

**INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED  
AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2025**

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

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# Non-Tribal Public Witness Statements

**Date:** May 10, 2024

**Submitted by:** Sapna Gheewala Dowla, Associate VP Policy & Research, Alliance to Save Energy

**Prepared for:** House Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

**Subject:** U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ENERGY STAR FY2025 Appropriations

The Alliance to Save Energy, a bipartisan, non-profit organization representing a coalition of businesses, government, and environmental & consumer leaders, respectfully submits this testimony alongside the undersigned allied organizations to urge you to support robust energy efficiency (EE) investments in critical programs managed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), particularly increasing the ENERGY STAR budget for FY 2025 to \$50 million. ENERGY STAR is well known for its ability to facilitate energy savings for consumers and to encourage innovation in residential construction and appliance manufacturing. Energy efficiency, a key domestic resource, is critical to ensuring safe, reliable, & affordable energy to Americans now & in the future. Efficiency measures have cut our energy use in half relative to the size of the U.S. economy since 1980. This energy waste reduction has effectively delivered more than \$2,000 in annual savings per American.

In 2020 alone, ENERGY STAR saved American consumers and businesses more than \$42 billion in avoided energy costs. During the same period, ENERGY STAR accounted for nearly 400 million metric tons of emissions reductions – equivalent to more than five percent of U.S. total greenhouse gas emissions. Since 1992 the program has helped businesses and consumers save 5 trillion kWhs of electricity and avoid over \$500 billion in energy costs—and the program is also responsible for 4 billion metric tons of GHG reductions during the same period.

Notwithstanding the program’s success, ENERGY STAR has seen its funding steadily decline from a high of nearly \$54 million more than a decade ago, to \$33 million today. If we were to simply adjust for inflation, ENERGY STAR would have a budget of approximately \$75 million<sup>1</sup> in today’s dollars versus a decade ago. This steady decrease in funding priority has greatly restricted ENERGY STAR’s ability to keep up with fast-changing markets and to expand the program’s reach in sectors where large untapped energy savings are achievable, including low-to-moderate income, disadvantaged, and tribal communities.

With broad bipartisan support and nationwide brand recognition above 90%, ENERGY STAR is among the most impactful energy and climate programs in the federal government. Our request to increase the ENERGY STAR budget to \$50 million reflects the urgency to address climate change and the need to prioritize energy efficiency solutions as consumers and businesses are faced with higher energy costs. We fully appreciate the competing interests during the budget and appropriation cycles, however, we urge prioritization of energy efficiency— as “one of the fastest, most cost-effective ways to save money, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, create jobs, and meet growing energy demand.”<sup>1</sup>

Thank you for your leadership on these important issues, and we look forward to working together to strengthen the ENERGY STAR program. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Sapna Dowla ([sgdowla@ase.org](mailto:sgdowla@ase.org)) with the Alliance to Save Energy.

<sup>1</sup> The chained GDP deflator in the FY25 budget (Historical Tables 10.1) gives 0.8968 for FY2010 and 1.2533 for FY2024 (estimate).  $53.6 / .8968 * 1.2533 = 74.9$

Sincerely,

Alliance to Save Energy (ASE)  
American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE)  
Acuity Brands  
ASHRAE  
Building Performance Association (BPA)  
Building Potential  
Cellulose Insulation Manufacturers Association  
DuPont  
E4TheFuture  
Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI)  
Federal Performance Contracting Coalition (FPCC)  
Institute for Market Transformation (IMT)  
Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (MEEA)  
National Association of Energy Service Companies (NAESCO)  
National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO)  
Northeast Energy Efficiency and Electrification Council (NEEEEC)  
Polyisocyanurate Insulation Manufacturers Association  
Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEEP)  
U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC)



**American  
Alliance of  
Museums**

**Testimony of Marilyn Jackson  
on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums to the  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
in Support of Funding for  
NEH, NEA, Smithsonian Institution, and Historic Preservation Programs  
May 10, 2024**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Marilyn Jackson, and I am the President and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). We urge your support for at least \$211 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), at least \$211 million in funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), as well as robust funding for the Smithsonian Institution. We also request your support for the Historic Preservation Fund, including at least \$70 million for State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and \$34 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs). We support \$28 million for African American Civil Rights Grants, \$13 million for Historically Black Colleges/Universities, \$7 million for Equal Rights Grants, and \$5 million for Underrepresented Community Grants. We request funding of at least \$40 million for the Save America's Treasures program and \$17 million for Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grants. We also ask that Congress include museums in, and provide robust funding for, supplemental programs for federal agencies carrying out Semiquincentennial/America 250 programming and commemorations. In light of museums being banned from House Community Project Funding, which we strongly oppose, increasing funding for competitive grants for museums is all the more critical.

Before detailing these funding priorities for the museum field, I want to express my appreciation for the funding enacted in FY 2024. The funds for the NEH, NEA, and historic preservation activities will enhance museums' work to enrich their communities and preserve our many heritages. Making these investments speaks volumes about Congress' commitment to our nation's cultural institutions and its understanding of the economic and educational impact these institutions have on Americans.

There is a museum for everyone, and in every part of the country. Museums are a robust and diverse nonpartisan business and cultural sector, including aquariums, arboreta, art museums, botanic gardens, children's museums, culturally-specific museums, historic sites, historical societies, history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, planetariums, presidential libraries, public gardens, railway museums, science and technology centers, and zoos.

Museums are economic engines and job creators. According to *Museums as Economic Engines: A National Report*, U.S. museums (pre-pandemic) support more than 726,000 jobs and contribute \$50 billion to the U.S. economy per year. The economic activity of museums generates more than \$12 billion in tax revenue, one-third of it going to state and local governments. For example, the total financial impact that museums have on the economy in the state of Idaho is \$228 million, including supporting 3,098 jobs. For Maine it is a \$195 million impact supporting 3,405 jobs. This impact is not limited to cities: more than 25% of museums are in rural areas.

The import of these data is not the numbers alone – but the larger point that museums give back tremendously to their communities in numerous ways – including economically. The federal funding for NEA, NEH, and the other programs does not stay in Washington, DC, it goes back to communities across the nation. And it is leveraged many times over by private philanthropy, and state and local investments.

Museums are key education providers. Museums spend more than \$2 billion yearly on education activities; the typical museum devotes 75% of its education budget to K-12 students, and museums receive approximately 55 million visits each year from students in school groups. Museums also answered the call and significantly ramped up online educational programs and resources for students and families throughout the pandemic and beyond. Museums help teach the state and local curriculum in subjects ranging from art and science to history, civics, and government. Museums have long served as a vital resource to homeschool learners. It is not surprising that in a public opinion survey, 97% of respondents agreed that museums were educational assets in their communities. The results were statistically identical regardless of political persuasion or community size. Museums are nonpartisan and accessible to all Americans.

While making strides, the museum field continues to face financial strain in the aftermath of the pandemic, with half of museums indicating at least one sign of financial distress. In the six months prior to completing a [recent survey](#), half of museums either lost revenue or had to make difficult decisions on personnel, programs, or other expenditures (or all of the above). Despite the tremendous financial and psychological stress caused by the pandemic, museum professionals understand the essential role they play in their communities and despite the stress and financial strain they have deepened their commitment to serving as community assets. Museums are essential community infrastructure.

**The National Endowment for the Humanities** is an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1965. Grants are awarded to nonprofit educational institutions, including museums, for educational programming, infrastructure and the care of collections. NEH supports museums as institutions of lifelong learning and exploration, and as keepers of our cultural, historical, and scientific heritages that can foster critical dialogues on challenging issues. Approximately 40% of its budget is awarded to state humanities councils located in every state and U.S. territory.

In FY 2023, the NEH awarded 798 grants totaling more than \$110.7 million to institutions across the U.S., including museums. All of NEH's divisions and offices support museums. Humanities councils sponsor family literacy programs, speakers' bureaus, cultural heritage tourism, exhibitions, and live performances. Many councils also offer grants to local cultural organizations, including museums.

In preparation for the U.S. Semiquincentennial in 2026, NEH's "A More Perfect Union" initiative provides funding opportunities across the agency's seven grantmaking divisions for humanities projects that promote a deeper understanding of American history and culture and that advance civic education and knowledge of our core principles of government. As part of the initiative, most of NEH's grant programs include special encouragements to applications related to the United States' 250<sup>th</sup>.

Here are just two examples of how NEH funding was used to support museums' work in your communities:

- **The Idaho State Historical Society in Boise, ID**, was awarded a \$400,000 grant to implement a permanent exhibition on the role of Native Americans in the history and culture of Idaho – a multi-year, significant effort to expand and improve its flagship property, the Idaho State Museum. The State of Idaho provided funding for the remodel and construction of the expanded Museum building, while the ISHS raised half the funds for the design, fabrication, and installation of the new exhibits. The exhibition, *Idaho: The Land and Its People*, includes co-created, accurate and respectful tribal content that is the basis of the tribal interpretations developed for the five exhibits and reflects important humanities content about Idaho's five federally recognized tribes, from origins to contemporary times.
- **The Shaker Village Herb House in New Gloucester, ME** was awarded a \$376,800 grant for the renovation of an 1824 herb house as a work, education, and display space linked to the folkways and history of the Sabbathday Lake Shakers. The Shakers will showcase their rich, 250-year-old agrarian heritage through the rehabilitation of their Herb House, a viewable, working herb production facility where Shaker folkways and their living culture will engage public audiences in interactive ways like never before. Through this project, the Shakers also intend to restore part of their founding cultural practices that creativity, learning, the arts, and humanities thrive in places, spaces, and landscapes that are maintained in good working-order.

**The National Endowment for the Arts** makes art accessible to all and provides leadership in arts education. Established in 1965, NEA supports great art in every congressional district. Its grants to museums help them exhibit, preserve, and interpret visual material through exhibitions, residencies, publications, commissions, public art works, conservation, documentation, services to the field, and public programs. Annually, the NEA typically provides more than 150 awards to museums and museum-related projects, totaling approximately \$5 million.

Since 2010, the NEA has collaborated with Blue Star Families and the U.S. Department of Defense on Blue Star Museums, which provides free museum admission to active duty military and their families all summer long. Typically each year more than 2,000 museums in all 50 states participated, reaching on average more than 900,000 military members and their families. Participating Idaho museums include the Boise Art Museum (Boise), Art Museum of Eastern Idaho (Idaho Falls), and Idaho Museum of Natural History (Pocatello). Maine includes the Abbe Museum (Bar Harbor), Ogunquit Museum of American Art (Ogunquit), and Maine Historical Society (Portland).

The federal role of the NEA is uniquely valuable; receiving a grant from the NEA confers prestige on supported projects, strengthening museums' ability to attract matching funds from other public and private funders. On average, each dollar awarded by the NEA leverages up to nine dollars from other sources. No other funder—public or private—funds the arts in every state and the U.S. territories. 40% of NEA's grant funds are distributed to state arts agencies for re-granting.

Here are two examples of how NEA funding was used to support museums' work in your communities:

- **The Arlington Museum of Art in Arlington, TX** was awarded \$10,000 from the Grants for Art Projects program to support an annual summer art camp for Title I students in Arlington, Texas. A collaboration with Arlington Independent School District, the summer art camp provided an opportunity for students to engage with the arts and contemporary artists. The project supported the purchase of supplies for the classrooms to better serve students and teachers alike. A gallery show of the students' work and accomplishments was presented to families, friends, and the community on the last day of camp. The program served teachers, students, families, and general audiences in the local community.
- **The Portland Museum of Art in Portland, ME** was awarded \$30,000 from the Grants for Art Project program to support a solo exhibition of the work of Passamaquoddy basketmaker Jeremy Frey (b. 1978). More than 45 works ranging from early point baskets and urchin forms to recent multicolored vases with porcupine quillwork will be presented. The exhibition will include the artist's first video work exploring themes of original culture and the evolution of a basket to reinterpret ideas about life and loss. Public programming will include artist talks, workshops, community projects, and gallery-based discussions. The exhibition will benefit in-person and online museum visitors, families, and collaborative partners including Passamaquoddy youth, artists, and community organizations.

The agency also runs the Arts and Artifacts Indemnity program, which reduces the cost of insuring major exhibitions. Absent this program, such exhibitions would need to be reduced in scale limiting visitors and students access to great art and artifacts from around the world. It saves museums millions of dollars annually, at a cost of almost zero to taxpayers.

**The Smithsonian Institution** comprises some of the most visited museums in the world. The National Museum of African American History and Culture has captivated audiences from around the globe, underscoring the power of our national museums to educate and inspire. We support robust funding that would allow these world-class museums to undertake critical collections care, make needed technology upgrades, conduct cutting edge research of every type, and increase access for all. We applaud the establishment and ongoing development of the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum and the National Museum of the American Latino.

**The Historic Preservation Fund** is the funding source of preservation awards to states, tribes, local governments, and nonprofits. State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices carry out the historic preservation work of the federal government on state and tribal lands. Historic preservation programs are not only essential to protecting our many heritages; they also serve as economic development engines and job creators, and provide vital funding to help museums serve their communities.

I hope that my testimony helped make it clear why these priorities are of critical importance to the nation and how they provide a worthwhile return on investment to the American taxpayer. Thank you.



**AMERICAN  
BATTLEFIELD  
TRUST** \* \* \*

PRESERVE. EDUCATE. INSPIRE.

**Testimony of  
David N. Duncan, President  
American Battlefield Trust**

**Before the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**

**Testimony of David N. Duncan, American Battlefield Trust (continued)**

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Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. My name is David Duncan, and I am the president of the American Battlefield Trust. I testify today to respectfully request that the House Appropriations Subcommittee for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies fund the Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants Program, along with related grant programs administered by the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program, at its authorized amount of \$20 million. I also respectfully request \$2 million for Multi-State Battlefield Parks inholding acquisition funding.

The American Battlefield Trust is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving America's remaining Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War battlefields. Thanks to the generosity of our 500,000 members and supporters from all 50 states, the American Battlefield Trust has protected more than 58,000 acres of critically important battlefield land in 25 states.

**Outdoor Classrooms and Military Training Grounds**

America's battlefields are irreplaceable parts of our shared national heritage. When preserved, these battlefields serve as outdoor classrooms to educate current and future generations about the defining moments in our country's history. They are living memorials, not just to the soldiers who fought and died there, but to all who have proudly worn our nation's uniform.

Preserved battlefields are also economic drivers for communities, generating tourism dollars that are extremely important to state and local economies. Battlefield visitors, who typically travel in groups and as part of families, tend to stay longer and spend more than other types of tourists.

Additionally, battlefields serve as training grounds for today's military, in the form of customized battlefield tours known as "staff rides." Preserved battlefields are frequently used by the modern military to place officers and enlisted ranks alike in the shoes of combat commanders, asking them to make difficult choices, in the face of daunting obstacles, over the same terrain. The American Battlefield Trust is proud to work with the Marine Corps University Foundation and others to host staff rides on battlefields we own and have protected.

**The American Battlefield Protection Program**

In 1990, Congress created the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission (CWSAC), a panel composed of lawmakers, historians and preservationists, to examine the status of America's Civil War battlefields. Three years later, the Commission released a report identifying the most important Civil War battlegrounds, prioritizing them according to preservation status and historic significance. In addition, the Commission also recommended that Congress establish a federal matching grant program to encourage private sector investment in battlefield preservation. The Commission's proposal for federal matching grants was the genesis of today's Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants Program.

The Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants Program is an authorized competitive matching grants program that requires a 1-to-1 federal/non-federal match, although on most occasions the federal dollars are leveraged much more than that. The program promotes cooperative partnerships between state and local governments and the private sector to protect high priority battlegrounds outside existing National Park Service boundaries.

**Testimony of David N. Duncan, American Battlefield Trust (continued)**

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Building on the enormous success and popularity of the program, Congress expanded its grant-making eligibility in fiscal year 2015 to include Revolutionary War and War of 1812 battlefields, in addition to Civil War battlefields. Similar to Civil War battlefields, funding for Revolutionary War and War of 1812 battlefield preservation is targeted toward sites reviewed and prioritized in a comprehensive study requested by the Congress and published in 2007 by the National Park Service.

Since the program was first funded in FY1999, grants have been used to protect 36,000 acres of hallowed ground in 20 states. Among the battlefields that have been preserved using this program are: Antietam, Maryland; Bentonville, North Carolina; Brandywine, Pennsylvania; Champion Hill, Mississippi; Chancellorsville, Virginia; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; Hanging Rock, South Carolina; Harpers Ferry, West Virginia; Kettle Creek, Georgia; Mill Springs, Kentucky; Prairie Grove, Arkansas; Princeton, New Jersey; Sackets Harbor, New York; Wilson's Creek, Missouri; and Wood Lake, Minnesota. It is important to note that grants are awarded for acquisition of lands from willing sellers only; there is — and never has been — any eminent domain authority.

**Multi-State Battlefield Parks Funding**

The Multi-State Battlefield Parks funding request provides the National Park Service with the flexibility to acquire privately-owned battlefield land within the boundaries of existing battlefield parks throughout the country. Since federal inholding money often goes for high-profile, big acreage tracts at larger, natural parks, smaller battlefield parks have trouble competing for limited federal inholding dollars. The Multi-State Battlefield Parks funding request provides NPS with the flexibility to acquire smaller but historically significant parcels when they become available for acquisition.

In addition, since the process for securing inholding funding for individual battlefield parks often takes years, the Multi-State Battlefield Parks funding request enables the National Park Service to direct funding to the battlefield parks that have the most urgent needs. Further, it enables nonprofit organizations like the American Battlefield Trust to secure these properties with the rapidity often expected of willing sellers, with intent to ultimately transfer land to NPS.

Since 2020, the Multi-State Battlefield Parks Line Item has been funded in FY2024 at \$2.68 million; FY2023 at \$2.5 million; FY2021 at \$2 million; and FY2020 at \$2 million. We respectfully request that the Multi-State Battlefield Parks Line Item be funded at \$2 million for FY2025.

**Urgent Need for Funding**

The American Battlefield Trust wishes to thank the subcommittee for its support for battlefield preservation and saving America's hallowed grounds for future generations. We recognize that these are difficult economic times and appreciate the constraints on this subcommittee.

However, we must point out that the clock is ticking on the remaining battlefields of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War. The American Battlefield Trust estimates that, in the next decade, most unprotected battlefield land will be either developed or preserved. Further, with the 250th anniversary commemoration of the American Revolution less than a year away, there is no better time to preserve these

**Testimony of David N. Duncan, American Battlefield Trust (continued)**

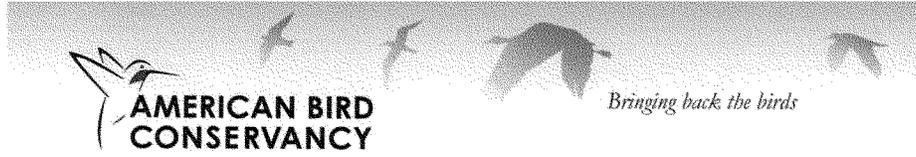
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historic shrines and prepare for the influx of visitors expected at that time. The Trust and its partners strive diligently to put these funds to good use in a timely manner. There is no shortage of land that can be saved.

**Conclusion**

The Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Civil War were defining moments in our country's history. America's battlefields are important to understanding who we are as a nation, and where we come from. They are open spaces and outdoor classrooms that commemorate the sacrifices of those who fought and died on these fields. The Battlefield Land Acquisition Grant Program has been an irreplaceable tool for preserving these hallowed grounds.

I sincerely hope you and your subcommittee will consider our request to provide funding of the American Battlefield Protection Program's land acquisition program at its authorized level of \$20 million and Multi-State Battlefields Parks inholding request at \$2 million. We look forward to working closely with you as we continue our important work to preserve America's sacred battlefield lands. Thank you for the opportunity to address the subcommittee.



Hardy Kern | Director of Government Relations | [EHardyKern@abcbirds.org](mailto:EHardyKern@abcbirds.org) | 202-751-1412

**FY 2025 BIRD CONSERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Park Service, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), USDA Forest Service (USFS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)*

To help recover endangered species, reduce environmental threats, and bolster programs needed to reverse bird declines and the loss of three billion birds since 1970, American Bird Conservancy respectfully requests funding increases for the following bird conservation programs in the FY 2025 Interior Appropriations bill.

**FY 25 Bird Conservation Recommendations**

*(all figures in millions)*

Agency	Program	FY24 Final	FY25 President's Budget	FY25 to Bring Back Birds (ABC Recommendation)
EPA	Pesticides Licensing	\$48.7	\$75.7	\$75.7
EPA	Marine Pollution Program	\$10.2	\$12.7	\$13
NPS	Window Collision Mitigation	\$0	\$0	\$10
NOAA	Seabird Recovery Technical Assistance	\$0	\$0	\$10
USFWS	ESA Pesticide Consultations	\$1	\$1	\$10
USFWS	Red Knot Recovery	\$0	\$0	\$5
USFWS, NMFS	Marbled Murrelet Recovery	\$0	\$0	\$5
USFWS	Lesser Prairie-chicken Recovery	\$0	\$0	\$5
USFWS, NPS, USGS	Hawaiian ESA Recovery	\$15.51	\$15	\$20
USFWS	NMBCA	\$5.1	\$5.1	\$6.5
USFWS	Migratory Bird Joint Ventures	\$16.82	\$17.7	\$25
USFWS	California Central Coast Joint Venture	\$0	\$0	\$0.6
USFWS	Non-Lead Exchange	\$0	\$0	\$20
USFWS	MBTA Incidental Take Mitigation	\$0	\$0	\$10
BLM	Sage Grouse Conservation	\$73	\$73	\$73

**EPA and USFWS Pesticide Reviews** | To address a 40-year backlog of reviews, and court-mandated Endangered Species Act compliance, we ask that Congress appropriate \$75.7 million to the EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs to expedite registration and registration review procedures mandated by the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act.

**EPA Plastic Pollution Mitigation** | Plastic pollution is among the leading threats to seabirds. We recommend that the EPA's Marine Pollution Program receive at least \$13 million to support their goals of reducing marine litter, capturing trash, and protecting human health and the marine environment.

**Reducing Window Collisions** | Please provide \$10 million to continue work by the National Park Service and other agencies to retrofit Department of the Interior buildings to make them bird-safe.

**USFWS Pesticide Consultations** | We also ask that an additional \$10 million be appropriated to the USFWS to be used expressly for pesticide consultations, including programmatic expenses and an additional 20 FTE, under the Planning and Consultation division of Ecological Services.

**Red Knot Recovery** | We recommend \$5 million to support the FWS Red Knot recovery program. Added funds should be used to improve state horseshoe crab egg density surveys and provide grants to reduce horseshoe crab bait fishing and bleeding for pharmaceutical purposes. Red Knot depend on horseshoe crab eggs to survive their migration and successfully breed.

**Marbled Murrelet Recovery** | We recommend an additional \$5 million for recovery of the threatened Marbled Murrelet, a rapidly declining critically endangered seabird which only nests in the inland Old Growth forests of the Pacific Northwest. Funds are needed to support campground cleanup campaigns to reduce the number of ravens and jays predating Murrelet nests.

**Lesser Prairie-Chicken Recovery** | We recommend \$5 million to initiate a robust recovery program that will incentivize landowners to provide for high quality habitat needed to maintain the currently declining population. A coordinated outreach campaign, technical support, and funding are needed to implement grazing rest and other practices that will improve the range.

**Hawai'i ESA Recovery** | ABC recommends funding Hawaiian Forest Bird Conservation through State of the Birds Activities and associated National Park Service and U.S. Geological Survey programs at \$20 million for FY25. Funds are being used to halt the spread of avian malaria threatening 12 of Hawaiian forest birds.

**Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act** | Please increase funding for migratory bird conservation including wintering grounds in Latin America and the Caribbean by providing \$6.5 million for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act. This program is essential to the conservation of wintering habitats, building capacity of our Latin American and Caribbean partners, and providing greater access to conservation resources in a region where it is urgently needed.

**North American Waterfowl Management Joint Ventures** | The national network of Joint Ventures (JVs) are essential to address the conservation needs of migratory birds, and they leverage significant matching contributions from partner organizations and foundations. We recommend that to help reverse bird declines the Joint Ventures be allocated \$20 million.

**California Central Coast Joint Venture** | We request \$600,000 the California Central Coast Joint Venture's (C3JV, <https://www.c3jv.org/>) and its BIRDS (Bridging Information for the Recovery of Declining Species) Project, including the preparation of a State of the Birds Report, launch of the Central Coast Bird Monitoring Network, and development of an Indigenous Stewardship Program.

**Non-Lead Exchange Program** | We recommend \$20 million appropriated to State Wildlife Agencies through the Department of the Interior for non-lead tackle and non-lead ammunition exchange programs.

**Migratory Bird Treaty Act** | We appreciate the President's FY25 Budget Justification from USFWS in regard to protections for birds under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and are hopeful the Service will soon propose a draft rule establishing an incidental take permitting system and general sector permits to reduce preventable mortality and ask Congress to support and designate \$10 million towards this effort.

**Climate Change and Energy Development** | Please include in wildlife incidental take mitigation funding. We also recommend report language emphasizing environmentally appropriate siting and minimizing wildlife impacts of renewable energy facility development and encouraging federal agencies to avoid ecologically important areas on public lands and in federal waters and to apply available best management practices that reduce wildlife mortality.

**Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation** | We remain deeply concerned by the Greater Sage-Grouse ESA listing rider given a recent USGS report indicating the species is in severe decline, and that that trend is anticipated to continue. We request the listing moratorium for all Sage Grouse populations be ended.

1. We appreciate the proposed \$73 million for sage grouse conservation in the House recommendation, and the Senate report language offering helpful guidance for the restoration program.
2. The remaining grouse strongholds are at risk and require immediate protection. We ask Congress to please include the following bill language to recover grouse populations:

*No less than \$3 million will be spent on the designation and planning for a network of ACECs deemed sufficient to prevent further long-term greater sage-grouse population declines in accordance with 43 U.S.C. §§ 1702(a) and 1712(c)(3).*

### Recommended Report Language

**Pesticides and Birds** | Please include report language directing EPA to:

1. In conjunction with the Center for Pollinator Conservation, conduct a scientific review of the impacts of neonicotinoid insecticides on birds, insects, and the environment and report these findings to Congress
2. Clarify that the Treated Article Exemption, FIFRA §152.25(a) should not include pesticide-coated seeds
3. Request that FWS ban the use of conventional pesticides used for crop production on National Wildlife Refuges and other important bird habitats
4. Direct the Government Accountability Office to study the impact of pesticides used in crop production on National Wildlife Refuges

**Public Lands Protection and Forest Carbon** | We are encouraged by the Executive Order to map and conserve Old Growth and Mature Forests which could make a major contribution to address climate change. Please include report language recommending:

*The protection of existing carbon stores in mature and old growth forests that provide habitat for the threatened Marbled Murrelet, Northern Spotted Owl, and California Spotted Owl.*

**Reducing Window Collisions** | Please include previous report language:

*All agencies under the jurisdiction of this Act are directed to monitor visitor and nature centers and office buildings for bird collisions with glass to address bird collision risk. At a minimum, facilities identified as high-risk should take low cost or no cost action, such as turning off interior lights at night or applying films or other adhesives to glass windows to reduce bird collisions.*

### **Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)**

**Reducing Seabird Bycatch** | U.S. fisheries have taken great strides to reduce seabird bycatch. To further assist ongoing efforts, we recommend \$10 million in technical assistance and seabird bycatch mitigation funding be provided to NOAA Fisheries in the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill. We recommend that at least \$100,000 of that money be directly appropriated to the National Seabird Program for staffing. This is necessary to boost program capacity and enhance internal coordination.

### **Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies FY2025 — Draft FY2025 Appropriations Report Language**

*The Committee recognizes the scientific, economic, supply chain, environmental, and animal protection benefits to utilizing synthetic safety approaches to test for bacterial endotoxins in vaccines, injectable therapies, and medical devices. Without clear guidance that the Food and Drug Administration accepts modern approaches in lieu of traditionally accepted animal-based methods, regulated entities are unlikely to adopt new approaches that accurately detect fever-causing contaminants with lower impact on animals and the environment. The Committee directs the FDA to update its 2012 Guidance for Industry on Pyrogen and Endotoxins Testing within 120 days of enactment of this Act to reflect acceptance of recombinant Bacterial Endotoxins Test (rBET) methods for new and existing products. FDA must also provide staff training on rBET. The Committee requests a written update by 180 days of enactment of this Act.*

#### **Contacts:**

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**Annie Chester** | Policy Initiatives Coordinator | [achester@abcbirds.org](mailto:achester@abcbirds.org) | 202-888-7471

**Steve Riley** | Director of Farm Bill Programs | [sriley@abcbirds.org](mailto:sriley@abcbirds.org) | 402-433-5078



**FY2025 DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR APPROPRIATIONS**

**STATEMENT OF AMANDA STRATTON,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE AMERICAN CULTURAL RESOURCES ASSOCIATION**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

**MAY 10, 2024**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for giving the American Cultural Resources Association (ACRA) the opportunity to provide written testimony about the Department of the Interior's appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025. I am Amanda Stratton, the Executive Director of ACRA.

ACRA is the national trade association supporting the common interests of cultural resource management (CRM) firms of all sizes, types, and specialties. ACRA member firms undertake much of the legally mandated cultural resource studies and investigations in the United States and employ thousands of professionals, including archaeologists, architectural historians, historians, ethnographers, and an increasingly diverse group of other specialists in the museum and non-profit sectors.

The majority of CRM firms in the United States are designated as small businesses under the U.S. Small Business Administration's size standards. They work in every state in the country to balance the necessity to build infrastructure with the need to protect our nation's cultural heritage. CRM firms like mine help enable smart development while elevating important cultural heritage assets.

Numerous programs within the Interior Department play an essential part in helping our nation understand its history. ACRA appreciates the important work of the Subcommittee over the last few years to ensure historic preservation and cultural resource programs at the Interior Department have adequate funding despite a challenging fiscal environment. Our recommendations outlined below reflect the reality that, as the demand for cultural resource services continues to rise, federal investments must keep up.

**National Park Service – Historic Preservation Fund (HPF): \$225 million**

Since its establishment in the 1970s, the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) has supported the rescue and rehabilitation of historic sites, revitalized communities, and created opportunities for economic growth.

The Fund helps the National Park Service administer heritage programs such as the National Register of Historic Places and the Historic Tax Credit Program. State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (S/THPOs), who are tasked with the survey and inventory of America's historic resources, rely on HPF funding for part of their budgets. Over the last four decades, the HPF has made possible the survey of millions of acres and identification of numerous cultural resources, resulting in over 95,000 listings on the National Register, provided millions of dollars for the rehabilitation of historic buildings, and leveraged more than \$162 billion in private investment through the Historic Tax Credit.

Not a single dollar of HPF funding comes from federal taxpayers; funding for the HPF comes from offshore oil leases. States are required to match at least 40 percent of the funding that they receive from the HPF. Recognizing the immense economic and cultural value of historic preservation, Congress has increased funding for the HPF in recent years.

Despite these increases, the investments have not kept up with rising demand. The need for full funding of the HPF has become more critical in recent years as SHPO responsibilities have increased, new THPO offices are established, and competitive grant programs are created and expanded. In addition, the passage of the 2021 bipartisan infrastructure bill means that state and Tribal preservation offices now face significantly more demand for their services as federal projects get funded.

Without adequate funding, state and Tribal preservation offices often lack the capacity to carry out programs that support management of our cultural resources, heritage preservation, and community development. As a result, critical infrastructure projects risk being delayed.

In FY2024, Congress appropriated \$188 million from the HPF. Although this amount is still above the \$150 million amount that is authorized to be transferred into the Fund each year, it is a reduction from the \$204 million appropriated the previous fiscal year. This reduction in funding comes at a time when many of the projects authorized by the infrastructure law are beginning to enter the permitting and construction phases.

Congress can help states, localities and Tribes continue their efforts to protect and celebrate our heritage by providing \$225 million from the HPF in fiscal year 2025, including \$70 million for SHPOs and \$34 million for THPOs.

**National Park Service—National Recreation and Preservation Cultural Programs:  
\$50 million**

NPS National Recreation and Preservation Cultural Programs enable the Park Service to administer technical assistance and support for resource protection, not just within the Park system but across the federal government. Cultural resources professionals in the NPS work alongside Tribes, state and local governments, nonprofits and others to ensure that our shared heritage is not lost.

The Cultural Programs include management of the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Landmarks Program, coordination of federal archaeology programs, certification of federal Historic Tax Credit projects, and the administration of grant programs like the Japanese American Confinement Sites Grants, American Battlefield Protection Program Assistance Grants, and others. These funds support projects and initiatives in virtually every community in the country, promoting economic development as they help celebrate the achievements of countless Americans whose stories otherwise would be lost to history.

ACRA appreciates the Subcommittee's efforts to maintain level funding for these programs in FY2024 and urges the Subcommittee to continue to invest in them. ACRA requests that the Subcommittee provide \$46 million for these programs in FY2025.

**National Park Service – African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program: \$3 Million**

ACRA requests \$3 million for the new African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program.

From the early days of our Republic to the Jim Crow era, African American families were often barred from burying their loved ones in White cemeteries. Large numbers of African American burial sites lack any official record of their existence, and many have been neglected and abused over time, effectively erasing the memory of Americans whose history deserves to be told. In many areas of the country, burial grounds are the only tangible properties that represent African American culture and heritage.

Congress recognized the importance of protecting these sacred sites in 2022 when it first authorized the African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program. This program supports efforts to research, identify, document, preserve, and interpret historic African American burial grounds, many of which have been badly neglected or lost to history. We urge the Subcommittee to provide \$3 million to this vital program.

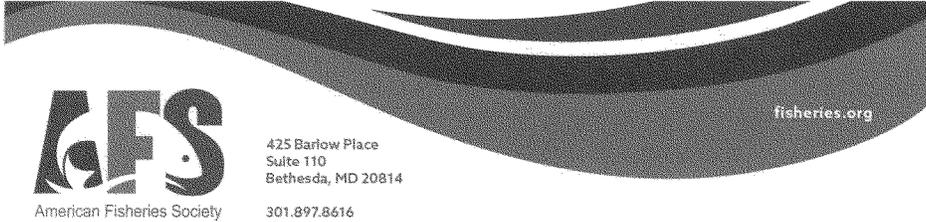
**National Park Service - Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Grants: \$12 Million**

In addition, ACRA requests the Subcommittee provide \$12 million for Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Grants.

NAGPRA is the federal government's cornerstone statute recognizing that Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony belonging to lineal descendants, Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations, and must be treated with dignity and respect.

Compliance with the newly revised NAGPRA rules will require significant consultation between Tribes and museum and curation facilities. The NAGPRA Grant program is an indispensable resource that supports the documentation, protection and repatriation of remains and cultural objects. Recognizing the increased demand the new rules have created, ACRA urges the Subcommittee to provide \$12 million for these Grants.

ACRA appreciates having the opportunity to provide this written testimony to the Subcommittee and looks forward to working with you to ensure that the federal government continues to serve as a collaborative partner with state and local governments, Tribes, non-for-profit organizations, the CRM industry and others who work every day to protect our nation's cultural treasures.



May 10, 2024

Representative Michael Simpson  
 Chair  
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
 Related Agencies  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 United States House of Representatives  
 Washington, DC 20515

Representative Chellie Pingree  
 Ranking Member  
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and  
 and Related Agencies  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 United States House of Representatives  
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Simpson and Ranking Pingree:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide recommendations on federal appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025. Founded in 1870, The American Fisheries Society is the oldest and largest professional society of fisheries biologists, managers, and researchers in the world. The mission of AFS is to improve the conservation and sustainability of fishery resources and aquatic ecosystems by advancing fisheries and aquatic science and promoting the development of fisheries professionals.

AFS respectfully submits the following funding recommendations for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and the U.S. Forest Service to secure critical funds for conservation and restoration of our country's important fisheries and aquatic ecosystems.

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

**Fish and Aquatic Conservation (FAC)** works with States, landowners, and other partners and stakeholders to achieve the goals of healthy, self-sustaining populations of fish and other aquatic species. Within this program, the National Fish Hatchery System has served an important role in recovering and restoring aquatic species through conservation aquaculture. AFS fully supports an increase in funding for this program for Restoring Salmon in the Columbia River Basin. However, we are particularly concerned with Administration's proposed funding reductions for Aquatic Habitat and Species Conservation. The program's important work to protect, restore, and recover native fish and our nation's freshwater ecosystems must be maintained to address increasing impacts to freshwater ecosystems and native fish populations from habitat loss, fragmentation, aquatic invasive species, pollution, and climate change. AFS requests \$253 million for FAC



for FY 2025 to maintain funding for Aquatic Habitat and Species Conservation and for additional appropriations for Restoring Salmon in the Columbia River Basin.

**The State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program (STWG)** is the nation's only program that encourages development and implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans. Collectively, STWG funds support strong partnerships among federal, state, tribal, private, and nonprofit entities that enable fish and wildlife professionals to implement on-the-ground conservation activities that benefit over 12,000 at-risk species, with the goal of eliminating the need to list them under the Endangered Species Act. In FY 2010, appropriations were at \$90 million for the program – allowing states to complete more projects deemed necessary for monitoring and management of at-risk fish and wildlife. Subsequent budget reductions in STWG, however, have not allowed this highly successful program to reach its full potential. AFS requests that Congress increase funding for the program to at least \$100 million annually.

#### **U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) - Ecosystems Mission Area**

The **Climate Adaptation Science Centers** program addresses evolving challenges posed by climate change on regional fish and wildlife, ecosystems, and community-based stakeholders. Modest budget increases in recent fiscal periods have bolstered the program's ability to swiftly respond to demands and expand its capacity, facilitating proactive engagement of tribal communities in project design and resource allocation. Nevertheless, funding levels have failed to match identified needs, especially in equipping USGS with adequate resources to effectively convey scientific insights to stakeholders for actionable decision-making based on project outcomes. For FY 2025, AFS recommends the full realization of the Administration's proposal, reaching no less than \$69.3 million.

**The Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Units (CRUs)** foster federal, state, nongovernment organization (NGO), and academic partnerships to provide actionable science tailored to the needs of natural resource managers. This science plays a pivotal role in the implementation of state and federal management decisions. CRUs are an exemplary model for cooperative natural resource science programming; with the support of collaborators this program leverages an average of three dollars in outside funds for every federal dollar invested. Thanks to support from Congress, Indiana was able to establish the Indiana Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit hosted by Purdue University. Despite growing interest from other states, limited federal funding has constrained the expansion of units and continues to result in vacancies at existing units. To address this gap, AFS recommends a funding increase to \$36 million in FY 2025, enabling CRUs to capitalize on emerging partnerships and fill vacancies in an effort to meet longstanding commitments.

#### **U.S. Forest Service (USFS)**

The Forest Service administers a large transportation and trails infrastructure system including roads, trails, bridges, and other types of stream crossing features. Stream crossings pose a significant challenge to water quality and the health of fish and aquatic species habitat. Legacy Road and Trail Remediation Program improves fish and aquatic

species passage and reduces erosion and sediment into streams to improve water quality while increasing flood resilience. AFS requests the full \$6 million in annual appropriations for FY 2025 in the Administration's proposal for decommissioning roads, removal or replacement of stream crossing structures that are barriers to aquatic organism passage, road and trail repair and improvements and associated activities in environmentally sensitive areas; and repair and improvements on roads and trails subject to recent storm damage.

Thank you for your commitment to conserving our country's natural resources. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas J. Austen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Douglas J. Austen, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

**Submission of: Tyler Ray, Senior Director for Programs and Advocacy, American Hiking Society**

**American Hiking Society • American Trails • American Motorcyclist Association • Back Country Horsemen of America • Equine Land Conservation Resource • International Mountain Bicycling Association • National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance • Partnership for the National Trails System • Rails-to-Trails Conservancy ± the 230 Organizations and Entities Below**

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the subcommittee, on behalf of American Hiking Society and the millions of trail users our collective 240 organizations and entities represent who spend their time, money, and energy to get out on trails for recreation, health and wellness, and to volunteer, we thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on the importance of adequately funding our nation's trails and public lands to ensure access for all. We ask the Committee to adopt the following funding requests so the federal government can continue to leverage private contributions and benefit from volunteer labor as well as provide inexpensive, healthy outdoor recreation options for your constituents and all Americans. Appropriations for federal land management agencies requested herein, coupled with the significant resources provided by non-profit partners, serve to accelerate collective stewardship of our nation's public lands and waters, and enhance climate adaptability.

**Summary of Requests**

**Forest Service:**

- *Capital Improvement and Maintenance (CMTL), Trails at \$30M, including \$15M for National Scenic and Historic Trails, and funding for the National Forest System Trail Stewardship Trail Partner Funding. In order to support adequate funding for all Forest Service trails and to avoid a reduction in the existing budget for non-National Scenic and Historic Trails managed by the Forest Service, increases for non-National Scenic and Historic Trails should occur in parity with the rate of increases for National Scenic and Historic Trails;*
- *At, minimum \$70M to fund Recreation, Heritage & Wilderness;*
- *At least \$10M to fund Legacy Roads & Trails, with support for Washington Watershed Restoration Initiative (WWRI) coalition request of \$100M;*

**Bureau of Land Management:**

- *Funding at \$15M for National Trails System Line Item;*
- *National Conservation Lands at \$78.145M, but a minimum level funding of FY24 Senate proposed at \$65M;*

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:**

- *Refuge Visitor Services at least \$86.114M;*
- *Support Infrastructure-National Partnership funding;*

**National Park Service:**

- *Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program at \$15M;*
- *Park Service Operations for the National Trails System at a minimum of \$20.964M;*
- *Volunteers in Parks programs at a minimum of FY23 levels, including dedicated funding to the National Trails System;*
- *Visitor Services sub-activity, Youth Partnership Programs at a minimum of \$10.95M, including an acknowledgment of the benefits for trails;*
- *Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) Program, at a min \$125M;*

**US Geological Survey:**

- *\$1.5M to fully fund the National Digital Trail Project (NDTP)*

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**Forest Service Recommendation:**

National Forest trails benefit everyone and receive increasing public use each year. Collectively, the National Forests provide 159,000 miles of trails for activities ranging from hiking, biking, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle usage, groomed winter trails for cross-country skiing and snowmobiling, and access points for "river trails." Roughly 120,000 of the 159,000 miles of trails are in need of some form of maintenance or repair.

**Program:** Capital Improvement and Maintenance, Trails

**FY25 Funding Level Requested:** \$30M      **FY24 Enacted Level:** \$20M (House bill was \$25M)  
**Department:** USDA      **Agency/Account:** Forest Service, Capital Improvement and Maintenance, Trails  
**Report Language requested:**

- In order to support adequate funding for all Forest Service trails and to avoid a reduction in the existing budget for non-National Scenic and Historic Trails managed by the Forest Service, increases for non-National Scenic and Historic Trails should occur in parity with the rate of increases for National Scenic and Historic Trails
- The committee supports continued funding for the National Forest System Trail Stewardship Trail Partner Funding Program. Much of the Forest Service's trail work is accomplished today by volunteer groups and non-profit partners. The Forest Service has a successful Trail Stewardship Partner Funding challenge cost share program that leverages federal funding by 3 to 5:1.

**Program:** Recreation, Heritage & Wilderness  
**FY25 Funding Level Requested:** At, minimum \$70M      **FY24 Proposed Level (House):** \$60M  
**Department:** USDA      **Agency/Account:** Forest Service, Recreation, Heritage & Wilderness

**Program:** Legacy Roads & Trails  
**FY25 Funding Level Requested:** \$10M minimum      **FY24 Enacted Level:** \$6M (House bill was \$10M)  
**Department:** USDA      **Agency/Account:** Forest Service, Legacy Roads & Trails

**BLM Recommendation:**

The BLM manages 13,468 miles of trails over 245 million acres —more land than any other federal land management agency and contains a diversity of landscapes that often provide the public less structured but nonetheless diverse recreational opportunities. BLM recreation resources and visitor services support strong local economies. More than 120 urban centers and thousands of rural towns (comprising 64 million people) are located within 25 miles of BLM lands.

**Program:** Bureau of Land Management National Trails System Line-Item Funding  
**FY25 Funding Level Requested:** \$15M      **FY24 Enacted Level:** \$11M (House bill was \$15M)  
**Department:** Bureau of Land Management      **Agency/Account:** Trails

**Program:** National Conservation Lands  
**FY25 Funding Level Requested:** \$78.145M, but a minimum \$63.599M  
**FY24 Enacted Level:** \$59.135M (Senate proposed FY24 level was \$63.599M)  
**Department:** Bureau of Land Management      **Agency/Account:** National Conservation Lands

**FWS Recommendation:**

Refuge Visitor Services provides funding for trail maintenance across FWS-managed land. Located in every U.S. state and territory, and within an hour's drive of nearly every major U.S. city, National Wildlife Refuges provide incredible opportunities for outdoor recreation, including hiking, hunting, fishing, birding, boating, and nature photography across 2,500 miles of trails. More than 37,000 jobs are reliant on refugees. Funding at a level of \$93M will provide for trail maintenance across the land and water trails, refuges, wetlands, and hatcheries, including eleven National Scenic and Historic Trails and forty-four National Recreation Trails.

**Program:** Visitor Services  
**FY25 Funding Level Requested:** \$86.114M      **FY24 Enacted Level:** \$76M (Senate bill was \$80.839M)  
**Department:** Department of Interior      **Agency/Account:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Visitor Services

**Program:** Infrastructure  
**Department:** Department of Interior      **Agency/Account:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Infrastructure  
**Report Language requested:** National Partnerships are an important component to maintain trail infrastructure across Fish and Wildlife Service sites. The Department shall continue support for National Partnerships and prioritize funding to leverage these partnerships.

**NPS Recommendation:**

National Parks, and the world-class experiences their 18,844 miles of trails provide, are one of the most unifying forces in America. Well-maintained trails improve the quality of visitor experiences and enhance visitor safety.

**Program:** Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance (RTCA)

**FY25 Funding Level Requested:** \$15M      **FY24 Enacted Level:** \$13M

**Department:** Interior      **Agency/Account:** National Park Service, National Recreation and Preservation

**Report Language requested:** Within, National Recreation and Preservation, \$13.845M for the Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance program.

**Program:** National Trails System

**FY25 Funding Level Requested:** \$20.964M      **FY24 Enacted Level:** \$18.856M

**Department:** Interior      **Agency/Account:** National Park Service, Park Service Operations

**Report Language requested:**

- Within, Park Service Operations, \$20.964M for administration of the National Trails System.
- National Trails System-The Committees understand the importance of providing adequate funding for the development and maintenance of the National Trails System for future generations to enjoy. The Committees urge the Service to continue its efforts to develop National Scenic and Historic Trails, not limited to supporting construction and maintenance projects and volunteer coordination efforts, and to recognize equal "unit" status of National Scenic Trails.

**Program:** Volunteers in Parks

**FY25 Funding Level Requested:** Maintain FY23 increase, at minimum      **FY24 Enacted Level:** Level

**Department:** Interior      **Agency/Account:** National Park Service, Park Partnership Support Functions

**Report Language Requested:** The committee recommends funding through Volunteers in Parks be provided for volunteer support of the National Trails System, National Rivers, and National Park Service trails.

**Program:** Youth Partnership Programs

**FY25 Funding Level Requested:** Maintain FY23 increase, at minimum      **FY24 Enacted Level:** Level

**Department:** Interior      **Agency/Account:** National Park Service, Visitor Services

**Report Language Requested:** The committee recommends funding through the Youth Partnership Programs be provided for support of the National Trails System, National Rivers, and National Park Service trails.

**Program:** Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership

**FY25 Funding Level Requested:** At least \$125M      **FY24 Enacted Level:** \$125M

**Department:** Interior      **Agency/Account:** National Park Service, State Conservation Grants

**Report Language Requested:** The committee recommends funding through the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program be provided for support of trails, including the National Trails System.

**U.S. Geological Survey Recommendation:**

**Program:** National Digital Trail Project

**FY25 Funding Level Requested:** \$1.5M      **FY24 Enacted Level:** \$1.35M

**Department:** U.S. Geological Survey      **Agency/Account:** Core Science Systems

**(Across Agencies) Restore Staffing for Federal Land Managers Recommendation:**

Federal land agency field staff continue to suffer from previous job reductions, and the resulting lack of oversight is now a roadblock to proper collaborative management between federal land agencies and volunteer-based partners. Crucial projects are stalled waiting for plan review or other necessary agency expertise, such as environmental studies, design, and other work that is above the ability and purview of trail groups. Delays have lasted years, contributing to the maintenance backlog and, ultimately, increasing the cost to taxpayers for this necessary work as trails continue to deteriorate at an even greater rate.

We must improve agency staffing levels to meet the need. Agency front-line managers provide crucial and unparalleled expertise and oversight to nonprofit trail partners. This guidance is key to the success of nonprofits as they take on more of the management responsibility for our trails and recruit, train, and marshal thousands of volunteers in public service. Increasing agency staffing levels is essential to completing the complex work of managing and maintaining trails and public lands.

Beyond increases in land management agency staffing, we ask the committee to include report language to audit the centralized agency hiring practices, which have been identified as a roadblock to filling thousands of crucial vacancies. Centralizing hiring prevents land managers from quickly filling vacancies from local talent pools. The cumbersome process slows hiring so much that vacancies often go unfilled. In many cases, by the time a job is offered, the candidate has already moved on. More hiring flexibility would help local land managers fill vacancies quickly.

A' Tuscan Estate Bed & Breakfast  
Access for All, LLC  
Ala Kahaiki Trail Association  
Alaska Trails  
American Chestnut Land Trust, Inc.  
American Discovery Trail Society  
American River Parkway Foundation  
American Rivers  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort  
Anza Trail Foundation  
Appalachian Mountain Club  
Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
Arizona Peace Trail, Inc.  
Arizona Trail Association  
Arkansas Parks and Recreation  
Foundation  
Back Country Horsemen of New Mexico  
Back Country Horsemen of Oregon  
Back Country Horsemen of Texas  
Back Country Horsemen of Utah -  
Southwest Chapter  
Front Range Back Country Horsemen  
Gila Chapter Back Country Horsemen  
Northern Colorado Back Country Horsemen  
Rocky Mountain Back Country Horsemen  
Bay Area Ridge Trail Council  
Beaver Island Archipelago Trail Association  
Bike Walk RVA  
Bitter Root Cultural Heritage Trust /  
qá' árin 'ákit (Respect the trail)  
Black Canyon National Recreation Trail  
Blue Ridge Horseman's Association  
Bonnaville Shoreline Trail Committee  
Buffalo Bayou Trail Coalition  
California Mountain Biking Coalition  
CalWild  
Capital Trails Coalition  
Cascade Volunteers  
Central Oregon Trail Alliance (COTA)  
Chamber of Commerce of Smyth  
County Inc  
Chautauqua County Partnership for  
Economic Growth  
Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance  
City of Clarksville Parks and Recreation  
City of Fitchburg  
City of Glendale, Trails & Open  
Space Program  
City of Hot Springs- Parks & Trails  
Clear Trails  
Collax Greenway Committee  
Colorado Mountain Bike Association  
Community Land Shepherds  
Concerned Off-Road Bicyclists Association  
Conservation Lands Foundation  
Conservation Minnesota  
Continental Divide Trail Coalition  
The Corps Network  
County Line Riders of Catalina, Inc  
Cross New Hampshire Adventure Trail  
Cycle Yamhill County  
Cyclotour Guide Books  
DJS Studios  
Delaware River Greenway Partnership  
Desperados Trail Scouts  
Dickinson County Trails Board

Dirt Dojo LLC  
Eagle Rock Shredders  
Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance  
East Coast Greenway Alliance  
Elkins Creek Horse Camp & Tack  
Shop LLC  
Elkins Creek Horse Club  
Enchanted Circle Trails Association  
Endangered Species Coalition  
Evansville-Area Trails Coalition, Inc.  
Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance  
Foothills Rails-to-Trails Coalition  
Forest Preserve District of DuPage  
County, IL  
ForeverGreen Trails  
Fort Wayne Trails Inc.  
Friends of Chessie Trail  
Friends of Constitution Park Ossipee  
Friends of Douglas-fir National Monument  
Jason Crodman  
Jodie Adams  
Friends of the Columbia Gorge  
Friends of the North Forks Creek Wetlands  
Gliner County Economic  
Development Association  
Greater Hells Canyon Council - Blue  
Mountains Trail  
Groundwork NRG  
Headwaters Trails Alliance  
Health by Design  
Higher Ground USA, Inc.  
Ice Age Trail Alliance  
Illinois Association of Snowmobile Clubs  
IMBA Team Dirt Chapter  
Intentional Hiking  
Iron Ore Heritage Recreation Authority  
Kicklat Trail Conservancy  
Kline Consulting LLC  
The Landing LLC  
Legacy Trails LLC  
Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation  
Lewis and Clark Trust, Inc.  
Lincoln City Chamber of Commerce  
Love in Motion  
Lowell's Respectable Citizens' Club  
Mac Market  
Maine Trail Riders Association, Inc. (Equine)  
Maine Trails Coalition  
Marin County Bicycle Coalition  
Mayes County HOPE  
Mayes County Trails Alliance  
Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiasts  
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District  
Milwaukee Riverkeeper  
Monkey Off Road Cycling Association  
The Mountaineers  
Mountain Surf Creative  
Multidisciplinary Education for the  
Environment  
Nantahala Area SORBA  
National Coast Trail Association  
National Washington Rochambeau  
Revolutionary Route Association  
Nature Trails  
The Naples Trail Collective  
Nevada Outdoor School  
New Hampshire Rail Trails Coalition

New Mexico Sportsmen  
New York Bicycling Coalition  
New York-New Jersey Trail Conference  
Newell Improvement Coalition, Inc. 501 C3  
Newport Chamber of Commerce  
Newtown Parks and Recreation  
Northwest Trail Alliance  
Northwest Trail Riders Association  
Northwestern Che-Rails-to-Trails Association, Inc.  
Northwoods Stewardship Center  
Oakridge Trails Alliance  
Ohio Mountain Bike Alliance  
Ohio Trails Partnership  
Oregon Equestrian Trails  
Oregon Horse Council  
Oregon Office of Outdoor Recreation Advisory Council  
Oregon State Snowmobile  
Association  
Oregon Trails Coalition  
Oregon-California Trails Association  
Orogenesis Collective  
OuterSpatial  
Over The Bars Mountain Bike Club  
Overmountain Victory Trail Association  
Ozark Trail Association  
Pacific Crest Trail Association  
Pacific Northwest 4-Wheel Drive Association  
Pelican Path Committee  
Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society  
PeopleForBikes  
Pike County Fiscal Court  
Pima Trails Association  
Potomac Brittle and Hiking Trails Association  
Prime Desert Woodland Preserve  
Princeton Open Space Committee  
Quad Cities Bicycle Club  
Red Line Parkway Initiative  
REI Co-op  
Reserve Concepts  
Resilient Headwaters  
Rio Grande Indivisible, New Mexico  
Rocky Mountain Field Institute  
Sage Trail Alliance  
San Diego Mountain Biking Association  
San Francisco Public Works  
San Jose Conservation Corps  
San Luis Valley Great Outdoors  
Schaumburg & Park, Inc.  
Seeds of Stewardship  
Seelye Trails Organization  
Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition  
The Sierra Club  
Siskiyou Upland Trails Association  
Sitka Trail Works  
Smith River Alliance  
Sonoran Desert Mountain Bicyclists  
South Coast Tours LLC  
Southern Kettle Off Road Riders (SKORR)  
Southern Nevada Mountain Bike Association  
Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association  
Southwest Montana Bike Association  
Southwest Montana Mountain Bike Association  
Stark County Bicycle Club  
The Street Trust  
SWIMBA  
Tahoe Rim Trail Association  
Teanack Creek Conservancy  
Terra-Strata, LLC

Thrive Allen County  
Thrive Kansas  
TORC  
Town of Awendaw, SC  
Town of Breckenridge Open Space & Trails  
Trail Access Project  
Trail Keepers of Oregon  
Trail Riders of Today  
Trailkeepers of Oregon  
Trails Inspire, LLC  
Travel Lane County  
Traverse Area Recreation &  
Transportation (TART) Trails  
Tri Town Trail  
Trinity Coalition  
Truckee Meadows Trails supported by the  
Truckee Meadows Parks Foundation  
Trust for Public Land  
Tuleymore  
Unified Government of Athens-Clarke  
County Leisure Services Department  
Upper Gila Watershed Alliance  
Urbana Park District  
Vail Valley Mountain Trails Alliance  
Ventana Wilderness Alliance  
The Vermont Mountain Bike Association  
Virginia 4 Wheel Drive Association  
Virginia Bicycling Federation  
Visit McMinnville  
Walk, Bike & Hike Committee, Canton, MA  
Wallawa Mountains Hells Canyon  
Trails Association  
Washington Area Bicyclist Association  
Washington Trails Association  
West Virginia Land Trust  
Western Riding Club  
Wild Horse Council District 1  
Wild Alaska - Alicia Fields  
The Wilderness Need Association  
The Wilderness Society  
Wilamette Valley Visitors Association  
Wilson Creek Trail Coalition  
Wisconsin Non-motorized Recreation  
& Transportation Trails Council

**Testimony in Support of FY 2025 Funding for the  
Smithsonian Institution, United States Geological Survey,  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and Environmental Protection Agency**

**May 10, 2024**

**Submitted by:**

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**Submitted to:**

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

The American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of appropriations for the Smithsonian Institution, the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for fiscal year (FY) 2025. We encourage Congress to provide additional funding to the Smithsonian Institution in FY 2025, including at least \$60 million to the National Museum of Natural History with new funding to support scientific and curatorial work. We urge Congress to provide the USGS with \$1.85 billion in FY 2025, with at least \$395 million for its Ecosystems Mission Area. We further request that Science Applications within USFWS be provided at least \$55.5 million in FY 2025. Lastly, we request that Congress provide EPA Science and Technology with at least \$876 million in FY 2025.

AIBS is a scientific association dedicated to promoting the use of science to inform decision-making that advances the biological sciences for the benefit of science and society. AIBS works to ensure that the public, legislators, funders, and the community of biologists have access to information to guide informed decision-making.

The unprecedented loss of biological diversity and the associated negative impacts on human health and well-being are of significant concern. As human population grows and people increasingly come into contact with new environments and species migrating into new habitats, the risk of new diseases, such as zoonotic pandemics, is of growing concern. Biological diversity, however, offers a buffer against the spread of pathogens and contributes to environmental sustainability and increases our resilience to natural disasters. Robust federal investments in scientific research and monitoring that improves our understanding of biological diversity and ecosystem function must be a priority. The agencies funded by this appropriations bill are centrally involved in conducting, supporting, and using this scientific research for public benefit.

**Smithsonian Institution**

Scientific collections and the professionals and scientists who collect, care for, and study these resources are a vital component of our nation's research infrastructure and bioeconomy. Collections are a critical resource for advancing the knowledge needed to address current global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pandemics.

The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) is a valuable federal partner in the curation of and research on scientific specimens. Scientists at the NMNH care for 148 million scientific specimens and ensure the strategic growth of this internationally recognized scientific research institution. To increase the availability of these scientific resources to researchers, educators, other federal agencies, and the public, NMNH is working on a multi-year effort to digitize its collections and make the data available online. That effort will substantially increase the use of these collections by researchers, educators and students, and policymakers. NMNH is also working to strengthen curatorial and research staffing and to backfill positions left open by retirements and budget constraints. The current staffing level is insufficient to provide optimal care for the collections.

Recognizing the importance of biological collections for research, the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act called for the establishment of an action center for biological collections. Such a center will provide leadership, support, and coordination for federal, non-federal, and private collections and enable transformative research to address grand societal challenges. Many federal agencies have a role in supporting the establishment of this center, including the Smithsonian Institution's NMNH. However, the budget for NMNH has not seen adequate increases in recent years. We urge Congress to provide NMNH with at least \$60 million in FY 2025 to allow the museum to undertake critical collections care, make needed technology upgrades, and conduct cutting edge research.

### **U.S. Geological Survey**

The USGS provides unbiased, independent research, data, and assessments that are needed by public and private sector decision-makers. Data generated by the USGS save taxpayers money by enabling more effective management of water and biological resources and providing essential geospatial information that is needed for commercial activity and natural resource management. The data collected by the USGS are simply not available from other sources.

The Ecosystems Mission Area is the biological research arm of USGS and is integral to the agency's other science mission areas. It provides the science needed to achieve sustainable management and conservation of natural resources and inform land and water stewardship. The USGS conducts research on and monitors fish, wildlife, and vegetation—data that informs management decisions by other Interior bureaus. Biological science programs collect and analyze long-term data not available from other agencies, universities, or the private sector. The knowledge generated by the USGS are used by federal and state natural resource managers to maintain healthy and diverse ecosystems while balancing the needs of public use.

Examples of successful USGS Ecosystem initiatives include:

- Development of comprehensive geospatial data products that characterize the risk of wildfires on all lands in the United States. These products are used to allocate firefighting

resources and to plan wildfire fuel reduction projects.

- Development and evaluation of control measures and other management interventions for invasive species, such as Asian carp and sea lamprey, that cause billions of dollars in economic losses to fisheries, hydropower, recreation, and many other industries.
- Development of the scientific understanding needed to combat the spread of avian flu, white-nose syndrome, and other diseases spread by wildlife in North America, including diseases that can jump from wild populations to livestock, agricultural systems, and humans.

The USGS also supports critical science needed to respond to a number of national and global challenges. Examples of the important work conducted by the USGS include:

- *The National and Regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers*. This program is responsible for developing the science and tools to address the effects of climate change on land, water, wildlife, fish, ecosystems, and communities. These centers play a vital role in addressing the impacts of unique weather patterns on ecosystem health across the country.
- *The National Wildlife Health Center*. This USGS-wide program investigates national and international wildlife health issues, including the spread of zoonotic pathogens, such as the virus that causes COVID-19. Zoonoses—diseases that spread from wildlife to humans—can pose serious threats to human health and cause significant disruptions to the economy.
- *Cooperative Research Units (CRUs)*. CRUs are located on 43 university campuses in 41 states. These research centers are a cost-effective way for USGS to leverage research and technical expertise affiliated with these universities to conduct actionable research, provide technical assistance, and develop scientific workforces through graduate education and mentoring programs.
- *Environmental Health Research*. The Toxic Substances Hydrology and Contaminant Biology programs work collaboratively with other Mission Areas, and with external collaborators to study environmental contaminants and pathogens and provide the critical science needed to help Federal, State, and local government agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders protect fish and wildlife health using a One Health approach that recognizes the interdependence of human, animal, and ecosystem health.
- *Research on ecosystems of concern*. This research is a critical component of efforts to restore and manage important national resources, such as the Everglades and the Chesapeake Bay. The Changing Arctic Ecosystems initiative conducts research on wildlife and habitat responses to ecosystem change in the Arctic to inform land and species management decisions and address the needs of Arctic residents, including Native communities.

In summary, the USGS is uniquely positioned to provide a scientific context for many of the nation's biological and environmental challenges, including pandemics, water quality and use, energy independence, and conservation of biodiversity. This array of research expertise not only serves the core missions of the Department of the Interior, but also contributes to management decisions made by other agencies and private sector organizations. USGS science also enables cost-effective decisions, as the agency's activities help to identify the most efficient management actions. Increased investments in these important research activities will yield dividends.

We urge Congress to provide significant funding increases to the Ecosystems Mission Area. In recent years, the budget for USGS has not seen adequate increases. In fact, in FY 2024, the agency received a 3 percent cut. Failure to make critical investments in the research conducted

by the agency will hamper long-term data collection initiatives, lead to critical data loss, and undermine the nation's ability to address national challenges.

We request that Congress fund the USGS at \$1.85 billion in FY 2025, with at least \$395 million for the Ecosystems mission area.

#### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

The Science Applications program within USFWS supports science partnerships with external stakeholders for collaborative landscape conservation activities. It supports pollinator conservation, proactive conservation of at-risk species and their habitats, habitat and ecosystem restoration grants, as well the agency's climate change action program. In FY 2023, Science Support was merged with the Cooperative Landscape Conservation activity and renamed Science Applications. The enacted funding for Science Applications in FY 2023, however, was lower than the combined FY 2022 funding for its two activities. The program received a further 4 percent reduction in funding in FY 2024.

We request that Science Applications be provided at least \$55.5 million in FY 2025 with robust funding for research activities previously under Science Support.

#### **Environmental Protection Agency**

Funding for EPA Science and Technology supports valuable research that identifies and mitigates environmental problems. EPA research informs decisions made by public health and safety managers, natural resource managers, businesses, and other stakeholders concerned about air and water pollution, human health, and land management and restoration. This program provides the scientific basis upon which EPA monitoring and enforcement programs are built.

Despite the important role of EPA Science and Technology in the federal government's ability to ensure that people have clean air and water, funding for this account in recent years has remained significantly lower than its peak of \$846 million in FY 2010. Notably, in FY 2024, EPA's Science and Technology budget was reduced by nearly 6 percent to \$758 million. Strong increases in funding are needed for programs such as the consistently under-funded Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Research Grants Program, which supports extramural research that advances EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment, and the Global Change Research program, which develops scientific information that allows policy makers, stakeholders, and society to respond to climate change.

Please provide at least \$876 million in FY 2025 to support scientific research at the EPA. This much needed increase will allow the agency to provide resources for efforts to protect and restore our nation's natural resources.

#### **Conclusion**

We urge Congress to sustain its bipartisan support for science by investing in our nation's scientific capacity. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request.



**Testimony of Harold P. Wimmer**  
 President and CEO, American Lung Association  
**House Committee on Appropriations**  
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
**Re: Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) appropriations for key public health programs within the  
 Environmental Protection Agency**

May 10, 2024

Summary of FY 2025 Appropriations Recommendations:

EPA topline – \$12 billion  
 Clean Air Program overall – \$915.5 million  
 Climate Protection Program – \$181.2 million  
 Categorical Grants: State and Local Air Quality Management – \$500 million  
 Categorical Grants: Tribal Air Quality Management – \$57.4 million  
 Compliance Monitoring – \$162.1 million  
 Enforcement – \$391.4 million  
 Environmental Justice - \$369.1 million  
 Diesel Emissions Reduction Grant Program – \$150 million  
 EPA Radon Program - \$5 million  
 Categorical Grant: Radon – \$18 million  
 Wildfire Smoke Preparedness - \$15 million  
 Office of Air and Radiation, Indoor Environments Division - \$100 million

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight the funding priorities of the American Lung Association within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for fiscal year 2025 (FY25). The American Lung Association is the trusted champion for lung health, working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through education, advocacy and research. We urge the Committee to support \$12 billion in funding for the Environmental Protection Agency.

EPA programs play an important role in efforts to improve lung health and save lives. The Agency is responsible for setting and enforcing national air pollution standards, supporting air quality monitoring, implementing emissions reductions and educating the public about the health harms of pollution. Air pollution poses a threat to the health of all Americans, but some individuals are at elevated risk. There are 34.4 million Americans living with a chronic lung disease like asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Children, seniors, individuals who are pregnant and people who work and play outside are also more likely to suffer health harms. Additionally, people of color and people with low incomes are often exposed to air pollution at a higher rate. The Lung Association’s 2024 “State of the Air” report

found that nearly 70 million people of color and 16 million people with incomes meeting the federal poverty definition live in counties that received a failing grade for ozone and/or particle pollution.<sup>1</sup>

EPA is also responsible for administering grants to states, localities, Tribes and other entities to improve health by improving air quality and climate resilience. While legislation passed in the past few years provided necessary increases in funding for communities to see relief from the impacts of pollution and climate change, it does not replace the need for funding the agency's core programs and infrastructure. The American Lung Association urges robust investments in the following key programs:

**Provide \$915.5 million for EPA's Clean Air program.** EPA is the agency responsible for protecting the public from air pollution and the Clean Air program is necessary to meeting that responsibility. Through this funding line, EPA assists states, Tribes and localities with implementing comprehensive air quality management programs and provides testing and oversight to ensure unlawful pollution is not impacting the health of communities. Please provide \$694.6 million for Environmental Programs and Management and \$220.9 million for Science and Technology.

**Provide \$500 million for State and Local Air Quality Monitoring Grants and \$57.4 million for Tribal Air Quality Monitoring Grants.** Accurately monitoring air quality is necessary to ensure resources to clean up pollution are spent effectively and deliver benefits to the areas in need of pollution cleanup. Unfortunately, state, local and Tribal air agencies – who run the nation's official air quality monitoring system – continue to face budget shortfalls and many are operating with out-of-date monitors. Supplemental funding passed over the past few years was necessary to progress towards an expanded and more efficient network, but it was not a replacement for regular and dependable appropriations. Both the National Association of Clean Air Agencies and the National Tribal Air Association conducted baseline needs assessments of their members to determine what would be needed to successfully implement programs under current and anticipated federal requirements. The results showed that air agencies need increases if they are to adequately protect health by monitoring air pollution levels.<sup>2,3</sup>

**Provide \$162.1 million for Compliance Monitoring, \$391.4 million for enforcement and \$369.1 million for environmental justice efforts.** Enforcing EPA's science-backed air quality

<sup>1</sup> The American Lung Association. State of the Air, April 2024 <https://www.lung.org/sota>

<sup>2</sup> National Association of Clean Air Agencies FY 2025 Funding Recommendations October 2023 [https://www.4cleanair.org/wp-content/uploads/NACAA\\_FY\\_2025\\_Grant-Recommendations.pdf](https://www.4cleanair.org/wp-content/uploads/NACAA_FY_2025_Grant-Recommendations.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> National Tribal Air Association. Tribal Air Quality Priorities and the Resources to Address those Priorities: *Key Findings of the National Baseline Needs Assessment Among American Indian and Alaska Native Communities*, May 2022 <https://www.ntaatribalair.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/5.5.22-NTAA-Baseline-Needs-Assessment-Key-Findings.pdf>

standards is necessary to truly achieve the rules' intended health benefits. EPA must have the resources and capacity to reduce non-compliance, as well as enforce penalties for violations. EPA must also be prepared to respond to civil enforcement actions authorized by the Clean Air Act. Additionally, air pollution does not impact everyone equally. Recognizing – and rectifying – the health disparities that come from air pollution requires dedicated funding and attention. We applaud the commitments to improving health disparities and urge that the funding matches that commitment.

**Provide \$150 million for the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act and Support the Clean School Bus Program.** The Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) Program is a bipartisan program to clean up cancer-causing diesel emissions. There are millions of legacy diesel engines still in use today that emit large amounts of pollution, making efforts to improve diesel engine efficiency a public health imperative. And it's cost-effective, with monetized health benefits exceeding federal funding by a factor of 10. Additionally, we urge the Committee to continue supporting the rapid transition to zero emission school buses through the popular Clean School Bus Program. Over 600 school districts have received awards to replace over 5,000 diesel school buses with cleaner, low or zero-emission versions which will provide a safer, healthier environment for children, who are among those most at risk of health harm from breathing in pollution.

**Provide \$5 million for EPA's Radon Program and \$18 million for State Indoor Radon Grants.** Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States and is estimated to result in 21,000 deaths annually. EPA's radon program and its State Indoor Radon Grants are critical for reducing radon exposure and a necessary component of a comprehensive cancer reduction strategy. Significant progress has been made in reducing radon risks, but more than 90,000 homes each year still require radon fixes. There are also health disparities in radon exposure that need to be addressed, such as financial barriers to radon testing and mitigation lack of tenant protections. Additionally, we recommend that the Agency prioritize SIRG funding to states are seeking to adopt or strengthen certification requirements for radon measurement and mitigation workers, including the adoption of national consensus standards.

**Please provide \$100 million for the Office of Air and Radiation/Indoor Environments Division and \$10 million to EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection.** Indoor air pollution is particularly dangerous when it exists in classrooms full of children, who are more susceptible to health harms from breathing in toxins and pollutants. Pollution exposure can decrease attendance, negatively impact test scores and harm health such as by worsening asthma symptoms. 41% of school districts were found to be in need of HVAC repairs in at least half of their schools.<sup>4</sup> Many school districts lack the education, training and resources to implement

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<sup>4</sup> Government Accountability Office. (2020). K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement (GAO-20-494)

effective prevention measures, making EPA guidance and assistance necessary to access funding opportunities. Additionally, the Office of Children's Health Protection plays a critical role in researching children's risks and exposures in school and childcare facilities. Improving indoor air quality in schools will benefit kids health both in the short-term and long-term.

**Please provide \$15 million for wildfire smoke preparedness.** Wildfire smoke is an urgent threat to public health. States across the country – not just in the western US – have experienced the impacts that wildfire smoke can have on health. Furthering our understanding of the depth and magnitude of that health impact as well as identifying what interventions are most impactful will help officials respond in effective ways and spend resources wisely.

**Oppose all policy riders.** Lastly, the American Lung Association also asks for your leadership in opposing all policy riders that would weaken key lung health protections, including those in the Clean Air Act. Policy riders have no place in appropriations bills, and the Lung Association strongly opposes attempts to include them, especially riders that would make it harder to protect Americans from air pollution.

Investments in EPA programs are critical to protecting public health. On behalf of the Lung Association, I thank you for your consideration of these requests.

**FY 2025 Recommendation:****U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies****Craig H. Piercy****Executive Director/CEO****American Nuclear Society<sup>1</sup>****May 10, 2024**

On behalf of the 10,000 men and women of the American Nuclear Society (ANS), I am pleased to provide one recommendation for an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) program under the Subcommittee's jurisdiction. We continue to be grateful to the Committee for its dedication and support for environmental protection programs and U.S. environmental safety standards.

**EPA; Environmental Programs and Management, Office of Radiation and Indoor Air**

ANS recommends an additional \$3 million dollars for the EPA Office of Radiation and Indoor Air in FY 2025. The \$3 million dollar addition would allow the EPA to begin development on a new generic, technology-neutral protection standard that reflects modern, international practices and that would apply to future high-level nuclear waste disposal facilities as authorized by the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982.

This new standard will not impact any policies related to Yucca Mountain. The current quantity of high-level waste in America exceeds the maximum capacity originally meant for storage at the Yucca Mountain site; when Congress chooses to pursue a second repository in the future, this standards development must be completed to prevent unnecessary delays and prevent burdensome litigation. Updating the EPA's generic geologic repository standard is a long-term endeavor and will not result in any immediate changes to U.S. policy; it may take five to ten years. Given the extended timeframe for the action, it is imperative that the EPA starts now on the development of an updated standard using state-of-the-art science to be applied to future repositories in order to protect public health and safety.

In a 2017 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on nuclear waste, GAO-17-174, experts advised that "it would be premature for [the U.S. Department of Energy] to site a... repository until health and safety regulations are revised." Recognizing that the EPA has responsibility for revising regulations, EPA officials specified in the same report that "they do not plan to invest resources in revising health and safety regulations without specific direction from Congress." Therefore, specific input from Congress directing the EPA to revise the standard

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<sup>1</sup> The American Nuclear Society is the premier organization for those who embrace nuclear science and technology for their vital contributions to improving people's lives and preserving the planet. ANS membership is open to all, and current membership consists of individuals from all walks of life; including engineers, doctors, students, educators, scientists, soldiers, advocates, government employees, and others. ANS is committed to advancing, fostering, and promoting the development and application of nuclear sciences and technologies to benefit society.

in advance of other policy actions is necessary for the success of any future policy actions on commercial spent nuclear fuel.

The Administration's FY 2025 budget request highlighted this future need and included a request for 2-3 FTE's which would address some of the critical gaps in EPA's radiological protection capacity including the ability to provide ongoing site characterization and analytical support for site assessment activities, radioactive waste storage and disposal approaches, remediation technologies, and measurement and information systems.

***Requested Report Language:***

*Within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Radiation and Indoor Air, the Committee provides \$3,000,000 to develop a new generic, technology-neutral protection standard that reflects modern, international practices and that would apply to future high-level nuclear waste disposal facilities as authorized by the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 (P.L. 97-425) as amended.*

For further information or questions, please contact John Starkey, ANS Director of Public Policy, [jstarkey@ans.org](mailto:jstarkey@ans.org).



**Written Testimony for the Record of  
Tom Kiernan, President and CEO, American Rivers  
to the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
5/1/2024**

My name is Tom Kiernan, I am the President and CEO of American Rivers. Since 1973, American Rivers has protected wild rivers, restored damaged rivers, and conserved clean water for people and nature. With headquarters in Washington, D.C. and 355,000 supporters, members, and volunteers across the country, we are the most trusted and influential river conservation organization in the United States, delivering solutions for a better future. On behalf of American Rivers, I would like to thank Chairman Mike Simpson, Ranking Member Chellie Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies for your leadership to reduce pollution in rivers, improve clean water access, and safeguard public drinking water supplies now and into the future.

American Rivers is pleased to submit our full requests (see the full River Budget [here](#) and below) as part of the written testimony for the record. We address the funding and programmatic needs for federal agencies' programs to make sure they are effective and efficient. Today, rivers across the country face daunting challenges on the road to recovery. From algal blooms in the Great Lakes to water scarcity in the Southwest and flooding in the Northeast, we must use every tool at our disposal to ensure healthy rivers have a fighting chance to bounce back. Our critical water supplies are at risk if we fail to fund these key programs that enhance our ability to improve river health and grow our economy. These topline figures are backed by River Budget Partners, a network of 156 partner organizations including utility and state agency associations, fishing groups, small businesses, rural communities, public health organizations, environmental justice leaders, and more.

Per our FY25 River Budget, we respectfully request the following:

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>FY25 Recommendation</b>
<b>BLM</b>	Wild and Scenic Rivers	\$7,500,000
<b>BLM</b>	Threatened and Endangered Species (T&E) Program	\$51,000,000
<b>EPA</b>	Chesapeake Bay Program	\$93,000,000
<b>EPA</b>	Clean Water SRF	\$7,600,000,000
<b>EPA</b>	Drinking Water SRF	\$7,600,000,000
<b>EPA</b>	Environmental Justice Programs	\$294,938,000
<b>EPA</b>	Great Lakes Restoration Initiative	\$450,000
<b>EPA</b>	Indian Reservation Drinking Water Program	\$50,000,000
<b>EPA</b>	Low Income Household Water Assistance Program Pilot	\$225,000,000
<b>EPA</b>	National Non-Point Source Management Program	\$200,000,000
<b>EPA</b>	Puget Sound Program	\$57,000,000

<b>EPA</b>	Reducing Lead in Drinking Water	\$100,000,000
<b>EPA</b>	Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants Program	\$280,000,000
<b>EPA</b>	Assistance for Small & Disadvantaged Communities Drinking Water	\$80,002,000
<b>EPA</b>	Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Fund	\$80,344,000
<b>EPA</b>	Water Pollution Control (Sec 106) grant program	\$255,000,000
<b>EPA</b>	Wetlands Program Development Grants	\$20,000,000
<b>Forest Service</b>	Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species (TES) Program	\$24,667,000
<b>Forest Service</b>	Legacy Roads and Trails (LRT) Program	\$100,000,000
<b>USFWS</b>	Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund	\$15,500,000
<b>USFWS</b>	National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	\$10,000,000
<b>USFWS</b>	National Fish Habitat Action Plan	\$7,500,000
<b>USFWS</b>	National Fish Passage Program	\$30,000,000
<b>USFWS</b>	National Wetlands Inventory	\$8,000,000
<b>USFWS</b>	National Wildlife Refuge System	\$1,500,000,000
<b>USFWS</b>	North American Wetlands Conservation Fund	\$50,150,000
<b>USFWS</b>	Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program	\$100,000,000
<b>IHS</b>	Sanitation Facilities Construction	\$250,000,000
<b>NPS</b>	Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers Program	\$5,800,000
<b>NPS</b>	Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance	\$15,000,000
<b>USGS</b>	Groundwater and Streamflow Information Program	\$150,000,000
<b>USGS</b>	National Water Quality Program	\$100,080,000

\*For more detail, see [here](#).

### Support Funding for the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System

We request that you support sufficient funding for the stewardship of the Wild and Scenic River System which preserves select free-flowing rivers that have nationally significant values for future generations of Americans. The National System protects 13,467 miles of 228 rivers in 41 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico; this is less than one half of one percent of the nation's rivers. We also request that you to institute transparency and accountability by creating a sub-category line item for the Wild and Scenic Rivers programs within the USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service budgets to better track performance. Without true accountability it is difficult to measure results and to apply limited resources appropriately to meet the agencies' statutory mandates.

Additional appropriations include:

- USDA Forest Service request: \$15 Million in support of ongoing management of designated rivers, Forest Plan Revision planning, and necessary increases in river manager staffing.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service request: \$450,000 to improve resource protection and management capacity for Alaska Wild and Scenic Rivers, Comprehensive River

Management Plan development and leveraging community involvement, and youth engagement including in urban refuges.

Investing in this nationally significant system of rivers pays back in multiple ways--tourism, hunting, fishing, other outdoor recreation, healthier ecological systems, abundant water resources-- and leverages local investments that strengthen local economies as well as the public's use and enjoyment of our country's natural resources. We appreciate your help providing stewardship resources for this uniquely American idea and establishing a legacy for local communities. This funding will enable agencies to meet their statutory requirements to protect and enhance those rivers that have been designated as nationally significant and avoid unnecessary litigation.

#### **Support Additional Funding to Remove Dams for Safety and Fish Passage**

Many dams have reached the end of their useful lives and pose public safety risks, negatively impact fish and other aquatic life, and can be costly liabilities to their owners. Removing dams is the fastest way to bring a river back to life. Removing dams restores native aquatic life to rivers, increases climate resilience, and reduces the risk of aging dams failing and causing catastrophic flood damages and even loss of human life. In addition, more than 1,400 people have died in the dangerous hydraulics created at the base of low-head dams. Funding from Congress is necessary to support the removal of unsafe or obsolete dams, including dangerous low-head dams.

Agencies of the Department of the Interior have demonstrated their ability to support barrier removal projects. These agencies need additional funding to support and expand this critical work. Funding is needed to adequately staff programs such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) National Fish Passage Program. Despite the significant investment of federal dollars through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), FWS continues to receive many more proposals through their fish passage grant programs than can be funded. In addition, agencies need more funding to assess their water infrastructure, including dams, for safety, use, and end of life plans for projects no longer needed whose removal will relieve the maintenance burden on those agencies. Prioritizing funding to remove, rehabilitate, and/or retrofit dams is the best way to bring life back to damaged rivers and protect communities.

#### **Wetlands Protection**

In May 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court limited the authority of EPA to regulate the nation's waterway including creeks, streams, and rivers that are scientifically significant and/or connected to wetlands. In the ruling of *Sackett v. EPA*, the majority of justices narrowly interpreted the definition of "waters of the United States" in the Clean Water Act. American Rivers is concerned with this ruling and its impact to our nation's rivers and waterways.

This new interpretation puts unprecedented constraints on the types of waterways EPA has the ability to regulate which Congress empowered the agency to oversee. The amendments to the Clean Water Act in 1972 passed overwhelmingly in a bipartisan fashion to enact strong protections to protect America's water resources. The dangerous precedent set by the Supreme Court sets us back and weakens national and state efforts to conserve and restore rivers, wetlands, and lakes that are essential to outdoor recreation, drinking water, and wastewater infrastructure.

We urge the committee to fund the Wetlands Program Development Grants at a minimum of \$20M for FY25. This funding will support development of state and tribal wetlands programs and give communities a way to respond to water shortages. Today, one in 10 watersheds in the U.S. is stressed for water natural supply including Houston, TX; Salt Lake City, UT; Lincoln, NE; Cleveland, OH; Miami, FL; Atlanta, GA; Washington, DC; El Paso, TX; San Antonio, TX; San Francisco Bay Area, CA; and Los Angeles, CA.

**Direct Cost Recovery Funds Back to USFWS to Support its Hydropower Programs and Improve Fish Migration Initiatives**

Improving fish passage at hydropower sites can prevent further declines in migratory fish populations and support sustainable commercial, tribal, and recreational fisheries. Fish such as the Pacific and Atlantic salmon and other migratory species, such as shad, river herring, American eel, lamprey, and sturgeon need access to both the ocean and freshwater habitat to complete their life cycles. But barriers like hydropower dams block migration patterns and access which lead to steep population declines and potential loss of species. USFWS' Hydropower Program is a vital program that partners rely on to identify and implement solutions to reopen rivers for migratory fish while preserving hydropower generation in smart and sustainable way. With more than 1,600 hydropower projects regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, USFWS needs more funding for staffing and science to upgrade and retrofit our nation's hydropower infrastructure.

Over the next ten years, we will see a rise in hydropower relicensing with over 440 scheduled to start the licensing process by 2035. We request the committee support reporting language that makes cost recovery for agencies at USFWS' Hydropower Program more explicit and efficient so they can continue providing technical assistance, staffing, and capacity for the relicensing process that are in the pipeline. Specifically, we ask the committee to support language on the disposition of charges arising from licenses. Currently, during the relicensing process charges are returned to the U.S. Treasury instead of to USFWS' Hydropower Program which could then use the funds dedicated for hydropower to support workloads for upcoming relicenses. We must do more to empower NOAA Fisheries Hydropower Program to keep their funding for future projects, so they can better prepare and provide the much-needed expertise for the wave of relicenses that are incoming. Direct cost recovery would be a major benefit to the hydropower programs, however additional funding is likely necessary for the programs to work with the full suite of hydropower projects to conserve and restore the migratory fish affected by them.

**Conclusion**

Thank you for your consideration of these funding requests, and for your leadership on appropriations. We look forward to working with you to support these opportunities to restore and protect rivers across America. Please contact Jaime D. Sigaran, Associate Director, Policy and Government Relations ([jsigaran@americanrivers.org](mailto:jsigaran@americanrivers.org)) with any questions.

Sincerely,



Tom Kiernan  
President and CEO  
American Rivers



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY**  
**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
**Fiscal Year 2025**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Submitted by: Meredith Hou, Director of Federal Legislation, Government Relations**  
**American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**  
**May 10, 2024**

On behalf of our more than 2 million supporters, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) submits this testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies regarding the Wild Horse and Burro Program administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Founded in 1866, the ASPCA is the first humane organization established in the Americas and serves as the nation's leading voice for animal welfare. The ASPCA is dedicated to ensuring good welfare for all equines, building innovative programs to provide them with a unique, comprehensive network of support. We appreciate this opportunity and respectfully ask that the Subcommittee consider the following requests when making FY2025 appropriations, including allocating \$170,917,000 for the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program.

**Wild Horse and Burro Management**

Our wild horses and burros should be revered as historical icons, treated humanely, and managed responsibly on our public lands. Yet, in the nearly 50 years since Congress charged the BLM with protecting our country's wild horses and burros, Americans have witnessed the agency's Wild Horse and Burro Program deteriorate into a continuous cycle of costly roundups and removals with little regard for the prioritization of on-range management of the herds. Thanks to past funding and strong congressional directives, we are starting to see the agency slowly embrace a more positive management framework. But more needs to be done to steer the program on track.

Accordingly, we ask you to:

- provide the funding needed to implement a multi-tiered non-lethal management approach;
- continue to include longstanding bill language prohibiting the BLM and USFS from killing or selling wild horses or burros to slaughter as part of the government's strategy for managing wild herds;
- continue to include report language directing the BLM to implement each of the four below-described strategies for a more humane and sustainable program; and,
- ensure the agency will adhere to those directives by making the funding contingent on BLM following the directives.

Recognizing that the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program is in dire need of an overhaul, the ASPCA has partnered with a diverse group of stakeholders to propose a non-lethal, humane, and long-term approach to on-range management that would implement a strategic and comprehensive fertility control program on the range and eventually release the BLM from a

continuous cycle of round-ups, removals, and warehousing of horses in off-range holding. The proposal contains four interdependent strategies that must be implemented simultaneously to have a meaningful effect: 1) immediate and robust application of proven, safe, and humane fertility control to manage the on-range population; 2) shifting horses currently in off-range BLM corrals to humane, cost-effective pasture facilities; 3) increasing safe wild horse and burro adoptions; and 4) removals of horses from densely populated herd management areas to reduce the population that must be managed on-range, the need for which will decrease over time as the program rebalances towards on-range management, with strict adherence to the BLM's Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, the FY2020 through FY2023 funding bills consistently increased funding for the Wild Horse and Burro Program and included clear language directing BLM to implement a comprehensive, on-range management program that embraces the four principles of our proposal. Although Congress decreased funding for the program in the FY2024 funding bill, it maintained language requiring a non-lethal, science-based wild horse and burro management program. With proper funding and with the appropriate safeguards guiding management, the BLM can effectively rebalance the program and ensure that wild horses and burros can live safely on our public lands for generations to come.

We have been encouraged by some signs that the Department of Interior and the BLM are making important changes towards preventative management. Since Congress has allocated additional funds for the program, the BLM has been slowly embracing fertility control and has demonstrated an ability to scale up management activities. Yet despite report language directing the agency to implement an effective, nationwide fertility control program, it has long been the missing component of the prescribed multi-tiered management plan. Fertility control is a critical component of any successful program and it must be incorporated into the BLM's Environmental Assessments used to guide management decisions. Unfortunately, it appears that the prior report language has not been enough to convince the agency to implement a fertility control program at a meaningful scale. We therefore respectfully request the below bill language to more clearly direct the BLM to adhere to the report language.

As part of its fertility control implementation, the agency should also do contingency planning for extreme climate conditions, drought, and other impacts to the program in order to achieve its goals for fertility treatment implementation. In 2021, for example, extreme drought conditions necessitated emergency removals of animals from the range. As a result, the BLM treated fewer than half of the mares they originally planned to inoculate using fertility control vaccines in their annual gather plan. In 2023, drought and inflation increased the cost of off-range care, resulting in a steep decline in fertility control treatments. It is mission critical, therefore, that the agency plan for these and similar, reasonably foreseeable events to ensure their management actions are effective and the program is in the best position to succeed in reaching its management goals.

Unfortunately, Congress also must continue to adopt bill language to explicitly prohibit the agencies from destroying wild horses or burros or selling them with the result that the animal is

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Land Management, Wild Horse and Burro Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program, PIM 2021-002: <https://www.blm.gov/policy/pim-2021-002>

destroyed as part of the government's management strategy. The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 declared that these icons were to be protected from harassment, branding, capture, and death. In 2004, however, the Act was amended to allow the sale of these animals to slaughter; this infamous amendment, known as the Burns Amendment, was included as part of the appropriations package and was not voted on. The overwhelming majority of the American public opposes horse slaughter, and this amendment flew in the face of the stated purpose of the Act, leading Congress to include annually the below requested bill language, which explicitly prohibits the agencies from utilizing lethal management. With the Burns Amendment still in place, this bill language remains necessary to protect our nation's wild horses and burros.

The ASPCA requests, therefore, that the Subcommittee continue its progress towards a humane, non-lethal and effective wild horse and burro management program by reinvesting in the program and including the bill and report language identified below.

#### **Appropriations Requests**

The ASPCA requests that the Subcommittee fund the Wild Horse and Burro Program at the amount included in the President's Budget Request to implement a multi-tiered, humane, non-lethal and effective management approach: **\$170,917,000**.

The ASPCA requests that the Subcommittee continue to include the following bill language, most recently included in FY24 as Section 417 of P.L. 118-42, which prohibits the BLM and U.S. Forest Service from killing or selling wild horses or burros to slaughter as part of the government's strategy for managing wild herds:

#### HUMANE TRANSFER AND TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

SEC. XXX. (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of the Interior, with respect to land administered by the Bureau of Land Management, or the Secretary of Agriculture, with respect to land administered by the Forest Service (referred to in this section as the "Secretary concerned"), may transfer excess wild horses and burros that have been removed from land administered by the Secretary concerned to other Federal, State, and local government agencies for use as work animals.

