

# Policy Resolutions

## STATE-FEDERAL RELATIONSHIP

### WGA Policy Resolution 2024-01, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship

Improving state-federal communication and coordination is among the Western Governors' highest priorities. In the absence of a Constitutional delegation of authority to the federal government, state authority should be presumed sovereign. Each executive department and agency should have a clear and accountable process to provide states with early, meaningful, and substantive input in the development of federal regulatory policies. Where authority has been delegated by the federal government to the states, states should be granted the maximum administrative discretion possible and should be treated as partners and co-regulators.

## COMMUNITY AND OPPORTUNITY

### WGA Policy Resolution 2023-03, Tax-Exempt Federal Lands

and Secure Rural Schools The federal government must honor its historic Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) agreement with states and counties in the West to compensate them for the presence of tax-exempt federal lands within their borders. Full and predictable payments under the PILT and Secure Rural Schools (SRS) programs are vital to the provision of state and county public goods and services, such as roads, emergency response, and wildlife and natural resources protection. Western Governors support legislative efforts to improve the predictability and reliability of PILT payments and ensure forest counties receive stable SRS payments.

### WGA Policy Resolution 2023-04, Housing is Foundational to

the Success of the West Due to rapid population growth and housing shortages, housing is a significant challenge in urban, suburban, and rural areas across the West. This resolution highlights Western Governors' policy related to the availability and affordability of housing in western states and territories. While many of the policies and programs affecting housing are within the jurisdiction of local governments, a variety of federal programs influence housing markets and housing development. In the resolution, the Governors recommend actions to improve federal housing programs and resources so that they function more effectively for western states and territories.

### WGA Policy Resolution 2023-05, Western Agriculture

Western Governors support an array of funding, trade,

education, research, and workforce development programs that promote agricultural contributions to the economies and quality of life in western states. Extended drought, changes in climate, and other factors have had significant effects on agricultural practices throughout the West. The Governors, in this resolution, provide policy recommendations to support and strengthen the health and prosperity of western agricultural communities and their economies.

### WGA Policy Resolution 2023-06, Rural Development

Healthy, vibrant, and prosperous rural communities are critical to western states. Rural communities, however, face a variety of challenges with respect to economic development, infrastructure, and quality of life. This resolution details policies and recommendations to strengthen rural communities and businesses and ensure that programs delivering state and federal resources are efficient and accessible.

### WGA Policy Resolution 2023-07, Broadband Connectivity

In this resolution, Western Governors highlight the importance of high-speed internet (broadband) for communities across the West. The Governors discuss common infrastructure challenges – vast distances, unforgiving terrain, and multi-jurisdictional permitting – that complicate broadband deployment projects in western states and territories. Their recommendations address new federal broadband investments and programs, data and mapping, digital equity, and strategies to help connect rural and tribal communities.

### WGA Policy Resolution 2023-08, Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs and other federal agencies offer many programs and services for veterans who struggle with complex challenges after their service, including higher unemployment rates, homelessness, food insecurity, physical and psychological wounds, and bureaucratic barriers. This resolution highlights Western Governors' policy related to veterans' issues and strategies for improving federal programs. Their recommendations address collaboration between federal and state governments, capacity and staffing needs, claims processes, and access to and awareness of critical services.

### WGA Policy Resolution 2024-06, Transportation Infrastructure in the Western United States

The resolution addresses surface transportation needs in the West. Western Governors emphasize their support for a long-term federal funding mechanism for the maintenance and expansion of both surface transportation networks and ports. The resolution highlights the need for flexible and accessible funding that allows states

to optimize infrastructure investment alongside efficient processes and waivers to ensure timely deployment of funding. It also outlines the unique air service needs of rural communities, and the need for state-federal collaboration when planning and siting electric vehicle infrastructure.

#### **WGA Policy Resolution 2025-03, Workforce Development in the Western United States**

Education and workforce training that is aligned with industry demand creates opportunity for students and workers to secure good jobs and builds a skilled workforce that can support economic growth. Western Governors call for expanding work-based learning, supporting high-quality career and technical education, and facilitating lifelong learning through workforce development policies. Governors also emphasize the need for flexibility in workforce system funding to help states anticipate and respond to changing economic conditions with creative solutions. The Governors support increased investment in state data infrastructure and better alignment across federal workforce, housing, human services, and education programs to improve the delivery of services.

#### **Policy Resolution 2025-09, Recreation and Tourism on Public Lands**

This resolution articulates Western Governors' policy on the management of recreation and tourism on public lands. Governors support public access and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities while protecting ecological, economic, and cultural resources, and encourage federal agencies to coordinate and collaborate with states and local stakeholders. The resolution recommends actions that the federal government should take to ensure federal land management agencies have the necessary resources to accommodate increased visitation, enhance the visitor experience, support local economies, and maintain public lands for multiple uses. The resolution also encourages the federal government to clearly communicate contingency plans and provide clear direction to regional and local land managers, communities, and state tourism offices in the case of future potential federal government shutdowns to minimize negative impacts to communities and tourists.

