



National Association of Conservation Districts

Memo

To: NACD Officers, Executive Board, Board Members, Presidents and Executive Directors of State/Territory Associations, Members

From: Jeremy Peters, NACD CEO 

Date: April 11, 2025

Re: **NACD Update on Recent Executive Actions**

I am writing to provide an update on recent Executive Actions.

Executive Orders:

On April 8, the White House released an Executive Order titled “[Reinvigorating America’s Beautiful Clean Coal Industry](#)” in order to increase energy independence. This executive order increases reliance on coal, declaring it essential to U.S. energy security, economic growth, and grid stability, directing federal support for increased domestic production, exports, and coal-fired electricity to meet rising demand from AI, manufacturing, and allied needs. It mandates prioritizing expedited coal leasing on federal lands, lifts the Jewell Moratorium on coal leases, and requires agencies to identify and remove regulatory barriers discouraging coal production within 60 days. The mining and processing of coal has historically impacted water quality, air quality, and public health.

On April 9, the White House released an Executive Order titled “[Zero-based Regulatory Budgeting to Unleash American Energy](#)”. This EO requires agencies (including EPA, DOE, BLM, FWS, and others) to implement sunset provisions for existing and new regulations, including but not limited to the Mining Act of 1872, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA – the governing regulation for management of BLM lands), the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1934, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and more. Many of these regulations have been amended and adjusted over time. Covered rules must expire within **1–5 years** unless agencies justify extensions through public cost-benefit reviews. If agencies fail to revalidate regulations, they will automatically expire and be removed from enforcement.

On April 10, the White House released [Executive Order 14219](#) which directs agencies and their DOGE teams to review and swiftly repeal any regulations that are found to be inconsistent with standing supreme court opinions without any public notice or comment. The EO determines that these regulations are “unlawful” and therefore subject to the “good cause” exemption which bypasses public input requirements in the APA. Regulations are being reviewed under key rulings like *Loper Bright*, *West Virginia v. EPA*, *Sackett v. EPA*, etc.. These rulings address air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and water quality and jurisdiction, among others. This EO is in line with the directive to EPA to rescind the 2009 finding that greenhouse gas emissions cause harm.

Department of the Interior:

Katharine MacGregor has been nominated for Deputy Secretary of the Dept. of Interior, a position she held in the last Trump Administration. MacGregor held several positions within



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DOI throughout President Trump's first term, including Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Land & Minerals Management and Deputy Chief of Staff. She previously worked previously served as a congressional staffer for Reps. Thelma Drake (VA-R) and Eric Cantor (VA-R) and served as senior professional staff on the House Natural Resources Committee.

The Interior Department plans to consolidate administrative functions (IT, HR, finance, contracting, etc.) into a central office, eliminating roles across agencies like BLM, FWS, and the National Park Service, with workforce cuts expected to reach 50% in some areas—impacting regional and field offices. [Employees are rapidly opting into a voluntary resignation program before forced layoffs begin, while key positions \(wildland fire, law enforcement, etc.\) are exempt.](#) Sec. Burgum framed the restructuring as a cost-saving measure to boost efficiency, suggesting AI could streamline operations, though staff fear increased politicization and loss of institutional knowledge. The changes are expected to be announced in the coming weeks.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

On April 9, Brian Nesvik's nomination for director of USFWS advanced through the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and now goes to the full senate for final confirmation, though no date has been set.

Bureau of Land Management:

On April 10, Kathleen Sgamma, nominee for Director of BLM withdrew from consideration. No replacement has been announced.

On April 10, the Department of the Interior announced it will no longer require the Bureau of Land Management to prepare an environmental impact statement for approximately 3,244 oil and gas leases spanning 3.5 million acres across seven Western states. This action rescinds a Notice of Intent issued in January 2025 and aligns with Executive Order 14154 and Secretary's Order 3418, both titled *Unleashing American Energy*. The move is intended to reduce regulatory barriers and expedite domestic energy development in Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. While the Bureau of Land Management will no longer pursue the original analysis, it will evaluate alternative options for meeting National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. The decision reflects the Department's continued commitment to advancing energy development on public lands while adjusting environmental review processes in accordance with current policy priorities.

<https://edit.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-will-no-longer-pursue-lengthy-analysis-oil-and-gas-leasing-decisions-seven>

Department of Agriculture:

On April 8, the Honorable [Stephen Vaden](#), nominated for Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, and [Tyler Clarkson](#), nominee for USDA General Counsel, provided testimony before the Senate Agriculture Committee. Vaden, who comes from a farm family, expressed support for science-based conservation and precision agriculture. In response to a question posed by Senator Marshall (R-KS), Vaden stated:

“No-till agriculture was kind of launched in West Tennessee. I grew up going with my father to the Milan No-Till Festival, which still goes on and was kind of an initial effort at evangelizing this notion that you do not have to plow the field every year, which, as you know, is bad for soil health.