(b) The Secretary concerned may make a transfer under subsection (a) immediately on the request of a Federal, State, or local government agency.

(c) An excess wild horse or burro transferred under subsection (a) shall lose status as a wild free-roaming horse or burro (as defined in section 2 of Public Law 92-195 (commonly known as the "Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act") (16 U.S.C. 1332)).

(d) A Federal, State, or local government agency receiving an excess wild horse or burro pursuant to subsection (a) shall not—

- (1) destroy the horse or burro in a manner that results in the destruction of the horse or burro into a commercial product;
- (2) sell or otherwise transfer the horse or burro in a manner that results in the destruction of the horse or burro for processing into a commercial product; or

- (3) euthanize the horse or burro, except on the recommendation of a licensed veterinarian in a case of severe injury, illness, or advanced age.
- (e) Amounts appropriated by this Act shall not be available for—
  - (1) the destruction of any healthy, unadopted, and wild horse or burro under the jurisdiction of the Secretary concerned (including a contractor); or
  - (2) the sale of a wild horse or burro that results in the destruction of the wild horse or burro for processing into a commercial product.

The ASPCA requests that the Subcommittee include the following report language directing the BLM to implement the multi-tiered humane, non-lethal and effective management approach for a more humane and sustainable program:

*Wild Horse and Burro Program.* The bill provides \$170,917,000 for the Wild Horse and Burro program. These funds are in response to the Bureau’s May 15, 2020 proposal to institute an aggressive, non-lethal population control strategy to address the current unsustainable trajectory of on-range wild horse and burro population growth. The Committees expect this strategy to continue and to include a robust expansion of fertility control utilizing methods that are proven, safe, effective, and humane. Such treatments and on-range gathers are to be maximized, even if appropriate management levels are not immediately achievable. As the Bureau works to substantially increase on-range gathers for removal, the Committees encourage the Bureau to continue to secure cheaper and longer-term off-range holding facilities and pastures. The Committees further expect the Bureau to demonstrate its ability to increase its capacity for gathers; procure additional short and long term holding facilities; and to ensure that adequate staffing requirements are met, both in the field and in a location that will facilitate communication with policy makers. The Bureau shall continue to abide by the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program and the statutory restrictions on sale without restriction, and the directives contained in Fiscal Year 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 House and Senate Reports and Explanatory Statements. Finally, the Committees believe that the full and successful implementation of the Bureau's strategy will be greatly enhanced with a traditional congressional communications policy that includes regular and timely briefings on the progress being made and the challenges ahead.

The ASPCA requests that the Subcommittee include the following bill language directing the BLM to adhere to the report language below:

*Provided, That* the funds for the wild horse and burro program shall be expended in accordance with the report accompanying this Act. *Provided further, That* the Bureau of Land Management shall submit reports to Interior Appropriators in accordance with the report accompanying this Act.

**General Nolen Bivens (U.S. Army Ret.), President and CEO Americans for the Arts  
Testimony for the U.S. House of Representatives Interior, Environment and Related  
Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee  
May 10, 2024**

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of federal funding for both the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) at no less than \$211 million each for Fiscal Year 2025. This represents only 0.006 % of last year's federal budget. We also encourage the Subcommittee to build a specific path to index funding for each of these two cultural agencies at \$1 per capita. Each agency is currently funded at about .62 cents per capita.

The arts are a national asset, and these agencies are vital to a thriving arts and culture sector which in turn positively affects the American economy as a whole. It has been a tough budget environment, but the arts community is thankful for this Subcommittee's leadership as well as the entire House of Representatives for its continued support. In a bipartisan fashion, the full body soundly defeated amendments last year that would have eliminated the NEA and NEH in FY2024. This ultimately led to level funding from the previous year.

We appreciated last week's Subcommittee hearing on the Administration's FY25 Budget Request for the Arts and Humanities which demonstrated bipartisan support for the NEA and NEH, along with an understanding of the importance of arts and culture to our country today. We hope that this is the start of a process that results in a necessary increase for both agencies.

The arts and culture help drive our creative economy which is a primer to our country's economic activity. Last March, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reported that arts and cultural economic activity accounted for 4.3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), or \$1.10 trillion with over 5.2 million jobs. Additionally, America's arts and culture exports increased the trade surplus from \$15.5 billion to \$21 billion. This data represents a new high-water mark that represents a larger percentage of GDP than the transportation, construction, and agriculture sectors.

Furthermore, the nonprofit arts sector generated \$151.7 billion in direct spending by organizations and attendees in and \$29.1 billion in tax revenue in 2022. The nonprofit arts sector also supported 2.6 million jobs and provided \$101 billion in personal income to workers in communities across America, clearly demonstrating that the arts are an asset to the economy.

The resilience of an artist is evident by these statistics, and the NEA and NEH have helped provide resources to support their creativity and work ethic. Every NEA grant dollar leverages at least \$9 in private and other public funds, generating more than \$500 million

in matching support. This leveraging power far surpasses the required non-federal match of at least 1:1 and illustrates why federal support for the arts is uniquely valuable. The federal investment in the arts helps power the creative economy across the country. 42% of NEA-supported activities take place in high-poverty neighborhoods, and 35% of NEA grants went to organizations that reach underserved populations such as people with disabilities and individuals in institutions. The NEA also funds school- and community-based programs that have helped children and youth navigate a mental health crisis exacerbated by the pandemic.

The NEA's funding to Local Arts Agencies (LAAs) is extremely vital to their ability to serve their communities. LAAs collectively are responsible for approximately \$912 million annually in public and private grantmaking. They are also the largest grantmaker to individual artists. LAAs work directly for and with mayors, city managers, county supervisors, and township managers as well as corporate CEOs, real estate developers, and social service providers in every size community across the country. Additionally, LAAs have taken the lead in equity-centered grantmaking in their cities, counties, and rural and suburban areas. They have been entrusted with federal, state, and local funds, including Community Development Block grants, CARES Act and American Rescue Plan Act state and local block grant funds, and other government sources to support emergency relief grants to arts small businesses, nonprofits, individual gig artists, and entrepreneurs.

At last week's budget hearing, members of the Subcommittee expressed strong bipartisan support for the NEA and NEH's ability to provide support and services to our Armed Services and their families. Both agencies offer healing programs for those who serve in our Armed Services as well as veterans reintegrating into civilian life. The NEH's Dialogues on the Experience of War programs bring together veterans and civilians to reflect on powerful literature and art. Across nine programs assessed from 2018-2020 by the National Humanities Alliance, ninety-six percent of respondents indicated that humanities materials helped them better understand their experiences. Seventy-nine percent of veteran respondents indicated that their program made them more likely to seek help if they needed it.

The NEA's Creative Forces program supports military families, a collaboration with the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, to serve the unique and special needs of military patients and Veterans diagnosed with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and psychological health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In clinical settings, creative arts therapists provide art, music, and dance/movement therapies, as well as therapeutic writing instruction, for military patients and veterans. The NEA also provides community engagement services by partnering with nonprofit organizations to provide arts-based programming for military communities.

Understanding our country's current environment that requires a focus on wellness and mental health, the NEA continues to provide sound leadership on arts and healing

throughout our federal agencies and our society. In January, the NEA and the White House hosted a first-ever summit that recognized the profound impact that arts and culture play in shaping our lives, communities, and nation. At this event, NEA Chair Maria Rosario Jackson moderated a conversation with the U.S. Surgeon General, Vice Admiral Vivek Murthy, about the importance of broadening the concept of healing to include our need for joy, social connection and hope. Murthy highlighted how arts and culture are critical ways in which we connect and essential tools for rebuilding the social infrastructure to address the nation's epidemic of isolation and loneliness and the mental health crisis that young people are facing. With the NEA's leadership, more work is necessary through interagency partnerships to help solve this epidemic.

The arts and humanities touch Americans in so many different ways, and its two cultural agencies provide the leadership necessary to help sustain livable communities for us and our children. Thank you for your consideration of federal funding for both the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) at no less than \$211 million each for FY 2025. We also encourage the Subcommittee to build a specific path to index funding for each of these two cultural agencies at \$1 per capita.

Americans for the Arts is the leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts and arts education in America. We have more than 60 years of service and are dedicated to representing and serving the more than 4,500 local arts agencies in every state. Together we work to ensure that every American has access to the transformative power of the arts.

**Fiscal Year 2025 U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Written Testimony of Christopher McGinty  
Executive Director, AmericaView  
May 10, 2024**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee, for your past support and the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Christopher McGinty, and I serve as the Executive Director of AmericaView. AmericaView is a national collaborative non-profit STEM network of 41 member states called StateViews. AmericaView's mission is to empower Earth observation education through remote sensing science, applied research, workforce development, technology transfer, and community outreach. We respectfully request that you continue to enable the USGS Remote Sensing State Grants Program within the Department of the Interior to reach all 50 states and the U.S. territories by including \$10 million for the program in FY 2025.

Remote sensing and Earth observation are vital to advancing technology and industry, conservation and environmental stewardship, and career paths in STEM. By investing in the USGS Remote Sensing State Grants Program, Congress will be pivotal in supporting the development of the next generation of Earth observation students, scientists, innovators, business leaders, problem-solvers, and public sector drivers of technological advancements. This crucial investment in the grant program will ensure that the United States remains globally competitive and has the technological prowess to support solutions that address critical issues such as natural resource sustainability, industry, and emergency response and recovery.

The USGS Remote Sensing State Grants Program (also known as the National Land Remote Sensing Education, Outreach, and Research Activity [NLRSEORA] grant) has been competitively awarded to AmericaView since 2003. Over the past two decades, this program has significantly addressed critical state-specific issues like health, security, emergency response, agriculture, and transportation. Each StateView provides technology, expertise, and actionable data collected from satellites and other means to tackle these challenges. Moreover, the program has been instrumental in engaging with educators and students to support tomorrow's technological workforce and provide educational opportunities for students through scholarships and training opportunities. It has also fostered relationships with underserved and indigenous communities across the United States, promoting the utilization of remote sensing and geospatial technology.

In just the past five years, AmericaView has had an unmistakable impact across the remote sensing field, including but not limited to:

- Trained or shared curriculum with 24,320 K-12 students, 2,621 K-12 teachers, 29,550 graduate and undergraduate students, and 4,299 members of the current workforce;
- Established more than 35 new remote sensing courses or programs at the university level and built an education resource portal for its website;

- Delivered hundreds of presentations to thousands of attendees at national and international scientific and technology-sharing conferences, statewide geospatial data meetings, and other venues;
- Made accessible and/or archived terabytes of publicly available remote-sensing imagery and derivative information, hosting more than half a million visitors at member websites;
- Provided 464 funding opportunities for undergraduate and graduate research and education positions;
- Developed online STEM resources that supported tens of thousands of educators during COVID pandemic school closures;
- Funded 189 collaborative, regional projects to address environmental challenges using remote sensing and Earth observation.

AmericaView is committed to expanding its program to all 50 states and U.S. territories, advocating for consistent funding to support state-specific initiatives. The use of remote sensing and geospatial data is rapidly expanding, driven by researchers and industries developing new applications to address pressing global issues such as resource and food security, a changing climate, urban planning, and disaster response. This evolution necessitates a workforce skilled in advanced technological applications. Thus, increasing funding for the USGS NLI Remote Sensing State Grants Program that supports AmericaView is essential. This increase will enable AmericaView to cultivate a nationwide workforce with the tools and expertise to effectively leverage these critical data and tools to address current and future challenges.

For nearly two decades, the USGS NLI Remote Sensing State Grants Program has maintained roughly the same funding level, forcing reductions in the financial support allocated to each StateView year after year. As the number of participating states has increased—from just one to 41—the per-state funding has effectively decreased by more than 200%, creating a budget that now only allows for about \$25,500 per state annually. Initially receiving \$1.25 million annually since 2003, funding slightly increased to \$1.465 million in FY 2023. This funding model is unsustainable as AmericaView strives to meet expanding national needs and USGS NLI grant objectives.

The House-passed FY 2024 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill included \$3 million for the program. The Senate version of this appropriations bill maintained funding at the FY 2023 enacted level of \$1.465 million. The final FY 2024 spending package continued funding for the program at the enacted level. AmericaView appreciates this support for the Remote Sensing State Grants Program. However, we must underscore that for the program to make an even more significant, more sustainable impact nationwide and meet the current demand in our high-tech world, the Program requires an annual funding level of \$10 million. Such an investment would significantly enhance a national program that has already demonstrated success. It would provide ample resources that USGS, NASA, EPA, FEMA, DHS, DOT, and state agencies in all 50 states depend on to bolster the use of Earth observation data that aids in education, outreach, workforce development, and applied research.

As a nation, we are at an inflection point where our technological innovation and workforce can catapult our progress as a global leader and competitor in a way that directly impacts the economy and those most underserved in our society. The Remote Sensing State Grants Program,

administered by AmericaView and allocated to the national network of StateView members, has not only helped enable the use of data throughout society for institutions, businesses, and government but has helped develop processes and educational tools that empower individuals, businesses, and academia. These processes and tools serve as a basis for establishing and responding to the needs of the workforce of the future.

AmericaView and its national network appreciate your consideration of our request to include \$10 million for the Department of the Interior's USGS Remote Sensing State Grants Program in the FY 2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

Thank you for considering this request.



# Animal Welfare Institute

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## Testimony to the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies for Fiscal Year 2025

Nancy Blaney, Director, Government Affairs, Animal Welfare Institute  
May 10, 2024

The Animal Welfare Institute, a national nonprofit animal welfare advocacy organization, asks the Subcommittee to provide adequate funding levels for crucial wildlife programs and to include measures to protect at-risk species.

### Wild Horses and Burros (BLM & FS)

The BLM, which oversees the vast majority of America's wild horses and burros, continues to mismanage herds, relying on an endless cycle of costly removals from public lands instead of implementing immunocontraceptive vaccines to control fertility rates and manage these federally protected animals on the range. From FY22-23, the BLM removed over 25,500 wild equines. Historically, the agency has spent less than 1 percent of its annual WHB program budget on fertility control; yet the BLM spent over \$100 million during FY23 alone on removals and holding. We ask the Subcommittee to include a directive for a minimum of ten percent of the BLM's WHB program budget to go towards the administration of proven and safe immunocontraceptive vaccines – specifically the widely supported porcine zona pellucida (PZP) vaccine, as per the National Academy of Sciences recommendation. Moreover, we strongly support the continued inclusion of provisions to ensure that both BLM- and U.S. Forest Service-managed wild equines cannot be destroyed for commercial purposes in order to protect these animals from slaughter, as well as language preventing the destruction of healthy, unadopted wild horses and burros.

Lastly, in recent years, the BLM has pursued attempts to manage wild horses via a risky surgical procedure known as "ovariectomy via colpotomy," which involves blindly locating the ovaries and severing them using a rod-like tool while the animal remains conscious. In its report on wild horse management, the NAS explicitly warned the BLM against using this procedure due to the risks of serious complications. Numerous lawmakers in the House and Senate have criticized the BLM's plans to ovariectomize horses and national polling shows overwhelming opposition to this procedure. In its FY25 budget justifications, the BLM proposes \$15 million for a permanent sterilization program – despite clear congressional directives to devote a sizeable portion of its WHB program budget to implementing proven immunocontraceptive vaccines. We ask the Subcommittee to include language barring the use of federal funds to conduct ovariectomies on wild horses and burros so that taxpayer dollars can be directed towards cost-effective, safe, and humane fertility control methods such as PZP.

### Endangered Species Act Implementation (FWS)

We ask the Subcommittee to appropriate \$857.32 million across five programs to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for the purpose of Endangered Species Act (ESA) implementation:

- \$70.1 million for Listing
- \$469.36 million for Recovery
- \$185.56 million for Planning and Consultation
- \$10.5 million for Candidate Conservation in Conservation and Restoration
- \$121.8 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (CESCF)

Implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), our nation's most effective law for species conservation, has been severely underfunded for years. The Fish and Wildlife Service requires a budget of \$857.32 million across five programs to begin to make up for lost ground and put species on the path to recovery. As we face a worsening biodiversity crisis, this funding package will better allow FWS to implement the ESA in the way Congress intended when it dedicated our country to protecting the most imperiled species and habitats.

Currently, FWS only receives around one-third of the funding required to properly implement the Act. The funding levels requested above would help FWS process the backlog of approximately 200 species on the National Listing Workplan that still need to be reviewed for protections under the ESA, with more species petitioned for inclusion under the ESA every year. It would also be put toward developing recovery plans for the approximately 25% of species currently without plans and revising the 890 recovery plans that are now over two decades out of date and may no longer contain the best available science.

In addition, the above funding levels would provide much-needed resources for maximizing the efficacy and efficiency of FWS consultations with other federal agencies, states, counties, and private landowners, as well as implementing early conservation actions that keep species from ever reaching the brink of extinction. Finally, the CESCF serves as an essential source of funding for states and private landowners, making it a crucial tool for cooperative conservation.

#### **Trophy Hunting (FWS)**

We urge the Subcommittee to include language prohibiting the use of funds by the FWS for the issuance of any permit authorizing the importation of a trophy-hunted elephant or lion trophy.

African elephant and lion populations have undergone steep declines in recent years. African elephants and lions are both listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), demonstrating a scientific need for heightened protections. Between the early 20th century and 2016, the number of elephants in Africa plummeted from 3-5 million to approximately 400,000. In 2021, the IUCN Red List reassessed the African savanna elephant as endangered, meaning it faces a very high risk of extinction in the wild. African lion populations declined by 43 percent from 1993 to 2014. The subspecies *Panthera leo melanochaita*, comprising the lions of east and southern Africa, is listed as threatened under the ESA, with only 17,000-19,000 remaining.

The FWS responded with a series of vacillating trophy-import policies, calling into question the degree to which the agency had evaluated whether lion and elephant trophy imports from the countries enhanced the survival of the species, as required under the ESA. Subsequently, the FWS updated its regulations regarding the importation of elephant trophies in March 2024, adding some additional criteria that the country of origin must meet. However, it remains permissible to import African elephant and lion trophies into the U.S., a policy that continues to harm the viability of these species.

In light of these conservation concerns, no funds should be provided for the issuance of import permits for African elephant and lion trophies.

#### **Trapping (FWS)**

We urge the Subcommittee to allocate \$300,000 to the FWS to institute a three-year pilot program that replaces the use of body-gripping traps (Conibears, legholds, and snares) on National Wildlife Refuge Service land by agency personnel with non-lethal methods and equipment. Furthermore, we hope the Subcommittee will encourage the FWS to continue reviewing and updating both physical trapping signage and trapping information posted on the website, and continue providing trapping information to the Subcommittee on an annual basis. In addition, for each refuge listed online as allowing trapping, the FWS should specify whether the trapping is conducted by private trappers for recreational/commercial purposes and/or by government personnel for management purposes.

This request builds upon FY20-24 report language directing the FWS to conduct an evaluation of trapping practices by federal personnel on Service lands, including an analysis of non-lethal alternatives to trapping. Given that FWS has not briefed the Committee on its findings, this request includes a directive to begin a pilot program to replace body-gripping traps with non-lethal methods for wildlife management purposes.

The use of body-gripping traps by federal personnel violates the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and is a threat to the safety of wildlife, humans, and pets. The purpose of these protected lands is clear: to be an inviolate sanctuary for native wildlife.

Body-gripping traps, such as snares, Conibear traps, and steel-jaw leghold traps, are inhumane and inherently nonselective. The nontarget animals caught in these traps include threatened and endangered species, as well as family pets. Refuges are a very popular destination; the National Wildlife Refuge System attracts more than 61 million visits every year. Additionally, many wildlife refuges are either close to or reside in urban areas. These traps are not an appropriate tool for wildlife management on national wildlife refuges where families enjoy spending time outdoors, and where anyone who trips a trap can become a victim.

Nonlethal methods are often highly effective and FWS personnel would be serving both wildlife and outdoor recreation interests—such as hiking and nature photography, which account for approximately 86% of total recreation-related expenditures on refuges—by prioritizing their use.

#### **Beaver Conflict Mitigation (FWS)**

Across the country, thousands of beavers are trapped, snared, and shot each year in an effort to prevent damage caused to property by beaver activity. However, this killing is often unnecessary due to the availability of cost-effective, nonlethal devices that can successfully prevent such damage. For example, trees can be shielded by encircling them with wire mesh fencing or coating their trunks with a mixture of paint and sand that deters beavers from chewing. Roads, agricultural resources, and other property can be protected from flooding by installing water flow control devices, which allow enough water to pass through a beaver dam to avoid flooding while ensuring sufficient pond depth for beaver use, thus maintaining acceptable water levels.

Restraining traps and snares used to capture and kill beavers can cause prolonged pain and unintentionally injure and kill nontarget animals. They are also rarely, if ever, a long term-solution; beavers dispersing in search of suitable habitat can quickly recolonize trapped areas. By contrast, flow devices can provide long-term relief and typically last 10 years before they need to be replaced. Nonlethal measures to mitigate beaver conflicts are effective, cost-efficient, long-lasting, and ecologically beneficial. These devices can protect transportation infrastructure, buildings, agricultural lands, and other property. Despite these benefits, no federal programs currently exist to promote or facilitate the use of these techniques.

We urge the Subcommittee to recognize the ecological benefits beavers provide to landscapes and ecosystems across the country by providing \$3,000,000 to the Fish and Wildlife Service to institute a pilot program to provide grants to eligible entities for projects that seek to use nonlethal measures to achieve a reduction in damage to roads, railroads, bridges, buildings, airports, levees, dams, agricultural resources, trees, or other public or private property caused by beavers. Eligible entities are: states, tribes; state, federal and tribal agencies, local governments, nongovernmental organizations, and landowners who have sustained property damage due to beaver activity in conjunction with one or more of these entities. Nonlethal measures are those that are not designed to grip, trap, relocate, injure, or kill beavers. Nonlethal measures include, but are not limited to, fencing and paint-sand mixtures used to protect trees, and water flow control devices used to prevent flooding and maintain beaver ponds at acceptable levels. To document the progress of this program, FWS should be encouraged to submit a report to the Subcommittee describing activities under the pilot program each fiscal year.

**Prescott Grant Program (FWS)**

We urge the Subcommittee to provide no less than \$4,000,000 for the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance grant program. The Prescott Program, led by the FWS, provides funding to eligible stranding network participants assisting stranded sea otters, manatees, Pacific walrus, and polar bears. Congress began to allocate funds to the FWS in fiscal year 2019 to implement the program. To date, the FWS has awarded \$5.2 million in funding to conservation organizations and state agencies through the Prescott Grant Program. In fiscal year 2024, \$2,300,000 was allocated towards this program. Given the rising number of strandings and the importance of marine mammals to the health of ocean ecosystems, at least \$4,000,000 in funding is requested.

Brendan Mysliwicz  
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April 25, 2024

U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
 Subcommittee on Interior, EPA, and Related Agencies  
 2007 Rayburn House Office Building  
 Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Operation of the National Park System Allocation for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail

Honorable Representatives,

On behalf of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC or "Conservancy"), I submit this request to increase the annual Operation of the National Park Service (ONPS) appropriation for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST, A.T., or Trail) park office ("APPA") within the Interior, EPA, and Related Agencies appropriations bill as well as report language supporting improved budgeting. The current level of ONPS appropriations for the Trail, \$2.024 million, is insufficient to fulfil the NPS obligations under the National Trails System Act (NTSA), relevant NPS-related statutes, and the cooperative agreement with ATC. We believe a budget of \$3.5 million is necessary to meet the needs of the Trail. Additionally, we believe that the entirety of the National Trails System (NTS) requires additional support in order to follow the intent of the National Trails System Act and unlock the conservation and recreational opportunities that Act and these trails provide.

The Conservancy is the §501(c)(3) nonprofit organization responsible for developing the Appalachian Trail and leading the Trail's Cooperative Management System, which joins the federal government, the governments of 14 states, 30 Maintaining Clubs (Clubs), and local and non-profit partners in caring for our iconic long trail. Our position with the Trail, outlining the vision of a continent-spanning footpath, began in 1925 and is currently formalized under a cooperative agreement with the National Park Service (NPS). We are grateful for the incremental increases Presidents Trump and Biden have granted for the ANST and NTS, as well as Congress' continued support therefore. Additional funding remains needed.

#### **Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST)**

The ANST is a large landscape conservation project, connecting people and places across the Appalachian Mountain range. Without federal employees in position to support this visionary, volunteer-driven work, the success of the project is at risk. Currently, the NPS office that administers the Trail has 8 fulltime-equivalent employees (FTEs), supporting approximately 40 Conservation-related staffers at ATC, who in turn supported 4,730 volunteers in 2023 (contributing a total of 209,502 labor hours equivalent to \$6,662,163.6 in labor costs). The \$2.024 million ONPS allocation is not tied to any discernable metrics, such as size of the park, projected visitation, facility asset portfolio, natural resource value, or overseeing the public-private partnership that is the Cooperative Management System. The ONPS base budget is mostly consumed by staff salary and benefits, preventing project work or things that are, under

the Service-wide calls, very difficult to fund except through a unit's ONPS allocation, specifically: providing visitor and park protection (visitor and park protection); processing environmental compliance documents (such as required by NEPA) and; overseeing (if not funding) resource management work. Visitor and park protection, compliance, and oversight, are the inherently governmental and "non-delegable" responsibilities of the ANST's "trail administrator" in APPA, which is both a significant federal land manager on the east coast and the governmental coordinator for a significant, multi-jurisdictional conservation unit. Both of these roles are important and neither of them are properly resourced.

In addition to a base budget allocation of \$3.5 million, ATC requests the following report language:

**NPS:** "*Appalachian National Scenic Trail.* -The Committees recognize the cooperative partnership between the Service and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in the management and operation of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and accepts the proposed funding increase for the Trail. The Committees are aware that the Service is examining how to appropriately support the Trail due to the complex land management and trail administrator responsibilities, including meeting its expanded visitor services, law enforcement, compliance, and land acquisition requirements. The Committees therefore encourage increased requests for the Trail."

**USDA FS:** "*Appalachian National Scenic Trail.* - The Committees are aware that the Forest Service provides significant support for Trail administration and cooperative management on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The Service is encouraged to evaluate how it supports Trail administration and how it is able to collaborate with the National Park Service on the same as it budgets for Fiscal Year 2026."

The *visitor and park protection (VPP)/law enforcement* needs of the Trail are significant considering the ANST spans 14 states and 88 counties. Person-on-person crime is thankfully low, and far outstripped by land use violations. The ANST itself includes over 2,000 NPS fee tracts, containing 108,000 acres of lands with over 1,200 miles of exterior boundary line which is maintained and monitored by ATC staff and staff-coordinated volunteers. Roughly 50 new encroachment violations are discovered each year, with 10% of those being severe in nature. Approximately 430 known (ATC-identified) ANST boundary violations have occurred over the past decade, many of which are unresolved. It is the responsibility of the NPS to address these encroachments, something unpracticable with its law enforcement (LE) staffing of two FTEs.

The current—and preferred—management of the Trail places the Chief Ranger duty stationed at the Trail's administrative headquarters in Harper's Ferry, WV and the one FTE split between the ANST and BLRI (Blue Ridge Parkway) in southern Virginia, serving that region, and one FTE split between APPA and GETT (Gettysburg National Military Park) serving that region. For the NPS-managed Trail miles north of Harrisburg (more than 50% of the total unit), APPA relies on less formal staff sharing. ATC advocates for replicating the staff-sharing model across the rest of the Trail, stationing four individuals, working 50% time on the ANST, in Maine, New Hampshire/Vermont, Connecticut/New York, and New Jersey/Pennsylvania. Increasing VPP staffing on the Trail will improve the NPS' ability to connect to rural communities and safeguard the increasing desire of the public to recreate on public lands, as well as safeguard the integrity of Trail lands and safety of Trail users.

Regarding *resources management*, ATC staff and volunteers are responsible for all Trail-related maintenance as well as the stewardship and restoration of the Trail corridor lands as quality habitat for flora and fauna. The ANST's length (spanning 12° of latitude in the temperate zone), north-south alignment, changes of over 6,500 feet in elevation and the numerous peaks and ridges as it crosses along the Appalachian Mountain chain creates its topographically diverse landscape, protecting very high habitat diversity and connectivity while providing for a unique recreation experience. It is an important landscape in the eastern U.S. that offers large-scale continuity and important climate refugia, increasingly vital attributes in the highly developed and increasingly taxed eastern public land network. The ANST is one of (if not the most) biodiverse units of the National Park System. Remarkably, however, there is no biologist or ecologist staffed to APPA and all natural and cultural resource management for NPS park office land is vested in a single NPS park office position.

In terms of its "facility assets," or hard infrastructure, the ANST has one of the largest portfolios in the National Park System, unsurprising given that each foot of treadway, every rockbar, staircase, bridge, shelter, and privy (to name some examples) are classified as facility assets. Additionally, ensuring proper marking for the approximately 4,500 miles of boundaries—particularly the ~50 percent thereof that is not surrounded by National Forest System land—is essential to maintain the integrity of the unit. ATC estimates approximately \$1.6m worth of improvements to land records needed, including placing boundary markings or conducting land surveys never undertaken. APPA's ONPS allocation does not reflect its facility asset portfolio or resource management needs.

Although much of the work that occurs within the bounds of park management is performed by ATC and Club members, APPA and FS partners are responsible for *oversight and compliance*. Close supervision is not needed—the expert, dispersed management and maintenance corps of the ANST operates so successfully in part because of cooperator independence—but oversight of cooperators is an essential function of APPA and the USDA FS. APPA and FS staff depend on ATC staff and other cooperative management partners to collect information required for the completion of National Environmental Policy Act compliance for all treadway and Corridor related work. ATC staff are generally responsible for the completion of impact assessments, field monitoring and coordination with state Natural Heritage and wildlife offices. The development of these evaluations—as well as review of research permit and special use permit applications—must be signed off on by federal employees. Additionally, closer coordination with state and tribal offices of historic preservation will further the ability of the ANST to address extant compliance demands as well as build the capacity to perform government-to-government consultations with the identified Native nations with ancestral and/or reservation lands along the Trail.

The ANST is an incredible public resource. It is also incredibly poorly funded by the NPS and USDA FS. In terms of acreage, the ANST has more NPS-administered acreage than Biscayne, Voyageurs, or Zion National Parks. In terms of boundary mileage, it is second in the National Park System only to Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. The Trail's normal visitation is now estimated at 4 million or more annually, placing it 19<sup>th</sup> in visitation within the System—higher than Grand Teton or Yosemite National Parks. It is physically present in 14 states—more than any other in the System. APPA deserves an ONPS base allocation more in line with these attributes, which will allow for this public-private partnership to operate even more productively.

### **National Trails System (NTS)**

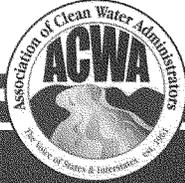
The ANST was the inspiration for the NTSA, which has to-date produced 31 other National Scenic and Historic Trails (NSHTs), with trail administration and land management responsibilities split between the USDA Forest Service (FS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and National Park Service (NPS). The ANST is the most “developed” of the NSHTs due to the diligent attention by Congress and many Presidents to actualize the vision laid out in the NTSA. ATC believes that similar attention must be paid to the other 31 NSHTs for the promise of the NTSA to be realized.

We therefore request, consistent with the priorities identified by the Partnership for the National Trails System, the coalition for NTSA-related organizations: **Bureau of Land Management (BLM): \$14 million for NSHT operations**, as well as a minimum of \$3.15 million for Historic Trail 145 Interpretive Centers and \$78.145 million for the wider National Conservation Lands; **National Park Service (NPS): \$20.964 million for NSHT operations** plus \$15 million for the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program, at least \$8 million for Volunteers in Parks, a minimum of \$10.95 million for Visitor Services sub-activity Youth Partnership Programs and \$125 million for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership; **U.S. Forest Service (USFS): \$30 million for Trails with \$15 million for NSHTs** in the Capital Improvement and Maintenance (CMTL) account plus \$70 million for Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness and \$100 million for Legacy Roads and Trails; **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF):** At least \$20 million in excess of what is guaranteed under the Great American Outdoors Act, to meet the backlogged demand for trail projects across the three federal land management agencies. Currently, all NPS-administered NSHTs have their land protection projects led by the Martinsburg Realty Office, a vital service component of the NTS.

NSHTs are collaboratively managed with volunteer-based, private nonprofit partners and federal administrators. In 2023 alone, nonprofit partners leveraged federal funds to raise and invest over \$56.5 million in private funding and volunteer hours on NSHTs. The model of stewardship pioneered on the Appalachian Trail, wherein individual volunteers and organizations committed to undeveloped recreation and conservation work substantial involvement but limited direct supervision on our public lands, has yielded significant management and cost-saving dividends. These dispersed, expert volunteer corps and cooperatively managed NSHTs, if properly funded and supported by aligned agency decision-making, have the potential to decrease gross costs for the government while increasing net gains for the public.

The NSHTs are currently also under-supported when it comes to land and resource conservation. The NTSA was developed in order to respond to the increasing demand for outdoor recreation opportunities and to allow trail partnerships flexibility in land protection, management, maintenance, and operation. The large landscape vision of the NTSA has been best advanced on the ANST, but many other NSHTs, even those with great land protection potential, receive limited if any support from Congress and the agencies to continue developing. We urge the Committee to direct the agencies to advance more land and resource protection projects.

Thank you for considering our requests.



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The Association of Clean Water Administrators  
FY25 Appropriations for the  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
for Water Programs  
May 6, 2024

Chair Tom Cole  
Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro  
House Appropriations Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

To Chair Granger and Ranking Member DeLauro,

The Association of Clean Water Administrators (ACWA) offers the following recommendations as the Committee begins work on appropriations for FY25. As the national voice of state, interstate, and territorial officials responsible for the implementation of programs that protect surface waters across the nation, ACWA recommends an appropriations of \$275.1M for water programs funded through the section 106 State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG), \$190M for section 319 programs, and robust funding for geographic programs like the Chesapeake Bay, the Long Island Sound, Puget Sound and the Gulf Hypoxia Task Force.

When Congress enacted the Clean Water Act (CWA), they clearly designated states as cooperative partners with primary responsibility for implementing the CWA. The scope and breadth of state surface water program responsibilities is ever expanding. State and Interstate water programs are responsible for core CWA programs -- sampling and monitoring requirements, analyzing data, establishing water quality criteria, developing TMDLS, drafting permits and responding to citizen concerns. Over time, new federal expectations regarding the implementation of delegated programs, such as stepped-up community engagement, consideration of disparate impacts on marginalized communities when issuing certain permits, support for public involvement, cybersecurity protection, and other activities that require expanded state activities to support permit issuance and other delegated activities have further diminished resources for states to address these concerns.

States are also being asked to address PFAS, climate change, harmful algal blooms, cybersecurity, and to support environmental justice priorities and

screening initiatives. Much of the federal funding has focused on specific outcomes and projects without much attention to the crucial seasoned state staff that execute vital support and analytic functions. Robust funding for CWA programs is necessary to ensure states have the capacity to handle an increase in funding for water infrastructure, establish critical water quality standards and TMDLs, manage permitting programs, and provide technical assistance to disadvantaged communities. Fully funding section 106 and similar programs will ensure that insufficient staffing and administrative resources do not cause delays or bottlenecks with projects moving to construction with the appropriate public health safeguards and environmental permits.

Categorical Grant funding to states and interstates is the most significant federal support for core day-to-day delegated program activity and state staff capacity. However, increasing inflation has reduced the impact of the dollar and forced programs to do more with less. At the same time, inflationary pressures make it hard for states to keep up with recruitment and retention of key staff given the rising cost of living. There is also an increasing need for investment in modern infrastructure like electronic permitting and a corresponding need for analysis of growing environmental monitoring data. In sum, federal support to states has eroded.

Federal funding of the sec. 106 and sec. 319 programs comprises approximately 33% of the funds states and interstates rely on to carry out the CWA's mandates. Section 319 funding has been on the decline since 2005<sup>1</sup>, and the states currently absorb over two thirds of the cost of mandated state and delegated federal water quality programs. Additional federal funding would enable states and interstates to build upon the successes of the 319 program and work to improve the states'/interstates' water quality protection activities and ability to carry out the basic requirements of the CWA.

While appropriation increases have occurred over time since the inception of these programs, a more comprehensive analysis shows federal funding has remained nearly flat throughout the past decade, and its purchasing power has diminished when taking inflation into account. For example, CWA sec. 106 funding in 2010 was \$229 million; after a rise in funding in 2011 and 2012, funding levels settled to \$231 million over 2014 – 2019. Section 106 funding in 2020 fell to \$223 million. If you look at a more recent time horizon, the Section 106 enacted level was \$230,806,000 in FY2016 and \$230,000,000 in FY2021, a reduction of \$806,000. This funding is especially critical as CWA programs have grown much larger. The NPDES permitting program now covers 900,000 municipal, industrial, stormwater and construction facilities today. Additionally, the water quality issues facing the states and interstates are more complex and more challenging. Nutrient reduction in surface waters, stormwater management, alterations in hydrology, in part due to climate change, considerations of ground water, e-reporting requirements, emerging contaminants such as PFAS, and now social considerations of environmental justice are complications not envisioned when the CWA became law 50 years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2005, the 319 program was appropriated \$209 million and in 2022, the program was appropriated \$178 million.

Similarly, the increase in federal infrastructure funding has added additional responsibilities on state programs. State surface water programs play an integral role in building water infrastructure, from planning to design permitting to construction to compliance and robust section 106 funding is critical. State agencies are responsible for a myriad of infrastructure-related tasks including providing technical assistance to small, rural, disadvantaged, and underserved communities; marketing investments in green infrastructure; processing loan and grant applications; prioritizing projects to meet the greatest need; conducting environmental reviews; performing engineering analyses; permitting projects; monitoring compliance; and preventing fraud and waste. Any upcoming gaps in funding would undercut the proven success of these programs and jeopardize the essential assistance they provide to states. The case against funding cuts is only strengthened when considering that increases in federal investment could help reverse declines in water quality, create hundreds to thousands of construction jobs, boost the national economy, and benefit private-sector development. With this in mind, ACWA asks for your support in delivering states the resources they need to carry out these critical programs.

In conclusion, we recommend that the Subcommittee appropriate \$275.1M for sec. 106, \$190M for sec. 319 funding, and robust funding for key regional geographic programs like Chesapeake Bay and the Puget Sound to provide states with the funding they need. These investments will have tangible benefits for states, interstates, territories, and Americans across the country by making progress toward our nation's water quality goals, not to mention the other benefits of stimulating economic growth, supporting tourism, providing recreation, and promoting nationwide health with a clean water supply. The states cannot do it alone, so we ask for a strong federal-state partnership through the FY25 appropriations process. Federal government support for ACWA's work – and states' work – is essential.

Sincerely,

Amanda Vincent  
ACWA President



The voice of fish and wildlife agencies

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Ronald J. Regan, Executive Director  
 Public Witness Testimony on Behalf of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
 U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
 USFWS, USGS, BLM, OSMRE, USFS, and USEPA  
 May 10, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to submit recommendations for Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) Congressional appropriations. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' (AFWA) mission, since our founding in 1902, is to protect and enable state fish and wildlife agencies (states) to exercise their statutory authority to conserve and manage the fish and wildlife within their borders. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are members. Further, we support and endorse appropriations recommendations that are submitted by regional associations of fish and wildlife agencies. While we offer justifications for our highest priority recommendations in the narrative for this testimony, please refer to **table 1.1** provided on pages 3-4 for the **remainder** of our recommendations, for which we would be glad to provide further information.

**UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE (FWS)**

**Aquatic Habitat, Assessments, Restoration, and Species Conservation** – We support no less than (NLT) funding at FY23 levels for Fish and Aquatic Conservation and support the FWS' FY25 budget request of \$7.6 million for the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHP), which includes funding for the NFHP grant program and \$400,000 for the FWS to provide scientific and technical assistance support to the program. Further, we respectfully request full funding for the USGS, USFS, EPA, and NOAA to provide scientific and technical assistance to the program, as well as the inclusion of report language recommending that the USGS, USFS, EPA, and NOAA each provide the full authorized level of \$400,000 for scientific and technical assistance for the NFHP as authorized under P.L. 116-188. With full funding at congressionally authorized levels, this would ensure the NFHP's continued ability to advance aquatic conservation projects that benefit all Americans. National Fish Hatchery Systems (NFHS) Operations is a high priority, and we recommend no less than FY23 funding levels.

**State and Tribal Wildlife Grants and Partnership Grants** - The State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program is the only federal program available to states to leverage non-federal funds to conserve over 12,000 state Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) identified in congressionally-required State Wildlife Action Plans to prevent them from becoming threatened or endangered. Funding for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant program was cut by ~2% in FY24, has been relatively flat since FY21, and remains 20% below FY10 funding levels. As costs rise due to inflation, state, territorial, and tribal fish and wildlife agencies are seeing an erosion in their ability to proactively conserve rare and declining fish and wildlife which is critical to the prevention and recovery of endangered species. This investment in voluntary, proactive, and state-led conservation is needed now to accelerate conservation of declining

species to preclude an increase in federal expenditures in the future under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). AFWA recommends the highest possible funding for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program in FY25 and supports enactment of legislation consistent with the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* as introduced in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress.

AFWA also recommends NLT \$60 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund to conserve vital wetlands and other habitats important to migratory birds and other wildlife. Since 1991, the NAWCA program has been a highly popular and successful conservation effort that protects and restores wetlands and associated habitats. It has leveraged more than \$4 billion to benefit more than 31 million acres from 3,200 projects in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, contributing to the long-term recovery of many wetland-dependent birds. We also recommend full funding at \$15 million for the Grant Program for Losses of Livestock Due to Federally Protected Species, as authorized by P.L. 116-188.

**Science Applications** - USFWS' Science Applications (SA) program has evolved into an important collaborator with state fish and wildlife agencies, and we request NLT \$55M for SA in FY25, including \$27.274 million for Science Partnerships. SA provides science, landscape design, and coordination capacity for the co-development of regional conservation blueprints and provides support for regional fish and wildlife association landscape conservation collaboratives. This work is improving the efficiency and effectiveness of state-based fish and wildlife conservation by facilitating work at landscape scales. SA also supports other state priorities including revision of State Wildlife Action Plans, at-risk species conservation, grassland and pollinator conservation, climate adaptation, and One Health. Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a critical focus for Science Support, and we request robust funding for USFWS to fulfill CWD responsibilities, including implementation of the Interstate Action Plan, prioritized research, monitoring, and studies of CWD in wild, free-ranging deer species.

**Migratory Bird Management (MBM)** – We support robust funding for MBM, including funding for Conservation and Monitoring at NLT \$53 million. This element provides critical conservation needs for the Program, including by supporting partnerships, working groups, and bird conservation planning efforts. This element also supports key needs for population monitoring and surveys, research, technical assistance and guidance, species conflict reduction. We recommend funding of the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures at \$25 million. The network of Migratory Bird Joint Ventures provides highly valuable partnerships that bring together stakeholders to focus on landscape-level bird conservation delivery. Since 1986, partners have invested more than \$4.5 billion in conserving 27 million acres to benefit birds and people.

To help meet the Program's responsibilities for permitting, including under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, at least \$13.3 million is needed for staff capacity for the Permits element, along with further support for the ePermits program, to help promote efficient, modernized, and coordinated permitting efforts, including to address incidental take. We also recommend NLT \$1.12 million for the Duck Stamp program, which has raised more than \$1 billion in funding since its inception, which has been invested back into wetland habitat conservation to benefit the National Wildlife Refuge System and the birds it supports.

**UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY (USGS)**

**Ecosystems** – We respectfully request no less than \$36 million for the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit Program (CRU) in FY24. This request is a step towards ensuring the program has more of the funding it needs to robustly implement its mission in support of partners and their fish and wildlife science needs. Additional funds would enable USGS to address vacancies across the units and address the safety equipment and training backlog. The core of the CRU program are the staff scientists. Each unit typically has 3 scientists, and there are >120 scientist positions across the program. Funds are needed to account for growth in existing staff salaries, fill existing and anticipated vacancies, and fill positions at newly established units to fulfil federal commitments to cooperators. We support the National Cooperators’ Coalition’s testimony on CRUs.

**BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)** – AFWA supports the administration’s request of \$170.9 million for the BLM’s Wild Horse and Burro (WHB) Program but recognizes that the need is much higher and recommends restoring BLM’s authority for sale and transfer of WHB. BLM estimates there are over 73,500 WHB across habitats with a total appropriate management level of less than 27,000. The harm inflicted on public lands from excess wild horses and burros compounds yearly as on-range population growth rates and off-range holding costs outstrip the BLM’s ability to manage herds. Further, there are 62,000 horses and burros in off-range holding facilities at a taxpayer expense exceeding \$100 million annually.

**UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE (USFS)** – AFWA recommends that USFS begin to receive dedicated funding for WHB management within a newly specified line-item, as funds are currently reallocated internally from other budgets. While USFS is responsible for 20% of the nation’s WHB, we understand that a gradual ramp-up in funds will be necessary but encourage that the 80/20 ratio eventually be reflected for WHB appropriations across BLM and USFS.

**TABLE 1.1 – OTHER PRIORITIES**

AGENCY	PROGRAM AREA	SUBALLOCATION	FY25 REQUEST
USFWS		Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund	Robust
		Multinational Species Conservation Fund	NLT FY23
		Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund	\$6.5M
		Habitat Conservation	NLT FY23
		Partners for Fish and Wildlife	NLT \$79M
		National Wildlife Refuge System	\$602.331M
		Delaware River Basin/Klamath Basin/Chesapeake Bay/Everglades/Great Lakes	Robust
		Aquatic Animal Drug Approval Partnership	\$1.2M
		Fish Health Centers/Fish Technology Centers/Wild Fish Health Survey/Mass Marking Program	Robust
		Great Lakes/Pac Northwest Mass Marking Initiative	NLT FY23
		Aquatic Invasive Species and Law Enforcement	

	Aquatic Nuisance Species - State Management Plan Implementation	NLT FY23; without compromising other ANS
	Mississippi River - Invasive Carp Management/Control Plan	NLT FY21; continuation of FY21 report language
	Combat Wildlife Trafficking	Increased
BLM	Management of Lands and Resources	Robust
	Wildlife and Aquatic Habitat Management	NLT FY23
	Sage Grouse/Rangeland Improvement/Bighorn Sheep Disease Prevention	Increased
	Wildlife Habitat Management - Combat Invasive Species	Increased
OSMRE	Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund	Robust
USFS	Regulation and Technology	Level
	Wildland Fire Management	Robust
	Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund	Increased
	State and Private Forestry	\$328M
	Forest Stewardship Program	Plus \$1M
	National Forest System	\$252M
	Hazardous Fuels Management	Robust
USGS	Water Resources	Robust
	Groundwater and Streamflow Information Program	Robust
	Federal Priority Streamgages	\$33M
	Cooperative Matching Funds	\$68M
	Streamgage Support	\$33M
	Next Generation Water Observing System	\$35M
	National Water Quality Program	NLT FY21
	Harmful Algal Bloom Research	\$2M
	Ecosystems	\$394M
	Land Management Research Program	\$60.55M
	Migration Corridor Research	\$5M
	Species Management Research Program	\$66.85M
	Climate Adaptation Science Center	\$69.3M
	Biological Threats and Invasive Species Research	\$45.446M
Invasive Carp Research	\$10.62M	
EPA	Geographic Programs	NLT FY23
	Great Lakes Restoration Initiative	Robust
	Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund/Nonpoint Source Grants/Pollution Control Grants	Robust
	National Estuaries Program, Beach/Fish Safety Program	NLT FY23



**ASSOCIATION OF STATE FLOODPLAIN MANAGERS, INC.**

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**Testimony of the Association of State Floodplain Managers  
From Chad Berginnis, Executive Director**

**Regarding the U.S. Geological Survey FY2025 Budget  
To the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
May 10, 2024**

The Association of State Floodplain Managers (**ASFPM**) advocates for funding critical programs within the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) that are essential for enhancing our nation's flood preparedness and risk reduction efforts.

**As you develop your Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2025, we urge funding for the 3DEP (elevation data acquisition) program at \$146 million, the funding for the 3D National Topography Model (3DNTM) at \$1.5 million, the Groundwater and Streamflow Information Program at \$121.39 million, which supports the Federal Priority Streamgages (FPS) at a requested level of \$30.315 million, and full support of the Budget Request for the Cooperative Matching Funds at \$66.53 million to support CMF in all three budget programs: Water Availability; Groundwater & Streamflow Information, and National Water Quality.**

ASFPM, along with its 38 state chapters, represents nearly 22,000 professionals encompassing flood hazard specialists from various sectors, including local, state, and federal government, research, insurance, engineering, hydrology, emergency management, and community planning. Our members are dedicated to mitigating flood-related losses and minimizing taxpayer burdens associated with flooding incidents.

The 3DEP program plays a pivotal role in acquiring crucial elevation data nationwide. This data serves as a cornerstone for federal agencies and informs various aspects of flood risk management, infrastructure design, emergency response, and land use decisions. Notably, 3DEP LIDAR data significantly enhances the accuracy of FEMA's flood risk maps, with FEMA being a major purchaser of this data. To fulfill the objective of acquiring data for the entire nation within a reasonable timeframe, \$146 million for 3DEP is essential for FY 2025. The 3DNTM is a critical national initiative which integrates 3DEP data and Hydrological data to model the entire U.S. in three dimensions (3D). This integration will result in updated and more accurate detailed

*Dedicated to reducing flood risk and losses in the nation.*

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## Association of State Floodplain Managers, Inc.

elevation data that will improve and enable better flood risk management. Accordingly, we support an appropriation for 3DNTM for FY2025 of \$1.5 million.

Streamgage data is also indispensable for accurate flood mapping, water flow prediction, and ensuring public safety. The FPS network, established in 2009 and contained within the Groundwater & Streamflow Information Program, was designed to support long-term Federal information needs and operations, such as National Weather Service flood forecasting. It is intended to serve as the fundamental backbone of the USGS Streamgaging Network that is not subject to variable state and local priorities and resources. An appropriation of \$30.315 million for FY2025 enables the USGS to maintain the 3,490 current streamgages and to add approximately 25 new or re-activated NPS sites to the network.

Similarly, the Cooperative Matching Funds (CMF) program needs sustained support to prevent loss of funding and operation for critical gages due to budget constraints. CMF is currently matched with funding and data from over 1,600 partners to monitor and assess water resources in every state and territory. CMF's are found in three of the four USGS budget programs: Water Availability and Use Science, Groundwater and Streamflow Information; and National Water Quality. The FY2025 Budget Request of \$66.53 million is equal to the FY2024 level.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of these recommendations for bolstering our nation's water and elevation data infrastructure. The data produced by these USGS programs are essential and critical to all other federal water resource-related agencies, many key public services, and the planning and operations of states, local, tribal and territorial government water resources programs, now and in the future. For any inquiries regarding these proposals, please feel free to contact Chad Berginnis, ASFPM Executive Director, at [cberginnis@floods.org](mailto:cberginnis@floods.org) or (608) 828-3000.

*Dedicated to reducing flood risk and losses in the nation.*

Dan Ashe  
President and CEO  
Association of Zoos and Aquariums  
Testimony for House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
May 10, 2024

Thank you Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree for the opportunity to submit testimony about the priorities of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums for Fiscal Year 2025. My name is Dan Ashe, and I am the President and CEO of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Founded in 1924, the AZA is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring that our more than 250 accredited zoos and aquariums reflect the global standard of excellence in animal care and welfare, conservation, education, science, and guest experience. AZA's member facilities are examples of how economic and environmental prosperity can work hand-in-hand. Our members welcome nearly 200 million visitors annually, generating more than \$22 billion in economic activity, and supporting more than 198,000 jobs across the country. They also contribute well over \$250 million in direct support for field conservation each year. They support work in 119 countries benefiting more than 998 species and subspecies, of which 232 are listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

At the heart of AZA is its mandatory accreditation requirement, which assures that only those zoos and aquariums – like Zoo Boise – that are committed to meeting the world's highest standards can become members. The independent and objective AZA accreditation process includes self-evaluation, rigorous on-site inspection, and critical peer review. Our standards are publicly available and are continuously evolving and improving as we learn more about the needs of the animals in our care. Once earned, AZA accreditation confers best-in-class status, an important message for local, state, and federal governments and the visiting public. All AZA members are accredited every five years, ensuring that AZA members continue to grow as standards improve. AZA accreditation is the global gold standard for modern zoological facilities.

AZA and its members are leaders, partners, and participants in species conservation. We work in concert with Congress, the federal agencies, conservation organizations, state governments, the private sector, and the general public to conserve our wildlife heritage. AZA's Wildlife Trafficking Alliance is a coalition of private companies, non-profit organizations, and AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums working closely with U.S. government agencies to combat wildlife trafficking worldwide. AZA and its member facilities have long-standing partnerships with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Our collaborative efforts have focused on:

- Engaging in endangered species recovery and reintroduction, including some of the most successful and heralded recovery efforts, such as California condor, black-footed ferret, Florida manatee, and southern sea otter;
- Carrying out rescue, rehabilitation, and confiscation of tens of thousands of animals in

collaboration with federal and state agencies, including USFWS, to the benefit of many threatened and endangered species;

- Supporting conservation domestically and internationally through multinational species conservation funds and state wildlife grants; and
- Partnering with USFWS, the National Park Service and others on migratory birds, freshwater and saltwater fisheries, national marine sanctuaries, illegal wildlife trade, amphibians, and invasive species.

I am submitting testimony in support of the following key programs funded through the annual Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

#### U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Budget

The 198,000 jobs and \$22 billion in economic contributions, as well as the vital conservation work supported by AZA-accredited facilities depends on adequate USFWS staff levels. During the past several years, lengthy permitting delays have become the rule, rather than the exception. Often, these delays put the welfare of animals and crucial conservation projects at jeopardy. They are a serious hinderance to AZA's science-based conservation breeding programs that require animals to be moved in an efficient, humane, and timely manner. This is particularly acute and serious within the International Affairs program (Management and Scientific Authorities). AZA members are keenly interested in expanding their critical work in support of rescue, rehabilitation, and reintroduction of threatened and endangered species, care and placement of live confiscated wildlife seized at ports and borders, and on scientific and conservation research on species like polar bears in AZA facilities. The success of these important initiatives depends on much improved permitting from USFWS.

For this reason, we request \$31 million in Fiscal Year 2025 for the International Affairs program at USFWS. We also ask that the Subcommittee include specific direction for the Management and Scientific Authority to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement, and hire and support a dedicated and qualified employee to facilitate zoo and aquarium permitting.

We also request \$110.8 million in Fiscal Year 2025 for the Office of Law Enforcement. As we battle the global epidemic of wildlife trafficking, and as the USFWS continues to improve detection and interruption of trafficking routes and syndicates, confiscated animals are the casualties. They are the unfortunate refugees from this crisis and need to be placed, and often held for lengthy periods, as evidence. Their care often requires very specialized and expensive expertise.

Increasingly, USFWS looks to AZA and its members for this assistance. In response to this need, AZA has partnered with USFWS to launch the Wildlife Confiscations Network, a new conservation initiative to create a coalition of reputable and trusted animal care facilities with capacity to provide immediate medical care and housing for wildlife that are trafficked through U.S. ports of entry. The Wildlife Confiscations Network currently operates as a pilot project in Southern California. Expanding the Wildlife Confiscations Network nationwide will allow

wildlife law enforcement across the country to concentrate on their core functions: the investigation and prosecution of criminals.

#### Endangered Species Recovery and Recovery Challenge Grants

We express our gratitude for the Subcommittee's continued support for endangered species through the Recovery account and working with our partners at USFWS to create the Endangered Species Recovery Challenge Grant program in Fiscal Year 2018. This program recognizes the critically important role of nonprofit partners to the Service's endangered species recovery efforts, and it is a mechanism, through merit-based matching grants, to provide funding in a more commensurate manner to support and enhance these efforts. Recovery Challenge Grants are limited to nonprofit organizations implementing the highest priority recovery actions identified in recovery plans, such as for genetically sound breeding, rearing, and reintroduction programs.

We urge you to continue to provide robust funding for endangered species recovery and prioritize longstanding recovery efforts in which existing resources and partner expertise can be most effectively leveraged. Specifically, we are requesting an increase in funding for the Recovery Challenge Grant program to at least \$12 million in Fiscal Year 2025. This funding will power recovery partnerships and inspire their work to better recover critically endangered species.

Additionally, we urge you to provide at least level funding of \$2.3 million in Fiscal Year 2025 for the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue and Response Grant Program. With increasing numbers of marine mammal strandings, the Prescott Program provides competitive grants to support the rescue and rehabilitation of marine mammals.

#### Multinational Species Conservation Funds

AZA supports the inclusion of \$30 million for the Multinational Species Conservation Funds (MSCF) administered by USFWS. These programs support public-private partnerships that conserve wild tigers, Asian and African elephants, rhinos, great apes, freshwater turtles, tortoises, and marine turtles in their native habitats. Through the MSCF programs, the United States supplements the efforts of developing countries that are struggling to balance the needs of their human populations and endemic wildlife. These programs help to sustain wildlife populations, address threats such as poaching and illegal trade, reduce human-wildlife conflict, and protect essential habitat. USFWS is seen as a global conservation leader in large part due to its commitment to international conservation efforts. This federal program supports AZA-accredited facilities in their field conservation efforts and partnerships with USFWS.

#### Endangered Species Act

AZA and its members enthusiastically support the ESA, which has saved hundreds of listed species from extinction. Like AZA accreditation, the ESA is the global "gold standard." It reflects our national commitment to species and ecosystem conservation, and it is working. Since its inception in 1973, it has prevented the extinction of 99% of the species it protects. However,

we know that the challenges facing our planet in the 21st century are as complex as they are urgent. Scientists estimate that the total number of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish has declined by more than 50% since 1970, and many believe, including me, that we are living amidst the planet's sixth mass extinction. Climate change is accelerating this crisis. Without critical intervention today, we are facing the very real possibility of losing some of our planet's most magnificent creatures such as lions, cheetahs, elephants, gorillas, sea turtles, and sharks.

AZA-accredited facilities have a unique opportunity and responsibility to help others understand this crisis. It is our obligation – to these animals and to all life on earth – to take bold action now to protect our planet's biodiversity. One achievement that has gone unnoticed by most people is that zoos and aquariums have played a significant role in bringing over 25 species, including California condor, Florida manatee, and black-footed ferret, back from the brink of extinction.

Although we have made significant progress in saving endangered species, this work is far from done. Species protection and conservation requires long-term commitment by all of us. It is through the ongoing work related to species recovery plans that we will conserve these species for future generations. The AZA and its members support the ESA, and we encourage you to assure that the agencies responsible for carrying out the mandates of the Act receive the necessary funding and human resource capacity to succeed.

AZA and its members look forward to continuing to work with this Subcommittee and Congress to assure that as a nation we are devoting the necessary resources to conserve wildlife at home and globally.

Thank you.

Statement of Lisa Jacobson, President, Business Council for Sustainable Energy  
Submitted to  
The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
Regarding FY2025 Interior and EPA Appropriations

Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree –

The Business Council for Sustainable Energy (BCSE) requests funding in FY2025 for offices and programs impacting clean energy at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Interior (DOI) in the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill. As a diverse coalition, not all BCSE members endorse or take a position on the set of recommended requests.

BCSE welcomes the opportunity to share information from the 2024 edition of the *Sustainable Energy in America Factbook*<sup>1</sup>, published by BCSE and BloombergNEF, which shows the growth of renewable energy and natural gas in electricity generation, along with a decline in U.S. energy consumption due to energy efficiency investments. We encourage you to build upon this momentum and success with sustained support for clean energy programs at the U.S. Department of Interior and the Environmental Protection Agency in FY2025.

#### **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Clean Energy Programs**

As a business group working to advance clean energy policies, BCSE has seen firsthand the importance of the federal role the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) fills in sharing information about new technologies and practices that help speed the adoption of clean energy and allow consumers to make more informed decisions about energy usage. EPA initiatives help businesses manage environmental issues, foster transparency and best practices in emissions and water management and develop leadership in environmental stewardship and sustainability. The EPA provides transparent, standardized, and independent data and expertise that cannot be replicated with the same credibility by the private sector or non-governmental organizations.

BCSE requests funding for EPA programs including the **CHP Partnership, Green Power Partnership, ENERGY STAR, Natural Gas Star, AgStar, Methane Challenge, Center for Corporate Climate Leadership, SmartWay Transport Partnership**, and more, which embody longstanding public-private endeavors that benefit American businesses and help them continue to compete on a global scale. These EPA initiatives provide market transparency, encourage voluntary action, and identify companies that are leaders in businesses and in environmental protection. Additionally, the EPA's laboratories lead the world in capabilities that make the United States preeminent in research and analysis, supporting private sector capabilities to enhance economic growth and emissions reductions simultaneously.

**The ENERGY STAR program** serves many market sectors and is the foundation for energy efficiency programs across the country, from tax incentives and utility incentive programs to local building performance standards. While it is best known for the blue label on consumer

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bcse.org/market-trends/>

products, the ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager program is also critical for tracking and improving the energy performance of our nation's building stock, which accounts for at least one-third of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. ENERGY STAR programs for new homes and manufacturing facilities are also growing in popularity and delivering increased impact. BCSE and our members support funding for the ENERGY STAR program that maintains a fuel neutral approach to energy efficiency. The EPA's recent proposal to eliminate certain natural gas products from the ENERGY STAR program is worrisome. This goes against the fundamental principles of the program and threatens the effectiveness of the fuel neutral energy efficiency home rebate program (HOMES rebates). The EPA should reiterate the importance of efficient natural gas products in the ENERGY STAR program and enable it to function as it was intended, in a fuel neutral manner.

**The Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS)**, which is implemented by the **Office of Transportation and Air Quality**, has enabled the biomass and biogas industry to help meet lower carbon energy needs. The EPA has finally proposed the framework to enable electricity from biogas to qualify for renewable identification number (RIN) generation when biogas electricity is used to power electric vehicles. This is a great first step, but the program must be expanded to allow all RFS-qualifying feedstocks to participate in the electricity program. BCSE encourages funding for the EPA for the processing of pathways and applications to enable biomass and waste-to-energy projects to participate in the program at the earliest possible opportunity. Electricity derived from renewable biomass and solid forms of biomass is currently being used as a transportation fuel and should be credited accordingly under the RFS program. Congress should appropriate \$1 million in funding for the EPA to take final action within 90 days on any registration application or pathway petition to participate in the Renewable Fuels Pathway II Rule.

The EPA's **State and Local Climate and Energy Program** offers expertise about energy efficiency, renewable energy, and climate change policies and programs to interested state, local, and tribal governments. By providing these resources, EPA removes barriers that would otherwise prohibit action at the local level due to resource constraints or lack of information on best practices. Through its programs on renewable energy, renewable natural gas (RNG), natural gas, combined heat and power, and energy efficiency, the EPA encourages the use of clean, efficient, and market-ready technologies that can lower costs and improve resilience in addition to lowering emissions.

The EPA is also engaged in a variety of international activities to advance climate change science, monitor our environment, and promote activities that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The EPA establishes partnerships, provides leadership, and shares technical expertise to support these activities.

#### **U.S. Department of Interior Clean Energy Programs**

The U.S. Department of Interior has a critical role in renewable energy production on public lands and waters. BCSE requests funding to facilitate this transition to clean energy.

**The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) Office of Renewable Energy Program (OREP)** plays a crucial role in the development of offshore wind energy. Providing

additional resources will help the processing of permits for offshore wind projects while allowing the Department to conduct additional lease sales and identify new lease areas on the Outer Continental Shelf. Funding is needed for the **Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE)** to ensure safety while deploying offshore wind projects. BCSE also supports funding for the **Bureau of Land Management** renewable energy management program, funding for planning and consultation services and staff at the **Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)**, funding for the **National Park Service** Historic Preservation Fund, and funding for the **U.S. Geological Survey** program to support supply chain research for emerging technologies.

### **Conclusion**

BCSE looks forward to working with you throughout the FY2025 budget cycle. Please feel free to reach out to Ruth McCormick at [rmccormick@bcse.org](mailto:rmccormick@bcse.org) with any questions.

### *About the BCSE*

BCSE is a coalition of companies and trade associations from the energy efficiency, energy storage, natural gas, renewable energy, sustainable transportation, and emerging decarbonization technology sectors. It includes independent electric power producers, investor-owned utilities, public utilities, equipment manufacturers, commercial end users, and service providers in energy and environmental markets. Founded in 1992, the coalition's diverse business membership is united around the revitalization of the U.S. economy and the creation of a clean, secure, and reliable energy future in America.

The Clean Energy Business Network (CEBN), comprising independent small- and medium-sized businesses, is an independent affiliate of BCSE. Together, BCSE and CEBN encompass a broad range of the clean energy economy, from Fortune 100 companies to small businesses working in all 50 states and more than 400 Congressional districts. On a national basis, these industries support more than 3 million U.S. jobs.

**Written Public Testimony from the Center for Invasive Species Prevention**

Submitted to the  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

Testimony Pertaining to the USDA Forest Service FY25 Budget  
and U.S. Department of Interior re: Hawaiian forest birds

May 6, 2024

Submitted by Faith T. Campbell, President

We seek your support for funding two programs of the USDA Forest Service that play vital roles in protecting the resilience of the Nation’s forests in the face of invasive pests.

We also support \$20 million for efforts under State of the Birds Activities and associated National Park Service and U.S. Geological Survey to protect endangered Hawaiian forest birds

**USDA Forest Service**

Program	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025 Pres Budget	Our Ask
<b>Research and Development</b>	\$307.3	\$300	\$316	\$316
Forest Inventory & Analysis	\$32.2	\$31.5		\$31.5
<b>Forest Health Protection</b>				
Federal lands	\$17	\$16		\$20
Cooperative lands	\$33	\$32		\$35

Specifically, we ask that the Subcommittee appropriate to the Forest Health Management Program (FHM) **\$20 million for the Federal Lands subprogram and \$35 million for the Cooperative Lands subprogram**. Both subprograms must be funded adequately in order to ensure continuity of protection efforts – which is the only way they can be effective.

We also ask that the Subcommittee adopt report language requiring that the USFS begin a phased increase in funding allocated to research on invasive species. We seek an allocation of **five percent of the overall Research Program’s budget request** by FY27. Invasive species imperil forest health independently of increased fire intensity and frequency, or climate change. The enhanced research will improve understanding of invasive species’ invasion pathways and impacts, thereby enabling development of effective management strategies.

**Background: Urban, Rural, and Wildland Forests: Indispensable and Threatened**

The many economic and ecological benefits provided by America’s forests are threatened by a growing number of non-native insects and pathogens. About 60% of these forests are owned by states, tribes, or private entities, so the Forest Service must address threats to forests outside the

National Forest System if it is to achieve its mission of sustaining “the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.”

Non-native pests already undermine these benefits. They **threaten more than 41% of forest biomass in the “lower 48” states.**<sup>1</sup> The loss of live biomass is at **rates similar to that attributed to fire.** The majority of these non-native pests attack trees in **Eastern forests** – the very forests that **store the majority of forest carbon stocks in the U.S.**<sup>2</sup> The non-native pests also destroy unique ecosystems and critical watersheds in the upper Midwest, California and Oregon, the Appalachians, and western mountain states.<sup>3</sup> Recently detected pests add to the damage. Rapid ‘ōhi‘a death is killing the most widespread tree species in Hawai‘i, threatening the islands’ water supplies. Beech leaf disease is killing a numerous and ecologically important tree species in the eastern deciduous forest. Oaks on the West coast are being killed by sudden oak death, goldspotted oak borer, Kuroshio shot hole borer, and the Mediterranean oak borer.

Over the decade 2011 – 2020, **tree mortality** was detected on **59 million acres.**<sup>4</sup> While three-quarters of the area was caused by native phloem feeders, especially the mountain pine beetle, nearly 10 million acres was lost to primarily non-native wood borers such as the emerald ash borer (EAB). Sap feeders such as the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) killed trees on another 635,000 hectares. The foliage feeders, primarily spongy moth, killed trees on 948,000 acres.

To counter this crisis the Forest Service must grow its pest-control efforts substantially. Current funding levels do not allow this. We hope the Congress will correct this problem.

#### **USDA Forest Service Forest and Rangeland Research Program: Falling Short**

Currently the Research stations spend just 1% of the total research budget studying a few of the dozens of non-native pests. Low funding does not allow the Service to develop effective programs to prevent, suppress, and eradicate the majority of non-native pests. The funds have been decreased 70% since FY2010 even as new pests enter our forests.

The Administration’s research priorities – nature-based solutions for climate risk reduction, watershed resiliency, forest ecology, and forest genetics – cannot be achieved without greater understanding of bioinvasion and development of effective mitigation strategies. Adequate funding might allow adaptation of successful programs, *e.g.*, spongy moth Slow the Spread and Southern Pine Beetle Prevention programs, to suppress other pests (see Coleman *et al.*). Funding shortfalls particularly **undercut efforts to breed trees** able to thrive despite introduced pests. The R&D program currently supports only a few such projects – for eastern hemlocks, ashes, beech and elms. Even these projects require outside funding.

Therefore, CISP supports the Administration’s request to increase funding for R&D. We urge **allocating 2% of the total R&D budget in FY25 (\$6.32 million) to research focused on invasive species.** This increase would enable the Service to respond to the threats identified by the Forest Inventory and Analysis program – which has received additional funding in recent years.

### **Forest Health Management: Supporting the Full Continuum of Pest Management**

Because they arrive on imported goods, non-native pests usually first appear in cities or suburbs. The immediate result is enormous damage to urban forests and associated ecosystem services. These pests then spread to rural forests, including National forests. Examples of tree-killing pests that have spread from urban areas to our National forests include the hemlock woolly adelgid, emerald ash borer, polyphagous and Kuroshio shot hole borers, goldspotted oak borer, and sudden oak death.

Protecting America's forests from these killers begins where they are first found – usually in urban or semi-rural forests. The FHM Cooperative Lands subprogram assists the states and other partners in doing so. Our request for \$35 million for work on cooperative lands would partially restore missing capacity lost through the 50% cut in funding over the past decade.

Of course, management of the numerous non-native and native pests threatening our rural and wildland forests, including National forests. CISP supports \$20 million for the Federal Lands subprogram to realize the full pest management continuum.

Among projects deserving continued funding are those addressing the multiple strains of the sudden oak death pathogen in Oregon and California and emerald ash borer-caused mortality of black (or brown) ash in the Great Lakes and Northeastern states.

The number of FHM projects and areas treated each year have shrunk since 2011 – reflecting cuts in funding. Two-thirds of projects are on National Forest lands. Only a small proportion of the trees and areas at risk are addressed. Native forest pests are addressed by three quarters of projects. While 53 tree taxa are threatened, **four** – eastern oaks, loblolly and ponderosa pines, and hemlocks – **are targetted by 95% of the projects**. Nearly all – **84% -- of the area treated for non-native pests concerns only one** – the spongy moth. To address threats to 50 additional tree taxa under threat, the FHM program needs additional resources (Coleman *et al.*).

### **Breeding Resistant Trees: Critical -- and Underfunded**

A critical component of a comprehensive pest-management strategy is breeding threatened trees to increase their resistance to non-native pests. Perhaps surprisingly, much of the (inadequate) funding is from FHM or the National Forest System, rather than the Research account. CISP advocates a substantial increase in USFS funding for resistance breeding programs.

The model program is the Dorena Genetic Resource Center. Beginning in the 1960s, the Dorena center has bred western white pine seedlings resistant to white pine blister rust that are now being planted. A 30-year effort has produced Port-Orford cedar trees sufficiently resistant to its root rot; they are being planted by National forests, the Bureau of Land Management, and others.

Most breeding programs rely on identifying and cross-breeding “lingering” trees – those that survive the pest's onslaught. Promising projects target whitebark pine, American chestnut, American elm, and Hawaiian koa. Programs at earlier stages address ash, beech, and 'ōhi'a; they are benefitting from the expertise of scientists at the Dorena Center.

- Whitebark pine is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Under Dorena's breeding program, begun in 2002, resistant seedlings have been planted experimentally.
- The American Chestnut Cooperators' Foundation (ACCF) has crossed "lingering" American chestnuts for several generations. Some are more than 50 years old and producing seeds.
- American elms were once large, long-lived trees keystone species in riparian forests. Dutch elm disease jeopardizes their ecosystem role. USFS scientists are testing whether planting disease-tolerant elms into canopy gaps created by dying ash trees can restore it.
- Several species of ash trees face functional extinction due to the emerald ash borer invasion. After a decade of effort, scientists have proved that about 1% of green ash trees survive years of heavy EAB attack. Scientists have begun breeding these trees to raise the level of resistance. This phase of the project will require another decade to ensure that the seedlings will have sufficient resistance to thrive in the forest.

These accomplishments show what federal dollars, wisely invested, can do. CISP is convinced that, with further investment, we can do even more to restore threatened trees to our forests.

#### U.S. Department of Interior – State of the Birds - Protecting Hawaiian birds

Funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law allowed the Department to launch its Strategy for Preventing the Extinction of Hawaiian Forest Birds. The Strategy represents the most promising approaches for halting the imminent extinction of **all the species of honeycreepers** still extant on the Islands.

Most urgent is curtailing spread of two diseases vectored by non-native mosquitoes. Applying the Incompatible Insect Technique (IIT), scientists genetically modify strains of a naturally-occurring bacterium carried by the mosquitoes. This alteration makes the mosquitoes sterile. Treated mosquitoes must be released each year. Scientists are also preparing to translocate two immediately endangered species to higher-elevation, mosquito-free, habitats on Hawai'i Island. Finally, aviaries are being expanded so that they can house 80 more birds.

Realizing the promise – restoring the bird species – requires continued funding through appropriations in FY25 and beyond.

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<sup>1</sup> Fei, S., R.S. Morin, C.M. Oswald, and A.M. 2019. Biomass losses resulting from insect and disease invasions in United States forests. *PNAS* August 27, 2019. Vol. 116 No. 35 17371–17376

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service. 2023. Future of America's Forests and Rangelands: The Forest Service 2020 Resource Planning Act Assessment. GTR-WO-102 July 2023

<sup>3</sup> *Invasive Species in Forests and Grasslands of the United States: A Comprehensive Science Synthesis for the United States Forest Sector*, available here <https://www.fs.usda.gov/treearch/pubs/61982>

<sup>4</sup> Coleman, T.W, A.D. Graves, B.W. Oblinger, R.W. Flowers, J.J. Jacobs, B.D. Moltzan, S.S. Stephens, R.J. Rabaglia. 2023. Evaluating a decade (2011–2020) of integrated forest pest management in the United States. *Journal of Integrated Pest Management*, (2023) 14(1): 23; 1–17

**Submitted by Mark J Musaus, Vice President, Board Member for the Coalition of Refuge Friends and Advocates**

*May 6, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Coalition of Refuge Friends and Advocates, which was formed in 2020 to support the National Wildlife Refuge System. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

“National Wildlife Refuges are places where the music of life has been rehearsed to perfection, where nature’s colors are most vibrant, where time is measured in seasons, and where the dance of the crane takes center stage. They are gifts to ourselves and to generations unborn- simple gifts unwrapped each time a birder lifts binoculars, a child overturns a rock, a hunter sets the decoys, or an angler casts the water.” This is a quote taken from Fulfilling the Promise in the forward by then U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Director Jamie Clark

The Coalition of Refuge Friends and Advocates (CORFA) is a not-for-profit organization that supports more than 180 officially designated Friends Groups by FWS that support an individual or complex of National Wildlife Refuges across the United States. They are comprised of local citizens that volunteer and passionately support “their” refuge as well as citizens across the country that have visited a refuge and enjoyed that “gift” so beautifully described by Director Clark.

The gifts to the American public are not just in connecting with nature. National Wildlife Refuges provides billions of dollars in ecosystem services. Storm water attenuation, groundwater recharge, protection of important oil and gas infrastructure, and carbon storage are all important benefits that refuges provide to local communities as well as the country.

The Friends Community that supports Refuges is upset by the current conditions on refuges and concerned for their future due to the continual erosion in funding and staffing for the refuge system. Refuge staffs have been cut in half or have one staff person and most refuges are now part of a refuge complex with other refuges that have less staff. Trails are closed or poorly maintained, visitor centers are open only a

couple days a week if at all. Worse yet is the unhealthy condition of habitats the refuges manage...rusting or inoperable water control structures, increasing spread of invasive exotics, the inability to use important habitat management techniques such as prescribed fire or impoundment management. The significant loss of biologists to monitor wildlife populations and provide the needed scientific expertise to ensure healthy wildlife populations, as well as the loss of refuge law enforcement officers to ensure the safety of the visiting public and stop poaching of wildlife have greatly impacted Refuges, the "gifts" Congress authorized over the last 121 years.

In order to continue to be the greatest network and lands and waters in the world set aside for wildlife, increased funding to operate the national wildlife refuge system is desperately needed. Although the funding need is huge, CORFA understands the current budget climate. A minimum of \$602.3 million is needed to begin the road to recovery of the refuge system and the billions of dollars in ecosystem, economic, and recreational values to the American public.

Executive Council  
 Phil Francis  
 Don Hellmann  
 Sue Consolo-Murphy  
 Sue Fritzsche  
 Russell Galipeau  
 Patrick Gregerson  
 Tim Hudson  
 Elaine Leslie  
 Linda Mazzu  
 Jeff Mow  
 Don Neubacher  
 Chris Powell  
 Cheryl Schreier  
 Bill Shaddox  
 Chris Saller  
 Sheridan Steele  
 Terri Thomas  
 Monique VanLandingham  
 Clara Wooden



**Statement for the Record**  
**Philip A. Francis, Jr.**  
**Chair of the Executive Council, Coalition to Protect America's National Parks**  
**Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
**Committee on Appropriations**  
**United States House of Representatives**  
**FY 2025 Appropriations for the National Park Service, Department of the Interior**

**May 10, 2024**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee, I am Philip A. (Phil) Francis, Jr., Chair of the Executive Council of the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks (Coalition). The Coalition is a non-profit organization composed of more than 2,500 retired, former and current employees of the National Park Service (NPS) who collectively have over 40,000 years of experience managing and protecting our national parks. The Coalition studies, educates, speaks, and acts for the preservation of America's National Park System. We appreciate the opportunity to present this statement for the record about the FY 2025 appropriations for the NPS, our national parks, and their partnership grant and assistance programs.

Our membership and the Executive Council of the Coalition speak on a regular basis with the leadership of the NPS, park superintendents and park staff, program managers in central and regional offices, as well as park partners and volunteers. The messages we receive are very similar with a sense of desperation setting in as annual appropriations and available funding have not kept up with the NPS mission Congress has mandated and entrusted to park employees.

Visitation has grown by ten percent over the past 10-12 years while park staff has been reduced by over 2,500 full-time equivalents. Congress recognized this situation and appropriated additional funds in some of the recent years' appropriations bills, allowing the NPS to hire additional staff. Unfortunately, the current FY 2024 appropriations reversed this progress with \$150 million less than the previous year's funding, while also requiring NPS to absorb \$125 million in fixed costs. The president's budget for FY 2025 attempts to reverse this slide by

requesting an additional \$101 million for the NPS, which is appreciated, but still is inadequate to meet the needs of the NPS.

The NPS is at a crossroads, and your Subcommittee will determine the direction the agency will take. At the same time, your decisions will inform the American public of the importance you place on the protection of these nationally significant historical, cultural, and natural resources. In addition, you will be sending an important signal to those who visit our parks for recreational activities, for experiencing the historic buildings and related artifacts, and for learning about the stories told, what they can expect when they arrive.

The NPS is facing an increasingly complex situation in managing park resources, as with the growing impacts from climate change. For example, recreational activities have been restricted at many of our water-based parks due to declining water levels at our lakes, reservoirs, rivers, and seashores. This is happening while both the House and Senate authorizing committees are considering comprehensive legislation to encourage more recreational activities among the visiting public at our national parks and public lands.

On top of fewer programs being available for the visiting public, the parks also are experiencing growing traffic and parking issues, overcrowding, the degradation of natural and cultural resources, and increasing safety and public health concerns for both visitors and employees. Staff are less able to carry out basic functions that are important to visitors, such as frequent cleaning of restrooms and emptying of refuse containers. In program offices, reduced staffing has resulted in less support for parks and programs. All of this has led to loss of employees through attrition, unfunded positions, and low staff morale; problems that are compounded by the increasing challenges presented by an inefficient hiring process.

Below are specific actions we recommend the Subcommittee take as it prepares the FY 2025 Interior appropriations bill to address the needs of the NPS.

**1) Continuing to Enhance and Build Operational Capacity (ONPS).** The Coalition believes the top priority is providing an adequate appropriation for park operations that will allow the NPS to hire additional employees to replace some of those lost over the past 12 years. The president's budget recommends only an additional \$21 million above the current year's appropriation in this account. The Coalition recommends this be increased to at least an additional \$250 million.

We place special emphasis on urging the Subcommittee to provide the amount needed for fixed costs to ensure park, regional, and program offices do not further deteriorate by having to absorb those costs in their base budgets. Additionally, the Coalition recommends the increased funding focus on staffing for new parks, parks experiencing dramatic increases in visitation, and those with new programs enacted by Congress. We also urge any increased funding provide adequately for youth programs and Americorps, which help develop our next generation of conservation stewards. These programs are so important for alerting young people to the gateways available for working in our national parks through park ranger, laborer, and wildland firefighting positions.

The Coalition continues to be concerned about the loss of almost 30 percent of cultural resource management positions in our national parks, regional, and program offices over the past decade.

Many cultural resources, including historic buildings, museum objects, and archeological sites, are unmaintained, severely threatened, or degraded due to a lack of funding.

Protection of these resources and the many compelling stories associated with our country's history remain an important part of the NPS mandate. We urge the Subcommittee to continue to work with NPS on ways to address these issues within available funding. We recommend the Subcommittee include committee report language accompanying the FY 2025 bill that directs NPS to provide the Subcommittee with the status of vacant cultural resource positions, their anticipated ability to fill any of the vacant positions in the current fiscal year, and any recommendations they might have for prioritizing vacant positions for hiring in future fiscal years.

Further, the Coalition urges that the provision that has been repeated for multiple years in appropriations bills concerning the NPS being prohibited from reducing, mitigating, and implementing educational awareness regarding the use of toxic lead be removed so that the NPS can appropriately address the continuing human and wildlife threat of toxic lead in parks where firing ranges and recreational hunting and fishing activities occur. This will enable the parks to protect and restore resources while ensuring a safe and healthy public environment.

2) **Construction.** The president's budget recommends \$237.2 million for the Construction account, which is an increase of \$65 million over the FY 2024 enacted level. The Coalition supports this funding as a needed partner to the mandatory funding provided by the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA). The NPS construction funding helps to ensure cyclic maintenance and repair/rehab activities are carried out in a timely manner so that the backlog of NPS maintenance does not continue to grow.

Of particular importance to the Coalition is funding to address the NPS' park housing needs. The FY 2025 budget recommends building on last year's momentum by increasing the housing request by \$9 million. The Coalition strongly supports this proposed increase to assist the parks in attracting and retaining the needed permanent and seasonal staffing who can live in affordable housing. Rental housing for temporary employees in resort areas has become almost non-existent due to the takeover of the rental market by weekly rentals. When government housing is unavailable, prospective employees either turn down jobs or quit when they cannot find a place to live.

The Coalition continues to work with the House and Senate authorizing committees on additional authorities that the NPS and other federal land management agencies may need to address the critical housing needs of the parks. To help advance this effort, we recommend the Interior appropriations Subcommittee include in the bill a provision to authorize the NPS to fill vacant positions using local people who already live in the area and know the area well. Having this expanded authority, outside of the usual competitive process, would help reduce the need for providing some of the additional housing while taking advantage of the knowledge and experience of local people near the park. It also would reduce the number of times individuals are offered permanent positions at individual parks in remote, or high-priced areas, only to have the offers declined due to the inability of the individuals to find and/or afford the cost of available housing.

**3) National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) and the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF).** Within the president's budget, various programs such as the National Register of Historic Places, Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance, and several grant programs including the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation, Japanese American Confinement Sites, and National Heritage Areas, are funded under this account.

The Coalition notes that these programs are critical to the partnership work of the NPS; they need adequate staff to fulfill their partnership responsibilities in a timely manner, which has been an area of critical concern in recent years. The president's budget recommends a decrease in funding for these programs of almost \$7 million. However, it recognizes that the work of administering these grant programs continues to grow with the addition of the African-American Burial Grounds Preservation program in the most recent Congress and, therefore, requests an additional \$500,000 to assist with this increased workload. The Coalition recommends maintaining at least level funding for these programs in FY 2025 to confirm the importance of these partnership opportunities and the resources being protected.

An excellent example of NPS partnership activity is the collaboration through the Historic Preservation Fund, which preserves historically and culturally significant sites and provides competitive grants to non-Federal entities, including our Tribal nations. These partnerships have been of increasing importance to more and more parks through the Centennial Challenge program, with its matching funds from park partners for individual park projects. The Coalition supports these critical partnership opportunities as they often double the funding provided by Congress and increase the impact on park and associated historic and cultural resources.

**4) Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA).** We note that the president's budget outlines its priorities for using the mandatory funding appropriated through the GAOA in FY 2025. The NPS is appropriated \$1.3 billion for various deferred maintenance programs through the Legacy Restoration Fund. This includes \$25 million directed to Maintenance Action Teams (MAT) that carry out projects among the small and medium-sized parks throughout the nation. The Coalition believes this amount is too limited and we continue to emphasize that the needs of these smaller parks are just as important as the large parks and urge that the capacity of the MAT be increased to help these parks.

The Coalition is supportive of the \$104 million in mandatory appropriations through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, also coming from the GAOA. We remain disappointed that only \$58 million is recommended for NPS federal land acquisition when so many parks have private inholdings that are waiting to be acquired. We also note how the division of the \$900 million available LWCF funding is heavily biased in the president's recommendation with over \$335 million being dedicated to NPS state assistance grants, and almost half of the total available funding being dedicated to this and other grant programs. We urge the Subcommittee to use its authority to redirect some of this funding to federal land acquisition to balance these funds more equitably commensurate with the need.

Thank you for consideration of our request. We look forward to continuing to work with you during the consideration of the FY 2025 Interior appropriations bill.



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 Jared Polis, CO  
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WRITTEN PUBLIC TESTIMONY  
FY 2025 APPROPRIATION

**TO:** The Honorable Mike Simpson, Chair  
 The Honorable Chellie Pingree, Ranking Member  
 House Committee on Appropriations – Subcommittee on  
 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

**SUBJECT:** Continued Funding for the Colorado River Basin Salinity  
 Control Program under BLM's Aquatic Resources Program

**FROM:** Don A. Barnett, Executive Director  
 Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum

**DATE:** April 22, 2024

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Waters from the Colorado River are used by nearly 40 million people for municipal and industrial purposes and for irrigation of approximately 5.5 million acres in the United States. Natural and human-induced salt loading to the Colorado River causes environmental and economic damages. Though past efforts have reduced annual damages to water users by several hundred million dollars per year, in 2023 the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) estimated the *quantifiable* damages to Lower Basin water users due to elevated salinity levels still at about \$348 million per year (unquantifiable damages add to this amount). Congress authorized the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (Program) through the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act (Act) (P.L. 93-320) in 1974 to offset increased damages caused by development and use of the waters of the Colorado River. Modeling by Reclamation indicates that the quantifiable damages would rise to approximately \$447 million by the year 2040 without continuation of the Program. Congress has directed the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to implement a comprehensive program for minimizing salt contributions to the Colorado River from lands administered by the **Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**. BLM has funded these efforts as directed by Congress through its **Aquatic Resources Program**. BLM's efforts are an essential part of the overall effort. A funding level of **\$2.0 million** for salinity specific projects in 2025 is requested to prevent further degradation of the quality of the Colorado River and a commensurate increase in downstream economic damages.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified that more than 60 percent of the salt load of the Colorado River comes from natural sources. The majority of land within the Colorado River Basin is federally owned, much of which is administered by BLM. In authorizing Program (P.L. 93-320, Act) in 1974, Congress recognized that most of the salts in the Colorado River originate from federally owned lands. Title I of the Act deals with programs downstream of Imperial Dam that enable the U.S. to meet its commitment regarding the quality of waters being delivered to Mexico (Minute No. 242 of the International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico). Title II of the Act addresses measures upstream from Imperial Dam, thus improving the quality of the water delivered to users in the United States. This testimony deals specifically with Title II efforts. In 1984, Congress amended the Salinity Control Act (P.L. 98-569) and directed the Secretary to develop a comprehensive program for minimizing salt contributions to the Colorado River from lands administered by BLM. In 2000, Congress reiterated its directive to the Secretary and requested a report on the implementation of BLM's program (Public Law 106-459). Beginning in 2003, BLM employed a Salinity Coordinator to increase BLM efforts in the Colorado River Basin to pursue salinity control studies and to implement specific salinity control practices.

BLM is now working on a comprehensive Colorado River Basin salinity control program as directed by Congress. In January 2018 BLM issued *A Framework for Improving the Effectiveness of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program, 2018-2023*. This document lays out how BLM intends to implement Colorado River Basin salinity control activities over the five-year period. Meaningful resources have been expended by BLM in the past few years to better understand salt mobilization on rangelands. With a significant portion of the salt load of the Colorado River coming from BLM administered lands, the BLM portion of the overall program is essential to the success of the effort. Inadequate BLM salinity control efforts will result in significant additional economic damage to water users downstream.

Damages to water users in the United States and Mexico, caused by the concentration of salt in the Colorado River, by water usage sector, include the following:

- a reduction in the ability to reclaim and reuse water for beneficial uses, including drinking water and irrigation water supplies, due to high salinities in the water delivered to water treatment and reclamation facilities,
- a reduction in the yield of salt sensitive crops, increased water use to meet leaching requirements and additional actions necessary to comply with the Clean Water Act for the agricultural sector,
- an increased use of imported water and cost of desalination and brine disposal for recycling water in the municipal sector,
- a reduction in the useful life of galvanized water pipe systems, water heaters, faucets, garbage disposals, clothes washers and dishwashers, and increased use of bottled water and water softeners in the household sector,

- an increase in the cost of cooling operations and the cost of water softening, and a decrease in equipment service life in the commercial sector,
- an increase in the use of water and the cost of water treatment, and a corresponding increase in sewer fees in the industrial sector,
- a decrease in the lifespan of treatment facilities and pipelines in the utility sector, and
- difficulty in meeting wastewater discharge requirements to comply with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit terms and conditions, and an increase in desalination and brine disposal costs necessary to minimize accumulation of salts in groundwater basins.

The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum (Forum) is composed of gubernatorial appointees from Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. The Forum is charged with reviewing the Colorado River's water quality standards for salinity every three years to facilitate compliance with Section 303(c) of the Clean Water Act (P.L. 92-500). In so doing, it adopts a Plan of Implementation consistent with these standards. The level of appropriation requested in this testimony is consistent with the adopted Plan of Implementation. If adequate funds are not appropriated, significant damages from higher salinity concentrations in the water will be more widespread in the United States and Mexico.

In summary, implementation of salinity control practices through BLM is a cost-effective method of controlling the salinity of the Colorado River and is an essential component of the overall Program. Continuation of adequate funding levels for salinity control within the Aquatic Resources Program will assist in preventing further degradation of the Colorado River's water quality and a commensurate significant increase in economic damages to municipal, industrial and irrigation users. A modest investment in source control pays huge dividends in improved water quality to nearly 40 million Americans. The Forum requests that this committee direct BLM to continue its support of the Program and expend at least \$2.0 million in 2025 from its Aquatic Resources Program for Colorado River salinity-control specific activities.