## **ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT**

#### **WGA Policy Resolution 2023-02, States' Share of Royalties and Leasing Revenues from Federal Lands and Minerals**

The federal government has codified several historic agreements and programs to compensate western states for costs associated with the presence of tax-exempt federal lands within their borders. The federal government must honor its obligations to share royalty and lease payments with states and counties. States, as recipients of revenues from these

programs and agreements, should be provided meaningful and substantial opportunities for consultation in the development of federal policy affecting those revenues.

#### **WGA Policy Resolution 2023-10, Infrastructure Permitting**

A clear, consistent, focused, and effective environmental review process is essential to protect environmental resources, ensure public participation, and facilitate timely decision making in the design, financing, and execution of critical infrastructure and land management projects. These review processes can be improved and streamlined while still providing meaningful opportunities for public input and promoting a safe and healthy environment for our citizens. This resolution makes several recommendations for Congress and the Administration to consider as they continue evaluating permitting processes. These include prioritizing the hiring of qualified permitting staff in agency field offices, streamlining review processes for similar projects delivering an environmental or conservation outcome, and making processes more accessible to underserved or historically disadvantaged communities, including small and rural communities. The resolution also emphasizes that federal permitting policies and efforts to streamline permitting processes should be flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of local communities and that federal efforts should increase transparency, accessibility, and agency accountability for all projects.

#### **WGA Policy Resolution 2024-08, Cleaning Up**

**Abandoned Hardrock Mines in the West** "Good Samaritans" are entities that voluntarily clean up abandoned mine sites. These Good Samaritans face potential liability under the Clean Water Act (CWA), the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), despite not having owned or operated the mine. In the resolution, Western Governors call on Congress to enact legislation to protect Good Samaritans from potential liabilities under CWA, CERCLA, and RCRA. Western Governors support pilot projects, including projects under state-led programs, to address site-specific liabilities if comprehensive legislation addressing these issues is not possible in the short term. The resolution also emphasizes that states are best suited to determine Good Samaritan eligibility and manage reclamation plans and calls for full appropriations for the Abandoned Hardrock Mine Reclamation Program to address the backlog of abandoned hardrock mine inventory.

#### **WGA Policy Resolution 2024-09, Water Quality in the West**

Clean water is essential to strong economies, healthy ecosystems, and quality of life in the West. In this resolution, Governors emphasize states' role as co-regulators in the implementation of the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. It also conveys Western Governors' shared perspective on the role of federal

assistance in meeting federal water quality standards, including technical assistance and funding for the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds.

#### **WGA Policy Resolution 2025-01, Energy in the West**

Western energy production and delivery infrastructure are indispensable to meeting our nation's energy demand, and the energy sector is a significant contributor to the economic success of many western communities. The effects of extreme weather events, the integration of clean energy resources, increasing demand from data centers, the electrification of vehicles and buildings, and the retirement of traditional energy generating assets are all contributing to fundamental shifts in the energy and electricity sectors. This resolution expresses Western Governors' collective priorities and recommendations for energy in the West, including grid modernization and resilience, innovation and technology, and economic and workforce development, while recognizing that energy priorities, use, and development vary widely among western states and territories. The resolution also incorporates the recommendations emerging from two recent WGA Chair initiatives: the Heat Beneath Our Feet initiative of Colorado Governor Jared Polis, and the Decarbonizing the West initiative of Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon.

#### **WGA Policy Resolution 2025-02, Air Quality Protection and**

**Management** Clean air is essential for strong communities and quality of life. Air quality is influenced by many human activities and natural phenomena. Western states have generated significant emissions reductions since the Clean Air Act was originally passed in 1963. Only by working together to understand and address air quality challenges in the West will states and federal partners make further improvements to air quality. This resolution presents Western Governors' recommendations to improve state-federal cooperation in the regulation of air quality, ozone and particulate matter, exceptional events, regional haze, methane, and hydrofluorocarbon emissions. The resolution also expresses support for the increased use of prescribed fire to reduce the air quality effects of uncharacteristic wildfire in the West, and encourages greater state-federal collaboration on smoke management planning and other tools to facilitate the use of prescribed fire where appropriate.

#### **WGA Policy Resolution 2025-06, National Minerals Policy**

Western Governors recognize the importance of strengthening domestic mineral supply chains to support energy, economic, and national security through policies and legislation that unlock our domestic mineral potential and ensure access to critical minerals. The resolution calls for a national minerals policy that enables mineral exploration and development by, in part, addressing federal permitting complexities that create uncertainty or extensive delays. The resolution supports addressing litigation risks and streamlining federal permitting processes through the use of mechanisms like categorical

exclusions. It also supports non-extractive mining operations such as processing, recycling, and reuse, which are also vital elements of a stable and secure domestic mineral supply chain.

#### **Policy Resolution 2025-07, Radioactive Materials**

**Management** The resolution establishes Western Governors' policy on radioactive materials management. Specifically, the resolution supports DOE's safe and uneventful transportation of transuranic waste through western states to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant disposal site in New Mexico. It notes the need for ongoing compliance with federal radioactive waste transport safety requirements and early coordination and effective communication with state, tribal and local governments. The resolution also affirms that no radioactive waste storage or disposal facility should be located within the geographic boundaries of a western state or U.S. territory without the written consent of the current Governor.

