

2017 WIR Fall Board Meeting Minutes
Sublette County, Wyoming

[Meeting began, 9:00 AM]

1. *Teresa Baker from the Idaho Association of Counties provided an update on the planning for the 2018 WIR Conference to be held May 23-25, 2018 in Sun Valley, Blaine County, Idaho.*
2. *NESARC Executive Director Jordan Smith discussed via teleconference comments offered to the new administration on the ESA, and how counties can be involved in shaping policies to improve the ESA. He also updated the Board of Directors on the [October 4th House Natural Resources Committee markup](#) of 5 Endangered Species Act reform measures.*
3. *Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) Executive Manager Mike Zupko updated the WIR Board on recent activities and opportunities for future engagement on issues surrounding wildland fire and public lands management, including ways to build relationships across federal, state, tribal and local partners on land management, wildfire and community resiliency. He spoke about WFLC's focus on resource management (including the training of firefighters, work with public health agencies on smoke inhalation, and how they are incorporating recommendations from the Western Governors Association into WFLC's work.*
4. *Keith Norris, co-chair of the National Horse & Burro Rangeland Management Coalition has been active in engaging the new administration on rangeland management issues, and the unsustainable population growth of wild horses and burros. He spoke potential about riders to appropriations bills in Congress to allow for euthanasia, as well as the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) budget request for euthanasia and unrestricted sales authority.*
5. *Alicia Dorsey, CPA, NACo Finance Director, via phone presented the current state of the 2017 WIR Budget and the proposed WIR Budget for 2018.*
6. *The WIR Board of Directors approved the proposed 2018 Budget.*
7. *The WIR Board of Directors discussed possible changes to the 2018 areas of policy focus. The Board added combating wildfire as its number policy focus for 2018.*
8. *Joe Riis, Photography Fellow with National Geographic and the Wyoming Migration Initiative, spoke about the efforts to mitigate damage to migratory wildlife in Wyoming through the construction of migration corridors on roadways throughout the state. His presentation included photographs and videos from his work throughout the state of Wyoming.*
9. *Jonathan Shuffield, NACo Associate Legislative Director for Public Lands and Liaison to the WIR, provided a legislative update.*
10. *Duane Spencer, BLM Deputy State Director for Minerals and Lands, spoke about Secretary Zinke's new priorities, including greater coordination and cooperation with state and local governments, and how they are being implemented*

11. *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Acting Regional Director Elsa Ramirez and Charles H. Smith, PhD, Regional Administrator, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, spoke about the strategy HHS is employing to combat opioid addiction and its consequences, and opportunities for counties to cooperate with the federal government on tackling this crisis.*
12. *U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue made reducing the burden of NEPA requirements, and working with local government key parts of USDA's agenda. Patricia O'Connor, Bridger-Teton National Forest Supervisor, discussed these new initiatives, and provided an update on the efforts of the Sublette County Forest Collaborative.*
13. *The WIR Board of Directors Meeting ended with a roundtable discussion where each member offered a brief update on challenges and opportunities their counties face.*
 - Commissioner Dahl from Elko County, Nevada spoke about travel management plans, and potential fines that could be levied on individuals driving on closed U.S. Forest Service roads. He also spoke about the transfer of federal lands to the states.
 - Commissioner McCart from Stevens County, Washington talked about the use release of wolves in his county, and their efforts to push back through a lawsuit.
 - Commissioner Flores from Otero County, New Mexico talked about flooding issues caused by lack of access to BLM lands to make necessary repairs to flood prevention structures.
 - Commissioner Bowman-Muskett from McKinley County, New Mexico mentioned that wolves were migrating into her county from Catron County, affecting the population. She also said the state government has placed large unfunded mandates on counties in New Mexico over the past few years, placing a strain on county budgets.
 - Commissioner Pollock from Garfield County, Utah talked about his state's efforts to put a heavier emphasis on combatting wildfire, and aggressively employing good neighbor authority on national forests. His county has also been active in the national monument review process with the Department of the Interior.
 - Supervisor Hanvelt from Tuolumne County, California talked about the need for greater forest management due to decreased supply to local mills. He also mentioned that land transfers are reducing the size of the tax base in his county, and is also being mismanaged by the federal government.
 - Supervisor Cann from Mariposa County, California spoke about tree mortality, especially among the state's ponderosa pine stands. He also spoke about the economic and public safety impacts of the fires in Napa Valley, lack of affordable housing, and the efforts of the state's marijuana lobby to eliminate local control of legalization/sales.
 - Commissioner Chilcott from Ravalli County, Montana spoke of the impacts of wildfire on Montana (over 1 million acres burned) and recovery efforts. The state of Montana is also facing a budget crunch that may lead to a special session. Montana's U.S. Senators are also teaming up to overturn the *Cottonwood* decision.
 - Councilmember Kanuha from Hawaii County talked about the increase in the homeless population, and his county's efforts to start a housing first program. Hawaii is also expanding its base of tourism.

