

# 2022

**Western Leaders Network**

ANNUAL REPORT

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR



Our Interior West landscapes, from the Land of Enchantment to Big Sky Country, the Grand Canyon to the Grand Tetons, take your breath away. The West is also one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation, among the most susceptible to climate change, and under threat from anti-democratic forces.

Western Leaders is a small organization with a big mission — harnessing the power of local, tribal and state elected officials to address the climate crisis, advance conservation initiatives, and protect our democracy. We elevate voices long missing in the conservation movement: local, tribal, and state elected officials in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming, aiming to inspire a new generation of pro-conservation local, tribal, and state leaders.

Local, tribal and state elected officials have outsize influence, and federal officials accord tremendous deference to their opinions and positions. When leaders testify at congressional hearings or publish opinion editorials, their voices carry magnified weight.

And WLN leaders certainly made their voices heard in 2022. From the Navajo Nation to Eagle County, Colorado, Summit County, Utah to Santa Fe, New Mexico, from the Hualapai Tribe to West Wendover, Nevada — and from Albany County, Wyoming, to the Fort Mojave Tribe — elected officials issued clarion calls to protect the West. They advocated for strong federal rules limiting climate-damaging methane emissions and new national



Heyengel / Adobe Stock

monument designations, modernizing the 150-year-old hard rock mining law, and the opportunities tribal communities have to build climate resilience and modernize infrastructure due to the recently passed Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act.

In 2022, WLN's work expanded, adding democracy defense, advocating for new national monuments, connecting local and tribal governments to federal climate funding, and launching the WLN Indian Country Fellowship program. We also launched an exploratory committee to assess the potential of creating the Appalachian Leaders Network in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia.

WLN welcomed new members to our board of directors, said goodbye to staff moving on to new horizons and hello to new employees and contractors.

This WLN annual report highlights our work to protect the West's land, air, water, people, and wildlife. All this work is possible because of the engagement of local, tribal and state elected officials and the financial support of individuals and private foundations.

There is a lot of work to do to make our communities more climate resilient. And there's never been a more important time to defend our democracy. WLN's staff and board are proud to stand with so many dedicated public servants in defense of the West.

Gwen Lachelt  
Founder & Executive Director



Elena\_Suvorova / Adobe Stock

## Organizational Highlights

WLN’s work expanded in 2022 to include democracy defense, advocating for new national monument designations, connecting local and tribal governments to federal climate funding, and launching the WLN Indian Country Fellowship program. We also established an exploratory committee to assess the potential of creating the Appalachian Leaders Network in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia.



From the Navajo Nation to Eagle County, Colorado – Summit County, Utah to Santa Fe, New Mexico – from the Hualapai Tribe to West Wendover, Nevada – and from Albany County, Wyoming, to the Fort Mojave Tribe – WLN leaders issued clarion calls to protect the West. They advocated for strong federal rules limiting climate-damaging methane emissions and new national monument designations, modernizing the 150-year-old hard rock mining law, and the opportunities tribal communities have through historical federal funding to modernize infrastructure.

### 2022 By the numbers, Getting the word out.

- 8** opinion editorials
- 10** action bulletins
- 6** virtual events and briefings
- 7** elected officials sign on letters
- 9** media statements

# CLIMATE, DEMOCRACY and NATIONAL MONUMENTS

## Missoulian

### Amber Torres and Shelly Fyant: Importance of prioritizing indigenous communities

Amber Torres, Walker River Paiute Tribal Chairman and Shelly Fyant, former Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Chairwoman  
*September 18, 2022*

## Climate and Democracy

The health of the climate and the strength of the nation's democracy are inextricably linked. WLN launched the Democracy & Climate program to advocate for laws and policies upholding democratic principles, achieving justice and equity, protecting voter rights, and building a more resilient climate future. WLN published action bulletins promoting legislation and initiatives to expand voting rights and prepare local governments and election workers for the 2022 midterms. That included a Q&A with county elected officials about the challenges they faced leading up to the election, their advice for other local governments across the West, and how they prepared to defend against attacks on the electoral process. WLN also engaged in candidate education leading up to the 2022 midterm elections to inform candidates running for state and federal offices in Colorado and New Mexico on key climate and conservation issues.



