

INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2024

HEARINGS BEFORE A SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION

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PART 3

	Page
U.S. Forest Service	1
Members' Day	49
Department of the Interior	73
Environmental Protection Agency	139
Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Requests for the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service	193



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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2024

THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2023.

U.S. FOREST SERVICE

WITNESS

RANDY MOORE, CHIEF, U.S. FOREST SERVICE

Mr. SIMPSON. This hearing will come to order. Before we start, we have a special guest today, and any of you that don't know that haven't been watching. This is, I call him Eddie Eagle because I can't think of another name for him, but they have had this eagle out here yesterday in the Senate and walked through the Rotunda with it, and then they were in the House today. I think they are going to be in the Resources Committee.

This is the Peregrine Fund, and they have been out here in years gone by, and they have usually brought their Aplomado falcon they are doing restoration with and stuff. But this is a treat for us to have Eddie here. It doesn't have a name, but "Eddie Eagle" comes to mind for me, the ski jumper and stuff.

I am going to give the people from the Peregrine Fund a few minutes to explain what they do and stuff, and then I am going to take the opportunity to introduce a special friend of mine to say a couple words.

VOICE. Am I in the light?

VOICE. You may want to move. [Laughter.]

VOICE. Can I see?

Mr. SIMPSON. When you bring him into my office tomorrow, is my stuffed wolf in there going to cause a problem? [Laughter.]

I didn't want to hear this, "aaaahhhh."

VOICE. They just go for the neck.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah. How much does the bird weigh?

VOICE. She is about 10½ pounds.

Mr. SIMPSON. Ten and a half?

VOICE. Yep.

Ms. PINGREE. Oh, Eddie is a she.

VOICE. Nine-point-six.

Mr. SIMPSON. It is a she?

Ms. PINGREE. Maybe it is Edna or——

Mr. SIMPSON. Edwina. Edwina, yeah.

Ms. PINGREE. Edwina is good. Edwina.

VOICE. How old is she?

VOICE. She is 17 years old this spring.

VOICE. So is that old?

VOICE. Out in the wild, late teens is a pretty good average. In an education setting like ours, she can live to be into her 40s.

VOICE. Wow.

VOICE. Wow.

VOICE. So her and I will teach together another 25 or 30 years.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

VOICE. Wow.

Ms. PINGREE. Oh, my goodness.

VOICE. Yeah, that is awesome.

Mr. SIMPSON. If wiser heads prevail then, or what is his name—

VOICE. Benjamin Franklin.

Mr. SIMPSON [continuing]. Benjamin Franklin that wanted the turkey for our national bird. [Laughter.]

Isn't that a beautiful animal?

VOICE. Yeah, it is.

VOICE. Is she nervous with us?

VOICE. No. For her, people are a reward. They are exciting and interesting where a lot of wild eagles will avoid people. Yeah, for her, she is an injured bird of prey, so that is why we have her, and so a roomful of people, there is nothing better for her.

VOICE. Did she grow up in the wild then?

VOICE. She started out there, yep. Yep. She was injured when she was about 6 weeks old, and so she has been in an education or a rehab setting ever since then.

Mr. SIMPSON. Was she injured because her parents threw out of her nest teaching her how to fly?

VOICE. That is a good question. She was maybe pulled or pushed from the nest.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

VOICE. It is kind of unusual for siblings to do that.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Ms. PINGREE. Is it okay if I take a picture?

VOICE. Yeah.

Mr. SIMPSON. Sure, yeah. If you want a picture next to Edwina, and then I am going to give the Peregrine Fund a few minutes to talk about their operations and what they do.

[Photo ops.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Isn't that a beautiful animal, though? Don't you wish your eyes were sharp as them?

Ms. PINGREE. I have multiple eagles who live, like, where I am.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Ms. PINGREE. So I can step out of my house, and they are in a spruce tree, like, as far as—

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Ms. PINGREE. So they will be up in the tree. Obviously, I have never been this close to one of them, but it is kind of amazing because I look at them all the time.

Mr. SIMPSON. I do, too. We have got a couple that live in some cotton woods.

Ms. PINGREE. And they are so beautiful.

Mr. SIMPSON. There you go.

[Cross-talking.]

Mr. SIMPSON. I knew Stuart would cause a problem. [Laughter.]
Even the eagle knows there is a problem here. [Laughter.]
What is the wing span on that bird?

VOICE. Six-and-a-half feet.

Mr. SIMPSON. Six-and-a-half feet?

VOICE. It can't zoom.

Mr. SIMPSON. Do you need somebody else to take it?

VOICE. Yeah, I will take it.

VOICE. It is mostly for my kids.

Mr. SIMPSON. Isn't that a beautiful animal, though?

VOICE. Yeah, just as soon as she comes out, you just go wow.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

VOICE. Yeah.

VOICE. Like, in the wild, can she, like, lift a rabbit, something that heavy?

VOICE. Yes. Something about half their body weight is generally what they can carry away. So at, like, at 10½ pounds, she would be easily be able to take a rabbit.

VOICE. Half their body weight. That is crazy.

Mr. SIMPSON. I live on a golf course. The hole is behind me, and there are some cotton woods on the other side there, and we have got a couple eagles that live up there. And you will watch them out there, and pretty soon they will come down, and they will be scooting down the freeway or down the fairway and stuff on the golf course. I make sure my little poodle is in the house when they are out looking for food, but it is fascinating to watch them.

Ms. PINGREE. Pretty cool, yeah.

VOICE. They are amazing.

Mr. SIMPSON. Actually in this cotton wood, they had built a nest, and a strong wind came up a few years ago and blew the nest down, and it was like a Volkswagen Beetle.

VOICE. Mm-hmm.

VOICE. Yes.

Ms. PINGREE. Wow.

Mr. SIMPSON. It was huge.

VOICE. Yeah.

Mr. SIMPSON. And they actually came back and rebuilt it in the same place. They don't usually do that, do they?

VOICE. If there is good hunting ground, why give it up?

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

VOICE. She is beautiful.

Mr. SIMPSON. I am going to give you a couple words to you to talk about the Peregrine Fund and what they do.

Mr. PARISH. Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to come and share with you. I am sure this is how you start most of your meetings.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah. [Laughter.]

Mr. PARISH. My name is Chris Parish. I am the Peregrine Fund's president and CEO, and we are very happy to make our first trip with the executive-level change. And I have been with the Peregrine Fund for 23 years and recently taken the job of president and CEO. We have members of our executive staff here, and we are introducing ourselves so that people who know who the Peregrine Fund is.

We have endangered species. Everybody knows that key word, right, “endangered species” and the Endangered Species Act. The Peregrine Fund is a private, nonprofit group. We work globally to work with threatened and endangered birds all around the world. Our focus is delisting, not listing. We are not a litigious-based group. We do work by working with stakeholders to solve problems after we come to understand the system and the science behind it. We are a science-based organization. We don’t litigate. We work with those stakeholders to solve problems.

The peregrine falcon, thus our namesake, is one of another great story, just like the recovery of the bald eagle. And they have been delisted, and the next one on deck probably the California condor. We want you all to know that we are a resource for you when it comes to anything in the system because these birds are an apex predator. When raptors are healthy, ecosystems are healthy, and our understanding of that should be of a resource for all, and we hope to play that role. We have been around for 53 years, and if we are doing our jobs well, we will be around for another hundred and hopefully be a resource for all of our natural resources to help in that. So we thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. SIMPSON. Where are you headquartered?

Mr. PARISH. Boise, Idaho. [Laughter.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Oh, okay. I just thought I would bring that up. I wasn’t sure. We have an area out there called Birds of Prey—

Mr. PARISH. Yes, we do.

Mr. SIMPSON [continuing]. That the Peregrine Fund operates with and stuff. And I would encourage anybody, if you are just coming through Boise, if you are going out to see NIFC or something like that, go out to the Peregrine Fund and take a couple of hours and look at it. You will be fascinated by the work that they have out there.

Mr. PARISH. And if you happen to be available, we have on Earth Day this year the grand opening of our new visitor center. She is excited about it.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Mr. PARISH. Our new visitor center, on Saturday, the 22nd. Is that correct? Saturday the 22nd, we are going to have our ribbon cutting and open up our new center where we host thousands of schoolchildren that come to know raptors, and what it means to do conservation, and what it means to preserve our heritage, and they come through to visit. We also have the archives of falconry there, and that is another unique thing about the Peregrine Fund.

We are founded by falconers, one of the oldest forms of hunting within human history. And so our perspective comes from a relationship with the birds, and when we add science to that, it makes it, I think, a unique insight into landscape systems and, most importantly, our systems because wildlife conservation is people working with people. So thank you—

Mr. SIMPSON. I appreciate that. We have a couple of things today. [Laughter.]

VOICE. Timing is everything.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah. [Laughter.] I said we have a special guest, and I didn’t mean you. [Laughter.]

VOICE. I saw him last night.

Mr. SIMPSON. Okay. But it is also my pleasure to introduce a good friend of mine who has been U.S. senator from Idaho, been governor of Idaho, and he has been the Secretary of Interior, and I am not talking about Ryan Zinke. He has been the Secretary of Interior, but Dirk Kempthorne. Do you want to say a few words, Dirk?

Mr. KEMPTHORNE. The better Secretary.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Mr. KEMPTHORNE. Mr. Chairman, and ranking member, and all members of the committee, first of all, thank you for your service to the country. Mike, to you as a dear friend, thank you for your service to the country.

Mr. SIMPSON. You bet.

Mr. KEMPTHORNE. Mr. Secretary, nice to be with you again. When I had the honor of being the Secretary of the Interior, I also had the honor of delisting the American bald eagle because I believed that the Endangered Species Act, which now is so prominent on listing species, but not recovering. We must get to recovery, and that is why when they asked me to serve on the Peregrine Fund board, I said yes.

Chris mentioned the peregrine falcon, but you need to realize that the captive breeding that took place, Mr. Chairman—they are at the World Center for Birds of Prey in Idaho—released 4,000 peregrine falcons. And today, when you see falcons here, high rises in New York City, or the Grand Canyon, it is about a 99-percent probability that they are the progeny of those released in Idaho. So the results are there. They are on five continents. We have professors, botanists, scientists in place through the world. It is helping indigenous people in the areas where we are teaching how they can help us with stewardship and not lose the lands which they hold so dear and giving to their children.

We took this magnificent eagle to the Rotunda yesterday. We had a few minutes. You can imagine the commotion that it creates, but it was one of joy and appreciation for all of those wonderful citizens that were in the Rotunda to see our Nation's symbol alive and well, and that is why the Peregrine Fund is so important. They are not lobbyists. I am not a lobbyist. And so if you need someone in your hearings, here are some good people, experts with a proven track record. And we are looking to find other opportunities that we can continue to build on what has already taken place.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. I appreciate it, Secretary.

Mr. KEMPTHORNE. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. You bet. Thank you all for being here. Just introduce the rest of your people that are here, if you would.

Mr. PARISH. We have Paul Juergens here. Paul is our vice president of conservation for domestic programs. We have Dr. Chris McClure, who is our executive vice president, conservation and science. And we have Heather Meuleman, who is our vice president of conservation, and of course, Al Gore.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you all, and as we talked when I was out there this fall, this is something that needs to be done, and I am fascinated by the fact that you don't litigate. You try to solve these problems by working with people because I don't think anybody wants to see a species go extinct. They want to recover them, and

if there is a way to work with people, that is the best way to do it.

So I appreciate you being here today. Thank you for taking a few minutes to come down here. I understand you are going up to the Resources Committee, and then you will be in my office tomorrow, and the Secretary is going to be there, and if Zinke wants come, hell, we will have three Secretaries there, and I will just be the toad that invited everybody. [Laughter.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you all.

Mr. PARISH. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. You bet. And if you don't know, this bird actually came from Michigan. They brought it down from Michigan. We just need to see something like that that close up and, you know, see that beak that comes over and you go, that would hurt, you know, those talons, so. Thank you, Chief. I appreciate you giving us the time to do that, and I am sure during a budget hearing, you don't mind yielding that time.

Mr. MOORE. No.

Mr. SIMPSON. Good morning, and thank you to Chief Moore for joining us here on Capitol Hill to discuss the Forest Service's fiscal year 2024 budget request. I am pleased to return as chairman of the Interior Subcommittee and to have the opportunity to address the critical issues and needs of the U.S. Forest Service. As a Western member of Congress, fire is far too familiar to the communities in my home State of Idaho and across the West. I genuinely enjoy the Forest Service employees in our region and value their important work. They are consistently doing the best job that they can do with the funding and the laws we enact from thousands of miles away in Washington, D.C. It is safe to say Forest Service employees are not in it for the money. They joined the Forest Service for their love of the outdoors and want to do their part to conserve and protect it.

Chief Moore, I know your time as Pacific Southwest Region for-ester for almost 15 years gave you invaluable insight into the mega fires that impact our national forests year after year. With 2 years under your belt as Chief, I look forward to hearing your perspective on the Forest Service's planned investments and how these reasonably build on the funding Congress provided in the 2023 appropriations, as well as the Infrastructure, Investment, and Jobs Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act. It would be beneficial to discuss the Forest Service's plans for implementing these additional sources of funding, which provided billions of additional dollars for the Forest Service. Over the coming years, this subcommittee intends to actively oversee the spending of the IIJA and the IRA funds to ensure value for the taxpayers and our national resources are without waste, fraud, and abuse.

For 2024, the President's request asks for \$7.43 billion for the Forest Service, an increase of \$2.57 billion above the fiscal year 2023 enacted level. That is a 53-percent increase. While critical investments for the Forest Service are necessary to protect and manage our Nation's forests and support our wildland firefighters, I have serious concerns about the scale of increases proposed in the President's budget. We are living in a time of record deficits and debt. The Republican Conference and the Appropriations Com-

mittee have committed to taking meaningful steps to help put our country's fiscal house in order. Like all Americans, the Federal Government must live within its means, and doing so will require us to make difficult choices and discern wants from actual needs.

I am glad to see the Forest Service's budget prioritizes compensation for wildland firefighters, wildland fire risk management, and access to all resources on our public lands. Our Nation's wildland firefighters safeguard vital benefits for the communities across the Nation. Firefighters protect our Nation's critical infrastructure, defend lives and private property from the risk of catastrophic wildfire, preserve forests so that they can mitigate wildfire risk, and protect landscapes that contain cultural and natural resources of significant value to Tribes.

As many of my colleagues may know, the Forest Service competes with States to hire and maintain Federal firefighting forces. In the past, the Forest Service and many of the fire-prone States have not been able to offer competitive pay, so I am pleased the administration is proactively working to address these gaps. The request prioritizes the wildland fire management workforce with \$180 million for permanent firefighting pay reform, and \$50 million for firefighter housing needs, and \$10 million towards a joint effort with the Department of Interior for mental health and well-being programs. While these efforts are noble and warranted, the Forest Service does not have the authority to implement any of the proposed workforce changes without the help of Congress, so I look forward to discussing that with you.

Additionally, I was pleased to see that wildland fire payment continues to be a top priority for the Agency in 2024. The proposal for almost \$3 billion of these activities will allow the Forest Service to focus critical investments on hazardous fuel treatments and support the objectives of the Agency's 10-year strategy to confront the Nation's wildfire crisis. The State Fire and Volunteer Fire Capacity grants, forest products, as well as grazing management activities are critical to my home State of Idaho. While I noticed some reductions to some of these programs, I look forward, with my colleagues, to ensure that these receive the attention and resources they deserve.

Chief Moore, thank you again for joining us this morning. Your leadership to The Forest Service is vital to our environment and communities across the country. I look forward to our discussion and working with you. Now I would like to yield to ranking member pingree for her opening statement.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you so much for bringing the special guest in this morning. That was a wonderful opportunity. Chief Moore, so nice to have you with us this morning, and thank you for your leadership. We are pleased to talk with you today and hear your thoughts on the fiscal year 2024 budget request for the Forest Service.

I am very pleased to see that this budget request builds on the historic investments made in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act to improve the resilience of landscapes, reduce wildfire risks, and conduct reforestation of impacted landscapes. And I am very supportive of the Administration's commitment to supporting wildland firefighters and their families

through better compensation, safe housing, and by providing the health and well-being assistance. Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Congress provided \$600 million to support Federal wildland firefighters and to ensure they receive a minimum of \$15 per hour. Your budget continues and expands these pay reforms to provide equitable, competitive compensation. This is essential to improving firefighter recruitment and retention, and I support your efforts. The budget also includes investments for climate science and the promotion of healthy forests.

Combatting climate change and protecting communities from the threat of wildfire go hand-in-hand. Healthy forests are a crucial part of our fight against climate change through long-term carbon sequestration, yet one of the biggest obstacles is the increase of high-intensity wildfires, which are affecting our landscapes. So I am interested to hear from you today about how your proposed investments in activities like hazardous fuel reduction and burned area rehabilitation fit into the Forest Service's 10-year wildfire crisis strategy to benefit forest health. I look forward to discussing the impact these investments will have and where any gaps in our response may still remain.

Thank you so much for being with us today. I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Ranking Member Pingree. With that, Chief Moore, you may proceed with your opening statement. Your official submitted testimony will be included in the record.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. I appreciate the opportunity to share how the Forest Service is putting America's money to work. The fiscal year 2024 request focuses on three primary areas: modernizing the wildland fire management system, confronting the wildfire crisis, and ensure equitable access to and benefits from the National Forest System. The people we serve deserve nothing less than to see the value of their money at work for their benefit.

National forests and grasslands cover about 193 million acres. Some 180 million people in over 68,000 communities rely on these lands to capture and filter drinking water. Our work contributes to over 373,000 jobs, \$40.3 billion to the GDP, and we work with Tribes, States and local governments, private landowners, and many other partners across the country to keep forests and grasslands healthy and safe. Today, America's forests face dire threats from wildfire, climate change, insects, and disease, and particularly in the West. This is an emergency situation that we have in many places, and we are acting with a sense of urgency and collaboration with communities and with our partners.

Our top priority, of course, is to reduce wildfire threats by safeguarding communities and critical infrastructure that these communities depend on, as well as creating healthy and resilient forests. Through our wildfire crisis strategy, we have revamped and ramped up to treat the right places at the right scales, using an all-hands/all-lands approach. This past January, we announced investments of \$930 million in 21 high-risk landscapes in the West, benefitting roughly 200 communities and many other resources that people value. Earlier this week, we announced nearly \$200 million in community wildfire defense grants toward 100 projects

in 22 States and 7 Tribes, including one for fuel breaks in Clark County, Idaho.

Recent investments by Congress gives us the historical opportunity to take bold and strategic action. We are working to do just that, to put every dollar to good use. We are grateful to Congress, this committee in particular, investing in foundational funding to do this work. Sustained execution depends on continued Federal investments. The proposed fiscal year 2024 budget responds to this need. This budget also calls for a \$1.4 billion investment in salaries, health, safety, and well-being for firefighters. A suite of new actions will permanently increase pay, it will improve options for housing, and provide better care and support for physical and mental health. It also increases the number of firefighters.

While firefighters represent the backbone of our wildfire system, we also need to actively and aggressively land manage in order to confront the wildfire crisis. This budget invests \$300 million in hazardous fuel treatments. It supports execution of the wildfire crisis strategy, and it targets investments in burn area rehabilitation. In fact, \$56 million has been put there to expedite the recovery of wildfire. It supports the use of the latest research, including grants to universities, to support educational and technical assistance for innovative wood products.

National forests and grasslands, in general, belong to every American. We are grateful for the Great American Outdoors Act. It has given us the ability to look at reducing \$7.7 billion of our maintenance backlog, which ensures public access. Every person should feel a personal invitation and connections to these lands. We remain committed to removing barriers so all people can enjoy National Forest System lands and services, particularly Tribal and underserved communities. We continue to focus policies, accountabilities, and training to ensure an equitable, respectful, and harassment-free work environment for all of our employees.

We know what is at stake if we don't address the effects of climate change and the wildfire crisis: the health of our forests, communities, clean water, vibrant wood product industry, and jobs, and resources that Americans depend on. We need to act now to meet the challenges before us. Thank you, and I am grateful for your support, and I welcome any questions that you all may have.

[The information follows:]

**Statement of Randy Moore, Chief of the USDA Forest Service
Before the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Concerning President's Fiscal Year 2024 Proposed Budget
For the USDA Forest Service
March 23, 2023 9:30 a.m.**

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the President's fiscal year (FY) 2024 Budget request for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service.

The fiscal year 2024 President's Budget for the USDA Forest Service discretionary appropriations totals \$7.4 billion for base programs and \$2.3 billion for the wildfire suppression cap adjustment (in the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund). The fiscal year 2024 request focuses on three primary areas: modernizing the wildland fire management system; confronting the wildfire crisis; and ensuring equitable access to and benefits from the National Forest System.

The investments highlighted below reflect services the Forest Service delivers through work on National Forests, partnerships with State, Private, and Tribal landowners, and our Research and Development mission area. These investments enable the Forest Service to restore long-term forest health and resiliency across landscapes the American people rely-on while ensuring equitable access to the resources on National Forest lands. Alongside our partners, the Forest Service will continue to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires to communities in FY 2024 through investments in the highest priority landscapes identified within the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. The Forest Service will maximize every dollar invested into our agency, making every dollar work for the American people. The people we serve deserve nothing less than to see the value of their money at work for their benefit.

The President's FY 2024 Budget Request for Specific Priorities to Support Focal Areas

The following investments align with and enhance the agency's efforts to modernize the wildland fire management system:

- **\$1.4 billion for Wildland Fire Management Salaries and Expenses:** Investing in our wildland firefighting workforce is a matter of national security as critical infrastructure, homes, communities, structures, and natural resources are at grave and growing risk of catastrophic wildfire. The FY 2024 budget funds a permanent increase in pay for the wildland firefighter workforce, providing a more livable wage, enhancing recruitment, and supporting retention. Specifically, this request includes:
 - \$180 million for increasing base pay for federal wildland firefighters to ensure that this crucial workforce does not face a pay cliff at the end of this year
 - \$69 million to support cost of living increases for FY 2024
 - \$259 million for increasing federal firefighting capacity (an estimated 970 additional federal firefighters and personnel) to expand our ability to address the wildfire crisis and reduce the strain on our current workforce

- \$10 million for vital health and well-being assistance to more comprehensively support our wildfire firefighter workforce;
- \$50 million to address the urgent need for wildland firefighter housing through necessary maintenance and repairs of Forest Service housing units that will support our recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts.
- **\$323 million for Hazardous Fuels Reduction:** To mitigate wildfire risk on 4.2 million acres in high priority and high-risk fire sheds, building on hazardous fuels funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act and aligned with the agency's 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy.

The following investments ensure that national forests and grasslands continue to provide experiences, services, and products to the American public by focusing on the restoration, enhancement, and resilience of the Nation's forests and grasslands:

- **\$56 million for the Burned Area Rehabilitation:** to build on capacity created with the \$65 million per year seed money from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to rehabilitate burned areas and free up existing funding for more proactive forest health work.
- **\$94 million for Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness:** to increase support of critical recreation operations, planning, services, and improvements, with particular emphasis on creating welcoming, sustainable, and equitable recreation opportunities for all Americans with a focus towards underserved and Tribal communities.
- **\$50.5 million for Vegetation and Watershed Management:** to support healthy and resilient watersheds and landscapes, sustain the production of clean and abundant air and water, assist with meeting the Administration's climate goals, and contribute to healthy and productive communities and Tribal Nations.
- **\$45 million for Minerals and Geology Management:** to locate and prioritize orphaned oil and gas wells for remediation and the inventory, environmental analysis, and clean-up of mine reclamation sites.
- **\$7.8 million for Grazing Management:** to support post-fire restoration, provide for strategic incentives to grazing permittees, and build vibrant rural economies.
- **\$55 million for Forest Health Management:** to ensure healthy forests and functional landscapes on federal and non-federal lands in support of the conservation priorities of the Administration.
- **\$80 million for Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program:** to invest in communities and regions with a collaborative, common purpose in reducing wildfire risk and improving forest health and resiliency.
- **\$1.7 billion for National Forest System Salaries and Expenses:** to support the agency's 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy as well as critical non-fire programs, which have decreased in funding over time as wildland fire response needs escalated.

Further investments ensure that the Forest Service relies on the latest science and technology to deliver results on the ground and for the people:

- **\$502 million for Information Technology Capabilities:** to continue

modernization of our Information Technology systems that allow the public to better access our services, sustain emergency communication systems, and provide our workforce the tools they need to carry out our conservation mission safely and efficiently.

- **\$72 million for Zero Emissions Vehicles:** included across several program funding requests to invest in replacing vehicles within the agency fleet and to provide for employees and visitors with charging infrastructure.
- **\$349 million for Forest and Rangeland Research:** to continue investments in research priorities, with a focus on climate change-related research including reforestation, carbon accounting, and fire and fuels research.
- **\$6 million for USDA Climate Hubs:** to accelerate science production and technology transfer that will aid management agencies, private landowners, and agricultural producers adopt scientifically sound climate adaptation practices.

Confronting the Wildfire Crisis

The Forest Service's paramount focus continues to be combatting the threat and impact of destructive wildfire to our nation's communities, critical infrastructure, forests, rangelands, water supplies, and wildlife. Changing environmental conditions have lengthened fire seasons into fire years and worsened wildfires across the West. Expanding development into the wildland/urban interface (WUI) increasingly puts more homes into fire-prone landscapes and increases the challenge and complexity of wildfire suppression and fuels reduction work. Most wildfires that cause significant damage to a large number of homes and other structures are human caused; 97% of wildfires threaten homes; and almost one-third of American homes are within the WUI.

The Forest Service has a historic opportunity now, between the investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and our annual appropriations, to implement solutions at a large scale. We are now entering our second year of carrying out our 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy. The Wildfire Crisis Strategy aims to increase science-based fuels treatments by up to four times previous treatment levels, especially in those areas at highest risk. By working in the right places at the right scale, our treatments can reduce wildfire risk and better protect communities, infrastructure, and natural resources while helping wildland firefighters respond to wildfires safely and effectively.

The Forest Service cannot succeed in this alone. The highest risk firesheds are typically in multiple land ownerships. The Forest Service will continue to strengthen our long-standing work and relationships with Tribes, States, local communities, private landowners, and other stakeholders to adapt lessons learned into a coordinated and effective program of work as outlined in the 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy. Through government-to-government consultation with Tribes, expanded partnerships and co-stewardship, and broader community support, the Forest Service will increase the use of prescribed fire, fuel treatments, and the management of unplanned ignitions to reduce long-term wildfire risks. Fortunately, we have decades of experience working through collaborative partnerships based on common values and shared goals across shared landscapes as set out in the National Cohesive Wildland Fire

Management Strategy.

Ensuring Equitable Access to and Benefits from the National Forest System

The Forest Service will continue to invest in actions that create broad and efficient access to the vital resources our forests and grasslands provide. This effort is twofold. First, we must ensure that those who rely on these services and benefits can access those benefits safely. Therefore, we are committed to improving the operation and maintenance of our extensive infrastructure portfolio that includes buildings, dams, communication sites, recreation sites, roads, trails, and bridges. Second, to carry out this work effectively, the Forest Service is committed to continued intentional internal and external engagement with Tribal Nations whose ancestral homelands are within or adjacent to federally managed public lands, and communities that live by, visit, and depend on national forests. The Forest Service is committed to identifying and removing barriers to access Forest Service programs and services for historically underserved communities. This will be done by integrating equity-centered criteria in the design, funding, and prioritization of all policies, programs, and activities to center equity considerations as part of the decision process. The Forest Service will also work to advance mission critical work, remove barriers and boost economic opportunities through improved access to contracts, grants and agreements, and permits.

Leveraging Additional Funding Authorities

Along with the tools and investments proposed in the FY 2024 Presidents Budget, the Forest Service will leverage funding within the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to confront the wildfire crisis, create new markets and technology for wood products, promote economic development, and restore forest health and resiliency through partnerships and collaboration across landscapes.

Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), Congress provided a \$1.4 billion down payment that greatly assists in putting our Wildfire Crisis Strategy into action with investments on ten landscapes in eight Western States (Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, and Washington). Through work on these landscapes and others, we completed treatments on 3.2 million acres nationally in 2022. We also accomplished these treatments in 118 of the 250 high-risk firesheds identified in the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. This work was accomplished despite numerous challenges including workforce capacity and high post-fire workloads from historic wildfire activity across the country the past several years. The work on these acres directly reduced risk to communities, infrastructure, and critical watersheds.

The Inflation Reduction Act provides the Forest Service an additional \$1.8 billion for hazardous fuels funding in the WUI. With IRA funding, we recently selected 11 additional landscapes for treatment in seven Western States (Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington). Combined with the initial BIL investment landscapes, our actions will span nearly 45 million acres across 134 of the 250 high-risk firesheds in the western U.S., with a total investment to date of \$930 million on 21 landscapes in 2023. These investments will help reduce the risk of wildfire to at-risk communities, Tribal lands, critical infrastructure, utility corridors, and public water sources. We listened to our partners, the public we serve, Tribes and many others regarding what mattered most to them, where opportunity is, and where

challenges remain. Their feedback and our experience on these landscapes helped us identify both challenges to implementation and enabling conditions for future success.

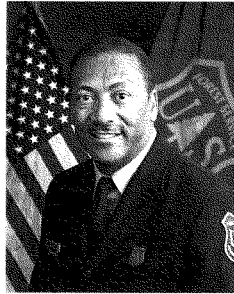
Through Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) (P.L. 116-152) funding for the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund, the Forest Service continues to repair and upgrade vital infrastructure and facilities in the national forests and grasslands. The GAOA also permanently funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), with which the Forest Service invests in conservation and recreation opportunities in public and private lands through the Forest Legacy Program and Federal Land Acquisition.

According to the agency's 2020 economic analysis, Forest Service GAOA deferred maintenance projects are projected to support approximately 4,400 jobs and contribute \$420 million to the Gross Domestic Product on an average annual basis over the 5-year authorization of the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund. In FY 2024, the Forest Service proposes \$94.3 million for the Forest Legacy Program, \$123.9 million for Federal Land Acquisition, and \$285 million for the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund. The FY 2024 project lists are included in the FY 2024 Budget request.

In closing, the President's FY 2024 Budget request for the Forest Service proposes a landmark investment in wildland fire, establishes funding priorities for risk-based wildfire reduction, and improves overall access and utilization of our National Forests System. The FY 2024 Budget request underscores our commitment to long-overdue investments in our wildland firefighter workforce to provide them with the compensation that they deserve, along with critical investments to support health and wellbeing, and expanded options for housing. The FY 2024 Budget also highlights the importance of restoring and creating resilient landscapes, improving infrastructure, and removing barriers to access. We look forward to working with this Subcommittee to fulfill the President's goals and our key responsibilities for the long-term benefit of the Nation's forests and grasslands, and for all Americans. I will be glad to answer your questions.

Randy Moore

20th Forest Service Chief



Randy Moore is Chief of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, leading a workforce of more than 31,000 permanent employees who sustainably manage 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands, support the world's largest forestry research organization and work with states, Tribes and others to sustain all of America's forests for the benefit of all citizens, today and in the future.

Chief Moore believes strongly that a leader must adapt and grow. He is committed to the Forest Service mission, distilling it to its core of improving forest and grassland conditions by bringing together partners with different perspectives.

Before being named Chief, he served as Pacific Southwest regional forester from 2007 to 2021. He also served as regional forester for the Eastern Region in Wisconsin, as forest supervisor on the Mark Twain National Forest in Missouri, and in myriad other roles throughout the agency. Chief Moore began his 45-year career in 1978 with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in North Dakota before joining the Forest Service in 1981.

A native of Bastrop, Louisiana, Chief Moore earned his bachelor's degree in plant and soil science from Southern University. He and his wife Antoinette have two sons, two daughters-in-law and three grandchildren.

Mark Lichtenstein

National Budget Director



Starting in June 2022, Mark Lichtenstein has served as Director for the USDA Forest Service's Office of Strategic Planning, Budget & Accountability. He joined the USDA Forest Service in 2009 with Fire and Aviation Management in the Washington Office. From 2009 to 2020, he served in a variety of different roles within Fire and Aviation Management including Assistant Director for Planning and Budget and Deputy Director. In 2020, Mark became the acting Associate Deputy Chief for Fire and Aviation Management. Prior to his career with the Forest Service, he spent three years with the Department of the Army and prior to that six years with Booz Allen Hamilton.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. I appreciate the testimony. First, a couple of local parochial questions. As you know, Idaho is rich in critical minerals, and it is vitally important we get these minerals out of the ground in Idaho and around the country. There is a mine in Idaho that was developed during World War II to provide antimony for war purposes, and it has been sitting abandoned in the mountains of Idaho. There is a company that wants to come in to restore the mine, clean the site up. However, it has taken them far too long to get licensed.

The Stibnite Gold Project in Idaho is the largest antimony reserve outside of Chinese and Russian control, and yet we continue to be far too reliant on countries that hate us for critical minerals. In October of 2022, the Forest Service released its Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the project, choosing the company's plan as their preferred alternative. And once fully approved, it would be the only source of antimony mined in the United States. I have brought this mine up with multiple agencies and just about anybody that would listen. Given the Forest Service is the lead Federal Agency on this project, I ask for your commitment to keep this project on track and on schedule. Do you have any updates on this? I would be happy to hear them.

Mr. MOORE. I do, and thank you for the question, Mr. Chair. You know, it is important to note also that the reason for the supplemental draft EIS was because the mine operator had made significant changes to the plan of operation, and so we were required to do a supplemental EIS because of that. So where we are in terms of the next step is that the FEIS, which is the final EIS, as well as the draft record of decision, is projected for December of this year, and then a decision, including the beginning of the objection period, is projected for the spring of 2024. So right now, we are projected to have that ready by the spring of 2024.

Mr. SIMPSON. I appreciate those comments, and I will tell you that the Forest Service people that have been working out there on this project have been great to work with, so appreciate that.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. The Forest Service has been working with Idaho to develop a multipurpose, non-motorized public trail between Stanley, Idaho and the Redfish Recreation Complex. The Redfish Stanley Trail has been in the works for almost as long as I have been a Member of Congress. I look forward to this project's completion. And I know that we have had legal issues in the last year or so with the contractor and stuff, but can you confirm this project is slated to be completed this year, and are there any updates on the possible completion date that you can speak to?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, sir. So as soon as the snow is off the ground, work will commence. [Laughter.]

Mr. SIMPSON. That might be June or July or August, the way things are going.

Mr. MOORE. That is Mother Nature.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah, it is.

Mr. MOORE. But the plan is to have it operational and open to the public in August of this year.

Mr. SIMPSON. Great. Well, thank you. I appreciate that. Ms. Pingree.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you for your questions, Mr. Chair. I would like to yield my time right now to Mr. Kilmer, who has two other hearings he needs to be in, and I will be here for the duration. So go ahead, Mr. Kilmer.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Kilmer.

Mr. KILMER. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the ranking member. Thanks, Chief, for being here. I do this every year, and, like, you are a good person. You have great people in our region and at the Olympic National Forest, but I am just at a loss. I represent an area that used to be very timber dependent. I saw a lot of my friends' parents lose their jobs, a lot of my neighbors lose their jobs because of decline in harvest levels. And every year I come to this hearing, and I just plead with you and I plead with your predecessors because in our region and on the Olympic, we are just failing. We are failing to produce meaningful harvest levels, not just to support timber-dependent communities, but to support forest health.

I sent a bipartisan letter with 20 my colleagues to you earlier this year asking how the Forest Service will prioritize increasing active forest management for a healthier ecosystem and for sustainable timber outputs. We have not heard back. We were told by the region that there would be what they call a tactical pause to try to do planning, so instead of the historic goal of 20 million board feet, they set a target of 10 million board feet. The actual last year was 3. And so the consequence of this is there is a bunch that is not getting done. There is no road maintenance, which is important for recreation, for timber harvest, and for conservation. We have a long list of partners that have restoration opportunities that are getting delayed by staffing capacity, or being deemed low priority, or that are being stuck in permitting hell.

And I come here every year, and, like, every year, I just sort of plead with the Forest Service and say what do you need. So, like, we have worked to fix fire borrowing, and we have increased appropriations to the Agency, and we passed an Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act, and plowing more resources in. And yet as I look at things in my region, you know, we have an awesome forest collaborative with conservation community folks and timber industry folks, and for the life of me, like, I don't understand why they wouldn't just take a walk because we are not getting the support from the Service that we need, and I am at a loss.

So, one, I am pleading for your help, but two, like, I want to ask, like, one, how are you working through the new 3-plus-1 strategy to ramp up the ability to do larger-scale management programs and increase timber harvests? Two, what are the plans to solve some of the capacity issues and address the backlog of vacant positions in our region? What are you doing to increase partnerships and to improve the contracting process? We also recently heard you are also working on establishing keystone agreements to help with these capacity issues. How is that process going? What are you doing to address the maintenance backlog on the ONF that is impacting recreation, and harvest, and conservation projects, and what is the plan so that I am not back here next year? I don't want to bang on you, and I don't want to bang on your team in the re-

gion or on our forest, but it is just so disappointing that we are just failing the communities I represent.

Mr. MOORE. So thank you for the question, and it was a really loaded question because, you know, I could cover the entire Agency's operation by answering that question. So let me try and start nationally, and then I will work down to the Olympic National Forest where you are.

So looking nationally, you know, we have set a target of about 3.4 billion board feet this year, and that is an increase from just 3 billion board feet just last year. We also, within the next 5 years, have set a target of 4 billion board feet, and we are dependent on implementing the wildfire crisis strategy to help us get there. We have also looked at doing a lot of our work through partners and collaboratives, which you mentioned, but in order to do a lot of this work through our partners, we also know that we needed to fix the infrastructure which we operate on, and that meant looking at our contracting policies. That meant looking at our grants and agreements policy to make it easier for partners to work with us since we are going to be so dependent.

You mentioned the keystone partnerships. We do. We have the National Forest Foundation. We are looking at up to about \$240 million with them. The Mule Deer Foundation is about \$50 million, and also we have about \$50 million that we work with National Wild Turkey Federation. So these are some of our keystone partners, and we are looking to even expand that even more with other partners. And so we have had to really look at our infrastructure and just how we do business, and so we spent much of this year changing how we operate internally, looking at policy shifts, policy changes in order to make that easier.

Now, when I look at the actual targets themselves, we are increasing the accountability in the system. For the first time, I have given each of the regions a target to achieve, and so each region also has a target to achieve. I am meeting with all of my senior leadership team once a month. That is the accountability piece that is in the system. We want to talk about what are the challenges, what are the issues, and how can we address those issues in real time to keep things moving because we have a lot at stake. That is our accountability to Congress that you were generous enough to provide us with a bill, and IRA as well a GAOA, and we want to redeem our responsibilities to Congress by holding ourselves accountable to achieve what we have said that we would achieve.

Now, looking more specifically at the region, they had a 3-plus-1 process, and basically what that was getting at is having 3 years of sale prep or pipeline kinds of things, plus 1 year. Now, what we want to do there as well is, you know, we have had a lot of fires. We had a lot of reasons for not being able to accomplish that. In fact, a lot of our timber sales that we had planned to sell, the fires burned through them and destroyed them. We have disease and insects that are spreading across the country that is also affecting them. And, you know, when we try and put up a sale, particularly with disease and insects, you have a couple of years to try to get that sale done. Otherwise, blue stain sets in, and the quality of the wood is not as high.

We also have some other challenges. Most of the material we have to look at, getting at the wildfire crisis strategy, are small-diameter, low-value material. And so another part of our strategy is to look at creating new industries with our wood innovation grant.

Mr. KILMER. Yeah.

Mr. MOORE. And so we have been providing wood innovation grants to look at things like cross-laminated timber, and cross-laminated timber has been really good. We have six plants across the country right now. We have about 1,600 buildings that are being built or being designed to be built across the country with CLT. In fact, one of the things that we are proud of to show that it has a lot of strengths is that the tallest building in the world right now is in Milwaukee, Wisconsin using cross-laminated timber. I believe it is about 25 stories. So we are trying to create a new industry with the type of material that we have plenty of supply. We still have reason for saw logs, we still have reason for our traditional program, but we have so much material out that we have to create new industries with some of the wood innovations.

Now, looking specifically at your area there, you know, the Olympic National Forest, what I am told is that we are trying to provide a consistent and stable supply. And when we look at what the Olympic National Forest has to provide, it is really restoration opportunities rather than a traditional timber program. If we look at it for restoration purposes for that forest and that type of ecosystem, what we have and what we think we can do on a consistent and stable basis is about 10 million board feet. I know that is not where the forest has been, but we know that, and I am being told that we can make that a stable type of an operation. Now, in order to do that we have also provided them with some additional funding this year to actually achieve that. And so our expectation is that they will achieve 10 million board feet and that we are looking at that to be a stable amount going forward.

Mr. KILMER. I know I am over my time, Chairman, but I would love to follow up with you.

Mr. MOORE. Sorry I took so long.

Mr. KILMER. No, no, it's—

Mr. SIMPSON. That is okay.

Mr. KILMER. We need your help. We can't do this every year.

Mr. MOORE. I am interested in working with you, Congressman.

Mr. KILMER. Okay. Thanks. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. MOORE. I can set up additional time with you.

Mr. KILMER. Thank you. Okay.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Mr. Cloud.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, and welcome. I am new to the committee, so it is great to be here with you and to talk to you about the work that you are doing and the good work that, you know, boots on the ground are doing throughout. You mentioned university grants, and I was wondering. Our staff had actually tried to find information on what grants are going to universities and had a hard time finding that. We couldn't find it available online. I am not saying it is not there. I am just saying if it is, it is difficult to find. I was wondering if you could provide a list of all the grants that the Forest Service—

Mr. MOORE. Sure. We would be happy to do it.

Mr. CLOUD [continuing]. Had over the last fiscal years or so.

Mr. MOORE. Yeah, we will follow up for sure.

Mr. CLOUD. That would be great.

I wanted to go to roads because, you know, a number of the budget is plus-up, but that is one that is noted to decrease, which is concerning to me. As my colleague just mentioned, there is some backlog work there. I know in Texas in the Sam Houston National Forest in Walker County, there are some neighborhoods there who need access because of the roads. They can't get their mail delivered because the roads go through the forest property. They have signed a cooperative agreement, but the Forest Service, they keep telling us, is unresponsive, and so they are having a hard time with what they are dealing with and getting answers to that. And so to hear from that and then to find out that we are going to minus the roads and then plus up some of these areas that are less tangible, I should say, that is a concern to me.

So first of all, is the Forest Service back to 100 percent not teleworking? Is everybody back in where they are supposed to be?

Mr. MOORE. So, Congressman, we have not been at 100 percent telework. It depends on what part of the Agency you were in and whether that was remote work or telework. Most of our employees who work on the ground have never really teleworked. They have always worked out in the field.

Mr. CLOUD. They were kind of social distanced anyway.

Mr. MOORE. Yeah. Well, where we were at, and we all struggled, even as a country, when the pandemic first hit, and so we were really trying to find a way to operate during the pandemic. And, you know, what I would say is that the unsung heroes are our recreation technicians who were out there with our publics. The publics only agreed to stay indoors for a while, and they began to go and visit a lot of our recreation sites. In fact, we had record number of visitors visiting our recreation sites. And our recreation technicians and recreation folks are on the front line of a lot of sometimes angry public, and so that is part of the unsung heroes in all of this.

Mr. CLOUD. Right.

Mr. MOORE. And we talk about our firefighters for good reason, but we have so many other employees within the Agency that are on the front lines. Now, as you leave the forest district and the forests and you move over to the regional office, that is where you begin to see more telework, more remote work, and when you get to the Washington office level, then that is true. But one of the things that we found doing this pandemic is that—

Mr. CLOUD. So I have a number of things to go through.

Mr. MOORE. Okay.

Mr. CLOUD. I have limited time. So they are still teleworking is my question, or they are not?

Mr. MOORE. Yes. Oh yes, teleworking is still an option for many people.

Mr. CLOUD. For many people.

Mr. MOORE. Yeah.

Mr. CLOUD. Productivity seems to go down. I found this, from agency to agency to agency, the response. We deal with case work

every single day in our office, and it is a notable decline over the last couple of years in response rates and those kind of things, and I would encourage everyone to get back to work.

Mr. MOORE. Our productivity, sir, just for your information, has not gone down. In fact, it has gone up.

Mr. CLOUD. Oh, okay. Can you address why the decrease in roads?

Mr. MOORE. Well, it is the budget, and looking at the fiscal year 2024 budget, we are going to still be able to do a lot of significant work with this proposed budget. I will always be concerned that we don't have enough money to do all the work that needs to be done out there. I look at the storms that have passed across the West recently, particularly in California where we have significant road damage, and I am concerned about our ability to do the work necessary to open up access back to the forests, but also into communities where these roads lead to.

Mr. CLOUD. I would note that in your budget, actually the highest percent in at least this part that we are looking at here, a 70-percent change increase in other accounts. That is pretty vague. What is that?

Mr. MOORE. Well, it is things like recreation facilities. You know, if you are going to put up a timber sale, as an example, we do archaeological surveys, wildlife surveys. There are a lot of other things that we do that traditionally has not been funded as well. And as we look at implementing the wildfire crisis strategy, we have to look at the entire budget if we are going to have all of this work in sync with each other.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. And I have one more question. I don't know where the clock is.

Mr. SIMPSON. Go ahead.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. By my calculation, we are spending about \$5,000 an acre managing our forests, which seems like a lot. I realize I am not schooled in this like you, so I am not assuming. How much of that is D.C. office? How much of that is these other regional offices? How much of that is boots on the ground, firefighters, people working in the forests, people helping people get access to the forest, you know, building these recreation facilities and such?

Mr. MOORE. Yeah. So, Congressman, I am not sure how you come up with that number and what all it involves or what all it includes. If I look at the work that we actually do on the ground, it is much less than that on a per-acre basis. If I look at how the forest is budgeted, particularly on those resource-related areas, on average we are doing about \$1,200 per acre. That varies depending on the location in the country. It could go as high as \$5,000 in some of those locations like——

Mr. CLOUD. How did you get \$1,200 because, basically, I took the budget and divided it by millions of acres, so, you know, there is a \$1,200 figure. I mean, I am trying to figure out how much of this is overhead——

Mr. MOORE. Yeah.

Mr. CLOUD [continuing]. And how much of this is boots on the ground working.

Mr. MOORE. I think you have over simplified that——

Mr. CLOUD. I am sure I have.

Mr. MOORE [continuing]. Because all of that doesn't go into per acre cost unless you are wanting to make a point about how much money we get and you just multiply it across the acres, but that money is not intended to go on improving acres or doing work out on the ground. So if we separated it out and look at the money that is really allocated to do work on the ground, it is much, much less than that, although depending on where you are, cases like Lake Tahoe at times can be \$5,000 per acre because of the restrictions, you know, that we have in certain parts of the country. But there are also other parts of the country where we can get the work done for \$800. So on average, we are looking anywhere between \$1,200 to about 1,800 per acre.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. And I will just say I am coming to this conversation, this is my first hearing, and so I am coming with no assumptions. I am trying to get an understanding basically where the breakdown is, where the workforce, I think, how many employees you said? There are 30,000?

Mr. MOORE. Yeah, 31,000.

Mr. CLOUD. Thirty-one thousand, what I thought, and how much of that is firefighters? How much of that is park managers or, you know?

Mr. MOORE. Yeah, right.

Mr. CLOUD. How much of that is D.C. office, and, you know, if I could get a breakdown of that, that would be very helpful—

Mr. MOORE. I would be happy to give you that, sir.

[The information follows:]

Response: As of Pay Period 13 2023 (ending June 17, 2023):

There are 992 employees working in the Washington Office

There are 2,828 employees working in the Regional Offices (Regions 1–10)

There are 1,591 employees working in Forest Service Research Stations

There are 1,085 employees working in Job Corps

There are 251 employees on Enterprise teams

There are 377 employees working in State, Private, and Tribal Forestry

There are 65 employees working in Law Enforcement and Investigations. Please note that our Law Enforcement has many employees in the field, this is the number of positions not stationed in a Forest.

There are 68 employees working in the Work Environment and Performance Office

Across all National Forests service-wide there are 24,058 employees

The grand total is 32,315 employees (full time equivalents).

Mr. CLOUD [continuing]. Just to try to understand.

Mr. MOORE. Sure.

Mr. CLOUD. Get a better overarching view of the Forest Service, so I appreciate that.

Mr. MOORE. Okay.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. I would be happy to provide that.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Cloud. Ms. Pingree.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you so much. It is great to have you here today, and thank you for your answers to our questions. I have a couple programs I want to talk about, but I want to just start with the budget here.

So last week in a response to a request from our committee, Secretary Vilsack provided a letter that highlighted some of the dif-

difficult cuts that would occur at the USDA if we were to return to fiscal year 2022 funding levels. That has been one of the things that has been talked about as we proceed in this budgeting process. So it is certainly my hope we are not going there, but I would like to have you highlight some of the challenges you would face if we were return to fiscal year 2022 levels just so I can better understand the detail of what that would look like.

Mr. MOORE. So I have my preference, but we have to do a lot of discussions about where those budgets would come from. But based on where I am right now, if we look at the intent behind fiscal year 2024 budget, what we are trying to do is make it right to the organization. And if I take firefighters as an example, we are doing a number of things that is really critical for firefighters, not only the pay increase to make it equitable to non-Federal firefighters, but we also are looking at things like portal-to-portal, where we pay other entities to come and help us fight fires. We just want to do the same thing for our employees. We are looking mental health and well-being. We are looking at the housing issue there. And so if we look at those types of things, those are the right things to do by our employees that work so hard.

Now, if we were to have a budget cut in those areas, what we would have to do is reduce the number of firefighters but provide them with the same benefits that I just mentioned because there has to be a correlation. We have to treat our employees like we value them. And so whether we cut 2,000 firefighters, or whether we cut 1,000 firefighters, 3,000 firefighters, we want the firefighters we have to have those same benefits that I mentioned there that this fiscal year 2024 budget provides. And the same would go for implementing wildfire crisis strategy where we have a lot of our resource-related positions that are really getting out protecting communities and saving lives. That would be reduced as well.

Ms. PINGREE. Yeah, thank you for that, and I really do appreciate it. I know the chair mentioned it earlier and I said in my opening remarks, the understanding that we have to have our Federal firefighters on par with, you know, local and other communities, and make sure that we are providing all that support, both in wages, but also, as you said, housing and mental health issues, you know, whatever it is. We increasingly understand how valuable this force is to us, so.

One program I want to talk about is agroforestry. We don't always get to it in this committee, but I am lucky to be on Ag and this committee, so, and here we are. Well, that, as many people may not know, it is an intentional integration of trees or shrubs with crop and animal production, and there is a growing interest in agroforestry to help mitigate the effects of climate change, sequester more carbon in the soil. So I was pleased to see the announcement of two USDA partnerships for climate-smart agriculture commodity grants that will advance agroforestry. I anticipate a growing number of producers will be seeking technical assistance and more information. In the omnibus, I was proud to help secure \$2 million for the National Agroforestry Center. So could you talk a little bit about what initiatives the Forest Service is

working on in the area of agroforestry and how can we accelerate some of those practices?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, and by the way, thank you for all of your work in that area. It is one of the unsung heroes in what we are trying to do. So under the Secretary Vilsack's direction, USDA is trying to operate as one USDA. And to reflect that, we are going to be entering into a partnership with the Natural Resource Conservation Service to produce and promote a lot of the agriculture-related technologies, training, and educational material to reach the agroforestry producers in a way that we are going to be ensuring value to them. So that is just one of the components that we are planning to do at the direction of Secretary Vilsack.

Ms. PINGREE. Great. Well, I am going to run out of time, but I have more questions for the next round. So thank you so much, and thanks for talking about that.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you for that answer. I am not going to bring up whether it ought to be one land management agency with the BLM. We talked about several years ago when Norm Dicks was chairman of this committee about moving the Department of Forestry over to the Department of Interior. We didn't get a very good reception, not from anybody. [Laughter.]

So I am not going to bring that up. I am not even going to talk about it. Mr. Amodei?

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chief, so gone are the good old days when I used to come down to Alameda to see you—

Mr. MOORE. Yeah.

Mr. AMODEI [continuing]. And Admiral Rick over at his old office building and—

Mr. MOORE. Right.

Mr. AMODEI [continuing]. And tell you that the Forest supervisor at Humboldt-Toiyabe told me to say hi to you, and that people who couldn't pass the Forest Service entrance exam to work at Humboldt-Toiyabe ended up in the Pacific Southwest Regional Office. [Laughter.]

I do want to put it on the record, though, that you took it very well, and your staff, after being momentarily stunned, took it equally as well. [Laughter.]

So it is nice to see you. Just a couple of things that I want to follow up on. First, one of the things that we are finding, not to try to combine everything under one umbrella, if you will, is that at least in Interior and in the Bureau of Land Management, when you look at staffing, not just fire, but all staffing—

Mr. MOORE. Right.

Mr. AMODEI [continuing]. That they are running at about 60, 70 percent on average, at least in the 6th District offices in Nevada.

Mr. MOORE. Yeah.

Mr. AMODEI. And so we are being told that part of that is compensation, and for the lower levels, GS-6, 7, 8, 9, where they are being asked to live quite simply can't afford to take the job even if they want it because you can't rent, you can't buy, you can't whatever, at the same time that we are being told that in the Park Service, those folks have housing with their deal, which was news to me. It looks like it is news to you, too, but maybe it isn't. And

so you are sitting there going, well, I get nobody gets all the resources they want.

Mr. MOORE. Yeah.

Mr. AMODEI. It is like, hey, if this is an institutional thing where we are, and I think it is beginning to look that way, chronically open on staff positions which nobody can afford to take, I think that is something we need to talk about to say from an appropriation standpoint, well, what is the answer there. Just having positions on the book at the lower end that nobody will ever take isn't solving anybody's problem. So I would like to follow up with that.

The second thing is, I would really like to follow up and, you know, from your history because you were over the Tahoe Basin Management Unit. After the recent fire realities there, you have had the opportunity to go take a big look at what the infrastructure there is for delivering water for fire suppression. And so as you go you look through pump stations, and tanks, and all the stuff that goes into that, this committee forwarded some stuff last time that talks about, hey, for infrastructure type stuff, the Forest Service can spend up to \$10 million. And so we recently followed up, and they are not Nevada.

Mr. MOORE. Yeah.

Mr. AMODEI. I mean, South Tahoe Public Utility District is one of them. I love the acronym, STPUD. [Laughter.]

I can relate to that. That is why I am like, hey, I got to do that issue for STPUD. But anyhow, they have got their allotment or allocation, or whatever, from Forest Service that says, hey, you got \$2.5 million. And so my question for follow up is, so what is the process that the Forest Service uses with a \$10 million up to authorization to go, it is \$2-and-a-half million, and here you go. So it is like, well, okay. I am not saying because you had \$10, you are supposed to do 10, but I would like to have some confidence. And I don't know, so I would like to have some confidence that that number reflects good, solid consideration, weighing whatever the value judgments are and going with that.

Mr. MOORE. Okay.

Mr. AMODEI. So those are the things which would be best left for, although you got an aviation guy who does your budget stuff, but at least he was an Army guy. That is good. I will look forward to the talk. But anyhow, with that in mind, any thoughts just off the top of your head, especially on that allocation of up to \$10 million and here is \$2.5?

Mr. MOORE. Yeah. You know, you said a lot, and you hit on the crux of a lot of concerns that we would have internally as well. And you started talking about the whole housing for all employees, and we talked about the housing issue for firefighters, but a lot of other employers will also benefit from that.

In terms of recruiting to go into some of our locations, it is becoming more of a concern, and I will give you an example. Last year, we hired 3,500 people, but we lost 2,700 through attrition and other reasons. And so out of all of that hiring, we were only able to net about 800 people in terms of capacity. When we look at some of our locations across the country, and it is across the country, more and more of our communities are beginning to be really expensive, particularly at the lower end of the grade scale. So any-

thing less than a GS-5, you are asking them to really work at the lower end, and depending on where you are, that is not enough to even pay for rent.

And so it is a real concern that we have across the Agency, and it is something that we all need to spend a bit more time on in terms of how do we address what is happening in our country right.

Mr. AMODEI. We can probably start with what are you doing now. I know some agencies are saying, hey, we are buying rooms in a hotel for seasonal people, not that that is a solution. But anyhow, probably a good place to start is here is what we are doing now, from something to nothing. Anyhow, go ahead.

Mr. MOORE. And we can and we are doing a little of that, not a lot, where the Forest Service would purchase or rent a facility and then, particularly when we have employees coming on detail, that they pay a percentage of their salary toward living conditions. So we just don't have the funds to do a lot of that, particularly the more we move into more of this century. We have locations, sir, that we are being forced to consider do we have enough presence there to continue to stay in the community.

Mr. AMODEI. Yeah.

Mr. MOORE. And as we look at that journey level of employee who has a family, they are concerned about schools. They are concerned about housing. They are concerned about a lot of things. And I don't know if this is just what the Forest Service is facing or if this is what our country is facing in terms of the labor workforce right now.

Mr. AMODEI. We look forward to following up with you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Mr. Harder.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you. I would like to start by just vigorously seconding Mr. Amodei's point on the workforce issues. I know in California, you know, Cal Fire starts out their folks at \$70,000 a year. The Forest Service starts at \$20,000 a year, and it is a pretty hard argument to be making that you can take folks. And so, generally, the only folks you are going to get are people that like the benefits or, you know, don't work out for one reason or another for Cal Fire. So I would love to work with you, Mr. Amodei, on a solution there because we desperately need it.

I wanted to start by talking about the hazardous fuels reduction. I remember the discussion that we had around the infrastructure bill, and we were excited to get more support for that. I think you were able to get about 3.2 million acres treated last year. This year, you are looking about \$4.2 million with this budget request, but that is still a fraction of what we need. I remember last year hearing as much as, you know, 10 times. We have the capacity to do actually 10 times more acres. We have the need to do 10 times more acres of fuel management. Is that accurate? Where does this leave us now even with this budget request in terms of what is still remaining that is left untreated that is still a pretty significant fire risk?

Mr. MOORE. So looking at the wildfire crisis strategy, we said we want to do two things. One, we needed to treat 20 million acres of Forest Service-managed land, but we also needed to treat 30 mil-

lion acres of other Federal, tribal, and private lands. And so what we have done in the crisis strategy is that we mapped fire sheds all across the country, but particularly, and let me just stick to the West right now, and in the West, a fire shed is about 250,000 acres. We have about 250 fire sheds across the West that the wild-fire crisis strategy is trying to respond to.

Looking at the fiscal year 2024 budget, we are able to move into about 134 of those 250 fire sheds. And when you look at our ability to do that, you would have to ask, and we do, so how many communities are you going to protect with that? You know, it is one thing to talk about fire sheds, but what about municipal water sheds? What about communities? In the 130, we are going to be looking at trying to have a positive effect on about 200 different communities throughout the West.

So that is our goal. I think that the fiscal year 2024 President's budget moves us a long ways in trying to achieve that goal. In doing so, we are doing a number of things which I mentioned earlier. We are also creating new industries with wood innovations. You know, I talked about CLT. We have talked about biochar. We have talked about some of those things that are emerging in our country, and we are trying to lean into those things that is emerging here in the country. And so we are pretty pleased with the fiscal year 2024 budget. It doesn't do everything, but it sure does a whole lot more than what we have been able to do in the past.

Mr. HARDER. But, see, even with this budget, you know, in California, you have about 20 million acres of Forest Service land just in California. And, of course, this works for the whole West, that there are still many times this number of acres that are left untreated that should be, you know, high priority, but maybe medium priority because they didn't quite make the list. Even if this is achieved, isn't there still a lot of unmet demand on hazardous fuel reduction?

Mr. MOORE. Yeah, there will always be that, you know. But let me point out, though, though our scientists are telling us that when you go into an area, and let's just stick with the fire sheds, if you will, in order to have a positive outcome on how fire behaves in a fire shed, you need to treat between 20 and 40 percent of that fire shed. And so even though in California you may be talking about 20 million acres, but don't forget the way California is designed, you know, we are working with the State and other private landowners there, so it is not just the 20 million acres, you know. It is how do we have an effect on a hundred million acres that have there.

And in order to do that, the governor's task force is really doing a really good job of looking at an integrated approach, bringing in Federal, State, private nonprofits, everyone into the equation. And so we feel that right now, that is really one of the better approaches to take to try to get at landscapes, regardless of jurisdictional boundaries because that is how you are going to have a positive outcome on how fire behaves and moves.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you. One last question. Given the constant challenges of workforce, given the unmet demand for hazardous fuels reduction, it feels like technology needs to be a much bigger piece going forward for the Forest Service's plan, you know, drones

for fire suppression, satellites for surveillance. I saw these, you know, IT capabilities, but that seemed like a little bit of a different piece. What does the innovation budget for the Forest Service look like, and what are the opportunities that you see to expand that?

Mr. MOORE. So what we are doing, and you mentioned it here, we are moving more into the era of drones. In fact, we have about 100 employees right now that are certified and qualified to operate drones. When I look at trying to introduce more prescribed burning into the ecosystem, we are looking at the southern region as an example where they do over a million acres a year in there. So we are looking at drones replacing helicopters for prescribed burning.

What we are also seeing, too, though, is that we have a really good use for drones to do resource monitoring. And so we want to experiment with that as well so that when it rains, as an example, you don't have to worry about actually physically going out. We also have agreements set up with the Department of Defense to look at how we might use satellites, particularly during fire activities. So we are using technology in a much bigger way. We also are moving away from having fire towers out to look for fires out across the landscape and looking at setting up a camera system that can detect smoke from long distances. So we are moving in that direction, Congressman, and we realize that we need to lean much further into the technology arena.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Mr. Stewart.

Mr. STEWART. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, again, Chief, welcome. And I hope you understand and will forgive those of us who are bouncing. We have got other—

Mr. MOORE. Sure.

Mr. STEWART. I wish I could have been here, but I think I have reviewed your comments, and I appreciate something that you mentioned, which I am going to mention in just a moment. If you were to look at a map of Utah and my district, it would look like I have about half the State. It is not quite that, but it is close. I have downtown Salt Lake City, but I have very rural and very beautiful parts of the State, and obviously the Federal lands and Forest Service is a big part of that. One group that we work very closely with are our sheriffs—

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Mr. STEWART [continuing]. Which law enforcement in rural communities is quite different than law enforcement in Washington, D.C., or, again, in Salt Lake City. And we have not always had a great relationship between the local sheriffs and the Federal Government, Federal agencies through the cooperative law enforcement contracts. We have seen less of that recently. We think there are real advantages in having those. Obviously, it is a bit of a financial benefit to the local sheriffs, many of which are in very, very rural counties that don't have much money, you know, a very small tax base. I mean, some of these rural counties have a few thousand people that live in them.

But that is not the primary reason I am interested. The primary reason is I feel like it benefits the community and law enforcement generally for them to have these contracts. I am wondering if you would respond to that, whether you feel like there are more re-

sources we can make available, and whether you agree that it actually is a good solution to a problem?

Mr. MOORE. Okay. Thank you. So I am a firm believer in cooperative agreements. In fact, I have worked out there enough to see value in those agreements where we have the local sheriff department helping to patrol a lot of the National Forest System's and but also to respond to some of the concerns, you know, that happens on the weekends or in the evenings. And it is something that I think we should all be a proud of, how the law enforcement community is really working together to try and do the work that is needed, regardless of the, like I was saying earlier, the boundaries. So I am a firm believer in that program, and I do think that it needs to be much more than what it currently is.

And so we have been trying to make some shifts where we can based on the budgets that we currently have. One of the problems and the biggest concerns that we have right now is that same budget line item that is in law enforcement's budget. That same budget has to do the must-haves, you know, like the cameras that our law enforcement personnel needs to have and the equipment. And so in addition to the must-haves, then what is left or what is balanced is the coop agreements with a lot of our local sheriffs' departments, but I will submit to you that that is a very important program. It is one that we should all be proud of how the law enforcement community is working together to try and get a lot of this work done. It is just not enough.

Mr. STEWART. Well, thank you, and I appreciate it, and, please, let's work together to try to increase some of this funding. And if I could, just two more comments on this. Number one is there is a reason why local sheriffs are elected—

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Mr. STEWART [continuing]. Because they are accountable to the people. The sheriffs know the people many times, and we have seen incidences, and I am sure, Chief, you are aware of some instances where there was some conflict that was unnecessary. And I think primarily it was because the Federal agency law enforcement just didn't have the training, and they didn't have the same background and relationships there. So I think that cooperation is actually very important, and we appreciate your support of that.

The last thing, and I am just going to mention this because it is way beyond what we could discuss here, and more than that, probably the answer still remains vague, but we want to work with you. And that is the idea in the West, the Western forests, the small-diameter trees being determined to not have any commercial value, and, therefore, we can't, you know, find commercial businesses that are willing, you know, try to take that to market. I am stumped by that for a couple reasons. If I am standing in the middle of Sequoia National Forest, I mean, and then you compare it? Yeah, that is a small-diameter tree. And by the way, I have gone out and cut small trees for firewood. It is beautiful timber, and really, it seems to me, I can't imagine it not having commercial value, but we have got this impediment to doing that.

Again, it is more than we can discuss here in the time that I have, but if we can continue to work with you to find the market. And by the way, if you want to talk about healthy forests, if you

want to talk about fire mitigation, allowing commercial access to this timber is a critical part of that.

Mr. MOORE. Right. I would be happy to follow up with you. In fact, I look forward to it. Just briefly, I had mentioned earlier about the wood innovations, though, where we do hear comments like this. We are trying to create new innovations for wood use, so if a tree is small diameter and has low value, we still can make products out of it. We still can create economic opportunities for many of our small rural communities. And so we have been issuing grants, even for mill owners that want to retrofit their mills to handle smaller material.

Mr. STEWART. Yeah.

Mr. MOORE. And so we are doing a lot of that trying to address a lot of the problems as they come up. So far, we have been received really well on some of the grant opportunities for retrofitting the mills, and we are continuing to look at doing that, but I would love to follow up with you on some specifics there in Utah.

[The information follows:]

Response: Congressman, we certainly agree that it is incredibly important to develop commercial markets for small-diameter trees, and other low value wood products that are being removed from forests, as a component of forests management. Central to this work is our wood innovations program. The Forest Service recently invested \$43 million dollars in 123 projects nationwide through Community Wood Grants and Wood Innovation Grants. These projects are resulting in new and expanded markets for wood products and wood energy including mass timber construction, engineered wood products, biochar, and combined heat and power energy projects.

Given the importance of this topic, we would be happy to follow up with you regarding the specific issues in Utah. Please contact Jake Donnay at Jacob.Donnay@usda.gov to set up a briefing.

Mr. STEWART. Thank you. We look forward to that, and, Chairman, I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Mr. Zinke.

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, Chief, good to see you guys again. You know, as Interior Secretary, I wanted the Forest Service in the worst way to crosswalk—

Mr. MOORE. And it was well known, sir. [Laughter.]

Mr. ZINKE. So I am sure the Great American Outdoors Act has been very, very helpful.

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Mr. ZINKE. You know, my concern is that it was intended really to make sure that it goes to infrastructure, and I believe housing was part of the infrastructure on that, but it seems, as I review it, a lot of it is going to studies. And so if you just look at that, and I ask you to look at it to make sure that the focus was on getting things done and not do an analysis of how to get things done.

And then in regards of forest fire, I am sure you have the same frustrations. A lot of it is litigation. I have talked to the superintendents in Montana, and they want to do the right thing. They recognize the health of the forests. They recognize that we have created a new industrial complex called firefighting. Eisenhower talked about the military industrial complex, and now we have firefighting industrial complex. It is huge. We are spending \$4 to \$5 billion, plus the damages. It is in probably the \$20-billion range when you talk about the damage, equipment, focus, and effort, and

a lot of your attention now is on fighting fires rather than managing forests.

The concern that I have is that we make sure you have the tools to managing properly the forests, but in every case, they always talk about litigation. They are trying to do the right thing, but they are stacked up on four, or five, or sometimes six lawsuits by various people. Do you share that concern on the amount of litigation over what seems to be a very simple timber sale that is in line with a sustainable yield? There are plenty of studies out there. We know we know what it takes to have a healthy forest, but every time we enter a timber sale, there seems to be a lot of litigation.

Mr. MOORE. Yeah. So, Congressman, I as a public servant, I accept all of us and how we are as a country, and in this country anyone can litigate us on anything. That is my reality as a public servant, and so I have to just deal with that. So my opinion doesn't mean a lot, particularly if it infringes on someone else's right, and so we are left to deal with that.

Mr. ZINKE. Well, let me shape it the other way rather than your opinion. Do you see that the speed of which you would like to manage the forests, to a degree, has a cause and effect of the litigation?

Mr. MOORE. Yeah. You know, I would love to be able to go out and do a lot of things that we feel needs to take place, but, you know, we have checks and balances in our system, and I am okay with that. I will give you an example. You know, I look at this wildfire crisis, and you mentioned in your opening comment that we are spending a lot of time fighting fires rather than managing the forests. And what we are trying to get at is the more we create health and resiliency in the forests, the less fires we going to have—

Mr. ZINKE. A hundred percent.

Mr. MOORE [continuing]. But, you know, which comes first? Right now, we have an issue with unwanted fires across the landscape, and so we have no other choice but to deal with that issue. And on the other side of us, what we are trying to do is to create the health and resiliency in these ecosystems so that we can reduce the number of fires. And it is tall order, and it is a big job, but that is our commitment to try and achieve that.

Mr. ZINKE. Well, I am sure this committee, and I don't mean to speak for the chairman, but we have talked many, many times. We want to work with you and make sure you have the tools necessary to go after, and the goals are the same. It is not a particularly partisan committee. The goal is the same, healthy forests, but healthy forests, we have knocked out the timber, smaller companies, so they can't go in, and all of a sudden the haul distance is so far, it becomes uneconomical, even for the micro industries that are emerging.

Management of the forests entails a set amount of material so our smaller mills can make sure that their return on investment and make the right investment over the long period of time. And when the litigation happens, they are not being able to get a known throughput, thus those mills go away, and it creates another series of problems. So I would like you to look at ways that we can be helpful—

Mr. MOORE. Sure.

[The information follows:]

Response: Congressman we appreciate your commitment to issues of forest management both from the perspective of industry and to address issues related to litigation. We would be pleased to set up a briefing with your office to discuss these topics further. Please contact Jake Donnay at *Jacob.Donnay@usda.gov* to set up a briefing.

Mr. ZINKE [continuing]. To have a strong dialogue to make sure. And also these mills, we have to guarantee them, to a degree, enough material so they can survive. And, you know, timber prices go up and down, but soon as you knock a timber mill out, then it is a couple hundred miles to the next one, and then all of a sudden our forests, we don't have the mechanism other than prescribed burns to manage our timber. So I appreciate what you do, and you were very, very wise to bring on board Chuck Rhodey.

Mr. MOORE. Yep, I love that notion, too. [Laughter.]

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Mr. Ellzey.

Mr. ELLZEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, sir. Thank you for being here. I am an aviator by trade. This is a part-time gig. [Laughter.]

But I have been flying my whole life, and I remember the first time I saw Always and the firefighting unit that was in that movie. And I, from time to time, before I figured out what I was going to do with my life, thought about being a fire service air tanker pilot. With the increase in fires across the country and, seemingly, the importance of the air tanker unit, do you all have what you need? Do you have the employees? Do you have the pilots? Do you have the tankers? Are they old? Are they new? Is there a good plan in place for going forward in the future because doing this job is very hard on those aircraft.

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Mr. ELLZEY. And I understand exactly how hard that is. So I am asking you, and this is my only question today, do you have what you need in the Air Service?

Mr. MOORE. I think so. Through contracting, you know, we have the opportunity to call when needed but also exclusive use, so, so far it is working. We will have to see how that continues to work into the future.

Mr. ELLZEY. Okay. If you had any pot of money that you could just go grab, and anything that you could do to improve your service, top three things on your mind that keep you up at night. If you could fix anything, what would they be?

Mr. MOORE. Continuous and stable budget, particularly increases, and I think you hit on it, and I think that is where you are going, but, you know, we have a real problem out there in our Nation's forests. And, you know, a lot of times when we look at just a landscape, and regardless of jurisdiction or boundary, that is a lot of different land ownerships there. And any time there is a fire that destroys a large area, and particularly when you have private businesses that are dependent on that landscape, it has a devastating effect.

And I think if we can get to the point where we can look at if we make an investment here, we can avoid the cost here. And we did a cost avoidance analysis a while back, and what it dem-

onstrated is that with a small investment, you can avoid a huge cost from fires. And I would like to be able to look at more of that type of analysis to really justify the value and doing the work that we are doing now because you avoid huge payoffs down the road. And it is whether we are talking about clean, whether we are talking about carbon that is going into the atmosphere, whether you are talking about burning up, let's just say, 100,000 acres of private land, that is probably \$100 million.

And so we have to look at the different values of that, and we have seen that, particularly with some of the large timber owners where fires have burned through and destroyed some of those private lands. That is lost money, that is lost value, and we have to be able to come together to operate in a way that we can prevent a lot of what is happening. And so how do we talk about the value, and of the investment to be made, and what we save on this end?

Now, we are exploring some of that now with conservation finance ecosystem services. We are exploring that. Nothing is more frightening than when an insurance company drops a homeowner's insurance, but we are seeing that. How do we prevent that from happening to homeowners that happen to live in some of these areas that are susceptible to a higher fire danger? We have a lot of work to do, and I would like to be able to look at a number of those things.