## **HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

#### **WGA Policy Resolution 2023-09, Missing and Murdered**

**Indigenous Persons** American Indian and Alaska Native people, particularly women, are disproportionately likely to experience violence, be murdered, or go missing. This resolution highlights Western Governors' policy to address this crisis. While many of these policies and programs are primarily within the jurisdiction of state and tribal governments, a variety of federal policies influence the resources available to tribes and states. In the resolution, Western Governors recommend actions to expand law enforcement capacity, shore up survivor support systems, and improve collaboration and coordination at all levels of government.

#### **WGA Policy Resolution 2024-04, Combating the Opioid**

**Crisis** The opioid epidemic has become one of the nation's most devastating and lethal public health and safety crises. This new resolution highlights the challenges posed by the potency and availability of these drugs and the social and economic damage they inflict on communities and contains Western Governors' policy related to combating rising rates of opioid use disorders, overdoses, and deaths. The Governors support efforts to identify and mitigate emerging threats, curb the supply and distribution of illicit opioids and the inappropriate use of prescriptions, and provide access to a full range of effective prevention, treatment, and recovery approaches.

#### **WGA Policy Resolution 2024-05, Disaster Preparedness**

**and Response** The resolution recognizes the role Governors have in coordinating the four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness,

response, and recovery. It also highlights federal agencies' roles and emphasizes the need for cooperation and clear communication between all levels of government and members of the public. In any disaster or emergency situation, good communication is key to developing and executing an effective response, promoting public confidence in that response, and empowering citizens to make informed decisions about their safety and welfare.

**WGA Policy Resolution 2025-05, Physical and Behavioral Health Care in Western States** Access to high-quality physical and behavioral health care services is a cornerstone for maintaining and enhancing the quality of life in western states. However, the West faces unique challenges that can hinder the ability to provide comprehensive health care to western residents. The resolution outlines Western Governors' policies and recommendations to address a wide range of health care challenges, including growing rates of behavioral health conditions, workforce shortages across the health care industry, social and economic conditions that affect health outcomes, and barriers to care in rural, frontier, and tribal communities. The Governors also acknowledge the importance of strong state-federal collaboration to ensure that all levels of government are working together to promote the health of the West's citizens.

## LAND MANAGEMENT

**WGA Policy Resolution 2022-10, Federal-State Land Exchanges and Purchases** Most federally owned lands are located in western states, and they are often interspersed with state, tribal, county, municipal, and private lands. This ownership pattern complicates various land management activities, including wildfire mitigation, habitat conservation, and watershed protection. In this resolution, Western Governors call on Congress to simplify and expedite federal-state land exchange, sale and conveyance processes to help address checkerboard land ownership challenges in the West. The resolution also encourages the Bureau of Land Management to fully leverage its authority to dispose of public land parcels for other public purposes.

**WGA Policy Resolution 2024-02, National Forest and Rangeland Management** 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. This resolution addresses a variety of national forest and rangeland challenges, emphasizing that effective management is only possible through coordination between federal, state, local, and tribal land management agencies, including collaborative, cross-boundary management strategies. The resolution

articulates Western Governors' policy recommendations relating to wildfire mitigation, suppression, and recovery. It also addresses major land management topics such as workforce development, infrastructure for active forest management, grazing administration, and forest products.

**WGA Policy Resolution 2024-03, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act** This resolution updates Western Governors' policy positions on species management and conservation issues. The resolution expresses the Governors' support for increased voluntary and proactive management efforts and use of best available science, while acknowledging the variability in state approaches to wildlife and habitat conservation. The resolution also contains Western Governors' policy on wildlife migration corridors and habitat.

**WGA Policy Resolution 2024-07, Water Resource Management in the West** The resolution addresses the management of water resources in the West, highlighting states' sovereign authority over the allocation of water within their boundaries. The resolution also emphasizes the importance of federal infrastructure investment in delivering clean and reliable water to communities throughout the West. Governors support federal programs and the role they play in managing water resources including programs under the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Geological Survey, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The resolution also addresses emerging cybersecurity threats.

**WGA Policy Resolution 2025-04, Compensatory Mitigation** Compensatory mitigation plays an important role in wildlife management and conservation, offsetting the loss of wetland and aquatic resource functions in a watershed affected by development activities. This resolution conveys the Governors' policy on compensatory mitigation and federal deference to state regulatory policies. It highlights the Governors' support for the federal government adhering to state mitigation policies and recognizing and incorporating the mitigation hierarchy into federal planning processes, and using adaptive management practices to avoid rigid mitigation requirements and formal regulations.

**Policy Resolution 2025-08, Biosecurity and Invasive Species Management** This resolution addresses invasive species management in western states and territories, including: a call to address the destructive relationship between invasive grasses and wildfires; mechanisms to enhance regional invasive species research, planning, and coordination; and recommendations to Congress and federal agencies on improving invasive species management on federal lands and supporting state-led management efforts.

**Contact: Troy Timmons, Policy Director**

ttimmons@westgov.org • 303.623.9378 • 1700 Broadway, Suite 500 • Denver, CO 80290

westgov.org   