**OUTSIDE WITNESS TESTIMONY  
FY 2025 APPROPRIATION**

**TO:** The Honorable Mike Simpson, Chair  
The Honorable Chellie Pingree, Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations – Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies

**SUBJECT:** Continued Funding for the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control  
Program under BLM's Aquatic Resources Program

**FROM:** Christopher S. Harris, Executive Director  
Colorado River Board of California

**DATE:** May 9, 2024

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This testimony is in support of Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 funding for the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) associated activities that assist the implementation of Title II of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-320). This long-standing successful and cost-effective salinity control program in the Colorado River Basin is being carried out pursuant to the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act and the Clean Water Act (P.L. 92-500). Congress has directed the Secretary of the Interior to implement a comprehensive program for minimizing salt contributions to the Colorado River from lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). BLM funds these efforts through the Aquatic Resources Program. BLM's efforts are an essential part of the overall effort. A funding level of \$2.0 million for salinity specific projects in 2025 is requested to prevent further degradation of the quality of Colorado River water supplies and increased environmental and economic damages.

The Colorado River Board of California (Colorado River Board) is the state agency charged with protecting California's interests and rights in the water and power resources of the Colorado River system. In this capacity, California participates along with the other six Colorado River Basin states through the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum (Forum), the interstate organization responsible for coordinating the Basin States' salinity control efforts. In close cooperation with the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and pursuant to requirements of the Clean Water Act, the Forum is charged with reviewing the Colorado River water quality standards every three years. Every three years the Forum adopts a Plan of Implementation consistent with these water quality standards. The level of appropriation being supported in this testimony is consistent with the Forum's 2023 Plan of Implementation. The report "2023

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Review: Water Quality Standards for Salinity, Colorado River System” contains both the water quality standard and the Plan of Implementation and can be found at: [https://coloradoriversalinity.org/docs/2023%20Review%20\(final%20with%20appendices%20to%20print\).pdf](https://coloradoriversalinity.org/docs/2023%20Review%20(final%20with%20appendices%20to%20print).pdf). If adequate funds are not appropriated, significant damages associated with increasing salinity concentrations of Colorado River water will become more widespread in the United States and Mexican portions of the Colorado River Basin.

The EPA has determined that more than sixty percent of the salt load of the Colorado River comes from natural sources. Most of the land within the Colorado River Basin is federally owned, much of which is administered by BLM. Through passage of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act in 1974, Congress recognized that much of the salts in the Colorado River originate on federally owned lands. Title I of the Salinity Control Act deals with the U.S. commitment to efforts related to maintaining the quality of waters being delivered to Mexico pursuant to the 1944 Water Treaty. Title II of the Act deals with improving the quality of the water delivered to U.S. users. In 1984, Congress amended the Salinity Control Act and directed that the Secretary of the Interior develop a comprehensive program for minimizing salt contributions to the Colorado River from lands administered by BLM. In 2000, Congress reiterated its directive to the Secretary and requested a report on the implementation of BLM’s program (Public Law 106-459). In 2003, BLM employed a Salinity Coordinator to coordinate BLM efforts in the Colorado River Basin states to pursue salinity control studies and to implement specific salinity control practices.

BLM is now working on creating a comprehensive Colorado River Basin salinity control program as directed by Congress. In January 2018 BLM issued A Framework for Improving the Effectiveness of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program, 2018-2023. This document lays out how BLM intends to implement Colorado River Basin salinity control activities over the next five years. Meaningful resources have been expended by BLM in the past few years to better understand salt mobilization on rangelands. With a significant portion of the salt load of the Colorado River coming from BLM-administered lands, the BLM portion of the overall program is essential to the success of the entire effort. Inadequate BLM salinity control efforts will result in significant additional economic damages to water users downstream.

Over the fifty years since the passage of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act, much has been learned about the impact of salts in the Colorado River system. Currently, the salinity concentration of Colorado River water causes about \$348 million in quantifiable economic damages in the United States annually. Economic and hydrologic modeling by Reclamation indicates that these economic damages could rise to more than \$447 million by the year 2040 without continued implementation of the salinity control program. For example, damages can be incurred related to the following activities:

- A reduction in the ability and increased costs to reclaim and reuse water due to high salinities in the water delivered to water treatment and reclamation facilities;

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Page 3 of 3

- A reduction in the yield of salt-sensitive crops and increased water use to meet the leaching requirements in the agricultural sector;
- Increases in the amount of imported water;
- Increased costs of desalination and brine disposal for recycled water in the municipal sector;
- A reduction in the useful life of galvanized water pipe systems, water heaters, faucets, and other household appliances, and increased use of bottled water and water softeners in the residential sectors;
- Increased costs of cooling operations and the cost of water softening, and a decrease in equipment service life in the commercial sector;
- Increases in the use of water and cost of water treatment, and an increase in sewer fees in the industrial sector;
- Decreased life of treatment facilities and pipelines in the utility sector;
- Increasing difficulty in meeting wastewater discharge requirements to comply with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit terms and conditions; and
- Increased desalination and brine disposal costs due to accumulation of salts in groundwater basins.

The Colorado River is, and will continue to be, a major and vital water resource to the nearly 20 million residents of southern California, including municipal, industrial, and agricultural water users in Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Ventura Counties. The protection and improvement of Colorado River water quality through the continued implementation of this very effective salinity control program avoids, or reduces, additional environmental and economic damages to Mexico, California and the other states that rely on Colorado River water resources.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

**Written Testimony for the Record of**

**David Feinman, Government Affairs Director  
Conservation Lands Foundation**

**to the United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC**

**May 10, 2024**

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is David Feinman, and I am Government Affairs Director for Conservation Lands Foundation, which is the only organization in the country solely dedicated to safeguarding the National Conservation Lands, the most ecologically rich and culturally significant of lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

This provides us with perhaps the most clear-eyed view available on the cumulative impacts resulting from Congress's continued underfunding of BLM, and I offer this testimony with respectful frustration, urgency, and hope that it may give the committee greater clarity on how the lack of appropriate funding is suffocating the agency and harming the public's quality of life and access to their public lands. **It is with this perspective in mind that I urge the Subcommittee to include at least \$1.395 billion for BLM for Management of Lands and Resources, at least \$78 million for the BLM National Conservation Lands, and at least \$25 million for BLM's cultural resources account.**

Conservation Lands Foundation and our Friends Grassroots Network – that we have grown to now more than 80 volunteer-powered organizations – are at the forefront of stewarding the National Conservation Lands. These community-based non-profits provide essential partnerships to BLM throughout the West to ensure the National Conservation Lands, and all lands managed by the agency, have a dedicated team of local volunteers to welcome and educate visitors, provide on-the-ground monitoring, assist both financially and via volunteer hours to complete recreation improvements as well as stewardship and restoration projects.

Conservation Lands Foundation, our Friends Network and local volunteers and supporters understand public lands have multiple uses and respect the work of BLM staff and the incredibly complex task they have to fulfill the Bureau's conservation mandate and multiple-use, sustained yield mission under the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLMPA).

What we don't understand is how Congress can continue to demand more of the Bureau and criticize it for its inability to fulfill its Congressionally-mandated work while continually refusing to allocate the resources necessary to do just that.

BLM is responsible for the largest portfolio of public lands in the United States, managing more than 245 million acres of land (along with nearly 700 million subsurface acres) while being the lowest funded federal land management agency. The unique mission of the Bureau and the sheer size of the estate it manages make the historic deficit in funding from Congress even more challenging and baffling.

We can quantitatively measure the deficit the BLM faces in two clear statistics: dollars per acre, and dollars per visitor.

**DOLLARS PER ACRE: FISCAL YEAR 2023<sup>1</sup>**

AGENCY	ACRES MANAGED	DOLLAR PER ACRE ALLOCATED BY CONGRESS
U.S. Forest Service	193M	\$52.20
National Park Service	84M	\$41.37
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	89M	\$19.89
Bureau of Land Management	248M	\$6.10

**DOLLARS PER VISITOR: TEN-YEAR AVERAGE 2012-2021<sup>2</sup>**

AGENCY	ACRES MANAGED	DOLLAR PER ACRE ALLOCATED BY CONGRESS
National Park Service	84M	\$5.20
U.S. Forest Service	193M	\$1.70
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	89M	\$1.32
Bureau of Land Management	248M	\$0.79

<sup>1</sup> Source: Bureau of Land Management

<sup>2</sup> Source: Bureau of Land Management

### **Public Access and Quality Experiences are at Risk**

Virtually every National Conservation Land location is negatively impacted by Congress's lack of funding and there are countless qualitative measures and examples of what this deficit has meant for the health of the land and water sources and for the people who have a right to access and have quality experiences on BLM lands.

One result of this chronic underfunding is delays and poor customer service for outdoor recreation visitors and guides at a time when the outdoor recreation economy is booming. Visitors to BLM lands continue to increase year over year with more than 80 million visitors in 2023 (a 10 percent increase from previous years), and according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, the outdoor recreation economy increased 4.8 percent in 2022, compared with a 1.9 percent increase for the overall U.S. economy.<sup>3</sup>

### **Public Safety and Land and Water Degradation is a Growing Problem**

Ensuring that people are safe while on BLM lands cannot be overlooked as a Congressional responsibility to fund. Between 2016-2022 there were 3,760 search and rescues on BLM lands, an average of 630 per year. These are straining local law enforcement budgets and increased BLM staff and resources on the ground will increase visitor safety and save lives.

Another result of the failure by Congress to invest in the agency is the degradation and abuse of the public lands it manages. Across the system of National Conservation Lands managed by the BLM, we've seen an increase in vandalism and defacement of sacred sites and petroglyphs, illegal dumping, theft of personal and government property, poaching of wildlife, illegal off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, and unlawful shooting.

The Caja del Rio Plateau in New Mexico is one of many examples. Located just a few miles outside of Santa Fe, the Caja del Rio Plateau holds deep historical value and remains vitally important to the Pueblo people of the middle Rio Grande. It's the most ecologically rich and culturally significant landscapes in the Southwest, known for petroglyphs dating back 8,000 years, wildlife and special status species, geologic features, and scenic values. The La Cieneguilla Petroglyph Site within it continues to be vandalized, off-highway vehicles are going off-trail and unchecked tearing up riverbeds, and graffiti on the canyon walls and trash is happening with abandon. Last month alone, 120 volunteers showed up to help clean-up the Caja for Earth Day and picked up 13,500 lbs of trash and toxic materials.

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<sup>3</sup> "Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis Reports Outdoor Recreation Economy Tops \$1 Trillion in 2022", U.S. Department of Commerce, December 15, 2023

Due to the rise in social media, these once remote and “secret escapes” no longer benefit from anonymity, and require much more active management from BLM, which cannot be provided without additional resources for rangers, outdoor recreation planners and other staff.

**Congress Holds the Power to Meet the Public’s Needs**

Whether it’s supporting ranchers with grazing leases, ensuring responsible mining operations, advancing energy production, providing the public with safe and accessible outdoor recreation opportunities, protecting cultural and paleontological resources, or managing lands for conservation, the Bureau of Land Management needs more funding to do all of this work it’s been mandated by Congress to do on behalf of the American people.

The American people expect the BLM to fulfill its mission and they expect Congress to fulfill its responsibility to provide the Bureau with the staffing and resources necessary to achieve it.

It’s time for Congress to invest in the Bureau of Land Management and do right by the American people, the public lands they cherish, and the public servants charged with managing them.

Conservation Land Foundation urges Congress to take responsibility for the priorities and promises you have laid out to the American people by adequately investing in the health and safe and quality access to America’s public lands under BLM, and the many benefits they provide to communities across this great country.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. Please contact me at [davidf@conservationlands.org](mailto:davidf@conservationlands.org) with any questions.



**Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement**

*Submitted by Libby Marking, CARE Chair,  
Director of Government Affairs for the  
National Wildlife Refuge Association*

**Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee On Interior, Environment, And Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System**

May 10, 2024

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

**The following members of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement urge Congress to allocate at least \$602.3 million in funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). This funding is necessary for the Refuge System to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature.**

Since 1995, the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) has worked to showcase the value of the Refuge System and to secure a strong congressional commitment to conserving these special landscapes. The CARE members listed below have endorsed this testimony and our request to your subcommittee. We represent millions of users of the National Wildlife Refuge System—wildlife watchers, hunters, anglers, wildlife professionals and conservationists, and Refuge Friends members.

American Birding Association  
American Fisheries Society  
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.  
Izaak Walton League of America  
Marine Conservation Institute  
National Audubon Society  
National Wildlife Federation

National Wildlife Refuge Association  
Safari Club International  
The Nature Conservancy  
The Corps Network  
The Wilderness Society  
The Wildlife Society  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation  
Partnership Trout Unlimited  
Wildlife Forever  
Wildlife Management Institute

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's largest network of lands and waters dedicated to wildlife conservation, and the only set of federal lands in the nation set aside for the management of America's native wildlife. Found in every U.S. state and territory, national wildlife refuges conserve a diversity of America's environmentally sensitive and vital ecosystems, including wetlands, coasts, forests, prairie, tundra, deserts, and oceans. These public lands and waters are important recreational and tourism destinations in communities across the United States, and offer a variety of recreational opportunities, including sustainable hunting and fishing, wildlife observation, photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7 percent since FY2010 and currently sits at \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. In today's dollars, the appropriations allocated in FY2010 equates to approximately \$765 million. Because funding has not kept up with inflation, accounted for annual fixed costs, or correlated with the growth and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased. This has led to unsustainably low staffing levels and lost capacity.

Our request of at least \$602.3 million for the Refuge System represents a needed increase over FY2024 funding levels and will help secure a strong future for the Refuge System, but more needs to be done. To achieve a fully funded and effective Refuge System, an annual budget of at least \$2.2 billion is needed to provide for its basic needs, meet mandates and public demand, and ensure commensurate staffing of other similarly sized public lands systems. This request is an important step towards that goal and we urge Congress to make significant investments in these treasured public lands and waters.

#### **Staffing Challenges**

At its peak, staffing levels exceeded 3,240 employees across the Refuge System. The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27 percent since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats.

The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day.

Rising fixed costs are also eating into annual appropriations. It costs the refuge system an estimated \$3 million for every one percent raise in payroll costs. Without base increases in the budget to cover these fixed costs, several much-needed positions are eliminated every year.

#### **Impacts to Visitors**

The Refuge System has grown significantly since FY 2010, adding 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opening 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and visitation

has grown to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While this growth has enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around refuges, it has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded System that provides vital wildlife habitat and important services to hunters, anglers, birders, and other nature enthusiasts.

Visitor Services staff has decreased by 25 percent since FY10 despite the increase in visitorship. Nearly all of the Refuge System's 125 visitor centers operate on limited hours, with some centers completely closed, and none would function without volunteers. However, many volunteer programs have been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure. In 2023, there were 48 percent fewer volunteers than in 2016.

The Refuge System has a large deferred maintenance backlog of \$2.65 billion, with most structures near or past the end of their maximum useful life spans, such as buildings, roads, bridges, and trails. As the Refuge System has opened additional acres for hunting and fishing, there has not been an equivalent increase in funding to improve habitat, maintain necessary infrastructure like blinds, boat launches, piers, parking lots, and restrooms, or support popular hunting and fishing programs for youth and serve people with disabilities, veterans, seniors, and others.

Public safety has also been jeopardized due to budget shortfalls, impacting both visitors and wildlife. As of February 2024, the Refuge System has the lowest number of law enforcement officers in over 10 years while simultaneously seeing its highest visitation and crime rates in its history. Currently, seven states have no officers stationed within their boundaries (CT, DE, IA, MI, NH, OH, VT), and nine states with just one officer (GA, Guam, HI, IN, KY, PA, PR, RI, WY). Increased funding is needed to improve visitor access, public safety, and wildlife protection.

#### **Impacts on Fish and Wildlife**

The limited staffing capacity has several negative impacts on the ecological health of the Refuge System. Due to capacity issues, only 27 percent, or 379 of the 1,364 threatened and endangered populations occurring on refuges, are monitored. This leads to compromised adaptive management capability, inability to manage invasive species, the destruction of native habitat, and the potential loss of more species. With current resources, USFWS can only successfully control 7 percent of 3.3 million acres of lands infested with non-native species, which has increased 30 percent since 2005. USFWS also has extremely limited capacity to effectively manage the Refuge System's millions of marine acres and 100 coastal and marine units.

Significant progress has been made in the early detection and rapid response against newly introduced invasive species on Refuge System lands thanks to the expansion of invasive species strike teams. Now up to 21 teams, this program eradicates and prevents the spread of invasive species on the Refuge System and nearby public and private lands, protecting natural resources for adjoining communities. For example, nutria has successfully been eradicated from the Delmarva Peninsula through this work in partnership with other agencies, which is helping to build resiliency against sea-level rise in impacted counties of the Chesapeake Bay. Funding for wildlife and habitat management activities is desperately needed to deal with longer-term

invasive species management challenges. Without funding to enhance and apply prevention measures, new threats will emerge and known invasive species such as phragmites, kudzu, quagga mussels, purple loosestrife, feral hogs, and invasive carps will continue their spread throughout the Refuge System.

By law, refuges must update their Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) every fifteen years. Up-to-date management plans ensure that each wildlife refuge can be adaptable to present and upcoming needs, from a changing climate and extreme weather events like wildfires to rising recreational visitors and commercial uses. However, over 60 percent of CCPs have become out-of-date or were never finalized, which severely limits landscape-level planning and adaptability to changing conditions. With an increased planning budget, refuges could modernize and update these important management plans that help them reach their conservation goals.

#### **The Need for Action**

Without a necessary increase in funding for the Refuge System, we anticipate further impacts both within and outside of refuge boundaries. These impacts could include more closures of visitor centers, elimination of environmental education programs for schools, reduced habitat quality, diminished hunting and fishing opportunities, reduced invasive species management on refuge lands and nearby private lands, and reduced capacity for prescribed fire, which is an important tool to improve wildlife habitat and to reduce hazardous fuels.

The common denominator to all these challenges is a lack of funding. Adequate staffing and funding are critical to the maintenance of healthy wildlife populations and access for recreational users to healthy ecosystems. Increasing funding for the Refuge System will empower and enable individual refuge units to deliver on-the-ground conservation that benefits wildlife and local communities across the nation. We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System.

On behalf of our more than 16 million members and supporters, CARE thanks the Subcommittee for the opportunity to submit comments on the FY2025 House Interior Appropriations bill. Thank you for considering our request of at least \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please contact Libby Marking at [lmarking@refugeassociation.org](mailto:lmarking@refugeassociation.org) for additional information.



**Testimony from the Council of Infrastructure Financing Authorities (CIFA)  
about Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Prepared for the U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
May 10, 2024**

The Council of Infrastructure Financing Authorities (CIFA) represents the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRFs), the nation's premier programs for funding water infrastructure that protects public health. The SRFs are state-run programs that provide subsidized loans to rehabilitate, replace and modernize infrastructure that provides safe drinking water, recycled water for multiple purposes, wastewater treatment, stormwater management and environmental restoration and protection.

**Requests from the Clean Water and Drinking Water SRFs:**

- Fund both SRFs to congressionally authorized levels of \$3.25 billion each.
- Fund congressional earmarks separately from the SRFs.
- Eliminate duplicative mandates for additional subsidy (grants and principal forgiveness).
- Eliminate the outdated mandate for green infrastructure.

**Protect public health.**

Fully funding the SRFs at \$3.25 billion each is a conservative and economical investment in water infrastructure. Stable, routine investment in water infrastructure is the single greatest factor in averting life-threatening and costly water crises in communities across the nation.

**Maintain affordable water bills.**

The SRFs provide loans at below market rates, which can cut interest payments by as much as 75% compared to a municipal bond or private financing. These savings alleviate the pressure on utilities to raise rates on water bills, which has a direct impact on family budgets.

**Meet the growing demand for affordable financing.**

Increased federal funding of the SRFs is needed to meet the growing demand for SRF subsidized loans, which has skyrocketed due to the increased cost of planning, design, construction and financing.

- According to the results of the 7<sup>th</sup> Drinking Water Needs Survey, America needs to invest \$625 billion over the next 20 years to provide safe drinking water to communities across the nation, a 32% increase from previous assessment. The Clean Watershed Needs Survey, which will be released in the coming months, is expected to show similar increases in need.

- While historic inflation has ebbed, the cost of planning, design and construction remains well above pre-pandemic levels, particularly in rural communities that can least afford it.
- Complying with more stringent water quality standards requires new investments in sophisticated and often expensive treatment technologies.
- Higher construction costs are compounded by higher financing costs from rising interest rates on the municipal market. The cost of borrowing has become a barrier to needed investment in water infrastructure.

**Strengthen fiscal responsibility.**

Increasing federal funding for the SRFs is a fiscally responsible approach to funding water infrastructure. Federal funding used for subsidized loans creates a perpetual, renewable source of revenue to meet the never-ending need to rehabilitate, replace and modernize aging infrastructure. Loan repayments are funding water infrastructure projects that may never have been built if the SRFs were a grant program.

**Restore financial integrity.**

Unfortunately, Congress is systematically turning the SRFs, which have been successful, sustainable, state-run loan programs, into a massive federal grant program. Over the last three years, Congress has diverted \$3.73 billion in federal funding from the SRFs to pay for congressional earmarks which are grants. Congress has also mandated that the SRFs use another \$1 billion of annual federal funding for principal forgiveness or grants instead of subsidized loans. As a result, more than 55% of annual federal funding for the SRFs will be used one time for one project in one community, rather than over and over for multiple projects in perpetuity.

**Fund the SRFs first.**

Congress can restore financial integrity to the SRFs by funding the programs first, then funding congressional earmarks *in addition to* the SRFs. Using the SRF capitalization to pay for congressional earmarks may be convenient, but it is inconsistent with the goals of the SRFs.

- First, congressional earmarks are grants, not loans. Giving away a majority of annual federal funding as grants diminishes the long-term lending power of the SRFs.
- Second, SRF projects must be prioritized based on risk to human health, environmental protection and affordability. It's unclear how congressional earmarks are selected by Congress.
- Third, congressional earmarks redistribute the allotment of federal funding, which is established by federal law. Congressional earmarks don't offset cuts to programmatic funding for the SRFs. In fact, nearly all states have experienced a net loss of federal

funding for water infrastructure (SRF funding plus congressional earmarks) since Congress began using the SRF capitalization grant to pay for congressional earmarks.

**Sunset the Duplicative Mandate for “Free Money.”**

For more than a decade, annual appropriations bills have required the SRFs to provide a portion of annual federal funding as principal forgiveness or grants. For the last three years, Congress has maintained these federal mandates, despite duplicative federal mandates being enacted in Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in 2021. Combined, the federal mandate for the Clean Water SRFs doubled from 10% to 20% and the federal mandate for the Drinking Water SRF increased from 20% to 26%.

Sunsetting the duplicative federal mandates won't end financial assistance for communities that need help. The Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act provide flexibility for the SRFs to use up to one-third of their annual federal funding to help communities that couldn't otherwise afford to build a water infrastructure project. Additionally, many states have more generous and flexible assistance programs to support small, rural and disadvantaged communities.

**Restore autonomy for prioritization of SRF-funded water infrastructure projects.**

For more than a decade, Congress has required the SRFs to allocate 10% of annual federal funding to build “green” water infrastructure projects as determined eligible by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. While well-intentioned, this federal mandate can have the unintended consequence of diverting annual federal funding from water infrastructure projects that may have a greater benefit to public health and environmental protection.

Sunsetting this federal mandate is unlikely to impact investment in “green” projects. Green projects are the norm today, growing substantially over the last ten years because of the need for resilient and sustainable solutions, demand by consumers, and cost-savings. Perhaps most importantly, many communities have adopted a more integrated and holistic approach, incorporating “green” components into every project rather than treating a green project as a separate special project.

**Fund state programs that support infrastructure investment.**

The Public Water System Supervision Grants and Water Pollution Control (Section 106) Grants play an integral role in the permitting of water infrastructure projects that protect water quality and public health. Without increased federal funding for these programs, states may not have adequate resources to process permit applications for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure projects.

**FY 2025 Testimony of Mary Beth Beetham**  
**Director of Legislative Affairs, Defenders of Wildlife**  
**House Committee on Appropriations**  
**Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**

Mister Chairman, Ranking Member and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am Mary Beth Beetham, Director of Legislative Affairs at Defenders of Wildlife. Founded in 1947, Defenders has nearly 2.2 million members and supporters and is dedicated to the conservation of wild animals and plants in their natural communities.

Biodiversity is in crisis on a global scale. Numerous scientific studies in the last several years have raised the alarm about this crisis. A landmark 2019 study<sup>1</sup> compiled by hundreds of the world's leading scientists found that about one million species are facing extinction. In February 2023, a new study<sup>2</sup> found that 40% of animals and 34% of plants in the United States are at risk of extinction, while 41% of ecosystems are facing collapse. The health of wildlife and ecosystems is directly related to human health – healthy ecosystems support clean water, clean air, and pollination, on which we all depend. The 2024 World Economic Forum Global Risks report continues to find that biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse is one of the fastest growing global risks, ranking as third most severe over the next ten years after extreme weather events and change to Earth's systems.<sup>3</sup>

The biodiversity crisis cannot be addressed without funding – more than 1,900 scientists previously signed a letter<sup>4</sup> published in the journal *Science* which asked Congress to fully fund conservation programs to protect biodiversity, including the Endangered Species Act (ESA). We were extremely disappointed with the funding cuts in the final FY 2024 bill. Given the scale of the catastrophe facing the planet's wildlife, significant increases, not cuts, are needed in every area.

Defenders very much appreciates the removal from the final FY 2024 appropriations bill of all the new riders that would have undermined the ESA, including protections for individual species, and would have blocked other key wildlife conservation efforts. However, we are deeply disturbed that the final bill once again included the longstanding prohibition on protecting the sage-grouse under the ESA that has been in the bill since 2014. We urge the Subcommittee to remove the sage-grouse rider from the FY 2025 bill and to reject all such riders that undermine the ESA and protections for wildlife.

***Fish and Wildlife Service***

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is our nation's premier wildlife conservation agency. To address the biodiversity crisis, the agency needs additional increases to support recovery of threatened and endangered species; protect migratory birds and fish, species of global conservation concern and other trust species; and prevent domestic and international wildlife crimes.

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<sup>1</sup> Diaz, S., J. Settele, E. S. Brondizio, et al. 2019. "Summary for Policymakers of the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services."

<sup>2</sup> NatureServe. 2023. Biodiversity in Focus: United States Edition.

<sup>3</sup> World Economic Forum Global Risks Report 2024

<sup>4</sup> Malcom, J et al. 2019. "Solve the biodiversity crisis with funding." *Science* 365 (6459): 1256

Ecological Services – Defenders is part of a coalition of more than 115 organizations requesting a significant infusion of funds into the Ecological Services program to begin to address the biodiversity crisis. We very much appreciate the \$338.1 million in the president’s request, but the need is far greater. Based on available data on the needs and costs for ESA implementation by FWS across its programs, as well as inflation adjustment, our recommendation is \$735.6 million, or \$447.3 million more than the FY 2024 level:

- **Listing:** There are approximately 200 species on the FWS National Listing Workplan for FY 2022-FY 2027 that must be reviewed for protections under the ESA, with more species petitioned for protection every year. For FWS to meet this obligation, a total of \$70.1 million is needed annually, an increase of \$48.1 million.
- **Recovery:** Of the more than 1,600 listed U.S. species, more than 1,200 have no recovery plans or have plans that are at least a decade old and that may no longer contain current scientific information, especially related to climate change. Hundreds of listed species receive less than \$1,000 per year for recovery and many receive no FWS funding at all. Congress should provide a minimum of \$101,000 per year per species for recovery. For FWS to meet its obligations under the recovery budget, a total of at least \$469.4 million is needed annually, an increase of \$358.9 million.
- **Planning and Consultation:** FWS conducts ESA Section 7 consultations on more than 10,000 federal actions each year so that projects can move forward while minimizing harm to listed species. The agency also has significantly increased obligations under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). To meet these needs and to continue development and expansion of the web-based Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) system, work with other agencies to develop proactive recovery plans under ESA §7(a)(1), monitor ESA compliance and work with non-federal stakeholders to develop Habitat Conservation Plans, \$185.6 million is needed annually, an increase of \$67.4 million.
- **Conservation and Restoration:** A total of \$10.5 million per year, a \$4 million decrease is sufficient for the Candidate Conservation element of Conservation and Restoration to assist with early conservation action on the current 23 candidate species.
- **Wolf Livestock Loss Demonstration Program:** Defenders urges continued funding at no less than \$1 million for this program that assists livestock owners co-existing with wolves.

National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance – A key component of addressing the biodiversity crisis in the U.S. is to refocus federal land management on it. Our National Wildlife Refuge System is the largest network of public lands and waters in the world dedicated to wildlife conservation. Since 2010, the System has added 2 million land acres, 18 national wildlife refuges, and 600 million acres of Marine National Monuments, has experienced a 46 percent increase in visitation, and has worked to significantly expand its urban refuge program in historically excluded communities. Despite its growing responsibilities, the System has lost 27 percent of its staff since 2010. Appropriations during that time have not kept pace with inflation, even in years when there has been a modest increase in funding. The \$527 million provided for the System in the FY 2024 bill, a decrease of \$14.5 million from FY 2023, will leave it even further below the FY 2010 inflation adjusted level of roughly \$735 million. Defenders recommends \$2.2 billion, an increase of \$1.7 billion, which is needed for the System to meet its mission.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife – Defenders supports the \$68.1 million in the president’s request, an increase of \$9.1 million, to address a backlog of applications and fund practices that could restore tens of thousands of land acres and stream miles on private land. We urge inclusion of report

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language directing continued prioritization of projects that connect, enlarge, and buffer national wildlife refuges.

Migratory Bird Management – In North America nearly 3 billion birds have disappeared since 1970 and the only group to not suffer severe declines was waterbirds that has received substantial funding over the decades.<sup>5</sup> The administration is currently working to develop regulations to govern incidental take under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act following the restoration of previously weakened MBTA protections. We are extremely pleased with the \$73.1 million in the request, an increase of \$19.9 million, to support crucial survey and monitoring programs, to build resilience of bird species and their habitats, to help support development of proposed regulations under the MBTA, and to support Urban Treaties intended to create bird-safe environments in cities.

Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) and International Affairs (IA) – For OLE, we support the \$110.7 million in the request, an increase of \$18.8 million, to help OLE continue to address the crisis in the illegal global wildlife trade and the threat of zoonotic diseases. For IA, we support \$31 million, an increase of \$2.4 million, crucial in continuing to combat the illegal wildlife trade and to build capacity in range countries.

ePermits – We support the consolidation of the multi-program ePermits system into one subactivity at a funding level of \$13.5 million as included in the request. Defenders is hopeful that this consolidation will lead to improved oversight, compliance, and transparency. This funding also should support the provision of information on permit applications and issuances to the public.

Science Applications – We support the request of \$37.9 million, an increase of \$4.1 million, to maintain and enhance partnerships and habitat strategies focused on biodiversity, adaptation, and resilience.

Key grant programs – We support: \$121.8 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Fund, an increase of \$67.2 million; \$10 million for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Fund, an increase of \$5 million; and \$30 million for the Multinational Species Conservation Fund, an increase of \$9.5 million.

***U.S Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management***

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (FS) manage close to 20 percent of the country's land base, providing habitat for hundreds of species listed under the ESA and thousands of sensitive species. These agencies have long been deprived of the funding they need to adequately conserve and recover imperiled species. Proactive investments to recover at-risk species can prevent the need for listing under the ESA. Likewise, recovery actions help listed species reach the point where they can eventually be delisted. Given the enormity, urgency, and complexity of the extinction crisis and the importance of federal public lands, continued increases are still needed for programs listed below to help prevent species' extinctions and restore resilient native ecosystems.

FS Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive (TES) Species – We request \$23 million for the TES Program and re-establishment of the TES budget line item under Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management (WFHM). Based on cost estimates in ESA recovery plans, FS would need to spend

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<sup>5</sup> Rosenberg, L. V. et al. 2019. "Decline of the North American avifauna." *Science* 366 (6461): 120-124.

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roughly twice the requested amount annually to meet its responsibility to help recover the over 400 listed plant and animal listed species on FS-administered lands. This request should also be reflected in top-line increases for WFHM to ensure that increased capacity for TES does not detract from WFHM's other mission-critical functions, including "keeping common species common."

FS Land Management Planning, Assessment and Monitoring – We request \$32 million, an increase of \$17.5 million, for planning, assessment, and monitoring. Land management plans provide the blueprints for how national forest and grassland natural resources are to be utilized and sustained for 10-15 year periods. Close to half of all land management plans are over 15 years old and not reflective of current science and conditions. Increased funding is necessary to ramp up revisions and amendments. The 2012 planning rule requires that plans advance threatened and endangered species recovery and adaptations to climate change. Outdated plans cannot provide adequate guidance for managing projects and activities in the era of climate change and unprecedented biodiversity loss.

BLM Plant Conservation and Restoration – Defenders supports \$34.7 million, an increase of \$14.1 million, for BLM, in coordination with other agencies, to support rare plants conservation and operationalize recent National Academy of Sciences (NAS) recommendations<sup>6</sup> for providing a reliable supply of native seeds necessary for ecological restoration and climate resilience. NAS warned that insufficient supplies of native seeds and plant materials are a major barrier to ecological restoration and revegetation and that "substantial inter-institutional commitment...at a much more intensive and expansive level than is currently underway" is needed. We also urge establishment of the program as its own activity given its substantial responsibilities and importance to many Bureau programs.

BLM Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species – Defenders recommends \$38.5 million, an increase of \$4.5 million, and elevation of the program to its own subactivity to meet its obligations to help recover the over 300 listed species that occur on public lands. This increase should be reflected in top-line increases for Wildlife Habitat Management (WHM) to ensure that increased capacity for T&E does not detract from WHM's other mission-critical functions.

BLM Wildlife Habitat Management (WHM) – Defenders supports \$162 million, an increase of \$19 million and \$8.6 million above the president's budget. This amount will help offset both recent needed increases in nested programs that were not reflected in increases in WHM and increases in fixed costs. It also will help fund the conservation of unlisted imperiled wildlife and wildlife corridors.

### ***U.S. Geological Survey***

Ecosystems – Defenders supports the \$326.1 million in the request, an increase of \$26.7 million to support development of crucial scientific information for sound management of our nation's biological resources. This includes a total of \$69.3 million, an increase of \$6.2 million for the National and Regional Climate Adaptation Centers.

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<sup>6</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2023. An Assessment of Native Seed Needs and the Capacity for Their Supply: Final Report. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.17226/26618>.



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**Testimony of Jennifer A. Henke, BCE – President, Entomological Society of America  
On Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Environmental  
Protection Agency, and the U.S. Department of Interior  
Submitted to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related  
Agencies, U.S. House of Representatives**

May 10, 2024

The Entomological Society of America (ESA) respectfully submits this statement for the official record in support of funding for entomology-related activities at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, and the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI). For fiscal year (FY) 2025, ESA recommends **\$976 million for the EPA Science and Technology (S&T) account, with \$40 million towards the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Program, as well as strong support for programs across the agency that advance the safe application of pesticides.** ESA also strongly supports EPA's commitment to work with other federal agencies to monitor and improve pollinator health. In addition, ESA requests the **Forest Service be funded at no less than \$9.7 billion in discretionary funds.** Within the Forest Service, ESA requests the **Forest and Rangeland Research budget be supported with at least \$349 million** to preserve valuable invasive species research and development. The Society also supports the **Forest Inventory and Analysis Program be funded at levels no less than \$36.7 million and continued investment in Forest Health Management programs across the Forest Service at no less than the FY 2020 request level of \$100 million.** ESA also recommends that DOI continue to support the important work of the **National Invasive Species Council (NISC), at a level no less than \$2 million** for its critical coordination of efforts across agencies to respond to invasive species.

Advances in forestry and environmental sciences, including the field of entomology, protect our ecosystems and communities from threats to our nation's economy, public health, and agricultural productivity and safety. Through improved understanding of invasive insect pests and the development of biological approaches to pest management, entomology plays a critical role in reducing and preventing the spread of infestation and diseases harmful to national forests and grasslands. The study of entomology also contributes to the development of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques, which use science-based, environmentally conscious, comprehensive methods to take effective management action against pests, often resulting in lower costs through a more judicious use of pesticides. Entomology also improves our knowledge of pollinators and factors affecting pollinator health and populations, helping to ensure safe, reliable crop production that meets the needs of a growing world population.

EPA carries out its mission to protect human health and the environment by developing and enforcing regulations, awarding grants for research and other projects, conducting studies on environmental issues, facilitating partnerships, and providing information through public outreach. Through these efforts, EPA strives to supply the nation with clean water, clean air, a safe food supply, and communities free from pollution and harmful chemical exposures. EPA's Pesticides Licensing Program Area, supported by EPA's Science & Technology and

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Environmental Program & Management budgets, evaluates, and regulates new pesticides to ensure safe and proper usage by consumers. Through the mandate of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA), EPA uses scientific expertise and data, including knowledge gained from entomological sciences, to set maximum tolerated residue levels and to register pesticide products as effective and safe. By controlling insects that carry diseases of humans and domesticated animals, consume agricultural and horticultural products, and become established as invasive species that endanger our environment, pesticides registered by EPA help protect public health and the nation's food supply.

Although pesticide registrations and regulations are within EPA's purview, the agency has not been a major sponsor of entomology research. However, EPA has provided support to projects that promote IPM adoption and the safe application of pesticides while also promoting pollinator protection. For example, the EPA has supported the Pesticide Educational Resources Collaborative (PERC), a cooperative agreement between the EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs and University of California Davis Extension, in collaboration with Oregon State University, which empowers farmworkers and other pesticide handlers to employ better and safer practices in pesticide use. Since 2016, PERC has developed and implemented over 40 multilingual pesticide-related training programs, manuals, videos, and guides which are widely relied upon by the community.<sup>1</sup> The program has been so successful that it was renewed in 2021 for a second cycle, along with a similar program, PERC-Med focuses on education and awareness raising of the safe application of pesticides among health professionals. In addition, the EPA's Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program (PESP) grants enable grantees to "implement sustainable pest management practices that reduce unnecessary risks from pests and pesticides."<sup>2</sup> While IPM is a long-standing paradigm for mitigating pests, relatively few focused funding sources are available to support entomologists conducting research or participating in community outreach on this subject. ESA encourages the committee to **encourage EPA to expand IPM investments and support of other programs to promote the safe use of pesticides through increased funding for such activities across the agency's research and regulatory portfolios. ESA also requests \$976 million for EPA S&T including \$40 million for EPA's Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Program.**

**ESA is also supportive of increased funding for scientific studies and other efforts to protect pollinator populations and health.** Pollinators play a vital role in our nation's agriculture industry. Honeybees alone pollinate more than 100 crops in the U.S. and are essential to produce an estimated one-third of all the food we eat or export, contributing over \$24 billion in annual crop and seed production in the U.S. alone, with even greater contributions when accounting for ecosystems services. To ensure a healthy bee population, more research is needed to fully understand the diverse factors that endanger bee health. Pesticides represent just one potential risk to bees, but both the risks and benefits must be balanced, and they will vary between different crops and different crop-producing regions of the U.S. EPA is well-positioned to identify methods for protecting bee health. The agency has awarded agricultural grants to three universities to aid in the development of IPM practices that lower pesticide risks to bees while protecting valuable crops from pests. **ESA supports EPA's continued participation in multi-agency efforts to**

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<sup>1</sup> EPA Awards \$6 Million to the University of California, Davis to Support Pesticide Safety Outreach <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-awards-6-million-university-california-davis-support-pesticide-safety-outreach>. Accessed April 19, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program Grants <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-environmental-stewardship-program-grants>. Accessed April 19, 2024.

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**investigate pollinator health and implement plans to prevent pollinator population decline – including the new Vulnerable Species Pilot Project.**

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) sustains the health, diversity, and productivity of 193 million acres of public lands in national forests and grasslands across 44 states and territories. Serving as the largest supporter of forestry research in the world, the agency employs approximately 30,000 scientists, administrators, and land managers. In addition to activities at the federal level, the Forest Service provides technical expertise and financial assistance to state and private forestry agency partners. The USFS Forest and Rangeland Research budget supports the development and delivery of scientific data and innovative technological tools to improve the health, use, and management of the nation's forests and rangelands. Programs within Forest and Rangeland Research provide science-based approaches to reduce and prevent the spread of destructive insects, plants, and diseases that can have serious economic and environmental consequences for our nation. For example, USFS scientists are working to understand the impact of the mountain pine beetle (MPB, *Dendroctonus ponderosae*) on U.S. forests. Since 2000, outbreaks of MPB have affected more than 10 million hectares of lodgepole pine forests, compromising long-term forest health while creating the potential for more dangerous wildfires, loss of wildlife habitat, poorer water quality, and soil erosion.<sup>3</sup> Such outbreaks are predicted to continue in the face of increased temperatures and drought associated with climate change. Funding for such studies will enable land managers to better predict and respond to ecosystem changes that occur following such outbreaks. **ESA requests that Forest and Rangeland Research be funded with at least \$349 million for FY 2025.**

In addition, research conducted through the Forest Service's Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Program have provided valuable insight on how forest environmental conditions affected three problematic tick species in the southeastern United States. This research found that each species responds differently to environmental conditions, meaning that using only one forest management approach, such as controlled burning, may not be able to adequately control all tick populations. As tick populations increase and their habitats expand, more research is vital to better understand how to modify current forest management practices to control these populations and limit the spread of harmful diseases. **ESA requests that the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program be funded at levels no less than \$36.7 million.**

The Forest Health Management program, also implemented by the USFS, conducts mapping and surveys on public and private lands to monitor and assess risks from potentially harmful insects, diseases, and invasive plants. The program also aids state and local partners to prevent and control outbreaks that threaten forest health. Invasive forest insects cost local governments alone an average of over \$2 billion per year; direct costs to homeowners from property loss, tree removal, and treatment averages \$1.5 billion per year. The damage caused by these pests can often be mitigated by integrated pest management programs, but the success of such initiatives depends heavily on the presence of sustained funding and national response frameworks. A recent investigation of forest pest management programs supported by the USDA Forest Health Protection program identified several key weaknesses in modern pest management programs.<sup>4</sup> Critically, these programs suffer from the lack of nationally coordinated response

<sup>3</sup> Fettig, C.J., R.A. Progar, J. Paschke, F.J. Sapiro. Forest insects. G. Robertson, T. Barrett (Eds.). (2020) Implications of Forest Disturbance Processes for Sustainability in the Western US. PNW-GTR-XX. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, OR.

<sup>4</sup> Coleman, T.W. et al. 2023. Evaluating a decade (2011-2020) of integrated forest pest management in the United States. *Journal of Integrated Pest Management* 14(1). <https://academic.oup.com/jipm/article/14/1/23/7317488>

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frameworks for invasive pests and minimal federal investment in forest pest management programs, ultimately reducing the impact of programs that are designed to mitigate the economic impact of forest pests. The USDA Forest Health Management program provides the needed leadership and national coordination required to mitigate the economic burden of forest pests, but the success of their efforts is contingent upon a renewed national investment in forest health protection and insect pest management. **To support these important functions, ESA requests that the subcommittee provide no less than \$100 million for Forest Health Management.**

The National Invasive Species Council (NISC) plays a critical role in coordinating policy, communication, and technology application to address invasive species detection and response across 16 federal agencies. NISC serves a vital function since the impacts of invasive species are felt across sectors (agriculture, environmental protection, public health). According to the NISC, invasive species impose substantial costs on society, leading to an estimated \$120 billion in environmental damages and losses annually in the United States. Invasive insects have directly impacted native insect populations and entire ecosystems through predation, plant consumption, and disease transmission. For example, emerald ash borer (EAB, *Agrilus planipennis*) is an exotic beetle discovered in Michigan in 2002. Since its discovery, EAB has been detected in 36 states, Washington, D.C. and five Canadian provinces. It has killed hundreds of millions of ash trees in North America and cost cities, property owners, forest products industries and many other stakeholders hundreds of millions of dollars.<sup>5</sup> Preventing establishment of invasive species like EAB requires early detection and rapid response. Improving these efforts requires standard means of inspection and tracking and new technologies. NISC has responded by developing guidelines for decision makers that improve access to and analysis of invasive species information.<sup>6</sup> Such methods enable effective communication and aid in early detection of invasive species and rapid response, saving billions of dollars' worth of crops, safeguarding ecosystems, and preventing the destruction of property. There are many other examples of NISC success addressing invasive species.<sup>7</sup> **ESA requests that the Committee provide the DOI funds to support NISC at no less than \$2 million.**

*ESA, headquartered in Annapolis, Maryland, is the largest organization in the world serving the professional and scientific needs of entomologists and individuals in related disciplines. Founded in 1889, ESA has more than 7,000 members affiliated with educational institutions, health agencies, private industry, and government. Members are researchers, teachers, extension service personnel, administrators, marketing representatives, research technicians, consultants, students, pest management professionals, and hobbyists. Thank you for the opportunity to offer the Entomological Society of America's support for programs at the National Invasive Species Council, Forest Service and EPA programs.*

<sup>5</sup> Emerald Ash Borer Information Network <http://www.emeraldashborer.info/index.php>. Accessed April 19, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> *Enabling Decisions that Make a Difference: Guidance for Improving Access to and Analysis of Invasive Species Information* 2018. [https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/isim\\_guidance.pdf](https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/isim_guidance.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Holland, J.S., J.R. Kirkey, and J.K. Reaser. 2018. *Protecting What Matters: Stories of Success*. National Invasive Species Council Secretariat. 2018.

[https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/protecting\\_what\\_matters\\_stories\\_of\\_success.pdf](https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/protecting_what_matters_stories_of_success.pdf).

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**Testimony of Elizabeth Biser, Secretary,  
North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality,  
and President, Environmental Council of the States,  
to the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, & Related Agencies  
Addressing the FY25 Budget Request for the  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
May 10, 2024**

The Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) – the national nonprofit, nonpartisan association of state and territorial environmental agency leaders – appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony on the Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) President’s budget request for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). ECOS requests: \$671M for three specific Categorical Grant programs to help counter stagnant funding to the states for carrying out federal delegated programs over the last two decades; \$3.25B each – full appropriations – for the Clean Water (CW) and Drinking Water (DW) State Revolving Funds (SRFs); and robust support for addressing per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and the circular economy.

**Building State Capacity**

Federal infrastructure funding and regulatory program support for states – the primary implementers and enforcers of the nation’s environmental laws – is critically needed for states to maintain robust, legally defensible programs.

Congress has established in the nation’s three key environmental statutes — the Clean Water Act (CWA), the Clean Air Act (CAA), and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) Subtitle C — its intent for states to have primary responsibility and rights to prevent, reduce, eliminate, and control water, air, and hazardous waste pollution through the management of permit and enforcement programs. In assuming delegation, primacy, and authorization for federal programs, states have made a commitment to match required federal funding through approaches including seeking fees from the regulated community. However, states have been forced to seek funding to significantly overmatch costs to implement federal programs. Federal support has eroded in the past two decades, whereas inflation has soared. A November 2023 [report](#) of the Association of State and Territorial Solid Waste Management noted, for example, that “STAG [State and Tribal Assistance Grants] funding fell \$63[M] short of the total cost to run the program in FY[22].” The \$63M difference was covered by “overmatch” by states, with states actually matching 48% of the grant funding, well beyond the 25% state match required. In FY24 enacted funding, the STAG grant supporting hazardous waste programs was reduced \$3.5M to \$101.5M, with \$5M directed to support post-consumer materials management or recycling facilities – further reducing funds for authorized state implementation of federal hazardous waste programs to their lowest levels since before 2010 while new state program requirements are being added.

Failure to increase Categorical Grant funding to keep up with growing regulatory and permitting responsibilities has a material impact on a state and territory's ability to deliver permits in an effective and efficient manner. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provided funding to support communities and economic growth with transportation, water, and other infrastructure projects, yet these projects depend upon state environmental agencies to carry out permitting requirements. State environmental agencies are struggling to keep pace with increased permitting demands with limited staff.

At an April 2024 [National Governors Association-ECOS Congressional Briefing](#) on environmental protection, a state agency environmental director noted, "Finding and keeping knowledgeable staff is a real challenge, and... as long as staff see that the funding isn't necessarily stable, that's going to be a factor for them in terms of whether they stay at a state agency versus looking around to other opportunities.... State and local agencies really are the frontline for implementing the federal clean air programs... it's really a challenge to keep... staff that are very knowledgeable in those areas." Other states have reported pulling staff away from permitting activities to meet deadlines for CAA State Implementation Plans or single projects that require multiple permit writers. Federal funding is critical to consistently support the state capacity required to implement and enforce these federally delegated programs. Many agencies are concerned about becoming a bottleneck in infrastructure and economic development projects because of the difficulties in competing for and retaining a specialized environmental permitting and related workforce.

To ensure states are able to support effective programs that respond to new regulatory requirements, maintain vibrant communities, and act as co-regulators with our federal partners, ECOS asks Congress to:

- Provide **\$271.9M** in combined funding through the STAG account of EPA to support state implementation of CAA Sections 103, 105, and 106 for state and local air quality management;
- Provide **\$275.1M** in funding through the STAG account of EPA to support state implementation of CWA Section 106 actions for water pollution control; and
- Provide **\$124M** in funding through the STAG account of EPA to support state implementation of Section 3011 of RCRA for hazardous waste management, with any funding for implementation of a federal permit program for coal combustion residuals in nonparticipating states, as authorized under section 4005(d)(2)(B) of the Solid Waste Disposal Act (42 U.S.C. 6945(d)(2)(B)), or to provide technical assistance to states establishing their own permitting program under section 4005(d) of the Solid Waste Disposal Act (42 U.S.C. 6945(d)) in addition to the amount for state programs.

#### **State Revolving Funds**

States ask the Committee on Appropriations to protect the integrity of the state-run and federally financed CW and DW SRFs, which affects our states' and territories' capacity to

carry out federal drinking water standards – including the recently adopted EPA PFAS standards – along with properly managing SRF programs to make new loans from these perpetual revolving funds. ECOS requests fully authorized FY25 funding of the CW and DW SRFs at \$3.25B each.

According to the Council of Infrastructure Financing Authorities, the subsidized loans offered by SRFs nationwide to build CW and DW infrastructure may result in as much as 75% in interest payment savings for communities. In 2022, the average interest rate was 1.25%, compared to market rates that exceeded 3% and are among the highest interest rates in decades. Lower interest rates result in more affordable water rates, a more favorable platform for business development, and cleaner water.

With the enactment of the 2022 IIJA, investments directed to the CW and DW SRFs were seen as transformative. Beginning in FY22, Congress appropriated funding for Community Project Funding/Congressionally Directed Spending (CPF/CDS) projects from SRF capitalization monies – now approximately half of the SRF appropriations – without a requirement for these projects to be included on a publicly vetted state Intended Use Plan (IUP). CPF/CDS erodes the corpus of the SRFs while designated funding waits for the specified community to apply. Forty-seven states and all five territories saw cuts to net water infrastructure funding in at least one of the last three fiscal years regardless of whether CPF/CDS projects were received.

A July 2023 Congressional Research Service report, The Role of Earmarks in CWSRF and DWSRF Appropriations in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, considered the impact of CPF on the SRFs in FY22 and FY23, including IIJA funding. Five states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and two territories did not receive CPF in these two years, but these and all states and territories saw across-the-board capitalization cuts. CRS found, “The states, territories, and the tribes that received no earmarks for clean water infrastructure projects received approximately 13% less in clean water infrastructure funding *after* (emphasis added) considering the FY[22] IIJA supplemental appropriation for the CWSRF general program. For drinking water infrastructure funding, the states, territories, and tribes that received no earmarks received approximately 19% less in available drinking water infrastructure funding after considering the FY[23] IIJA supplemental appropriations for the DWSRF general program.” IIJA does not cover the gap created by CPF/CDS for all states and territories, makes planning for annual SRF management more challenging, and is fiscally unsound over the long term once IIJA funding reaches its limit. We request that Congress maintain the corpus of the SRFs, and separately fund CPF/CDS projects.

In FY25, state and territorial SRF managers must also meet the increased required IIJA match of 20% (from 10% the first three years) and respond to increased EPA SRF oversight on climate resiliency and equity, increased project costs due to the scarcity of construction contractors, and competition for qualified engineers.

**Funding and Managing PFAS Responsibilities**

PFAS treatment, disposal, and destruction need continued advancements to enable water systems to fully comply with the National Primary Drinking Water Regulations (NPDWR), and to ensure PFAS is not moved across media, including to air. States encourage funding to EPA to continue to establish science-based recommendations related to treatment technologies, to research and approve methods for total destruction, and to continue to assist states with monitoring – all with a greater sense of urgency and federal resources. States need support from EPA to understand and successfully implement the updated interim guidance on destruction and disposal.

In addition, while the NPDWR rule applies only to public water systems, many Americans are on private wells and also experience challenges with PFAS contamination, but do not receive funding assistance under the SRFs. Congress should consider providing additional financial and technical support for all public water systems and communities before and after reaching the five-year implementation deadline. We also encourage Congress to consider funding to assist state agencies in providing support to Americans who rely on private wells that are contaminated with PFAS. States need significantly more funding for state capacity building and infrastructure, including for assessments and the certification of laboratories, to achieve compliance with PFAS-related regulations.

**Accelerating the Circular Economy**

States and territories agree that sustainable materials management is a key strategy to help reduce carbon pollution and other environmental stressors, increase equity and community resilience, and grow the circular economy. Funding for solid waste and recycling infrastructure supports market-based and customized solutions in each state to maximize landfill diversion and ensure materials continue to have productive economic use.

**Advancing Innovation and Productivity**

Finally, states and territories alongside EPA and tribes benefit when we share information and learn from each other and from our colleagues in the public and private sectors. Congressional funding for state capacity building funds these supportive activities, such as through E-Enterprise for the Environment, to modernize the business of environmental protection through permitting efficiencies, improved data exchange, and other advancements.

Thank you for your consideration of these funding requests.

**TESTIMONY OF HOWARD LEARNER  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY CENTER  
IN SUPPORT OF THE GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE  
TO THE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES  
APRIL 10, 2024 – WASHINGTON D.C.**

I am Howard Learner, Executive Director of the Environmental Law & Policy Center (ELPC), the Midwest's leading environmental legal advocacy and sustainability innovation organization. ELPC's staff works throughout the Great Lakes states, in Washington D.C., and with Canada to protect the Great Lakes. Since 2008, ELPC has engaged with policymakers and partners to build, effectively implement, and expand the successful Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI).

Thank you, Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and all members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of full funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative for FY 2025 at \$450 million as provided in the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act of 2019 (signed into law on January 5, 2021). GLRI funds have been effectively deployed to protect safe clean drinking water supplies, clean up toxic sites, protect wetlands and shorelines, hold off invasive species from entering the Great Lakes, and safeguard aquatic resources. Restoring the Great Lakes creates substantial environmental, public health, and recreational benefits, while fostering economic growth. GLRI is a program that has worked very well and has demonstrated consistent successes.

The Great Lakes are a global gem. They contain 21% of the planet's surface fresh water supply, and 42 million people rely on the Great Lakes for safe drinking water. They provide a rich aquatic habitat for many species. They support a \$7 billion annual fishing industry, and Great Lakes recreation draws millions of tourists who boost the economies of shoreline communities. In short, the Great Lakes are where many millions of people live, work, and play.

ELPC strongly supported reauthorization of the GLRI and the ramp up of funding to \$475 million in 2026, matching the funding the program received in its initial year. **We request that the Committee fully fund the GLRI program with at least the authorized \$450 million for FY 2025 and, hopefully, consider a higher amount.**

I'll make two points in support of fully funding the GLRI:

**First**, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is vitally important, and it is successful. This is a model federal program providing significant environmental and economic benefits, and it is working well.

**Second**, the challenges to the Great Lakes from increases in harmful algal blooms and climate change merit full funding of at least the authorized \$450 million for FY 2025 and, again, the program could benefit from an even higher amount.

**1. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is vitally important and successful. This is a model federal program providing important benefits, and it is working well with strong bipartisan federal, state, and local support.**

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has been a breakthrough program, injecting critical funding and structure that had been missing in order to restore the lakes. Over the past 14 years, the GLRI has achieved strong results with sustained funding. As the third GLRI Action Plan states: “the GLRI has been a catalyst for unprecedented federal agency coordination, which has, in turn, produced unprecedented results.” The program supports shoreline and wetlands protection projects, keeping out invasive species, and reducing harmful algal blooms. Congress’ recognition of the effectiveness of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is reflected in the strong bipartisan support of fully funding this program with increasing funding.

The GLRI funds and supports thousands of projects across the Great Lakes states to:

- Improve water quality for safe drinking water supplies, fisheries, and aquatic habitats.
- Protect shorelines and restore wetlands.
- Protect and restore native habitats and species.
- Help prevent and control invasive species.
- Clean up toxic sediments on lake bottoms.
- Reduce agricultural and other nutrient pollution that causes harmful algal blooms.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative creates an effective system of coordination among federal agencies, state entities, and local partners to achieve important outcomes to make a meaningful difference for the Great Lakes. Since its inception, the program has achieved strong results with sustained funding.

There are countless examples of GLRI projects that deliver multiple benefits to the Great Lakes, from watershed and natural area restoration projects to addressing and ultimately delisting Areas of Concern. Below are three examples of projects from smaller more community-based work to major projects to clean up waterways. The [Healing Our Waters Coalition](#) provides additional examples of projects across the Great Lakes region.

- **Powderhorn Prairie and Marsh Nature Preserve on Chicago’s Southeast Side:** This project next to the Calumet Area of Concern restored 192 acres of wetland habitat, 630 linear feet of stream habitat and 45 acres of native vegetation, in an area burdened by industrial pollution and flooding. This project benefits the community with decreased flooding and reconnected Powderhorn Lake with Wolf Lake and Lake Michigan, allowing passage for native fish and wildlife.
- **Gorge Dam Removal, Cuyahoga River:** This project will remove 100 years of accumulated dangerous sediment (nearly 900,000 cubic yards) that sits behind the Gorge Dam to allow for its removal. This project will improve water quality in the Cuyahoga River and bring recreational opportunities and economic development. The four local partners include the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, the city of Akron, FirstEnergy, and the Ohio EPA.

- **Milwaukee Waterways Clean Up**: This multi-year project will address a century of pollution entering the Milwaukee River, the Menomonee River, and Milwaukee’s Inner Harbor creating an “area of concern.” This project will result in cleaner water, safer fish, and access to recreation. The five local partners on the project include the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, We Energies, the city of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County Parks.

GLRI projects bring together a broad array of partners to achieve the program’s goals and create jobs. The GLRI Action Plan III details work to address Areas of Concern (AOC). As of October 2023, six AOCs have been delisted including the Ashtabula River in Ohio, Lower Menominee River in Wisconsin, Presque Isle Bay in Pennsylvania, and Deer Lake and White Lake in Michigan and work toward delisting has been completed in ten areas. Significant work remains to be done, however, to fully address Areas of Concern across the Great Lakes basin.

GLRI has broad regional economic benefits. A University of Michigan study showed that every federal dollar spent on GLRI projects between 2010 and 2016 will produce \$3.35 in additional economic activity in the Great Lakes region through 2036.

**2. The challenges to the Great Lakes from fluctuating lake levels and increases in harmful algal blooms and climate change merit full funding of at least the authorized \$450 million for FY 2025, and we urge Congress to consider an even higher amount.**

While recognizing the GLRI’s success, the growing threats from climate change and recurring severe algal outbreaks are getting worse.

ELPC commissioned 18 leading Midwestern and Canadian university and research center scientists to write the state-of-the-science report, *An Assessment of the Impacts of Climate Change on the Great Lakes*, which we released in 2019, along with recommended policy solutions. The scientists concluded that climate change is causing significant and far-reaching impacts on the Great Lakes region, including increasingly extreme water level fluctuations, which wreak havoc on communities, homes, beaches, businesses, and the overall shoreline’s built environment. Annual precipitation in the region has increased at a higher percentage than in the rest of the country, and more precipitation is coming in unusually large events, such as derechos and intense storms. Lake Michigan had record-high water levels in 2021 – especially when whipped by strong winds and large waves, this caused extensive flooding that damaged the shoreline and infrastructure.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), December 2023 through February 2024 was the warmest such winter time period on record. NOAA reports that “[t]here is a 45% chance that 2024 will be the warmest year in NOAA’s 175-year record and a 99% chance it will rank in the top five.” Climate change impacts the Great Lakes region.

ELPC issued a report in June 2022 focused on the threats to people, communities, and businesses from high Lake Michigan water and wave levels, *Rising Waters: Climate Change Impacts and Toxic Risks to Lake Michigan’s Shoreline Communities*. Using NOAA’s Enhanced Digital Elevation Model data, this report visualizes the extent and severity of inundation at 12 hot spots along Lake Michigan’s shoreline and surrounding areas due to extreme weather events of the scale

expected in the near future. This report points to opportunities for the GLRI and other programs to invest in projects that will enhance coastal protection, resilience, and flood control.

Climate change impacts on the Great Lakes also exacerbate the growing problem of agricultural pollution – mostly fertilizers and animal waste – that is the principal cause of severe recurring toxic algae outbreaks in western Lake Erie and other Great Lakes areas like Green Bay. The Ohio EPA concluded that agricultural pollution accounts for about 90% of the phosphorus flowing into western Lake Erie.

The current GLRI Action Plan provides a detailed look at strategies to reduce this harmful agricultural pollution, noting that GLRI projects have kept more than one million pounds of phosphorus out of the Great Lakes. Nutrient pollution threats to the Great Lakes region continue, and are amplified by changing rainfall patterns. Industrial-scale animal production facilities, often called concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) produce enormous volumes of waste, including those in the Maumee River basin flowing into Lake Erie. GLRI funds could be used to support wetlands restoration to more effectively capture phosphorus, and water testing and monitoring to identify effective approaches to reducing agricultural pollution. A more robust GLRI will continue to be an important source of solutions for this urgent problem.

In conclusion, the Environmental Law & Policy Center and I commend the House Appropriations Committee and this Subcommittee's strong support for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative with each year's budget. GLRI is a successful program and a model for federal, state, and local cooperation. We urge the committee to fully fund the program with at least the authorized \$450 million for FY 2025 and, also, to consider additional funding. In addition to this funding request, the Environmental Law & Policy Center is pleased to support H.R. 7257, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act of 2024 to extend the program through FY 2031.

**Environmental Working Group (EWG) – Gianfranco Cesareo, Stable Law Fellow**

**Testimony prepared for the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies regarding funding for the Environmental Protection Agency to develop and implement Effluent Limitation Guidelines for PFAS industrial discharges**

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) respectfully requests no less than \$20 million in dedicated funding to the Environmental Programs and Management, Clean Water Program within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for the development and implementation of Effluent Limitation Guidelines (ELGs) for PFAS industrial discharges under the Clean Water Act.

PFAS are known as “forever chemicals” because they build up inside the human body and do not break down in the environment.<sup>1</sup> These chemicals are found in the blood of 98 percent of Americans,<sup>2</sup> and are linked to health harms including cancer,<sup>3</sup> developmental and reproductive harm,<sup>4</sup> and damage to the immune system.<sup>5</sup>

EWG has estimated that nearly 30,000 companies could be discharging PFAS into the nation’s water supply.<sup>6</sup> Industrial discharges of PFAS have caused significant contamination in places

<sup>1</sup> *What are PFAS Chemicals?*, ENV’Tl WORKING GROUP, <https://www.ewg.org/what-are-pfas-chemicals> (last visited May 2, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Antonia M. Calafat et al., *Legacy and Alternative Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances in the U.S. General Population: Paired Serum-Urine Data from the 2013–2014 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey*, 131 ENV’T INT’L 105048 (2019).

<sup>3</sup> *Study: PFAS Act Similar to Known Cancer-Causing Chemicals*, ENV’Tl WORKING GROUP (Mar. 4, 2020), <https://www.ewg.org/news-insights/news-release/study-pfas-act-similar-known-cancer-causing-chemicals>.

<sup>4</sup> *PFAS and Developmental and Reproductive Toxicity: An EWG Fact Sheet*, ENV’Tl WORKING GROUP (Sept. 2019), [https://www.ewg.org/sites/default/files/u352/EWG\\_PFAS\\_Toxicity\\_C02.pdf?\\_ga=2.261156366.226128373.1596463302-](https://www.ewg.org/sites/default/files/u352/EWG_PFAS_Toxicity_C02.pdf?_ga=2.261156366.226128373.1596463302-1166909982.1546543464&_gac=1.186103003.1594309408.Cj0KCOjwgJv4BRCrARIsAB17JI76ePJXIJNzc67zHlqjxFXy10Ntg92CSH4GngKg_giy_vA8DJtkkCgaAuCPEALw_wcB&_gl=1*_gat5nn*_gcl_aw*_R0NMLjE1OTQzMDk0MDguO2owS0NRandnSnY0QIJdckFSSXNBQjE3Skk3NmVQSIhsSk56YzY3ekhscWp4RlhZMTBodGc5MkNTSDRHbmdLZ19nanlfdkE4REp0a2tDZ2FBdUNQRUFMd193Y0I)

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<sup>5</sup> Tasha Stoiber, *PFAS Chemicals Harm the Immune System, Decrease Response to Vaccines*, *New EWG Review Finds*, ENV’Tl WORKING GROUP (June 21, 2019), <https://www.ewg.org/news-insights/news/pfas-chemicals-harm-immune-system-decrease-response-vaccines-new-ewg-review>.

<sup>6</sup> *Twelvefold Increase in Suspected Industrial Dischargers of ‘Forever Chemicals’*, Env’tl Working Group

like North Carolina's Cape Fear River Basin;<sup>7</sup> Parkersburg, West Virginia;<sup>8</sup> and Hoosick Falls, New York.<sup>9</sup>

Uncontrolled industrial discharges of PFAS pose a major threat to drinking water supplies across the country. ELGs would regulate industrial polluters, requiring them to adopt technology that would result in the greatest PFAS pollution reductions that are economically achievable in their respective industries, limiting the amount of PFAS that can be present in dischargers' wastewater.

Recognizing the importance of regulating industrial polluters in addressing the PFAS contamination crisis, the EPA's 2021 to 2024 PFAS Strategic Roadmap includes the potential development of ELGs for nine industrial categories.<sup>10</sup> The Roadmap stated a goal of significant progress by the end of 2024, including proposed rules establishing ELGs for two industrial categories by the summer of 2023 and 2024 respectively.<sup>11</sup> The EPA has missed its deadline for developing a proposed rule for its first ELG for PFAS in part due to limited resources.

Congress has expressed its intent that the EPA work expeditiously to establish ELGs for PFAS discharges from nine industrial categories, or what would likely amount to over 7,800 suspected PFAS dischargers.<sup>12</sup> Twice in 2021, the House of Representatives has passed legislation that would require the EPA to issue ELGs for all nine categories within four years.<sup>13</sup>

The development of ELGs for PFAS are particularly important in light of the EPA's historic action in April establishing a national drinking water standard for PFAS pollution.<sup>14</sup> By limiting

<sup>7</sup> Lewis Kendall, *A Town's Water is Contaminated with 'Forever Chemicals' – How Did it Get This Bad?*, THE GUARDIAN (Apr. 2, 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/apr/02/pfas-testing-forever-chemicals-pittsboro-north-carolina>.

<sup>8</sup> Mariah Blake, *Welcome to Beautiful Parkersburg, West Virginia: Home to One of the Most Brazen, Deadly Corporate Gambits in U.S. History*, HUFF POST (Aug. 27, 2015), <https://highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/welcome-to-beautiful-parkersburg/>.

<sup>9</sup> *Hoosick Falls Area: Region 4 – Environmental Remediation Project Information*, N.Y. DEPT. ENV'TL CONSERVATION, <https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/site-cleanup/regional-remediation-project-information/region-4/hoosick-falls-area> (last visited May 3, 2024).

<sup>10</sup> EPA, PFAS STRATEGIC ROADMAP: EPA'S COMMITMENT TO ACTION 2021–2024 13–14 (Oct. 2021).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> Clean Water Standards for PFAS Act of 2024, H.R. 8076, 118th Cong. (2024); Jared Hayes, *EPA Plan to Regulate Industry 'Forever Chemical' Discharges Omits Thousands of Potential Polluters*, ENV'TL WORKING GROUP (Sept. 30, 2021), <https://www.ewg.org/news-insights/news/2021/09/epa-plan-regulate-industry-forever-chemical-discharges-omits-thousands>.

<sup>13</sup> PFAS Action Act of 2021, H.R. 2467, 117th Cong. 2021; Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, H.R. 3684, 117th Cong. § 12023 (2021); *see also* Melanie Benesh, *EPA's Plan to Regulate Industry 'Forever Chemicals' Discharges Falls Short*, ENV'TL WORKING GROUP (Sept. 17, 2021), <https://www.ewg.org/news-insights/news/2021/09/epas-plan-regulate-industry-forever-chemicals-discharges-falls-short>.

<sup>14</sup> *Biden-Harris Administration Finalizes First-Ever National Drinking Water Standard to Protect 100M People from PFAS Pollution*, EPA (Apr. 10, 2024), <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/biden-harris-administration-finalizes-first-ever-national-drinking-water->

the amount of PFAS that can be present in their wastewater, these rules will ensure that polluters pay to clean up PFAS pollution, rather than passing the cost along to water utilities and taxpayers.

The requested \$20 million dollars in dedicated funding to support the development of ELGs would allow the EPA to hire additional full-time employees. The funding would allow the Agency to devote increased resources and personnel to data collection and conducting the studies necessary to inform these rulemakings.

The funding in this request would expedite the process of developing ELGs for industrial discharges of PFAS, and in turn better protect communities living downstream from industrial dischargers. We urge Congress to recognize the importance of protecting these communities and provide the funding required to turn off the tap on PFAS pollution at the source.

**Testimony Bill Imbergamo, Executive Director, Federal Forest Resource Coalition to the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies: Re: FY 2025 U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Budgets**

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Federal Forest Resource Coalition, representing purchasers of Federal timber in 38 states, with over 650 member companies and affiliated associations, collectively representing over 300,000 employees.

The Forest Service has received substantial additional funds in recent spending measures enacted since 2021. Funding for hazardous fuels reduction remains at historic highs. It is critical that the Committee continue to support the base budget for Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, so that forest management across the National Forest System increases to meet the needs of the American people.

We make the following specific programmatic recommendations for Fiscal Year 2025. These investments are essential to meeting our nation's wildfire and forest health crisis; supporting critical forest sector infrastructure, workforce, and associated supply chains; and meeting President Biden's Buy American standards that call for more American-grown and manufactured wood products:

- Increase funding for the **National Forest timber program** by 25 percent over the omnibus spending level, with an explicit goal of a 4.2 Billion Board Foot (BBF) timber sale program in FY 2025. The sale program should be geared towards sustaining and creating local jobs and increasing the pace of forest restoration; National Forest timber must be processed domestically, so increased timber sales generate needed jobs in economically distressed rural counties.
- Increase funding for **Capital Improvement and Maintenance-Roads**. We recommend a 25 percent increase for this program, with a focus on efforts to repair and restore road access in areas damaged by wildfires, hurricanes, and other natural disasters.
- Maintain strong funding for **Wildland Hazardous Fuels Reduction**.

These increases can be funded by redirecting lower priority spending enacted in recent years. We urge Congress to enact an FY 2025 spending bill in a timely manner to prevent unnecessary delays in offering timber sales and implementation of other critical forest management activities.

**Our Members Rely on Predictable and Growing Supplies of Timber:** Our member companies make significant investments in logging capacity and mill infrastructure. Stagnant or declining timber outputs from the National Forests has led directly to mill closures in several States. Forest Service timber volume sold has declined since 2019, including during periods of robust demand. Erratic and late arriving appropriations and obstructionist litigation make it difficult to sustain the investments needed for our industry to remain competitive.

Timber sale volume has decreased from some Forest Service regions despite consistently strong appropriations and an influx of funding which supports the use of harvest to reduce hazardous fuels. Congress must demand the Forest Service use streamlined authorities adopted since 2014

to reduce costs and retain viable mill and logging infrastructure, including the Insect & Disease and Fuels Reduction CE's adopted in recent Farm Bills, and the Fuel Break CE, and the Emergency Action authority adopted in the 2021 Infrastructure Bill.

**The Need for Management:** The Forest Service 10-Year Wildfire Strategy accurately described a forest health and wildfire *crisis* on the National Forest System and a \$50 Billion effort to reverse it. More than 80 million acres of National Forest land is in need active management, with large scale insect and drought mortality in the Rockies, the Northwest, and California. In the East, most National Forests are falling well short of forest plan goals for young forests. The current pace and scale of management is insufficient to reduce fire danger, create needed wildlife habitat, or support local economies. The fires of 2020 and 2021, coupled with recent reduction in timber sales, are significant threats to forest health and the viability of the communities that rely on them.

Years of Forest Service research and experience show that managed forests are more resilient; less susceptible to catastrophic wildfires and are more able to survive drought. A recent study by the Forest Service showed that fire, drought, and insects were the primary threats mature forests in California, and the Forest Service's preliminary threat assessment regarding older forests show that most loss of older forests has been due to fire, insects, and disease. As the 10-Year Strategy notes, current efforts to treat more acres have been wholly insufficient to reverse the negative trends we've seen since at least 2020.

The Forest Service faces at least a \$5.3 Billion road maintenance backlog, even after Congress made mandatory funding available through the Great American Outdoors Act. The CI&M Roads line item remains significantly below the FY 2009 level, when adjusted for inflation. These concerns were urgent prior to the 2020 and 2021 Fire Seasons; now, they are a crisis. Loss of road access threatens resource management; limits access for firefighters and other first responders and reduces recreational access. Congress should prioritize maintenance of existing roads over any efforts to expand National Forests ownership.

These investments will create jobs in hard-pressed rural communities while improving wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, public safety, and resource management. Our Federal forests can produce climate resilience, carbon sequestration, improved wildlife habitat, needed wood and paper products, and good rural jobs, but they can only do so if decades of neglect and passive management come to an end.

**Increasing the Pace and Scale of Restoration Through Shared Stewardship:** Current forest plans call for about 6 Billion Board Feet of harvest annually, enough to substantially increase the number of acres treated for hazardous fuels, watershed protection, and wildlife habitat each year. Congress has provided numerous new authorities to achieve these ends over the last two decades.

The current level of management is insufficient to address pressing forest health problems or meet the needs of the forest products infrastructure remaining near our National Forests. Congress should direct the Forest Service to focus on meeting forest plan ASQ's and urge them to utilize expedited authorities to meet this goal.

The Forest Service should be directed to use commercial timber receipts to replenish Forest Roads Trust funds, in addition to using Stewardship Contracting retained receipts for road repair. The Forest Service should be directed to maximize the use of expanded Knutsen-Vandenberg authority beyond the sale area. Congress should also demand a full accounting of how the agency is implementing the billions of dollars provided by the IJA and IRA.

The Committee should direct the Forest Service to aggressively utilize streamlined authorities, (including the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, Good Neighbor Authority, and Categorical Exclusions adopted by Congress in 2014, 2018, and 2021, as well as the fuel break CE and Emergency Actions authority adopted in IJA) to increase the number of acres treated, restore forest health, and supply timber to local economies.

We strongly urge Congress to enact binding legislative language directing the Forest Service to track forest products output using only commercial products such as sawlogs, pulpwood, and commercial biomass, not personal use firewood; and to focus forest management projects on lands designated in Forest Plans as suitable for timber production.

Stepping up management will address pressing forest health concerns while bolstering employment in economically distressed rural communities and producing timber to meet the needs of the American public. Investing in the Forest Service timber program is an effective job creator, generating 16.5 new direct and indirect jobs per million board feet harvested.

**BLM Forest Management:** BLM's Public Domain forestry program has numerous benefits, reducing hazardous fuels, making forests more resilient to drought and climate change, and providing timber supplies for local economies. FFRC strongly supports funding this program at no less than \$12.1 million dollars compared to the President's FY 2025 Request level of \$11.1 million. We also urge the Committee to provide a long-term extension of the BLM's forest health and recovery account, an additional source of funding for reforestation and restoration activities. The current extension runs through September 30, 2024.

FFRC's members in Oregon rely on timber harvests from BLM's Oregon & California (O&C) Grant lands in Western Oregon, which have a statutory mandate for sustained-yield timber production under the O&C Act. The O&C Lands grow an estimated 1.2 billion board feet of timber per year, but recent low harvest levels have harmed local communities and leave these lands badly overstocked and at-risk of catastrophic fire.

Congress provided the BLM \$120.5 million in FY 2023 and \$115.5 in FY 2024 for the O&C line item. The BLM offered and sold 260 MMBF of timber in FY 2023, which was a reduction from the FY 2022 sale level of 274 MMBF. We understand that the BLM is planning to offer just 212 MMBF in FY 2024 – a further reduction that represents a significant departure of the harvest levels expected from the BLM's current RMPs. These volume reductions also ignore the need for increased timber harvest from commercial thinning activities on fire-prone BLM forests in southwest Oregon as required by the 2016 RMPs.

We urge the Committee to provide funding and policy direction for the BLM to offer and sell no less than 278 MMBF in FY 2024, including volume from thinning in fire-prone forests. 278

MMBF is the level of harvest directed by the BLM's current RMPs. These increased timber outputs sustain thousands of good jobs in western Oregon and produce millions of dollars in timber revenues for counties in western Oregon to fund critical public services.

**Alaska:** The 2016 Tongass Forest Plan amendment planned a transition from old growth harvest to a young growth harvest over 15 years, based on models predicting growth rates in currently unmerchantable timber stands. Now, the Forest Service has issued a directive to immediately cease old growth harvest, before the transition to young growth is feasible, creating an immediate gap in harvest which would decimate what remains of the industry in Southeast Alaska.

Put simply, the Forest Service cannot both implement the legally binding 2016 Forest Plan and the directive to cease old growth sales. The agency must follow the plan – or exchange acres with different land management agencies with a clearer timber mandate – if a timber industry is to survive. Congress should direct the Forest Service to offer a viable transition that can support the remaining wood using industries in SE Alaska.

We urge the Committee to continue language directing the Forest Service to offer viable timber sales to sustain the forest industry in SE Alaska, and to make permanent the Red Cedar language found in Interior bills for more than a decade to ensure the agency does not offer deficit sales.

**Conclusion:** Much more forest management work needs to be done on the National Forests to help mitigate fire hazards, create habitat, and increase employment in hard pressed rural areas. Congress should prioritize the management of these American resources before it is too late. We urge you to enact a 2025 bill on a timely basis that makes forest management job one for the Forest Service.



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**Testimony on Behalf of the Federation of State Humanities Councils**

*Prepared for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies by Phoebe Stein, President, Federation of State Humanities Councils, Addressing the National Endowment for the Humanities, May 10, 2024*

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and members of the subcommittee, my name is Phoebe Stein and I am the President of the Federation of State Humanities Councils (Federation), the membership organization of the 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. The state and jurisdictional humanities councils were authorized in the founding legislation for the National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities and are funded, in part, through the Federal/State Partnership (F/SP) line in the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) budget. The councils are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, with voluntary boards and they leverage their NEH funding to raise tens of millions of dollars to invest in local projects and grassroots organizations. While councils' funding comes from a variety of sources, NEH support is critical, especially for on-going operations.

It is important to remember that the state councils are the local face of the public humanities. They are long-standing institutions that understand the culture and the cultural organizations in their states. In fact, they partner with more than 6,500 local organizations annually across the country. Councils offer a rich variety of resources—all driven by community needs. Nearly all councils focus on grantmaking to local entities; others concentrate on developing and presenting free public programs; many do both. The F/SP line is the principal NEH investment in many states and is the most evenly distributed, direct, and consistent federal source of humanities funding within a state or jurisdiction.

The Federal/State Partnership (F/SP) funding, currently (FY 2024) at \$65 million, goes directly to the state councils by a distribution formula. The Federation is requesting a \$68 million appropriation for the F/SP in FY 2025. This would mean an increase of approximately \$50,000 per council (although individual state allocations would vary according to the formula). Funding has been flat for two years so the \$3 million increase requested would help compensate for inflation, allow councils to reach additional unserved and underserved areas, and address new and expanded needs and requests for services. Every council has far more requests for funding than it can accommodate. We also strongly support the request for funding of at least \$211 million for each of the NEH and the National Endowment for the Arts in FY 2025.

Each year, councils make thousands of grants to local cultural organizations — schools, libraries, museums, historical societies, preservation groups, other non-profit organizations — to develop and present programs, exhibits, lectures, and discussions free to their communities. Many councils conceive, create, and deliver their own programs. In 2023, councils made more than 3,700 grants to local entities and, as noted above, partnered with more than 6,500 local organizations.

These activities contribute to quality of life in communities, expand educational opportunities, enhance personal growth, strengthen community cohesion, help with community development and redevelopment plans, and support a variety of economic activities. Councils meet the needs of a multitude of interests and

constituencies in the states they serve and to offer a plethora of programs that are specifically designed for their states and communities. And, even though each state and territory are unique, there are common threads. In 2023, more than 90% of councils supported civic education in their communities; 85% of councils provided cultural resources to rural residents; 47% of councils provided programs for veterans, active military, and families; and 34% of councils provided programs focused on health and well-being outcomes.

Let me give you some details about specific programs and their contributions to your constituencies.

**Civic Education** For decades, the state and jurisdictional humanities councils have actively conducted or supported nonpartisan programs, resources, and events providing civic education in support of our democracy. In California, the Civics + Humanities grant program is supporting middle school efforts that include an understanding of public service, city governance, and the complexity of digital citizenship. In Montana, The Democracy Project is a non-partisan initiative led by teens and supported by local libraries, community partners, and Humanities Montana to empower teens to address community needs while learning about their role in a changing democracy. Now in its third year, The Democracy Project is implemented in libraries throughout Montana, including rural, frontier, and Indian Country communities.

**Understanding and Sharing Our History** Historical and cultural events, local, state, national and international, have been a mainstay of councils over the past half-century. A review of any council website will illustrate the breadth and scope of programming on historical topics. For example, the majority of councils have long participated in the annual National History Day Program which reaches far beyond a "day." The effort involves more than half a million students in grades 6-12 and tens of thousands of teachers annually in the student history contest which culminates in a week-long session for 3,000 winners. Students produce papers, exhibits, performances, documentaries and websites as part of their research and communications work. In 2023, the NEH granted additional funds to councils to support NHD activities, including supporting the recruitment of more teachers, schools, and judges statewide and encouraging projects that are part of new historical research into the dark past of Native American boarding schools.

Maine Humanities' Community History project is engaging focus groups in all 16 counties to determine local and regional histories of special interest, a prime example of the local focus of council programs in general. And, many councils have been planning for some years for the Semiquincentennial in 2026 when our nation will commemorate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and serve in leadership positions on their state and jurisdictional 250<sup>th</sup> commissions.

**Strengthening rural connections and cultural opportunities** Ninety-seven percent of the American landscape is rural, and rural areas impact many aspects of our lives: food supply, water and other natural resources, forest products, recreational activities and are home to millions of Americans. Voices and Votes is a traveling exhibition that brings the Smithsonian to rural communities, including dynamic features like historical photos, archival video, engaging multimedia interactives, games, and historical objects like campaign souvenirs and voter memorabilia. In 2023, the exhibit toured 24 rural communities in Arkansas, Kansas, Nebraska, and Tennessee.

North Carolina Reads is an award-winning statewide virtual book club that serves rural residents as well as urban ones.

Missouri Humanities' Small Town Showcase initiative celebrates the distinctiveness of rural towns, revealing the essence of Small Town America and emphasizing their significance. This program invests in these communities and highlights rural Missouri's contributions to the state's history and cultural heritage, showcasing how these communities have triumphed over challenges, pursued progress, and preserved their identity amidst an ever-changing landscape.

**Veterans** Councils support veterans and their families in a myriad of ways, including the collection of oral histories, the sharing of experiences, the examination of service as seen through literature, writing workshops encouraging the expression of and reflection on aspects of war and its aftermath, dealing with injuries and medical conditions, support for VA medical staff, and helping communities to understand their challenges. Humanities Texas supports veterans through their Veterans' Voices program, where participants come together in small groups to read aloud from classic and contemporary literary texts about war, military service, and the return to civilian life. After the readings, participants engage in facilitated conversations that explore how the texts relate to their own experience and allow for shared reflection on combat and civic responsibility.

**Healthcare and the Humanities** Councils have a long history of collaborating with the medical community and play a prominent role in efforts to better position those in the field to deliver their services as well as to help individuals and their families manage the many aspects of their illnesses. Since 1997, when Maine Humanities Council created and piloted "Literature & Medicine: Humanities at the Heart of Healthcare," the reading and discussion program for healthcare workers has been a hallmark effort for many councils, including Arizona, California, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Vermont. Councils have also targeted specific medical challenges, such as opioid addiction, with their programming.

**Serving Teachers & Students** Support for our nation's educators and students has never been more important. The Idaho Humanities Council and Humanities Texas, among others, continue teacher professional development institutes and workshops. Other councils, including the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, continues to support educators, students, and families with nationally-recognized literacy programs, such as "PRIME TIME, Inc." and other similar programs. National History Day, referenced earlier, focuses on students in grades 6-12.

**Serving Native and Indigenous Populations** The Minnesota Humanities Center has, for many years, actively reached and served Indigenous populations, educating Minnesotans about the history and culture of Indigenous people through the award-winning traveling exhibit, "Why Treaties Matter: Self Government in the Dakota and Ojibwe Nations," and the "Bdote Memory Map," a resource for teaching about the Dakota people's relationship to the people of Minnesota.

**Environmental Humanities** In 2023, 57% of councils provided their communities with resources related to the environment, using literature and history to make sense of the changing environmental concerns facing Americans. From hiking trails to canoe trips, water to forests, and sustainability to preservation, council programs address our sense of place and shared responsibility for the future of the planet. They help us contemplate wilderness and what it means, fire and the anxiety and loss it engenders, and the landscape's impact on how we relate to our communities.

The Idaho Humanities Council hosted its annual week-long summer teacher institute in July 2023, entitled "An Environment of Hope: Reimagining the Humanities in the 6-12 Classroom." The institute explored the

questions with Idaho 6-12 teachers, focused on why do people continue to pollute when we understand that such behavior contributes to environmental degradation, and exploring cultural texts—films, literature, music—to help us to react. The institute empowered teachers with knowledge, tools resources, and connections with teachers across the state in a variety of grades and disciplines. The institute also provided the teachers with the material and techniques to translate these complex topics into their classrooms across Idaho. A quote from an attendee of the institute: “That’s one of the best things about this institute—so many varied teachers with different backgrounds, but we find what makes us similar and what strengthens us is this bond so we can go back and teach better.”

**Youth** Youth programs have been integral to council activities over the decades. For example, Alaska’s “Ilakucaraq Project,” conducted in collaboration with the Alaska Native American Education Program, empowers youth to identify their heritage as a source of strength through personal reflections, positive self- and cultural identity formation, cross-cultural experiences, peer-to-peer learning, elder and culture-bearer teachings and art. National History Day is designed for 6-12 graders. Other programs impact youth, whether it be sessions at book festivals for literacy programs. Increasing collaborations with community colleges also support younger audiences.

Humanities Washington Prime Time Family and Preschool Reading programs extend beyond traditional library story times, inspiring families to read, discuss, and learn together. Conducted statewide at various locations, including libraries, schools, and museums, each 6-week Prime Time session models reading and discussion methods that families can readily embrace, fostering learning environments at home and equipping parents and children with enduring skills for lifelong learning.

**Community Connections** Maine Humanities connects communities with extraordinary speakers through its Maine Speaks Program, which supports individuals and organizations who want to bring people in their community together to learn from and talk with a speaker who will share their expertise and lived experience in engaging ways.

Nevada is one of many states that maintains an online encyclopedia of importance to residents, researchers, students, businesses, and visitors.

PA Humanities partners with communities to lead their own growth and change, bringing people together to shape their future through the power of stories, reflection, and relationships. “PA Heart & Soul” is a program using a unique community planning approach with storytelling and conversations to spark collective decision-making and action. This award-winning program is now in 13 towns, putting 6,000+ stories and other data into action to build community, thanks to NEH support and collaboration with state agencies like the PA Departments of Conservation & Natural Resources and Community & Economic Development, and nationally with Community Heart & Soul.

In this space, I described only a very few of the many activities underway in communities across the nation. Councils are proud of their work and their contributions. But we are far from meeting the needs and interests of the states and localities. We need additional resources, and we ask this subcommittee’s support for directing those additional resources to cities, towns and rural areas throughout the nation. We can easily double the 3,700 annual awards that we make with additional funding. Investments in the Federal/State Partnership are a direct investment in communities. In a complex, fast-paced and rapidly changing nation, much work remains to be done. Please support the F/SP at a level of at least \$68 million in FY 2025.

**Written Testimony of Jessica McDermott, Board Member Friends of Camas NWR in  
Support of Funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System FY25  
April 20, 2024**

Mr. Speaker and House Members, I am Jessica McDermott, Secretary and Board Member of The Friends of Camas National Wildlife Refuge in Hamer, Idaho. This year, our refuge is not requesting any appropriations directly for Camas National Wildlife Refuge; this is a request for general FY 2025 funding of the National Wildlife Refuge System of \$602.3 million. This support for the system our refuge belongs to is crucial for us to maintain these unique community and cultural gems. Without your funding, our wildlife areas and the environment they protect will suffer. For this reason, I write to you as a friends group advocate and request that you support the stated budget amount for FY 2025.

Camas NWR not only supports birds by acting as a refueling area for them on their long journeys, it also serves as habitat for many other species of insects and animals. A big part of our mission is to support the work to protect and restore biological diversity and historical resources to the refuge landscape, while providing opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, education, interpretation, and scientific research. We host many events focused on birding and gardening, and we also conduct outreach to educate our communities on this wonderful space. Camas hosts over 300 species of birds and 30 species of butterflies, which makes it a prime birding area.

We have also worked closely with the Fish and Wildlife staff to secure grants and improve visitors' experiences at the refuge by improving signage and historical information. We believe our cooperative model serves not only our goals but also the federal mandate to protect these wild places.

By funding the FY 2025 National Wildlife Refuge System, you'll not only support us but the many other crucial habitats across the country that need your funding. We believe part of what makes our country great is its outdoors and wildlife, and in protecting it and being good stewards of the land, we also rebuild our own connections with our communities and nature. Thanks very much for working with us to protect Camas NWR.

Sincerely,  
Jessica McDermott

**Submitted by Thomas Gula, President, Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge**

*May 8, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, which was formed in 1999 to support Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, a hardwood swamp relic of the Wisconsin glacial Lake Passaic, located in north-central New Jersey, was founded in 1960 as the result of a years-long campaign in opposition to the proposal of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to fill in the swamp to build a fourth jetport in the New York Metropolitan area. Local citizenry fought to preserve the swamp and acquired over 3,000 acres of swampland and presented it to the USFWS as the initial landholding of the refuge. The Refuge is currently nearly 8,000 acres, which includes a wildlife management area and 3,000 acres of the first Congressionally designated wilderness in the National Wildlife Refuge System. It provides critical habitat for the endangered Bog Turtle, the Red-shouldered Hawk and the Spotted Salamander. It is a stopping place for migrating waterfowl, warblers and other seasonal migrants. 244 different bird species have been identified on the Refuge. Great Swamp NWR is home to 39 species of mammals, 12 species of turtles and 12 species of snakes.