Mr. ELLZEY. Thank you very much. Thank you, Chief. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. I got a few comments and questions, I guess. I have been working for, like, 20 years with different chiefs, different administrations, whatever, on wildfire fighting and the air capacity that they had. I have always felt like the Forest Service should have at least a small fleet that they could use for initial attack and that type of stuff, and I realize we do, what, 90 percent, 95 percent through contract. But it changes every time there is a new administration, a new chief, on what they think they need and stuff. This committee cannot fund 10 new helicopters, you know, if that was what you would need, and former Chief Tidwell told me he would take helicopters over anything else.

What we need is a 10-year plan of what you would like in terms of air service that the Forest Service owns, understanding it is going to be a very small percentage of the overall wildfire fighting thing, but so that we can plan on that in the budgets. And if we could get that and start that, I think we could do it through different administrations and different chiefs, if you know what I mean.

Next, just a question. Why don't we fight wildfires at night? As you know, they blow up in the day. They calm down at night. And lot of countries now, Australia particularly, is looking at nighttime wildfire fighting with air tankers and stuff.

Mr. MOORE. We do fight fire at night, you know. That has been a misconception for quite a while now. We didn't do it as much years back, and, you know, there is generally a reason for everything, right? And the reason we stopped night flying is because of aircraft flying into each other, and——

Mr. SIMPSON. Oh, that is not good.

Mr. MOORE. No, it is not, but we have better technology now. We have night vision. We can see better. And so we had brought on a night flying aircraft down in Southern California to just kind of tiptoe back into that arena. And what we are looking at now is adding additional night flying helicopters, for example, up in the Northern part of the State.

We have also been working with some of the counties who also have that capability, you know, whether it is, you know, large cities. Some of the counties have that. So we are exploring more and more of that, but we are doing night fighting of wildfires.

Mr. SIMPSON. Good. Following up on what Mr. Zinke had to say, you know, I agree with you fully that the public has a right to say how the public lands are managed, and it is not your fault that you spend all this money in lawsuits.

Mr. MOORE. Right.

Mr. SIMPSON. It is because of the process that we have created in Congress, whether it is with NEPA or any of the other things that allow you to challenge a decision almost every step of the way, and the same lawsuits go on and on forever. And right now we are having a lawsuit about fire retardant, and I don't want to ask you about the particulars of the lawsuit. What would be the impact if you lost this lawsuit and lost the ability to use fire retardant? I mean, I almost can't believe that.

Mr. MOORE. So first of all, we are going to plan for whatever happens, and the loss—

Mr. SIMPSON. Well, do you have something to use in its place?

Mr. MOORE. No, we have nothing currently to use in place of retardant, water perhaps. But we are in the process of working with the EPA to get a permit that is going to take some time, though, perhaps 2 to 3 years. And so that is our approach right now, and we are waiting to see what happens in the courts.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah, you know, if I am a wildfire fighter and you are not using fire retardant, I am out of there.

Mr. MOORE. Well, it is a concern for sure.

Yeah. I want to ask, and this is just a comment. I once asked, I believe it was Chief Donbeck, so that was a long time ago. That tells you how long I have been here. [Laughter.]

I once asked him, I said, when you decide to do a timber sale and all of the cost it takes to put that together, how much of the money that it cost is spent on what you believe to be a good, sound scientific decision, and how much of it is spent on trying to make it bulletproof from a lawsuit. And he said, depending on the sale, he said between 25 and 50 percent is spent trying to make a good, sound scientific decision on a timber sale. Between 50 and 75 percent is spent trying to make it bulletproof from a lawsuit, and that was 20 years ago.

I don't know if that same situation exists today, but somehow Congress has got to change the way we do NEPA and those other environmental laws, not to weaken them, not to take away the public's right to have a say in how things are managed, but when you can file a lawsuit with a, you know, a stamp, we got a problem in this country. And so we need to make it make more sense and not cost so damn much money in court where we could spend that

money actually managing the forests. And that is one of the frustrations I have had for 20 years.

It is not your fault. It is our fault, and it doesn't apply just to the Forest Service. It applies to every land management agency, almost every agency in government. So I am hopeful that we will take a look at that. It is a tough process to do because there are organizations that make a living off of lawsuits, and we got to change that mentality in this country and, again, maintain people's rights to have a say in how things are managed and stuff. So I appreciate it. Ms. Pingree.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I have just got one more thing I want to talk about, but it is always such a treat for me to be in this particular hearing because the issues that all of you experience in the West are just so significantly different than what we have on the East Coast. Now, I come from the most forested State in the Nation, so we care deeply about our forest, but they are not public land, so it is just so different, and I know you know Maine and my region well.

But one of the things you have talked a lot about today, which I have enjoyed hearing about, is how the wood innovation grants work and how some of this transition, which really applies to forest restoration lands and some of the small-diameter timber that people have been talking about, because as my State lost virtually almost all of our paper mills and really had to transition our wood products industry, we have benefitted so much from the wood innovation grants and really thinking about, as you talked about, cross-laminated timber. We have a facility about to come online that will be wood fiber insulation, so that is going to be significant, and that can use waste wood. Biochar, another opportunity.

And I know we have been funding it, and it is one of the things I am really interested in. And I see that in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we also created a new grant program which is called Wood Products Infrastructure Assistance. So I am just interested in how you see that money being spent, anything else you want to say about the importance of this. And I think while we have been able to benefit from this really to revitalize our industry and bring back some of those jobs we had been devastated by the losses of, I can see how it is going to impact some of my colleagues into the future as well.

Mr. MOORE. You know, Congresswoman Pingree, we are of the mindset now that we want to work with all of our partners and look at what are those opportunities out there. And you mentioned some of the ones that we are working on, but we also want to create the opportunity to be creative on what is possible. We do know that we are learning a lot. Cellulosis nanomaterial is another one of those things that we are looking at. We know that—

Ms. PINGREE. I am glad you can say that term because I don't dare bring it up because I can't get it out right all the time, but it is amazing—

Mr. MOORE. Yeah.

Ms. PINGREE [continuing]. You know, you can make plastic from trees, basically.

Mr. MOORE. Right, and it strengthens material. In fact, it is known to strengthen concrete by 19 percent, which uses less rebar and things like that, and also putting it in the bumpers of cars.

So we are looking at really trying to move into the innovative period to look at different uses for woods that are not used in a traditional way. We still need the traditional way of using wood, but there is so much more material out there that we generally burn. We just pile. And so rather than to do that, what can we do to create economic opportunities for our communities to create. And so we want to look at the science community, both university system as well as private and Federal, and put our heads together, and we are starting to explore that.

I am really pleased with what we are able to do now with some of the types of science and the types of research that we are finding for different uses of wood, and I look for us to continue creating new opportunities. I also see us making shifts to a new type of industry, and I am really pleased to see a lot of our researchers and scientists working with the university system, as well the private and even the military, to look at ways of using wood. And I don't know what we are going to do as a country, but as we look at ecosystem services, and as we look at even potentially some type of a cap-and-trade system for carbon sequestration, what are the opportunities there that we can be looking at, and how do we begin to account for what we do and how much carbon is lost, how much carbon is sequestered.

And so I think we are just exploring those types of things, but I am pretty excited about the potential.

Ms. PINGREE. That is great, and I would just add, and, you know, any time any of my colleagues want to come visit some of the work we are doing in Maine. It is very interesting, and some of it is in former paper mills. Our wood fiber insulation facility that is about to go online will employ 100 people. It is like cross-laminate timber. It is one of those entities that once, you know, they are established, then they will be looking to do that in other places around the country because it is a relatively new product for the United States, but it is used in Europe all the time. So, you know, there are great implications for all of these things.

And the other thing, I think often people forget, and particularly from the environmental sector, think, oh, well, we can't cut any more trees, but the fact is you cut a tree, you use that wood product in construction, and the carbon in that tree is stored forever. So you have done your carbon sequestration job twice, once you are growing the tree and then once when you keep it in the building. So I think the more we are getting back to using wood products in building is just a win-win for all of us so.

Mr. MOORE. I agree.

Ms. PINGREE. So I yield back. Thank you very much.

Mr. MOORE. It doesn't want to stay on.

Mr. SIMPSON. Oh, it doesn't want to stay on?

Mr. MOORE. Would you like to use mine? [Laughter.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Oh, there it is. I was just going to say, and the worst thing you can do for sequestration is to burn that tree.

Ms. PINGREE. That is true.

Mr. SIMPSON. And that is what happens with the wildfires out there. It is amazing the amount of carbon we put in the air through wildfires.

Mr. MOORE. Right.

Ms. PINGREE. Right.

Mr. SIMPSON. And, I mean, we try to save carbon, sequester carbon, all that kind of stuff, and then, boom, you know? It is amazing. Anyway, Mr. Cloud.

Mr. CLOUD. Thanks again. Thanks for sticking around. Sorry. I am right under the speaker and kind of create some feedback. This is for my colleague from Texas.

Mr. SIMPSON. Together, two Texas—

Mr. CLOUD. He knows me too well and doesn't want me to be heard. [Laughter.]

VOICE. I wonder if those Texans overheard—

[Laughter.]

VOICE [continuing]. Says this guy. [Laughter.]

Mr. CLOUD. We were talking about cooperation with local law enforcement.

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Mr. CLOUD. And I am wondering from firefighters because part of the budget is a big plus-up with firefighters, and we want the firefighters to be paid, you know, what the rate is and what they should be paid. Just because we raise the budget doesn't make immediately there to be more firefighters. And so we can draw firefighters, but sometimes, depending on the region, we will just be drawing them from the State or local firefighters, which will solve one problem, create another. I am wondering if there is a way or if maybe there is a program already in place about local, regional, State cooperation, if you could speak to that, what we can do to, you know, maybe supplement what is going on locally already to help.

Mr. MOORE. Yeah.

Mr. CLOUD. You know, because sometimes, you know, they do tremendous work and are far braver than I would be in that certain circumstance, but some it is waiting around for a problem to be solved as well, you know, to arise. Anyway, if you could speak to maybe if that is a potential—

Mr. MOORE. Sure.

Mr. CLOUD [continuing]. Or what is standing in a way of that might happening?

Mr. MOORE. Well, so let me start from a self-serving point of view first. That has been part of the Forest Service's problem. You know, we have lost a lot of our journey-level firefighters, and they have gone on into the wildfire community, whether that is with States or other entities, and it has created loss of an experience for us. The good news, though, is that most of the Forest Service's hiring is at the lower end of the level, so we are not taking generally from other benefits. We are bringing people in, training them, and then they are going out into the wildfire community, generally. Not always, generally.

And to give you an example, when we talk about hiring 11,300 firefighters, most of those are at the GS-8/9, below, and the majority of them is at the GS-5 and 6 level. And when you talk about

hotshot crews, which is a very experienced crew, a lot of them are G-6s. Some are GS-5s. So we have really, really technical experts at that low end of the scale, and, of course, they are going to go on to where they can be paid better. And that is why this fiscal year 2024 budget is such a blessing to the Agency because it gives us an opportunity to pay the Federal firefighters a fair compensation to the other non-Federal firefighters.

Mr. CLOUD. I am on board with that. The question I am having is that, you know, we have to build a pipeline to train them to get them. It doesn't suddenly make more firefighters available when we are looking at all the issues we need to solve nationally. Do you have the mechanism, is there a plan in place to have cooperation with—

Mr. MOORE. Oh yes, yes.

Mr. CLOUD [continuing]. The State and local—

Mr. MOORE. In fact, each State has agreements—

Mr. CLOUD. Right.

Mr. MOORE [continuing]. On how we are going to approach fire-fighting. In fact, the State of Idaho, we met with the governor just recently there looking at signing an agreement between the Forest Service and the State. And generally, how that works is the closest resource responds to the initial attack, and it is for a certain amount of hours, and then, you know, then you look at what the agreement says in terms of how reimbursements are made.

So we do have that across the country in different States to really talk about how when a fire happens, how each of the entities are going to work together. But when you look at the firefighting now, in most areas, it is mixed. It is a combination of State, county, volunteer fire departments, paid fire departments, as well as the Federal firefighters.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. I guess what I was wondering, you don't feel like there are any authorities or any hurdles in the way of you being able to supplement what you are doing with local resources and to pay them.

Mr. MOORE. We are already doing a lot of that now, you know. In addition to just looking at, let's just say, the Federal Forest Service firefighters, we have what we call Ads, administrative determined, so we have about 6,000 that we can pull from there. We also have what we call militia, and that is a part of the organization that are not qualified as firefighters, but they have the qualifications and a certification for different parts of the firefighting program. And when I look at the South, whether that is Texas or just generally South, and the East, most of their firefighting workforce is militia. So that 11,300 firefighters does not include that number of folks, nor does it include the 6,000 ADs that we can draw from, nor does it include, well, all the neighbors, whether it is the State folks, county, or volunteer fire department. Altogether, 2 years ago, to give you an example, we had about 33,000 firefighters at one time out fighting fires, and that was a combination of State, Federal, local, volunteer, and as well as private contract firefighters.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. The only other thing, I guess, I would say is I want to echo with Secretary Zinke was saying about, you know, housing versus studies.

Mr. MOORE. Yeah.

Mr. CLOUD. And that is kind of what I was getting to when I was like it seems like there is some overhead. I am trying to figure out where it is. You know, when a project is listed, you know, this project cost us this much, to know how much of that was actually infrastructure versus the litigation involved in it, you know. I would be curious to know how much you are spending on litigation and not only, you know, in preparing for it, but the settlements that are going out as well to see what needs to be done there.

You know, we like to think that is above board and that it is an accountability check, and certainly sometimes it is, but I have been here in D.C. long enough to know some of that is a little self-dealing that is going on politically, and——

Mr. MOORE. Would you like for us to provide you that?

Mr. CLOUD. Yes. Yes.

Mr. MOORE. Okay.

[The information follows:]

Response: Congressman, we understand your interest in this topic, and your desire to understand the total cost to the agency that pertains to litigation. In general, we would estimate this by providing the number of full-time employees dedicated to litigation, but there are other factors that cost the agency. For example, agency leadership spends time working on issues related to litigation, and there are other indirect costs that litigation creates. Additionally, since we cannot forward project this estimate, any estimate would be a retrospective look at past fiscal years.

Project cost estimations do not include any contingency funding for litigation. Litigation costs are not measured as a direct or indirect project management cost and we are unable to include litigation costs as a component of project management because there isn't a methodology to predict which projects will ultimately end up in litigation.

We would like to offer you a briefing in order to provide you with the best information and context to support your inquiry. Please contact *Jacob.Donnay@usda.gov* to set up a briefing.

Mr. CLOUD. If you could, that would be good to know as well.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Zinke.

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know you have said that you have been here for many, many chiefs, but you haven't been to Pinchot, so you are not that old. [Laughter.]

So a couple comments. When I talk about going to the frontline with wildland firefighters themselves, a lot are seasonal, and what they are telling me is there they are living on overtime.

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Mr. ZINKE. Would that be a fair assessment?

Mr. MOORE. Yeah. I mean, you know, when you look at the overtime hours that a number of our firefighters are making, it depends on the fire year, of course, but anywhere from 600 to 1,200 hours of overtime.

Mr. ZINKE. And they are saying they couldn't make it without overtime? Is that——

Mr. MOORE. Well, it depends on where they live. That is true, and then you have to worry about an overworked workforce——

Mr. ZINKE. Right.

Mr. MOORE [continuing]. When that happens.

Mr. ZINKE. And then also pay equity real quickly, the tribal firefighters.

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Mr. ZINKE. A lot of times, you know, in Montana, side by side. There was the Elmo fire. You have two groups, and bad as the Forest Service pay is, I think the tribal pay is even worse. So, you know, and there are a lot of troops that, you know, same thing that they have. They get someone qualified, and they will leave to you, and then you will put more training on them, then they will leave. Are you concerned also because we depend on our tribal firefighters also for forests? Are you looking at the umbrella of not only your troops, but theirs as well as pay?

Mr. MOORE. Well, I can't look after the tribal, but I will tell you, I do think it is unfair. I do think something has to be done about that. I think when you look at the firefighting community, you know, what is fair and what is good, it should be for everyone.

Mr. ZINKE. I would agree. Lastly, the Good Neighbor Program. Let's talk about something that is good.

Mr. MOORE. Mm-hmm.

Mr. ZINKE. So what I am seeing and talking to different counties and the States, you know, the Good Neighbor Program, it began kind of as a pilot program, has continued to expand, and it seems like is a great program. Would you be in favor of looking at expanding that program perhaps on acres or forests as a whole, perhaps, as a pilot?

Mr. MOORE. Yeah. You know, one of the really great things about the, and there are many great things, but about the 2018 farm bill is that it allowed that to happen. Now, we believe that under the Good Neighbor authority, you know, where you used to have timber sale receipts, the States could keep those receipts, and so we have a lot of agreements with the States. Where we do not have that is with the counties and the tribes, and that is probably why we don't have much participation from the counties and tribes because right now, under the existing bill, they are not allowed to keep the receipts. I do believe that if that was changed, then you would see a lot more participation with the Good Neighbor authority because it really is a great tool for how we do our work.

Mr. ZINKE. And last question, and thank you. I agree with you on that. So, you know, Europe, I have always looked at their forests. You know, they don't tend to have the catastrophic burns. They manage, and perhaps it is a little unfair to compare apples and oranges. They don't have the wilderness. When a tree is first beginning, they know when they are going to harvest it. They are Germans, they are very efficient, but what I do admire is they don't have the problem of doing a single timber sale.

And perhaps we should look at a forest more holistic because we know what the sustainable yield is. We know that that is the amount of material that has to come out of the forests, and it is coming out one way or the other as a burn, or by harvest, or innovation, so it is coming out of the forest. But the Europeans do it where they have one contract, a longer period, and they don't have individual timber sales that are subject to litigation. And so the throughput over time is more predictable. It is known.

Have you heard of that? Have you looked at that management scheme on a forest before?

Mr. MOORE. No, I have not compared what we do to what the Europeans do. I will say also that, you know, I feel like we are doing an excellent job based on the laws that governs us, and if they were to change, then we could potentially change how we do business as well.

Mr. ZINKE. Well, it seems to me a forest is a breathing entity, and what we are doing is we are stopping, we are starting, we are stopping, we are starting. We are fighting fires, but it is not a journey, which we know.

Mr. MOORE. Right.

Mr. ZINKE. And a lot of the healthy forests are at risk where there is watershed. So, you know, I encourage us all to look at maybe a pilot program on a forest scale of, you know, that scale, and look at it and see if we can do longer-term contracts that we have known throughputs and the investment can be there. So if you are a startup business, hey, look, there is going to be this amount of material. I don't know where it is going to come from, but it is going to come from forests, and that is why we rely on foresters to tell us, look, whether it is a selective cut, or a little more aggressive, or a little less aggressive, you know, that is what you guys do.

So I would encourage us all to look at maybe a couple of pilot programs in different regions, you know, to look at a different model that perhaps would sidestep some of the point litigation that is going on on a small timber sale. So thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you.

Mr. ZINKE. And I wish you the best of luck. I think you are doing a great job, and you have a tough task ahead of you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Congressman.

Mr. ZINKE. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, and you will notice most of the questions have been about wildfire fighting, and obviously it is a huge issue, a huge issue for you. And what you described is you are training people that are then going to higher pay and stuff, you know. We are hearing from the Tribes and every entity. They train the law enforcement officers, and the law enforcement officers then go to the cities, you know, that have higher pay. This is throughout government.

I was a city councilman in Blackfoot, and we had towns of 50,000 people 25 miles on each side of us, and we were a town of 10,000. We were the training ground for Idaho Falls and Pocatello. You know, that is a problem, and I told the Tribes during the hearing that we are going to try to solve that somehow. So it is the same problem that you have.

Mr. MOORE. Yeah.

Mr. SIMPSON. And you talk about the different groups or organizations that fight wildfires, that it is not necessarily just one, just you. When I was, I think, my second year here, I called my chief of staff when he was out in Idaho in August and said, hey, let's go fight a wildfire, and he looked at me like I was crazy. [Laughter.]

I said, no, I called. They had the huge fire up in Salmon, Idaho, Clear Creek fire, and I said, I called the chief out there, the superintendent of the forests up there, and we would like to come up and have you treat us as if we were wildfire firefighting, a couple peo-

ple. So they brought us up. I said we are not bringing any press or anything like that. We just want to learn what it takes to fight one of these fires, and that is a town of 5,000 people that had to be set up to fight this wildfire.

It is stunning logistics of what it takes to fight one of these wildfires. How do you know the next day, how do you predict where it is going to blow up, make sure you have the people in place, that they have the water, the food, safety, and that kind of stuff. It is amazing. So we got to go to the planning session, then we got to take food to them the next morning for breakfast around the mountain. You know, it is like a 30-mile trip to get around the mountain.

But there were Federal firefighters. There were State firefighters. There were local firefighters. The army was there. We had some National Guard there. I mean, it is a combination of everything.

Mr. MOORE. Right, mm-hmm.

Mr. SIMPSON. And they ought to all be treated equally.

Mr. MOORE. Right. I agree.

Mr. SIMPSON. So anyway, I thank you for being here today. It has been a good discussion. There are a lot of areas that the Forest Service covers that we didn't get into questions today, but we have a number of questions that we are going to be submitting to you, and we would like a written response as quickly as you can. And if members have additional comments or statements, they should submit those to the committee within, what, 5 days so that we can get those questions to you, too, and we would appreciate it very much.

Again, thank you for being here today and taking our questions. We look forward to working with you as we work through this budget year.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Chair.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. The committee stands adjourned.

[Questions and answers submitted for the record follow:]

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
The U.S. Forest Service's FY 2024 Budget Request Hearing
March 23, 2023

Questions from Chairman Simpson

Staffing

Chairman Simpson Q1: *Chief Moore, you have been provided with more authority and funds to hire fire fighters and increase their pay in the Infrastructure bill. What is the current staffing situation for the upcoming fire season? I would like a regional breakdown of the staffing situation – full-time/expected seasonal hires, crew breakdown (hand, engine, fuels, hotshot, heli-tack, etc.). What is filled / where are the gaps? What are you doing to fill the gaps?*

Response: Under the first year of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the Forest Service had a target of hiring 11,300 operational firefighters. We were approximately 97% successful in achieving that target for the 2022 fire season. This year, we will once again aim to employ 11,300 operational firefighters. The Forest Service is currently still in the hiring process for the 2023 fire season, and we do not yet have final numbers, but the Agency is updating hiring numbers bi-weekly and by region on our public facing website¹. Currently, when compared to recent years, the Agency is on pace to meet or exceed its target of 11,300 firefighters. That information will remain publicly available for the record. The number of permanent versus seasonal employees is also a variable target at this time as we aim to continue to convert additional seasonal positions to permanent, year-round positions. The agency will share the results of its hiring efforts when that information available. Finally, we annually publish in our Agency Budget Justification the numbers and types of resources we will provide nationally. In terms of where are the gaps to help us confront the Wildfire Crisis, the President's FY2024 Budget includes our request to increase our Wildland Fire System capacity by 970 wildland firefighters in 2024, an effort that would require an investment of \$259 million.

Across the country, more than 12,000 wildland firefighters benefitted from the temporary pay increase provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, including more than 1,200 firefighters in the State of Idaho. The temporary pay supplement of \$20,000 or 50% of base pay (whichever is less) will expire unless Congress intervenes to avert this reduction in pay. To ensure pay continuity and to advance wildland firefighter compensation reforms included in the FY 2024 budget, we have transmitted a legislative proposal to improve recruitment and retention rates, that includes base pay increases for Federal wildland and tribal firefighters, invests more in mental and physical health and wellbeing, improves housing options, and expands the number of permanent firefighters. These reforms build on the temporary pay increase provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and seek to invest in wildland fire fighters and overall staffing capacity. The permanent pay reforms require authorizing legislation, and the Administration is

¹ <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land-fire/workforce>

committed to working with congressional leaders on developing a comprehensive legislative proposal. As such, the FY 2024 budget includes a specific request for \$180 million in support of a special base rate salary table for all responders that are mobilized to a fire assignment. In addition to funding, we will need Congress to authorize the new, corresponding pay table.

Hazardous Fuels and Wood Products

Chairman Simpson Q2: *Utilizing the Infrastructure bill funding, is the agency using the tools and budgets Congress has provided to expedite projects that reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire through thinning? If yes, how much has been accomplished and what can be done to expedite more work? If no, why not?*

Response: Yes, this year Secretary Vilsack announced a \$930M investment in 21 Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscapes, funded by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), covering 45 million acres across 134 of the 250 high-risk firesheds in the West. This work will reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire for roughly 200 communities, and help protect powerlines and other values that benefit the American people.

The agency continues to use all the tools we have to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire at the landscape scale. The treatments on non-National Forest System acres are accomplished in partnership with States, Tribes, counties, local communities, contractors and other agencies. New programs such as the Community Wildfire Defense Grants are critical tools in helping to address the challenges of the wildfire crisis for at risk communities and tribes. A total of 100 project proposals reducing wildfire risk for communities from 22 states and seven tribes were selected and funded in the amount of \$197 million this year.

Although the BIL and IRA investments are the most significant in recent history for the Agency, this investment only represents a down payment for what is needed to address the scale of work on the 50 million acres identified in the National Wildfire Crisis Strategy. Over the long term, funding at a level necessary to address and maintain resilience on and off the National Forest System is critical to continuing to meet this challenge at the landscape level.

Chairman Simpson Q3: *The Infrastructure bill authorized a categorical exclusion for fuel breaks on National Forests. To date, the Forest Service has only approved 8 projects using that authority. What future fuel break work will the Forest Service complete in the next year?*

Response: As of April 5, 2023, approximately 20,428 acres have been treated with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's categorical exclusion (CE) for fuel breaks. The last Decision Memo was signed on March 30, 2023. The Agency has 30 projects using the Fuel Breaks CE category. Specifically, 8 projects are underway; 10 have a signed decision memo; 10 more are developing a proposal; and 2 are on hold. We expect more projects to use this authority as the year progresses.

Chairman Simpson Q4: *How much of the funding made available under the Infrastructure bill for the following provisions has been allocated to timber-producing projects:*

- *Sec. 40803(c)(11): \$400M for “mechanical thinning and timber harvesting in an ecologically appropriate manner”, with 80 percent (\$400M)*
- *Sec. 40803(c)(14): \$250M for the establishment of “control locations, ... including installing fuelbreaks... with a focus on shaded fuelbreaks when ecologically appropriate”,*
- *Sec. 40802(c)(15): \$100M for hiring crews “for the removal of flammable vegetation on Federal land, and for using materials from treatments, to the extent practicable, to produce biochar and other innovative wood products.*

Response: Investments made available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law have enabled the Agency to perform critical work that protects communities while improving forest health and resiliency. A robust timber industry is critical to address the wildfire crisis and to maintain healthy forests across the Agency in the face of climate change. The Agency has developed a number of largescale contracting and agreement tools with partners that will be critical to implementing this work.

A total of \$83,500,000 has been made available for timber producing projects from provision 40803(c)(11). A total of \$27,300,000 has been made available for timber producing projects from provision 40803(c)(14). A total of \$5,500,000 has been made available for projects that include development and production of biochar and other products from provision 40803(c)(15).

Chairman Simpson Q5: *What is the amount of standing sawtimber on unreserved National Forest System lands in the lower 48, as identified by the Forest Inventory and Analysis program databases? How much standing sawtimber is located on lands designated as “insect and disease treatment areas” under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act? How much standing sawtimber is located on lands designated as “priority landscapes” in the Forest Service’s 10-year Wildfire Strategy?*

Response: We are working to collect and analyze the data required to answer these questions. We would be pleased to provide your office with a briefing on this topic.

Chairman Simpson Q6: *Does the Forest Products Laboratory have a comprehensive accounting of the amount of carbon stored in wood products on an annual basis? If so, is the compilation broken down by discrete segments of the wood products industry?*

Response: Forest Service Research & Development collects and analyzes a variety of information on the carbon pool for forest products. Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis program within Research and Development is the lead for upward reporting to EPA for the forest sector annually and produces a report that describes the forest carbon pools, reporting net carbon emissions/sequestration for each, including the harvested wood products pool. This estimate is based on a model that estimates the flow of harvested wood into different end uses and lifespans and can provide estimates for different wood products. The model basis for this pool is being

updated and should be completed this year by the Forest Products Laboratory, a research unit within Forest Service Research and Development.

In addition, the Lab continues to develop Life Cycle Assessment of different wood products. The Forest Products Laboratory has partnered with the American Wood Council to update the Life Cycle Inventory used to conduct Life Cycle Assessments for different building materials and structures. This information will be used to provide a reliable estimate of embodied carbon and carbon stored in buildings for carbon credit reporting. The Lab has also developed Environmental Product Declarations accounting for the environmental footprint in a variety of wood products to provide the basis for inclusion of these products in the USDA Bio-preferred Program. Understanding the net amount of carbon across different forest products, processes, and lifespan is an important program at the Forest Products Laboratory.

Questions from Representative Ryan Zinke

Wildland Fire Management

Representative Zinke Q1: *The United States has experienced some of the worst fire seasons on record in recent years. In 2022 alone, the United States experienced over 68,000 fires, with 7.5 million acres burned – roughly equivalent to the entire state of West Virginia. Therefore, the threat of wildfire is no longer seasonal but is now a year-long affair, and operators of the existing Forest Service-owned and contracted aircraft understand that demand firsthand. As reported previously, a preponderance of the calls for air support for our firefighters on the ground go unanswered. It is imperative that the U.S. utilize all available air delivery resources to build an aerial firefighting fleet to its full potential, as they play an integral role in wildfire suppression.*

In 2022 the Committee directed the Forest Service in House Report 117-400 and the joint explanatory statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (Public Law 117-328) to provide a report on the Forest Service's that assesses the feasibility of working with the National Interagency Aviation Committee and the International Airtanker Board to conduct an evaluation of innovative new technologies, such as the Containerized Aerial Fire Fighting System (CAFFS), as appropriate and whether any new technologies which may meet the Service's standards of water and retardant delivery systems including retardant delivery standards for safety, airworthiness, coverage level, consistent delivery, delivery time, precision delivery, and ground firefighter safety.

Will the Forest Service comply and meet the Committee's deadline for the report?

Response: Yes, we currently finalizing this report.

Please provide an update on the initial findings of the report.

Response: The findings in the report are currently under final review. We will be transmitting the report to the committee in the near future.

Representative Zinke Q2: *In a July 17, 2020, letter to Congressional Offices, Patricia Grantham, then Acting Director, Fire and Aviation Management, USFS stated:*

"We have completed an assessment of our retardant delivery requirements in conjunction with current industry science, technology, and best practices. Our current system of retardant loading and delivery has a very efficient and operationally effective infrastructure. Currently, our current capabilities align very well with our requirements and modernization strategy. Thus, we are not seeking any additional capabilities, including containerized delivery systems."

As Chief of the Forest Service, do you agree with this assessment that the Forest Service is not seeking any additional capabilities in retardant delivery?

Response: We are not currently seeking additional capabilities in retardant deliveries; however, we are continuously evaluating the needs for aerial assets in support of interagency wildland fire response and are moving to contract vehicles that allow us to modernize our fleet and response capabilities.

Question from Representative Derek Kilmer

Wood Utility Pole Supply

Representative Kilmer Q1: *The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act made critical investments in our nation's electric grid, including clean energy transmission upgrades and electric vehicle infrastructure. Implementation of these programs will require the construction of new transmission lines, including new utility poles. What is USFS's plan to ensure that federal forests play a role in meeting the increased demand for wood utility poles?*

Response: The increased investment in forest management will provide more opportunity for pole producers to procure product meeting their specifications from project areas. While Forest Service management objectives don't target production of specific products such as utility poles, veneer, or grades of timber, the increases in wood fiber production particularly in the Northwest, Pacific Southwest, Pacific Northwest, Southern, and Eastern Regions will create more open market opportunity. The Forest Service sells trees or other forest products and specifies the trees or products that may be harvested, typically designated as "sawtimber" or a version of "biomass". These sales of trees and forest products provide opportunity for pole producers and ensures fair and open competition among forest product manufacturers, regardless of their end-use.

THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2023.

MEMBERS' DAY

Mr. SIMPSON. [Audio malfunction in the hearing room.] Ranking Member Pingree and the members of this subcommittee to pass a bill. Before we get under way, I would like to yield to my friend, Ranking Member Pingree, for any opening statements that she may have.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to thank you for holding this hearing, and thank my colleagues for being here today to talk about their priorities in the 2024 process. So thanks so much for being with us.

Mr. SIMPSON. [Audio malfunction in the hearing room.]

THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2023.

WITNESS

HON. AUMUA AMATA C. RADEWAGEN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE TERRITORY OF GUAM

Ms. RADEWAGEN. [Speaking native language.] Thank you, Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree, for the opportunity today to testify on the needs of American Samoa for their budget under the Interior Department and their Office of Insular Affairs.

Tuna is to American Samoa what the potato is to Idaho and the lobster is to Maine. Without them, our economies and identities would be drastically reduced. Now, what would happen if the President declared that potato growing could be outlawed or that lobster couldn't be caught in an area bigger than Alaska and Colorado combined, because that is what the President bragged about yesterday, declaring that over 777,000 of tuna fishing grounds be off limits to the U.S. fishing industry and that is canned at the American Samoa cannery.

In our case, 80 percent of our exports and port traffic revolve around StarKist Tuna operations that employ nearly 4,000 people in our territory, second only to the local government as an employer. Expanding the Pacific Remote Marine Island National Monument, or we call it the PRMIN, without allowing for fishing management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, will devastate our economy. So yesterday, I sent a letter to Commerce Secretary Raimondo and Interior Secretary Haaland, who is a dear friend, strongly opposing this expansion, and I have a copy here for the committee's record. So please support us by ensuring the American Samoa and Economic Development Credit, also known as the Section 30(a) tax credit provision, is extended to maintain those jobs. Please let your Ways and Means colleagues, Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Neal, know how important its renewal is to us.

To that end, I thank the subcommittee for its recent support for funds for the architectural planning and design of a hospital expansion to help improve and alleviate the poorly-conditioned facilities we are struggling with. This is 60-year old infrastructure that has endured over 300 inches of tropical annual rainfall that has left us in a state of disrepair, well documented by the Army Corps of Engineers, since 2018. As a result of my territorial colleagues' efforts, we were able to secure additional support from the Treasury Department to use American Rescue Plan funds to further improving our sole hospital's dire situation. The American Samoan Government has signed a design contract and announced the location of a new medical facility in the village of Tafuna located in the Western District. Attached to my written testimony is information from ASG's American Rescue Plan Act oversight office executive director, Keith Gebauer, outlining the local and Federal funds that have been allocated for this project.

While the planning and project is well under way, the primary obstacle to construction that remains is our geographic and economic isolation. Inflation disproportionately affects the Pacific region as we deal with the rising cost of imported diesel. As such, I am requesting a modest increase of \$1 million to the American Samoa Government operations account to partially offset inflation and allow ASG to move forward with their hospital improvement plans uninterrupted.

At the Pacific Islands Country Summit in September 2022, the U.S. announced the U.S. Pacific partnership strategy and \$810 million in additional extended or expanded programs for the region, subject to congressional approval. The Federal Government recognizes that investment in the Pacific is necessary to push back against adversarial forces in the region, and I thank this committee for recognizing that need for support extends to the territories.

I want to thank you again, Mr. Chairman and ranking member, for your time and consideration of my request. I yield back.

[The information follows:]

**Appropriations Member Day
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Amata Radewagen Testimony**

Thank you, Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree, for the opportunity today to testify on the needs of American Samoa for their budget under the Interior Department and their Office of Insular Affairs.

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Now what would happen if the President declared that potato growing be outlawed or that lobster couldn't be caught in an area "bigger than Alaska and Colorado combined"? Because that's what the President bragged about yesterday declaring that over 777,000 acres of tuna fishing grounds be off limits for the U.S. fishing industry and that is canned at the American Samoa cannery.

In our case, 80% of our exports and port traffic revolve around the StarKist tuna operations that employ nearly 4000 people in our territory - second only to the local government as an employer. Expanding the Pacific Remote Marine Island Monument without allowing for fishing management under the Magnuson Stevens Act will devastate our economy.

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As a result of my territorial colleagues' efforts, we were able to secure additional support from the treasury dept to use American Rescue Plan funds to further improving our sole hospital's dire situation.

The American Samoan Government has signed a design contract and announced the location of a new medical facility in the village of Tafuna located in the Western District. Attached to my written testimony is information from ASG's American Rescue Plan Act Oversight Office executive director, Keith Gebauer, outlining the local and federal funds that have been allocated for this project.

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I want to thank you again Chair and Ranking Member for your time and consideration of my request.

American Samoa Medical Facility Funding Overview

(Based on information provided by ASG ARPA Oversight Office Executive Director, Keith Gebauer)

- The American Samoa ARPA Recovery Plan (State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds) approved by Governor Lemanu P.S. Mauga allocated \$300,000,000.00 to improve the Fagalu site facility, hire new Doctors, nurses and staff and to design and construct a \$200,000,000.00 new medical facility.
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted disparities and deficiencies of our healthcare system in American Samoa. This was exacerbated by the border closure for nearly two years. Improving medical services and access to high quality healthcare in the territory is one of the highest priorities for this administration.
- The LBJTMC management team will administer \$100,000,000.00 for the Fagalu facility improvements.
- Governor Lemanu has designated a Steering and Construction Management (SCM) Committee to administer the new medical facility budgeted at \$200,000,000.00. The SCM committee is chaired by the Department of Health Director and is made up of key stakeholders.
- The new medical facility will be located in the village of Tafuna located in the western District.
- Through the LBJ Procurement RFP process, Architects Hawaii Limited (AHL) was awarded the design contract. The architecture contract was signed in January 2023 and the firm is in its first phase and recently visited the island to connect with the territory stakeholders and begin their information gathering. They are scheduled to return on April 13, 2023, with their medical planner.
- To date, only \$129,000.00 has been paid for the new medical facility project (per the architect contract for mobilization costs). The payment process has been established to ensure work is completed as scheduled and payments made in a timely manner.
- The new medical facility is designed for a maximum 40 bed capacity but that might be modified based on the final services to be offered.
- AHL is working with ASG to modify its design format to a design/assist/build model to bring on the construction contractor earlier in the process.

AUMUA AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN
AMERICAN SAMOA

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

VICE RANKING MEMBER
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
ECONOMIC GROWTH, TAX, AND CAPITAL ACCESS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE, TRADE, AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5200

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE UNITED STATES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

VICE RANKING MEMBER
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

March 23, 2023

Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Honorable Gina M. Raimondo
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Haaland and Secretary Raimondo,

I write to you regarding President Joe Biden's March 22, 2023, announcement of a Presidential Memorandum directing you to consider initiating a new National Marine Sanctuary (NMS) designation for some 777,000 miles around the Pacific Remote Islands.

I wrote the enclosed letter of June 20, 2022 to the President in support of Governor Lemanu to oppose any expansion of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRIMNM) and urged the President to engage regional actors before any decision is taken. On September 28, 2022, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Director sent the enclosed reply stating that the "FWS is not considering additional or potential expansion of the PRIMNM beyond what has already been implemented by Presidential Proclamations 8336 and 9173." At the IGIA forum at the Department of the Interior last month, the administration made no effort to discuss this issue with the Pacific delegations or to notify us that such a drastic change to our way of life was even being considered. What changed? Why were we not given the courtesy of a discussion or even advance notice of this policy?

I strongly oppose any new or expanded National Marine Sanctuary designations in the Pacific that do not allow for commercial and subsistence fishing, especially ones that are implemented by executive order without consultation with native Samoans and other Pacific Islanders who have cared for and relied on these waters for millennia. This action would destroy American Samoa's fishing industry, which makes up about 80% of our local economy, contribute to regional food insecurity, and do nothing to address the predatory IUU fishing practices of the Chinese Communist Party.

By expanding the current Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRIMNM) or designating a new NMS nearly double its size, American Samoan fishing vessels would have to venture even further out from home to catch anything, including tuna for our

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cannery. Because our fishermen do their best to abide by the law, their potential Pacific fishing grounds would be severely limited. Meanwhile, IUU fishing from the likes of the CCP would essentially continue with the perverse effect of this action benefiting illegal Chinese fishing at the expense of Americans.

Furthermore, declaring a swath of ocean nearly four times the size of California as a new NMS could worsen regional food insecurity. Native and commercial fishing from Hawai'i to Samoa would be disrupted, as the current PRIMNM and Rose Atoll Marine National Monuments already prohibit much of the best fishing grounds in the Pacific.

I also cannot see how destroying the economy of the southern-most U.S. territory and declaring vast sections of the Pacific unfishable for our neighbors in a time of strategic competition with China will help our diplomatic efforts in the region. This action is especially more concerning given that our law enforcement efforts and U.S. Coast Guard presence in the region are limited. This action is tantamount to the federal government tying our hands while CCP fishing vessels rob our house.

This expansion is also unprecedented, as no regional and local actors were even consulted before the President's announcement. The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (WPFMC), which is authorized by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to make fishery-management decisions for the PRIMNM, was similarly left in the dark. Essentially, the Administration replaced the regional mechanisms in place to ensure that local equities are weighed with a White House tweet.

The Administration's action in the Pacific continues a reckless pattern of abuse of the Antiquities Act to rope off millions of acres of lands and waters with a dangerous disregard for the people who rely on these areas or even enforcement mechanisms to ensure no one else benefits from these closures. As has been well put by Senator Mike Lee, whose state had 1.3 million acres declared as the Bears Ears National Monument despite local opposition, this constitutes a 'midnight monument spree' that disregards the will of the local populations. Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo also decried the national monument declaration in his state as a 'federal confiscation' that will 'cost Nevadans for generations to come.' The same is true for American Samoans, who could see their economy destroyed by this federal confiscation of waters without respect to our wishes.

In short, this action seems to be a knee-jerk reaction to placate environmental activists who are hostile to, or at the very least ignorant of, the ways of life of people who actually live in the Pacific. As one of the most senior elected officials from the Pacific region, I implore you and the Administration to reconsider this brash policy action that benefits the U.S. in no way while paving the way for CCP fishing companies to extend their reach into the Western and South Pacific.

I urge you to consult with our Governor and our industry stakeholders to find reasonable ways to bolster conservation efforts, strengthen American Samoan fishing, and address our national food security. The Administration must allow the WPFMC to do their job under the law and manage the waters under its jurisdiction with buy-in from regional actors, as former Interior

Secretary Ryan Zinke recommended during his tenure. The Pacific needs proper fishing management instead of outright and unfair fishing bans in our own waters.

I have spent my life in the region. I have grown up in these waters. I cannot sit idly by while the country that American Samoans love mortgages their future for absolutely nothing in return. American Samoans are not against conservation; in fact our ancestors have been the chief custodians of these very same waters for centuries. We have been doing conservation work since before we became part of the United States. What we do oppose, however, is conservation by confiscation without consultation, and without regard to the local economic impacts. I urge you again to reconsider this dangerous policy.

Sincerely,



Uifa'atali Aumua Coleman Radewagen
Member of Congress, American Samoa

Cc:

Hon. Antony Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State
Dr. Richard Spinrad, Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere
Hon. Carmen G. Cantor, Assistant Secretary for Insular and International Affairs
Hon. Lemanu P.S. Mauga, Governor of American Samoa
Hon. Talauega E.V. Ale, Lieutenant Governor of American Samoa
Hon. Joe Manchin, Chairman, Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Hon. John Barrasso, Ranking Member, Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Hon. Bruce Westerman, Chairman, House Natural Resources Committee
Hon. Raul Grijalva, Ranking Member, House Natural Resources Committee
Hon. Cathy McMorris-Rogers, Chairman, House Energy & Commerce Committee
Hon. Frank Pallone, Ranking Member, House Energy & Commerce Committee
Hon. Mike Simpson, Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior
Hon. Chellie Pingree, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior
Hon. Dan Newhouse, Chairman, Congressional Western Caucus
Hon. Mike Lee, U.S. Senator, Utah

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. I appreciate you being here today. And I am going to ask Congresswoman Garcia to give her statement, and then we will ask questions of both you.

Ms. GARCIA. That would be great. We got a long day. I am like the eagle.

THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2023.

WITNESS

HON. SYLVIA GARCIA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS

Ms. GARCIA. I, too, thank you, Mr. Chair, and ranking member, and the members for doing this Member Day here, and it is always so important to hear directly from members about the projects that they have in their districts that are a priority. I am proud to represent Texas' 29th Congressional District, which includes the cities of Houston, South Houston, Pasadena, Jacinto City, and Galena Park. My district is 77 percent Latino.

First, I would like to discuss two of my community projects under the EPA STAG Drinking Water State Recovery Fund account for cleaner water that I strongly urge the committee to consider. The first is in the city of Jacinto City, and that is one of the small cities around Houston. I have a request for \$3.2 million, which will provide safe drinking water and fire protection to a diverse mix of residences and small businesses. These pipes will be replaced with larger polypropylene pipe, which will eliminate the threat of lead poisoning. It will also allow the water system to operate at a pressure that can ensure the delivery of safe water to each user and supply adequate pressure and fire flows. Again, that request is \$3.2 million.

The second one is for a project in the City of Galena Park, another of the small cities around Houston. This \$6 million project request will improve the city's drinking water system by installing and replacing distribution pipes to prevent contamination. The new pipes will also improve water pressure and quality, and, again, this one is for \$6 million, another water project.

The third request that I have for the committee to consider is general appropriations for funding clean air programs. Mr. Chairman, most of the entire petrochemical complex is located in my district, likewise, almost 80 percent of the Houston Ship Channel. So we get all the ships. We get all the manufacturing. We get all the plants. Those are in my district. Again, my district is a working-class Latino district.

Residents in and around the area regularly struggle with healthy air quality due to high amounts of ozone pollution and smog. Unfortunately, the Houston region frequently ranks among the highest in the country for air quality issues. In fact, right now, we are ranked number 8 in the country for the most ozone in our city, and that is by stats from the American Lung Association.

Air monitors have helped us pinpoint problematic areas, and specific pollutants, and their effects on people's health. For example, we know that poor air quality can aggravate preexisting health conditions, like asthma and allergies, and technology can help us

caution those residents who are near a particularly high ozone area before they go outside. As someone who has allergies all the time, I can attest to that because I watch those numbers before even I leave my house, and I am not near the Ship Channel.

My community is trying to monitor air quality more closely and more equitably through local, community, State, Federal, and private initiatives. We are trying to get ahead of any potential hotspots. Increasing the number of air monitors and pollution abatement programs through adequate Federal funding is one more step in that direction. Clean air is a public health issue.

We need to do more to help our communities, so specifically, I am asking the committee to robustly fund the EPA State and Tribal Assistance Grants Programs. These grant programs offer funding for a variety of clean water and clean air initiatives. My letter asked for strong funding for this program, specifically those focused on air monitoring and pollution abatement programs. This funding would greatly help communities like mine and those around the country that have long been underserved. Everyone deserves a God-given right to breathe clean air, period. I am proud to see that this committee prioritized strong funding for this program last year, and I sincerely hope that the committee can once again prioritize funding for this critical program.

Thank you again for your consideration to these three requests. I am happy to answer any questions that you might have. I yield back.

[The information follows:]

Congresswoman Sylvia R. Garcia Remarks
Interior Subcommittee on Appropriations

Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you Chair Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree for having me here today to share my Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations priorities within the Interior Subcommittee.

I am proud to represent Texas' 29th Congressional District, which includes the cities of Houston, South Houston, Pasadena, Jacinto City, and Galena Park.

My district is 77% Latino.

First, I would like to discuss two of my community projects under the EPA-STAG-Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Account for cleaner water that I strongly urge the committee to consider.

1. In the city of Jacinto City, my \$3.2 million project will provide safe drinking water and fire protection to a diverse mix of residences and small businesses.

These pipes will be replaced with larger polypropylene pipe which will eliminate the threat of lead poisoning.

It will allow the water system to operate at a pressure that can assure the delivery of safe water to each user and supply adequate pressure and fire flows.

2. Another project is for the city of Galena Park.

This \$6 million project will improve the city's drinking water system by installing and replacing distribution pipes to prevent contamination.

The new pipes will also improve water pressure and quality.

- 3. Another request for the committee to consider is my general appropriations request for funding clean air programs.**

Mr. Chairman, most of the petrochemical complex and the Houston Ship Channel is in my District.

Residents in, and around, the area regularly struggle with healthy air quality due to high amounts of ozone, pollution, and smog.

Unfortunately, the Houston region frequently ranks among the highest in the country for air quality issues.

In fact, right now, we are ranked #8 in the country for the most Ozone-polluted city in the country by the American Lung Association.

Air monitors have helped us pinpoint problematic areas and specific pollutants and their effects on people's health.

For example, we know that poor air quality can aggravate pre-existing health conditions like asthma or allergies and technology can help us caution those residents who are near a particularly high ozone area before they go outside.

My community is trying to monitor air quality more closely and more equitably--through local community, state, federal, and private initiatives.

We are trying to get ahead of any potential hotspots.

Increasing the number of air monitors and pollution abatement programs through adequate federal funding is one more step in that direction.

Clean air is a public health issue.

We need to do more to help our communities.

That is why I am championing a request letter among my colleagues for strong, robust funding for Clean Air programs.

Specifically, I am asking the committee to robustly fund the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) State and Tribal Assistance Grants Programs.

The EPA State and Tribal Grants program offers funding for a variety of clean water and clean air initiatives.

My letter asks for strong funding for this program, specifically those focused on air monitoring and pollution abatement programs.

This funding would greatly help communities like mine, across the country, that have long been underserved.

Everyone deserves the God-given right to breathe clean air.

I am proud to see that the committee prioritized strong funding for this program last year and I sincerely hope the committee once again prioritizes funding for this critical program.

Thank you for consideration of these requests.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have, and I yield any remaining time.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, and thank you for being here. First, let me ask, Congresswoman, America Samoa, is 300 inches of rain unusual? You know, I have no idea how much rain you usually get.

Ms. RADEWAGEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. No, it is pretty average.

Mr. SIMPSON. Is that pretty average? Do you have any idea why the administration declared this huge area unavailable for tuna fishing? What was the reasoning?

Ms. RADEWAGEN. Perhaps it was environmental concerns, but the bottom line is that they didn't even bother to consult with us, consult with our governor, and consult with the stakeholders out there. And these are U.S. waters, and what it is doing, it is devastating our economy because—

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Ms. RADEWAGEN [continuing]. We are a one industry economy, and that is canned tuna. We are the home of Charlie the Tuna, so when you go to your supermarket and you buy StarKist tuna, most likely it was canned in American Samoa.

Mr. SIMPSON. See, I had no idea that that was a huge industry there, and I eat a lot of tuna from the can.

Ms. RADEWAGEN. So do I.

Mr. SIMPSON. Interesting.

Ms. GARCIA. Especially during Lent.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah. Congressman Garcia, have you put in requests for those specific projects in the community? What do we call them?

Ms. GARCIA. Project funding? Yes.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Ms. GARCIA. They are community-based project funding, yes, sir.

Mr. SIMPSON. Okay.

Ms. GARCIA. I just wanted to make you aware of them.

Mr. SIMPSON. Okay.

Ms. GARCIA. The one that would come under more of your jurisdiction is continuing to fund the air monitoring and air quality.

Mr. SIMPSON. Air quality. Yeah. Okay.

Ms. GARCIA. And they really do help. Well, I have had prior lives, and my prior life was as a State senator, but before that one, I was county commissioner. And it was always a challenge to try to get as many monitors as we could so that we would know where the trouble spots were—

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Ms. GARCIA [continuing]. So that we would know to alert people in order to work on abatement issues. And I must say that any time that we brought that to the attention of industry there, we worked together to try to resolve the issues and figure out where to put them and how to set them up.

Mr. SIMPSON. Okay. Thank you. Congresswoman Pingree.

Ms. PINGREE. Yeah. Well, thank you again both for coming, and thank you. You know, we never know enough about the territories. We always learn from hearing about it, and I had recently just heard about the President's declaration, and didn't realize that that was such an important part of your economy, had no idea that every can of tuna that I purchased comes from there. Are the tuna

fishermen who fish in that area exclusively from American Samoa, are there other countries who fish there, or is that——

Ms. RADEWAGEN. It is——

Ms. PINGREE. I am not that familiar with it.

Ms. RADEWAGEN. They are American Samoans, and they are from the U.S.

Ms. PINGREE. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So it is primarily, and it all comes back and it gets processed where you live, yeah.

Ms. RADEWAGEN. Yes.

Ms. PINGREE. Well, thank you for filling us in about that and also the challenges. I am glad to hear we are moving forward with funding that hospital, but it sounds like you might need a little bit more to get it done.

Ms. RADEWAGEN. Thank you.

Ms. PINGREE. Yeah, and thank you, Representative Garcia.

Ms. GARCIA. Thank you.

Ms. PINGREE. Always interesting to hear about your district and those programs at the EPA and the STAG grants, critically important to all of our States. So good to hear you are submitting those.

Ms. GARCIA. Thanks.

Ms. RADEWAGEN. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. We thank you both for being here today and informing us of your requests. And keep in touch with us as we try to put a bill together, which is going to be, you know, who knows when and what, when we ever get a budget resolution done. So I look forward to working with you to address your concerns. I would say that you did mention potatoes because of Idaho and lobsters because of Maine, but you could have mentioned potatoes because of Maine, too, so that was a double whammy there, you know. You got them. [Laughter.]

Ms. RADEWAGEN. You have got a point.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you both for being here.

Ms. GARCIA. Thank you.

Ms. RADEWAGEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. GARCIA. Thank you for sharing your visitor.

Ms. PINGREE. That was a very——

Mr. SIMPSON. For the members' information, both Representative Schrier and Representative Griffith, other things came up, so they are not going to be able to make it. So thanks to our colleagues for taking time to join us today and discuss the issues that are important to your districts, and this subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Statements submitted for the record follow:]

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Written Testimony
 House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related
 Agencies
 Thursday, March 23, 2023

Thank you Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree for holding this hearing today, I appreciate the Committee's willingness to provide me the opportunity to discuss the Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization program, or the AMLER program. The AML Pilot Project began several years ago and over the last few years 3 additional states were added, including Virginia. My district in the coalfields of Virginia rank 409th out of 435 Congressional Districts in median household income. This program has not only made former Appalachian mining areas safe by closing mine portals, remediating tailing lagoons, and taking down highwalls. The AMLER program has also breathed new economic life into an area that has long depended on coal as its industrial driver. Because of this reclamation program, former mine sites have been transformed into productive areas once again with solar farms, ecotourism destinations, manufacturing sites, and industrial parks. I appreciate the help this Committee has already provided over the years and ask that you all maintain robust funding for the program as you draft the Fiscal Year 2024 Interior and Environment bill. I am sorry I cannot deliver these comments in person due to my participation in committee hearings and a markup. Should any Member or staff have questions, I would be more than happy to address them.

KIM SCHRIER
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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March 23, 2023

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
2084 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and
Related Agencies
2354 Rayburn House Office Building
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Dear Chair Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify to your Committee about a few issues of great importance to me. Specifically, I want to address funding for State and Volunteer Fire assistance, the Legacy Roads and Trails program, and the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.

The first programs I want to speak about are the **State and Volunteer Fire Capacity Programs**, previously known as the State and Volunteer Fire Assistance Programs. Wildfires across my district and the country have become bigger and more intense in recent years. In 2022, 69,000 wildland fires burned more than 7.5 million acres and resulted in more than \$4 billion in state and federal suppression expenditures. These programs are essential for keeping communities in my district and across the country safe.

The State Fire Capacity program helps state and local fire departments respond to wildland fires and with conducting land management activities that mitigate fire risk on non-federal lands. It funds training for state and local responders who are often first to arrive at a wildland fire, as well as equip them with the tools they need to put wildland fires out efficiently and safely.

The Volunteer Fire Capacity program provides support to volunteer fire departments protecting communities with populations of 10,000 or fewer residents. Fire departments protecting smaller communities often lack the necessary resources and rely more on volunteer staffing compared to departments protecting communities with larger populations. Increasing funding and capacity for volunteer fire departments is paramount because they are the first responders to more than 80% of wildland fires – whether on state, federal or private lands.

I am leading a bipartisan letter on these programs with Congressman Mike Bost and respectfully ask the Committee to fund the State Fire Capacity program at \$79 million and the Volunteer Fire Capacity program at \$22 million for FY24.

Next, I want to speak about a program that is near and dear to my heart, the US Forest Service's **Legacy Roads and Trails** program. This program leverages public and private funding to address water quality and access for threatened and endangered species like the Chinook salmon, bull trout, and steelhead.

It was created in 2008 because the general Forest Service road maintenance budget was unable to address the sheer volume of blocked culverts, landslides and washouts which were impacting water quality and access for threatened and endangered species. The need for funding remains great today. The Forest Service has identified a backlog of over \$4.4 billion in deferred maintenance for its network of over 370,000 miles of roads, hundreds of high priority culvert projects, and over \$600 million for priority watershed restoration projects in need of restoration.

Let's continue to implement the LRT program in line with its purpose, to "protect or improve water quality in drinking water source areas, restore habitat of threatened or endangered fish or wildlife". Few programs deliver the trifecta of environmental, recreational, and economic benefits like Legacy Roads and Trails, so I respectfully request that the Committee provide \$100 million for this program.

Also, I want to speak about the Forest Service's **Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program** (CFLRP), which funds science-based ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes, in Western fire prone states such as my home state, and across the country. CFLRP leverages national, local, and private resources to fund collaborative, community-based forest management that restores National Forest System lands. It improves forest health, builds wildfire resilience, reduces management costs, brings local stakeholders together to seek solutions, and achieves ecological and watershed health goals. This program also supports rural communities by encouraging the utilization of forest restoration by-products to offset treatment costs, benefit local rural economies, support forest sector jobs and improve forest health.

My district contains many areas identified as the most at-risk from catastrophic wildfire in the nation. In North Central Washington, CFLRP funds could be utilized to implement strategic fuels treatments and ecosystem restoration and resilience projects to reduce the risk of wildfire and other disturbances to help protect lives, communities, ecosystems, assets and working forests. With sufficient funding, programs like CFLRP, which have a diverse range of benefits, including - wildfire risk reduction, reforestation, job creation, and wildlife habitat restoration - can serve as models for the critical restoration of forest landscapes across the country. I urge you to support this vital program by providing full funding for CFLRP in Fiscal Year 2024.

I sincerely thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify today on a few issues of critical importance to my constituents. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress

March 31, 2023

Congressman James P. McGovern (MA-02)

FY24 Member Day Testimony

**House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Committee: thank you for this opportunity to testify.

As you draft this year's appropriations bill, I ask that you provide critical funding for conservation programs that preserve this country's rich history and natural beauty. We have an opportunity in this Congress to make significant, further progress in protecting our public lands and spaces, and the leadership of this Committee will be instrumental in that effort.

I'd like to share some examples of the important stewardship work being done in my district and highlight the ways in which the Committee can continue to support those efforts.

The John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, which spans more than two dozen towns from my hometown of Worcester, Massachusetts to Providence, Rhode Island, tells the remarkable story of the birth of the industrial revolution in America and the transformations that followed.

Vital to the success of the Corridor – and the unit of the National Park Service within it – is strong funding for the National Park Service and the Heritage Partnership Program, as well as a commitment to the cooperative agreement that NPS has undertaken with the local coordinating entity. I ask that the committee fully fund the operations budget of the National Park Service, fully fund the Heritage Partnership Program account at NPS, and encourage NPS to enter into a cooperative agreement for the coming fiscal year.

Next, I would like to highlight the importance of our National Wildlife Refuge System. Specifically, I would like to draw your attention to the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge, which spans the entirety of the Connecticut River watershed and comprises fully one-sixth of the entire area of New England.

Those who care for the Refuge do extraordinary work thanks to support from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which in Conte's case is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I am proud that Congress permanently funded LWCF through the Great American Outdoors Act of 2020, and I am eager to work with you to ensure that LWCF funds reach refuges

like Conte in a timely manner, in order to address a backlog of essential projects. I also appreciate the Committee's previous efforts to highlight the uniqueness of Conte, and I am grateful for any further efforts that might better prioritize or direct funds to the refuge.

I would now like to say a few words about the newest of the country's eleven national scenic trails, the New England National Scenic Trail. Nearly two million people live within 10 miles of the trail, which spans 220 miles through Massachusetts and Connecticut, and it has grown significantly in popularity in its first decade.

Federal funding must keep up with increased demand for the recreational and educational opportunities that the trail provides. I ask the Committee to provide full funding for the National Park Service so that the New England National Scenic Trail can be funded at \$500,000 in the coming fiscal year.

Lastly, I'd like to briefly mention something outside of conservation that has been a priority of mine for a long time. Clean, safe water is a right for every person in this country, and I am asking this committee to continue to support the highest possible funding for both the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds. These programs help communities across the country maintain safe and effective water infrastructure, and they afford states the flexibility to fund their highest-priority projects.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to share stories of what our foundational conservation programs make possible. I am grateful for the Committee's longstanding support for protecting our public spaces and shared heritage, and I look forward to working with you.

TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2023.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

WITNESSES

HON. DEB HAALAND, SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
DENISE FLANAGAN, DIRECTOR OF BUDGET, DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

JOAN M. MOONEY, PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

OPENING STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE MIKE SIMPSON

Mr. SIMPSON. The committee will come to order.

Madam Secretary, thank you for being here today, and thank you for our conversation last week in advance of this hearing. I look forward to our discussion on several important issues facing the Department of the Interior. While I don't agree with all of your decisions or the Administration's policy, I am glad that we have been able to work together on many bipartisan issues like working to meet our treaty and trust obligations with American Indians and Alaska Natives, and implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act.

I am thrilled to return as chairman of this subcommittee after serving on it for over the past two decades. This subcommittee oversees funding for the public land agencies, like the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and the Forest Service. And as chairman, I have a unique opportunity to influence Federal policies that directly impact Idaho and the rest of the Nation. Since nearly two-thirds of Idaho is Federal land, our Federal land management policies have a direct impact on our State's economy and on the lives of Idahoans who live, work, and recreate on or near Federal lands. This is why as a lifelong Idahoan, I have spent my career in Congress working to ensure the land management agencies are good neighbors and have the tools to manage our lands effectively and efficiently.

As you know well, your Department also has the sacred responsibilities for meeting our Federal Government's commitment to Indian Country. This subcommittee, under both Republican and Democratic chairmen, has committed to addressing the greatest tribal needs, including education, tribal land management, law enforcement issues, and health issues. These continue to be non-partisan subcommittee priorities. We welcome your active involvement working with us and our American Indians and Alaska Native brothers and sisters.

I know my colleagues also have a lot of priorities that they will want to discuss with you today, and I want to quickly mention a few things. One is ensuring that we are not dependent upon our adversaries for minerals. During our meeting, you discussed the

work being done to identify those resources in the United States, which is a good first step, but we also must work together to get them out of the ground. Here in the U.S., that can be done safely and in a way that protects the environment better than anywhere else in the world.

And in terms of the budget, the President has requested almost \$17 billion in discretionary funding for the Interior Department. At a time when our Federal deficit continues to rise—in fact, it has doubled since I first joined this committee—we need to have a serious discussion about how to do more with less. I will be looking for ways to increase efficiencies, reduce duplication, and ensure that Federal dollars are spent wisely with a demonstrated benefit. I know there are many stakeholders and partners involved in the Department's work, and I appreciate the leverage that non-Federal partners provide for many programs and projects.

I look forward to talking more about this and many other issues that our members will want to discuss with you today, and with that I would like to yield to Ranking Member Pingree for her opening statement.

STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE CHELLIE PINGREE

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for having us for this hearing. Good morning, Madam Secretary. Thank you for being with us today to discuss the fiscal year 2024 budget request for the Department of the Interior. We are thrilled with the job you are doing there, and we miss you in Congress.

Your budget continues to build upon this Administration's commitment to addressing the climate crisis by requesting significant increases to advance science and enhance conservation efforts but ensures that we are upholding our treaty and trust obligations, and it comprehensively expands the Federal Government's response to wildland fire. As the steward of Federal land, your Agency faces significant climate-related challenges, from drought, wildfires, floods, and invasive species, so I am pleased to see a continued emphasis on science.

This budget includes an additional \$288 million for the U.S. Geological Survey to carry out important work, such as the Groundwater and Stream Flow Information Program, which provides data for forecasting water availability. The utility of this work goes beyond resource management and is used for decision making by the agriculture sector. The budget also seeks to meet our responsibilities and legal obligations to protect Indian trust assets and resources and to provide direct services, such as education, public safety, and justice. A total increase of \$690 million is proposed for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, with targeted investments to address missing and murdered indigenous peoples, the legacy of the Federal Indian boarding schools, and native language revitalization. I believe these increases are appropriate and necessary. Finally, I am pleased to see that the budget takes a holistic approach to wildland fire, focusing on both a healthy landscape and a healthy workforce. I am supportive of the Administration's commitment to supporting wildland firefighters and their families through better compensation, safe housing, and providing the health and well-being assistance.

Secretary Haaland, thank you again for appearing before us this morning. I appreciate your testimony and the answers to our questions. I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Ranking Member Pingree. Secretary Haaland, you may proceed with your opening statement. Your official statement will be submitted for the record.

STATEMENT OF HONORABLE DEB HAALAND, SECRETARY,
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Secretary HAALAND. Good morning, Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Interior's fiscal year 2024 budget request. Our 2024 budget totals \$18.9 billion in current authority, an increase of \$2 billion from the 2023 level.

First, I want to highlight several important proposals. These include significant reforms to support the Wildland Fire Workforce, mandatory funding for future Indian water rights settlements, expanding Good Neighbor and stewardship contracting authorities, to include the Fish and Wildlife Service and the NPS, reclassifying legally-required tribal sovereignty payments, contract and leasing costs from discretionary to mandatory funding, and \$6.5 billion over 20 years from the Department of State to fund economic assistance under the Compacts of Free Association.

Let me begin with our Indian Affairs budget request. This administration has made a steadfast commitment to strengthen government-to-government relationships with Indian tribes with a total request of \$4.7 billion for Indian Affairs programs. Investments will address missing and murdered indigenous peoples, the legacy of Federal Indian boarding schools, and native language revitalization. BIA's budget includes \$48 million for the Tribal Climate Resilience Program to support climate resilience planning, including relocation. In response to concerns by tribal leaders for public safety and their communities, the budget includes an increase of nearly \$86 million above 2023. We also request \$1.6 billion for Indian education programs. Notably, the 2024 request for BIE construction will support seven school projects.

Turning to wildland fire, the 2024 budget honors President Biden's commitment to address this issue to assist firefighters, supporting an additional 370 Federal and 55 tribal fire personnel. Complementing the pay reforms, we also include \$993.3 million for fuels management activities, an increase of \$46.3 million above 2023. These investments are crucial as wildfires were noticeably higher in 2022 than the 10-year average.

Stewardship of our natural resources sources is a core mission for us as Interior manages about 20 percent of America's public lands. Our request covers \$3.2 billion in annual funding for conservation efforts that supports key initiatives, such as wildlife corridors and youth corps partnerships. The request also includes \$140 million for Fish and Wildlife Service partnership programs that support voluntary conservation on public and private lands, a key focus of the America the Beautiful Initiative. To complement the \$681 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, I am proud to propose \$12 million in discretionary funding for a new tribal LWCF program, which is a top priority for Tribes.

At the Department, science is our foundation. The USGS works with partners across the country to maintain 20,000 groundwater monitoring wells, 11,800 stream gauges, and 3,800 earthquake sensors. It also directly monitors 70 volcanoes. The budget includes \$128 million that supports nine regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers with university partners. We are also looking forward to the Landsat Next Mission that will take advantage of new technologies for global imaging data.

When it comes to energy, we are excited to be on our way to achieve the administration's goals to deploy 30 gigawatts of offshore wind capacity by 2030. As of last month, BOEM has conducted 11 wind energy lease sales for areas in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. That is more than 2.5 million acres of commercial wind energy lease areas. The budget includes over \$64 million for BOEM's Renewable Energy Program, including a \$12 million increase for permitting. Onshore, BLM is also making progress to permit 25 gigawatts of renewable energy on public lands by 2025. BLM has permitted more than 126 renewable energy projects, processed many more, and is working to support much-needed transmission lines. To meet these needs we include \$72 million for BLM's Renewable Energy Program.

At the end of 2020, Interior's staffing was at a 10-year low of around 60,500. When fully enacted, the budget would support an increase of 4,000 personnel from the 2023 estimate, to over 68,000. Regarding infrastructure, our request includes more than \$3 billion for operations and maintenance. In addition, there is \$1.6 billion in mandatory funding available each year through 2025 through the Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF). At the end of 2020, our LRF Program will have initiated 276 projects, touching all 50 States, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Those projects will address \$3.4 billion of our deferred maintenance backlog, creating an average of 17,000 jobs per year.

Overall, the President's budget for Interior invests in programs to strengthen our Nation for all Americans. I look forward to doing this work together. Thank you, and we are pleased to answer questions if you have them.

[The information follows:]

STATEMENT OF DEB HAALAND
SECRETARY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

March 28, 2023

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Interior Department's Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request.

It is an honor and privilege for me to be here with you today to speak on behalf of the President's 2024 Budget for the Department of the Interior. I value and appreciate Interior's long tradition of working together with the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee to accomplish great things for the American people. This Subcommittee plays a vital role in the success of the Department of the Interior (DOI). As the 118th Congress begins, I look forward to working with the Members of this Subcommittee this year, both new and returning, in continued collaboration to address some of our country's most pressing challenges.

As the steward of 20 percent of America's lands, the DOI serves several important roles for America. Interior's programs are important to the Nation's economy: generating jobs, supporting local economic growth, building resilience to our changing climate, and managing important natural resources. Interior is also charged with unique responsibilities and legal obligations to protect Indian trust assets and resources and provide direct services to federally recognized Tribes, Alaska Natives, and individual Indian beneficiaries to honor the Nation's Federal Indian trust responsibilities.

The Department's 2024 budget totals \$18.9 billion in current authority—an increase of \$2.0 billion, or 12 percent, from the 2023 enacted budget. For programs within the jurisdiction of this Subcommittee, our request is \$16.9 billion in net discretionary authority—an increase of \$2.0 billion or 13 percent from the 2023 enacted appropriation. The net discretionary request assumes Contract Support Costs and 105(l) Tribal Leases are reclassified as mandatory funding in 2024 and are not included in the total. An additional \$350.0 million is accessible through a budget cap adjustment for wildfire suppression to ensure funds are available in the event the regular annual appropriation is inadequate to meet suppression needs. Within the increase for 2024, \$438.5 million will be used to cover fixed-cost increases, such as rent and Federal salary adjustments needed to maintain Interior's core operations carried out by close to 70,000 people living and working in every corner of the country.

This budget allocates important mandatory funding available through the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), including \$1.6 billion for deferred maintenance projects through the Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service (FWS), National Park Service (NPS), and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). The budget also allocates \$681.9 million in mandatory funding for Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) programs.

The President's 2024 Budget complements the landmark investments in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Those funds are providing the significant boost needed to address long-standing challenges, from reclaiming lands to tackling critical drought and threats of wildland fires. These targeted investments address specific objectives, but they do not supplant the need for the annual appropriations supporting our on-going base programs and operations.

2024 Legislative Proposals

The 2024 President's Budget includes several important legislative proposals and technical budget adjustments.

Wildland Firefighting Workforce—The budget proposes legislation and funding to implement significant reforms to better support the wildland fire management workforce. The Administration proposes legislation to establish a special base rate salary table for wildland firefighters, create a new premium pay category that provides some additional compensation for all hours a wildland fire responder is mobilized on an incident, and establish a pay cap that provides waiver authority to the Secretary using specific criteria. The budget supports this legislative proposal with funding for these Federal pay reforms and similar pay increases for Tribal personnel. These proposals build upon the historic reforms in BIL to ensure wildland fire personnel receive the enhanced support they need to meet evolving mission demands as both the frequency and intensity of catastrophic wildfires are expected to continue to increase due to climate change.

Indian Water Rights Settlements—Building upon investments in the BIL, the budget proposes \$2.5 billion in mandatory funding over 10 years to expand the Indian Water Rights Settlement Completion Fund to cover the costs of enacted and future water rights settlements and \$340.0 million in mandatory funding over 10 years for ongoing costs including operations and maintenance costs associated with enacted water settlements managed by the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). Providing a stable, dedicated funding source for Indian water rights settlements helps to ensure these commitments are honored and Tribal communities have safe, reliable water supplies to support public and environmental health and economic opportunity.

Good Neighbor and Stewardship Contracting Authority—The budget proposes to expand Good Neighbor and Stewardship Contracting authorities currently available to BLM and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to include FWS and NPS. Including these bureaus would allow them to enter into cooperative agreements or contracts with States, Tribes, and counties to perform watershed restoration and forest management services on bureau lands. Expanding stewardship contracting authority would enable FWS and NPS to enter into stewardship contracts or agreements to achieve bureau land and resource management goals. These contracts enable agencies to apply the value of timber or other forest products removed from the lands as an offset against the cost of land and resource management services provided through the agreement. The

budget also proposes appropriations language to extend current Good Neighbor Authority for BLM and USFS which expires at the end of FY 2023 by 1 year.

Contract Support Costs and Payments for Tribal Leases—The budget proposes to reclassify funding for payments required by law to reimburse Tribes for costs associated with carrying out Federal functions under a self-determination contract or self-governance compact, from discretionary to mandatory funding in 2024. Contract Support Costs funding is a critical Tribal sovereignty payment enabling Tribes to assume responsibility for operating Federal programs by covering the costs to administer the programs. Section 105(l) of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act provides that Tribes and Tribal organizations carrying out contracted or compacted Federal functions may enter into a lease agreement with the Department of the Interior for the tribally owned or rented facility used to carry out those functions. These legally required critical Tribal sovereignty payments bring Tribes closer to meeting the full cost to administer and operate Federal functions, including costs associated with the use of Tribal facilities.

