



Working Lands Roundtable

The Working Lands Roundtable was launched in 2018 as a vehicle for the ongoing implementation of Western Governors' Association natural resource-focused initiatives, including policy recommendations emerging from WGA Chair Initiatives. The Roundtable also examines regional cross-cutting resource management issues and brings together a broad coalition of stakeholders to identify emerging threats to the viability of western working landscapes. In 2019, WGA tapped the expertise of hundreds of resource management and policy experts at two Roundtable workshops and executed a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to pursue collaborative projects regarding wildfire response, vegetation management and invasive annual grasses.





Themes and Projects

Roundtable workshops, numerous facilitated small group work sessions, and working groups have surfaced a number of interrelated and inter-jurisdictional themes as focal areas under the Working Lands Roundtable.

Cheatgrass and Invasive Annual Grass Management

Large-scale infestation of cheatgrass and other invasive annual grasses on western forests and rangelands present significant challenges to western working landscapes. The presence of cheatgrass and other invasive annual grasses alters fire and hydrological regimes and can lead to significant habitat alteration or destruction for fish and wildlife species. WGA developed the Western Cheatgrass Network in response to establish a new multi-agency/multi-stakeholder network to develop new approaches to invasive cheatgrass management, support local efforts to implement those approaches, and share best practices between land managers.

Vegetation Management

WGA Policy Resolution 2017-10, *National Forest and Rangeland Management*, states that “clear, coordinated and consistent application of federal vegetation management practices is integral to maintaining the health of western forests, preventing dangerous and damaging fires, and maintaining grid reliability.” WGA is facilitating a collaborative dialogue through the Roundtable to improve the efficiency

and effectiveness of vegetation management in or near transmission and distribution corridors to reduce the likelihood of wildfire in the West. The effort is also seeking to address regulatory barriers to vegetation management activities; expand authorized activities to areas adjacent to the right-of-way; focus on the complexities of vegetation management on and adjacent to transmission corridors that cross multiple land ownerships; and improve coordination across jurisdictions to increase the efficiency and reduce the cost of these activities.

Interagency Wildfire Disaster Response

After a wildfire, multiple federal agencies can be involved with response activities: the affected land management agency or agencies, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). State and local governments are also integral to disaster response. In fact, under the *National Response Framework*, local governments have the lead role in response and recovery. Recognizing the complexity of the process, WGA and federal agency partners are developing a “roadmap” of federal assistance

available to local governments and states after a disaster. The roadmap will provide a comprehensive overview of available assistance and guide federal, state and local governments in deploying this assistance for disaster response and restoration activities.

Collaborative Conservation

Western states are home to diverse and bountiful fish and wildlife populations that contribute to economic opportunity and quality of life. Investments in fish and wildlife conservation are imperative to maintaining resilient working landscapes managed according to principles of multiple use. However, species conservation and working lands development are at times characterized as competing interests. To combat this narrative, WGA is leading an effort to develop holistic, collaborative, proactive and innovative solutions to challenges facing western fish and wildlife populations and communities. The effort to advance collaborative conservation will identify opportunities for more proactive conservation of at-risk species and facilitate greater coordination among stakeholder groups to conserve mutually identified priority habitats and working landscapes.

Workshops

The two workshops conducted in 2019 provided a forum for a diverse group of management and policy experts to identify emerging issues impacting resource management in the West, share success stories and best practices, and formulate recommendations to advance Governors' cross-boundary conservation priorities. Key findings and a summary of the Roundtable workshops follow.

Boise, Idaho: Nov. 3, 2019

While the Spring workshop consisted of panel discussions on emerging issues to inform the focus of future Roundtable efforts, the Fall session focused on small group work sessions to inform the development of policy recommendations and next steps for projects focusing on the four key Roundtable themes. Idaho Gov. Brad Little kicked off the workshop with a keynote. A portion of top-line findings for each of the work groups follow.

Cheatgrass and Invasive Annual Grass Management

- More work needs to be done to combine invasive species management with wildfire/hazardous fuels management efforts.
- The tools to manage this integration exist, but a broad strategy and potential regulatory revisions are needed to realize the full potential of these tools.
- A working group will develop a common spatial strategy to address cheatgrass and invasive annual grass management at a regional scale. This strategy will employ new analytical tools and proven management practices and focus on early detection and rapid response principles to protect biologically intact "core" areas.

Vegetation Management

- Challenges to reducing wildfire risk along utility corridors include a lack of interagency and intra-agency coordination, consistency in policies and guidance, limited agency resources, lack of knowledge regarding utility requirements,

Denver, Colorado: April 3-4, 2019

The purpose of this workshop was to identify issues, discuss collaboration and at-risk species conservation from a variety of perspectives. NRCS Chief Matt Lohr spoke about the service's work. Attendees also contemplated how large-scale inter-disciplinary challenges such as wildfire and invasive species affect collaboration at a number of different scales.

Among other subjects, workshop sessions discussed: elements of

successful collaboration on a number of different resource challenges; the effect of cheatgrass and invasive annual grasses on the western working landscape; and how litigation influences the collaborative process. Attendees also highlighted how coordination among federal agencies and with private landowners leads to greater success on the ground. [Watch recordings](#) of panel presentations and audience Q&A on WGA's website.

workforce shortages, and potential liability for work outside of the transmission right-of-way.

- Identified solutions to address these challenges include: expanding the utilization of stewardship agreements and Good Neighbor Authority; advancing the development of consistent, accessible data on risk and incidence of wildfire used by utilities and agencies; and creating better methods of communicating priorities, actions and needs between agencies and the utility sector.

Interagency Wildfire Disaster Response

- Work session participants reviewed a draft catalog of current assistance programs and identified missing elements, discussed additional roadmap information needs, and began mapping a post-wildfire response continuum.

- The role of "navigators," who assist local communities affected by wildfire, emerged as a critical element of post-wildfire response. Issues to be clarified include the appropriate venue (federal, state, local, NGO) where navigators should be situated, and funding requirements to stand up a navigator system.

Collaborative Conservation

- Successful efforts start with the objective of building and maintaining resilient working landscapes and recognize that collaboration is the key to meeting that objective.
- High-level policy barriers inhibit proactive and collaborative conservation. Many have already been identified in previous Roundtable sessions, and specific recommendations are needed to address these issues at scale.





NRCS Chief Matt Lohr spoke at the Denver workshop.



Idaho Gov. Brad Little kicked off the Boise workshop with a keynote.

Next Steps

WGA will continue work through the Roundtable on the identified themes and seek to identify emerging challenges to cross-boundary working lands conservation in the West. Bi-annual Roundtable workshops will continue and WGA also will facilitate working groups to implement Governors' policy recommendations and regional challenges illuminated through this model. In 2020, WGA also intends to facilitate discussion on natural resource data mobilization and standardization, as well as socio-economic factors that influence the health of working landscapes.



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