The Refuge is 26 miles from Times Square, NYC, and is surrounded by suburbs. It is within easy driving distance of both the New York and Philadelphia Metropolitan areas. It includes approximately 11 miles of hiking trails, in both the management and wilderness areas. The Refuge averages about 250,000 visitors per year.

Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge ("Friends") was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 1999. It supports and assists the refuge by providing volunteers to staff the Helen C. Fenske Visitor Center, which includes a nature shop, and the Wildlife Observation Center, which includes boardwalks and trails. A construction crew aids the refuge in building and maintaining trails and boardwalks. The Friends, which is an entirely volunteer organization, provides an array of programs for the public, including a Fall

Festival, birding and wildlife programs, lectures, service opportunities, and hosting school, scout and community groups. Friends have partnered with local organizations, including Groundwork Elizabeth, to bring underserved children and adults into nature settings. The Friends have two separate invasive species removal groups which regularly provide invasive species control, as well as a GardenKeepers group that plant native species, as needed. The Friends organization supports the operations of the refuge staff, donating between 15,000 and 18,000 hours per year (the equivalent of 8-9 FTEs).

To provide a local perspective on the devastation continued budget cuts have caused, in 1999, when the Friends group was formed, the Refuge had 14 full-time employees. In 2005, the Refuge was complexed as one of four refuges in three states (New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania). With the allocation of USFWS employees across the four refuges, Great Swamp NWR currently has the equivalent of only 5 full-time employees! To appreciate the scope of this deficiency even further, it is noted that Great Swamp NWR currently has no single full-time, on-site USFWS staff. In fact, there are only 13 full-time equivalents across the entire four refuge, multi-state complex. One wage grade maintenance employee recently took a position outside the Refuge System and there are no plans to fill the position due to lack of funds. The Complex has one law enforcement officer and only one visitor services specialist. The Friends have 160 volunteers who help provide services, but because of the loss of staff, personnel can no longer provide adequate supervision. As a result, volunteers cannot pursue needed projects as there are insufficient staff to advise and monitor. Habitat restoration goals cannot be met, participation in meaningful research is stymied, and collaboration with partners in conservation becomes a luxury, rather than standard operating procedure. The lack of funding is creating a situation that can only result in the failure of refuges to maintain habitat and encourage appreciation for and enjoyment of our natural resources.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are

fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. If you have any questions or would like added information, please contact Thomas Gula, President of Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge at <tomgula@gmail.com>

Very truly yours,



Thomas Gula  
President  
Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge

*Friends of Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge*

P.O. Box 6065

Hilo, HI 96720

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Email: [FriendsOfHakalauForest@gmail.com](mailto:FriendsOfHakalauForest@gmail.com)



**Submitted by Deborah J. Anderson, President, Friends of Hakalau National Wildlife Refuge**

**May 9th, 2024**

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge to support the Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Hawaii and the National Wildlife Refuge System nationwide. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million, the amount requested by the President, to support the National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

The future of native forest birds in Hawaii has never been more dire. Conditions have reached a crisis point, with all the rare and endangered species at critically low populations. Extinction of some of these species is a real possibility in the next few years. Conditions at Hakalau Forest National NWR are more favorable than other refuges in Hawaii but could reach a crisis point in the next 5-10 years unless we can reverse the trends. Indeed, the upper elevations of Hakalau Forest NWR are perhaps the only safe refuge for many of the endangered birds because most of the reserve is located at relatively high elevations currently free from avian malaria.

Hakalau Forest NWR was established in 1985 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It consists of two distinct parcels. The Hakalau Forest Unit is a 32,830 acre parcel on the windward slopes of Mauna Kea on Hawai'i Island. The other parcel is a 15,448 acre unit south of Kailua-Kona on the slopes of Mauna Loa, which is called the Kona Forest Unit.

The higher elevation Hakalau Forest Unit contains some of the finest remaining stands of native montane rain forest in Hawai'i and habitat for 29 critically endangered species including seven birds, one insect, one mammal and 20 plants found nowhere else in the world. Currently, it is the only place in Hawai'i where native forest bird populations are stable or increasing.

The lower elevation Kona Forest Unit is predominantly 'ōhi'a (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) trees with an understory of nonnative trees and shrubs and home to a number of endangered birds,

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plants and one insect. This area was home to the last wild pair of 'ālalā (*Corvus hawaiiensis*) in 2002. The primary purpose of this unit is to protect, conserve and manage this native forest for threatened or endangered species.

Volunteers and staff have restored approximately 5,000 acres of koa-ohia forest over the last four decades at Hakalau Forest. This has had a profound impact on habitat improvement as well as carbon sequestration. Awareness of the plight of the native forest birds has never been greater.

Avian Malaria and Avian Pox, transmitted by introduced mosquitoes, are perhaps the most imminent and substantial threats to forest birds in refuges throughout the Hawaiian Islands. This threat is accelerating with the uphill movement of mosquitoes due to warming climate. Efforts to control/eliminate avian disease are underway on Kauai, Oahu and Maui. The use of a technique involving Wolbachia infused mosquitoes to control mosquito breeding has been shown to be locally effective but is not a viable long-term solution. More cost-effective, long-term means of control are needed.

Loss/damage to the native forest habitat in both the Hakalau Forest and the Kona Forest units is also a major threat. Introduced ungulates (pigs, cattle, sheep, goats) continue to do significant harm to the sensitive habitats the native birds and plants depend upon. Introduced predators, such as feral cats, mongoose, and rats, also pose a substantial threat to native forest birds at all refuges in Hawaii.

Hakalau Forest NWR and its surroundings offer the best hope for survival of native forest birds throughout the Islands. Most of the Hakalau Forest lands are at higher elevations than other native forests (i.e. less accessible to mosquitoes) and active management is stemming the tide of habitat damage to the forest floor by ungulates and invasive plants. The Kona Forest unit is not as actively managed, and in both units controlling mosquitoes, feral pigs, feral cattle, feral sheep, and predators is a relentless challenge.

Volunteers recruited by the Friends currently work to help plant trees and shrubs and offer other assistance to Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) staff to support tree planting, visitations, and other special projects. They are doing a terrific job, but additional federal support for staffing and maintenance activities is desperately needed. Fencing to keep out ungulates needs to be regularly inspected and repaired is perhaps the greatest challenge, and the removal of invasive species in both units is a never-ending task.

The Friends are working on developing a Visitor Services Plan to enhance access and visitor experiences and staff support at Hakalau Forest NWR. This plan would provide a small visitor/education center with restrooms, storage facilities, a suitable parking area, shelters for observing wildlife, and other amenities that do not exist today. Currently, there are no bathrooms

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or handwashing facilities for visitors or staff. Increasing opportunities for public visitation and education is an essential component in support of the Refuge system and its overall objectives. There are currently no funds in the Administrative Budget Request for such facilities.

The conservation of the endangered and other native plants and animals at Hakalau Forest will require more support at the national level. Considering inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased salaries and other needs of the Refuge System, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased since FY2010. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats, including those in Hawaii.

We are doing our very best to support Hakalau NWR to address the plight of native forest birds, and to preserve and protect the forest and other wildlife in Hawaii, but your support is needed to effectively manage the system in Hawaii and the Refuge System nationwide.

We urge Congress to address these funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and support staff and visitors at Hakalau Forest and all the other refuges throughout the US that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. The President's FY2025 Budget Request is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request that you support \$602.3 million, as requested by the President, for operations at the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact me, President of the Friends of Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge, at [debbieanderson808@gmail.com](mailto:debbieanderson808@gmail.com) should you have any questions.

Mahalo!

*Deborah J. Anderson*

Deborah J. Anderson,  
President, Friends of Hakalau National Wildlife Refuge

**Submitted by Barbara S. Mogel, Chair, Board of Directors for the  
Friends of Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge (FOMCI)**

*May 7, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge (FOMCI) which was formed in 2003 to support the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge. FOMCI is a 501(c)3, grassroots organization based in Rockland Maine. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The success of the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge's management of remote island habitats does not fully explain the parallel success of the breeding seabirds' recovery over the past 40 years. The Refuge researchers have shown that the presence of summer researchers and interns, on the islands 24/7 from early May to mid-August, serve as guardians for the puffins, the rare roseate terns, common terns, globe-crossing Arctic terns, razorbills, black guillemots, eider ducks and Leach's storm petrels. Without people on the islands, these fragile bird populations would disappear within weeks from predation by great black-backed gulls, raptors, owls, even minks and snakes that reach the islands. That is why the Friends are now so focused on finding non-governmental funds to place those guardian interns on the islands, and to also engage the public on conservation issues at the MCINWR Visitor Center in Rockland. This year, the Friends are also focused on finding funding to replace the previous years' Outreach Interns who were hired by the USFWS through the Student Conservation Association (SCA). The Outreach Interns were critical to the Visitor Center's success, and in fact, the current home page for the SCA website features one of the previous MCINWR summer outreach intern, holding a puffin!

This week, the puffins are expected to return to their nesting burrows. With luck, by mid-August, a new cohort of "pufflings" will take flight toward the open Atlantic Ocean. These charismatic birds are iconic for Maine's summer tourism industry when 8.5 M people will enjoy "life as it should be" among Maine's 1.3 M residents. Overall, while the seabirds breed this summer, tourists will spend nearly \$5.2 billion in Maine. It is estimated that 30,000 visitors will participate in a Puffin Cruise so the seabirds are now also an economic engine in mid-coast Maine: investing in the Refuge system pays back many times over in Maine.

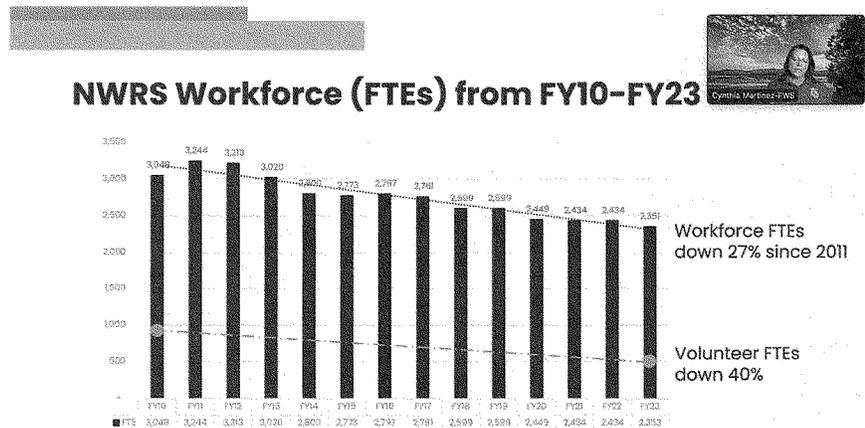
Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units, 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and visitation has grown to over 68 million

annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 16% since FY2010. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

Recent, USFWS Chief Cynthia Martinez conducted in a webinar for Friends groups sharing her concerns for Refuge funding. This graph showing how reduced Refuge staff funding perpetuates reduced volunteer participation clearly captures FOMCI’s current situation. Reduced Refuge staff contributes to the difficulty finding non-governmental support.



Without increased federal support for the National Wildlife Refuge System, the outcome looks dismal, once again, for wildlife - no matter how hard citizen volunteers work to turn it around at a local level. We ask you to please don't throw away all gains, and knowledge, achieved in the

restoration of the Atlantic puffins and other breeding seabirds to the United States on remote islands in Maine.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact Barbara S. Mogel, the Chair of the Board of Directors, Friends of Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge at (207) 594-0600 ext.5114.

*Submitted by William Tweed, Board Chair, Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge*

7 May 2024

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, which was formed in 1999 to support the Oregon refuge of the same name. We request that Congress allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Our group does not make this request lightly. Malheur is a large refuge, containing over 290 square miles of critical habitat, and it holds iconic status as one of our nation's oldest refuges and as a critical stop for migratory birds. In the twenty-five years since our organization was established, we have sought to support and enhance the refuge's operations and the visitor experiences that make it such a special place. Our thousand members care deeply about Malheur and show their support through cash donations and volunteer work group participation. This allows us to do everything from funding student interns to work with government staff to assisting with the refuge's trail and fencing needs. We also operate a nature store and information station at refuge headquarters that provides an important visitor service.

In recent years, Malheur, like nearly all other federal wildlife refuges, has seen annual reductions and erosion of its funding. This trend simply cannot be sustained without real damage to the refuge's natural resources and even more loss of public use and enjoyment. Groups like the one represented by this letter do not have the capacity to fill the resulting gaps.

The scale of these reductions only makes full sense when the cuts to the entire refuge system are laid out.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget

is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

This level of funding is, quite simply an embarrassing failure for all those who endorse it. America's National Wildlife Refuge system deserves better.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. We know that many other organizations are making the same recommendation, and we urge you to listen to this groundswell of public opinion.

Please feel free to contact me if I may be of further assistance to the committee.

William C. Tweed, Board President  
Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

559-786-6649  
wtweed@bendbroadband.com

**SUBMITTED BY JULIE FILIBERTI FOR THE FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE  
APRIL 24, 2024**

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES  
CONCERNING FISCAL YEAR 2025 APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM**

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and offer comments on the FY 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. My name is Julie Filiberti, and I sit on the board of the Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, a non-profit organization formed in 2002 to support the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge in Swanton, Vermont. My comments in this testimony are on the behalf of this organization. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge is situated in the northwest corner of Vermont on the eastern shore of Lake Champlain. It is made up of lands and waters cared for by the Abenaki for thousands of years and is one of only two National Wildlife Refuges in the state of Vermont. Missisquoi NWR was established in 1943 to protect habitat for migrating waterfowl, and 70 years later, in 2013, was designated as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. In addition to the main parcel located where the Missisquoi River delta feeds into Lake Champlain, the 7218 acres of the refuge includes a 457 acre Eagle Point Unit in Derby, VT, co-managed with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, and a 262 acre tract located in upstate New York. The refuge is also responsible for the management and oversight of 376 acres of Conservation Easement in both Vermont and New York.

The main parcel of the acreage in northwestern Vermont encompasses a variety of habitats. A majority of the refuge is composed of wetlands and floodplain forest where the Missisquoi River empties into Lake Champlain. This area is the most expansive intact floodplain forest in the state. The refuge also contains the largest bog in the northeast, the 900-acre Maquam Bog. In addition to these expanses of unique habitat, the refuge also contains shrublands and maintains 250 acres of managed grasslands. The refuge is an essential resting and feeding stopover for migrating ducks, geese, shorebirds, and other water birds. It is a haven for 17 state threatened or endangered species, including Spiny Softshell turtle, Black Tern, and the recently listed Eastern Meadowlark.

The refuge is utilized for all six of the public use focuses of the National Wildlife Refuge system: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and education. Because of limited public lands in the area, the trails and waterways of the Missisquoi NWR provide the population of northwest Vermont with available areas for these outdoor recreation activities in all seasons. The Covid pandemic saw a dramatic increase in the

usage of the refuge as people sought out places to safely immerse themselves in the natural world. The refuge lands also provide the habitats for important learning and mentoring opportunities for students engaging in environmental education. Perhaps most importantly, the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, like most refuges in the system, has the critical job of protecting and conserving a biologically diverse, internationally important, and archaeologically significant area.

In 2002, the non-profit Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, Inc. was formed to support the work at the refuge. Now in our 22<sup>nd</sup> year, our small but dedicated group works to bring awareness to the refuge through public outreach by organizing educational and fun events for the public at large. We provide environmental education webinars, presentations, group birding opportunities, and various other outdoor events. Through our membership funds and donations, we support learning opportunities at the refuge for both students and adults. Our financial support also stretches to assist the refuge in acquiring grant funding for invasive species control. We work in collaboration with the refuge manager to provide financial assistance with any projects that do not have funding but are deemed necessary for the operation of the refuge.

It has been many years since the Missisquoi NWR has had adequate federal funding to keep up with its mission to appropriately manage the refuge for public use and provide protection for the lands and waters. According to the Comprehensive Conservation Plan, the refuge would need 7 permanent full-time positions to completely function and meet its goals. Missisquoi is currently operating with a Refuge Manager, a Wildlife Biologist, a regional Administrative Officer, one Maintenance Worker, and an occasional seasonal technician. This current level of staffing is making operations and maintenance of the refuge difficult.

The difficulties are seen in many areas. Missisquoi lost its Park Ranger in 2018, and the position has yet to be replaced. This critical loss, on top of an already short staff, has left a huge hole in the educational opportunities available, so our interpretive center and spacious classroom sit essentially unused. Many loved long-running programs such as the fishing derby and the Jr. Waterfowl Duck Stamp program have come to an end without staff to organize them. The refuge struggles to find volunteers to operate the visitor's center during the workweek, and it remains closed on weekends, which is peak visitation on the refuge. The trails and boardwalks are falling into disrepair because recruitment, management, and coordination of volunteers and supervision of youth programs such as YCC are no longer possible. The absence of a Law Enforcement Officer means poaching, vandalism, dumping, and drug use are going unchecked since the closest federal officer to respond is in Massachusetts. The State Wardens respond when they can, but they cannot fully dedicate themselves to ongoing refuge enforcement. Planning for any new projects for the refuge has not been possible when even emergency projects are struggling to get done. This refuge, with its small staff, is struggling. The Friends of Missisquoi contributes when possible, but our small organization with limited dollars and limited time, cannot make up for the lack of federal funding or staffing. Like refuges all across the country, ours is visibly showing the suffering under a continual lack of appropriate federal funding.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 16% since FY2010. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

As you see, the situation at the Missisquoi NWR is not unique. Refuges across the country are suffering the same staffing and maintenance challenges. We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact Rich Kelley, President of the Friends of Missisquoi, at [info@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:info@friendsofmissisquoi.org) if you would like any further information regarding our organization.

Submitted by: Joseph Laakso, Director of Science Policy, Endocrine Society  
On Behalf of the Friends of NIEHS

May 1, 2024

The Friends of the NIEHS are pleased to submit the following testimony regarding Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 federal appropriations for the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies in support of the vital work being carried out by the NIH/NIEHS as a result of the annual appropriation provided for this work in the Subcommittee's bill. We ask you to provide at least \$89.3 million for the Superfund Research program in FY2025.

Our coalition of organizations represent a variety of interests, including medical and scientific professional societies, environment and public health focused organizations, children's health advocates, women's health advocates, and many others. Collectively, our community supports and calls attention to the vital work being done by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). NIEHS, one of the component institutes and centers of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), focuses on the prevention of health problems and diseases with special emphasis on the intimate interactions between our bodies and the environments where we live, work, and play over our lifetimes.

The NIEHS Superfund Program (SRP) supports research to address the health impacts from hazardous substances in the environment, develop clean-up technologies for hazardous waste, advance new risk assessment methods, and train the future generation of scientists to work in interdisciplinary research teams to tackle such problems. The SRP provides the scientific foundation used by the Worker Training Program (WTP) to train hazardous waste workers, to accelerate remediation efforts, and to prevent health consequences related to toxicant exposure. These programs have provided the safety tools and training to transform contaminated sites into new opportunities for residential, industrial, and commercial ventures – which means new jobs for the surrounding community and new sources of revenue for state and local governments.

The SRP's research portfolio and research successes include:

- ***Pregnancy Complications*** - Researchers at the University of Michigan revealed how exposure to Trichloroethylene (TCE), a widely used industrial chemical frequently found at Superfund sites as a contaminant in soil and groundwater, may have a negative impact on placental growth during pregnancy, which may affect the growth and wellbeing of the baby.
- ***Childhood asthma*** – Researchers at Louisiana State University are investigating how the presence of environmentally persistent free radicals (EPFRs) in household dust is linked to persistent wheeze in children. The presence of these emerging environmental contaminants in settled dust inside the home demonstrates their longevity in the environment and the association between EPFR characteristics and wheeze status points to the involvement of oxidative stress.
- ***Hurricanes*** - Researchers at the Texas A&M University Superfund Research Program Center are developing methods and tools to predict exposure during environmental emergencies, such as the aftermath of Hurricanes Harvey and Florence and to produce applied solutions to mitigate negative effects of environmental disasters on human health. Researchers from Northeastern University are providing water filtration kits and other

support to its study participants in Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The researchers are investigating links between the high preterm birth rate of 11.8% on the island, and the extent of hazardous waste contamination there. Puerto Rico has more than 200 contaminated sites that include 18 active Superfund sites.

- ***Groundwater Contaminant Sensing, Tracking and Removal*** - Researchers at MIT are developing ways of using tiny sensors and smart phones to sense and track the movement of emerging chemical contaminants in the environment. Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley are developing a device for convenient on-site treatment to remove lead and arsenic from drinking water.
- ***Addressing PFAS contamination*** – Researchers at the Brown University, Harvard and Texas A&M SRP Centers and other SRP-sponsored SBIR projects are heavily engaged in addressing legacy and emerging PFAS contamination, providing urgently needed scientific information on exposure sources, toxicity, and clean-up methods to inform policy, and aiding states and impacted communities.
- ***Airborne PCBs*** – Researchers at the Iowa superfund research program are leading efforts to measure exposure to airborne polychlorinated biphenyls and understand how these exposures contribute to children’s neurodevelopmental health, metabolic syndrome, and other human health effects.
- ***Remediation Efforts*** – Research teams supported by the University of Kentucky Superfund Research Center are developing intervention and prevention strategies to reduce disease risks from exposure to hazardous chemicals, while also engineering solutions to current and future exposures through innovative technologies. Importantly, the Center, like other SRP funded projects, includes stakeholder engagement activities to ensure that solutions address the unique challenges faced by highly exposed and under-resourced communities.

To ensure that the critical activities of this program continue to advance alongside other important national research priorities, we ask the NIH/NIEHS Superfund-related activities receive an increase in funding in Fiscal Year 2025 to a total of at least \$89.3 million, which will help to keep our air, soil, and water safe to improve public health, advance private sector job creation, and bolster the economy. If the opportunity to meet the current investment needs of the NIEHS Superfund Research Program and Worker Training Program is lost, we risk reversing a variety of public health, environmental, and economic gains. Thank you for considering our request.

**Submitted by Friends of O'ahu National Wildlife Refuges**

**May 9, 2024**

**Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System**

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of O'ahu National Wildlife Refuges, which was formed in May 2023 to support the James Cambell National Wildlife Refuge and the Pearl Harbor National Wildlife Refuge. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Our Friends group was organized to provide much needed support to the O'ahu National Wildlife Refuge complex. The complex has the only urban refuge in the Pacific and provides a variety of benefits. Four endangered birds, two of them endemic to Hawaii, use the refuge as vital habitat. Numerous migrants also use the refuges as migration and winter habitat. Endangered Monk Seals, Green Sea Turtles, and a variety of threatened insects and plants benefit as well. The refuge provides potential flood control if needed and supports cultural artifacts from early Polynesian inhabitation. Our Friends group has supported public education and refuge tours, in addition to assisting in habitat improvement efforts. In 2024, we received a \$10,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. These funds will be used to support the most critical needs of the refuge complex.

In these highly populous and increasingly developed islands, these small refuges are critical for the animals and plants that live on the refuges and are also very important in providing a learning experience in a natural world.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

Our Friends group is dedicated to growing our membership and our ability to support and fund our refuges. The shortfall in manpower and funding has taken its toll: Our dedicated professionals work hard to keep the programs going smoothly, but to get best results, more personnel and more funds are clearly needed. Our invasive plant species grow rapidly, 365 days a year, reducing viable habitat for the endangered species, and a variety of management actions are needed daily to merely keep up, much less to incorporate the improvements we hope for to add viable habitat within the complex and to better accommodate an eager public.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitor facilities that rely on funding for the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact Richard M. May, Jr, the President of the Friends of O`ahu National Wildlife Refuges at [rmayhi02@hotmail.com](mailto:rmayhi02@hotmail.com), or via phone or text at (808) 375-2439.

**Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System**

**May 10, 2024**

**SUBMITTED BY**

AIMEE ARENT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
FRIENDS OF OTTAWA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, which was formed in 1997 to support the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Oak Harbor, Ohio. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex totals 11,126 acres of critical habitat and is comprised of three national wildlife refuges. Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge is located between Toledo and Port Clinton. The 8,369 acre refuge is managed for waterfowl, shorebirds, neo-tropical migrant songbirds, and a variety of plant and animal species. The three-story Visitor Center and hiking trails are located here. Cedar Point NWR's 2,675 acres comprise the largest contiguous marsh on Lake Erie (US). Aside from a designated fishing and kayaking area, this refuge is closed to the public and provides excellent nesting habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, and songbirds. West Sister Island National Wildlife Refuge is an 82-acre island situated in Lake Erie, about 9 miles from shore. It is the largest Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, and Black-Crowned Night Heron rookery in the U.S. Great Lakes. It is also the only Federally Designated Wilderness Area in the State of Ohio.

**History**

Before European settlers arrived, much of the area from the southwest shores of Lake Erie to Fort Wayne, Indiana was covered by dense, deep habitat called the Great Black Swamp. It was a foreboding place to the early settlers but home to many Native American tribes. Bartering with early settlers for tobacco and corn, the largest of these tribes came to be called "Ottawas", a name derived from the Algonquin word *adawe*, meaning "to trade". Much of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and the surrounding lands were once part of this swamp which included 1,500 sq miles of a vast network of forests, wetlands and grasslands. Farmers and farm fields replaced Native Americans and wetlands; blackbirds and livestock supplanted eagles and panthers. The Great Black Swamp was reduced from 300,000 acres of habitat to just 15,000 acres – less than 5% of the Great Black Swamp remained by 1900. Fortunately, in 1961 Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge was established under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act when several hunt clubs and farmsteads were purchased with Federal Duck Stamp funds. The refuge complex protects a network of wetlands, grasslands and forests to provide habitat for a variety of migratory birds, resident wildlife and threatened and endangered species. It has been recognized with global significance for its value to wildlife. The refuge has received the following designations: Globally Important Bird Area through the American Bird Conservancy, Important

Bird Area through Audubon Ohio and Regionally Significant Site in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network.

### **Impact**

The refuge provides valuable habitat for a diversity of waterfowl and other migratory birds, resident wildlife and endangered and threatened species. It provides a place for people to enjoy wildlife-dependent activities and learn about the complexities of the natural world through education and interpretive programming. The refuge adds to the richness of the community by holding in trust a portion of the natural heritage of the Great Lakes ecosystem for the continuing benefit of the American people. Our region has grown nature tourism as an economic sector as thousands come to visit every year for outdoor recreation, specifically birding. In early May, 60,000 – 90,000 visitors descend upon the refuge and surrounding natural areas to view migratory warblers as they feed and refuel before crossing Lake Erie into Canada. These visitors bring thousands of dollars into the local community from Toledo to Sandusky. The refuge also has a huge impact on the health of Lake Erie. The refuge complex is located along the shores of the 11<sup>th</sup> largest lake in the world. The Great Lakes contain about 20% of the world’s fresh water. The wetlands of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge play a critical role in the Lake Erie ecosystem, acting as the kidneys of the landscape; working to protect NW Ohio’s drinking water, work and leisure. Through the support of special funding initiatives like the Great Lakes Restoration Fund, the refuge has been able to address failing infrastructure, reconnecting hydrology to filter pollutants from Lake Erie and work to combat harmful algal blooms.

### **Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge**

Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge was formed in 1997 by a group of passionate volunteers. They worked together with federal partners to support the conservation mission of Ohio’s only national wildlife refuge complex by acquiring and restoring land, engaging the community, and enhancing public access. The Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge exist to support the refuge through fundraising and volunteerism so that we can be the change that our wildlife and community deserve. Through the engagement of the NW Ohio community, the Friends are diligently working to fill the gaps of the federal budget each year to support the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex in three priority areas: Youth Development, Public Access Projects, and Land Acquisition and Restoration. In 2023 a total of \$422,347 of Friends funding went directly towards these priorities. It’s a drop in the bucket compared to what we need.

### **Challenges and Needs**

The Friends are dedicated to supporting the refuge’s priorities – in part to create outdoor recreation opportunities on the refuge focused around the “Big 6” wildlife-dependent recreational uses – wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, interpretation, hunting and fishing. Along with such incredible habitat and opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, we are seeing record visitation. Visitation to the refuge has increased from 212,033 visits in 2016 to 372,000 visits in 2023, a 75% increase over 7 years. What hasn’t increased is the refuge budget.

Ottawa NWR is managed primarily for migratory and nesting bird habitat. A lot of that management involves manipulation of our greatest natural resource- water. The refuge biologist

and maintenance teams manage 57 water control structures, 46 culverts, 18 electric pump stations, 18 flap gates, 9 portable pumps, and 7 fish passage structures. The refuge also has 70 miles of roads and dikes that it must maintain. Rising costs of doing business are having a profound impact on the costs of materials for routine maintenance. Budgets need to reflect the rising costs of managing a refuge whether it's for large-scale projects or just basic essentials. Fixed costs are increasing for electric, fuel, and vehicle maintenance but budgets are not keeping pace with inflation forcing the refuge to make hard decisions. Do you maintain trails or maintain the building? Fix the trucks or the dikes? These are daily questions and stressors on our refuge staff.

The refuge also has aging infrastructure that needs to be maintained. For example, the maintenance shop was built in the 1960s. Its septic system is outdated, and the building is not up to OSCA standards. Other outbuildings used to store equipment have outdated electric which is disconnected, while other buildings have poor drainage and other maintenance issues. Refuge staff are daily facing climate change-related impacts to infrastructure and outer dikes due to high water. In some areas entire dikes need to be rebuilt to effectively manage water. Invasive species are another huge challenge at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Phragmites is everywhere. European frogbit is choking out ditches and wetlands. Purple loosestrife is thriving with climate change. Last year populations exploded because the plants had more moisture than normal during critical times. The plants produce a lot of seed, and it will now only continue to get worse without enough staff to address this issue.

Staffing is one of the biggest challenges at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. We currently have 6 full time permanent staff members dedicated to Ottawa Refuge's 11,126 acres and 372,000 visitors. In order to manage the types of programs needed to effectively deliver our messaging to our constituency, we need to add several more full-time year-round staff members to our roster. Within the past four years we have lost several positions including our Law Enforcement Officer, Visitor Services Manager, Admin, and Maintenance Worker as these people moved on to other positions and no one has taken their place. Additionally, a full time bio-tech would assist the biologist in addressing water and habitat management. A full-time maintenance worker would help address the deferred maintenance backlog. The visitor services program in particular is struggling. In December 2020 our Visitor Services Manager accepted different job and this position still has not been advertised because there's no money to fill the position. With the increased visitation we need to fill the Visitor Services Manager position and add another full time permanent Visitor Services staff person to promote and increase interpretive programs and administer the hunt program. We also do not have a law enforcement officer at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and while local law enforcement responds to major issues, minor incidents and infractions devaluing the conservation mission of the refuge are happening and there's no way to enforce the refuge's rules and regulations. If refuge had full funding, it would have a staff of 20 people to manage this resource including additional law enforcement, biology, maintenance, visitor services, and managers.

Connecting underrepresented communities and providing more inclusive services to a broader segment of society has been the goal of the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program. However, reduced budgets and staffing have significantly limited the Service's ability to build new community partnerships and engagement opportunities with urban partners and their

constituency. If we had sufficient staff, our refuge could broaden our reach to Toledo and address environmental and social justice in underserved communities, manage policy and planning, host education programs on site and off site in addition to addressing deferred maintenance projects. Our current staff are doing the best they can with what they have, but what they have is not enough.

### **National Funding**

We are working every day to protect, conserve, and enhance Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge to the best of our ability with limited resources. You can help us to protect Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and refuges around the country. Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System. Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

I'm honored to have this opportunity to share the story of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge with you today. As a 9<sup>th</sup> generation NW Ohioan, Ottawa Refuge is in my blood. My ancestors hunted and trapped these marshlands for survival. My grandfather grew up on a family farm located on what is now the end of the Ottawa NWR Wildlife Drive. It means so much to me to be able to advocate and protect the very land that provides the soil for the roots of my family tree. We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal. Please help us to fund these natural areas to preserve their cultural, economic, and ecological value for generations to come. Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025.

**Submitted by Richard Dolesh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Friends of Patuxent Research Refuge.**

*May 10, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System and the US Geological Survey

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of Patuxent Research Refuge, Inc.

We would like to offer comments on appropriations needs generally for the National Wildlife Refuge System, of which Patuxent Research Refuge is a National Wildlife Refuge, and specifically on behalf of the Eastern Ecological Science Center of the US Geological Survey.

The Friends of Patuxent Research Refuge was formed in 1992 to support the then Patuxent Wildlife Research Center which was later divided by the Department of the Interior into the Patuxent Research Refuge (PRR) under the jurisdiction of the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Eastern Ecological Science Center (EESC) under the jurisdiction of the US Geological Survey. The Friends of Patuxent since our founding have remained dedicated to equally supporting the research, education, and conservation missions of the refuge and the science center. The Friends of Patuxent raise funds, conduct educational programs, and support the refuge and science center through an extensive network of volunteers.

We would like to support full funding for the personnel at the refuge and science center including being able to fill all current and future vacancies in the coming fiscal year for both the Patuxent Research Refuge and the Eastern Ecological Science Center. As we have seen in recent years, no past budget increases have kept pace with inflation, costs-of-living increases, and annual fixed costs expenses. As a result, the refuge and the science center have had to make up these costs by effectively reducing their budgets to make up the operational costs, the cost-of-living increases, and the fixed costs that continue to grow dramatically due to inflationary pressures. The net result has therefore been budget reductions and a lack of ability to fulfill their missions. These facilities must be adequately funded to achieve their approved level of service in FY 2025.

Patuxent Research Refuge is unique among the National Wildlife Refuges of our nation. It is the only refuge dedicated to wildlife research. Additionally, it is critically located within the fast-developing Baltimore/Washington corridor. The 13,000 acres of PRR have been called “the green lungs of Baltimore and Washington” by the late Sen. Paul Sarbanes. Patuxent is not only

home to vital wildlife research and conservation, but also as a vital conservation and educational resource to a burgeoning urban population which it serves.

In general, we request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Recent additions of refuges and new responsibilities have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, but this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure. We see these effects at the Patuxent Research Refuge.

Specifically for the Eastern Ecological Science Center, we would like to see Congress address several urgent research needs. Provide an additional \$6 million (at least \$2 million to start) to the US Geological Survey Ecosystem Mission Area's Biological Threats and Invasive Species Program to develop a comprehensive, multi-pronged and science-based response plan in collaboration with State agencies and coordinate a research program to understand the ecological and socio-economic impacts and inform population monitoring, control and mitigation strategies in Chesapeake Bay. USGS is the right organization and has inherent capability to take on this mission.

Additionally, the recent proliferation of invasive catfish, especially the blue catfish, in many of the Bay's major rivers has the potential to disrupt the Baywide restoration efforts of not only the federal government, but a broad partnership of state, local, and nonprofit partners, and limit the full potential improvement of the ecosystem. USGS can increase science leadership and harness the technical capabilities to work with stakeholders, academics, and resource managers to provide a more strategic approach for managing this challenge.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025 and the specific requests for the Eastern Ecological Science Center of USGS. Please feel free to contact the chair of the board of directors of the Friends of Patuxent Research Refuge, Richard Dolesh, at [dolesh@gmail.com](mailto:dolesh@gmail.com) or 301-848-8154.

**Written Testimony of Bill Durkin, President  
Friends of Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge  
In Support of FY25 Funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
The Honorable Mike Simpson , Chair  
The Honorable Chellie Pingree, Ranking Member**

May 8, 2024

Chair Simpson , Ranking Member Pingree and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee: I am Bill Durkin, President of The Friends of Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, headquarters in Wells, Maine.

I have been a member of the Friends of Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge for the past 35 years. The group was founded in 1987, we are a small group supporting the refuge and it's staff in various ways. The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For FY25, I request that this subcommittee allocate \$1.9 billion in funding for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). This includes \$602.3 million to address the National Wildlife Refuge System's Operations and Maintenance Budget. For Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge , I request \$1.5M in land acquisition funds for the purchase of critical wildlife habitat.

The Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge is named in honor of one of the nation's foremost and forward-thinking biologists. After arriving in Maine in 1946 as an aquatic biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Rachel Carson became entranced with Maine's coastal habitat, leading her to write the international best-seller *The Sea Around Us*. This landmark study, in combination with her other writings, *The Edge of the Sea* and *Silent Spring*, led Rachel Carson to become an advocate on behalf of this nation's vast coastal habitat and the wildlife that depends on it. Our Friends group continue to have community activities that involve the local schools and neighbors with the teachings of Rachel Carson and her impact on the awareness of the natural world. In the past few years , The Friends have had a photography contest with the winners displayed in yearly Friends Calendar. We have kept busy working with the new Visitor Service Specialist in various educational programs and public outreach. With the refuge's building of a new headquarters, we will have a new Visitor's Center and a Multi-purpose room that will aid in more continuous community engagement. The Friends will have a bookstore and office by early 2026. People can use the refuge as a springboard to connect to nature by experiencing wildlife observation, environmental education, interpretation, wildlife photography, hunting and fishing.

Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1966 in cooperation with the State of Maine to protect valuable salt marshes and estuaries for migratory birds. Located along 50 miles of coastline in York and Cumberland Counties, it consists of 11 divisions in 12 municipalities protecting approximately 5,600 acres within a 14,800 acre acquisition zone. Consisting of meandering tidal creeks, coastal upland, sandy dunes, salt ponds, marsh, and productive wetlands, the Rachel Carson NWR provides critical nesting and feeding habitat for the threatened piping plover and a variety of migratory waterfowl, and serves as a nursery for many shellfish and finfish. The proximity of the Refuge to the coast and its location between the eastern deciduous forest and the boreal forest creates a biodiverse composition of plants and animals not found elsewhere in Maine. Major habitat types present on the Refuge include forested upland, barrier beach/dune, coastal meadows, tidal salt marsh, and the distinctive rocky coast. The Refuge provides public recreational opportunities, including wildlife observation, fishing, hunting, photography, and kayaking for the growing, and increasingly diverse and more urban, population of southern Maine and its summer visitors.

With 568 units, the National Wildlife Refuge System is a model for conservation around the world. More than 160 coastal refuges buffer communities from the increasing frequency and intensity of storms, and even more provide habitat for millions of migrating birds each year. All of the refuges are in dire need of staffing and upkeep. An investment in the nation's Refuge System is an excellent investment in the American economy, generating \$3.2 billion and creating about 41,000 jobs in local economies. Without increased funding for refuges, wildlife conservation and public recreation opportunities will be jeopardized. Overall, the National Wildlife Refuge System requires at least \$602.3M in Operations and Maintenance Funding to be considered "full funding", which all refuges staffed, with adequate maintenance, biological, hunting, fishing, environmental education, and interpretation programs. The failure to offset the impacts of inflation has led to unsustainably low staffing levels and lost capacity. Over 800 permanent positions have been lost since FY2011—an enormous 25% loss in capacity. Much of the Refuge System is virtually unprotected due to the lack of law enforcement officers, with some officers covering entire states and refuge units hours away from one another. Several much-needed positions like these are eliminated every year as congressional appropriations lag behind inflation and actual funding needs. This also impacts the Friends Refuge volunteer groups like ours, as many volunteer programs—critical for the operation and maintenance of refuges—are being cut back or eliminated entirely due to a lack of supervision from full-time professional staff. We urge the subcommittee to do everything possible to bridge this inflation gap and provide the necessary additional funding of \$602.3M to adequately fund the Refuge System.

Here in Maine, Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge is seeking to have \$1.5M secured in LWCF monies for land acquisition for 146 acres of vital marshland and upland habitat. FWS is in negotiations with landowners to acquire tracts that contain riparian and tidal habitats. These acquisitions will support salt marsh migration which is crucial to the long-term viability of this salt marsh focused Refuge. One parcel encompasses the west bank of the Little River in Kennebunkport, one of the least developed tidal river habitats

in southern Maine. The parcel is adjacent to Timber Point and existing Refuge lands in the Little River Division in Biddeford and Kennebunkport. In 2009 , your Subcommittee was very supportive in securing funds to acquire Timber Point and it's surrounding lands, the refuge is now requesting to allow further expansion within the division. This acquisition would connect these parcels and improve public access for kayaking, fishing, and hunting on the river. The parcels are in very desirable areas of development in southern Maine and the funds are needed to conserve several properties. With towns in the area growing rapidly – at rates ranging between 11 percent and 32 percent over the next ten years – development pressures continue to spiral upwards and additional coastal properties are under threat. RCNWR needs the \$1.5M. This will provide great dividends for refuge trust resources such as shorebirds and waterfowl and life and safety for local communities. As well as delivery of ecosystem services such as clean water, air, economically important marine resources and coastal protection in the face of sea level rise and increased storm incidences fueled by global climate change.

I again extend our appreciation to the Subcommittee for its ongoing commitment to our National Wildlife Refuge System and respectfully request the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee allocate \$1.9B for the USFWS , \$602.3M for the Refuge System's O & M Budget and \$1.6M for Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge from the LWCF.

Thank you again, Chair Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree for the opportunity to present this testimony in support of protecting wildlife and it's habitat. Enjoy your next walk out on a National Wildlife Refuge.

Bill Durkin  
President  
Friends of Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge  
PO Box 1097  
Kennebunk , ME 04043

**Submitted by Polly Sheppard, Member, Board of Directors  
Friends of Seney National Wildlife Refuge**

*May 4, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of Seney National Wildlife Refuge which was formed in 1987 to support the Seney National Wildlife Refuge in Germfask, Michigan located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

We are a volunteer-powered nonprofit membership organization and a proud partner of the Seney National Wildlife Refuge. Our mission is to support the Seney National Wildlife Refuge through community building, awareness and education, and fundraising. We've been working hard to build community engagement, raise private funding and communicate the importance of wild spaces like the refuge. We've been more successful than ever this past year, joining together with people who love the wildness of the refuge and who want to preserve and nurture it into the future. No matter how hard we work, as volunteers we can never make up the gap of lost funding caused by many years of inadequate federal appropriations.

The refuge is critical to the economy of our region in addition to its importance in maintaining essential biodiversity. Many visitors come to the UP for outdoor recreation and Seney is almost always a stop. The refuge protects wildlife and habitats and provides a level of resilience for our communities in responding to climate hazards. Without tourism, and people's love of our wilderness, we would lose many jobs and families would be forced to move elsewhere to make a living.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units, 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and visitation has grown to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 16% since FY2010. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact William MacLachlan, the President of the Friends of Seney at [friends@friendsofseney.org](mailto:friends@friendsofseney.org).

Submitted by Susan L Hix, Member, Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, Inc.

May 10, 2024

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

**This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of Sherburne NWR**, which was formed in July 1993 to support the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, Zimmerman, MN. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

**The Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge is a grassroots nonprofit organization with more than 600 members.** We have a single purpose: to nurture an appreciation for, and the conservation of, the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. We are a 501(c)(3) Minnesota corporation founded in 1993 with a formal partnership agreement with the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, a unit of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We are an all-volunteer organization with no paid staff, and we serve visitors from Central Minnesota and beyond, including the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, outstate Minnesota, neighboring states, and beyond to the entire United States and even foreign countries. Our areas of strategic focus include Education, Advocacy, Volunteerism, Sustainability, and Diversity/Equity/Inclusion.

**The refuge, within 50 miles of downtown Minneapolis, is a unique place** with 30,700 acres of rare oak savanna as well as prairie, wetlands, and some woodlands. Well over 100,000 visitors come in all seasons of the year to explore the Blue Hill, Mahnomon, and Oak Savanna Learning Center hiking trails, tour the Wildlife Drive, and enjoy birding—from spring migrants, to summer nesting favorites like trumpeter swans and sandhill cranes, to the tens of thousands of sandhill cranes that stage at the refuge each fall before heading to the Gulf Coast and other southern locations for the winter. Hunting—including waterfowl, deer, and turkey—is popular as well, and the refuge’s nature education program serves thousands of students of all ages throughout the year. In addition, the refuge’s events draw visitors from miles around. The highlight of the event calendar is the fall Wildlife Festival, which has attracted as many as 2,000 visitors in one day. Visitors especially flocked to the refuge for an escape in nature during the 2020 pandemic, when trailhead parking lots overflowed and lines of vehicles crowded the Wildlife Drive.

**We have seen that Sherburne NWR offers notable benefits beyond conservation.** Refuge visitors and the refuge itself significantly enhance the quality of life as well as the economy of the surrounding area. **Spaces like ours bring people together—regardless of age, ability, background, or political preference.** It seems to us that funding for the Refuge System should be a winning proposition for Congress members, regardless of political party.

**The Friends of Sherburne do much to support the refuge** through outreach in surrounding communities and volunteering to assist with education and conservation programs. We also raise funds to support the refuge's nature education program, free public events, informational brochures and signage for visitors, and more. Local support is important to both us and the refuge. We have recently raised more than \$400,000 from the community to construct an amphitheater adjacent to the Oak Savanna Learning Center on the refuge. We have also raised funds to contract with a naturalist to assist the refuge's Visitor Services staff member.

**During my 25-year "career" as a Friends member and volunteer for the refuge and US Fish and Wildlife Service, I have watched refuge visitor and program numbers increase while the Service staff has shrunk.** In fact, I would estimate that the current staff is only about half of what it was in 2010. Unfortunately, as staff numbers have decreased, funding has as well. In short, fewer people are being asked to do the same amount of work—and even more—but with much less financial support. When a staff member retires, transfers to another site, or otherwise leaves our refuge, that person is very rarely replaced. My greatest fear is that if we lose our Visitor Services Specialist—who works for the benefit of volunteers as well as visitors—we may no longer be supported to do the very valuable work that we perform as volunteers. **By the way, volunteers perform as much as 20% of the work done on National Wildlife Refuges each year!**

**This sad situation is not unique to Sherburne Refuge!** I am acquainted with many Friends and Service staff from across the United States, and I don't know any of them who currently have a full staff at their Service site. To me this is an unforgivable situation and shows no respect for the American people, for whom Service staff are "working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."

**So how has this happened? Let's take a look back.** Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to more than 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

**Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre.** When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

I recently read that “the five branches of the United States armed forces maintain nearly 150 military bands ... with annual spending on music ensembles in excess of \$300 million.” **We have nothing against the military or its bands but believe that we can—and should—do better than \$527 million to support the Refuge System’s 95 million land acres and 755 million water acres.**

**The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011.** This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have no staff at all on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

**We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System** and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitors that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. **The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.**

**Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025.** Please feel free to contact Carol J Mertesdorf, President of the Friends of Sherburne NWR, at [cjmertesdorf@yahoo.com](mailto:cjmertesdorf@yahoo.com)

**Submitted by Vanessa Thurk, General Manager, Friends of the Front Range Wildlife Refuges**

*05/10/2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of the Front Range Wildlife Refuges, which was formed in 2013 to support the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Friends of the Front Range Wildlife Refuges (FFRWR) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2007 to support Colorado's two largest National Wildlife Refuges, Rocky Mountain Arsenal (RMANWR) and Rocky Flats (RFNWR) National Wildlife Refuges. FFRWR is part of the National Wildlife Refuge Association & Coalition of Refuge Friends & Advocates. These "Friends" groups raise funds for education programs, habitat restoration, community partnerships, and special outreach events.

Friends envisions a space rich in natural and intercultural diversity that furthers environmental education and recreation for Front Range communities. Our mission is to support and advocate for the conservation and restoration of Rocky Mountain Arsenal and Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuges and provide opportunities for the public to experience wildlife near a major metropolitan area in the form of volunteering, events, environmental education, and more.

Ongoing programming Friends supports at RMANWR includes family and community programs and events and programs including the Pollinator Garden and Black-footed Ferret Exhibit, Historical Egli House Restoration and Development, and host location of the Generation Wild Northeast Metro Coalition (GenWild NEMC) Youth Council program

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget

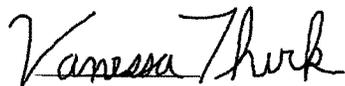
is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

The Projects Leaders and Visitor Services Manager at RMANWR are incredibly dedicated and hard-working individuals who are committed to fostering a connection to wildlife for future generations.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact Vanessa Thurk, the General Manager of the Friends of the Front Range Wildlife Refuges at Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vanessa Thurk". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Submitted by Carl Berkowitz, Secretary, Friends of the Mid-Columbia River National  
Wildlife Refuge Complex**

*May 10, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of the Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which was formed in 2001 to support 7 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services refuges (McNary, Conboy Lake, Toppenish, Cold Springs, Columbia, McKay Creek, Umatilla) and the Hanford Reach National Monument, all in eastern Washington State. We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on the FY 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. With this written testimony, we are requesting that Congress allocate \$602.3 million in funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Our reasons for supporting this action are given below.

Our Friends group works closely with Refuge staff on many projects, including wildlife habitat remediation, environmental education including field trips for the general public, trail maintenance (including improved ADA access), and citizen science programs. We know from personal experience how hard Refuge staff work to keep these lands healthy for wildlife and, where appropriate, open to the public.

Recent development and extensive construction in our area has resulted in the loss of much valuable habitat. Similar issues on a national level are resulting in a reduction in the population of many species. The Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex provides critical habitat for hundreds of thousands of waterfowl, endangered salmon, and rare/declining species including burrowing owls, long-billed curlews, and ferruginous hawks. We feel strongly that the Refuge system should continue playing a role in turning around national trends, and if we do not act now, we will lose much that we hold precious and valuable to our very existence.

The Mid-Columbia River NWR Complex sees about 100,000 visitors annually, including hunters, photographers, birders and naturalists, and this number is growing. Despite this increase in use, funding constraints have had a significant negative impact on the ability of our local Fish and Wildlife Service staff to serve our area. For example, staffing at the Complex has decreased from 13 employees in 2019 to just eight as of this year. And this count does not include the reduction in law enforcement staff, which has decreased from three LEs shared across two Complexes with seven Refuges and a National Monument totaling 250,000 acres, to just one individual.

It is our understanding that funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. Accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed

costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

We urge you to address these funding challenges so that the USFWS can effectively manage wildlife and habitat programs and also provide safe and worthwhile opportunities for the many visitors that use our Refuges. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you in advance for your support of this important issue and providing the necessary funds for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. For clarification or additional details on any of the issues raised in this testimony, please contact Carl Berkowitz, Secretary of the Friends of The Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex at [CDBerkowitz@charter.net](mailto:CDBerkowitz@charter.net) .

**Submitted by Jane Stock, Board Member and Past President, Friends of the Prairie  
Wetlands Learning Center, Fergus Falls, Minnesota**

*[date]*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of Jane Stock, past president of the Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center, which was formed in 1990 to support the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center, a unique set-aside of the Wetlands Management District of the National Wildlife Refuge System. I appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. I request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Along with US Fish & Wildlife staff, our Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center members and volunteers partner with visitors that include artists, campers, elected public officials, environmental educators, local business owners, members of area nonprofits, and students of all ages who share a love of our unique wetland and prairie landscape.

Located within the city limits of Fergus Falls, Minnesota, our Friends of the Prairie Wetland Learning Center's mission is to support the FWS in public education and appreciation of the value of our unique prairie pothole region. Our hometown's recent designation as a Prairie City USA community is a very favorable outcome of the influence of our Friends' affiliation with both governmental agencies and the public. Many residents have planted "pockets of prairie" in their backyards and/or at churches throughout the city ensuring that pollinators are welcome here.

To accomplish quality programming, we have encouraged conservation best practices for the restoration of prairie and wetlands habitats first by funding an onsite greenhouse and more recently by seasonally employing a Greenhouse Naturalist. Related activities include fall seed collection of prairie plants with cold stratification propagation that mimics seasonal prairie conditions. Students who attend half-day onsite Prairie Science classes during the school year use plant journals to identify and record seed growth. Eventually, students participate in transplanting prairie species and invite caregivers to participate in an end-of-year celebration that includes instructing visitors on best practices for prairie plantings and reading their essays on what they have learned from their outdoor school experiences at the Prairie Wetlands.

Given the retirements of three full-time FWS employees stationed at the PWLC between 2022-24, this supplementation by our Friends' funding of environmental programming became essential by the spring of 2024. Our budget was graciously augmented by grant funding to employ 3 seasonal Naturalist Educators beginning March 1, 2024. This is when our Greenhouse requires a full-time naturalist to implement all that was previously explained. Our local school district has depended on the FWS personnel, whether full-time Instructional Systems Specialists or seasonal Interns. This spring we were grateful to have the capacity to hire experienced individuals who had previously spent time as Interns at the PWLC. Two hundred fourth and fifth-grade students attend half-day classes for a full school term and their teachers will readily share how specialized instruction from USFWS employees enhances the Prairie Science Class curriculum (see Friends Newsletter at <https://www.friendsofprairiewetlands.com/>).

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

As a Board member, volunteer grant writer and fundraiser for the Friends of PWLC, I truly understand the nature of budgeting and never want to anticipate a time when we cannot supplement the great opportunities for environmental learning that take place at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center.

I urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect

communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering my request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact Jane Stock, retired President and current Board member of the Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center at [janemstock@gmail.com](mailto:janemstock@gmail.com).

**Submitted by Matthew Emmer, President,  
Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges, Inc.**

*May 7, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

All public lands are our nations greatest treasure, one of our proudest achievements, and an ideal that separates us from other countries. They are truly American, however they are not treated the same. The National Wildlife Refuge System encompasses more acres than all other public lands combined, a staggering 62%, yet is appallingly underfunded to the pitiful amount of \$0.62 per acre; roughly 4% of total appropriations amongst all public lands. While I struggle to comprehend the reasons for this disparity, I ask that the budget for the National Wildlife Refuge System be brought in-line with an appropriate respect to the other public land agencies.

I choose to refrain from any lengthy discussion about staffing shortages or deferred maintenance projects, to which much could be said, because the truth is that no one will judge us, or remember, how many jobs we created or what backlog we cleared. Instead, we will all be judged on what we chose to invest in and what we saved for the future. If I could raise the stakes a bit higher, these underfunded refuges are some of our last bastions of hope against climate change here in America. They are home to some of our greatest carbon sinks, our greatest natural filters of drinking water, our greatest sponges against rising sea levels, yet we are dangerously close to losing them if we don't start investing in their protection, and subsequently our own.

But it's not solely the ecosystem services the refuges bestow, a 27 billion+ annual benefit to our nation<sup>1</sup>, that's in jeopardy but our nation's character— our American spirit. Near my home in Savannah, Georgia each refuge contains tidal salt marsh. No other place in the world has the same unique charm that the marsh provides here. It's the embodiment of legend, the very subject of song and verse, the reason that millions visit and the privileged few stay. Just one opportunity to witness the hypnotic sway of the grasses, the gentle texture of the late afternoon colors that awash the horizon in shades of gold, the rich umber browns of the plough mud that clings to your feet and binds to your soul— and your heart will ache at the thought of ever losing it.

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<sup>1</sup> 1. Molly W. Ingraham, Shonda Gilliland Foster, The value of ecosystem services provided by the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge System in the contiguous U.S., *Ecological Economics*, Volume 67, Issue 4, 2008, Pages 608-618, ISSN0921-8009, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2008.01.012>. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800908000396>)

What will we lose as a country if we allow these refuges to slip away? What will it say about us as a society, when we cannot prioritize that which we cannot create ourselves?

If not to save it for us, those who have already been blessed with these environs, then to save it for future generations, who may miss out through no fault of their own. What America will we choose to leave them? One without wonder, without wild places, without hope?

I support these refuges because I choose to save the promise of a better tomorrow. One where alligators bellow under moss draped oaks, where snowy egrets dance in shallow pools, and where hardwood giants shield entire islands from view.

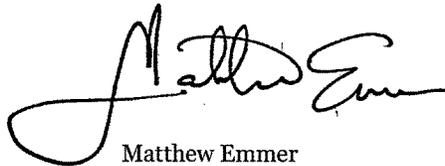
I support these refuges because they hold the secrets needed to protect us from the worst effects of climate change.

And I support these refuges because my children still run with open arms to the ocean, because their eyes still twinkle at the sight of fireflies, and because I want their children, one day, the chance to see the same magic.

So now I ask you, for your support of these, our last wild places.

With appreciation, I am,

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Emmer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Matthew Emmer  
President  
Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges, Inc.

**Submitted by Barbara Howard  
President, Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges**

April 26,2024

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges which was formed in 2008 as a 501c3 to support the Tampa Bay Refuges, which include Egmont Key, Passage Key, and Pinellas National Wildlife Refuges. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request that Congress allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the 2025 fiscal year.

The Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuge Islands are a part of the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge Complex located in west central Florida. The offices are located roughly 90 miles north of Tampa Bay. Our Tampa Bay Friends group has over 300 members who spend many hours volunteering and raising funds. Our volunteer hours this past year were the equivalent of 1.5 full time employees. Our members are passionate about the environment, the wildlife, and the history of Egmont, Pinellas, and Passage Keys.

The Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuge islands were set aside for nesting and resting birds as well as preserving the ruins of Ft. Dade on Egmont Key NWR. The refuge complex has lost almost all of its staff due to budget cuts and staff retirements. They are not even close to having enough personnel to carry out their mission and mandates. The Tampa Bay NWR's have one visitor services manager for Tampa Bay but he frequently has to fill in at the Refuge Headquarters in Crystal River. There is almost always a budget shortfall towards the end of the fiscal year causing staff to discontinue many of the activities they should be doing to fulfill the mandates for each refuge. The Complex has a Project Leader, Visitor Services Manager, Visitor Service Specialist, and one maintenance employee to cover the five refuges which are located a hundred miles apart. The Complex doesn't even have a Biologist! The complex used to have 12 staff members and now they have 4. It is a next to impossible task for the few staff left. Our Friends group is understandably concerned that there is not enough staff to protect these incredible places and wildlife on our refuges.

The Tampa Bay Refuges large populations of wonderful birds, gopher tortoises, box turtles, and Loggerhead sea turtles are important to the community as well as our Friends members. The Friends do monthly bird counts for Pinellas Refuge Islands, but are not equipped to count Egmont or Passage Keys, that requires a biologist. The Friends also fill the gap of providing

environmental education and field trips for adults and kids, as well as public outreach at festivals and presentations. Friends spend countless hours repairing boats to get to the islands, refurbishing informational kiosks, picking up trash, pulling invasive plants, and posting and reposting signs to keep the birds safe. We fund items for the refuges as needed if we have the funds and apply for community grants for larger projects to help protect the islands from erosion.

Tampa Bay loves the refuges. Egmont Key NWR has hundreds of thousands of visitors each year who enjoy the beaches, see the Ft. Dade ruins, and watch the birds in the areas that are open to the public. Visitors are always thrilled to see the healthy gopher tortoises and some of the more than 150,000 birds during nesting season. Many of these folks are from all over the U.S. and abroad. Boating across the bay, exploring the island, and beachcombing gives people a feeling of relaxation and a way to unwind. Everyone needs that. It is important to protect Egmont and equally important for Passage Key and Pinellas Refuges which do not have visitors but supply the area with new generations of beautiful birds.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units, 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and visitation has grown to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 16% since FY2010. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitation that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact me, Barbara Howard, President of the Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges at 727-512-4914 or [Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org](mailto:Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org).

**Submitted by Jim Chapman, President  
Friends of the Wildlife Corridor  
3325 Green Jay Rd., Alamo, Tx 78516**

*May 8, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of the Wildlife Corridor, which was formed in 1997 to support Santa Ana and Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuges. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Our all-volunteer Friends organization supports both refuges by assisting in the ongoing refuge revegetation work, operating the nature store in the visitors center, doing volunteer and public outreach, supporting volunteer appreciation events, assisting Santa Ana's interpretive tram, and more. We also support the ongoing (but underfunded) land acquisition program for Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR.

The refuges are critical to preserving the wildlife and plant diversity here in the Rio Grande Vally. Though it is one of the most biologically diverse areas in North America, the RGV is rapidly urbanizing, and the clearing of native habitat is extensive and ongoing. Hidalgo County is estimated to have less than 5% of its original native habitat, and adjacent Cameron County less than 10%. Completing the Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR (still 20,000 acres short of its authorized size) is the heart and soul of preserving this region's biodiversity..

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult

for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

Here in South Texas, funding shortfalls have brought land acquisition nearly to a halt, and there are so many unfilled staff positions that refuge tract management has been impaired and public outreach and programming has suffered.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact Jim Chapman, President of the Friends of the Wildlife Corridor at 956 571-0545. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on this vital issue.

**Submitted by Bonnie Anderson, Executive Director, Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Complex**

*May 1, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am submitting this testimony as an employee of the Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which was formed in 1993 to support the Tualatin River and Wapato Lake National Wildlife Refuges in Sherwood and Gaston, Oregon. I appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Complex (the Friends) played an unusual and pivotal role in the establishment of the Refuge Complex. Founded in 1993, the Friends is a community-based nonprofit organization. Unlike most refuges, Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Complex was established due to the vision and hard work of a group of local citizens who saw the value of having a National Wildlife Refuge in the midst of a rapidly growing urban area. These founders worked with local political leaders to gain approval for and the establishment of the Refuge. The Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge is more than just a sanctuary for wildlife; it's a vital resource for the surrounding community. Here's why it's important:

- **Habitat and Biodiversity:** The refuge provides a critical haven for a diverse range of plants and animals, some of which are threatened or endangered. This healthy ecosystem plays a role in maintaining air and water quality, which benefits everyone.
- **Flood Control and Water Management:** The wetlands of the refuge act like a natural sponge, absorbing floodwaters and helping to regulate water flow. This reduces the risk of flooding downstream and ensures a steady supply of clean water for the community.
- **Recreation and Education:** The refuge offers opportunities for hiking, birdwatching, and environmental education. This allows people to connect with nature, learn about the environment, and enjoy healthy outdoor activities.
- **Economic Benefits:** The refuge attracts visitors who spend money in local businesses, boosting the economy. Additionally, a healthy environment can contribute to tourism and property values.

The Friends group plays a crucial role in supporting the refuge and the community:

- **Fundraising and Advocacy:** They raise funds to support refuge projects, educational programs, and outreach initiatives. They also advocate for policies that benefit the refuge and conservation efforts.
- **Volunteer Opportunities:** The Friends group provides opportunities for volunteers to get involved in the refuge's work, from habitat restoration to visitor services. This allows community members to contribute directly to the refuge's success.
- **Public Education and Awareness:** They organize events, workshops, and educational programs to raise public awareness about the importance of the refuge and environmental conservation. This fosters a sense of stewardship and encourages community involvement.
- **Bridge Between Refuge and Community:** The Friends act as a bridge between the refuge and the community, promoting understanding and collaboration on conservation issues.

The Friends group thrives as a bridge between the refuge and the community. We foster collaboration to ensure both parties' needs are met. However, my experience working alongside refuge staff since 2009 highlights a crucial aspect of this partnership: staff capacity.

With adequate resources, USFWS staff can effectively supervise and train volunteers. This allows the Friends to fulfill our role of recruiting and inspiring the community. Over the past decade, the Friends helped managed a volunteer force equivalent to eight full-time employees! These volunteers educated and inspired thousands of local schoolchildren.

Sadly, recent staff limitations have significantly reduced these numbers. Currently, the refuge can only manage volunteers for one school and a few field trips. This means thousands of students may miss out on experiencing public lands and potentially finding their spark for conservation.

For over two decades the Refuge and Friends have hosted an annual community bird festival. This event, that I chaired for twelve years, is no longer offered. The Tualatin River Bird festival grew to host over 1200 visitors from the greater Metro Portland area. This free, family friendly event was focused on getting families comfortable with being in nature and focused on the "Big Six" purposes for National Wildlife Refuges. The Friends planned, organized and raised funds to ensure this regional event was always well executed and beloved by all that attended. During the pandemic, when our refuge was closed for almost 3 years, we hosted the Bird Festival virtually. The decision was made by Refuge management that they no longer had the capacity to host the Bird Festival, and so it is no longer part of our connection to the community. In fact, the **only** ongoing community program the Tualatin River NWRC hosts is a monthly puddle stompers program for preschool children. Tualatin River NWRC was once the shining example of "What if?" I took calls from counterparts across the country asking how we were able to connect so well with our community. I know the answer to "What if?" What if we had full funding? I also unfortunately know the answer to "What if we don't?"

The solution is clear: well-resourced USFWS staff can exponentially increase outreach by training volunteers. This empowers the Friends to fulfill our mission and connect the community to the refuge. Without adequate staffing, the potential of our dedicated volunteers goes untapped.

This spills over into more than environmental education, it also includes our volunteer base that help with visitor services, restoration, outreach and special events.

We need to work together to ensure refuge staff have the resources needed to maximize our impact. This, in turn, will inspire future generations of conservationists and ensure a thriving refuge for all.

The Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge is much more than just a beautiful place to visit. It's a cornerstone of our community, offering a wealth of benefits for both people and wildlife. Here's why it matters:

- **A Haven for Nature:** The refuge provides a critical habitat for a diverse range of plants and animals, some of which are threatened or endangered. This healthy ecosystem plays a vital role in our environment:
  - **Clean Air and Water:** The refuge acts like a natural filter, cleaning the air we breathe and purifying the water we use.
  - **Flood Control:** Wetlands within the refuge soak up excess rainwater, helping to prevent downstream flooding and protecting our communities.
- **A Place for People:** The refuge offers a much-needed escape from the urban environment:
  - **Recreation and Education:** Trails for hiking and birdwatching provide opportunities for exercise, relaxation, and learning about the natural world.
  - **Mental and Physical Wellbeing:** Spending time in nature has been shown to reduce stress, improve mood, and boost overall health.
- **Economic Engine:** The refuge attracts visitors who spend money in local businesses, restaurants, and hotels, contributing to the economic vitality of the area.

The Friends group plays a crucial role in ensuring the continued health of the refuge and the well-being of the community:

- **Financial Support:** Through fundraising and grants, the Friends secure funding for critical projects within the refuge, such as habitat restoration, educational programs, and scientific research.
- **Volunteer Power:** They mobilize volunteers to assist with refuge activities like trail maintenance, visitor services, and wildlife monitoring. This allows community members to directly contribute to conservation efforts.
- **Raising Awareness:** The Friends organize events, workshops, and educational programs to educate the public about the importance of the refuge and environmental issues. This fosters a sense of stewardship and encourages community involvement.
- **Bridge Between Refuge and Community:** The Friends act as a liaison between the refuge and the community, promoting collaboration and ensuring the needs of both are met.

By supporting the Refuge System needs you will be supporting our community and future conservation leaders, the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Complex. You're investing in the future of a healthy environment, a vibrant community, and a thriving local economy.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitor ship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact myself as Executive Director of the Friends at [Info@ FriendsofTualatinRefuge.org](mailto:Info@FriendsofTualatinRefuge.org) or the President of the Friends of Cheryl Hart at [OregonCHart@Comacast.net](mailto:OregonCHart@Comacast.net).

Submitted by Cheryl Hart, Board President,  
Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Complex

May 10, 2024

Written Testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives  
Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations for the  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Complex. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of the Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Friends), near Portland, Oregon. Friends is a 501 (C) (3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the conservation and welfare of the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge for all dependent species and to enrich the lives of citizens through education and experience. Our organization has approximately 350 members. I am President of the Board of this organization. The Refuge Complex also includes Wapato Lake National Wildlife Refuge, in Gaston, OR. Our volunteer organization helps to support these two refuges and the refuge system. We provide thousands of volunteer hours each year to assist our understaffed and underfunded refuges and refuge system.

In 2020, when the pandemic quickly shutdown most federal, state, and local parks, our beloved Oregon Coast beaches, and other public lands in the Portland area, there was one place where visitors could go and safely bask in nature. That place was Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge. Although the Visitor Center and restrooms and even part of the parking lot were closed for a time, we flocked there by the thousands to soak up our much-needed ration of nature. The refuge became just that for humans as well as wildlife and we value it more today than ever.

Located just 15 miles from the heart of Portland, OR, Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge, founded in 1992 and opened to the public in 2006, is cradled in Portland's southwest suburbs and is easily accessible to this urban population including being accessible by public transportation with a bus stop at its main gate and a wheel-chair friendly trail. The refuge has existed as a designated Urban Refuge since it was created. I am blessed to live less than a mile from the main gate of the refuge. As a 4th generation Idahoan, I grew up outdoors in nature and am passionate to protect these treasured places for all to enjoy.

As more and more people “discovered” the Refuge as a respite in a very stressful time, there has been a heightened public awareness of its value as a resource to our community. But, with increased awareness and usage comes increased need for upkeep and protection. Being in an urban area results in a higher level of required management to safeguard the wildlife and habitat.

Our Fish and Wildlife Staff has done a stellar job of preserving the refuge, but they are working at a great handicap. In 2012, the refuge consisted of 1,384 acres under the management of a full-time staff of 6. In 2013, the 944-acre Wapato Lake National Wildlife Refuge was created and complexed with Tualatin River NWR with no additional staff or funding. Since then, additional acres have been added to Tualatin River NWR, bringing it to over 1,800 acres. Managed acres have increased by 50% but there is still only a staff of 6. Complexing these two refuges also results in staff having to travel substantial distances several times a week to juggle duties on multiple refuges.

Without sufficient staff, the progress toward public access at Wapato Lake and the date for opening to the public was delayed until last year. Restoration, conservation, and access to this refuge is extremely significant to the local communities and to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde who are the original caretakers of this land. It also provides habitat for a variety of wildlife ([https://youtu.be/-GcQ\\_ORL-9M](https://youtu.be/-GcQ_ORL-9M)) including many migratory waterfowl that stop-over in the winter. But the refuge is amazing year-round.

Historically, the Wapato lakebed filled and receded with the rise and fall of the Tualatin River. A pump system and earthen levees, designed to facilitate farming, were installed in the 1930s. Eighty years later, the economic and public health risks of this aging infrastructure had become evident. The failing dikes on the Lake must be repaired to protect surrounding private and public lands, to ensure the safety of drinking water, and to enable US Fish and Wildlife Service Staff to adequately control water levels for the benefit of wildlife. The \$9M that had been allocated toward the anticipated total \$21M cost of the project was redirected without any thought to how this would impact Wapato Lake. The citizens of Gaston are wondering what will happen when the dikes fail and water from the lake contaminates the drinking water for their city.

Challenges at Wapato Lake involved not only the aging infrastructure, but also the developing a significant level of collaboration, funding and expertise that would be needed to transform this expansive and critical site into a haven for wildlife and an asset to the surrounding communities.

The past three years have been a time of exciting change at Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge as well. Chicken Creek that flows across the main unit of the refuge has been reoriented to a sinuous flow, replacing the straight channel that was created when the land was converted for agricultural use over a century ago. The project created a 280-acre connected, naturally

functioning wetland system on the Refuge's Atfalat'i Unit. A reconfigured pedestrian trail now allows visitors to access the new natural wetland and creek area.

Both projects have been accomplished with the help of numerous community partners making the refuge more meaningful to even more members of our communities.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges, including Wapato Lake NWR, have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

“National Wildlife Refuges are places where the music of life has been rehearsed to perfection, where nature’s colors are most vibrant, where time is measured in seasons, and where the dance of the crane takes center stage. They are gifts to ourselves and to generations unborn—simple gifts unwrapped each time a birder lifts binoculars, a child overturns a rock, a hunter sets the decoys, or an angler casts the water.” This is a quote taken from *Fulfilling the Promise* in the forward by then U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Director Jamie Clark

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact me, the President of the Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Complex at [oregonchart@comcast.net](mailto:oregonchart@comcast.net) or 503 758-5534.

**Submitted by Thomas P. Hartz, PhD, Board Secretary,  
Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Complex**

**May 10, 2024**

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am submitting this testimony as a volunteer at Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge in Sherwood, OR. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The TRNWR acquisition boundary near Sherwood includes 3060 acres. An additional 4310 acres near Gaston, Oregon, was added to the acquisition in 2007, the Wapato Lake Unit. The unit was designated as the Wapato Lake NWR (WLNWR). WLNWR was placed under the management of TRNWR, creating the TRNWR. The Refuge currently manages 2165 acres, about 1400 of that in Sherwood. The population of Sherwood has grown from fewer than 5,000 people in 1992 to over 20,000 people in 2023. TRNWR was one of the 10 original Urban Refuges within a total of over 600 refuges nationally. Urban refuges are located within 25 miles of a population center of 250,000 people. As US populations grow into suburban and rural areas, there are now over 100 urban refuges. The Friends group of TRNWR was recognized nationally as Friends Group of the Year in 2014.

As people drive across the Sherwood City Limit on Highway 99, they are greeted by a sign claiming, "Home of the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge." There are approximately 300 Friends Memberships, with about 350 members, including family memberships. Under the leadership of the FWS Staff, the Friends provides much of the manpower supporting the various programs and projects within the Complex in compliance the Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

The Friends write grant proposals to foundations and community partners to help fund specific projects. For example, the Friends provided supporting manpower and grant funding a 5-year restoration project to restore a historic creek which ran through the main unit before the land was developed into a farm at TRNWR. A total of \$940,000 of funding for the project was secured from Willamette Water Supply, the Intel Corporation, Tualatin Soil and Water District, and One Tree Planted. That project was completed in 2023.

In collaboration and under the leadership of the FWS's Visitor Services Team, Friends volunteers create and staff programs at the Refuge and into the community in support of

environmental education, conservation and recreation. For example, the Friends provide staffing and funding for:

- Visitor Center / Store volunteers
- Trail Rovers
- Interpretive Activities
- Volunteer Naturalist Training
- Environmental Education Programs:
  - School / Scouts / other group Field Trips
  - Non-Residential Outdoor School

The Visitor Services team created the TREE Program (Tualatin River Environmental Education Program) to “adopt” an underserved elementary school to join with the school Principal and Staff to provide an environmental education curriculum through regular on-campus visits to the school and an annual on-Refuge field trip for all students (K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade). That program was recognized by the Beaverton School District for a “Community Partnership Promise Award: Believe” in 2023. That program is completing its 3<sup>rd</sup> year at the Beaverton Greenway Elementary School in 2024.

Friends volunteers staff restoration projects such as habitat restoration (planting and invasive species control), Special Events such as Native Plant Sales, Earth Day, Public Lands Day, and off-refuge fundraisers such as Brews for the Birds.

I’ve provided some examples of what the cooperation and mutual respect and support between the Fish and Wildlife Service Staff and Friends Volunteers have achieved. The FWS and Volunteers are at (or beyond!) capacity with the programs at TRNWR. There is so much more than can be done both at the TRNWR and throughout the Northwest Region to promote Environmental Education and Conservation. WLNWR near Gaston is about 35 miles from TRNWR. That refuge needs restoration, maintenance, and the development of programs specific to that refuge. Volunteers local to the refuge will rely on partnership with the FWS staff. It would not be possible to expand the programs we have developed and create additional opportunities at Wapato Lake simply by adding more Friends Volunteers. Program Development, Volunteer Training, Community Outreach, and Activity Planning and Scheduling all require staffing and support from the FWS. No additional FWS staff were added when the TRNWR was expanded to include WLNWR.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact Cheryl Hart, President of the Friends of TRNWRC, at 19255 SW Pacific Highway, Sherwood, OR, 97140.

**Submitted by Willem Stoeller, Vice-President, Friends of the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Complex**

*5/5/2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am submitting this testimony as a volunteer at the Tualatin River and Wapato National Wildlife Refuges in Portland, Oregon. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Founded in 1993, the Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge (the Friends) is a community-based nonprofit organization. Unlike most refuges, Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge was established due to the vision and hard work of a group of local citizens who saw the value of having a National Wildlife Refuge in the midst of a rapidly growing urban area. These founders worked with local political leaders to gain approval for the establishment of the Refuge.

The Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuges as urban sanctuaries, aim not only for ecological restoration but also to engage underrepresented communities in conservation efforts. However, progress in community involvement has been severely hindered by a shortage of USFWS staff and budgetary limitations. As volunteers, we are restricted from initiating projects without staff oversight, which has postponed projects due to staffing shortages. I have been a passionate supporter of community science projects that engage high school students in conservation. Still, the limited USFWS staff resources have prevented the launch of new initiatives in this area.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units, 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and visitation has grown to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 16% since FY2010. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact Willem Stoeller, the Vice-President of the Friends of the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Complex at 1(503)467-8716.

**Submitted by Annie Montes, Executive Director  
Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge**

*10, May 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge which was formed in 2011 to support the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge (Friends) was established in 2011 with a mission to help shape and support Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and foster a community conservation ethic by promoting environmental and cultural awareness through public educational programs and recreational opportunities. Wildlife habitat in and around American cities are shrinking, fortunately in Albuquerque, our backyard is home to Valle de Oro NWR whose staff and partners are working in collaboration with their community to restore 570 acres of the former Price's Dairy Farm to native wildlife habitat. Valle de Oro NWR is part of a network of National Wildlife Refuges under USFWS, and is a national model for establishing new urban wildlife refuges with community input and engagement. Our refuge is guided by the Urban Refuge Standards of Excellence, developed by USFWS to ensure natural resources will be conserved by engaging the public in meaningful ways, emphasizing community and partnership engagement, in order to foster environmental stewards among new, non-traditional, audiences. The refuge and the Friends aim to create a gateway for urban dwellers to the natural world, with a special focus on young people, by providing opportunities to work at the refuge and advise on Valle de Oro NWR's design and restoration. Together we are building engagement and support for the protection and conservation of lands in Albuquerque and beyond while championing a new era of conservation.

Valle de Oro NWR is located along the Rio Grande, just 7 miles south of downtown Albuquerque and within one hour of more than half the state's population. Originally founded by a group of community members in 2011 to assist in the establishment of the refuge, the Friends were instrumental in advocating for and safeguarding the 570-acre former Price's Dairy Valley Gold farm which was established as Valle de Oro NWR in 2012. The establishment and restoration of the refuge is a huge accomplishment for the neighboring community -- the diverse, underserved, and high-poverty Mountain View Neighborhood (MVN) in Albuquerque's South Valley. Although the refuge is located only 15 minutes from Downtown Albuquerque and is an asset for residents of the Albuquerque metro-area, state of New Mexico and Southwest region,

families and youth of the MVN and the South Valley are an important target audience for the Valle de Oro NWR and Friends in their joint efforts to be a community asset and a gateway for urban and non-traditional refuge audiences to explore public lands. MVN is a low income, disadvantaged neighborhood with residents characterized as multi-generational Spanish speaking families. The MVN is an environmental justice neighborhood that suffers a disproportionate burden of industrial pollution and lack of green space. The neighborhood is home to 2 EPA-designated superfund sites, over 30 EPA-regulated sites, the largest waste-water treatment facility in New Mexico, and 5 bulk-fuel terminals, all inter-mixed with residential homes, an elementary school and community center. Once a thriving agricultural hub and residential community, MVN became the preferred location for New Mexico industry after WWII and fell victim to clear environmental issues related to lack of green space, clean air and water. Much of these environmental and health concerns are due to the release of contaminants in the air and water and a large amount of industry concentrated in an 11 square mile neighborhood intermixed with residential and agricultural lots. With dirty industries continuing to encroach on the community, residents are frequently on the defensive, fighting against the impacts of polluting industries and environmental injustice inherently tied to the industrial growth overtaking its community. Despite this disadvantage, MVN residents have a strong history of advocacy for its community needs, including the establishment of Valle de Oro NWR.

Our surrounding neighbors deserve to have a safe place to recreate, engage with nature, and learn outdoors. The Friends support MVN and adjacent communities by prioritizing youth employment and outdoor education, creating habitat for urban and migratory wildlife in their backyards, and uplifting Valle de Oro's NWR's Economic and Environmental Strategic Plan. To promote outdoor education, the Friends host a field day with all the students from Mountain View Elementary School where students are brought out to the refuge for a day to learn about naturalist tools, the history of the refuge, and taking observational data. The Friends increase habitat for urban and migratory wildlife within MVN and the city of Albuquerque through our ABQ Backyard Refuge Program which offers the opportunity for participants to certify their yards if they incorporate key elements of habitat like food, water, and shelter. The program aims to be inclusive of all participants, whether they create habitat in a patio, balcony, courtyard, yard, or community garden. Finally, to advocate for economic and environmental justice, the Friends help our various partners by providing community stipends, food at all events, and educational scholarships as well as supporting the annual Environmental Justice Community Celebration at Valle de Oro. Our services to the community make adequate USFWS funding that much more critical.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units, 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and visitation has grown to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

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We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitation that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact Annie Montes, the Executive Director of the Friends of Valle de Oro NWR at [annie@friendsofvalledeoro.org](mailto:annie@friendsofvalledeoro.org) or call (505) 401-0455.

Sincerely,



Annie Montes  
Executive Director  
Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge

**Written Testimony of Grantmakers in the Arts  
Regarding FY2025 Request for National Endowment for the Arts before the House  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
May 10, 2024**

**Eddie Torres  
President and CEO, Grantmakers in the Arts**

On behalf of Grantmakers in the Arts, we urge you to increase funding in Fiscal Year 2025 to \$211 million for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the Interior Appropriations bill. Grantmakers in the Arts represents over 300 arts supporters across the nation. As the only national association of public and private arts funders, Grantmakers in the Arts provides members with resources and leadership to support artists and arts organizations that advance the use of philanthropic and governmental resources to support the growth of the arts and culture across the United States.

GIA has witnessed firsthand how NEA funding supports artists and organizations, ensuring that they can thrive and continue to contribute to American culture. However, as we look towards the future, it's clear that increased investment in the NEA is essential to sustain and amplify these efforts. The arts sector has faced unprecedented challenges, from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to ongoing struggles with equity and access. By bolstering NEA funding, we can provide much-needed support to these individuals and institutions, fostering innovation, resilience, and cultural equity. Moreover, increased investment in the NEA will yield significant returns, not only in terms of economic growth but also in fostering social cohesion and community well-being.

Additionally, we know that the widespread and multiplying effects of these NEA investments are undeniable. For every dollar spent on direct grants, nine dollars in private and other public funds are leveraged, generating more than \$500 million in matching support. Moreover, 40 percent of NEA's grant-making budget is re-granted through state arts agencies and regional arts organizations. These re-grants are often to communities not served by private philanthropy, such as rural and remote communities. Private support cannot substitute the leveraging role of government cultural funding.

The arts and cultural industries in our country contribute over \$1 trillion to the U.S. economy. The nonprofit arts and culture sector alone generated \$151.7 billion in economic activity in 2022 with \$73.3 billion spent by arts and cultural organizations and an additional \$78.4 billion in event-related expenditures by audiences. This activity in the nonprofit arts and culture sector supported 2.6 million jobs, provided \$101 billion in personal income to residents, and generated \$29.1 billion in tax revenue to local state and Federal governments.

The arts also play a significant role in well-rounded educational opportunities for our nation's students. In recent years, there have been consequential declines in the teaching of arts. Loss of access to arts education is a fundamental matter of equity, which is especially important to address considering how creative learning bolsters academic success. Students with an education rich in the arts have higher GPAs and

graduation rates. The positive impact of arts education has been shown to be greater in low-income communities, a positive result for the equity, efficiency and effectiveness of investing in arts education as an intervention to support increasingly equitable outcomes. The NEA's education programs have helped sustain support in local communities for arts education, which has been proven to close the education achievement gap, and benefit children and adults in many critical ways throughout their lives.

We encourage you to consider increasing funding for the NEA both to bolster support and opportunities for all communities to be able to access and participate in the arts, but also for the significant impact it has on our nation's economy.

**Written Public Testimony of Pedro Hernández, Public Lands Advocate, *GreenLatinos*  
For the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related  
Agencies  
May 10, 2024**

GreenLatinos is an active community of Latino leaders confronting national and local environmental issues in Latino communities. We thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed FY 2025 Department of Interior budget.

The Department of Interior is a critical agency charged with the stewardship of some of the United States' most critical cultural and environmental resources including over 480 million acres of lands. We expect that all agencies within DOI, especially the National Park Service (NPS) and Bureau of Land Management which administer public lands significant to Hispanic and Latino cultures and histories, are accountable to the various executive orders and agency memorandums intending to establish increasingly equitable outcomes for underserved communities, including but not limited to:

- Executive Order 13171 - *Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government*
- Executive Order 13985 - *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Government*
- Executive Order 14045 - *Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunities for Hispanics*
- Executive Order 13583 - *Establishing a Coordinated Government-wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce*
- Executive Order 11478 - *Equal Employment Opportunity in the Federal Government*
- Executive Order 14035 - *Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce*
- Presidential Memorandum on Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Our National Parks, National Forests, Marine Protected Areas, and other Public Lands and Waters
- Department of Interior Secretary Order 3406 *establishing the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) Council*

We appreciate the overall commitment demonstrated in the FY 2025 budget towards improving the quality of equitable outcomes for the Department of Interior's workforce and managed lands. In order for the Department of Interior to meet its statutory and legislative mandates, it must be adequately funded and staffed in order to ensure success of its initiatives. To this end, we are supportive of the overall proposal of \$17.8 billion for FY 2025, an \$800,000,000 increase from 2023 levels. This funding will be essential to ensure success of the America the Beautiful Initiative, ensuring equitable representation within public lands administration, and addressing the longstanding public lands maintenance backlog. While estimates vary, all studies demonstrate need much larger than current funding levels. The National Park Service estimates that as of FY 2023 Quarter 4 there is \$23,263,000,000 in deferred maintenance and repair. At the local level, the 2021 Report Card for America's Infrastructure also identifies a maintenance backlog of an additional \$5.6 billion for state parks and \$60 billion for local parks.

GreenLatinos has identified three budgetary categories for improvement regarding the proposed FY 2025 budget. Generally, our concerns can be categorized under the following:

1. Ensuring accurate and equitable representation of Latino histories at conservation and recreation sites under DOI jurisdiction.
2. Ensuring adequate funding for the maintenance of existing Latino Heritage sites and public lands in close proximity to communities of color and;
3. Advancing equitable hiring practices and removing barriers to career pathways within DOI and its umbrella agencies to ensure fair and equitable representation of Hispanics and Latinos in employment through the Federal Government

***1. Ensuring accurate and equitable representation of Hispanic and Latino histories at conservation and recreation sites***

*Contemporary Latino Underrepresentation in Public Land Protections and Designations*

The FY 2025 NPS appropriations for National Recreation and Preservation programs, and the Historic Preservation Fund indicate specific program funding related to African American, Japanese American, Indigenous American, and Native Hawaiian histories and cultural resources including but not limited to historic sites, landscapes, ecosystems, parks and rivers. We celebrate and commend the Park Service's work to elevate the stories of underserved communities. But there are minority groups that are not explicitly prioritized by the Historic Preservation Fund, National Recreation and Preservation, and other program appropriations. At worst, the exclusion of other racial and ethnic groups of color makes a statement that those who are excluded do not matter. Hispanic and Latino Americans, Middle-Eastern Americans, and Alaska Natives have been excluded from meaningful investments in the Historic Preservation Fund and the National Recreation and Preservation appropriations year after year during the Biden Administration. As a result, despite the robust framework of policy direction, Latinos, communities of color, and various other underrepresented identity groups such as the LGBTQ+, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and other communities are not currently equitably represented in lands administered by DOI agencies.

For example, less than eight percent of NPS managed National Historic Register of Places units specifically conserve the stories of Native Americans, African Americans, American Latinos, Asian Americans, women and other underrepresented groups. Only 190 out of the nearly 96,000 (0.02%) National Historic Register sites center Latino histories, and many are tied to Spanish colonial or military history. States like California, New Mexico, and Texas have many units on the Historic Register, but other states with significant Latino populations have much less Latino Heritage sites. Other states do not have any federally-protected Latino Heritage Sites at all. Additionally, the National Park Foundation reports that only 24 of 429 (5.6%) National Park units specifically preserve Latino/a/x history; most represent the history of Spanish colonization rather than recognizing contemporary history and the multitude of Latino cultures.

*Recommendation: Establish program funding specifically for Latino Heritage Conservation*

As is, the NPS budget does not meet its declared intention to fund "new and critical responsibilities at parks preserving the stories of underrepresented communities and for interpretive projects that tell these stories". We recommend a one-time allocation of **\$3,000,000** to allow DOI, in close collaboration with agency staff and conservation, historical, and

community experts to conduct a national systematic review of reinterpretation opportunities for existing parks, recreation areas, and historic sites to identify areas to include Latino history where appropriate, including the identification of new sites for federal protections.

**2. Increase funding for the maintenance of existing Latino Heritage Sites and public lands in close proximity to communities of color**

Latino communities, and communities of color in general, disproportionately lack access to healthy and protected green spaces. Black and Latino families with children are the most nature-deprived groups compared to any demographic. Moreover, Latino history in America exists far into history preceding Spanish colonization. And one in every four Americans by the year 2060 will be Hispanic/Latino. Yet Latino heritage represents a mere fraction of all federally-protected lands. As such, protecting the small number of existing sites while supporting efforts to expand equitable access to nature must be prioritized in the final FY 2025 budget.

*Budget recommendations for increasing funding for the maintenance of existing Latino Heritage Sites and public lands in close proximity to communities of color*

Given the scale of nature deprivation and underrepresentation in currently protected federal public lands, FY 2025 must ensure robust levels of funding for flagship programs such as the Historic Preservation Fund and Outdoor Recreation Legacy Program but also smaller, yet effective initiatives to expand representation, education, and awareness of underrepresented communities. Specifically we recommend the following FY proposals:

**Funding for public lands in close proximity to communities of color**

- *Support \$125,000,000* for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Program Initiative. (Budget of the US Government FY 2025, 95-96)
- *Support \$2,203,886,000* for the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (DOI Office of Secretary: FY 2025 Department Wide Budget Justification, GAOA -3)

**Historical Interpretation, Education, and Cultural Preservation of Existing and New Sites**

- *Increase* allocation of Historical Preservation Fund from \$151 million to \$250 million
- *Support \$84,400,000* for National Recreation and Preservation (NPS FY 2025 Budget Justification, Overview - 3)
- *Support \$11,200,000* for New and Critical Responsibilities (NPS FY 2025 Budget Justification, Overview - 8), including **\$215,000** for Interpretation and Education Capacity at the Cesar E Chavez National Monument, (NPS FY 2025 Budget Justification, Overview - 9,13)
- *Support \$145,627,000* for Cultural Resource Stewardship (NPS FY 2025 Budget Justification, ONPS-28)
- *Support \$287,058,000* for Interpretation and Education (NPS GreenBook, ONPS - 42) including the Fund Latino Heritage Internship Program (NPS FY 2025 Budget Justification, ONPS - 50)
- *Support \$10,050,000* for Interpretation and Education Programs (NPS FY 2025 Budget Justification, ONPS - 43)
- *Support \$4,567,000* increase in overall funding for Interpretation and Education Programs (NPS FY 2025 Budget Justification, Overview - 67)
- *Support \$3,768,000* for Informational Publications (NPS FY 2025 Budget Justification, Overview - 67)

- *Support \$3,848,000* for Interpretation and Education Program (NPS FY 2025 Budget Justification, Overview - 68)
- *Support \$331,000* for Interior’s Museum Program “to provide policy, guidance, training, and technical support for the Department bureaus and offices that together manage over 75 million museum objects in over 2,000 locations nationwide and abroad.” (DOI Office of Secretary: FY 2025 Department Wide Budget Justification, DO 34-35)

#### **Increased Representation on Public Lands**

- *Support \$3,100,000* for Increasing Representation on Our Public Lands (NPS FY 2025 Budget Justification, ONPS - 44) including support for **\$385,000** for continuing start-up costs for Blackwell School NHS (NPS FY 2025 Budget Justification, Overview - 5,6)
- *Support \$11,000,000* for “new sites that preserve the stories of the cultures and history across America” (NPS FY 2025 Budget Justification, Overview -8)

#### **3. Addressing Diversity Deficits in DOI Workforce Composition**

We support DOI’s increased funding to expand the total number of full-time equivalent staff (FTEs) up to 1,369 FTEs through 2023. Although progress has been made on the aforementioned commitments to diversify DOI’s workforce composition, much work is needed to ensure this projected expansion includes Latinos and other members of underserved communities. For example, a 2021 DOI assessment of workplace composition revealed that:

- 26.2 percent of the total DOI workforce in FY 2021 was identified of race and ethnicity categories other than “White” or “Not Identified.” In comparison, the Civilian Labor (CLF) benchmark from 2014 to 2018 was 32.5 percent
- 69.8 percent of the total DOI workforce was from the category “White” in FY 2021, a 3.9 percentage decrease from 73.7 percent in FY 2014
- 6 of 11 bureaus fall below the DOI average of 26.2 percent for workforce representation from race and ethnicity categories other than “White” or “Not Identified” in FY 2021
- 65.7 percent of the promotions in 2021 were issued to employees in the category “White”
- Of the 887,383 applications received for DOI job opportunities that were audited in FY 2021, 78.4 percent of the applicants were “White”
- 81.6 percent of selected applicants in FY 2021 were “White”

#### *Budget Recommendations to address Diversity Deficit in DOI Workforce Composition*

We support allocations dedicated to advancing DEIA initiatives within DOI agencies. Congress must support the Biden Administration’s proposed budget allocations to ensure timely advancement and adequate resourcing of these efforts. Successful implementation will help eliminate access barriers for underrepresented communities. We support the **\$2.8 million** proposed for implementation of the DOI Equity Action Plan through the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights; Office of Human Capital; and Office of Collaborative Alternative Dispute Resolution (DOI Office of Secretary - Department Wide Budget Justification, OS-11).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our recommendations. For any questions or clarifications please reach out to Pedro Hernandez, GreenLatinos Public Lands Advocate, at [pedrohernandez@greenlatinos.org](mailto:pedrohernandez@greenlatinos.org) and Olivia Juarez, GreenLatinos Public Land Program Director, at [oliviajuarez@greenlatinos.org](mailto:oliviajuarez@greenlatinos.org).

