also vest federal agencies with the clear authorities necessary to manage invasive species on lands and waters under their jurisdiction and help ensure that state and federal agencies are able to collaboratively protect the West from the spread of ANS. Thank you for your efforts to address this critical issue. We look forward to working with you as S. 2975 moves through the legislative process.”

On November 21, WGA Executive Director Jim Ogsbury wrote Susan Combs, Assistant Secretary, Policy, Management and Budget, providing comments on the Department of the Interior’s (DOI) invasive species strategic plan, which is being developed pursuant to section 7001 of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act (Pub. L. 116-9). The letter states: “Invasive species control is an issue of great concern to Western Governors. The Western Governors’ Association (WGA) has recently pursued...
Several activities and projects related to invasive species management. These include: Creation of the WGA Top 50 Invasive Species in the West, a first-of-its-kind regional prioritization tool; The “WGA Invasive Species Data Management Workshop,” hosted by WGA in Denver, Colorado, in March 2019 and publication of the workshop’s Findings and Recommendations; and Adoption of WGA Policy Resolution 2019-06, Biosecurity and Invasive Species Management.”

In addition, the WGA Biosecurity and Invasive Species Initiative last year focused on “…the effects invasive species have on western landscapes; identified and synthesized best practices for the control and management of invasive species; and explored emerging policy tools and technologies to address major biosecurity and invasive species risks. The Initiative’s Special Report contains more than 35 recommendations to improve biosecurity and invasive species management in the West.” Key recommendations included creation of a Western Invasive Species Council (WISC) to “enhance coordination between existing state invasive species councils; improve communication and collaboration on regional biosecurity and invasive species control efforts; and advocate for regional needs at the federal level.” WGA also recommended convening of an “Invasive Mussel Leadership Forum” to assemble state, federal and tribal agency staff to determine common interagency priorities for the prevention and containment of invasive zebra and quagga mussels in the western U.S.” These WGA documents were provided as attachments to their comments, with a request that they be considered in development of the DOI-wide invasive species strategic plan.

**WATER RESOURCES**

**Drought/Irrigation/Water Use**

“Water Wars That Defined The West Are Heading East,” was the title of an article on the front page of the Wall Street Journal on December 3. It observed, “Water stress, a hallmark of the American West, is spreading east…. Increasing competition for water is playing out across the Eastern U.S., a region more commonly associated with floods and hurricanes and one that was mostly a stranger, until recently, to the type of bitter interstate water disputes long seen in the West…. Eastern farmers’ rising thirst for water, together with urban growth and climate change, now is taxing water supplies and fueling legal fights that pit states against each other. The shift has exposed the region to changes in water supply occurring globally as swelling populations, surging industrial demand and warmer temperatures turn a resource seen as a natural right into a contested one….”

The article cites U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) sources indicating water use for irrigation from 1960 to 2015 increased the most in Arkansas, followed by Missouri, Mississippi and Florida. Every state east of the 100th Meridian experienced an increase in water use for irrigation, except Louisiana where it is unchanged. Irrigated acres in the East rose from zero in 1960 to over 15 million acres by 2015. Over the same time, irrigated acres in the West peaked before reaching 50 million acres about 1980, then declined before fluctuating somewhere above 45 million acres since the 1990s. Water use for irrigation in the West increased between 1960 and 2015 in Kansas, Nebraska, Montana, Oklahoma and Wyoming, but declined significantly in Texas, California, Washington and other western states. It was unchanged in New Mexico.

USGS estimated consumptive use of water withdrawn for irrigation nationwide for 2015, after dropping such estimate after 1995. All irrigation withdrawals were considered freshwater, and included irrigation of golf courses, parks, nurseries, turf farms, cemeteries, and other self-supplied landscape-watering uses. Irrigation water use includes self-supplied withdrawals and deliveries from irrigation companies or districts, cooperatives, or governmental entities.

For 2015, total irrigation withdrawals were 118.000 million gallons per day (Mgal/d), which accounted for 42% of total freshwater withdrawals. Withdrawals from surface-water sources were 60,900 Mgal/d, which accounted for 52% of the total irrigation withdrawals. Groundwater withdrawals were 57,200 Mgal/d. About 63.5 million acres were irrigated in 2015, 34.7 million acres (55%) with sprinkler systems, 23.3 million acres with surface water flood systems, and 5.49 million acres with micro-irrigation systems. The national average application rate for 2015 was 2.09 acre-feet per acre. See https://doi.org/10.3133/cir1441.

Sources of data for irrigation withdrawals and irrigated acres included State and Federal crop reporting programs, irrigation districts, canal companies, incorporated management areas, satellite data depicting cropland landscapes, and evapotranspiration estimates. Withdrawals were estimated using information on irrigated crop acreages by crop type and specific crop water-consumption coefficients, or irrigation-system application rates, as well as soil-moisture balance models. Estimation methods varied from one State to the next and sometimes between geographic areas within a State. Estimation methods ideally included adjustments for climate, system efficiencies, conveyance losses, and other irrigation practices, such as pre-growing season irrigation, salt leaching, or frost protection. Other methods for estimating irrigation withdrawals included extrapolation of sample data on crop water-application rates or power-consumption coefficients. See https://www.usgs.gov/mission-areas/water-resources/science/irrigation-water-use?qt-science_center_objects=0#qt-science_center_objects.

The WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL is an organization of representatives appointed by the Governors of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.