

FIELD NOTES

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WRA takes a look at data centers, analyzes their vast energy and water demands, and offers state-specific solutions.

WRA RISES TO MEET THE MOM- ENT

BY JON GOLDIN-DUBOIS



Hours after Inauguration Day, the new administration began slashing hard-fought environmental wins: rolling back protections from fossil-fuel development, withdrawing from the Paris Climate Accord, and freezing spending for climate resilience projects.

The sun sets over the U.S. Capitol.

In the name of “efficiency,” many talented people who protect our land, air, and water at the federal level — park rangers, biologists, and environmental protection experts — saw their jobs and livelihoods vanish. Attempts to sell off America’s most treasured asset, our public lands, were next on the list.

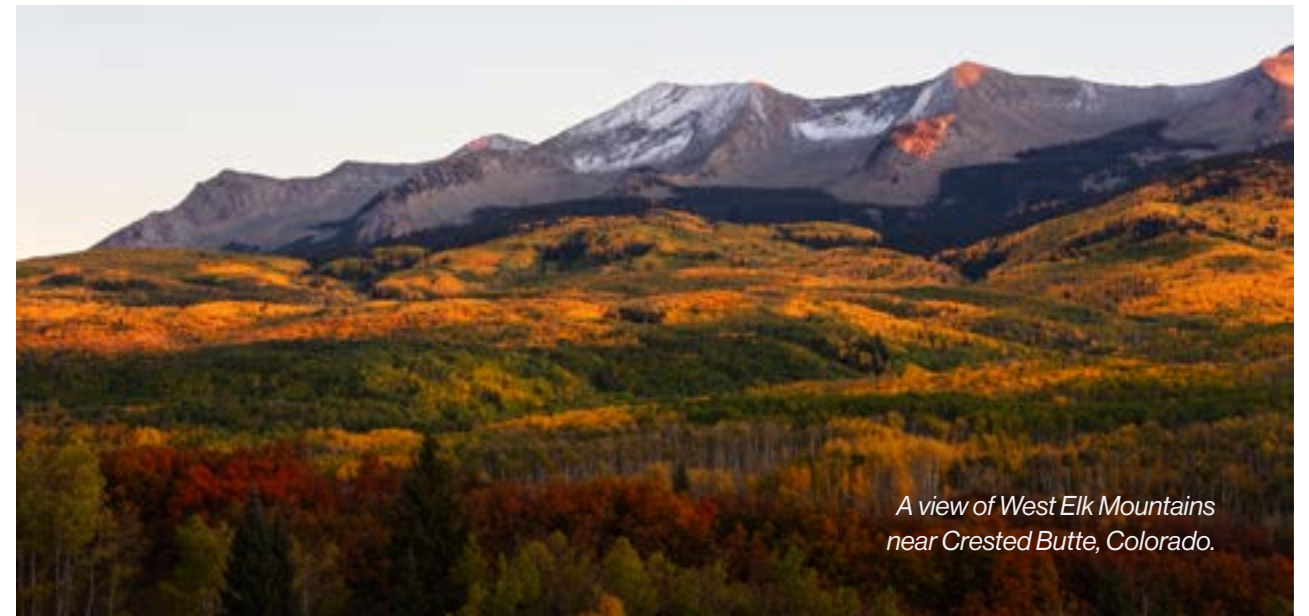
The Trump administration continues on a path that will force Americans to pay more for energy, bear the high financial and health costs of air pollution, and face the accelerated impacts from climate change, while creating a weaker economy. The speed and scale of this dismantling have been staggering. It has left many reeling and asking what can be done to meet the climate goals science demands for the sake of our ecosystems and quality of life.

Unquestionably, aggressive defense of the nation’s bedrock environmental laws and protections must be a priority. WRA continues to support our federal partners and state leaders as they fight to make us safer and healthier, and preserve our landscapes, habitats, and wildlife.

We know that progress is still possible. At WRA, we’ve spent more than three decades advancing critical climate, environmental, and conservation policies in the decision-making forums where most policy is made — at the state level. As we face federal antipathy toward climate protections and environmental responsibility, we remain steadfast in our belief in the power of state-level advocacy.

