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**“Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future”**

The 2006 WGA report entitled “Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future” (WGA Water Report) contains numerous recommendations and action items to encourage and assist local, state and federal planners and managers to coordinate effectively and to prepare for and meet the ever-increasing challenges associated with water management in the arid West. It was crafted with the assistance of a large and diverse group of stakeholders, and it provides a roadmap for addressing the water challenges facing the West.

The WGA asked the WSWC to assist in the implementation of the WGA Water Report’s recommendations. Accordingly, the WSWC prepared a “scope of work” outlining several tasks. In carrying out these tasks, a varied and diverse group of stakeholders made significant contributions in the context of a number of conferences and workshops sponsored by the WGA and the WSWC, in association with other agencies and organizations.

Further, given the significant role of the federal government in water resource management in the West, the WGA and the WSWC invited several federal agencies to assist in providing information and technical assistance.

The 2006 Western Governors’ Associations’ Report contained broad ranging recommendations to address the ever-increasing challenges associated with water management in the West. The progress to date and the “next steps” identified in this 2008 report represent a productive start in implementing these recommendations in what will be an ongoing process.

The success in this endeavor will depend in large part on state initiative and innovation, since states have the pivotal role in water planning, as well as allocating and protecting the resource. But in the West, where the federal government is a substantial landowner and has a significant regulatory presence, the federal role is also critical. Cooperation among the states and the federal government continues to be vital.

To support the state leadership role, the federal government should help by providing a rational federal regulatory framework, together with technical and appropriate financial assistance. It will be paramount to move state and local government participation back into the process of federal decision making, before too much momentum has been built towards policy decisions.

Developing optimal solutions to the challenges laid out in the 2006 WGA water report will require an integrated approach and greater partnerships among state, local and federal agencies. This approach should consider all needs together, develop effective solutions which are complementary rather than conflicting, and provide direction for selecting the most appropriate governmental entities or organizations for implementing solutions.

We believe that implementing the following recommendations will bring us closer to this paradigm, and to success in implementing many of the other “next steps” identified in this report. As such, they have the potential to fundamentally change for the better the way states and the federal government carry out their respective responsibilities regarding water management in the West.

1. The Western States Water Council (WSWC) should enter into a formal agreement to create a “Western States Federal Agency Support Team” made up of representatives of federal agencies having water resource responsibilities and create a WSWC “liaison position” to facilitate collaboration.
2. The WGA should urge Congress to require federal water resource agencies to include “Integrated Water Resources Planning and Assistance” as one of their primary missions, with the goal of:
  - (a) changing the way water planning is conducted by encouraging more comprehensive plans developed under state leadership with federal assistance; and
  - (b) reducing inefficiencies caused by the present mode of project-specific responses to competing demands, contradictory actions by multiple state, local and federal water agencies, and hastily conceived reactions to the latest real or perceived crisis.
3. Federal agencies should use state water plans
  - (a) to help determine national water policy and priorities that best align federal agency support to states and
  - (b) to inform decision making regarding regional water issues.