- Commissioner Butts from Custer County, Idaho pointed out 96% of his county is owned by the state or federal government. A major concern for residents is that individuals are buying large tracts of private land, and gifting it to the federal government, further reducing the county's tax base. This also jeopardizes the renewal of grazing permits and other important aspects of multiple use.
- Councilmember White from Maui County, Hawaii said the state is trying to mandate that neighboring islands should pay for a rail project that is behind schedule. The county is also facing a lawsuit over its use of injection wells for sewage, requiring an NPDES permit.
- Commissioner Chadwick from Natrona County, Wyoming mentioned his county's issues with Sec. 106 consultations, which require the BLM to consult with 18 different tribes, and in one instance mandated his county construct an extra 5 miles of roads to avoid a certain site. The BLM is requiring ranchers to get their permission to build on their own private property due to the property's presence within a viewshed.
- Judge Joyce from Malheur County, Oregon mentioned that litigation is impacting access to public lands, and also stated that FEMA needs to be aware of the relationship between wildfire and mudslides due to accumulating snow packs.
- Commissioner Avery from Campbell County, Wyoming talked about his county's issues with federal agencies sectioning off 63,000 acres due to the presence of prairie dogs.
- WIR President Joel Bousman from Sublette County, Wyoming talked about the Wyoming Public Lands Initiative, which focuses on addressing Wilderness Study Areas. He also talked about the length of time it takes to get an EIS completed, such as the attempts to reauthorize a grazing allotment that should have taken 4 years, but has instead taken 15 years with no record of decision.

Western Interstate Region Key Issues for 2018

Since 1978, the Western Interstate Region (WIR) has worked within NACo to promote the interests of Western counties, sustain the Western quality of life and advocate on critical public lands, community stability and economic development issues facing counties in the WIR's 15 member states.

In furtherance of the policies and resolutions adopted by NACo, the WIR Board of Directors identified the following advocacy priorities for 2018:

1. As Its Number One Priority for 2018, WIR Urges Congress and The Administration to Enact Legislation and Policy That Reduce the Threat of Catastrophic Wildfire.

Catastrophic wildfires destroy public lands, jeopardize access to vital resources, decrease biodiversity and impact public health and safety. Western county officials believe that a comprehensive approach is necessary to address this growing threat to communities. This includes active forest management, fire recovery efforts, addressing regulatory burdens that hinder management activities, stopping frivolous lawsuits and ensuring agency budgets are able to effectively combat wildfire without pulling funds from other accounts.

- 2. WIR Urges Federal Policy Makers to Ensure Certainty in Federal County Payments.**
Counties provide critical services to their residents and public land visitors alike. WIR supports extending full, predictable and mandatory funding for the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, which compensates counties for the services they provide on tax-exempt public lands within their boundaries. WIR further supports legislative efforts to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program, which provides bridge payments to counties to compensate for significant declines in federal revenue sharing within the National Forest System.
- 3. WIR Urges Congress and the Administration to Strengthen the Partnership Between Counties and the Federal Government When Making Legislative or Regulatory Decisions.**
Western county officials have a responsibility to provide local leadership and seek community-based solutions to strengthen their counties. WIR supports a strong federal-county partnership that encourages and gives great deference to county input in federal decision making. WIR opposes policies that restrict county governance and planning, impose unfunded mandates, or unduly burden community economic development and opportunity.
- 4. Strengthen Local Infrastructure:** Successful communities are built on strong infrastructure. WIR supports initiatives to strengthen local infrastructure in the West by promoting local decision making in transportation investments, prioritizing investments to modernize and improve infrastructure safety, ensuring the long-term predictability and solvency of federal infrastructure investments, and maintaining and enhancing local financing options. As technology generates new economic opportunities for communities in the West, WIR also supports policies that expand local access, promote investment in and development of a modern, high-speed communications infrastructure in Western communities.
- 5. Encourage Access to Western Lands and Responsible Development of Western Resources:**
Responsible development and improved access to Western lands and natural resources is critical to Western economies and maintaining the Western quality of life. WIR supports policies that promote the sustainable development and active management of natural resources in the West as a means of promoting community economic growth, job creation and the long-term viability of Western communities. WIR encourages the development of policies that seek to sustainably and responsibly manage activities on Western public lands in the least restrictive manner, in support of the greatest number of recreational, historic and productive uses and in consultation with local governments and stakeholders.
- 6. Promote Safe and Healthy Communities:** Counties invest billions of dollars to deliver public health and safety services each year. WIR supports policies that strengthen public health and well-being by maintaining and enhancing local healthcare systems, preserving the federal-state-local partnership for Medicaid and promoting access to medical and behavioral healthcare for those in need. WIR supports policies that protect public safety through intergovernmental partnerships and a comprehensive approach to addressing public safety challenges. Planning, resource sharing and mutual support is critical to addressing law enforcement and crime prevention issues facing Western counties.