Wirepec / Adobe Stock

## THE ASPEN TIMES



### **Make Camp Hale a monument now**

Kathy Chandler–  
Henry, Eagle County  
Commissioner and Greg  
Poschman, Pikin County  
Commissioner

*October 5, 2022*

LAS VEGAS  
SUN

### **New national monument a win for all Americans**

Timothy Williams,  
Chairman of the Fort  
Mojave Indian Tribe of  
Nevada, Arizona and  
California

*December 11, 2022*

## National Monument Campaigns

WLN engaged in two successful national monument campaigns — the designation of Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument in Colorado and Avi Kwa Ame National Monument in Nevada. Federal protection for public lands is critical to preserving cultural heritage and sacred sites, enhancing local economies, and protecting wildlife habitat and biodiversity. WLN worked with tribal and local leaders in both states to author opinion editorials on these areas' cultural, ecological and historic significance, and the need for federal protections. WLN Executive Director Gwen Lachelt was pleased to join President Biden in Colorado for the official designation of Camp Hale. Several tribal leaders and other Nevada officials joined President Biden in Washington, D.C. for the Avi Kwa Ame designation.

# FEDERAL and STATE CLIMATE

## Federal Climate Rules

According to the White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy, cutting methane waste from the oil and gas industry is the quickest and most effective way to slow the rate of climate change and protect communities from the worst effects of extreme weather. Since WLN's inception in 2017, we've worked for meaningful and enforceable federal safeguards to limit this climate-damaging pollution. In 2022, both the Bureau of Land Management and the Environmental Protection Agency moved forward with rulemaking to limit methane emissions from oil and gas operations. WLN sent a letter signed by 168 local, tribal, and state elected officials from eight Interior West states and six tribal nations, urging the EPA to strengthen and finalize its draft proposal to cut methane pollution.

## New Mexico Climate Work

New Mexico made history in 2022 when the Environmental Improvement Board adopted statewide rules to reduce methane emissions from oil and gas operations. This campaign was a hard-won, multi-stakeholder effort with WLN engaging leaders from across New Mexico in the rulemaking process. The EIB rule built upon the New Mexico Oil Conservation Division regulations finalized in 2021 to limit methane waste from the oil and gas sector by banning routine

**SANTA FE**  **NEW MEXICAN**

### **Cleaning up after abandoned wells is essential**

Daniel Tso, delegate to Navajo Nation Council

*February 24, 2022*





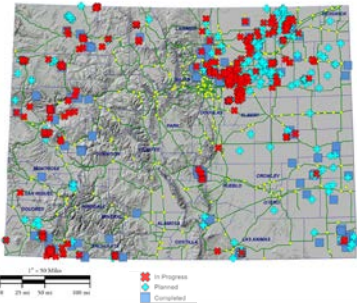


Gleb Tarassenko / Adobe Stock

venting and flaring. Together, the new rules made New Mexico a leader in the nation for addressing methane emissions and taking bold action to fight climate change.

### Colorado Climate Work

WLN engaged elected officials in the Centennial State in supporting the Colorado Oil & Gas Conservation Commission's adoption of new financial assurance rules to protect public health, safety, welfare, the environment, and wildlife from oil and gas development impacts. Historically, Colorado's financial assurance program has been woefully underfunded, resulting in a severe shortfall in bonds and leading to over 800 orphaned wells statewide in need of plugging and cleanup. Groundwater and air pollution from abandoned and orphaned oil and gas wells threaten public health, damaging our climate, clean air, lands, waters, wildlife, and outdoor recreation.



Map from Colorado Oil & Gas Conservation Commission. Over 800 wells throughout Colorado need plugging and cleanup.