When it comes to energy and transportation, state governments wield significant authority to advance clean energy, regulate polluting fossil fuels, and protect communities. Municipalities can adopt sustainable, efficient building codes, create smart land-use plans, and invest in clean infrastructure that powers our homes and vehicles. These decisions add up to major reductions in emissions. In fact, a study from the University of Maryland released this year found that even if the Inflation Reduction Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure Act, and recent Environmental Protection Agency regulations were rolled back, ambitious state and local action could still lead the U.S. to a reduction in emissions of between 54% and 62% by 2035.

And we can make progress safeguarding rivers, habitats, and landscapes, too. When federal decisions



A view of West Elk Mountains near Crested Butte, Colorado.

stripped wetlands of protection, WRA stepped up, helping advance state legislation to permanently restore protections in Colorado and New Mexico. We’re working to extend these permanent protections to Western lands as well. Through programs like New Mexico’s Legacy Fund and Colorado’s oil and gas production fee, we’re ensuring that habitat is protected for future generations, and that conservation and outdoor opportunities have the funding they need.

There is hard work to do. And with climate and conservation progress, the path forward runs through the advancement of state and local policy. This is WRA’s strength.

It’s how we’ve secured more than 91 million tons of emissions reductions annually.

It’s how we’ve safeguarded more than 2,000 miles of rivers. And how we’ve added new layers of protection to more than 8.75 million acres of Western habitat.

History has shown that we cannot wait for the federal government to solve these challenges. We’re both determined and undeterred by the obstacles. Our path to limiting the most severe impacts of climate change is still within reach.

WRA will continue to lead in this fight. We’ve built the expertise, infrastructure, and relationships to drive progress — regardless of dire federal setbacks. Our reputation as trusted policy and analytical experts empowers us to advance climate solutions where we can secure the biggest and most durable victories.

91.5M tons of emission reductions annually
8.75M acres of habitat protected
2,071 river miles safeguarded



NEWS FROM THE FIELD

WRA Safeguards the West Through Legislative Wins

WRA Ensures Renewables Remain Viable in Arizona and Utah

Utah and Arizona saw numerous environmentally harmful bills in their respective 2025 legislative sessions aimed at stopping clean energy expansion, but our experts were on the ground to intervene. WRA worked with clean energy advocates in both states to ensure that renewables remain a viable energy resource. We helped defeat bills in Arizona that hindered wind energy development, including a bill that would have required wind projects to be set back 6 miles from the nearest

property line. This would have halted new projects and made it one of the most restrictive clean energy environments in the nation. In Utah, we intervened to stop House Bill 241, a ban on solar power on agricultural land. We were also able to negotiate changes to Senate Bill 132 that allow clean energy resources to serve large electricity customers, like data centers.



Colorado Data Center Bill Defeated

Our advocates protected the climate progress we've made in Colorado by helping stop Senate Bill 280, which would have provided significant tax benefits to data centers with no consumer or climate safeguards. WRA worked with legislators to ensure this bill didn't leave the floor.

WRA Defends New Mexico's Wildlife

Senate Bill 5 was a top priority for WRA and a huge win for New Mexicans who cherish diverse wildlife. SB5 modernizes how the state manages wildlife and updates the name of the Department of Game and Fish to the New Mexico Department of Wildlife. This sweeping legislation gives the department the legislative authority and modern tools needed to protect wildlife and critical habitat. The law also reforms the New Mexico State Game Commission by creating a bipartisan nominating committee to select candidates, with the governor holding appointing power.



Outdoor Equity Funding Secured Across 3 States

Connecting with nature is important, and it's why we advocate for increased outdoor equity funding. This year, we successfully helped Colorado, New Mexico, and Nevada expand funding for their grant programs that help youth and families who may experience barriers in accessing the outdoors. This funding comes at a time when states are facing budget constraints,

but through our advocacy, we showed lawmakers that these programs have far-reaching benefits, like improving health and sustaining outdoor recreation economies. New Mexico appropriated resources in its budget bill, making a historic investment of nearly \$4 million for the upcoming grant cycle. Colorado House Bill 1215 increased the allocation to its program by \$1 million annually, with the opportunity for additional money when funding allows. In Nevada, Assembly Bill 108 appropriated \$500,000 to its grant program.