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“But that only becomes possible if you have in your toolkit as a farmer the amazing chemicals that are provided in order to clear the land so that you can plant. If you take those chemicals away, what you are doing is you are taking a tool out of the toolkit of the farmer and requiring him to revert, in my view, to the somewhat antiquated plow. That’s bad for soil health, and quite frankly, it threatens a lot of the work done by the old Soil Conservation Service, and now the Natural Resources Conservation Service, to instill best practices in farms. Because, as you know, if you’re destroying the soil, it’s the equivalent of eating into your principal to pay living expenses.”

Natural Resources Conservation Service:

NACD President Gary Blair and CEO Jeremy Peters welcomed Chief Aubrey Bettencourt during her first week at NRCS. Chief Bettencourt met with NACD, NCDEA, and NASCA representatives on April 9 to discuss conservation districts’ long-time partnership with NRCS and local priorities.

NACD is tracking potential reduction-in-force and office space optimization plans. While there have been several news articles that speculate on USDA’s next steps, formal decisions have not been made or communicated. NACD will share official information as it is known. **In the interim, we are asking that members help us understand conservation districts’ office footprint and the potential impacts of lease terminations.** With 3,000 members across 50+ states and territories, NACD does not have specific data on how many districts are collocated with USDA. As USDA contemplates its overall federal footprint, please help distribute this [survey](#) to members. Our goals are to:

- Understand conservation districts’ overall office footprint (e.g., how many are collocated with USDA, how many have standalone offices?)
- Anticipate potential impacts to conservation districts, nationwide.
- There have been few, if any, official lease terminations at USDA FPAC. However, as USDA continues to assess its federal footprint and staffing changes, this survey can also be utilized for members to inform NACD of official closures or lease terminations.

Forest Service:

Following [Secretary Rollin’s April 4 memorandum](#) directing a dramatic increase in timber production and declaring an Emergency Situation Determination on over 112 million acres of National Forest System lands, [the U.S. Forest Service released an implementation memo from Associate Chief Chris French](#) to guide agency response. The memo outlines immediate steps to operationalize Secretary’s Memorandum 1078-006, including identification of priority acres for treatment, expanded use of emergency authorities, and streamlined planning and environmental review. It directs deputy areas to coordinate closely to expedite hazardous fuels reduction, salvage logging, and reforestation activities. The memo also emphasizes increased use of Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), stewardship contracting, and Tribal Forest Protection Act agreements to accelerate forest health treatments. Regional foresters are instructed to work with state and Tribal partners to align with Forest Action Plans, expand Shared Stewardship efforts, and submit implementation updates within 30 days.



Federal Emergency Management Agency:

On April 4, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) [announced the termination of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities \(BRIC\) program](#). Under the direction of Secretary Noem and in alignment with President Trump's Executive Orders, FEMA will cancel all BRIC applications from Fiscal Years 2020–2023 and return undisbursed funds either to the Disaster Relief Fund or the U.S. Treasury. Approximately \$882 million from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will be rescinded or reapportioned by Congress. Of the \$1 billion originally authorized for BRIC, only \$133 million had been distributed for about 450 applications. FEMA stated that ending the program will refocus the agency on its core mission of disaster response and recovery, ensuring resources are directed toward immediate needs. The agency estimates more than \$3.6 billion will remain available in the Disaster Relief Fund to support future disaster assistance.

An example of a grant funded through the BRIC program includes a [\\$35 million award to Napa County to support implementation of its Community Wildfire Protection Plan](#). The project aimed to reduce wildfire risk through hazardous fuels reduction, ignition-resistant construction, and defensible space treatments.

NACD Call for Action:

NACD issued a [survey](#) to all members to better understand the local impacts of executive actions. More than 400 districts representing 48 states and territories submitted responses. **You can view NACD's updated survey report [here](#), which includes anonymized responses from conservation districts across the country.** Thank you to those who have completed the survey, and we encourage all districts to share local impacts and updates as executive actions develop. NACD staff are reviewing each submission and contacting those who requested a response.

Conclusion:

Executive orders continue to be introduced, lawsuits are constantly developing, and the impacts of many recent actions are still unclear. Federal agencies are working to interpret and implement these orders and will share additional guidance as soon as possible.

NACD encourages members to contact NACD's Government Affairs Associate, Connor Simons (connor-simons@nacdnet.org) to share updates and concerns related to the impacts of recent executive actions. This information will inform NACD's engagement with agency and congressional leaders.