Compacts of Free Association (COFA)—The Administration supports funding the renewal of our COFA relationships with the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the Republic of Palau. The 2024 budget will seek \$6.5 billion in economic assistance over 20 years to be provided through a mandatory appropriation at the Department of State, with language calling for continued implementation by the Department of the Interior. The total amount requested as part of a COFA mandatory proposal will also include \$634 million for continued U.S. Postal Service services to the Freely Associated States (FAS). Funding for postal services will be requested as a direct payment to the Postal Service Fund. The United States remains committed to its long-standing partnerships with the governments and the people of the FAS as we work together to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Injurious Species—The budget supports congressional efforts to amend Title 18 of the Lacey Act to return the longstanding authority of FWS to prohibit interstate transports of injurious species. Recent incidences of injurious species, such as invasive mussels contaminating commercial products, demonstrate the need to restore this authority.

Strengthening Tribal Nations

This Administration has made a steadfast commitment to honor our Nation's Tribal trust responsibilities and strengthen government-to-government relationships with Tribal Nations. This budget maintains that commitment to support and expand this work with a total request of \$4.7 billion for Indian Affairs programs, an increase of \$690 million from 2023. The 2024 budget makes significant investments to strengthen Tribal Nations, their sovereignty and revitalization, providing new and expanded funding opportunities and resources for Tribes to manage and support their lands, waters, and communities. These investments include continuing support addressing matters deeply important to Native Americans to address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples, the legacy of the Federal Indian Boarding Schools, and Native Language Revitalization.

Investing in Tribal Communities

The request includes \$3.0 billion for Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) programs, an increase of \$482.8 million above 2023 enacted. The BIA budget contains several significant investments in Tribal communities, including \$78.1 million for the Tiwahe Initiative, an increase of \$33.5 million from 2023. Under Tiwahe, a portion of the funding assists Tribes at selected sites to implement a tribally driven approach to deliver essential services more effectively and efficiently. Since 2015, the Tiwahe Initiative has focused primarily on promoting family stability through several Human Services programs. The Department's 2024 budget further expands Tiwahe in Social Services, Indian Child Welfare Act, Housing, Tribal Justice Support, and Economic Development programs.

Tribal leaders across the country have expressed increased concern for public safety in their communities. Their elevated level of concern is coupled with emerging needs to expand services to address the *McGirt v. Oklahoma* decision and the needs of 31 Tribes that have been eligible for but have not received BIA public safety and justice funding. Interior's 2024 budget submission includes \$717.1 million for Public Safety and Justice Programs and related construction, an increase of \$85.8 million above the 2023 enacted level. That amount includes \$316.3 million for Criminal Investigations and Police Services programs, an increase of \$42.2 million above 2023. At the increased 2024 level, all Tribes currently receiving funds would receive an equal share of the increase – including those newly participating Tribes that elect to receive BIA law enforcement services available in 2023. The budget includes \$154.6 million, an increase of \$18.3 million above the 2023 level, to support the operational needs of detention and corrections programs encountering growing personnel, equipment, and technology costs. Complementing those operational increases, the budget includes \$75.3 million for construction supporting public safety and justice programs, an increase of \$23.8 million.

The budget includes \$385.9 million, an increase of \$52.7 million above 2023 enacted, for Trust Natural Resource Management programs which includes Tribal forestry, irrigation, energy and minerals, water resources, climate resilience, co-stewardship, and other activities. In a separate account, the 2024 budget includes \$12.0 million for a new Tribal LWCF Land Acquisition program. During LWCF listening sessions last year, one of the top priorities sovereign Tribes identified was having direct access to LWCF funding for conservation and recreation projects without partnering with or applying through States. Through this BIA program, Tribes would have the opportunity to acquire lands or easements to protect and conserve natural resource areas, which may also be of cultural importance to the Tribe or have significant recreational benefits for Tribal communities, consistent with the purposes of LWCF funding.

During Tribal consultations and listening sessions on Federal Subsistence Management programs, Tribal participants consistently pointed to the adverse impacts the changing climate is having on Alaska Native subsistence practices and Alaska Native communities and the need to expand Tribal co-management partnerships and incorporate indigenous knowledge into subsistence management. In response to these recommendations, the 2024 budget proposes to transfer the functions of the Office of Subsistence Management from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the Office of the Assistant Secretary—Indian Affairs, along with an increase of \$2.5

million for the program. The budget includes additional increases in the land management bureaus—FWS, NPS, and BLM—to support resource management associated with Alaska Native subsistence.

Advancing Indian Education

The 2024 budget includes \$1.6 billion for Indian Education programs, an increase of \$209.2 million above 2023 enacted. Native students face stark inequities in access to education, many of which were highlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic. To help address that gap, the budget invests in the day-to-day operations of BIE-funded elementary and secondary schools. The budget includes \$508.7 million for Indian Student Equalization Program formula funds, which provide the primary support for academic activities in the classroom, instructional services, and teacher training, recruitment, and retention. The budget includes resources to operate and maintain BIE-funded schools and fully funds the estimated \$98.7 million requirement for Tribal Grant Support costs to cover the administration costs for Tribes that choose to operate BIE-funded schools.

The budget includes \$189.6 million for postsecondary schools and programs, including \$133.5 million for Haskell Indian Nations University and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute and for Tribal colleges, universities, and technical colleges; and \$56.1 million for expanded Tribal scholarships and adult education programs.

Addressing BIE-funded school facilities in poor condition and deferred maintenance backlogs at more than 180 schools in the BIE school system continues to be a top priority for the Department—45 percent of BIE schools are currently identified as in “poor” condition. The 2024 budget includes \$416.2 million in annual funding for Education Construction, an increase of \$148.3 million over the 2023 enacted level. The 2024 request for School and Facility Replacement Construction will support seven school projects. The budget also includes \$160.1 million for facilities operation and maintenance, to help maintain the condition of schools. An additional \$95.0 million in mandatory funding for BIE school construction through the GAOA will be available in 2024 to support the replacement of two additional school campuses. The continued emphasis on BIE school infrastructure conditions has produced tangible results, with two new campuses opened to students in 2022.

Meeting Financial Tribal Trust Responsibilities

The budget includes \$109.1 million to support the Tribal financial functions managed by the Bureau of Trust Funds Administration (BTFA). BTFA currently serves as the financial manager for more than \$8 billion of Indian Trust Funds and provides services for 4,100 Tribal accounts and roughly 408,000 Individual Indian Money accounts. The 2024 budget continues to propose BTFA as a stand-alone bureau with critical independent functions for effective management of Indian assets and service to Indian Country. The Department held listening sessions on the future of BTFA, and the input received showed Tribes did not want to eliminate BTFA or its functions, and some Tribes would like to have expanded services from BTFA. The Department looks forward to working with Congress to ensure BTFA is fully recognized as a bureau to allow the organization to focus on its mission of serving Indian Country.

Addressing Climate Challenges and Building Resilience

The United States faces a profound climate crisis that is rapidly changing how we consider the future, evaluate risk, and protect resources. Together with agencies across the Federal Government, States, Tribes, and other partners, the Department of the Interior is working in real time to address the immediate and long-term needs driven by the changing climate. Catastrophic fire, flood, and drought events brought about by the climate crisis are increasingly top-of-mind considerations. These events demand immediate attention and resources, but long-term success requires more work to build resilience to better meet these challenges.

Wildland Fire Reforms

The National Interagency Fire Center reports 68,988 wildfires occurred across the United States in 2022, burning 7.5 million acres. The number of wildfires was noticeably higher than the 10-year average, which has been consistently increasing. The 2024 President's Budget expands the Nation's response to the impacts of wildland fire beyond the near term to include aggressive longer-term actions. The 2024 budget honors President Biden's commitment to wildland firefighters by taking significant steps forward in ongoing bipartisan efforts to build a more professional, year-round workforce, better aligned with the challenges of today's wildfire activity.

Enacting these reforms is essential to meet the challenges posed by longer and more intense fire seasons while providing wildland firefighters a more livable wage, addressing long-term competitiveness and equity issues, helping prevent burnout and fatigue, and ensuring stable recruitment and retention. The cornerstone of these long-term reforms is a permanent increase in pay. The Administration proposes legislation to establish a special base rate salary table, create a new premium pay category to provide additional compensation for all hours a wildland fire responder is mobilized on an incident, and institute pay cap authority that provides waiver authority to the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture using specific criteria. The budget funds these Federal pay reforms and similar pay increases for Tribal fire personnel.

The 2024 budget request for the Department's Wildland Fire Management programs is nearly \$1.7 billion, including \$1.3 billion for the Wildland Fire Management account and \$350.0 million for the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund. This request is an increase of \$243.1 million, or 17 percent above the comparable 2023 enacted amount for base fire programs. Of this, \$72.0 million supports the pay increases for Federal and Tribal wildland firefighters. In addition, the 2024 budget provides an increase of \$45.0 million more than the comparable 2023 enacted amount to increase firefighting capacity by an estimated 325 Federal and 55 Tribal full-time equivalents (FTEs). In total, DOI's request for wildland fire management will support an additional 370 Federal and 55 Tribal FTEs.

The 2024 budget also addresses challenges concerning recruiting and retaining wildland firefighters with an increase of \$10.0 million for Interior (and another \$10.0 million for the Department of Agriculture) to establish a comprehensive joint Interior-Agriculture program to enhance firefighters' mental and physical health and well-being. The budget also includes a \$22.0 million increase to repair, renovate, and construct housing for wildland firefighting

personnel, which can be inadequate or unaffordable in certain geographic locations. To further build fire program capacity, the budget increases funding for aviation contracts and uncrewed aerial systems support by \$20.0 million, program management for incident support by \$18.3 million, and increases funding for Tribal contract and administrative support and Reserved Treaty Rights Lands projects by \$9.0 million.

The President's 2024 Budget, featuring this suite of workforce reforms, will transform interagency Wildland Fire Management by improving recruitment and retention and laying the foundation for further advancements. The Administration looks forward to working with Congress to enact this important legislation and the requested funds needed to implement these reforms in FY 2024.

Complementing this wildland fire package of reforms, the budget includes \$293.3 million for Fuels Management activities, an increase of \$46.3 million above 2023 enacted. This request maintains Interior's strong support for a pro-active Fuels Management program to reduce wildland fire risk from burnable plant materials which can pile up and make fires burn hotter, larger, longer, and faster.

Supporting Community Resilience

Persistent drought conditions across the West are exacerbating fire risk and increasing concerns for water availability. Prolonged drought in much of the West and low runoff conditions accelerated by climate change have led to historically low water levels in Lakes Powell and Mead, and many other reservoirs are also being affected by drought. In the Colorado River Basin, the period from 2000 through 2022 was the driest 23-year period in more than 100 years of record-keeping. Extreme drought conditions across the West are forcing very difficult challenges and choices to manage available water supplies. Although the Bureau of Reclamation, which comes before the Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee, is at the forefront of Interior's drought response, mitigation, and resilience efforts, the historic drought conditions facing our country is a concern shared across the agency.

As a land and resource manager for more than 480 million acres of lands across the United States, climate related challenges from drought, wildfire, floods, invasive species are real day-to-day considerations. Interior's significant stewardship mission requires us to be an active partner in ongoing efforts to understand, mitigate, and build resilience to these climate impacts on our natural resources and resident species. The U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) programs are key contributors to this effort.

The 2024 budget includes \$120.3 million for the USGS Groundwater and Streamflow Information Program, which maintains a nationwide network of streamflow and water level information collected from more than 31,000 sites. The information from the network is available online to help States, Tribes, natural resource managers, scientists, and emergency managers across the country with monitoring for floods and drought and with forecasting water availability for crops and natural resource management. The USGS request also includes \$74.7 million for Water Availability and Use Science programs, which includes funding to apply fire and drought science to support natural resource management.

The budget includes \$63.0 million for the USGS Coastal and Marine Hazards program, which leverages field research, high-resolution data, and modeling to help communities plan for and respond to changes in coastal landscapes. Agencies and communities use this science to plan evacuation notices, inform city planning, and construct storm-resistant infrastructure. Others use program information to restore coastal ecosystems, developing infrastructure that can buffer future storm damage and coastal erosion.

Interior is also working to address climate resilience in Tribal communities. The BIA's 2024 budget includes \$48.0 million for the Tribal Climate Resilience program to support climate resilience planning, assessment, and adaptation activities. The program also provides funding for planning and design work for Tribal communities evaluating the need for or pursuing climate-related relocation. Building on the success of this program, Interior has leveraged BIL and IRA funding to join with the Federal Energy Management Agency and the Denali Commission to launch a new Voluntary Community-Driven Relocation Program.

The budget includes \$120.8 million for Assistance to Territories, which supports the Insular Areas through the provision of basic services and targeted investments related to climate change, including \$3.5 million for work related to coral reef ecosystems and other natural resource needs and \$15.5 million to promote renewable energy and grid infrastructure in the Insular Areas.

Conservation and Healthy Lands

Interior manages more than 480 million acres of lands across the United States and is responsible for the protection and recovery of more than 2,375 endangered and threatened species, of which 1,678 are in the United States. This significant stewardship mission requires Interior to be among the leaders as an active partner in ongoing efforts to understand and mitigate climate impacts on natural resources, promote biodiversity, and ensure these valuable assets remain available for the public to experience and enjoy. Interior's conservation and adaptive management work relies heavily on partnerships and interagency collaboration to leverage information and resources.

Interior's work to strengthen the resilience of natural resources through conservation, restoration, recovery, and adaptive management is a fundamental part of our mission. The Department estimates the budget includes \$3.2 billion in annual funding for conservation efforts. This includes dedicated funding increase to expand natural resource program in the NPS, BLM, and FWS totaling \$2.5 billion for critical restoration and improvements supporting healthier lands, waters, and ecosystems and their resident species. Within that amount, the budget supports key conservation and ecosystem management initiatives such as the National Seed Strategy, Migration Corridors, and youth corps partnerships.

The 2024 budget also invests in conservation programs which greatly leverage Federal efforts by engaging a wide variety of partners. The request includes \$140.3 million, an increase of \$34.2 million from 2023 enacted, for FWS partnership programs including Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Candidate Conservation, Coastal Programs, and Migratory Bird Joint Ventures programs. These programs support voluntary conservation on public and privately-owned lands—a key focus of the America the Beautiful initiative.

The Great American Outdoors Act established permanent, mandatory funding totaling \$900.0 million a year for Land and Water Conservation Fund programs to advance conservation and outdoor recreation. These funds are allocated to the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture for a combination of Federal land acquisition and grant programs. The LWCF programs support a wide variety of Federal, State, and local conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities in communities large and small across our country.

The 2024 budget proposes \$681.9 million for Interior's mandatory funded LWCF programs. This includes \$306.2 million for Interior land acquisition and \$375.7 million for grant programs. Interior's land acquisition programs prioritize projects as authorized for the National Parks, National Wildlife Refuge areas, and BLM public lands, which feature strong local partner engagement, protect at-risk natural or cultural resources, and advance the mission of the bureaus. In addition to the mandatory LWCF funding to be allocated in 2024, another \$117.9 million in GOMESA oil and gas revenue is estimated to be available for LWCF State formula grants.

The 2024 budget also proposes \$12.0 million in discretionary funding to establish a new Tribal LWCF Land Acquisition program in BIA. The program will enable Tribes to directly participate in the LWCF for the first time to acquire lands for the purposes of natural and cultural resources conservation and recreation access. It is envisioned this program would provide funds for eligible land acquisition projects submitted by Tribes, although BIA plans to hold formal Tribal consultation on the establishment of the program. This new program, together with the proposed mandatory funding allocation, and anticipated GOMESA revenue, increases Interior's total LWCF funding to \$811.7 million in 2024.

Leveraging Science

Interior actively incorporates science to inform and enhance delivery of core mission activities. The 2024 budget includes roughly \$1.5 billion across Interior for scientific work and research. This commitment to science is evident in Interior's collection of natural resource data from years of day-to-day field measurements and recorded land, water, and species conditions, which help inform resource management decisions at Interior and a wide range of partners, States, Tribes, and the public. Interior is leveraging this information and applying new technologies and understanding to develop forecasting and modeling tools to inform and improve how we manage challenging conditions, such as water supply and demand or increasingly severe wildland fires. Interior also conducts basic and applied research to better understand and identify solutions to emerging challenges, such as harmful algal blooms, invasive carp, white nose syndrome in bats, and avian influenza.

The 2024 budget includes \$1.8 billion for USGS programs and operations, an increase of \$288.3 million from the 2023 enacted amount. To provide timely, relevant, and useful information about the Earth and its processes, USGS works with a variety of partners across the country to maintain roughly 20,000 groundwater monitoring wells, more than 11,800 stream gages and 3,800 earthquake sensors, and USGS directly monitors 70 volcanoes.

The 2024 budget includes \$128.0 million for the USGS Climate Adaptation Science Centers and Land Change Science Program, which provide information, tools, and science applications to

meet current and emerging challenges that threaten the sustainability of natural resources and our cities, infrastructure, and rural communities. USGS has nine Regional and one National Climate Adaptation Science Centers across the country, which are affiliated with university partners. The centers work with a wide range of resource managers and other partners to address specific climate-related challenges to natural and cultural resources.

Through the Landsat program, the country has maintained a 50-year observational record of the Earth's surface, providing invaluable scientific information. The Department of the Interior continues to work closely with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to develop the upcoming Landsat Next mission, which will involve launching a constellation of three satellites into orbit at the same time. The Landsat Next mission concept will take advantage of new technologies, such as smaller satellites and improved sensors, to sustain consistent imaging data and deliver far more capabilities than Landsat 8 and 9, meeting more user needs with improved spatial resolution and faster revisit times. The USGS will also establish a commercial data pilot program to augment data from the Landsat satellites. The FY 2024 budget includes an increase of \$17.0 million to support these efforts.

Creating Jobs and Meeting Energy and Environmental Challenges

Interior's programs create jobs and spur economic growth in a variety of areas—energy and minerals, recreation and tourism, grants and payments, and infrastructure investment. The 2024 budget maintains a consistent strategy to emphasize investment in areas that better position the country to be more competitive in the changing economy and environment.

Congress has enacted historic investments launching Federal and private-sector infrastructure projects that will build climate resilience and create more American jobs. The focus now is on project implementation to put those funds to work as soon as possible. The Administration is coordinating efforts across Federal agencies to streamline processes as appropriate to responsibly get these projects underway. Interior is actively engaged in those efforts, primarily as they concern statutorily required Endangered Species Act (ESA) permit reviews.

The FWS budget includes \$171.4 million, an increase of \$50.5 million from 2023, to increase the bureau's environmental permitting capacity to accelerate and improve environmental reviews supporting responsible development of priority infrastructure projects funded through the BIL and IRA. In addition, the budget includes a new government-wide General Provision to expand authority beyond existing reimbursable and Economy Act authorities by enabling Federal agencies to more effectively transfer funds provided under the BIL to FWS and the National Marine Fisheries Service to complete permitting activities. This authority in concert with existing authorities will improve efficiencies and increase capacity for environmental planning and consultation to better support the implementation of infrastructure investments now underway.

FWS will continue to advance electronic permitting efforts in 2024, and the budget proposes to consolidate all ePermitting efforts into a single activity to better manage the program's resources and provide additional visibility to this important effort. The program helps applicants properly identify and submit complete application packages and supports more efficient and effective

processing. Although FWS has achieved a secure and modern system that enables permit applicants to apply and pay processing fees for permits online, work remains to be done to build and optimize features to better achieve efficiency and streamlining.

Moving Forward With Clean Energy

The 2024 budget includes increases in offshore and onshore renewable energy programs building upon the tremendous growth accomplished by these programs the past year. We are on our way to achieve the Administration's goals to deploy 30 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind capacity by 2030, 15 GW of floating wind by 2035, and continued growth thereafter. In FY 2022, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) approved the South Fork project, initiated Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) for two projects, published draft EISs for two projects, and began the environmental review process for the construction and operation of offshore wind projects in the New York Bight.

As of February 2023, the BOEM has conducted 11 competitive wind energy lease sales for areas in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, representing more than 2.5 million acres of commercial wind energy lease areas offshore California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Virginia. Together, leases from these sales have the potential to support 43.5 GW of offshore wind. BOEM conducted the first renewable energy lease sale ever off the California coast on December 6, 2022, and the agency plans to hold the first renewable energy lease sale in the Gulf of Mexico in FY 2023. The bureau is in the planning stages of identifying additional areas in the Gulf of Maine, and offshore the Central Atlantic, Hawaii, and Oregon. BOEM has also received unsolicited lease requests for areas offshore Washington and will continue to assess interest in those areas.

As of February 2023, BOEM has approved two construction and operations plans, and those projects are under construction. BOEM is actively processing 16 additional plans and expects to receive one more plan in 2023. If fully approved, these 19 projects have the potential to support more than 30 GW of generation capacity and power 10.6 million homes. The IRA authorized BOEM to conduct offshore wind leasing in the U.S. Territories. In FY 2023, BOEM will move forward with its lease planning process in Puerto Rico, and the 2024 budget includes an increase of \$6.0 million to continue this planning in the U.S. Territories.

The 2024 budget includes \$64.5 million for BOEM's Renewable Energy program, an increase of \$21.6 million above the 2023 enacted level. This request includes a \$12.0 million increase to support permitting. The budget includes \$92.8 million for BOEM's Environmental Programs, an increase of \$10.4 million, which includes funding for environmental review associated with renewable energy projects.

The budget for the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) includes \$8.4 million to continue to support offshore Renewable Energy deployment and oversight. BSEE

anticipates receiving more than 40,000 wind engineering, construction, and other technical reports for review through the end of FY 2024. BSEE is working closely with BOEM to develop the necessary framework to ensure offshore renewable energy projects are implemented safely and responsibly.

BLM's onshore renewable program is also making tremendous progress to achieve the Energy Act of 2020 goal to permit 25 GW of renewable energy on public lands by 2025. The BLM has permitted more than 126 renewable energy projects in solar, wind, and operating geothermal power plants. They are processing 68 priority utility-scale onshore clean energy projects proposed on public lands in the western United States, including solar, wind, geothermal, and associated interconnect transmission line projects that are vital to grid connection. If approved, these projects would provide more than 35 GW of renewable energy to the western electric grid. In addition to the 68 priority projects currently underway, BLM has over 120 pending ending applications for processing when transmission capacity is available, with the potential to support 50 GW of solar and wind energy.

The BLM is taking additional steps to prepare for this increase in demand, including working to revise seven interstate transmission corridors designated under Section 368 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005. This effort involves amending 19 land use plans to remove barriers or conflicts in the currently designated corridor network to improve the siting, permitting, and review of electricity transmission projects.

The bureau is also initiating a programmatic environmental impact statement in support of utility-scale solar energy planning. In light of improved technology, new transmission, and ambitious clean energy goals, the BLM is updating the 2012 Solar PEIS and considering adding more States, adjusting exclusion criteria, and potentially identifying new or expanded areas to prioritize solar deployment.

The 2024 budget includes \$72.5 million for BLM's Renewable Energy program, an increase of \$31.6 million from the 2023 enacted level. This funding supports the bureau's Renewable Energy Coordination Offices and includes increases to build staffing capacity and support planning and permitting efforts to accommodate the surge in demand and workload. The request supports proactive programmatic assessments and consultations with FWS under Section 7(a)(1) of the ESA. This work will review ecological regions for appropriate renewable energy deployment scenarios in key areas where substantial renewable energy development interest exists. This approach is an efficient alternative to project-by-project consultation. BLM estimates using the ecological region assessment approach will result in ESA project-consultation reviews completed up to 90 percent faster and deliver substantially improved species conservation outcomes.

Conventional Energy

The budget for BOEM provides \$72.3 million for conventional energy programs to support Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) planning, leasing, and oversight, including inventorying oil and gas reserves, overseeing ongoing activities, ensuring adequate financial assurances for

decommissioning liability and risk management, developing and implementing the National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program (National Five-Year OCS Program), reviewing and administering oil and gas exploration and development plans and geological and geophysical permits, and conducting economic analyses and resource evaluation. The budget also includes \$92.8 million for Environmental Studies, supporting conventional and renewable energy activities.

As directed by the IRA, in 2022, Interior reinstated bids from Lease Sale 257 and on December 30, 2022, held Lease Sale 258 in Cook Inlet offshore Alaska. BOEM is proceeding with congressional direction to prepare two lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico, Lease Sales 259 and 261. The bureau is on track to meet the statutory requirements that Lease Sale 259 be held by March 31, 2023, and Lease Sale 261 by September 30, 2023. BOEM is continuing development of the next National OCS Leasing Program.

The 2024 budget for BSEE includes \$217.1 million for conventional energy programs to support OCS permit application reviews, regulation and standard development for offshore activities, verification and enforcement of operator compliance with all applicable environmental laws and regulations, technical reviews of planned operations and emerging technologies to properly identify and mitigate risks, a robust inspection program employing an annual inspection strategy that includes risk-based inspections, and incident investigations. BSEE's budget also includes \$30.0 million to fund the decommissioning of orphaned offshore oil and gas infrastructure. This funding, along with funding from other sources, will be used to address the most immediate and urgent well, pipeline, and platform decommissioning needs to help reduce the risks to environmental health and safety.

The 2024 budget includes \$123.5 million for BLM's Oil and Gas Management program, an increase of \$10.6 million from the 2023 enacted amount. The BLM budget also includes \$51.0 million for Oil and Gas Inspection Activities and proposes to offset the cost of this program through the establishment of onshore inspection fees. Increases in the 2024 budget support increased program capacity and support to implement requirements in the IRA, which modernized the Mineral Leasing Act and mandates collecting royalties on all extracted methane. In addition to administering oil and gas leasing and ensuring environmentally responsible development, the budget request includes funding to remediate legacy well sites in the National Petroleum Reserve—Alaska.

The 2024 budget includes \$13.8 million for onshore and offshore carbon sequestration programs in BLM, BOEM, and BSEE. Incentives included in the IRA are expected to rapidly increase interest in carbon sequestration, and Interior's bureaus are laying the groundwork to help ensure that these efforts are implemented responsibly and safely. BOEM and BSEE are working together to develop and publish a carbon sequestration notice of proposed rulemaking for review and public comment. While the rule is under development, BOEM and BSEE will continue to develop their carbon sequestration programs to facilitate program implementation upon final rule publication.

Reclamation Jobs

To complement significant BIL investments in abandoned coal mine reclamation projects, the 2024 budget provides annual ongoing support for other related reclamation activities addressing State and Tribal reclamation needs associated with abandoned hardrock mines, legacy pollution on Interior's lands, and economic development projects with a nexus to abandoned coal mine lands. These projects address legacy pollution—which harms the environment and often risks the public health of communities – while creating good-paying jobs, advancing long overdue environmental justice, and restoring lands for other uses.

The budget includes \$30.0 million for the Abandoned Hardrock Mine Reclamation Program authorized in the BIL to support State, Tribal, and Federal efforts to inventory and address legacy sites on their lands. Many States, Tribes, and Federal land programs do not have good inventories or strong programs to manage Abandoned Hardrock Mine sites. This program targets the need to build capacity and begin to address these long-standing risks to health and safety.

The 2024 budget includes \$62.8 million for BLM's Abandoned Mine Lands and Hazardous Materials Management program, an increase of \$5.6 million more than the 2023 enacted amount, which will operate in tandem with the national Abandoned Hardrock Mine Reclamation Program to increase efforts to inventory and remediate those sites on BLM lands.

Interior has also spearheaded an Interagency Working Group on Mining Regulations, Laws, and Permitting (IWG) to examine the existing statutory and regulatory framework for hardrock mining. The group will identify and recommend potential improvements to Federal mining laws and mine permitting processes, while better ensuring new mining activity engages local and Tribal communities and meets strong environmental standards. These efforts will help promote sustainable and responsible domestic production of critical minerals that are vital to achieving a clean energy economy. The IWG has hosted extensive listening sessions to solicit input from a multitude of stakeholders and will be releasing its report with recommendations in FY 2023. The Administration looks forward to working with Congress in FY 2023 and FY 2024 to implement much needed mining reforms that will ensure strong social, environmental, and labor standards while making improvements in the efficiency, transparency, and inclusiveness of the Federal mine permitting system.

Interior's Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) works with States and Tribes to regulate active coal mines to ensure mining is done in an environmentally-responsible manner occur and to remediate abandoned coal mines to address health and safety hazards. High priority abandoned mine land problems pose an immediate threat to health, safety, and the general welfare of communities and can include clogged streams/stream lands, dangerous piles or embankments, dangerous highwalls, and underground mine fires, and polluted water. OSMRE manages the State and Tribal abandoned mine reclamation grant programs authorized by the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act and the BIL. In 2022, OSMRE invested nearly \$1 billion in coal communities, including making nearly \$725 million available to 22 States and the Navajo Nation for reclamation as part of the BIL and \$144.0 million available through the traditional, fee-funded, mandatory AML grant program.

The 2024 budget includes \$135.0 million for the Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) grant program, which administers grants to 6 States and 3 Tribal Nations to return legacy coal mining sites to productive uses and foster economic and community development. The AMLER program has made more than \$750 million available to the Nation's current and former coal communities to provide economic and community development and achieve reclamation of historic abandoned mine sites.

Promoting Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion of Underserved Communities

Interior continues to work across the Department to expand equity, diversity, and inclusion beyond day-to-day management policies to incorporate this concept in the delivery of our missions. This effort is consistent with the Administration's whole-of-government approach to advance equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunity. Interior's 2024 budget request supports the actions needed to recognize and redress inequities and to proactively advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility within the Department's workforce. The Department seeks to ensure that everyone, no matter their background or ZIP Code, can enjoy the benefits of green spaces and the outdoors.

Increasing Representation and Inclusion

Reflecting the Administration's commitment to accessibility and inclusion, the budget includes an additional \$10.0 million as part of the Increasing Representation in Our Public Lands initiative. Funding is included in the budgets of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at \$4.0 million; the BLM at \$3.0 million; and the NPS at \$3.0 million. The initiative will provide support for recent or potential new designations that preserve important places and tell the stories of those that have been historically underrepresented, such as the recent designations of the New Philadelphia and the Blackwell School National Historic Sites.

The Administration remains committed to efforts to strengthen Tribal Sovereignty including Tribal and Federal co-stewardship of Federal lands, waters, and wildlife, through collaborative and cooperative agreements with Tribal Nations. At the end of 2022, Interior and the USDA Forest Service had signed more than 20 new co-stewardship agreements with Tribes, Alaska Native corporations, and consortiums. Interior's 2024 budget includes targeted increases to expand Tribal co-stewardship across the Department. The NPS budget includes \$7.1 million to directly support Tribal participation in management of Federal lands and waters with cultural and natural resources of significance and value to Indian Tribes and their citizens, including sacred religious sites, burial sites, wildlife, and sources of indigenous foods and medicines.

The budget for the FWS includes increases of \$3.5 million to advance improved co-stewardship and engagement with Tribes on Indigenous Knowledge research and conservation planning. Implicit in the Marine Mammal Protection Act is the realization that cooperative management of subsistence harvests between FWS and Alaska Native organizations is more likely to achieve the goals of the Act than management by a Federal agency alone. The budget provides strong support to continue to build these relationships with partners such as the Eskimo Walrus Commission and Alaska Nannut Co-management Council, which is the FWS co-management partner for polar bears.

Many of Interior's bureaus have dedicated Tribal liaison services to support Tribal engagement. The NPS 2024 budget proposes separate funding for Tribal Heritage Grants within the Historic Preservation Fund to support Indian Tribes, Alaska Native villages and corporations, and Native Hawaiian organizations for the preservation and protection of their cultural heritage, in addition to other important ongoing Tribal programs. The USGS budget includes an increase of \$7.2 million for Tribal climate adaptation science as well as geospatial and geologic research focused on Tribal lands.

Ongoing Commitment to Diversity and Equity

The Department is responsible for protecting and preserving the treasures of this Nation and aims to build a workforce that represents the treasures of this Nation—its people.

In 2022, the Department published its first Equity Action Plan, which outlined efforts to advance equity through all DOI operations, remove barriers to equal opportunity, and deliver resources and benefits equitably to the general public. The Equity Action Plan is a key part of Interior's efforts to implement [Executive Order 13985](#), Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, and Executive Order 14091, Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through The Federal Government, which calls on Federal agencies to advance equity by identifying and addressing barriers to equal opportunity that underserved communities may face as a result of some government policies and programs.

In support of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Action Plan, the 2024 budget includes program increases of \$11.1 million for the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights; Office of Human Capital; and Office of Collaborative Alternative Dispute Resolution to do the following:

- Provide resources to the Department's first-ever DEIA Council to coordinate, develop, and implement policies and initiatives promoting the integration of DEIA across the agency.
- Conduct barrier and workforce analyses and increase equal employment opportunity (EEO) and DEIA training to employees across the agency.
- Address EEO adjudication resourcing and compliance gaps identified by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission resulting from two technical assessments of DOI's EEO program.
- Improve the Department's Public Civil Rights reporting and tracking capabilities.
- Strengthen the Department's Affirmative Employment Programs, including the development of diversity and recruitment flexibilities and assessment of hiring programs to improve recruitment results.
- Expand capacity for alternative dispute resolution and EEO complaint mediation.

The budget also includes \$2.0 million to coordinate and manage Departmentwide Justice40 efforts to help deliver at least 40 percent of the overall benefits from certain Federal investments to disadvantaged communities.

Building Agency Capacity

Interior is strengthening the Department's delivery of core programs and services for the American people. Efforts related to improving Interior's workforce and operations and better leveraging technology and information are underway across the Department.

Interior's Workforce and Infrastructure

Interior's mission activities rely on a talented and dedicated workforce, and many bureau operations are labor intensive and complex. At the end of 2020, however, Interior's staffing was at a 10-year low, with 60,558 FTE. Despite the pandemic, by the end of 2022, staffing had increased to 61,857 FTE. When fully enacted, the Department's 2024 budget would support an estimated 68,329 FTE, an increase of 4,009 FTE from the estimated 2023 level. As the Department rebuilds its workforce, Interior is working to recruit, hire, and train the next generation of talented people who will reflect the diversity and strength of the United States.

The NPS depends on a talented staff to carry out its mission at national park areas across the country. Over time, full-time staffing across the National Park system has eroded due to absorption of fixed costs and other challenges. As part of a multiyear effort, NPS is working to build up its full-time Federal staff across the park system. The 2024 budget includes an increase of \$25.4 million to continue this support to build operational capacity across all park areas, the U.S. Park Police, and NPS Special Agents.

Interior manages an infrastructure portfolio valued at more than \$400 billion, which includes a variety of structures, including dams, storage buildings, and national icons. The Department is responsible for roughly 43,000 buildings, 115,000 miles of road, and 83,000 structures. Operations, maintenance, renewal, and modernization of infrastructure are a significant focus of Interior's funding that directly help to create jobs and benefit local economies.

The 2024 budget includes more than \$3.0 billion, \$40.5 million above the 2023 level, to address the Department's infrastructure operations, maintenance, renewal, and modernization needs. Interior's annual request for infrastructure funding is in addition to \$1.6 billion in mandatory funding available to Interior each year through 2025 through the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) included in the GAOA. Those funds are available to address the Department's deferred maintenance backlog in the NPS, FWS, BLM, and BIE schools. The USFS also receives up to \$285 million in LRF funding each year.

At the end of 2023, Interior's LRF program will have initiated 276 projects touching all 50 States; Washington, D.C.; Puerto Rico; and the U.S. Virgin Islands. When completed, those projects are estimated to address \$3.4 billion of Interior's deferred maintenance backlog, create an average of 17,000 jobs each year, and contribute an average of \$1.8 billion each year to the overall gross domestic product. The 2024 budget proposes another \$1.6 billion in identified LRF projects across the country.

In addition, the budget includes \$53.6 million across multiple bureaus to support a multi-year plan to fully transition the Department's light duty fleet acquisitions to zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs). This funding will be used to conduct fleet planning (including ZEV integration), electric

vehicle supply equipment (EVSE) site evaluations, EVSE installation, and ZEV acquisition. This planning helps to ensure ZEVs are integrated into Interior fleet plans; prioritize facilities for deployment; determine infrastructure needs, such as increased electrical supply and access for EVSE; and coordinate installation to ensure Interior can maximize the use of the charging stations across the bureaus and other Federal agencies.

Investing in Technology and Information Management

The 2024 budget includes \$4.5 million in the Appropriated Working Capital Fund, complemented with \$200,000 in BTFA, to help improve Interior's customer service by better understanding our customers, reducing administrative hurdles and paperwork burdens, and redesigning compliance-oriented processes to improve the customer experience. Interior is targeting these efforts in four specific programs: Bureau of Indian Affairs probate activities; Bureau of Trust Funds Administration management of Individual Indian Money accounts and beneficiary services; FWS trip planning through fws.gov; and NPS digital experience and volunteer services.

The 2024 budget includes \$10.1 million to enhance data management practices and conduct program evaluations to inform evidence-based decisions. That amount includes \$2.1 million to establish a robust data management program to organize data through an enterprise data inventory to better support analysis and evaluation across the agency. Another \$6.1 million will support evidence and program evaluations of programs, initiatives, and processes across Interior to assess how well they are working to achieve the intended goals.

To better support that data-driven work, the 2024 budget includes \$59.7 million for the operation and maintenance of the Financial and Business Management System (FBMS), an increase of \$5.3 million from the 2023 enacted amount. The request includes funding required for ongoing operations and maintenance of the Department's integrated FBMS system of record. Modernizing Interior's core business system to ensure a strong administrative backbone is critical to the continued execution of Interior's mission activities.

The 2024 budget includes \$67.8 million to fund cybersecurity efforts, an increase of \$23.4 million. The budget continues to fund extremely high-priority, recurring operations and maintenance costs for incident remediation activities and provides resources to be directed against emerging threats. The request includes an increase of \$23.4 million to support a Zero Trust (ZT) architecture, which will advance Interior's adaptation of a modern security model founded on a principle requiring all devices and users, regardless of whether they are inside or outside an organization's network, to be authenticated, authorized, and regularly validated before being granted access. Within the \$23.4 million increase is \$5.0 million for a secure access service edge (SASE) solution, which focuses on securing access points to meet the required ZT security and performance standards.

The 2024 budget proposes appropriations language to establish a nonrecurring expenses fund (NEF), which will allow the Department to transfer unobligated balances of expired discretionary funds from 2024 and subsequent years, no later than the fifth fiscal year after the last fiscal year of availability, to the NEF as no-year funds to support specific purposes. The NEF

will provide funding for critical infrastructure projects that may require significant one-time investments, such as information technology modernization projects. Those requirements often do not coincide with the timing of the budget formulation process and are difficult to forecast. In many cases, those costs either cannot be accommodated within existing funds or are emergency requirements that would otherwise require the Department to reprogram existing funds from other priority projects.

The 2024 budget includes \$185.4 million for the Office of Natural Resources Revenue (ONRR) to ensure revenue from Federal and Indian mineral leases is effectively, efficiently, and accurately collected, accounted for, analyzed, audited, and disbursed in a timely fashion. The request will fund additional staff and counsel support and strengthen ONRR's audit and compliance activities as well as expand ONRR's Tribal audit program to include agreements with two additional Tribes. The budget includes an increase of \$5.0 million to address new royalty rates and other changes enacted in the IRA, which are expected to increase the complexity of royalty reporting and audit requirements.

Interior's operations rely heavily on field communications which in some places, the Department's legacy land mobile radio system, a technology largely unchanged since the 1950s, is the first and often only source of communication. The 2024 budget includes \$32.2 million for DOI's Field Communications Modernization (DIFCOM) as part of a multiyear investment which includes the BIA, BLM, FWS, NPS, and USGS, and the Office of the Chief Information Officer.

Conclusion

The 2024 President's Budget for Interior invests in programs to strengthen our Nation for all Americans, protect our environment, and ensure our future generations continue to not only enjoy, but improve our way of life. I look forward to doing this work together. Thank you again for having me, and I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.



Biography of Deb Haaland Secretary of the Department of the Interior

Secretary Deb Haaland made history when she became the first Native American to serve as a cabinet secretary. She is a member of the Pueblo of Laguna and a 35th generation New Mexican.

Secretary Haaland grew up in a military family; her father was a 30-year combat Marine who was awarded the Silver Star Medal for saving six lives in Vietnam, and her mother is a Navy veteran who served as a federal employee for 25 years at the Bureau of Indian Affairs. As a military child, she attended 13 public schools before graduating from Highland High School in Albuquerque.

As a single mother, Secretary Haaland volunteered at her child's pre-school to afford early childhood education. Like many parents, she had to rely on food stamps at times as a single parent, lived paycheck-to-paycheck, and struggled to put herself through college. At the age of 28, Haaland enrolled at the University of New Mexico (UNM) where she earned a Bachelor's degree in English and later earned her J.D. from UNM Law School. Secretary Haaland and her child, who also graduated from the University of New Mexico, are still paying off student loans.

Secretary Haaland ran her own small business producing and canning Pueblo Salsa, served as a tribal administrator at San Felipe Pueblo, and became the first woman elected to the Laguna Development Corporation Board of Directors, overseeing business operations of the second largest tribal gaming enterprise in New Mexico. She successfully advocated for the Laguna Development Corporation to create policies and commitments to environmentally friendly business practices.

Throughout her career in public service, Secretary Haaland has broken barriers and opened the doors of opportunity for future generations.

After running for New Mexico Lieutenant Governor in 2014, Secretary Haaland became the first Native American woman to be elected to lead a State Party. She is one of the first Native American women to serve in Congress. In Congress, she focused on environmental justice, climate change, missing and murdered indigenous women, and family-friendly policies.



**Biography of Joan Mooney
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
Policy, Management and Budget**

Joan M. Mooney serves Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget (PMB) exercising delegated authorities of Assistant Secretary PMB. As President & CEO of The Faith & Politics Institute from 2015-2022, Mooney worked closely with lawmakers, federal officials and Board Chair Emeritus Congressman John Lewis at the intersection of their values and public service to advance constructive collaboration. In 2020, Mooney established the Institute's John Robert Lewis Scholars & Fellows Program in his memory.

From 2009-2014, she served as Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Congressional and Legislative Affairs, leading Congressional efforts to secure significant increases in agency funding for veterans and execution of programming. Mooney also served as a Congressional Chief of Staff, including for an Oregon member of Congress from 1997-2009.

She earned a BA in Government & Politics from George Mason University and Master of Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania.



**Biography of Denise Flanagan
Director, Office of Budget
Department of the Interior**

Denise Flanagan is the Director of Budget for the Department of the Interior where she directs and manages budget formulation, presentation, justification, and execution funds control for the Department. She manages the process of assessing resource needs, taking into consideration Administration and Secretarial priorities, program performance goals and accomplishments, policy guidance, and legislative direction and requirements for the mandatory and discretionary portions of the budget. The Office of Budget publishes the Interior Budget in Brief and 19 bureau and office congressional budget justification books annually to assist the Congressional Appropriations Committees and the public in understanding the details of the President's budget request for the Department's programs.

Prior positions include Director of Financial Management in the Office of Naval Research at the Department of the Navy, Director of Financial Management for the Navy's Office of Civilian Human Resources, and Director of Business Operations for the Navy's Human Resources Operations Center. Ms. Flanagan began her Federal career as a 1991 Presidential Management Intern with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

Ms. Flanagan grew up in Fargo, North Dakota and graduated from the University of North Dakota with a Bachelor of Science in Public Administration with Honors. She earned a Master of Public Administration with a Concentration in Public Finance from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, and a Master of Science in National Resources Strategy from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces at National Defense University. Ms. Flanagan is a Harry S. Truman Scholar, a Defense Leadership and Management Program Scholar, a Certified Defense Financial Manager, and honors include two Department of the Navy Superior Civilian Service Awards.

WIND ENERGY

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Madam Secretary, and, again, thank you for being here today. You talked about the offshore wind. What are you going to do if they find it is connected with the dolphins and the whales that have washed up on shore in New Jersey and stuff?

Secretary HAALAND. Well, of course we are very cognizant of that issue, and we are making sure we are communicating with the folks who are studying this. From my understanding, it doesn't have anything to do with offshore wind, but, of course, regarding the animals in the ocean, we have a responsibility——

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Secretary HAALAND [continuing]. For us as well. So we will stay on top of the issue and, of course, keep those conversations going.

Mr. SIMPSON. One of the other things you talked about, the number of permits you've given for onshore wind and stuff. As you know, there is one happening in Idaho right now that is in the permitting process that would be the largest wind towers ever put on land. The space needle, I think, is 700 or 650 feet tall. These are, like, 704 feet tall. You plan on putting, like, 144 of them out there. They estimate that they will kill over 250 raptors every year. That means eagles, hawks, other birds, and nobody in the community, the whole valley, wants them there. How is BLM looking at this in the Department of Interior?

Secretary HAALAND. Of course we care about raptors. We care about every single animal on our public lands, and with that particular project, Chairman, we would be happy to get the details and be back in touch with your office about that.

Mr. SIMPSON. Okay.

Secretary HAALAND. I don't have particular details with respect to that particular project.

Mr. SIMPSON. Okay.

Secretary HAALAND. We will absolutely be in touch about it.

[The information follows:]

STATUS OF LAVA RIDGE WIND ENERGY PROJECT

The BLM takes its role of managing public lands for diverse, and often competing, multiple uses in the public interest very seriously. The Bureau is also committed to robust public engagement on projects proposed for development on the public lands. The BLM published a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Lava Ridge Wind Energy Project on January 20, 2023, and opened a 90-day public comment period. In the Draft EIS, the BLM analyzed the potential impacts of Magic Valley Energy's proposal to a variety of resources, including air quality, avian and bat populations, big game habitats and populations, cultural and historic resources, eagles and non-eagle raptors, greater sage-grouse habitat, livestock grazing, pollinators, recreation, wildlife migration, soils, visual resources, water and wetlands. The BLM also considered the potential impacts of the proposal on Tribal interests, environmental justice, wildfire and fuels management, socioeconomics, and transportation. In addition, the BLM analyzed the potential impacts of three other action alternatives that were designed to avoid or minimize impacts to resources, including eagles and other raptors. Under all the action alternatives analyzed, tower heights would range between 390 and 740 feet tall.

The public comment period for the Draft EIS closes on April 20, 2023. Since the opening of the public comment period, the BLM held in-person and virtual open house meetings. All comments the BLM receives during the public comment period will be appropriately considered and incorporated into the Final EIS. As environmental review of the project continues, the Bureau will further analyze potential im-

pacts and consider options to best meet the BLM's multiple use and sustained yield mission. The BLM will also continue to engage with cooperating agencies and stakeholders to further explore potential protection measures, mitigation, and adaptive management approaches to reduce the potential impacts of the alternatives.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND INFLATION REDUCTION ACT INVESTMENTS;
HIRING

Mr. SIMPSON. I appreciate that, and I didn't plan on bringing those up, but as I was listening to you talking about BOEM and the wind tower stuff, those came to my mind. Anyway, the Department received significant funding through both the Infrastructure Bill and the Inflation Reduction Act last year, more than \$26 billion for everything from abandoned mine reclamation to forest restoration. I am very concerned, however, with the amount of new staff that are planned to be hired with this funding because, as you know, this funding will run out. It was an influx of cash outside of the annual appropriations process.

I am interested to learn how the Department plans to avoid pinning Congress with a staffing cliff when the supplemental funding runs out. The Park Service, for example, got \$500 million just to hire people. That could be more than 2,500 people. I know you mentioned that visitations on our public lands has increased, and, therefore, more staff is needed to help keep our public lands and facilities maintained and safe. I think that is a good discussion to have, but I think it should happen as part of the annual appropriations process, especially because you agreed that these visitation numbers will only increase. How does the Department plan to hire staff using its supplemental money so that it does not create a cliff for employees when no more money is available out of those funds that will run out?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you for the question, and I appreciate you caring about our staff. We agree that could be a difficult situation that we would like to avoid. We are moving out responsibly with respect to hiring and focusing on term employees. I mentioned in my opening statement that we are understaffed at the moment. We are working to build up our capacity in the Department, so if we had staff on a term basis and we could move them over, we would want to do that.

We haven't hired a lot, and we are not hiring a lot. There are about 350 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law positions that we have hired so far, and as I mentioned, we are still rebuilding. So over time, given that we are understaffed at the moment, we are working to build up our capacity in the Department. So if we had staff on a term basis and we could move them over, we would want to do that.

Mr. SIMPSON. Well, I appreciate that—

Secretary HAALAND. And agree wholeheartedly with you.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah. As you know, we don't want to be forced into a position where all of a sudden that, because of the annual appropriation process, you are going to have to lay off a couple thousand people or something like that. So I am glad to hear that you are keeping that in mind as you look at the hiring with temporary funds, if you would.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Ms. Pingree.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. With your permission, I would like to defer to Mr. Kilmer who needs to get to another committee, and I am still in here.

TRIBAL CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Mr. KILMER. Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the ranking member. Madam Secretary, great to be with you. Thanks, too, for coming out to my neck of the woods a while back. I really appreciated you highlighting the Tribal Climate Resilience Program in your testimony. When we did the tribal testimony days here, we heard from a leader out at the Quinault Indian Nation where you visited, and one of the things that he raised was simply to move their lower village of Tahola, where we took our photo together right on the bank of the ocean, is about a \$400 million price tag. The BIA's budget for the entire Tribal Climate Resilience Program is \$48 million.

And so I guess to kick things off, I would love to just get your thoughts on how your Agency, how the Biden Administration can work with Congress, can work with this subcommittee to develop and to execute a more coordinated and comprehensive plan for helping these communities that are facing imminent threat, not just from the rising sea levels and more severe storms, but certainly the threat of tsunami as well. Their ancestral homelands are really in danger, and I would love to see us step up more than we are for these communities.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much, Congressman, and, yes, it is a large concern for us as well. In 2022, Interior committed \$115 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for projects in 11 communities. Three Tribes with shovel-ready relocation plans have been selected to receive \$25 million each, and eight other communities will receive \$5 million each through the Inflation Reduction Act funding.

With respect to community resilience relocation in Indian Country, President Biden has charged us all with an all-of-government approach, so we will look for partners to help with this issue. The Indian Affairs team is now working with FEMA to further increase the resources available to each Tribe in executing these relocation plans. These are Tribes who have been there for hundreds, thousands of years, and you can't just pick up and pack a suitcase and move. So we understand that, and we will continue to work with partners to make sure that we can move forward on that and certainly work with you.

Mr. KILMER. We would love to be your partner in this. I would also just mention when I was with the Quileute Tribe, you mentioned the all-of-government approach. They mentioned sometimes there is just sort of competing requirements from different agencies. If they use HUD funding for this, they can't use BIA dollars for that. If there are things where our committee or where Congress needs to change authorizations or change the rules so that communities can actually take advantage of a whole-of-government approach, I think we were eager to do that.

TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The other thing I just wanted to raise, you highlighted in your testimony some of the stark inequities facing Native American students in terms of access to education. Adequate funding for tribal colleges and universities is really important, and within that program, I am a strong supporter of funds being made available for endowments, which allow the TCUs to have more robust endowments and help their institutions provide scholarships, and conduct research, and access new technology, and expand and offer other academic programs. I was hoping you could just expand on the work that BIE is doing to close some of these gaps, to address some of these inequities, to deal with the poor condition of facilities, to expand TCU scholarships and adult education opportunities, and anything else you think we ought to know in terms of what is cooking on that front.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes, thank you so much for the question. And so BIE's budget includes \$190 million for post-secondary education programs, TCU's tribal technical colleges and scholarships, including scholarships for postgraduate education. There is another \$16 million in BIE for repairs and improvements at tribal colleges and university facilities. And many TCUs leverage funding by teaming with local and national businesses to provide training partnership opportunities for Indian students.

And, yes, thank you for mentioning the all-of-government approach. TCUs receive funding from BIE, the Department of Education, and the USDA, which includes support for endowments. So we will keep working together with those folks and certainly understand your concern.

BROKEN PROMISES REPORT

Mr. KILMER. Thank you. Before I yield back, I just want to invite your engagement on something that you worked on when you were here and that we are continuing to work on. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights put out what was called the Broken Promises Report detailing all of the ways in which we fail tribal communities. Senator Warren and I introduced last Congress a bill called the Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act. We are going to reintroduce that bill and would love to just get any feedback or a partnership from you and your team on that. So with that, I yield back. Thank you, Chairman.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Amodei.

REMARKS OF REPRESENTATIVE MARK AMODEI

Mr. AMODEI. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Madam Secretary, good to see you. I don't expect to cover everything that I want to cover, but as you can imagine, since over 80 percent of my State is owned by predominantly Department of Interior, and specifically BLM, I want to kind of set the stage for a few things that are top of our radar screen right now.

First and foremost is the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It gives me no joy to say this, and I know Nevada is not big Indian Country by any national standard, but nonetheless, the problems that we

experience on our various reservations and communities are just as important to the people there as they are in the larger populations. I would like to get with your BIA person, and I understand they are going to be in front of us later, but I would really appreciate your assistance through your liaison and hooking us up with them.

Realty is something we have been talking about the whole time I have been here, and I don't know any personalities, and it is not my intent to impugn or offend, but, you know, it just hasn't gotten any better. People are waiting a decade to get a conveyed title where it is like try to build a home, try to do anything where you don't really own it, according to the title company, which is BIA. And I just have this feeling that we should have done better, and we could, and it needs emphasis. The same with the housing programs. So I am going to be contacting your folks and make you aware of who we have contacted and what we are doing to try to really move the needle on the dial for a change.

I am also sure you are aware of what the problem is going on in Owyhee with the school and BIA contamination of a plume underneath the school there. When we talk about an all-of-government approach, that is good to hear. I think there is a role not only for EPA to play, but maybe FEMA and stuff like that since there is a significant contamination of their domestic water there. There is a lot of jurisdiction mixing the local school district as well as the local tribe, as well as, generally EPA, so we are going to be darkening your doorway, if you will, in the near future to make sure that we have your leadership on that.

Next, I want to switch to a thing that is going to come before you that we have discussed before, and I appreciate your access, and that is a NASA request for a public lands withdrawal of over 22,000 acres in Railroad Valley, Nevada, because there are some lithium claims there, and they are afraid that, hey, somebody is going to come and start doing a lithium operation, which is going to ruin the reflectivity of the Railroad Valley. And I am going to provide you a letter before you have to make a decision next month summarizing our concerns.

But let it just suffice to say that when a member of Congress asks NASA to be a cooperating agency in the NEPA process and NASA very politely and timely says, "eeenh," as well as the county that has local planning and zoning jurisdiction, that is not, I think, what was contemplated by NEPA. And I sit here as a Republican with the cameras rolling who thinks actually the transparency and the due process provided by NEPA are important and good things, and this is an Agency which I know the right stuff and astronauts used to get Corvettes and all that fun stuff, but it is like, that is no way to run a NEPA operation.

And along with the fact that it is like of all people, when somebody says, hey, we think we can run an operation with lithium. Remember the energy discussion just a minute ago? We think we can run a NEPA-compliant operation for lithium that doesn't do anything to the surface of the lake bed, and the response from the agency is nobody has ever done that before. That is a curious statement for an outfit that went to the moon when nobody had ever done that before, too. So while I fully support preserving their mis-

sion, the fact that they need to own it and exclude all notions of future multiple use is a bit on the arrogant side.

But more for the letter. Wild horses. Thanks for what you folks are doing. I appreciate the fact that you guys are looking for long-term solutions as opposed to what is now a phenomenal expense. It is like, hey, we are just going to relocate them and feed them until the actuarial tables take over. So I am looking forward to an updated briefing on what the program is and how you are planning on getting this beyond just trying to get down to AML, which is not at hand or near so that we can be of assistance in helping you do that.

I want to talk to you about employees for a minute. I try to be in every one of your district offices once a quarter. I don't make that, but I try to be there because you got over 80 percent of the land. When you talk to those managers, field office managers and district managers, and it is, like, so how is your manning doing, womaning, whatever I am supposed to say. Personnel. That is an old term, too. How is your human resources doing? And it is, like, hey, listen, we are dependent on the office, 60 percent staff, 70 percent staff, whatever. He said, well, where are they, what is the problem.

When they talk about the lower GS, you know, the 6, 7, 8, 9s, even, it is, like, well, we have got plenty of jobs, but nobody can afford to take them. And you say, well, what is the affordability thing. Obviously, in Nevada, it is housing, whether you are leasing, whatever. I know your folks are doing extraordinary things for the fire crews. We are leasing blocks or rooms in motels and stuff like that. But when you look at things like the locality pay that is available for some people in the Western part of the State, the difference in salary between, for instance, a GS-8 in Winnemucca versus Reno is about \$20,000 a year.

Now, that is a nice, you know, statement, but then I find out that there is a long history of providing housing to Parks people, and not that that is a bad thing. So my challenge is, it is, like, how do we solve that problem, because if we are carrying positions on the books, which, quite frankly, are unfillable, and I didn't mean to go on all that. I see my time has expired, but I look forward to talking offline substantially about the solutions to those problems.

Secretary HAALAND. Absolutely. Our door is open for you, Congressman. We will be happy to have all of those conversations and appreciate your input.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF FUNDING CUTS

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Secretary, recently in response to a request from our committee, you provide a letter that highlighted some of the difficult cuts that would occur at the Department if we were to return to the fiscal year 2022 funding levels. So I know you have prepared some of that. I just think since this is a budget hearing, I would love to hear a little bit of some of the highlights of the challenges you think you would face.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much, Ranking Member Pingree. Yes, I could give you a long list, but for starters, the proposal would have real and damaging impacts to our country. It

would require a hiring freeze, and I have already mentioned that we are working to staff up a lot of areas. It would cause deep cuts to seasonal employees in our national parks, refuges, and on our public lands, with Parks taking a particularly large hit. It would be a 27 percent reduction impacting up to 5,000 staff. And that would translate to visitors seeing a significant drop in Park operations, and things that they require——

Ms. PINGREE. Mm-hmm.

Secretary HAALAND [continuing]. Empty trash cans, and clean bathrooms, and so forth. There would just be fewer services all around. It would also reduce the number of wildland firefighters we have, between 1,000 and 1,700 positions, and all those acres of fuel management that we feel we need to do in order to try to stay on top of things. As you know, wildfires go by years now instead of seasons. It would be a catastrophic risk during the upcoming fire season. And also, with respect to maintaining firefighter pay, which is something they deserve, when the BIL funding ends, that means a 50 percent or \$20,000 cuts to firefighters' pay unless additional funds are provided.

It would also stall work on damn modifications. It would be risking flooding in some of our most vulnerable areas. And, you know, we have seen the snow pack on a lot of our mountains. When that flooding comes down, it would be difficult to deal with it. We could lose over 1,500 tribal law enforcement personnel and over 500 teachers and school staff at the BIE schools, along with a 25 percent cut for BIE K through 12 schools and programs. And it would just overall reduce staffing needed to handle permitting for renewable and conventional energy, along with the critical minerals that we know our country needs as well.

TRIBAL PUBLIC SAFETY AND JUSTICE PROGRAMS

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you for that. Just a little follow-up. One of my questions was about the tribal public safety. Since that was a common theme in our tribal witness hearing, request for more public safety and justice, it looks like the 2024 request is \$67 million. You have just mentioned how many we would lose if we go back to fiscal year 2022. But of that \$67 million, how will that make an impact on the needs that we heard of during our tribal witness hearings.

Secretary HAALAND. If the cuts are implemented?

Ms. PINGREE. No, so I got that you said we might lose 1,500, but I am curious, does \$67 million go very far, or how far can we go in meeting the demand that we heard about the other day?

Secretary HAALAND. Right. Well, of course, I think the \$62 million would help a tremendous amount for Tribes across the country, and I know that, yes, we do have a very long way to go. However, in order to meet the need in Indian Country documented by the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010 Report, it could go a long way toward that. Without this budget, we would not add roughly 222 Federal and tribal officers, which are badly needed. That is the largest priority for tribes across the country. When they speak to us about what their needs are, it is officers in the field.

The budget It would add 120 Federal and tribal positions and investments needed to improve operation of BIA-funded detention

and correction facilities. That is also a priority of Tribes. And it would support other public safety and justice programs, meet court-ordered requirements to the Navajo courts, and Fund needed maintenance and operating requirements at tribal courts across the country. So it doesn't seem like a lot, but it is a lot for Indian Country.

Ms. PINGREE. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Well, thank you for that, and thank you for putting the increase in the 2024. As you mentioned, it certainly was one of the biggest items that we heard about consistently from the tribes, and I think along with that, the chair mentioned, you know, making sure that it is an adequate pay so that they are not just training new officers and then losing them to local municipalities or other places. So that seems critically important, and thank you. I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Ms. Pingree. Mr. Zinke.

REMARKS OF REPRESENTATIVE RYAN ZINKE

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, Madam Secretary, you won't find this in the brief book, but thank you for your work with me on the Blackfeet Tribe. As the gentleman from Oregon has said, that we have made a lot of promises but not a lot of promises kept. In the case of the Blackfeet, we would like your commitment that you will continue to work with me and make sure the promise that was made to the great tribe is met.

Secretary HAALAND. We will always work with you.

CRITICAL MINERALS

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you. Let's shift to critical minerals.

Secretary HAALAND. Okay.

Mr. ZINKE. So, Madam Secretary, is it your policy that critical minerals should be sourced from countries that are stewards of the environment, like the U.S. and our allies, or sourced from Russia and China that don't share our same values?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, what I will say is the President is committed to—

Mr. ZINKE. It is pretty much a "yes" and "no." It is your policy, madam?

Secretary HAALAND. Our policy is to work to make sure we have the best.

Mr. ZINKE. I will take that as a maybe. So are you aware that China produces more emissions than any other country on the planet?

Secretary HAALAND. I have probably read that somewhere.

Mr. ZINKE. Are you also aware that China produces 90 percent of the world's plastic from four rivers?

Secretary HAALAND. I will take that as—

Mr. ZINKE. You also are aware that China is the biggest offender on illegal fishing.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Congressman.

Mr. ZINKE. Have you read the Department of Interior report on critical minerals, dated December 17th?

Secretary HAALAND. December 17th of 2021?

Mr. ZINKE. 2017.

Secretary HAALAND. 2017. I have not read that full report from 2017.

Mr. ZINKE. Are you aware that China controls, by proxy production, the supply chain of critical minerals that are critical to both the EV world and defense?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you for that information.

Mr. ZINKE. Are you aware by multiple studies that in order to satisfy the present requirements of EV, and critical minerals, and defense, it would take an increase of 2,000 percent of mining for 20 years. Are you aware of that?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you for the information, Congressman.

Mr. ZINKE. Are you also aware that Northern Minnesota is home to those critical minerals that are necessary for EV and our Defense Department?

Secretary HAALAND. I think there are critical minerals across our country, yes.

Mr. ZINKE. Before you put a moratorium, did you identify and fast-track those sources of critical minerals that you just mentioned?

Secretary HAALAND. Are you talking about in Minnesota and the boundary—

Mr. ZINKE. You had mentioned that there are other places within the United States that also hold critical minerals that are required for the country. Did you identify those and have you fast-tracked the production or permitting—

Secretary HAALAND. We are—

Mr. ZINKE [continuing]. Or identification?

Secretary HAALAND. In Minnesota particularly?

Mr. ZINKE. Across our country.

Secretary HAALAND. Across our—

Mr. ZINKE. Can you pick any place that you have identified for an alternative to critical minerals to fast track so we are not vulnerable to China and Russia for our very critical economy, both in defense and EV?

Secretary HAALAND. We are working currently on identifying those critical minerals. That is with the U.S. Geological Survey, and, of course, we—

Mr. ZINKE. You would identify, and you would agree that not having the critical minerals identified and produced in this country would present a security problem and prevent us from moving ahead on multiple issues, and we are vulnerable to China for very critical components of our economy. Would you agree?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I know that energy independence is a priority of President Biden.

KING COVE ROAD

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you. Let's shift to one of my favorite topics, the Aleutian Chain. As a Seal, I have spent a lot of time in the Aleutian Chain. So would you agree that pregnant women, either indigenous, native, or not, deserve access to healthcare?

Secretary HAALAND. Absolutely.

Mr. ZINKE. Well, would you agree that the Village of King Cove deserves that same access to healthcare?

Secretary HAALAND. I think every American should have access to healthcare.

Mr. ZINKE. Do you agree when the Wildlife Refuge was put in place by, I believe, President Jimmy Carter, did the village agree to give up their access to healthcare, the property that was traditionally theirs but then made into a refuge?

Secretary HAALAND. When I visited King Cove, they shared that information with me, Congressman.

Mr. ZINKE. So is there a study that would suggest a small acreage in the middle of the Aleutian Chain that was designated to be a wildlife refuge, a small gravel road would be an environmental catastrophe such that you would deny access to that village for healthcare?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, we are working to ensure that the Village of King Cove has the access that they need, and the conversations are ongoing.

Mr. ZINKE. And how you do that without a road? I have been there, and I have been a Seal, and crossed the beach. I know when the weather is inclement that nor a rotary wing or a boat will meet the requirement to go around the corner, but yet a road would, a small road.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes.

Mr. ZINKE. So how is this possible you are working with them when you removed the ability for them to have that road?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, two of my high-level staff were just in King Cove having conversations with the Tribe, and I want to assure you that we care deeply about that Tribe and want to make sure that they have access to the medical care they need.

Mr. ZINKE. And do I have your commitment you will work with this committee to make sure that the wonderful Village of King Cove has access to healthcare?

Secretary HAALAND. I will absolutely work with this committee on any item that you bring forward to us.

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Ellzey?

ENERGY PERMITTING

Mr. ELLZEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member. Madam Secretary, I would first like to congratulate you on your post. I wasn't here when you were in Congress, and as a military brat, thank you for your service to the country as the children of veterans, and clearly pulled yourself up by your bootstraps to get where you are today. It is an inspiring story.

So I am going to ask about some energy questions today. I come from Texas just south of Dallas, and energy production is very important to my State, and so I have got some very simple questions. What is the average time for approval for drilling on Federal lands?

Secretary HAALAND. The average time to approve a permit to drill after they have the lease? I couldn't tell you the exact time, but I know that since I have been in this office, that those permits have been pushed through. We are working very hard to make sure

we can be efficient in every single permitting opportunity that we have.

REMOTE WORK AND TELEWORK

Mr. ELLZEY. Can you tell me what percentage of your employees are working from home at this time?

Secretary HAALAND. Well, I think the Department of the Interior is unique in that we have a lot of employees who work out in the field. For example, our scientists with the USGS, are working in the field. I can get that number to you. If you want a percentage or an actual number, I would be happy to try to answer that question in a more detailed sense when I get back to my office.

[The information follows:]

PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES WORKING AT HOME

Although the percentages vary from month to month, as of March 2023, 39% of DOI employees teleworked one or more days per pay period, 51% worked full time at their office/facility, and 9% were fully remote. As part of a government-wide effort, Interior is reviewing the workplace plans and policies put in place during the pandemic to assess what is working well and what can be improved. It is our expectation that as a part of these assessments DOI will continue to substantially increase meaningful in-person work at Federal offices, particularly at headquarters and equivalents. However, we recognize that workplace flexibilities were available for federal employees in years prior to the pandemic and will also continue to be important to remain competitive in DOI's ability to recruit and retain top talent. We will consider this balance as we review recent changes in Interior's work environment to continuously improve our operations and identify better ways to accomplish our mission and provide services to the public.

Mr. ELLZEY. Okay. I appreciate that because I don't think that the Department of the Interior, but I think the Federal Government as a whole, Washington, D.C., even the mayor of Washington, D.C. has said please come back to work, Federal employees. And I think all of our Departments are notably behind the civilian populace because they have a job, and they got a guaranteed paycheck not going to work. And I am pretty sure that there is probably direct correlation between the lag time of getting these permits done and how many employees are actually at work. I think that is a very direct thing that is occurring there.

CARBON SEQUESTRATION

So let's shift gears a little bit to carbon capture and sequestration, and the BOEM is already 5 months behind schedule on draft regulations for the OCS long-term sequestration. Can you tell me when we are going to see something from the BOEM on that subject since they are already 5 months late? How much longer are we going to have to wait for that?

Secretary HAALAND. I will get you an exact date as soon as I get back to my office. I couldn't tell you at the moment, but I would be happy to get back with you and let you know exactly when.

[The information follows:]

TIMING OF THE DRAFT RULE FOR OFFSHORE CARBON SEQUESTRATION

Establishing a new offshore carbon sequestration program is a large and complex undertaking. BOEM and BSEE have been working closely on these regulations to ensure operations on the OCS will be safe and protective of the environment. We anticipate issuing proposed regulations for public comment later this year.

OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS

Mr. ELLZEY. You don't need to answer this question, but I am also curious how many folks at BOEM are actually at work or working from home. I think there might be a correlation there. So let's go ahead and go on to the 5-year lease program. So for the first time since 1980 since this program was instituted, DOI is already a year late in issuing the new 5-year program for offshore oil and natural gas leasing. When can we expect to see that? I mean, I have heard it is the end of 2023. How is it that we are a year late on something that is that vital to our Nation's economic and energy security needs, and so what is the plan going forward? How many of these folks are working, how many of these folks aren't because a 1-year lag on this issue is absolutely unconscionable in a time of worldwide possibility for war and energy insecurity. So when are we going to see that thing?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Congressman. So just so you know, the previous administration abandoned the effort on the 5-year plan. We picked it up again. We expect the final plan out in September, and after the required review period, it will be effective in December.

Mr. ELLZEY. This September.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes, sir.

Mr. ELLZEY. Okay. So it has been said that there might be 11 sales. There might not be any. Can you confirm that there are going to be some lease sales in this 5-year plan?

Secretary HAALAND. I can't essentially pre-decide what the 5-year plan will say, but I can say that when it is out in September, we will all know.

Mr. ELLZEY. Okay. So is that decision up to you?

Secretary HAALAND. Well, I am not the scientists. I am not the data people. But BOEM works on it. It comes through many, many eyes, including mine, and then after that, it is approved.

Mr. ELLZEY. Okay. One final question. The IRA mandated Interior hold to lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico that BOEM had previously analyzed, Lease Sale 259 by March 31st of this year, and Lease Sale 261 by September 30th, 2023. In both lease sales, Congress specified you shall conduct the lease sales in accordance with the record of decision approved by the Secretary on January 17th, 2017. Congress ratified the lease sales as described in the 2017 record of decision. Do you agree that Congress took away the Department's discretion with respect to holding Lease Sale 259 and 261?

Secretary HAALAND. Do I believe that Congress took away the discretion?

Mr. ELLZEY. Do you have any discretion at the Department of Interior on how you are going to conduct those sales, or did Congress stipulate how that was going to be had?

Secretary HAALAND. We will absolutely follow the law. The Lease Sale 259 is scheduled for March 29th, 2023, and 261, the end of September, and those will happen.

Mr. ELLZEY. Do you have the ability to remove any acreage from that?

Secretary HAALAND. I mean, I think once the plan goes through, we decide what is up for lease.

Mr. ELLZEY. Okay. I think that answered my question of whether or not you think Congress took away your ability to stipulate how that works. But my time has expired. I appreciate your answers to my question, and it has been nice talking with you.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Mr. Harder, I apologize. I didn't see you come in.

FLOODING IN CALIFORNIA

Mr. HARDER. No worries. No worries. I know I am over at the edge of the table here, but thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, yeah. And it is good to see all of you, Secretary Haaland, Ms. Mooney, and Ms. Flanagan. I will never get tired of saying "Secretary Haaland." It has such a great ring to it.

And I wanted to chat about how we can prevent future floods from devastating our community. Right now, my district is under water. We have had record rainfall for the last 3 months with no end in sight. As we speak, it is raining all across San Joaquin County, and it has caused catastrophic flooding where we have had 29,000 residents who have already lost power, major roadways have washed away, homes are sinking. Less than a mile from my home in Tracy, a minor levy collapsed. The roads were flooded. Folks had to be evacuated in many parts of our area. And that is not surprising because our geography makes us one of the most densely-populated flood plains in America.

Right now, my community in San Joaquin County is at greater risk of catastrophic flooding than New Orleans was before Hurricane Katrina, according to recent scientific responses. And I think it is unacceptable that all we have seen is a lot of short-term post-disaster relief as opposed to the long-term strategic investment that can keep our community safe. Ninety percent of properties in Stockton across San Joaquin County are likely to flood given the rainfall that we are seeing right now.

So given this danger, what is your Agency's plan to prevent future flooding, and what can we do to make sure the residents are kept safe?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, first, I just want to let you know that our heart goes out to the folks who are dealing with this, and we have seen all the reports, and, of course, it is devastating. And it is climate change, right? Some places are still in drought, and others are flooding. Our water managers work with all Federal, State, and local agencies to manage the system as best we can, so please be assured that Reclamation and other folks in our Department are having those conversations every single day during this terrible time. We also know that that we can't do it alone, so it will take cooperation on multiple levels. Our Reclamation leadership stands ready to work with you and your local governments and communities to move that forward.

I assume that you have been in touch with Camille Touton and other folks from Reclamation who can give you details on all of those things, and if not, we will absolutely get you in touch with those. And we are also closely coordinating with the Army Corps of Engineers on any and all of those flooding issues.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you. One of the frustrations I have about the budget request that I saw is that I don't think it invests enough in flood management infrastructure. Estimates that I have seen are that we need, just across our State, \$34 billion over the next decades to upgrade those dams, those levees. We saw what happened with the Orville Dam where, you know, many, many years of deferred maintenance led to a collapse that threatened the lives of folks all across the community, and it takes a lot more money to rebuild the damn than to make sure that we are doing more to fix those dams and levees.

Secretary HAALAND. Mm-hmm.