Free State Parks Entrance for Ute Tribes

Colorado Ute Tribes can now access Colorado State Parks for free thanks to House Bill 1163. WRA backed this legislation, and our Senior Indigenous Peoples Engagement Manager Tahlia Bear explained during a committee hearing how it helps repair historical injustices, restores ancestral connections, and increases equal access to outdoor spaces.



1

A wind turbine spins in Arizona.

2

Chairman Manuel Heart of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and WRA staff stand inside the Colorado Capitol for Ute Day.

3

A child paddles on Lake Tahoe in Nevada.

4

Sandhill cranes fly over Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico.

5

Sun shines on the Colorado Capitol in Denver.

A Snapshot of Who Fuels Our Work

At WRA, our work is rooted in research, data, local communities, and driving state-level action to fight climate change. This work is more than a job for WRA's staff — it's personal and keeps us moving forward.

LAUREN ZAPIEN  Phoenix, Arizona
Annual Fund Manager

As a lifelong Sonoran Desert dweller, Lauren wants future generations to experience the beauty of the West. She ensures our critical work is funded so we can continue advocating for the Interior West's land, air, water, and communities.

She has experienced the effects of climate change firsthand — breathing dirty air due to burning fossil fuels, extreme heat worsening each summer, and watching precious waterways recede. These experiences lit a fire inside her that compels her to work in the pursuit of smart, sustainable solutions to Arizona's challenges.

"I feel a deep responsibility to help protect the places and people I love."

She sees herself as a bridge, connecting people with the causes they care deeply about and showing them how supporting WRA protects their communities.

One exciting development that she is watching unfold is how we are working to secure protections for the Colorado River. She takes comfort in knowing that WRA is making strides to make sure water stays in rivers through conservation and responsible planning.

"This progress is a reminder that state-level advocacy works, and that when passionate people come together to demand change, we can influence major decisions that impact millions. It's incredibly motivating."

Lauren snaps a selfie in Williams, Arizona.



CHELSEA BENJAMIN  Boulder, Colorado
Policy Advisor, Healthy Rivers

For Chelsea, water is life. It is what she advocates for at WRA and is one of her greatest joys in life — dipping in a snowmelt-fed stream.

She has worked to create positive change for people and the planet since she was 8 years old, when she first learned about deforestation in the Amazon.

When she moved to Boulder to pursue her master's degree in environmental policy, she learned about the scarcity of Western water resources and wanted to protect them. Here, she honed her specialty — integrating water policy with municipal land use planning.



Now, Chelsea helps municipalities and their land planning and water departments regularly collaborate and set goals to use their water efficiently as they continue to grow, using foresight to find solutions to conserve and protect precious water.

This year, she helped secure the passage of Colorado House Bill 1113, which expands on 2024's Senate Bill 5. Together, the bills prohibit the installation of thirsty, nonfunctional grasses and nonfunctional artificial turf on nonresidential and multifamily properties. These laws will help communities save water and adapt to changing water supplies.

She explains that WRA's supporters allow her to pivot when new issues pop up — it can be difficult to get funding, especially when you need to act quickly.



Left: Boulder Creek flows through a canopy of trees.

Right: Chelsea testifies at the Colorado Capitol in support of HB1113 in February 2025.

Lauren loves to explore Arizona.

You might find her hanging out at Arcosanti, founded by the visionary architect Paolo Soleri in the 1970s, or floating on the Salt River.

Chelsea loves catching a sweet breeze and taking a dip in Boulder Creek.

