

ORGANIZATIONS
Western Regional Partnership (WRP)

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Special Report #2375

WRP's 2019 Principals' Meeting was held near Oceanside, California on November 18-19, at the Marine Corps' Camp Pendleton. The mission of WRP is to provide a proactive and collaborative framework for senior-policy level federal, state and tribal leadership to identify common goals and emerging issues in the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah and to develop solutions that support WRP Partners and protect natural and cultural resources, while promoting sustainability, homeland security and military readiness. The WRP region contains significant military assets, federal and tribal lands, energy and transportation infrastructure systems, air, space, watersheds, wildlife, and ecosystems.

WRP's value as a forum help partners identify and share best practices. The goals of WRP are to: (1) serve as a catalyst for improved regional coordination; (2) address common goals, identify and solve potential conflicts; (3) provide a forum for information exchange, issue identification, problem solving and recommendations; (4) adopt strategic priorities; (5) leverage existing resources and linking of efforts to better support key projects; and (6) identify geospatial requirements and leverage existing tools and resources to support WRP priorities.

Participants were welcomed by Kate Gordon, Director of California Governor Newsom's Office of Planning and Research. She addressed challenges related to resiliency and sustainability in California, using as an example the continuing wildfires raging in the State and emergency power shut offs implemented due to high winds to avoid conditions that might spark new catastrophic fires. Both have had serious economic and environmental impacts, disrupting communications, business, commerce, government services, water and wastewater treatment, and personal day-to-day activities. She is also the Senior Advisor to the Governor on Climate. She declared, "All of us are in this together.... Climate change and the impacts on our systems is reality." California is a testbed for climate change with fires, floods, landslides, extreme heat, declining snowpack and sea level rise. California is also home to dozens of military bases and much of our combat training and readiness capacity.

Brig. Gen. Daniel B. Conley, Camp Pendleton commanding general, briefly welcomed WRP members and guests.

WRP is co-chaired by Utah Governor Gary Herbert, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainment Robert McMahon, and the Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary for Lands and Minerals Management (currently vacant). Mike Mower, Governor Herbert's Deputy Chief of Staff, represented him and addressed the benefits of working together to address the challenges we face. He noted Governor Herbert often quotes his father when staff suggest the difficulty of any task: "Work will win, when wishy washy wishing won't!" Allison Sands, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Infrastructure, represented Mr. McMahon. She stated that the Department of Defense (DOD) is committed and excited about finding creative solutions to land management conflicts, streamline infrastructure development, habitat rehabilitation and endangered species protections, and other challenges. These are complicated problems requiring collaborative work to leverage resources and tools.

Alex Herrgott, Executive Director, Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council, and Chris French, Deputy Chief, National Forest Systems, U.S. Forest Services (USFS), both provided an update regarding significant federal activities. Herrgott explained the Council is a one-stop shop with executive level oversight to address issues related to efficient federal permitting processes and schedules. States can also opt in and commit to streamlining efforts. Alex can mediate disputes among decisionmakers and if unresolved within 30 days, can elevate them to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

French addressed unsustainable forest management practices, the loss of watershed functions, wildfire and other challenges. The scale of operations needed transcend federal agency, state and community boundaries. He observed, related specifically to wildfire, "Landscapes are reacting in ways we haven't seen before." USFS manages 80 million acres at high risk of wildfire and one-third of that at risk of catastrophic losses. How do we protect lands, forests and adjacent communities. He noted that 15 years ago about 15% of the USFS budget was spent on wildfires, now it is 60%. We have seen a change in approach and culture

toward shared stewardship. We need to work together to treat the right acres, in the right places, to achieve the right results.

A number of tribal representatives attended and participated. A tribal invocation was given by Chris Devers, former Pauma Band Chairman of the Luiseno Indians, on whose ancestral tribal lands Camp Pendleton is located.

Juana Majel-Dixon, Secretary, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), and also a member of the Pauma Band was a special guest speaker. She highlighted the role of the Colorado River as a lifeline to 22 tribes. The river is part of their religion and creation story. It also flows through 23 national parks and refuges. Water, fish and game don't recognize political boundaries. She noted the role of the Gila River Tribe in leasing water to groundwater replenishment districts in Arizona, working together to fallow land and leave the unused water in Lake Mead, which was a key to completion of Arizona's Drought Contingency Plan (DCP). She added that the subsequent authorizing legislation to implement basinwide DCPs was enacted by Congress in just eleven days! Partnerships involving tribes are important for energy, environment, natural resource and infrastructure projects working together as sovereigns. Memoranda of understanding exist between tribes and the DOD for a number of protection and management purposes.

Clayton Honyumptewa, Hopi Tribe, Director of Natural Resources, described a 20-year drought that has had a significant impact on the tribe, which has only one small reservoir, no lakes, five dry washes and problematic arsenic issues. He also talked about the retirement of the Navajo coal-fired power plant, and related coal mine. The latter has generated royalties for the tribe that account for 85% of tribal funding, on top of the loss of jobs for tribal members.

Four plenary sessions covered energy resilience and infrastructure threats, DOD range modernization and resilience to support mission readiness, trends and policies for unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), and all hazards disaster resilience and response. Weather events, wildfires and cyber attacks threaten the reliability of electric services, and in turn water-related services. The threats and impacts cross state boundaries. Proactive steps by stakeholders include the use of distributed generation and microgrids.

DOD's strategy to ensure mission resilience and readiness involves modernizing systems and infrastructure, and requires land, air and sea space (as well as electromagnetic spectrum) for testing, training and operations.

UAS uses, technology, law and policy are all rapidly evolving, creating both new opportunities and threats for the military, law enforcement, state and local governments, commerce and business. Regulation provides safety and certainty.

Natural and man-made disasters increasingly strain emergency managers' ability to mitigate and respond to earthquakes, hurricanes, flooding, high winds, wildfires, drought, heavy rains, mudslides and cyber threats. Often there are multiple and cascading threats. The impacts of an earthquake in the California Bay-Delta could threaten much of California's water supply. The importance of better forecasting of microclimates for operational decisions was also discussed.

Finally, a state roundtable included remarks by Jim Ogsbury, Executive Director, Western Governors' Association (WGA), as well as officials from Arizona, California, Colorado, and New Mexico. Jim emphasized the substantive initiatives and policy statements from WGA related to rural development, forest and rangeland management, invasive species, water and water quality, and the environment. He also emphasized the role of the states and noted establishment of a federalism center for excellence. North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum, WGA Chair, is focused on rural development through enhanced economic opportunity, connectivity and community, including education, health care and the arts. Others on the panel outlined the importance of military installations and personnel in their states, particularly the contributions to their economy. Growth and encroachment on military bases are common problems.