# FEDERAL CLIMATE FUNDING and MINING REFORM

## Federal Climate Investments

The Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law contain historic and unprecedented federal investments for climate resilience, job creation, environmental justice, and equity. WLN sent letters to the U.S. Senators in the Interior West, urging their support for the climate components in these investment packages. WLN also worked to educate and engage its network in climate and energy-related programs and grant opportunities to access these federal dollars for their communities to fight climate change, protect public health, create quality jobs, and invest in clean energy. WLN co-hosted a virtual briefing and provided online resources, deadlines, and tools to connect local and tribal governments to federal climate funding opportunities. Tribal and local elected officials in Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico published op-eds on the importance of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act to limit pollution and protect disproportionately impacted communities.

ALBUQUERQUE  
**JOURNAL**  


### **Senate must tackle pollution; 'Build Back Better' has blueprint**

Victor Snover, former mayor,  
Aztec, New Mexico  
*March 14, 2022*

**reno gazette journal**

### **Tribal communities stand to gain from infrastructure, inflation legislation**

Amber Torres, chair of the  
Walker River Paiute Tribal  
Council in Nevada; and Shelly  
Fyant, former chair of the  
Confederated Salish and  
Kootenai Tribal Council in  
Montana  
*September 15, 2022*



reno gazette journal



**Reform of hard rock mining industry regulations 150 years overdue**

Daniel Corona, former mayor Reno, Nevada  
*May 19, 2022*

ARIZONA  
**Daily Sun**

**Coconino Voices: General Mining Law in desperate need of updating**

Damon Clarke, Chairman of Hualapai Tribe  
*February 24, 2022*

## Hard Rock Mining Reform

The transition to a clean energy economy is driving a boom in mining metals such as lithium for battery-powered electric vehicles. This boom poses significant risks to communities as mining companies continue to operate under the 150-year-old law governing hard rock mining. WLN continued to advocate for administrative and legislative reforms to protect communities and the environment from the detrimental effects of the General Mining Act of 1872 and hold the hard rock mining industry accountable for pollution. WLN published op-eds by Hualapai Tribal Chairman Damon Clarke in Arizona and former West Wendover Mayor Daniel Corona in Nevada on the urgency of industry reforms. We also hosted a virtual briefing, CODE RED: Clean Energy & U.S. Mining Policy, to educate elected officials about the law and the need for reform to protect tribal communities.

# BUILDING WESTERN LEADERS NETWORK

## Virtual Briefings

WLN's CODE RED Climate Action Series continued in 2022 with a record six virtual briefings covering the importance of plugging methane-leaking abandoned oil and gas wells, connecting local and tribal governments to federal climate funding, post-election conservation strategies and how the Antiquities Act and new national monuments and refuges can help achieve climate goals. The series featured speakers included U.S. Senator Ben Ray Luján, local and tribal elected officials from across the Interior West, leaders of national monument campaigns, officials from state energy offices and other experts.

Western Leaders Network

**CODE RED**  
Clean Energy & U.S. Mining Policy

ROUNDTABLE  
EVENT AND  
DISCUSSION

**The Connection Between Mining and Climate**  
*Debunking the myth of "Critical & Strategic" Minerals*

Join the Discussion

with

Austin Nunez, Tohono O'odham Nation San Xavier District Chairman  
Lauren Pagel, Earthworks Policy Director  
Aimee Boulanger, IRMA Executive Director  
Kristi Disney Bruckner, IRMA Senior Policy Advisor

register here

U.S. WEST  
OFFICIAL

**CODE RED**  
Climate & Orphaned Gas Wells

ROUNDTABLE  
EVENT AND  
DISCUSSION

**United States Senator Ben Ray Luján (D-NM)**

and special guests

Adriana Sandoval, Director of the New Mexico Oil Conservation Division  
Randy Pacheco, CEO & Plant Well Service  
Adam Piles, EDF Senior Attorney-Engineer

Will discuss the new federal funding to plug and remediate orphaned oil and gas wells in New Mexico and across the country.