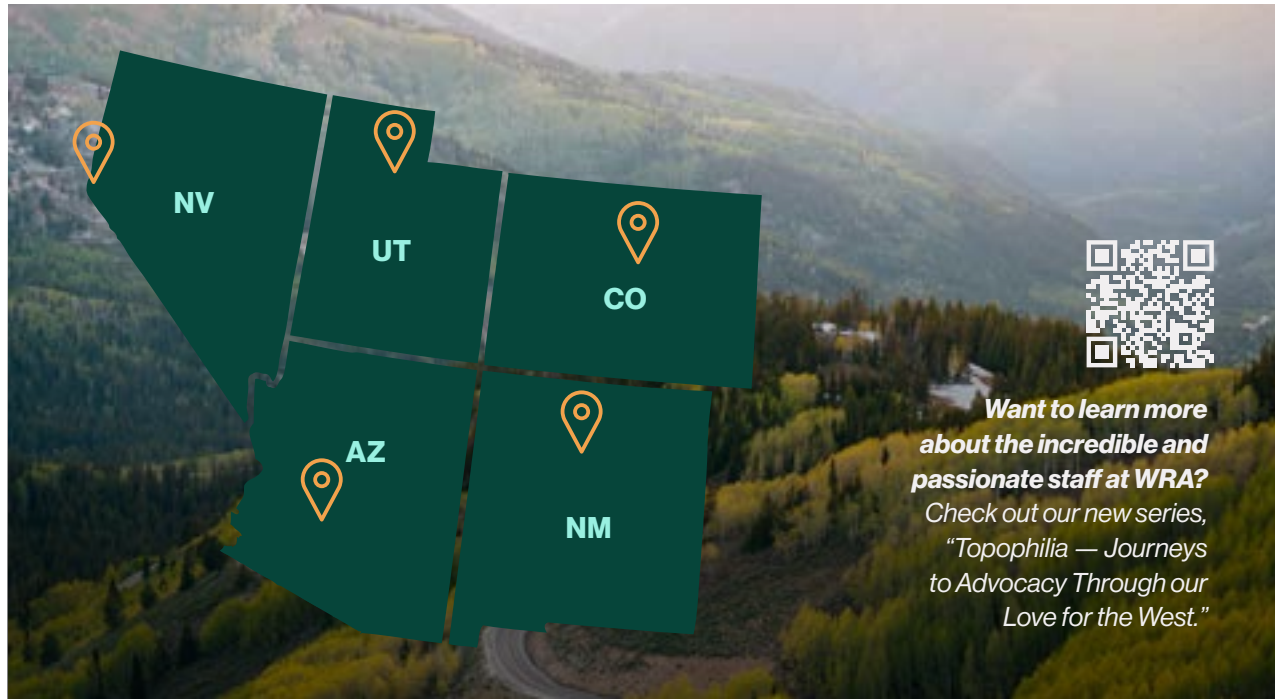
You can find Jessica and her family hanging out at the top of Little Cottonwood Canyon during wildflower season.

George loves recreating in the West.

He especially enjoys exploring Black Rock Desert.

Tammy loves taking walks along Albuquerque's Bosque, a 16-mile wild area along the Rio Grande River that supports critical habitat.





Want to learn more about the incredible and passionate staff at WRA? Check out our new series, "Topophilia — Journeys to Advocacy Through our Love for the West."

JESSICA LOELOFF
Program and Legal Assistant,
Clean Energy

📍 Salt Lake City,
Utah

Jessica felt called to fight climate change because it was directly impacting her life. Terrible air quality, wildfires, and drought made her want to act. She doesn't do this work just as a career; she is fighting for her children's future.

"I want my daughters to have the same opportunities to enjoy this beautiful place and not have to constantly worry about natural disasters, wildfires, extinction events, and drought. Climate change threatens their ability to live, work, and play here, and I want to help protect this place for them."

Left: Jessica stands in a field of wildflowers in Albion Basin.

Right: She and her daughter take in the views of Cecret Lake.



In her role, she verifies WRA's materials are properly cited and formatted to ensure our climate-forward policies and arguments are clear, persuasive, and accurate, so the impacts are durable.

"The only reason I can do that is because generous donors invest in WRA, so I can spend my time sweating the details."

One recent win she is especially proud of was assisting in persuading the EPA to designate the Uinta Basin as a moderate ozone nonattainment area, which will require Utah to take significant steps to improve air quality by reducing emissions. She will continue to pursue efforts to improve Utah's air quality regardless of the presidential administration in power.

GEORGE CAVROS
Nevada Clean Energy Manager
and Senior Attorney

📍 Reno,
Nevada

George works with utilities, regulators, and energy coalition partners to help reduce climate pollution and create a healthier future for Nevadans. But before he became a professional advocate, his climate story began in his own backyard as a neighborhood organizer who successfully derailed two proposed fossil-fuel projects.

"After that, I was hooked on environmental advocacy, and I realized I had a role to play in protecting our climate, land, and water resources."