**Testimony by Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition to the  
House Committee on Appropriations' Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and  
Related Agencies Regarding the Interior and Environment Appropriations Act  
Submitted by: Laura Rubin, Director  
Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition  
May 10, 2024**

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Laura Rubin, Director of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, a Coalition that since 2004 has been harnessing the collective power of more than 180 groups representing millions of people, whose common goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes. Today, the HOW Coalition joins our regional partners in asking you to support full funding for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) at \$450 million and other Great Lakes restoration priorities in Fiscal Year 2025.

The Great Lakes define our region's way of life, serving as the drinking water source for more than 42 million people, providing a rich aquatic habitat supporting a \$7 billion annual fishing industry, and supporting a Great Lakes recreation industry that draws millions of tourists who boost the economies of our communities. In short, the Great Lakes are where millions of people live, work and play.

Congress has long recognized how important the Great Lakes are to our region and our nation. Protecting and restoring them is a non-partisan priority for the people in the eight-state region and we are grateful for the much-needed support the region has received. We are seeing on-the-ground results because of the investments in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. However, the Great Lakes still face many urgent challenges. Legacy pollutants persist, well-known contaminants like lead and toxic PFAS make drinking water unsafe, critical habitat continues to degrade, emerging contaminants are uncovered, and severe storms and floods overwhelm aging infrastructure. Ongoing federal investments to face these challenges are especially important if we are to help the communities that have been most burdened by pollution and environmental harm.

The federal government is an essential partner in our shared endeavor to help heal the lakes through our undertaking of one of the world's largest freshwater ecosystem restoration projects, the GLRI. Non-governmental groups, industries, businesses, cities, and states are forging partnerships to clean up toxic hot spots, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and combat invasive species. And we know we have more work to do before Great Lakes restoration is complete. The region still faces fish consumption advisories, beach closures, and drinking water restrictions. Without the continued full support from Congress this progress will slow, the challenges we face will get worse, and the price we pay will rise.. We urge the Subcommittee to support full funding for the GLRI at \$450 million in Fiscal Year 2025.

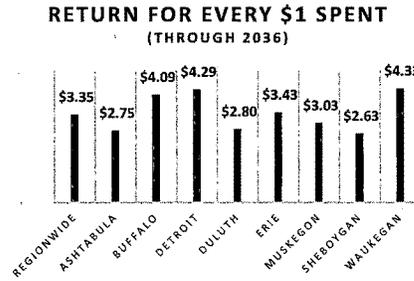
**Environmental and Economic Benefits**

Great Lakes restoration efforts are improving the lives of millions of people and work is underway or completed on more than 8,000 restoration projects throughout the region. These

projects are benefiting communities, strengthening their resilience, and cleaning up the source of drinking water for over 30 million Americans. Because of GLRI investments, we are seeing impressive results:<sup>1</sup>

- 5 Areas of Concern (AOC), the most polluted rivers and harbors in the region – Presque Isle, Pa.; Deer Lake, Mich.; White Lake, Mich.; Lower Menominee River, Mich. & Wis.; and Ashtabula River, Ohio – have been delisted since the GLRI began. The management actions necessary to delist 10 additional AOCs have also been completed. In the previous two decades before the GLRI, only one AOC had been cleaned up.
- 113 beneficial use impairments (BUIs), a benchmark of environmental harm that characterize AOCs, have been addressed in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin under the GLRI, over 11 times the total number of BUIs removed in the preceding 22 years.
- Vital support for the early detection, monitoring, and regional response to address the threat of new and existing aquatic invasive species, including invasive carp has been provided. Invasive species control activities have been implemented on more than 250,000 acres in coordinated efforts with federal, state, and local partners.
- 2.2 million farmland acres in priority watersheds have received technical and financial support, in partnership with other programs, to implement nutrient management actions. Conservation efforts across the Great Lakes have resulted in a projected reduction of 2.8 million pounds of phosphorus runoff, a major contributor to toxic algal blooms.
- Over 7,400 river miles have been cleared of dams and barriers resulting in fish swimming into stretches of river where they have been absent for decades and increasing biodiversity and water quality overall.
- Habitat and wildlife connectivity continue to improve as the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration worked with partners to restore, protect, or enhance more than 500,000 acres of habitat, including 65,000 acres of coastal wetlands.

Moreover, investments in Great Lakes restoration create jobs and lead to long-term economic benefits for the Great Lakes states and the country. A 2018 assessment estimated that for every \$1 the GLRI invested through 2016 to clean up toxic hot spots in Areas of Concern (AOC), control invasive species, restore wildlife habitat, protect wetlands, and reduce toxic algal blooms more than \$3 in additional economic activity regionwide will be produced through 2036 (see chart).<sup>2</sup> The GLRI is revitalizing our waterfronts and leading a resurgence in water-based outdoor recreation and increasing tourism across the region.



While these numbers are impressive, the stories behind them are more illuminating:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.glri.us/results>

<sup>2</sup> University of Michigan. 2018. "Socioeconomic Impacts of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative." Research Seminar in Quantitative Economics.

- When the small town of Grand Marais, Minnesota, on the coast of Lake Superior realized their stormwater runoff was polluting the lake, they acted. With funds from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, in partnership with state and local support, the town is updating part of the city's green stormwater infrastructure, using natural features to restore habitat, improve water quality, and reduce flooding by enlarging its main stormwater ponds to handle the more frequent 100-year storms the city is now experiencing.
- The iconic Two-Hearted River in Michigan has seen increased opportunities for recreation and fishing thanks to restoration that stabilized the riverbanks. In addition, 23 road crossings over the river were repaired and culverts were replaced. The combination of this work connected 35 miles of river and reduced sediment pollution by more than 625 tons per year.
- At the Ashtabula River in Ohio, a sediment cleanup and habitat restoration project has restored the lower two miles of the river and advanced efforts to get it de-listed as a Great Lakes Area of Concern. The project has improved water quality and deepened the river channel, making the lower Ashtabula suitable again for maritime commerce, fishing, and recreational boating.

These stories and more can be found [here](#) and at [www.healthylakes.org](http://www.healthylakes.org).

#### **Building on a Solid Base**

How the region is accomplishing all this work is as impressive as what we are doing. The GLRI is a model for large, landscape-scale restoration. It ensures that the focus remains on the highest regional priorities that are identified by stakeholders through the GLRI Action Plans<sup>3</sup>, which are themselves based on a larger restoration strategy called the “Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes.” It also provides a way for the U.S. to meet its commitments under the 2012 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement with Canada. The GLRI is a critical component towards ensuring that the goals we set for ourselves in both the agreement and in this comprehensive plan can be achieved.

Additionally, the GLRI is effectively allowing federal agencies to obligate their GLRI funds quickly to on-the-ground work. The EPA, working with other Federal agencies like the USACE, USFWS, USGS, NOAA, NRCS, and NPS, quickly convert the funding they receive to supplement restoration activities through existing, authorized programs. This structure allows for funds to move quickly from EPA through the interagency agreements EPA reaches with other federal agencies and onto the ground to complete important restoration work. This model also ensures accountability through the establishment of an “orchestra leader” (EPA), helps accelerate progress, and avoids potential duplication, all of which help save taxpayers money while focusing efforts on the highest, consensus-based priorities.

This model, however, works best when both existing federal agencies and programs, as well as the GLRI, have the funding they need to support each other.

#### **Maintaining Support Until the Job is Done**

Even with the tremendous results we are seeing, the Great Lakes face serious threats. Sixteen U.S. AOCs are still contaminated with toxic sediment, threatening the health of people,

<sup>3</sup> Draft GLRI Action Plan IV is now out for comment through May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024, and can be found here: <https://glri.us/action-plan>

curtailing recreational opportunities, and stunting the development of communities. Harmful runoff from farm fields continues to pollute our waters, causing toxic algal outbreaks that threaten water systems, public health, and economic vitality. Habitat loss and aquatic invasive species continue to damage our region's outdoor way of life and outdoor economy. And communities across the Great Lakes region continue to grapple with crumbling, antiquated drinking water and wastewater infrastructure and are faced with a staggering \$225 billion<sup>4</sup> over the next 20 years for needed improvements, upgrades, and repairs in the eight-state region. Many of these threats disproportionately impact communities that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice, underscoring an urgency to address these issues for everyone in the region.

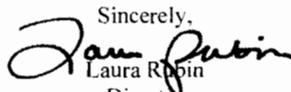
We have solutions to these problems. Congress must continue to fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) and other fundamental restoration programs that produce results. Congressional investments can help communities replace lead pipes, address emerging contaminants like PFAS, end polluted stormwater runoff, and keep water affordable and safe for everyone. Congress must support action to stop invasive carp and other aquatic invasive species from invading the Great Lakes and support communities in enhancing their resilience to more frequent severe weather and flooding to help the Great Lakes adapt to a changing climate. We also need strong clean water protections, as well as institutions that are adequately staffed and funded to enforce protections that we all depend on.

#### **Conclusion**

There is work to be done, and to keep restoration on track, we recommend support for the following Great Lakes programs under the subcommittee's jurisdiction: at least \$450 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative; \$8 million for the Fish and Wildlife Service's Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Program; \$15 million for the U.S. Geological Survey's Great Lakes Science Center; \$35 million for invasive carp prevention undertaken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and \$15 million for the USGS to continue making progress on invasive carp research. We also urge the subcommittee to support national programs like EPA's Sec. 106 and 319 programs and fully fund EPA's Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds consistent with the bi-partisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58).

The GLRI and other Great Lakes restoration investments are producing results. But serious threats remain. Cutting restoration funding now will only make projects harder and more expensive the longer we wait.

Thank you again for your support and the opportunity to share our views with you. If you have any questions regarding this request, please do not hesitate to contact our Coalition's Senior Policy Manager, Alexis Lopez-Cepero, at [alopez-cepero@npca.org](mailto:alopez-cepero@npca.org).

Sincerely,  
  
 Laura Rubin  
 Director

<sup>4</sup> Data from the EPA's "Clean Watersheds Needs Survey 2012 Report to Congress" and the 2023 "Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment – 7<sup>th</sup> Report to Congress".

Paul Peschel, General Manager, Hi Desert Water District

Chairman, Members of the Committee,

I am honored to present this testimony in support of the Hi Desert Water District's Fiscal Year 2025 Community Project Request, the Drought Resiliency and Recycling Program. Hi-Desert Water District (HDWD) is requesting \$2,300,000 for an Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water State Revolving Fund Grant. If the committee sees fit to provide this funding it will be the first community project awarded to HDWD.

HDWD serves a critical role in providing domestic water and sewer collection services to disadvantaged communities within the Town of Yucca Valley California and adjacent San Bernardino County areas. With over 11,000 active water service connections and an extensive infrastructure spanning a 57-square-mile service area, HDWD plays a vital role in ensuring the availability of clean water and maintaining the integrity and quality of groundwater sources.

The proposed Drought Resiliency and Recycling Program is a forward-thinking initiative aimed at implementing water reuse strategies to address the challenges posed by drought conditions and to safeguard groundwater storage within the Warren Valley basin. By investing in sustainable recycled water supply infrastructure, HDWD aims to reduce regional reliance on purchased water from external sources, thereby enhancing local water security and resilience. In particular, reliance on State Water Project water will be reduced.

The Program consists of two key phases: Phase I involves the construction of a reclaimed waterline and recycled water pump station at the HDWD Water Reclamation Facility. Phase II builds upon the foundation laid by Phase I, by constructing a pipeline to convey treated effluent to groundwater spreading basins in the northwest region of the Town of Yucca Valley (Town).

The Program represents a significant investment in enhancing water efficiency, water resilience and water sustainability. Once operational, the Recycled Water Project will have the capacity to offset up to 160,000 gallons per day of potable water irrigation demand during peak seasons. Furthermore, as HDWD expands its sewer connections through the ongoing septic to sewer program mandated by the State, the projects' impact on potable water demand will increase.

The Town is located in the San Bernardino region of southeastern California which receives only 8 inches of rainfall each year. The Town and surrounding areas have seen growth in recent years, and is doing its best to meet the current and new needs of the region, while also adhering to the State mandated conversion from septic to sewer.

In conclusion, the Drought Resiliency and Recycling Program exemplifies HDWD's commitment to innovative water management practices that prioritize sustainability, efficiency, and long-term resilience, which helps not only this disadvantaged community's water supply, but also the entire region, State and Colorado River region. By supporting this initiative, Congress has the opportunity to contribute to the preservation of vital water resources and the well-being of communities served by HDWD.

Thank you for considering this testimony in support of the HDWD's Community Project Request.

**Testimony of Humane Society Legislative Fund  
 and The Humane Society of the United States  
 from Tiffany Mendoza-Farfan, Senior Legislative Specialist, Humane Society Legislative  
 Fund  
 to House Committee on Appropriations,  
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
 May 10, 2024**

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony on matters of importance to our organizations and to our millions of supporters. We thank you for the support and investment in animal protection in the Subcommittee's Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations bill. We appreciate your continued consideration of our priorities in Fiscal Year 2025 and urge you to include the following requests in the FY25 Department of Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill:

- *FWS Big Cat Public Safety Act*: report language
- *FWS Office of Law Enforcement*: increase of \$18.94 million per President's Budget request
- *FWS Endangered Species Act*: exclude policy riders that delist species, including grizzly bears and gray wolves
- *FWS Ecological Services Program*: \$857.32 million
- *FWS trophy hunting reporting*: bill and report language
- FWS Multi Species Conversation Fund: \$30 million
- FWS Office of International Affairs: \$31 million
- *BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program*: \$170.917 million; implementation of nonlethal management strategy addressing the considerations detailed below; expeditious action to fill staff vacancies
- *BLM & USFS prohibition on destruction of healthy wild horses and burros*: bill language per President's Budget request
- *EPA sunseting mammalian testing*: report language

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Big Cat Public Safety Act Enforcement & Office of Law Enforcement**

The Big Cat Public Safety Act (Public Law 117-243) was signed into law on December 20, 2022. This law revises restrictions on the possession and exhibition of big cats, including restrictions on direct contact between the public and big cats. On June 12, FWS issued a strong interim final rule implementing the Act. Numerous large cat species are now subject to seizure and forfeiture when possessed or exhibited illegally, the disposition of which will require collaboration with U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Justice, and private sector entities to ensure proper placement and care.

We urge the inclusion of the following report language:

*On June 12, 2023, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued its plans and regulations for implementing the Big Cat Public Safety Act (Public Law 117-243).*

*The Service is directed to use all available enforcement tools, including confiscation, to quickly address violations of the law in order to limit harm to the public and covered big cats. The Service is further directed to provide a report to the Committee no later than 90 days after enactment of this Act describing any resource needs required to fully address this issue, expected coordination with other federal agencies, state and local law enforcement and key stakeholders, and plans to raise public awareness on how to report violations.*

We also support and urge inclusion of the President's FY25 Budget request of \$110.8 million, an increase of \$18.94 million more than the FY24 enacted level, to appropriately enforce and the Big Cat Public Safety Act and other wildlife laws. This function is within the Office of Law Enforcement's Law Enforcement Operations program.

#### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Endangered Species Act Implementation & Ecological Services Program**

In 1973, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was signed into law, establishing science-backed national protections to recuperate critically threatened plant and animal populations from the brink of extinction. As once-common wildlife and plants are dwindling worldwide, and scientists warn that one million animal and plant species are headed toward extinction, many in the next few decades, due to habitat loss, climate change, wildlife exploitation, and other human-caused factors, the ESA continues to be one of the strongest tools the United States has to combat the current extinction crisis.

Thousands of animal and plant species depend on the ESA for survival, yet it has been systematically and severely underfunded for decades. Currently, the Service only receives around one third of the funding needed to fully implement the Act. As a result, many species sit in limbo, or receive funding only after declining even closer to extinction, when the costs of action are higher or the conservation options are more limited. The requested funding level of \$857.32 million will ensure every listed species receives a minimum of \$101,000 per year for recovery, allowing the ESA to be implemented the way Congress originally intended.

Furthermore, we request the rejection of any policy riders impacting the recovery of species protected by the Endangered Species Act, including grizzly bears and gray wolves. Legislating ESA listing decisions undermines the statute itself, which vests this authority within federal agencies. For over 50 years, the success of this act, a bedrock environmental law supported by the majority of Americans, has been supported by the idea that listing and delisting decisions under the ESA are best made by scientists and other technical experts at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, not by Congress.

Maintaining Endangered Species Act protections for large native carnivores such as grizzly bears and gray wolves is vital to the long-term, sustainable recovery of these species, to our nation's interest in preventing the loss of vulnerable species, and to maintaining healthy ecosystems. Large native carnivores are particularly likely to be imperiled. In addition to their direct killing by poachers, trophy hunters, and trappers, they face many other threats, including loss of habitat and prey species. This is exacerbated by the fact that they have long reproductive cycles and produce relatively few offspring. As dozens of U.S. and international scientists have documented, the loss of top native predators such as wolves results in trophic downgrading and the subsequent disruption of ecosystem functions.

### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Trophy Hunting**

African elephant and lion numbers have dropped steeply in the last decade from poaching, habitat loss, and other threats. Poorly managed trophy hunting exacerbates this decline. The Endangered Species Act requires that imports of these and other listed species enhance their survival. Congress previously directed FWS to reevaluate its trophy-import policy to this end, but the agency has not yet done so. It is time for FWS to show that importing African elephant and lion trophies helps, not harms, the species.

We therefore urge the inclusion of the following bill language:

*None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to issue a permit for the import of a sport-hunted trophy of an African elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis* and *Loxodonta africana*) or lion (*Panthera leo*). The limitation described in this section shall not apply in the case of the administration of a tax or tariff.*

We also request the inclusion of the following report language:

*The Committee reiterates its concern first declared in the explanatory material accompanying P.L. 116-94 regarding the efficacy of the Service's policies for evaluating import applications for African elephant and lion trophies. These two species have undergone steep declines in the last decade, driven in part by trophy hunting. The FWS updated its regulations regarding the importation of elephant trophies in March 2024, adding some additional criteria that the country of origin must meet. This change does not apply to African lion trophies, making FWS trophy hunting regulations an inconsistent patchwork that do not prioritize species conservation. Furthermore, it remains permissible to import African elephant and lion trophies into the U.S., a policy that continues to harm the viability of these species. Therefore, the Committee includes bill language that prohibits the issuance of any permit for the import of a sport-hunted African elephant or lion.*

### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service- Office of International Affairs and Multinational Species Conservation Fund**

The Multinational Species Conservation Fund supports international conservation efforts through five congressionally established grant programs benefiting several of the world's most imperiled species in their native habitats, often in conjunction with efforts under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. We join a broad coalition of organizations in requesting \$30 million for the MCFS to continue supporting the conservation of iconic species such as tigers, African and Asian elephants, rhinos, great apes, turtles, and tortoises.

Additionally, we request \$31 million for USFWS' International Affairs program which supports broader conservation efforts of our planet's rich wildlife diversity. By providing oversight of domestic laws and international treaties that promote the long-term conservation of plant and animal species by ensuring that international trade and other activities do not threaten their survival in the wild, the program is critical in building capacity for landscape-level wildlife conservation and stopping illegal wildlife trade.

### **Bureau of Land Management – Wild Horse and Burro Program**

To maintain the wild horse population in a humane and fiscally conservative manner, we, along with our partner stakeholders in the Path Forward for Wild Horse and Burro Management, request continued support for BLM's implementation of a humane, nonlethal, and effective program. We support a funding level of \$171.917 million for the Wild Horse and Burro Program.

an increase of \$29.945 million from the FY24 enacted level. We support directives to implement a nonlethal management strategy with specific attention on: increasing the use of fertility control, including measurable objectives in reducing population growth with fertility controls; targeting removals from the most heavily ecologically impacted and populated areas; expanding long-term, off-range humane holding; developing contingency plans for emergency situations to ensure the continuation of proactive management under a variety of conditions including extreme drought; and continuing adoptions while fully implementing and enforcing existing safeguards, including pre-approval of adoption applicants and postadoption compliance checks for adopted wild horses and burros. Additionally, we request that the agency act expeditiously to fill the high number of staff vacancies within the program.

**Bureau of Land Management & U.S. Forest Service – Prohibition on Destruction of Healthy Wild Horses and Burros**

We strongly support and urge the Subcommittee to include the bill language requested in the President’s FY25 request that bars BLM and USFS from sending any wild horse or burro to slaughter or selling/transferring any horse or burro in a manner that results in its destruction, and bars any federal, state, or local government that receives any wild horse or burro transferred from BLM or USFS from doing likewise.

**Environmental Protection Agency – Commitment to Ending Vertebrate Testing**

The EPA has a history of embracing new approach methodologies (NAMs) that do not use animals to assess the safety of pesticides and chemicals. In 2019, EPA confirmed its commitment to NAMs by setting a goal to end reliance on mammalian testing for its regulated products by 2035 and achieve a 30% reduction by 2025 (including tests commissioned in-house and that businesses must conduct). The Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act (P.L. 114-182) included statutory language to reduce and ultimately end use of animals in toxicity testing for risk assessments of chemicals under the Toxic Substances Control Act.

Non-animal approaches include cell cultures, computer modeling, organ-on-a-chip technologies, and other methods that are often faster, cheaper and more predictive of human health or environmental risks than animal tests. Different animal species and even differing sexes or sub-species can respond differently when exposed to the same chemicals. As a result, results from animal tests may not be relevant to humans or other non-target species, or may under- or over-estimate health hazards. NAMs, by contrast, are much more likely to provide relevant safety information to protect human health and the environment. Finally, because animal testing is time-consuming and expensive, it limits the number of chemicals and products that can be tested. Thousands of new chemicals are created every year with tens of thousands more already in use. Using animal tests to evaluate the human and environmental safety of all these chemicals would take decades to complete and cost millions of animal lives.

We therefore urge the inclusion of the following report language:

*The Committee recognizes that new approach methods (NAMs) represent the cutting edge of toxicity testing and should be prioritized for use in assessing the safety of pesticides and industrial chemicals over the use of animals and encourages EPA to continue to fund the rapid development and acceptance of NAMs and eliminate requirements for animal testing wherever possible.*

**Submitted by Gary R. Kirsh,  
Chairperson, International Wildlife Refuge Alliance**

*May 8, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairperson Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the nonprofit “friends group” that supports the Detroit International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR). We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Since 2001 the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge has existed as the only international refuge in North America and proudly stands as one of only 14 priority urban refuges in the nation with the distinct responsibility to bring conservation to cities. Stretching from southwest Detroit to the Ohio-Michigan border, the refuge highlights a remarkable 48 miles of shoreline. With over 6,000.00 acres of land under the careful watch of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service priorities such as conserving, protecting and restoring habitats for birds, fish and plants are a reality.

To further the necessary work of the DRIWR a dedicated group of individuals came together in 2005 to form the nonprofit “friends group” known as the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (IWRA). Nearly 20 years later the Alliance’s mission “to support the first International Wildlife Refuge in North America by working through partnerships to protect, conserve and manage the Refuge’s wildlife and habitats, and to create exceptional conservation, recreational and educational experiences to develop the next generation of conservation steward.” remains our prime focus.

Now in its 23<sup>rd</sup> year, the refuge continues to conserve, protect, and restore habitats for the many fish, birds, animals, and plants thriving on the refuge, while also serving an equally important role of providing physical, mental and emotional support to the tens of thousands of visitors each year. The LEED-certified visitor center was designed and built to provide visitors of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to experience a hands-on environmental and interpretive conservation adventure. The interpretive trails, learning stations and wildlife observation decks throughout the refuge invite individuals and families to explore, learn and embrace nature. For a truly unique opportunity, visitors can enjoy a casual stroll or the excitement only fishing can create on our 740-foot fishing pier, providing experienced or first-time anglers access to some of the nation’s finest fishing.

With fewer individuals DRIWR Staff will be required to do more to maintain the level of service the Refuge System and visitors have come to expect. In 2023, more than 180,000 people visited the DRIWR and over 18,600 visitors enjoyed the hands-on experience provided when entering the John D. Dingell Visitor Center. After only 4 months in 2024 both total refuge visitations and specifically visitor center visitations are on pace to far exceed the total numbers of 2023. We continue to ask our Refuge staff to focus on designing programs, creating habitat, increasing outreach while cutting their funding. How can we expect their devotion, passion, and commitment to the service and those they serve to remain at the highest level when our words say “continue to serve and give more” while our actions say “your service isn’t valued” when we cut funding.

The DRIWR staff is comprised of dedicated individuals who give of their time, energy, knowledge, and passion to provide each visitor the opportunity to learn, explore, and grow as individuals and conservationists. To support the wonderful work of refuge staff the IWRA’s Nature Store Manager, board members and volunteers help operate the Nature Store within the refuge visitor center, provide some volunteer staff to outreach events, and assist park rangers during field trips and classroom activities. IWRA’s Executive Director is instrumental in researching and applying for grants, creating sponsorships, and collaborating with donors to support large and small projects on the refuge. IWRA’s board continues to explore opportunities to build new partnerships, strengthen relationships, and work with local organizations and agencies to encourage and actively create an inclusive environment enjoyed by all visitors.

Since 2010 the overall Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and has seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere \$0.62 (or 62 cents) per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 16% since FY2010. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

The Refuge system is forced to reduce the workforce necessary to adequately run each of the refuges, which creates fewer opportunities to fully implement the worthwhile and necessary programs and educational experiences required to reduce barriers and create inclusive programs for all visitors.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact Gary R. Kirsh, the Chairperson of the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance, the "friends group" of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge at 1-586-707-5773.

**Statement of Thomas L. Clarke on behalf of the Interstate Mining Compact Commission re the FY 2025 Budget for the Interior Department and the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement before the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee – May 10, 2024**

My name is Thomas L. Clarke. I serve as Executive Director of the Interstate Mining Compact Commission (IMCC), an interstate organization comprised of 26 States that together produce over 98% of the Nation's coal, as well as other important minerals. My address is 437 Carlisle Drive, Suite A, Herndon, VA 20190. My phone number is 703 709 8654. My email is [tclarke@imcc.isa.us](mailto:tclarke@imcc.isa.us). We request that, at a minimum, the FY 2021 funding level of **\$68.59** million be restored in the budget of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) of the Department of the Interior for State and Tribal regulatory grants under Title V of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (SMCRA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025. We also request that at least **\$65** million be appropriated for the hardrock abandoned mine lands (AML) program authorized by section 40704 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in FY 2024. Most of this funding for hardrock AML can come from claims maintenance fees being paid by industry under the General Mining Law of 1872. Currently, a portion of these fees go to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), but a significant amount in excess of BLM's needs is going to the US Treasury. We understand that the Interior Department and industry both support using this money for hardrock AML.

States are given exclusive jurisdiction, or "primacy," over regulation of the environmental impacts of coal mining under Title V of SMCRA. The core regulatory functions under this federal law are carried out by the member States of IMCC. These duties include inspection and enforcement, ensuring that timely reclamation occurs following mining, designating lands as unsuitable for mining and permitting of mining and reclamation activity, as mandated by SMCRA. SMCRA calls for the cost of coal regulatory programs to be borne equally by the States and the federal government for mining on non-federal lands. The federal government pays one hundred percent of the cost of the program on federal lands.

Primacy states are being caught in a squeeze. Congress has cut OSMRE's budget for regulatory grants to States and Tribes for SMCRA Title V Regulatory Programs twice now in the last three fiscal years. The FY 2024 budget cut funding to \$62.4 million, down from \$65 million in FY 2023. A cut to \$65 million was made in the FY 2022 budget. In the FY 2021 budget, and for many years before, coal regulatory grants to States were funded at \$68.59 million per year. At the same time these cuts are being made, inflation is hitting these programs hard. *All the States' costs are increasing.* Chief among them are personnel costs (salaries, benefits plus indirect costs paid on a per person basis), which comprise over 80% of the total cost of program operation. Competitive pay and benefits for staff are unavoidable costs. According to State coal program managers' estimates, personnel costs, alone, will be \$15.8 million *higher* in FY 2025 than in FY 2022. Under SMCRA, *the federal share of the personnel cost increase is \$8.9 million.*

Congress has an obligation to provide at least enough coal regulatory funding to States to meet the requirements SMCRA imposes on the federal government. As noted above, the federal government is supposed to pay 100% of the program cost for federal lands and 50% of the program cost elsewhere. It has not been living up to these obligations. In the three-year period

since funding was cut in the FY 2022 budget, States have often been required to pay more than their share of the program costs. The federal government needs to live up to its part of the bargain with primacy States. The total grant requests for all State and Tribal Title V regulatory programs combined have consistently exceeded \$71 million. For the last five fiscal years, the total of State and Tribal Title V budget requests has ranged from \$71 to \$76 million. These requests represent what the States believe they will need from the federal government to operate their regulatory programs for the year.

Fulfilling SMCRA's federal mandate for effective environmental regulation of coal mining impacts comes at quite a bargain to the federal government. Just the fact that a significant portion of the cost is shifted to primacy States, alone, allows the federal government to avoid these costs. In addition, the federal government also realizes significant savings by using state employees to carry out the core program functions because state pay scales are, for the most part, lower than those of the federal government. With personnel costs being the biggest single category of Title V program expense (over eighty percent (80%) of the total cost of program operation), the States' lower personnel cost is another feature of state regulation that makes it cost-effective. If you compare the cost of operating any State's program under SMCRA per ton of coal produced to what the federal government spends to operate a federal coal regulatory program in the State of Tennessee, you will find what a true bargain state implementation of SMCRA is. If State coal regulatory programs become ineffective because they are starved for funding, the only alternative is to replace them with federal regulatory programs, which will be far more costly to the federal government than simply providing adequate funding for the States.

It is no secret that coal production in America has declined. Instead of simplifying the regulatory challenge for States, the effect of this decline has been the opposite. The challenge of effectively regulating the environmental impacts of an industry in decline is much greater than when its markets were robust. Not only do States have the challenge of gaining compliance from mine operators who face declining and disappearing revenue, they also have the challenge of navigating their way through complex, high-stakes bankruptcies. Meanwhile, the number of permits that States must inspect has *not* declined at anywhere close to the falling rate of coal production. In addition, each individual coal mine continues to require inspection and enforcement, ensuring that timely reclamation occurs, and permitting for revisions to reclamation activities, as mandated by SMCRA throughout the multi-year liability period. In many instances the regulatory workload may increase once production decreases or ceases altogether. Adequate funding to protect people and the environment from the adverse impacts of coal mining is more important than ever. Appropriation of adequate funding for State regulatory programs is essential if these programs are to achieve the objectives Congress established for them.

A forward-looking observation that should be made concerns the potential impact of actions to eliminate emissions of greenhouse gases. A foreseeable collateral impact of greenhouse gas regulation may be reduction or elimination of revenue from the coal industry many States have been using to pay for their state share of the cost of SMCRA Title V regulatory programs. If this happens, the States are likely to need a significant increase in the federal government's share of regulatory program funding to make up the difference. In the aftermath of any significant new regulation of greenhouse gas emissions, well-funded State regulatory programs will be essential to the effort to effectively address the environmental impacts of existing mines.

Clear indications from Congress that reliable, consistent funding will continue will do much to stimulate support for these programs by state legislatures and budget officers who, in the face of difficult fiscal climates and constraints, have had to deal with the challenge of matching federal grant dollars with state funds. This is particularly true for those States whose match is partially based on fees from the mining industry, where significant reductions in mining and permitting activity translate to lower revenue, but *not* necessarily a corresponding reduction in the volume of regulatory work for State agencies.

For all the above reasons, **IMCC urges Congress to approve not less than \$68.59 million for State and Tribal Title V regulatory grants in FY 2025**, the same amount enacted by Congress in recent fiscal years through FY 2021. In doing so, Congress will continue to fulfill its obligation to ensure the States have the resources they need to continue their work on the forefront of environmental protection and preservation of public health and safety.

In addition to the States' funding needs under Title V of SMCRA, there are some other issues on which the Committee's attention may be beneficial. First, an OSMRE rule that takes effect on May 9, 2024, makes radical changes that totally redefine the federal-state relationship, contrary to the letter and spirit of the law. Primacy States are granted "exclusive" regulatory jurisdiction. OSMRE has no direct authority in a primacy State over permitting, enforcement or any other matter. OSMRE retains two main types of authority: (1) to conduct oversight of the States' efforts; and (2) to notify a State of a potential violation by a mine operator (a "Ten Day Notice" or "TDN") so the State can take appropriate action. The new rule effectively merges these two processes by redefining and expanding the term "violation" to include anything OSMRE does not like about the way the State is operating its program. Thus, the new rule transforms the TDN process from its statutory purpose (correction of violations by mine operators) into an enforcement mechanism for OSMRE's use in regulating the State, itself. Any distinction between the separate TDN and oversight processes is eliminated. There is no limit on the number of Ten Day Notices OSMRE can issue. Authority to issue a barrage of TDNs completely abrogates the "exclusive" regulatory authority States are supposed to enjoy. By caprice, OSMRE has seized authority Congress withheld from it and gave to the States. This cannot be allowed.

Second, OSMRE has plans to adopt a rule regulating emergency action plans (EAPs) for coal related dams as well as related implementation procedures for EAPs. One problem with this plan is that OSMRE has zero statutory authority to intrude into this area. Another problem is that it is an intrusion on the authority of 49 of the 50 states that already have state laws, independent of SMCRA, governing EAPs for all dams, not just those that are coal related. EAPs establish the procedures for notifying the public and actions to be taken in the event of a dam safety emergency. Having two sets of potentially conflicting rules on this subject can only result in confusion as to what should happen in the event a real emergency occurs, which could be very dangerous. This is a solution in search of a problem OSMRE has no business pursuing.

Third, until three years ago, OSMRE met with States at least twice every year and provided a detailed briefing on where the States stood in utilization of the funds Congress appropriated for regulatory program grants under Title V of SMCRA. During these meetings, OSMRE accounted

for all funds appropriated by Congress for these purposes. Despite many State requests to resume these discussions over the last three plus years, OSMRE has yet to provide this transparency. OSMRE has this information but has been unwilling to share it. This information is extremely useful to the States in wisely managing their program finances, which is now more important than ever following two cuts in Title V funding over the last three years. OSMRE needs to account to Congress and the States for the disposition of all funds appropriated for Title V grants since 2019. It also needs to be encouraged to resume financial briefings with the States like those it held in the past, so States do not remain in the dark as to what has happened with the US taxpayers' funds Congress appropriated for State use.

In addition to the Committee's consideration of our funding requests, we urge the Committee to, through report language or otherwise:

1. Prohibit OSMRE from spending any money to implement the new TDN rule.
2. Prohibit OSMRE from spending any money to promulgate an EAP rule for dams.
3. Require, as a condition of funding provided to OSMRE, that it:
  - (a) account for the disposition of all funds appropriated for State Title V grants from FY 2019 forward, and
  - (b) be required to meet with State Title V program managers twice per year and provide a complete, transparent breakdown on utilization of Title V funds.

With regard to funding for State Title IV Abandoned Mine Land (AML) program grants, in FY 2025, the States and Tribes should receive the mandatory appropriation (before sequestration) under the pre-existing AML Title IV program as well as grant amounts set under Section 40701 of the IJA. We also support appropriation of \$135 million for the AML economic revitalization (AMLER) program for economic and community development goals. IMCC very strongly supports direct payment of money appropriated for the AMLER program to States and Tribes within 90 days of enactment, as the FY 24 budget required. IMCC also supports funding for watershed cooperative agreements at \$1.5 million.

Section 40704 of the IJA authorized a multi-year \$3 billion hardrock AML program that would provide badly needed grants to States and Tribes to address the legacy hazards of non-coal mining. Unfortunately, the appropriation necessary to make this program a reality was omitted from the IJA. Appropriations for FY 2022 through 2024 have only supplied \$5 million per year for the program, with only \$1.7 million per year targeted to state grants. IMCC appreciates that demand for federal funding is great, but much more is needed for this program to make meaningful progress in eliminating legacy mining hazards. The amounts in the Administration's proposed budgets for FY 2022 and 2023, \$65 million per year, would be a good start. We urge you to appropriate at least this amount for the IJA Section 40704 hardrock AML program in FY 2025. As noted above, funding for most of this is available from fees being paid by industry.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement on OSMRE's budget for FY 2025. We also endorse the statement of the National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Programs (NAAMLPP), which goes into greater detail regarding the implications of OSMRE funding for the States and Tribes related to the AML program, as well as hardrock AML funding needs. We would be happy to answer any questions.



Submitted by William H. Harkey  
Board President  
"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society

Protect. Educate. Inspire. 

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I submit this testimony on behalf of the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, the non-profit friends group supporting the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex located on Sanibel Island, Florida, and its thousands of members who love this Refuge and the entire National Wildlife Refuge system.

It is an honor to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate a minimum of \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Before Covid-19, the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge welcomed more than a million annual visitors from around the world. It gave the refuge staff, volunteers and friends group the opportunity to educate and inspire these visitors about the importance of protecting our natural lands and having them available to both the wildlife and to each and every one of us. The refuge has been in existence for nearly 80 years and the friends group since 1982.

With the mission to "Protect, Educate and Inspire", the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society (DDWS) has worked for more than 40 years supporting the Refuge and its staff. We see the challenges that the small staff faces daily in accomplishing the conservation work necessary to maintain a refuge the size of "Ding" Darling and it is our mission to help fill in the gaps where federal funding has fallen short. But it is not enough.

Wildlife Refuges around the country not only foster a deeper connection between people and nature, but also generate significant economic benefits for the communities and surrounding areas in which they are located. By allowing visitors to explore these natural habitats, wildlife refuges promote environmental education, conservation awareness, and appreciation for biodiversity. Moreover, increased eco-tourism to these areas stimulates local economies through spending on lodging, dining, and recreational activities, thereby creating job opportunities and supporting small businesses.



Protect. Educate.   
Inspire. 

To understand the significance of funding for the national Refuge System, it is important to understand how the system has grown in both size and visitors. Since 2010, the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres and opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing. Visitation has grown to over 68 million annual visitors – an increase of 47 percent since 2011. While we all celebrate this growth and the benefits to the communities, it also puts considerable added pressure on the already under-funded Refuge System and its dedicated staff.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by only 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When you add in water acres, that becomes a mere .62¢ per acre. Then when you consider the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System's real time budget has decreased even more significantly. We simply cannot operate a system as important as this on a shoestring budget like that.

The number of full-time Refuge employees (FTEs) –already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at merely 2,500 FTEs–has decreased by 16% since FY2010. At “Ding” Darling, the refuge staff has decreased by nearly 50% over the last 20 years. This makes it almost impossible for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats, as well as educating the public on the importance of conservation.

The impacts of insufficient funding and increased capacity are felt here at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge and throughout the entire Refuge System. The funding shortage impacts conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and overall maintenance. Just like “Ding” Darling, none of the other refuges in the country are fully staffed, and more than half of the refuges have **zero** staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged, due to the lack of funding. In addition, many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day in their jobs. Many volunteer programs have been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional staff or necessary infrastructure.

We ask Congress to fully fund the US Fish and Wildlife Service and its national wildlife refuge system to safeguard America's rich biodiversity, preserve critical habitats, protect imperiled species, and inspire millions of people. Adequate funding enables the US Fish and Wildlife Service to effectively manage and conserve diverse ecosystems and ensure their resilience. The national wildlife refuge system provides invaluable opportunities for outdoor recreation,



Protect. Educate.   
Inspire. 

wildlife observation, and education, benefiting millions of visitors each year and fostering a deeper appreciation for the natural world. It deserves adequate funding.

By investing in the US Fish and Wildlife Service and its refuge system, Congress not only ensures the long-term health of ecosystems and wildlife populations but also promotes sustainable use of natural resources and supports local economies through tourism and recreation-related revenue. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million, while considerably short of the ultimate need, is an important step toward that goal and is what we ask you to support.

**Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025.** Please feel free to contact me directly or our Executive Director, Ann-Marie Wildman at [wildman@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:wildman@dingdarlingsociety.org).

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**Submitted by John & Shari Kraljic, retired**

*May 10, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of my wife and myself as friends of wildlife and the Maine coast. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

By chance this afternoon we stopped by the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center at 9 Water Street, Rockland, Maine. What a hidden gem! Everyone in Maine should be encouraged to visit the center to learn about the work being done to support and protect coastal wildlife. Forty-seven years ago I had the privilege of visiting the puffins and terns on Machias Seal Island. Since then both populations have experienced challenges, but are both on the rebound as a result of work by people from Coastal Island National Wildlife employees, volunteers, and similar organizations. This work is critical to protecting wildlife and slowing species' extinction.

Another chance encounter with the work of the National Wildlife Refuge was at the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina where we were treated to the view of Tundra Swans and other migrating birds. The man-made lake, observation towers, and knowledgeable personnel made the visit both impressive and educational.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System. Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased. The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are

completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025.

Sincerely,  
John & Shari Kraljic



League  
of American  
Orchestras

Simon Woods, President and CEO  
League of American Orchestras  
May 10, 2024

Written Testimony in Support of FY 2025 Funding for the  
National Endowment for the Arts

The League of American Orchestras urges the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to provide at minimum \$211 million for the National Endowment for the Arts in fiscal year 2025. We are grateful for consistent bipartisan support from House and Senate Appropriators that has enabled the cultural agencies to provide much-needed grants to arts organizations throughout the country so they can bring inspiration, creative opportunity, and connectedness to people of all ages.

The National Endowment for the Arts has long held a unique federal leadership role; its direct and indirect grantmaking, indispensable research, and inspiring convenings advance learning and provoke important action by arts organizations, practitioners, other federal agencies, and the public to advance the myriad benefits of the arts and reach more Americans. A direct grant awarded by the NEA is a highly sought national designation because it demonstrates an organization has offered an artistic engagement that a rigorous panel review process deems worthy of federal investment. Every orchestra—large and small—is a vital part of its local ecology, and those that receive an award from the National Endowment for the Arts highly value this support of their continual work to enhance the experience of live music for people of all ages. The following examples highlight recent orchestra-led projects supported by the NEA.

The **Boise Phil** received an FY24 Challenge America grant to support free performances for more than 7,000 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade students. From Treasure Valley's largest public school district of West Ada to individual homeschool students in Emmett, students were able to engage with classical music at a performance centered around the educational state standards for music history. Collaborating with Boise Contemporary Theater brought to life composers, instruments, and musical concepts, which won overwhelmingly positive feedback from students. Teachers were also appreciative that the concerts were able, thanks to grant funding, to offer accommodations for students who face accessibility hurdles to experiencing live orchestra music in an inclusive environment.

Another orchestra making intentional strides to engage underserved students is the **Palm Beach Symphony**, which is utilizing its Challenge America grant to partner with the Palm Beach County School District for a residency program that brings symphony musicians to Title I schools. The teaching artists help students with technique, tone, posture, proper instrument

position, and the intricacies of reading and interpreting music in small group settings, working toward a culminating event of a large group ensemble rehearsal alongside symphony musicians. Schools are selected after consulting with teachers and the School District of Palm Beach County's K-12 Arts Education Program Planner in the Department of Teaching and Learning, who oversees all music activities in the public schools. The symphony is intentional about maintaining an enduring and continuous relationship with teachers, schools, and students, and it is especially impactful for the students when they attend Palm Beach Symphony concerts as guests and see their coaches perform on stage.

Yet another Challenge America grantee that is focusing its efforts on young audiences and learners is the **Kamuela Philharmonic**, which hosted two Children's Concerts in Kamuela, HI attended by approximately 650 students, accompanied by teachers and chaperones. The enthusiastic response from the students underscored the impact of the orchestral experience on their musical education and appreciation, with students coming from seven public schools from around the island and a strong turnout from the Waimea/Waikoloa areas. In addition to school groups, 13 individuals, homeschoolers, and families attended the concerts. The concerts allowed musicians to creatively demonstrate their orchestral instruments and the experience was enhanced with verbal narrations, American Sign Language interpretation, and captivating illustrations on the screen, providing a multi-sensory journey through the musical narrative. In addition, students were inspired by the performance of 12-year-old violinist Yunju Cho, one of this season's Youth Concerto Competition winners.

While much orchestral education programming focuses on young learners in elementary and secondary school, older students and adults also benefit from programming specifically curated for them. The **Chicago Sinfonietta's** Grants for Arts Projects FY24 award helped support a sold-out, free to the public orchestral concert and series of educational opportunities at the historically Black Spelman College in Atlanta, GA – an extension of the community work done in Chicago. The concert featured a performance of music by Black, woman, and living composers, an integral part of Sinfonietta's mission and especially relevant to the student body. In fact, surrounding events within the Sinfonietta tour offered several connection and enrichment engagements that highlighted the importance of diversity in the symphonic world, including lecture/demonstrations and master classes with Sinfonietta musicians, and a special pre-concert panel discussion for Spelman students.

Featuring the work of historically underrepresented voices is a growing focus for many American orchestras, and the **Oregon Symphony's** 2023-24 season provides a platform for women and people of color appearing as guest soloists, conductors, or composers on nearly every program. An FY24 NEA grant is supporting two concerts highlighting composers of color. The first features two Black composers whose music directly explores themes of racism and resilience: *Darker America* by William Grant Still, which fuses classical, jazz, and spiritual elements to depict the struggle of Black Americans, and *Remnants* by contemporary composer James B. Wilson, which utilizes spoken word poetry to address the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. The second concert celebrates the rhythms and dances of Latin America, opening with

a new commission by Portland-based Venezuelan composer Giancarlo Castro (b. 1980) and followed by an orchestral arrangement of Astor Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*. This concert will also welcome Artist-in-Residence Xavier Foley (b. 1994) on the double bass. Both programs will reach an in-person audience of more than 6,000 people and will be broadcast globally on All Classical Radio, disrupting usual perceptions of classical music by utilizing orchestral music to illuminate the pressing issues of our time.

The **Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra** (LPO) serves as a culture bearer honoring monumental figures and telling stories of Louisiana through music. With an FY24 grant from the NEA, the LPO honored New Orleans icons Edgar "Dooky" Chase II and Leah Chase for their significant contributions to the city through their civic activism, musical influence, and culinary expertise. An ode to jazz in the art form's birthplace, the concert was a nostalgic celebration of the Dooky Chase Orchestra's 75th anniversary of their final performance ended with George Gershwin's 100-year-old timeless sensation, *Rhapsody in Blue*. Featured on the program were vocalist Chase Kamata – Mr. and Mrs. Chase's granddaughter – and the Marcus Roberts Trio. Audiences were immersed in the Chase family history with a pre-concert lecture featuring maestro Thomas Wilkins and a program book with their written legacy and archival photographs. The LPO values the various elements that thread New Orleans' cultural tapestry and aims to represent these elements in their programming and community initiatives throughout the season.

Over the years, NEA support has empowered the **Detroit Symphony Orchestra** to make innovative programs come to life. In commissioning works by living composers, the orchestra especially seeks to showcase voices that may have been historically underrepresented. An FY24 Grants for Arts Projects award is supporting DSO's April performance of a new co-commissioned work for the pipa by composer Du Yun in a collaboration with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Carnegie Hall. Du Yun was an early recipient of the DSO's own Elaine Lebonbom Award for women composers and so the orchestra is thrilled to welcome the work of an honoree to the Orchestra Hall stage. One of the DSO's proudest achievements is the ability to share performances far beyond the in-person audience. This program will be broadcast live on Detroit radio station 90.9 FM WRCJ, and online in HD video through the DSO's free *Live from Orchestra Hall* program.

Focusing on an enhanced local community experience is the **Louisville Orchestra**, which will utilize its NEA award to support the Creators Corps Program. The Creators Corps seeks artists that are passionate about forging relationships with community organizations to advance music's role in civic life, care deeply about education, and are interested in being "artist-leaders" for both the orchestra and the community more broadly. The unique experience of living in Louisville and working as part of the orchestra's staff for a year deeply informs and inspires the compositions the composers write, allowing for a level of specificity and customization for the orchestra and community. In addition, composers will work on projects that bring them into regular meetings or sessions with community members, students, and teachers. In becoming a

Louisvillian, the investment in community and partnerships built over that time results in ties that are indispensable to the orchestra and community for years afterward.

Finally, the **Toledo Alliance for the Performing Arts** received an FY24 grant which assisted in a commissioning and performance project featuring a new set of Symphonic movements by nine members of the composers' collective **ADJ•ective New Music**. The Toledo Symphony performed music inspired by the planets of the solar system in celebration of the anticipated total solar eclipse on April 8, 2024. This project was an opportunity to partner with the University of Toledo Department of Physics and Astronomy and KV265, a nonprofit organization dedicated to communicating science through multidisciplinary artistic projects. As a part of TAPA's ongoing partnership with Imagination Station, Dr. Salgado from KV265 and composers from **ADJ•ective New Music** appeared as part of the Total Eclipse Lecture Series at Imagination Station's KeyBank Discovery Theater in the weeks leading up to the Toledo Symphony's performances. The first of these free Community Conversations was a lecture on exoplanets with solar system ambassador Jim Ottaviani and the composers of Jupiter and Pluto. Dr. Salgado shared how his work with NASA inspired the creation of his extraordinary videos that accompany existing and new orchestral works.

These orchestral projects are a small sampling of the thousands of thoughtful initiatives and ongoing programs orchestras undertake year-round in a variety of settings. Federal support is uniquely impactful and invaluable in leveraging additional forms of support. Just as the arts ecosystem in our country comprises countless partners all striving to meet people where they are, the funding ecosystem is similarly complex and relies on each element to provide as robust a level of support as possible. Thank you for this opportunity to share how the National Endowment for the Arts supports orchestras' engagement with their communities. These grants, and many others throughout the country disbursed via the agency's state and regional partnerships, make a tremendous difference by helping orchestras provide employment to musicians and staff while fulfilling their core purpose of educating and serving. We applaud the NEA's consistent leadership in promoting public engagement with all forms of art and for its responsiveness to both present and future concerns for the sector. With Congressional support for an annual appropriation of at least \$211 million for the National Endowment for the Arts in FY2025, more communities throughout our nation will be able to experience the life-changing and affirming benefits of the arts.

*The **League of American Orchestras** champions the vitality of music and the orchestral experience, supports the orchestra community, and leads change boldly. The only national organization dedicated to orchestras and their communities, the League supports the field through advocacy, research, convenings, leadership development, artistic programs, and grants. Founded in 1942 and chartered by Congress in 1962, the League includes nearly 25,000 musicians, conductors, orchestra staff, board members, volunteers, and business partners working within our membership of 1600 world-renowned orchestras, community groups, summer festivals, student and youth ensembles, conservatories and libraries, businesses serving orchestras, and individuals who love symphonic music.*



**Testimony of Aroub Yousuf**  
Advocacy Co-Chair, Medical Students for a Sustainable Future  
**House Committee on Appropriations**  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
**Re: Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) appropriations for key public health programs within the  
Environmental Protection Agency**

April 27, 2024

Summary of FY 2025 Appropriations Recommendations:

EPA topline – \$12 billion  
Clean Air Program overall – \$915.5 million  
Categorical Grants: State and Local Air Quality Management – \$500 million  
Categorical Grants: Tribal Air Quality Management – \$57.4 million  
Environmental Justice - \$369.1 million  
Diesel Emissions Reduction Grant Program – \$150 million  
Wildfire Smoke Preparedness - \$15 million  
Office of Air and Radiation, Indoor Environments Division - \$100 million

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony to highlight the funding priorities of Medical Students for a Sustainable Future within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and/or Department of Interior for fiscal year 2025 (FY25). Medical Students for a Sustainable Future is a national organization comprised of medical students who are devoted to a greener, more sustainable planet for our future patients. We urge the Committee to support \$12 billion in funding for the Environmental Protection Agency.

While the nation has made great progress in cleaning up air pollution thanks to the Clean Air Act, air pollution continues to threaten health across the country. Exposure to pollution like particulate matter, ozone, nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxides can trigger asthma attacks, worsen lung conditions, lead to developmental and reproductive harm and even cause premature death.

Climate change is also a health emergency. Communities across the country are experiencing adverse health and mental health impacts due to changing climate conditions. But climate change is also a health opportunity. We can avoid worsening of some of the catastrophic impacts we're seeing now while also delivering immediate health benefits. EPA's work to protect public health from pollution and climate change is imperative and deserves robust, dedicated funding.

EPA is also responsible for administering funds to States, localities, Tribes and communities for improving air quality and building resilience. Funding in the Inflation Reduction Act is leading to improvements across the country and Medical Students for a Sustainable Future supports its continued implementation. But that funding does not replace the need for robust, predictable funding of the agency's core programmatic work. Medical Students for a Sustainable Future would like to highlight a few key areas that are need of strong appropriations:

**Provide \$915.5 million for EPA's Clean Air program.** Robust funding for EPA's clean air work is necessary to meet the agency's responsibility under the Clean Air Act to protect health from air pollution. This funding allows EPA to assist states, localities and Tribes with meeting federal clean air standards by providing technical assistance, resources and expertise on how to clean up the sectors that contribute to air quality challenges. Please provide \$694.6 million for Environmental Programs and Management and \$220.9 million for Science and Technology.

**Provide \$500 million for State and Local Air Quality Monitoring Grants and \$57.4 million for Tribal Air Quality Monitoring Grants.** State, local and Tribal air agencies receive grants from EPA to help maintain their air monitoring networks. Air agencies are operating under constrained budgets, impairing their ability to adequately maintain and improve air monitors. This funding is crucial to help inform the public about air quality risks to their health and in identifying areas that are most in need of pollution cleanup.

**Provide at least \$369.1 million for environmental justice efforts.** Far too many communities are still waiting on the promise of clean air. Targeted funding dedicated to cleaning the air in disadvantaged communities and to advance the protection of those overburdened by air pollution is necessary to provide clean air for all. As medical students, we see the effects of air pollution firsthand, and we request these changes in the name of our future patients.

**Provide \$150 million for the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act and Support the Clean School Bus Program.** The Diesel Emissions Reduction (DERA) Grant program continues to be a cost-effective program that enjoys bipartisan support. According to EPA's 2022 report to Congress, the health benefits of diesel emissions reduction projects are cost-effective, with monetized

health benefits estimated to exceed federal funding by a factor of 10 to 1. But there are still millions of dirty diesel engines that are polluting communities – particularly low-income areas and communities of color. We also urge the Committee to support the popular Clean School Bus Program. The program has already led to the replacement of dirty diesel school buses with cleaner zero-emission versions and the Organization supports even greater adoption of zero-emission school buses.

**Please provide \$100 million for the Office of Air and Radiation/Indoor Environments Division and \$10 million to EPA’s Office of Children’s Health Protection.** Exposure to indoor environmental pollution can decrease attendance, negatively impact test scores and worsen asthma symptoms or other health impacts. A 2020 GAO report found that 41% of school districts were in need of HVAC repairs in at least half of their schools. Educators and school personnel need education, training and resources to implement effective prevention measures. Additionally, the Office of Children’s Health Protection plays a critical role in researching children’s risks and exposures in school and childcare facilities.

**Please provide \$15 million for wildfire smoke preparedness.** Wildfire smoke is an urgent and increasing threat to public health, and it is not confined to western areas. In 2023, wildfires in Canada and the Northeast set off unprecedented air quality alerts down the East Coast, increasing emergency department visits for asthma-related conditions. EPA plays a vital role in forecasting and communicating the impacts of wildfire smoke.

**Oppose all policy riders.** Lastly, Medical Students for a Sustainable Future strongly opposes the inclusion of policy riders that would weaken clean air protections, particularly those that would undermine the Clean Air Act. We urge the Committee to reject policy riders in appropriations bills.

Investments in EPA programs are critical to protecting public health. On behalf of Medical Students for a Sustainable Future, I thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

*Aroub Yousuf*

Aroub Yousuf  
First year medical student at Harvard Medical School



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Pam Breaux  
 President and Chief Executive Officer  
 National Assembly of State Arts Agencies  
 Prepared Testimony  
 To the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies  
 U.S. House of Representatives

May 9, 2024

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and esteemed members of the Committee—

Thank you for the opportunity to deliver this testimony in support of federal appropriations for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations bill. My name is Pam Breaux, and I am honored to serve as President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), representing and advocating for the nation's 56 state and jurisdictional arts agencies.

Today, I stand before you to express our profound appreciation for your ongoing support of the National Endowment for the Arts and to urge the Committee to consider funding it at \$210.1 million in FY 2025. This increased allocation, in line with the President's request, would enable the NEA to continue its vital mission of supporting arts and creativity to foster an environment where arts participation and practice benefits everyone across the United States.

In recent years, the Subcommittee has demonstrated a commendable commitment to the arts by increasing funding for the NEA. We are sincerely grateful for this bipartisan effort, which underscores the importance of the arts in our communities and our nation as a whole.

As you deliberate on the Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations bill, I urge you to prioritize the National Endowment for the Arts once again, recognizing its significant impact on communities nationwide. The NEA's unique federal-state partnership ensures that arts funding reaches every corner of our country, empowering states and regions to address their unique priorities and serving far more constituents than federal funds alone can reach. Unique among federal agencies, the Endowment funds state plans; these plans are developed by state arts agencies in response to citizens, communities, arts organizations, legislatures and governors. This makes the federal-state arts investment incredibly responsive and relevant to citizens in every state and jurisdiction.

In FY 2024, the NEA distributed 40% of its grants funds to state, jurisdictional, and regional arts agencies, amounting to \$65 million. State arts agencies used their share of NEA funds, combined with funds from state legislatures, to support almost 23,000 grants to arts organizations, civic groups, and schools in over 4,800 communities across the nation. Twenty-two percent of state arts agency grant awards went to non-metropolitan areas, supporting



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programs that strengthen the civic and economic sustainability of rural America. Thirty percent of state arts agency grant dollars went to arts education, fostering student success in and out of school and building the critical thinking, creativity and communications skills needed to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive workforce. Congress's continued support of the 40% formula is essential to state arts agencies, boosting their ability to ensure that the arts benefit all communities, regardless of wealth or geography.

Federal funding for arts and creativity is a high return investment in cities, towns and rural communities nationwide. It improves the lives of all Americans, equips an innovative workforce and keeps us competitive globally. It is a great example of government done right, as it fuels public-private partnerships, leverages \$9 in additional funds for every federal dollar invested and puts tax dollars and decision-making authority into the hands of citizens.

New research shows that the arts are a highly effective economic investment that drive state economies, regardless of how other economic sectors perform. The arts also strengthen the economy following periods of acute economic distress. Research findings reveal that the arts are an agile and resilient sector with the capacity to ignite job growth, reduce economic risk through diversification, stimulate commerce and attract tourism. As we continue to work toward arts sector recovery and stability (particularly germane for the performing arts), that work not only benefits the arts industry, but it also positions the arts to benefit the broader economy. Strengthening the arts provides opportunities for the arts to help strengthen the nation.

NASAA and states applaud the NEA's many services to the country, including its leadership in developing beneficial programs for communities, military personnel, veterans, students and many others. NASAA and state arts agencies proudly partner with the NEA and work collaboratively and in solidarity to benefit all communities across the country. Together we accomplish what neither side can achieve alone.

I extend our sincere appreciation for Congress's steadfast support of the National Endowment for the Arts and federal funding for the arts. As we move forward, NASAA remains committed to serving as a resource to this Committee and to advancing our shared goal of promoting the arts for the betterment of our society. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Pam Breau  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

**Statement of Dustin Morin, Director, Mining and Reclamation Division, Alabama Department of Labor, on Behalf of the National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Programs regarding: the FY 2025 Proposed Budgets for (1) the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement and (2) the Interior Department's (DOIs) Energy Community Revitalization Program (ECRP) before the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee – May 10, 2024.**

My name is Dustin Morin and I serve as Director of the Mining and Reclamation Division within Alabama's Department of Labor. I provide this statement on behalf of the National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Programs (NAAML), for which I currently serve as President. NAAML represents 32 states and tribes, all of which implement coal abandoned mine land reclamation (AML) programs under Title IV of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) or state level hardrock AML programs or both. [REDACTED]

**Summary of NAAML Funding Requests**

- \$65m for hardrock AML grants to state and tribes under the Energy Community Revitalization Program (ECRP), which can mostly come from excess claims maintenance fees
- \$135m for the Abandoned Mine Lands Economic Revitalization Program (AMLER)
- \$1.5m for the Watershed Cooperative Agreements Program under SMCRA Title IV

**State and Tribal Hardrock AML Grants** – The majority of states and many Indian tribes suffer ongoing impacts of abandoned hardrock and other noncoal mines (referred to as “hardrock AML” hereafter). Hardrock AML damages the safety, environment, and economic vitality of nearby communities throughout the Country – it is especially prevalent in the West but is a problem in every other region as well. Most states and tribes have very limited, if any, ability to address hardrock AML problems due to lack of funding. The states with well-established hardrock AML programs struggle to make consistent progress in the absence of steady funding.

The \$3 billion funding authorization for hardrock AML grants (\$1.5 billion for states and tribes) in Section 40704 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) was a very exciting development. However, funding has not yet been appropriated on the scale authorized. \$1.7m for states and \$400k for tribes has been appropriated in each of FY 2022, 2023, and 2024 through the ECRP. This is a welcome beginning but is not enough to make meaningful progress addressing hardrock AML hazards. The total cost to address the national hardrock AML problem is estimated to be in the tens of billions of dollars. We urge Congress to appropriate an amount of funding more commensurate to the need, at least \$65m for FY25. We also suggest encouraging federal agencies with responsibility for addressing hardrock AML to expand their partnerships with states and tribes, allowing state and tribal hardrock AML programs to conduct additional projects enabled by federal agency funding.

We suggest utilizing excess funding generated by claims maintenance fees from mining on public lands for this purpose. We understand that between \$40-50 million or more is generated by claims maintenance fees in excess of what the Bureau of Land Management is provided from

these funds each year. It would be sensible to put this excess, industry-generated funding, which otherwise goes to the general treasury, toward hardrock AML work. We understand this idea has the support of the National Mining Association and the Biden Administration.<sup>1</sup>

While awaiting additional funding, the nascent IJA-authorized hardrock AML state and tribal grants program has been developing very well. NAAML and our sister organization the Interstate Mining Compact Commission (IMCC) have been working closely with DOI's Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance (OEPC) and have appreciated its willingness to incorporate state and tribal input. We have convened a group of 40+ states and tribes to provide continuing input to OEPC on how the program should work and how funding should be utilized. We are also working closely with USGS on development of a national hardrock AML inventory, which will eventually provide Congress a nationwide picture of the scope of the hardrock AML problem – but this effort will take a significant amount of time to complete.

The new inventory will confirm what we already know – that the need to address hardrock AML issues is great. The hardrock AML grants program is ready to be fully funded. It is too important to wait for the inventory to be complete, or for hardrock mining law reform legislation to be agreed upon. The states and tribes are aware of the most harmful sites, and their harm is immediate and ongoing. We are prepared to begin delivering the benefits of safe, restored landscapes and water resources to our citizens as soon as funding is provided.

Adequate government funding is just one element of the action Congress needs to take. The Appropriations Committee should be aware that Good Samaritan legislation is an essential part of a solution to the hardrock AML problem. Current law holds states and tribes liable for the full costs of cleaning up water pollution at an AML site they have remediated, even if their work made the site better and perfect site cleanup was impractical or impossible. Community and conservation groups, as well as industry, who are the states' potential "Good Samaritan" partners in hardrock AML remediation, are threatened by the same undeserved liability despite having no connection to the site in question. We strongly support *The Good Samaritan Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act of 2023* (S. 2781 & H.R. 7779), a carefully tailored "pilot" Good Samaritan program. With or without this kind of legislation, the hardrock AML program should be fully funded as soon as possible - but it should not be forgotten that the programs' great potential for restoration of water resources, especially in the West where water is so precious, is majorly constrained without common sense Good Samaritan liability protections.

**IJA Coal AML Funding Implementation** – The infusion of new coal AML funding in the IJA ushered in a re-invigorated era for coal AML programs. We thank Congress for recognizing the critical role AML programs play in safety, environmental restoration, and the creation of jobs and economic growth. These benefits are felt throughout the Country, especially in places like Appalachia that are most affected by the energy transition. We also thank Congress for the STREAM Act, which ensures the gains enabled by the IJA for AML water restoration will be long-lasting.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Interior, Interagency Working Group on Mining Laws, Regulations, and Permitting (2023). Recommendations to Improve Mining on Public Land.

Implementation of IJJA coal AML funding is well underway. States and tribes have been busy designing and coordinating an expanded number of AML projects and beginning construction on IJJA-funded AML projects. We have also been working with the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) on implementation of the new program.

The IJJA coal AML program is and will continue to be a great success, but OSMRE's handling of the IJJA coal AML program has made implementation more difficult than necessary. Congress directed that these funds be provided to states and tribes "as expeditiously as practicable".<sup>2</sup> OSMRE is treating the IJJA program as entirely separate from the long-standing, well-functioning AML fee-funded program, despite the new IJJA funding being for the same purposes as AML fee funding with only minor differences in how it can be utilized. The result has been slower than necessary roll out of funding, an unduly, cumbersome, and confusing process, and significant diversion of limited state and tribal AML staff time away from the core mission of planning and executing AML projects.

We appreciate Congressional support encouraging OSMRE to improve collaboration with states and tribes to improve implementation. As a result, there has been some recent progress, but there is much important work left to do. We request that Congress continue to encourage OSMRE to improve implementation of the IJJA coal AML program. In particular, OSMRE must be encouraged to do the following:

*Combine Grant Processes for IJJA and AML Fee Funding* – OSMRE requires that state and tribal IJJA-funded AML grants and AML fee-funded grants be applied for in entirely separate applications. This effectively doubles the amount of time states and tribes must spend managing federal grants. It would be much more efficient to have a single combined grant application. Tracking the respective use and impact of IJJA- and fee-based funding can be accomplished through normal accounting controls, as we have done for years

*Constrain New Requirements, Priorities, and Information Gathering* – OSMRE continues to create new requirements for and request new types of information of the state and tribal AML programs. Existing processes and available information are already more than adequate to effectively manage the AML program and inform OSMRE, Congress, and the Public what is being accomplished. This information is available through the national coal AML inventory (e-AMLIS), state/tribe grant applications, authorization to proceed requests, annual reports, and websites maintained by individual AML programs, NAAML, and IMCC. Without restraint regarding new requirements and information requests, the burden of these administrative activities will outweigh their benefit, ultimately detracting from the programs' effectiveness.

*Increase Training Resources* – Historically, OSMRE's training program has provided state, tribal, and OSMRE personnel foundational education in how AML programs work and the design and management of AML projects. Current OSMRE planning for the training program is inadequate to accommodate the increase in state, tribal, and OSMRE personnel as a result of expanded IJJA coal AML funding. The IJJA provided OSMRE with \$339 million to implement the IJJA. To our knowledge, it has no plans to spend any of this money on the training program, where it is acutely needed. We recommend that Congress increase funding for the NTTP and

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<sup>2</sup> IJJA, § 40701(b)(1).

TIPS training programs and encourage OSMRE to do the following: 1) increase the number of training courses offered, 2) offer regionally-focused sections of courses to address regional climatic and ecological differences where appropriate, 3) offer compensation to instructors where appropriate, rather than continue to rely solely on volunteer instructors.

**SMCRA Title IV Coal AML** – We encourage Congress to maintain OSMRE funding for the agency’s role of supporting state and tribal AML programs, for example, technical assistance and applied science. We also recommend funding for Watershed Cooperative Agreements be maintained. This funding serves an important role in facilitating state and local partnerships, helping to leverage outside sources of funding and allowing reclamation funding to go further.

**Abandoned Mine Lands Economic Revitalization Program** – The states and tribes are proud of what has been accomplished through the Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) program (formerly known as the “pilot program”), which looks for creative ways to turn AML sites into opportunities for economic development. We request that funding for AMLER in the amount of \$135 million continue.

While AMLER has been successful, it has experienced significant implementation difficulties. OSMRE’s “vetting” process has done more to hurt than to help. It requires every AMLER project to be reviewed and pre-approved sequentially by three levels of OSMRE offices before project plans are fully developed. Vetting often amounts to OSMRE asserting its own opinions in place of the states and tribes’ more locally-informed expertise on economic and community development. Substandard communication and opaque evaluation criteria have caused delays, uncertainty and devotion of a disproportionate amount of AML program staff time to this program. Local businesses and community groups that would be AMLER project partners find it difficult to navigate the process and are increasingly less interested in participating.

We thank Congress for its efforts to address these implementation difficulties. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2024 directed OSMRE to distribute AMLER funding directly to eligible states and tribes within 90 days. This should alleviate many of the problems described above and allow the program to operate as originally envisioned: state and tribal AML programs working cooperatively with economic development agencies and local stakeholders to facilitate economic development on or near AML sites informed by their first-hand knowledge and expertise. We recommend that the direct payments requirement be continued in FY25.

**Conclusion** – In closing, the states and tribes represented by NAAML P again express our gratitude to Congress for the recognition of the value of the AML programs, both coal and hardrock, and the investment in their future represented by the IJA. We look forward to beginning this new chapter for coal AML and are thrilled to be moving toward a national-scale hardrock AML grants program. With Congress’ continuing support and attentiveness to AML implementation issues, we feel confident that continued success of the state and tribal AML programs is assured.



**Testimony of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies (NACAA)  
Submitted to the House Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Regarding the FY 2025 Budget for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
May 9, 2024**

On behalf of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies (NACAA), thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on the FY 2025 budget for the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), particularly grants to state and local air pollution control agencies under Sections 103 and 105 of the Clean Air Act (CAA), which are part of the State and Tribal Assistance Grant (STAG) program. NACAA has four recommendations with respect to FY 2025 appropriations. The association urges Congress to 1) provide \$500 million in grants to state and local air agencies, which is an increase of \$264 million over the FY 2024 appropriation of \$236 million; 2) provide flexibility to state and local air quality agencies to use federal grants to address the highest priority programs in their areas; 3) retain grants for monitoring fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) under the authority of Section 103 of the Clean Air Act, rather than shifting it to Section 105; and 4) provide grant increases under authorities of the CAA that do not require matching funds (e.g., Section 103) as much as possible to allow agencies that do not have sufficient matching funds to still obtain the additional grants.

NACAA is the national, nonpartisan, non-profit association of 157 air pollution control agencies in 40 states, including 117 local air agencies, the District of Columbia and four territories. NACAA exists to advance the equitable protection of clean air and public health for all, and to improve the capability and effectiveness of state and local air agencies. These agencies have the “primary responsibility” under the CAA for implementing our nation’s clean air programs. As such, they conduct an array of critical activities intended to improve and maintain air quality and protect public health.

**The Clean Air Act Has Been Very Successful**

Since the adoption of the CAA in 1970, federal, state and local air quality agencies have made tremendous strides in reducing air pollution and thereby protecting public health. According to EPA, total emissions of the six criteria air pollutants (for which the national health-based standards are set) have decreased by 73 percent between 1980 and 2022 and, between 1990 and 2017, emissions of the toxic air pollutants identified in the CAA have declined by 74 percent.<sup>1</sup> Since state and local air agencies have the primary responsibility for implementing the federal clean air program, their contributions to the success of the program have been essential.

While these impressive air quality improvements took place, our country has continued to experience strong economic growth.<sup>2</sup> During the same period identified above (1980 – 2022), during which pollution was reduced markedly, gross domestic product increased 196 percent,

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/air-trends/air-quality-national-summary#emissions-trends>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/air-trends/air-quality-national-summary>

vehicle miles traveled went up 108 percent, energy consumption increased 29 percent and the country's population grew by 47 percent.<sup>3</sup> Improvements to air quality and a strong economy have gone hand in hand.

### **Air Pollution Remains a Serious Public Health Problem**

Despite the gains federal, state and local programs have made in the pursuit of healthful air quality, air pollution remains a serious public health concern. *In fact, very few problems this subcommittee addresses pose greater threats to public health than air pollution and climate change.* Air pollution continues to threaten public health and welfare, especially in overburdened environmental justice communities that disproportionately suffer adverse human health and environmental impacts.

Each year in America, air pollution causes tens of thousands of premature deaths and exposes millions to unhealthful levels of air contaminants, resulting in cancer, damage to respiratory, cardiovascular, neurological and reproductive systems and other health problems.<sup>4</sup> In 2022, about 85 million people in the U.S. lived in areas that exceeded one or more federal health-based air pollution standards.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, EPA's hazardous air pollution data show that "millions of people live in areas where air toxics pose potential health concerns."<sup>6</sup> Environmental justice communities are particularly at risk.

When it comes to climate change, there is still much to be done to address increasing greenhouse gas emissions that result in more and worse wildfires, longer ozone seasons and upward-trending global temperatures. State and local governments have instituted some of the country's strongest climate change programs, making meaningful progress towards reducing greenhouse gases.

### **Significant Challenges Remain for State and Local Air Quality Agencies**

As stated earlier, under the CAA, state and local agencies have the primary responsibility for implementing the federal clean air program. This massive undertaking calls for monitoring, issuing permits, planning, developing emission-reduction strategies, enforcing rules, educating the public, hiring and training staff and conducting many other complex activities. Increasingly, these agencies are tasked with new and high-priority responsibilities to reduce air pollution, address the disproportionate harm facing overburdened communities and tackle climate change. Unfortunately, this simply cannot be accomplished with current levels of funding.

Federal, state and local air quality programs have come a long way in cleaning up the air, but there is still far to go. Unfortunately, there are no longer any "easy fixes" or low-hanging fruit to be had. What remain are extremely difficult challenges toward making incremental, but essential, improvements. These include addressing dispersed sources (e.g., mobile sources and

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/air-trends/air-quality-national-summary#emissions-trends>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/clean-air-act-overview/air-pollution-current-and-future-challenges> and <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3670349/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/air-trends/air-quality-national-summary#emissions-trends>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-02/AirToxScreen\\_2018%20TSD.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-02/AirToxScreen_2018%20TSD.pdf) (page 113)

smaller area sources), climate change, cumulative impacts and other very complex issues. Confronting these problems requires investments in increasingly high-tech solutions that come with a cost, including monitoring, modeling and data analysis, among others, not to mention investing in and retaining staff who are sufficiently trained in these increasingly complicated subject areas.

Just one example of a problem that is placing greater demands on state and local air agencies is wildfires. These fires in many places across the country cause smoke and pollution that can pose significant public health challenges and they have been rising in number, frequency and size. Increased resources are needed for such complex activities as monitoring smoke, analyzing data, notifying and communicating with the public and promoting preparedness activities, all of which are essential to address public concerns and protect public health.

#### **Air Agencies Need Significant Resources to Succeed and Help Grow the Economy**

State and local air agencies have been underfunded for many years. Federal grants to state and local air quality agencies (under Sections 103 and 105 of the CAA) were not much higher in FY 2024 than 20 years ago, representing a substantial decrease in purchasing power when factoring in inflation. During this time, air quality issues have become more complicated and costly. Moreover, while federal grants were originally intended to cover 60 percent of the cost of implementing the CAA, they cover less than a quarter of that today, with the remainder coming largely from state and local programs themselves.

The increase in funds we are recommending is not necessarily sufficient for the many responsibilities facing state and local agencies, but it would be very helpful as a foundation of support to meet the modern-day demands of our programs. Not only would this further our quest for healthful air quality, but adequate funding for clean air programs would be good for the economy as well, ultimately helping in the creation of new jobs. For example, well-funded state and local programs could reduce delays in construction and operating permitting, increase needed compliance assistance for businesses, provide monitoring that would help tailor strategies to the hardest-hit areas and develop rules and plans to implement those strategies.

Increased grants would be used for many of the basic ongoing and essential responsibilities facing state and local air quality agencies. Additionally, new funding would support:

- strengthening pollution detection and visualization through monitors, sensors and airborne- and mobile-detection equipment;
- supporting small business programs and emission reductions from smaller sources, including inspections, compliance assistance and technical support;
- addressing climate change through planning, monitoring, permitting and enforcement; energy-transition assistance for communities dependent on fossil fuels; and adaptation and resilience for communities that face extreme weather and climate impacts;
- ensuring state and local agencies can meet necessary long-term planning requirements and take on the additional air quality responsibilities in new federal clean energy and clean transportation programs;

- tackling the ever-increasing threats posed by wildfires, including mitigating adverse health impacts and communicating with the public; and
- expanding and adding new programs that protect all Americans, especially vulnerable communities that continue to bear the greatest pollution burdens.

#### **Funds from Permit Fees and Recent Legislation Do Not Solve the Problem**

The permit fee program under Title V of the Clean Air Act, while extremely valuable, does not solve state and local air agencies' funding problems. Title V fees only support the operating permit program and must not be used for other activities (i.e., federal grants and permit fees must not be mingled) and they apply only to major sources and do not cover the significant costs for non-major sources (e.g., permits, monitoring, enforcement, compliance assistance). Additionally, current fees already are substantial and there would be significant resistance to any increases. Finally, fee revenue has decreased drastically due to reductions in emissions on which they are based (i.e., success in controlling emissions results in diminished fee revenue).

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)<sup>7</sup> includes essential and welcome funding for state and local air agencies to address climate change in particular. However, those funds are not a substitute for the increases we seek, which are intended to make up for the historical deficits in state and local grant funding and bring the appropriations to the level they should be for these agencies to carry out the ongoing responsibilities that existed prior to the IRA and will continue into the future. Additionally, successfully implementing the IRA will likely increase the responsibilities of state and local air agencies' core programs, for which the measure did not allocate specific additional funding.

#### **Conclusion**

Federal grants to state and local air quality agencies are a relatively small piece of the national budget. Yet the return on investment is among the highest when considering the benefits of protecting public health and the environment against the serious threats posed by air pollution and climate change.

State and local air quality agencies' efforts to protect and improve air quality are critically important both for public health and a sound economy. NACAA recommends that Congress 1) provide \$500 million in grants to state and local air agencies, which is an increase of \$264 million over the FY 2024 appropriation of \$236 million; 2) provide flexibility to state and local air quality agencies to use federal grants to address the highest priority programs in their areas; 3) retain grants for monitoring PM<sub>2.5</sub> under the authority of Section 103 of the Clean Air Act, rather than shifting it to Section 105; and 4) provide grant increases under authorities of the CAA that do not require matching funds (e.g., Section 103) as much as possible to allow agencies that do not have sufficient matching funds to still obtain the additional grants.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to provide testimony. If you require additional information, please contact Miles Keogh ([mkeogh@4cleanair.org](mailto:mkeogh@4cleanair.org)) or Mary Sullivan Douglas ([mdouglas@4cleanair.org](mailto:mdouglas@4cleanair.org)) of NACAA.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bills/117th-congress/house-bill/5376/text>

**National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA)  
Written Testimony Submitted to House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Regarding FY25 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Funding**

May 10, 2024

Contact: NACWA Director, Government Affairs, Matthew McKenna, [mmckenna@nacwa.org](mailto:mmckenna@nacwa.org)

The National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) represents over 350 public wastewater and stormwater utility members nationwide, providing essential clean water services to more than 150 million Americans daily. These utilities serve communities large and small, urban and rural, in nearly every state and work around the clock to protect public health and the environment and support economic growth.

Providing these essential clean water services come with a great deal of complex challenges, including reinvesting in aging infrastructure, managing the escalating operation and maintenance costs and supply chain disruptions, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce, addressing water quality impairments and regulations, such as for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), emerging contaminants and nutrients, and investing in climate resilience and system security.

Public clean water utilities are working each day to overcome these challenges and provide the highest level of service to the communities they serve while ensuring rates remain affordable for families and local businesses.

NACWA greatly appreciates Congress's direct appropriations for clean water under the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)*. Other programs were authorized but not directly or fully funded through the *IIJA*. It is important that Congress fully appropriate the clean water programs authorized and reauthorized under the *IIJA* to ensure local communities have the resources they need to provide essential public wastewater and stormwater services.

NACWA's FY25 requests are below. As always, we appreciate the Subcommittee's engagement with the Association and our members and consideration of these clean water priorities.

**Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF)**

The CWSRF is the primary federal clean water financing tool that communities and public clean water utilities utilize to help meet their Clean Water Act (CWA) obligations and infrastructure needs. The CWSRF has been instrumental to communities' successes in advancing water quality and public health protection for over 40 years. Yet as EPA's newly updated Clean Watersheds Needs Survey shows, the cost of maintaining wastewater and stormwater infrastructure is growing substantially, with an estimated 20-year need of over \$630 billion – a 73 percent increase since a decade ago. The CWSRF must remain a vital tool to support communities in making these investments.

While the *IIJA* provided a direct five-year infusion of additional funds into the CWSRF, NACWA appreciates that it was the intent of Congress for these funds to supplement – not

supplant – continued robust annual CWSRF appropriations. NACWA strongly urges annual CWSRF appropriations be provided at the full *IIJA* authorized level of \$3.25 billion for FY25.

We note that NACWA members who have received Congressionally Directed Spending in recent Fiscal Years greatly appreciate those funds, and we support their continued provision. However, as the Committee considers Congressionally Directed Spending moving forward, NACWA urges that funding for these projects is not taken from the CWSRF's appropriation total, but rather be additive, to ensure that state programs do not see their ability to finance water projects severely curtailed and to avoid reducing access to the CWSRF by all eligible communities in a state.

Lastly, NACWA wishes to emphasize that innovative technology will play an increasingly vital role in public clean water service provision. NACWA appreciates the Subcommittee's work in the first FY24 omnibus appropriations package to enhance the use of clean water technology. For FY25, NACWA requests that the Committee include language prioritizing eligibilities for technological innovation through the CWSRF by allowing states the ability to use up to five percent of the funds provided to them for projects that utilize proven or emerging clean water technology for publicly owned treatment works optimization and to meet or enhance local public health and environmental objectives. This will help underscore the ability of the CWSRF to finance innovative project approaches and new clean water technologies.

#### **Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants**

Reducing sewer overflows has been a key driver of financial strain on hundreds of communities and their ratepayers. This is especially clear in communities under federal consent decrees, as well as those addressing aging infrastructure and/or adjusting to population and economic shifts, all while dealing with the growing impacts of climate change and extreme weather events.

The Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants program provides federal grant dollars to assist municipal clean water utilities and communities in more affordably managing combined sewer overflows, sanitary sewer overflows, and stormwater flows for water reuse. NACWA strongly supports the growth of this program, which provides communities with direct grant dollars (as opposed to loans) to make these critical investments and fully supports funding at the reauthorized level of \$280 million in FY25.

#### **Low-Income Water Assistance**

For over a decade, NACWA has pushed for the creation of a federal low-income water assistance program to help households maintain access to affordable and reliable public clean and drinking water services. Similar federal programs exist to help low-income families with food and energy costs, and the time has come for water to be equally recognized as a costly but vital public health need. A robust and permanent federal water assistance program is critical to ensuring communities and public utilities can provide service to all customers and set the rates necessary to maintain safe, reliable water and wastewater systems.

NACWA is grateful for the steps Congress has taken to advance this vital need by providing funding for a temporary emergency Low Income Household Water Assistance Program administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and authorizing the establishment of an EPA low-income water customer assistance pilot program in the *IIJA*.

However, HHS' LIHWAP funding expired at the end of 2023, leaving many struggling families unable to afford their essential water services. Additional resources are needed to bridge this gap and ensure the long-term viability of a permanent program, and NACWA requests the Subcommittee provide \$225 million in FY24 for the EPA to implement its pilot program.

#### **Integrated Planning**

Integrated Planning (IP), codified into the CWA by Congress in 2018, can assist large and small communities in managing costs and sequencing and prioritizing their clean water investments—empowering communities to maximize environmental benefits and prioritize their most critical environmental outcomes. The IP approach requires a shift from business as usual, requiring significant work upfront by communities, states, and EPA to achieve improved outcomes.

NACWA greatly appreciates the \$2 million provided by the Committee in the first FY24 omnibus appropriations package to provide EPA with dedicated resources to help communities develop IP frameworks. The Agency is currently working with state regulators to incorporate IP approaches into permitting and enforcement, a critical step. NACWA requests an additional \$2 million in FY25 appropriations to continue these efforts.

#### **Water Workforce Infrastructure Grants Program**

The public clean water sector can provide stable career paths across skill levels where workers take pride in serving their community. However, the water utility workforce is retiring rapidly and public utilities are struggling to compete with other sectors to attract and retain workers.

NACWA strongly supports EPA's Water Workforce Infrastructure Development Grant Program and requests that the Subcommittee provide at least \$6 million in FY25, which is higher than the FY24 allocation but equal to the FY23 allocation. This funding will support innovative efforts to develop tomorrow's utility workforce and ensure long-term stability in the sector.

#### **Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) Program**

The WIFIA program complements the SRFs, accelerating significant water infrastructure investments and leveraging limited federal resources. NACWA supports at least \$75.6 million in FY25 for WIFIA, which is equal to the FY23 appropriated amount and a slight increase from FY24 appropriations. NACWA also supports an additional \$5 million for the SWIFIA program, which allows state financing authorities that administer the SRFs to apply for WIFIA loans directly through the EPA. This ability of a state to bundle multiple projects on its approved intended use plan can increase participation in smaller, rural, and lesser-resourced communities.

#### **Clean Water Infrastructure Resilience and Sustainability Program**

NACWA strongly supports this program, which was established under the *IJA* to help clean water utilities that are on the front lines of mitigating the impacts of climate change and extreme weather. Communities vary in how climate change impacts their infrastructure and are trying to implement locally appropriate solutions that ensure resilience for critical water services. For FY25, NACWA requests the fully authorized amount of \$25 million to jumpstart this program.

#### **Connection to Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTWs) Grant Program**

NACWA continues its support for this program, established under the IJJA, which allows the EPA to provide grants to POTWs or nonprofit organizations to cover the costs incurred from connecting a household to a municipal or private wastewater system. Connecting Americans currently served by a decentralized water system can help provide clean water and sanitation services to underserved communities while also better-protecting water quality in impaired bodies of water across the country. NACWA requests the total authorized amount of \$40 million in FY25 to establish this critical program.

**Establish the Small Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTWs) Efficiency Grants**

NACWA requests that the Subcommittee establish the Small POTWs Efficiency Grant Program at EPA. This program, authorized under the IJJA, allows the EPA to assist small POTWs that serve fewer than 10,000 people or a disadvantaged community by replacing or repairing equipment to increase water or energy efficiency. At least 15 percent of appropriated funds made available under this program will be used for grants to POTWs that serve fewer than 3,300 people. Because the rate basis of these small communities is so small, it can be very difficult for the POTWs serving these communities to upgrade their plants to operate more efficiently.

**Grants for Construction and Refurbishing of Individual Household Decentralized Wastewater Systems for Individuals with Low or Moderate Income**

NACWA requests that the Subcommittee provide \$50 million for grants from the EPA to allow nonprofit organizations to receive funds to construct, repair, or replace decentralized wastewater systems for low- or moderate-income households or groups of such families. This program, which was authorized under the IJJA, would significantly protect water quality throughout communities that do not have access to sewer sanitary disposal systems and where a connection to a publicly owned treatment works (POTWs) might not be feasible or is cost-efficient.

**PFAS**

Clean water utilities are very concerned about emerging contaminants in their influent, the impact of these chemicals on treated effluent and biosolids, and potential costs that may accrue to public ratepayers. NACWA urges strong funding for EPA to advance scientific understanding of PFAS in the environment – particularly exposure pathways, toxicity levels, and treatment technologies – key factors that guide the development of appropriate, scientific, risk-based standards to protect public health and the environment. This work can also help advance source control and the transition from PFAS in products and supply chains to alternative materials.

As a crucial part of this, NACWA urges Congress to provide dedicated funding to bolster EPA's Biosolids Program, which regulates the beneficial reuse of wastewater treatment residuals. EPA's ongoing work on the problem formulation for biosolids is critical to providing certainty regarding continued safe residual management.

**Additional Key Programs**

NACWA also supports strong funding for the EPA's **Geographic Programs**, which support critical watershed-based investments; **Section 319 Nonpoint Source grants**, which support watershed solutions to pollution driven by nonpoint sources, which remain the largest outstanding driver of water quality impairments; and the EPA's **National Priorities Water Research grant program**, which supports work on timely national water research initiatives.

TESTIMONY OF DAVID TERRY, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE  
ENERGY OFFICIALS, BEFORE THE HOUSE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND  
RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF FY'25  
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY FUNDING

May 9, 2024

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee, I am David Terry, President of the National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO), which represents the 56 State and Territory Energy Directors and their Offices. NASEO submits this testimony in support of funding for the ENERGY STAR program (within the Climate Protection Partnership Division of the Office of Air and Radiation) at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). NASEO supports funding of at least **\$50 million in FY'25, including specific report language directing that the funds be utilized only for the ENERGY STAR program. The program received \$54 million a decade ago and is now down to approximately \$35 million.** The ENERGY STAR program is successful, voluntary, and cost-effective. The program has a proven track record – it makes sense, it saves energy and money, and Americans embrace it. ENERGY STAR helps consumers and businesses control expenditures over the long term. The program is strongly supported by product manufacturers, utilities, and homebuilders, and ENERGY STAR leverages the states' voluntary efficiency actions. Voluntary ENERGY STAR activities are occurring in public buildings, such as schools, in conjunction with State Energy Offices, in virtually every state, including Idaho and Maine. The states and the public utilize ENERGY STAR because it is seen as unbiased and delivers cost-saving benefits to businesses, consumers and state and local governments.

The ENERGY STAR program is focused on voluntary efforts that reduce energy waste, promotes energy efficiency and renewable energy, and works with states, local governments, communities and business to achieve these goals in a cooperative, public-private manner. NASEO has worked closely with EPA and approximately 40 states are ENERGY STAR Partners. With very limited funding, EPA's ENERGY STAR program coordinates with the State Energy Offices to give consumers and businesses the opportunity and technical assistance tools to make better energy decisions and catalyzes product efficiency improvements by manufacturers without regulation or mandates. The program is voluntary.