Tuesday, January 25, 2022  
12:30 to 1:30 p.m. MST

register here

westernleaders.org • EDF.org



## WLN Welcomed Two New Leaders to Our Board of Directors

Amber Torres, Walker River Paiute Tribal Chairman: Amber serves on the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada Executive Board, Equity Cabinet created by Congressman Steven Horsford, as Chair for the Congressionally Mandated Intergovernmental Executive Committee, and on the National Indian Health Board, and is a former Western Regional representative for the National Congress of American Indians.

Shelly Fyant, former Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Chairwoman: Shelly served on the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribal Council for eight years, most recently as the chairwoman from January 2020 to December 2021. During her tenure, the tribe's water compact passed through the state and federal processes and was the largest settlement at \$1.9 billion and nearly four decades of negotiations. It included the restoration of the former National Bison Range to tribal hands.



**Shelly Fyant**  
Former Chairwoman,  
Confederated Salish and  
Kootenai Tribes

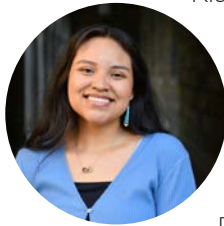


**Amber Torres**  
Chairman,  
Walker River Paiute Tribe

# BUILDING WESTERN LEADERS NETWORK

## WLN Welcomed New Staff

Kianna Pete, WLN Indian Country Fellow, joined the staff in January 2023.



Kianna is a Columbia University student and a Diné (Navajo) Nation member from Farmington, New Mexico. At the university, she serves as the Native American Council President. Before joining WLN, Kianna interned with her Navajo Nation Chapter in Newcomb, New Mexico, for Senator Ben Ray Luján and the Association on American Indian Affairs.

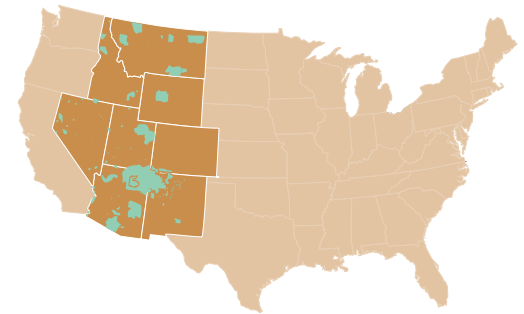


Edward Mosimann



## Indian Country Fellowship Program

Indigenous leaders are central to WLN's mission and success as an organization. The Interior West is home to 89 sovereign tribes, pueblos and nations and their elected and appointed leaders have outsize influence at all levels of government. WLN launched the fellowship program to help guide the organization's work in Indian Country, build tribal representation within the network, engage tribal officials throughout the Interior West on climate and conservation issues, and provide young leaders mentorship and professional development opportunities.



## Appalachian Leaders Network

WLN's mission of harnessing the power of local, tribal, and state-elected officials to address the climate crisis and protect democracy is a value-add in the conservation movement. Our success over the past six years led leaders in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia to request that WLN form an exploratory committee to assess the potential of creating the Appalachian Leaders Network. The committee is in formation, and we'll provide a full report of the organizing assessment in the fall of 2023.

# WESTERN LEADERS VOICES

A PROGRAM OF WESTERN LEADERS NETWORK

On the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for Tribal Communities:

**“The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will invest a historic \$13 billion into Tribal communities across the country and make Tribal communities eligible for billions more in investments. The BIL will support safe drinking water, expand access to reliable internet, repair roads and bridges, make our infrastructure resilient against climate change, protect our land and water, clean up legacy pollution sites and more. This historic investment will mean that tribal communities across the country and right here in our home states of Nevada and Montana will have access to the same services that for so long have been out of reach for members of our communities.”**

— Amber Torres, Walker River Paiute Tribal Chairman and Shelly Fyant, former Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Chairwoman. Excerpt from their WLN opinion editorial published in the *Missoulian* on September 16, 2022



Shelly Fyant



Amber Torres

On national monument Avi Kwa Ame:

**“A monument designation for Avi Kwa Ame would be a win on many fronts. It allows us to fight climate change through conservation, protect critical wildlife habitat and species that depend on it, support local economies and quality of life, and honor Indigenous culture and history. At the November 2022 Tribal Nations Summit, President Biden promised “respect” to Indigenous people and tribal nations — respect for tribal sovereignty, respect for tribal consultation in federal decision-making, and respect for Indigenous knowledge. The designation of this monument would be a tremendous example of fulfilling that promise.”**

— Timothy Williams, Fort Mojave Tribal Chairman from his WLN opinion editorial published in the *Las Vegas Sun*, December 11, 2022



Timothy Williams





## On protecting democracy and election integrity:

**“We have taken several measures to help protect our election workers. We have installed a camera system at each drop box and at the locked entrance to our county election center. We can see who is at the door from our phones/computers. We have met with our county Sheriff several times to discuss risks and security needs. This partnership has been crucial, and our Sheriff is incredibly supportive...”**

**...Our biggest challenge is a small but very vocal and active group of people who feel that voting by mail and using technology undermine elections’ integrity. Their efforts and like-minded groups from other states have created unease among many voters. The challenge is educating the public on the actual process and existing safeguards of ballot processing rather than exaggerated and often-untrue allegations that splash across blogs and social media...**

**...Election officials are good at administering elections, but not very good at PR. One of the most effective ways to combat election disinformation is to have other elected officials express confidence in the system.”**

— Ricky Hatch, Weber County Clerk, Utah,  
from his WLN profile in September 2022, [westernleaders.org/voices](https://westernleaders.org/voices)



Ricky Hatch

## On reforming the 1872 Mining Law:

**“The General Mining Law of 1872 was designed to encourage colonization and settlement of the American West, in part to force out the Indigenous peoples who had already lived there for tens of thousands of years. This law has not meaningfully changed 150 years since its enactment. It continues to prioritize the hard rock mining industry above all other uses and interests, including the rights and perspectives of tribes and impacted communities.”**

— Damon Clarke, Hualapai Tribal Chairman from his WLN editorial  
published in the *Arizona Daily Sun* on February 24, 2022, [azdailysun.com](https://azdailysun.com)



Damon Clarke

# FINANCIALS

## Financials

### 2022 REVENUE

Grants: \$401,000

Membership/Contributions: \$22,140

Other: \$37

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**Total Revenue: \$423,177**

### 2022 EXPENSES

Programs: \$229,837

General & Administrative: \$38,640

Events/Travel: \$12,664

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**Total Expenses: \$281,141**

## Foundations, Organizations and Corporations

Earthworks

Energy Foundation

Environmental Defense Fund

League of Conservation Voters

Maki Foundation

Methane Partners Campaign

New-Land Foundation

Resources Legacy Fund

— *Thank you!* —

## Board of Directors

Elise Jones, Chair

Former Boulder County Commissioner  
(2012–2020)

Executive Director, Southwest  
Energy Efficiency Project  
COLORADO

Lauren Pagel, Vice Chair

Policy Director, Earthworks  
WASHINGTON, DC

Don Schreiber, Treasurer

Rancher  
NEW MEXICO

Daniel Corona, Director

Mayor, West Wendover  
NEVADA

Victor Snover, Director

Former Mayor, Aztec  
NEW MEXICO

Juanita Vero, Director

Commissioner, Missoula County  
MONTANA

Amber Torres, Director

Chair, Walker River Paiute Tribal Council  
NEVADA

Shelly Fyant, Director

Former Tribal Council Chairwoman,  
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Arlee  
MONTANA

## Staff & Contractors

Gwen Lachelt, Founder & Executive Director

Jessica Pace, Program Coordinator

Kianna Pete, WLN Indian Country Fellow

Rudy Soto, Indigenous Leaders Organizer

Bonnie Rozean, Accountant & Bookkeeper

Paul Jolly, Fundraising Consultant

Joan May, Membership Outreach Coordinator

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Western Leaders Network is a nonprofit under section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. We unite, support and cultivate local, tribal and state elected officials to protect western lands and build healthy, sustainable and resilient communities. Donations to Western Leaders Network are tax-deductible.



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