He became a lawyer to become a more effective advocate because he was deeply concerned about the world his son's generation would inherit. George can delve into the murky world of utility regulatory policy, but his biggest flex is translating complicated energy issues into layman's terms.

"I take pride in being able to explain complex energy issues in a way that my neighbors can understand."

Effectively communicating the issues is a vital part of his role in ushering in a clean energy transition. A recent example of this work is Nevada Assembly Bill 458, which passed with his help this year. It will allow affordable housing developers to install rooftop solar panels on multifamily units, giving tenants the economic benefits of solar power.



George stands next to Pyramid Lake near Reno, Nevada.

TAMMY FIEBELKORN
New Mexico Government
Affairs Manager

📍 Albuquerque,
New Mexico

Tammy has deep roots in the West; she was born in New Mexico, went to graduate school in Colorado, and currently lives in Albuquerque. But no matter what state she's in, she has always been an advocate for environmental conservation.



Top: The Bosque in Albuquerque along the Rio Grande.

Bottom: Tammy and her dog Ruby rest in the shade on the 10K Trail in the East Sandia Mountains.



She brings more than 30 years of experience in climate change advocacy to WRA's New Mexico team. Unwaveringly committed, she has shepherded monumental wins over the past year.

"There were close to 1,000 bills this session, and I read every one."

She was instrumental in securing the passage of Senate Bill 5, a top priority for WRA, which overhauls wildlife management in New Mexico. Another win she helped advance was WRA's priority water bill in the state — Senate Bill 37. The bill ultimately allows the state to keep more water in rivers and supports sensitive habitats.

This isn't just policy on paper; it is a safeguard to her home.

And she knows none of this happens without donor support. While we are securing wins every year in New Mexico, there is still work to do, and she takes solace in knowing WRA's expertise is not only long-lasting, but also ever moving forward.

When Values Align

WRA Supporters Mace Hack and Rosie Zweiback

After 14 years of regular visits, Mace and Rosie moved to Park City in 2019. They were empty nesters in Nebraska, drawn West by the mountains and the incredible access to public lands. Skiing, hiking, biking, fly fishing — they love it all. Utah’s waters and lands are a big part of why they call the state home.

They first connected with WRA through a neighbor, board member Jamie Starr, who invited them to a local event with staff and leadership.

WRA’s pragmatic, policy-driven approach resonated with them, especially on energy and climate issues in Utah. While the state’s political landscape can be challenging, they value how the organization works within that complexity.

“WRA’s staff is smart, strategic, and committed. They find ways to make progress, even in a tough environment.” — Mace

They’ve been especially encouraged by WRA’s efforts to advance renewable energy. Whether it’s preventing rollbacks on solar development or shaping long-term change with major utilities, they appreciate that WRA is at the table, moving things in the right direction.

“We care so deeply about protecting the natural beauty and wildlife in Utah. WRA’s mission, strategic approach, and singular focus have impressed us, and we are very glad to support their work.” — Rosie

Looking ahead, they’re hopeful about the role their giving plays in the region’s future.



In the fall of 2023, they spotted the rare boreal owl in the Murdock Basin of the Uintas; it was the 700th bird species sighting for Mace in the U.S.



Our corporate partners aren’t just supporting today’s work — they’re investing in long-term change across the West. Their commitment helps us tackle complex climate challenges and shape lasting state-level solutions. We’re grateful to stand alongside them, and all our supporters, in pursuit of a healthier, more resilient future.



Legacy Planning Guide

Your first step toward a lasting legacy

Thinking about the future can feel overwhelming, but planning your legacy doesn’t have to be. WRA’s free Legacy Planning Guide can help you clarify your values, explore your giving options, and take meaningful steps toward a planned gift that reflects your goals.

Planned gifts are a powerful way to forge a path forward for the West’s land, air, water, and communities for generations to come.

They can be made through your will, retirement accounts, or appreciated assets like stock — often with significant tax advantages. And they don’t impact your financial security today.

When you notify us of your gift intention, you’ll be welcomed into the **1989 Legacy Society**, a community of visionary WRA supporters. Members receive a commemorative gift, exclusive updates, and opportunities to connect with WRA experts and fellow donors who are shaping the West’s future.