ENERGY STAR focuses on energy-efficient products as well as buildings (e.g., residential, commercial, and industrial). Over 300 million ENERGY STAR qualified products were sold in 2019 alone, not including another 300 million ENERGY STAR certified light bulbs. The ENERGY STAR label is recognized across the United States. Approximately 90 percent of households recognize the ENERGY STAR label and a majority of surveyed U.S. households reported having purchased an ENERGY STAR product. The manufacturing, installation, design, wholesale distribution, and provision of installation services related to ENERGY STAR products employed approximately 750,000 American workers (not including retail employment) in accordance with a 2023 DOE report. It makes the work of the State Energy Offices much easier, by engaging the public on easily-recognized products, services, and targets. In order to obtain

the ENERGY STAR label, a product has to meet established guidelines. ENERGY STAR's voluntary partnership programs include ENERGY STAR Buildings, ENERGY STAR Homes, ENERGY STAR Small Business, and ENERGY STAR Labeled Products. We are also encouraged by the ENERGY STAR Home Upgrades Program.

Marketplace barriers are also eradicated through the ENERGY STAR program's collaborative approach to consumer education. State Energy Offices are working with EPA to promote ENERGY STAR products, ENERGY STAR for new construction (including in Maine), ENERGY STAR for public housing, etc. Another ENERGY STAR success is in the manufactured housing sector. Some states and utilities offer modest rebates for ENERGY STAR manufactured homes in order to deliver both energy cost savings to homeowners and lower overall electric grid operation costs for all customers.

In 2023, millions of consumers and thousands of voluntary partners, including manufacturers, builders, businesses, communities, and utilities, tapped the value of ENERGY STAR and achieved impressive financial and environmental results.

More than 840 utilities, state, and local governments and non-profits utilize ENERGY STAR in their energy efficiency programs, as do approximately 1,700 manufacturers.

The State Energy Offices are very encouraged by progress made at EPA, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy, and in our states to promote programs to make schools more energy-efficient while improving indoor air quality and comfort. In fact, there are over 150 ENERGY STAR-rated schools in states. In addition, many states' private sector partners voluntarily utilize ENERGY STAR to promote energy efficiency and lower operating costs.

EPA provides technical assistance to the State Energy Offices in such areas as ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager (how to rate the performance of buildings), setting an energy target, and financing options for building improvements and building upgrade strategies. ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager is used extensively by State Energy Offices to benchmark performance of state and municipal buildings, saving taxpayer dollars. Portfolio Manager is the industry leading benchmarking tool which has been used voluntarily in approximately 50% of the commercial buildings in the United States. Portfolio Manager is used to measure, track, assess, and report energy and water consumption. Portfolio Manager has been updated and is now more helpful. Portfolio Manager is utilized by 7 states and 48 local governments.

Additionally, the industrial sector embraces ENERGY STAR at job-creating companies such as GM, Eastman Chemical, Nissan, Raytheon, and Boeing. Recent ENERGY STAR certified manufacturers include such companies as J.R. Simplot, Flowers Foods, Ardagh Glass, and Marathon Petroleum Refining. At the close of 2022, more than 750 U.S. industrial sites had committed to the ENERGY STAR Challenge for Industry

The State Energy Offices are working cooperatively with our peers in the state environmental agencies and state public utilities commissions to ensure that programs,

regulations, projects and policies are developed recognizing both energy and environmental concerns. We have worked closely with this program at EPA to address these issues. We encourage these continued efforts.

### **Conclusion**

The ENERGY STAR program saves consumers billions of dollars every year. The payback and job creation benefits are enormous. NASEO supports robust program funding of at least \$50 million in FY'25. Funding for the ENERGY STAR program is justified. It is a solid public-private relationship that leverages resources, time and talent to produce tangible results by saving energy and money and, in light of Administrator Michael Regan's commitment to environmental justice, can provide immense benefits to high-need and underserved communities. NASEO endorses these activities as well as the constructive partnerships that the State Energy Offices have with EPA to cooperatively implement a variety of critical national programs without mandates.

**Contact:** David Terry, NASEO President ([dterry@naseo.org](mailto:dterry@naseo.org)); and Jeff Genzer, NASEO Counsel ([jcg@dwgp.com](mailto:jcg@dwgp.com)).

**Written Public Testimony of the National Association of State Foresters (NASF)  
Scott Phillips, South Carolina State Forester, and President, NASF  
Prepared for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and  
Related Agencies  
Concerning FY 2025 USDA Forest Service Appropriations  
May 10, 2024**

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) appreciates the opportunity to submit written public testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies regarding our fiscal year (FY) 2025 appropriations recommendations. Our priorities focus primarily on appropriations for the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) State, Private, and Tribal Forestry (SP&TF) programs, as well as the Research and Development (R&D) Forest Inventory and Analysis Program.

State foresters deliver technical and financial assistance, along with forest health, water, and wildfire protection for more than two-thirds of the nation's 751 million acres of forests. The Forest Service SP&TF mission area provides vital support to deliver these services, which contribute to the socioeconomic and environmental health of rural and urban areas. The comprehensive process for delivering these services is articulated in each State's Forest Resource Assessment and Strategy (Forest Action Plan), authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill and continued in the 2018 Farm Bill. State Forest Action Plans—completed in 2010, updated in 2015, and comprehensively revised in 2020 by all 59 states, U.S. territories, freely associated states, and the District of Columbia—offer practical and comprehensive roadmaps for investing federal, state, local, and private resources where they can be most effective in achieving national conservation goals. SP&TF programs provide a significant return on federal investment by leveraging the boots-on-the-ground and financial resources of state agencies to deliver assistance to forest landowners, tribes, and communities. As federal and state governments continue to face financial challenges, state foresters, in partnership with the SP&TF mission area of the Forest Service, are best positioned to maximize the effectiveness of available resources by focusing work on priority forest issues where resources are needed most.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA/BIL) has provided game changing support in the form of flexible funding for State Forest Action Plan implementation—allowing states to address the highest priority forest management activities within their state, as identified and developed collaboratively with partners and stakeholders. Additionally, the IIJA/BIL provided critical support for the State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance Programs. We look forward to working with you to develop pathways for these historic investments to continue beyond FY2026.

Your support of the following programs is critical to helping states address the many and varied challenges outlined in Forest Action Plans.

**Assisting Landowners and Maintaining Healthy Forests – Forest Stewardship Program and Forest Legacy Program**

Actively managed healthy forest landscapes are a vital part of rural America, providing an estimated 900,000 jobs, clean water, wood products, and other essential services to millions of Americans. Over 50% of U.S. forestland is privately owned and supports an average of eight jobs per 1,000

acres.<sup>1</sup> However, the Forest Service estimates that 57 million acres of private forests in the U.S. are at risk of conversion to urban development over the next two decades. Programs like the Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) and the Forest Legacy Program (FLP) are key tools identified in the Forest Action Plans for keeping working forests intact and providing a full suite of benefits to society. With the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) signed into law, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) now receives permanent annual funding at the full authorized level of \$900 million, nearly doubling historical appropriations for the LWCF. FLP should receive significantly increased funding levels commensurate with the increased funding provided to the LWCF by the GAOA.

Currently, there are over 20 million acres nationwide managed under the Forest Stewardship Program. FSP is the most extensive family forest-owner assistance program in the country and is delivered in partnership with state forestry agencies, cooperative extension services, certified foresters, conservation districts, and other partners. In 2023, the program initiated over 12,000 new management plans providing assistance and educational opportunities to over 585,000 landowners and covering over 1.32 million acres. FSP equips private forest landowners with the unbiased, science-based information they need to sustainably manage their forests now and into the future, helping to keep forests as forests. In addition to delivering technical assistance directly to forestland owners, the Forest Stewardship Program often serves as a gateway to other landowner cost-share assistance programming, like the USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program, state programs, and partner programs, that can help landowners keep their forests working and intact. Forest landowners with management plans are almost three times more likely to meet their management objectives compared to those without management plans. The FSP leads landowners to reach their management objectives while tying them to the state's Forest Action Plan.

The Forest Stewardship Program is facing an uncertain future. **Not only does current enrollment represent only a fraction of the landowners and acres that could benefit from the program with additional funding, but – assuming continued level funding – the Forest Stewardship Program will see close to 7 million acres leave the program over the next three years due to expiring plans.** The result is families and individuals without the additional resources needed to meet their forest management goals and a strain on other agencies' programs and resources to support landowners who previously received assistance through the Forest Stewardship Program. Although effective and in demand, the Forest Stewardship Program has seen a troubling 50 percent decline in federal funding over the last decade. The program simply cannot meet or maintain its current enrollment without sustained increases in funding.

Following congressional direction, NASF has worked closely with the Forest Service to modernize the funding allocation formula to state agencies for FSP, focused on improving program delivery with greater emphasis on performance-based outcomes. Under the new allocation formula, priority areas and priority resource concerns have been designated in each state and greater emphasis has been placed on providing technical assistance and implementing land management plans in those priority areas. *NASF supports funding for the Forest Stewardship Program at \$22 million, a \$10 million increase from the FY 2024 enacted level and the Forest Legacy Program at \$128 million, a \$40 million increase from the FY 2024 enacted level, in FY 2025.*

#### **State Fire Assistance (SFA) and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA)**

<sup>1</sup> Forest2Market. *The Economic Impact of Privately-Owned Forests*. 2009.

More people living in fire-prone landscapes, high fuel loads, drought, and deteriorating forest health have led most state foresters to identify wildland fire as a priority issue in their Forest Action Plans. We now grapple with increasingly expensive and complex wildland fires - fires that frequently threaten human life and property. Prior to 2003, our forests and communities experienced an average of 2.8 million acres burning annually. Since 2004, however, annual wildfires have burned over 7.1 million acres on average, with historic highs in the numbers of acres burned in 2015, 2017, and 2020.<sup>2</sup> As of last month, we have already seen nearly 1.8 million acres burned in 2024 with the summer and fall fire season yet ahead of us. State and local agencies respond to the majority of wildfires across the country; in 2023 state and local agencies were responsible for responding to 46,176 (82%) of the 56,580 reported wildfires across all jurisdictions.

SFA and VFA are the fundamental federal mechanisms for assisting states and local fire departments in responding to wildland fires and conducting management activities that mitigate fire risk on non-federal lands. SFA also helps train and equip local first responders who are often the first to arrive at a wildland fire incident and who play a crucial role in keeping fires and their costs as minimal as possible. Attacking fires when they are small is the key to reducing fatalities, injuries, loss of homes, and cutting federal fire-fighting costs. The need for increased funding for fire suppression on federal lands has broad support. The need to increase fire suppression funding for state and private lands, where roughly 80 percent of wildfires occur and where many federal fires begin, is just as urgent. ***NASF supports funding the State Fire Assistance Program at \$85 million, a \$9 million increase from the FY 2024 enacted level, and Volunteer Fire Assistance Program at \$25 million, a \$4 million increase from the FY 2024 enacted level, in FY 2025.***

#### **Forest Pests and Invasive Plants**

Among the greatest threats identified in the Forest Action Plans are native and non-native pests and diseases which have the potential to displace native trees, shrubs, and other vegetation types in forests; the Forest Service estimates that hundreds of native and non-native insects and diseases damage the Nation's forests each year. The growing number of damaging pests and diseases are often introduced and spread by way of wooden shipping materials, movement of firewood, and through various types of recreation. An estimated 81 million acres are at risk of attack by insects and disease.<sup>3</sup> These extensive areas of high insect or disease mortality can set the stage for large-scale, catastrophic wildfire.

The Cooperative Forest Health Management program supports activities related to prevention, monitoring, suppression, and eradication of insects, diseases, and plants through provision of technical and financial assistance to states and territories to maintain healthy, productive forest ecosystems on non-federal forest lands. The Cooperative Forest Health Management program plays a critical part in protecting communities already facing outbreaks and in preventing exposure of more forests and trees to the devastating and costly effects of damaging pests and pathogens. ***NASF supports funding the Forest Health—Cooperative Lands Program at \$39.43 million in FY 2025, a \$7.4 million increase from the FY 2024 enacted level.***

<sup>2</sup> *Wildfires and acres.* National Interagency Fire Center. (n.d.). Last accessed on April 30, 2024 at <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/wildfires>

<sup>3</sup> Tkacz, Bory, et al. 2014. NIDRM 2012 Report Files: Executive Summary. 2013–2027 National Insect and Disease Forest Risk Assessment. Last accessed on March, 5, 2019 at: [http://www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/technology/pdfs/2012\\_RiskMap\\_Exec\\_summary.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/technology/pdfs/2012_RiskMap_Exec_summary.pdf)

### **Urban and Community Forest Management Challenges**

Urban forests are essential for achieving energy savings, improved air quality, neighborhood stability, aesthetic value, reduced noise, and improved quality of life in municipalities and communities around the country. Urban trees and forests provide a wide array of social, economic, and environmental benefits to people living in urban areas; today, more than 83 percent of the Nation's population lives in urban areas. Yet, urban and community forests face serious threats, such as development and urbanization, invasive pests and diseases, and fire in the wildland urban interface (WUI).

The program is delivered in close partnership with state foresters and leverages existing local efforts that have helped thousands of communities and towns manage, maintain, and improve their tree cover and green spaces. In FY 2023, the U&CF program delivered technical, financial, educational, and research assistance to 7,542 communities across all 50 states, U.S. territories, three nations in compacts of free association with the U.S., and the District of Columbia. ***NASF supports funding the Urban and Community Forestry Program at \$42 million in FY 2025, a \$6 million increase from the FY 2024 enacted level.***

### **Importance of Forest Inventory Data in Monitoring Forest Issues**

The Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program, managed by Forest Service, Forest and Rangeland Research, is the only comprehensive inventory system in the United States for assessing the health and sustainability of the Nation's forests across all ownerships. FIA provides essential data related to forest species composition, forest growth rates, and forest health data, and it delivers baseline inventory estimates used in Forest Action Plans. Further, this data is used by academics, researchers, industry, and others to understand forest trends and support investments in forest products facilities that provide jobs and products to society. The program provides unbiased information used in monitoring of wildlife habitat, wildfire risk, insect and disease threats, invasive species spread, and response to priorities identified in the Forest Action Plans.

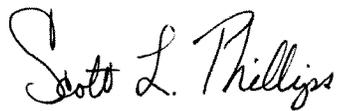
As the key partner in FIA program delivery via state contribution of matching funds, state foresters look forward to continued work with the Forest Service to improve efficiency in delivery of the program to meet the needs of the diverse user groups for FIA data. This will ensure that, at a minimum, the historical level of base program delivery is accomplished, which should include funding the collection of data on a 7-year cycle in the east and 10-year cycle in the west. ***NASF appreciates Congress supporting this program with a significant increase in FY 2023 and encourages ongoing support of the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program at \$32.4 million in FY 2025, a \$930,000 increase from the FY 2024 enacted level. Furthermore, we continue our request that you work with the Forest Service to establish a budget line item for FIA for salaries and expenses.***

### **Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR)**

The Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) program is an important way that states address critical forest priorities across the landscape, in collaboration with the Forest Service and other partners. LSR projects focus on the most critical priorities identified in each state's Forest Action Plan and on achieving resource objectives outlined in the 2018 Farm Bill. The program prioritizes funding projects that reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfires, improve fish and wildlife habitats, maintain

or improve water quality and watershed function, mitigate invasive species, insect infestation and disease, improve important forest ecosystems, and measure ecological and economic benefits including air and soil quality and productivity. As a result, LSR contributes to achieving results across the landscape and to making meaningful local, regional, and national impacts. ***NASF supports funding the Landscape Scale Restoration Program at \$20 million in FY 2025, a \$6 million increase from the FY 2024 enacted level.***

NASF appreciates the opportunity to share our FY 2025 appropriations recommendations for the Forest Service with the Subcommittee.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott L. Phillips". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Scott Phillips, NASF President and South Carolina State Forester



The Honorable Kay Granger  
Chairwoman,  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Simpson  
Chairman,  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rose DeLauro  
Ranking Member,  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
Ranking Member,  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

**Subject: Wetlands Program Development Grant FY25 Appropriations Request**

Dear Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Simpson, and Ranking Member Pingree,

On behalf of the undersigned sporting and conservation organizations, we urge Congress to provide robust funding for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Wetland Program Development Grant (WPDG) Program and encourage EPA to revisit current WPDG guidance restricting funding for the implementation of state, Tribal, and local wetland conservation programs. As such, our organizations support an FY25 appropriations request of \$30 million for the WPDG and corresponding report language clarifying Congressional intent that WPDG funds may be used to support both the development *and* implementation of wetland conservation programs.

Wetlands provide countless opportunities for outdoor recreation, from hunting and fishing, to observing wildlife. Wetlands also provide broad public benefits, including erosion control, flood control, groundwater recharge, water quality enhancement, and minimization of certain wildfire impacts. Recent research shows that the loss of one acre of would result in increases in flood insurance costs of approximately \$800 each year, and more than \$3,000 per acre in more developed areas. Conservation of wetlands supports economic development, sustains fish and wildlife, and significantly reduces burdens on taxpayers and communities.

***Wetlands Program Development Grant Program***

EPA's Wetland Program Development Grant Program provides critical funding to state, Tribal, local, and interstate agencies to develop and refine comprehensive wetland conservation programs, including voluntary wetland conservation efforts. WPDG grant funding is divided among EPA's headquarters and ten regional offices, according to the number of states and territories per region, providing important resources for capacity building efforts taken by state, Tribal, and local governments to increase the quantity and quality of wetlands. WPDG funding has been utilized by

states and Tribes for wetland conservation and restoration efforts through the development of Wetland Protection Plans, which include wetland mapping and monitoring efforts. These plans and data management help inform strategic actions to increase the pace and scale of wetland conservation efforts. The Fremont County Soil and Water Conservation District in Iowa, for example, received WPDG funding to develop a program to support farmers and ranchers in evaluating financial incentives for conserving wetlands through conservation easements. WPDG program funding has similarly supported a wide range of wetland conservation efforts nationwide.

Oregon has used WPDG funds to develop the Oregon Wetland Program Plan (2017 -2021) for their restoration projects and provision of technical assistance to landowners participating in their state voluntary conservation programs. The Oregon Wetland Program Plan provides guidance on statewide efforts to sustainably manage and conserve wetlands. Oregon's government agencies and non-profit organizations involved have participated in capacity building to administer these programs successfully, including developing staff training and monitoring protocols to improve program efforts. Oregon's wetland mapping efforts and development of methods and tools for site assessment have enabled the State's existing voluntary conservations programs to effectively utilize changing regulations, policy prioritization, and technological advances in implementing their mitigation activities and investments. Inter-agency discussions resulted in the development of clear guidelines for roles, responsibilities, and procedures; and collaboration resulted in recommend strategies and policies for salmon recovery and watershed restoration. The WPDG Program has also funded Oregon Tribes in their water conservation and wetlands restoration projects, including the Klamath Tribes and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians and Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR).

Maine's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Biological Monitoring Program hosts invaluable wetland resources for future generations and the Maine Wetland Program Plan created interagency work groups to identify needed regulatory, management, conservation, planning and research measures to address increasing environmental threats and cumulative impacts to wetlands. WPDG funds contributed to the Maine State Wetlands Conservation Plan (2001), which identified protection goals for specific wetlands systems of statewide significance and allowed for monitoring and assessment efforts critical to the development of the Maine Wetland Program Plan 2023-2028. Through diverse collection of biological sampling, from locations of high quality to locations that were severely degraded, DEP was able to capture a broad spectrum of existing human impacts to wetlands. DEP also developed the wetland linear discriminant model (LDM) to predict potential impacts to wetlands, effectiveness of applicable mitigation measures, and ensure compliance with the State's Water Quality Standards program.

The Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), created in 1970, is the principal environmental management agency in Washington with the primary goals to prevent pollution, clean up pollution and support sustainable communities and natural resources. Under the State Water Pollution Control Act, the agency's Shorelands and Environmental Assistance Program plays the lead role in protecting wetlands. Ecology provides technical assistance and relies on partnerships with other government agencies and communities to facilitate the effective management of these resources. Ecology engages with their partners by reviewing development proposals to ensure proper consideration of potential wetland impacts, aid in developing mitigation policies to offset unavoidable impacts, and provide support in obtaining funding for wetland conservation projects. Through WPDG funding, the development of such tools, resources and guidance encourages collaboration when establishing the existence (location) and physical limits (size) of a wetland in accordance with federal, state, and local regulatory standards.

**FY 25 Appropriations Request**

Funding under the WPDG program has been flat for more than a decade, maintained at approximately \$14.5 million per year. When adjusted for inflation, FY23 funding levels are at a 22% reduction from ten years ago. Increasing funding for wetland conservation efforts can help reverse wetland loss trends and help meet the unmet demand for wetland conservation, given that all existing federal wetland programs are oversubscribed without enough funding to address the backlog of wetland conservation projects seeking funding. Finally, states, local governments, and Tribes play an essential role in developing and implementing innovative wetland conservation strategies, such as the development of wetland ecosystem markets. Through these trading programs, wetland ecosystem markets have provided multiple benefits to landowners, while reducing water treatment costs for utilities.

Table 1, EPA Wetlands Grant Programs, includes the appropriations enacted from FY22-FY24 and the requested funding for FY25 to allow the program to continue fostering collaborative approaches taken by diverse applicants to protect and conserve our nation’s wetlands.

**TABLE 1  
EPA WETLANDS GRANT PROGRAMS**

<b>Grant</b>	<b>Statutory Authority</b>	<b>Program Area</b>	<b>FY22*</b>	<b>FY23*</b>	<b>FY24*</b>	<b>FY25* Admin Request</b>	<b>FY25* Conservation Request</b>
<b>Wetlands Program Development Grants</b>	FWPCA, as amended, Section 104 (b)(3)	Categorical Grants, State and Tribal Assistance Grants	\$14,192	\$14,692	\$14,104	<b>\$22,000</b>	<b>\$30,000</b>
<p><b>Note:</b> *Funding amounts have been provided in thousands.                      Eligible recipients include States, Local Governments, Tribes, Interstate Organizations, Intertribal Consortia, Non-Profit Organizations to develop new wetland programs or enhance existing programs for the protection, management, and restoration of wetland resources.  <b>Source:</b> EPA FY 2025 Congressional Justification</p>							

**Report Language Request**

Currently, the Environmental Protection Agency interprets WPDG funding to be limited to the development of wetland conservation programs, although authorization of the Clean Water Act provision section 104(b)(3) is silent on whether funds can be used for program implementation. Given the limited capacity and resources within state, Tribal, and local governments, a lack of implementation support is a significant challenge in transitioning from program development to on-the-ground results. As such, we respectfully request that the following report language be included in the FY25 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

*“Categorical Grant: Wetland Program Development Grant. – The Committee recognizes the importance of the Wetland Program Development Grant Program in aiding states, Tribes, and local governments in developing efforts to protect, restore, and manage wetlands and aquatic resources to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters such as flooding, enhancing drinking water quality, and benefiting fish and wildlife. The bill clarifies Congressional intent*

*that funding provided through the Wetland Program Development Grant, authorized through Section 104(b)(3) of the Clean Water Act, can be used to develop new or refine existing state and Tribal wetland and aquatic resource programs, as well as the implementation of these programs.”*

We urge you to prioritize increased funding for wetlands programs in the Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations bill. Your support in this matter is crucial for safeguarding our wetland ecosystems for future generations of hunters, anglers, and conservationists. We look forward to discussing these recommendations in further detail in support of restoration and conservation funding opportunities.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. Please get in touch with Alexander Funk, Director of Water Resources, ([afunk@trcp.org](mailto:afunk@trcp.org)) or Elle Benson ([lbenson@trcp.org](mailto:lbenson@trcp.org)), Rio Grande Program Manager, at the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership with any questions.

Respectfully,

Marla Stelk  
Executive Director  
National Association of Wetland Managers

Jim Murphy  
Senior Director of Legal Advocacy  
National Wildlife Federation

Alexander Funk  
Director of Water Resources and Senior Counsel  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Zachary Spencer  
Manager, Government Affairs  
National Audubon Society



On behalf of the National Audubon Society and our 1.4 million supporters, we would like to submit testimony demonstrating why several agencies and programs with the Department of the Interior deserve the funding requested below.

As you begin developing the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Appropriations bill, we request increased funding for the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). We request \$18 billion for DOI and \$8.9 billion for USFS. Managing over 480 million acres of land across the United States, DOI and its agencies are essential for protecting public lands and waters, wildlife, and historic and cultural resources. USFS is responsible for 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands that cover more than 193 million acres of the National Forest System (NFS). Yet, both the Interior Department and the Forest Service remain underfunded and understaffed.

In FY24, cuts across the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), DOI, and USFS totaled \$1.5 billion. These agency funding levels have not kept pace with the increase in demand, inflation, and other growing operational and maintenance needs. These shortages, coupled with spending caps from the Fiscal Responsibility Act, hinder agency capacity to advance commitments to clean energy projects, environmental protections, and environmental justice for all our communities. These budget caps cut non-defense discretionary spending to entirely inadequate funding levels, exacerbating agency constraints as they seek to fully their mission. We urge the full committee to offset these losses by maximizing the Interior and Environment subcommittee's 302(b) allocation for FY25.

We request that the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) be appropriated \$450 million in funding through the EPA. The Great Lakes, which provide drinking water for over 42 million people and support a \$7 billion fishing industry and a vast tourism industry, are being improved by restoration efforts. For every dollar spent on GLRI initiatives such as cleaning up toxic hot spots, controlling invasive species, restoring wildlife habitat, protecting wetlands, and reducing harmful algae, communities reap economic benefits of more than 3 to 1. More than 6,000 projects are either underway or completed throughout the region, benefiting community health and creating jobs.

The Delaware River Basin Restoration Program should receive at least \$15.5 million in funding through the Fish and Wildlife Service. The Delaware River Watershed, covering 12,800 square miles, generates \$25 billion in annual economic activity, supports 600,000 jobs, and contributes \$21 billion worth of ecosystem goods and services each year. It provides drinking water for 13.3 million Americans—more than four percent of the U.S. population—with more than 6.4 billion gallons of water withdrawn daily. The watershed,

home to the longest undammed river east of the Mississippi, serves as a critical refuge for over 90 species of fish and 400 types of birds, including more than 250 species of migratory birds.

Lastly, we request the following funding for the Migratory Bird Program (Program) within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service budget- including the accounts that fund the program listed below:

**Conservation and Monitoring:** This element provides critical conservation needs for the Program, including supporting partnerships, working groups, and bird conservation planning efforts. The funding should ensure that each of the plans, including for waterfowl, grassland birds, shorebirds, and waterbirds, have sufficient funding for staffing, coordination, and implementation. This element also supports key needs for population monitoring and surveys, research, technical assistance and guidance, species conflict reduction, and efforts such as the Urban Bird Treaty program, which helps to conserve habitat and enhance engagement with urban communities. At least \$40.85 million is needed for FY25 for this element to continue to meet these responsibilities, as well as the growing challenges facing migratory birds.

**Permits:** To help meet the Program's responsibilities for permitting, including under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, at least \$13.43 million is needed for staff capacity for the permits element, along with further support for the ePermits program, to help promote efficient, modernized, and coordinated permitting efforts, including to address incidental take. These resources can help support regional office staff in processing permits and provide technical assistance and training to help meet the needs of the public.

**Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act:** We request that the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act program receive increased funding with at least \$6.5 million for FY25, which will support essential bird conservation needs across the Western Hemisphere. More than 350 species of birds migrate annually between the U.S. and Canada, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean, including many species of songbirds and shorebirds facing steep declines. Since 2002, more than 700 projects funded by the NMBCA have positively impacted more than 5 million acres of migratory bird habitat in the U.S. and Canada, and more than 35 nations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

**North American Wetland Conservation Act:** We request that the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) program receive \$60 million in funding from the Fish and Wildlife Service. NAWCA has been a highly popular and successful conservation effort that protects and restores wetlands and associated habitats. It has leveraged more than \$4 billion to benefit more than 31 million acres from 3,200 projects in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, contributing to the long-term recovery of many wetland-dependent birds.

**North American Waterfowl Management/Joint Ventures:** The network of Migratory Bird Joint Ventures provides highly valuable partnerships that bring together stakeholders to focus on landscape-level bird conservation delivery. Since 1986, partners have invested more than \$4.5 billion in conserving 27 million acres to benefit birds and people. To help support conservation needs, we recommend an increase in base funding, and a \$25 million funding level will provide an important step forward.

**Federal Duck Stamp:** The Duck Stamp program has been a successful venture for decades, and funding helps to support the implementation of this program, including the Duck Stamp contest and more. The program has raised more than \$1 billion in funding since its inception, which has been invested back into wetland habitat conservation to benefit the National Wildlife Refuge System and the birds it supports, and at least \$1.14 million in funding during FY25 will allow for continued success for the program.



National Conference of  
State Historic Preservation Officers

Ramona Bartos, President  
National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers and Deputy SHPO of the North  
Carolina Office of Archives and History  
Testimony before the Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
and Related Agencies of the U. S. House of Representatives  
The Honorable Mike Simpson, Chairman

May 10, 2024

**Fiscal Year 2025 Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) Appropriations Request: \$225 million**

- \$70 million for State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs)
- \$40 million for the Save America's Treasures grant program
- \$34 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs)
- \$28 million for the African American Civil Rights grant program
- \$17 million for the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grant program
- \$13 million Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) grant program
- \$11 million for the Semiquincentennial grant program
- \$7 million for the History of Equal Rights grant program
- \$5 million for the Underrepresented Community grant program

*Funded through withdrawals from the Historic Preservation Fund (16 USC 470h), U.S.  
Department of the Interior's National Park Service*

**Unique and Successful Federal-State Partnership**

Recognizing the importance of our national heritage, in 1966 Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act ([NHPA, Title 54 U.S.C. 300101 et seq](#)), which established historic preservation as a priority of the federal government. Recognizing that State officials have local expertise, the Act's authors directed federal entities charged with its implementation – the Department of the Interior and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation – to partner with the States. Duties delegated to the SHPOs include: 1) locating and recording historic resources; 2) nominating significant historic resources to the National Register of Historic Places; 3) cultivating historic preservation programs at the local government level; 4) providing funds for preservation activities; 5) commenting on federal rehabilitation tax credit projects; 6) review of all federal projects for their impact on historic properties; and 7) providing technical assistance to federal agencies, state and local governments and the private sector.

Ten years later in 1976, Congress established the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) to assist the states in accomplishing this federally delegated work. The HPF is funded from outer-continental shelf lease revenues (rather than tax dollars), so that the depletion of one non-renewal resource can be used to help preserve another non-renewable resource – our heritage. The states also contribute to this effort, matching at least 40 percent of the HPF funding they receive.

**Saving America's Heritage**

The first step in preserving and protecting America's heritage is identifying it – which requires the survey, documentation, stewardship and sharing of historic place data. These places represent the many people and events that shape our collective national identity. Adequate funding is essential

for SHPOs to meet these goals. For example, current shortfalls in funding mean that many states must continue to rely upon outdated paper records for a variety of program purposes. Having accurate, up-to-date, and digitally accessible information about our Nation's historic resources would dramatically increase the efficiency of and foster a balanced approach for all local, state, and federal projects. From decisions on the design of local infill development, to state transportation planning projects, to federal large-scale energy projects and disaster recovery efforts – every single project that could impact historic places, and by extension, the American people, benefit from enhanced and accessible historic resource databases.

Directing \$70 million for FY 2025 to SHPO offices will provide much needed operational funding to aid in increased capacity and efficiency – goals embraced by Congress and the Administration. With the recent \$500 billion in new infrastructure spending nationally, SHPOs are in dire need of resources to operate programs as they continue to fulfill responsibilities to review and comment on increasing numbers of federal undertakings under NHPA to fulfill their obligations towards protection and preservation of their states' irreplaceable historic places. **In FY 2022, HPF funding also enabled SHPOs to review 177, 400<sup>3</sup> federal undertakings – a 42.7% increase over the prior year.** Likewise, Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) assume many of the responsibilities of the SHPO on their respective Tribal lands. The number of THPOs continues to increase annually, requiring funding to keep pace with expanding needs. With over 222 THPOs currently, funding of \$34 million for THPO offices is necessary to prevent a decrease in the average THPO grant.

Once identified and documented, America's historic resources are primarily recognized at the local, state, and national levels by listing on both the National Register as well as state and local historic registers with varying degrees of protection, consideration, and recognition. State Historic Preservation Officers, through the authority of the National Historic Preservation Act, assist, support and encourage communities with their preservation efforts and are the gateway to listing on the National Register of Historic Places. National Register recognition by the Secretary of the Interior confirms citizens' belief in the significance of their communities' historic places and enhances support for their preservation.

*Allow me to underscore that the National Historic Preservation program is primarily one of assistance, not acquisition.* The federal government does not own, manage, or maintain responsibility for the vast majority of the historic assets aided by the National Historic Preservation program. Rather, the program, through the SHPOs, provides individual Americans and communities, together with local, state, and federal governments with the tools they need to identify, preserve, and utilize the historic assets of importance to them. SHPOs are constituent-oriented and constituent-focused, and working closely and cooperatively with individual Americans to preserve historic places across the nation is a fundamental role.

HPF funds also support competitive grant programs aimed at protecting and promoting the nation's historic and cultural resources, while furthering efforts to tell the full scope of America's history through recognition and preservation of irreplaceable historic places. As such, NCSHPO supports HPF funding of \$40 million for the Save America's Treasures grant program; \$28 million for the African American Civil Rights grant program; \$17 million for the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grant program to support historic preservation in rural communities; \$13 million to

assist in the preservation and rehabilitation of buildings on the campuses of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); \$11 million to support the Semiquincentennial grant program to commemorate the nation's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary; \$7 million for the History of Equal Rights grant program; and \$5 million for competitive grants to identify, recognize and preserve the sites and stories related to Underrepresented Communities.

The FY24 omnibus spending level for the HPF in the amount of \$188.666 million, reflects a decrease of over \$15 million from FY23, to the detriment of our historic and cultural assets.

#### **Jobs, Economic Development & Community Revitalization**

Historic preservation has stimulated economic growth, promoted community education and pride, and rescued and rehabilitated significant historic resources throughout the country. By positively combatting the effects of blight and vacancy through respectful repurposing of existing historic building stock, historic preservation is frequently a catalyst for positive community change – resulting in dynamic destinations for visitors and residents alike. Further, preservation incentives and programs foster affordable housing and solutions to the challenge of environmental change.

The Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HTC) program, administered by the State Historic Preservation Offices in cooperation with the National Park Service, is an important driver for economic development. Since 1976, the HTC has driven completion of nearly 49,000 individual projects, created more than 3.2 million jobs, leveraged over \$131.71 billion in private investment nationwide, and created 199,138 low and moderate income housing units<sup>1</sup>. On average, the HTC leverages \$5 dollars in private investment for every \$1 dollar in federal funding, cultivating highly effective public-private partnerships and community focused re-investment. 39 states currently offer a historic tax credit program<sup>2</sup>, including my own state of North Carolina. State tax credit programs complement the federal HTC program incentives and provide additional opportunities for community revitalization and saving historic places for the use and enjoyment of future generations of Americans.

Historic preservation also stimulates economic development through heritage tourism. SHPOs are essential local partners in identifying and interpreting the historic places that attract and inspire visitors. A modest increase in SHPO funding would allow SHPOs to expand their public outreach and assistance efforts, enabling communities to take greater advantage of heritage tourism opportunities which lead to job creation, new business development and enhanced community pride.

#### **State Historic Preservation Offices' Accomplishments**

The HPF has facilitated nearly 100,000 listings to the National Register, with over 1.9 million contributing resources, and the survey of millions of acres for cultural resources<sup>3</sup>. The HPF has also provided SHPOs with the administrative capacity for constituent access to the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit program, which has generated more than \$50.3 billion in

<sup>1</sup> 2024. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Technical Preservation Services. *Federal Tax Incentives for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings | Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023*.

<sup>2</sup> 2022. National Trust for Historic Preservation. *Preservation & State Historic Tax Credits*.

<sup>3</sup> 2024. National Park Service. *Historic Preservation Fund Annual Report FY23*.

federal tax revenue from historic rehabilitation projects from inception through FY 2022<sup>4</sup>. Further, SHPO federally mandated responsibilities of project review are on the rise, and remain key to conscientious public consideration of how to balance two fundamental needs – public investments for the future and preservation of America’s historic places.

Many SHPOs have made extensive use of HPF grant programs to ensure preservation of sites associated with the Civil Rights Movement. In North Carolina, in recent years, we have applied for and received grants under several of these grant programs. A 2015 Underrepresented Communities grant yielded National Register nominations and listings for eight Rosenwald School nominations, two historic African American cemeteries, and the College Heights Historic District, which is associated with the HBCU North Carolina Central University; a 2022 Underrepresented Communities grant will focus on survey and identification and National Register nominations of surviving Green Books properties - telling the story of individual resilience during the Segregation era as “oasis places” for African American travelers. A 2020 Civil Rights Phase I grant was finalized, and gathered invaluable oral histories and background research, and identified conclusively places associated with the Civil Right Movement in northeastern North Carolina; while Phase II will foster National Register nominations of these places. A 2022 Semiquincentennial grant provided \$500,000 to the Brunswick Town State Historic Site, a key Colonial town and prime Revolutionary War site of pro-Patriot activity near Wilmington, North Carolina, and will be used to identify unmarked graves of colonial residents, preserve known graves, repoint the masonry of St. Philip’s Anglican Church, and preserve the foundational ruins of private residences, a tavern and a courthouse.

### **Conclusion**

Historic preservation recognizes that what was common and ordinary in the past is often rare and precious today, and what is common and ordinary today may be extraordinary, whether it is fifty, one hundred or five hundred years from now. But moreover, historic preservation elevates and promotes the value of the lives and stories of individual Americans through the places where they lived and worked, fulfilling one of the fundamental purposes of the National Historic Preservation Act: “that the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people.”

The national network of State Historic Preservation Offices helps to ensure that the places associated with the history of all Americans are recognized and preserved. To that end, I would like to thank the committee sincerely for its commitment to historic preservation. The federal government plays an invaluable role in preserving our nation’s history and our collective sense of place. Through our partnership, SHPOs remain committed to working together to identify, protect, and maintain our Nation’s heritage.

On behalf of all 59 SHPOs, I’d like to thank you, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies for the opportunity to submit testimony.

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<sup>4</sup> 2024. Rutgers & National Park Service. *Annual Report on the Economic Impact of the Federal Historic Tax Credits for Fiscal Year 2022*.

TESTIMONY OF WILL HEATON  
 DIRECTOR, EXTERNAL RELATIONS  
 NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE FOUNDATION  
 HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR,  
 ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES REGARDING THE  
**FY 2025 APPROPRIATION FOR THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE  
 SERVICE, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, U.S. FOREST SERVICE AND  
 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

May 10, 2024

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for your longstanding support of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). Created by Congress in 1984, NFWF works to sustain, restore, and enhance the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats for current and future generations. Many NFWF conservation outcomes also enhance nature-based infrastructure that protects communities from the impacts of flooding, sea level rise, drought, wildfire, and other natural threats. We appreciate Congress's continued bipartisan support for the Foundation and its many programs across the country.

Congress has provided federal funding to NFWF since its founding 40 years ago that NFWF leverages with non-federal funds to increase conservation benefits across the country. NFWF applies 100% of the appropriated funding towards on-the-ground conservation projects and does not cover any administrative costs with these funds. These funds support many conservation programs, including the Western Big Game Seasonal Habitat and Migration Corridors Fund that supports migration corridors and habitat for species across the Rocky Mountains including Idaho, and the Northeast Forests and Rivers Fund that supports fish and bird habitat throughout New England.

The Foundation appreciates the Subcommittee's past support and respectfully requests that the Subcommittee recommend the following funding levels for Fiscal Year 2025:

- **\$3.0 million provided through the Bureau of Land Management's Management of Lands and Resources appropriation. We also ask that the Subcommittee restore the bill text appropriating BLM funds to NFWF to administer in support of BLM's wildlife conservation efforts<sup>1</sup>;**
- **\$7.032 million provided through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Resource Management appropriation which would be a return to FY23 level and;**
- **\$3.0 million provided through the Forest Service's National Forest System appropriation (same funding level as FY 2024).**

**BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to the FY18 spending bill, the appropriations language required BLM to provide NFWF the full amount of appropriated funds. The FY18 appropriation bill changed the law by making the provision of funds to NFWF the discretion of the Director of the BLM and removed the language from the bill which has hindered the two organizations' ability to partner in the most effective manner. We request that the FY17 bill language be restored in the FY25 bill.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has partnered with NFWF for more than two decades to further conservation efforts on BLM lands throughout the United States. The benefits this partnership provides have decreased over the last five years, however, as the amount of funding provided for species conservation efforts on BLM lands has decreased. For FY2023, NFWF received \$2,200,000 from BLM which was a decrease from the FY2022 allocation of \$3 million. For FY2021, NFWF received \$800,000. This fluctuating amount of funding creates a lack of certainty for how NFWF can direct federal funds consistently to conservation programs and is the primary reason we are requesting a return to the FY 2017 language that would provide \$3 million on an annual basis.

NFWF continues to administer programs that benefit BLM lands despite inconsistent amounts of funding. NFWF is focusing the BLM funding within just a few programs where it can have the greatest impact and conservation value. The primary program is the Western Big Game Seasonal Habitat and Migration Corridors Fund which was created by Secretarial Order 3362 that conserves habitat and migration corridors to maintain healthy populations of migratory animals. NFWF works with private landowners, state game and fish agencies and other entities to utilize a voluntary approach that will have the greatest project efficiency and return on investment. Last year NFWF awarded nearly \$1.6 million of BLM funds to projects through this program. To date, the program has awarded \$18.6 million across 76 projects, leveraging \$81.1 million in matching contributions to generate a total conservation impact of more than \$99.7 million. With the federal funding NFWF receives we generate significant private match to further the impact of federal funds and urge the committee to consider restoring earlier funding levels to enable the Foundation to continue its conservation work.

Requested restoration of FY17 BLM Bill Language for FY 2025:

*“; of which \$3,000,000 shall be available in fiscal year 2025 subject to a match by at least an equal amount by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for cost shared projects supporting conservation of Bureau lands; and such funds shall be advanced to the Foundation as a lump-sum without regard to when expenses are incurred.”*

**UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has been a trusted partner since NFWF was created by Congress in 1984. Since FY 2020, NFWF has allocated over \$21 million in FWS appropriated funds across 213 projects leveraging an additional \$80 million in additional funding, for a total conservation impact of \$101 million. The funds appropriated to NFWF enable the Foundation to attract private sector funds and enable the Foundation to strengthen public-private partnerships critical to restoring fish, wildlife, eco-system restoration, improving aquatic passage, addressing climate change, and increasing natural processes for immediate carbon sequestration.

The annual appropriation of \$7,032,000 which was reduced to \$5,500,000 in FY24 provides critically important funding that NFWF uses to fully support some conservation programs and to fill important funding gaps in other conservation programs. The approximately \$1.5 million reduction in funding in FY24 will lessen NFWF's ability to support various conservation programs across the country, including some programs solely reliant upon this appropriations funding. For example, the Alaska Fish and Wildlife Fund (Alaska Fund) is fully dependent on

FWS appropriated funds and United States Forest Service (USFS) appropriated funds. For FY23, NFWF directed \$300,000 of appropriated FWS funds to the Alaska Fund but to continue this funding level for the Alaska Fund will require NFWF to decrease funding for other conservation programs that rely in part on these appropriated dollars. The FWS appropriated funds also provide NFWF with flexible funding that is used to support a myriad of programs such as Klamath Basin Restoration, efforts to combat white-nosed syndrome in bats, and fish passage.

The Foundation appreciates the Subcommittee's past support and respectfully requests that the Subcommittee recommend the following funding level for the FY2025 bill:

**Requested FWS Bill Language for FY 2025:**

*“; of which \$7,032,000 shall be available in fiscal year 2025 subject to a match by at least an equal amount by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for cost-shared projects supporting conservation of wildlife and other natural resources; and such funds shall be advanced to the Foundation as a lump-sum grant without regard to when expenses are incurred.”*

**UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE -**

Congress has appropriated approximately \$3 million in annual funding to NFWF for partnerships with the United States Forest Service (USFS) since FY 1998. Since FY2020, NFWF has leveraged \$15.0M in USFS appropriated funds across 150 projects into a total of \$68.5 million in on-the-ground conservation impact. We respectfully request that the Committee continue supporting this cost-effective partnership. These USFS funds also support programs such as the Western Big Game Seasonal Habitat and Migration Corridors Program, the Northeast Forests and Rivers Fund, the Southwest Rivers Headwaters Fund which focuses on restoring, protecting, and enhancing aquatic and riparian species and their habitats in the headwaters of the Rio Grande and Colorado River watersheds, and the Alaska Fish and Wildlife Fund for habitat restoration benefitting salmon in southeast Alaska.

**Retain US Forest Service Language for FY 25 as with previous years:**

*“Pursuant to section 2(b)(2) of Public Law 98–244, up to \$3,000,000 of the funds available to the Forest Service may be advanced to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in a lump sum to aid cost-share conservation projects, without regard to when expenses are incurred, on or benefitting National Forest System lands or related to Forest Service programs: Provided, That such funds shall be matched on at least a one-for-one basis by the Foundation or its sub-recipients: Provided further, That the Foundation may transfer Federal funds to a Federal or non-Federal recipient for a project at the same rate that the recipient has obtained the non-Federal matching funds.”*

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

NFWF has partnered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) since FY 1997 to make grants to states and other grantees within the Geographic Programs appropriation. Therefore, we respectfully support the highest possible funding levels for the Great Lakes Restoration

Initiative, Chesapeake Bay, Gulf of Mexico, and Long Island Sound within the EPA Geographic Programs. We also respectfully ask that the long-standing report language that delineates the amount of funding for nutrient and sediment removal grants and small watershed grants within the Chesapeake Bay program be continued (U.S. House approved FY 2024 report language is below). Last year NFWF, through its Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Fund and Small Watershed Grant Fund which together award most of the funding for NFWF's Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund, collectively awarded \$43.7m across 92 projects that leveraged \$44.1m of matching funds to create nearly \$87.9m for on the ground conservation impact.

The Foundation appreciates the Subcommittee's past support and respectfully requests that the Subcommittee recommend the following report language in the FY2025 bill:

*Chesapeake Bay.— From within the amount provided, at least \$10,000,000 is for nutrient and sediment removal grants, at least \$10,000,000 is for small watershed grants to control polluted runoff from urban, suburban, and agricultural lands, and at least \$8,000,000 is for state-based implementation in the most effective basins.*

#### **NFWF BACKGROUND**

NFWF was established by Congress in 1984 to catalyze private investments to conserve fish, wildlife and their habitats. NFWF raises private funds not only to leverage appropriated dollars, but also to support the associated management costs of implementing the appropriated funds. Since its creation by Congress in 1984, NFWF and its partners have funded more than 22,100 grants and supported more than 6,800 grantee organizations. The Foundation's investments since its founding have leveraged matching contributions from grantees and other partners to generate a total conservation impact of \$10 billion.

NFWF remains fully transparent and is required by law to notify Congress 30 days in advance of every grant that exceeds \$10,000 in federal funds. Details of all projects awarded during FY 2023 can be found in NFWF's annual investment guide and all NFWF's grants can be found on our website: <https://www.nfwf.org/grants/grants-library>

In FY 2023, NFWF was audited by an independent accounting firm and issued an unqualified report with no material weaknesses identified and no deficiencies identified. This is the FIFTEENTH consecutive year of unqualified audits. In addition, NFWF has continually qualified as a low-risk auditee under OMB guidelines.

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and members of the subcommittee, we greatly appreciate your continued support and stand ready to answer any questions you or your staff might have.

Public Witness Testimony  
**Submitted to the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee  
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives  
Regarding FY 2025 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities  
Stephen Kidd, Executive Director, National Humanities Alliance (May 10, 2024)**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Humanities Alliance (NHA), with our more than 260 member organizations, I write to express strong support for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

**Overview**

**For FY 2025, we respectfully urge the Subcommittee to consider at least \$211 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities.**

While we recognize the difficult choices that are before this Subcommittee, we believe that expanding the capacity of the NEH is essential at this moment in the nation's history, when the humanities are so needed to 1) build strong communities and foster civic dialogue; 2) preserve cultural heritage, including Indigenous languages; 3) cultivate knowledge of world histories and cultures; and 4) shore up local tourism economies and community institutions.

The NEH has a clear track record of supporting programs that work towards these ends, and additional capacity is needed to ensure that these crucial goals are met around the country. The NEH does not have the capacity to fund many of the highly rated proposals it receives—in FY 2020, 1,605 applications with high ratings were not funded, amounting to a total of \$184,789,512.

**Building strong communities and fostering civic dialogue**

NEH funding builds strong, civically-engaged communities through its support of cultural organizations. The agency's grantmaking helps establish and sustain robust community institutions, providing opportunities for learning, empathy, and understanding. The International Storytelling Center in Jonesborough, Tennessee, regularly hosts programs that promote discussion and dialogue. Ninety-three percent of respondents to a survey done by NHA indicated that they were "motivated to listen to the stories of people whose background was different from their own" after participating in a program featuring the stories of Black Appalachians. The NEH's *Dialogues on the Experiences of War* grants strengthen communities by offering veterans the chance to reflect upon their experiences, while building bonds with each other and with civilians. Ninety-nine percent of respondents across eight programs reported a desire to "keep in touch with some of the people [they] met during the program."

NEH funding has an especially outsized role in small and rural communities, where it can build and support the infrastructure and programs that are vital to strong communities. In Ketchum, Idaho, NEH funding has helped the local library increase cultural opportunities in its rural area

by bringing community members together to explore Ernest Hemingway's regional legacy. By leveraging an NEH challenge grant to garner additional private support, the library has preserved Hemingway's Idaho home and personal collections, developed audio walking tours, established a Writer-in-Residency program, and created an annual seminar that brings lectures, art, and discussion programs to the community. In Kittery, Maine, (pop. ~11,000) an NEH grant helped renovate the Rice Public Library, creating space for community programs: in 2023, the library welcomed 5,107 attendees to children's programs. The library is also newly accessible, with an elevator helping people bypass the 14 granite steps into the building, stacks spaced wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair or a walker, and hearing assistive technology for public programs. Likewise, the Seward Community Library and Museum leveraged an NEH challenge grant to build a new facility and has averaged 60,000 more visitors per year than it received in its old space. In addition to hosting tourists, the organization provides space for nonprofits and other institutions to conduct their business.

#### **Preserving cultural heritage, including Indigenous languages**

Our cultural heritage lives in many forms, from presidential letters and great works of art to community archives and endangered languages. It is also vulnerable, and requires protection from natural and man-made disasters as well as simple decay over time. NEH funding is indispensable to ensuring that our cultural heritage is both accessible now and preserved for future generations. In addition to funding projects that tell important presidential histories—like the publication of *The Papers of John Adams* and archaeological research at Andrew Jackson's The Hermitage—the NEH helps small and mid-size institutions invest in their own preservation needs. Institutions like St. Vincent College in Pennsylvania and the Stillwater Public Library in Oklahoma have used NEH funds to help ensure their collections are protected for the future. NEH funds also help make these collections more widely accessible by funding digitization projects.

Funding for documenting traditional cultures and endangered languages supports Indigenous people throughout the United States. Through the Dynamic Language Infrastructure-Documenting Endangered Languages program, a partnership with the National Science Foundation, NEH funding has preserved and made accessible languages spoken by Indigenous communities, having a profound impact on their way of life. DEL grants have helped produce dictionaries for languages such as Northern Paiute and Arapaho; they have also provided the funds for these resources to be online and freely available to tribal members. NEH support for the Coeur d'Alene Online Language Resource Center helped create a single, searchable repository for a wide range of language resources, from dictionaries to archival recordings of personal narratives and coyote stories. The NEH additionally supports the documentation and revitalization of Indigenous American languages through its regular grant programs—a recent research grant to Western Carolina University is supporting *Eastern Cherokee Histories in Translation*, an annotated translation of Eastern Cherokee archival materials dating from the 1880s-1990s.

#### **Cultivating knowledge of world history and cultures**

Established in the midst of the Cold War, the NEH has always provided funding to support research and programs that help Americans understand and engage with timely world issues.

From scholarly exchanges with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and language institutes in the 1970s to international research support for American scholars and professional development for schoolteachers today, NEH funding supports efforts to understand other nations' languages, cultures, and geopolitical contexts. NEH funding has supported the research and publication of books such as *Treason in Transit: Soviet Defectors and the Borders of the Cold War World* (2022), by Erik R. Scott, and *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (2013)—among many other works of history that shed light on current events. NEH-supported English translations of Ukrainian literature, including *Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine* (2017) and *The White Chalk of Days: The Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series Anthology* (2017) bring Ukrainian literature to broader American audiences.

NEH funding also provides high-quality education on world affairs for school teachers and college educators. Using the Holocaust as a case study, Kean University's 2021 two-week seminar "The Search for Humanity after Atrocity" helped higher education faculty integrate atrocity studies into their research and curricula. A 2016 program for K-12 educators, hosted by Ferris State University, explored U.S.-Russian/Soviet relations from 1776 to the present. Moreover, from 2013-2018, a series of NEH grants helped community colleges throughout the U.S. integrate the study of world cultures into their curricula. These programs included content on Latin America, Asia, Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, among other topics.

**Building local tourism economies and shoring up community institutions**

NEH funding catalyzes growth in local tourism economies and shores up local institutions so that they can continue serving their communities. A series of grants to the Dubuque County Historical Society, in Iowa, helped the organization transform from a small, regional museum into a world-class institution dedicated to the Mississippi River and its history—one that contributes more than \$10.5 million per year to the local economy. NEH support has also proven crucial to Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, which is an important economic driver in its Virginia region: 50 percent of the site's 400,000 annual visitors stay in a hotel for at least one night, contributing no less than \$13.1 million to the local economy.

Humanities organizations play a crucial role in their communities, and NEH funding helps ensure their financial stability and longevity. From offering COVID relief funding to the University of Dallas and the University of North Carolina, Asheville that ensured continuity of instruction for students to supporting Corpus Christi's South Texas Institute for the Arts following Hurricane Harvey, NEH funding helps cultural organizations survive times of crisis. NEH funding also offers crucial financial support necessary for accomplishing the more mundane tasks that private funders often overlook, such as replacing the roof on Libby, Montana's Heritage Museum or installing HVAC systems in Scottsdale, Arizona's Taliesin West.

**Written Outside Witness Testimony of John Garder,  
Senior Director of Budget and Appropriations  
National Parks Conservation Association  
For the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). Founded in 1919, NPCA is the leading national, independent voice for protecting and enhancing America's National Park System for present and future generations. We appreciate the opportunity to provide our views regarding the National Park Service (NPS) FY25 budget and provide commentary on related accounts and issues. We call for a \$250 million increase for the Operation of the National Park System; \$17 million for the Housing Improvement Program; \$32 million for the National Heritage Area program; and support for other accounts without specified recommended amounts.

**Increase the Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) by \$250 million**

This account remains NPCA's highest priority and critically needs a significant increase, in particular after the damaging cut in FY24. We respect your allocation will be limited this year and there are many competing priorities. We know you will have to make difficult decisions; at the same time, we also urge you to recognize the importance of helping our parks operate more capably. ONPS has been described as the "bread and butter" of our national parks, providing critical funding for personnel and other operational needs. It is the core funding that allows national parks to meet their mission protecting the world-class cultural and natural resources for which these places were designated, and to ensure the safety and enjoyment of the visiting public that collectively own them. Unfortunately, because the ONPS has not kept up with needs, NPS continues to struggle with insufficient staff and other operating needs due in part to the impact of uncontrollable fixed costs that has been a contributor to the long-term erosion of staffing levels.

Prior to this year, parks and supporting offices were already struggling with understaffing due to the impact of uncontrollable fixed costs that include staff Cost of Living Increases and pay raises, rental payments, the Departmental Working Capital Fund, unemployment compensation and more. Outside of more significant appropriated increases in FY16 and FY23, appropriated ONPS funding increases over the last decade have been largely insufficient to provide for these fixed costs. As a result, superintendents have become accustomed to letting positions lapse and making other hard decisions to absorb these costs. As a result, between 2012 and 2022, NPS lost nearly 3,000 staff (in FTES, or full-time equivalent staff).

The disappointing ONPS appropriation in FY24—the account's first cut in a decade—is making this year even more challenging. The Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill cut park operations by \$35 million, but this cut was compounded by the forced absorption of more than \$120 million in fixed costs—a significant amount this year due to the mandatory 5.2% federal pay raise. As a result, appropriators in recent budget hearings have been appropriately expressing concern that this will mean fewer visitor services during the busy season. Resource protection will suffer as well, making it that much harder for parks to meet their mission. A \$250

million ONPS increase would provide for an estimated \$44 million in fixed costs and ensure a program change of a little more than \$200 million that would ensure modest, direly needed increases across hundreds of NPS units.

**An ONPS increase is needed to help with high visitation and climate change adaptation:** NPS understaffing is being compounded by record visitation increases. Between 2012 and 2022, NPS gradually lost 13% of its staff capacity. Meanwhile, visits to NPS sites grew by ten percent. Superintendents regularly report staffing constraints that are compounded by often double-digit percentage increases in visitation. Staff commonly cover multiple collateral duties. It is not uncommon to have, for example, interpretive staff addressing increased restroom use or law enforcement assisting with cars in parking lots. As a result, other needs go unaddressed. Natural and cultural resource protection, research and monitoring, programming, and other services central to parks meeting their mission go unaddressed or delayed indefinitely. NPS is addressing the visitation challenge in many parks with timed entry, permits, and related tools. However, they all require staffing and resources that take away from other needs.

Our national parks are also on the front lines of climate change, between storm surges, wildfire risks, and threatened wildlife habitat and irreplaceable cultural sites. Helping our parks adapt to a changing climate requires funding. These investments can be made across diverse subaccounts within park operations, including Cultural and Natural Resource Stewardship. Among other climate-related needs, funding is vital to relocate facilities threatened by erosion and storm surges, combat invasive species, address catastrophic wildfires, provide critical air and water quality monitoring and otherwise inventory and monitor cultural and natural resources to identify threats and develop adaptive management strategies. Management planning is needed in many areas including related to climate and increased visitation.

**ONPS support for cultural resource management is needed:** As we outlined in our recently released Cultural Resource Challenge for the National Park Service, the ability for NPS to staff its cultural resource operations has fallen significantly and disproportionately over the years. Inventory and monitoring, climate-related needs, museum collections and more are all overdue for added investments. A significant shortfall in cultural resources funding has undermined the agency's ability to plan and manage the resources in their care. It is difficult to impossible to care for these resources when NPS has not been able to even properly inventory the resources they are tasked with stewarding. FY25 is an opportunity to help meet these needs and highlight the importance of NPS' world-class, nationally significant cultural and historic resources. Our cultural resource report calls for investments in: a professional cultural resource stewardship workforce; historic research; cultural resource inventory and monitoring; the Cultural Resource Project Budget; collections management; and museums collections digitization.

**New park units:** We commend this committee for historically supporting more recent NPS designations. NPCA has advocated for these new units that better protect and interpret America's diverse history. We encourage continuing fiscal support as well as highlighting in the bill's Explanatory Statement the importance of these units, such as Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument, Blackwell School National Historic Site, and Amache National Historic Site.

**Management Planning capacity is needed.** Planning is not happening at the pace needed to guide park decision-making; this becomes more of an issue when considering the dual and intersecting challenges of climate change and skyrocketing visitation at many parks. NPS must be equipped to successfully respond to rapidly evolving and increasing visitor use. We urge investments to conduct research and prepare and implement visitor use management plans to address rising use and its threat to visitor safety and resources. NPS needs staff and resources to collect baseline data on visitation and resource conditions to inform visitor use management planning processes; enhance NPS' capacity for conducting good social science and using it to guide visitor use management planning and adaptive management; study the application of recreation ecology science in visitor use management planning; and support mechanisms for gateway communities and other public land management agencies to collaborate and conduct coordinated regional visitor use management planning. NPS can also improve its communications systems to reach new and underrepresented communities.

**Great American Outdoors and appropriated maintenance and repairs:** The Great American Outdoors Act's Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) is funding hundreds of projects across the country that are successfully repairing park infrastructure. We commend your support for and oversight of this important program and ask that members of this committee support legislation to extend the LRF for at least an additional five years at current levels. We are hopeful authorizing legislation will be introduced in the coming months. We also encourage you to support cyclic maintenance, repair and rehabilitation and line-item construction to address the \$23 billion deferred maintenance backlog and ensure the day-to-day maintenance that can reduce the growth of the backlog. We are disappointed with the levels in the president's budget for these appropriated accounts and encourage you to provide more if your allocation allows.

**NPS Housing:** Unfortunately, the lack of affordable housing facing countless Americans has been taking a toll on NPS' capacity to house its employees. Rent and home sale prices have increased prohibitively so that as staff who have long served parks retire, new incoming staff cannot afford to live near parks. In absence of decent housing within a reasonable commuting distance and with limited housing stock in parks, prospective park employees turn down jobs and superintendents struggle to fill positions even when funds are available. NPCA is discussing with partners, congressional offices and NPS the varied options for trying to address this housing crisis; however, additional funding would clearly be helpful in addressing some of these needs. Accordingly, we commend the committee for its \$4.7 million increase in FY23 for the NPS housing program and its maintenance of that \$7.9 million level in FY24. We ask the committee to support the president's budget level of \$16.9 million for this important account in FY25.

**Heritage Partnership Program:** This program supports National Heritage Areas (NHAs) in dozens of communities throughout the country. NHAs are strong examples of truly effective public-private partnerships established in support of conservation and preservation values. NHAs allow local experts to better protect and interpret stories and resources that are regionally distinct and nationally significant. The federal funding NHAs receive must be matched 1:1 with money from a non-federal source. The NHA system was formalized through legislation at the end of the last Congress, so this subcommittee's maintenance of the \$29 million funding level for this small but mighty program is commendable. We urge you to reject the president's proposed cut and urge you to provide level funding at a minimum. A modest increase to \$32 million could ensure

that every NHA has at least \$500,000 in funding, that NPS guidelines and performance benchmarks are met, and that the program can support new NHAs and NPS management.

**Historic Preservation Fund:** NPCA supports this important program that provides support for cultural resource protection in communities throughout the country, so were disappointed in the significant cut in FY24 and poor funding levels proposed in the president's budget. We support increasing this fund with a particular eye towards the Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) that have long been underfunded. We commend the committee's increase for these grants-in-aid to tribes in FY23. This increase raised the average for each THPO to \$100,000, which is helpful, but these offices are expected to respond to thousands of consultation requests. We encourage an increase specifically for these THPOs to help meet preservation responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act and protect important artifacts.

**Investments are also needed for related agencies that support the health of park resources and communities.** We commend the committee's work to better invest in the many agencies and programs that support wildlife, clean air and water in our parks and help research and address climate change. Park wildlife, for example, benefit from US Fish and Wildlife Service funding. We urge the committee to make significant investments in the protection and recovery of our most vulnerable species, including the more than 600 threatened and endangered plants and animals in national parks. The US Fish and Wildlife Service needs robust funding for **Endangered Species Act** programs. Investments in **EPA's Geographic Programs** are critical for restoring and maintaining the health of the Great Lakes, Chesapeake Bay and other waterways and ecosystems in and surrounding national parks. There are many important investments the committee can continue to make that helps our parks adapt to climate change. For example, **USGS Climate Adaptation Science Centers** are critical to support climate science that benefits our national parks and their ecosystems.

**We urge the committee to support supplemental disaster relief funding for NPS.**

Catastrophic weather events—increasingly related to climate change—cause massive harm to park communities and infrastructure. We commend the \$1.5 billion investment in NPS disaster relief in FY23, which will address the damage to numerous parks from flooding, hurricanes, wildfires, and more. The nondefense supplemental bill introduced in October 2023 included \$395 million for disasters at numerous parks. This includes the Hurricane Ridge day lodge at Olympic National Park and numerous national park sites in California, in addition to historic resource damage due to the wildfires in Maui. Since then, Acadia National Park has seen at least \$20 million in damage from two back-to-back storms in January 2024 and Big Thicket National Preserve has recently joined surrounding communities in suffering from recent flooding. These disasters and any others this year should be included in a disaster supplemental package that we hope can move forward in the coming months to provide not only for the countless communities impacted by climate change-related and other disasters, but also our national parks. We urge members of this subcommittee to support this funding when an opportunity arises.

**Policy riders:** The FY24 Interior bill included hundreds of riders that would have damaged national parks, their wildlife and clean air and water. We applaud the stripping of these riders in conference and urge that the underlying bill in FY25 does not contain damaging riders.



**Statement of the National Trust for Historic Preservation  
Shaw Sprague, Vice President of Government Relations  
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee  
Committee on Appropriations, United States House of Representatives  
National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Endowments  
for the Arts and for the Humanities**

**May 10, 2024**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate the opportunity to present the National Trust for Historic Preservation's recommendations for FY 2025 appropriations. My name is Shaw Sprague, and I am the Vice President of Government Relations. The National Trust is a privately funded nonprofit chartered by Congress in 1949. We work to save America's historic places to enrich our future.

Thank you for considering recommendations made by the National Trust. We look forward to continuing our work with this Subcommittee as you address the ongoing need for investments to sustain our nation's rich heritage of cultural and historic resources that also generate lasting economic and civic vitality for communities throughout the nation. We offer our gratitude for your longstanding support for preserving America's special places.

Our annual report, "[The Preservation Budget: Select Preservation Priorities for FY 2025 Appropriations](https://savingplaces.org/preservation-funding-priorities),"<sup>1</sup> includes more information on the programs identified below, including funding levels over time and many remarkable recent examples of program successes.

**National Park Service: Historic Preservation Fund.** The HPF is the principal source of funding to implement the nation's preservation programs. This critical program saw six successive historic funding levels until FY 2024. While this recent investment in the HPF has facilitated innovative and impactful historic preservation work across the country, additional appropriations are needed to ensure a more complete historic narrative is preserved for future generations and lesser-known places of historic and cultural significance may continue to enrich our communities.

HPF funding supports fundamental preservation activities such as survey, nomination of properties to the National Register of Historic Places, public education, and project reviews required for federal Historic Tax Credit (HTC) projects. Among many highlights, we would like to emphasize the Subcommittee's sustained support for the African American Civil Rights grants program to preserve and highlight sites and stories associated with securing civil rights for All Americans. We would also like to highlight the extraordinary impact Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants have in fostering economic development in our nation's rural communities. The competitive grant programs within the HPF are having a transformative impact in communities throughout the country and these investments are helping preserve a broader

<sup>1</sup> <https://savingplaces.org/preservation-funding-priorities>

historic narrative while revitalizing communities and creating local jobs. State and Tribal historic preservation offices are at the forefront of protecting our nation's historic and cultural resources and are consistently asked to do more with less funding. The National Trust strongly supports addressing this unmet financial need.

We respectfully request that Congress provide a total FY 2025 HPF appropriation of \$225 million. Within that funding we recommend:

- \$70 million for State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs)
- \$34 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs)
- \$28 million for competitive grants to preserve the sites and stories of efforts to advance African American Civil Rights
- \$7 million for the History of Equal Rights Grants program to preserve the sites and stories associated with securing civil rights for All Americans, including women, American Latino, Native American, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and LGBTQ Americans
- \$13 million for grants to Historically Black Colleges and Universities to preserve and rehabilitate historic buildings
- \$40 million for Save America's Treasures grants
- \$17 million for Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grants
- \$5 million for Underrepresented Community grants
- \$11 million for Semiquincentennial Grants program

**National Park Service: National Networks.** The NPS manages five national networks around important themes in American history: African American Civil Rights, the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, the Reconstruction Era, World War II Heritage Cities, and Japanese American World War II History. These programs coordinate preservation, research, and education efforts nationwide across large networks of partners. Please support \$11.75 million to administer and enhance National Networks programs. Increased funding would provide additional support for the NPS to enhance the administration and expansion of National Networks programs.

**National Park Service: Deferred Maintenance.** The NPS is responsible for maintaining a system comprised of more than 85 million acres that tell the stories of remarkable people and events in our country's history. Unfortunately, after over 100 years of operation and inconsistent public funding, the NPS faces a multi-million dollar deferred maintenance backlog. Deferred maintenance in our national parks puts historic and cultural sites at risk of permanent damage or loss, and in the absence of funding, the condition of these assets will continue to deteriorate and become more expensive to repair and preserve in the future. We also recommend sustained increases for specific line items to ensure the maintenance backlog continues to decrease.

- **Construction.** We recommend at least \$150 million in funding for Line-Item Construction projects that address the deferred maintenance for the NPS' highest priority non- transportation assets with project costs greater than \$1 million.

- **Repair and Rehabilitation; Cyclic Maintenance.** We are enormously appreciative of the Committee's commitment to enhancing these accounts with significant investments since FY 2016. We recommend additional increases for Repair and Rehabilitation at \$150 million and maintaining \$205 million for Cyclic Maintenance to ensure routine and emerging needs are appropriately addressed.

**National Park Service: Cultural Programs.** Within its cultural programs, the NPS manages many critical historic preservation activities, including management of the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Landmarks Program, certification of federal historic tax credit (HTC) projects, coordination of federal archaeology programs, and the administration of invaluable and targeted grant funding. These grant programs include the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Grants, Japanese American Confinement Sites Grants, American Battlefield Protection Program Assistance Grants, and many more.

The National Trust recommends \$46 million for Cultural Programs for FY 2025. Specifically, we want to highlight our recommendation of \$3 million for the African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program, which has been authorized since FY 2023, but has yet to receive any appropriated funds to begin this critical work. This recently authorized program will allow descendant-led and preservation organizations working to protect African American burial grounds to receive funding to preserve these sacred landscapes. Assisting with the discovery of these places of tribute and memory ahead of commercial development will help avoid disturbances of these sacred places and aid family members, descendants, and community members in honoring and remembering their shared past.

Further increases in this account will support sustained demands to review and approve federal HTC projects and allow improvements to, and a more complete list of, historic and archeological resources in the National Register of Historic Places.

**National Park Service: National Heritage Areas.** We recommend \$34 million for the Heritage Partnership Program and National Heritage Areas (NHAs). This level of investment would provide the necessary funding for each of the 62 individual NHAs in 36 states, as well as NPS administrative support for coordination, guidance, assistance, and training. NHAs uniquely combine historic preservation, cultural and natural resource conservation, local and regional preservation planning, and heritage education and tourism. According to the NPS, NHAs leverage an average of \$5.50 for every \$1 of federal investment to create jobs, generate local government revenue, and sustain local communities through revitalization tourism.

**Bureau of Land Management: Cultural Resources Management.** The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees the largest, most diverse, and scientifically important collection of historic and cultural resources on our nation's public lands, as well as the museum collections and data associated with them. The National Trust recommends \$25 million to bolster this program.

The cultural resources program also supports Section 106 review of land-use proposals, Section 110 inventory and protection of cultural resources, compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and consultation with Tribes and Alaska Native Governments.

Moving forward, we recommend \$1 million in dedicated funds for the agency to enhance its National Cultural Resources Information Management System (NCRIMS). This collaboration with state historic preservation offices is one of the nation's most innovative programs to support predictive modeling and data analysis to enhance planning for large-scale, cross-jurisdictional land-use projects.

**Bureau of Land Management: National Landscape Conservation System.** The BLM's National Landscape Conservation System (National Conservation Lands) includes approximately 37 million acres of congressionally and presidentially designated lands, including National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, National Scenic and Historic Trails, and Wild and Scenic Rivers.

We encourage the Committee to provide at least \$78 million to the base program for the National Landscape Conservation System. An increase in funding will allow for greater inventory and monitoring of cultural resources in this growing system, prevent damage to the resources found in these areas, ensure proper management, and provide for a quality visitor experience.

**Independent Agencies: National Endowments for the Arts and for the Humanities.** We urge the Committee to provide no less than \$211 million each for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). NEA and NEH funding is critical to communities around the country and strengthens our nation by promoting the 'lessons of history' to all Americans. This funding has also supported efforts by the National Trust's Historic Sites and others to tell a fuller American story and engage visitors in compelling ways.

**Independent Agencies: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.** We recommend \$10.5 million for the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP). This increase would enhance the ACHP's ability to perform its essential role in ensuring the nation's historic and cultural resources are protected while also advancing timely delivery of major infrastructure projects and improving consultation with Indian Tribes. The increase would also support the ACHP's efforts to promote enhanced mapping and digitization of cultural resources.

We stand ready to assist the Committee in support of our recommendations.

Sincerely,



Shaw Sprague  
Vice President of Government Relations  
National Trust for Historic Preservation

Submitted by Libby Marking, Director of Government Affairs & Public Policy

**NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE ASSOCIATION**

*May 10, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
**Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System**

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. **We request Congress to allocate at least \$602.3 million in funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).** However, to achieve a fully funded and effective Refuge System, an annual budget of at least \$2.2 billion is needed to provide for its basic needs, meet mandates and public demand, and ensure commensurate staffing of other similarly sized public lands systems. The President's budget request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal and we urge Congress to make significant investments in these treasured public lands and waters.

The Refuge Association is a non-profit exclusively focused on protecting, promoting, and enhancing the National Wildlife Refuge System. As the nation's only set of federal lands dedicated to the conservation and management of America's native wildlife, it is the world's largest and most diverse network of conservation lands and waters, encompassing more than 850 million acres of unique habitats that our native wildlife species depend on. Our national wildlife refuges are essential for protecting biodiversity and climate-resilient habitats, providing community-driven conservation, and expanding wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities nationwide.

The Refuge System has been stymied by over a decade of a severe lack of funding and resources. Steadily increasing funding needs paired with insufficient budgets has led to a Refuge System that is quickly eroding in habitat management and an ability even to keep refuges open. Understanding these impacts is critical for Congress to begin addressing the significant challenges facing our native wildlife and ensure the health and integrity of the Refuge System well into the future.

USFWS' limited staffing capacity has several negative impacts on the ecological health of the Refuge System. For example, only 27% of the threatened and endangered populations occurring on refuges are monitored due to limited capacity. This leads to compromised adaptive management capability, inability to manage invasive species, the destruction of native habitat, and the potential loss of more species. With its current resources, USFWS can only successfully

control 7% of the lands infested with non-native species, which has increased 30% since 2005. Planning is at the core of Refuge System management, but more than 60% of refuges have an outdated Comprehensive Conservation Plan or no plan at all. Limited capacity is hampering these efforts and severely limits landscape-level planning and adaptability to changing conditions.

Significant investments must be made today to begin working towards better outcomes for our native wildlife. USFWS has done excellent work to deploy creative solutions and new partnerships to manage the Refuge System as well as possible with their existing resources. But USFWS should not have to make hard decisions every year about how to operate under this longstanding funding crisis. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting not just conservation planning and wildlife and habitat management, but also visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. Congress must provide adequate resources to effectively administer the Refuge System.

The \$503 million appropriated to the Refuge System in fiscal year (FY) 2010, when the Refuge System relatively saw its highest funding and staffing levels, is worth approximately \$765 million today. Yet current funding sits at \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. Considering the level of inflation and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased, and USFWS has been forced to do more with less every single year. The failure to offset the impacts of inflation has resulted in a Refuge System that has long been strained under the weight of critically low staffing levels and lost capacity. Rising fixed costs are also eating into any increases in appropriations. It costs the Refuge System an estimated \$3 million for every one percent raise in payroll costs. Without base increases in the budget to cover these fixed costs, several much-needed positions are eliminated every year. This situation is completely unsustainable.

National wildlife refuges are important recreational and tourism destinations in communities across the United States, providing families and everyday Americans access to some of the nation's best opportunities for wildlife observation, sustainable hunting and fishing, photography, and environmental education for people of all ages and backgrounds. Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units, hundreds of millions of acres of marine national monuments, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and visitation has grown to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. This generates over 41,000 jobs and provides more than \$3.2 billion in economic output each year. It has also added new services, such as the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, which was launched in 2012 and seeks to address inequalities in recreational access and conservation participation. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at approximately 2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. While not all refuges need on-site staffing, many refuges and refuge complexes have been de-staffed or understaffed significantly. Multiple refuges are closed

to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling over vast distances, hundreds of miles per day.

Visitor Services staff has decreased by 25% since FY10, yet the number of visits has steadily increased by an average of 3.8% annually. Sadly, nearly all of the Refuge System's 125 visitor facilities operate on limited hours, with some centers completely closed, and none would function without volunteers. However, many volunteer programs have been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure. In 2023, there were 48% fewer volunteers than in 2016.

A nationwide study conducted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police in 2005 indicated that the Refuge System only has 20% of the recommended 1,074 Federal Wildlife Officers (FWOs) needed to provide adequate public safety and resource protection. As of February 2024, the Refuge System has the lowest number of FWOs in over 10 years with 221 officers, while simultaneously seeing the highest visitation and crime rates in its history. Currently, seven states have no officers stationed within their boundaries (CT, DE, IA, MI, NH, OH, VT), and nine states have just one officer (GA, Guam, HI, IN, KY, PA, PR, RI, WY).

In 2022 alone, officers responded to a total of 10,854 criminal incidents on Refuge System lands. There have been 1,384 significant incidents in the last four years—an average of 1 per day. There have been 1,605 arson or vandalism cases since 2019. Since 2016, the USFWS has sustained \$1.7 million dollars in property loss due to theft or damage. However, USFWS does not currently have the authority to collect civil damages for repairs and restoration.

The Refuge System also has a large deferred maintenance backlog of \$2.65 billion, with most structures near or past the end of their maximum useful life spans, such as buildings, roads, bridges, and trails. Under current appropriations, supplemented by the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), deferred maintenance costs are projected to reach \$28 billion by FY2050. Additional funding is necessary to address this backlog, or assets will continue to degrade well beyond their recommended life spans. This could jeopardize visitor access, safety, climate resilience, and wildlife conservation efforts, as well as double or triple long-term maintenance costs over the next 20 years. We support the permanent authorization of GAOA and increasing the allocation of GAOA funds to USFWS from 5% to at least 15% so it can begin to address its deferred maintenance backlog.

Congress must recognize and understand the Refuge System's budget realities to begin addressing the significant challenges facing our native wildlife and habitats and ensure the health and integrity of the Refuge System for future generations. To achieve a healthy and adequately staffed Refuge System, the Refuge Association believes it needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602 million is an important step towards that goal.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its

conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of at least \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please contact Libby Marking at [lmarking@refugeassociation.org](mailto:lmarking@refugeassociation.org) for more information

**Testimony in Support of FY 2025 Funding for the  
Department of the Interior and Smithsonian Institution**

May 10, 2024

***Submitted by:***

Gil Nelson, Ph.D.

President

Natural Science Collections Alliance

950 Herndon Parkway Suite 450, Herndon, VA 20170

Phone: 202-628-1500, E-mail: [jpandey@aibs.org](mailto:jpandey@aibs.org)

***Submitted to:***

House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

The Natural Science Collections Alliance appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of fiscal year (FY) 2025 appropriations for the Smithsonian Institution and the Department of the Interior. We encourage Congress to make new investments that address agency backlogs and secure future efforts for the preservation, curation, growth and study of scientific and cultural collections within the Department of the Interior and the Smithsonian Institution. We request that Congress provide the **National Museum of Natural History with at least \$60 million in FY 2025**, with new funding to correct for a lack of adequate increases in recent years. Please provide the **United States Geological Survey (USGS) with at least \$1.85 billion in FY 2025**, with increased support for collections related activities.

*The Natural Science Collections Alliance is a non-profit association that supports natural science collections, their human resources, the institutions that house them, and their research activities for the benefit of science and society. Our membership consists of institutions that are part of an international network of museums, botanical gardens, herbaria, universities, and other institutions that contain natural science collections and use them in research, exhibitions, academic and informal science education, and outreach activities.*

Scientific collections, and the collections professionals and scientists who make, care for, and study these resources, are an important component of our nation's research infrastructure. These collections and their associated experts contribute to the expansion of our bioeconomy. Whether held at a museum, government managed laboratory or archive, or in a university science department, these scientific resources form a coordinated network of specimens, samples, and data (e.g. genetic, tissue, organism, and environmental) that are a unique and irreplaceable foundation from which scientists are studying and explaining past and present life on earth.

Preservation of specimens and the strategic growth of these collections are in the best interest of science and the best interest of taxpayers. Existing scientific collections that are properly cared for and accessible are a critical component of the US science infrastructure and are readily integrated into new research on significant questions. Specimens that were collected decades or centuries ago are now routinely used in research in diverse fields related to genomics, human health, biodiversity sciences, informatics, environmental quality, and agriculture.

According to the U.S. Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections (IWGSC), “scientific collections are essential to supporting agency missions and are thus vital to supporting the global research enterprise.” A [2020 report](#) by the IWGSC highlights the long-term benefits of scientific collections and presents a framework for estimating and documenting these benefits, both monetary and non-monetary, generated by federal institutional collections. In 2023, the IWGSC released another [report](#) enumerating the many ways federal scientific collections have served the nation in diverse areas, including with the COVID-19 response and improving national health, climate change research and mitigation, ensuring the nation’s food security, as well as environmental health and safety.

Additional recent reports have highlighted the value of mobilizing biodiversity specimens and data in spurring new scientific discoveries that grow our economy, improve our public health and wellbeing, and increase our national security. In 2019, the Biodiversity Collections Network (BCoN) issued a community informed call for the development of an Extended Specimen Network. The report, [Extending U.S. Biodiversity Collections to Promote Research and Education](#), outlined a national agenda that leverages digital data in biodiversity collections for new uses. “Science and industry rely on physical specimens housed in U.S. biodiversity collections,” the report suggests. “Rapid advances in data generation and analysis have transformed understanding of biodiversity collections from singular physical specimens, to dynamic suites of interconnected resources enriched through study over time. The concept of the 'extended specimen' conveys the current perspective of the biodiversity specimen as extending beyond the singular physical object, to potentially limitless additional physical preparations and digital resources.” This endeavor requires robust investments in our nation’s scientific collections, whether they are owned by a federal or state agency or are part of an educational institution or free-standing natural history museum or other types of research or educational centers.

A [2020 report](#) by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM), *Biological Collections: Ensuring Critical Research and Education for the 21st Century*, argued that collections are a critical part of our nation’s science and innovation infrastructure and a fundamental resource for understanding the natural world. The report’s recommendations for establishing an action center for biological collections and requiring specimen management plans for research proposals generating new specimens underscore the importance of biodiversity specimen collections and have been supported by the CHIPS and Science Act.

A recently published white paper, [“Envisioning a Natural History Collections Action Center,”](#) summarizes the features and functions of an action center and underscores the essential role that collections play in medical science, human health, food security, pathogen-borne disease, biosecurity, a strong bioeconomy, mitigating the effects of climate change, and conserving ecological services for human use and subsistence. Such a center will provide leadership, support, and coordination for federal, non-federal, and private collections and enable transformative research to address grand societal challenges. Many federal agencies have a role in supporting the establishment of an action center for biological collections, including the Smithsonian Institution and the Department of the Interior and its bureaus.

All of the above reports articulate a common vision of the future of biological collections and emphasize the need to broaden and deepen these collections and associated data to realize the potential for biodiversity collections to inform 21st century science. Collections are a critical resource for advancing the knowledge needed to address current global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pandemics. The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated how humans are inextricably part of the natural world. Biological collections, their extended data, and the experts that build and study them are globally important for understanding where viruses such as SARS-CoV-2 exist in nature or when they cross from their current hosts to humans.

The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) is the central federal partner in the curation and research on scientific specimens. Scientists at the NMNH care for 148 million specimens and ensure that the institution remains a global leader in scientific research and public engagement. To increase the availability of these scientific resources to researchers, educators, other federal agencies, and the public, NMNH is working on a multi-year effort to digitize its collections. Funding is required to ensure this work is completed.

The National Museum of Natural History is also working to strengthen curatorial and research staffing and to backfill positions left open by retirements and budget constraints. The current staffing level is insufficient to provide optimal care for the collections. Future curatorial and collections management staffing levels may be further jeopardized given insufficient funding increases in recent years. This lack of funding for collections care jeopardizes our bioeconomy at a time when critical investments are needed to leverage our network of collections to address the myriad issues facing the country.

Interior is an important caretaker of museum collections as well; the Department and its bureaus collectively manage an estimated 206 million museum specimens. Although many of the department's collections are located in bureau facilities, numerous artifacts and specimens are cared for in non-governmental facilities, such as museums and universities. The Interior Museum Program supports these collections by providing oversight, policy development, advocacy, technical assistance, training, and data management support.

In addition, the USGS furthers the preservation, inventory, and digitization of geological scientific collections, such as rock and ice cores, fossils, and samples of oil, gas, and water. The National Geological and Geophysical Data Preservation program helps states with collections management, improves accessibility of collections data, and expands digitization of specimens to ensure their broader use. One example of the returns from this program is the potash mineral deposit discovered in Michigan that is valued at an estimated \$65 billion. Rock samples from Michigan were entered into a national database, where private companies discovered the deposit's existence and potential for mining.

USGS supports the documentation and conservation of native pollinators through its Native Bee Inventory and Monitoring Lab (BIML). Pollinators, such as bees, are critical components of ecosystems and play an integral role in wildlife and habitat management and restoration. Three-fourths of the world's flowering plants and about 35 percent of the world's food crops rely on pollinators to reproduce. Given that pollinator populations are in decline globally, BIML's work

in developing a nationwide method to inventory and monitor bee population trends on public lands is crucial.

USGS had more than a million specimens of birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles that were housed at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. The Biological Survey Unit (BSU) consisted of USGS scientists stationed at the NMNH, where they conducted research on USGS-specimens of fish, reptiles, birds, and mammals that are curated at the NMNH. These specimens, data, and the research they enable have been critical for informing land and natural resource management decisions at the Department of the Interior, and have also supported decision-making by State and Tribal governments. This arrangement, dating back to 1889, was recently eliminated with the Smithsonian taking over care of these collections. The work that BSU supported and conducted at the NMNH was important and in the national interest. Adequate funding is required to ensure continued care for these valuable collections.

The Bureau of Land Management manages nearly 4 million museum objects and archives and has a large backlog of cultural resources to inventory on public lands. Currently, only about 11 percent of public lands have been assessed for heritage resources. Such assessments need to be conducted before unique resources are lost to looting, vandalism, fire, or environmental change.

The National Park Service must continue its investments in scientific collections in order to monitor the nation's protected natural heritage, which means cataloging millions of museum objects and connecting the resulting databases to national and global data portals to monitor changes through time. The National Park Service curates a wide range of specimens and artifacts, from historical and cultural items to preserved tissues from protected species and living microorganisms collected in our National Parks. Several parks have made progress on addressing planning, environmental, storage, security, and fire protection deficiencies in museum collections, but much work remains, and present and future collections will be fundamental for effective management efforts.

### **Conclusion**

Scientific collections are critical research infrastructure that help support the nation's bioeconomy. Research specimens connect us to the past and are used to document and solve current problems. They allow us to predict threats to human health, find successful methods for ensuring food security, and address the impact of future environmental changes. Sustained investments in scientific collections are in our national interest.

The budget for NMNH has not seen adequate increases in recent years. We urge Congress to provide NMNH with at least \$60 million in FY 2025 to allow the museum to undertake critical collections care, make needed technology upgrades, and conduct cutting edge research. Please support adequate funding for programs within Interior bureaus that support the preservation and use of scientific collections – a truly irreplaceable resource. We urge Congress to provide the USGS with at least \$1.85 billion in FY 2025, with increased support for collections.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request.



## North American Lake Management Society

PO Box 5443 • Madison WI 53705-0443 • 608-233-2836 • nalms.org

May 6, 2024

Representative Michael Simpson  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Chellie Pingree  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Simpson and Ranking Pingree:

The North American Lake Management Society (NALMS), a professional society working to foster the management and protection of lakes and reservoirs in the U.S., writes to request \$71 million in annual funding for the Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Program (Section 319) be directed specifically for monitoring lakes, restoration of degraded lakes and protection of high quality lakes in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) budget for the fiscal year 2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. We recommend the language below for inclusion in the related Explanatory Statement.

“The Committee recognizes our nation’s lakes as the economic engine for surrounding communities and for the highly valued ecosystem services they provide including drinking water supplies, recreational and commercial fisheries, habitat for freshwater species, and nature-based recreation, particularly for underserved communities. The Committee recognizes the significant potential to build resilience for communities and fish and wildlife through lake-focused protection and restoration. The Committee supports \$71 million for EPA’s Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Program (Section 319) specifically for monitoring and restoration of degraded lakes, ponds, and reservoirs and protection of high quality lakes, including lake restoration and protection activities previously funded under the section 314 Clean Lakes Program.”

The primary focus of the EPA’s water quality programs since 1994 has been to restore impaired waters and reduce pollutant levels in waterways through the Nonpoint Source Management Program (Section 319). The EPA, state, tribal and other partners have made, and continue to make, considerable progress in understanding and addressing the many sources of pollution to our nation’s waters. There is no doubt that they must continue to do so, and appropriations to Section 319 should continue to be a priority. Nevertheless, existing funding strategies are insufficient to reverse the declining water quality trends in U.S. lakes.

From 1976 to 1995, EPA’s Clean Lakes Program (Section 314), was a highly successful mechanism for funding to states, to clean up individual, publicly owned lakes but it has not been funded since the 1990s. In the last 30 years, water quality in lakes throughout the U.S. has significantly declined.

Today, Section 319 is the funding mechanism used to address the nutrient pollution that impacts lakes from runoff from the surrounding lands that drain into them, called their watershed. States and Tribes must compete for very limited funding to address lake water quality. Despite roughly 20% of the total 319 funding

going to lake, reservoir, or pond projects, the US EPA National Lakes Assessments have shown that the percentage of lakes with the highest nutrient pollution (called eutrophic and hypereutrophic lakes) just keeps growing. Section 319 funding is typically focused on reducing pollution at the watershed-level, but recent proposed guidance from EPA will allow for in-lake interventions when the watershed reductions are insufficient alone. In-lake interventions have been demonstrated to be successful on lakes with historic nutrient pollution loadings, but they are costly. Meanwhile, protection of the remaining high quality, low-nutrient polluted lakes is urgently needed to ensure future generations can experience crystal clear lakes that support cold water fisheries and unparalleled recreational and aesthetic experiences. States and tribes will need access to more funding to not only protect the best of the remaining healthy lakes, but to restore the overwhelming majority of the nation's lakes that suffer from excessive nutrient pollution.

Successful lake management requires 1) lake monitoring and assessment, 2) diagnostic/feasibility studies to determine cause of poor water quality trends or status, 3) restoration and protection and, importantly, 4) funding for evaluation to determine if restoration has been successful. Because restoration is so costly, much of the 319 funding goes to implementing restoration efforts at the expense of monitoring, protection, diagnostic studies and post-restoration evaluation. Significant additional appropriations are necessary to provide dedicated resources for the full suite of lake management strategies that are needed to meet the goals of the Clean Water Act for the nation's lakes and reservoirs.

The quality of lakes is expected to worsen as the frequency of extreme weather events increases and intensifies. Invasive species, nutrient loading, and harmful algal blooms will increasingly impair and degrade lakes, exacerbate the release of greenhouse gases, threaten human health, limit recreational opportunities, and decrease the economic value of lakes. Section 319 does not currently provide funding necessary to address these critical threats to water quality in lakes, ponds, and reservoirs. Americans value their remaining high quality freshwater lakes and the fish and wildlife they support, but very few resources are currently available to protect and preserve them. Doubling the amount of funding for lake projects from approximately \$35 million to \$71 million in annual appropriations will certainly not meet the full need, but it will help to stabilize declining lake water quality.