Mr. HARDER. And unfortunately, we are currently investing about half the amount of money in water infrastructure to keep communities like mine safe. What do you think we could be doing to make sure that those investments go up, and are you open to talking about other ways to make sure that the Interior budget that you provide is investing more in that type of infrastructure that I think is needed?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much for the question. So I can say that Reclamation has invested \$240 million in fiscal year 2022, from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds for 46 projects to address the aging water infrastructure. So even though it looks like the budget seems flat, there are investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act to help some of these issues. Reclamation included an additional \$649 million for further aging infrastructure projects in our spend plan for 2023 as well.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you. Just to say I think in our State, we need about \$1.4 billion per year in investment and flood infrastructure, so I appreciate the help. I think a lot more is going to be needed. Climate change is creating a lot more precipitation in our area. One last thing that I wanted to get your thoughts on, which is the proposed Delta tunnel, which is a project that would actually take some of that water from our farmers, from our area, ship it down to Los Angeles and Beverly Hills. It would increase the salinity of our land. Do you have thoughts on that project? I know that the Interior Department is reviewing permitting on that and would love a close look from the Department on a project that, I think, would be very harmful to our area.

Secretary HAALAND. We will absolutely take a look at it, and we are happy to be in touch with you and your office to specifically discuss that issue, if you would like, of course.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you so much.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. Ms. McCollum.

BOUNDARY WATERS WILDERNESS CANOE AREA

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you, Chair. Madam Secretary, welcome to the subcommittee. I know you testified when we had member witness day back a while ago when you served in the House, and we all have a lot of overlapping hearings today. I am the subcommittee's ranking member where I work firsthand on national security interests, making sure that our Nation has what it needs

to be safe and strong, not only for today, but for tomorrow. And, Mr. Chair, I know you are going to do a great job working on a lot of our shared values. We will see what your number is, and we will look forward to working with you on that, but I just have to give a shout-out to Chair Pingree and all the great work she did in fiscal year 2022 and 2023.

You have a broad mission. You have obligations to Indian Country, conserving our lands, protecting biodiversity. And I want to ask a question on Indian Country, but I was coming up from the Defense Committee when I understand another question was going on about the decision on the Boundary Waters Wilderness Canoe Area, as we affectionately call it, the BWCA. The previous administration protected water resources in Montana that were going to possibly be mined and in Washington State, but the BWCA was not protected.

In fact, there was a study that started happening under the previous administration which was stopped under the Freedom of Information Act, which I and others asked for information on that study. We were handed redacted copies. I want to thank you for completing that study because it is important to understand what 20 percent of the Forest Service's cleanest, purest water in that area, what could happen if those minerals were to be extracted, a mine was to fail, and these copper sulfide mines always fail, what that would mean to our water ecosystem up there, and what it would mean to also our national shared boundary with Canada.

Twenty percent of the purest water in the United States is in the BWCA. Wars are fought over water. Wars will continue to be fought over water. And water is a resource which we fail, especially some of us from water-rich States, sometimes to really put an economic value on it, but it also has a moral value, so I want to thank you for that.

TIWAHE INITIATIVE

I want to ask you a little bit about Indian Country, in particular. In your budget, you expand Tiwahe, which is a great initiative out of out of Red Lake where we heard testimony, the chair and I, from what is going on with opioid addiction, and that, and then fentanyl abuse, and just you know, how Tiwahe is an anchor in those communities to keep them together. The work that we are having to do with you on Indian education, tribal public safety needs, we heard so much of that in Public Witness Day, along with big thank yous for advanced appropriations.

So could you kind of tell me in your budget your focus on making sure that the United States Government funds its trust and treaty obligations and also ensures those young children, who live on the tribal communities, who are part of our whole Nation's future, as well as protecting elders to retire with lives of dignity.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much, Chairwoman.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Former.

Secretary HAALAND. Well, you are chair of your other committee as well, and thank you. I am happy to see you today. Sure. So with respect to tribal programs in 2024, public safety and justice, an increase of \$62 million. That is for law enforcement, corrections, and

tribal courts. Thank you for mentioning, and I know you are a champion of the Tiwahe community programs. There is an additional \$34 million for social services, ECWA, housing, wellness courts, and economic development in our budget. For our community and economic developments, plus \$46 million, and that works on tribal broadband and native language revitalization. You likely know about our boarding school initiative and native languages is a large part of the healing that we feel needs to happen within Indian Country. Coming out of the boarding school initiative. BIE school construction is plus \$136 million that is very badly needed. I know from some of the conversations I have had with tribal schools across the country, it is badly needed, so we are happy about the proposed budget increase, and then BIE school programs is a plus \$61 million. So those are all things that are included in our 2024 budget, which we think will get us closer to where we need to be to live up to our trust and treaty obligations for Tribes.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you very much, Madam Secretary. Mr. Chair, with you and the ranking member's permission, I have to back and be ranking member of Defense. Thank you for the courtesy extended me.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, former chairwoman of this committee and ranking member of this committee. It seems like everybody that has been a chairman or a ranking member here stays on this committee pretty much because they like it and stuff. I remember that Norm Dicks, when he left, he had been on this committee since the day he entered Congress.

Ms. PINGREE. Wow.

Mr. SIMPSON. He said it was the best committee he had ever been on, so he had been on here an awful long time. Let me ask you a couple questions.

Secretary HAALAND. Mm-hmm.

ROADS IN INDIAN COUNTRY

Mr. SIMPSON. Funding or building and maintenance of roads in Indian Country is inadequate. In fact, Ms. McCollum and I could tell you that we were out on a reservation, on the Navajo Reservation. We both had Fitbits on, and they drove us, how far was that? Maybe 5 miles, 10 miles?

Ms. MCCOLLUM. I don't know, but thousands of steps.

Mr. SIMPSON. We got—

Ms. MCCOLLUM. I think you cheated.

Mr. SIMPSON. We were sitting on the van driving us out there, and we got, like, 30,000 steps just sitting on the van. That is how rough the road was. But anyway, even when there is funding, tribes often have to overcome multiple permitting and regulatory hurdles to use their funds, which increases costs and lowers the value of the road funding that the Tribes do receive. When I met with the Tribes in my district, the Shoshone Bannock, they talked about the difficulty and time lag in the permitting, environmental reviews, right-of-way processes, and so forth. And I hear these same concerns from other Tribes, and not only with Interior and Transportation, but also with state and local governments.

It seems like we ought to be able to get Interior and Transportation Departments to streamline these projects and lower the

number of hoops Tribes must jump through to repair, build, and maintain their own roads. Will you commit to working with me on this specific problem in my district with the Shoshone Bannock Tribes and the problem they are having with the roads, but also, will you commit to working with this subcommittee and my colleagues on the Transportation, HUD Subcommittees and the Secretary of Transportation on a streamlined process on how Indian Country gets approval to build and maintain its roads?

And, in fact, in the regular appropriation process, I think, \$52 million went to, if I remember correctly, to Indian Country, which is totally inadequate. And I have talked to the chairman of the Transportation Subcommittee, and he is very interested in trying to increase that amount that goes to Indian Country. But roads in Indian Country are vitally important.

Secretary HAALAND. Absolutely. We would love to work with you, Chairman, and recognize that that is an issue, absolutely.

Mr. SIMPSON. Okay.

Secretary HAALAND. So thank you. Yes, we are happy to work with you on that.

FEDERAL WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER PAY REFORMS

Mr. SIMPSON. You bet. I want to talk just a little bit about wildland firefighter pay reforms. The President's 2024 budget proposal includes increased funding for firefighter pay reforms. The cornerstone of the reforms is a permanent pay increase through a new authorization of a base rate salary table. The proposal would permanently increase pay for Federal wildland firefighters and provide additional compensation for all hours, including rest and sleep time, when they are mobilized on incident.

Currently, the legislative authorizing fix allowed for this new pay schedule has not been presented to Congress. Has the Department estimated the impact that these reform proposals, and additional staff and related pay increases, and fixed costs could have on future discretionary budgets?

Secretary HAALAND. So we understand the issue. We have worked on this issue for a long time because it is important. We are increasing funding by \$72 million in 2024 for those pay reforms and just want you to know that this is a priority of ours. We recognize that firefighters are, they are saving our communities. They are doing all they can to fight these fires, and we as a country need to support that work.

Mr. SIMPSON. I fully agree with that. I was just wondering if we have looked out at 2025, 2026, 2027, what that is going to do to future discretionary parts of this budget. You know, that is something that we need to look at as we put this in place.

Secretary HAALAND. Absolutely, yes, and we are happy to have that conversation with you as well.

Mr. SIMPSON. Okay.

Secretary HAALAND. We are happy that we moved for an increase for this 2024 budget.

Mr. SIMPSON. Additionally, we have heard from Tribes about how increasing the pay of Federal employees only further exacerbates the hiring and retention problems for Tribal firefighters. Does the Department's proposal cover Tribal firefighters as well, not just

those in BIA, but also for the Tribes, and does the Department's budget provide for funding to Tribes to execute the pay increase? We not only have problems with firefighters, and Tribes training firefighters and then them going to higher-paid positions in other places. But as Ms. Pingree mentioned with law enforcement, the same thing happens.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes.

Mr. SIMPSON. It is like Tribes of the training grounds for everybody, and if they can get a job at a higher pay, then they go. Somehow we have got to address that, but this will kind of exacerbate that problem, which doesn't mean it shouldn't occur, but have we thought about does this affect the Tribes? Does this cover Tribes also?

Secretary HAALAND. Yes. So Interior's 2024 budget pay proposal provides increased pay for tribal and Federal firefighters. So that there is pay parity for tribal wildland firefighters, it is a high priority for all of us—

Mr. SIMPSON. Okay.

Secretary HAALAND [continued]. Because we recognize that.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Secretary HAALAND. We want to make sure they can stay in their communities and do the work that they want to and not be drawn away by higher pay.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Secretary HAALAND. They should get what they are due.

Mr. SIMPSON. Lastly, what conversations has the Department had with the authorizing committees of jurisdiction on the pay reforms, and should no authorizing fix be passed by the House and Senate, what part of the pay reforms would the Department be able to execute this year?

Secretary HAALAND. If it is okay, Chairman, Joan has studied this issue intensively. I would love to just have a conversation specifically about that with you, if that is okay. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. Okay. You bet. Thank you. Ms. Pingree is next.

LANDSAT NEXT PROGRAM

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the budget requests \$12 million in satellite operations to kick off the Landsat Next Program. This is the longest continuous space-based record of the earth's surface, and thanks to this partnership between DOI and NASA, changes in the Earth's surface have been observed for 50 years. The data has applications in areas as agriculture, cartography, geology, and forestry. So could you just tell us a little bit more about how this budget builds on the change and what is the difference between Landsat 8 and 9?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much. So we all love Landsat. Landsat Next will unlock new capabilities for the next generation of Landsat users with new applications for research on water quality, crop production, plant stress, the snow pack dynamics, and that is planned to launch around the end of 2030. So it will basically extend the over 50-year continuous observation record of Earth's land surface with several upgrades, increase the frequency of observations, produce better imagery with finer resolution, which

we think is helpful to the scientists, and it will collect more than 20 times the data as Landsat 9. So it is bigger and better.

Ms. PINGREE. Wow.

Secretary HAALAND. It is awesome.

Ms. PINGREE. Sounds great. I mean, it is certainly something that is critically important with our changing weather and all the other issues.

Secretary HAALAND. Absolutely.

MAINE OFFSHORE WIND ENERGY

Ms. PINGREE. I want to do a parochial issue here. I want to do a parochial issue on Maine's offshore wind. So Maine's floating offshore wind research represents a tremendous opportunity for Maine and the country to secure our leadership position on building a domestic floating offshore wind supply chain and working to support coexistence with our iconic fishing industry. Before submitting the application for a Federal research lease, the State went through an extensive site assessment and a stakeholder process, which included many public meetings with interested stakeholders and existing ocean users.

I understand that after the State's application was submitted to BOEM, the U.S. Coast Guard issued a draft port access study that puts the project at risk. So I am just curious about what you are doing to ensure that the State's preferred site is allowed to move forward without delay so we can ensure that this project can move ahead, supporting many of our shared offshore wind, economic development, and environmental goals.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much for the question, and, of course, DOI has a strong partnership with the Coast Guard, and supporting offshore wind siting, and safe maritime navigation, which is something I think they are particularly concerned with. So right now, BOEM is working with the Coast Guard to incorporate their recommendations on the maritime traffic routing in the Gulf of Maine. We will make sure that we are talking those things out. We understand how important this is to Maine, and we will work concurrently to try to avoid those delays. So to your question, we will keep those conversations going and to keep moving forward.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you for that. I hope it is not an extensive delay, and I guess I would just say again sort of a more plain language, you know, we all know offshore wind is challenging for a variety of reasons. It is really important to have consultation with the fishermen. Determining that site where the application process was, did take a lot of conversations with fishermen and others, and so the fact that the Coast Guard study was done after that and seems to have some conflicting concerns, I think it is a really important conversation to have moving forward. So I know you said you are involved in that, and I will look forward to hearing more about it.

Secretary HAALAND. We will make sure that those conversations are rectified. Thank you.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Reschenthaler?

GREEN NEW DEAL

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Secretary, you were in Congress in the 116th Congress, correct?

Secretary HAALAND. Yes.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. And you were supportive of the Green New Deal?

Secretary HAALAND. Yes, I ran on that.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. You co-sponsored it.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. You said, "I 100 percent support a Green New Deal."

Secretary HAALAND. Yes. I ran on that when I had my first campaign in Congress, yes.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Are you aware that the Green New Deal bans fracking?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, if I could just say—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. It is a "yes" or "no."

Secretary HAALAND. I am aware of whatever the Green New Deal had at the time, however it was many years ago that I signed onto it.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. It does, and I will enter the Green New Deal in the 116th for the record.

But are you aware that it also bans clean coal?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Congressman.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. So is that a "yes?"

Secretary HAALAND. Honestly, it is 2023.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. You were a—

Secretary HAALAND [continued]. And I probably co-sponsored—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. You were a co-sponsor of the bill. Are you aware it bans clean coal?

Secretary HAALAND. Yes, I would be happy to look it up and refresh my memory on the bill. I sponsored a lot of bills.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. I can read you the resolution—

Secretary HAALAND. I sponsored a lot of bills when I was in Congress.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. You also said you 100 percent support a Green New Deal. Are you aware also that the Green New Deal bans oil and gas Leasing?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Congressman.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Is that a "yes?"

Secretary HAALAND. If you are telling me and you are reading it from there, yes.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. All right. So you would agree that the Green New Deal bans fracking, bans oil and gas leasing, and bans clean coal. Do you still support the Green New Deal?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, as the Secretary of the Interior—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. It is a "yes" or a "no." Do you support it or not?

Secretary HAALAND. Well, I am a Secretary of the Interior now. I am no longer a member of Congress.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. So you do still support the Green New Deal. Yes or no.

Secretary HAALAND. In my current capacity, I am not——

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Would you still have co-sponsored the bill in the 116th had you known that it banned all this?

Secretary HAALAND. I am not sure of the question. I co-sponsored it when I was a Member of Congress. I am no longer a Member.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Knowing all these points, would you have still co-sponsored the bill? It is a very simple question.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you. I ran on the Green New Deal.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. “Thank you” is your response? It is “yes” or “no.” Would you have co-sponsored or not?

Secretary HAALAND. I co-sponsored it, yes.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Okay. And you don’t regret that.

Secretary HAALAND. No, that is——

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. And you still stand by your statement that you 100 percent support the Green New Deal.

Secretary HAALAND. When I was a Member of Congress, yes.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Okay. I am glad for the record we have established that. By the way, Mr. Chairman, I would ask unanimous consent that H.R. Res. 109 from the 116th be entered into the record.

Mr. SIMPSON. Without objection.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. And I would point anybody of interest to page 7, specifically lines 18 and 21.

CRITICAL MINERALS

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. All right. Madam Secretary, critical minerals.

Secretary HAALAND. Mm-hmm.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Electric vehicles and renewables are heavily dependent on critical minerals, correct?

Secretary HAALAND. Yes.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. China accounts for 63 percent of the world’s rare earth mining, correct?

Secretary HAALAND. I don’t know that particular——

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Will you stipulate that China is the majority of rare earth elements or they control the mining of rare earth elements to a great majority?

Secretary HAALAND. I don’t know what the percentage of what China produces.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. All right. Well, I am telling you right now——

Secretary HAALAND. You can tell me that and I will see. Thank you.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER [continuing]. 63 percent of rare earth mining and will stipulate to it. By deductive reasoning, that would mean that electric vehicles and renewables deepen our reliance on China, correct?

Secretary HAALAND. Yes. Okay.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Okay. Knowing this, your Department blocked critical minerals in Rapid Creek Watershed, correct?

Secretary HAALAND. Okay.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. They did, correct?

Secretary HAALAND. Okay. Okay.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. I mean, it is your Department, and you banned critical mineral mining. Okay. Would you also agree that your Department also banned it in Northeast Minnesota?

Secretary HAALAND. Are you talking about the Boundary Waters—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Critical mineral mining in Northeast Minnesota?

Secretary HAALAND. Well, we did a mineral withdrawal in the Boundary Waters Conservation Area.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. So yes. So yes, you banned it there.

Secretary HAALAND. I don't know what kind of minerals were there. I don't think they were critical minerals.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Okay. I can tell you they were critical minerals in Northeast Minnesota.

Secretary HAALAND. Okay.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. I am the co-chair the Critical Mineral Caucus. I can tell you that. So knowing that your Department under your leadership banned the critical mineral mining in Rapid Creek Watershed in Northeast Minnesota, would you not say that those actions further deepened our reliance on China?

Secretary HAALAND. I—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. It is a "yes" or "no."

Secretary HAALAND. No, because critical minerals can be mined—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. So let me get this straight.

Secretary HAALAND [continuing]. In other areas—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. So let me get this straight.

Secretary HAALAND [continuing]. Of our country.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. You banned the mining of critical minerals in places like Rapid Creek Watershed in Northeast Minnesota, where, by the way, we have tons of environmental protections. You also just told me that China is accountable for the majority of critical minerals, and before that, you told me that EVs and renewables are heavily dependent on critical minerals. And now you are telling me that you banning critical mineral mining in the United States doesn't deepen our dependence on China? Explain that.

Secretary HAALAND. May I say something, Congressman?

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Of course.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much. Since January 2021, the BLM has approved 20 new mines or mine modifications or expansions.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. I am talking specifically about critical mineral mining, and you just told me that your Department banned critical mineral mining in Rapid Creek Watershed in Northeast Minnesota. You also told me that we are heavily dependent on China. Would your actions not make us more heavily dependent on China? It is a "yes" or "no."

Secretary HAALAND. Since 2021, the BLM has approved 20 new mines or mine modification and expansions.

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. We are talking about critical mineral mining, not just any mines.

Secretary HAALAND. We are approving mines, and we—

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Okay. Okay. Well, any reasonable person would look at the actions you have taken and concede that your ac-

tions that made us further dependent on China, particularly rare earth elements. But with that, I yield back.

Secretary HAALAND. Okay.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Reschenthaler. Mr. Amodei?

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Secretary—

Secretary HAALAND. Yes?

NASA LAND WITHDRAWAL APPLICATION

Mr. AMODEI [continuing]. Just a quick follow-up things. I want to let you know that your IG did a nice job of regarding work of the solicitor's office at the Interior level for purposes of the aforementioned assets to the [inaudible]. And they did a good job of scrubbing the CFRs and found a provision that said, A, the agency that is going to make the decision can assist the agency that is supplying in some circumstances, which, arguably, I think can apply to the NASA application. We are going to do, through this committee, try to do some legislation to say that is fine. NASA is not synonymous with NEPA—

Mr. SIMPSON. Put on your mic because you are so interesting to listen to, and I want everybody to hear.

Mr. AMODEI. Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chairman. You have never said that before. I am glad I came today. [Laughter.]

But anyhow, we are looking at that with an idea to say, hey, listen, that is fine to tell somebody how to do an application or whatever. But I think when you are talking about a public lands withdrawal where there are arguably claims, rights involved, that the agency that is deciding probably shouldn't be helping the agency that is applying for something that would require the extinguishment of claims and things like that. So we will try to thread the needle on that. We obviously want your input on that, but I don't think in a due process sense it is right to say, hey, we are applying to agency X, and agency X has a CFR provision, not a statute, a CFR provision which says, oh, by the way, go ahead and help them because it just doesn't sound like you as the ultimate decider ought to also be responsible for helping them with their application, in at least a global sense. So I want to give you a heads up on that.

I have another question which is, are you aware of any instance where the 1874 mining law trumps NEPA, and let me tell you why I am asking you the question. There have been some folks who have said, well, NASA is afraid, and this thing about, oh, maybe the 1874 mining law will allow somebody to mine that Playa and destroy NASA's whatever. And it is, like, I am unaware, unless I have missed it. NEPA is NEPA. It isn't subject to the 1874 mining law or anything else like that, unless I have missed something. So I will ask you that question knowing that you probably don't know that off the top of your head.

Secretary HAALAND. Mm-hmm.

FUNDING FOR AVI KWA AME NATIONAL MONUMENT

Mr. AMODEI. If you do, fire away, but we are going to be following up on that because it would be unique to me to find that out. And then the last thing I want to bring to your attention for follow-up purposes, there was recently a designation by the White House of a new area in Southern Nevada. Can you tell me who has

operational responsibility for operating that as designated in that executive order? Whose budget does that fall under in terms of doing what you have to do for areas like that?

Secretary HAALAND. Of AVI KWA AME you are speaking of?

Mr. AMODEI. Yes.

Secretary HAALAND. That would be the BLM.

Mr. AMODEI. Okay. So it is fair to let Ms. Stone-Manning know, hey, we would kind of like to know how you are going to pay for operating this, not as public land, but as special public land.

Secretary HAALAND. Absolutely, and she will be happy to have a conversation with you about that.

Mr. AMODEI. Great. Thank you, ma'am.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you.

Mr. AMODEI. I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you. Thank you, Congressman.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Mr. Zinke.

CRITICAL MINERALS AND MINING

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For the record, I would like to enter the Department of Interior Critical Minerals report of December 2017. There seems to be confusion by some on what a critical mineral is or isn't, for the record. Even Lewis and Clark recognized the Missouri was one the largest of channels in our country. I believe they said it was wider, cleaner, and more powerful. So for the record, clean water does start in Montana.

Now, having said that, also, Madam Secretary——

VOICE. [Inaudible.]

Mr. ZINKE. Yes, sir, it is, on both sides. Thank you. Madam Secretary, would you agree that gravel is also mining? A gravel mine would be a definition of a mine?

Secretary HAALAND. If it is, well——

Mr. ZINKE. Because you mentioned that the Department of Interior has improved 20 mines. Would gravel be one of those?

Secretary HAALAND. I don't know what the particular 20 mines are, but we are happy to get back in touch with your office, Congressman.

[The information follows:]

Mines Permitted, Modified, or Expanded

Mining Plans of Operation Authorized by the BLM 1/20/2021 - 05/03/2023

State	Owner/Operator Name	Date Operations/Modifications Authorized (second date captures modification authorizations)	Targeted Mineral(s)
Alaska	GUILES ANNA COUP CINDY COUP JOSEPH BERRINGER ASH	9/17/2009 9/30/2021	Gold
Alaska	GREENE STEPHEN A	9/30/2011 5/11/2021	Gold
Alaska	BONACOR JOHN LESLIE ORLEN	7/22/2021	Gold
Alaska	NORDEEN KARL	5/27/2021	Gold
Alaska	SHOREY TIMOTHY A	4/8/2021	Gold
Alaska	HOTTINGER DOROTHY (SUE) CRARY WALTER TRAVIS SCOTT	5/6/2021	Gold
Alaska	Mystery Creek Resources, Inc	11/16/2020 09/16/2021	Gold
Alaska	Joseph Rojas	6/9/2022	Gold
Alaska	Ralph Hamm	3/15/2023	Gold
Alaska	COUP JOSEPH BERRINGER ASH	3/17/2023	Gold
Arizona	ANTLER OPERATIONS INC	2/8/2023	Zinc
California	US GYPSUM CO	2/7/2022	Gypsum
California	GLACIAL MINERALS INC	8/17/2022	Gold
California	ROACH JOHN M	9/22/2022	Gold
Idaho	TAYLOR ROBERT	7/14/2021 7/14/2022	Gold
Idaho	TREASURE CANYON CALCIUM INC	8/11/2022	limestone
Idaho	SHULL JASON	9/26/2022	Gemstone
Nevada	WK MINING (USA) LTD	2/19/2021	Gold
Nevada	BEACH MINING LLC	7/6/2021	Gold

State	Owner/Operator Name	Date Operations/Modifications Authorized (second date captures modification authorizations)	Targeted Mineral(s)
Nevada	PURE ENERGY MINERALS LTD SCHLUMBERGER TECHNOLOGY CORP	7/28/2021 12/16/2021	Lithium
Nevada	WK MINING (USA) LTD WK-ALLIED HASBROUK LLC	10/14/2016 7/30/2021	Gold
Nevada	WALKER LANE MINERALS CORP	5/21/2018 9/16/2021	Gold
Nevada	GEMFIELD RESOURCES LLC	7/29/2019 9/27/2021	Gold
Nevada	GULLSIL, LLC	10/5/2021	Gold
Nevada	SIO2 PARTNERS LLC	3/14/2022	Gemstone
Nevada	HALLELUJAH PARTNERS LLC	3/24/2022	Gemstone
Nevada	PANKOW JERRY	8/10/2022	Gold
Nevada	LITHIUM NEVADA CORP	2/22/2023	Lithium
Utah	ROCK LOVERS LLC	12/1/2021	Gemstone
Wyoming	WILSON BROTHERS CONSTRCTN INC	9/24/2021	Bentonite Clay
Wyoming	WILSON BROTHERS CONSTRCTN INC	9/24/2021	Bentonite Clay

Note: The BLM process for mineral development is considered authorized by the agency after the mining plan has been approved and the BLM receives an acceptable financial guarantee from the operator/claimant. This allows the operator/claimant to proceed with mining/milling and beneficiation of the ores, providing they have all the other necessary state and federal permits that may be required.

Mr. ZINKE. Okay. One of my favorite topics is Montana. Would you agree in the case of our position, our colleagues, that in the case of wind in Maine in or animals in Montana, that the States should be coordinated with and worked with? When you place a mine, or an, or a wind farm off the coast of Maine, do you think the States should be coordinated with?

Secretary HAALAND. We really work hard to make sure that we are in contact with all local communities and stakeholders in any—

BISON RESTORATION IN MONTANA

Mr. ZINKE. Well, I am glad you said that because your Secretary Order 3410, Restoration of Bison on Prairie Grasslands, the CMR happens to be in the great State of Montana, and I note that you excluded the State governments in that body of working group. Was that an oversight, or do you intend to make a correction that the State should have a place on the table when you are talking about moving bison in the great State of Montana?

Secretary HAALAND. We would be happy to have a further conversation with you. We would be happy to have a conversation with the State.

Mr. ZINKE. Do I have your commitment that you will place a representative from the great State of Montana when it comes to moving bison within our State?

Secretary HAALAND. We will obviously be in touch with any stakeholder with respect to any of the issues that our Department manages.

2017 CLIMATE REPORT

Mr. ZINKE. And I am sure in the case of Maine's wind, they would also like a rep, you know, on dealing with our communities. It would go a long ways. Secondly, Mr. Chairman, I would like the climate report from Department of Interior also entered in the record of 2017. Madam Secretary, have you read that climate report from 2017?

Secretary HAALAND. From 2017?

Mr. ZINKE. Now, that was the last U.S. Government report on climate change. It was a multi-agency, multiyear climate change. I believe, get me wrong, it may have been 1,762 pages, as I remember reading it. Have you read it?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I don't believe I have read that whole entire 1,700-page report, but—

Mr. ZINKE. Well, let me give you some excerpts.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you.

Mr. ZINKE. So we hear a lot about ocean rising. How much has the ocean risen? I asked that same question to U.S. Geological Survey around about a table about this size. I said, can you give me how much the oceans have risen in the hundred years broken down in 20-year increments. I think it was a fair question because a lot of what we are concerned with, villages, climate change. So what was the answer? It depends on the model. In fact, there are 200 models and over a thousand variables. So I asked again, what does the empirical data say because as a geologist, I understand plate tectonics. Oceans and islands rise. They subside. Continents move.

So what is the empirical data? Well, sir, it is from a few millimeters to a couple centimeters. We don't know. It depends on the model.

Now, I fully recognize that in some villages, there are signs of tsunamies, erosion, but it seems to be that no one actually reads the report. No one actually read the critical minerals report. Those are essential to decision making. So, Mr. Chairman, I ask that both be entered in the record, and I would hope that decision makers would read those two reports that I didn't change a comma on either of them.

Mr. SIMPSON. Without objection.

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Just a couple quick things. Great American Outdoors Act, great program. Great bipartisan support. You don't see that very often. You don't see that very often with a couple Secretaries sitting around the table talking about the great work of the Great American Outdoors Act. I won't ask you specifically now, but I would like a follow-up, if you could, on what we have done with the Great American Outdoors Act to address the backlog and how that is going, how of it is being used in planning versus actually doing work on the ground because what we thought when we enacted that was actually to get work done. And sometimes we spend a lot more time, as some people around this table have told me, on planning that we do on actually doing things. So if I could get a follow-up on that, if you would get back to me on that.

[The information follows:]

Leveraging the Great American Outdoors Act Legacy Restoration Fund to Address DOI's
Deferred Maintenance Backlog and Amount of Planning

The Department of the Interior is grateful to Congress for passing the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), a historic piece of bipartisan legislation that is already showing demonstrable results in many areas of our nation, from the replacement of critical failing electrical infrastructure and a high voltage transmission line serving multiple areas of Yosemite National Park in California, to increased accessibility and improvements to the parking areas, trailheads, walkways, seating, exhibits and viewing areas along the ten-mile-long battlefield tour route at Saratoga National Historic Park in New York.

When the 327 unique projects enacted and proposed with funding from fiscal years 2021 – 2024 are complete, they will address an estimated \$4.8 billion in deferred maintenance. Deferred maintenance is not addressed (i.e., removed from systems and estimates) until a project is administratively closed out. Given the multi-year duration of most GAOA LRF projects, the Department anticipates that significant amounts of deferred maintenance will start to be addressed in fiscal years 2025 – 2028.

Interior is rapidly applying the funding supplied via GAOA's Legacy the Restoration Fund (LRF) to address high priority maintenance needs nationwide. Through December 31, 2022, Interior has obligated more than \$1.68 billion (54%) of the LRF funding supplied during the first two years of the program and has initiated work on 186 projects (84%). The National Park Service (NPS) receives lion's share of GAOA LRF funding annually (\$1.33 billion, 70%). To put this in context, at the time of enactment, GAOA LRF funding constituted a 34% increase to NPS total appropriations. Despite challenging market conditions that have resulted in exponential increases in the cost of construction materials and lengthened procurement process, NPS has obligated more than \$1.48 billion (57%) of its fiscal year 2021 and 2022 funding as of December 31, 2022. Obligation of these funds demonstrates an ability to drive significant progress through its well-functioning project selection and investment review processes, a high-performing cadre of construction project managers, and exceptional planning.

The five primary components of the construction project lifecycle include: Planning, Design, Procurement, Construction, Substantially Complete / Closed. The first component and arguably the most important, planning, is foundational to a project's success. As concluded in a research paper presented to the Project Management Institute's North American Global Congress in 2012, "planning completeness is positively correlated with project success in the construction industry," and "The benefits of planning have been confirmed through the practice of project management. It has thus become an expected part of all projects. It has, as stated in a 2003 article in the International Journal of Project Management, become a hygiene factor for successful projects." Put simply: measure twice, cut once.

The Department uses GAOA LRF funds for construction planning activities to support execution of successful construction projects. Construction planning (which includes design and

compliance) is a necessary component of any construction program. The National Park Service requests Project Planning and Compliance funds as a lump-sum, but all executed funds are ultimately tied to specific GAOA LRF construction projects. To ensure transparency, this information is publicly available in the Project Data Sheets for each GAOA LRF project, which document LRF planning and design funds received prior to the construction component of the project.

Secretary HAALAND. Absolutely.

CRITICAL MINERALS

Mr. SIMPSON. One of the other things, critical minerals I knew would come up, and it has come up obviously. You said that we are researching where the critical minerals are in this country and stuff. I have read several reports from the USGS, and they know where they are.

Secretary HAALAND. Mm-hmm.

Mr. SIMPSON. Just because a critical mineral is found someplace doesn't mean that you can go mine it, though. The problem is trying to get permitting to mine some of the critical minerals that we really should be mining, and we can do it in an environmentally safe manner, and we need to balance that. I mean, there are other factors that come into whether you permit or mine or not in some of these places. So I understand that, but we need to get busy on providing some of these critical minerals in this country because it is not only national defense, it is not only battery technology, all of that kind of stuff that all of us want, so it is a difficult issue.

FY 2024 BUDGET CONSIDERATION

And then lastly I will say I appreciate the question that the ranking member asked about what would happen if we went back to the 2022 levels, the devastation that would occur. The Department of Interior would probably just close the door down there. I understand that. Some of those things might be true. Some of them might not be true. If you look at going back to the 2022 bill, we might have different priorities now, so we might prioritize things that you don't see cuts in. Others might see bigger cuts, that kind of stuff.

But I will tell you what is also devastating to this country, and that is the horrendous inflation that we have seen, and every economist that I have ever talked to has said that it is caused by excessive spending by the Federal Government. And as you know, we went on a spree that would embarrass drunken sailors of just spending. We have got billions, I mean billions of dollars sitting out there in COVID relief, and we can't find out where it is, or I guess we can find out where it is, but we are not taking the time to find out where it is, or haven't over the last few years.

When we passed the \$1.9 billion COVID relief bill, we didn't even look and find out if it was necessary. We didn't find out how much money was still unspent in the other COVID relief bill that were bipartisan. You know, anybody that tells you that the Infrastructure Bill, which many Republicans voted for, was paid for is crazy. The reason I voted against it is because they kicked the can down the road on the tough issue, and that is how you are going to pay for it in the future.

So in 5 years, we are going to be back around the table, going, geez, how are we going to pay for transportation. That has been a problem for the last 10 years, but nobody has been willing to take it on. But because of all of the excessive spending that went on the last several years, inflation is out of control. So it is not just what it would do to the departments across government but what our country needs. And so, you know, when I have looked at some of

the scenarios, I would be glad to go back to 2022 if that is what we ended up with, but I think it might be worse than that in some Departments.

So it is going to be challenging, but we will get through this, and we will hopefully do the right thing for the country, both in what we fund and how much we spend. So I appreciate you being here today. Ms. Pingree, do you—

Secretary HAALAND. Chairman, may I respond very quickly, please?

Mr. SIMPSON. Sure. You bet.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you. So the Department has a mission, and that is to conserve and protect our public lands, our cultural heritage for all Americans, plus, of course, to live up to our treaty and trust responsibilities to our Nation's Indian tribes. We are unique in that in times of hardship, and heartache, and whatever else experiences that Americans experience, for example, the horrible 2 years of the pandemic, they flocked to our public lands—

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Secretary HAALAND [continuing]. To find solace, to fill their emotional gas tanks, if you will. And so I apologize, we don't see this as just jobs. Our people are committed to the work they do at the Department. We know how much people rely on our public lands, and so we are committed to ensuring that we can do that work and complete our mission with respect to that. So I just want you to know that it is personal for a lot of us, and we are just very appreciative for the support that you are giving the Department for all of the things that we know that we have to do for the American people. Our public lands belong to every single person in our country, and we acknowledge that every single day we come to work.

Mr. SIMPSON. Well, I appreciate that, and I agree fully with what you just said, and that is the difficult thing. I have stayed on this committee for 20 years because I love virtually every agency that it deals with. I mean, we have got National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities, which people always try to defund. I think they are very important and they are a very small part of the overall budget and stuff.

And I didn't mean to downplay the importance of what the Department of Interior does. I could sit with the Department of Energy and the researchers at our National Labs, and they feel the same way about the work they do, and they are right.

Secretary HAALAND. Mm-hmm.

Mr. SIMPSON. I know that every chairman that I have known, whether it was all the way back to Norm Dicks and the chairmen that have come along since, myself included, Ms. Pingree included, Ms. McCollum included, Mr. Calvert included. I have always asked leadership for a higher allocation in our 302(b) because we have so many programs that everybody likes, and we have fought to try to get that up there. And I think that Ms. Pingree and Ms. McCollum were more successful than me and Calvert were in trying to get that allocation up, but it is a tough time for budgets all across the spectrum. But as I said, I don't know what our 302(b) is going to be yet, so we will just have to wait and see where it comes down.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. Ms. Pingree.

CRITICAL MINERALS

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you so much, Madam Secretary. I appreciate all of your thoughtful remarks today and your answers to our question, and I just wanted to make a couple of quick comments. The former Secretary was mentioning those two reports. I am happy to go back and look at them, but I just wanted to comment on, you know, this whole topic of critical mining minerals. You know, I think it is so easy to turn it into a political football, but the fact is whether it is defense issue, whether it is electric cars, which, by the way, they are demonstrating a Ford F-150 on the Capitol Hill today and I drove it this morning. If you guys haven't given it a try, that is a nice vehicle.

Mr. SIMPSON. If you order one, how long will it be before you get it?

Ms. PINGREE. Well, because we got to get a few more things going in the supply chain. I am just saying it is a nice car, and we are all going to drive electric cars soon. But my point is, you know, it might be a good roundtable conversation for this committee because we got to bring it into the realm of, okay, you know, as Mr. Amodei said, we can get to the moon. We got to figure out how to do mining.

I mean, my State has significant mining laws. They are very concerned about mines. We also have a lithium deposit that people are talking about. But how are we going to be able to do that if we don't really have a serious conversation about what is the next stage of technology work, and how does the permitting process work.

It just seems like it would be a really useful conversation for us to have because one way or the other, we are going to end up having to deal with this issue, and it just can't be this sort of political football, do you know, how much need, you know, it is all in China. You know, it is everywhere, and it is everywhere, not just the boundary waters. It is in my State. It is probably in your State. It is all over the place. So I just want to say, it is 2023. We got to figure this out.

SEA LEVEL RISE

And I just have to say sea level rise, I don't know about all those models. I am happy to look at it, but I represent coastal communities. I live in a coastal community. Half my earmarks last time were thinking about—maybe I shouldn't have but are about dealing with my community. I got sewer problems, water problems, the waterfront, the working waterfront. There isn't a town in my State that isn't already dealing with sea level rise, so to us it doesn't matter what model it is. You get a severe storm. We had one on Christmas Eve Day this year, and all of a sudden, your coastal businesses are under water, or you can't afford to get insurance anymore because the insurance company doesn't want to cover you, or you can't get a mortgage at the bank.

So, I mean, we are way beyond having a model that tells us whether or not it exists. We have to deal with this right now, and

that is certainly a, you know, important issue that you deal with and everything, everybody else, but that is just where we are.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

So I appreciate having you here. I appreciate the great work that you do. It is great to have this committee. It is really a wonderful opportunity to dig in on some of these tough issues that we all have to deal with and face, and I appreciate your indulgence on that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. SIMPSON. You bet. Do you have anything, Mr. Zinke?

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Secretary, thank you for your time, and believe me, I know how difficult the job is, but I also know all the rewards. So thank you for serving all these years, and I appreciate your candidness when you are here. You have you have a great staff, and believe me, from the bottom of my heart, we will work with you to make sure our lands are protected, our treaty rights are respected, and we can move forward on the critical issues that face this country. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Secretary Haaland, thank you for taking the time to join us this morning. I think it was a constructive discussion on a lot of different issues, and we will continue to have those discussions as we move forward with this. I think we all have the same goals in mind. We want to protect this beautiful environment we call America, whether it is from the high plains deserts and mountains and forests in Idaho, to the seashore in Maine, because they grow potatoes, too. [Laughter.]

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah. We look forward to working with you and continuing our work over the coming months. Again, thank you for being here. We appreciate it.

The committee stands adjourned.

[Questions and answers submitted for the record follow:]

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
The Department of the Interior's FY 2024 Budget Request Hearing
March 28, 2023

Question from Chairman Simpson:

Information Collection

Simpson Q1: It is widely known that there are different platforms and systems for collecting data on threatened and endangered species. The decisions made by the Department of the Interior and the Bureaus can have a significant impact on States, communities, businesses, and stakeholders in rural areas across the United States. These decisions must be made using consistent, standardized, and fundamental information and databases on species and habitats.

1. How does each Bureau (BLM, FWS, USGS) currently collect State and local information and maintain the individual databases?

Response: Biodiversity data collected on BLM-managed lands by staff, contractors, project proponents, State agencies, and partner inventories and surveys are shared with the State natural heritage programs, and field offices. For the past three years, BLM has worked with NatureServe on species information, data flow (e.g., establishment of common data collection business practices across BLM states), and data sharing agreements to update status and location information for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and establish a data sharing platform in BLM that provides access to biodiversity information on national, cross-State scales.

Within FWS, the Ecological Services program manages its threatened and endangered species information through an internal system called the Environmental Conservation Online System (ECOS). ECOS is a gateway web site that provides access to data systems related to listing, consultation, recovery and other aspects of administering the Endangered Species Act (ESA), primarily based on information provided by FWS biologists and other Federal data sources. This central point of access helps FWS personnel to manage data and information, and provides public access to information from numerous FWS databases, (e.g., Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Migratory Birds' Injury Mortality System, Fisheries and Aquatic Conservation's Fisheries Implementation System, etc.).

For determining species ranges, and species assessments related to candidate, proposed, and federally listed endangered and threatened species, FWS seeks information from partners, such as States, Tribes, local landowners, State natural heritage networks, NatureServe, and other Federal agencies. Providing the data is entirely voluntary but most parties have cooperatively shared their information so that the FWS' ESA decisions are based on the best available science.

For USGS, individual databases are maintained by the decision-makers or the State or local office where data are collected. The USGS collects species information when it is conducting science to meet partner needs by using standardized methods that USGS scientists often develop

for targeted research purposes. When the USGS releases datasets and analyses that include States' data, it allows the USGS to describe large scale patterns across regions. Two examples of this for the USGS would be the North American Breeding Bird Survey and the North American Bat Monitoring Program, both of which are conducted with State partners. The USGS regularly provides support to States in using the analytical output from programs such as these.

2. How is data shared?

Response: BLM field office staff share collected field data with the respective State natural heritage programs. As indicated above BLM is also working with NatureServe to ensure consistency in the collection and reporting of BLM data to State natural heritage programs and leverage a data sharing platform to provide a national level approach to accessing information.

The FWS makes its threatened and endangered species information available to the public through its public web site and the ECOS web pages which are also available to the public and partners via web services that can be integrated into their information management systems. The FWS also integrates its threatened and endangered species information into a project planning tool called the Information Planning and Consultation System (IPaC) that streamlines the FWS' environmental review process. One of the most active public uses for IPaC is to receive an official species list as part of early project planning and design. For example, Federal agencies or partners draw a polygon over a specific area in the U.S. and will receive a list of all of the federally listed, proposed, and candidate species that are or may be present in that location. In FY 2022, the IPaC program generated over 103,500 official species lists in response to user requests.

The USGS shares data through peer-reviewed publications, datasets, maps, or similar products that are available to States and other stakeholders. All USGS data collection projects follow USGS data management policies, which include an explicit data management plan; that plan and data releases adhere to requirements of any partner agreements. The USGS also works directly with other DOI bureaus to bring together data into publicly shared databases and tools to deliver information aligned to application to species, land, or water resources conservation.

3. How many individual databases currently exist?

Response: It is difficult to estimate the number of biodiversity related databases which currently exist. Related data is collected and shared across a wide range of State, Federal, local, and private entities.

For example, BLM indicates that in addition to its own database described above, each State agency has a natural heritage program database. In addition, other Federal agencies have their own databases.

The FWS maintains one database for endangered and threatened information within the ECOS suite of applications. FWS also maintains another 40 databases that relate to this primary

database but they focus on specific functionality like IPaC, a petition tracking system; the Recovery Online Acting Reporting, etc.

By the end of 2024, ECOS, a server-based platform of over 35 older applications of varying ages and technologies, will be replaced by ECOSphere, a modern, web services, cloud-based enterprise system, in accordance with DOI and NIST specifications. ECOSphere will consolidate all of FWS' data and workflows in a centralized data warehouse and enterprise ESRI-based maps. FWS anticipates providing more robust reporting through ECOSphere, which will provide data to partners and the public through web services and FWS' public websites.

USGS maintains over one hundred individual databases maintained, in part because the purposes are so varied. The USGS holds a handful of long-term species monitoring databases (e.g., those associated with the North American Breeding Bird Survey and the North American Bat Monitoring Program), while other databases might compile outcomes of restoration efforts, detections of zoonotic diseases, or occurrences of invasive aquatic species. Where possible, the USGS supports or leads in the coordination and compilation of data using standards; for example, the USGS compiles a reference database of Species of Greatest Conservation Needs for States, and partners with the National Science Foundation in supporting and contributing species observation data to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility.

4. What is needed to update to one single biodiversity platform that can be used across DOI?

Response: Interior and the bureaus are working on a strategy of data integration to consolidate various databases and applications to be interconnected, to provide a virtual platform for shared access to the various DOI sources of information. By creating a virtual platform of biodiversity information supported by regular transfers of information following a standard methodology together with the use of a supporting set of technologies, DOI is working to support a "one source" approach to its data and reports across the entire organization. Each bureau would be responsible for managing data according to common data management protocols/processes and security requirements.

Creating a single, unified, and consistent platform to access up-to-date biodiversity information across an expanded user community would increase the complexity and challenges of establishing a single biodiversity platform. Addressing data sensitivity concerns would be among those challenges. States, Tribes, and other data contributors have been concerned about sharing difficult-to-obtain and sensitive locational data for endangered species, which would need to be addressed. A larger scale effort would also increase the resources required to develop and stand up a platform and provide ongoing support. For example, State and other non-federal data would need to be regularly updated to identify changes in distributions over space and time, which would require permanent staffing.

Questions from Ranking Member Pingree:**STOP Act Funding**

The Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act (Public Law 117-258) that was signed into law on December 21, 2022, makes it a Federal crime to export, attempt to export, or otherwise transport from the United States Native American cultural items and archaeological resources without obtaining an export certification. U.S. Customs and Border Protection must detain any item requiring an export certification that does not have one.

Pingree Q1: Has the Department established regulations for obtaining export certification? If not, what is the current timeline for promulgating these regulations?

Response: On April 26, 2023, the Department sent a letter to all 574 Tribal Leaders inviting them to consult on STOP Act program requirements. The Department will consult with interested Indian Tribes on items that should be included in regulations to be proposed under the STOP Act. Consultations will occur throughout Summer 2023. Following the close of the consultation period, the Department will review feedback and determine the best steps to propose regulations for obtaining export certification. The Department intends to complete this proposal by the end of Calendar Year 2023, as set forth in the STOP Act.

Pingree Q2: What funding and staffing are included in the FY 2024 budget for this work?

Response: Funding for the STOP Act was not included in the FY 2024 President's Budget. At the time the Act was passed, funding levels for the Department for the FY 2024 budget had been determined. The authorization provides for \$3.0 million per fiscal year which would develop the program to a level similar to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act program. The Department is currently consulting with Indian Tribes on implementation. The Department looks forward to working with you and your staff to fully implement the Act.

Pingree Q3: The act also requires the Department of the Interior to:

- designate a liaison to facilitate and hold trainings and workshops on the voluntary return of human remains and cultural items.
- refer individuals and organizations to Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations to facilitate the voluntary return of human remains and cultural items.
- Convene an interagency working group.
- Convene a Native working group consisting of representatives of Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations to provide advice on issues concerning the return of, and illegal trade in, human remains and cultural items.

What funding and staffing are included in the FY 2024 budget for this work?

Response: Funding for the STOP Act was not included in the FY 2024 President's Budget. At the time the Act was passed, funding levels for the Department for the FY 2024 budget had been determined. The authorization provides for \$3.0 million per fiscal year which would develop the program to a level similar to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

program. The Department is currently consulting with Indian Tribes on implementation. The Department looks forward to working with you and your staff to fully implement the Act.

Pay Equity for Tribal Wildland Fighters

Pingree Q4: What is specifically being done to increase firefighting capacity and provide pay equity for Tribal wildland firefighters?

Response: The Department of the Interior recognizes the important contributions of Tribal wildland firefighters to interagency response efforts. To ensure their salaries are on par with those of Federal wildland firefighters, Interior set aside \$24.0 million this fiscal year to increase Tribal firefighters' pay retroactive to FY 2022. This funding provides temporary pay supplements for Tribal firefighters comparable to the special pay supplements for Federal wildland firefighters authorized and funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Interior recently completed a series of formal Tribal consultations to help determine the number of Tribal firefighting personnel and the best approach for calculating pay.

The President's FY 2024 Budget proposes to permanently increase the pay of Federal and Tribal wildland firefighters. The 2024 budget requests an increase of \$12.0 million for Tribal firefighters' pay. The budget also provides funding to increase Tribal firefighting capacity by the equivalent of 55 full-time personnel, to an estimated 813 Full-Time Equivalent Tribal personnel.

TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2023.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

WITNESSES

MICHAEL REGAN, ADMINISTRATOR, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

FAISAL AMIN, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Mr. SIMPSON. The hearing will come to order.

Good afternoon, and welcome back for the second time today to discuss the President's budget proposal for fiscal year 2024. Earlier this morning, Secretary Haaland and the Interior Department joined us, and now we are pleased to welcome Administrator Regan from the Environmental Protection Agency. Thank you for being here today, Mr. Regan.

As you know, I previously served as chairman of this subcommittee, and I am very excited to be back in this role again, in part because I am a lifelong conservationist from a Western State and recognize the importance of protecting and preserving our land and water resources. But as I said the last time I was chairman and will say it again, the overspending has gone on for too long, and we need to tighten our belts. When I chaired this subcommittee a decade ago, we wrote and passed a bill in the House that reduced EPA funding by 18 percent. I thought it was only 17, but it was 18 percent. We again need to have a serious and reasoned discussion about our Federal spending.

The President's fiscal year 2024 budget proposal for EPA totals \$12 billion, a 19.2 percent increase above the current level. If enacted, this would be the highest level of funding for EPA in history, and the record high budget request comes alongside the unprecedented influx of more than \$100 billion EPA received from several large spending packages this year. Already, the Agency has hired an additional 742 staff using money just from the Infrastructure Bill. One of my concerns is what all of this hiring is going to do to the Agency down the road because the money from the packages last year is temporary, not permanent. Is the agency going to be pinning Congress with a hiring cliff down the road?

Additionally, while the increase in the EPA budget request is staggering, it is concerning that the budget proposal flat funds many bipartisan and popular programs and grants that go directly to States, tribes, and local governments. In fact the proposal, eliminates or reduces funding in some of the most popular places, like rural water technical assistance funding, while substantially increasing select program enforcement and environmental justice by \$312 million, clean air by \$459 million. That will be dead on arrival in this House. Finally, I am concerned about the EPA barrage of burdensome regulations that are harming everyone, from farmers,

energy developers, critical mineral development, and American families who will bear the brunt of the cost.

Just a few weeks ago, the House passed, with bipartisan support, a Congressional Review Act Disapproval Resolution on the administration's Waters of the U.S. Rule, rule which went into effect 8 days ago on March 20th for all States, except Texas and Idaho, due to a court decision. From where I sit, it seems like the rulemaking staff at the EPA is continuing to sprint to get as many regulations as possible on the books which will have serious consequences on our economy, jobs, energy security, and reliability. Rolling back the WOTUS rule received bipartisan support in Congress, and I hope that is a clear message to the administration that Americans are concerned about overregulation.

I know many of my colleagues have questions for you today, and I am ready to have the necessary and tough deliberations about how best to spend our limited Federal resources in order to ensure our natural resources, our waters and lands in Idaho and across the country, are protected and preserved while still promoting economic development and job creation. Thank you, Administrator Regan, for being here today, as I said, to have this discussion with us. Now, I would like to yield to Ranking Member Pingree for her opening statement.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome back to the subcommittee, Mr. Regan, and, Mr. Amin, thank you for being here. The EPA's budget request totals \$12.1 billion, an increase of \$1.9 billion over the enacted level, to support its mission to protect human health and the environment. The request proposes substantial increases to address the climate crisis through robust funding for the EPA science and technology and environmental programs. It makes important investments in environmental justice programs so that we can continue to address historic underinvestment in underserved and overburdened communities.

The budget request also makes key investments in EPA's workforce. Not only has the EPA mission expanded tremendously over the last decade, but the growing challenges around climate change requires more expertise and more staff. To recognize these growing demands, since fiscal year 2021, this committee has worked in a bipartisan manner to increase the EPA's budget by nearly \$900 million. These investments have paid off, and we increased funding in all areas, areas that both Democrats and Republicans care deeply about. Historic funding levels for environmental justice, for example, reaches all States and many rural areas in both conservative and progressive districts. Historic funding levels for clean air and clean water programs make sure we all breathe clean air and have access to clean water, no matter where you live and who you vote for.

We cannot and should not reverse progress we have made to protect human health and the environment. The EPA should be fully resourced and staffed. Recent rhetoric about cutting Federal spending to its fiscal year 2022 levels would have a damaging impact on the EPA. It would amount essentially to an \$800 million dollar cut when you include fixed costs. This is unacceptable. Mr. Regan, I look forward to hearing more about what this cut would mean to the EPA. I am also interested in hearing more about the new Fed-

eral standard, which would regulate PFAS in drinking water, which will bolster public health across the Nation. This is a significant step to deal with these harmful forever chemicals, and I look forward to hearing more about the progress you have made on this and PFAS in air and soil.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing before us today. We appreciate your testimony and your answers, and I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Ranking Member Pingree. We are fortunate to have the ranking member of the full committee with us, and I would like to yield to Ms. DeLauro for any opening remarks.

Ms. DELAURO. I think in all the time I have spent in the House of Representatives, this is a very first time I have been in this room. I swear to God, I said where is 2008, you know? Whoa. This is great. It is wonderful. Okay. Thank you.

Ms. PINGREE. A distant era.

VOICE. We are in close quarters here, so.

Ms. DELAURO. Yes, but, you know, it is homey. This is great. Thank you. A real thank you to you, Chairman Simpson and to Ranking Member Pingree, for holding what is an important hearing. And Administrator Regan, it is really wonderful to see you as well as you, Mr. Amin, you know, and your work at the Agency.

You know, the EPA plays a very critical role in all of our lives. We witnessed this recently on a national scale as critical cleanup work surrounding the disaster in East Palestine and the spill in the Delaware River continues right now. The EPA is central to cleaning up the contaminated water and lands that people rely on. Right now, parents and cities around these areas, even many miles away, do not know if they can turn on their tap out of fear of the water their kids are going to drink. They are scared to breathe the air outside their homes, but the EPA has a key role in understanding the size and the scale of these disasters, oversees the cleanup, making sure those responsible do not cut corners.

For this reason, I am proud that in the 2023 bill we passed in December, we strengthened the EPA's ability to serve American families. We included critical funding to restore and preserve our lands and bodies of water, including critical funding for the Long Island Sound. We dramatically expanded environmental justice efforts to address unacceptable pollution in underserved communities. We provided funds to clean up contaminated sites, hold polluters accountable, and we strengthened water management projects, including investments in lead pipe replacement and water and sewer infrastructure. The President's 2024 budget builds on these critical investments by strengthening environmental enforcement efforts and recommitting to clean water, land, and air programs, so that these are safe, healthy today and for future generations.

I am also glad to see a significant increase for environmental justice work. People of color and historically underserved communities are hardest hit one when disasters of all kinds strike. We saw this as recently as this weekend as tornadoes swept through vulnerable communities across Mississippi and Alabama. We have so much work to do. However, there are some of my Republican colleagues who are calling out to cut the 2024 budget to the 2022 level and even more. These are extreme, in my view, and we also have some

former Republican officials who would fully eliminate critical programs that threaten so much of the progress we have made to ensure the health and safety of our communities.

As you have mentioned in your letter to me, Mr. Secretary, on the impacts of these cuts, they could set our success back years, threatening the sustainability of water systems that thousands of people rely on, undermining critical improvements to clean water and wastewater infrastructure. Regulators who ensure water is safe to drink and who keep things like lead and asbestos out of our water would be eliminated, especially impacting tribal lands. Progress being made towards addressing forever chemicals, such as PFAS, would be reduced. Programs that address wildfires would be delayed, putting lives at risk and letting our firefighters down. These cuts would jeopardize work to ensure compliance with environmental laws, an area that has brought in billions of dollars, catching those companies who are cheating emissions testing.

The health of our environment and our communities cannot fall victim to denial and to political stunts any longer. Mr. Administrator, I know you agree. I look forward to our discussion, and with that, many thanks to you, Mr. Chairman, and to you, Ranking Member Pingree. I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. With that, Administrator Regan, you may proceed with your opening statement. Your officially-submitted testimony will be included in the record.

Mr. REGAN. Thank you, Chairman Simpson, and Ranking Member Pingree, and Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of this committee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the necessary vision laid out in the United States Environmental Protection Agency's proposed fiscal year 2024 budget request. In this budget request we lay out an ambitious plan for EPA, with the goal of building a healthier, more prosperous Nation, while ensuring global competitiveness and energy independence and security. President Biden's proposed fiscal year 2024 budget request for EPA provides \$12.1 billion to advance key priorities, including protecting air quality, upgrading our Nation's water infrastructure, tackling the climate crisis, and rebuilding core functions at the Agency.

Over the last year we have made significant progress towards many of these goals together. I am proud of the foundation we have laid and the partnerships that we have underpinned our success, but there is still much more work to do to ensure that all of our children have safe, healthy places to live, learn, and play, to build a stronger, more sustainable economy, and to advance American innovation and ingenuity. Simply put, investing in EPA is investing in America.

Across the country, poor air quality still affects millions of people, perpetuating harmful health and economic impacts. In fiscal year 2024, the Agency will protect our air quality by cutting emissions of ozone-forming pollutants, particulate matter, and air toxins. The President's budget includes \$1.4 billion to improve air quality and set standards that reduce pollution from mobile and stationary sources. EPA's work to set these standards provide certainty to industry, build on advances in technology, and reinforces

market movement towards a cleaner energy system that provides safe, reliable, and affordable energy.

A thriving economy also requires clean and safe water for everyone. Although progress has been made, many still lack access to healthy water, face inadequate wastewater infrastructure, and suffer from the effects of lead pipes. America's water systems are also facing new challenges, including cybersecurity threats, climate change, and emerging contaminants, such as PFAS. The budget proposes more than \$4 billion to upgrade drinking water and wastewater infrastructure nationwide, with a focus on underserved communities.

Over the last year, I have had the privilege of traveling across the country from Jackson, Mississippi to East Palestine, Ohio. I visited communities in many of your States and have seen firsthand the environmental and public health challenges many of your constituents continue to experience. I have spoken to families who have been sickened by the air they breathe. I have met with people who live with toxic waste in their backyards. I have seen conditions in this country that are simply unacceptable in the United States of America.

From investing in our Nation's climate resilience to cleaning up contaminated land and water, there is no shortage of important work to be done, and, members of the committee, EPA is up for the task. We are eager to work with all of you to deliver for our fellow Americans and to secure our Nation's global competitiveness, but we need your support. Both the urgency and economic opportunity presented by climate change require that we leave no stone unturned, and we know the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies have not always ensured that fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income.

In fiscal year 2024, EPA requests additional funding and staff for the Environmental Justice Program. The funding will help to expand support for community-based organizations, indigenous organizations, tribes, States, local governments, and territorial governments so that they can develop and implement solutions to their environmental justice concerns through our multi-partner collaborations.

The fiscal year 2024 President's budget positions the EPA to create durable environmental policy, investing in America, and setting our Nation on a path to win the 21st century. It will allow for us to meet the pressing needs faced by millions of Americans and fundamentally improve people's lives for the better. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to submit this testimony for the record, and I look forward to our continued partnership to achieve these ambitious yet necessary goals, and I welcome all questions. Thank you so much.

[The information follows:]

TESTIMONY OF
MICHAEL S. REGAN

ADMINISTRATOR
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

BEFORE THE
U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES

March 28, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the bold vision laid out in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Budget request. Before turning to FY 2024, I also want to express my appreciation for the targeted increases included in the FY 2023 enacted appropriation and all of the work that went into accomplishing this year's budget. Building off that foundation, in our FY 2024 Budget request, we lay out an ambitious plan for EPA that provides the resources needed to advance a cleaner, healthier, and more equitable Nation where all people have equal access to safe and clean water, air, and communities.

The FY 2024 President's Budget Request

The President's FY 2024 Budget for EPA provides \$12.1 billion to advance the key priorities outlined in the *FY 2022-FY 2026 EPA Strategic Plan*, including tackling the climate crisis, delivering environmental justice, protecting air quality, upgrading the Nation's aging water infrastructure, and rebuilding core functions at EPA. EPA is committed to providing robust support to our tribal, state, and local partners through grants that directly reach these communities. Nearly half of our Budget, over \$5.8 billion, is to support state, tribal and local partners to advance the critical mission we can only accomplish by working together. The Budget requests approximately \$1.2 billion to support implementation of grant programs authorized in the Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act (DWWIA). The Budget also includes more than 1,900 additional Full Time Equivalents (FTE) across program and regional offices, bringing EPA back to 17,000 FTE, to ensure EPA has the capacity to protect human health and the environment across the Nation.

Tackling the Climate Crisis

In FY 2024 EPA will continue to prioritize climate mitigation and adaptation, which are both essential components of the strategy to reduce the impacts of climate change. EPA's budget will support federal partners, tribal governments, states, territories, local governments, environmental justice organizations, community groups, and businesses to address climate change. EPA will provide an additional \$45 million and 26 FTE for climate adaptation efforts to strengthen the adaptive capacity of tribes, states, territories, local governments, communities, and businesses. In

addition, EPA also will provide \$400 million in grants, an increase of \$151 million, to help expand the efforts of state and local air pollution control agencies to implement the Clean Air Act. We will leverage an additional \$65 million to implement the American Innovation in Manufacturing Act to continue phasing out hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). EPA will direct an additional \$37 million to improve knowledge of the impacts of climate change on human health and the environment through our research programs.

Enforcing Environmental Laws

Enforcing and ensuring compliance of our Nation's environmental laws is central to achieving EPA's mission. EPA holds, and will continue to hold, bad actors accountable for their violations, with a particular focus on communities with multiple pollution sources. This Budget invests \$246 million for civil enforcement efforts, such as increasing enforcement efforts in communities with high pollution exposure and preventing the illegal importation and use of hydrofluorocarbons in the United States. The request also includes \$165 million for compliance monitoring and additional resources to implement a coal combustion residuals compliance program. The Budget also directs \$75 million for criminal enforcement efforts to pursue investigations of the most egregious environmental cases and to support a specialized Criminal Enforcement Initiative focused on addressing environmental justice issues in partnership with the Department of Justice (DOJ).

Ensuring Clean and Healthy Air for All Communities

Poor air quality still affects millions of people across the country, perpetuating harmful short- and long-term health and quality of life impacts. In FY 2024, EPA will improve air quality for communities by reducing emissions of ozone-forming pollutants, particulate matter, and air toxics. The President's Budget includes \$1.4 billion to improve air quality and reducing localized pollution, reducing exposure to radiation, and improving indoor air for communities across the country. The Budget dedicates \$180 million to the development and implementation of national emission standards to reduce air pollution from vehicles, engines, and fuels. EPA's work to set these standards provides certainty to industry, builds on advances in technology, and reinforces market movement towards a cleaner energy system that provides reliable and affordable energy. The Budget provides \$150 million, a \$50 million increase above the 2023 level, to expand the availability of Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) grants and rebates.

The Budget includes \$367 million to assist tribal, state, and local air pollution control agencies in the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs for the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) and to establish standards for reducing air toxics. EPA will continue to build on its historic progress in protecting human health and the environment from the harmful effects of air pollution and work to assure clean air for all Americans, with a particular focus on those in underserved and overburdened communities.

Achieving Clean and Safe Water for All Communities

Clean and safe water is a foundation for healthy communities and a thriving economy, and EPA is committed to ensuring clean and safe water for all. Although immense progress has been made across our Nation, many still lack access to safe and clean water and suffer the effects of aging infrastructure and legacy lead pipes. America's water systems also are facing new challenges, including cybersecurity threats, climate change, and emerging contaminants of concern, such as PFAS.

In FY 2024, EPA will continue our work with federal, tribal, state, and nongovernmental partners to advance water quality science, provide clean and safe water for all communities, and protect our Nation's waterbodies from degradation. The Budget provides more than \$4 billion for water infrastructure, an increase of \$1 billion over the 2023 enacted level. The Budget funds all of the authorizations in the original Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act of 2021 and maintains funding for EPA's State Revolving Funds (SRF) at the total 2023 enacted level, which complements funds provided for water infrastructure programs in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. To further the President's goal of replacing all lead pipes within the next decade, the Budget proposes \$219 million for two grants dedicated to remediating lead contamination in water—Reducing Lead in Drinking Water and Lead Testing in Schools.

Also included is \$80 million to support the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) loan program. As of February 2023, EPA has issued 100 WIFIA loans to communities across the country totaling over \$17 billion in credit assistance to help finance more than \$36 billion for water infrastructure projects. WIFIA loans for these projects have saved communities nearly \$5 billion, which can be used for additional infrastructure investment and to keep rates affordable for water system users. These WIFIA-financed projects have created over 123,000 jobs and benefited more than 50 million people, demonstrating that WIFIA credit assistance is an effective tool to help address a variety of water infrastructure needs to support communities nationwide.

In FY 2024, EPA will continue to work across environmental programs to advance agency efforts to tackle Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) pollution. As part of the President's commitment to tackling PFAS pollution and EPA's PFAS Strategic Roadmap, the FY 2024 Budget provides EPA with the resources to increase its understanding of PFAS and their human health and ecological effects; restrict PFAS use to prevent new PFAS pollution from entering the air, land, water; and remediate PFAS that have been released into the environment. The FY 2024 Budget provides \$279 million for the Section 106 Grants Program, which funds state, interstate, and tribal water pollution control programs, and is a critical funding source to establish, expand, and implement water quality programs to protect and restore water resources. More than \$60 million in additional funding is provided across the budget to accelerate progress on EPA's PFAS Strategic Roadmap, and enable EPA to move more quickly on policy, regulatory, and enforcement actions across multiple statutory authorities. EPA will continue its efforts in FY 2024 to develop analytical methods, drinking water health advisories, toxicity values, effluent limitation guidelines, as well as risk communication and other tools to support states, tribes, and localities in managing PFAS risks in their communities.

From the Great Lakes to the Chesapeake Bay, from Lake Pontchartrain to the Puget Sound, the United States is home to water bodies of ecological, cultural, and economic significance. The Budget invests \$682 million to continue strong support for EPA's Geographic Water Programs to protect and restore these water bodies of special ecological and economic importance to the Nation. EPA's Geographic Programs deliver technical and financial assistance to solve problems and support healthy resilient ecosystems and to maintain, restore, and improve water quality, which yields environmental, economic, and recreational benefits to their communities.

Safeguarding and Revitalizing Communities

Preventing and cleaning up environmental pollution that harms communities and poses a risk to public health and safety continue to be a top priority for the Administration. The FY 2024 Budget enables EPA to collaborate with Tribal, state, and local partners to improve the livelihood of all residents of the United States by addressing contaminated sites, including Superfund, brownfields, leaking underground storage tanks, and other waste sites and restoring them to productive use.

An estimated \$2.5 billion in Superfund tax receipts that will be available to EPA in FY 2024, combined with ILJA funding and appropriated resources, will enable the Superfund program to continue with a renewed urgency cleaning up some of the Nation's most contaminated land and respond to environmental emergencies and natural disasters. This historic level of funding will allow EPA to advance critical Superfund pre-construction work such as site characterization, construction design, and community outreach/engagement. Additionally, this funding will allow the Superfund Emergency Response and Removal Program to effectively and efficiently address situations that require emergency response and removal actions such as chemical releases, fires or explosions, natural disasters, and other threats to people from exposure to hazardous substances, including from abandoned and uncontrolled hazardous waste sites. The Budget also includes \$217 million for EPA's Brownfields programs to provide grants and technical assistance to communities so they can safely clean up and reuse contaminated properties, as well as \$20 million for the new Alaska Contaminated Lands program. Taken together, these investments will ensure EPA is cleaning up sites and fully engaging the communities we serve in the process.

Ensuring the Safety of Chemicals for People and the Environment

Chemicals and toxic substances are ubiquitous in our everyday lives and are often released into the environment from their manufacture, processing use, or disposal. EPA has significant responsibilities under amendments to the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) to ensure the safety of chemicals in or entering commerce and addressing unreasonable risks to human health or the environment. The FY 2024 Budget includes \$131 million and 534 FTE to support the TSCA Program, an increase of \$48 million and 174 FTE over the 2023 level. EPA will continue to emphasize quality of work, adherence to statutory intent and timelines applicable to pre-market review of new chemicals, chemical risk evaluation and management, data development and information collection, and review of Confidential Business Information (CBI) claims. These resources will support EPA-initiated chemical risk evaluations, issue protective regulations in accordance with statutory timelines, and establish a pipeline of priority chemicals for risk evaluation.

The agency also has significant responsibility under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) to screen new pesticides before they reach the market and ensure pesticides already in commerce are safe. In addition, EPA is responsible for complying with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and ensuring that federally endangered and threatened species are not harmed when the agency registers pesticides. To continue making progress toward meeting ESA mandates in FY 2024, the Budget includes an additional \$27 million in our environmental pesticides program, including an additional \$10 million to support Endangered Species Act Pesticides Review to improve EPA compliance in pesticide regulatory activities and develop improved methodologies for ESA review.

Elevating Environmental Justice

The development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies has not always ensured the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income. To help address these inequities, EPA created a new national program in September, the Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights, to lead our efforts in this area and embed environmental justice practices into EPA programs.

In FY 2024, EPA requests more than \$375 million and 265 FTE for the Environmental Justice Program to expand support for community-based organizations, indigenous organizations, tribes, states, local governments, and territorial governments to identify and develop solutions to environmental justice issues through multi-partner collaborations. This includes \$130 million in four environmental justice grant programs and \$91 million and 50 FTE to build out community-centered technical assistance hubs. The Budget provides a total of \$31 million, an \$18 million increase, to build civil rights capacity across EPA and to reduce the backlog of civil rights cases. In the long term, the vigorous enforcement of civil rights laws will address historical and systemic barriers that contribute to the environmental injustice affecting vulnerable communities. The Budget proposes additional funds and FTE to increase protection of fence-line communities with disproportionately high pollution exposure through improving inspections, compliance assistance, and monitoring capacity in those communities.

Continuing to Restore EPA's Core Capacity and Following the Science

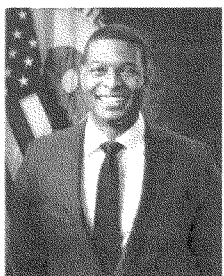
The Budget adds more than 1,960 FTE relative to the 2023 enacted level, for a total of more than 17,000 FTE, to help rebuild EPA's capacity. The Budget also will dedicate resources to continue strengthening the agency's ability to recruit, hire, develop, promote, and retain top talent and remove barriers to equal opportunity at management and staff levels to strengthen and advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Ensuring EPA has the work force it needs to carry out its mission to protect clean air and water, tackle the climate crisis, and promote environmental justice is essential. A commitment to follow the science underpins EPA's work, and this budget includes \$968 million for the Science and Technology account, an increase of more than \$165 million above current levels that will ensure programs have the best available data to inform decisions.

Conclusion

All people in this country deserve clean air, clean water, and safe land on which to live. This is the core of EPA's mission and is a worthy investment of federal resources. The FY 2024 President's Budget positions the EPA to advance our vital mission of protecting human health and the environment, championing environmental justice, and tackling the climate crisis. With these investments we lay the groundwork to ensure the benefits of a cleaner environment for future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to our continued partnership to achieve our goals and welcome any questions you may have.

USEPA Administrator**Michael S. Regan**

Michael S. Regan was sworn in as the 16th Administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency on March 11, 2021, becoming the first Black man and second person of color to lead the U.S. EPA.

Administrator Regan is a native of Goldsboro, North Carolina, where he developed a passion for the environment while hunting and fishing with his father and grandfather, and exploring the vast lands, waters, and inner Coastal Plain of North Carolina.

As the son of two public servants - his mother, a nurse for nearly 30 years, and his father, a retired Colonel with the North Carolina National Guard, Vietnam veteran, and former agricultural extension agent - Michael Regan went on to follow in his parents' footsteps and pursue a life of public service.

Prior to his nomination as EPA Administrator, Michael Regan served as the Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

As Secretary, he spearheaded the development and implementation of North Carolina's seminal plan to address climate change and transition the state to a clean energy economy. Under his leadership, he secured the largest coal ash clean-up in United States history. He led complex negotiations regarding the clean-up of the Cape Fear River, which had been contaminated for years by the toxic chemicals per- and polyfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS). In addition, he established North Carolina's first-of-its-kind Environmental Justice and Equity Advisory board to better align social inequities, environmental protection, and community empowerment.

Previously, Administrator Regan served as Associate Vice President of U.S. Climate and Energy, and as Southeast Regional Director of the Environmental Defense Fund where he convened energy companies, business leaders, environmental and industry groups, and elected officials across the country to achieve pragmatic solutions to the climate crisis.

He began his career with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, eventually becoming a national program manager responsible for designing strategic solutions with industry and corporate stakeholders to reduce air pollution, improve energy efficiency and address climate change.

Throughout his career, he has been guided by a belief in forming consensus, fostering an open dialogue rooted in respect for science and the law, and an understanding that environmental protection and economic prosperity go hand in hand.

Administrator Regan is a graduate of the North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, making him the first EPA Administrator to have graduated from a Historically Black College and University. He earned a master's degree in Public Administration from The George Washington University.