Download your **free** Legacy Planning Guide and start shaping your legacy today.



Need assistance? We’re here to help.
Elizabeth O’Connell, Development Director
elizabeth@westernresources.org
720.763.3743

Lightning strikes above a road on the Colorado Plains.

Powering Data Centers During a Climate Crisis

Artificial intelligence, or AI, has burst into our everyday lives — realistic images and videos seep into social media feeds, and tools like ChatGPT are used to complete everyday tasks from drafting emails to meal planning. While most people understand what AI does, many haven't looked behind the curtain to fully understand what powers it — data centers. These facilities are packed with rows of servers that bring AI, cloud computing, and high-speed internet to our smartphones and laptops. But all this computing power comes at a high cost.

Over the past few years, electric utilities in the Interior West have seen projected future

demands for energy, known as load forecasts, increase significantly. This is largely due to the explosive growth in electricity demand from data centers. Without the guidance of reasonable policies, AI and the data centers that power it pose an imminent threat to meeting the climate and water conservation goals of Western states.

In WRA's latest report, *Data Center Impacts in the West: Policy Solutions for Energy and Water Use*, we take a detailed look at the implications of these facilities. We analyzed future energy and water demands from new data center developments to create solutions specific to the states we work in.

Key Findings

Imagine a warehouse the size of a football field, filled not with goods, but with rows and rows of computer servers. These energy-hungry data centers are expected to drive a more than 50% increase in energy demand in our region in the next 10 years. And compared to conventional manufacturing, data centers generate very few permanent jobs.

Additionally, the new large volumes of water needed to cool the hardware contained in these facilities could consume substantial new amounts of water in a region where supplies are already scarce. New data centers in our region are projected to use 7 billion gallons of water annually by 2035.

Advancing Clean Energy

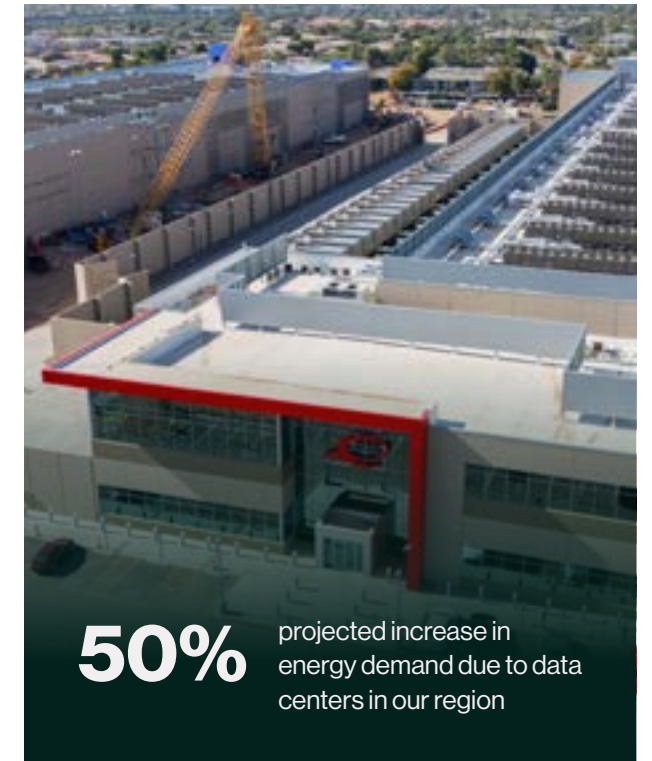
Our research identifies solutions to meet skyrocketing demands while still achieving clean energy goals to reduce climate pollution in our communities.

One option is to encourage data centers to invest in zero-emission energy generation and battery storage resources that they own and utilize directly to reduce energy demand from utilities. This would limit stress on utilities' generation, transmission, and distribution systems, avoiding costly upgrades.

Another option is to adjust how much energy is being used at specific times. Throughout the day, there are times when electricity demands spike, like when many people return from work and begin to use their appliances and air conditioners. During times of high demand, utilities use more fossil fuels. But if some data centers could shift their electricity consumption away from these times of peak electricity usage, fewer polluting resources may be required.

