

**2019 WIR Fall Board of Directors Meeting
Mariposa County, California**

[Meeting opened at 9 AM]

President Kevin Cann presided over the meeting.

Update from the Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages approximately one-tenth of the acreage of the United States and 30 percent of its minerals. Deputy Director for Policy and Programs (acting with the authority of the BLM Director) William Perry Pendley discussed actions taken by the BLM in 2019 and potential initiatives for next year. Director Pendley focused on efforts to reduce the impact of wild horse and burro populations on western landscapes, how the BLM is cooperating with other agencies to improve border security and mitigate the environmental impact of border crossings, activities within wilderness areas, improvements to federal-state-local coordination, and the efforts to move BLM staff out west.

Sierra Foothill Conservancy

Bridget Fithian, Executive Director of the Sierra Foothill Conservancy, discussed their efforts to keep ranches working. The Conservancy is a land trust that currently owns 6,481 acres in order to protect wildlife, preserves native flora and historic rangelands, provide educational and recreational opportunities and promote the scientific study of local ecosystems. Bridget Fithian's presentation can be [found here](#).

Natural Disaster Management in Rural Counties

Mariposa County undertook a recent effort to improve planning and emergency management amid multiple successive natural disasters. County Public Works Director Mike Healy spoke about this effort and its implementation, which was recognized with an award from the American Public Works Association. Director Healy's presentation can be [found here](#).

Roundtable Discussion on WIR Key Priorities for 2020

Each year, the WIR Board of Directors approves the next year's WIR policy areas of focus. This discussion will include a review of the current WIR Priorities and a collaborative discussion and adoption of the Board's priorities for 2020. Most importantly, we will have a discussion on the strategies and tactics we need to make progress.

The WIR Board unanimously adopted the attached Key Priorities for 2020.

WIR Partner Organization Update

WIR's Public Lands Trust contributes to the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) so that counties are represented. WFLC Executive Manager Mike Zupko will update the WIR Board on recent activities and opportunities for future engagement on issues surrounding wildland fire. The documents he shared with the group are attached to this email.

New Technology Use to Improve Landscape Health

The Sierra range served as ground zero for the pine bark beetle epidemic impacting the American West. Neal Bolton, CEO of Blue Ridge Services, discussed how southern Sierra counties reacted and the innovative new drone technology which evolved to determine forest health, project procedures and costs to stabilize and maintain critical watersheds. Mr. Bolton's presentation can be [viewed here](#).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cbnRZPWmKQ>

Forest Health Initiatives

The Golden State Natural Resources Corp. has developed a partnership with USDA and private forest owners to innovatively remove low and no value biomass from the forests and process it into industrial wood pellets to be used in Asian electric generation plants which have committed this renewable technology. Rural County Representatives of California President Greg Norton discussed the agreements made with the USDA and private forest owners and how this new process is moving forward. He also shared the following video with the WIR Board: <https://vimeo.com/361915634/2a840c820a>

Legislative and Budget Update

Jonathan Shuffield, NACo Associate Legislative Director for Public Lands and WIR Liaison, provided a legislative update that covered the FY 2020 appropriations negotiations, PILT, SRS, infrastructure and opioids legislation. Additionally, Jonathan presented a 2020 WIR budget to the Board, who then voted unanimously to approve it. (Presentation attached)

Members concluded the meeting with a tour of the Mariposa County Courthouse. Constructed in 1854, the Mariposa County Courthouse is the oldest courthouse in continuous use west of the Rocky Mountains.

[Meeting Concluded at 5 p.m.]

Western Interstate Region Key Issues for 2020

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 2020:

- **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. WIR also supports full funding of other existing federal lands payments programs, such as Refuge Revenue Sharing and PILT payments for U.S. Department of Energy nuclear research sites.
- **Support legislation and policies that reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire and restore sustainable forest health, function and productivity:** 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. WIR supports active forest management measures to reduce the

threat of wildfire, restore landscapes and watersheds, and reduce the impact of drought.

- **Strengthen Local Infrastructure and Access To Modern Telecommunications Technology:** 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 broadband infrastructure in Western communities.
- **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, landscape and watershed health 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.
- **Strengthen the partnership between counties and the federal government and increase transparency 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, ignore legally mandated requirements for coordination with counties or unduly burden community economic development and opportunity. WIR supports efforts to ensure greater transparency and consultation in the development of federal rules, regulations and guidance.
- **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.