

Maria Nájera **Government Affairs Director**



Maria Nájera is the government affairs director at Western Resource Advocates (WRA). In her role, she serves as WRA's senior liaison to state and local elected officials and works to create partnerships with diverse stakeholders to promote and advance conservation policies in the organization's seven-state region.

When Nájera joined WRA in 2017, she was the first government affairs director. The group's government relations efforts were in their infancy; in the intervening years, she has steadily grown the department in both scope and scale. It was her influence that enhanced WRA's government affairs team to include on-the-ground staff in several states, along with a position dedicated to working with Indigenous people and governments.

Nájera has decades of experience in both government and environmental causes. She mostly recently served as the director of the Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs under former U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, where she collaborated with governors, mayors, and state legislators on key White House priorities, including the designation of 12 national monuments, historic greater sage-grouse conservation efforts, and safeguarding water resources in the West. Prior to her work at the Department of the Interior, Nájera spent ten years as a press secretary for U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman and deputy press secretary for Governor Bill Richardson's 2002 gubernatorial campaign.

A passion for preserving our natural resources didn't come accidentally. Nájera grew up on a small ranch in New Mexico, where her parents taught her the value of respecting the land and the abundance it provides. She spent much of her youth outdoors – riding horses, milking cows, and tending to her pet goats and chickens. These formative years fostered an appreciation for the West, cementing in her a desire to help safeguard western land for future generations.

Where some only see problems in the complexities of the climate crisis and its impact on lives and livelihoods, Nájera sees opportunities for learning, growth, and collaboration. She works in tandem with WRA's program staff to identify solutions on everything from equitable land use access to habitat restoration and to advance innovative legislative and administrative policy solutions critical to addressing the region's most pressing conservation challenges. Her expertise was instrumental in securing the passage of critical climate change legislation in three western states that advanced measures to safeguard healthy rivers and invest in conservation.

Nájera holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. She currently resides in Colorado. She enjoys horseback riding, hiking, and cooking, especially with New Mexico green chile.

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