By prioritizing funding for lakes, you will support healthy and resilient waters, fish and wildlife, and communities. We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you to ensure our nation's lakes continue to provide a myriad of important benefits across the country.

Respectfully,

*Kellie Merrell*

Kellie Merrell

President

North American Lake Management Society

NORTHERN NEVADA  
**Public Health** | Air  
 Quality

May 29, 2024

Committee on Appropriations  
 H-307 The Capitol  
 Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear House Appropriations Committee Chair Cole and fellow members,

Our country's programs to reduce air pollution have been a tremendous success but, despite nationwide progress, air pollution still causes tens of thousands of early deaths in America and is a serious public health problem resulting in negative health impacts to millions every year. We are requesting your support to address this significant problem.

The Northern Nevada Public Health, Air Quality Management Division (AQMD) and other state and local clean air agencies across the country are charged with running the essential air quality programs that protect public health. Unfortunately, these programs have been underfunded for many years and need significant increases in resources. To meet current and expected obligations, we ask that Congress provide \$500 million in Section 103 and 105 (Clean Air Act) federal grants to state and local air agencies in FY 2025 to support current programs and new challenges and allow flexibility for state and local air agencies to use federal grants for their highest-priority needs. As much as possible, these grant increases should not require matching funds (e.g., providing funding under Section 103 authority, which does not call for a match).

Federal grant funding under Sections 103 and 105 of the Clean Air Act, which support state and local clean air and climate agencies, has been essentially flatlined for nearly 20 years, despite many new regulations and requirements. These grants have not even kept pace with inflation, while our programs have become more costly and complex. Continued shortfalls in federal funding will leave communities at risk and will result in cuts to existing programs, just as climate change and air pollution are exacerbated. The AQMD is experiencing ever increasing delegated tasks, because of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulatory reform and continued focus on Cooperative Federalism, with no increase in financial assistance. The Clean Air Act established Section 105 Grants for state/local air programs recognizing EPA did not have the capacity to regulate sources of air pollution at the local level. The 105 grants were intended to provide 60% of the program costs with the state/local programs to provide the remaining 40%. As funding has been kept relatively level for a number of years, the result is the 105 grant now only supports approximately 30% of the AQMD's personnel costs with no support for operating expenses.

Additional funds would be used nationally for important efforts, such as advancing new programs and expanding existing clean air efforts that protect vulnerable communities; supporting pollution detection and visualization through air monitors and sensors; supporting small business programs; and addressing climate change with activities that include planning, monitoring, permitting, enforcement, adaptation and resilience. Specifically, due to limited financial resources, the AQMD struggles with maintaining its ambient air monitoring network, provide the level of detail in its permitting and inspection activities, and put forth the necessary assets on planning. These struggles have led to Washoe County being on the verge of becoming designated as non-attainment

AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT DIVISION  
 1001 East Ninth Street, Building B-171, Reno, Nevada 89512  
 AQMD Office: 775-784-7200 | Fax: 775-784-7225 | [OurCleanAir.com](http://OurCleanAir.com)  
 Serving Reno, Sparks and all of Washoe County, Nevada.

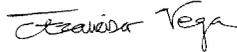
Date: May 29, 2024  
Subject: Air Grant Recommendations  
Page: 2 of 3

**NNPH**

for the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for ozone. A non-attainment designation carries significant financial, public health, and environmental considerations.

We work hard to improve air quality, but sufficient federal funding is critical. Please ensure that federal grants to state and local air quality agencies under Sections 103 and 105 of the Clean Air Act are increased to \$500 million in FY 2025. I would be glad to answer any questions you have or provide more information. Thank you for any assistance you can offer.

Sincerely,



Francisco Vega, P.E., MBA  
Director, Air Quality Management Division  
Norther Nevada Public Health

*Katrina McMurrian, Executive Director, Nuclear Waste Strategy Coalition (NWSC)*

**Testimony for the Record to the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies re Fiscal Year 2025 EWD Appropriations**

**RE: Environmental Protection Agency**

**May 10, 2024**

The NWSC recommends the Subcommittee (1) provide support and funding for development of generic repository standards by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and (2) call for EPA collaboration with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), specific Department of Energy (DOE) offices, and the U.S. Navy regarding disposal plans and standards as appropriate. **Relevant EPA programs include the Indoor Air and Radiation Program.**

Background

The NWSC is an ad hoc organization representing the collective interests of member state utility regulators, consumer advocates, attorneys general, and radiation control officials; tribal governments; local governments; electric utilities with operating and/or shutdown nuclear reactors; and other experts on nuclear waste policy matters. Our mission is to ensure the timely, safe, and cost-effective removal, transport, storage, and permanent disposal of spent nuclear fuel and reactor-related Greater-Than-Class C waste stranded at numerous operating and shutdown commercial reactor sites in our states and communities. Thus, the NWSC has a keen interest in efforts to facilitate progress on permanent disposal.

Generic Repository Standards

The NWSC supports an update to the generic standards for permanent disposal, as it is necessary for any future proposed repository sites. While reserving response on any such proposed standards in the future, it is time for the federal government and relevant agencies to begin the process. In fact, the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future (BRC) called for agencies "to work together to define an appropriate process (with opportunity for public input) for developing a generic safety standard for geologic disposal sites. . ." in the "Near-Term Actions" chapter in its report to the Secretary of Energy over a decade ago.

The NWSC stresses the importance of not specifying that DOE will be the entity to conduct future repository work. Along with the BRC and many other stakeholders, the NWSC has long supported the formation of a new, independent nuclear waste management organization with sustained annual funding from the Nuclear Waste Fund. Thus, the generic standards should be flexible enough to accommodate such changes in program management.

Collaboration with NRC, DOE & the U.S. Navy

The NWSC also recommends that appropriators convey through report language that the EPA collaborate and work together as appropriate with the NRC, DOE's Office of Nuclear Energy and Office of Environmental Management, as well as the U.S. Navy, to ensure that disposal plans and standards address all the nation's waste forms.

Closing

The NWSC appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony and thanks you for considering these recommendations. We welcome additional engagement regarding all potential avenues for pursuing meaningful progress on nuclear waste management.

Testimony of April Snell, Executive Director, Oregon Water Resources Congress  
Submitted to the United States House Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
May 6, 2024

**FY2025 Budget for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's  
Fisheries Restoration Irrigation Mitigation Act (FRIMA) Program**

The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) is writing to express its strong support for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Fisheries Restoration Irrigation Mitigation Act (FRIMA) program and is requesting **\$15 million** in FY2025, which is the previously authorized amount. The FRIMA program is an essential cost-share funding program that helps water users and fishery agencies better protect sensitive, threatened, and endangered fish species while ensuring water supply delivery to farms and communities.

OWRC was established in 1912 as a trade association to support the protection of water rights and promote the wise stewardship of water resources statewide. OWRC members are local governmental entities, which include irrigation districts, water control districts, drainage districts, water improvement districts, and other agricultural water suppliers that deliver water to roughly one-third of all irrigated land in Oregon. These water stewards operate complex water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, fish screens and fish passage, and hydropower facilities.

**FY2025 Appropriations**

The FRIMA program meets a critical need in fishery protection and restoration, complimenting other programs through USFWS. Fish passage and fish screen installations are a vital component to fishery protection with several benefits:

- Keep sensitive, threatened and endangered fish out of canals and water delivery systems
- Allow fish to be safely bypassed around reservoirs and other infrastructure
- Reduce water quality risks to fish species

There are over one hundred irrigation districts and other special districts in Oregon that provide water supplies to over one million acres of irrigated cropland in the state. Almost all these districts are affected by either state or federal Endangered Species Act listings of salmon, steelhead, bull trout or other sensitive, threatened or endangered species. The design and installation of fish screens and fish passage facilities to protect the myriad of fish species is often cost-prohibitive for individual districts to implement without outside funding sources.

The cost of addressing fish screening and fish passage needs in Oregon far outweighs current appropriations or the program authorization as a whole. Oregon irrigation districts anticipate at least \$25 million in funding is needed to meet current fish passage and fish screen needs in our state alone. Limited cost-share funds are available from the Oregon Watershed Enhanced Board (OWEB), but the primary cost-share for fish screen and fish passage projects has been provided by the districts and their water users. Projects include construction of new fish screens and fish passage facilities as well as significant upgrades of existing facilities to meet new requirements (new species or science) from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Fisheries Service and the USFWS. Upgrades are often needed to modernize facilities with new technologies that provide better protection for fish species as well as reduced maintenance and increased lifespan for the operator.

**Background of the Fisheries Restoration Irrigation Mitigation Act (FRIMA) Program**

FRIMA, originally enacted in November 2000, created a federal partnership program incentivizing voluntary fish screen and fish passage improvements for water withdrawal projects in Idaho, Oregon, Washington and western Montana. The funding went to local governments for construction of fish screens and fish passage facilities and is matched with non-federal funding. Irrigation districts and other local governments that divert water for irrigation accessed the funding directly, while individual irrigators accessed funding through their local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), which are local governments affiliated with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The original legislation in 2000 (PL 106-502) was supported and requested by the Pacific Northwest Partnership, a coalition of local governmental entities in the four Northwest states, including OWRC. The FRIMA legislation authorized \$25 million annually, to be divided equally among the four states from 2001 to 2012, which was when the original authorization expired. The actual funding appropriated to the FRIMA program (through Congressional write-ins) ranged from \$1 million to \$8 million, well short of the \$25 million originally authorized and far short of what is needed to address fish passage and screening needs across the region. However, that small amount of funding was used to leverage other funds and assisted the region in making measurable progress towards installing fish screens and fish passage critical to protecting and restoring populations of sensitive, threatened, and endangered fish species.

FRIMA funding was channeled through USFWS to state fishery agencies in the four states and distributed using an application and approval process based on a ranking system implemented uniformly among the states, including the following criteria: Fish restoration benefits, cost effectiveness, and feasibility of planned structure. All projects provided improved fish passage or fish protection at water diversion structures and benefitted native fish species in the area, including several state or federally listed species. Projects were also subject to applicable state and federal requirements for project construction and operation.

FRIMA was reauthorized as part of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (WIIN) of 2016. However, a fifth state, California, was also added as an eligible FRIMA cost-share recipient and the program was only reauthorized for \$15 million, well short of the estimated \$500 million in fish screening and passage needs in the Pacific Northwest alone. Now that the program has been reauthorized, it is imperative the program receive appropriations so all five states can better leverage state and local funding to meet their fish passage and screening needs.

**Program Benefits**

FRIMA projects provide immediate protection for fish and fills a large unmet need in the Western United States for cost-share assistance with fish screening and fish passage installation and improvements. Compared to other recovery strategies, installation of fish screens and fish passage has the highest assurance for increasing populations of sensitive, threatened, and

endangered fish species in the Pacific Northwest. Furthermore, the construction of these facilities have minimal impact on water delivery operations, and projects are done cooperatively using methods well accepted by landowners and rural communities.

Funding of the FRIMA program has catalyzed cooperative partnerships and innovative projects that provide immediate and long-term benefits to irrigators, fishery agencies, and local communities throughout the Pacific Northwest. This program is also a wise investment, with past projects contributing more than the required match and leveraging on average over one dollar for each federal dollar invested. FRIMA provides for a maximum federal cost-share of 65%, with the applicant's cost-share at 35% along with on-going maintenance and support of the structure for passage or screening purposes. Applicants operate the facilities and state agencies review and monitor the projects.

#### **Oregon Projects & Benefits**

Twenty-six fish screen or fish passage projects in Oregon were previously funded using FRIMA for part of the project financing. These projects have led to:

- Installation of screens at seventeen diversions or irrigation pumps
- Removal or modification of twelve fish passage barriers
- Three-hundred sixty-five miles of surface waters re-opened to safe fish passage

In addition, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has used some of the FRIMA funding to develop an inventory of needed fish screens and passages in the state. Grants ranged from just under \$6,000 to \$400,000 in size with a local match averaging 64% of the project costs, well over the amount required under the Act (35%). In other words, each federal dollar invested in the FRIMA program generates a local investment of just over one dollar for the protection of fish species in the Pacific Northwest.

The following are examples of how Oregon has effectively utilized FRIMA money.

**Santiam Water Control District:** Fish screen project on a large 1050 cubic feet per second (cfs) multipurpose water diversion project on the Santiam River (Willamette Basin) near Stayton, Oregon. Partners are the Santiam Water Control District, ODFW, Marion Soil and Water Conservation District, and the City of Stayton. Approved **FRIMA** funding of **\$400,000** leveraged a **\$1,200,000** total project cost. Species benefited included winter steelhead, spring Chinook, rainbow trout, and cutthroat trout.

**South Fork Little Butte Creek:** Fish screen and fish passage project on a sixty-five cfs irrigation water diversion in the Rogue River Basin near Medford, Oregon. Partners are the Medford Irrigation District and ODFW. Approved **FRIMA** funding of **\$372,000** leveraged a **\$580,000** total project cost. Species benefited included listed summer and winter steelhead, Coho salmon, and cutthroat trout.

**Running Y (Geary Diversion):** Fish screen project on a sixty cfs irrigation water diversion in the upper Klamath Basin near Klamath Falls, Oregon. Partners are the Wocus Drainage District,

ODFW, and Jeld-Wen Ranches. Approved **FRIMA** funding of **\$44,727** leveraged a total project cost of **\$149,000**. Species benefited included listed red-band trout and short-nosed sucker.

**Lakeshore Gardens**: Fish screen project on a two cfs irrigation water diversion in the upper Klamath Basin near Klamath Falls, Oregon. Partners are the Lakeshore Gardens Drainage District and ODFW. Approved **FRIMA** funding of **\$5,691** leveraged a total project cost of **\$18,970**. Species benefited included red-band trout, short-nosed sucker and Lost River sucker.

**Conclusion**

Providing funding for the FRIMA program fills a vital funding gap for fish screens and fish passage projects that are needed to protect and restore sensitive, threatened, and endangered fish species, which in turn benefits the economy, local communities, and the environment. Eligible FRIMA funded projects are ready for construction and will provide immediate habitat benefits for fish as well as jobs and economic revitalization for local communities. Dollar-for-dollar, providing screening and fish passage at diversions is one of the most cost-effective uses of restoration dollars, creating fishery protection at relatively low cost, with minimal risk and significant benefits.

The return of a robustly funded FRIMA program will once again catalyze cooperative partnerships and innovative projects that provide immediate and long-term benefits to irrigators, fishery agencies, and local communities throughout the Pacific Northwest. We respectfully request an appropriation of \$15 million for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fisheries Restoration Irrigation Mitigation Act program for FY2025.

Sincerely,  
April Snell  
OWRC Executive Director

# OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

Testimony of Louis Geltman, VP for Policy & Government Relations, Outdoor Alliance  
 United States House Committee on Appropriations  
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
 Outside Witness Testimony Addressing USDA Forest Service, EPA, and Department of Interior  
 May 10, 2024

### Summary of Recommendations

Agency	Program Funding Recommendations
Department of Agriculture Forest Service <sup>1</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness: \$70M</li> <li>• Land Mgmt. Planning, Assessment, and Monitoring: \$21.75M</li> <li>• Cap. Improvements &amp; Maintenance, Trails: \$30M, including \$15M for National Scenic and Historic Trails</li> <li>• Cap. Improvements &amp; Maintenance, Roads: \$109.5M</li> <li>• Legacy Roads and Trails: \$100M</li> <li>• Forest and Rangeland Research: \$375M</li> </ul>
Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreation Resources Management: \$100M</li> <li>• Resource Management Planning: \$102M</li> <li>• National Conservation Lands: \$78M</li> <li>• Wilderness Management: \$27.67M</li> <li>• National Trails System: \$15M</li> </ul>
Department of Interior National Park Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Recreation and Preservation: \$136.85M, including \$15M for Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance</li> <li>• Park Service Operations for the National Trails System: \$20.964M</li> </ul>
Environmental Protection Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BEACH Act Grant Program: \$15M</li> <li>• U.S./Mexico Border Water Infrastructure Grant Program: \$100M</li> </ul>
Other Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land and Water Conservation Fund: \$1.35B, including \$125M for Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership.</li> </ul>

Dear Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Subcommittee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide requests to inform the FY25 appropriations process.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of

<sup>1</sup> All Forest Service appropriations should be accompanied by a commensurate increase to Salaries & Expenses.



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Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

Federal public lands and waters provide outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation, including at some of the world's most iconic recreation destinations. These recreation opportunities, as well as the irreplaceable cultural, ecological, and scenic values found across public lands, in turn support the growing outdoor recreation economy, which accounted for \$1.1 trillion in gross economic output, 2.2 percent of U.S. GDP, and 5 million jobs in 2022.<sup>2</sup>

Due to decades of underinvestment, federal land management agencies face staffing and resource challenges that have left them unable to meet modern needs related to recreation access, conservation, and sustainability. This trend of underfunding directly impacts the visitor experience on America's public lands and waters. Maintenance issues like trash, pollution, fire starts, and erosion have become more common, sometimes in a way that creates a public safety issue. In some cases, partner-led efforts to complete recreation infrastructure projects, such as trail systems, are delayed for years due to lack of capacity by agency staff to complete project planning. Moreover, the cost-of-living in many gateway communities has increased dramatically in recent years, and some land managers have been unable to fill recreation-related positions due to inadequate pay rates and cost-of-living concerns, particularly around housing. Investing in recreation and conservation programs will help fill this capacity gap, improve the visitor experience, and enable partner organizations to better invest in public lands and waters.

Over the past decade, federal public lands have benefited from historic investments from Congress through the Great American Outdoors Act, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act. Land managers are currently in the process of putting these funds to good use through a wide range of beneficial projects. While significant, these funds are not a substitute for adequate discretionary funding to support staffing and other basic needs of the agencies. Investing in federal land management agencies will help ensure that mandatory dollars are expeditiously put into action to benefit the American public.

## USDA Forest Service

**Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness:** \$70M. The Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness budget line item is the foundation of the USFS's recreation program. An increase is necessary to address inflation and cost-of-living for USFS employees and to account for a significant increase in recreational visits to USFS lands over the past decade. Between 2010 and 2020, funding for Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness decreased 23% accounting for inflation, while recreational visits increased 17%.<sup>3</sup> Funding this program at \$70M would allow the agency to rebuild its recreation workforce, provide high-quality visitor experiences, and implement its new national recreation strategy: Reimagine Recreation.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Econ. Analysis, BEA 23-54, Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2022 (2023).

<sup>3</sup> Data are derived from agency budget justifications and NVUM 5-year visitation estimates.



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**Land Management Planning/Assessment/Monitoring:** \$21.750M. Forest plans form the foundation for sustainable recreation opportunities and restoration activities across our National Forests, but a majority of plans are outdated. An increase in funding will help the USFS increase the pace and scale of forest plan revisions and launch the Planning Service Organization—a new national organization to make forest planning more efficient and responsive to stakeholder input.

**Capital Improvements and Maintenance. Trails:** \$30M, including \$15M for National Scenic & Historic Trails. The Forest Service manages more than 160,000 miles of trails, which provide access to extraordinary scenic, cultural, and ecological resources. Increasing trails funding will help the agency maintain and expand its trail system and strengthen trails partnerships.

**Capital Improvements and Maintenance. Roads:** \$109.5M. Forest Service roads, bridges, and parking lots are critical access points for outdoor recreationists. Significantly increased resources are needed to help the agency improve recreation access and increase the resilience of the extensive USFS road system to high use levels and extreme weather events.

**Legacy Roads and Trails:** \$100M. Outdoor Alliance supports the WA Watershed Restoration Initiative's request for Legacy Roads and Trails. Although Congress permanently authorized this program in the IJIA at \$50M per year, this does not meet the need for road and trail repair, road decommissioning, and other needs. IJIA investments should be augmented with an additional \$100M to prevent adverse impacts to water quality, habitat, and recreation from USFS roads.

**Forest and Rangeland Research:** \$375M. Forest Service research is critical to understanding our natural world. Increasing research funding will help address pressing ecological questions and develop new techniques for forest and rangeland management.

## Bureau of Land Management

**Recreation Resources Management:** \$100M. The Recreation Resources Management subactivity is the BLM's primary account for providing sustainable recreation opportunities. Despite overseeing more lands than any other federal land manager, BLM's recreation funding has historically lagged considerably behind other agencies. Since 2006, BLM has seen a 25% reduction in real appropriations for Recreation Resources Management.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, visitation to BLM lands has increased 46%, and the number of full-time equivalents under Recreation Resources Management has decreased by 25%.<sup>5</sup> \$100M will restore historic funding levels, enabling the agency to rebuild its workforce and implement its new national recreation strategy.<sup>6</sup>

**Resource Protection and Maintenance—Resource Management Planning:** \$102M. BLM planning ensures the best use of BLM lands, including balancing recreation with other multiple

<sup>4</sup> Historic funding data are derived from BLM budget justifications.

<sup>5</sup> Data are derived from BLM Public Lands Statistics reports and agency budget justifications.

<sup>6</sup> See, U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Recreation and Visitor Services, The Bureau of Land Management's Blueprint for 21st Century Outdoor Recreation, Washington, DC (2023).



# OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

use values. Approximately 134 of the BLM's 169 Resource Management Plans are outdated, and additional plans need to be completed for new National Monuments.

**National Conservation Lands:** \$78M. The National Conservation Lands system includes some of our country's marquee destinations for outdoor recreation. Investing in these lands is critical for their long-term protection and their ability to deliver economic benefits to local communities. Increased funding is needed to account for the increase in acres protected over the last 20 years, and to address the backlog of management plans for recently protected areas.

**Wilderness Management:** \$27.67M. BLM Wilderness lands, which include a network of 263 Wilderness areas and 487 Wilderness Study Areas totaling more than 21 million acres, provide some of the nation's best opportunities for backcountry recreation. Funding will maintain these areas' Wilderness character, while sustaining irreplaceable ecological and cultural resources.

## **National Park Service**

**National Recreation and Preservation:** \$136.85M, including \$15M for the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program. NPS requires additional resources to meet the challenges of increased visitation, climate, and other stressors. Additionally, RTCA is a critically important program for helping local communities realize their visions for improved recreation resources.

## **Environmental Protection Agency**

**BEACH Act Grant Program:** \$15M. The BEACH Act grant program provides funding to coastal states to run their beach water quality monitoring and public notification programs. This funding is critical for protecting public health in areas valued for coastal recreation.

**U.S./Mexico Border Water Infrastructure Grant Program:** \$100M. This funding is needed to address a significant public health concern caused by sewage pollution from the Tijuana River affecting coastal recreation in southern California and Mexico. Funding will advance the EPA Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution to upgrade treatment facilities at the U.S./Mexico Border.

## **Other Appropriations Priorities**

**Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF):** \$1.35B, including \$125M for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership. Congress guaranteed permanent dedicated funding of \$900M per year to the LWCF through the GAOA. While significant, this funding is intended as a baseline for LWCF, and the number of time-sensitive projects seeking funding far surpasses \$900M.

**National Trails System:** We support an increase in appropriations for the National Trails System across agencies, including \$20.964M at NPS, \$15M at BLM, and \$15M at USFS. This funding will ensure that federal agencies and stewardship partners can keep these iconic trails accessible, maintained, and sustainable.



U.S. Commissioners  
Phil Anderson  
McCoy Oatman  
Scott Rumsey  
Douglas Vincent-Lang

**UNITED STATES SECTION  
of the  
PACIFIC SALMON COMMISSION**

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**Statement Submitted by  
W. Ron Allen  
U.S. Section of the PACIFIC SALMON COMMISSION  
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES  
On the FY 2024 Budgets for the  
Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
May 10, 2024**

Mister Chair, and Honorable Members of the Committee, in March 1985 the United States and Canada agreed to cooperate in the management, research and enhancement of Pacific salmon stocks of mutual concern by ratifying the Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST). I am Ron Allen, the Tribal Commissioner and Chair of the Finance and Administration Committee for the U.S. Section of the Pacific Salmon Commission (PSC). The U.S. Section prepares an annual budget for implementation of the Pacific Salmon Treaty. The United States and Canada completed revisions of five of the Annex Chapters to the PST in 2019. The Annex Chapters contain the details for operations of fisheries under the Treaty for ten years, through 2029. The U.S. and Canada are entering negotiations to revise the Annex Chapters for another 10 years, through 2039.

Funding to implement the PST comes from the Departments of Interior, Commerce, and State. The integrated budget details program needs and costs for Tribal, Federal, and State agencies involved in the Treaty. Tribal participation in the Treaty process is funded within the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) budget as a line item within Rights Protection Implementation. Our recommendations are as follows:

**In order to meet the increased obligations under the Pacific Salmon Treaty Agreement, the 25 affected tribes identified costs at \$7,420,000 for Tribal research and monitoring projects and participation in the U.S.-Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty process. This represents a 9.3% increase from FY 2023 levels and the FY 2024 CR. The funding for Tribal participation in the Pacific Salmon Treaty is a line item in the BIA's budget under Rights Protection Implementation.**

Under U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service programs, the U.S. Section identified funding needs as follows:

**USFWS participation in the Treaty process is currently funded at \$372,362. In addition, the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) Regional Mark Center receives support from the USFWS to provide data services to the PSC process at \$236,189 annually. The U.S. Section recommends increasing the funding for PSMFC by \$150,000. The recommended total for the two programs for FY 2025 is \$758,551. The**

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**USFWS received \$4,700,000 for Pacific Salmon Treaty Implementation in the Hatchery Operations account starting in FY 2020. The USFWS uses these funds to work with state agencies and tribes to implement projects on anadromous salmonids subject to the PST including producing hatchery salmon to offset Treaty fisheries impacts Southern Resident Killer Whales as required under the ESA. For FY 2025 the USFWS plans to transfer \$400,000 of the additional funds to the BIA to support Tribal implementation of the PST. The U.S. Section recommends maintaining that level of funding for FY 2025.**

The base funding for the USFWS supports critically important on-going work and participation in the process. The funding for Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission's Regional Mark Processing Center is utilized to meet Treaty requirements concerning data exchange with Canada. These program recommendations are integrated with those of participating State and Federal agencies to avoid duplication of effort and provide for the most efficient expenditure of limited funds.

The U.S. Section of the PSC and the Treaty Tribes appreciate the increases in funding in recent years for the Tribes to implement the revised chapters of the Pacific Salmon Treaty. Tribal programs are essential for the United States to meet its international obligations. Tribal programs have taken on additional management responsibilities over time. All participating agencies need to be adequately supported to achieve a comprehensive U.S. effort to implement the Treaty. The U.S. Section of the PSC recommends the proposed increase in funding to support the work carried out by the twenty-five Treaty Tribes' participating in implementation of the Treaty. Programs carried out by the Tribes are closely coordinated with those of participating State and Federal agencies.

The USFWS activities are essential, so the U.S. can maintain the coded wire tag database necessary to implement the Treaty. The work of the Regional Mark Processing Center includes maintaining and updating a coastwide computerized information management system for salmon harvest data as required by the Treaty. This work has become even more important to monitor the success of management actions aimed at reducing impacts on ESA-listed salmon populations. Canada has a counterpart database. The U.S. database will continue to be housed at the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. The U.S. Section appreciates the \$4,700,000 in the Hatchery Operations account of the USFWS budget to work with state agencies and tribes on Treaty implementation. The U.S. Section recommends maintaining that funding for FY 2025.

Funding to support activities under the Pacific Salmon Commission comes from the Departments of Interior, State, and Commerce. The U.S. Section can provide a cross-cut budget summary to the Committee. Adequate funding from all three Departments is necessary for the U.S. to meet its Treaty obligations. All the funds are needed for critical data collection and research activities directly related to the implementation and are

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used in cooperative programs involving Federal, State, and Tribal fishery agencies and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in Canada. The commitment of the United States is matched by the commitment of the Government of Canada.

Mister Chair, the United States and Canada established the Pacific Salmon Commission, under the Pacific Salmon Treaty of 1985, to conserve salmon stocks, provide for optimum production of salmon, and to control salmon interceptions. After thirty-eight years, the work of the Pacific Salmon Commission continues to be essential for the wise management of salmon in the Pacific Northwest, British Columbia, and Alaska. For example, upriver bright fall Chinook salmon from the Hanford Reach of the Columbia River are caught in large numbers in Alaskan and Canadian waters. Tribal and non-Tribal fishers harvest sockeye salmon from Canada's Fraser River in the Strait of Juan de Fuca and in Puget Sound. Canadian trollers off the west coast of Vancouver Island catch Washington coastal Coho salmon and Puget Sound Chinook salmon. In the Northern Boundary area between Canada and Alaska, fish from both countries are intercepted by the other country in large numbers.

The Pacific Salmon Commission provides a forum to ensure cooperative management of salmon populations. The United States and Canada reached agreements for revised Annex Chapters for management of Chinook, Coho, Chum, Fraser River Sockeye and Pink, and transboundary salmon populations for the next ten years. It is critically important to have adequate resources for U.S. participants to implement the revised agreements and protect our Tribal Treaty resources.

Before the Pacific Salmon Treaty, fish wars often erupted with one or both countries overharvesting fish that were returning to the other country, to the detriment of the resource. At the time the Treaty was signed, Chinook salmon were in a severely depressed state because of overharvest in the ocean as well as environmental degradation in the spawning rivers. Under the Treaty, both countries committed to rebuild the depressed runs of Chinook stocks and recommitted to that goal in 1999 when adopting a coastwide abundance-based approach to harvest management. Under this approach, harvest management has complemented habitat conservation and restoration activities undertaken by the States, Tribes, and other stakeholders in the Pacific Northwest to address the needs of salmon listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act. The updated Annex Chapters continue these commitments. The combination of these efforts is integral to achieving success in rebuilding and restoring healthy, sustainable salmon populations.

Finally, you should consider that the value of the commercial harvest of salmon subject to the Treaty, managed at productive levels under the Treaty, supports the infrastructure of many coastal and inland communities. The value of the commercial, recreational fisheries, and the economic diversity they provide for local economies throughout the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, is immense. The Commission funded an economic study of fisheries and determined that this resource creates thousands of jobs and is a multi-billion-dollar industry. The value of these fish to the twenty-four Treaty Tribes in

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Washington, Oregon, and Idaho goes far beyond their monetary value, to the cultural and religious lives of American Indian people.

The Commission funded a study to capture the socioeconomic value of the fisheries to U.S. Tribes and Canadian First Nations. A significant monetary investment is focused on salmon due to the listings of Pacific Northwest salmon populations under the Endangered Species Act. Given these resources, we continue to utilize the Pacific Salmon Commission to develop recommendations that help with the development and implementation of solutions to minimize impacts on listed stocks. We continue to work towards the true intent of the Treaty, and with your support, we will manage this shared resource for mutual enhancements and benefits.

Mister Chair, that concludes my written testimony submitted for consideration by the Committee. I want to thank the Committee for the support that it has given the U.S. Section in the past. Please feel free to contact me, or other members of the U.S. Section to answer any questions you or Committee members may have regarding the U.S. Section of the Pacific Salmon Commission budget.



**PARTNERSHIP FOR THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM**

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**TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES  
COURTNEY LYONS GARCIA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
PARTNERSHIP FOR THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM**

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Partnership for the National Trails System (PNTS). Use of the 32 Congressionally designated National Scenic and Historic Trails (NSHTs) has grown substantially since the onset of the pandemic and is expected to continue to grow, making increased investment in National Trails System (NTS) critical to meet public demand. PNTS requests the following Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 funding for NSHT and the wider trails system on federal lands:

- **Bureau of Land Management (BLM): \$14 million for NSHT operations**, as well as a minimum of \$3.15 million for Historic Trail 145 Interpretive Centers and \$78.145 million for the wider National Conservation Lands.
- **National Park Service (NPS): \$20.964 million for NSHT operations** plus \$15 million for the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program, at least \$8 million for Volunteers in Parks, a minimum of \$10.95 million for Visitor Services sub-activity Youth Partnership Programs and \$125 million for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership.
- **U.S. Forest Service (USFS): \$30 million for Trails with \$15 million for NSHTs** in the Capital Improvement and Maintenance (CMTL) account plus \$70 million for Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness and \$100 million for Legacy Roads and Trails.

PNTS supports robust funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) with up to \$20 million set aside from the federal land acquisition programs of the BLM, the NPS and the USFS for projects that complete NSHTs and protect side or connecting trails and viewsheds. Finally, we ask that Congress fully fund agency requests for deferred maintenance projects on NSHTs.

Authorized through the 1968 National Trails System Act, the NTS includes 10 National Scenic Trails (NSTs) and 22 National Historic Trails (NHTs) that will eventually preserve over 62,000 miles of public trails, traversing all 50 states and the District of Columbia, connecting 84 national parks, 89 national forests, 70 national wildlife refuges, over 100 BLM public land areas and 179 national wilderness areas. The NTS continues to grow with new trails in the pipeline to be considered by Congress in 2025 and beyond. NSHTs represent a broad spectrum of our nation's iconic landscapes and its natural and cultural heritage. From the Southern Appalachian Mountains to the wildest reaches of Alaska, the San Francisco Bay and the breathtaking coast of the "Big Island" of Hawaii, they feature diverse ecosystems and shine a light on the stories of the lands, the people and the United States as a nation such as the struggles for independence and equal rights, the forced relocation of Native Americans, the trails blazed by indigenous peoples, immigrants and pioneers and more.

NSHTs are collaboratively managed with volunteer-based, private nonprofit partners and federal

administrators. In 2023 alone, nonprofit partners leveraged federal funds to raise and invest over \$56.5 million in private funding and volunteer hours on NSHTs. PNTS is the only national nonprofit focused on NSHTs. Our trail organization members are the primary partners working with the federal agencies to cooperatively manage, construct, maintain, protect, and promote the NTS.

PNTS is grateful for support for NSHTs, and all trails administered by the land management agencies that Congress has provided, in the FY2024 House Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. It will have an incredible impact on the general public and on local economies. We also thank you for the 2020 passage of the Great American Outdoors Act and urge the reauthorization of the Legacy Restoration Fund to continue to address the backlog of deferred maintenance to the nation's trail system that is the result of inadequate ongoing regular funding and the impact of climate change reflected to increasing levels of wildfire and storms.

Adequate annual funding is essential to achieving Congressional intent to provide high quality outdoor recreation opportunities for urban and rural communities on National Trails. It is up to Congress to ensure that adequate annual trail funding needs are met so the agencies and their nonprofit partners have sufficient resources to complete and maintain NSHTs to the necessary, expected and deserved standard. Public access to public lands is at stake.

#### **LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCY STAFFING AND ASSESSMENT NEEDS**

The impact of funding increases for trail development and maintenance over the last several years cannot be fully realized without adequate agency staffing. For instance, the commitment to fund deferred maintenance through GAOA has been critically needed yet, without additional staff resources, the backlog continues to grow even as specific deferred maintenance is addressed.

The administrative and field staff at federal land agencies have been severely reduced over the past 20 years, leading to fewer 'boots on the ground' and less oversight. For example, many USFS positions were vacated over the last decade due to "fire borrowing." While Congress fixed that budgetary issue years ago, the results linger, and agency staff has not been restored to its previous strength.

Federal agency NSHT staff work collaboratively with nonprofit trail partners, providing crucial administration, oversight, skills, and expertise. Their guidance is key to the success of nonprofit partners as they fulfill their co-management responsibilities, and as they recruit, train and marshal tens of thousands of volunteers in public service. Staffing must be substantially increased to sustain the current NTS, and to increase its capacity should Congress choose to designate more NSHTs.

As the Committee prepares the FY 2025 budget, PNTS requests increased funding for federal staffing at land management agencies as noted below, including at least one dedicated superintendent or administrator per NSHT, with related direction for the agencies. PNTS requests report language to audit the centralized agency hiring practices, which have been identified as a roadblock to filling thousands of crucial vacancies. Centralizing hiring prevents land managers from quickly filling vacancies from local talent pools. The cumbersome process slows hiring so much that vacancies often go unfilled. This is especially true for short term or seasonal positions.

Great disparities in the levels of funding appropriated to operate each NSHT exist, further exacerbating the staff limitations on these trails. For greater clarity and transparency and to

ensure fiscally sound management of the NTS, PNTS requests the Committee direct agencies administering NSHT to conduct an assessment to examine the actual needs and costs of operating NSTs and NHTs to establish a baseline level of funding needed to operate and staff trails.

#### **BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)**

The BLM administers and manages NSHTs as part of its National Conservation Lands. BLM protects nearly 6,000 miles of 18 designated trails in 15 States, in addition to thousands of miles of trails under study for potential designation. It administers the Iditarod NHT and co-administers the Old Spanish and El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro NHT with the NPS.

We are grateful that Congress included language in the FY 2022 bill to encourage BLM to restructure its budget and for noting a dedicated National Trails System budget line item as an example. Moving forward, **we request Congress continue to its support of adding transparency to agency budgeting by instructing BLM to retain and effectively manage its line items for trails and for each NSHT in its budget.** At a minimum, like the guidance the Subcommittee provided to the USFS in FY 2020, we ask that the FY 2025 bill direct BLM to include unit-level allocations within major sub-activities for each of the NSHTs as BLM has done for individual national monuments, wilderness areas, and conservation areas.

PNTS requests including at least **\$14 million for NSHTs** to administer, manage, maintain and improve the Trails under BLM jurisdiction on public lands and add or improve amenities for trails. This should include for interpretive planning and resource inventory work on the Iditarod NHT.

PNTS also respectfully requests **\$78.154 million** for overall management of the National Conservation Lands. This level of funding is needed to properly administer the system's expansion by 18 million acres since 2000, and will permit increased inventory, monitoring, and protection of cultural resources, enhance proper management of all resources and provide a quality visitor experience.

#### **NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (NPS)**

The NPS administers 26 NSHTs established by Congress. Funding at **\$20.964 million** within the Park Service Operations account for the NSHTs is essential for keeping these popular trails that connect people to iconic landscapes and the quintessential stories of the U.S., both past and present, accessible for all. This request will help the work of NPS and its nonprofit trail organization partners as they build, maintain, and interpret the trails.

PNTS requests additional fund totaling for construction projects on the Ice Age NST (\$55,000), the Overmountain Victory trail (\$1 Million), and for signage along the Washington Rochambeau Revolutionary Route in the run up to the event's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (\$150,000), and to fund the completion of the long overdue, Congressionally required Comprehensive Plan for the Potomac Heritage Trail.

In addition, continued support for the **RTCA program** will provide NPS expertise in trail and other recreation access projects to communities across the country. When a community asks for assistance with a trail or other project, NPS staff provide critical tools for success, on-location facilitation, and planning expertise, which draw from project experiences across the country and adapt best practices to a community's specific needs. Funding at **\$15 million** will ensure these trail planning services are available to communities in all regions of the nation.

#### **U.S. FOREST SERVICE (USFS)**

The USFS is the administering federal agency for five NSTs (Arizona, Florida, Pacific Northwest, Continental Divide and Pacific Crest), one NHT (Nez Perce) and manages 16 NSHTs in part where they are on USFS managed lands.

Funding for the USFS administered and managed portions of the NSHT comes from the CMTL account. In FY25, PNTS respectfully requests an appropriation of **\$30 million USFS managed trails, with \$15 million specifically allocated to the NSHT**. This funding will allow the USFS to meet its administering agency responsibilities such as trail-wide coordination, guidance, technical assistance, and consultation with National Trail managers. Congressionally designated NSHT are special places and have specific legislative requirements that are broader than typical trail construction and maintenance activities on National Forest System trails. These legislative requirements, particularly the requirement for volunteer engagement and partnerships with volunteer organizations, are unique to NSHT programs and form a core component of their administration. Funding the USFS NSHT at \$15 million will assist the Service meet its management responsibilities. An additional **\$888,000** for new trail construction for priority reroute projects on the **Arizona NST**.

As part of its ongoing 'budget modernization' project the USFS removed the salaries and travel expenses from the CMTL line. This makes it impossible for trail partner nonprofits to track staff time dedicated to national trails. Already, we've seen the loss of a dedicated trail administrator position in favor of a much broader, regional trail administrator position and consolidation of their duties. Such a trend would further overwhelm over-extended staff in a manner that threatens the quality and integrity of the NSHT. **We respectfully ask that the Subcommittee include language in its FY25 appropriations bill that compels USFS to calculate and provide staff and travel expenses in addition to CMTL for the National Trails System trails or otherwise delineate those expenses for each NSHT in its budget.**

We request report language that encourages the Forest Service to prioritize funding for their private partners who can often leverage federal funds with private dollars and volunteer labor to extend the impact of the nation's investment in these trails

#### **LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (LWCF)**

We appreciate and look forward to a minimum of \$900 million in annual LWCF appropriations being utilized to protect public lands. Given the healthy pipeline of forthcoming land preservation projects on National Trails, PNTS respectfully requests Congress increase funding to a minimum of \$20 million per year for the next three years for NSHT. The funding provides an important opportunity for agencies to prioritize voluntary trail land protection projects on Congressionally designated NSHTs. Dedicated funding would empower NSHT public and private partners to more actively pursue NSHT projects to complete NSHTs.

PNTS stands ready to work with you to secure critically important programs that help fund, maintain and protect the NTS across the nation. The examples provided in the testimony of how the funding will be used represent only a small proportion of the work being done and funding needs of the NTS. PNTS would be happy to provide additional detailed information as needed. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony and your consideration of our request for greater investment in our National Trails System.

**Submitted by Lisa Clark, [Board Member, Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge**

*May 8, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge, which was formed in 1994 to support the Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Established in 1994, as the 502nd national wildlife refuge in the country, the Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge and Management Area is located in rural southwestern Indiana, in Pike and Gibson counties. The refuge is 30 miles north of the city of Evansville, Indiana by way of State Road 57 and adjacent to the small towns of Oakland City along State Road 64 and Winslow on State Road 61.

As of 2021 the Refuge was a mosaic of 10,295 acres of non-contiguous parcels, and the Refuge continues to grow. Acquisitions obtained each year from willing sellers move the Refuge closer to the completion of its authorized 22,472-acre boundary. This boundary stretches for 20 miles as the crow flies in an east-west direction along the lower third reach of the 162-mile-long Patoka River. It includes 30 miles of Patoka River channel, 19 miles of cut-off river oxbows, three miles of the South Fork Patoka River, and 12,700 acres of existing bottomland wetland habitat. Shaped by the last retreating glacier 10,000 years ago, the Patoka River meanders through the sand, gravel, and silt deposits from the glacial outwash.

Lying within the Southern Bottomlands and Southwestern Lowlands Natural Regions, the principle natural habitat in the Patoka River Refuge is bottomland forested wetland. These wetlands provide some of the most productive wood duck nesting and brood-rearing habitat in the State. They also support several nesting colonies of great blue herons. A few select areas of old growth forest maintain a healthy population of nesting cerulean warblers. These and other species of neotropical migratory songbirds thrive in this rich ecosystem which lies within the historically important north-south flyway of the Wabash River Basin.

Two outlying wildlife management areas (WMAs) are also managed out of the Patoka River Refuge headquarters. The 463-acre Cane Ridge WMA lies 24 miles to the west of Oakland City. This Wabash River bottoms property lies off the southwest corner of the 3,000-acre Gibson Lake. The 219-acre White River Bottoms WMA lies nine miles to the north of Oakland City, just

to the northwest of Petersburg on the south side of the White River.

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

For more information, visit the Refuge website at: [www.fws.gov/refuge/patoka\\_river/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/patoka_river/)

*The refuge provides an area for the community to get out and enjoy nature by hiking, fishing, hunting, bird watching, painting, photography etc.. The refuge also protects Over 380 species of wildlife, including nesting bald eagles, the Federally endangered Indiana bat and the threatened northern copperbelly watersnake that reside upon the Refuge. At least 20 plant species and 63 animal species considered as threatened, endangered or of special concern by the State of Indiana live within this river valley. The friends group works on projects such as building trails, surveying wildlife and eradicating invasive species. In addition to this they offer programs and activities, and educating the public about this special place and what it has to offer. This year programs had included: In February a "Species Spotlight" on the Whooping Crane. In the not-so-distant past, Whooping Cranes faced near extinction throughout North America. Thanks to the widespread conservation efforts, their population is slowly growing. A few can frequently be seen at the Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge. March was "An Evening with the Woodcocks" a unique birding experience for the whole family. April was Wabash and Erie Canal Walk/Talk. Where there are places the canal can still be recognized to this day on the Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge. Also in April the Friends Group gave away 1000 trees to members of the community in support of conservation efforts and in celebration of Earth Day. May the 18<sup>th</sup> at 10 AM Central Time is a program on Dragonflies and Damselflies. Additional programs are being planned for the remainder of the year.*

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have

zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

*\*\*Anything further you want to say.*

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact Nancy Gehlhausen, President of the Friends of Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge, at [naturegirl.gehlhausen@gmail.com](mailto:naturegirl.gehlhausen@gmail.com)



**Testimony of Brian G. Campbell, PhD**  
 Executive Director, Physicians for Social Responsibility  
**House Committee on Appropriations**  
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
**Re: Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) appropriations for key public health programs within the  
 Environmental Protection Agency**

May 10, 2024

**Summary of FY 2025 Appropriations Recommendations:**

EPA topline – \$12 billion  
 Clean Air Program overall – \$915.5 million  
 Categorical Grants: State and Local Air Quality Management – \$500 million  
 Categorical Grants: Tribal Air Quality Management – \$57.4 million  
 Environmental Justice - \$369.1 million  
 Diesel Emissions Reduction Grant Program – \$150 million  
 Office of Air and Radiation, Indoor Environments Division - \$100 million  
 Wildfire Smoke Preparedness - \$15 million

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony to highlight the funding priorities of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for fiscal year 2025 (FY25). PSR is a national non-profit organization that works to protect human life from the gravest threats to health and survival, namely climate change and nuclear war. Our 24,000 members and e-activists and over 20 chapters nationwide contribute a health perspective to energy, environmental health, and nuclear weapons policy at all levels of government. On behalf of our membership, we urge the Committee to support \$12 billion in funding for the Environmental Protection Agency in fiscal year 2025.

While the nation, with EPA's leadership, has made great progress in cleaning up air pollution thanks to the directives of the Clean Air Act, poor air quality contributed to by a range of pollution sources continues to threaten health across the country. Exposure to emissions like particulate matter, ozone, nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxides can trigger asthma attacks, worsen lung conditions, lead to developmental and reproductive harm and even cause premature death. In addition to these severe impacts, climate change caused by carbon pollution is also a health emergency. Communities across the country are experiencing adverse health and mental health

impacts due to changing climate conditions, such as increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters, record high temperatures, and stress on existing infrastructure, water systems and food production. Moving forward, we can avoid worsening some of the catastrophic impacts we're seeing now while also delivering immediate health benefits. EPA's work to protect public health from pollution and climate change is imperative and deserves robust, dedicated funding.

EPA is also responsible for administering funds to states, localities, Tribes and communities to improve air quality and build resilience. Funding spurred by the Inflation Reduction Act is leading to additional improvements across the country and PSR supports its continued implementation. However, that funding does not replace the need for necessary and predictable funding of the agency's core programmatic work. Below, we have highlighted several key areas that are need of strong appropriations for FY25:

**Provide \$915.5 million for EPA's Clean Air program.** Robust funding for EPA's clean air work is necessary to meet the agency's responsibility under the Clean Air Act to protect health. This funding allows EPA to assist states, localities and Tribes with meeting federal clean air standards by providing technical assistance, resources and expertise on how to clean up the sectors that contribute to air quality challenges. Please provide \$694.6 million for Environmental Programs and Management and \$220.9 million for Science and Technology.

**Provide \$500 million for State and Local Air Quality Monitoring Grants and \$57.4 million for Tribal Air Quality Monitoring Grants.** State, local and Tribal air agencies receive grants from EPA to help maintain their air monitoring networks. Air agencies are operating under constrained budgets, impairing their ability to adequately maintain and improve air monitors. This funding is crucial to help inform the public about local air quality risks to their health and in identifying areas that are most in need of pollution cleanup.

**Provide at least \$369.1 million for environmental justice efforts.** Far too many communities are still waiting on the promise of clean air and a healthy environment. Targeted funding dedicated to improving air quality in disadvantaged communities and to advance the protection of those overburdened by pollution is necessary to close the gaps of health and environmental inequities.

**Provide \$150 million for the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act and Support the Clean School Bus Program.** The Diesel Emissions Reduction (DERA) Grant program continues to be a successful program that enjoys bipartisan support. According to EPA's 2022 report to Congress, the health benefits of diesel emissions reduction projects are cost-effective, with monetized

health benefits estimated to exceed federal funding by a factor of 10 to 1. However, there are still millions of dirty diesel engines that are polluting communities – particularly low-income areas and communities of color. We also urge the Committee to support the popular Clean School Bus Program, which has already led to the replacement of dirty diesel school buses with cleaner zero-emission versions. PSR supports even greater adoption of zero-emission school buses.

**Provide \$100 million for the Office of Air and Radiation/Indoor Environments Division and \$10 million to EPA’s Office of Children’s Health Protection.** Exposure to indoor air pollution can decrease school attendance, negatively impact test scores and worsen asthma symptoms, among other negative health impacts. PSR strongly supports the prioritization of indoor air quality through building decarbonization, promotion of energy efficiency, and decreasing the use of fossil fuels in homes. Outside of the home, educators and school personnel need education, training and resources to implement effective prevention measures. A 2020 GAO report found that 41% of school districts were in need of HVAC repairs in at least half of their schools. Additionally, the Office of Children’s Health Protection plays a critical role in researching children’s risks and exposures in school and childcare facilities.

**Provide \$15 million for wildfire smoke preparedness.** Wildfire smoke is an urgent and increasing threat to public health, and it is not confined to western areas of the country. In 2023, wildfires in Canada and the Northeast set off unprecedented air quality alerts down the East Coast, increasing emergency department visits for asthma-related conditions. EPA plays a vital role in forecasting and communicating the impacts of wildfire smoke.

**Oppose all policy riders.** Lastly, PSR strongly opposes the inclusion of policy riders that would weaken clean air or other environmental protections, particularly those that would undermine the Clean Air Act and its benefits to public health. We urge the Committee to reject policy riders in appropriations bills.

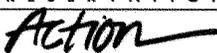
Investments in EPA programs are critical to protecting public health and our shared climate. On behalf of Physicians for Social Responsibility, I thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,



Brian G. Campbell, PhD  
Executive Director

P R E S E R V A T I O N

The logo for Preservation Action features the word "Action" in a bold, black, cursive script font. Above the word, the word "PRESERVATION" is written in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font, with wide letter spacing. A thin horizontal line runs through the middle of the word "Action".

Russ Carnahan  
*President, Preservation Action*

United States House Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

**Department of Interior Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the National Park Service**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of Preservation Action's thousands of members and supporters - representing nearly every state - we appreciate the opportunity to present written testimony on the Department of Interior's FY 2025 Appropriations for the National Park Service and its historic preservation programs. Founded in 1974, Preservation Action is a 501(c)4 nonprofit created to serve as the national grassroots advocacy organization for historic preservation. We represent an active and engaged grassroots constituency from across the country, and this testimony reflects their priorities.

Preservation Action's mission is to demonstrate that historic preservation is a national priority. For 50 years we've advocated for sound preservation policy, including two of the most important federal tools for historic preservation: the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) and the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HTC).

First, we would like to thank the subcommittee for their continued support of historic preservation programs and priorities - especially for including language to reauthorize the Historic Preservation Fund for one year in FY24 appropriations. Thanks to your support, all Americans continue to benefit from programs that have a proven track record of saving places Americans value, revitalizing communities, combating climate change, promoting heritage tourism, and creating jobs. In Fiscal Year 2024 the HPF was funded at \$188.66 million, a nearly \$16 million cut below 2023 enacted levels. While we recognize the challenging budget, these cuts undermine the critical preservation work carried out by the program.

**National Park Service: Historic Preservation Fund (HPF)**

The HPF is the principal source of funding to implement the nation's historic preservation programs. Since 1976 the HPF has helped to recognize, save, revitalize, and protect America's historic resources.

HPF funding is critical to ensure State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs/THPOs), whose job it is to administer federal historic preservation programs, have the staffing capacity needed for the timely review of infrastructure, renewable energy, and other federal projects, per requirements under the National Historic Preservation Act. In FY 2022 SHPOs reviewed and consulted on 177,400 Federal undertakings (a 42.7% increase over FY 2021), provided 83,200 National Register eligibility opinions and surveyed over 5.3 million acres for cultural resources.

HPF's competitive grant programs preserve, document, and exhibit diverse histories. These programs address a wide variety of preservation needs across the country and fund various types

of work. The Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grant Program, for instance, helps to foster economic development in rural communities through subgrants. In 2022, the Idaho Heritage Trust was awarded a \$750,000 Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grant to support the preservation and restoration of nine historic theaters in rural communities across Idaho. While the Semiquincentennial Grant Program helps to preserve historic sites associated with America's founding. In 2022, the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry received a Semiquincentennial grant for the rehabilitation of the Colburn House in Pittston, ME, where Major Colburn worked with local Indigenous leaders and colonists to map a water trail route for Benedict Arnold's campaign to seize Quebec in 1775 during the American Revolution.

Preservation Action appreciates the support this Committee has shown for the HPF, but more is needed. The bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act has added significantly to the workload of SHPOs and THPOs and cuts to HPF grant programs like the ones mentioned above undermine preservation efforts and the economic development these programs produce.

⇒ **Preservation Action recommends this subcommittee support historic preservation by appropriating \$225 million in funding for the Historic Preservation Fund in FY25's Department of Interior budget**, including funding at the following levels:

- **\$70 million for State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs).** SHPOs carry out the primary functions of the National Historic Preservation Act: finding and documenting America's historic places, nominating places to the National Register, aiding rehabilitation tax credit projects, reviewing impacts of federal projects, working with local governments, and conducting preservation education and planning. Due to 2023 changes to SHPO apportionments, 23 states did not receive an increase in funding from 2022 to 2023.
- **\$40 million for Save America's Treasures Program.** The Save America's Treasures grants program helps preserve nationally significant historic properties and collections that convey our nation's rich heritage to future generations of Americans.
- **\$34 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs).** THPOs are designated by federally recognized tribal governments and assume the federal compliance role of the SHPO on Tribal lands. Tribal historic preservation plans are based on traditional knowledge and cultural values, and often involve projects to improve Indian schools, roads, health clinics and housing. THPOs are chronically underfunded. Funding levels have not kept pace with the growing number of Indian Tribes with THPO programs, resulting in a lower average apportionments per tribe.
- **\$28 million for the African American Civil Rights Initiative Grants.** A competitive grant program to preserve the sites and stories of the African American struggle to gain equal rights.
- **\$13 million for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).** Funding provides grants to HBCUs to preserve and repair historic buildings on their campuses.
- **\$17 million for Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Subgrants.** Supports the rehabilitation of historic properties and fosters economic development of rural communities through subgrants.
- **\$11 million for the Semiquincentennial Grants.** Competitive grant program that preserves publicly-owned historic sites commemorating the 250th anniversary of the founding of the U.S.

- **\$7 million for the History of Equal Rights Grant Program.** A competitive grant program to preserve sites and stories related to the struggle of all Americans to achieve equal rights.
- **\$5 million for the Under-Represented Communities Grant Program.** Competitive grants that support the survey and nomination of properties to the National Register of Historic Places associated with under-represented communities.

**Total FY 2025 Historic Preservation Fund Request: \$225 million**

Additionally, we are grateful to Congress for reauthorizing the HPF for one-year as part of the FY24 Appropriations bill and urge support for a longer-term authorization. Preservation Action supports the bipartisan Historic Preservation Fund Reauthorization Act (H.R. 3350), which would reauthorize the HPF for 10 years and increase the authorized level to \$250 million annually. This would provide much-needed certainty to the states, tribes, and local communities that rely on this funding to carry out their critical preservation work.

- ⇒ **Preservation Action encourages inclusion of language to reauthorize the Historic Preservation Fund and increase the authorized level.** The HPF's authorization has not been increased since the program's inception in 1976 and the program's current authorization is set to expire in September of this year.

**National Park Service: Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HTC)**

The HTC, administered by SHPOs, THPOs, and the National Park Service is the most significant federal investment in historic preservation. The HTC has supported historic rehabilitation projects across the country, like the renovation of the 1934 Old Rialto Hotel in Hailey, ID, or the rehab of the historic John E. L. Huse School in Bath, ME into housing. The HTC has been a catalyst for development and job creation, and is responsible for:

- Rehabilitating more than 49,000 historic buildings across the nation.
- Leveraging over \$235 billion in private investment.
- Creating more than 3.2 million jobs since its inception.
- Producing over 199,000 affordable housing units.
- Rehabilitating buildings and revitalizing communities in all 50 states.
- Returning more to the Treasury than the cost of the program.

Preservation Action supports the bipartisan **Historic Tax Credit Growth and Opportunity Act (H.R 1785, S. 639)**, which would increase the value of the HTC, improve access to the credit, and make the credit more appealing for smaller projects.

- ⇒ Preservation Action urges the Committee to **support the HTC by sufficiently funding SHPOs, THPOs and the National Park Service who administer the program.**

**National Park Service: African-American Burial Grounds Preservation Program**

The African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program was established by Congress in 2023 and was included in the President's budget request. This program will identify, document, preserve, research, and interpret these historic and sacred burial sites whose protection and documentation has too often been neglected or forgotten.

- ⇒ Preservation Action supports **\$3 million in funding for the newly authorized, African-American Burial Grounds Preservation Program.**

**National Park Service: National Heritage Areas**

Designated by Congress, National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are community-driven sites that weave cultural, natural, and historic resources together to tell nationally significant stories. NHAs rely on public-private funding where every federal dollar allocated is matched with an average of \$5.50 in public and private funds. \$34 million keeps all NHAs at their existing funding levels while providing funding for the newly authorized NHAs.

- ⇒ We express our support for **\$34 million for the Heritage Partnership Program**, which supports National Heritage Areas nationwide.

**Independent Agency: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation**

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) is an independent federal agency that promotes the preservation, enhancement, and sustainable use of the nation's diverse historic resources, and advises the President and Congress on national historic preservation policy. We appreciate the continued support of this important agency.

- ⇒ Preservation Action recommends the Committee support **\$10.5 million for the ACHP.** This will enhance the critical functions of the agency: ensuring the nation's historic and cultural resources are protected, advancing tribal consultation, and finding efficiencies to deliver timely federal review of major infrastructure projects.

**Conclusion**

Preservation Action appreciates the opportunity to provide our views on the FY25 Department of Interior budget. We work closely with a broad cross-section of preservation professionals from the state and local level and are pleased to add their perspective through our testimony. We value the dedicated work of National Park Service employees, partnership with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the instrumental work of SHPOs and THPOs in preserving our cultural heritage.

Thank you for valuing the input of the preservation community as you consider the FY25 funding levels and your past support of vital historic preservation programs. We look forward to working with the committee and are happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,



Russ Carnahan  
President, Preservation Action

**Submitted by Joseph F. McCauley, Vice-president,  
Rappahannock Wildlife Refuge Friends**

*May 8, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am submitting this testimony as vice president of the Rappahannock Wildlife Refuge Friends (RWR Friends), a refuge volunteer and a 32-year veteran of the National Wildlife Refuge System. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The RWR Friends is a 501c3 non-profit corporation formed in 2004 in Warsaw, Virginia dedicated to supporting the Rappahannock River Valley NWR and the National Wildlife Refuge System. The RWR Friends is made up of people with diverse backgrounds and interests. We build and maintain trails, establish and maintain native plant gardens, participate in wildlife surveys, fight invasive species, host educational field trips, administer hunt programs, and more. What all our members have in common is a love of the National Wildlife Refuge System and its mission to help protect our environment and, in particular, our wildlife.

When I think about the Refuge System I am filled with pride, and immensely saddened. I am proud that at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our Nation's leaders had the foresight to create what would become largest, most diverse assemblage of lands and waters dedicated to fish and wildlife conservation anywhere in the world. I am in awe of a Refuge System workforce that is among the most resourceful, dedicated, and passionate of all in our public service sector. These facts should elicit pride in every American.

What saddens me is to see it diminished and starved for lack of adequate congressional funding. Each year over the past ten, we witnessed modest increases to the Refuge System budget be completely swallowed by fixed salary costs and general inflation. Even before the recent spike in inflation resulting from a deadly world-wide pandemic and supply chain disruptions, "normal" inflation was enough to negate modest annual budget increases. The result is a Refuge System that is dying a death from a thousand cuts.

That description is unfortunately not far off. The Refuge System has shed 27% of its workforce since 2011, over 600 full time positions. As noted by the National Wildlife Refuge Association, "the insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation

planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many of our volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.”

We have seen this play out over the past 10 years at the Eastern Virginia Rivers National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The Rappahannock River Valley NWR is one of four refuges that comprise this Complex. “Complexing” is a mild sounding word that strikes fear into refuge staffs. It translates into combining what were stand-alone refuges with other refuges in the landscape, thereby giving refuge managers and staff more responsibility but with fewer resources. Example: Two refuges, each with a modest staff are located 100 miles apart. The manager of one refuge retires, so to save money, the refuge are combined into a “complex,” with now one manager supervising both. When a position becomes vacant, it often remains vacant and the duties are spread among other staff. This has been happening for many years and has significantly diluted the ability of existing staff to fulfill the mission of the Refuge system.

The Eastern Virginia Rivers NWR Complex has a staff of five individuals charged with achieving the Refuge System mission on four refuges scattered over hundreds of square miles. This is down from a staff of eight 10 years ago, when the Complex was much smaller. In past years there was also a student trainee position at the Complex to bring fresh ideas and diversity into the ranks. That position has been eliminated. That is simply unacceptable and as congressional leaders, it should give you pause.

There is no law enforcement staff stationed at the Eastern Virginia Rivers Complex as there had been in the early-mid 2000s. If any emergency occurs, the refuge must call upon and rely on local law enforcement from the sheriff’s departments of the various counties in which the refuge units are located. The counties have complained for years that refuge revenue sharing payments have significantly diminished and are at an all-time low. Localities are receiving less than 25% of what the revenue sharing formula calls for, so when the refuge asks a county for assistance, it can increase resentment of the refuge and the federal government as a whole.

The Rappahannock River Valley refuge has never had a staff person dedicated to visitor services, yet it offers the visiting public opportunities to engage in all six of the priority uses that Congress directed the Refuge System to provide. That is why the RWR Friends have spent much of our energy and resources creating and maintaining visitor facilities, staffing events on and off the refuge, leading school field trips, and organizing special hunts for youth and disabled hunters to name a few of our regular activities. This frees staff to work other priorities, but the help from Friends and volunteers is not enough. More permanent staff are needed, and quickly, to stop the hemorrhaging.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the

Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact me at [joemccauley1955@gmail.com](mailto:joemccauley1955@gmail.com).

Joseph F. McCauley, Vice-president  
Rappahannock Wildlife Refuge Friends

Written Testimony of  
Todd Dupler  
Chief Advocacy Officer  
Recording Academy

before the  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
on  
Fiscal Year 2025 Funding of the National Endowment for the Arts

As the only trade association in Washington representing all music creators – songwriters, performers, and studio professionals—the Recording Academy is pleased to offer testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies in support of a continued increased funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in Fiscal Year 2025 of no less than the \$211 million. The Recording Academy is proud to support the NEA and its initiatives to enrich American music and culture.

The NEA brings music and the arts to communities across the country, and its mission has never been more important. The agency is an indispensable part of the nation’s \$1.1 trillion creative economy and is well-positioned to invest in local arts sectors in all 50 states. As such, the Recording Academy supports increasing funding of the NEA for the coming fiscal year.

Through supporting music and the arts, the NEA empowers local communities, improves student development, and advances cultural achievements. Considering that NEA grants yield more than \$500 million in matching support—leveraging outside funds at a ratio of 9:1—it is financially one of the smartest investments the government can commit to. In the music industry, the NEA supports more than \$50 million in music related direct grants each year—bringing music, and matching investments, to your back yards. From Boise Hive in Idaho (approx. \$10,000, in 2021) to the Music & Ideas Festival (\$10,000, 2021) to the 317 Main St Community Music Center in Yarmouth, Maine (\$10,000 in 2022); and from the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition (\$10,000, 2023) in Fort Worth to the New Haven Symphony Orchestra in Connecticut (\$15,000, 2023) and El Sistema Oklahoma for a local concert series (\$10,000, 2024), the NEA has proven to support and foster local music communities and opportunities.

The Recording Academy appreciates Congress’s continued support of the NEA during recent fiscal years, but the Agency remains in need of additional funding in order to fulfill its mission of expanding access to and participation in the arts. Robust funding for the NEA will ensure the agency can provide grants across all 50 states, while promoting more equitable access and reaching more diverse audiences.

As you finalize appropriations for FY25, please make a strong commitment to the arts and music with robust funding for the NEA.

**Submitted by Mary Deschene, Program Administrator, San Francisco Bay Wildlife Society**

May 9, 2024

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the **San Francisco Bay Wildlife Society**, a nonprofit Friends Group formed in 1987, with a formal agreement with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to support the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex in California. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We respectfully request Congress to allocate at least \$602.3 million in funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

Our Friends group works at the heart of the San Francisco Bay, bringing children, families, college students, and a diversity of other groups out to learn about the abundantly diverse ecosystem in the middle of where they live their busy lives. It can be surprising to learn that such a densely populated place as the San Francisco Bay metropolitan region has large areas of preserved habitat (about 45,000 acres) on the National Wildlife Refuges, important for the survival of millions of local and migrating birds, marine life, and other wildlife.

Our organization is one of many that are pulling together to try to address the looming environmental crises threatening the San Francisco Bay area. The water and land that edge the bay are a thriving tidal habitat, with great potential to be naturally adapted to resist the impacts of flooding along the shoreline through appropriate restoration techniques. Restored marshlands and sloping levees can absorb and cushion the impacts of high water. Marsh habitat is also very effective at carbon sequestration as well. This restoration is a primary effort of our USFWS biologists, in their work to preserve habitat for endangered and threatened species.

We know that there are many, many highly intelligent and aware people around us who support the preservation of nature, and who have the potential to be globally influential with the decisions they make in the tech industries and other important businesses around us. Our work is to help them become more aware, yet when they see the current state of our sites with invasive plants and decaying infrastructure – all I can say is it is not inspiring. What is inspiring is when we get them out to help and facilitate them being part of the solution. They love that. This is what you support for people and wildlife refuges, and the future of life on Earth. But without funding to be able to work cooperatively under the supervision of USFWS staff, we cannot operate. We need your help to turn around the dire state of affairs in the Refuge System.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere 62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, mandatory staff COLA raises, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased significantly. It is also funded at a lower level than any other federal public lands.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

Our own staff gives public programs at our refuge, and we have experienced firsthand, on a day-to-day basis, the effects of this severe underfunding. We see the staff and operations shortfalls resulting in loss of institutional knowledge, loss of infrastructure due to neglect, people with talent and skills doing the tasks that must be done at all levels beyond their focus areas and not able to do their own essential work, all in a time when the world is losing biodiversity at an alarming rate. We know we already have this great institution that can best address the problem of species loss and ecosystem imbalances, but the remaining staff is losing morale, and we are losing good people who could be our best hope at providing for the future of the diversity of life on earth.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitors that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Currently, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact me, Mary Deschene, and I can put you in touch with others at San Francisco Bay Wildlife Society, at: [mary.deschene@sfbayws.org](mailto:mary.deschene@sfbayws.org), or 505-417-2561.



May 16, 2024

Hon. Patty Murray, Chair  
Hon. Susan Collins, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Agencies

Hon. Jeff Merkley, Chair  
Hon. Lisa Murkowski, Vice Chair  
Senate Subcommittee on Int., Env., and Related

Hon. Tom Cole, Chair  
Hon. Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member  
House Comm. on Appropriations  
Agencies

Hon. Mike Simpson, Chair  
Hon. Chellie Pingree, Ranking Member  
House Subcommittee. on Int., Env., and Related

**Subject: Request for Inclusion of Funding for STOP Act Enforcement in FY 2025 Budget**

Dear Congressional Appropriators:

On behalf of the Sealaska Heritage Institute we respectfully request that the fiscal year 2025 appropriations bills include implementation funding for the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act. The STOP Act marks a significant advancement in efforts to protect Tribal cultural heritage from illegal trafficking and sale. However, the successful implementation of this Act hinges on the availability of adequate resources. Adequate funding will enable the Department of the Interior and associated agencies to:

- Conduct comprehensive training for enforcement personnel.
- Establish and maintain a robust database for monitoring and protecting cultural items.
- Facilitate effective repatriation processes and support voluntary return initiatives.
- Enhance interagency collaborations essential for the STOP Act's success.

Thank you for considering our important request to include implementation funding for the STOP Act in the fiscal year 2025 appropriations bills. We look forward to your positive response and are available to discuss this matter further at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Rosita Kaahaani Worl, Ph.D.  
President





SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

**Testimony of Daniel H. Sandweiss, President of the Society for American Archaeology,  
before the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**

**Regarding Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations**

**House Appropriations Committee**

**April 30, 2024**

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) is pleased to once again present its recommendations to the subcommittee regarding fiscal year 2025 (FY 2025) appropriations for the Department of the Interior's (DoI) cultural resources preservation programs. I am Dr. Daniel H. Sandweiss, president of the SAA.

The SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 5,500 members, the SAA represents professional and avocational archaeologists, archaeology students in colleges and universities, and archaeologists working at tribal agencies, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. The SAA has members throughout the United States, as well as in many nations around the world.

The members of the SAA understand the fiscal difficulties facing Congress. The lengthy delay in completing the FY 2024 spending legislation only added to the complications that appropriators had to face. Given these realities, we appreciate the fact that the final agreement maintained many accounts at level funding. Nevertheless, we must make two important points. First, the need for more federal archaeologists and funding to support cultural resources preservation is great and continues to increase, thanks in large part to the growth in workloads from the infrastructure bills of 2021 and 2022. Second, the recent revisions to the regulations implementing the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) will create substantial new compliance burdens on agencies that are not adequately met by either existing appropriations or those called for in the administration's FY 2025 budget request.

The federal and federally funded historic and cultural preservation programs created under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other preservation statutes, and the activities that they support, comprise the principal means of preserving and protecting our nation's irreplaceable historic, archaeological, and cultural treasures. It is imperative that Congress supply federal agencies with the staff and the means necessary to effectively carry out these functions. This is especially true given that so many of the renewable energy infrastructure projects authorized by legislation in 2021 and 2022 have reached the permitting and construction phases.

As we stated in last year's testimony, federal archaeologists perform a huge number of mission-critical tasks, and their numbers are inadequate given the scale of the mission, which is immense and growing. The following table shows the number of acres overseen by the top land-managing agencies versus the number of archaeologists each agency employs to carry out reviews under Section 106 of the NHPA for federal projects:

Agency	Acreage	Archaeologists	Acres / Archaeologist
BLM	244 million	217	1,124,424
USFS	191 million	462	413,420
USFWS	89 million	22	4,045,455
NPS	80 million	268	298,507
DoD	9 million*	305	29,508
Total	613 million	1,274	481,162

\* Domestic acreage only

If the Section 106 process is to function effectively and federally sponsored undertakings are to be delivered in a timely manner, the NPS, BLM, and other agencies need still more archaeologists to satisfy the statutorily required program responsibilities.

**National Park Service—National Recreation and Preservation Cultural Programs: \$50 million**

NPS National Recreation and Preservation Cultural Programs provide vital technical assistance and other support for resource protection within National Parks and for other federal agencies. In particular, the archaeological program identifies, documents, and inventories archaeological resources in parks; produces archaeological technical and programmatic publications; implements regulations for protecting archaeological resources; and assists other agencies through program development and training. The SAA greatly appreciates the administration's budget request for \$44.1 million for FY 2024, of which \$3 million of the requested increase for FY 2024 would go to fund the new African American Burial Ground Network program and the balance to pay increases. The SAA believes, however, that more is needed and requests another \$6 million to fill vacant archaeologist positions within the NPS. The increase will also allow the NPS to continue to apply its National Archaeology Database information to the NAGPRA compliance efforts of the NPS and other agencies. As pointed out in the National Parks Conservation Association's [report](#) of April 2024, the NPS will need \$250 million over the next five years "to help the National Park Service protect, restore, and archive our country's diverse history." The upcoming fiscal year would make for a good first installment in this effort.

**National Park Service—HPF funding: \$225 million**

The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) provides crucial support to State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) and matching grants to nonprofits and local governments to preserve and document historic resources. The HPF (among

other programs) plays a crucial role in the ability of states and local municipalities to comply with the preservation system established by the NHPA, particularly with regard to Section 106 consultations. SHPOs and THPOs remain the “front line” in the effort to preserve our cultural heritage, and just as federal archaeologists are dealing with substantial workload increases, so are SHPOs and THPOs, the latter of whom face an even more difficult situation, given the average funding per office. There are now 221 offices and the average THPO receives just \$104,000 per year. The increases for the HPF in the omnibus FY 2023 appropriations legislation were badly needed. Unfortunately, the president’s request for static SHPO and THPO funding levels is insufficient to handle the increased workload. The SAA recommends an overall amount of \$225 million for the HPF, of which \$70 million would go to SHPOs and \$34 million to THPOs.

**Bureau of Land Management—Cultural Resources Management: \$30 million**

The BLM manages 245 million acres, which makes the agency the largest land manager in the United States. These lands contain an enormous number of known and as-yet-undiscovered cultural resources, many of which are in remote locations, while others are in areas with high visitation rates. Patrolling, inventorying, and monitoring of cultural heritage sites is essential to their protection. The 217 archaeologists on staff, along with the small number of other cultural resources specialists and law enforcement officers, are simply not enough to accomplish the mission when each archaeologist is responsible for over 1 million acres. The reduction of more than \$800,000 in the final FY 2024 spending package is exacerbating the problem, particularly in light of recent salary increases. On top of that, complying with the new NAGPRA regulations is going to place a substantial new demands on BLM personnel that existing funding and staff levels cannot possibly meet. The administration’s request for an additional \$250,000 and a new full-time employee is completely inadequate. In order to bring BLM’s cultural resources personnel and funding up to sufficient levels, we request an increase of \$10.78 million, \$5 million of which should be dedicated toward NAGPRA regulatory work.

**Bureau of Land Management—National Conservation Lands: \$65.8 million**

The National Conservation Lands (NCL), first established in 2000 and authorized by Congress in 2009, contains more than 37 million acres that are home to an extensive and diverse array of the nation’s archaeological and cultural resources. The FY 2023 omnibus appropriations bill contained \$61.5 million for the NCL. Unfortunately, the FY 2024 budget agreement reduced that amount by \$2.46 million. In order to secure the gains made to stewardship of these lands and the cultural resources they contain, we support the administration’s request of \$65.8 million for FY 2025, an increase of \$6.67 million.

**Forest Service Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness: \$55 million**

USFS heritage activities focus on Section 106 compliance on federal forest land, a task it is struggling to carry out, given the enormous increase in workload thanks to the passage of the infrastructure bills. While the USFS hired new archaeologists in FY 2023 to deal with the situation, most National Forests still remain understaffed. This situation will be exacerbated by the fact that many of the projects authorized by the Inflation Reduction Act and other measures are now ready to proceed. The \$10 million reduction in the FY 2024 budget for the Recreation,

Heritage and Wilderness account makes this reality even worse. In order to fulfill its preservation obligations and comply with the new NAGPRA regulations, we recommend the Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness account be allocated \$55 million.

**Fish and Wildlife Service Historic Preservation: increase of \$4 million**

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is tasked with identifying and caring for the historic properties located within the lands and waters under its management. This includes nearly 17,000 recorded archaeological and paleontological sites, as well as millions of objects under its control in museums and collections facilities. As we noted above, there are only 22 archaeologists on staff in the USFWS. This number is wholly inadequate if the Service is to carry out its congressionally mandated historic preservation responsibilities. Increasing the number of archaeologists will help clear the way for other projects in the refuges to move forward but also builds relationships with local communities, including many Indigenous peoples. As with other agencies, the work necessary for compliance with the new NAGPRA regulations will place an additional burden on the already-overworked archaeological staff. Though the USFWS historic preservation program does not receive a line item allocation, we recommend that the subcommittee specify an increase of \$4 million for the program in FY 2025. This new funding will allow the USFWS to increase its archaeological staff to 40 and enable the Service to comply with its new NAGPRA responsibilities.

**Department of Defense (DoD) Legacy Resource Management Program: \$1.5 million**

The Department of Defense Legacy Resource Management Program is partnering with the National Preservation Institute (NPI) to carry out survey projects under Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act. These projects identify and evaluate historic properties under the DoD's stewardship. About 51% of the Department's land holdings remain to be surveyed, and this initiative will make a significant contribution toward reducing that number. While the DoD has allocated \$13.5 million over five years to the Legacy Resource Management Program, and the NPI will support the effort with \$1.25 million this year, the SAA believes that Congress could strengthen and accelerate the effort with another \$1.5 million.

**Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Grants: \$12 million**

Compliance with the new NAGPRA rule will require a great deal of time and money from covered institutions. Consultation between tribes and museum and curation facilities, and the disposition of remains and cultural objects, is an intensive and often expensive process but one that must be done correctly to ensure that objects are returned to the correct lineal descendants, Indian Tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations, if that is the desired outcome of stakeholders. The NAGPRA Grants Program serves an invaluable role in facilitating these activities, but it will require far greater resources than are currently available in order to meet the increased demand expected to be created by the revised regulations. The SAA requests that the NAGPRA Grants Program receive \$12 million in FY 2025.

Cummulatively, these appropriations fund the bedrock of the protection and ongoing identification of archaeological sites in America. Preserving this fragile knowledge is crucial for today and for tomorrow. The SAA greatly appreciates your time and consideration of these important issues. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

**Submitted by Ariana Rickard, Public Policy and Funding Program Manager,  
Sonoma Land Trust**

*May 10, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of Sonoma Land Trust. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

We partner closely with the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) on many projects, including land acquisition, restoration, and conservation for the benefit of fish and wildlife and their habitats in San Francisco Bay. Our collaboration has been critical to the successful restoration of thousands of acres of diked baylands to wetland habitats. We have purchased, restored, and transferred several parcels to the San Pablo Bay NWR, including Sears Point and Haire Ranch.

The Service worked closely with us on the development of the Sonoma Creek Baylands Strategy, an integrated plan for landscape-scale habitat restoration, flood reduction, and public access in the Sonoma Creek watershed. The planning area encompasses several units of the San Pablo Bay NWR. We are now working with the Refuge and our partners on implementing the restoration of this former tidal marsh ecosystem, starting with Phase One of the Sonoma Creek Baylands Restoration Project. The San Pablo Bay NWR needs additional funding and increased capacity to continue to collaborate with us to achieve the restoration, public access, and habitat goals of the Sonoma Creek Baylands Strategy and other regional plans.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact Ariana Rickard, Public Policy and Funding Program Manager for Sonoma Land Trust at [ariana@sonomalandtrust.org](mailto:ariana@sonomalandtrust.org).



**STATE OF ALABAMA  
SURFACE MINING COMMISSION**

P.O. BOX 2390 - JASPER, ALABAMA 35502-2390  
(205) 221-4130 • FAX: (205) 221-5077

Statement of Kathy H. Love, Director Alabama Surface Mining Commission  
Re: FY 2025 Budget for Department of the Interior and the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement  
Before: The House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee  
May 10, 2024

My name is Kathy H. Love, Director of the Alabama Surface Mining Commission (ASMC). My

OSMRE is failing to comply with adequate funding of Title V State and Tribal regulatory programs. Therefore, an increase of \$13.9 million, or 21.4%, is requested over the \$65.0 million included in the FY 2025 budget of the Department of Interior - Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) for State and Tribal regulatory grants under Title V of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (SMCRA). This increase to \$78.9 million equals the funding requested by State and Tribal programs for FY 2024.

My testimony is to bring attention to the significant risk OSMRE's is taking by underfunding State and Tribal regulatory programs, these programs are responsible for the prevention or mitigation of adverse environmental effects of present and future surface coal mining operations. Enacted under Title V of SMCRA are rules and regulations designed to prevent a repeat of pre- 1977 abandoned and unreclaimed mine sites, now costing our Nation billions annually.

Using my state as an example, for FY 2024, Alabama requested \$1.94 million 50% matching funds as provided under SMCRA. This amount was reviewed and recommended for approval by the OSMRE field and regional offices to the OSMRE DC office. Yet, Alabama's distribution was set at only \$1.31 million, a critical shortfall of \$648,797 or 32.4%. The \$1.31 million allocation does not even cover the 50% federal share of payroll much less any other required operating expenses. Alabama must somehow cross this gap by elimination or deferral of necessary costs. And Alabama is not the only program experiencing the pressures of inadequate funding.

For FY 2024, all Title V State and Tribal programs requested \$78.9 million, an amount that was reviewed and approved for recommendation by OSMRE field offices. However, the OSMRE DC offices decided otherwise and submitted a budget request of only \$65.0 million, later cut of \$62.4 million as included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 dated March 9, 2024.

This represents a \$16.5 million, or 20.9% shortfall across all State and Tribal programs. Also, all regulatory programs are personnel heavy, not overstaffed, but with personnel needed in multiple sciences. On average, 80% of program costs are personnel related. Therefore, \$63.12 million, or 80%, of the \$78.9 million requested is personnel costs. The appropriation of \$62.4 million falls short of even covering payroll.

These facts beg the question of how the OSMRE budget request submitted to the House was determined in the face of valid program needs. Apparently, the regulatory programs, those who have boots on the ground experience and knowledge of active coal mining and reclamation and recommendations of experienced OSMRE field personnel were not considered. Only the opinions of executive level OSMRE DC personnel, who probably have never been to a mine site, were considered. Exhibited on page 4, is a listing of individual State and Regulatory program requests and grant distributions for FY 2024. Underfunding is quite evident as not a single program was granted its request, with shortfalls ranging from -32.5% in Kentucky to -6.5% in Utah.

Below is the history of OSMRE Grants as Compared to Budgets from 2019 to 2024.

OSMRE State and Tribal Regulatory Grants Summary by Year (In Millions)					
Grant Year	Prior Year Distribution	Regulatory Request	Current Year Distribution	Variance	% Variance
2019	\$ 68.59	\$ 72.06	\$ 68.59	\$ (3.47)	-4.8%
2020	68.59	75.88	68.59	(7.29)	-9.6%
2021	68.59	72.75	68.59	(4.16)	-5.7%
2022	65.00	71.05	65.00	(6.05)	-8.5%
2023	65.00	74.97	65.00	(9.97)	-13.3%
2024	65.00	78.90	62.40	(16.50)	-20.9%
Total	\$ 400.77	\$ 445.61	\$ 398.17	\$(47.44)	-10.6%

Source: OSMRE.gov

The current year distribution since FY 2019 decreased \$6.19 million, or 9%. Over the same period the regulatory request increased \$6.84 million, or 9.5%. A swing of \$13.3 million. When costs go up due to significant inflation, funding cannot be decreased. The result is a hollowing out of the necessary funding to accomplish the mission of protecting the environment as was intended by the 95<sup>th</sup> Congress. The regulatory programs cannot continue without a significant increase in funding, otherwise, programs may not be able to meet established Title V performance standards. The consequences of which are federal government takeover.

One additional point for consideration, on May 9, 2024, the updated OSMRE Ten Day notice rule took effect. The effect of this rule is OSMRE overstepping its authority as outlined in SMCRA. This new rule is an updated version of the 2020 Ten Day notice rule that all participants, State, Tribe and OSMRE, worked together to agree upon. Yet, 2 ½ years later, OSMRE decides the

2020 rule is insufficient. OSMRE's preamble reports that it is proposing "non-substantive" changes and changes to "improve" readability. However, there are hidden consequences which cannot go unrecognized. Without going into detail, this rule fundamentally alters the nature of state primacy under SMCRA whereby states are given exclusive rights over its regulatory program. Instead, the rule provides OSMRE with unjust "powers" over regulation of State programs not envisioned under SMCRA. Yet to be determined, is what circumstances precipitated OSMRE to make such significant changes to a rule that was working as designed.

In conclusion, for Alabama as well as other States and Tribes, the funding of Title V programs must be increased to provide adequate support. Without a significant increase the intent of SMCRA Title V cannot be accomplished to prevent or mitigate adverse environmental effects of present and future surface coal mining operations. **Congress is urged to approve an increase of \$13.9 million for State and Tribal Title V regulatory programs in FY 2025 to \$78.9** A small price to pay for enjoying environmental protections and preventing unreclaimed properties.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my statement on this matter. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Fiscal Year 2024 Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement Regulatory Grant Distribution					
State/Tribe	Start Date	FY 2024 OSMRE Regional Offices' Recommendations <sup>1</sup>	Fiscal Year 2024 Final Distribution <sup>2</sup>	Variance	Percent
Kentucky	1-Sep	\$ 18,978,846	\$ 12,806,612	\$ (6,172,234)	-32.5%
Alabama	1-Oct	1,938,701	1,309,904	(628,797)	-32.4%
Illinois	1-Jul	4,573,298	3,124,098	(1,449,200)	-31.7%
Missouri	1-Jan	263,179	192,933	(70,246)	-26.7%
Maryland	1-Jan	1,130,890	834,275	(296,615)	-26.2%
Ohio	1-Jul	1,738,288	1,315,951	(422,337)	-24.3%
North Dakota	1-Jul	1,257,578	954,004	(303,574)	-24.1%
Arkansas	1-Oct	123,992	94,553	(29,439)	-23.7%
Crow Tribe	1-Jul	696,631	538,938	(157,693)	-22.6%
Pennsylvania	1-Oct	15,727,434	12,483,364	(3,244,070)	-20.6%
Montana	1-Jul	2,604,164	2,074,399	(529,765)	-20.3%
Navajo Nation	1-Jul	1,778,827	1,420,967	(357,860)	-20.1%
New Mexico	1-Jul	959,396	786,067	(173,329)	-18.1%
Hopi Tribe	1-Oct	411,729	340,981	(70,748)	-17.2%
Texas	1-Dec	3,008,507	2,587,444	(421,063)	-14.0%
Indiana	1-Oct	1,248,785	1,083,222	(165,563)	-13.3%
Colorado	1-Jul	2,513,009	2,183,853	(329,156)	-13.1%
Louisiana	1-Jan	283,754	246,904	(36,850)	-13.0%
Alaska	1-Jul	391,374	349,110	(42,264)	-10.8%
Wyoming	1-Jan	2,551,171	2,312,722	(238,449)	-9.3%
West Virginia	1-Jan	10,734,727	9,824,294	(910,433)	-8.5%
Virginia	1-Jan	3,677,135	3,367,364	(309,771)	-8.4%
Utah	1-Jul	2,055,747	1,921,930	(133,817)	-6.5%
Kansas	1-Jul	43,915	42,208	(1,707)	-3.9%
Mississippi	1-Oct	198,903	198,903	-	0.0%
Iowa	1-Jul	5,000	5,000	-	0.0%
<b>Totals</b>		<b>\$ 78,894,980</b>	<b>\$ 62,400,000</b>	<b>\$ (16,494,980)</b>	<b>-20.9%</b>

<sup>1</sup> Each State or Tribe with a Title V Regulatory Program submits a current program budget 3 months prior to the beginning of the Federal fiscal year for which a grant will be requested. OSMRE then conducts a detailed analysis of these program budgets and provides a regional recommendation.

<sup>2</sup> FY Year 2024 Regulatory Grant Final Distribution is \$62,400,000 as per the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, Public Law No: 118-42. Note: Reduced \$2,600,000 from Fiscal Year Appropriation of \$65,000,000, 4%. Source: <https://www.osmre.gov/resources/grants-resources>



**STATE OF NEW MEXICO  
OFFICE OF THE STATE ENGINEER**

**MIKE A. HAMMAN, P.E.**  
**STATE ENGINEER**

**WRITTEN PUBLIC TESTIMONY FY 2025 APPROPRIATION**

**TO:** The Honorable Mike Simpson, Chair  
The Honorable Chellie Pingree, Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations – Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies

**FROM:** Mike A. Hamman, P.E.  
New Mexico State Engineer

**DATE:** April 30, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Continued Funding for the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control  
Program under **BLM's Aquatic Resources Program**

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Congress authorized the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program through the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act in 1974 to offset increased damages caused by development and use of the waters of the Colorado River. Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to implement a comprehensive program for minimizing salt contributions to the Colorado River from lands administered by the **Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**. BLM has funded these efforts as directed by Congress through its **Aquatic Resources Program**. BLM's efforts are an essential part of the overall effort. A funding level of **\$2 million** for salinity specific projects in 2025 is requested to prevent further degradation of the quality of the Colorado River and a commensurate increase in downstream economic damages.

The 1974 Act has been amended several times. Beginning in 2003, BLM employed a Salinity Coordinator to increase BLM efforts in the Colorado River Basin to pursue salinity control studies and to implement specific salinity control practices.

Natural and human-induced salt loading to the Colorado River causes environmental and economic damages to water users in the United States and Mexico, including:

- reduced ability to reclaim and reuse water for beneficial uses, including drinking water and irrigation water supplies,
- reduced yield of salt sensitive crops,
- increased use of imported water and cost of desalination,

- reduced useful life of water pipe systems and household appliances,
- increased cost of cooling operations and water softening,
- increased use of water and cost of water treatment,
- decreased lifespan of treatment facilities, and
- difficulty in meeting wastewater discharge requirements to comply with Federal laws.

Though past efforts have reduced annual damages to water users by several hundred million dollars per year, in 2023 the Bureau of Reclamation estimated the *quantifiable* damages to Lower Basin water users due to elevated salinity levels still at about \$348 million per year (unquantifiable damages add to this amount). Modeling by Reclamation indicates that the annual damages would rise to \$447 million by the year 2040 without continuation of the Program.

New Mexico is a member of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum and voted to adopt a Plan of Implementation developed to control the salinity levels in the Colorado River. The level of appropriation (**\$2 million**) requested in this testimony is in keeping with the adopted Plan of Implementation. New Mexico stands in support of Congress allocating this money to the BLM.

**Submitted by Molly Stoddard**

*May 4, 2024*

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the  
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am submitting this testimony as a retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employee and current volunteer at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center, part of the Fergus Falls Wetland Management District in Fergus Falls, Minnesota and part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. I worked there for 18 years ending last summer. Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. I request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

**PRAIRIE WETLANDS LEARNING CENTER**

The award-winning Prairie Wetlands Learning Center (PWLC) sets an example to all of the USFWS in visitor services, especially innovation and effectiveness in environmental education. However, the USFWS fails to prioritize and adequately staff the facility to serve the public due to chronic inadequate funding from Congress. The visitor center has only been open one day per week to walk-in visitors for the last two years due to declining staffing. The only USFWS employee currently working there is a maintenance professional.

Visitor services have been significantly reduced for its former 70,000 annual walk-in visitors, preschool through college classes, youth, and families. The PWLC no longer offers USFWS staff-led educational programming for preschool through college-level classes visiting the center with the exception of two visits per year with Fergus Falls Public Schools 3rd graders. Since most teachers prefer staff-led visits, the Prairie is void of the delighted voices of thousands of children from over 30 communities who visited up to 3 times per year for the past 15 years. The PWLC no longer offers preschool through 6th grade summer nature programs, residential educational experiences for 5th grade and older, the Jr. Friends of the PWLC for youth, numerous special events for the public, and much more. Monarch tagging has been severely reduced at a critical time for this vanishing species. The PWLC has been tagging monarchs with students and the public longer than any other site in the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The USFWS has recently invested large sums of federal funds in building and parking lot renovations (which I applaud) but cannot staff the facilities to keep the doors open. The epitome of government waste. This is what flatlining agency budgets looks like on the ground. Who are the Fergus Falls Public Schools supposed to partner with for the new school they propose to build across Highway 210 from the PWLC entrance?