He and his wife Melvina are proud parents to their son, Matthew.

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Chief Financial Officer
Faisal Amin**



Faisal Amin is the Chief Financial Officer at EPA, responsible for EPA's annual budget and performance plan, strategic planning efforts, continuous improvement program, financial operations and policy, and financial information systems for the Agency. He also oversees the E-Enterprise for the Environment initiative.

Faisal has spent his career working to make government better. He began his federal career as an appropriations attorney at the Government Accountability Office, where he developed and drafted legal decisions, provided technical assistance to agencies and Congress, and taught appropriations law at agencies around the country. While on detail from GAO to the Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, he helped develop and advocate for EPA's fiscal year 2020 appropriation.

Within the executive branch, he held several positions within the Executive Office of the President, including as Chief Financial Officer. Within the Office of the Vice President, he served as Director of Administration and Associate Counsel for Fiscal Law, as well as Deputy Chief of Staff. He also served as Deputy General Counsel within the Office of Administration and most recently as Deputy Director in 2021.

Faisal earned his bachelor's degree at the University of California, Berkeley, and his law degree at the University of Arizona.

WATERS OF THE U.S.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Again, thank you for being here today. I want to start off with something that I am sure that you have never heard of before—Waters of the United States—and I am going to ask this, and it is going to sound a little partisan. I don't mean it to be, but it is just how I kind of view things. This administration has been actively trying to repeal anything that has Trump anywhere near it, whether it was the Trump EPA or the Trump rule at the borders, or the Trump this or the Trump that. I mean, look at what happened within an hour after the President was sworn in. What was it, 36 executive orders repealing Trump stuff? It has worked real well at the border.

I want to know what you found was lacking in the Trump rule on Waters of the United States that you had to correct, and I hope it wasn't getting Trump's name off of the Trump rule that was written during his period. Secondly, why in the world would you issue the WOTUS rule when a major case is before the Supreme Court? It is almost like you are trying to sway the Supreme Court or saying to hell with you, this is what we are going to do. Why wouldn't you sit back and say, okay, we have written it. We think this is what we got to do. Let's see what the Court says because we may have to change it some or we might not.

But right now, my fear is this. Two years from now we have a different administration. Now we got a different WOTUS rule, and it just goes on and on. This doesn't seem to be, like, that big of a problem to try and solve. I mean, we are trying to redefine what Waters of the United States are because the Court said I don't know what "navigable water" means. We ought to be able to solve this damn problem. I have been working on it or at least dealing with it for 24 years since I have been in Congress, so I will let you respond to that venting.

Mr. REGAN. No, I appreciate the question, and I come to this from the perspective of a former State regulator that had the challenge of trying to implement the Obama WOTUS rule and then trying to implement the Trump WOTUS rule. Let me start by saying that this is very different from both. The Trump rule was vacated nationally by multiple courts, so there was no basis for us to move from. It was vacated nationally by multiple courts. This rule that we are proposing is much more balanced and narrow than the Obama rule.

So I have engaged more of our ag constituency than any administrator in modern history, and what I learned from that was what could we do to improve upon the lack of an existing rule. So we went back to 2015 and then we codified what we consider to be streamlined interpretations of two Supreme Court rulings. And then based on the engagement that we had, we created or clarified exclusions that support farmers, like prior converted crop land, and for ranchers, like artificial ponds used as drinking water for their herds. We also simplified and narrowed the test that the Supreme Court set to make it easier to determine which waters are covered and which aren't. And then when we embedded exemptions for normal agricultural activity, regardless of whether they are covered by waters or not.

So these are just a few of the reasons why the U.S. Department of Agriculture supported this rule. I think Secretary Vilsack said from day one you have got to follow the rule, but we need for you to engage, and we need to improve upon this rule. So we didn't wait because there was nothing for us to wait on because the previous rule had been vacated by multiple courts at a national level.

There are also some aspects of this rule that Sackett case won't touch. And so what we decided to do was move forward, try to codify a number of exemptions that were requested of us by the agricultural community, and I obviously respect the Supreme Court's position. I will respect the Supreme Court's ruling. What we have now is we can adjust, if the Supreme Court rules this summer, we will adjust this rule, and we will move forward in a much more expeditious way than waiting until June and then starting a 2- to 3-year rulemaking process.

So I think we are ahead of the curve in terms of having the framework for moving forward. The Sackett case may or may not have some impact on that. Whatever that ruling is, we will build it in and continue to move in addition to those exemptions that we built in.

Mr. SIMPSON. You need to come to Idaho and speak to some farmers because I will tell you, and these are not extremist farmers, MAGA farmers.

Mr. REGAN. Sure.

Mr. SIMPSON. They are everyday people who are concerned that it is going to substantially affect their ability to produce on their farms and stuff. And there are States who believe that EPA is trying to take over the State's traditional role in Waters of the United States, and that, essentially, the EPA wants to control all the waters. I mean, that is what I hear from a lot of things, but later on, I will tell you a good thing about the EPA, too. My time is up.

Ms. Pingree.

Ms. PINGREE. I will defer to Ranking Member DeLauro.

Mr. SIMPSON. Okay.

BUDGET CUTS

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you, and thank you, Mr. Administrator. First of all, I want to just say thanks for really responding to the letter that I sent asking for your assessment of, going back to the 2022 budget, what effect would that have on the 2024 budget, because some of my Republican colleagues are calling for that. And what I am particularly concerned about is what the cuts mean for American families. So we are talking roughly, and it could be more, is a 22 percent cut. EPA's funding would go down to about \$7.9 billion, the lowest level since 2013. What impact does the Agency foresee on its work were we to revoke funding to the fiscal 2022 levels? Can you elaborate on some of the examples you provided in your letter?

Mr. REGAN. Absolutely. I think that I will continue with the theme of our agriculture community. We find ourselves over the past 50 years struggling with the Endangered Species Act. Now, we find ourselves entangled with the courts and the courts putting us on deadlines. I don't believe that any farmer should have to wake up to a Court ruling and the Court decides what tools a farmer can

use to grow food, fuel, and fiber in this country. If we are going to get new pesticides and new herbicides registered, we have to have the workforce to do that, and so while we are taking pesticides and herbicides off the market, we need to be replacing them. So it will set back our agriculture community.

I think the task of TSCA and looking at how we handle toxics in this country, if we are set back in this budget, we will not be able to accomplish what the bipartisan legislation set up for us to do in 2016. You are talking about \$100-plus million cut in our PFAS work, which, you know, as a former State secretary of North Carolina, I visited 90 of our 100 counties, red, blue, and independent counties. PFAS is indiscriminate, especially with our small rural communities, and so——

Ms. DELAURO. And forever.

Mr. REGAN. And forever, and so we are seeing the harmful impacts of that. So those are just three examples of, you know, the bread-and-butter aspects of EPA is to protect public health and the environment. That would significantly hamper our ability to do so.

Ms. DELAURO. Just quickly, have my colleagues on the other side of the aisle made any similar requests for information about the impact of the cuts they intend to make? Yes or no.

Mr. REGAN. You know, I am not quite certain, but I have had a lot of conversations on both sides of the aisle about why this budget is important.

LONG ISLAND SOUND

Ms. DELAURO. Okay. Great. I have a quick question, which is parochial. The Long Island Sound, ecological treasure, health of my State depends on it, home to thousands of species of wildlife, is an engine for our State's economy. Over the years, I have been successful in advocating, and this is on a bipartisan basis, we have been successful in advocating for securing investments in the Long Island Sound. But I am concerned about the deep cuts to the program that rolls back the significant progress we have made in the health and the well-being of the Long Island Sound.

You stated in your letter that cuts as high as \$95 million could come from the geographic programs. And I might add the Long Island Sound is just one of the geographic programs. We are looking at Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Gulf of Mexico, San Francisco Bay, Chesapeake Bay, Lake Pontchartrain, South Florida just to name a few, so that this is just not one area of the country. And so what kind of an environmental economic impact will the cut have on communities located near these water bodies of national significance?

Mr. REGAN. Well, we are talking about a significant decrease in our ability to protect water quality for one of the most densely populated areas of the country, 9 million people living near the watershed. We appreciate your leadership and the \$8.6 million. This is a great example of how we can improve our economy while improving public health and our ecosystems. Tourism, watershed protection, water quality protection, this is critical, and so if we don't get these resources, obviously it significantly hampers our ability to continue to pour in those tourism dollars because we have a threat

to the water quality, not just for drinking, but for recreation as well.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, and I will answer one of your questions. Yes, I hadn't sent him a letter, but I have talked to the heads of all the different agencies about the impacts and stuff, so.

Ms. DELAURO. I appreciate that very, very much. Just to say this one thing, Mr. Chairman, if you allow me. I think sometimes phrases sound very good. "Let's cut back to 2024 for 204," and people say, okay, yeah, but I think it is incumbent on us, both sides of the aisle, for us to take a look at what that means and how that gets translated into very, very critical issues in every one of the appropriations.

Mr. SIMPSON. I would agree with that.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. And I have no problem with that. The other thing we are trying to look at is trying to slow down inflation, and inflation has been caused by all the excessive spending that is going on, but that is neither here nor there.

Ms. DELAURO. Well, no, we will have that discussion at another time, Mr. Chair.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah, we will have that discussion at another time. Ms. Pingree.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you very much. I am going to just continue a little bit on this same tack here. Can you guys give me a sense about the environmental justice and where we would see rollbacks there? It has been so impressive to see the work that your organization has done and with the funding we have had available, but if we had these cuts and went back to 2022, how would that set-back environmental justice?

Mr. REGAN. Well, it would set it back significantly, and I say that because, you know, whether it is Lowndes County, Alabama, or McDowell County, West Virginia in Appalachia, I have been visiting communities all across this country, tribal communities as well. There are a lot of communities in this country in 2023 that just don't have access to clean drinking water. In McDowell County, West Virginia, visiting a community with lack of access to water infrastructure, mothers using contaminated creek water for baby formula. You know, there are some serious issues.

And so when we see these disparities because of income, or because of the rural nature of these communities, or because of race, we are not equally protecting all people in this country. We are not equally involving all people in this country. So the environmental justice resources really do serve as a rising tide for everyone so that this country can be as great as it should be.

STAFFING LEVELS

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you for that. Just to follow up a little bit on the staffing, I know you mentioned that before, and thank you for mentioning some of the things like pesticide review. We hear about that. You know, no matter where you stand on those things, people want assurance. They want a decision made quickly. But we

are still operating the EPA at Reagan level, or we are at Reagan staffing levels, and I know you have been working hard to get those numbers back up. You are requesting to us to get up to 17,000 full-time equivalents. Can you talk to us a little bit, as these climate change and other challenges increase, why is it so important to get to those staffing levels, and sort of where are we in making that happen?

Mr. REGAN. We are making tremendous progress with the resources that we have been given over the past year or so. Listen, we are facing 21st century challenges with resources of the past. It is just plain and simple, and so we are trying to make up that ground that the market is requiring. Farmers want new registrants and new pesticides on the market. We have to respond. You know, we proposed a regulation and a supplemental regulation for methane because the industry asked for us to do that, because the trade associations ask for us to do that.

We have to have the technical staff and the ability to look at how to design a regulation that is innovative, high tech, uses artificial intelligence, robots, and the like, not only because we are trying to save the product itself from being wasted, but we are trying to reduce those methane emissions. If we don't have the staff to have the conversations with industry to keep pace with the market and technology, then we are not doing our job.

And by the way, whether it is the power sector or the agriculture sector, they are asking for us to engage and to keep pace with an evolving economy of the 21st century. We need the staff to do that, and we can't do that with Reagan era numbers.

NAITONAL RECYCLING STRATEGY

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you for that. I still have a little more time, so I am going to bring up a completely unrelated topic, but something that I have gotten very interested in. In 2018, the EPA estimated that over 100 billion garments are produced annually, most of which end up in incinerators or landfills. This generates about 17 million tons of textile municipal solid waste, an issue that we know concerns municipalities and the increasing cost of waste. Unfortunately, the National Recycling Strategy does not address this critical source of pollution and waste. Is it a focus area at all for the EPA, and if so, what programs or activities are you undertaking that either reduce textile waste or encourage textile recycling?

Mr. REGAN. Well, it is a great question, and as I travel the world, second to climate change, this is the issue that most young people are focused on, and we are. We are very focused on it in a voluntary way. We are designing our recycling programs that really do begin to address these issues and some of the market constraints that we are seeing.

We have got a transformative vision for our waste management system, and we have released a series of strategies or strategic goals that really do underpin the circular economy. We are excited about it because there are things that we can do on a regulatory and voluntary basis to reduce waste, which we all know reduces some of that strain and capacity on some of our local governments, but it also gives us the ability to reduce methane and other harmful pollutants that come from these landfills.

Ms. PINGREE. Great. Well, I will look forward to looking at your strategy, and I know as you said, it is an issue that young people talk to us about a lot, usually calling it fast fashion or slow fashion.

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

Ms. PINGREE. But the idea that so much of the waste that we produce ends up either in the ocean as plastic pollutions are all over the world, and no one wants our waste anymore. These are important issues to address, so thank you. I will yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Mr. Kilmer.

PUGET SOUND

Mr. KILMER. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Administrator, for being back with us. Before we kicked off the hearing, I mentioned to you the importance of Puget Sound to my region economically, to our federally-recognized tribes, to treaty reserve fishing rights. It is a really important body of water. Unfortunately, it is sick body of water, and the EPA has played a really important role in trying to recover the Sound. I want to thank Deputy Administrator McCabe for coming out to our neck of the woods. I want to issue again a standing invitation to you. It is really nice in the summer in our area, but I just want to underscore the urgency of this and having the EPA with skin in the game. We can't get it done without you.

At the end of last year, the Puget SOS Act was signed into law to set up a Puget Sound recovery national program office in EPA and to codify the Federal Leadership Task Force that will ensure that the entire alphabet soup of Federal agencies is working hand-in-glove with the folks on the ground in our region to move forward and advance progress toward Puget Sound recovery. I am just hoping to get a sense from you on how the rollout of that office and task forces is progressing. And I want to also just say thank you for including Puget Sound and the Geographic Program in the testimony that you submitted.

Mr. REGAN. Well, thank you for that question, and Deputy Administrator McCabe enjoyed the visit and made me regret not taking that visit, but we were a little tied up. The Puget Sound obviously is a national treasure, and we take it very seriously in terms of the protection of it. We also take very serious the President's charge to look at a whole-of-government approach, leverage all of our resources so that we are not wasting resources, but we are maximizing that opportunity.

You know, of the fiscal year 2023 increase of \$20 million, \$17 million of that is immediately going towards strategic initiative lead cooperative agreements that we have for safe shellfish habitat and storm water projects with our Washington State partners. For our tribal partners, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission is working already to finalize work plans for each of the tribes in the next couple of months for the on-the-ground tribal-led projects. And so we plan to announce a second round of that funding this month.

So we are seeing significant progress, we are seeing significant leveraged resources, and we are seeing significant leveraged partnerships. Again, as a former State regulator, I understand that the Federal Government has a role to play, but States and local gov-

ernments have an even more important role to play, know their communities better than we ever could, so those partnerships are really important.

Mr. KILMER. But would love to follow up with you and your team on the implementation side of the PUGET SOS Act, and just as that is rolling out, making sure that we are hitting the ground running.

Mr. REGAN. Okay.

Mr. KILMER. I want to raise one other issue, and if you do come out, and, Chairman, I know you said you might want to come out to our neck of the woods, too, there is a lab doing research, looking at what is killing fish. And one of the things that they found was a chemical called 6PPD-quinone, which is used in tires. It is an anti-ozonant that interacts with ozone, runs into our streams, and kills fish, and they actually showed a video of it. It is crazy, just this polluted stormwater. Within seconds, the salmon just died. And there is more research required on this to understand the impact of this chemical and Federal funding needed.

You mentioned stormwater to try to make sure this chemical isn't ending up in our rivers. Can you give me any sense of what EPA is doing to combat the impacts of this 6PPD-quinone, and what resources you might need to potentially review alternatives to this chemical that hopefully won't kill fish?

Mr. REGAN. Absolutely. I think last year, Deputy Administrator McCabe helped kick off a cross-EPA work group consisting of just about every leader from every media office at EPA, including Region 10. And so we are working very closely with Washington Ecology on this issue. So through some EPA funding already, we have established a critical link between that chemical additive in tire dust and salmon deaths in the Puget Sound region, so we are continuing to fund research activities on impact to salmon but also to other fish species.

We need the resources to continue to invest in this research because there is a critical link, and, again, that critical link just doesn't identify an ecological piece of degradation. There is also an economic, there is a cultural piece to that for those who require salmon for sustenance and the like. So cultural, economic, ecological, we need to do the research, and we need to have a replacement chemical.

Mr. KILMER. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Mr. Harder.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. HARDER. All right. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, ranking members, and thank you to Administrator Regan and Mr. Amin for being here. I want to talk about how we can mitigate poor air quality. My region last year received an F grade for air pollution standards. Frankly, if grades were any worse than F, we would have gone all the way to Z. We have the worst air quality in America. I grew up with childhood asthma, my brother grew up with childhood asthma, and I refuse to let my daughter deal with the same air quality or even worse than what I did.

We have been trying to take action. In 2018, the San Joaquin County Air District submitted a plan. It took the EPA 4 years to

review that plan. During that 4 years, while EPA was reviewing what we do to improve our air quality, more than 4,000 adults had their lives cut short by poor air quality just in our region. I would have hoped that it happened sooner, but in the end, the EPA staff recommended approval of our plan, but then politics intervened, and that plan ended up getting rejected just last year, October 22nd.

Now we are in process trying to figure out what happens next, and, you know, this process better than I. The first sanctions are going to take it effect in June. My understanding is the transportation funding sanctions will take effect in December of this year. That could lead to billions of dollars of transportation funding lost in our district, which already doesn't get our fair share of Federal resources. Obviously, we want to do everything we can to fix this before we become where we are on track to be, which is the first time in U.S. history that a community would be subject to penalties this severe. We want to be part of the solution.

What recommendations do you have for our air quality district and others, and what is the ideal timeline for a plan of action?

Mr. REGAN. Well, I appreciate that question, and I do know that the San Joaquin Valley faces some of the most difficult air quality challenges in the country. So I want you to know that we are taking this very serious, and we also take sanctions very serious, which is why we have been engaging with the district. It is my understanding that we have been having some really good conversations, and we actually expect the district to submit a new contingency measure plan in the next couple of months. Once we get that plan, we anticipate that because we worked on it together, that will be approved and then that will stop the sanctions clock while we continue to tackle this issue of getting SIP approval.

I think in addition to some local measures that are being contemplated by both EPA and the district, we also have a series of technologies standards that are coming out nationwide that we think will also benefit the region, primarily focusing on transportation, but we also have some others that are coming out as well. So I anticipate that a combination of both Federal action, State and local action will help to get us closer to remedying the San Joaquin Valley problem.

Mr. HARDER. I hope you are right. My concern about that timeline is that it cuts it really short, and what I just heard from you is, you know, we are now almost in April. The first sanctions are taking place in June. If it takes us months to come up with the plan, we are going to be at risk of losing a lot of resources that our community desperately needs. So we are happy to help. I know you are in direct conversations as well, but my office stands ready to assist because we want to get this to a resolution.

But I also think we should have been able to anticipate this and get it fixed, frankly, years before. It shouldn't take 4 years to get to this the process. I know you weren't the administrator that whole time, but this is a process that has been very slow and very opaque from an air district that, I think, wants to help, and certainly from an office like ours that desperately wants to do more to address air quality. What does the EPA need to make these sorts of processes faster so it doesn't take 4 years and even better

to help give enough guidance to air districts about what they need to get right the first time so they don't end up at risk of sanctions and, frankly, catastrophe when you look at what those resources would do to an area like ours?

Mr. REGAN. I think that when you look at a diverse constituency like your district, I think that is where these environmental justice dollars will come in handy because the majority of these environmental justice dollars are going to State and local governments. Because of the lack of meaningful engagement of many of the constituents in your district, that is where the threat comes from for litigation if we are going to approve a SIP that doesn't equally protect everyone on the ground. And so there is an education and outreach component to how the State builds these State implementation plans that are then submitted to EPA.

I think we have to follow the science, but I also think we have to follow the law, and we have to approve plans that we know are not vulnerable to litigation. I think that is what we are doing right now.

Mr. HARDER. Okay. Well, if you need more people, if you need more regulatory authority, let us know. We want to make sure that we are anticipating these sorts of problems as early as possible and be part of the solution. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. REGAN. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Harder. Mr. Zinke.

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A couple comments. You said you travel the world. That got my interest. How many trips have you done overseas?

Mr. REGAN. I believe we have been to six countries maybe. Six or seven countries.

Mr. ZINKE. Have you taken commercial air on all of them?

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

EAST PALESTINE TRAIN DERAILMENT RESPONSE

Mr. ZINKE. Good. That is what I like to hear. So I am also concerned about the toxic waste in the backyard, your comment. Have you been to Palestine, Ohio.

Mr. REGAN. I have, 3 times.

Mr. ZINKE. And what did you find?

Mr. REGAN. You know, I found a community that has been traumatized, and luckily for us, we were there within a matter of hours after the accident. We have been on the ground since day one, and we have, you know, done what we think is good State-Federal cooperation, which is support the State of Ohio on the initial emergency response. We did air testing and water testing, and then EPA took its federally-appropriate role, which is to begin to look at the cleanup aspects.

Mr. ZINKE. Okay.

Mr. REGAN. And that is where we started the leadership role.

Mr. ZINKE. My understanding is the railroad has the lead on cleanup. Is that true?

Mr. REGAN. They have the accountability and obligation, yes, to clean up the mess they caused.

WATERS OF THE U.S.

Mr. ZINKE. Okay. And to switch to Montana. You ever been to Montana?

Mr. REGAN. I have not.

Mr. ZINKE. Well, it is amazing that you have said that the States have an important role, and you visited all sorts of people that support Waters of the U.S. Have you talked to the Montana stock growers?

Mr. REGAN. I am not quite sure if I have or not. I have talked to——

Mr. ZINKE. Okay. How about the Montana Farm Bureau?

Mr. REGAN. Yes. Yes, we have.

Mr. ZINKE. How about the Montana wheat growers? You personally because you said you have.

Mr. REGAN. I would have to go back. I would have to go back and look at the list.

Mr. ZINKE. Beet growers. I could go on the whole list, and from my perspective, what they are telling me is Waters of the U.S., you know where the Yellowstone River is? You have never been there. Do you know where the Yellowstone River is outside of the Yellowstone series?

Mr. REGAN. I don't.

Mr. ZINKE. All right. Well, how is it do you think you can manage the Yellowstone River if you don't know where it is, because you want to manage the water flow, the temperature, the riparian bank, wildlife in, and wildlife out, by Waters of the U.S., intermittent streams, cal ponds, vernal pools. So how is it that you think you are in a position to manage our water in Montana when you haven't been there?

Mr. REGAN. Well, first, I don't want to make it personal. I don't want to manage it, but I do want to follow the law and the Clean Water Act.

Mr. ZINKE. Do you believe that the WOTUS is a law or a rule, first of all?

Mr. REGAN. First of all, well, the Waters of the U.S. is a rule——

Mr. ZINKE. Yes, it is, right——

Mr. REGAN [continued]. That we have to promulgate that is a——

Mr. ZINKE. But you said you would work in coordination with the States, and you haven't been to Montana. You haven't addressed the State of Montana, the governor's office, or anyone in there. And I can list all the farmers that you say that support this thing, and there isn't a one of them that I know that supports water of the U.S., your rule, sir.

Mr. REGAN. Well, I can cop to saying I don't have the budget or the time to visit all 50 States. That is true. What I can say, though, is that I have engaged heavily with Zippy Duvall and the Farm Bureau. I have engaged with numbers of farm bureau presidents all across this country. Before my nomination, I was endorsed by most of the elected agriculture commissioners across this country. My grandfather was a farmer. I come from Eastern North Carolina, again. As a former State secretary, I attempted to implement both versions of this rule, so I understand the frustration.

My point is that I attempted to look at what we have learned over the past two administrations, take into consideration what two Supreme Court justices have said, looked at how the courts have weighed in over the past 5 to 7 years, and thread a needle to codify exemptions and exclusions that we were asked directly to do, while also looking at how we have narrowed that definition.

Mr. ZINKE. Who asked? What asked you for this rule?

Mr. REGAN. They asked for the exemptions and exclusions.

Mr. ZINKE. Who asked you to implement and form the Waters of the U.S. rule? Who in the West?

Mr. REGAN. Well—

Mr. ZINKE. Which governor, which organization asked you to do the Waters of the U.S. rule?

Mr. REGAN. By law, we have to promulgate a rule. Remember, the courts—

Mr. ZINKE. Oh, I know.

Mr. REGAN [continued]. They nationally vacated the previous administration's rule.

Mr. ZINKE. But when you put a rule, wouldn't be better to actually talk to the governors' office, talk to Idaho, talk to Utah, talk to the people that actually live out there? Now, I understand there is a lot of difference between East and West Coast, and I appreciate that, and I wear a cowboy hat because I think our cowboy lifestyle is under a little attack. But I want to work with you, but what we see is the rule is an infringement on States' rights, and it worries a lot of farmers. And as you know in your farming business, there is no money in cattle. You pay for the lifestyle.

Mr. REGAN. Sure.

Mr. ZINKE. And people see a threat on their lifestyle, they get a lot of upset. In Montana, we are really upset about it because we don't see that that path separates what we see is an overreach. And, you know, I want your commitment that you will work with us on this because it is a very sensitive issue, and you have heard it before: whiskey is for drinking, water for fighting. So, you know, I appreciate that. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. REGAN. Absolutely.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Mr. Stewart.

Mr. STEWART. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Administrator, thanks for being with us. I've got to tell you, I am impressed with you as a witness and the work you are doing. This would be, I think, a difficult environment because you come here and you generally maybe have some idea, but you don't know what we are going to ask you or what we are going to talk to you about. And you seem to have a remarkable working knowledge of being able to talk about these different topics, so thank you for that. And I don't mean to beat a dead horse, as they say, but I've got to emphasize the Waters of the U.S., if I could, and maybe I won't ask you to comment, maybe I will, but to help you understand, and I think you do, but to reinforce for you it is difficult to appreciate what this rule means to people in the West.

You are from a very beautiful State, but you have lots of water. You go out West, and, I mean, water is so precious. And as Secretary Zinke has said, there is probably nothing that is more divisive and more contentious than is this rule in the West with farm-

ers and ranchers because they feel like their entire livelihood, but not just how they feed their families, but, you know, the preservation of the culture, the thing that they have chosen to do which means so much to them, could literally be taken away by the stroke of a pen by someone who doesn't understand or appreciate what that stroke of the pen meant for them, and many times for something they say what was the benefit. How is this rule benefiting, you know, or preserving?

And the first time we met, I asked you about this, and you said, well, your rule of the waters, you know, you expect a new rule would be very different than President Obama's rule. You have indicated the same thing here. What would you say to a farmer or rancher who, you know, has these same fears, and in their mind or their application, it seems like it is much the same as what the previous rule was. And if you would answer briefly because there is one other issue I would like to address with you, please.

Mr. REGAN. I think I would say that we want to do the best job we can to talk about this rule and what is actually in the rule. There is a reason that Secretary Vilsack supported it, and he is being very supportive in looking at how we can do some co-resource location on the implementation of this rule. Listen, the first listening session I did on this rule was in North Dakota, then I went to Iowa. Listen, trying to regulate streams, and rivers, and ponds, and ditches in North Carolina and Nevada is almost impossible.

So the goal was to look at what the Clean Water Act requires for us to do by law, and also look at how we can really leverage our State partners and codify as many of these exemptions as possible, and then work with USDA to be sure that we are implementing the rule in a way that people can actually understand it. It is a difficult task.

FEDERAL STATIONARY SOURCE REGULATIONS

Mr. STEWART. It is, and I could counter with you, but I am going to leave it at this, and that is, please, you need to understand and come back and talk to folks about what this means to people out West and why is so threatening to them. If I could switch gears, Quad-O, the super meter program, which, as I understand it, deputizes third party entities to essentially go out and monitor oil and gas emissions. Are you familiar with this?

Mr. REGAN. I am not familiar with that exact program.

Mr. STEWART. Okay. Well, I am going to ask you to follow up with us, if you would, because, I mean, this rule, as we understand it, essentially, as I said, it deputizes third-party entities to go out and do what clearly the Federal Government should do, and if not, have the authority to defer some of that authority to the States, but certainly not to third parties. And if we were to use third parties for that, there is no question that environmental and activist groups would use that as an opportunity and would provide data that we have no idea whether that data is accurate or not.

Follow up with us, will you? My office is going to reach out.

Mr. REGAN. Okay.

Mr. STEWART. If this is what we think it is, this idea of a citizen scientist, there is, A, no authority for it at all, it is going to break down trust, and we have no reason to know if we can trust the

data or not we would be getting for that. So we will follow up with you.

Mr. REGAN. Absolutely.

Mr. STEWART. Thank you, Michael. I appreciate it.

Mr. REGAN. Yes, thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Amodei.

CARSON RIVER MERCURY CLEAN UP

Mr. AMODEI. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Mr. Administrator. It is nice to hear your testimony. I want to start first with the Carson River Mercury clean up. I would like to know from your office who your point person is going to be, whether that is a Region 9 person or whoever, for purposes of interacting with what they are going to do, how they are going to coordinate with the State DEP folks that your office has been coordinating with for a while, just so we have a real A to Z understanding of who the contractor is, what you are going to do, what the methodology is——

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

Mr. AMODEI [continuing]. All that other sort of stuff because when you talk about mercury and other things embedded in a river for well over 100 years, which is not ideal obviously, but when you talk about dredging the full length of the river up and replacing it, that is a huge thing in terms of dislodging and making contamination more friable, if you will, to a reservoir down.

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

Mr. AMODEI. So it is like all those things, it would just be nice to have comprehensive cradle-to-grave understanding of here's the plan now that EPA's going to take the primary position and hire people, and people are going to be in the river doing stuff.

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

Mr. AMODEI. We would like to make sure we understand that. So that is a please, and we will look forward to working with your folks to get up to speed on that as soon as possible.

[The information follows:]

Pat Bowlin is the Remedial Project Manager and Omar Shalev is the Section Chief for the Carson River Mercury site.

WATERS OF THE U.S.

Mr. AMODEI. I want to follow up on, Mr. Stewart said beat a dead horse, and it is, like, well, we won't go there. But when you talk about the Intermountain West, in my portion of it, that is 12 inches of rain a year. When you talk about clean water, and clean air, and clean soil, and all that stuff, that is a different proposition, with all due respect to my colleagues from places which experience much more water——

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

Mr. AMODEI [continuing]. During the year. And I appreciate that one size doesn't fit all. It is, like, I am not going to go manage it for one county in Nevada or Montana, or whatever, but when it represents about a third of the land area of the country, I think it is worthy of being able to say, when somebody like me starts pointing his finger at you, for you to say we have engaged in the Great Basin, we have engaged in the Intermountain West, here is

what we know, here is why it is not the same as the Chesapeake Bay or Maine, or, you know, up in the north plains or something like that, because those folks out there intuitively know. I mean, you don't got to tell somebody a place that averages 12 inches of water how important water is.

So when you step back from that role for a minute and go, do these people benefit from playing fast and loose with water quality and what they are doing with it, heck no or they wouldn't be in the business. Do they benefit from dirty air? Do they benefit from breaking the rules? Obviously not, but they like to know that when it is time to talk about the rules, that what they are doing right, if anything, is being acknowledged and taken care of so that when I go to your folks at Region 9 and say, tell me how you are going to implement this new rule.

Mr. REGAN. Mm-hmm.

Mr. AMODEI. You are going to have field hand books, who is going to be doing it, you are going to visit the sites. What are you doing to bring that to the ground, and we are gonna do the same thing with the Corps of Engineers out in that neighborhood, which is out of Sacramento. It is, like, so how are you implementing this because I will be honest with you, it didn't sound good.

Mr. REGAN. Yeah.

Mr. AMODEI. But you know what? Maybe I am wrong, which is why I want to know how you actually are going to do it. And so the challenge for you is that infrastructure has been there for decades.

Corps in Sacramento, Region 9 in San Francisco. We just expect that when those people are there, that they are not getting a long-ways-away-centric on how to deal with those resources, not that they are not just as important everywhere. But dealing with them correctly in the Intermountain West in high arid places, with all due respect, is not the same as other areas.

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

Mr. AMODEI. And so what I would like to be able to do after doing my homework is to go back to those people, like Mr. Zinke is talking about in his neighborhood and whatever, and say, here is what they are doing in Region 9, and here is how they are interacting with you. And obviously you can't pollute the water, and you can't pollute the air, you can't pollute the anything, but it feels like a long ways away. And I get the whole-of-government approach stuff, and it is, like, that is good, but the whole-of-government approach in the Intermountain West is a little different than the whole-of-government approach in the Southeast, the Northeast, the Appalachians, whatever.

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

Mr. AMODEI. So I will look forward to getting together with your folks and making sure that everybody has the maximum amount of knowledge possible regarding the rule.

Mr. REGAN. You can count on that.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you.

Mr. REGAN. Yes, sir.

Mr. SIMPSON. Was that a question?

Mr. AMODEI. Did you miss the question, Mike, at the end?

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah, I was looking for it in there. Ms. McCollum.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you, and I appreciate the fact, Administrator Regan, that you haven't been able to be everywhere, but I have fished on the Yellowstone, and there is a beautiful little town called Glendive, Montana. As you are going through, stop and visit it. I think Mr. Zinke would agree with me, it is a charming little town. It was built because of the Pacific North America, the empire builder goes through there.

Mr. ZINKE. My dad was born in Glendive.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Yeah. So it is a great little town. So now, we talked about the Yellowstone, and now I want to talk about the Mississippi River, and I haven't been every place on the Mississippi River yet either, but I want to just thank you for the work that the EPA, working with other Federal agencies doing this, working to protect 20 million people who drink Mississippi River water. And as we see more water shortages, and that is what you are trying to avoid with Waters of the USA, to make sure that everyone has access to clean, safe drinking water. Mississippi is a working river with barges, farms, and then recreation.

I really appreciate the collaboration that that you have been doing. Right now, it looks like the St. Croix River is going to have more flooding than the Mississippi, but I don't know what is going to happen downstream later on this spring. So your work on helping us work to be more resilient on the river, working with communities that are disadvantaged either with pollution or other things that have happened in the past, and that is really greatly appreciated. My office is going to follow up with you on that, and we have some legislation that we have been working with the League of counties, the League of Cities, and other community leaders up and down the mighty Mississippi on that.

PFAS

But I just want to follow up a little bit about two things that I work a lot on. Being on the Defense Committee, I work a lot on PFAS. You work a lot on PFAS. I know some of the work that we are doing to find out how to break this chemical down is a DOD-EPA looking at things right now. And so as we work on the defense budget, I would like to know who in the EPA I can reach out and talk to about PFAS and some of the research and R&D going on so two committees can work in unison to get the biggest bang for the buck on what to do on this.

BUDGET CUTS

But, you know, I am concerned about what could happen with the EPA's budget, and I know people sometimes love to hate the EPA. But I got to see the EPA work first hand, and they asked about the Ohio railroad derailment, when I had a plating factory that had been abandoned. And the St. Paul police and St. Paul fire had been watching it the best that they could, and we saw kids were breaking in there, and the roof was falling in, and it was bad. It was really bad. And the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and our office were talking, and they said we have called the EPA. Our fire department, our police department, the houses that lived adja-

cent to that plating factory, the trust that you installed with everyone as you cleaned that up, thank God you were there.

And as you are seeing more and more of these places become identifiable where local communities, even States can't handle some of this stuff, and the emergency teams that leave their families come out and work with really dangerous stuff. Every day, the EPA left a note for our fire department, and I am going to call it the rescue cart, what to do first if something goes bad here, was updated, and our fire department felt very, very supported in that. But we had a full-time professional fire department. You go places where there isn't even that available.

Mr. REGAN. That is right.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. What would a budget cut to 2022 mean because I am, like, all in, you guys. Now, I am reading about these HAZMAT teams all the time. What would that do because we are finding more and more of this pollution around. Work on the PFAS. We will keep that one separate. We will work on that, but just what you are finding now and with these rail derailments.

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. I bet that cost a lot of money.

Mr. REGAN. Well, you know, we are working from a deficit already in terms of public trust. I think we all are, and so I want to be clear that 85 percent of the budget increase that we are asking for goes to State, tribal, and local partners. That helps us to build his credibility on the ground. We do have the technical ability, we do have the expertise, but when we talk about these relationships, it is really the resources that we provide to State agencies and local agencies that really grease the skids for us to build that trust.

We are able, with technology, to detect levels of pollution that we have never been able to detect before, whether it is in drinking water or whether it is in soil. Once a community identifies a contamination, we have an obligation to clean that up. And so when you do have a situation like East Palestine, you don't want to find yourself short of resources. You need resources to go in to respond to the emergency, to clean up the emergency, to be able to do risk communication, to build trust with the community.

And even with East Palestine, there are things that, scientifically, we didn't think we needed to do, but I visited 3 times. I meet with small businesses, and they said please test for things, even if you don't believe there is a health impact because we need that confidence to rebuild the local economy and to rebuild trust, and we sent people in to test. We opened up a storefront in East Palestine where people can come in and get information, you know. And we are going to make this company toe the line. We are going to hold them accountable. We need enforcement dollars to hold bad actors, like Norfolk Southern, accountable. They created the mess. We have to make sure that they clean it up.

And so if we roll back these budgetary dollars, we are going to find ourselves in a world of trouble.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. They do amazing work.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. I said I would say something good about the EPA, and actually, I actually like the EPA. And during

one campaign, I remember my opponent was saying, this is back when I was chairman before, just get rid of the EPA. We don't need the damn EPA anymore, you know? It was the biggest applause line of the whole campaign. Everybody in the audience was applauding. I said, well, I don't know. The Cuyahoga River hasn't started on fire spontaneously, you know, and you can actually drive through Los Angeles without tears running down your cheeks from the smog and stuff. So the EPA has done some good things.

So I have defended you in the past, and I don't know how much you know about the Dixie Drain in Boise, Idaho.

Mr. REGAN. No, I don't.

Mr. SIMPSON. Have you ever heard about it?

Mr. REGAN. I have not.

Mr. SIMPSON. It is a fascinating thing that happened. The EPA came in and said you have got to reduce your phosphates and nitrates that is going into the Boise River, the City of Boise. It would have been hugely expensive. City engineers came up with a different plan. They worked with State of Idaho, they worked with Region 10, and it is called the Dixie Drain. And the EPA looked at it and said, you know, we think this will work, so they went ahead and did it, and it is about a 10th of the cost of what it would have cost, and it is working fantastically. In fact, what the Region 10 people said, you know, this could be the model for some other places where it might work to do this type of thing.

If you ever get a chance to get out to Boise, which, you know, why wouldn't you go to Boise, you know? [Laughter.]

Mr. REGAN. Is that an invitation?

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah, any time, any time. I will go with you. And so the EPA was flexible in allowing local communities to come up with plans that are alternatives that might work. It doesn't mean they always will, but I was proud to work with the EPA, and the State of Idaho, and the City of Boise to do that. So there are good things, too.

HIRING

Now, about everything that is going to happen if we go back to 2022 levels and all the damage is going to be done, your annual appropriation is about \$10 billion. Last year alone, the EPA received an additional \$100 billion in supplemental funding, \$100 billion, 10 times your annual appropriation. I want to ask specifically about the hiring that will occur with this money. As you know, this \$100 billion is finite. It will run out.

Mr. REGAN. Sure.

Mr. SIMPSON. It is not going to last forever. We have learned that 742 new staff have been hired so far just through the Infrastructure Bill alone. When we spoke last week, you explained that only one-half of 1 percent of funding from the massive \$27 billion Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund included in the Inflation Reduction Act would go to hiring. That is still approximately 675 staff. And to be clear, this surge of hiring is separate from the President's budget request, which has proposed to add an additional 1,900 FTEs above the current hiring ceiling.

I mean, you're staffing up big time, sometimes with money that is going to disappear, but 1,900 new employees this next year?

What is the total number of hiring that is estimated to take place just from the supplemental funding in the Infrastructure Bill and Inflation Reduction Act, and what does the agency plan to do with everyone that has been hired when this money is no longer available?

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

Mr. SIMPSON. Because we are going to hit an employee cliff.

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

Mr. SIMPSON. And I won't be in Congress at that time most likely, but I don't want a Congress to be sitting here going, man, if we do that, you know, we could increase your budget by 5 percent next year, and we are going to have to lay off 2,000 people.

Mr. REGAN. Mm-hmm.

Mr. SIMPSON. And it is not just this committee. It is all the committees because of the huge addition of employees that went on in almost every department from the additional hiring with all the money we spent out there.

Mr. REGAN. Yeah, I would like to tackle that sort of from two angles. The first is the resources from the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, as you say, they will expire. There is a term limit there. And so a lot of the positions we are hiring to supplement those new laws are term limited as well. I will get you the specific stat, but not all of the hires from those pieces of legislation are permanent hires. They are term limited as well. So we are trying to match the requirements of that law with the resources for the time frame.

Mr. SIMPSON. So when they are hired, you are hiring them and you will say, this job will last 5 years and it is gone?

Mr. REGAN. Those positions will sunset, some 5. I could get you the specifics—

Mr. SIMPSON. Okay.

Mr. REGAN [continuing]. But yes, those positions are what we call term limited and will sunset, so all of them aren't permanent. You know, there are a lot of bread and butter issues that just aren't IRA and BIL related: emergency response, TSCA, looking at pesticides and herbicides, some of our enforcement actions. So what you will see in the supplemental budget request is really trying to be sure that these mission critical issues that we are required by law to put in place can be sustained.

And as we have discussed, I will use the Endangered Species Act as an example. We have the courts now that have tied us up that are basically taking products off the shelves. Well, we can litigate those things all we want, but in the meanwhile, we need to be green lighting new products so that farmers have replacement tools. We need bodies to do that. In 2016, you all passed a great bipartisan TSCA law. As we think about asbestos and some of these chemical compounds that just have no place in society, we are trying to catch up and execute and implement on those laws. And so obviously, we can provide you all the details, but there are a lot of programs that just aren't IRA and BIL related that really fit squarely into this budget request.

And I will just end with the environmental justice request. The majority of those positions go out into our regions and into the field, and they really are community engagement focused. And a lot

of times, we don't really look at the full definition of "environmental justice," and that is income, race, national origin, but there are just so many communities in this country, rural and urban, that have been left out, left behind, that face some pretty dire environmental consequences. We have to provide the resources and the infrastructure to be equally protective of all people in this country, and that is what we are trying to achieve in that program.

Mr. SIMPSON. When you were a State regulator, did you ever look at the Federal EPA and say these guys are crazy? [Laughter.]

Mr. REGAN. You know, I mean, listen despite some of the political rhetoric that we find ourselves engaged in, you know, I had a lot of success as a State regulator during the previous administration on some issues. When you talk about brownfields redevelopment and when you talk about looking at Superfund, North Carolina had a great program. It tied very well into the Federal Government. I haven't changed any of that. I know you opened with—

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah.

Mr. REGAN [continuing]. Erasing Trump things. I think that when we look at PFAS, States like West Virginia, and North Carolina, and Michigan were on the front lines. We didn't get what we needed from the Federal Government, so I brought that expertise in, and we have tried to make up for some lost time.

Waters of the U.S. is not something unique to this administration. As you said, it is a decades-old issue, and so we are going to keep at it. It is a tough conversation. I am going to be honest and transparent about it, recognizing that it is going to be tough when I get questions from Mr. Zinke and others about it, but we are going to continue to engage. And so, as a former State regulator, a lot of that perspective is what I bring to this job, and I recognize that there is a lot of value in having our States have autonomy to protect the States' natural resources and public health.

Mr. SIMPSON. Well, I have always said if you want to know the difference between the East and the West, in the East, they try to get rid of water. That is why they have riparian water rights. In the West, we try to save every drop of water, and that is why we have prior appropriation water rights, which is entirely different in how we treat water rights and stuff in the East and the West.

Mr. REGAN. Yeah.

Mr. SIMPSON. And consequently, I am not sure the same rule works in all places, you know? So anyway, that is a discussion. We will have it at another time. We have had quite a bit of that discussion so far. Ms. Pingree.

PFAS

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I did check. Mr. Amodei said that he gets 12 inches of rain a year. We get 48 in Maine, so we get about 4 times as much water, so I guess we are in a whole different conversation really.

I will just talk a little bit more about PFAS. You know, I am not interested in being the expert in Congress on PFAS. I didn't want this to have to be an issue that I was like, you know, focusing on all the time, but sometimes it is just no fun to be the State that is out there in the lead. And as you know, and you have been very good on this, you know, working with Maine, and we have just

been in the forefront of dealing with our PFAS-related issues. So thank you for the step you took 2 weeks ago to deal with PFAS in drinking water, really, really important steps to take, I think, for public health across the Nation.

But I just want to describe a couple things to you. When we had our 2 hours in between hearings, I had a meeting with the Maine Municipal Association, so that is community leaders, you know, city councilors, and others, and we have a new situation in our State. Because we have been a leader in discovering the amount of PFAS that was in our agricultural land, we are now doing testing of agricultural soil. But one of the things the legislature passed last year was a law that said we can't spread municipal waste, you know, biosolids on land anymore.

So I think we are the first State in the Nation to do that, and the downside of that is that now we have got all these municipal waste facilities that are having to truck these biosolids to landfills, and now our major landfills are saying we don't want it anymore. So now they are being confronted with massive increases in the cost per ton, huge changes in their budgets that are just happening overnight. And my understanding is a lot of it is actually going to Canada, and we all know what happens when you try to ship your waste out of the country or to other States. Eventually, they will say no.

So I am not even asking you to answer a question about it, but I just wanted to alert you that it is yet another challenge that if we are having to deal with other States are having to deal with, and I don't know how to help them how to help them out financially. I don't know how we work through this issue so that we can figure out is there a way to safely process those biosolids. Is there a way to test to see if some of them would be acceptable to, you know, to spread on agricultural land, but right now that is a prohibition that we are having, and I am sure other States are going to look at the same kind of thing. So you may have a comment on that.

But I guess at the same time, I would just be interested to know what, if any, work or can you update how you are looking at PFAS contamination in the soil because that is one of the biggest questions our farmers are now asking us. These are farmers who have tested positive, so they have high levels of PFAS contamination in their soil. A lot of them are organic farmers who have been working for years to have, you know, high-quality farms. Now they have got to, you know, stop selling. They are not sure what they are going to do. They are worried about their own family's health, but we don't really even know how to remove it from the soil, are there certain crops we can grow or can't grow, what are safe levels in these crops? And I talked to Secretary Vilsack, of course. You know, we sort of got it working on at the EPA, the USDA, but where are you in the sort of issue with soil?

Mr. REGAN. Well, we are sort of knee deep in all of those, and it is sort of interesting for an EPA administrator to say, but my two buddies in the administration are Defense and USDA. PFAS has brought us together.

Ms. PINGREE. Defense has got all the money, by the way, so get Ms. McCollum to spend everything she can on it.

Mr. SIMPSON. That is right.

Mr. REGAN. My first reaction to that, in response to that, was in order for us to set these PFAS limits, I assured Secretary Vilsack that I would look at our enforcement discretion because what we want to do is keep the focus on the bad actors, which are those who pollute, not our agriculture community and not even our water utilities. We are all victims and forced to deal with this, and so keep the eye trained on those who have polluted but also look at enforcement discretion.

I think we can talk a little bit more, but in looking at our enforcement discretion, and how we exercise that, and not going after farmers, and looking at how municipalities treat biosolids, I think if institutions or entities know that there isn't enforcement coming, it sort of creates a pause what we all can talk about, okay, now that we are not going to push enforcement, how do we deal with the solution. There are a lot of innovative ideas on the ground in different communities that we are having conversations with to see what the best management practices are. I would love to continue to talk to you on that, but that is something that EPA and USDA are working very closely on. And again, Secretary Austin, and I, and Secretary Vilsack, we have been looking at this PFAS issue from day one as a whole-of-government approach.

Ms. PINGREE. Mm-hmm. Good. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate the work that you are doing. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Mr. Zinke.

CRITICAL MINERALS

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Critical minerals. You know, we had a conversation with Secretary Haaland this morning, an interesting one, but I would assume it is your policy to source critical minerals from ourselves or our allies rather than foreign countries, like China and Russia.

Mr. REGAN. I think we have to take a very good look at our permitting process. The critical minerals are essential for this clean energy economy that we want to pursue. We cannot afford to be overly reliant on any foreign sources, and so we have to deal with how we look at critical minerals domestically. I believe from EPA's vantage point, we are doing the necessary things that we can to be sure that when we look at critical minerals and mining, that we do it in an ecologically and environmentally responsible way.

Mr. ZINKE. The report I have is that in order to catch up on where the demand is today, we would have to increase mining by 2,000 percent over a 20-year period. It seems like we are a little bit behind. As you know, critical minerals are key to EV as well as defense, and we don't want to talk about defense, but it is critical on our ability to defend and strike.

What I am concerned about is it seems like we are running to the EV world without looking at the supply chain. So on the front is a supply chain of where do we get it, who processes it, and it turns out 62 percent are from China, and in some cases, they are the absolute monopoly over critical minerals which we need, let alone where they are sourced from in Africa, but I am also concerned on the back end. You know, what are we going to do when

the batteries are now done with their life cycle? Where are we going to put them?

As you recall, we decided on the nuclear that we would build a national repository in Yucca. We spent \$10 billion.

Mr. SIMPSON. Fourteen.

Mr. ZINKE. Fourteen—thank you, Mr. Chairman—\$14 billion over 10 years, and the moment we build it and we are ready to turn the key on, ah, not so fast. So now we store them at 128 distributed sites, which is unsafe for a number of reasons, batteries. So here comes the batteries. My understanding is 90 percent of solar cells get deposited in some landfill somewhere across this country—90 percent—and I can tell you and I am sure you know, the list of toxins that are in those cells, and they are not good. Then let alone the batteries.

What is the plan? What are we going to do with these batteries? Is the administration moving towards a national repository site? Are we looking at regionally? Whose liability when you buy a Tesla and you buy the battery, do you buy that liability, too, for the battery? Does that mean when you deposit it someplace, are you responsible for it as well? What is the plan and what are you doing about the end state of EV world?

Mr. REGAN. Yeah. I would love to have a longer conversation with you where we could get our staffs together. I am not quite sure about the 90 percent number, but what I can say is when I engage with industry, I think that there are going to be a lot more market corrections than we think. A lot of solar companies and these car companies are already designing programs to pull back these batteries and recycle them because they understand how expensive and energy intensive it can be to recreate new batteries, to recreate new solar panels.

So there is a massive recycling wave that is being pushed by industry to pull back some of this—

Mr. ZINKE. I will agree a probable, but nothing I have seen is proven—

Mr. REGAN. Sure.

Mr. ZINKE [continuing]. Or affordable, and it seems like we are rushing. The government is buying EV vehicles, and we have parking lots full of batteries. And to put them in a landfill is not a good idea.

Mr. REGAN. Yeah.

Mr. ZINKE. Put them in a parking lot is not a good idea. It seems before we jump in this arena, and I think it is a mega trend. I think we are moving towards that, but before we do, I would, you know, get with your staff and figure out what is the plan.

Mr. REGAN. Yeah.

Mr. ZINKE. I am a military guy. I love a plan, but if we don't have a plan, I can tell you when we get there, it is not going to be what we think or oftentimes what we like. So I would like your commitment to work with you on the back end of it to make sure we look at what resources are required, what interagency work we need to develop, and I am sure that the chairman—I don't mean to speak for the minority, but I am sure that is an area that is sensitive as well.

Mr. REGAN. Absolutely. Thank you.

Mr. ZINKE. Mr. Chairman, I yield back, and thank you, by the way. Thank you for your service. I know it is tough, and thank you for your service when you are in the Carolinas. And it is not easy being on the Hill, but thank you, and rest assured that our staff will work with you.

Mr. REGAN. Thank you, and it is good to see you again. I enjoyed your visit to North Carolina, I guess, a couple of years ago on another tough topic that we were engaged on.

Mr. ZINKE. We wrote the check. [Laughter.]

A promise made is a promise kept.

Mr. REGAN. That is right. Thank you, sir.

Mr. SIMPSON. Let me just say on Mr. Zinke's question there, what are you going to do with, say, the batteries in the solar panels? I know where there is a \$14 billion hole in the ground that we need to fill with something. I have told the Secretary of Energy not to cave that in because we are going to need a place to store the 52 or 53 Academy of Science studies that have been done on that. It is the most studied piece of ground in the world, but you know how that goes, a fight we have been fighting for years.

RURAL WATER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS

I want to ask you some fairly simple, quick questions. One, I was disappointed to see that the President's budget request proposed to zero out the funding for the Rural Water Technical Assistance grants, which is currently funded at just over \$30 million. Small communities across this country depend on this funding for technical assistance to help them learn how to meet or maintain Federal water standards, and I have worked with these people in Idaho that do training. You know, a town of 2,000 has a hard time trying to keep up with what they have to do to meet the clean water standards and so forth. Given the program's proven success and longstanding bipartisan support, is it wise to eliminate this program?

Mr. REGAN. I will say two things. The first is nearly half of the \$43 billion SRF dollars must go out as grants or forgivable loans to disadvantaged communities, which includes a lot of rural communities. So we are providing already more than \$150 million in technical assistance grants over the next 5 years. A lot of that is coming from Bill dollars, so that money is going out, \$150 million in technical assistance. That is why you don't see that money there because we are getting from another place.

CYBERSECURITY-WATER SECURITY TEST BED

Mr. SIMPSON. I suspect you are going to see \$30 million more in the next budget that is written because I think Congress has good bipartisan support for that program. Another question. Shortly after the administration released its National Cybersecurity Strategy, the EPA announced certain cybersecurity mandates for the water sector. We must secure the Nation's water infrastructure, which is critical for public health and safety. There is ongoing research and development associated with securing these systems and learning how to respond to an incident, including research and development at your water security testbed at the Idaho National Laboratory in Idaho. Can you please explain how the EPA plans

to utilize the water security test bed to help public and private sector entities understand cyber risk and what to do, and do you support expanding the test bed capabilities in the future?

Mr. REGAN. Oh, I can say that, obviously, cybersecurity is absolutely very important, and I think our teams are already talking about how research labs, like the Idaho National Lab and the water security test bed, is critical and essential for us. So I think we are already working together on that to expand those capabilities and look at what we can learn from Idaho, and we will continue to do that.

FIRE RETARDANT

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. Last, last week during the Forest Service budget hearing, I asked Chief Moore about the repercussions of losing fire retardant as a tool to fight wildfires. There is a pending lawsuit that threatens to do just that. In fact, I joined my colleagues in introducing legislation to make sure that doesn't happen. Chief Moore told me that the Forest Service is in the process of working with EPA on ensuring the continued use of fire retardants. Can you provide an update on that process and the importance of your work with the Forest Service to ensure this important tool can continue to be used in catastrophic wildfires across this country?

Mr. REGAN. Yeah. There is no shortage of topics that Secretary Vilsack and I enjoy conversing on. On this one, as an immediate solution, EPA and the Forest Service signed a Federal facilities compliance agreement that allows the Forest Service to continue normal firefighting activities. What we are going to do from that point is move forward with an NPDES permit process. That is using our existing authorities, working under the existing Clean Water Act, that will give some long-term permitting assurance to the Forest Service.

Mr. SIMPSON. Well, I hope so. To lose that ability to use fire retardant, well, I wouldn't be a firefighter anyway, but if I were—

Mr. REGAN. Yeah.

Mr. SIMPSON. I would think twice about going out and fighting wildfire if they didn't have the ability to suppress these catastrophic wildfires with fire retardant and stuff.

Mr. REGAN. Yeah.

Mr. SIMPSON. So I appreciate that. Anything else?

Ms. PINGREE. No.

Mr. SIMPSON. Let me just in closing echo what Mr. Stewart said. You are good. I have appreciated working with you and look forward to working with you in the future on a lot of these very complex issues that the EPA deals with.

Mr. REGAN. Thank you.

Mr. SIMPSON. So when you see the budget, don't go particularly nuts, but, you know, it won't be pretty when it first comes out, but that is the way it is.

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

Mr. SIMPSON. So anyway, I look forward to working with you, and thank you for being here today.

Mr. REGAN. Absolutely.

Mr. SIMPSON. The hearing is adjourned.

Mr. REGAN. Thank you so much.
[Questions and answers submitted for the record follow:]

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
United States Environmental Protection Agency FY 2024 Budget Request Hearing
March 28, 2023

Questions from Chairman Simpson:

TSCA

Simpson Q1: A February 2023 GAO report found that EPA has consistently failed to meet chemical review under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), as amended. For example, GAO found that EPA only achieved the 90-day review of new chemicals 10% of the time.

Question: What changes has EPA made to ensure that it can meet the 90-day deadline?

Answer: Between the enactment of TSCA in 1976 and the amendments to TSCA in 2016, EPA had a requirement to review the potential risks associated with new chemicals, although companies were able to move them into commerce if EPA did not finish its review within 90 days. Consequently, EPA completed formal reviews of approximately 20 percent of new chemicals during those four decades. When TSCA was amended in 2016, one of the fundamental reforms was to require EPA to perform formal reviews of potential risks for 100 percent of new chemicals within 90 days, but before the chemicals went into commerce, dramatically increasing the Agency's workload.

The previous Administration never asked for additional funding from Congress to meet the responsibilities of the new law. In the past two years, EPA requested more funding for the TSCA program, but has not received all that was requested. EPA received a small increase in the FY 2023 budget of about \$18 million dollars for the TSCA program, which in part will go towards hiring 65 FTEs in the TSCA program. We plan for 11 of those hires to be in the new chemicals program.

In addition, last year, the new chemicals program only had two or three human health risk assessors to review the hundreds of new chemical submissions that come in every year. Currently, between new hires and detailees, we have almost a dozen of them. While we still need additional capacity, this is a start for EPA to begin fully implementing TSCA at the pace envisioned by Congress.

EPA has invested in improving the scientific and other infrastructure needed to meet TSCA's requirements to quickly and protectively review new chemicals. EPA has updated science policies, implemented an aggressive recruitment and hiring plan, developed enhanced training and mentoring for new and existing staff, and engaged in ambitious efforts to standardize approaches for similar compounds with similar uses for which multiple submissions have been received. For example, EPA just concluded a two-part webinar series on its new standardized risk assessment approach for mixed metal oxides. The approach implements a more efficient process to assess risk

and apply mitigation measures for this group of chemicals used in EV batteries, semiconductors, and other energy sectors. EPA is also engaging with the fragrance industry to explore whether a standardized approach for assessing certain ingredients in fragrances is scientifically appropriate.

Additionally, in February, EPA concluded its engineering initiative three-part webinar series to reduce “re-work” of initial risk assessments. Rework is often necessary when submitters supplement incomplete initial new chemical review submissions, which contributes to delays in EPA’s reviews of these chemicals. When premanufacture notice (PMN) submitters supplement their initial submissions with new information, EPA must dedicate resources to additional review of those submissions; thus, reducing the resources available to review new submissions. EPA conducted outreach to ensure that submitters have the information they need to submit notices that move through the new chemicals review process as quickly as possible.

Question: What plans or policies has EPA developed to improve the chemical review process that have not yet been implemented? Please explain the content of such plans, such as internal process reforms (staff training, stakeholder outreach) or policy changes.

Answer: As stated above, EPA has recently implemented new process reforms and policies including aggressive recruitment and hiring. Last year, the new chemicals program only had two or three human health risk assessors to review the hundreds of new chemical submissions that come in every year. Currently, between new hires and detailees, we have almost a dozen of them. While we still need additional capacity, this is a start for EPA to begin fully implementing TSCA at the pace envisioned by Congress. EPA has also initiated efforts for enhanced training and mentoring, updating of science policies, reducing rework through its engineering initiative, and standardizing risk assessment approaches for similar compounds with similar uses. EPA is committed to continuously improving upon these efforts and will share regular updates via listservs, press releases, websites, outreach webinars, etc. In addition to these recent efforts, EPA recently proposed changes to the new chemical regulations that would improve the new chemicals review process and increase efficiencies. EPA will accept and consider comments received on the proposed rule before taking final action.

Question: Will EPA start tracking the number of times individual EPA program managers ask for additional delays by contacting submitters and requesting extensions?

Answer: EPA tracks the number of times companies ask individual program managers for voluntary suspensions of notice review periods, by way of an internal tracking system, where EPA also stores confidential case information submitted by each company.

Question: Please explain EPA’s evaluation – including what factors are used in such evaluation - of how much the agency estimates to collect in the TSCA Service’s Fee Fund.

Answer: The Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) provides EPA the authority to collect fees to defray up to 25 percent of its costs to implement sections 4, 5, 6 and 14 of TSCA. In a joint explanatory statement in Congress's FY 2022 omnibus spending bill, Congress reminded the Agency that the Lautenberg Act established a shared responsibility for the taxpayer and industry to contribute their share to support the TSCA program. In addition, Congress encouraged the Agency to properly consider full costs in its deliberations, in line with the Lautenberg Act's intent. On November 16, 2022, EPA released a notice to modify and supplement its proposed revisions to the Fees for the Administration of the TSCA Rule to adequately account for the anticipated costs of meeting its statutory mandates. The Agency expects to publish the final rule in early 2024. More information on the content of the proposal is available at <https://www.epa.gov/tsca-fees/proposed-revisions-tsca-fees-rule>.

To determine implementation costs, the Agency accounts for direct costs, both intramural and extramural, and indirect costs. Intramural costs are related to the efforts exerted by EPA staff and management in operating the program, collecting and processing information and funds, conducting reviews, and related activities. Extramural costs are those costs related to the acquisition of contractors to conduct activities such as analyzing data, developing information technology systems, and supporting the TSCA Help Desk. Indirect costs are those costs that are not accounted for in the direct costs, and typically include such cost items as accounting, budgeting, payroll preparation, personnel services, purchasing, centralized data processing, and rent. The Agency then adds indirect costs to the direct program cost estimates. The Agency uses an indirect cost rate of 20 percent to calculate the indirect costs associated with all direct program cost estimates for TSCA implementation based on EPA's indirect cost methodology. The amount of fees EPA can collect annually is 25 percent of the total direct and indirect costs, which are then allocated across the fee-triggering events in TSCA sections 4, 5, and 6.

Question: EPA has claimed inadequate resources in the New Chemicals Division have resulted in its inability to complete timely reviews. The "Skills Gap Assessment" performed by the Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics (OPPT) (Dec. 20, 2021) identified a target of 76 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) for the New Chemicals Division by the end of FY2022. The employee accounting provided by Assistant Administrator Freedhoff in the Questions for the Record (QFRs) from the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW) Hearing "Toxic Substances Control Act Amendments Implementation" held on June 22, 2022, confirmed that there were 67 FTEs (excluding the Immediate Office for New Chemicals) currently on staff. The number of completed PMNs, however, decreased approximately 53% in 2021 and 62% in 2022 compared to the average performance over the 2018 to 2020 period. There is a concern that, even with increased resources and staffing levels close to the Agency's prior targets, the number of completed chemical reviews is still decreasing. How will EPA ensure that any additional resources would result in measurable improvements and reduced backlogs at the program?

Answer: EPA is diligently working to ensure that additional resources result in improvement in new chemical case review, updating standard operating procedures and chemical category information to include the latest science and science policies and timely regulatory actions. To complete timely decisions, EPA's New Chemicals Program must have enough trained scientists across a spectrum of scientific disciplines onboard. Attrition in any single area of

expertise can seriously impact the ability to meet deadlines. EPA is working to recruit, retain, and identify critical disciplines to ensure that the time from loss of staff to replacement is minimized in the future.

EPA has paired each new risk assessor with a senior staff mentor and designed a training program specific to each discipline that contributes to the case review. However, the new chemical review program has a steep learning curve and training new employees requires significant time and resources. Therefore, measurable improvements are typically not observed for at least several months after new employees are onboarded. Additionally, assessing progress on the backlog is not a simple metric as even when older cases are completed, new cases are being added. In the past six months, EPA has received 196 new FY 2023 submissions and has completed 221 risk assessments and 182 risk management actions for FY 2023 and older cases. Over the last several months, the number of risk assessments being completed is trending upwards overall (i.e., 28 cases in January 2023 to 47 cases in April 2023) as shown on [EPA's New Chemicals Statistics webpage](#). This can be attributed to EPA's hiring of new risk assessors since July 2022. Last year, the New Chemicals Program only had two or three human health risk assessors to review the hundreds of new chemical submissions that come in every year. Currently, between new hires and detailees, we have almost a dozen of them. While we still need additional capacity, this is a start for EPA to begin fully implementing TSCA at the pace envisioned by Congress.

Question: There has been a significant increase in the backlog (submissions under review for greater than 90 days) over the past two years. The number of PMNs in the backlog has increased approximately 43% from 204 in January 2021 to 357 in March 2023. The budget requests states "In FY 2024, EPA will conduct risk assessments and make affirmative determinations on risks for more than 500 new chemical notice and exemption submissions annually." What are your plans to reduce the number of submissions in the backlog? How will you prevent any increase in the number of backlog submissions? How are you internally tracking your progress on the backlogs? Are you planning to publish this number on the New Chemicals Website?

Answer: Between the enactment of TSCA in 1976 and the amendments to TSCA in 2016, EPA had a requirement to review the potential risks associated with new chemicals, but companies were able to move them into commerce if EPA didn't finish its review within 90 days. EPA completed formal reviews on only about 20 percent of new chemicals during those four decades. When TSCA was amended in 2016, one of the fundamental reforms was to require EPA to do formal reviews of potential risks for 100 percent of new chemicals within 90 days before the chemicals went into commerce, dramatically increasing the Agency's workload.

In the past six months, EPA has received 196 new FY 2023 submissions and has completed 221 risk assessments and 182 risk management actions for FY 2023 and older cases. EPA anticipates that throughput will continue to increase as we train the new human health assessors now onboard as described above, continue our hiring and recruitment efforts, and find more opportunities to streamline/standardize reviews, and/or develop new/update existing science policies that will close out additional cases. Over the last several months, the number of risk assessments being completed is trending upwards overall (i.e., 28 cases in January 2023 to 47 cases in April 2023) and risk management actions completed remain relatively steady (i.e., 27

cases in January 2023 and 25 in March 2023) as shown on [EPA's New Chemicals Statistics webpage](https://www.epa.gov/reviewing-new-chemicals-under-toxic-substances-control-act-tsca/statistics-new-chemicals-review) (<https://www.epa.gov/reviewing-new-chemicals-under-toxic-substances-control-act-tsca/statistics-new-chemicals-review>).

EPA publishes the date of new chemical notices received at <https://www.epa.gov/reviewing-new-chemicals-under-toxic-substances-control-act-tsca/new-chemical-notices-received-epa>. This date can be cross walked with data on the revamped new chemicals statistics page (link above) to find out the number of days any active case has been in review.

EPA has also started to build the scientific and other infrastructure needed to meet TSCA's requirements to quickly and protectively review new chemicals. EPA has updated science policies, implemented an aggressive recruitment and hiring plan, developed enhanced training and mentoring for new and existing staff, and engaged in ambitious efforts to standardize approaches for similar compounds with similar uses for which multiple submissions have been received. For example, EPA just concluded a two-part webinar series on its new standardized risk assessment approach for mixed metal oxides. The approach implements a more efficient process to assess risk and apply mitigation measures for this group of chemicals used in EV batteries, semiconductors, and other energy sectors. EPA is also engaging with the fragrance industry to explore whether a standardized approach for assessing certain ingredients in fragrances is scientifically appropriate.

In addition, in February, EPA concluded its engineering initiative three-part webinar series to reduce "re-work" of initial risk assessments. Rework is often necessary when submitters supplement incomplete initial new chemical review submissions, which contributes to delays in EPA's reviews of these chemicals. When PMN submitters supplement their initial submissions with new information, EPA must dedicate resources to additional review of those submission, reducing the resources available to review new submissions. EPA conducted outreach to ensure that submitters have the information they need to submit notices that move through the new chemicals review process as quickly as possible.

Simpson Q2: AA Freedhoff recently discussed the need to reimagine EPA's risk evaluation process in order to meet TSCA's requirements while still using the best available science. Can you provide further details on this approach and how it is expected to impact the resources needed for TSCA risk evaluation and risk management of chemicals?

Answer: Because the TSCA program has been chronically underfunded, EPA will not meet most of its current statutory deadlines. EPA is working to identify efficiencies in its risk evaluation and management processes in order to develop a leaner, more focused approach to meet TSCA's timelines while still using the best available science. This will allow the Agency to get rules in place to protect our affected communities more quickly.

EPA is looking at several avenues to better focus the resources available to evaluate chemical substances undergoing TSCA risk evaluation. The Agency's TSCA program will maximize the use of existing Agency science. EPA is working through opportunities to tailor its

analyses in a fit-for-purpose manner to meet the needs of each risk evaluation, considering the landscape of reasonably available information for each chemical.

EPA may qualitatively address some conditions of use or exposure pathways where initial analyses shows that they do not require a quantitative estimate of risk, such as, for example, if a use is not expected to result in exposure because it takes place in an entirely closed system. EPA will continue to consider the weight of evidence, documenting decision-making and rationales for conducting more limited, qualitative assessments that appropriately and adequately support risk determinations and any subsequent actions required to mitigate unreasonable risk.

EPA is also developing TSCA section 5(a)(2) significant new use rules (SNURs) that align with the timing of current and future risk evaluations under TSCA section 6 to help identify uses relevant to TSCA risk evaluations early in the risk evaluation process. This avoids reworking or scrambling to understand and analyze uses that are identified later through systematic review, subsequent public comment periods, or other stakeholder engagement.

Finally, EPA is creating a sustainable pipeline of chemicals for evaluation under TSCA. In the near term, EPA aims to prioritize chemicals from the 2014 Update to the TSCA Work Plan for Chemical Assessments to build on the substantial work already completed to characterize these chemicals. Going forward, EPA expects that approximately five chemicals per year will be prioritized for risk evaluation. This will enable EPA to more effectively balance our risk evaluation workload while moving a consistent number of chemicals into risk management. A pipeline approach also allows for more interaction with the regulated community at much earlier and regular, predictable intervals. In addition to soliciting public comment on the potential high-priority chemicals during the prioritization process, EPA will, before prioritization, actively engage industry to increase EPA's understanding of the relevant sectors and conditions of use for the chemical substances to inform risk evaluations.

Question: How will EPA further accelerate and operationalize use of non-animal methods (new approach methodologies) in the risk evaluation process to help accelerate science-based decision-making and ensure that statutory deadlines are met?

Answer: EPA recognizes the importance of advancing the use of New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) to address human health and environmental decisions. EPA is continuing to invest in increased research and development of NAMs, as well as the validation and application of NAMs for use in regulatory decision making. We will continue to collaborate closely with our federal partners to leverage resources and limit duplication of efforts in the research, development, validation, and implementation of NAMs. The collective objective is to identify timely and cost-efficient ways to advance our knowledge of potential hazards from chemicals to inform and make scientifically appropriate regulatory decisions. This may be done by incorporating alternative data (i.e., NAM data) streams into chemical evaluation across the risk assessment paradigm (which includes hazard identification, dose-response assessment, exposure assessment, and risk characterization). Effective engagement and communication with stakeholders are essential to increase understanding, obtain constructive feedback, and improve the acceptance of using NAMs to inform Agency decisions. In 2022, EPA continued to communicate and engage stakeholders to

encourage the use of NAMs through trainings, outreach, grant opportunities, and collaborations. EPA provided access to training resources and expanded engagement opportunities with stakeholders through NAMs trainings and public access to a NAMs Training Catalog that houses various existing EPA NAMs resources. EPA hosted its 3rd NAMs Conference on October 12-13 2022. At the conference, EPA, other federal agencies, industry, universities, and international organizations provided presentations on the state of the science on the development and use of NAMs for chemical safety testing. In addition, EPA provided an update on the deliverables it committed to in the EPA NAM Work Plan. These updates included metrics on the number of vertebrate animals used annually for chemical testing, and the status of the EPA scientific confidence framework for NAMs.

Simpson Q3: Can you explain why EPA cannot allow the inclusion of a wire transfer payment option throughout the TSCA fees program, as is allowed for the collection of fees in the Office of Pesticides Program (OPP) for the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) and the Pesticide Registration Improvement Act of 2022 (PRIA 5)?

Answer: EPA's selection of Pay.gov for electronic payment of TSCA fees using a credit or debit card allows the Agency to easily track and verify payments, linking payments directly to submissions. Additionally, Pay.gov allows verification of fee payments required at the time of submission, which is necessary for the Agency's new chemicals program. EPA considered allowing payment of TSCA fees using Fedwire—generally used for foreign payments—through which payers authorize a financial institution to initiate a wire transfer to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. However, Fedwire does not provide the tracking and transmittal options that Pay.gov does. Further, due to the chronic underfunding of the TSCA program, EPA determined in the 2018 TSCA fees rule that the additional effort required to track wire payments and connect them to the payer would impose a significant burden on the EPA. EPA will revisit the 2018 decision if additional resources are provided to implement TSCA. EPA made the decision very earlier on, prior to current FTE challenges, when the original PRIA authorization had passed, to dedicate additional FTE to make the wire transfer option work. However, given the challenges for the TSCA program of reduced funding, the decision was not made to dedicate limited TSCA FTE to this effort at this time.

PFAS

Simpson Q4: Concerns have been raised regarding the cost to comply with EPA's recently proposed drinking water standard (MCL) rulemaking for six per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), particularly for smaller water systems and ratepayers who typically bear the brunt of increased costs. Will you commit to robustly and thoroughly analyzing the costs of this rule, including the potentially unfunded mandate it imposes on states on localities?

