



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 06/01/2016

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Commissioner Brong participates in Western counties policy conference

WASHINGTON – Skamania County Commissioner Chris Brong joined 500 county officials at the National Association of Counties' (NACo) [Western Interstate Region](#) (WIR) conference in Teton County, Jackson Hole, Wyo. from May 25 to 27. In partnership with Teton County and the Wyoming County Commissioners Association, the conference brought together nationally renowned experts, state and federal policy leaders and county officials from across the country.

With critical legislative and regulatory issues being debated in the nation's capital, county leaders discussed [issues](#) particularly important to Western communities. These issues included:

- Ensuring certainty in federal county payments through the [Payments in Lieu of Taxes](#) (PILT) and [Secure Rural Schools](#) (SRS) programs
- [New regulations](#) proposed by the Bureau of Land Management that could substantially affect counties containing federal public lands, and
- Strengthening local infrastructure.



“Each county is unique, but we can learn from one another to address the challenges counties and residents face. It’s also important for Skamania County to have a role in shaping key federal policies that affect us every day,” “Much of the information presented at the conference will help our efforts at home. Teton County, WY has many of the same issues facing Skamania County, with only 3% private land and 97% federal lands in Teton County” said Commissioner Brong.

WIR President Gordon Cruickshank, Valley County, Idaho commission chair, said, “Western county leaders work every day to pursue opportunities aimed at improving the quality of life for our residents. The issues facing Western counties are as diverse as the Western landscape itself. The WIR Conference focused on strengthening public and private sector partnerships to achieve results for our residents.”

The conference brought together national experts, state and federal policy leaders and county officials from across the country. Featured speakers included Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead, U.S. Interior Department Deputy Secretary Michael Connor, U.S. Bureau of Land Management Director Neil Kornze and Grand Teton National Park Superintendent David Vela.

Educational workshops focused on priority issues including:

- Responding to active shooter incidents
- Addressing local road safety
- Managing public lands
- Maintaining cybersecurity
- Creating fire-adapted communities
- Fostering economic development, and
- Leveraging technology to expand access to health services

Highlights of the conference included a tour of Vertical Harvest, a hydroponic greenhouse in a public/private partnership, on 1/10 of an acre to grow an annual amount of produce equivalent to 5 acres of traditional agriculture in a three story, 13,500 sq. ft. building. 95% of the harvest is already under pre-purchase agreements selling to local restaurants, grocery stores and direct to consumers through on-site stores. Photos of the greenhouse operation will be presented to the Board at our June 7 BOCC Meeting by Commissioner Brong.

WIR serves as the counties' advocate for [public policy issues](#) affecting the West. WIR is affiliated with the NACo and is dedicated to the promotion of Western interests within NACo. These interests include public lands issues such as land use and conservation, community stability and economic development and the promotion of the traditional Western way of life.

WIR's membership consists of the state associations of counties in 15 Western states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

WIR is dedicated to promoting a clearer understanding of challenges facing county officials and serves as a valuable resource for exchanging information about Western county governments for NACo, Congress, the Administration and to county officials nationwide.

For more information about WIR, see the new [video](#) and visit <http://www.naco.org/WIR>.

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The [National Association of Counties](#) (NACo) unites America's 3,069 county governments. Founded in 1935, NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government and exercise exemplary leadership in public service. More information at: www.naco.org.