Safeguarding Habitat and Wildlife

Meeting the energy demands from data centers without imperiling our climate goals will require an enormous build-out of energy resources,



ideally from renewable sources. But building more energy capacity across the West means permitting and siting for these new projects, which must be navigated using caution to ensure land, wildlife, and habitat are protected.

State wildlife departments should incorporate best practices and other development standards, in consultation with wildlife managers, when developing new energy infrastructure. In 2024, WRA helped pass Colorado Senate Bill 212, which established a study to assess current siting procedures and update high-priority habitat maps and best management practices to address adverse impacts to wildlife and habitats. WRA continues to work with agencies across the region to ensure the best available science is used to thoughtfully evaluate sensitive habitats and wildlife resources when considering new leases for clean energy development.

These strategies lay the groundwork to make sure the clean energy transition during the next 10 years of projected data center growth works in partnership with land conservation priorities.

Cont. on page 16

Progress is not always linear.

Bold Ideas Power the West

The Climate Fix began as an idea based on one specific challenge: How can WRA take aggressive and effective action on climate change that leads to large-scale carbon reductions from the power sector, and as quickly as science demands?

Launched in 2018, the Climate Fix is a road map to drive significant carbon emissions reductions, billions of dollars of investments in clean energy, and a transformation in our regional energy systems that would enable electrification of the transportation and building sectors. The plan was driven by the knowledge that strategic, state-level action can transform our energy future.

Through direct advocacy, regulatory engagement, and coalition building, WRA has:

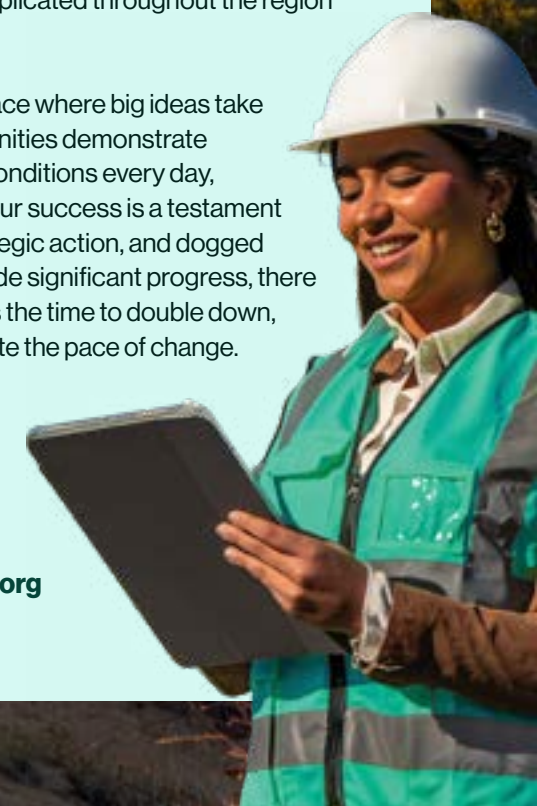
- ✓ Locked in commitments to retire coal plants and avoid new investments in methane gas, cutting annual emissions in the power sector by 85 million tons by 2030.
- ✓ Secured \$69 billion in clean energy investments across the region.
- ✓ Catalyzed the transition to zero-emission vehicles and investments in transportation electrification, avoiding over 12 million tons of emissions annually by 2035.

These accomplishments demonstrate that state-led action delivers tangible results and effective climate solutions can be implemented, expanded, and replicated throughout the region and beyond.

The West has always been a place where big ideas take root, where people and communities demonstrate their resilience to challenging conditions every day, and where innovation thrives. Our success is a testament to an innovative approach, strategic action, and dogged persistence. While we have made significant progress, there is much work to be done. Now is the time to double down, expand our reach, and accelerate the pace of change. The future of the West — and the planet — depends on it.



Learn more:
[TheClimateFix.org](https://www.TheClimateFix.org)



Increased load growth from data centers puts small businesses and residential customers at risk of increased utility bills.



Putting Customers and Communities First

As more utilities in our region forecast accelerated load growth, WRA is advocating for policies that protect small businesses and residential customers from bearing significant costs imposed on the electric system and ensure data centers pay their fair share.