Answer: EPA used the best-available science and peer-reviewed models to complete an economic analysis for EPA's proposed PFAS National Primary Drinking Water Regulation, and this analysis is included in the docket for the proposed rule.

With respect to costs, following requirements in the Safe Drinking Water Act, EPA has included a robust and thorough cost estimate in the proposed PFAS drinking water standard rulemaking. EPA estimated the costs to public water systems associated with administration, monitoring, and treatment and costs, as well as estimated costs of implementation and administration to primacy agencies. With respect to the benefits of the proposed rule, EPA has quantified some of the reduced adverse health effects expected from the proposed rule including reductions in kidney cancers, heart attacks, strokes, and developmental (birth weight) effects. EPA estimates the total national quantified benefits of the proposed rule range from \$908 million to \$1.2 billion per year. In addition, EPA anticipates significant additional benefits beyond those that EPA has quantified, including avoided immune, liver, and other cancer effects, among others. EPA anticipates that, if fully implemented, the rule will prevent tens of thousands of serious PFAS-attributable illnesses or deaths. In accordance with the Safe Drinking Water Act EPA has determined that the benefits of the proposed regulation justify the costs.

EPA has requested public comment on all aspects of the rule, including EPA's cost and benefit estimates, and looks forward to considering input prior to finalizing the rule. Additionally, thanks to President Biden's vision and bipartisan action in Congress, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides \$10 billion dedicated to addressing PFAS and emerging contaminants in water. These funds will promote access to safe and clean water in small, rural, and disadvantaged communities while supporting local economies.

IRIS

Simpson Q5: The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine recently declined a request for a public information gathering session related to formaldehyde, indicating that their review of the draft formaldehyde assessment was limited by the scope of the contract with EPA. Please explain this constraint and EPA's decision making with regard to the scope of the contract.

Answer: The Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) Program follows a structured and transparent process to develop scientifically defensible toxicity assessments in accordance with the EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy, EPA's Peer Review Handbook, and the IRIS process. The [IRIS Process](#) is comprised of seven steps that include multiple opportunities for public comment, including opportunity for public comment during the external peer review process. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) is currently conducting an independent external peer review of the draft formaldehyde assessment. In accordance with standard NASEM procedures, NASEM has encouraged the public to submit written and oral comments to the review committee. NASEM has convened multiple meetings during which the public could provide comments directly to the committee, including an additional stakeholder public meeting in December 2022 dedicated to public comments. As of April 2023, the NASEM committee has heard from over 40 members of the public. Additionally, prior to beginning the external peer review process in Spring 2022, EPA provided an opportunity for the public to

comment on EPA's draft formaldehyde assessment documents. EPA continues to encourage all interested stakeholders to provide comments to the committee throughout the peer review process.

Simpson Q6: Of the assessments that IRIS is currently undergoing based on the February 2023 IRIS Program Outlook, how many of those products are also being evaluated or assessed by other offices within EPA? Please list the product and the relevant EPA office.

Answer: EPA offices, including the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention (OCSPP) and the Office of Research and Development (ORD), continue to work together and coordinate on chemical assessment activities of mutual interest, leveraging resources and expertise to ensure the best available science is used to inform decision-making. OCSPP is currently conducting risk evaluations and risk assessments for chemicals under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) and Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). Of the chemicals currently under assessment by the Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) Program, managed by ORD within EPA, only one chemical (formaldehyde) is currently being evaluated under FIFRA, TSCA and the IRIS programs. Two additional chemicals have registered pesticidal uses under FIFRA that are also being evaluated by the IRIS program (inorganic arsenic, naphthalene). Inorganic arsenic is also currently being evaluated under FIFRA. IRIS assessments are developed to meet the scientific needs of the EPA program or regional office(s) requesting the assessment. IRIS assessments include the first two steps of the risk assessment process: hazard identification and dose-response. The information provided by IRIS can be combined with exposure assessments to inform risk assessments conducted by EPA programs, regions, and others including States. Thus, information from an IRIS assessment can inform risk assessments and evaluations conducted by programs such as FIFRA and TSCA.

Air Quality

Simpson Q7: EPA is under a Consent Decree deadline to review and, if necessary, propose revisions the Hazardous Organics NESHAP by the end of March. Please explain how EPA distinguishes between, and identifies, background levels of ethylene oxide, and how this factors into EPA's regulatory determinations.

Answer: In our Clean Air Act (CAA) section 112(f) reviews of air toxics emission standards, EPA evaluates emissions from the facilities in the source category that is the subject of the review. Background levels of pollutants do not impact our assessment of risk from facilities in the source category, and we therefore did not include background concentrations in the assessment. Our proposal discusses our emissions estimates at 88 FR 25080, 25096 (April 25, 2023). EPA will take comment on the proposed rule until June 26, 2023. Written comments, identified by Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2022-0730 may be submitted online at <https://www.regulations.gov/>. We held a virtual public hearing about the proposal on May 16, 2023. EPA has a consent decree deadline to take final action on the proposal by March 29, 2024.

Simpson Q8: On November 3, 2022, EPA announced the selection of 132 air monitoring projects in 37 states that would receive funding to enhance air quality. How will the agency ensure the quality and integrity of air monitoring equipment and subsequent air quality data that will be generated from these projects, and how will it ensure appropriate risk communication of collected information?

Answer: In the Enhanced Air Quality Monitoring for Communities grant competition, EPA required that all applicants address quality assurance and air monitoring equipment in their project proposals. Both subjects were part of the evaluation criteria that EPA used to select projects for funding. To provide timely air quality information to communities, all applicants were required to use commercially available technology and/or proven air monitoring methods. Generally, the use of established air monitoring equipment/methods suggests that there is publicly available information on its operation (e.g., manuals from the manufacturer). To ensure that the collected data are of known quality, all applicants were required to provide a quality assurance statement in their proposal describing the quality assurance and quality control (QA/QC) practices that the organization would apply during the project (e.g., precision, accuracy, representativeness, comparability, or data quality objectives).

EPA is in the process of awarding the funds. After organizations receive their award, grant recipients are required under 2 CFR §1500.2 to submit to EPA a quality assurance project plan (QAPP) for approval, which outlines the QA/QC procedures for conducting the specific air monitoring project before environmental data collection can begin.

These grant recipients are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the collected data are usable, accessible to the public, and shared with the appropriate stakeholders and communities. As with all grants, EPA will provide various levels of technical assistance and grant oversight, and the grant recipients must adhere to the terms and conditions of the award, submit periodic reports to the Agency, and communicate regularly with their EPA project officers.

Online Systems

Simpson Q9: EPA recently announced it will be upgrading the FOIA online system. Does EPA also have plans to upgrade the Chemical Data Exchange (CDX) system that directly supports the new and existing chemicals regulatory programs? Please identify any other expenditures for “non-regulatory” systems or programs, including assigned FTEs, annual budget, and cost associated with contractor support.

Answer: The Central Data Exchange (CDX) is EPA’s regulatory entry point for receiving legally acceptable submissions from our vast industry partners. EPA recently upgraded CDX. Specifically, EPA migrated CDX to the cloud, increased system availability, increased system scalability to support programmatic peak reporting seasons, and performed portfolio rationalization to reduce technical debt. As CDX is the regulatory entry point for EPA, any upgrades now and into the future that are made to the system are completed in coordination with EPA program offices to minimize any disruption to the mission, and in consideration of program mission business needs.

Questions from Rep. Ellzey:**Class VI Wells and State Primacy Applications**

Energy production is critical to our national security, and American Energy production is the cleanest, safest and most efficient in the world.

The bipartisan infrastructure law enacted in November 2021 authorized EPA to receive \$25 million to support the permitting of Class VI wells and \$50 million to support states' applying for primacy to grant Class VI well permits in their state.

However, there are over 30 Class VI well applications languishing at EPA along with two state applications for primacy.

Ellzey Q1: Is Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) viable without Class VI wells for permanent storage?

Answer: Geologic sequestration of carbon dioxide for permanent storage is an essential component of CCS. Where the Safe Drinking Water Act is applicable, Class VI injections wells are required to emplace CO₂ for permanent geologic storage.

Ellzey Q2: How long should an application for primacy take from submission to EPA to a state being able to issue permits?

Answer: EPA strives to make final determinations on primacy applications as expeditiously as possible after a state submits a complete application, with a goal of within 12 months from determination of a complete application. However, there are instances where the applicant needs to revise elements of the application, revise state statutory or regulatory provisions, or provide additional information to ensure the application is complete. All of these may impact the review period. Our regulations at 40 CFR 145.22(b)–(d) provide direction regarding the statutory review period associated with EPA's decision on an application to receive section 1422 authority under the Safe Drinking Water Act. Our regulations at 40 CFR 145.32 identify the process for revising a section 1422 program. When a state already has a section 1422 UIC program, adding primacy for Class VI is considered a program revision.

Ellzey Q3: Please describe the process at EPA for evaluating and reviewing Class VI well applications for permits and primacy?

Answer: Review of a Class VI permit application by the permitting authority entails a multidisciplinary evaluation to determine whether the application includes the required information, is technically accurate, and supports a risk-based determination that underground sources of drinking water will not be endangered by the proposed injection activity. The EPA Region where the project will be located has the lead for the permit application review, communicating with the applicant, and issuing permitting decisions, in coordination with other

EPA components, as well as federal, state, Tribal, and local entities, as appropriate. EPA's October 2022 Report to Congress: Class VI Permitting describes the process in further detail on pages 13 through 15 under section 3.2 Permit Application Reviews.

Regarding primacy, 40 CFR part 145 specifies the procedures EPA will follow in approving, revising, and withdrawing state underground injection control programs under section 1422 of the SDWA and outlines the elements and provisions that a state must include in their application. EPA supports early engagement from States, Tribes, and Territories that are interested in receiving primacy for Class VI injection wells.

Ellzey Q4: Does EPA currently have the resources it needs to review Class VI primacy and well applications in a timely manner?

Answer: EPA has sufficient resources to review Class VI primacy and well applications. In addition to annual appropriations, beginning in FY 2022, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides \$5 million per year for 5 years to support federal capacity required for Class VI carbon management projects to move forward over the next decade.

Workforce and Remote Working

Ellzey Q5: In 2019, what percentage of the EPA's workforce was working remotely?

Answer: In FY 2019, EPA had a limited number of employees working full time under a remote agreement at an alternative duty station per then-applicable agency policies.

Ellzey Q6: Today, what percentage of the EPA's workforce is working remotely?

Answer: Similar to other large organizations, EPA operates in a hybrid environment, with employees who work on-site, remotely, or in some hybrid capacity.

Questions from Rep. Zinke:

Official Air Travel

Zinke Q1: Administrator Regan, during your testimony you stated that all of your flights taken in your official capacity were commercial. I trust your testimony was truthful but wish to verify. I request that you supply the committee with your complete flight records including all foreign, domestic and carrier travel from the start of your appointment at EPA to present.

Answer: As stated at the March 27, 2023 hearing, all of Administrator Regan's air travel taken in his official capacity has been via commercial flights.

EPA recognizes the importance of Congress's interests in obtaining information necessary to perform its legitimate legislative and oversight functions, and the Agency is committed to cooperating with Committee staff to provide information the Committee needs, and to engaging in the accommodation process. Should Committee staff wish to review the Administrator's travel records, we will make arrangements to accommodate the Committee's request.

Fire Retardant

Zinke Q2: Administrator Regan, as you may know the US Forest Service is currently facing a lawsuit in Montana that if lost would require them to apply for a National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit from the EPA. I have heard that the process can take between 2 years to 5 years and will have to be ratified by every state this retardant is used in. How long would you expect it to take for all 47 states to ratify an NPDES permit for Aerial fire retardant like those used by aerial fire fighters in my district such as Neptune Aerospace?

Answer: The May 26, 2023, decision in *Forest Service Employees for Environment Ethics v. United States Forest Service* determined that the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) had unpermitted aerial discharges of fire retardant into navigable waters of the United States in certain states but allows the USFS to continue the aerial deployment of fire retardant as a tool to fight wildfires. EPA has been working collaboratively with USFS to develop a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit that will ultimately authorize discharges during USFS' use of aerial fire retardants in areas where EPA is the permitting authority. The decision also recognizes the February 2023 federal facilities compliance agreement between EPA and USFS, under which the USFS will continue to use aerial fire retardant where and when it deems it is necessary throughout the development of EPA's NPDES general permit. The Court acknowledged that a permanent injunction is not needed to achieve the objectives of the Clean Water Act in light of the ongoing development of the NPDES permit and the compliance agreement that is in place.

EPA has also begun coordinating with NPDES-authorized states, that may, in their sole discretion, develop state NPDES permits to authorize any discharges from the aerial application of fire retardant, and that may model their permits on EPA's permit. We will continue to collaborate with USFS and other Federal land management agencies throughout the permit development process.

so that EPA's permit is finalized as quickly as possible, and so that any states who choose to do so can expediently issue their own general permits.

Questions from Representative Betty McCollum:

Mississippi River

McCollum Q1: Please elaborate on the work that EPA is doing in collaboration with other federal agencies to expand upon and follow up on the Mississippi River Basin Restoration and Resilience Strategy (released August 2022). What are the specific next steps the Agency is taking? How is the Agency working with disadvantaged, rural, and environmental justice communities along the River as part of its restoration and resiliency efforts in 2023?

Answer: The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Public Law 117-58, often referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), provides an investment in critical strategies to improve water quality in the Mississippi and Atchafalaya River Basin (MARB) and the Gulf and reduce the hypoxic zone in the northern Gulf. Through EPA's new IIJA Gulf Hypoxia Program (GHP), initial funds were awarded to Task Force member states in 2022, and in 2023, EPA is working to award funds to tribes, sub-basin committees (Upper Mississippi, Lower Mississippi, and Ohio), and the Southern Extension and Research Activities Committee Number 46 (SERA-46). This investment will support the development and implementation of strategies to accelerate the reduction of nutrient loads in the MARB and Gulf. EPA is committed to ensuring that GHP funds are used to meet the needs of all communities, including disadvantaged communities that disproportionately experience the impacts of degraded water quality from nutrient pollution. The GHP, is part of the Justice40 Initiative, which sets a goal that at least 40 percent of the benefits provided from certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. EPA is also committed to taking actions to anticipate, prepare for, adapt to, and recover from the impacts of climate change while advancing the nation's climate resilience.

EPA continues to engage with other federal agencies through existing partnership efforts. EPA's April 2022 memo *Accelerating Nutrient Pollution Reductions in the Nation's Waters* reaffirms the Agency's commitment to "reenergizing partnerships with governments, Tribes, agriculture, community organizations, research institutions, and the public to make sustained progress." EPA is coordinating closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to support enhancements to the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) and Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI), focusing not just on traditional implementation, but also identifying opportunities to better ensure that the conservation efforts benefit disadvantaged and underserved communities in the Basin. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and EPA co-chair the Interagency Working Group for the Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act, which is working with communities, resource managers, and other stakeholders to minimize impacts during an event and prepare well in advance through forecasts and monitoring. EPA also published a memo in September 2022 titled *Continued Actions in FY23 to Increase Equity and Environmental Justice in the Nonpoint Source Program*, articulated new CWA section 319 NPS program flexibilities and expected actions as well as increased support for Tribal NPS programs.

Finally, EPA participated in the Water Science Forum led by the US Geological Survey (USGS) in February 2023 which further examined and engaged stakeholders in studying science issues and gaps related to Mississippi River Restoration and Resiliency. EPA continues to

participate in a dialogue led by USGS, Tulane University and The Nature Conservancy on design of a more comprehensive monitoring network for the Mississippi River Basin. EPA is also participating in further stakeholder engagement on Mississippi River restoration and resilience, in meetings led by U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary Bonnie and a large group of stakeholders and federal partners. The group is expanding its focus to examine gaps and needs across the entire Mississippi River Basin and its major sub basins.

McCollum Q2: What support does the agency need from Congress to establish a Mississippi River National Office as encouraged by this Subcommittee in House Report 117-400?

Answer: As described above, EPA continues to engage with multiple agencies, particularly USDA, on ways to enhance inter-agency collaboration regarding restoration and resiliency efforts on the Mississippi River. EPA will continue to use its authorities and programs to enhance Mississippi River restoration and resilience, with a particular focus on the water quality issues.

PFAS

McCollum Q3: What is the status of EPA's recommendations for non-incineration PFAS destruction technologies? Please provide recent updates from the PFAS Innovative Treatment Team (PITT) and include information about other Agencies/Departments that EPA is collaborating with on PFAS destruction efforts.

Answer: The PFAS Innovative Treatment Team (PITT) was a 6-month dedicated team that brought together multi-disciplined research staff, established in Spring 2020. The team's work added practical knowledge to EPA's efforts to address PFAS. EPA researchers continue to build on the knowledge developed by the team because evaluating and developing technologies for reducing PFAS in the environment is a key priority in EPA's PFAS Strategic Roadmap. EPA continues to evaluate and develop technologies for drinking water and wastewater treatment, contaminated site remediation, air emission controls, and destruction and disposal of PFAS-containing materials and waste streams. These efforts include conducting laboratory- and pilot-scale studies, which will inform the design of full-scale field studies done in partnership with facilities and states to evaluate real-world applications of different PFAS technologies and management approaches.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 2023.

FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET REQUESTS FOR THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, AND NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

WITNESSES

HON. CHARLES F. SAMS III, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

HON. TRACY STONE-MANNING, DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

HON. MARTHA WILLIAMS, DIRECTOR, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

OPENING STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE MIKE SIMPSON

Mr. SIMPSON. The committee will come to order. Oh, I was right on time. Good afternoon.

Today the subcommittee is pleased to be joined by this panel of Department of the Interior leaders: Director Tracy Stone-Manning with the Bureau of Land Management, Director Martha Williams with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Director Chuck Sams of the National Park Service.

Following our hearing with Secretary Haaland yesterday, we appreciate you all being here today to discuss the bureau-level details and priorities of the administration's fiscal year 2024 budget request.

Among the three DOI bureaus, you manage most of the land in my home State of Idaho, and I am well acquainted with the challenges you and your staff face on a daily basis protecting and conserving our national parks, wildlife refuges, and public lands.

My colleagues and I hope to cover a lot of ground with you today. While I may not agree with all of the priorities in this budget proposal, I appreciate that we can have a productive conversation about the land management issues we are facing and the tools you need to manage our lands effectively and efficiently.

Each of your fiscal year 2024 requests are for increases of hundreds of millions of dollars, including for initiatives like zero-emission vehicles.

This year, more than ever, we must decide between wants and needs. I have said this before, but it is important to repeat it: as the Nation faces record inflation, we must be very conscious of our decisions on this committee to not saddle future generations with unnecessary economic burdens and further debt.

The Republican Conference and the House Appropriations Committee have committed to taking meaningful steps to help put our country's fiscal house in order.

In Idaho it is difficult to think of land management without first and foremost thinking about threatened and endangered species.

I commend the three of you for your cooperative approach you all are taking to conserve the sage grouse through collaboration with private landowners and investments in the State and Federal lands. The sage grouse has not been listed. This is a huge win for conservation and should serve as a blueprint for other species.

On the other end of the success spectrum, again this year, we are hearing about growing permitting backlogs for grazing and energy and mineral activities. There are continued population issues with wild horses and burros, which I am sure that my colleague from Utah will bring up, and management activities that aren't hitting the mark.

Many of my colleagues hear from their constituents about the increasing demand for access and recreation on our public lands. I could go on, but I feel our time would best be used with the conversations that we will have. So I look forward to working with you on many of these issues, and thank you and your staff for their hard work and assistance.

At this time, I would yield to Ranking Member Pingree for her opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE CHELLIE PINGREE

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Director Stone-Manning, Director Williams, Director Sams, thank you for being with us this afternoon. We are pleased to talk with you today about the fiscal year 2024 for your bureaus and to hear about your thoughts as managers of our country's national parks, national wildlife refuges, and public lands.

I am pleased to see that your budget requests build on the historic investments made in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act to improve the resilience of landscapes, reduce wildfire risks, support clean energy development on Federal lands, and restore ecosystems.

We know your bureaus have been challenged with staffing shortages as you work to deliver core programs and services to the American public and carry out your mission.

I am pleased your budget requests include significant funding increases to strengthen your workforce and support these historic infrastructure investments.

As we confront the challenges of species extinction, I am also pleased your requests include investments for species conservation and preserving biodiversity. These are essential if we are to protect our cultural and natural resources for present and future generations.

I am looking forward to our discussion today on how we continue to advance your missions and ensure that American families, communities, and economies can benefit from all our public lands have to offer. Thanks for being with us today.

I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Ranking Member Pingree.

Director Stone-Manning, we look forward to your testimony. You may proceed.

OPENING STATEMENT OF TRACY STONE-MANNING, DIRECTOR,
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the subcommittee, I am Tracy Stone-Manning, the Director of the Bureau of Land Management. It is nice to see you all, and it is nice to be here with my colleagues from the Department. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the fiscal year 2024 budget priorities and the mission of the BLM.

We are the Nation's largest land manager, responsible for 1 in 10 acres in this country. The multiple-use, sustained yield mission established by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act directs us to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of 245 million acres of public lands and 700 million acres of mineral estate for multiple uses.

These lands provide food, fiber, minerals, energy, clean water, wildlife habitat, and lifetime memories for countless families. They are open to all.

In fiscal year 2021, public lands managed by the BLM supported \$201 billion in economic output and 783,000 jobs.

Equally and vitally important is the work we do to conserve, protect, and restore public lands and nationally significant landscapes for the benefit of current and future generations.

The President's fiscal year 2024 budget request of \$1.7 billion for the BLM balances our responsibilities and advances the Administration's priorities to address the climate crisis, accelerate responsible renewable energy development on public lands, create family-supporting union jobs, and strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion in our work.

The proposed budget emphasizes investments to improve the health and resilience of public lands from the stresses brought on by climate change, such as historic, widespread drought and wildland fires of increasing scope and intensity.

That is why the budget requests \$304.3 million for the BLM's land resources activity, which provides for management of forests, rangelands, and cultural resources, as well as wild horses and burros.

As we transition to the clean energy economy, the remarkable solar, wind, and geothermal potential on our public lands can and must help meet Congress and the Administration's goal of permitting 25 gigawatts of renewable energy by 2025.

The budget reflects this priority by proposing \$72.5 million in our Renewable Energy Management program, an increase of 77 percent.

I am so pleased that the much-needed investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act will enable us to put people to work on public lands restoring wildlife habitat and clean water, enabling us to leave these lands better off than we found them.

Conservation is a key part of BLM's mission with over 900 units of national conservation lands covering about 35 million acres, which includes national monuments and wilderness.

These areas are also the current and ancestral homeland of Tribal nations and indigenous peoples, many of whom have deep cultural and spiritual connections to these places.

In addition, our neighbors across the country count on public lands managed by BLM as beloved recreation destinations. The ever-increasing interest in these lands requires additional support, and the budget request for the National Conservation Lands program is \$11.3 million above the 2023 enacted.

Throughout all of our work, we prioritize supporting the administration's efforts to create good-paying jobs and advance environmental justice, a priority that is emphasized in the budget request and in our programs to remediate and reclaim orphaned wells and abandoned mines.

The budget also includes an increase of \$12 million to help us establish and support the Youth Job Corps Program, which will enable the BLM to employ young adults and veterans.

Above all, the proposed budget reflects the administration's continued commitment to striking the right balance of land conservation and sustainable use of resources.

It is incumbent on us as professional land managers to ensure that these activities are sustainable and beneficial to all Americans, regardless of where they live, and to future generations.

We take this responsibility seriously. I take this responsibility seriously. I look forward to working with the subcommittee to provide us with the tools and resources necessary to achieve these important objectives.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

[The information follows:]

**Statement of
Tracy Stone-Manning
Director, Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Before the
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
On the
*“FY 2024 Budget Priorities & Mission of the Bureau of Land Management”***

March 29, 2023

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the FY 2024 budget priorities and mission of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The BLM’s 2024 budget proposal supports the critical role the bureau plays in achieving the environmental, conservation, and economic goals of the Biden-Harris Administration, while working in partnership with thousands of communities mostly across the American West and in Alaska, where the vast majority of our employees live and work.

Overview

The BLM’s work is immense in both scale and scope. One in 10 acres of land in the United States are managed by the BLM, as well as approximately 30 percent of the nation’s subsurface minerals. Driven by our mission, the BLM sustains the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s public lands for multiple uses, such as conventional and renewable energy development; livestock grazing; conservation; mining; watershed protection; and hunting, fishing, and other forms of recreation. This multiple-use, sustained yield mission, established by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, enables the BLM to contribute tremendously to economic growth, job creation, and domestic energy production, while generating revenues for Federal and State treasuries and local economies and allowing for a thoughtful and balanced approach to management of our public lands.

The 245 million acres of land and 700 million acres of mineral estate managed by the BLM are economic drivers for the communities where these resources are located. BLM estimates in FY 2021, programs administered on public lands managed by the BLM supported an estimated \$201 billion in economic output and approximately 783,000 jobs. According to DOI’s Office of Natural Resources Revenue, public lands managed by the BLM generated more than \$8 billion for the U.S. Treasury and States in FY 2022. Equally important are the public lands and nationally significant landscapes the BLM has the responsibility for conserving, protecting, and restoring on behalf of all Americans for the benefit of current and future generations.

As the steward for more land than any other Federal agency, the BLM plays a critical role in achieving the climate and economic goals of the Biden-Harris Administration through science-based, balanced management of public lands and waters. The President’s FY 2024 budget request of \$1.7 billion for the BLM balances these responsibilities and advances the Administration’s priorities of addressing climate change; accelerating responsible renewable energy development on

public lands; creating good-paying jobs with a free and fair chance to join a union; and strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion and related partnerships.

Landscape Health and Climate Resilience

The BLM's proposed budget for FY 2024 emphasizes investments to improve the health and resilience of BLM-managed public lands from the stresses of persistent drought and water scarcity, which have led to an influx of invasive species and wildland fires of increasing scope and intensity. The budget calls for increases in efforts to restore and conserve our shared public lands, making sure they are available for enjoyment by current and future generations. Locally-led and voluntary conservation empowered by the Administration's "America the Beautiful" initiative to conserve, connect, and restore 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030 will contribute to climate resilience in the face of rising temperatures and extreme weather.

The budget requests \$304.3 million under the BLM's Land Resources Activity, which provides for the management of forests, rangelands, and cultural resources, as well as wild horse and burro management. This includes \$12.3 million for Public Domain Forest Management; combined with a request of \$118.0 million for Western Oregon Resources Management, BLM will support timber sales and help improve forest health and resilience. The Western Oregon Resources Management funds are also used for identifying and managing carbon sinks and implementing reforestation projects, as well as for projects to protect mature and old-growth forests. The BLM will also support carbon sequestration efforts on public lands with a requested program increase of \$3.4 million in the Cadastral, Lands and Realty Management program.

The budget requests \$162.0 million for Wildlife Habitat Management to bolster efforts to identify, protect, conserve, and restore large landscapes. These efforts are necessary to support the long-term resilience of wildlife and plant populations, particularly in light of the ecological transformation occurring due to climate change. BLM will use the requested funding increase to improve habitat health and resiliency and advance efforts to identify, protect, conserve, and restore functional, landscape-level wildlife migration, dispersal, and daily movement corridors for big game, migratory birds, pollinators, and at-risk species. In a time of prolonged drought, we are working to restore nature's capacity to keep water in streams. The proposed funding level of \$73.4 million for Aquatic Resources will enhance the BLM's capacity to conserve remaining high-quality lands and waters, restore degraded land and water resources, and ensure the connectivity of these systems.

Key elements of improving the health of public lands include eradicating invasive species, re-establishing native plant communities, and carrying out other forms of restoration, which will improve habitat and support increased landscape connectivity and terrestrial and aquatic wildlife movement. Invasive species are a pervasive problem on public lands, and efforts to control invasive species are often impeded by drought conditions and wildland fire.

Transitioning to a Clean Energy Economy

The BLM has a significant role in advancing the development of renewable energy by providing sites on public lands for environmentally sound renewable energy production and transmission projects. With excellent solar, wind, and geothermal energy potential on public lands, renewable energy development on BLM lands provides an important contribution to the Administration's goal

of permitting 25 gigawatts of renewable energy on public lands by 2025. This is part of the broader strategy to rapidly reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 percent by 2030 and achieve a zero-carbon electric power sector by 2035. Consistent with the Energy Act of 2020, the BLM continues to accelerate responsible permitting of renewable energy projects on public lands. The BLM permitted over 2,800 megawatts of clean energy projects in 2021 and 5,700 megawatts in 2022. The complexities involved with authorizing bulk energy generation and transmission line facilities require extensive stakeholder engagement, coordination, and environmental review, all of which the BLM works diligently to carry out.

To ensure we achieve the goals of the Energy Act, the 2024 budget proposes funding that will allow the BLM to facilitate increased renewable energy development, including \$72.5 million in our Renewable Energy Management program, a 77 percent increase over the 2023 enacted level, and a program increase of \$11.0 million in the Resource Management Planning program. Currently, the BLM has prioritized the review of 50 solar, 4 wind, and 10 geothermal and 9 transmission interconnect projects which, if approved, represent roughly 37 MW of renewable energy capacity. In addition to the 73 priority applications, BLM has approximately 124 additional applications (107 solar, 12 wind, and 5 electricity transmission gen-ties) that are in the preliminary adjudication phase. The funds requested in the budget will support the siting, leasing, and processing of right-of-way applications, and oversight of renewable energy projects and associated transmission lines. The BLM anticipates continued demand for renewable energy generation from public lands over the coming years, given Administration efforts and as States and utilities also seek to increase their use of renewable power sources. Further, investments from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) will help make clean energy more affordable and accessible, and lower energy costs by hundreds of dollars per year for households.

A substantial part of the BLM's energy portfolio is oil and gas production from public lands. Since January 21, 2021, the BLM has approved almost 7,000 new drilling permits – over 3,000 in 2022 alone, and onshore oil production from Federal lands is at an all-time high. The Department is implementing the oil and gas provisions in the IRA, updating regulations and policy guidance to implement the law, and also incorporating the recommendations in the Department's November 2021 Report on the Federal Oil and Gas Leasing Programs. The Administration is committed to the responsible and sustainable development of Federal energy resources as the nation transitions to a low-carbon economy, and such reforms are a critical component of this effort.

Implementing Historic Investments in America's Public Lands

In 2024, the BLM will continue to put people to work on our public lands through investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the IRA: plugging orphaned oil and gas wells, restoring watersheds, and addressing and reducing the risks from wildfire. By the end of calendar year 2022, the BLM obligated nearly \$21 million in contracts and cooperative agreements for various BIL projects nationwide. The BLM will work with its partner agencies, external partners, stakeholders, and Tribes to achieve meaningful outcomes envisioned in these two historic laws. In addition, the BLM will also continue to implement the Great American Outdoors Act to address BLM's deferred maintenance backlog to support public safety, visitor access, and visitor enjoyment more effectively. The BLM anticipates that approximately \$91.8 million in deferred maintenance will be addressed upon completion of the proposed FY 2024 projects. Fully implementing these laws will help restore the balance on public lands amid the increasing demands of an ever-growing Western population. Together, these laws are a historic investment in

clean water, clean air, and wildlife habitat that will benefit people, landscapes, and local economies for generations to come.

Wild Horses & Burros

The Wild Horse and Burro program continues to present significant challenges for the Bureau, with on-range populations far in excess of the statutory allowable management level, and off-range holdings severely straining BLM's capacity. As of the end of FY 2022, there were approximately 82,000 wild horses and burros across the 177 Herd Management Areas that BLM manages – exceeding the nation-wide AML of 27,000 animals by over 55,000. Of the 177 Herd Management Areas, 85 percent are above AML.

The budget requests \$154.8 million for the Wild Horse and Burro Management program, which will help to offset rising program costs and conduct on-range and off-range management activities for wild horses and burros. The BLM is focused on addressing the management challenges with this program, notably through use of fertility control treatments and permanent sterilization efforts and through private placements of animals. However, significant increases in the cost of off-range holding caused by recent price increases for feed, fuel, labor, and related costs have slowed the BLM's ability to deliver fertility treatments or remove wild horses and burros while balancing the obligations to ensure the wellbeing of the 60,000 horses off range in our care. On-range costs such as for contracted gather and removal operations will continue to be similarly impacted, which impacts our ability to gather horses and implement an aggressive program of fertility control. The program's budget supports the BLM's commitment to continued efforts to manage the on-range populations as it is critical to prevent permanent damage to public lands and resources.

Recreation

The BLM's neighbors, particularly in the American West, count on public lands managed by the BLM as a beloved recreation destination. More than 86 million people live within 100 miles of BLM-managed public lands in the western United States, making the BLM a key part of connecting Americans to the outstanding and unique outdoor opportunities that contribute to and preserve the social fabric of the nation, bond families across generations, and preserve the character of the rural American West and Alaska. Public lands are open to use for pursuits such as camping, off-highway vehicle riding, mountain biking, river running, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, and fishing—and the vast majority of the public lands managed by BLM are open to visitors without any fees. In 2022, BLM-managed public lands attracted approximately 81 million visitors, which is an increase of 8 million visitors from 2020. The increased interest in recreating on our public lands is outpacing BLM's ability to keep up. Meeting America's diverse recreational needs requires new, innovative, and collaborative management. The budget request in FY 2024 for the Recreation Resources Management program is \$65.4 million, an increase of \$9.8 million over the FY 2023 budget. The FY 2024 budget request will also help the BLM further the priorities of the Biden-Harris Administration and Secretary Haaland, such as investing in America's infrastructure by providing access to public lands for all Americans.

National Conservation Lands

National Conservation Lands protect resilient ecosystems, provide opportunities for research and self-discovery, and create a refuge for biodiversity. The BLM-managed National Conservation

Lands currently encompass over 900 units covering about 35 million acres, including National Monuments, Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Conservation Areas, and National Scenic and Historic Trails. Designated by Congress or the President, these components of the BLM's National Conservation Lands represent some of the nation's most spectacular landscapes and provide abundant recreational opportunities, important scientific research grounds, and outstanding ecological and cultural resources. They are also the current and ancestral homelands of Tribal Nations and Indigenous peoples, many of whom have deep cultural, historic, and spiritual connections to these places. Conserving these lands means collaborating with local, State, and Tribal governments and other Federal partners; enhancing and maintaining recreational access; and engaging communities to foster shared stewardship efforts. An estimated 11 million visitors each year come to these sites, providing significant economic benefits to surrounding communities and supporting long-term jobs by promoting multiple-use activities, tourism, and the service industry. The ever-increasing interest in the BLM's National Conservation Lands requires additional support, and the FY 2024 budget request for the National Conservation Lands program is \$11.3 million above the FY 2023 enacted level. This includes a program increase of \$3.0 million for the Department's Increasing Representation in our Public Lands initiative, which will provide support for recent or potential new designations that preserve important places and tell the stories of those that have been historically underrepresented.

Jobs & Equity

The impacts of climate change and environmental degradation in the United States are not evenly distributed in our society. Communities of color, low-income families, and rural and Indigenous communities have long suffered disproportionate and cumulative harm from air pollution, water pollution, and toxic sites. The BLM, as part of its work, dedicates time and resources to engage a wide range of stakeholders and communities in all its land management decisions, as well as to conduct formal consultation with Tribes in recognition of the Federal Government's trust responsibilities.

The FY 2024 BLM budget request will advance the Administration's efforts to create good-paying jobs through its program to remediate and reclaim orphaned wells and abandoned mines. These jobs may also serve to ease the transition for oil and gas field workers, coal miners, and conventional energy and mining communities as the market transitions toward cleaner energy sources. The proposed budget will help support underserved communities that have been adversely impacted by energy and mining activities in the past. The budget also includes an increase of \$12 million to enhance BLM capacity to support various youth corps programs, allowing the BLM to employ young adults and veterans, drawing on their skills to improve the public lands while training the next generation of public land stewards.

The budget also invests in the BLM's Seeds of Success program, which employs Tribal youth in the collection and preservation of culturally important native plant species. This program is conducted in partnership with the Fort Belknap Indian Community and the Society for Ecological Restoration. Seeds of Success is part of a larger interagency National Seed Strategy that works in partnership with a network of seed collectors, farmers and growers, nurseries, and seed storage facilities to develop science-based native seed mixes to restore resilient ecosystems.

Conclusion

The BLM's FY 2024 proposed budget reflects the Administration's continued commitment to striking the right balance of land conservation and sustainable use of resources. It is incumbent on us as professional land managers to ensure the use of public lands is sustainable and beneficial to all Americans, regardless of where they live, and to future generations. The decisions we make about how we manage and shape this development now and into the future will have a profound impact on Americans across the country, and we take that responsibility seriously. I look forward to working with the Subcommittee to provide the BLM with the tools and resources necessary to achieve these important objectives. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.

TRACY STONE-MANNING

BLM Director

In September 2021, Tracy Stone-Manning was confirmed as the 19th Director of the Bureau of Land Management. Tracy Stone-Manning has spent her career devoted to public service and conservation, bringing people together to solve the biggest challenges facing our lands and waters. Before coming to the BLM, Stone-Manning served as both a senior advisor for conservation policy and associate vice president of public lands at the National Wildlife Federation.

Before joining the federation, she served as former Montana Governor Steve Bullock's chief of staff, where she helped broker bipartisan legislation, including delivering healthcare to nearly 100,000 Montanans by expanding Medicaid and passing a water compact with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. She also helped launch the state's first Office of Outdoor Recreation.

Prior to that, Stone-Manning worked as the director of Montana's Department of Environmental Quality, overseeing the state's water, air, mining and remediation programs. She served as a senior advisor and regional director to Senator Jon Tester during his first term, where she worked primarily on natural resource issues.

Raised in a big, Navy family, she was guided into public service from childhood. She is an avid backpacker, hunter and singer and holds a M.S. in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana and an B.A. from the University of Maryland.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you for that testimony.
 Director Williams, you may proceed with your statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF MARTHA WILLIAMS, DIRECTOR,
 U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ms. WILLIAMS. Good morning, Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree and members of the subcommittee. I am Martha Williams, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and I am honored to join my colleagues today from the National Park Service and the BLM, and I am honored to serve alongside them.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Service's fiscal year 2024 budget request.

The Service collaborates with partners across the country to fulfill our mission of working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

Working with others is our identity. We are not the biggest agency. You might say we are a small fish in a big sea. But our strength lies in the relationships we build with States, Tribes, and local partners that help us leverage conservation to make a difference in communities all over the country.

We know we must connect with people and connect people to nature, so that every day, every one of us can benefit from clean air, clean water, thriving wildlife populations, and the functioning habitat they depend on, and access to the outdoors no matter where you are or where you live. It matters for our well-being, for our businesses, and for our communities.

I know you are all familiar with our work, but few know the breadth of it. The Fish and Wildlife Service works with partners, States, Tribes, sister Federal agencies, and local governments through all of our programs, whether ecological services, the National Wildlife Refuge System, migratory birds, fisheries and aquatic conservation, the Office of Law Enforcement, international affairs, communications, the National Conservation Training Center, the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, technology and administration.

We use grant programs, provide technical assistance, join migratory bird flyway councils, work with communities to design fish passages, deliver urban wildlife conservation, stock and conserve fish, to make sure that iconic species that we all know and love, and even the crazy little and unsung species that you may not have heard of, are here into the future.

We serve the public through fighting fires, providing law enforcement for refuges, and as backup when needed and called upon by our other partners, or provide visitor services, and so much more.

The key is that we always do this with others. We support our partners' efforts to protect wildlife habitat, conserve wildlife species, ensure sustainable hunting, educate the next generation of hunters, improve local docks and marinas, and contain the spread of invasive species.

We also work with private landowners across the country, with our partners for Fish and Wildlife program, migratory bird joint ventures, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and oth-

ers, providing technical and financial assistance to landowners as they work to conserve wildlife habitat on their private lands.

It is also essential for us to build and maintain government-to-government relationships with Tribes. We are following the Secretary's leadership to pursue co-stewardship of the lands, wildlife, and fish that are a cornerstone of tribal culture.

One example of leveraging money and impact is our Fish Passage Program, through which we have collaborated with conservation groups and local stakeholders to remove over 3,400 barriers to fish passage at dams, culverts, streams, and other sites to ensure that we have healthier fish populations, reduced erosion, and cleaner water.

Building on this ongoing effort, in July we cosponsored a National Fish Passage Infrastructure Law workshop with more than 100 partners from State agencies, Tribes, NGOs, and other Federal agencies.

So far, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding has supported 184 fish passage projects coordinated across five Federal agencies for a total of \$259 million.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act. We are making progress in protecting, recovering, and delisting species. Two months ago, in partnership with the Department of Defense, we delisted the San Clemente Bell's sparrow, one of the species you may not have heard of, and four other species.

Because of the work we can do through our partnerships, hundreds of species are stable, recovering, or recovered, from the Louisiana black bear to the Aleutian Canada goose.

At the Service, we are incredibly grateful for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and how it has proven to be a catalyst for conservation.

This past year, the Service used \$111 million of BIL funding to support over 300 projects across the country, from improving water quality in the Delaware River Basin, to aquatic invasive species control around Lake Tahoe, to restoration and fish hatchery innovation in the Klamath, to capping orphan oil and gas wells in Louisiana and Oklahoma.

The Service is putting BIL funding to work across the country.

Creating and supporting these partnerships and projects requires a talented and dedicated workforce. The Fish and Wildlife Service's employees are our greatest asset. They manage habitat on refuges, produce healthy fish at hatcheries, take care of our amazing national wildlife refuges, and when doing so, I must say, our maintenance professionals, I feel like they can fix anything.

They work with project proponents in ecological services field offices and help them comply with the Endangered Species Act to get projects through always in a hurry.

And they conserve species internationally, put their lives on the line in law enforcement and fighting fires, and do so much more.

To support the Service's capacity to expand these partnerships, the Administration is proposing a budget of \$2.2 billion to fund the Service's resource management and conservation programs, an increase of \$315 million.

These increases address the Service's need for additional workforce capacity to work more quickly and thoroughly to review devel-

opment projects, to expand hunting and fishing opportunities, to keep our visitors engaged and safe.

We need to invest in these important goals, and I will touch a little bit on what building our capacity can do.

The Service——

Mr. SIMPSON. Quickly.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Yes. The Ecological Services Program helps bring species back to recovery, protects species. The budget request proposes an \$88.5 million increase which will help right-size our workforce.

Our budget also includes a roughly \$30 million increase for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program to support collaborative efforts that improve habitat and keep working lands working.

We will also invest \$3 million in connecting wildlife corridors to allow species to move across the landscape.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. If enacted, this budget will make a significant difference in our ability to conserve natural resources in partnership with others for the benefit of all Americans.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you.

[The information follows:]

**STATEMENT OF
MARTHA WILLIAMS, DIRECTOR, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED
AGENCIES OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
REGARDING THE FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET REQUEST**

March 29, 2023

Good morning, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Fiscal Year 2024 budget request, and for the Subcommittee's continued support of the Service's work. The Administration continues to show strong support for the Service and our conservation mission through its annual budget request.

This past year we were pleased to begin implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, through which the Service received nearly \$111 million for more than 300 projects across the country. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is a historic investment in the nation's infrastructure and economic competitiveness. The law is also a substantial investment in wildlife conservation. In the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's inaugural year, the Service identified 12 projects in the Delaware River Basin, 33 projects in the Klamath Basin and five projects in the Lake Tahoe area that will provide habitat restoration, invasive species control, conservation of at-risk species and other benefits to these ecosystems. The Service and its partners also started work on 40 National Fish Passage Program projects, which are restoring habitat connectivity for aquatic species and reducing flooding risks and public safety hazards throughout the country. And, we co-sponsored a first-ever National Fish Passage Bipartisan Infrastructure Law workshop to pull together diverse stakeholders, including more than 100 practitioners from federal and state agencies, Tribes, conservation organizations and other partners, to identify shared goals in an effort to make the most of this opportunity. We are also improving habitat by plugging 175 orphan wells on six National Wildlife Refuges in Louisiana and Oklahoma. These wells are actively leaking hydrocarbons, methane and contaminated water, and pose a threat to wildlife, their habitat and nearby communities. And through the Service's Sagebrush Conservation program, we are implementing 49 projects in the western states to conserve strategic areas within the sagebrush ecosystem and safeguard precious water resources for neighboring communities and wildlife.

As excited as we are about the opportunity afforded to us by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Service would not be capable of undertaking this work without a robust base budget to fund our dedicated staff who implement programs and projects. I am pleased to announce the Administration's budget request provides significant resources for base capacity and our conservation mission. Throughout, the Service's budget request carries forward our commitment to building successful partnerships and working collaboratively. Working with others is a critical component of our mission and something we rely on daily to be successful.

The FY 2024 President's budget request for the Service totals \$4.2 billion, including current appropriations of \$2.2 billion. The discretionary portion of the Service's request is an increase of \$315 million above the 2023 enacted level. A majority of this increase directly supports conservation and retaining biodiversity on the landscape.

The budget also includes \$2 billion available under permanent appropriations, most of which is provided directly to states for fish and wildlife restoration and conservation.

The FY 2024 budget promotes strategic investments to implement the goals of America the Beautiful, the Administration's conservation initiative to address the impacts of climate change on natural resources, conserve species and habitats, reconnect Americans with the outdoors, facilitate economic development and create good-paying job opportunities. At its core, America the Beautiful is about supporting locally-led and voluntary efforts to conserve, steward and restore lands and waters on local, state, Tribal and private lands. America the Beautiful is about working with communities to identify and support the conservation programs and projects that work well for them. We want to invest in those efforts and stitch them together into a collaborative and inclusive approach to conservation across the country.

Key investments in the FY 2024 budget request also include Conservation and Biodiversity, Service Capacity, Science and Customer Service.

Conservation and Biodiversity

This year we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Our budget request includes an increase of \$19 million for species recovery and an overall increase of \$88.5 million for our Ecological Services program, which will support our endangered species work. The ESA provides a critical safety net for fish, wildlife and plants and has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species, promoted the recovery of many others and helped conserve habitats upon which they depend.

But the ESA alone cannot recover imperiled species. The law's success depends to a large extent on partnerships and our collaborative efforts with stakeholders across the country. The ESA continues to be successful because it facilitates and incentivizes collaborative conservation.

Our FY 2024 budget request will continue to support those collaborative efforts through a nearly \$20 million increase in our Partners for Fish and Wildlife program and a \$6.5 million increase for the Coastal program. The Partners program provides financial and technical assistance to private land owners for voluntary conservation projects that improve habitat for listed and at-risk species while supporting working lands such as forests, farms and ranches, while the Coastal program is another partnership-based, habitat conservation program with priority areas along the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts, as well as the Great Lakes and Caribbean. The Partners program will also invest \$3 million in connecting wildlife corridors to allow for species to move across the landscape, connecting habitat.

The budget also provides \$14.6 million in additional funding for our Migratory Bird program's conservation and monitoring efforts to help address the documented loss of over 3

billion birds since 1970, a net loss of 29 percent of the breeding bird population over the last half-century. The total requested increase for Migratory Birds is \$24.6 million, including funding for our partners in Joint Ventures around the country, as well as \$4.8 million for Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation grants.

Another persistent conservation challenge is invasive species. We need to shift our approach from funding eradication efforts for already established species to funding prevention, so species do not get the chance to establish. The budget would provide \$7.4 million in additional funding for invasive species prevention to address problem species before they spread.

Conservation Capacity Needs

The Service's ability to address the threats to wildlife and ecosystems and effectively leverage investments like the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law depends on the capacity of our programs to do their day-to-day work. The FY 2024 budget request invests heavily in that capacity, with additional funds for endangered species consultation and other environmental review and permitting work, as well as funding for recovery of listed species, migratory birds and native fish.

The National Wildlife Refuge System spans more than 850 million acres of lands and waters and includes 568 national wildlife refuges, 38 wetland management districts, 49 coordination areas and five national marine monuments that cover 760 million acres of submerged lands and waters. There are refuges located in all 50 states, including 63 refuges with wilderness areas. The budget requests \$624.9 million for the Refuge System to continue its legacy of conserving wildlife populations and biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. Within an increase of \$6 million for conservation planning, the budget focuses \$4 million on increasing representation on public lands. This will support planning for units that preserve and tell the stories of those people who have been historically underrepresented and to increase representation at other units where such people remain historically underserved.

To begin to address this capacity need, we are requesting an additional \$30.5 million for wildlife and habitat management. Funding for refuge operations—including wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, refuge law enforcement and planning—is \$454.3 million, or \$63 million above the previous year's enacted level. The increase will be used for adaptive management, habitat resilience and the use of science-driven decision making.

Another capacity issue is in our Ecological Services program. Ecological Services planning and consultation capability is significantly constrained due to spiking workload and a decrease in funding. Effective and efficient project development from a range of action agencies, and related economic growth, depends on the work completed by our Ecological Services program. To meet the increasing demand, we are requesting an increase of \$50.5 million.

In addition to the requested funding to increase environmental permitting capacity, the budget also proposes to expand our existing authorities to allow federal agencies to more

effectively transfer funds provided under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to both the Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service to complete permitting activities. This authority will help address the unique workload surge anticipated from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and would accelerate environmental reviews in support of responsible development of priority infrastructure projects and energy solutions across the country.

In addition to demand for consultations, requests for other environmental reviews such as those related to migratory bird permitting are also at historically high levels. This budget request proposes to provide an additional \$7.8 million to support staff handling migratory bird permitting in our regional offices.

Our request would provide an increase of \$10 million to provide more capacity for Fisheries field offices. This funding will support the ability of these offices to assess the status and trends of aquatic species, evaluate the causes of species decline and work with partners to implement actions to restore fisheries populations

Advancing Science

Science is the foundation of our work, and a robust science program is critical to ensure we are making fully informed decisions across all of our programs. The President's budget request includes an increase of \$21 million for the Service's Science Applications program, including \$13.5 million for Science Partnerships to work with partners on landscape level planning and shared science, as well as \$6.6 million for translating science into useful tools for on-the-ground management.

Customer Service

The Service's mission is to work with others to conserve wildlife on behalf of the American public. Our efforts to provide the public with the best customer service possible are another cornerstone of the FY 2024 budget request. We are engaged in a series of efforts to improve customer service, including addressing the fact that environmental policy decisions have often failed to adequately account for environmental injustices. One of our primary focal points for supporting the Administration's initiative to advance racial equity in conservation and recreational access is the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program.

The program encompasses 101 urban national wildlife refuges, including seven flagship refuges that deliver additional programming for visitors, 32 designated Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership cities and 30 Urban Bird Treaty cities. The FY 2024 budget includes an additional \$5.5 million to support creation of five more urban flagship refuges and nearly \$1 million more to support urban bird treaties.

In order to serve members of the public seeking one of our permits, we are requesting an additional \$6 million for upgrades to our online system, known as E-permits. Enhancements will include continued work on secure paperless CITES permitting, the inclusion of the Migratory Bird program's permits and allowing users to apply online for Refuge System special use permits. Our goal is to make all Service permits available online.

Construction and Maintenance

Implementing an aggressive agenda to advance conservation in the face of climate change requires a commensurate investment in support of resilient facilities and real property. The Service is responsible for more than \$50 billion in constructed real property assets that include over 25,000 structures as well as nearly 14,000 roads, bridges and dams. Our FY 2024 construction request is \$51 million, \$21 million more than the 2023 enacted amount, including \$42 million for line-item construction projects. This includes funding for charging infrastructure to support deployment of a fleet of zero-emission light-duty vehicles and critical investments in field communication modernization that is coordinated across several DOI bureaus.

Starting in FY 2021, the Great American Outdoors Act Legacy Restoration Fund provided mandatory funding for Refuge System Deferred Maintenance. This is in addition to the Deferred Maintenance funding within our Refuge program, which is funded at \$48.6 million.

Altogether, this budget includes \$280.4 million for asset maintenance and construction. The Service will use these funds to address high-priority health and safety needs for Service-owned assets to begin a transition to a life-cycle maintenance strategy that will reduce long-term maintenance costs and improve the visitor experience.

Law Enforcement and International Affairs

The Service's Office of Law Enforcement investigates wildlife crimes and enforces the laws that govern and facilitate trade in wildlife and wildlife products. FY 2024 funding is proposed at \$104.4 million for the Office of Law Enforcement, an increase of \$12.3 million above the 2023 enacted level.

We continue to work with the State Department, other federal agencies and foreign governments to address the threat to conservation and global security posed by illegal wildlife trade and trafficking. A portion of the funding proposed for the Office of Law Enforcement will support implementation of the new Big Cat Public Safety Act, which prohibits the private possession of big cats and makes it illegal for exhibitors to allow direct contact with cubs.

The budget request also includes \$26.7 million for the International Affairs program, \$5.1 million more compared to the 2023 enacted amount. This increase will support expanded conservation capacity for iconic species such as elephants and rhinos, as well as climate adaptation and resilience efforts abroad.

Our international program complements our law enforcement efforts by developing strategies to target consumer demand for illegal products, which is driving a rapid increase in the poaching of species such as tigers and pangolins. And, as part of the One Health effort, the two programs also work to protect against disease transmission through the wildlife trade.

Legislative Proposals

This year's budget request contains a number of important legislative proposals which would enhance the Service's ability to use our resources to the maximum extent possible. As discussed above, we are asking for direct transfer authority for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds from other federal agencies to support environmental reviews for covered projects. This has worked well where existing authority exists, such as with the U.S. Forest Service, which has resulted in faster action and less overhead to fund this work and deliver valuable hazardous fuels treatments to protect communities and resources.

Another legislative proposal is to expand Good Neighbor and Stewardship Contracting authority to the Service. Good Neighbor authority would allow States, Tribes, and local governments to enter into agreements to perform forest, rangeland and watershed restoration work on federal land. Stewardship Contracting authority would allow the Service to trade forest products for land management and services.

Finally, the proposed resource protection authority would allow us to recover funds from responsible parties when Service resources are injured or destroyed. Currently, the costs of repair and restoration falls upon the appropriated budget and any fines or penalties are paid to the U.S. Treasury.

Conclusion

Thank you again for your support for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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Martha Williams

Growing up on a farm in Maryland, Martha Williams gained an appreciation for open lands, waters, wildlife, and people. This passion led her to the wild places of the West and a career spent fostering a love of the outdoors and stewarding the protection of natural resources.

On March 8, 2022, Williams was sworn in as the 23rd Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Williams was appointed to the Service as Principal Deputy Director in January 2021. Preceding her appointment, she served as the Director of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks from 2017 to 2020. As State Director, Williams delivered leadership that embraced the diversity of Montana's natural resources and outdoor recreational values that also incorporated public expectations and values into the agency's direction. Representing Montana and the state perspective, Williams chaired the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee and was a member of Joint Federal/State Task Force on Federal Assistance Policy. She also served a term as the Vice President of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Previously, Williams was an Assistant Professor of Law at the Blewett School of Law at the University of Montana in Missoula, Montana. In addition to teaching fundamental environmental law courses related to public lands and resources, property, climate change, and wildlife, Williams co-directed the university's Land Use and Natural Resources Clinic and co-supervised the Public Land and Resources Law Review and the Environmental Law Group.

During the Obama Administration, Williams served as Deputy Solicitor Parks and Wildlife at the Department of the Interior for two years, providing counsel to the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service on issues arising in parks and recreation, fish and wildlife, environmental protection, natural resources assessment and restoration, and land and water conservation law.

From 1988-2011, Williams was agency legal counsel for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, where she advised and represented the department on real estate transactions, Endangered Species Act policy and litigation, and on state and national environmental policy acts. During her tenure, she also taught continuing legal education classes on real property law and on public participation in government.

Williams earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia and a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Montana School of Law. Williams is a hunter and an angler.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHUCK SAMS, DIRECTOR,
THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Mr. SIMPSON. Last but certainly not least, we have Director Sams from the National Park Service.

You may proceed with our opening statement. And all three of your official submitted testimonies will be included in the record.

Mr. SAMS. Chairman Simpson, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on the fiscal year 2024 budget request for the National Park Service. I also feel very privileged to be joining my sister bureau directors from U.S. Fish and Wildlife and BLM to appear before you today.

I would like to summarize my testimony and submit my entire statement for the record.

I want to begin by thanking Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree for our recent visits. I appreciate the opportunity to hear your priorities and was pleased that so many of our goals align for the future of our parks and our dedicated employees.

I also want to thank the subcommittee for your support of the National Park Service in fiscal year 2023. Over the past year, I have visited parks across the country and seen firsthand some of the challenges they are facing, like recovery from natural disasters, adapting to increased or changing visitation, and the need to expand the breadth of the stories we are telling.

I have also seen and heard from our employees about how much recent funding increases through fiscal year 2023's appropriations, the Inflation Reduction Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the Great American Outdoors Act are making an impact.

I thank you for your support, and I am pleased to share with you how our fiscal year 2024 budget will support that continued progress.

The discretionary budget request for the National Park Service is \$3.8 billion, an increase of \$289.2 million compared to fiscal year 2023 enacted funding.

I want to highlight a few components with you—conservation, racial justice, capacity, and housing.

Our request proposes an additional \$110.7 million in Service-wide investments to protect park resources from 21st century threats.

Fundamental to this effort is an \$86.8 million increase in operational funding to enhance natural resource capacity, expand youth corps programs that support conservation, and improve climate risk assessments and responses for our cultural resources.

We also propose installing additional charging infrastructure to support the transition to zero-emission vehicles, complete climate vulnerability assessments, and better position the agency to respond to natural disasters.

The fiscal year 2024 budget proposes \$32.3 million in increased investments to advance racial justice and equity for underserved communities, including strengthening our Nation-to-Nation relationship with Tribes.

The budget supports an additional \$7.1 million for expanded Tribal co-stewardship of Park resources, \$2.5 million to increase tourism that benefits Tribes, \$2.5 million in dedicated funding for

Tribal Heritage Grants, and \$1 million for management of subsistence uses of NPS lands and waters in Alaska.

The initiative also supports funds to improve physical and programmatic accessibility and invests in new parks, like the New Philadelphia National Historic Site and Blackwell School National Historic Site.

The fiscal year 2024 request also invests in our employees. The National Park Service has lost almost 19 percent of our operations capacity since 2011.

Over the same period, over 30 units have been added to the National Park System, and annual visitation has increased by more than 30 million.

To help meet this demand, the budget seeks \$25.4 million to support an additional 170 full-time employees. This increase will address new and critical responsibilities across the parks and bolster the U.S. Park Police and Special Agents program.

Lastly, the budget proposes an increase of \$7 million to construct, improve, and modernize housing for our employees, which remains a critical issue at parks, with insufficient available or affordable housing nearby.

Finally, I am pleased to update you on the progress to implement the Great American Outdoors Act.

Funding from the Legacy Restoration Fund has provided us almost \$3.9 billion for deferred maintenance. We have obligated more than \$1.4 billion with over 70 projects underway and more starting this year.

From the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the National Park Service has received nearly \$300 million for the land acquisition activities and over \$1 billion for State grant programs, matched by non-Federal funds, for a total impact of at least \$2 billion.

Chairman, this concludes my summary, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your continued support of the National Park Service.

I would be happy to answer any and all your questions.

[The information follows:]

**STATEMENT OF CHARLES F. SAMS III
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED
AGENCIES OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

March 29, 2023

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today at this hearing on the Fiscal Year 2024 President's Budget Request for the National Park Service (NPS, Service).

I am pleased to share with you the President's Budget Request for the NPS, which directly supports the vision and objectives laid out by President Biden and Secretary Haaland for the Department of the Interior, as well as my own priorities for the National Park Service. If enacted, this budget will support our ability to protect our resources, our visitors, and our employees well into the future.

FY 2024 Budget Summary

The FY 2024 discretionary budget request for the NPS is \$3.8 billion, an increase of \$289.2 million compared to FY 2023 enacted funding levels. This level supports an estimated 15,601 full-time equivalents (FTE). Recreation fee revenue, funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and other mandatory funding sources provide additional funding of \$1.2 billion. The total FY 2024 request for NPS is \$5.0 billion and 20,759 FTE.

The NPS FY 2024 request prioritizes conserving our natural and cultural resources and protecting them from climate-related threats, advancing racial equity and supporting underserved communities, and making investments in park operations. The request makes bold investments essential for the Service's continued mission success in its second century while remaining committed to the daily mission of ensuring that the American people continue to have an enriching experience at each and every one of the NPS's 424 sites. The request also invests in our most valuable resource—NPS employees. My top priority as Director is to connect and empower a thriving and diverse workforce, and I believe that funding initiatives such as providing quality employee housing and increasing parks' capacity to address growing responsibilities directly support this goal.

Operation of the National Park System – The FY 2024 budget request for the NPS operations account is \$3.2 billion. This includes \$509.6 million for Resource Stewardship, \$300.3 million for Visitor Services, \$457.7 million for Park Protection, \$983.0 million for Facility Operations and Maintenance, \$697.3 million for Park Support, and \$241.8 million for External Administrative Costs. The FY 2024 operations budget includes an \$86.8 million increase to support science, build NPS resiliency to climate change, and increase conservation efforts. The operations account also includes an \$18.8 million increased investment to advance racial justice and equity for underserved communities, including \$3 million to support recent or potential new

parks that preserve important places and tell the stories of those who have been historically underrepresented. Additionally, to invest in the future of our parks, this account supports \$17.3 million to build park capacity throughout the National Park System in visitor services, park protection, facility operations and maintenance, and park support, and \$8.2 million for new and critical responsibilities in NPS operations.

Centennial Challenge – This appropriation, requested at \$15.0 million, leverages partner donations for signature projects and programs at national parks. The Centennial Challenge program is instrumental in garnering and fostering strong partnerships. All Federal funds must be matched on at least a 1 to 1 basis, creating a program total of at least \$30.0 million. These projects focus on repairing and modernizing NPS infrastructure, expanding recreational opportunities and access to the public, and developing new and improved educational and interpretive programs for visitors.

National Recreation and Preservation – The FY 2024 budget request for the National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) appropriation is \$95.2 million. This appropriation provides technical and financial assistance to preserve natural and cultural resources from the local level to the international. Natural resource programs funded in this account support collaborative and community-driven efforts and outcome-focused investments to preserve and enhance rural landscapes, urban parks and rivers, important ecosystems, and wildlife habitat. NPS cultural programs funded in this account support partnerships in preserving the Nation's cultural heritage through National Register Programs, research and training in historic preservation and conservation, and a number of grant programs. NR&P also supports cooperation with other nations on park and heritage resource management issues, as well as the management of the Heritage Partnership Program, which distributes Federal funding to 60 National Heritage Areas in 44 States and one territory.

The FY 2024 NPS request includes an increase of \$3.0 million for the recently established African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program and an increase of \$1.0 million to support the NPS's growing workload of grants administration. The FY 2023 appropriation provided new funding under the Japanese American Confinement Sites Grants program to provide grants for projects to educate the public on the historical importance of Japanese American confinement during World War II. The NPS is working to establish the competitive criteria and other specifications for these two new grants authorized in the FY 2023 Omnibus.

The request maintains funding for all other NR&P-funded programs except one-time funding received in FY 2023 for community project funding items. This appropriation includes the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance and National Register Programs. It also supports important grant programs for Chesapeake Gateways and Trails, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation, Japanese American Confinement Sites, American Battlefield Protection Program Assistance, and American Indian and Native Hawaiian Art and Culture.

Historic Preservation Fund – The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) supports Historic Preservation Offices in States, territories, and Tribal lands to preserve historically and culturally significant sites and provides competitive grants to other entities. The authority to deposit receipts of up to \$150 million annually to the HPF expires at the end of FY 2023. The FY 2024

budget request proposes to extend that authority for an additional year and to appropriate \$177.9 million for FY 2024. As part of the budget's advancement of racial justice and equity for underserved communities, the request includes an increase of \$2.5 million in dedicated funding for Tribal Heritage Grants to support Federally recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Villages and Corporations, and Native Hawaiian Organizations in preserving and protecting their cultural heritage.

The request maintains support for all other programs funded from the Historic Preservation Fund except one-time funding received in FY 2023 for community project funding items. This includes grants to State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices to help meet preservation responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act to protect and preserve historic resources based on local needs and priorities. This appropriation also supports a number of competitive grant programs that support preservation of historic structures on the campuses of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), historic preservation projects that stimulate economic growth in rural areas, preservation of historic sites that tell the stories of the struggles for civil rights and equal rights in America, diversification of the listings in the National Register of Historic Places, restoration and preservation of sites that commemorate the founding of the Nation, and preservation of nationally significant sites and collections.

Construction – The FY 2024 budget request includes \$286.6 million to fund construction projects, equipment replacement, management, planning, operations, and special projects. This includes \$128.7 million for line-item construction, \$15.9 million for zero-emission fleet modernization deployment and related infrastructure, \$18.3 million for DOI Field Communications Modernization, and \$14.9 million to improve and expand NPS housing, a \$7.0 million increase from the FY 2023 enacted budget. The budget includes increases of \$7.0 million to address transportation barriers from underserved communities to national parks, \$2.0 million to mitigate abandoned mineral lands, \$7.0 million for emergencies and unscheduled projects, and \$4.1 million for climate vulnerability studies.

FY 2024 Budget Priorities

Conservation Initiative – The NPS Organic Act includes the stewardship of natural resources in our mission. This responsibility is woven throughout park operations, programs, budget activities and appropriations. The FY 2024 budget is an important step by the Biden-Harris Administration to address the critical challenges of our time by increasing scientific capacity and improving strategic thinking and resource planning to leave lands and waters preserved for future generations to use and enjoy. The NPS is a vital component of the governmentwide approach to addressing the impacts of climate change. Therefore, the FY 2024 budget includes multiple and varied investments to better understand and address resource challenges on park lands.

The NPS proposes \$110.7 million in Servicewide investments to protect the Nation's treasured natural and cultural resources from 21st-century threats. With these targeted increases, the budget seeks to build on existing, successful NPS and partnership programs and strengthen functions that support science-informed resource management. The proposal includes \$86.8 million in operational funding to enhance frontline natural resource stewardship capacity, expand youth corps programs that support conservation, and expand partnerships for interdisciplinary

resources and stewardship. It also includes \$23.8 million in the Construction account specifically for conservation efforts. This provides funding to move the NPS toward a zero-emission vehicle fleet, to help parks recover from natural disasters, which are increasing in frequency and intensity due to climate change, mitigate abandoned mineral lands, and to conduct climate vulnerability assessments.

Advancing Racial Justice and Equity for Underserved Communities – The Biden-Harris Administration directs Federal agencies to operate in an environment that advances equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. Current NPS priorities also include a focus on advancing equity, inclusion, and access as we carry out the NPS mission.

The FY 2024 NPS budget proposes \$32.3 million in targeted investments Servicewide to advance racial justice and equity for underserved communities. This increase is spread across multiple appropriations. \$7.0 million of this increase is requested within the Construction appropriation to assess and address transportation barriers to parks from underserved communities. Within the operating account, the NPS requests an increase of \$3.0 million to fund new and critical responsibilities at recent and potential new parks preserving the stories of underrepresented communities. It will allow NPS to hire staff and cover operating expenses at recently added units including the New Philadelphia National Historic Site, Blackwell School National Historic Site, and the Summerton Site at Brown v. Board of Education National Historical Park and provide start-up funds for potential new parks upon being designated a unit of the national park system. Setting funds aside specifically for potential new parks demonstrates the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to supporting our public lands. The NPS also requests \$250,000 of initial funding to stand up the Japanese American World War II History Network, which was authorized in the FY 2023 Omnibus.

The NPS's commitment to respect and strengthen Indigenous connections, enhance our nation-to-nation relationships, and fully uphold our trust and treaty responsibilities - another top priority for the Service - is reflected in our request for an additional \$7.1 million to support expanded Tribal co-stewardship of park resources, \$2.5 million to support tourism that benefits Tribes, and \$1.0 million to support the management of subsistence uses of NPS lands in Alaska. Also in ONPS, we have requested \$5.0 million to support parks working with the disability community to improve physical and programmatic accessibility. In the National Recreation and Preservation appropriation, we have requested \$3.0 million to implement the recently established African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program, as well as \$1.0 million to address the growing workload of grants management. Finally, within the Historic Preservation Fund, the NPS requests an increase of \$2.5 million to provide dedicated funding for competitive grants to Tribes, Alaska Native Villages and Corporations, and Native Hawaiian Organizations for the preservation and protection of their cultural heritage.

Restoring Operational Capacity in the National Park System – The NPS has lost almost 19 percent of its operations staff capacity since FY 2011. Over the same period, over 30 new units and additional authorized sites have been added to the system, existing units have seen responsibilities grow, and visitation has increased by more than 30 million. To meet this demonstrated and anticipated demand, the FY 2024 budget proposes \$25.4 million and 177 FTE

to add capacity for current operations and to address new, critical, and additional responsibilities at parks and central offices. Within the ONPS appropriation, the budget requests \$17.3 million and 125 FTE to support basic operational capacity needs at all parks, rivers, and trails. \$10.1 million of this request will go specifically to park base increases to increase park capacity, and \$7.2 million will support the U.S. Park Police and NPS Special Agents. An additional \$8.2 million will support new and critical responsibilities at park units and central offices, such as funding facility operation and maintenance personnel to care for the Denali Park Road and establishing a law enforcement ranger program at Fort Smith National Historic Site

Additional Priorities – The 2024 President’s Budget contains several additional increases, totaling \$27.9 million and 21 FTE, that support key NPS priorities, in particular our goal to improve, streamline, and modernize NPS management and business practices, and ensure accountability to ourselves, our partners, and the American people. The NPS requests \$3.0 million to continue to improve our digital tools for visitor services, \$1.55 million to support efforts to improve workflow management and expand Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access within NPS contracting and Financial Assistance functions, and \$2 million for America’s Semiquincentennial Commemoration (America 250). Finally, to recruit and retain quality employees in remote areas with few rental or purchase options, the NPS must be able to provide quality and affordable housing to its permanent and seasonal workforce. To support that need, the NPS has requested an increase of \$7.0 million to support constructing, improving, and modernizing park employee housing.

Conclusion

The President’s FY 2024 budget proposal supports President Biden’s commitment to address the impacts of climate change, respecting and strengthening our connections with underserved communities, and restoring parks’ abilities to protect our shared cultural and natural heritage. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for your continued support of the NPS.

Charles F. "Chuck" Sams III
19th National Park Service Director

Charles F. "Chuck" Sams III was ceremonially sworn in as the 19th director of the National Park Service on Dec. 16, 2021, by Interior Secretary Deb Haaland.

Sams is Cayuse and Walla Walla and is an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in Northeast Oregon, where he grew up. He also has blood ties to the Cocopah Tribe and Yankton Sioux of Fort Peck.

Sams most recently served as Oregon Governor Kate Brown's appointee to the Pacific Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NW Council) where he held a position as a council member from March to December of 2021. Prior to joining the NW Council, he served as executive director for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.



For more than 25 years, Sams has worked in tribal and state government, and in the non-profit natural resource and conservation management field, with an emphasis on the responsibility of strong stewardship for land preservation for this and future generations.

Sams is a veteran of the U.S. Navy where he served as an intelligence specialist. He holds a Bachelor of Science in business administration from Concordia University and a Master of Legal Studies in Indigenous Peoples Law from the University of Oklahoma School of Law. He lives with his wife, Lori Lynn (Reinecke) Sams and their youngest daughter in Alexandria, VA.

LAVARIDGE WIND ENERGY PROJECT

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you for your testimony.

Director Stone-Manning, you are probably anticipating a little question about Lava Ridge, in fact several of them on here.

Magic Valley Energy has proposed the Lava Ridge Wind Project, a 400-unit wind turbine field on 73,000 acres of BLM property adjacent to the Minidoka National Historic Site, 25 miles northeast of Twin Falls, Idaho. If built, it would be one of the largest in the United States.

The proposed turbines would stand at 740 feet tall. To put it in perspective, that height is greater than the Washington Monument or the Seattle Space Needle, with each turbine being comparable to the length of a Boeing 747.

It is safe to say that, if approved, the Lava Ridge Wind Project will forever change the landscape in southern Idaho. Affected farmers, ranchers, Tribes, Japanese-American community, and sportsmen have voiced legitimate objections. As it stands today, the local community predominantly has not shown support for this development. In fact, no one has called me and said they support this.

This project is part of a greater initiative related to renewable energy and the Magic Valley seems to be the target for these developments.

I find myself questioning at this point, will the pressure to increase renewable energy trump the impacts to species and cultural sites?

Question. How would the operation of these turbines and the assorted towers located affect birds of prey and avian populations such as sage grouse?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Chairman Simpson, thank you for the question. And as you know, as the whole subcommittee knows, we are working hard to meet Congress' request that we get 25 gigawatts of renewable energy, and the President's request that we get 25 gigawatts of renewable energy, onto our public lands by 2025.

And we are working hard on the Lava Ridge proposal, listening carefully to your constituents on the ground. And I hope you see that we heard a bunch of the concerns with the draft preferred alternatives that are currently the source of much public conversation in a public comment period.

It is a terrific example about how we all work together. I have worked with Director Sams and his team and Director Williams and her teams on digging in and making sure that we preserve the desolate feel at the Minidoka site, so people understand what it was like to be interred there.

And some of the changes you saw in the draft were because of sage grouse. And we are also looking at the bird of prey issue. And we will continue to refine that work before the final comes out.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you. And I will say that the hearing they held down—BLM held down in Twin Falls was very well attended, and I thought it was very respectful both by BLM and by the people that were there.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Yeah. Glad to hear that.

Mr. SIMPSON. How would project construction, operation, and maintenance affect available livestock forage and subsequent active grazing permits?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Thanks for that question as well, Chair Simpson.

It is my understanding that the company is working with the permittees on how those disruptions could be made up for in an equitable way.

But ultimately you can have cattle grazing and wind development in the same spot. I understand that the construction is a real issue. But ultimately the two can coincide.

Mr. SIMPSON. What is the rough timeline for a decision to be made on large-scale wind and solar energy projects proposed on Bureau of Land Management land?

And I understand, as we have talked about this when you were in my office, that that valley is kind of a target because there is going to be many different proposed wind turbines and stuff in there because of its location and the wind that goes through there.

And actually it is not that the wind blows in Idaho, it is that Utah sucks is what we—no, that was a joke for years and years in Idaho. I am glad Stewart left before I said that.

Anyway, can you remember the question now?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. I can, I think, what are the timelines? So, we are currently—at Lava Ridge, we are currently right in the middle of the NEPA process. We extended the comment period to the end of this week, as I think you know—or actually into April.

And it depends on the amount of comments that we get and the substance of those comments for how long it is going to take us to really properly incorporate them into our final, but I expect something by this fall or this winter.

And you are right, those proposals are coming because there is a transmission line slated there that was Congressionally mandated, and the projects are going to follow those lines.

VIRTUAL FENCING

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah. Thank you for that.

I want to ask one more question before my time is up.

Last week I had the BLM Idaho in my district office—or my D.C. office. One of the initiatives I was interested in learning about that I had never heard about before was the testing of virtual fencing for grazing animal plots.

Could you share with us the extent to which virtual fencing has been plotted in the United States? And are there potential cost savings associated with transition to this? And I understand they are doing some of that in Colorado. Fascinating.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Chairman Simpson, we are in the middle of pilot projects in Colorado, and I think there might be one in Idaho, and I will double check on that for you.

I am really excited about this technology. You know, barbed wire helped settle the West, but we don't necessarily need it anymore now that satellites can literally help guide where cattle go.

And it will help us, I think, get really smart about rotational grazing in a really thoughtful way that is going to help us get

through some of these issues on the landscape because of climate change.

So we are working with our partners, permittees, through pilot projects now, and I hope that it grows.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you.

Ms. Pingree.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF BUDGET CUTS IN FY2024

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here. Thank you for your testimony. It is good to have a chance to speak with all of you, and I appreciate so much the work that you do.

In a recent response to a request from our committee, Secretary Haaland, who was here earlier, provided a letter that highlighted some of the difficult cuts that might be faced if we were to return to fiscal 2022 year funding levels.

So could you each just talk briefly about what you think the impact would be in your department? Maybe we start with Director Williams and just go through.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Ranking Member Pingree.

Returning to the 2022 funding levels would be devastating for the Fish and Wildlife Service for a number of reasons.

First off for our national wildlife refuges, where we are already—we have 800 fewer staff than we did in 2013. We have 309 unstaffed refuges. So to have those cuts would be very difficult to provide the services that I think the communities who hold refuges dear look to use those refuges for.

In addition, the Endangered Species Act requires, for projects undertaken by other Federal agencies, the Service to do section 7 consultation on those projects, and we have had an over 30 percent increase in project reviews.

And I am afraid we would become a bottleneck, and we would slow those projects down from getting delivered on the ground. And so we would have to make employee cuts for that instead of being able to ramp up to meet that growing need.

So those are two very specific examples, but it would be difficult for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you for that.

We just had the EPA director in talking about the consultation on pesticide review, and I know that is already a bottleneck. So we don't want to increase that.

Director Sams.

Mr. SAMS. The proposal would have real and damaging effects on the country and the National Park Service in particular.

Reductions would be difficult for the National Park Service because as an organization we rely heavily on staff. And with nearly 30 percent of Interior's full-time employees, it would require us to do hiring freezes, deep cuts to seasonal employees in our parks, and furloughs of permanent employees, and we could lose as many as 5,000 FTEs from our workforce.

Seeing significant impacts to parks operations, we would end up having to close visitor centers, reduce trash collection and facility cleaning, reduce ranger-led programs, and likely see delays in plowing operations and emergency response time.

We would reduce the number of wildland firefighters across our fire bureaus, including the National Park Service. We have between 1,000 to 1,700 positions total. It would be very devastating to see nearly 30 percent of them just gone.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you so much.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Congresswoman, thank you for the question. Chairman Simpson and I discussed this a little bit in his office as well.

It is my understanding that fiscal year 2022 budget would also have to absorb increases elsewhere, so we could be seeing a 25 percent decrease in the Bureau's budget.

And if that were to be the case, we simply would not be serving the American people, and we would be failing the future.

I hear often, because it is true, that business needs certainty. We are currently working on 68 renewable energy solar projects with 120 coming right behind them. We need people to get those projects analyzed to figure out if they are the right projects for the right places.

Same goes with oil and gas permitting. We take a real hit to that program and the ability to deliver the certainty that is there now.

I am really concerned about what it would do to our fire work and the work we do to prevent fire from harming communities around our lands. The hazardous fuels reduction work, that takes people on the ground doing hard work.

And finally, we have this remarkable opportunity under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act to do real, meaningful restoration on our public lands that will help things like fire resilience, and we just won't be able to get that work done.

Ms. PINGREE. Great. Thank you, everyone.

I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. SIMPSON. Ms. McCollum.

UPDATES ON BUREAU OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The employees of the Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife, National Park Service, you are the guardians. You are the guardians and caretakers of our great national treasures—public lands, waters, natural and cultural resources—and we thank you for your work.

And I am pleased to have worked, along with Chair Pingree and others, over the last few years to support the essential work that you do.

So I am going to ask each of you a question, but I am going to do it in a rolling order.

Director Sams, you mentioned what would happen to the backbone of the Park Service, its employees, but if you could give us a couple examples or some concerns you have about backlog and maintenance of facilities.

Director Stone-Manning, I am concerned that the Bureau is still suffering from lost staff needed to implement its programs. Under the previous administration, BLM's headquarters was relocated from D.C. to Grand Junction, Colorado, without any input from Congress. It was a unilateral decision.

This cost the Bureau 87 percent of its headquarters staff. And these are the people who prepare all the reports that we are asking for and that the public needs. It was 320 positions that were there; 287 did not relocate.

Could you maybe tell us how that workforce replenishment is going and how that has contributed to some of the backlog that you have?

And then to you, Ms. Williams, climate change and its effects on some of the infrastructure projects that we currently have. For example, the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge is increasingly seeing its trail system go under water during parts of the year. And we are also seeing now, in the upper Mississippi, invasive carp.

So could you tell me some of the things in your budget, not only for investing in conservation work for endangered species, but you are starting to develop, because of climate change, a backlog at Minnesota Valley National Refuge. I am sure it is happening elsewhere where you now have new maintenance you have to do.

Mr. SAMS. So I will start. Thank you, Congresswoman.

So first and foremost, the budget balances a continuing commitment to address the maintenance backlog. We have a \$22.3 billion backlog. We have over 75,000 structures and pieces as a bureau.

In addition to the \$1.3 billion from the GAOA Legacy Restoration Fund, the budget proposes over \$970 million to prevent or eliminate deferred maintenance from multiple sources, including line item construction, cyclic maintenance, Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, and Federal Lands Transportation.

If those funds were cut, we would be further put behind in being able to get those. And there is a big expectation from the American people that we make sure these investments are out there. But I can only do that with having the boots on the ground to carry out and implement the Great American Outdoors Act and the LRF funding. And that is with the help of even our consultants and construction folks who are helping us get those done.

And so any major cut to that would further put us back in deferred maintenance and only make this backlog continue to grow for the American people.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Ms. Manning.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Congresswoman, thank you for the question.

I am committed to rebuilding the BLM into the robust agency that the American people deserve and that the future deserves and that our public lands deserve.

And not only did we lose bodies, we lost hundreds of years of institutional knowledge, and that is going to take time to rebuild for all the obvious reasons.

But when it comes to rebuilding, I am starting sort of from the ground up. We have hired 60 HR people, for example, in the last couple of years, so that we can do the work to go get the people we need.

We have got some leadership back in place. More are coming. The move had downstream effects, because some people left State offices to move into the headquarters when it moved West. So those vacancies remain as well.

We are taking advantage of this to say: What workforce do we need for the challenges ahead? So we are doing a workforce analysis. We are also putting together recruiting tools to get out onto our campuses to bring a crop of young Americans into public service.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Representative McCollum. You raise two very important issues for all of us, and that is climate change and climate's impact on our public lands and then also invasive species.

So for climate change, our budget request does include the capacity that I mentioned for our refuge staff to be able to build and rebuild this infrastructure. It does require an all-of-government approach.

There is a task force for the Department of the Interior. We are looking at climate across the board for the Fish and Wildlife Service, but then also very specifically, for example, for the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

We also have specific money for invasive carp and are working with partners and continuing those projects that are very important.

And I would add for invasive species, we know how important it is to address invasive carp, but also early detection and rapid response is something that we are all paying attention to, because if we can prevent the invasive species, we can save that habitat destruction by preventing the invasive species from taking hold.

So thank you for asking those questions.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Kilmer.

JAPANESE AMERICAN CONFINEMENT SITE GRANTS

Mr. KILMER. Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks all for being with us.

Director Sams, I wanted to just direct a few questions for you. And obviously exciting to have a leader who is from the Northwest leading the Park Service, and I want to recognize the significance of you being the first Tribal citizen to hold this role.

As you know, during World War II, thousands of Japanese Americans across our country were forced from their homes as a consequence of an executive order that authorized the exclusion of Japanese Americans.

That was a very dark chapter. Thousands of Japanese Americans from Washington State were incarcerated. In my district on Bainbridge Island, 227 Japanese Americans were forced to leave, boarding a ferry at Eagledale to begin a journey that would put them in internment camps for the duration of the war.

A memorial, which is managed by the Park Service, is now located at that ferry dock, which is a way of commemorating that dark chapter.

I want to thank you for including the Japanese American Confinement Sites Grants in your written testimony. It is, I think, a critical program that supports that memorial and many sites around the country.

I guess I wanted to just ask you to elaborate a bit on the progress made in establishing the competitive criteria and other specifications for that program. I would love to get a sense of how the National Park Service intends to strengthen its work on preserving and interpreting those sites.

There is a keen interest in providing more active visitor experience there on Bainbridge Island. And I would love to just hear how the committee can support that and you in these efforts.

Mr. SAMS. Well, thank you, Representative Kilmer.

So, yes, that is an important part of our history as is looking back on it so we don't ever repeat that mistake again, especially to American citizens of any group or ethnicity in this country.

We continue to work very closely with the Japanese-American community, a number of folks from historical World War II, to ensure that the grants are competitive in your home State, and in Bainbridge and Minidoka, also now at Amache, in figuring out how we continue to preserve these places.

In my own home State, across the Oregon border, we also had one of the encampments.

Being able to ensure that the different voices are being heard. We are losing that generation very quickly. And so we are actively working to ensure that we get that money out the door so that we can capture those stories and those stories can be told in full throat at these places that are so important to tell.

TRIBAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICES

Mr. KILMER. I also wanted to thank you for including the Historic Preservation Fund in your testimony. There are a number of Tribes in the Northwest that have Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, THPOs, that consult with Federal agencies and others to protect and preserve and revitalize places of historical and cultural significance to Tribes.

Can you just say a word or two, Director Sams, about the importance of THPOs for protecting these sites and comment on how the Park Service ensures appropriate Tribal consultation?

Mr. SAMS. You know, I can speak from personal understanding and working very close with our own Tribal Historic Preservation Officer on the Umatilla Indian Reservation, in which we had to work very hard to get back the Kennewick Man, or as we call him, the Ancient One.

Mr. KILMER. Yeah.

Mr. SAMS. And so that work that Tribal Historic Preservation Officers do, not just in my own home territory and your home territory but across the Nation, is critical in order to protect those who passed before us, the funerary objects, and the things that have been taken away and put in museums and held in both public and private collections, and how Tribes can go and reacquire those and work in partnership with those institutions if they wish to display them in such a way that would tell a much fuller story.

And so ensuring that when we looked at the budget we put support in there for more Tribal Historic Preservation Officers each year. We are able to expand that program, which is also part of the Tribes' self-governance, and work in partnership with States and State Historic Preservation Officers.

Mr. KILMER. Great. I see I am on yellow. I have another question, but I will wait until the next round, Mr. Chair. Thanks.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Stewart.

Mr. STEWART. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And for all of you being here.

I had to step out briefly to take a meeting. I wish I had been here because apparently there was an unprovoked attack on my beautiful State by the Chairman. I wish I had been here—

WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROGRAM

Mr. SIMPSON. Well, I am sure that the National Park Service, Mr. Sams, loves Utah. You have got more national parks there than just about anywhere else in this country.

Mr. STEWART. That is true, that is true. We are going to talk about that.

So a couple things, if I could, Director, good news and bad news.

One is, thanks for your help on wild horses. Again, the chairman mentioned that I have become, or at least I was known as being kind of a one-trick pony, if you will—no pun intended—on wild horses because they became a very important issue in my State.

The good news is, is we are making progress. We do need more gathers. I think we need more contraception for the gathered horses. We are worried about the cost of feed. The cost of hay is obviously much, much higher.

We are worried that you will back off on gathering because of that, and I wish you wouldn't. And we will try and get you more money to cover the cost of the additional feed. Because we can't give up the progress that we have made on this so far.

So comments on that, if you would, just broadly, but if not, I will move on.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Congressman, I couldn't agree more. We have made 2 years of really solid progress with the numbers going down. But those are mouths that we need to feed when they are off the range. And the problem I am facing is that it used to cost \$4 per animal per day for the care and feeding of those horses, and now it is \$7.

Mr. STEWART. Yeah.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. So I'm going to need your help.

Mr. STEWART. And we are aware of that. And once again, we just hope—we can't stop gathering because of that. And again, I would encourage the use of contraception because this is a lousy existence for these horses.

I have got some of those corrals, these pastures, they call them, in Utah, and you have got hundreds and hundreds of horses all sitting in a pen that seems to be about as big as this, and they are just standing there in the dust. It is a lousy life for them.

Thanking you for that.

GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT

Now a concern, if I could, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The State is a cooperating agency, a cooperating agency in designing those plans. I know you know that. I would ask you if they were, but the answer is clearly they are.

But they don't feel like they have been treated like a cooperating agency. And when we talk about the grazing rights and other things associated with that, I mean, that is enormously important to the local community.

And the great fear is that they are going to be pushed aside and not considered. And I would ask for your commitment that you will include the State and the local communities who have a stake in this and have a legal and a moral right to be involved with the planning of these new management plans.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Congressman, the State is a cooperator. And I would like to believe we work really closely with Utah. They have been a help to me in understanding the issues in your State, and we are in touch with them on everything from sage grouse to monuments to connectivity and more.

So you have my commitment that we will continue to hear the voices of the State as we put that management plan together.

Mr. STEWART. Well, and I appreciate that. And I notice in your biography you talk about bipartisan legislation, and you are proud of being bipartisan.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. I am.

Mr. STEWART. But there is a difference too between being heard and actually—because we can hear anything, but if you don't actually consider and then adjust plans according to their priorities.

Now, I know that you can't allow the State to write these management plans. You can't allow the counties to write these management plans.

But again, there is a difference just being heard and then feel like, well, they heard me, but then they ignored everything I said.

And so I appreciate you being willing to listen to them, but I also ask you to take the next step, and that is try to accommodate some of their very legitimate concerns.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Congressman, I hear you and I will. We need to marry the concerns of folks on the ground with what the proclamation asks us to do.

Mr. STEWART. Thank you. And we are going to push on that. And we look forward to other conversations about that as well.

Mr. Sams, thank you. I am going to just very quickly in the minute and 8 seconds, I think, as I can see.

VISITOR MANAGEMENT PLANS IN ZION NATIONAL PARK

Talking about visitor management plans in State parks, especially Zion National Park, which is one of my favorite places in the world to be.

We want to keep and protect a good experience for people to go there. If they go to a national park, you don't want it to feel like you just hung out at Walmart for the afternoon, walking through crowded aisles and surrounded by people.

But on the other hand, if you implement some of the reservation plans and reduce the numbers, then you are essentially locking out people from their own backyard, because people in Utah won't have access, and others.

And I would make the same point if I could. And again I will allow you to respond. But the State and the local counties are tech-

nically, statutorily, they are cooperating agencies, they get to have a say in this.

And I will just tell you, this is a very important issue to me. And we are going to push back really, really hard if they come up with numbers that we don't understand the science behind it and if people in Utah feel like they are locked out of going into their own national parks.

Mr. SAMS. Thank you, Congressman Stewart.

So, yeah, so last year I visited over 60 parks across the country and went both in low and high seasons, on the shoulders and on the high seasons, to really try to understand this.

And your particular park I haven't gotten to yet, but visitation at Zion has grown from 2.7 million in 2010 to over 5 million in 2021. It has more than doubled in many places.

The NPS is currently preparing the Visitor Use Management Plan and the accompanying environmental assessment for Zion National Park in cooperation with the State of Utah, the relevant county governments, the town of Springdale, and our partners at the Bureau of Land Management. And we are committed to that.

But I also agree with my staff that what might work at Zion may not work at Acadia. So we are looking at this very closely at what the gateway communities want, what the State wants, to ensure that we recognize we are in somebody's backyard.

Mr. STEWART. Okay and thank you. We will continue to talk with you.

Mr. SAMS. Thank you.

Mr. STEWART. Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Harder.

NUTRIA ERADICATION

Mr. HARDER. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I have a special guest for our hearing. Director Williams, you might recognize my good friend, Nellie the Nutria. It has been a few years since she has appeared at a congressional hearing, but she was able to fit us into her tight schedule.

Nellie the Nutria is a swamp rat, an invasive species. She can grow up to 40 pounds, eat a quarter of her body weight every single day. One female nutria can reproduce 200 offspring a year. These suckers grow exponentially.

They are endemic in Louisiana, as you know well. And if we didn't take action in California, we were at a moment where we would have up to 500,000 of these swamp rats destroying our wetlands, damaging our almond trees, and causing havoc everywhere.

This is one of the few issues in Congress where \$1 saves us \$10 or \$100 by eradicating this invasive species.

However, I was shocked and devastated and disappointed to see that the proposed budget that we are talking about today cuts the nutria eradication budget by almost 61 percent. I don't think that makes a lot of sense. She may look cute right here, but I can tell you she causes a lot of harm in the wetlands.

What are you going to do to help us make sure that we can address this shortfall and ensure that she stays in a museum and not on an almond farm?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Congressman Harder, it is hard to know where to start with that. I am somewhat delighted, but not completely, to be joined by Nellie the Nutria, because she may be interesting here, but I do understand nutria create a serious problem. So it is a serious issue.

An example is, I went to the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and saw how well they have done eradicating nutria in the Delmarva Peninsula. So we know we can do it. It takes money and it takes partners and effort, but we can do that.

So it is very important that we continue our nutria eradication efforts across the country. As I said earlier, with other invasive species, early detection, rapid response is the way to go, but once they are there, we need to eradicate. We are working very closely with APHIS at USDA to address nutria across the country and notably in California.

So we are putting money toward nutria, we are paying attention, and I agree, it is a serious concern.

Mr. HARDER. Thank you. I agree, you are putting money, but you are putting 60 percent less, or planning to put 60 percent less towards it.

Do you think that is going to be enough to fully eradicate nutria from California in the next 3 to 5 years, which was the plan under the bill that we passed unanimously just a few years ago in the House, the Senate, and was signed by the last President?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Congressman Harder, I look forward to getting back to you with more specifics, but it was my understanding it was an earmark in FY2023 and with the timing of the budget coming out, we were unaware of that when we made our budget decisions and it looks like we were cutting this.

So I will get back to you on exactly what we will do going forward, and I believe that was a matter of timing, not a matter of defunding this effort.

I appreciate the question.

[The information follows:]

FUNDING TO ERADICATE NUTRIA

Over the past few years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has been working closely with partners to control invasive nutria in California. We are still optimistic that nutria eradication is possible in the state. Since the first nutria were detected in the state in 2017, the San Juis National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex) has coordinated closely with partners and stakeholders, including the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, County Commissioners, and other Service staff to advance the shared goals of eradicating/controlling nutria, establishing common protocols, and fostering a unified response. The Service meets regularly with CDFW and other partners on an Executive Committee to address overarching issues and coordinated response to eradication.

The Service's National FAC-AIS program is providing approximately \$100,000 annually to CDFW through the State Plans Grant Program, with CDFW directing some of the funding to nutria eradication. In 2021/2022, the Service's Refuges program also allocated about \$300,000–\$350,000 for nutria eradication. With the increased funding provided in the 2023 Enacted budget, the Service is planning to provide an additional \$331,000 in Partners for Fish and Wildlife funding and \$600,000 in Refuges Wildlife and Habitat Management funding to our Pacific Southwest Region. At the requested level, we will be able to continue the base funding level.

Mr. HARDER. Terrific. And I hope that is the case, and we would love to work with you to make sure that this effort is fully funded.

These are an exponential problem. And if you go in Louisiana, you can't go two steps without one of these suckers. We don't want the same thing happening in California.

They have been found in Illinois. Many other States are having nutria problems. And because they may look cute but they do breed so quickly, 200 offspring every single year, if you let even one go off, it causes a problem. You will have to pay millions of dollars more where it could have cost you just a couple cents to get it right the first time.

So we were thrilled to get this bill across the finish line, but it is not going to mean much if we are not going to be able to fully fund these eradication efforts.

I have spent time putting on waders, going into the wetlands myself. I know it works. I know these eradication efforts are successful.

Every single environmental advocate, every single farmer in our district is on board with this effort, and we want to make sure this program is a huge success.

And I want to thank the team that is on the ground. I just want to make sure that the team on the ground is fully funded to get this across the finish line for good.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Mr. Chair, Representative Harder, if I may, I would be delighted to go with you on the ground and with waders on and following the canines that also sniff out for nutria. So I look forward to doing that.

Mr. HARDER. Absolutely. We would love to do it. My hope is, by the time we get there, we don't find any because we have been successful at eradicating this, for sure.

Mr. Chair, you are always welcome to put on some waders and come out into our wetlands and we will maybe even go duck hunting.

Mr. SIMPSON. Can we go duck hunting?

Mr. HARDER. You can go duck hunting as well.

But, no, these are actually, it is a pellet gun. They actually, they capture one, they sterilize it, and then it is called the Judas nutria program. They release them back into the wild to sniff out the den and make sure we get them for good. So that is my understanding.

Mr. SIMPSON. I have often said that I am not going to the Everglades until they get rid of those pythons down there because those will swallow you alive. But I will wait until you eradicate them.

Mr. HARDER. There we go.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thanks for bringing your pet today.

Mr. HARDER. I will get it out of here.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Amodei.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Stone-Manning, I am going to congratulate you first for, when they had to pick between wild horses and those things, you picked wild horses, and I think you did the right thing. No offense to Mr. Harder. We had first pick and we made it last for once.

I won't go into whether the Utah thing was unprovoked, although I do find it interesting that somebody from the Beehive State is talking about contraception, and I will let it go at that.

Mr. SIMPSON. Yeah. It is kind of weird, isn't it?

WILD HORSES ON THE SHELDON ANTELOPE RANGE

Mr. AMODEI. Director Williams, it has historically been Fish and Wildlife's position that, for instance, on the Sheldon National Antelope Range, that wild horses are inconsistent with—and cows too, let's be fair—are inconsistent with the goals of the Service in areas like that, especially when you are talking about sage hen, which is what some of us lesser educated people refer to the sage grouse as.

And so can you just tell me briefly, what is Fish and Wildlife doing to cooperate with BLM on wild horses?

I am trying to start a little fight here in case anybody. Go right ahead.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Mr. Chair and Congressman Amodei, well, I would say, if you want to start a little fight, I am very proud of the work that we all do together, including sorting through some very difficult issues that have been around for a long time. I believe this is one.

REMARKS FROM REPRESENTATIVE MARK AMODEI

Mr. AMODEI. And I appreciate that. And so I will follow-up with you, not during the committee meeting, to talk about how there can be more collaboration.

Don't think you are off the hook, Mr. Sams. Employee housing is something that you mentioned, and it is like you are way ahead of the folks down here in the BLM in terms of employee housing.

So I would just like to ask you if you would share with the folks over at the Bureau how you have—and I know it is a long history, but you have got a long history and there were reasons for it. But if there are lessons to be learned, we dearly need to know how we basically can hire GS-6 through 9s at the present rates and make it affordable for them to live in the communities we ask them to work in, because it ain't right now.

So I will appreciate following up with whoever the appropriate folks are on your staff.

Also, I was pleased to hear you talk about Indian tourism and stuff like that, and I am looking forward to being able to work with you guys. The American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association, which is a Federal entity, is looking for a home, and the home they are looking for is on the old Stewart Indian School complex in western Nevada.

We are going to need some help with Ms. Stone-Manning's folks on saying: here State, give us this part of this campus, not a big part, and so here is how we are going to make the pot right for the State.

But we would really appreciate Park's support in that when we go to the folks in Nevada and say: You need to do this swap so that these folks have a permanent home.

So I look forward to talking with you about that if that is okay.

Ms. Williams, I want to visit with your folks in Sacramento and also in Nevada, and when you are done with those waders in the San Joaquin Valley, come on over to what used to be a fairly dry area.

I want to have a better understanding of transparency in your operation. And it is not because—I am just saying, it seems like a lot of stuff in the last couple years has been kind of a surprise. This has come out of nowhere, and it is something that is going on.

And I will tell you the biggest one—and this hearing isn't long enough for it, thankfully—but when I have got BLM people in the Carson district office looking at a geothermal project that they have gone quite a ways through the process, and it is not like—I am proud of our BLM employees. They got a huge job. They own more than 80 percent of the State—not all BLM.

But you know what? They have got good leadership, they do a good job. Sometimes they make a mistake. When they do, they own it and they move on. So there is my shout-out to your folks, Madam Director.

But when those folks are doing their thing, and it is like for the first time in 9 years we have an emergency listing for the Dixie Valley toad, it is, like, I don't know whether that is right or wrong, it is just a big surprise to me when Fish and Wildlife and BLM, one is going north and one is going south.

So I want to understand how that happened better, not in terms of whether it should or shouldn't have been listed, but how your process works where somebody enters your jurisdiction and gets, for the first time in 9 years—I would imagine it is a pretty compelling story. But at the same time I am like: Well, what did they miss in that district office, in that field office?

So I look forward to contacting you and getting together to set that up, and we will not ask you to put waders on, on anything.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Congressman, I would look forward to that, and I can assure you we are always trying to coordinate the best we can, so there aren't surprises, and there should be transparency. So I would be happy to follow up.

Mr. AMODEI. Good.

Finally, thank you for stopping by my office. I look forward to following up on that.

No editorial comments on you have somebody on your staff who graduated from Valley High School in Las Vegas. We will forgive that. A great product of public education.

And thank you for being here today.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you.

Mr. Zinke.

MANAGING PARK VISITATION

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And believe me, I recognize how difficult at times the job is, and I commend you for taking the job.

So this is one of my favorite pictures. Inscribed in stone above the Yellowstone arch, the Teddy Roosevelt arch is: For the Benefit and Enjoyment of the People.

It is in the Enabling Act. I looked.

Mr. Director, do you also believe in this?

Mr. SAMS. Thank you, Congressman Zinke. Absolutely.

Mr. ZINKE. All right.

Mr. SAMS. These are American's treasures, and all Americans——

Mr. ZINKE. All right.

Mr. SAMS [continuing]. Should be able——

Mr. ZINKE. All right.

Mr. SAMS[continuing]. To enjoy them.

Mr. ZINKE. So this is what I hear around my district: Glacier Park rationing.

You talked about coordination. The State wasn't coordinated with. The county wasn't coordinated with. Great Falls wasn't coordinated with.

And Mr. Chairman, I have a statement from Great Falls, Montana, about Glacier National Park.

And I get it. The population is up. But I also get that over 90 percent is wilderness. So you are limited on how you can manage inside the boundaries. I get there is a lot of traffic, and, you know, the Great American Outdoors Act gave you the funds to fix.

When I came in, two great things: we have a problem with infrastructure. Number one problem across the parks, across our forest was infrastructure. The Great American Outdoors Act solved that. As long as the money goes to infrastructure and not studies, I think we will be in pretty good shape.

But part of the infrastructure is we have got to figure out a transportation system inside the park because those families that grew up and lived, like myself, around and in the Glacier Park were boxed out.

And I appreciate that it went to 3 o'clock. If you would look, sir, at maybe moving it to 1 because the issue is at least it gives an opportunity for people, when they have got the kids, run to the park, do the hike, and come back before it gets dark. And in the morning reservation system, everyone is running for a parking spot, and a lot of locals will double up, triple up, and a lot of locals will go a little further in because they know where to go in. So I urge you to do that.

So a bus system, I am sure there are other parks that do bus systems. It could be EV. It could be whatever, but we need to manage the people and manage our parks better. Would you agree?

Mr. SAMS. Congressman Zinke, absolutely.

And thanks for touring with me a couple weeks ago over at the Lincoln.

Yes. And our conversation was about EV and other buses. I agree with you 100 percent. We have got to figure this out.

And, of course, at Glacier, because of some of those limitations, we are putting the money forward to figure out and tackle that. We have some of our best social scientists looking at how we can better time those entries in because denying people who have traveled a long way to get there is not working.

Mr. ZINKE. If you don't hook a kid by—the statistics were compelling. If you don't hook a young adult by the time he is 14 or so, you know, they don't develop the deep love for the land. They might get it out of statistics, you know, a little later, but in order

to hook them hard, statistically, you have to have an experience when you are younger in the parks.

And the parks to a degree—this is why, to a degree, we have them. So I look forward to working with you.

And also, we talked about it, but just on the record, we are very sensitive about it. If you look at one, it would be a big, big help, and we will work you through, you know, along this committee, how to look at a longer-term plan.

GREATER YELLOWSTONE GRIZZLY BEARS

Grizzly bears. Boy, you know, when I was Secretary, we looked at the grizzly bears. And in 2005, then the director put a—and we are talking about the Greater Yellowstone grizzly. I think the argument on the Greater Yellowstone grizzly, the research is compelling. The species has recovered. It has brilliantly recovered. I think we should celebrate and bring those sources, resources to other species that are challenged.

Does your directory still support the 2005 study that says the grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem have recovered and should be a candidate to remove from the list?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Mr. Chair and Congressman Zinke, the Fish and Wildlife Service recently, or in 2021, completed a 5-year review of the status of grizzly bears.

Then also, last year we received petitions from the States of Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho to delist grizzly bears, and we issued positive findings for the Montana and Wyoming petitions, which then trigger the next step under the Endangered Species Act, which is a status review that would be the next step toward delisting.

I was the——

Mr. ZINKE. And you know, also, Congress has the authority. So there is a little bill floating around that can take that track, and Congress has a bill within House resources to compel you. I understand you are going to have lawsuits and stuff like that, but if you would commit to work with us on it, because I think we are going in the same direction.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Mr. Chair and Congressman Zinke, I am aware of those bills and understand there was a hearing last week, in which my Deputy Director testified on those bills.

And yes, I was the Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks when those previous bills went through. I am very aware of this issue, care very much about grizzly bears and their impacts on the people who live on the ground.

Mr. ZINKE. I know you have experience, and thank you.

Finally, Director Manning. Good to see you.

LOCATION OF BLM OPERATIONS

So what percentage of BLM-managed property is in Washington, D.C. other than a desk, perhaps?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Our closest facility is at Meadowood——

Mr. ZINKE. Not very much.

Ms. STONE-MANNING [continuing]. Which is in Virginia.

Mr. ZINKE. What would you think the percentage is, let's say, west of Mississippi. Let's say out west. What do you think the percentage is?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Congressman, as I like to say, the vast majority of our holdings—

Mr. ZINKE. I think the vast majority would be an understatement.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. As is our staff. Over 97 percent of our staff is in the West.

Mr. ZINKE. So when we did move—well, I will ask you this: What is the mission of BLM? Is it to—I will give you multiple choice. Is it to preserve the health, diversity, and the future of our lands that are under your charge? Or is it to deliver reports to Congress?

Exactly.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Congressman, we have a beautiful mission to sustain the health and productivity of our public lands and that requires—

Mr. ZINKE. I am reading the mission. And you know what? It doesn't say report to Congress, deliver a report to Congress at all. It says do your work. And I think, Madam, your work is out in the West.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Congressman, with due respect, my work is sitting across the table from you.

Mr. ZINKE. Today it is.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. And in order to serve the people who are doing the real work, right—we, at the headquarters, we serve the people on the ground, and in order to do that work and serve them well, the Secretary believes, as I believe, that we need leadership here to work with our colleagues.

When the Dixie Valley toad—

Mr. ZINKE. So is there a reason why you only had 200 and some people want to come back from the West? Could it be, perhaps, that we did do a study and look at quality of life? Because they are trying to hire an E or a GS-6 or 7.

I can tell you from experience, D.C. is a little rough. You know, a lot of the young people that want to work for the BLM, or Park Service, they don't want to work in D.C. You know where they want to work? In the field.

It is amazing the U.S. Geological Survey loves to do science in the field. Park ranger's love to do science in the field. BLM loves the great outdoor spaces.

BLM MINING PROGRAMS

So having said that, also Secretary Haaland said there were 20 mines that were permitted. Do you know how many mines of those that are of the 20 are gravel pits?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Congressman, it is my understanding that it was 20 mines that were either permitted or expanded.

Mr. ZINKE. Permitted and expanded or expanded?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Permitted, modified, or—

Mr. ZINKE. Okay. She said permitted.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Permitted, modified, or expanded and—

Mr. ZINKE. Do you know how many were gravel pits?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. I don't know the answer to that question, but I will get it to you and——

Mr. ZINKE. Because gravel pits would be part of that. You are in charge of gravel pits as well, right?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. I know I am, yes.

Mr. ZINKE. Okay.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Well, I am not. I mean, the people on the ground are.

Mr. ZINKE. See, out there.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. But I think it is very important to impart that we are committed. The President is committed to mining critical minerals that are going to be necessary for the energy transmission in this country.

Mr. ZINKE. Are you aware it will take 2000 percent increase in 20 years to catch up of where we are today in critical minerals?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Well, that is why I am so happy that——

Mr. ZINKE. Are you aware of that?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. That particular statistic, I wasn't. I know that——

Mr. ZINKE. Are you aware that China owns 62 percent of the critical minerals necessary for EV?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. I heard that. I heard that from you yesterday.

What I am really pleased about is that we are beginning to solve the problem. Earlier this month, we issued a notice to proceed for the Thacker Pass Mine. When it is up and running, it will produce 20 percent of the lithium that this Nation needs.

Coming right on its heels, we are working really hard on the Rhyolite Ridge Project. We are taking seriously the President's call——

Mr. ZINKE. Can you give me a list of the 20?

And last question really quick.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. I will.

[The information follows:]

Mines Permitted, Modified, or Expanded

Mining Plans of Operation Authorized by the BLM 1/20/2021 - 05/03/2023

State	Owner/Operator Name	Date Operations/Modifications Authorized (second date captures modification authorizations)	Targeted Mineral(s)
Alaska	GUILES ANNA COUP CINDY COUP JOSEPH BERRINGER ASH	9/17/2009 9/30/2021	Gold
Alaska	GREENE STEPHEN A	9/30/2011 5/11/2021	Gold
Alaska	BONACOR JOHN LESLIE ORLEN	7/22/2021	Gold
Alaska	NORDEEN KARL	5/27/2021	Gold
Alaska	SHOREY TIMOTHY A	4/8/2021	Gold
Alaska	HOTTINGER DOROTHY (SUE) CRARY WALTER TRAVIS SCOTT	5/6/2021	Gold
Alaska	Mystery Creek Resources, Inc	11/16/2020 09/16/2021	Gold
Alaska	Joseph Rojas	6/9/2022	Gold
Alaska	Ralph Hamm	3/15/2023	Gold
Alaska	COUP JOSEPH BERRINGER ASH	3/17/2023	Gold
Arizona	ANTLER OPERATIONS INC	2/8/2023	Zinc
California	US GYPSUM CO	2/7/2022	Gypsum
California	GLACIAL MINERALS INC	8/17/2022	Gold
California	ROACH JOHN M	9/22/2022	Gold
Idaho	TAYLOR ROBERT	7/14/2021 7/14/2022	Gold
Idaho	TREASURE CANYON CALCIUM INC	8/11/2022	limestone
Idaho	SHULL JASON	9/26/2022	Gemstone
Nevada	WK MINING (USA) LTD	2/19/2021	Gold
Nevada	BEACH MINING LLC	7/6/2021	Gold

State	Owner/Operator Name	Date Operations/Modifications Authorized (second date captures modification authorizations)	Targeted Mineral(s)
Nevada	PURE ENERGY MINERALS LTD SCHLUMBERGER TECHNOLOGY CORP	7/28/2021 12/16/2021	Lithium
Nevada	WK MINING (USA) LTD WK-ALLIED HASBROUK LLC	10/14/2016 7/30/2021	Gold
Nevada	WALKER LANE MINERALS CORP	5/21/2018 9/16/2021	Gold
Nevada	GEMFIELD RESOURCES LLC	7/29/2019 9/27/2021	Gold
Nevada	GULLSIL, LLC	10/5/2021	Gold
Nevada	SIO2 PARTNERS LLC	3/14/2022	Gemstone
Nevada	HALLELUJAH PARTNERS LLC	3/24/2022	Gemstone
Nevada	PANKOW JERRY	8/10/2022	Gold
Nevada	LITHIUM NEVADA CORP	2/22/2023	Lithium
Utah	ROCK LOVERS LLC	12/1/2021	Gemstone
Wyoming	WILSON BROTHERS CONSTRCTN INC	9/24/2021	Bentonite Clay
Wyoming	WILSON BROTHERS CONSTRCTN INC	9/24/2021	Bentonite Clay

Note: The BLM process for mineral development is considered authorized by the agency after the mining plan has been approved and the BLM receives an acceptable financial guarantee from the operator/claimant. This allows the operator/claimant to proceed with mining/milling and beneficiation of the ores, providing they have all the other necessary state and federal permits that may be required.

BISON RESTORATION

Mr. ZINKE. Bison always comes up. Boy, it comes up. Hot topic in Montana. And you had said that you, your department, wants to work with local communities, State, because it is such a—and I think by law it is a coordinated authority.

But the Secretary issued this Order 3410, restoration of bison on prairie grasslands. And what is interesting is the State of Montana is excluded from that. The State is.

Do you support excluding Montana from the State's discussion of bison on Montana? Or was that an oversight we need to correct and probably have stock growers and some stakeholders in there that this adversely might affect?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Congressman, it is my understanding that any reintroduction of bison—

Mr. ZINKE. But should the State have a say?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Well, any reintroduction of wild bison to the landscape would go through a NEPA process, and of course the State would be a cooperator in that.

Mr. ZINKE. Well, here is the Secretary demanding restoration of bison and the prairie lands. It is a group, right? It is a group that gives advice. Don't you think the States should have—be a part of that group?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. I believe that she was directing the Federal family to work together to bring these ideas to the public.

Mr. ZINKE. She had latitude.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you.

Let me ask you a couple questions I have got going here.

Director Williams, this takes an introduction before the question. Approximately, 360 million acres, or nearly 70 percent of working forests in the U.S. are on private land, and access to these private forests is vital for wildlife conservation given over 60 percent of at-risk species rely on privately-owned forest lands.

Collaboration between private forest owners and State and Federal agencies has proven to drive conservation outcomes, often precluding the need for regulatory actions in aiding in species recovery efforts. Proactive collaborative conservation efforts produce win-win outcomes for at-risk and listed species for regulatory and conservation communities and for private landowners, private forest owners.

For example, one example of a highly successive collaborative between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, States, and private forest owners is the wildlife conservation initiative carried out by the National Alliance for Forest Owners and its many Federal, State, and local partners.

The WCI relies on modern sustainable forest management, the sustainable cycle of growth, harvest, and regrowth to provide habitat for at-risk listed and other rare species.

Could you tell me a little bit more about how the Wildlife Conservation Initiative is helping utilize collaborative conservation to

help conserve wildlife on private lands to prevent regulatory action?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Yes.

Chairman Simpson, I am incredibly grateful and proud of our work with Mr. Tenny and Mr. Bullocks, specifically, from the National Alliance of Forest Owners. Also, the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement. They have been absolute leaders in collaborative conservation, and I learn from them every day.

Just last week I was in St. Louis, Missouri celebrating signing an MOU with NAFO and to put in place this wildlife conservation initiative. And we did that at the North American Conference on Wildlife Conservation with all of the other State agencies across the country.

So they are leaders, and we have worked well with them over the years in developing these collaborative approaches, which I think are the future of conservation.

So I am pleased you asked.

Mr. SIMPSON. I appreciate that comment, and I think you are right. That is one of the reasons, frankly, that I have put no listing the sage grouse in several bills. Not because I don't care about sage grouse, but right now, we have got the States, we have got private landowners, and we have got the Federal Government working together.

And as soon as you list it—and I understand that there are sometimes you have to list the species, but as soon as you list sage grouse, all of a sudden the private landowners are, like, I am out of here. You won't get my cooperation anymore.

So as long as we can keep the States and the private landowners and the Federal Government working together to preserve sage grouse habitat, I think we will get further ahead.

I will give you another example. There is an organization called the Peregrine Fund in Idaho. It works out of the Birds of Prey area out there. If you have never been out there, you need to go look at it. It is amazing the birds that they help recover, and they help recover them not through litigation, not through Endangered Species Act, but by working privately with organizations.

And when I talked to them, they said the biggest danger to bird populations is lead shot or lead bullets to deer and stuff because then they eat the deer and lead gets in them and that kind of stuff.

And I said, so are you pushing legislation to ban lead bullets, lead shot? And they said, no. They said, we don't push that kind of stuff. We find we have much greater success going to the hunting organizations and talking to people, showing them what the effect is and stuff. We have much greater effect doing that and much greater cooperation than we would if we tried to mandate steel shot and stuff.

So it is, I think, a way in the future how we can better manage for some of these listed and endangered species.

PROGRAM AUTHORIZATIONS

You mentioned that it is the 50th year of the Endangered Species Act. When was the last time it was reauthorized?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Mr. Chair, I don't know that. I am embarrassed that I don't know that, because I have been a long-time student and teacher of wildlife law. So I don't know the answer to that.

Mr. SIMPSON. I think it has been like 30, 35 years now.

Mr. ZINKE. I think you were a freshman, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. It was literally—I brought a bill down an Interior bill when I was chairman before. So that was like 9 years ago or so, 7 or 8 years ago. And I brought it down with the chairman of the Resources Committee at the time, Doc Hastings from Washington. It defunded, or put no funding in for endangered species or critical habitat management because we were trying to make a point.

At that time, it had been 23 years since the Endangered Species Act had been reauthorized, and we knew that there would be an amendment to put the money in. That is okay. We expected that, you know. If not, we would have put it in, in conference. But we were trying to make the point that the authorizing committees needed to do their job.

And even at the time, Secretary Salazar told me there are some changes that need to be made to the Endangered Species Act. We have changes. You write a bill. You put it before the committee, and let amendments be offered and all that kind of stuff. That's how you do reauthorizations.

But it is not the new stuff that you get all the credit for and everything, and so, consequently, what you have got—and I don't know how it is going to work this year—but you have got a bill that much, in fact, all of the 12 bills—you can go through them—many of the programs in there are not authorized or the authorization has expired.

We, technically, are not supposed to fund anything that is not authorized. So what would you do—and traditionally, they waived that rule when they do a rule and bring it to the floor.

What are you going to do if the Rules Committee says, No, we are not going to waive that provision? I mean, the whole State Department I think is unauthorized. Or expired is a better way to say it.

Mr. ZINKE. Department of Energy.

Mr. SIMPSON. Most senior programs.

Mr. ZINKE. Department of Energy.

Mr. SIMPSON. Department of Energy. I mean, authorization has just expired. And the reason you put them in is so that you will review them to see how they are working and see if changes need to be made.

But we don't do that, and that is a challenge I think for both Republicans and Democrats because there are—over time, there are things that you can do better if you take the time to look at it.

ADAPTING TO INCREASED PARK VISITATION

What you and Congressman Zinke were talking about, you and I talked about at my office. We love our national parks to death. We get so many visitors, and I understand that. I love our national parks.

But the transportation in these—you know, when I was first elected to Congress, the big conflict was at Yellowstone and snow

machines. And literally, you would go to the west gate, and before they would open up, there would be a blue haze, literally. It was amazing. Probably shouldn't have been breathing it, but there were so many private snow machines that went in there.

And it was very, very controversial when they came up with the plan to have guided snow machines. They have to be certain types that don't emit as much exhaust.

And then they have done a lot of the tour buses, however they do that with snow machines and stuff. But it has worked out great since then. But the west Yellowstone community was, you are going to destroy our economy, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Change is hard, and some of these parks we have got to find a better way to do it. Yosemite is—you know, you send all of these cars down there emitting exhaust and stuff. I guess there still are exhaust cars on the road. But emitting all of the exhaust and stuff to go through.

Normally, if you go through Yellowstone Park late at night, or late October, you can drive through it in pretty quick time. You go through it in the middle of June. You would be lucky—you had better have a sleeping bag with you to get from one side of the park to the other because there are so many people.

And as that says, it is for the benefit and enjoyment of the people, and that is why we need to maintain it in its current state, so that people in future generations can enjoy it. But that is going to take some tough decisions and some really hard talking with local communities and other things to actually get it done.

But I appreciate the job that you do, with all of you. I have a couple other questions that we will submit for the record on the Great American Outdoors Act and how we are using it and how we are going to address the backlog.

And also, on the August 21 BLM issued a Federal registry notice announcing that it would reinstate consideration of whether 10-million-acre mineral withdrawal to conserve priority sage grouse habitat is necessary.

So we will submit these for the record so that you can give us a written statement on that, if you don't mind. Okay?

Ms. Pingree.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and really also for this conversation about our national parks. We do love them to death. That is a good point.

And when we get you to visit Acadia, you will see——

Mr. SIMPSON. I want to get up there.

Ms. PINGREE. We are looking forward to it, and it might be the most visited park on the east coast anyway in a very small land area, particularly when you compare it to your western parts.

Mr. ZINKE. Smoky. Smoky Mountains.

Ms. PINGREE. Oh, so close. We were so close to being first.

But I have to say they have done some interesting innovation in trying to—I mean, just the pathway to get to the top of Cadillac Mountain, which is what everybody wants to do, was so lined with cars. You know, then the tour buses were trying to get up there. It was just a nightmare, and it ruined, really, the visitor experience.

And they have done a great job thinking about parking and, same thing, visitor buses bringing people in. It is not easy. Nobody likes the change, but I appreciate the work that is going on at the national parks, and I know you will continue to do more about managing the visitor experience.

And I was really pleased to hear you, Director Sams, talk a little bit about the importance of housing. That is a big issue. I know they are dealing with that all the time in the National Park Service in our State.

TRIBAL CO-STEWARDSHIP

But I just wanted to have you reiterate a little bit. You and I got a chance to talk about this briefly, but the National Park Service policy to strengthen Tribal co-stewardship and help park managers facilitate and support working relationships with Tribes.

And you mentioned one, perhaps, that was going on with the Wabanaki Nation on sweetgrass. Do you want to just elaborate? I know you talked about some of the THPO things, but just the work that is going on. I think that is such a good thing, and I appreciate your emphasis on that.

Mr. SAMS. Thank you, Ranking Member Pingree.

So, yes. You know, I spent 30 years outside the organization, mostly throwing rocks at the Department of Interior. So on the inside, I am trying to be a little more careful.

That being said is, you know, really fulfilling our trust responsibility. The Biden-Harris Administration and the Secretary are very serious about that.

And we are seeing more engagement with Tribes. We currently have 35 agreements with Tribes across the country in 35 different parks in which we are doing a myriad of things, everything from plant propagation at Acadia, working with the Wabanaki Tribe and using their traditional knowledge and being able to do the rotation of plants in a way that will be sustainable, and also adapting to the climate change that we are seeing in the parks.

Everything to working with 11 Tribes out in Grand Canyon, and everything from economic development, looking at how we are doing concessions with them, to how are we doing in restoring water in the Colorado Basin? How is that water being shared? And how can we work in partnership to ensure the water is there in order to support the fish and other aquatic wildlife and the sage areas along the way.

And so these programs that we are doing, and since the Secretarial Order, followed by Director's memoranda really outlined that trust responsibility. What I am most excited about is seeing our younger staff really grabbing onto that and wanting to figure out how to work more closely with Tribes across—not just telling their story, but to actually truly partner with them.

We know that the sophistication of some Tribes is very advanced and some are needing some help. That is why we are putting in that request to help them get to where they need to be so that their knowledge is being put into the ground to help us to sustain these places that have been here since time immemorial. And those future generations will also get a chance to enjoy them.

Ms. PINGREE. That is great. Well, I look forward to following your work on that.

A couple of other quick questions.

E-PERMITTING SYSTEM

Director Williams, the budget proposes an increase for ePermitting and to move it from International Affairs to a new budget line. I am just curious about why the change is needed. And how will the increased funding requested be used?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you for asking that.

Ranking Member Pingree, the ePermitting system, because it delivers the same function, I think it is much more effective and makes more sense to have it all be under one place. I think it has been successful but not fully staffed, and so I think we can build it out with better software and with better capacity.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you.

Ms. WILLIAMS. I think it is an exciting opportunity for us.

Ms. PINGREE. Good.

And we look forward to having you come to Maine as well when we can. You are all welcome, of course.

And I think you were there just last summer. So come back.

ONSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY PERMITTING

And Director Stone-Manning, the budget prioritizes increasing renewable energy projects, and you were addressing some of that in the member questions. I am just curious if you want to talk a little bit more about how to accelerate the permitting for what you are doing. You talked about the number of solar projects that need to be permitted and come online.

So how are you accomplishing that? Is that just a staffing issue, or is there more to it?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Thank you for the question, Congresswoman.

It is a staffing issue mostly, and a time issue. There is a bit of a rush on our public lands for renewable energy development. I am really pleased that we permitted 8½ gigawatts in the last 2 years.

There are 68 projects that we are working on now. There are five major transmission lines that we are working on to get that power to the people who need it. And then, there are roughly 120 projects waiting to come in behind that, and what that requires is people.

And so, I am working hard. That is all part of the rebuilding of the Bureau, and I am working hard to try and build that up. And as Director Sams noted, there are some challenges. The West has been discovered, and it is an expensive place to live in now.

So we are working closely at figuring out everything from retention bonuses to recruitment bonuses to housing and figuring out if there is a way that we can do an all-of-government approach to help solve this problem so that people can stay in public service and deliver these kinds of projects on the ground.

Ms. PINGREE. Great.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Zinke.

TRANSPORTATION IN THE PARKS

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Parks. And I hate to say when I was Secretary. It seems like a long time ago. We looked at taking the red bus of Glacier and redoing it. Because if you are going to have transportation within the park system, it has to be enriching, rather than driving around with a school bus, right. And you want the transportation to have an experience that, again, is an enriching experience to the park.

So we looked at red buses because they were cool but upgrade them, you know, to some transportation. We looked at maybe Tesla doing a drive train and then some cars you can expand or contract according to the need and time of year and all that kind of stuff.

The Great Northern—or the Great American Outdoors Act had provisions in there to begin to look at prototypes, testing, those type of things. Are you involved in that?

Mr. SAMS. Thank you, Congressman Zinke.

Yes. We have been looking at using non-GAOA LRF funds for different types of EVs, different types of transportation, looking at everything from the red buses to the yellow buses and how can we retrofit them in a way to provide that enhanced visitor experience, one that dates back to 30, 40 years ago, 50 years ago, 60 years ago, and figuring out how new technology can be retrofitted in those so that we can use it and give the visitor experience.

Mr. ZINKE. I would be interested to swing by sometime and talk to your staff, just out of interest, for where you sit on it.

PLANNING FOR ENERGY TRANSITION

So critical minerals. Boy, it seems to be in the discussion on everyone's lips. So the way I look at it, I am all of the above, but it has to be affordable, reliable, and abundant.

So EV world. We know that Russia, China, and perhaps our adversaries, have the market share of materials, whether it is lithium, whether it is cobalt. We have problems of supply chain about children mining cobalt. And it is true that children are mining cobalt.

So we have a supply chain about how much. And the statistic I heard, I think it came from the U.S. Geological Survey, as a matter of fact, it would take about a 2000 percent increase over 20 years just to reach where we are today. So we have the supply chain.

And even if we get a permit and lithium at 30 percent, it is not enough of what the demand is.

And then the other side of it is what do you do when a battery's life cycle is done? What do we do with this? Right now, 90 percent of solar cells are being dumped in landfills, and solar cells primarily are being sourced from China. The chips and the technology components have primarily been sourced to China.

And it seems at the moment, we are trading dependence on fossil fuels to a greater vulnerability and dependence on China. And it is very concerning for me, both on the military side, but also the EV. We are blindly going on a cliff, and we haven't quite figured out what we are going to do with the batteries.

And some of us are old enough to remember the nuclear program. Just when we decided we would invest in Yucca, I think the

chairman was saying about \$12 or \$14 billion over 10 years, and just when we decided we are going to turn it on, something happens. And now, we have distributed storage of nuclear material at some 128 sites across the country.

So is there a plan that you know of, of what are we going to do? And are we going to put the toxins on Federal land? Or what are we going to do? Because right now we can't even get rid of the windmill blades. We are struggling to find a hole deep enough for it.

And, oh, by the way, wind does kill a lot of birds. Would you agree it is at least 750,000 a year, and at least 1,200 raptures of the eagles and all of that in there? You would? You do recognize that wind and everything has a cost, right?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Everything we do as humans has a cost, I agree with that.

Mr. ZINKE. So what is the plan? Because I love plans. Is there a plan for a national depository, repository for this material? Or are we just pushing it, and we will try to figure it out when we get there?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Congressman, thanks for the question.

And, you know, we have learned from the mistakes of the past, right. We have got \$4.7 billion from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to go clean up orphaned oil and gas wells that are across our landscape, and that won't be enough to get the whole job done.

So I am interested in what this body can do to help chart a cleaner future for our country. The President is very clear that—

Mr. ZINKE. Is there a plan right now? Is there a plan on what to do with the toxins and the batteries, or is it developing?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Congressman, I think that we would have to ask the Department of Energy that question. It is out of the BLM's purview, but I would be happy to get you in touch with the right person.

Mr. ZINKE. BLM could very well get saddled with it, right? I assume it is a government agency, and I assume the CEQ is aware of this. I assume you guys, the body talks.

The bottom line is, you don't know of any plan at the moment. We would have to call and talk to the Department of Energy or someone in the CEQ?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Because it is out of the BLM purview, I am not aware of a plan, but I do have—

Mr. ZINKE. Your part is just to build it. And they are going to deal with it some other time.

Ms. STONE-MANNING. And I do have great faith in the American people to learn from the mistakes of the past.

Mr. ZINKE. Let's make sure we don't repeat them again.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Kilmer.

EUROPEAN GREEN CRABS

Mr. KILMER. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Director Williams, since everyone else has invited you into hip waders, I feel like I should do the same.

I went out this summer with a group hoping not to find European green crabs in the Puget Sound, and unfortunately, we were successful in finding them, which, on one hand, I was glad to see what one looked like; and on the downside, there were a whole bunch of them in a place they are not supposed to be.

They are consuming microalgae and clams and oysters and a real threat to Tribal treaty rights, a real threat to our shellfish industry, a real threat to other native species. And like all of these other invasive species, they are growing like gang busters and have exponential growth.

Our governor, Governor Inslee, did an emergency order last year. I just want to get a sense of what Fish and Wildlife is doing to minimize the spread and the destruction of the European green crab and how can this committee help?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you for asking that question, Congressman Kilmer. And yes, I share the concerns about European green crab and controlling their impacts.

At the moment, NOAA is the primary agency over green crab, but that does not mean that the Fish and Wildlife Service is abdicating responsibility and engagement in any way. We are very much a part of the groups, and the stakeholders are responding.

And we, too, are contributing to a draft national control plan that should be out by the end of April. So that is soon. And we have been working hand in hand with NOAA and the State, as you say, to address the green crab.

But I wish I had an answer. Like so many invasive species, once they have taken hold, it is really hard to eradicate them. So we are also taking on-the-ground actions for ourselves as well. I mean, using our own money, including—because of the impact to Tribal treaty rights. I mean, we recognize that.

We have provided \$82,000 to the Makah Tribe, and I know we also have been working with USGS in trying to find a way to have early detection so that we can detect them before they spread farther than they are.

But we share concerns with you on this issue and are doing everything we can in concert with our partners.

Mr. KILMER. Great. I am eager to help. And certainly, as the action plan rolls out, we would love to get a brief from you or NOAA.

Ms. WILLIAMS. I am happy to do that.

Mr. KILMER. Great.

Thanks, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you.

And thank you all for being here. We got through a whole hearing without talking about quagga mussels. I just had to throw that term out there. It is something we are trying to keep out of Idaho and the Pacific Northwest and that kind of stuff. It was interesting a couple years ago.

You know they have the wash stations for the boats. They found quagga mussels on one of them. It happened to be a Fish and Wildlife Service boat that was coming in. But, I mean, these wash stations do a good job.

The other thing I would just note is you mentioned the 25 gigawatts of power, that our goal is by when?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. 2025.

FUTURE OF ENERGY

Mr. SIMPSON. 2025. And sometimes I get the idea—we talk so much about this, that wind and solar and battery power is going to be our future, and that is not going to cover the energy necessary in this country, and it is intermittent energy. What you have got to have is firm power, so that when you turn on your light, your light goes on, and you can ramp it up and down as the need, you know, as the need is required.

I find it interesting that in this and other budgets in the Administration's proposal, they want to increase funding for wind and all that kind of stuff and solar and everything else, but when you look at the budget, they decreased by about \$300 million any nuclear energy.

If you are ever going to get to zero carbon, nuclear energy is an essential part of it. So I just find that interesting in the whole Administration. I know that is not part of your bailiwick. So I thought I would just bring that up while we were talking about wind and solar.

But, again, thank you for being here today. We look forward to working with you over the coming months as we try to put together a budget and see where we end up. Okay?

Ms. STONE-MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIMPSON. The committee stands adjourned.

[Questions and answers submitted for the record follow:]

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
The Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and
National Park Service's FY 2024 Budget Request Hearing
March 29, 2023

Questions from Chairman Simpson:

Helium

Simpson Q1: As the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) prepares to move the Federal Helium Reserve (FHR) into private hands, a number of issues have come to light that need to be resolved to ensure the continued safe and reliable U.S. supply of helium. These include incomplete pipeline rights-of-way determination and non-compliance with certain federal and state laws and regulations for which the federal government was exempt. If not resolved, each of these issues is likely to result in the shutdown of the FHR for an indefinite period once a private owner takes possession, thus endangering the reliable supply of helium we need. Given the lack of easily accessible sources of helium internationally, including the removal of access to Russian-produced helium over the past year, ensuring a strong domestic helium supply is a key national security issue, as well.

What is BLM's plan to ensure that the safe and reliable U.S. supply of helium is not interrupted, will BLM entertain a delay in the sale of the FHR until all issues – including the disposition of all privately owned helium held in the FHR – are resolved?

Response: The safe and reliable delivery of helium through the Federal Helium System (FHS) is a top priority for the BLM. To that end, the BLM has contracted out the operation of the Crude Helium Enrichment Unit and the operation and maintenance of the pipeline and well field. This has allowed safe operation of the system and greater consistency in the delivery of helium as the BLM works with the General Services Administration (GSA) to implement the requirements of the Helium Stewardship Act to sell the FHS. In addition, the BLM holds storage contracts with 11 private entities. Those contracts will be assignable to the successful bidder, requiring them to continue to deliver helium.

The BLM has worked with Federal and State agencies such as the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, and the Texas Railroad Commission to determine regulatory compliance for future operations. All agencies have declined regulatory oversight of the FHS and its associated pipeline, primarily due to the inert, noncombustible nature of the pipeline content. As long as future owners do not change the content of the pipeline, they would also be exempt from regulation. The BLM has also located and made available through GSA's website all legal descriptions, locations, case numbers for condemnations, and easement recordation information for the Government-held helium pipeline

easements. The Government will convey these easements through quitclaim or assignment without warranty at the time of conveyance.

The BLM continues to make every effort to comply with the statutory directive in the Helium Stewardship Act to sell the FHS and is working diligently to move forward with the sale.

Energy Permitting

Simpson Q2: The Departmental Highlights for the FY 2024 budget said the “BLM is processing 68 priority utility-scale onshore clean energy projects proposed on public lands in the western United States, including solar, wind, geothermal, and associated interconnect transmission line projects that are vital to grid connection.” It also stated that the “BLM has over 120 pending applications for solar and wind development for processing when transmission capacity is available.” Is the Department providing the same level of priority to process permit applications from other industries, such as extractive industries like coal and minerals projects?

Response: The Administration recognizes the importance of sustainable and responsible energy development on public lands as we transition to a clean energy future. In addition to processing renewable energy projects, since January 2021, the BLM has approved over 7,000 new drilling permits and over 30 new mines or mine modifications/expansions.

BLM is committed to ensuring the Federal minerals programs are working in the best interest of the American taxpayer, and that mining is done in the right way and in the right places. BLM actively participates in the Interagency Working Group on Mining Laws, Regulations, and Permitting that was formed following the review directed by Executive Order 14017, America’s Supply Chains. This Working Group has conducted an exhaustive amount of outreach with the public, the mining industry, Tribes, State and local governments, legal and academic experts, and others over the past year. This feedback has informed efforts that will identify and develop reforms of mining practices to better serve communities and taxpayers while meeting the country’s need for minerals.

Great American Outdoors Act (for Director Sams)

Simpson Q3: The National Park Service receives more Legacy Restoration Funding than any other bureau - \$1.3 billion per year out of the total \$1.9 billion. When Congress was working to pass the Great American Outdoors Act in 2020, we were looking at \$12 billion in deferred maintenance at the Park Service. However, since then, the Park Service underwent a process of re-evaluating what it considers deferred maintenance.

Please explain how and why the Park Service changed its classification of deferred maintenance and why this new way makes more sense. Please provide details on the current definition of deferred maintenance and how it differs from the previous definition.

Response: The National Park Service initiated Project revAMP in September of 2017 to streamline the NPS asset management by evaluating business processes, identifying gaps, and conducting business more efficiently and consistently across the organization. This internal

evaluation identified challenges administering and maintaining asset management data, including data inaccuracy and inconsistency and laborious and costly processes, and resulted in recommendations to improve the reliability, consistency, and timeliness of asset management information while streamlining the workload associated with maintaining such information.

Effective in FY 2022, with the concurrence of the Department of Interior and the Office of Management and Budget, the NPS updated the methodology used to assess facility condition and generate deferred maintenance & repair (DM&R) estimates. The changes streamline the condition assessment process to provide a more comprehensive, consistent, and timely identification of condition deficiencies and estimated repair needs for the NPS portfolio.

Previously, Deferred Maintenance (DM) was calculated by individually assessing assets and writing work orders for deficiencies against those assets. This prior methodology, while not incorrect, was a time-consuming process, making it difficult to comprehensively assess the entire NPS asset portfolio. As a result, it was necessary to prioritize assessment activities to focus on the highest priority assets, effectively only gathering data on a subset of the total portfolio. The updated DM&R methodology relies primarily on a Parametric Condition Assessment (PCA) process, which is a streamlined methodology for determining asset-level modeled DM&R estimates based on the condition score and the asset's Current Replacement Value (CRV). The new methodology is considerably less burdensome, allowing for more comprehensive and timelier DM&R estimates.

Simpson Q4: How much deferred maintenance has been addressed to date under the Great American Outdoors Act within the National Park Service, and how much remains?

Response: The National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) established by the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) provides NPS with up to \$1.3 billion each year for deferred maintenance needs over five years. Including projects proposed using FY 2024 LRF funding, the NPS has prioritized 130 projects to address critical deferred maintenance and improve infrastructure spanning all 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The estimated deferred maintenance addressed by these projects is \$3.8 billion. The NPS estimated cost of deferred maintenance at the end of FY 2022 was \$22.3 billion.

Questions from Rep. Ellzey:

Workforce

Ellzey Q1: In 2019, what percentage of the respective NPS, BLM and FWS workforce was working full time (meaning 5 days a week) in a physical office?

Response:

- ⦿ BLM 87%
- ⦿ FWS 90%
- ⦿ NPS 87%

Ellzey Q2: Today, what percentage of the respective NPS, BLM and FWS workforce is working full time (meaning 5 days a week) in a physical office?

Response:

- ⦿ BLM 60%
- ⦿ FWS 87%
- ⦿ NPS 72%

Ellzey Q3: In 2019, what percentage of the respective NPS, BLM and FWS workforce was working remotely?

Response:

- ⦿ BLM 1%
- ⦿ FWS 7%
- ⦿ NPS 2%

Ellzey Q4: Today, what percentage of the respective NPS, BLM and FWS workforce is working remotely?

Response:

- ⦿ BLM 6%
- ⦿ FWS 5%
- ⦿ NPS 8%

Rodanthe Beach Nourishment

In 1958 the National Park Service changed the static boundaries of Rodanthe, Waves and Salvo, NC. Rodanthe has seen accelerated erosion in the past 5 years.

Elzey Q5: What plan does the National Park Service have to reduce erosion to protect the homes, businesses, wildlife, and the economy on coastal Rodanthe?

Response: NPS records, including deeds and other real estate documents, do not indicate any changes to the static or ambulatory boundaries of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area since 1958.

Like most areas of Cape Hatteras National Seashore's (Seashore) of approximately 75 miles of Atlantic-facing beaches, data indicate the beach in Rodanthe is generally eroding at a rate of up to several meters per year. The rate of erosion over the last two decades has been fairly constant with a small increase observed south of the Rodanthe pier.

In 2020, the NPS began public scoping for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for sediment management activities in collaboration with multiple State, local and Federal agencies. Following the NEPA process, the NPS Record of Decision (ROD) was signed on the final Sediment Management Framework EIS in 2021. The Framework guides partnerships and helps the NPS and its partners address permit requests for beach nourishment and other sediment management activities to protect critical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, utilities, and to repair island breaches and restore habitat.

The NPS coordinates closely with partners including Dare and Hyde Counties, the North Carolina Department of Transportation, and the Army Corps of Engineers to support sediment management projects consistent with the Framework. NPS performs daily nesting patrols of the beaches and implements wildlife management protocols to protect wildlife and may partner with other agencies, consistent with the Framework, to restore habitats lost to erosion, but does not have a plan to reduce erosion to protect private homes or businesses in coastal Rodanthe. The 2021 Sediment Management Framework, however, permits agencies, municipalities, and others to conduct, with conditions, sediment management at the Seashore.

Conservation Status Defined (for Ms. Stone-Manning)

As you mentioned, the Administration has called to place at least 30 percent of our lands and waters in conservation status by 2030. While the Administration has since tried to rename this effort the ‘America the Beautiful’ initiative, the issue remains that the ambiguous “conservation status” has yet to be defined, and even if it were to be defined, it is clear the Administration does not know what percentage of lands and waters are currently meeting this status.

The U.S. Geological Survey has data to show that over 30% of our Federal lands already have permanent protection from conversion and a mandated management plan to maintain a primarily natural state.

Elzey Q6: Why is the Administration continuing to push an initiative that is a back-door way to prevent public lands from being used for much needed resource development?

Response: The America the Beautiful initiative is a call-to-action to Americans to help conserve, connect, and restore lands, waters, and wildlife across the country. The Administration has been very clear and transparent about America the Beautiful. It is an effort to encourage voluntary and locally led conservation and restoration across the country to improve community resilience and access to nature and recreation.

The principles of the America the Beautiful initiative emphasize efforts which are collaborative, inclusive, locally led, and honor private property rights. There is broad engagement across the country, including from agricultural and forest landowners, fishers, outdoor enthusiasts, Tribal Nations, States, territories, local officials, and other important partners and stakeholders working to identify strategies that reflect the priorities of all communities. There is a strong emphasis on collaborative conservation – leveraging the voluntary conservation efforts of fishers, ranchers, farmers, and forest owners which are integral to this effort.

While the information in the U.S. Geological Survey’s Protected Areas Database of the United States (PAD-US) dataset is a helpful starting point, the interagency team continues to look at ways to understand and reflect the data in a more clear and accurate way in line with the goals and principles of America the Beautiful and the President’s call to action in Executive Order 14008.

Questions from Rep. Zinke

International Affairs - CBW & CITES import and export permits

Zinke Q1: How many FTE's work in the permitting office of the Division of Management Authority? In the Division of Scientific Authority?

Response: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service generally has roughly 35 FTE that support the permitting program in the International Affairs Program. A majority of staffing resources sit in the Division of Management Authority and roughly 5-6 FTEs within the Division of Scientific Authority.

Zinke Q2: What is the average number of years each person has worked in the permit office?

Response: FWS has a diversity of experience in its permitting program, ranging from new employees who have been hired this fiscal year to employees who have been with the program for over 20 years. Most of the managers in the Permit Office have over 15 years permitting experience. Over the last three years the International Affairs program had significant attrition. FWS has recruited and hired staff to backfill vacancies and is currently prioritizing onboarding and developing this new cohort of staff.

Zinke Q3: What is the pay grade (GS) for each position in the permit office?

Response: The FWS' Division of Management Authority has a range of staff that work on permits including Legal Instrument Examiners (GS-06, FPL GS-8), Government Information Specialists (GS-9, FPL GS-12), Biologists (GS-07, FPL GS-12), Supervisory Biologists (GS-13), Supervisory Program Analyst (GS-13) and a Branch Manager (GS-14).

The Division of Scientific Authority has Biologists with grade levels ranging from GS-11-13. In addition, a GS-14 Branch Manager manages the making of permit findings, including non-detriment findings under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Zinke Q4: How many CBW permit applications are received annually for animals? For plants?

Response: FWS typically receives up to 100 Captive-Bred Wildlife (CBW) permit applications annually for animals. FWS does not issue CBW permits for plants.

Zinke Q5: How many CITES import/export permit applications are received annually (please report a total for each import and export)?

Response: FWS estimates it receives approximately 2,000-3,000 CITES import/export applications annually, resulting in 20,000-30,000 individual permits. Since multiple single-use CITES permits may be issued from a single Master File application, the number of permits finalized annually is generally an order of magnitude higher than the number of applications received. FWS does not separate import and export applications and therefore has provided a combined total.

Zinke Q6: What are the 5 most common reasons a CBW permit application is denied?

Response: The number one reason FWS denies permit applications is because the applications are incomplete and FWS is unable to make the required permit findings.

For complete permit applications, enhancement of propagation or survival of the species through bona-fide conservation breeding is the priority lens through which FWS reviews the submissions. FWS will deny permit applications because the applicant is not able to demonstrate maintenance of a viable genetic population, or if the applicant is not part of a coordinated breeding program that includes a breeding plan established to ensure the genetic diversity of the captive population.

Zinke Q7: What are the 5 most common reasons a CITES import/export permit application is denied (please report a total for each import and export)?

Response: The number one reason FWS denies permit applications is because the applications are incomplete.

Outside of incomplete applications, conservation of species and facilitation of biologically sustainable trade is the priority lens through which decisions are made regarding approval or denial of permit applications.

For CITES import/export permits, an application can be denied if FWS determines the action would have a detrimental impact on the species survival in the wild or if there was insufficient information available to determine whether the action is detrimental or not. Factors considered in making non-detriment findings can be found in 50 CFR 23.61. They include:

- (1) Biological and management information demonstrates that the proposed activity represents sustainable use.
- (2) The removal of the animal or plant from the wild is part of a biologically based sustainable-use management plan that is designed to eliminate over-utilization of the species.
- (3) If no sustainable-use management plan has been established, the removal of the animal or plant from the wild would not contribute to the over-utilization of the species, considering both domestic and international uses.

- (4) The proposed activity, including the methods used to acquire the specimen, would pose no net harm to the status of the species in the wild.
- (5) The proposed activity would not lead to long-term declines that would place the viability of the affected population in question.
- (6) The proposed activity would not lead to significant habitat or range loss or restriction.

Additionally, permits can be denied if FWS cannot determine that the specimen was legally acquired. Factors considered in making legal acquisition findings can be found in 50 CFR 23.60. They include whether the specimen and its parental stock were:

- (1) Obtained in accordance with the provisions of national laws for the protection of wildlife and plants. In the United States, these laws include all applicable local, State, Federal, Tribal, and foreign laws; and
- (2) If previously traded, traded internationally in accordance with the provisions of CITES.

Zinke Q8: How many CBW permit applications were received and processed in FY 2022? FY 2012?

Response: The available information shows that in FY 2022, FWS received approximately 25 applications for CBW registrations and processed approximately 45 registrations (Note: some of these applications had been received prior to FY 2022). In late 2019, the Service transitioned to ePermits, the information system we currently use. Information prior to 2019 is housed in an archived system and would require reallocating staff resources from processing permits to query this data. The only readily available information is for FY 2021 and FY 2022. Both years were irregular due to reduced international trade resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Zinke Q9: How many CITES import/export permit applications were received and processed in FY 2022? FY 2012?

Response: FY 2012 CITES import/export application data is not readily available, as our records do not go back that far. However, readily available data based on paper records show that in 2015, FWS processed about 20,000 CITES import/export permit requests, and in 2022, processed about 30,000 CITES permit requests. Since multiple single-use CITES permits may be issued from a single Master File application, the number of individual CITES permit applications received annually is generally an order of magnitude less than the number of CITES permit requests processed.

Zinke Q10: What are the top five most commonly-referenced sources for population data or other status evaluations when processing CITES import/export or CBW permit applications (for example: data from IUCN, etc.)?

Response: FWS looks at a diversity of data regarding population including: the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List Species Assessment and Taxon Specialist Groups data, NatureServe data, published scientific literature, range country population data and management plans, population surveys, other range country information, peer-reviewed papers, CITES documents, and for native U.S. species population data from State wildlife agencies, among others.