Integrated resource planning is the foundation that assures utilities acquire the right level of resources to meet demands while managing customer costs and risks. Utilities recoup their costs via electricity bills and could spend millions on infrastructure expansions to meet projected load growth. But if demand from data centers is less than initially predicted, regular customers could be on the hook to pay for those expensive and ultimately unnecessary projects. WRA recommends regulators take steps to protect residential customers from the financial risks that could arise when utilities invest to serve large loads that don't materialize.

Protecting Water Supplies

In the arid West, every drop of water is precious, and special consideration should be made when looking at data centers' water use. Water use varies between data centers, and there are trade-offs between achieving energy efficiency or water efficiency. Cooling systems that are water efficient can have higher energy demands and vice versa. Decision makers need to thoughtfully examine this when determining policy solutions for data center locations, designs, and operations.

Currently, there's a lack of comprehensive information about data centers' water use.

7 Billion
gallons of water are projected to be used annually by new data centers in our region by 2035.

Estimates suggest data centers used over 500,000 acre-feet nationwide in 2020, a number that's certainly grown. For context, Nevada's allocation from the Colorado River is 300,000 acre-feet per year. But in order to protect our water, we need to first know how much is being used. Requiring data centers to report their water usage is the first step toward implementing the best water reuse and conservation programs. In addition, data centers should not negatively impact local streams, groundwater, or habitats.

Implementing the Solutions

Data centers pose a myriad of challenges, but WRA has the technical expertise, data, influence, and solutions needed to guide decision makers in adopting policies that ensure new energy and water demands from AI are not a burden to the people and places of the West. But we can't continue this critical work without support from donors.

WRA's newly published report is a critical first step, and now the real work begins by

advocating at the state and local levels for the adoption and implementation of these recommended policies, best practices, and customer safeguards.

“We are on the cusp of monumental change, and we can't afford to get this wrong. Without proactive regulation, there is a risk residential customers will be on the hook for higher energy bills, and the progress we've made towards reducing pollution from burning fossil fuels could be lost.”



Deborah Kapiloff, Policy Advisor for WRA and co-author of the report



Learn more about the impacts of AI, data centers, and WRA's recommended policy solutions.

Turning Strategy Into *Impact*

Real change doesn't happen by chance. Our 2023-2025 strategic plan, *For Home, For Nature*, outlined how we'd protect the West — and it's working. With only months left, we're building on our momentum to deliver measurable wins for land, water, and climate. We've been hard at work:

Protecting more than **2,071 miles** of Western rivers and streams to ensure thriving ecosystems and avoiding 62,680 acre-feet of water usage through municipal conservation.

Safeguarding **8.75 million acres** of Western land by securing new and additional layers of protection.

Supporting and advocating for passage of **89 legislative bills** that tackle climate change and protect rivers, lands, and air.

Your support will help us finish strong. **Make your gift today!**

Securing nearly **91.5 million tons** of yearly greenhouse gas reductions from utilities in our region by 2030.

Retiring **13,700 megawatts** of coal plant capacity by 2030, representing 79 million tons of emissions.

Funding the Future

Through a transformative \$3 million grant, the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation is accelerating WRA's work to build regional electricity markets — an essential step to clean, affordable, and reliable electricity for communities in the West.

"This confidence in our work is more than financial support; it's a catalyst. It allows us to move faster, think bigger, and bring more people to the table."



Theresa Bushman,
WRA Executive
Vice President

Our progress toward a healthy and sustainable West relies on diverse philanthropic support. While grants provide significant momentum, individual donors are crucial to our success. A broad base supports the work that is necessary to fight climate change. Your next contribution is a direct investment in WRA's future.

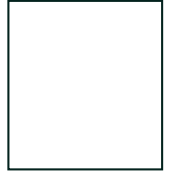
Partner with WRA and join us in forging a path ahead.

WesternResourceAdvocates.org/give





1401 Walnut Street • Suite 200
Boulder • CO 80302



FROM YOUR FIELD

WRA donors Don and Karen Brown venture deep into the Grand Canyon, embracing the Colorado River's power and beauty — and the urgent need to protect it.



Thank you for protecting the West with us. If you have questions about our work or would like to increase your impact, please contact Annual Fund Manager Lauren Zapien at lauren.zapien@westernresources.org or 480.676.2873.

WesternResourceAdvocates.org

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