Zinke Q11: Please provide a current list of all CBW permit holders, contact information, species for which they are permitted, and expiration date of their CBW permit. (This info is already public as it is published in the Federal Register, we just want it presented efficiently here)

Response: The requested information follows.

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
77904D	Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium		2026-12-19	MACROPOUS ELEPHAS VARECIA LEMUR	PARMA MAXIMUS VAREGATA CATTIA	PARMA WALLARY ASIAN ELEPHANT BLK-&-WHITE RUFFED LEMUR RING-TAILED LEMUR N. WHITE-CHEEKED GIBBON
76158D	City of Attleboro/Capron Park Zoo		2027-04-25	NOMASCUS NEOFELIS PANTHERA TAPIRUS BUBALUS GRUS	LEUCOGENYS SYNDACTYLUS NEBULOSA TIGRIS INDICUS DEPRESSICORNIS JAPONENSIS	SIAMANG CLOUDED LEOPARD SUMATHAN TIGER MALAYAN TAPIR LOWLAND ANOA RED-CROWNED CRANE
71028D	NATIONAL AVIARY IN PITTSBURGH		2026-06-11	VARECIA ARA	VAREGATA GLAUCOGULARIS	BLK-&-WHITE RUFFED LEMUR BLUE-THROATED MACAW
71365D	CALDWELL ZOO		2026-12-03	LEUCOPSAR SPHENISCUS TRAGOPAN VULTUR ARA DICEROS EQUUS GERONTICUS VARECIA LEMUR PANTHERA PANTHERA SAGUINUS SPHENISCUS CAMELUS EQUUS HYLOBATES LEMUR VARECIA LEONTOPITHECUS PANTHERA PANTHERA PONGO SPHENISCUS CERATOTHERIUM	ROTHSCHILD DEMERSUS CABOTTI GRYPHUS MILITARIS BICORNIS GREVYI EREMITA RUBRA CATTIA LEO TIGRIS OEDIPIUS DEMERSUS BACTRIANUS AFRICANUS LAR CATTIA VAREGATA ROSALIA LEO TIGRIS PYGMAEUS DEMERSUS SIMUM	BALI STARLING JACKASS PENGUIN CABOT'S TRAGOPAN ANDEAN CONDOR MILITARY MACAW BLACK RHINOCEROS GREVY'S ZEBRA NORTHERN BALD IBIS RED-RUFFED LEMUR RING-TAILED LEMUR AFRICAN LION TIGER COTTONTOP TAMARIN JACKASS PENGUIN BACTRIAN CAMEL AFRICAN WILD ASS LAR GIBBON RING-TAILED LEMUR BLK-&-WHITE RUFFED LEMUR GOLDEN LION TAMARIN AFRICAN LION SIBERIAN TIGER BORNEAN ORANGUTAN JACKASS PENGUIN SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS RADIATED TORTOISE
77262D	Henry Vilas Zoo		2026-12-03	CAMELUS EQUUS HYLOBATES LEMUR VARECIA LEONTOPITHECUS PANTHERA PANTHERA PONGO SPHENISCUS CERATOTHERIUM	BACTRIANUS AFRICANUS LAR CATTIA VAREGATA ROSALIA LEO TIGRIS PYGMAEUS DEMERSUS SIMUM	
PER0013488		Antonin R Dvorak	2027-01-23	ASTROCHELYS	RADIATA	

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
71028D	NATIONAL AVIARY IN PITTSBURGH		2026-06-11	CARDUELIS	CUCULLATA	RED SISKIN
77784D	Honolulu Zoo		2027-05-08	ANDRIAS ASTROCHELYS CHELONIDIS VARANUS SPHENISCUS LEMUR HYLOBATES SYMPHALANGUS PAN PYGMAELUS PONGO ACINONYX PANTHERA LYCAON DICEROS GAVIALIS ELEPHAS ACINONYX ATELOPUS EQUUS VARECIA EULEMUR PANTHERA	JAPONICUS RADIATA NIGER KOMODOENSIS DEMERSUS CATTA LAR SYNDACTYLUS TROGLODYTES PYGMAELUS JUBATUS TIGRIS BICORNIS GANGETICUS MAXIMUS JUBATUS ZETEKI PRZEWALSKII VAREGATA COLLARIIS LEO RODRICENSIS	JAPANESE GIANT SALAMANDER RADIATED TORTOISE GALAPAGOS GIANT TORTOISE KOMODO MONITOR JACKASS PENGUIN RING-TAILED LEMUR LAR GIBBON SIAMANG COMMON CHIMPANZEE BORNEAN ORANGUTAN CHEETAH TIGER AFRICAN WILD DOG BLACK RHINOCEROS GAVIAL ASIAN ELEPHANT CHEETAH PANAMANIAN GOLDEN FROG PRZEWALSKI'S HORSE BLK-& WHITE RUFFED LEMUR RED-COLLARED LEMUR AFRICAN LION RODRIGUES FLYING FOX
76158D	BINDER PARK ZOO		2026-12-20	ACINONYX ATELOPUS EQUUS VARECIA EULEMUR PANTHERA	PENICILLATA RUBRA CATTA LEO LEO LEO ABELII JUBATUS BRACHYURUS VIPIO CATTA RUBRA AFRICANA LEUCOGENYS LEO	WOYLIE RED-RUFFED LEMUR RING-TAILED LEMUR AFRICAN LION AFRICAN LION AFRICAN LION AFRICAN LION SUMATRAN ORANGUTAN CHEETAH MANED WOLF WHITE-NEPED CRANE RING-TAILED LEMUR RED-RUFFED LEMUR AFRICAN ELEPHANT N. WHITE-CHEEKED GIBBON AFRICAN LION
77784D	Honolulu Zoo		2027-05-08	PANTHERA PANTHERA PANTHERA PONGO CHRYSOCCYON GRUS LEMUR VARECIA LOXODONTA NOMASCUS PANTHERA		
PER0036502	Safari Game Search Foundation		2028-01-29	ACINONYX		

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
PER0037184	NNNN Operations, LLC	Continental Ranch Hunts/Kothman Ranch Co WILDLIFE WORLD ZOO, INC.	2027-12-07 2027-12-06 2027-04-25	SAGUINUS	OEDIPUS	COTTONTOP TAMARIN
PER0038858	Continental Ranch			PANTHERA	TIGRIS	SUMATRAN TIGER
				CERATOTHERIUM	SIMUM	SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS
				KOBUS	LECHE	LECHWE
54998D				ORYX	LEUCORYX	ARABIAN ORYX
					SIMUM	SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS
				CROCODYLUS	POROSUS	SALTWATER CROCODILE
				ASTROCHELYS	RADIATA	RADIATED TORTOISE
				CHELONOIDIS	NIGER	GALAPAGOS GIANT TORTOISE
				CAIMAN	CROCODILUS	BROWN CAIMAN
				CAIMAN	CROCODILUS	COMMON CAIMAN
				OSTEOLEMIUS	TETRASPIS	AFRICAN DWARF CROCODILE
				OSTEOLEMIUS	TETRASPIS	AFRICAN DWARF CROCODILE
				CROCODYLUS	NILOTICUS	NILE CROCODILE
				HYLOBATES	LAR	LAR GIBBON
				HYLOBATES	PILEATUS	PILEATED GIBBON
				SYMPHALANGIUS	SYNDACTYLUS	SIAMANG
				SAGUINUS	OEDIPUS	COTTONTOP TAMARIN
				BETTONGIA	PENICILLATA	WOYLIE
				ACINONYX	JUBATUS	CHEETAH
				PANTHERA	LEO	AFRICAN LION
				PANTHERA	LEO	AFRICAN LION
				PANTHERA	TIGRIS	TIGER
				VULTUR	GRYPHUS	ANDEAN CONDOR
				GRUS	VIPIO	WHITE-NEPED CRANE
				PANTHERA	PARDUS	LEOPARD
				LEMUR	CATTA	RING-TAILED LEMUR
				VARECIA	VAREGATA	BLK-&-WHITE RUFFED LEMUR
				VARECIA	RUBRA	RED-RUFFED LEMUR
				ORYX	LEUCORYX	ARABIAN ORYX
				KOBUS	LECHE	LECHWE
				TAPIRUS	TERRESTRIS	SOUTH AMERICAN TAPIR
				ARA	MACAO	SCARLET MACAW
				ARA	GLAUCOGULARIS	BLUE-THROATED MACAW
				ARA	MILITARIS	MILITARY MACAW
				NEOFELIS	NEBULOSA	CLOUDED LEOPARD
83956D	UTICA ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY		2027-08-22	EQUUS	ZEBRA	HARTMANN'S MT. ZEBRA
				GRUS	VIPIO	WHITE-NEPED CRANE
PER0051886	INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR THE PRESERVATION OF WILD ANIMALS		2023-11-23	CERATOTHERIUM	SIMUM	SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
PER0054404	AUDUBON NATURE INSTITUTE		2028-01-23	LEUCOPSAR	ROTHSCHILDI	BALE STARLING
018969	CENTER FOR THE CONSERVATION OF TROPICAL UNGULATES, LLC.		2024-04-23	BUBALUS	GLAUCOGULARIS DEPRESSICORNIS	BLUE-THROATED MACAW LOWLAND ANOA
030006		PAUL BODNIAR	2023-08-23	DICEROS	CELEBENSIS	NORTH SULAWESI BABIRUSA
117577	B Bryan Preserve LLC		2024-04-09	EQUUS	JAVANICUS	BANTENG
				EQUUS	TERRESTRIS	SOUTH AMERICAN TAPIR
				DICEROS	INDICUS	MALAYAN TAPIR
				OSTEOLEAEMUS	UNICORNIS	INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				EQUUS	BICORNIS	BLACK RHINOCEROS
				DICEROS	TETRASPIS	AFRICAN DWARF CROCODILE
				EQUUS	ZEBRA	HARTMANN'S MT. ZEBRA
				DICEROS	GREVYI	GREVY'S ZEBRA
				DICEROS	BICORNIS	BLACK RHINOCEROS
				ACINONYX	JUBATUS	CHEETAH
681252	Zoological Society of Cincinnati		2023-12-11	ARA	GLAUCOGULARIS	BLUE-THROATED MACAW
				DAUBENTONIA	MADAGASCARIENSIS	AYE-AYE
				DICEROS	BICORNIS	BLACK RHINOCEROS
				EUDYPTES	CHRYSOCHOME	S. ROCKHOPPER PENGUIN
				FELIS	NIGRIPES	BLACK-FOOTED CAT
				GORILLA	GORILLA	WESTERN GORILLA
				GRUS	JAPONENSIS	RED-CROWNED CRANE
				HYLOBATES	LAR	LAR GIBBON
				LEMUR	CATTA	RING-TAILED LEMUR
				LEOPARDUS	PARDALIS	BRAZILIAN OCELOT
				LEUCOPSAR	ROTHSCHILDI	BALE STARLING
				LYCAON	PICTUS	AFRICAN WILD DOG
				MACACA	FUSCATA	JAPANESE MACAQUE
				NEOFELIS	NEBULOSA	CLOUDED LEOPARD
				NYCTICEBUS	PYGMAEUS	PYGMY SLOW LORIS
				PAN	PANISCUS	BONOBO
				PANTHERA	LEO	AFRICAN LION
				PANTHERA	TIGRIS	TIGER
				PONGO	ABEUI	SUMATRAN ORANGUTAN
				PROPTHECUS	COQUELI	COQUELI'S SIFAKA
				RHINOCEROS	UNICORNIS	INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				SPHENISCUS	DEMERSUS	JACKASS PENGUIN
				SYMPHALANGUS	SYNDACTYLUS	SIAMANG
				UNCIA	UNCIA	SNOW LEOPARD
				VULTUR	GRYPHUS	ANDEAN CONDOR

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
724896	Tanganyika Wildlife Foundation		2024-02-01	HYLOBATES	LAR	LAR GIBBON
				SYMPHALANGUS	SYNDACTYLUS	SIAMANG
				MANDRILLUS	SPHINX	MANDRILL
				TAPIRUS	INDICUS	MALAYAN TAPIR
				SAGUINUS	SPECIES	TAMARIN
				LEMUR	CATTA	RING-TAILED LEMUR
				VARECIA	VAREGATA	BLK-& WHITE RUFFED LEMUR
				SPHENISCUS	DEMERSUS	JACKASS PENGUIN
				VARECIA	RUBRA	RED-RUFFED LEMUR
				CERCOPITHECUS	DIANA	DIANA MONKEY
				SYMPHALANGUS	SYNDACTYLUS	SIAMANG
				NEOFELIS	NEBULOSA	CLOUDED LEOPARD
				UNCIA	UNCIA	SNOW LEOPARD
				PANTHERA	PARDUS	LEOPARD
				ACINONYX	JUBATUS	CHEETAH
				DICEROS	BICORNIS	BLACK RHINOCEROS
				RHINOCEROS	UNICORNIS	INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				CERATOTHELIUM	SIMUM	SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS
				EQUUS	GREVYI	GREVY'S ZEBRA
				ORYX	LEUCORYX	ARABIAN ORYX
				KOBUS	LECHE	LECHWE
757434	GIBBON CONSERVATION CENTER		2025-04-07	HYLOBATES	MOLOCH	SILVERY JAVAN GIBBON
				HYLOBATES	PILEATUS	PILEATED GIBBON
				NOMASCUS	LEUCOGENYS	N. WHITE-CHEEKED GIBBON
796988		STEPHEN HALL	2025-05-05	SYMPHALANGUS	SYNDACTYLUS	SIAMANG
813047	Statens Island Zoological Society		2024-03-26	ASTROCHELVS	RADIATA	RADIATED TORTOISE
			2024-03-26	CROTALUS	DURISSUS	ARUBA ISLAND RATTLESNAKE
				PANTHERA	PARDUS	AMUR LEOPARD
				SAGUINUS	OEDIPUS	COTTON TOP TAMARIN
				ALLIGATOR	SINENSIS	CHINESE ALLIGATOR
				ATELOPUS	ZETEKI	PANAMANIAN GOLDEN FROG
				LEMUR	CATTA	RING-TAILED LEMUR
				VARECIA	VAREGATA	BLK-& WHITE RUFFED LEMUR
				PTEROPUS	RODRIGUESI	RODRIGUES FLYING FOX
				CALLIMICO	GOELDII	GOELDI'S MARMOSET
816505		ROSS POPENOE	2025-03-20	ASTROCHELVS	RADIATA	RADIATED TORTOISE
003980	METRO RICHMOND ZOO		2024-03-28	PAN	TROGLODYTES	COMMON CHIMPANZEE
				SPHENISCUS	DEMERSUS	JACKASS PENGUIN
				SYMPHALANGUS	SYNDACTYLUS	SIAMANG
				HYLOBATES	LAR	LAR GIBBON

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
02406D	MONROE COUNTY SENECA PARK ZOO			CERCOPITHECUS VARECIA VARECIA RUBRA LEMUR TAPIRUS TAPIRUS TAPIRUS DAMALUSCUS ACINONYX PANTHERA UNCIA UNCIA CHELONIDIS VARECIA CERATOTHECIUM PONGO PONGO 2024-06-03	DIANA VAREGATA RUBRA CATTIA BAIRDII TERRESTRIS INDICUS PYGARGUS JUBATUS LEO UNCIA UNCIA NIGER KOMODOENSIS SIMUM PYGMAELUS ABELII UNCIA	DIANA MONKEY BLK-&WHITE RUFFED LEMUR RED-RUFFED LEMUR RING-TAILED LEMUR BAIRD'S TAPIR SOUTH AMERICAN TAPIR MALAYAN TAPIR BONTEBOK CHEETAH AFRICAN LION SNOW LEOPARD GALAPAGOS GIANT TORTOISE KOMODO MONITOR SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS BORNEAN ORANGUTAN SUMATRA ORANGUTAN SNOW LEOPARD
02439D	YO SCHREINER RANCH OPERATIONS			SPHENSCUS RUCERVUS	DEMERSUS DUVAUCELII	JACKASS PENGUIN BARASINGHA
03134B	White Oak Conservation			2025-04-28 EQUUS EQUUS NANGER DAMA DICEROS RHINOCEROS CHRYSOCTON ACINONYX CRAX VULTUR CERATOTHECIUM GAZELLA BABYROUSA ELEPHAS	AFRICANUS GREVYI DAMA BICORNIS UNICORNIS BRACHYURUS JUBATUS ALBERTI GYPHUS SIMUM LEPTOCEROS CELEBENSIS MAXIMUS	SOMALI WILD ASS GREVY'S ZEBRA DAMA GAZELLE BLACK RHINOCEROS INDIAN RHINOCEROS MANED WOLF CHEETAH BLUE-BILLED CURASSOW ANDEAN CONDOR WHITE RHINOCEROS SLENDER-HORNED GAZELLE NORTH SULAWESI BABIRUSA ASIAN ELEPHANT
PER0052800	DENVER ZOOLOGICAL FOUNDATION			2027-12-08		
03596B	COASTAL EXOTICS INC.			2023-11-27 ASTROCHELYS	RADIATA	RADIATED TORTOISE
03672A	LAKE SUPERIOR ZOO			2024-12-10 SAGUINUS LEMUR	OEDIPIUS CATTIA	COTTONTOP TAMARIN RING-TAILED LEMUR
06177D	CITY OF SANTA ANA			2024-07-07 LEMUR VARECIA LEONTOPITHECUS	CATTIA VAREGATA CHRYSOMELAS ROSALIA	RING-TAILED LEMUR BLK-&WHITE RUFFED LEMUR GOLDEN-HEADED LION TAMARIN GOLDEN LION TAMARIN

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
07495D	ARDENR LP	DANIEL PEARSON	2024-08-25	SAGINUS	GEDIPIUS	COTTONTOP TAMARIN
08907D	Fresno Chaffee Zoo		2024-03-20	ASTROCHELYS	DUVAUCELI	BARASINGHA
09932D			2024-07-11	PANTHERA	LEO	RADIATED TORTOISE
			VULTUR	GRYPHUS	ANDEAN CONDOR	
			ACINONYX	JUBATUS	CHEETAH	
			BRACHYLOPHUS	FASCIATUS	FUJI BANDED IGUANA	
			CALLIMICO	GOELDII	GOELDI'S MARMOSET	
			LEONTOPTHECUS	ROSALIA	GOLDEN LION TAMARIN	
			VARANUS	KOMODOENSIS	KOMODO MONITOR	
			PANTHERA	TIGRIS	TIGER	
			VARECIA	RUBRA	RED-RUFFED LEMUR	
			LEMUR	CATTA	RING-TAILED LEMUR	
			SAUROMALUS	VARIUS	SAN ESTEBAN ISLAND CHUCKWALLA	
10867B	Ox Ranch Investments, LLC		2025-08-03	ORYX	LEUCORYX	ARABIAN ORYX
				RUCERVUS	DUVAUCELI	BARASINGHA
				RUCERVUS	ELDII	ELD'S DEER
				KOBUS	LECHE	LECHWE
10997B	Los Angeles Zoo	LAUREN OGBURN	2024-03-28	CARDUELIS	CUCULLATA	RED SISKIN
11986D			2024-05-13	PETROGALE	XANTHOPUS	YELLOW-FOOTED ROCK WALLABY
				LYCAON	PICTUS	AFRICAN WILD DOG
			VULTUR	GRYPHUS	ANDEAN CONDOR	
			BUBALUS	DEPRESSICORNIS	LOWLAND ANOA	
			ELEPHAS	MAXIMUS	ASIAN ELEPHANT	
			TAPIRUS	BAIRDII	BAIRD'S TAPIR	
			LEUCOPSAR	ROTHSCHILDI	BAI STARLING	
			EULEMIUR	MACACO	BLACK LEMUR	
			CRAX	ALBERTI	BLUE-BILLED CURASSOW	
			ARA	GLAUCOGULARIS	BLUE-THROATED MACAW	
			PONGO	PYGMAEUS	BORNEAN ORANGUTAN	
			BABYROUSA	CELEBENSIS	NORTH SULAWESI BABIRUSA	
			PAN	TROGLODYTES	COMMON CHIMPANZEE	
			TRACHYPITHECUS	FRANCOISI	FRANCOIS' LANGUR	
			PTERONURA	BRASILENSIS	GIANT OTTER	
			LEONTOPTHECUS	ROSALIA	GOLDEN LION TAMARIN	
			EQUUS	GREYI	GREY'S ZEBRA	
			HARPIA	HARPYIA	HARPY EAGLE	
			VARANUS	KOMODOENSIS	KOMODO MONITOR	
			MANDRILLUS	SPHINX	MANDRILL	
			CHRYSOCCYON	BRACHYURUS	MANED WOLF	
			ANTILOCAPRA	AMERICANA	PENINSULAR PRONGHORN	
			ASTROCHELYS	RADIATA	RADIATED TORTOISE	

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
13035D	North Carolina Zoo	JOHN SEYMOUR		LEMUR	CATTA	RING-TAILED LEMUR
13263B				SAURONMALLUS	VARIUS	SAN ESTEBAN ISLAND CHUCKWALLA
				SYMPHALANGUS	SYNDACTYLUS	SIAMANG
15052D	INGRHAM COUNTY, MICHIGAN			UNCIA	UNCIA	SNOW LEOPARD
				PUDU	PUDA	SOUTHERN PUDU
				PANTHERA	TIGRIS	TIGER
				TOMISTOMA	SCHLEGELII	TOMISTOMA
				PROPTHECUS	VERREAUXI	VERREAUX'S SIFAKA
				GORILLA	GORILLA	WESTERN GORILLA
				BETONGIA	PENICILLATA	WOYLIE
				CROTALUS	DURISSUS	ARUBA ISLAND RATTLESNAKE
				PHASCOLARCTOS	CINEREUS	KOALA
				2024-08-20 VARANUS	KOMODOENSIS	KOMODO MONITOR
				2024-12-16 RUCERVUS	DUVAUCELII	BARASINGHA
				ORYX	LEUCORYX	ARABIAN ORYX
				2025-02-24 DICEROS	BICORNIS	BLACK RHINOCEROS
				PANTHERA	TIGRIS	SIBERIAN TIGER
				MANDRILLUS	SPHINX	MANDRILL
				LEONTOPITHECUS	ROSALIA	GOLDEN LION TAMARIN
				PANTHERA	LEO	AFRICAN LION
				PANTHERA	LEO	AFRICAN LION
				UNCIA	UNCIA	SNOW LEOPARD
				SAGUINUS	OEDIPUS	COTTONTOP TAMARIN
				2025-08-26 TRAGOPAN	CABOTI	CABOT'S TRAGOPAN
				VARANUS	KOMODOENSIS	KOMODO MONITOR
				ALLIGATOR	SINENSIS	CHINESE ALLIGATOR
15196D	ST. AUGUSTINE ALLIGATOR			ARA	GLAUCOGULARIS	BLUE-THROATED MACAW
16838B		Judy May		CROCODYLUS	SIAMENSIS	SIAMESE CROCODILE
				RUCERVUS	DUVAUCELII	BARASINGHA
				RUCERVUS	ELDII	ELD'S DEER
				ORYX	DAMMAH	SCIMITAR-HORNED ORYX
				ORYX	LEUCORYX	ARABIAN ORYX
				ADDAX	NASOMACULATUS	ADDAX
				NANGER	DAMA	DAMA GAZELLE
				KOBUS	LECHE	LECHWE
				EQUUS	GREYI	GREY'S ZEBRA
				2027-08-22 AMAZONA	RHODOCORYTHA	RED-BROWED PARROT
PER0044700	RARE SPECIES CONSERVATORY FOUNDATION				LECHE	LECHWE
23872D	J-3 RANCH			2024-08-25 KOBUS	GORILLA	WESTERN GORILLA
24690D	Jacksonville Zoological Society			2024-07-03 GORILLA	PANSCUS	BONOBO
				PAN		

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
25262B 26429D	Memphis Zoo	John Grigus	2026-08-24 2024-07-03	PANTHERA	TIGRIS	SUMATRAN TIGER
				PANTHERA	TIGRIS	TIGER
26837B 28567D	LA COMA RANCH, THE RED GATE CORPORATION	JOANN HOLLAND	2025-02-17 2024-07-22	ACINONYX	JUBATUS	CHEETAH
				CERATOTHERIUM	SIMUM	SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS
29141A		JOHN AYNES	2024-04-09	VARANUS	KOMODOENSIS	KOMODO MONITOR
				ASTROCHELUS	RADIATA	RADIATED TORTOISE
PERL200907	FOSSIL RIM WILDLIFE CENTER, INC.		2023-04-02	DAMALISCUS	PYGARGUS	BONTEBOK
				LOXODONTA	AFRICANA	AFRICAN ELEPHANT
32147D	BREVARD ZOO		2024-09-30	ELEPHAS	MAXIMUS	ASIAN ELEPHANT
				ACINONYX	JUBATUS	CHEETAH
				PANTHERA	PARDUS	AMUR LEOPARD
				PANTHERA	TIGRIS	SUMATRAN TIGER
				UNCIA	UNCIA	SNOW LEOPARD
				NOMASCUS	LEUCOGENYS	N. WHITE-CHEEKED GIBBON
				SYMPHALANGUS	SYNDACTYLUS	SIAMANG
				VARECIA	VARECIA	BLK-& WHITE RUFFED LEMUR
				CERATOTHERIUM	RUBRA	RED-RUFFED LEMUR
				GUAROUBA	SIMUM	SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS
				RUCERVUS	GUAROUBA	GOLDEN PARAKEET
				KOBUS	DUVAUCELII	SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS
				GUAROUBA	GUAROUBA	GOLDEN PARAKEET
				ARA	LECHE	BARASINGHA
				CACATUA	GUAROUBA	LECHWE
				CACATUA	GLAUCOGULARIS	GOLDEN PARAKEET
				ORXY	HAEMATUROPPYGIA	BLUE-THROATED MACAW
				ORXY	SULPHUREA	PHILIPPINE COCKATOO
				CHRYSOXYON	LEUCORYX	CITRON-CRESTED COCKATOO
				EQUUS	BRACHYURUS	ARABIAN ORYX
				EQUUS	GREVYI	MANED WOLF
				EQUUS	PRZEWALSKI	GREVY'S ZEBRA
				ACINONYX	ZEBRA	PRZEWALSKI'S HORSE
				FELIS	JUBATUS	HARTMANN'S MT. ZEBRA
				GRUS	NGRIPES	CHEETAH
				DICEROS	JAPONENSIS	BLACK-FOOTED CAT
				ACINONYX	BICORNIS	RED-CROWNED CRANE
				LEMUR	JUBATUS	BLACK RHINOCEROS
				SYMPHALANGUS	SYNDACTYLUS	CHEETAH
				SAGUINUS	CATTA	SIAMANG
				TAPIRUS	OEDIPUS	RING-TAILED LEMUR
				TAPIRUS	BAIRDII	COTTONTOP TAMARIN
				TAPIRUS	BAIRDII	BAIRD'S TAPIR

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
33103D	TURTLE CONSERVANCY	RICARDO LONGORIA	2024-08-25	ASTROCHELYS	RADIATA	RADIATED TORTOISE
33202D				EQUUS	GREYI	GREY'S ZEBRA
33202D				GUAROUBA	GUAROUBA	GOLDEN PARAKEET
35106D	GULF BREEZE ZOO		2024-12-13	ORYX	LEUCORYX	ARABIAN ORYX
35106D				ASTROCHELYS	RADIATA	RADIATED TORTOISE
			2025-02-21	CHELONIDIS	NIGER	GALAPAGOS GIANT TORTOISE
				CATTA	CATTA	RING-TAILED LEMUR
				VARECIA	VARIEGATA	BLK-&WHITE RUFFED LEMUR
				SAGUINUS	OEDIPUS	BLK-&WHITE RUFFED LEMUR
				HYLOBATES	LAR	COTTONTOP TAMARIN
				SYMPHALANGUS	SYNDACTYLUS	LAR GIBBON
				KOBUS	LECHE	SIAMANG
				ORYX	LEUCORYX	LECHWE
				CHELONIDIS	NIGER	ARABIAN ORYX
				ASTROCHELYS	RADIATA	GALAPAGOS GIANT TORTOISE
				CERATOTHELIUM	SIMUM	RADIATED TORTOISE
				GORILLA	GORILLA	SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS
				PONGO	PGYMAELUS	WESTERN GORILLA
				PANTHERA	TIGRIS	BORNEAN ORANGUTAN
				PANTHERA	LEO	TIGER
				EQUUS	GREYI	AFRICAN LION
36848D	4 J CONSERVATION CENTER, INC.		2025-02-25	NEOFELIS	NEBULOSA	GREY'S ZEBRA
				VARECIA	RUBRA	CLOUDED LEOPARD
				LEMUR	CATTA	RED-RUFFED LEMUR
36949D				VARECIA	VARIEGATA	RING-TAILED LEMUR
37142A	EAST TEXAS RANCH, LP	STEVENS FOREST	2025-02-25	RUCERVUS	DUVAUCELI	BLK-&WHITE RUFFED LEMUR
42009B	WRIGHT FAMILY LLC		2023-07-23	RUCERVUS	DUVAUCELI	BARASINGHA
				KOBUS	LECHE	BARASINGHA
			2026-09-07	ORYX	LEUCORYX	LECHWE
				KOBUS	LECHE	ARABIAN ORYX
42547B	Steve Martin's Natural Encounters, INC.			RUCERVUS	DUVAUCELI	LECHWE
42675B	CLYDE PEELING'S REPTILAND		2026-06-08	ARA	GLAUCOGULARIS	BARASINGHA
						BLUE-THROATED MACAW
44219B			2025-12-21	CROCODYLUS	SIAMENSIS	SIAMESE CROCODILE
44888D	CITY OF SAN JOSE	KRISTINE HOLMBERG	2025-05-05	VARANUS	KOMODOENSIS	KOMODO MONITOR
44974D	NEW JERSEY AQUARIUM, LLC		2025-02-12	CARDUELIS	CUCULLATA	RED SKIN
49149D	Toledo Zoological Society		2025-02-25	MACROPUS	PARMA	PARMA WALLABY
			2025-02-25	SPHENISCUS	DEMERSIUS	JACKASS PENGUIN
			2025-04-28	TRAGOPAN	CABOTI	CABOT'S TRAGOPAN
				PANTHERA	PARDUS	AMUR LEOPARD

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
49623B	BINDER PARK ZOO		2026-12-20	UNCIA	UNCIA	SNOW LEOPARD
				DAMALISCUS	PYGARGUS	BONTEBOK
				LYCAON	PICTUS	AFRICAN WILD DOG
				LEMUR	CATTA	RING-TAILED LEMUR
49667D		James Badman	2025-05-05	ASTROCHELYS	RADIATA	RADIATED TORTOISE
				CHELONOIDIS	NIGER	GALAPAGOS GIANT TORTOISE
				GEOCLEMY'S	HAMILTONII	SPOTTED POND TURTLE
				GOPHERUS	FLAVOMARGINATUS	BOLSON TORTOISE
				TERRAPENE	COAHUILA	AQUATIC BOX TURTLE
				CYCLURA	NUBILA	CUBAN GROUND IGUANA
				CYCLURA	NUBILA	CAYMAN BRAC GROUND IGUANA
				SAUROMALUS	VARIUS	SAN ESTEBAN ISLAND CHUCKWALLA
				LEUCOPSAR	ROTHSCHILDII	BAU STARLING
				AMAZONA	LEUCOCEPHALA	CUBAN PARROT
				AMAZONA	VINACEA	VINACEOUS PARROT
				ARA	GLAUCOGULARIS	BLUE-THROATED MACAW
				ARA	MILTARIS	MILITARY MACAW
50118D	ROCKIN'S EXOTIC GAME RANCH LLC		2025-10-26	ORYX	LEUCORYX	ARABIAN ORYX
				RUCERVUS	ELDII	ELD'S DEER
51201D	BRIGHT AND ASSOCIATES, INC.		2025-07-16	SPHENISCUS	DEMERSUS	JACKASS PENGUIN
				TAPIRUS	BAIRDII	BAIRD'S TAPIR
				SAGUINUS	OEDIPUS	COTTONTOP TAMARIN
				CHELONOIDIS	NIGER	GALAPAGOS GIANT TORTOISE
				EQUUS	GREYII	GREY'S ZEBRA
				EQUUS	ZEBRA	HARTMANN'S MT. ZEBRA
				ASTROCHELYS	RADIATA	RADIATED TORTOISE
				HYLOBATES	LAR	LAR GIBBON
54979D	H. YTURRIA LAND & CATTLE COMPANY		2025-05-04	KOBUS	LECHE	LECHWE
54998D	WILDLIFE WORLD ZOO, INC.		2027-04-25	SPHENISCUS	DEMERSUS	JACKASS PENGUIN
55736D	GRANITE RANCH		2025-04-30	KOBUS	LECHE	LECHWE
56427D	DALLAS ZOO MANAGEMENT, INC.		2025-06-09	ACINONYX	JUBATUS	CHEETAH
				LOXODONTA	AFRICANA	AFRICAN ELEPHANT
				EQUUS	ZEBRA	HARTMANN'S MT. ZEBRA
				VARANUS	KONODONENSIS	KOMODO MONITOR
				TOMISTOMA	SCHLEGELII	TOMISTOMA
56470D	CHATTANOOGA ZOO		2025-08-17	UNCIA	UNCIA	SNOW LEOPARD
59433D	MISSISSIPPI AQUARIUM		2025-11-23	SPHENISCUS	DEMERSUS	JACKASS PENGUIN

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
60203C	OREGON WILDLIFE FOUNDATION	LONESOME BULL RANCH	2024-07-10	GAZELLA	LEPTOCEROS	SLENDER-HORNED GAZELLE
60507D			2025-11-08	RUCERVUS KOBUS	DUVAUCELII	BARASINGHA
62275C	DUB WALLACE RANCH LLC			ORYX	LECHE	LECHWE
62334C	ODYSEA AQUARIUM, LLC		2023-10-10	ORYX	LEUCORYX	ARABIAN ORYX
63871A	BAR H BAR LAND & CATTLE COMPANY		2023-11-28	SPHENISCUS	LEUCORYX	ARABIAN ORYX
66451D	Zoological Subdistrict of the Metropolitan Zoological Park and Museum District		2025-05-14	KOBUS	DEMERSUS	JACKASS PENGUIN
					LECHE	LECHWE
			2025-11-23	PANTHERA	TIGRIS	SIBERIAN TIGER
				PANTHERA	PAROUS	AMUR LEOPARD
				UNCIA	UNCIA	SNOW LEOPARD
				LYCAON	PICTUS	AFRICAN WILD DOG
				ACINONYX	JUBATUS	CHEETAH
				PANTHERA	LEO	AFRICAN LION
				ELEPHAS	MAXIMUS	ASIAN ELEPHANT
				DICEROS	BICORNIS	BLACK RHINOCEROS
				ADDAX	NASOMACULATUS	ADDAX
				BABYRUSA	BABYRUSA	BURU BABIRUSA
				BOS	JAVANICUS	BANTENG
				EQUUS	AFRICANUS	AFRICAN WILD ASS
				EQUUS	GREVI	GREY'S ZEBRA
				NANGER	DAMA	DAMA GAZELLE
				EUDYPES	CHRYSOCOME	S. ROCKHOPPER PENGUIN
				SPHENISCUS	HUMBOLDTI	HUMBOLDT PENGUIN
				GRUS	VIPIO	WHITE-NEPED CRANE
				LEUCOPSA	ROTHSCHILD	BALI STARLING
				OREOPHASIS	DERBIANUS	HORNED GUAN
				TRAGOPAN	CABOTI	CABOT'S TRAGOPAN
69710D	VIRGINIA ZOOLOGICAL PARK		2026-06-08	CROCODYLUS	SIAMENSIS	SIAMSE CROCODILE
				EQUUS	ZEBRA	HARTMANN'S MT. ZEBRA
				SYMPHALANGUS	SYNDACTYLUS	SIAMANG
				TAPIRUS	INDICUS	SIAMANG
				GRUS	VIPIO	SIAMANG
				PONGO	VIPIO	SIAMANG
				LOXODONTA	VIPIO	SIAMANG
71365D	CALDWELL ZOO			AFRICANA	VIPIO	SIAMANG
75297A	DOS HIJOS RANCH - OPERATIONS, INC.		2026-12-03	ACINONYX	GOELDII	SIAMANG
			2023-11-27	RUCERVUS	JUBATUS	SIAMANG
					DUVAUCELII	SIAMANG

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
75693A	TURTLE BACK ZOO		2024-03-28	VARANUS	KOMODOENSIS	KOMODO MONITOR
				PANTHERA	PARDUS	LEOPARD
				UNCIA	UNCIA	SNOW LEOPARD
				NOMASCUS	LEUCOGENYS	N. WHITE-CHEEKED GIBBON
				SPHENISCUS	DEMERSUS	JACKASS PENGUIN
				VULTUR	GRYPHIUS	ANDEAN CONDOR
				GRUS	VIPIO	WHITE-NECKED CRANE
				LEUCOPUS	ROTHSCHILD	BALI STARLING
				CACATUA	MOLUCCENSIS	SALMON-CRESTED COCKATOO
				CHELONIDIS	NIGER	GALAPAGOS GIANT TORTOISE
				ASTROCHELYS	RADIATA	RADIATED TORTOISE
				CHRYSOCYON	BRACHYURUS	MANED WOLF
				PANTHERA	LEO	AFRICAN LION
77904D	Point Delfante Zoo & Aquarium		2026-12-19	ASTROCHELYS	RADIATA	RADIATED TORTOISE
78121C	THE PINOLA CONSERVANCY		2024-02-26	GRUS	JAPONENSIS	RED-CROWNED CRANE
				TRAGOPAN	CABOTI	CABOT'S TRAGOPAN
79076D	VENADO VENTURES LLC.		2026-12-16	KOBUS	LECHE	LECHWE
82001D	CHEROKEE EXOTIC		2027-04-20	KOBUS	LECHE	LECHWE
83956D	UTICA ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY		2027-08-22	HYLOBATES	LAR	LAR GIBBON
84035C	Cleveland Metroparks Zoo		2023-08-09	PHASCOLARCTOS	CINEREUS	KOALA
85048C	KYLE WILDLIFE LIMITED		2024-07-22	RUCERVUS	DIVAUCELII	BARASINGHA
	PARTNERSHIP					
PER0054404	AUDUBON NATURE INSTITUTE		2028-01-23	ATELOPUS	ZETEKI	PANAMANIAN GOLDEN FROG
				ATELOPUS	ZETEKI	PANAMANIAN GOLDEN FROG
				DERMATEMYS	MAWII	CENTRAL AMER RIVER TURTLE
				BRACHYLOPHUS	MAWII	CENTRAL AMER RIVER TURTLE
				BRACHYLOPHUS	BULABULA	BANDED IGUANA
				TOMISTOMA	BULABULA	BANDED IGUANA
				TOMISTOMA	SCHLEGELII	TOMISTOMA
				VARANUS	SCHLEGELII	TOMISTOMA
				VARANUS	KOMODOENSIS	KOMODO MONITOR
				PANTHERA	KOMODOENSIS	KOMODO MONITOR
				PANTHERA	PARDUS	AMUR LEOPARD
				PANTHERA	PARDUS	AMUR LEOPARD
				PANTHERA	TIGRIS	SUMATRA TIGER
				PANTHERA	TIGRIS	SUMATRA TIGER
				LYCAON	PICTUS	AFRICAN WILD DOG
				LYCAON	PICTUS	AFRICAN WILD DOG
				PONGO	PICTUS	AFRICAN WILD DOG
				PONGO	ABELI	SUMATRA ORANGUTAN
				ELEPHAS	ABELI	SUMATRA ORANGUTAN
				ELEPHAS	MAXIMUS	ASIAN ELEPHANT
					MAXIMUS	ASIAN ELEPHANT

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
88038A 88649A	DOUBLE ARROW BOW CIRCLE E RANCH			BABYROUSA	CELEBENSIS	NORTH SULAWESI BABIRUSA
				BABYROUSA	DUVAUCELII	NORTH SULAWESI BABIRUSA
				RUCERVUS	DUVAUCELII	BARASINGHA
				RUCERVUS	PUDU	BARASINGHA
89124A	ST. CATHERINES ISLAND FOUNDATION			PUDU	PUDA	SOUTHERN PUDU
				BOS	JAVANICUS	SOUTHERN PUDU
				BOS	JAVANICUS	BANTENG
				KOBUS	LECHE	BANTENG
90228C	LOWRY PARK ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF TAMPA, INC.			KOBUS	LECHE	LECHWE
				RUCERVUS	DUVAUCELII	BARASINGHA
				RUCERVUS	DUVAUCELII	BARASINGHA
				KOBUS	LECHE	BARASINGHA
91440C	Minnesota Zoo			LEMUR	CATTA	LECHWE
				EQUUS		RING-TAILED LEMUR
				LOXODONTA		
						GREY'S ZEBRA
93568C	Zoological Society of San Diego					AFRICAN ELEPHANT
91440C	Minnesota Zoo			CERATOTHERIUM		SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS
				EQUUS		HARTMANN'S MT. ZEBRA
				PETROGALE		YELLOW-FOOTED ROCK WALLABY
				RHINOCEROS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
91440C	Minnesota Zoo			TAPIRUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				NEOFELIS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				VARANUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				SPHENISCUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
91440C	Minnesota Zoo			LEONTOPITHECUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				SAGUINUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				CUON		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				MACACA		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
91440C	Minnesota Zoo			EQUUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				PANTHERA		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				PANTHERA		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				NOMASCUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
91440C	Minnesota Zoo			LEMUR		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				TAPIRUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				LEUCOPUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				SPHENISCUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
91440C	Minnesota Zoo			OSTEOLEMIUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				VARANUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				VARANUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS
				TODIRAMPHUS		INDIAN RHINOCEROS

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
				ANAS	LAYSANENSIS	LAYSAN DUCK
				ASARCORNIS	SCUTULLATA	WHITE-WINGED DUCK
				CACATUA	ALBA	WHITE COCKATOO
				VULTUR	GRYPHUS	ANDEAN CONDOR
				NEGOENAS	MAYERI	PINK PIGEON
				CRAX	ALBERTI	BLUE-BILLED CURASSOW
				GRUS	JAPONENSIS	RED-CROWNED CRANE
				MACROCEPHALON	MALEO	MALEO MEGAPODE
				TRAGOPAN	BLYTHI	BLYTH'S TRAGOPAN
				PYRRHURA	CRUENTATA	BLUE-THROATED PARAKEET
				AMAZONA	LEUCOCEPHALA	CUBAN PARROT
				ARA	AMBIGUUS	GREAT GREEN MACAW
				ARA	GLAUCOGULARIS	BLUE-THROATED MACAW
				ARA	MILITARIS	MILITARY MACAW
				CACATUA	MOLUCENSIS	SALMON-CRESTED COCKATOO
				RHYNOCHETOS	JUBATUS	KAGU
				SPHENISCUS	DEMERSUS	JACKASS PENGUIN
				LEUCOPSAR	ROTHSCHILDI	BALI STARLING
				GERONTICUS	EREMITA	NORTHERN BALD IBIS
				ANTILOCAPRA	AMERICANA	PENINSULAR PRONGHORN
				BUBALUS	DEPRESSICORNIS	LOWLAND ANOA
				NANGER	DAMA	RED-NECKED GAZELLE
				ORYX	LEUCORYX	ARABIAN ORYX
				DAMALISCUS	PYGARGUS	BONTEROK
				GAZELLA	CUVIERI	CUVIER'S GAZELLE
				BOS	GAURUS	SELADANG
				BOS	JAVANICUS	BANTENG
				GAZELLA	LEPTOCEROS	SLENDER-HORNED GAZELLE
				KOBUS	LECHE	LECHWE
				CUON	ALPINUS	DHOLE
				CHRYSOCYON	BRACHYURUS	MANED WOLF
				LEONTOPITHECUS	ROSALIA	GOLDEN LION TAMARIN
				LEONTOPITHECUS	CHRYSOMELAS	GOLDEN-HEADED LION TAMARIN
				TRACHYPITHECUS	FRANCOISI	FRANCOIS' LANGUR
				THEROPITHECUS	GELADA	GELADA
				MACACA	SILENUS	LION-TAILED MACAQUE
				MANDRILLUS	SPHINX	MANDRILL
				CERVUS	ELAPHUS	BACTRIAN DEER
				RUCERVUS	DUVAUCELII	BARASINGHA
				CERVUS	ELAPHUS	BARBARY DEER
				RUCERVUS	ELDI	ELD'S DEER
				CERVUS	NIPPON	NORTH CHINA SIKI DEER

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
				PUDU	PUDA	SOUTHERN PUDU
				MOSCHUS	MOSCHIFERUS	SIBERIAN MUSK DEER
				DAUBENTONIA	MADAGASCARIENSIS	AYE-AYE
				LOXODONTA	AFRICANA	AFRICAN ELEPHANT
				ELEPHAS	MAXIMUS	ASIAN ELEPHANT
				EQUUS	GREYI	GREY'S ZEBRA
				EQUUS	PRZEWALSKII	PRZEWALSKI'S HORSE
				EQUUS	AFRICANUS	SOMALI WILD ASS
				PANTHERA	PAROUS	AMUR LEOPARD
				FELIS	NIGRIPES	BLACK-FOOTED CAT
				NEOFELIS	NEBULOSA	CLOUDED LEOPARD
				PANTHERA	LEO	AFRICAN LION
				PANTHERA	TIGRIS	TIGER
				UNCIA	TIGRIS	SNOW LEOPARD
				ACINONYX	JUBATUS	CHEETAH
				PANTHERA	TIGRIS	TIGER
				PAN	PANISCUS	BONORO
				PONGO	PYGMAEUS	BORNEAN ORANGUTAN
				PONGO	ABELII	SUMATRAN ORANGUTAN
				GORILLA	GORILLA	WESTERN GORILLA
				NOMASCUS	GABRIELAE	RED-CHEEKED GIBBON
				SYMPHALANGUS	SYNDACTYLUS	SIAMANG
				PROPTHECUS	COQUERELI	COQUEREL'S SIFAKA
				VARECIA	VARIEGATA	BLK-&WHITE RUFFED LEMUR
				EULEMUR	COLLARIS	RED-COLLARED LEMUR
				LEMUR	CATTA	RING-TAILED LEMUR
				NYCTICEBUS	PYGMAEUS	PYGMY SLOW LORIS
				MACROPUS	PARMA	PARMA WALLABY
				PETROGALE	XANTHOPIUS	YELLOW-FOOTED ROCK WALLABY
				PHASCOLARCTOS	CINEBELUS	KOALA
				BETTONGIA	PENCILLATA	WOYLE
				PTEROPUS	RODRIGUESIS	RODRIGUES FLYING FOX
				DICEROS	BICORNIS	BLACK RHINOCEROS
				CERATOTHERIUM	SIMUM	SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS
				TAPIRUS	BAIRDII	BAIRD'S TAPIR
				TAPIRUS	INDICUS	MALAYAN TAPIR
				ALLUROPODA	MELANOLEUCA	GIANT PANDA
				ALLIGATOR	SINENSIS	CHINESE ALLIGATOR
				CROCODYLUS	CATAPHRACTUS	AFR SLENDER-SNOUT CROCODILE
				OSTEOLEAMUS	TETRASPIS	AFRICAN DWARF CROCODILE
				GAVALIUS	GANGETICUS	GAVAL

Parent permit	Account name	Consumer	Date expired	Genus	Species	Common name
93748A	SURPRISE SPRING			GEOCEMYS BATAGUR BRACHYLOPHUS CYCLURA CHELONIDIS ASTROCHELYS VARANUS 2024-03-25 ASTROCHELYS CHELONIDIS GEOCEMYS 2024-05-28 CARDUELIS 2024-12-10 NEOFELIS NOMASCUS CERATOTHERIUM PANTHERA SYMPHALANGUS LEMUR VARECIA SAGUINUS TAPIRUS 2024-03-25 RUCERVUS EQUUS 2025-01-15 VARECIA VARECIA NOMASCUS SYMPHALANGUS ACINONYX NEOFELIS NANGER 2024-03-25 ORYX	HAMILTONII BASKA BULABULA COLLEI NIGER RADIATA KOMODOENSIS RADIATA NIGER HAMILTONII CUCULLATA NEBULOSA LEUCOGENYS SIMUM TIGRIS SYNDACTYLUS CATTIA RUBRA OEDIPUS BAIRDII DUVAUCELII AFRICANUS RUBRA VAREGATA LEUCOGENYS SYNDACTYLUS JUBATUS NEBULOSA DAMA LEUCORYX	SPOTTED POND TURTLE RIVER TERRAPIN BANDED IGUANA JAMAICAN IGUANA GALAPAGOS GIANT TORTOISE RADIATED TORTOISE KOMODO MONITOR RADIATED TORTOISE GALAPAGOS GIANT TORTOISE SPOTTED POND TURTLE RED SISKIN CLOUDED LEOPARD N. WHITE-CHEEKED GIBBON SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS TIGER SIAMANG RING-TAILED LEMUR RED-RUFFED LEMUR COTTONTOP TAMARIN BAIRD'S TAPIR BARASINGHA AFRICAN WILD ASS RED-RUFFED LEMUR BLK & WHITE-RUFFED LEMUR N. WHITE-CHEEKED GIBBON SIAMANG CHEETAH CLOUDED LEOPARD DAMA GAZELLE ARABIAN ORYX
94795C	AVIAN PRESERVATION AND EDUCATION CONSERVANCY					
95132C	Nashville Zoo at Grassmere					
95637C	L.A. WATERS RANCH, LLC					
98224C	Zoological Society of Pittsburgh					
99164C	UNO MAS RANCH LLC					

Zinke Q12: Please provide the job descriptions for each FTE position in the permit office and the division of scientific authority.

Response: FWS has different types of positions and specialties in the permitting program including general and specialized biologists, government information specialists, legal instrument examiners, administrative specialists, supervisory biologists, and managers.

The IA biologists and botanists are responsible for conducting legal acquisition findings and non-detriment findings under the CITES convention, ESA enhancement findings, and a variety of other regulatory permit findings. In doing so, IA biologists and botanists help to conserve species at-risk by using the best science to identify and evaluate the status of species in international trade; recommend appropriate protection of species through promulgation of ESA special (Section 4d) rules and listings in the CITES Appendices; conduct scientific analyses and provide recommendations on permitting actions regarding the international trade of protected species; collaborate with States, Tribes, and others to monitor the trade and status of protected species in the wild; and provide training and technical assistance to other countries on conservation and policy matters, particularly as they relate to international wildlife trade. Government information specialists are responsible for the publication of permits in the Federal Register and collection and consolidation of public comments. Additionally, these individuals ensure proper permit fees have been paid, review other permit applications for completion, and ensure records are maintained in accordance with established procedures.

Legal instrument examiners are responsible for making legal acquisition findings for select CITES applications as well as the processing of single-use permit requests from established Master Files. They are also responsible for customer service and response to public inquiries. Administrative specialists support administrative needs for the permitting program, including mail management, filing, file searches, record keeping, and other administrative tasks.

Zinke Q13: Please provide an organizational chart for the International Affairs division down to each position along with the GS number for each position.

Response: FWS has a range of employees who work in the permitting program with a diversity of specialties, including biologists, government information specialists, legal instrument examiners, administrative specialists, supervisory biologists, and managers. The International Affairs Program's Divisions are housed under the Assistant Director's Office. The Assistant Director's Office oversees the Office of Program Support, Office of Outreach and Communications, Division of International Conservation, Division of Management Authority, and Division of Scientific Authority. The requested organizational chart information follows.



Zinke Q14: Please describe the process, complete with positions designated to perform the work, for publishing CITES and CBW permit information in the Federal Register, from application receipt to approval/denial.

Response: For CBW applications, under 50 CFR 17.21(g), FWS is required to publish both a Federal Register notice of receipt of permit applications requesting activities with endangered and threatened species as well as a notice of issuance of permits for endangered and threatened species.

Once a CBW application is received, biologists review the permit application and work with the permit applicant to obtain any missing information that is necessary to make the required permit finding. Applicants may take 45 days to provide the requested information, in accordance with General Permit regulations at 50 CFR Part 13. Once the applicant submits the complete application, the biologist begins analysis of the submitted materials and drafts a Federal Register notice announcing receipt of the application, which we batch with other applications received over the course of about a week. A Government Information Specialist reviews and finalizes the batched Federal Register notice and submits it for review and approval.

Once approved, the Supervisory Program Analyst submits the final notice to the Office of the Federal Register. The notice is published for a 30-day public comment period. After the public comment period has closed, the biologist reviews the comments, completes required findings and recommends issuance or denial to the Branch Manager who is responsible for the final permit decision. For each permit issued under CBW, the biologist completes the Federal Register Notice Issuance template, and the Government Information Specialist reviews and finalizes the template and submits for review and approval. Once approved, the Supervisory Program Analyst submits the final notice of issuance to the Office of the Federal Register.

FWS' CITES regulations do not require publication of a notice of receipt of permit applications or a notice of issuance in the Federal Register.

Zinke Q15: What was the average page count for a CBW permit application in FY 2022? In FY 2012?

Response: CBW permit application pages range depending on the complexity of the permit request, such as the number of species involved; generally, they are 90-100 pages in length.

Zinke Q16: What was the average page count for a CITES import/export permit application in FY 2022? In FY 2012?

Response: CITES Permit application page length is highly variable, from 3 to 1000+ pages, depending on the complexity of the permit request, the number of species, and a variety of other factors.

Zinke Q17: Please list the names of all employees currently involved in the evaluation of CBW and CITES import/export permits along with a description of their hands-on experience working with the species contained in the permit applications they are charged with evaluating. Please include specific date ranges, locations, and activities with each species. Please include both the permit office as well as the Division of Scientific Affairs.

Response: FWS has a team of highly dedicated staff with extensive experience in a diversity of fields that support the U.S. in meeting its global conservation mission. See the attached organization charts in response to Question 13. Please contact the Department of the Interior's Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs to request any additional information, including information protected by the Privacy Act.

Question from Ranking Member Pingree:

Wild Horse and Burro program

Pingree Q1: Congress directed the creation of a Departmental Wild Horse and Burro Task Force. How often is it meeting and what is it focusing on?

Response: The DOI Wild Horse and Burro Task Force (Task Force) has met twice. The last meeting was held on May 11, 2023. The focus of the last meeting was ongoing wild horse and burro research support from other agencies, particularly the United States Geological Service. The Task Force also discussed the latest on-range population estimates (82,833 as of March 2023), the value of the new PopEquus population modeling tool, fertility control updates, ongoing and recently completed studies, off-range holding challenges including the associated rising costs, the Adoption Incentive Program, and next steps for the Task Force to implement changes to improve outcomes.

Pingree Q2: How is the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) addressing the rising costs of keeping wild horses and burros in off-range holdings?

Response: BLM's principal outlet for excess wild horses and burros removed from public lands is to place them into private care (i.e., adoptions, sales, and transfers). Each animal placed into private care saves the agency approximately \$26,000 in lifetime holding costs.

Since 2019 – when the agency began offering cash incentives for individuals to adopt untrained animals – the BLM has placed nearly 29,700 animals into private care, representing nearly \$772 million in out-year savings. The agency continues to use incentives and other means (partnerships to offer trained animals, facility and satellite adoption events nationwide, increased online offerings, bulk sales to trusted domestic and international organizations, etc.) to maximize private placements.

For animals that remain in BLM holding, the agency makes greatest use of lower-cost off-range pastures (which cost about a third of what off-range holding in corrals cost on a daily per-head basis). The agency continues to seek low-cost pasture space to house additional, unadopted animals. The latest solicitation for off-range pasture space is expected to increase capacity by approximately 8,000 spaces in FY 2024, providing additional off-range flexibility to conduct needed on-range management activities.

Pingree Q3: How is drought impacting the need for gathers and the condition of the range?

Response: The wild horse and burro population is estimated to be at 82,833 animals residing on public lands in the West. This is three times over the appropriate management level of 26,700 animals. The chronic wild horse and burro overpopulation on fragile desert and sagebrush ecosystems, with scarce forage and water, endangers overall land health and risks irrecoverable damage to important resources. This puts other wildlife and rangeland resources at great risk along with the wild horses and burros themselves.

As climate change drives more frequent and extreme drought events across the West, the impacts of overpopulation on rangeland and animal health will be amplified. The damaging impacts of drought will further reduce availability of water and forage for wild horses and wildlife, especially in areas of public lands where wild horses and burros are chronically overpopulated. To a very large extent, management of water resources lies outside BLM's direct control. In many areas, the agency relies on partnerships and cooperation with private landowners to ensure access to water.

The fact that animals still exceed the appropriate management level by three times continues to require attention to help lessen the impact to already water starved lands in the West. In 2022, the BLM initiated its largest removal effort in history and removed approximately 21,000 animals. Many of these animals were removed from drought-stricken herd management areas that were overpopulated. This removal effort immediately helps restore these fragile plants and soils that make up the habitat and rangelands of the West.

Pingree Q4: What is the efficacy rate of the fertility control currently being administered by BLM?

- Are there any new products under development that would be more effective?

Response: Fertility control vaccines are a useful tool in managing wild horse and burro populations; however, for fertility control applications to be most effective, herd management areas must be at or near appropriate management level. The BLM primarily uses a vaccine called Porcine Zoonosis Pellicida, or PZP, which has been approved by the EPA since 2012 for use in wild horses and burros. The BLM is also expanding its use of a newer vaccine called GonaCon-Equine, which works slightly differently than PZP. In FY 2020, the BLM increased its use of GonaCon-Equine by 75 percent.

To keep a wild horse herd stable in size, there needs to be some level of removals unless about 75 percent of the mares are infertile. Under ideal circumstances the efficacy rate for the PZP fertility control vaccine is approximately 95 percent for one year. Lasting contraceptive effect requires a mare to be treated every year.

GonaCon-Equine can have a longer-lasting effect with approximately 80–90 percent of treated mares being infertile for about 3 years. For GonaCon-Equine vaccinated mares to stay infertile they need to be retreated about every 3-4 years. For both vaccines, the effects can last longer the more times a mare is treated. Although there are a few herds small enough for successful, effective darting programs, most treatments must be administered after horses and burros are gathered. However, it can be challenging to recapture the same animals in back-to-back years, as repeated gathers can cause animals to become aware that they are being gathered and evade capture.

Regarding "new products," in Spring 2023, the BLM authorized two research trials to study whether formulations of fertility control vaccines might lead to long-lasting contraception in wild horse mares from a single dose.

Developing and testing long-lasting fertility control for wild mares was identified as the BLM's highest priority for wild horse and burro research in the agency's 2021 Wild Horse and Burro Strategic Research Plan. Existing fertility control methods are short-lasting and require multiple doses, which limit their effectiveness as a management tool. Longer-lasting fertility control methods would be potent tools to better control herd growth and protect animal and land health.

The approved research projects were selected after external scientific expert review and internal agency review, the effects were analyzed in an environmental assessment in 2022, and the BLM has taken public comments about the selected projects. One of the approved projects will test formulations of 'oocyte growth factor' vaccines, which are intended to prevent a mare's eggs from developing completely and would prevent estrus cycles. The other approved project will test whether a PZP vaccine called 'SpayVac' works better when injected into the neck muscles or the gluteal (rump) muscles. Successful immunization with SpayVac can prevent sperm from entering fertile eggs.

Animals in the study will be well cared for, consistent with the BLM's Comprehensive Animal Welfare Plan, and with additional animal welfare oversight from research institutions. They will be housed in pens to allow for frequent scientific data collection. The studies will be conducted in a wild horse corral facility in a Nevada prison.

Rebuilding Staffing Capacity

Pingree Q5: At the end of 2020 the Department was at a 10-year low in staffing. Since then, the Department has been building back and in fiscal year 2024 the BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service propose staffing increases above the fiscal year 2023 enacted level so core services and programs can be delivered to the American people.

- What are the consequences of not achieving the desired fiscal year 2024 staffing level?
- What is required to recruit, hire, and train these new staff?

BLM Response: The BLM continues efforts to rebuild staffing levels and fill vacancies from Headquarters relocations. Rebuilding staffing levels will provide the agency with the human resources required to carry out the BLM's multiple use mission, to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's public lands uses, such as conventional and renewable energy development; livestock grazing; conservation; mining; watershed protection; and hunting, fishing, and other forms of recreation.

The BLM uses various recruitment options and hiring authorities to include non-competitive and competitive appointments. These include but are not limited to veterans appointments such as Veterans' Recruitment Appointment, 30 percent or more disabled, and Military Spouses hiring authorities. In addition, the BLM recruits with the use of Schedule A, Pathways and Student programs, and direct Hire authorities. Once a new hire is on-boarded, training BLM staff requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that takes into account the unique and widely varied missions the Bureau covers. Staff members must be equipped with the necessary

skills and knowledge to carry out their duties effectively, ultimately leading to increased efficiency and effectiveness in managing public lands.

The BLM increasingly must meet the talent pool with the skills they come with. This necessitates not only technical skill training for BLM-related programs (rangelands, solid/fluid minerals, land use planning) but also leadership and supervisory skills training.

FWS Response: Staffing levels across the FWS are down. In 2011, FWS staffing totaled 9,500 FTEs and in 2022 there were 8,391 FTE. At the same time responsibilities have increased impacting the level of service FWS can provide. Rebuilding FWS staffing is one of the bureau's highest priorities and is a key element of the FY 2024 President's Budget Request for FWS.

The National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) protects forests, prairies, desert, coral reefs, tundra, and wetlands in all 50 States and five U.S. territories. In FY 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Refuge System hosted a record breaking 67 million visits to national wildlife refuges, an increase of 46.6% since FY 2011. Since 2010, the Refuge System workforce has dropped 25% while visitation has increased 36%. Lower staffing levels are impacting the refuges' abilities to monitor, manage and protect the natural resources, ensure public safety and law enforcement coverage, and maintain hours of operation for the public.

Staffing is a significant issue with FWS' law enforcement programs. FWS' special agents play a key role in combating international wildlife trafficking through investigating and disrupting criminal activity and their networks. FWS currently has 222 special agents and expects 47 mandatory retirements over the next 4 years. A newly hired agent must attend the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center academy and Field Training for Officers, which is an investment of 1.5 years until the agent is at full performance for sworn duties.

The International Operations Unit has special agent attachés at 10 U.S. embassies, including South Africa, Brazil, China, Nigeria, Mexico, Peru, Tanzania, Thailand, Vietnam, and Kenya; with an analyst at the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) in Germany. These locations are selected to facilitate the coordination and intelligence sharing in the fight against illegal wildlife trafficking. Hiring locally employed staff at the attaché offices to rebuild administrative and investigative capacity at the attaché offices is a critical need since attaché offices overseas are presently only staffed by a single special agent.

In FWS' Migratory Bird Program the workforce is nearly 20 percent smaller today than it was in 2013, with exponentially increasing responsibilities. Additional staffing is needed to meet the demand to work through partnerships to tackle conservation issues facing migratory birds; with the energy sector and industries to incorporate bird-friendly actions into projects; to improve permitting processes; and to sustain the monitoring and population assessments that provide the biological foundation to support migratory bird hunting seasons and the permitted take of migratory birds.

FWS' Ecological Services programs are also experiencing impacts from lower staffing levels, impacting the ongoing work to meet the bureau's mandatory and statutory responsibilities. The Ecological Services program has approximately 19% fewer FTEs than in FY 2005. As a result,

critical tasks are not being completed in a timely manner or are deferred until staffing becomes available. As a result, FWS faces increasing litigation related to response to actions to list and delist species under the Endangered Species Act. FWS will also have difficulty engaging in mandated environmental reviews on critical infrastructure projects in a timely fashion and will often have to postpone recovery planning and implementation, and conservation of candidate species, among other tasks. Without additional staff capacity, the FWS will continue to have to triage its work under the ESA and other authorities, risking negative impacts to the projects and actions of other Federal and non-Federal agencies important to growing the economy while conserving listed and imperiled species.

NPS Response: The FY 2024 President's Budget would support 15,601 FTE that would carry out mission operations at 423 park units and central offices. The FY 2024 budget includes an increase of over \$117 million across various efforts that would support more than 600 additional FTE across the Service, including specific increases to build park capacity, support U.S. Park Police operations, and to address new and critical operating responsibilities. This includes security and law enforcement, interpretive programming and visitor experience, preservation of natural and cultural resources, expansion of research projects, providing education to the public, continued maintenance and operations of our assets and facilities, and supporting park commercial operators that provide recreational activities like guided hiking or river tours and concession operations. Additionally, the FY 2024 budget requests \$124.9 million to support fixed costs, including covering the 2023 and proposed 2024 pay raise. If these funds are not provided, parks will absorb these costs, further reducing their purchasing power and limiting services.

The process to recruit and hire a well-qualified workforce is complex, but it starts with a hiring manager determining what position to hire. The NPS then considers which hiring path will result in the best candidate pool for that particular position, including consideration of potential challenges. Typical challenges for the NPS include whether or not Federal compensation is commensurate with private or State/local sector compensation in that area or for that type of position, whether private sector or park housing is available and/or affordable, and other factors. Where possible and appropriate, the NPS deploys tools from its hiring toolbox, such as limited flexible hiring authorities, or recruitment, relocation and retention incentives.

Question from Rep. McCollum:

Connecting Youth to Public Lands

McCollum Q1: House Filed Report 117-400 for FY 2023 encouraged the Department to examine the challenges in connecting youth in marginalized communities to public lands.

- How are the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management working to enhance youth engagement on our public lands, especially youth from underrepresented communities?

Response: NPS works to enhance youth engagement on our public lands through a wide variety of programs focused on outdoor recreation access, education, volunteer service and employment in our national parks. The NPS collaborates with education partners and youth organizations to create a pathway to employment focused on diversifying the NPS workforce. At least 10,000 youth annually are involved in a multi-year progression of experiences, from engagement and education programs to internship and volunteer opportunities to employment. Partners include organizations such as service and conservation corps, community-based environmental and heritage organizations, and educational institutions.

The NPS supports programs which specifically include youth from underrepresented communities, including the Indian Youth Service Corps, the American Sign Language Conservation Corps Program, the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Internship Program, the Latino Heritage Internship Program, the Mosaics in Science Diversity Internship Program, Intern X Program, the Public Health Fellows Program, Pacific Islands Indigenous Conservation Corps Program, the Environmental Justice Fellows Program and the Cultural Resources Diversity Internship Program, among others. In FY 2022, there were 4,292 participant hires through youth serving partner organizations and 367 participants in youth conservation corps programs. The NPS also partnered with the YMCA to provide outdoor recreation, education, volunteer service and employment opportunities to youth. In FY 2022, the program had 16,449 participants including 4,316 children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and 200 children from active-duty military families.

Additionally, in FY 2022, the Recreational Fishing and Junior Ranger Angler program invested in a diverse set of partnerships to expand the program's reach into a broad cross-section of the population. The NPS, the National Park Trust (NPT), Our Military Kids (OMK), and Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) partnered to provide 14 fishing outings in national parks for military and gold star families, reaching 350 individuals representing more than 100 families. The NPS partnered with Blue Star Families to reach 100+ military families in four metropolitan areas through recreational fishing clinics and outdoor activities to extend fishing experiences to 400 Title I students and 200 college students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

The FWS partnership with the NHT engages youth nationwide from under-represented communities from early childhood to early career. Through the 101 urban refuges, all located near major population centers, FWS strives to dismantle historic barriers to help youth access

nature. Each year, thousands of K-12 students from urban communities participate in curriculum-based environmental education programs. Youth Conservation Corps crews also provide opportunities to gain hands-on experience working in nature, to conduct habitat restoration at national wildlife refuges, national fish hatcheries, and other conservation projects directly benefiting their communities.

The Directorate Resource Assistant Fellowship Program (DFP) is one of two signature national diversity focused programs and has close to 100 participants from accredited higher education institutions who work on rigorous internship projects across the country. This program is designed to attract highly talented and diverse students into Fellowships, with particular attention to women and groups underrepresented in the workforce, including but not limited to, African American/Black, Alaska Native, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islanders students and students with disabilities. The recruitment efforts for this program are focused on Minority Serving Institutions. The FWS partners with the women-owned Hispanic Access Foundation to co-manage this program.

The second signature FWS diversity focused national youth program is the newly launched Maintenance and Infrastructure Fellows Program (MIFP). This program is in its first program year and has 40 fellows who are working alongside Service employees at national wildlife refuges, regional offices, national fish hatcheries, ecological services offices and with fire programs. MIFP is a collaborative partnership with the African American women owned Mobilize Green service and conservation corps organization. The aims of this program are to:

- Recruit a talented and diverse workforce.
- Provide a meaningful FWS experience through training and mentorship.
- Accomplish deferred maintenance, repairs and climate adaption and resiliency work.
- Adapt to workforce needs and retain successful, passionate fellows in permanent positions.

The BLM youth program, also referred to as the Public Lands Corps (PLC) program, partners with qualified youth conservation corps organizations to provide opportunities and education for young people ages 16 to 30 and returning veterans up to age 35 in natural and cultural resources management. These hands-on experiences often lead to entry-level careers with Federal land management agencies. In recent years, many youth corps organizations have offered undergraduate and graduate students the same opportunity to participate in the PLC program. These emerging youth corps professionals often bring scarce skills (GIS, Engineering, Web-Design) to the sponsoring agency. The BLM youth program also provides opportunities for veterans to develop skills in various public land management disciplines, such as wildland fire or landscape restoration, while benefitting the Bureau with their military experience and work ethic.

The BLM has developed a PLC Program Implementation Plan that provides targets and outcomes to address hands-on training, workforce needs, and hiring opportunities for young adults through various employment programs. In addition, it provides guidance and identifies resources necessary to implement the PLC Program Initiative. This plan relies on existing authorities and directorates' support across the Bureau. This Initiative is recruiting participants

from underrepresented communities by marketing opportunities to job boards, minority and veteran hiring services, and organizations serving diverse student populations such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Alaska Native-Serving Institutions and American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions.

The DOI through the BLM, FWS and NPS is designing youth development programs that focus on providing meaningful opportunities to participants from underrepresented communities by developing livable wage standards, incorporating pre-placement training for the participants and Federal personnel hosts, and providing housing and transportation assistance where appropriate. Additional efforts are being made to provide major financial assistance opportunities to community-based and national minority led youth serving organizations such as the African American owned Greening Youth Foundation and Mobilize Green, Hispanic owned Hispanic Access Foundation and Native American owned Capacity Builders.

- How are the Agencies working with each other and the Secretary and with other Federal agencies on this issue?

Response: The President's FY 2024 Budget Request includes funding for a Youth Programs Coordinator position to increase inter-bureau and inter-agency collaboration on youth programs with an emphasis on increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in these programs. The position will work directly with Secretary's Office and lead an intra-bureau working group to leverage resources and support coordination and collaboration between the bureau programs to increase youth education and employment opportunities. Additionally, the Bureau of Indian Affairs is collaborating with the NPS, FWS, BLM and the U.S. Forest Service on Indian Youth Service Corps projects. The first set of collaborative Indian Youth Service Corps projects with BIA will launch in FY 2023.

The DOI participates in standing interagency meetings with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, Department of Labor, and AmeriCorps. The primary purpose for these meetings is to share best practices and increase inter agency collaboration on youth projects. Policy issues are discussed, and solutions are developed to address critical issues impacting youth programs. DOI is also expanding its partnership through the BLM, FWS and NPS with AmeriCorps and its' service corps partner organizations to expand the number of AmeriCorps Education Awards to service corps participants who meet the qualifications.

- How are the Agencies collaborating with State and private entities who are doing this work?

Response: The Department, through the bureaus and offices, works with State, non-profit, and private entity partnerships to support youth programs and corps across the United States. These partnerships generate workforce readiness for America's youth, using Public Lands Corps Authority. The Department partners with many non-profit organizations, such as the Hispanic Access Foundation, Mobilize Green, the American Conservation Experience, and many other private organizations to employ hundreds of youths as Maintenance and Infrastructure Fellows, Directorate Fellows, interns, and in other positions as they earn certificates to pursue non-

competitive Federal employment. National Park Friends groups along with Refuge and Hatchery Friends groups also serve as integral partners in youth engagement by providing transportation funding for school visits, leading educational and interpretive programs, and supporting internship opportunities.

Some of the most dynamic youth development programming in the BLM, FWS and NPS are collaborative partnerships with community-based non-profit organizations including Federated youth serving entities like Groundwork USA, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) and the YMCA. These organizations have formed significant partnerships with DOI to develop programming and projects that are not only on public lands but also on State and local lands. The NPS is developing community-based open green space, climate resilience and environmental justice projects that engage economically racially diverse youth through its national partnership with Groundwork USA, a network of local organizations devoted to transforming the natural and built environment of low-resource communities.

The NPS through its Rivers, Trails, and Community Assistance (RTCA) Fellows Programs is providing meaningful and dynamic internship opportunities to diverse youth and young adults to develop open green spaces in State and local communities. The NPS, FWS and BLM partnerships with the BGCA and YMCA are actively engaging tens of thousands of diverse young people from underrepresented communities in outdoor recreation, place-based environmental science programming and volunteer service projects and programs on both public lands and State and local lands. The NPS has also supported the development of education curriculums with both organizations that expose K-12 youth to exciting opportunities on public lands and in their immediate communities.

WITNESSES

	Page
Amin, Faisal	139
Flanagan, Denise	73
Garcia, Hon. Sylvia	57
Griffith, H. M	68
Haaland, Hon. Deb	73
McGovern, Hon. J. P	71
Mooney, J. M	73
Moore Randy	1
Radewagen, Hon. A. A. C	49
Regan, Michael	139
Sams, C. F., III	193
Schrier, Hon. Kim	69
Stone-Manning, Tracy	193
Williams, Martha	193