This past winter, a former Friends of the PWLC president and I alerted the public to this staffing crisis. As a result of the public response, USFWS regional director Will Meeks committed to filling two of the four vacant positions by fall. Filling two vacancies sets us in the right direction, and at a minimum, we need the other two filled for a fully staffed and fully operational facility. It is past time for Congress to do its part to reverse this trend for the PWLC as well as for hundreds of sites in the National Wildlife Refuge System across the country.

#### **FRIENDS OF THE PWLC**

The Friends of the PWLC are contributing to resolving this chronic and urgent matter by securing grant funds to temporarily hire a few seasonal naturalists (myself included) to keep the few remaining services afloat. However, it is not the role of Friends groups to permanently fix this ongoing crisis. It is Congress' job to provide federal funding to fill federal positions. I urge Congress to prevent frustrating and morale busting emergencies like this from happening again and to fully and sustainably fund and staff the internationally recognized PWLC so it can return to full staff capacity and full operations serving the public.

The Friends of the PWLC:

- Promote conservation and understanding of the prairie pothole region
- Support activities of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center
- Creatively generate funds and foster volunteer involvement at the PWLC.
- Solicit community, regional, statewide and federal support.

More specifically, the Friends own and operate the Bluestem Store, welcome visitors, help staff events, provide funding for an education intern, help administer the annual Summer Explorers Biology Camp and concurrent Teaching in the Outdoor Classroom Workshop, publish a quarterly newsletter and The Compass to Nature booklet, sponsor a narrow photography contest, and donate thousands of hours of volunteer time to the PWLC. They have raised funds for construction of a teaching greenhouse and continue to fund a naturalist position.

#### **PWLC AND WESTERN MINNESOTA**

The PWLC is so vital to western Minnesota that the city of Fergus Falls unanimously passed a resolution in support of fully funding, staffing and operating the facility. The city of Fergus Falls is the first Prairie City USA, has been a signatory to the Mayors Monarch Pledge for five years, has established numerous pockets of prairie in city parks and sites, and is a Fergus Falls Wetland Management District Partner of the Year. In large part, these achievements have occurred because of outreach efforts of PWLC staff into the community over more than 25 years.

The city and USFWS have worked in close partnership since 1998 through a Memorandum of Understanding. The city owns the PWLC buildings, while the USFWS owns the remaining acreage as Townsend Waterfowl Production Area and provides staff and most maintenance. The USFWS also works in close partnership with Fergus Falls Public Schools through another MOU

for housing and operating the Prairie Science Class since 2003, where the same 200, 4th and 5th graders spend half of every school day over 9 months at the Prairie, taught mainly by school district teachers, indoors and outside daily.

These two most vital partnerships are the resulting legacy started in the 1970s by dedicated, visionary, passionate, local conservation heroes. They flourished among many other partnerships not only in Fergus Falls but beyond in western Minnesota that thrived with a fully staffed and fully operational PWLC.

The PWLC is our best connection to prairie wetlands ecology and conservation in the vast Prairie Pothole Region creating and supporting a citizenry that is literate and active in land stewardship. People of all ages, abilities and backgrounds CAN once again engage with USFWS professional conservation educators outdoors in meaningful ways that leads to respect for and a positive relationship with the natural world that sustains us all.

#### **AMERICA'S REFUGE SYSTEM**

The staffing crisis at the PWLC is symptomatic of a larger, long-term problem in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service which can be fixed by Congress providing funding that keeps up with costs instead of flatlining the agency's budget for the past 10 years. Hundreds of sites across the country in the National Wildlife Refuge System, including the PWLC, are hurting for funds for staffing and suffering from a lack of professionals to keep visitor services in operation and to conserve wildlife and the habitats they need to survive.

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units and 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and seen visitation grow to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 27% since FY2011. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

I urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering my request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Thank you for your effective attention to this matter.

Please feel free to contact me at [msprairiefairie@gmail.com](mailto:msprairiefairie@gmail.com) or cell 218-770-7291.



May 10, 2024

Written Testimony of  
Katie Day  
Senior Manager of Science and Policy  
Surfrider Foundation  
to the  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

**Support for Fiscal Year 2025 Funding to the EPA BEACH Act Grants Program and EPA Border Water Infrastructure Grant Program**

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies:

The Surfrider Foundation (“Surfrider”) strongly supports the appropriations of \$15 million to the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (“BEACH”) Act Grants Program and \$100 million to the U.S./Mexico Border Water Infrastructure Grant Program (Infrastructure Assistance: Mexico Border State and Tribal Assistance Grants) administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) to protect public health and beach water quality in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 federal budget.

The EPA BEACH Act Grants Program provides critical funding to 35 states and territories to conduct beach water quality testing, publish results on public notification programs, and post signage when elevated bacteria levels are measured. Many states rely completely on this funding to administer their beach water quality testing and public notification programs which are essential for protecting public health and coastal tourism economies. However, years of funding this program at less than a third of its authorized level has resulted in piecemeal water testing across the nation, where local agencies are forced to reduce testing frequency, test only at certain beaches, and test only during a portion of the year, leaving many beaches and communities in the dark regarding the status of their local water quality. According to the EPA, of the 5,089 EPA BEACH Act “program beaches”, only 3,560 beaches were monitored in 2023,<sup>1</sup> with many of which monitored less than once a week and only during “beach season”.

The nation’s \$138 billion coastal tourism and recreation industry supports nearly 2.5 million jobs,<sup>2</sup> but it is dependent upon clean water and healthy beaches. Sadly, coastal water quality is constantly at risk of impairments from untreated and undertreated sewage due to outdated and inadequately maintained wastewater infrastructure, resulting in combined sewer overflows, sewage spills and diversions, backups and cracks of sewage distribution pipes, and more. Over

<sup>1</sup> <https://ordspub.epa.gov/ords/beacon2/f?p=BEACON2:DNR>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.oceaneconomics.org/ocean\\_econ/ocean\\_econ.html](https://www.oceaneconomics.org/ocean_econ/ocean_econ.html)

850 billion gallons of raw sewage are released into U.S. waterways each year from sewer overflows alone.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, many outdated decentralized wastewater systems provide no treatment before releasing sewage polluted wastewater into the environment. Approximately 25 percent of U.S. households are still serviced by septic and cesspool systems,<sup>4</sup> with up to 50 percent of households serviced by septic and cesspool systems in certain states.<sup>5</sup> For instance, there are nearly 88,000 cesspools in Hawaii that discharge 53 million gallons of sewage into coastal waters every day.<sup>6</sup> On the East End of Long Island, New York, there are approximately 360,000 on-site sewage disposal systems of which 250,000 are cesspools.<sup>7</sup> Sewage polluted wastewater often makes it into stormwater runoff, which continues to be the main cause of beach closures nationwide. There is an estimated 10 trillion gallons of untreated stormwater runoff threatening our coastlines and local waterways each year.<sup>8</sup>

Exposure to untreated and undertreated sewage poses a significant public health threat. Sewage contains bacteria, viruses and parasites that can make people sick with gastrointestinal symptoms, rashes, and eye infections, as well as more serious conditions including hepatitis, acute respiratory disease, cholera, giardia, methicillin-resistant staph infections (MRSA), and even flesh eating bacteria from *V. vulnificus*, among others. A 2018 study estimated that each year, 90 million illnesses are caused by recreating in sewage-polluted waters, which costs the U.S. economy up to \$3.7 billion annually.<sup>9</sup> For this study, the primary exposure route was through dermal contact and accidental ingestion of polluted water during recreation. However, bacteria and industrial chemicals in areas chronically polluted with high levels of sewage and industrial discharges, such as coastal waters near the Tijuana River Watershed at the U.S./Mexico border, can become aerosolized in sea spray, reducing air quality and causing an additional exposure route through inhalation, further threatening public health.<sup>10</sup>

This area of chronic coastal pollution in South San Diego County along the U.S./Mexico border is important for our second ask of elevated funding for the Border Water Infrastructure Grant Program managed by the EPA. Binational flows of polluted water, in part due to the insufficient treatment capacity, mechanical failures and neglected maintenance of the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant, are wreaking havoc on the local community, economy, and environment. Since October 2018, the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission has documented the entry of over 148 billion gallons of toxic effluent into the United States through the Tijuana River,<sup>11</sup> with 28.2 billion gallons of polluted flows crossing the international border since the start of this year.<sup>12</sup> The southernmost beach in San Diego

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/csosortc2004\\_full.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/csosortc2004_full.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/septic/about-septic-systems>

<sup>5</sup> [www.nepm.org/regional-news/2017-12-22/in-new-england-gone-are-the-days-when-septic-can-be-out-of-sight-out-of-mind#stream/0](http://www.nepm.org/regional-news/2017-12-22/in-new-england-gone-are-the-days-when-septic-can-be-out-of-sight-out-of-mind#stream/0)

<sup>6</sup> <https://health.hawaii.gov/wastewater/home/cesspools/>

<sup>7</sup> [www.suffolkcountyny.gov/News/ArtMID/583/ArticleID/2725/SUFFOLK-HEALTH-OFFICIALS-OUTLINE-CHANGES-TO-WASTEWATER-PRACTICES-TO-TAKE-EFFECT-ON-JULY-1-2019](http://www.suffolkcountyny.gov/News/ArtMID/583/ArticleID/2725/SUFFOLK-HEALTH-OFFICIALS-OUTLINE-CHANGES-TO-WASTEWATER-PRACTICES-TO-TAKE-EFFECT-ON-JULY-1-2019)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/rooftopstoriversII-update.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://ehjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12940-017-0347-9>

<sup>10</sup> <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.2c02312?ref=pdf%20>

<sup>11</sup> Email exchange with IBWC Area Operations Manager, February 6 2024

<sup>12</sup> Email exchange with IBWC Area Operations Manager, May 2 2024

County has been closed for 882 consecutive days and counting. Nearby, Imperial Beach has been closed 100 percent of 2024 to date, with Silver Strand Beach closed for 96 percent of this year, and world-renowned Coronado Beach closed for 74 percent of this year as a result of these flows.<sup>13</sup>

Not only do polluted flows threaten the public health of surrounding communities, the Tijuana River pollution crisis undermines U.S. national security, affecting Navy SEAL training programs and the ability of Border Patrol agents to do their jobs. According to a House Report of the Committee on Armed Services that outlines impacts on Navy readiness and training, pollution from the Tijuana River caused over 250 in-water canceled training events in FY2020.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Border Patrol agents have experienced illnesses from exposure to toxic water while performing job duties, including flesh-eating bacteria.<sup>15</sup>

Local businesses and economies have also been hit hard and continue to suffer due to increasing water and air contamination. The County of San Diego, with assistance from the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce, recently conducted an economic impact study to measure the impacts of border pollution on local businesses. Preliminary results reveal that 74 percent of local businesses have been negatively impacted, 30 percent have laid off staff, 50 percent have lost more than \$100,000 in revenue, the City of Imperial Beach has experienced \$1-1.5 million in property tax damage, and the estimated revenue loss for tourism is over \$500,000 annually.<sup>16</sup> Some businesses have been forced to close, and many residents have lost their livelihoods.

These economic and public health concerns are why the City of Imperial Beach, City of San Diego, and the County of San Diego maintain an ongoing State of Local Emergency related to the impacts of cross-border pollution from the binational Tijuana River. The Tijuana River was also recently designated as one of America's most Endangered Rivers<sup>17</sup> due to the severe level of sewage and industrial pollution threatening local communities and wildlife. Yet despite national attention, toxic flows continue to threaten families, expose Border Patrol personnel and impede public access to the coast every day.

Progress has been made with federal funding allocated through the United States Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA) to develop and advance the EPA Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution to repair and upgrade treatment facilities at the U.S./Mexico Border. The Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution is designed to both increase wastewater treatment plant capacity and the broader distribution system to be able to adequately handle wastewater flows. Once implemented, the Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution is estimated to decrease cross-border flows by 75 percent year-round and reduce beach closures by 95 percent in summer months.<sup>18</sup> However, even with the \$300 million provided from the USMCA, recent funding allocations to the International Boundary and Water Commission, and contributions made by the Mexican government, there is a several hundred million dollar funding gap to fully implement

<sup>13</sup> Email exchange with San Diego County Environmental Health Specialist, May 2 2024

<sup>14</sup> <https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20210920/CRPT-117hrpt118.pdf> (see page 108)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.surfrider.org/news/the-impact-of-toxic-border-pollution-on-us-border-patrol>

<sup>16</sup> Preliminary findings presented during testimony by Lauren Cazares, San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce, to the California Coastal Commission on October 11 2023: [https://cal-span.org/meeting/ccc\\_20231011/](https://cal-span.org/meeting/ccc_20231011/)

<sup>17</sup> <https://mostendangeredrivers.org/river/tijuana-river/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/usmca-tijuana-river-watershed>

the Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution. Funding the EPA Border Water Infrastructure Grant Program at the full authorized level of \$100 million in FY2025, with the majority directed specifically for the Tijuana River Watershed, will help close this gap and address the severe public health crisis and military preparedness threat occurring at the U.S./Mexico border.

Funding the BEACH Act Grants Program at \$15 million, which is just half of the program's Congressionally authorized level of \$30 million, would increase the ability of local health departments in coastal states and territories across the nation to test more beaches more often and keep the public informed of their local beach water quality to prevent against unnecessary yet potentially life threatening water-borne illnesses. Increasing funding for this program will also help agencies continue to identify pollution hot spots and more strategically invest in infrastructure upgrade solutions to stop pollution at the source.

Thank you for your consideration of elevating funding for these critical water quality and public health programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Day". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katie Day  
Senior Manager of Science and Policy  
Surfrider Foundation

**Testimony on Fiscal Year 2025 for the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Regarding Department of Interior, Department of Agriculture, and Environmental Protection Agency**

**Submitted by Kelly Reed, Senior Vice President of Government Relations, The Conservation Fund**

**May 10, 2024**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, thank you for this opportunity to submit outside witness testimony on behalf of The Conservation Fund (TCF). TCF supports the mandatory funding request of \$900 million and additional discretionary funding in Fiscal Year 2025 for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which includes the federal land acquisition programs of the Bureau of Land Management (\$85 million), National Park Service (\$115 million), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (\$125 million), U.S. Forest Service (\$134 million), as well as three state grant programs, among others: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (\$32 million); National Park Service's State Assistance Grants program (\$260 million); and the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program (\$100 million). TCF also supports a funding request for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's North American Wetlands Conservation Fund (\$50 million); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's State and Tribal Wildlife Grant Programs (\$100 million); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense Program (\$15 million); National Park Service's Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Program (\$3 million); and the U.S. Forest Service's Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (\$7 million); and the Department of Interior's (DOI) Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program (\$10 million). TCF requests funding for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (\$425 million) and Chesapeake Bay Program (\$100 million).

TCF is a national, non-profit conservation organization dedicated to conserving America's land and water legacy for future generations. Established in 1985, TCF works with landowners; federal, state and local agencies; and other partners to conserve our nation's important lands for people, wildlife and communities. To date, TCF has helped our partners to conserve over 9 million acres. These accomplishments are due, in large measure, to the leadership of this Subcommittee over many years to appropriate funds to acquire lands for future generations, working forests, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, and many other benefits.

Below are highlights of some benefits of the LWCF and land acquisition programs. While these projects show the tremendous diversity of benefits of land acquisition for the public, they have one thing in common: each of these projects is driven by landowners. Many farmers, ranchers and forestland owners have significant financial equity in their land. By enabling a landowner to sell a conservation easement or fee title, the LWCF program provides landowners with funds to stay in business, reinvest in businesses, or meet other financial goals.

As the Subcommittee crafts its Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, there are several key points we respectfully request you to consider, listed below.

**Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at \$900 million in mandatory and additional discretionary funding:** The enactment of the Great American Outdoors Act is a top momentous land conservation victory in a generation. The Conservation Fund applauds Congress for passing the bipartisan, bicameral legislation that provides full and mandatory funding (at \$900 million) for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. We also encourage Congress to provide discretionary funding to address emerging needs and opportunities. Funding the nation's premier conservation program with both mandatory and discretionary funding in FY2025 will ensure LWCF continues to fulfill its mission to safeguard natural areas, water resources, and our cultural heritage, and to provide recreation opportunities to all Americans.

The Conservation Fund applauds the Senate and House Committees for its support for land acquisition and appraisal process improvements, as was included in the Fiscal Year 2023 and 2024 reports. TCF urges the Committees to continue working with the Departments to streamline and improve processes, particularly appraisal timelines and partnerships with non-federal parties, to deliver on priority land conservation efforts and effectively implement the Great American Outdoors Act.

The Conservation Fund also urges the Senate and House Committees to support reprogramming of prior years' funding from the LWCF, as opposed to rescinding the funding as that practice undermines this critical conservation program. It is common for federal land acquisition funds to remain "unobligated" until the last step in an acquisition project—this can reasonably take up to five years. Unobligated balances are not a problem in and of themselves, but funding should be moved to other acquisition projects if it is no longer needed for acquisitions within the federal unit originally receiving the LWCF funding. To this end, Congress should continue to encourage the agencies to use a tool they already have—reprogramming—rather than rescissions to ensure LWCF funds are spent on critical conservation needs, fulfilling the purpose of the LWCF and the intent of the Great American Outdoors Act.

**LWCF-Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Land Acquisition at \$85 million.** The BLM and its National Conservation Lands provide some of our nation's best recreation and historic areas, such as opening new recreational access to sportsmen and protecting water quality and riparian resources in the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness in Colorado. We request \$85 million to fund BLM's land acquisition program and projects.

**LWCF-National Park Service (NPS) Federal Land Acquisition at \$115 million.** Hosting more than 325 million visitors in 2023, the 429 National Park units provide an economic boost to their local communities and those employed directly and indirectly. Funding for NPS LWCF will help protect key access points for recreation, historic areas, trails and more. We respectfully request \$115 million to fund NPS's land acquisition program and projects.

**LWCF-U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Land Acquisition at \$125 million.** National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) are our nation's protectors of clean water, clean air, abundant wildlife, and world-class recreation. Funding for FY2025 FWS LWCF will help protect critical wildlife habitat, provide public access and recreation, and improve water quality at Refuges, including Maryland's Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and Georgia's Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge; as well as preserving our nation's working lands, such as at Montana's Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area. We respectfully request \$125 million to fund FWS's land acquisition program and projects.

**LWCF-USDA Forest Service (FS) Land Acquisition at \$134 million.** FS LWCF funding is an important forest management tool, as it protects key inholdings and reduces fire threats. As a national partner facilitating transactions, we are working with willing landowners at priority project areas and respectfully request \$134 million to fund FS's land acquisition program and projects.

**LWCF State Grant Programs: FWS-Cooperative Endangered Species Fund, NPS- State Conservation Grants, and USFS-Forest Legacy:** We encourage the Subcommittee to fund:

- **FWS—Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund: \$32 million** (for the LWCF-funded portion)
- **NPS—State Assistance Grants program: \$260 million**
- **USFS—Forest Legacy Program: \$100 million**

**DOI and FS Conservation and Land Acquisition Programs:** TCF encourages the Committee to fund:

- **FWS—North American Wetlands Conservation Fund at \$50 million**
- **FWS—State and Tribal Wildlife Grant Program at \$100 million.** The State and Tribal Wildlife Grant Program is the only federal funding source available to states that leverages non-federal funds to help protect critical habitat for over 12,000 species in greatest conservation need identified in state wildlife action plans. To build upon the State and Tribal Wildlife Program, TCF urges Congress to enact the Recovering America's Wildlife Act. This legislation aims to provide critical resources to conduct proactive, non-regulatory fish and wildlife conservation efforts nationwide.
- **FWS—Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense Program at \$15 million**
- **NPS—Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Program at \$3.075 million**
- **FS—Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program at \$7 million**

**Department of the Interior—Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program at \$10 million.** The Restoration Program leads the national response for recovery of natural resources that have been injured or destroyed because of oil spills or releases of other hazardous substances. Recoveries from responsible parties can only be spent to implement

restoration plans developed by the Trustee Council for each incident. These funds are one hundred percent private and represent the amount needed to restore environmental resources or compensate for lost public use since the damage in question. The FY2024 funds would allow the Program to add carefully targeted staff allocated to Interior bureaus and offices through its Restoration Support Unit to accelerate restoration activities.

**Environmental Protection Agency Programs:** TCF encourages the Committee to fund:

- **Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) at \$425 million.** TCF urges funding of GLRI at \$425 million. The Initiative provides critical support for on-the-ground restoration programs and projects targeted at the most significant environmental problems in the Great Lakes ecosystem.
- **Chesapeake Bay Program at \$100 million:** TCF urges funding of the Chesapeake Bay program at \$100 million. This program brings together a diverse partnership to support the Bay's restoration.

The Conservation Fund stands ready to work with you to secure full and consistent funding for the LWCF and the other critically important programs that help protect the environment, economies, forests, and community values across our nation. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony and your consideration of our request.

**Submitted Testimony of Robin Bronk, CEO, The Creative Coalition and  
Tim Daly, President, The Creative Coalition  
Fiscal Year 2025 Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
May 9, 2024**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) on behalf of The Creative Coalition. We respectfully request the Committee provide \$211 million for the NEA in the upcoming fiscal year.

Founded in 1989 by prominent members of the entertainment community, The Creative Coalition is dedicated to educating, mobilizing, and activating its members on issues of public importance, including the positive impacts of the arts in our communities, in our schools, and to our economy. Our #RightToBearArts campaign exists to protect, defend and promote the arts for all our citizens.

Our request for a funding increase of \$4 million more than the Fiscal Year 2024 level is justified by the irrefutable benefits that the arts provide to this country. Data released in March of this year showed that the arts and culture industry's value to U.S. GDP hit an all-time high in 2022, and it has continued to rise<sup>1</sup>. This sector of our economy accounted for 4.3 percent of GDP in 2022 or \$1.10 trillion, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. Furthermore, employment in this field returned to pre-pandemic levels with nearly 5.2 million workers receiving \$540.9 billion in wages<sup>2</sup>.

But, like many sectors in our economy, this return has not been shared equally. Performing arts organizations, non-government museums, and arts-related construction, the entities most often in underserved areas and the most frequent NEA grant recipients, have not kept pace with their high-earning broadcasting, publishing, and streaming counterparts. That is where the NEA must continue to increasingly play a part in spreading equal access to the arts across the nation. Whether it be in rural or urban areas, or for the betterment of the young or the old, the arts should be available to all who seek to express their most essential human creativity and innovation.

Studies have shown repeatedly that exposure to the arts increases positive education and social outcomes. Most recently, researchers determined that stimulus associated with art promote feelings of humility and generosity among children in early development<sup>3</sup>. Down the road, high school students with high levels of arts engagement are five times more likely to graduate high

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/arts-and-culture>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.arts.gov/news/press-releases/2024/arts-cultural-sector-hit-all-time-high-2022-value-added-us-economy#:~:text=Washington%2C%20DC%E2%80%94New%20data%20released,trillion%2C%20to%20the%20U.S.%20economy.>

<sup>3</sup> <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/study-art-awe-children-generosity-2276455#:~:text=Children%20Who%20Are%20Exposed%20to,Adults%2C%20a%20New%20Study%20Says>

school, are three times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree, and are more likely to earn "mostly A's" in college. Without the NEA's robust support, youth in under resourced communities will fail to realize these positive effects.<sup>4</sup>

Older adults also feel a profoundly positive impact when engaging with art. In particular, participating in the arts can help promote healthy aging through improvisation, community engagement, and physical action. In fact, those elements of art are helpful in reducing our worst ailments, from depression to dementia. Again, those benefits should not only be sheltered in the wealthiest communities who can afford to supplement their local arts economy.

The arts should also not only be for those affected by these ailments, but for those family members that care for them. The growing community of 53 million caregivers in this country were among the hardest impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, making them important recipients and providers of healing through art. As a result, the Creative Coalition has teamed up with AARP to launch the Entertainment Industry Commission on Caregiving, which will collaborate with caregiving organizations and individuals to raise awareness and promote authentic caregiving stories for television, film, and other media. It is long overdue that we shine a light on the estimated \$600 billion in unpaid care provided by those individuals every year and identify them as a group who seeks out the arts for their own healing.

As we saw during last November's floor consideration of the FY 2024 Interior/EPA Appropriations Bill, the threat to the NEA is as real as it was in the 1980s, when The Creative Coalition was founded in reaction to a proposal to zero out the program. Now, as then, The Creative Coalition stands ready to fight for the minute portion of the overall federal budget that the National Endowment for the Arts so rightly deserves.

Investing in our country's arts and culture industry by funding the NEA is commonsense. Every \$1 spent on NEA leverages \$9 in non-federal spending, and our request would only constitute 0.005 percent of the federal budget. Furthermore, the U.S. arts and culture industry is a linchpin in the U.S. economy. In 2022, according to federal statistics, the arts and culture industry brought in a \$21 billion trade surplus when so much of the U.S. economy continues to operate in a trade deficit.

As you know well, the pandemic was an experiment in how Americans spend their free time, prompting many to turn to the arts. Polls indicate that 42% of consumers participated in reading and 17% of consumers participated in painting, drawing, pottery, and other art during the pandemic. Among Gen Z, those activities were among the top 5 most popular hobbies, at around 35% of consumers<sup>5</sup>. This is at the same time as this group struggles with the highest generational reports of depression and anxiety. It is well-proven that arts education improves mental health and education outcomes, which is why we need the arts now more than ever.

But, while the pandemic connected people with the arts, it also crippled the industry which was the source of that relief. The U.S. arts economy shrank at nearly twice the rate of the whole

<sup>4</sup> <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/study-art-awe-children-generosity-2276455#:~:text=Children%20Who%20Are%20Exposed%20to,Adults%2C%20a%20New%20Study%20says>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pitneybowes.com/us/blog/pandemic-hobbies.html>

economy during that period. That is why the NEA must be funded at robust levels to use the multiplying power of the arts to restore education and mental health to pre-pandemic levels<sup>6</sup>. This fiscal year, the NEA has been hard at work distributing more than 1,200 grants totaling over \$32 million. For example, in Chairman Simpson's district, the NEA awarded a \$10,000 grant to the Boise Philharmonic Association to provide elementary school students with an opportunity to experience the philharmonic perform a program of educational orchestral music.

One of the NEA's most successful programs is the Creative Forces: NEA Military Healing Arts Network, a collaboration between the National Endowment for the Arts, the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, and state arts agencies that provide creative art therapy to help service members deal with trauma as part of an integrated care model. According to a Rand publication, *Invisible Wounds: Mental Health and Cognitive Care Needs of America's Returning Veterans*, evidence-based treatments for PTSD and depression, like arts therapy, could save more than \$1,000 in healthcare costs per veteran, a total of \$1.7 billion. Via the Creative Forces program, service members receive NEA-supported writing, music, and visual art therapy<sup>7</sup>.

Last fiscal year, veterans in Helena, Montana could participate in six-week classes incorporating painting, creative writing, poetry, and photography conducted by the Cohesion Dance Project using a \$10,000 grant from the Creative Forces Program.<sup>8</sup> The Creative Coalition has facilitated numerous visits between the entertainment industry and veterans and active-duty service members at Walter Reed in Bethesda, MD and at Fort Belvoir, VA. The testimonials we heard are backed up by a survey conducted at Walter Reed, where 85 percent of military patients said art therapy was helpful to their healing.

We once again, The Creative Coalitions calls on Congress to recognize the important contributions of the NEA by increasing its funding level in Fiscal Year 2025 to \$211 million. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.arts.gov/news/press-releases/2022/new-data-show-economic-impact-covid-19-arts-culture-sector>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.arts.gov/news/press-releases/2023/creative-forces-community-engagement-grant-applications-now-available>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.creativeforcesnrc.arts.gov/programs/community-engagement/2023-grant-projects/>



**Brent Keith, Federal Lands Policy Team Lead, The Nature Conservancy**  
**Written Testimony Addressing Programs under the Department of the Interior and**  
**U.S. Forest Service for Fiscal Year 2025**  
**United States House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations**  
**Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies**  
**May 8, 2024**

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit recommendations for fiscal year 2025 (FY25) appropriations. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for people and nature. Investments in our natural systems help bolster resiliency, respond to climate change and, if equitably implemented, aid socially and economically disadvantaged communities. Recent investments support but do not supplant the need for ongoing program funding through the appropriations process. A robust appropriations package is needed to ensure long-term success for critical programs under the Subcommittee's jurisdiction.

**Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).** We are grateful for the Committee's continued leadership and support for conservation and recreation needs through dedicated funding of LWCF. Project demand in every state and county continues to far outstrip the \$900 million a year of available funding for the program. TNC appreciates the continued support from Congress to improve the appraisal process and real estate policies of agencies delivering LWCF programs.

**Forest Restoration and Fire.** TNC recommends funding for U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Department of the Interior (DOI) programs that address forest threats like catastrophic wildfires, disease outbreaks and pest impacts. TNC supports substantial reinvestments in programs that increase forest resilience, specifically those that are collaboratively developed, science-based, climate-informed and ecologically focused. These programs also create jobs, support local economies and reduce wildfire risk to communities, among other benefits.

An estimated 50 million acres are in critical need of wildfire resilience treatments across the United States. A 2021 TNC [report](#) recommends an investment surge of \$5-6 billion per year over the next 10 years to increase wildfire resilience and provide communities with much-needed resources for infrastructure and adaptation. In 2023, TNC released another [report](#) detailing 88 comprehensive wildfire policy recommendations backed by a diverse group of partners.

TNC recommends investing in the USFS Hazardous Fuels Program at \$207 million and DOI's Fuels Management Program at \$288 million. In addition, TNC supports fully funding the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program at \$34 million and the State Fire Assistance at a minimum of \$76 million. TNC also supports funding Burned Area Rehabilitation at a minimum of \$20 million in order to address the gap in post-fire restoration needs.

**Investing in Ecosystem Restoration, Reforestation and Planting.** TNC supports sufficient funding for programs that enhance water quality, biodiversity and forest health. TNC recommends funding the Urban and Community Forestry program at a minimum of \$40 million

to support the increase in tree cover in urban landscapes to improve air quality, reduce electricity, and help cities mitigate stormwater and floodwater. TNC also recommends budgeting \$20 million for the Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) Program. LSR promotes science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes across multiple jurisdictions.

Additionally, Vegetation and Watershed Management promotes restoration and climate resilience of national forests through watershed treatment, invasive plant species control and reforestation. TNC supports a funding level for this program at or above \$33 million in FY25.

**Research and Planning.** TNC recommends sufficiently funding research programs to include the USFS Research and Development Program (with carve-outs for climate research and climate hubs), Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) and Joint Fire Science for USFS and DOI. Advances in FIA measuring and monitoring are critical for public and private forest carbon management. Investments in the Joint Fire Science programs would provide applied science solutions to improve land management and protect communities through interagency partnerships.

The Land Management, Assessment and Monitoring program provides foundational stewardship direction to USFS related to high-carbon, mature and old-growth forests on public lands. In FY25, TNC supports funding this program at \$32 million, \$10 million of which should go toward developing adaptive strategies for the conservation of old-growth forests and to assist USFS in creating a national old-growth monitoring network.

**State, Private and Tribal Forestry.** Forest health protection programs work to minimize the impacts caused by invasive pests and disease. The Federal Lands Forest Health Management and the Cooperative Lands Forest Health Management programs help maintain carbon stocks and reduce outbreaks that destroy iconic American trees. TNC supports funding levels for these programs at a minimum of \$17 million (federal) and \$33 million (cooperative).

Additionally, TNC supports reducing barriers for private landowners to reforest and improve management of their lands. The USFS Forest Stewardship Program supports landowners to sustainably manage their forests, with far-reaching cross-boundary benefits. TNC asks that this program be funded at \$22 million in FY25.

**Endangered Species.** TNC supports continuing funding of at least \$60 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund. This funding supports critical matching grants to states and territories for conservation and species recovery efforts on non-federal lands. TNC requests the Subcommittee's continued support for Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) funding and HCP Land Acquisition Grants.

**State and Tribal Wildlife Grants.** Substantial federal investments are essential to support strategic actions by state, tribal and federal agencies and the conservation community to protect wildlife and their habitats. TNC appreciates the continued support from members of this Subcommittee to address these significant funding needs through ongoing work to enact the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.

**Wildlife Conservation Programs.** TNC urges the Subcommittee to continue funding for North American Wetlands Conservation Act grants, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Migratory Bird Management Programs and FWS Coastal Program at no less than the FY24 funding levels. Likewise, TNC supports continued strong funding for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, the Cooperative Landscape Conservation and Adaptive Science programs and the National Fish Habitat Initiative.

**International Programs.** Programs appropriated annually within DOI and USFS with a global focus include DOI's Office of International Affairs, FWS Multinational Species Conservation Funds, FWS Wildlife Without Borders regional and global programs, the National Park Service's International Program and the USFS International Program. TNC requests modest increases over FY24 funding levels for these accounts and supports implementation of the Lacey Act to manifest U.S. global leadership.

**National Wildlife Refuge System.** Found in every state and territory, national wildlife refuges conserve the diversity of America's environmentally sensitive and economically vital ecosystems, including oceans, coasts, wetlands, deserts, tundra, prairies and forests. TNC supports increased funding for the system's operations and maintenance accounts to meet the well-documented needs of the national wildlife refuge system. We support funding for the refuge system at the President's requested level of \$602 million in FY25.

**Sage Grouse Conservation.** TNC requests \$85 million to support the implementation of the Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy (BLM: \$75 million, FWS: \$5 million, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS): \$5 million). These resources are needed to implement on-the-ground projects and monitor habitat treatments, address rangeland fire and noxious and invasive grasses, fund suppression and restoration efforts and facilitate the partnership and science necessary for effective conservation in western states. TNC continues to request the removal of language that would bar FWS from proposing a rule to list the greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act from the FY25 bill.

**BLM Land Management and Renewable Energy Development.** TNC supports ongoing work to expedite renewable energy development, including funding to operationalize the Renewable Energy Coordination Offices and regional clean energy plans. TNC recommends robust funding to support BLM's thoughtful planning and management of public lands. This includes the National Landscape Conservation System at \$65.8 million, the Resource Management Planning at \$71.6 million, the consolidated Wildlife and Aquatic Habitat Management budget line at \$153.359 million and the Renewable Energy Development program at \$53 million.

**BLM's Aquatic Resources Program.** Aquatic resources on BLM lands are among the most important, productive and diverse resources in the nation. Overall, BLM stewards over 155,000 miles of streams and rivers, which provide drinking water to one in 10 Americans. Increasing support for BLM's aquatic resource management efforts is key to providing reliable water supplies, building long-term wildfire and drought resilience, and improving the ability of BLM to conserve the economic and resource values of public lands. BLM's Aquatic Resources Program also works to prevent the establishment and spread of aquatic invasive species and

sustain public access to quality hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities. TNC requests \$65 million for the BLM Aquatic Resources Program in FY25.

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Geographic Programs.** TNC urges the Subcommittee to continue robust funding for EPA's geographic programs, including the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the Chesapeake Bay, Puget Sound, Long Island Sound and Gulf of Mexico programs. These programs make significant contributions to protecting habitat, improving water quality and enhancing resilience in the large landscapes they encompass.

**Colorado River Basin Recovery Programs.** The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program take a balanced approach to the recovery of four threatened and endangered fish species in the upper Colorado River basin. The FWS budget includes \$1.64 million to support these programs as well as fish hatchery needs associated with the recovery plans. TNC supports the budget request for these programs in FY25.

**Restoring Rivers and Streams.** Removing problematic dams and upgrading culverts can improve public safety and provide environmental, economic and social benefits. TNC recommends \$30 million for the FWS National Fish Passage Program and funding increases for USFS barrier removal efforts including the Legacy Roads and Trails program; State, Private, and Tribal Forestry programs; and National Forest System programs such as Vegetation and Watershed Management. Even with enhanced spending levels under the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, demand for aquatic connectivity funds far exceeds the amount of funding available.

**Federal Priority Streamgauge (FPS) Network.** USGS operates the FPS Network to provide continuous streamflow information at over 8,400 locations nationwide. TNC supports \$33 million for the FPS Network to maintain existing gages. TNC also requests \$68 million in Cooperative Matching Funds (CMF) for streamgaging and protecting the approximately 5,275 CMF-supported streamgages already in place and functioning nationwide. Lastly, TNC supports \$35 million for the Next Generation Water Observation System to expand this program and allow USGS to modernize water data delivery systems across the United States.

**3D Elevation Program (3DEP):** 3DEP sponsors satellite topographical mapping, a critical resource that provides communities with high-quality elevation mapping. This information is vital for assessing and developing strategies to combat challenges such as flood risk, drought and erosion. It also informs investments in infrastructure, water resource management and protection and much more. The program also equips USGS and other federal agencies with the best scientific information to prepare for threats from natural hazards. Understanding these threats can help prevent communities from developing in unsafe areas and can allow risk mitigation in developed areas. TNC supports continued funding of \$42.9 million in FY25 for 3DEP.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit TNC's recommendations for the FY25 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.



May 10, 2024  
 Submitted by The Wilderness Society  
 Lydia Weiss  
 Senior Director, Government Relations

**Written Testimony to the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies re: Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the FY25 House Interior Appropriations bill and process. On behalf of our one million members and supporters, The Wilderness Society (TWS) respectfully urges Congress to sufficiently increase funding for the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the US Forest Service (USFS). Budget cuts and spending caps from the Fiscal Responsibility Act are hindering agency capacity to advance commitments to clean energy projects, environmental protections, and environmental justice for all our communities. When adequately funded, these agencies create jobs, foster climate resilience, save taxpayer money, and mitigate costly future harms.

Congress should support the following priorities to address critical programmatic funding needs in any appropriations package/legislation:

**Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)**

Tribal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) FY25 Request: at least \$8 million

Tribal Nations and communities continue to highlight barriers to accessing LWCF funding with the existing program requirements to partner with or apply through states. To strengthen Tribal land management, TWS supports significant funding of at least \$8 million to create a new Tribal LWCF land acquisition program. The new program would protect and conserve natural resource areas of cultural importance or that have significant recreational benefits for Tribal Nations and communities.

**Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**

Cultural Resources Account FY25 Request: at least \$25 million

We urge the Subcommittee to provide at least \$25 million for BLM's cultural resources management account to inventory and protect cultural resources, manage paleontological resources, and improve government-to-government consultation with Tribes. We also request the Subcommittee include \$1 million specifically for the National Cultural Resources Information Management System (NCRIMS) to support collaboration with Western State Historic Preservation Officers to standardize and integrate cultural resources data.

National Conservation Lands FY25 Request: at least \$78 million

The National Conservation Lands encompass more than 37 million acres of National Monuments, National Conservation Areas (NCAs), the National Trails System, and similar designations, as well as Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Further investment is necessary to ensure BLM can properly manage this system of critical landscapes, complete and implement resource management plans, and rebuild staffing needed to do this work.

Oil & Gas Management and Oversight FY25 Request: \$166.9 million, including inspection fees  
 We support the Administration's request of \$166.9 million to enhance capacity, perform inspections, and implement long-overdue reforms while enabling the continued permitting of renewable energy rights-of-way. TWS particularly supports the agency's proposal to implement inspection fees pursuant to language proposed in the FY23 appropriations bill to cover the costs of BLM's inspection activities – this would better align the onshore program with the offshore program and shift the cost burden of these critical inspections from communities to industry.

Renewable Energy Management Program FY25 Request: \$53.1 million

BLM is working to increase staffing and capacity to prioritize and improve permitting coordination on many utility-scale renewable energy projects. BLM's Renewable Energy Program has been critical to achieving, and exceeding, the statutory goal of permitting 25 gigawatts of renewable energy on public lands by 2025, and full appropriations are critical to meeting, and exceeding, the Administration's goal of carbon pollution-free by 2035.

Resource Management Planning, Assessment, and Monitoring FY25 Request: \$71.6 million

BLM faces a significant backlog of conservation, restoration, and planning needs, and about 80% of BLM's existing resource management plans (RMPs) are outdated or need revision, including:

Alaska: BLM's Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act 17(d)(1) Draft Environmental Impact Statement highlighted substantial deficiencies in the 5 underlying RMPs: Kobuk/Steward, Bay, East, Bering Sea-Western Interior, and Ring of Fire. TWS encourages allocating sufficient funding and resources for BLM's Alaska Office to undertake a programmatic RMP process to correct deficiencies, modernize plans, incorporate Indigenous and traditional knowledge, and make this plan climate ready.

High Divide: Idaho and Montana's High Divide is essential for maintaining continental-scale wildlife connectivity. With over 4 million surface acres managed through the Upper Snake, Challis, Salmon, Dillon, and Butte Field Offices, this region's land use plans have outdated migration data and fail to address wildlife movement, connectivity, and landscape intactness. TWS requests \$5 million additional planning dollars to address habitat connectivity threats and initiate preplanning to revise the Upper Snake and Lemhi RMPs and amend the Challis, Dillon, and Butte RMPs.

Nevada: BLM's Nevada State Office needs continued funding to successfully modernize Nevada's 12 RMPs through a single Environmental Impact Statement. A recent evaluation found planning issues related to cultural, ecological, economic, environmental, resource, scenic, and social values and uses. We request \$15 million be allocated through the appropriations process to continue and complete this effort.

**Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)**

National Wildlife Refuge System FY25 Request: at least \$602.3 million for Operations and Maintenance (O&M)

The Refuge System is the largest network of public lands and waters dedicated to wildlife conservation in the world. However, after a decade of underinvestment, inflation, and soaring visitation, \$2.2 billion is needed for O&M. Within that, we request at least \$4.9 million for the Refuge System Conservation Planning line item. Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs) are crucial to the purposes of each refuge unit yet 60% of refuges lack a current CCP.

**National Park Service (NPS)**Every Kid Outdoors FY25 Request: \$25 million

Every Kid Outdoors (EKO) provides fourth graders and their families with free access to any national park for an entire year, helping millions of children build lifelong relationships with their public lands. However, the EKO program has never been funded by Congress, leaving EKO unable to reach its full potential of reaching all families.

Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) Program FY25 Request: \$125 million

Established by Congress in 2014 and funded through LWCF's State and Local Assistance Program, ORLP is a national competitive grant program that provides funding to urban communities to create new outdoor recreation spaces, reinvigorate existing parks, and forge connections between people and the outdoors in economically underserved communities.

Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program FY 24 Request: \$15 million

The RTCA program helps local communities and public land managers develop or restore parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats. The program bolsters community-led conservation and sustainable outdoor recreation projects.

**US Forest Service (USFS)**Capital Improvement and Maintenance – Trails FY25 request: \$21.5 million

Recreational trails are the gateway to a wide range of activities in the National Forests System (NFS). Funding the trails program at this requested level will help to address the agency's significant trail maintenance backlog.

Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) FY25 request: \$34 million

The CFLRP successfully prioritizes holistic restoration at the landscape scale. Congress should fully fund and expand the CFLRP to increase essential science-based forest restoration projects on public lands.

Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) FY25 request: \$32.2 million for program; \$54.9 million for salary and expenses

The FIA's scientific knowledge on the current state of the nation's forest is critical to support sound policy and forest management decisions. This requested increase reflects the many demands currently placed on the program, despite inadequate resources for implementation.

Joint Fire Sciences Program (JFSP) FY25 request: \$8 million

The JFSP is unique among federal research programs in its focus on applied fire science through interagency partnerships. Fire and land managers from the Administration identify, with community and collaborator input, the most urgent research needs around fire management. The JFSP competitively solicits the best proposals, and research findings are delivered to fire and land managers and practitioners through the JFSP-funded Fire Science Exchange Network. The JFSP, with only a modest budget, is highly efficient and effective at meeting the needs of fire practitioners.

Land Management Planning, Assessment, and Monitoring FY25 request: \$32 million

One-third of management plans are over 20 years old and cannot provide adequate guidance in the era of climate change and unprecedented biodiversity loss. The 2012 planning rule was meant to speed up planning, engage communities, provide land designation opportunities, promote species recovery, and establish robust monitoring programs. Monitoring is essential to enable adaptive management in the face of changing conditions, but the NFS rarely has the funds needed to conduct adequate monitoring. We ask Congress to include report language that ensures 25% of planning funds is devoted to monitoring.

Legacy Roads and Trails (LRT) FY25 request: \$100 million, including salaries and expenses

The LRT program primarily addresses water quality problems caused by USFS' extensive road and trail network, particularly old logging roads. Decommissioning unneeded roads, restoring fish passage, and providing critically needed maintenance to roads and trails is essential to protecting water quality, recreational opportunities, and economic benefits in our national forests and adjacent communities. Congress should increase funding for ecologically beneficial road improvements and decommissioning.

Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness FY25 request: \$94.367 million

National Forests and Grasslands provide a great diversity of recreation opportunities, connecting the American public with nature in an unmatched variety of settings and activities. Funding at this level will give the agency the resources needed to continue providing these opportunities.

Research and Development (R&D) Programs FY25 request: \$55 million

Restoring and maintaining healthy ecosystems across NFS lands depends on robust R&D to generate knowledge and technologies that will help protect habitat and recover at-risk species. We ask that the Subcommittee also include report language to encourage funding to focus on science foundational to strategies to enhance the resilience of old-growth and mature forests to climate-induced changes in fire behavior.

Watershed Condition Framework (WCF) and Water Source Protection Plans (WSPP) FY25 request: \$30 million each

The WCF identifies and restores priority watersheds across NFS lands, and the WSPP encourages watershed restoration partnerships between the USFS and downstream water users. Increased funding for WCF would allow watersheds that are degraded or at-risk to be returned to a properly functioning condition, while also creating well-paying rural jobs. USFS also lacks funding to work with willing partners, such as water utilities, to fund and implement projects that protect water supplies.

**National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Implementation**

We ask the Appropriations Committee to provide funding to ensure all agencies adequate capacity to conduct environmental reviews under NEPA. We know that, despite widespread claims, NEPA is not the reason for permitting delays, and a more inclusive and meaningful environmental review process can save time, money, and lead to better decisions. It is therefore critical that agencies receive adequate resources to staff the positions responsible for shepherding the environmental review process.



Written Statement of  
 Theatre Communications Group  
 Submitted May 10, 2024  
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
 Committee on Appropriations I United States House of Representatives  
 The Importance of Federal Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the subcommittee, Theatre Communications Group—the national service organization for the American theatre—is grateful for this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of our over 500 not-for-profit member theatres across the country and the approximately 10.4 million audience members that the not-for-profit theatre community served in 2022. **We urge you to support the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) appropriations in the FY 2025 Interior Appropriations bill to no less than \$211 million, in order to broaden access to the cultural, educational, and economic benefits of the arts and to advance creativity and innovation in communities across the United States.**

The entire not-for-profit arts industry has a history of stimulating the economy, creating jobs, and attracting tourism dollars. Prior to the pandemic, the not-for-profit arts generated \$166.3 billion annually in economic activity, supported 4.6 million jobs, and returned \$27.5 billion in government revenue.

The arts sector is an economic engine which uplifts, engages, educates, and innovates. The NEA can help leverage the arts sector to play a key role in the work to contribute to the American economy. The arts sector is also a powerful conduit for bridging and healing deep divisions. The NEA has a role in redressing systemic injustice—including long-time inequities in arts funding, as well as a lack of appreciation for creativity from all cultures. The NEA's role is to make sure all Americans have access to the arts no matter where they live. Among the NEA's accomplishments is the growth of arts activity in areas of the nation that have been under-resourced, especially in rural and inner-city communities. In many communities, NEA grants support free performances, as well as reduced ticket prices for those who cannot afford to buy a ticket. A significant percentage of grants benefit those who have fewer opportunities to participate in the arts.



Federal funding for the arts creates a significant return, generating nine dollars in matching funds for each federal dollar awarded, and is clearly an investment in the economic health of America. At this time of financial stress and economic uncertainty, increased federal funding is essential. The not-for-profit sector will need sustained support to recover, rebuild, and be able to fully return to serving communities.

Our country's not-for-profit theatres present new and classical works and serve as catalysts for economic growth in their local communities. These theatres also nurture and provide artistic homes for the development of the current and future generations of acclaimed writers, actors, directors, and designers working in regional theatre, on Broadway, and in the film and television industries. Our theatres develop innovative educational activities and outreach programs, and before the pandemic provided millions of young people, including "at-risk" youth, with important skills for the future by expanding their creativity and developing problem-solving, reasoning, and communication abilities—preparing today's students to become tomorrow's citizens. At the same time, theatres have become increasingly responsive to their communities, serving as healing forces in difficult times and producing work that reflects and celebrates the strength of our nation's diversity.

**Here are some recent examples of NEA grants and their community impact:**

**Alley Theatre** in Houston, Texas received a \$20,000 NEA grant to support educational and community engagement activities centered around the Hero's Journey. Utilizing sets from a cancelled production of *The Odyssey*, students will be invited to workshops where they will be introduced to the 12 stages of the hero's journey, which will serve as the source material for a staged devised piece of theatre. Students will then collaborate on creating a collective hero's journey poem based around those 12 steps. Other activities will include guest artist presentations and tours of Alley Theatre's world-class production center. The project will benefit high school students in the greater Houston region.

**Boise Contemporary Theater (BCT)** received a \$25,000 NEA grant to support its 4th Annual BIPOC Playwrights Festival. The Playwrights Festival, founded in 2021 with assistance from the Idaho Women's Charitable Foundation, seeks to champion emerging and mid-career playwrights by connecting exceptional works with professional actors, directors, and technicians. It gives playwrights of color the chance to workshop their script during the week with a director and full cast. Hearing their words read out loud by professional actors provides valuable feedback. The festival culminates in two nights of staged readings. This experience helps inform their work, building the careers of playwrights of color, so they can keep telling their stories. Boise Contemporary Theater is a professional nonprofit theatre company in Boise, Idaho. Founded in 1997, BCT is the only nonprofit professional theatre within 300 miles dedicated to producing challenging new work. BCT serves 15,000 visitors annually and over 2,000 students through education and outreach programs.



**Pittsburgh Public Theater** received a \$35,000 NEA grant to support the world premiere production of *The Coffin Maker* by Mark Clayton Southers. Set in the 1840s, freed man Lawrence and his wife Eula, still enslaved, serve as the region's undertakers and coffin makers. The play deals with themes of justice, judgment, slavery, and agency at a time and place where the working definitions around those words were blurred. Inspired by August Wilson's *Century Cycle*, Southers is in the process of creating his own cycle of plays centering Black experiences in America during each decade of the 19th century. The production will serve theatre artists and audiences in Pittsburgh.

**Portland Stage Company** in Portland, Maine, received a \$15,000 grant to support the world premiere production of *Manning* by Benjamin Benne. Winner of the Clauder Competition, celebrating the distinctive voice of New England playwrights, the bilingual play explores grief through interactions with the supernatural. After the death of his mother, Freddy and his father Julio spread her ashes in the garden, and a giant zucchini that seems to have a heartbeat sprouts overnight. Together, with his brother, Freddy tries to coax their despondent father out of his room. All three men begin to develop language for their individual experiences of loss through their interactions with the supernatural vegetable. The production will serve theatre artists and audiences in Portland, Maine.

These are only a handful of examples of the kinds of extraordinary programs supported by the National Endowment for the Arts. In terms of pre-pandemic annual appropriations, the Endowment's Theatre Program was able to fund only 60% of the applications it receives, so 40% of applying theatres were typically turned away—in part because available funds have remained insufficient. Indeed, the NEA was able to fund only 7% of the eligible applicants through its American Rescue Plan program, further illustrating the unmet need for Endowment funding. Theatres were among the first to close and the last to reopen, and the financial consequences have been severe. The need across the arts field remains drastic.

The arts infrastructure of the United States is critical to the nation's well-being and economic vitality. Restaurants and hotels, along with other businesses, often depend upon the theatres and other arts organizations in their communities and the success of these sectors is intertwined. The arts community is supported by a remarkable combination of government, business, foundation, and individual donors and represents a striking example of federal/state/private partnership. Federal support for the arts provides a measure of stability for arts programs nationwide and is critical at a time when other sources of funding are diminished.

Theatres work hard to serve their communities and maintain connection with audiences through performances and education offerings. Audiences have still not returned to pre-pandemic levels and costs continue to rise dramatically, and so theatres are still trying to manage the financial consequences of the impact of COVID-19 which we anticipate will be felt for several more years.



The NEA's FY 2024 budget is \$207 million. We thank the subcommittee for its leadership in supporting the work of the NEA. Theatre Communications Group urges you to support the largest possible increase for FY25 for the NEA, at no less than \$211 million to maintain citizen access to the cultural, educational, and economic benefits of the arts; to advance creativity and innovation in communities across the United States; to restore the theatre sector beyond disaster relief, and toward ongoing recovery and service to communities. Please invest in the arts at a level that reflects the significant role the arts play in our society.

Thank you for considering this request.

Phyllis Straight-Millan

Board Member, Naturalist, and Trail Rover at Tualatin River National Wildlife Complex

The Refuge system needs at least \$2.2 billion to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife dependent recreation and connect communities to nature. The Presidents FY25 request of \$602 million is an important step towards that goal. What I know as a voting constituent is that we need to prioritize those things that provide a positive benefit to all citizens. I believe funding our National Wildlife Refuge serves all citizens.

As a naturalist volunteer at Tualatin River National Wildlife Complex I get to experience the joy and excitement of the children and adults who experience the Refuge for the first time, or the 100<sup>th</sup> time.

The Fish & Wildlife Service have done a fantastic job with limited resources, but how long can that continue. As a naturalist, I hear the rangers trying to figure out how to allow more student groups to visit the refuge, but they just cannot because of staffing and resources.

Just last week a student group came to the Refuge, the three young girls were excited and happy to be there even though it was cold and rainy. They talked about how they could not wait to come back at the end. When I get depressed about the future of the world due to climate change and other issues, I am buoyed by listen to these youngsters. They understand and want to be actively involved in conservation. They know a lot about the natural world, and want to be a part of making it better.

A disability advocacy group came to the Refuge recently and we (Refugee staff and volunteers) toured the Refuge, with an eye for how it could be improved to provide a safer and more inclusive environment for those with varying handicaps. There was a portion of the trail that was determined to be a significant hazard to those in a wheel chair. Fish & Wildlife totally agreed, and are eager to fix it, but where are the funds to make this needed improvement. Along with staffing shortage, there is a funding shortage.

The Refuge is in a metropolitan area, through the efforts of the Refuge staff I have personally witnessed the change in the demographics of those visiting the Refuge. This did not "just" happen. The staff at the Refuge has worked tirelessly to hold inclusive events, with Latino groups, the Chinese coalition, Representatives of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. I have heard their frustration as how they would like to do more events, and reach out to more groups. Recently, a connection was made with Women Veterans. Do we as the volunteers want to see a program/event for these women who have given of themselves. Absolutely! But, will this happen, possibly again there is limited staff and limited funding to reach out to all the diverse groups who would benefit physically and emotionally from time in the outdoors at the Refuge. Nature does heal. But without adequate staffing and resources this and many other deserving groups cannot be encouraged and welcomed at the Refuge.

Thank You for your consideration.

# USGS COALITION

Testimony of the USGS Coalition  
Elizabeth Duffy, Chair  
Regarding the U.S. Geological Survey FY 2025 Budget

To the  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
May 10, 2024

The USGS Coalition is writing in support of the Administration's continued focus on the federal science apparatus, and to further recommend an increase in funding to support the critical science programming of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to better enable USGS to fulfill its mission.

The USGS Coalition, representing over 85 organizations spanning scientific associations, universities, businesses, and natural resource managers, strongly supports the Administration's emphasis on bolstering federal scientific capabilities and urges Congress to increase funding for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to enhance its critical science initiatives. To fully implement the agency's mission and fulfill the USGS 21st-Century Science Strategy released in 2021 will **require \$1.85 billion in annual appropriations**. Additionally, we call upon Congress to restore the \$42 million in cuts from the USGS's FY2024 enacted appropriations. We firmly believe the agency needs to reach at least this funding level to ensure that the USGS is able to respond to 21st-century challenges with 21st-century science and technology.

The USGS plays an indispensable role as the nation's premier scientific agency within the Department of the Interior, serving as a cornerstone for unbiased, evidence-based decision-making across government agencies, academia, industry, and the public. From informing land management strategies to providing essential data for disaster preparedness, the USGS's contributions are felt in every U.S. state and territory. Moreover, its collaborations with agencies such as FEMA, DOD, NASA and DOE underscore its far-reaching impact on national security, environmental stewardship, and economic prosperity. However, despite its vital contributions, the USGS has faced chronic underfunding in recent years, hindering its ability to reflect and respond to the nation's continuously evolving needs.

In light of the evolving landscape of challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and natural hazards, the USGS requires adequate resources to fulfill its mission and uphold its commitment to excellence in science. We commend the Administration's recognition of the importance of federal science and urge Congress to allocate \$1.85 billion in funding for the USGS in FY 2025, aligning with the agency's 21st-Century Science Strategy.

Key Priorities:

- Reinforcing federal science programming to confront climate change, invasive species, mineral exploration, natural hazards, and habitat preservation.
- Supporting the America the Beautiful Initiative by identifying conservation metrics and prioritizing high-value habitats.
- Strengthening interdisciplinary teams to develop data-driven decision support tools across various mission areas.

Specific Mission Area Needs:

- **Natural Hazards:** The USGS plays a crucial role in monitoring and assessing natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, and volcanic eruptions. By investing in advanced monitoring systems and research, we can improve our ability to predict and mitigate the impacts of these events, ultimately saving lives and reducing economic losses.
- **Core Science Systems:** The USGS serves as the nation's primary mapping agency, including geologic and topographic mapping for federal and state requirements, national geospatial coordination, satellite operations and remote sensing. The agency's data and products are vital to understanding, monitoring, and detecting changes that affect the nation's natural and agricultural resources, the economy, public safety, and security, such as those produced by the 3D Elevation Program.
- **Ecosystems:** The USGS conducts research to understand and conserve our nation's ecosystems, including forests, wetlands, and wildlife habitats. By studying ecosystem dynamics, biodiversity, and the impacts of climate change, the USGS provides essential knowledge for managing natural resources, preserving biodiversity, and climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.
- **Water Resources:** Water is a fundamental resource that sustains life, agriculture, industry, and ecosystems. The USGS provides critical data and analysis to support informed decision-making on water allocation, quality, and sustainability. With growing concerns about water scarcity and contamination, increased funding for the USGS is needed to address these ongoing, pressing challenges.
- **Energy and Minerals:** The USGS conducts research to assess the nation's energy and mineral resources, including fossil fuels, metals, critical minerals and rare earth elements. This information is vital for ensuring a secure and sustainable supply of these resources, supporting economic growth, energy independence, and environmental stewardship. Increase funding will allow the agency to advance initiatives like Earth Mapping Resources Initiative to secure critical resources and support the energy transition.

Challenges and Solutions:

- Ensure sustained funding to meet national needs, train the scientific workforce, and address maintenance backlogs.
- Prioritize Science Support funding to streamline operations and facilitate timely research dissemination.
- Uphold scientific integrity policies to safeguard national security, public health, and environmental conservation.

- Secure long-term funding for the USGS Library to preserve critical geological data and support diverse stakeholders.

While the USGS has achieved remarkable milestones with limited resources, there remain significant challenges that require increased investment. Sustained funding is essential to address critical needs such as research backlog, workforce development, and infrastructure modernization.

Furthermore, we emphasize the importance of upholding scientific integrity, ensuring open access to data and research findings, and preserving vital resources like the USGS Library, which serves as a cornerstone of geoscience knowledge.

**USGS Coalition urges this Committee to prioritize funding for the U.S. Geological Survey in FY 2025 at \$1.85 billion**, recognizing its indispensable role in advancing science, informing policy, and safeguarding our nation's natural resources. The USGS Coalition remains available to address any inquiries regarding this request or the initiatives outlined above. Please contact Coalition Chair Elizabeth Duffy at [eduffy@federalaffairs.com](mailto:eduffy@federalaffairs.com).

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Jason Dafforn, General Manager, Valley Sanitary District

Honorable Members of Congress,

I am honored to submit testimony in support of the Fiscal Year 2025 community project request for Valley Sanitary District, in Indio, California for its Recycled Water Project Phase II. Valley Sanitary District is requesting \$1,920,000 for an Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water State Revolving Fund Grant. If the committee sees fit to provide this funding it will be the first community project awarded to Valley Sanitary District.

Valley Sanitary District, a stalwart institution serving the disadvantaged community of Indio and its neighbors since 1925, has been a beacon of environmental stewardship, ensuring a healthy environment and sustainable water supply.

In the face of increasing challenges posed by climate change and dwindling water resources, the Recycled Water Project Phase II represents a crucial step towards mitigating the impacts of water scarcity in the Coachella Valley.

With precipitation averaging a mere 3.1 inches annually, and groundwater levels declining, the reliance on imported water from the Colorado River is no longer a sustainable solution.

The proposed project, with its focus on upgrading wastewater treatment facilities to meet Title 22 tertiary treatment standards for beneficial reuse, presents a transformative opportunity. By recycling treated wastewater this initiative not only ensures a drought-proof water supply but also safeguards the local groundwater basin from further depletion.

Valley Sanitary District's request for \$1,920,000 from the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill is not just an investment in infrastructure; it's an investment in the resilience and prosperity of our communities. The benefits extend far beyond mere dollars and cents, reaching into the realms of environmental sustainability, public health, and social equity.

As stewards of our nation's resources, it is incumbent upon us to support initiatives like the Recycled Water Project Phase II, which not only address immediate needs but also pave the way for a more sustainable future. Let us seize this opportunity to diversify water supplies, protect vital ecosystems, and ensure the well-being of generations to come.



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May 10, 2024

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
 Chair, Subcommittee on Interior,  
 Environment, and Related Agencies  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 United States Senate  
 Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
 Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Interior,  
 Environment, and Related Agencies Committee  
 on Appropriations  
 United States Senate  
 Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Mike Simpson  
 Chair, Subcommittee on Interior,  
 Environment, and Related Agencies  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 United States House of Representatives  
 Washington DC, 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
 Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Interior,  
 Environment, and Related Agencies Committee  
 on Appropriations  
 United States House of  
 Representatives  
 Washington DC, 20515

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
 Chair, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
 Human Services, and Education  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 United States Senate  
 Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
 Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,  
 Health and Human Services, and Education  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 United States Senate  
 Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Robert Aderholt  
 Chair, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
 Human Services, and Education  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 United States House of  
 Representatives  
 Washington DC, 20515

The Honorable Rosa L.  
 DeLauro  
 Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,  
 Health and Human Services, and Education  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 United States House of  
 Representatives  
 Washington DC, 20515

**RE: FY25 Budget Recommendations from the Water Environment Federation**

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members,

Thank you for the opportunity for the Water Environment Federation (WEF) to provide this letter of funding priorities for the FY25 Interior & Environment Appropriations bill and the FY25 Labor, Health & Human Services, and Educations Appropriations bill. WEF<sup>1</sup> is the educational and technical association for over 34,000 water municipal wastewater and stormwater professionals, maintaining and improving water quality and public health in communities across the country and around the world. The FY25 Budget helps address WEF's top policy priorities to increase funding for water infrastructure, address water workforce

development needs, improve resilience to climate change, increase system sustainability, protect communities from emerging public health concerns, and improve environmental equity for all Americans.

FY25 Interior and Environment Appropriations Bill Recommendations

It's critical for Congress to include in the FY25 Budget full funding for the programs authorized in Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA), as well as several additional existing programs. Without this funding, communities will struggle to make progress on the local water infrastructure investments that are critically needed to protect public health and the environment, as well as ensure continued local economic prosperity. WEF strongly urges Congress to include in the FY25 Budget funding for the following programs:

- \$3.25 billion for Clean Water State Revolving Fund (IIJA Sect. 50210)
- \$3.25 billion for Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (IIJA Sect. 50102)
- \$80 million for Water Infrastructure Finance & Innovation Act (WIFIA) (IIJA Sect. 50215)
- \$280 million for Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants (OSG) program (IIJA Sect. 50204)
- \$1.6 billion for direct loans under USDA Rural Utilities Service Rural Water and Waste Disposal Program Account (Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act Sects. 306 & 381E(d)(2))
- \$670 million for grants under USDA Rural Utilities Service Rural Water and Waste Disposal Program Account (Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act Sects. 306, 306A, 306C, 306D, 306E, 310B, 306C(a)(2), 306D, 306E, and 381E(d)(2))
- \$25 million for Clean Water Infrastructure Resiliency and Sustainability Grants (IIJA Sect. 50205)
- \$20 million for Wastewater Energy Efficiency Grant Pilot Program (IIJA Sect. 50202)
- \$40 million for Connection Publicly Owned Treatment Works Grant Program (IIJA Sect. 50209)
- \$10 million for the Small & Medium POTW Circuit Riders Technical Assistance (IIJA Sect. 50206)
- \$5 million for 5 Centers of Excellence for Stormwater Control Infrastructure Technologies (CESCITs) (IIJA Sect. 50217)
- \$10 million for community planning and implementation grants for stormwater or watershed-based planning investments (IIJA Sect. 50217)
- \$25 million for the Alternative Source Water Pilot program (IIJA Sect. 50203)
- \$20 million for the Title XVI-WIIN Water Reuse Grants Program
- \$6 million for Water Infrastructure and Workforce Investment Grant Program (IIJA Sect. 50211)
- Funding to establish the Small Publicly Owned Treatment Works Efficiency Grant Program (IIJA Sect. 50207)
- \$2 million for EPA's Integrated Planning (IP) (33 U.S. Code, Sect. 1342(6)(s))

FY25 Labor, Health & Human Services, and Education Appropriations Bill Recommendations

WEF supports the inclusion of additional Emerging Infectious Disease funding to support Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) wastewater surveillance activities. As the President notes in his FY25 Budget proposal the Congress, wastewater surveillance demonstrated its value as a public health tool during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing timely, cost-effective, and unbiased information about community disease transmission.

Since its establishment in September 2020 by CDC, the National Wastewater Surveillance System (NWSS) has grown to more than 1,400 testing sites across 50 states, covering 1 in 3 people in the U.S. Through NWSS, CDC weaves together a network of independent, local wastewater efforts into a robust national system that has already expanded to include mpox virus surveillance. With funding and support from CDC, state and local health departments across the U.S. have used NWSS SARS-CoV-2 and mpox wastewater information to fill in clinical case data gaps, confirm trends observed in other public health surveillance datasets, prioritize vaccine distribution, alert healthcare providers about expected increases in community transmission, and communicate with the public. Many of these health departments are already analyzing wastewater for other emerging and re-emerging health threats, such as antibiotic resistance genes, *Candida auris*, measles virus, and poliovirus. The CDC and state public health departments have now begun using NWSS wastewater data to monitor for avian influenza A (H5N1) in communities nationwide.

Securing new base funding for wastewater surveillance will enable CDC to ensure equitable application of this tool, sustaining the NWSS network as a resilient and adaptable platform for addressing emerging infectious diseases in the U.S. To protect the tremendous progress in establishing this efficient public health surveillance system, we recommend including an additional \$130 million annually in Emerging Infectious Disease funding to CDC for wastewater surveillance.

- \$130 million for the National Wastewater Surveillance System (NWSS) administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Thank you for your support of infrastructure funding and public health protection priorities, and we look forward to continuing to work with Congress on the FY25 Budget.

Thank you,



Steve Dye  
Senior Director, Government Affairs  
Water Environment Federation

<sup>1</sup> The Water Environment Federation (WEF) is a global nonprofit organization of water quality professionals. For more than 90 years, WEF has provided premier education and the latest technical expertise to the water sector. WEF pursues solutions to today's critical water sector challenges, including infrastructure funding, water affordability, and workforce sustainability and diversity. WEF advances innovation and technology and promotes the circular economy through water reuse, nutrient recovery, and energy conservation and generation. With worldwide members and partners, WEF supports the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals and is a proud partner of UN Water. Each year WEF organizes WEFTEC, the world's largest annual water quality exhibition and conference. To learn more, visit [www.wef.org](http://www.wef.org).

Written Statement on FY 2025 Requests  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
United States House of Representatives  
May 9, 2024  
Contact: Greg Fogel ([gfogel@watereuse.org](mailto:gfogel@watereuse.org)), WaterReuse Association

Thank you for the opportunity to present our FY 2025 funding requests for programs administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). **The WaterReuse Association (WaterReuse) urges you to include \$25 million for the Pilot Program for Alternative Water Source Grants, Section 220 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (33 U.S.C. 1300)**, in FY 2025 appropriations legislation.

WaterReuse is a not-for-profit trade association for water utilities, businesses, industrial and commercial enterprises, non-profit organizations, and research entities that engage in and on water reuse. WaterReuse and its state and regional sections represent more than 200 water utilities serving over 60 million customers, and over 300 businesses and organizations across the country. Our mission is to advance safe and sustainable water supplies, to promote acceptance and support of recycled water, and to advocate for policies and funding that increase water reuse.

In recent years, droughts have brought severe conditions including wildfires, heat waves, severely depleted water sources, and reduced crop production across the country. Despite rain events, in the West, conditions were recently at their driest point in 1,200 years and will almost certainly worsen. In parts of Pennsylvania, Illinois, New England, and other regions across the country, communities have faced significant and even extreme drought conditions.

As water supply and water quality challenges intensify, the nation must invest in water recycling to build resilience, manage energy demands, support public and environmental health, and ensure America's economic prosperity. Investments in water recycling ensure reliable and resilient community water supplies, support sustainable economic development, and help protect our rivers, lakes, streams, aquifers and wetlands.

Water reuse is a long-standing practice in supply-constrained areas in the West. However, water reuse is also now common practice in other parts of the country, where communities are turning to reuse to recharge strained aquifers and meet other needs. The drivers for water reuse are many, including stringent discharge regulations and a need to reduce pollutant loads to receiving waters. Communities are also turning to reuse to manage a range of stormwater challenges.

To help communities build resilient supplies and protect water quality, Congress authorized the Pilot Program for Alternative Water Source Grants as part of the recently enacted Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021. Through the program, EPA will make competitive grants to state, interstate, and intrastate water resource development agencies to engineer, design, construct, and test alternative water source systems, including water reuse systems.

By investing in the Pilot Program for Alternative Water Source Grants, Congress can begin to give communities in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico the tools and resources they need to protect public health and the environment, support economic development, and create long-term solutions for future generations.

#### **Examples of Water Recycling from Around the Country**

In Virginia's tidewater region, Hampton Roads Sanitation District is pursuing a multi-benefit water reuse program called the Sustainable Water Initiative for Tomorrow (SWIFT). HRSD's SWIFT project treats wastewater effluent to drinking water standards and reuses it to recharge the regional aquifer. The investment of \$1.1 billion in capital outlays provides critical public health, environmental and economic benefits by replenishing the overdrawn Potomac Aquifer, recharging 100 million gallons per day (MGD) of fresh water at full implementation, providing a reliable safe water supply to support the region's population and the nation's critical military assets, and generating nutrient credits that HRSD can trade - providing an estimated savings of \$1.5 billion for 11 counties across the region.

In Florida's Tampa Bay Region, Hillsborough County's Saltwater Intrusion and Aquifer Recharge Program (SHARP) is creating a hydraulic barrier to saltwater intrusion between the Bay and the region's drinking water aquifer. At a cost of \$20 million, SHARP is yielding significant climate-resiliency benefits by protecting the region's freshwater aquifer from sea level rise and saltwater intrusion, reducing pumping costs and energy use by raising groundwater levels and increasing pressure in the potable freshwater aquifer, generating water supply credits that offset the project's cost, and supporting seagrass and fishery recovery efforts by reducing nutrient and other effluent loadings.

In Texas, El Paso Water is using water recycling and saline groundwater desalination to produce a drought-resilient, cost-effective, and reliable water supply to support a vibrant local economy. Compared to the next best alternative (importing groundwater), El Paso's water reuse program is reducing energy use by 3.6 million MWH over the planning period and addressing affordability challenges related to imported water by saving more than \$1.2 billion, or 74 percent.

In California's Chino Basin, local leaders developed the Optimum Basin Management Program (OBMP) to address the region's water challenges. The OBMP generates energy savings in excess of 5.8 Billion kWh over 30 years by relying on local resources rather than energy intensive water imports, saves ratepayers an estimated \$2.4 billion in water supply costs, and restores instream flows and water quality in the Santa Ana River, returning a surface water supply and replenishing and improving water quality in the Chino Groundwater Basin.



**Jacqueline E. Esposito**  
Advocacy Director  
Waterkeeper Alliance

**The Honorable Mike Simpson**

Subcommittee Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations, Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee  
2007 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**The Honorable Chellie Pingree**

Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations, Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee  
2007 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree,

We submit this letter on behalf of Waterkeeper Alliance in connection with the Budget Hearing for Fiscal Year 2025 Request for the Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA"). We support a minimum funding level of \$11,000,000,000 to the EPA to fulfill its mission to protect human health and the environment by ensuring the public has access to clean air, land, and water. In particular, we ask for:

1. \$170,000,000 for the PFAS Strategic Roadmap;
2. \$270,600,000 for the Surface Water Protection Program;
3. \$1,500,000,000 for environmental justice efforts;
4. \$100,000,000 for the Office of Science and Technology, housed within the Office of Water;
5. \$509,500,000 million for Categorical Grants;
6. \$300,000,000 for the Office of Pesticide Programs and Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics, housed within the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention;
7. \$1,200,000,000 for the Office of Land and Emergency Management, which includes \$60,000,000 for the Office of Superfund Remediation and Technology Innovation and, \$60,000,000 for the Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery, and;
8. \$700,000,000 million for Geographic Water programs;
9. \$600,000,000 for the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance, including a dedicated \$40,000,000 for the Office of Site Remediation and Enforcement; and
10. Funding for Core Capacity at a minimum of 2,023 full-time equivalents.

Waterkeeper Alliance is a global movement uniting more than 300 community-based Waterkeeper groups around the world, focusing citizen action on issues that affect our waterways, from pollution to climate change. We collectively patrol and protect nearly six million square miles of rivers, lakes, and coastlines in the Americas, Europe, Australia, Asia, and Africa. In the United States, Waterkeeper Alliance represents the interests of more than 150 U.S.

Waterkeeper groups and their more than one million members and supporters that live, work, and recreate in or near waterways across the country, many severely impaired by pollution.

Water is life, and healthy watersheds connect and sustain us all. However, without adequate funding, EPA struggles to safeguard these crucial resources and adequately address pollution endangering our communities. Insufficient funding has led to tangible repercussions nationwide, such as heightened Per- and Polyfluorinated Substances (PFAS) levels in our drinking water, compromised food standards, and increased reports of illness. We urge you to prioritize funding for EPA to enable it to fulfill its mission effectively, as outlined below.

**PFAS Strategic Roadmap:** EPA acknowledges that regulating PFAS is a crucial task that requires a comprehensive and collaborative effort. These chemicals, found to pose health dangers even at extremely low levels of exposure, are estimated to be contaminating the drinking water for over 100 million Americans. The urgency of EPA's work to address this pervasive pollution cannot be overstated. By providing the requested additional funding, we can support a rapid response, potentially safeguarding the health and safety of millions of Americans. We therefore ask that EPA receive a minimum of \$170 million for the work outlined in the PFAS Strategic Roadmap.

**The Surface Water Protection Program:** As a part of EPA's mission, "all parts of society--communities, individuals, businesses, and state, local and tribal governments--have access to accurate information sufficient to effectively participate in managing human health and environmental risks." The Surface Water Protection Program, which works to protect, improve, and restore the quality of coastal waters, rivers, lakes, wetlands, and streams throughout the country is essential to the agency's mission. Funding for this critical program will support the implementation of water quality standards, effluent guidelines, impaired waters listing, water quality monitoring and assessment, water quality certification, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permitting, and management and oversight of the Clean Water State Revolving Fund. We therefore ask the Surface Water Protection Program receive a minimum of \$270.6 million.

**Environmental Justice:** For too long, under-represented communities have unfairly borne the cost of impaired waterways and damaged environments. We therefore ask that EPA receive a minimum of \$1.5 billion to support efforts to correct these inequities.

**Office of Science and Technology:** A chronic underfunding of the Office of Science and Technology has contributed to EPA's inability to fulfill the congressional mandate of the Clean Water Act that requires the agency to develop and publish "criteria for water quality reflecting the latest scientific knowledge." This ensures the water we use for drinking, recreation, and other purposes is safe for humans, animals, and the environment. In the last decade, EPA has only developed three new water quality criteria for aquatic life. Yet, we know dangerous chemicals like lead and PFAS are present at dangerous levels, and they are either underregulated or not all. By fully funding this office, we will have water quality criteria that will reflect our scientific knowledge of the dangers of these chemicals. We therefore ask the Office of Science and Technology to receive a minimum of \$100,000,000.

**Categorical Grants:** EPA's budget includes several categorical grants, including National Nonpoint Source Management, Wetlands Program Development Grants, and Water Pollution Control Grants. These grants provide critical support for state, tribal, interstate, and local governments to implement water quality projects. All communities should be able to access critical funding to ensure they can meet water quality standards and protect local waters; however, these grants must be funded so that access exists. We therefore ask that EPA's Categorical Grants receive a minimum of \$509.5 million.

**Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention:** Pollution prevention is the best way to safeguard human health and our environment while avoiding costly cleanup efforts. Under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act and the Toxic Substance Control Act, EPA is responsible for evaluating risks presented by new and existing chemicals. At a time when innovation and advancement occur quickly, this office needs to be fully staffed to maintain pace. We therefore ask that the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention receive a minimum of \$300,000,000.

**Office of Land Emergency Management:** EPA is responsible for managing hazardous waste facilities under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act and its remediation and response to abandoned, uncontrolled hazardous waste sites through the Superfund program under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act. However, funding is required to safeguard against deficiencies in the Superfund budget so that vulnerable communities are not left to bear the full consequences of poisoned plots. While EPA may suggest tax receipts are adequate to cover these costs, they fall short of the budgetary amounts needed for ongoing cleanup projects. Given the nature of these environmental disasters, these communities should not sacrifice their health due to insufficient budgeting. We therefore ask that the Office of Land Emergency Management receive a minimum of \$1,200,000,000.

**Geographic Water Programs:** EPA also has specific geographic work that critically supports iconic watersheds. By supporting accelerating ecological restoration and sustainable management, the agency can protect ecosystems and give them a chance to recover. We therefore ask that the Geographic Water Programs receive a minimum of \$700 million to be allocated, in part, as follows: \$93 million for the Chesapeake Bay, \$57 million for Puget Sound, \$27 million for the Gulf of Mexico, and \$500 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

**Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance:** EPA's enforcement capacity has declined almost a third in the last decade. This office must be fully staffed to ensure our laws are enforced, and polluters are accountable for their violations. A modest increase in funding will reverse this trend and ensure that all communities are adequately protected. We therefore ask that the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance receive a minimum of \$769,000,000.

**EPA Core Capacity:** It has been well reported over the last few years that EPA has faced difficulties retaining staff to meet its congressional mandate and fully carry out all water programs. It is essential that the agency has the requisite number of staff. EPA needs to be able to modernize its hiring, and Congress should ensure locked-in budget increases to secure workforce levels while guaranteeing pay increases for employees. We therefore ask that EPA's core capacity receive a minimum of 2,023 full-time equivalents, focusing on ensuring proper staffing levels for

positions in management, oversight, enforcement, and science, such as those working in water quality models and grant managers.

EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment is essential, but can only be achieved with sufficient funding and accountability. Without it, the well-being of every community in the nation is threatened and at risk.

Sincerely,

Alamosa Riverkeeper	Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper	Bayou City Waterkeeper
Black Warrior Riverkeeper	Calusa Waterkeeper	Cahaba Riverkeeper
Choctawhatchee Riverkeeper	Choptank Riverkeeper	Coastal Carolina Riverwatch
Friends of Casco Bay	Hackensack Riverkeeper	Humboldt Waterkeeper
Hurricane Creekkeeper	Lake Erie Waterkeeper	Los Angeles Waterkeeper
Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper Association	Miami Waterkeeper	Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Missouri Confluence Waterkeeper	Mobile Baykeeper	Northsound Waterkeeper
NY/NJ Baykeeper	Orange County Coastkeeper	Peconic Baykeeper
Potomac Riverkeeper Network	Puget Soundkeeper	Rogue Riverkeeper
San Antonio Bay Waterkeeper	San Antonio Bay Estuarine Waterkeeper	Santa Barbara Channelkeeper
San Diego Coastkeeper	Seneca Lake Guardian	Suwannee Riverkeeper
Snake River Waterkeeper	Spokane Riverkeeper	Tualatin Riverkeepers
Twin Harbors Waterkeeper	Wabash Riverkeeper Network	Waterkeeper Alliance
	West Virginia Headwaters Waterkeeper	



**Outside Witness Testimony Submitted by David Holland, Deputy Director, Western States Arts Federation in support of the National Endowment for the Arts**

Prepared for the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

**May 10, 2024**

Dear Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee Members:

Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit outside witness testimony as you consider investments in vital federal agencies, including the **National Endowment for the Arts (Arts Endowment)**. The Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF), a regional partner of the Arts Endowment, writes to affirm the integral impact the Endowment plays in communities throughout the West. Through innovative programming, advocacy, research, technology, and grantmaking, WESTAF encourages the creative advancement and preservation of the arts in the West, serving the states and jurisdictions of Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona, California, Colorado, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, Guam, Hawai'i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. We express gratitude for Congressional support in funding the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities in the FY 2024 Interior Appropriations bill at \$207 million to broaden opportunities for Americans to realize the cultural, educational, and economic benefits of the arts and creativity in communities across the United States. **We write to urge you to increase the Arts Endowment's FY 2025 budget to at least \$211 million and for Congress to maintain parity funding between the National Endowment for the Arts and its sister agency the National Endowment for the Humanities.**

**Supporting Arts and Creativity is Supporting the US Economy**

We know that arts and creativity strengthen our nation. They make us stronger—as individuals, families, communities, states, and as a country. Arts, culture, and creative industries are a backbone of innovation, prosperity, and thriving people and places. They are also a major portion of the US economy. According to the BEA, in 2022 **Arts and cultural economic activity accounted for \$1.1 trillion of the US economy (4.3% of GDP) and over 5 million jobs**. In addition, a 2024 study commissioned by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies provides **strong evidence that there is a causal link between growth in the creative economy and overall economic growth in the US.**<sup>1</sup> However, the study also shows that growth in the overall economy does not necessarily lead to growth in the arts economy, which is why public investment in arts is vital. Choosing to invest in the arts is choosing to invest in US economic growth.

Because of the leadership of Congress, an increase will mean expanded investment in arts and culture across the US driven by decisions made at the community level. The structure of the Arts Endowment is focused on a local control model. By mandate, 40% of the agency's grantmaking budget is awarded to state and regional arts agencies. We further request you to support the

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<sup>1</sup> Noonan, D. (2024). Arts and Creativity Drive Economies and Build Resilience: 2024 Key Findings. NASAA. [https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa\\_research/arts-and-creativity-drive-economies-and-build-resilience/](https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/arts-and-creativity-drive-economies-and-build-resilience/)



sector by allowing the Arts Endowment to continue to provide more types of flexible funding, such as general operating support, within the scope of its grantmaking.

We deeply understand the importance of the Arts Endowment's leadership in the West and would like to point out the following:

1. The Arts Endowment is a significant funder and a positive force for arts development in the West, a fast growing and exceptionally diverse region that is home to nearly a quarter of the U.S. population.
2. Arts Endowment investment reaches *every* congressional district in the West and throughout the United States. Public support is a critical component in ensuring that arts funding reaches *every* community in the U.S.
3. Investment is particularly critical to the most rural states and jurisdictions. Rural communities make up a significant portion of the WESTAF region and are home to nearly 20% of the people in the US. Yet, rural communities receive only 7% of US private foundation funding.<sup>2</sup> Public support of arts and culture in these areas is critical and an important strategy of community and economic development.
4. Federal-state partnership is vital to the WESTAF region. Four states, American Samoa, Guam, and CNMI receive over a third of their agency funds from the National Endowment for the Arts. State and jurisdictional arts agencies are crucial in ensuring that public funds are distributed to local and rural communities.
5. **Every dollar of federal funding invested in the National Endowment for the Arts leverages \$9 of additional funding nationally. Investment into state arts agencies in our region alone provides a nearly 7:1 return on investment based on 2024 data** (see table below). In addition to leveraging significant state and local government dollars, Arts Endowment funding allows some organizations to access additional investment from private foundations.

**Arts Endowment Contribution to State Arts Agency Revenue in the West in FY24**

State	Total Agency Revenue (\$)	Arts Endowment funds (\$)	% of Total Funding From Arts Endowment
Alaska	\$4,147,702	\$874,002	21.1%
American Samoa	\$540,695	\$373,695	69.1%
Arizona	\$7,572,787	\$1,136,787	15.0%
California	\$40,923,900	\$1,579,900	3.9%
Colorado	\$3,121,031	\$943,331	30.2%
Guam	\$964,854	\$378,700	39.2%
Hawai'i	\$11,238,035	\$907,500	8.1%

<sup>2</sup> Ford Family Foundation. (2021). *Investing in Rural Prosperity: The Role of Philanthropy in Rural Community Development*. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. <https://www.stlouisfed.org/community-development/publications/invest-in-rural>



Idaho	\$1,999,490	\$1,002,155	50.1%
Montana	\$2,341,337	\$1,074,400	45.9%
Nevada	\$3,262,440	\$934,200	28.6%
New Mexico	\$2,636,700	\$918,600	34.8%
Northern Marianas	\$631,054	\$350,800	55.6%
Oregon	\$7,773,127	\$1,016,100	13.1%
Utah	\$10,635,339	\$964,500	9.1%
Washington	\$11,164,822	\$1,110,200	9.9%
Wyoming	\$2,047,728	\$899,978	44.0%
<b>WESTAF region</b>	<b>\$111,001,041</b>	<b>\$14,464,848</b>	<b>29.86%</b>

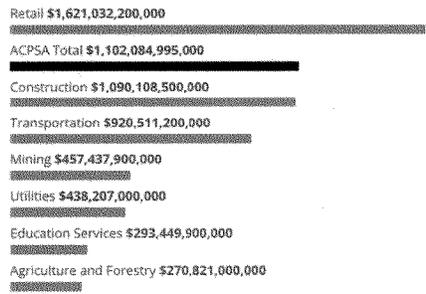
Source: National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2024

The Arts Endowment invests in projects that represent communities in the West and its support has been particularly important to engaging rural communities, indigenous communities, young people, and the full range of communities and cultures that make up the West in terms of race and ethnicity. **The Endowment’s long standing focus on the underserved, prompted in part by Congressional leadership, inspires the work of state arts agencies across the West and WESTAF.**

**Supporting the Endowment as Supporting the Creative Economy Ecosystem**

Arts and creativity are an engine for the US economy. In the West, jobs in creative occupations, creative industries earnings, and cultural nonprofit revenues have been on a growth trajectory for a decade. **The National Endowment for the Arts acts as the flag bearer for this powerful national industry which in the West alone grew by 85% between 2011 and 2020.**<sup>3</sup> When looking at the value added across the US economy in 2022, **arts and culture is ranked second among comparison sectors.**<sup>4</sup>

**Comparing Arts and Culture to Other Sectors of the Economy**



Source: National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, US Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2024

<sup>3</sup> WESTAF. Creative Vitality Suite. (2022).

<sup>4</sup> Noonan, D. (2024).



Arts, culture, and creative industries provide people with the foundation for creative thinking, generate new ideas in every field, and keep our nation globally competitive. Arts and creativity strengthen economic health by creating jobs in multiple industries, driving tourism, and providing workforce development opportunities for young people. Unlike conventional industries, the arts tend to grow independently from other sectors, which provides a diversification strength—something that may be especially important for states whose economic fortunes hinge on just a few industries. States with varied arts ecosystems (including nonprofit, commercial, and community-based arts) posted bigger economic gains after the Great Recession than their less-diversified neighbors. In addition, growth is not restricted to states with large populations and high concentrations of creative businesses, smaller states also experience notable growth on a per capita basis.<sup>5</sup> **Creativity stimulates economic development while bolstering civic engagement, making the arts a powerful catalyst for building community and economic strength.**

Public funding for arts and creativity improves the lives of all Americans, equips an innovative workforce, and enriches communities. Public support in the arts is important because it fuels innovative public-private partnerships, leverages considerable additional public and private investment far surpassing the required federal match of 1:1, and puts tax dollars and decision-making authority into state and local hands. **We encourage the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee to work with other Congressional leaders to increase the Arts Endowment's FY 2025 budget to at least \$211 million and build a specific path to fund the Arts Endowment at \$1 per capita.** Currently funding is at about \$0.62 cents per capita. A more robust NEA budget would ensure that the arts continue to contribute to the strength, pride, cohesion and economic success of every community in the United States.

Sincerely,

Teniqua Broughton  
Chair

Christian Gaines  
Executive Director

David Holland  
Deputy Director

**Endorsed by:**

**Regional Organization**

Western Arts Advocacy Network

Co-Chairs: Andrew Schneider (Wyoming), Jessi Wasson (Washington)

**State-Wide Organizations**

**Arizona Citizens for the Arts  
CA Arts Advocates  
Creative New Mexico  
Hawai'i Arts Alliance**

**Inspire Washington  
Montana Arts Council  
Utah Cultural Alliance  
Wyoming Arts Alliance**

<sup>5</sup> Noonan, D. (2024).

**Testimony of the Wildlife Conservation Society  
to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the  
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
May 10, 2024**

Contact: Colin Sheldon, Director of Federal Affairs, [csheldon@wcs.org](mailto:csheldon@wcs.org)

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) would like to thank Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and the members of the Subcommittee for providing this opportunity to submit testimony in support of funding in the FY25 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for the Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF), Office of International Affairs (IA), Office of Law Enforcement (OLE), and Endangered Species Recovery Grants Program accounts at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and the International Forestry program at the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

WCS was founded with the help of Theodore Roosevelt in 1895 with the mission of saving wildlife and wild places worldwide. WCS combines the power of its zoos and an aquarium in New York City and a Global Conservation Program in more than fifty countries to achieve its mission to save wildlife and wild places. WCS runs the world's largest conservation field program, protecting more than 50 percent of Earth's known biodiversity in partnership with governments, Indigenous people, local communities, and the private sector. Its four zoos and aquarium (the Bronx Zoo, Central Park Zoo, Queens Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo, and the New York Aquarium) welcome more than 3.5 million visitors each year, inspiring generations to care for nature.

The world faces three existential crises, all caused by humankind: a pandemic of zoonotic origin, the loss of biodiversity, climate change. These crises are interrelated, with many of the same causes and solutions. We know that pandemics of zoonotic origin (passed between animals and people) such as COVID-19 are directly tied to wildlife trade and the breaching of the human-wildlife interface through deforestation and forest degradation. We also know that deforestation and forest degradation are major causes of carbon emissions, and that more than a third of the answer to climate mitigation can come from nature-based solutions. Protected and conserved areas are at the heart: they protect biodiversity, mitigate climate change, and prevent future pandemics of zoonotic origin. Ecologically intact areas in and between protected areas support the well-being of millions, including Indigenous Peoples, and are critical to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Additional funding in the FY25 Interior appropriations bill for international conservation programs will be critical to address these crises and continue U.S. leadership in the world.

**FWS—Multinational Species Conservation Fund—\$30 Million:** Global priority species, such as tigers, rhinos, African and Asian elephants, great apes, turtles, and tortoises, face constant danger from poaching, habitat loss and degradation, conflicts with human populations, and other serious threats. MSCF programs have helped to sustain and recover wildlife populations by combating poaching and trafficking, reducing human-wildlife conflict, and protecting essential habitat—all while promoting U.S. economic and security interests across the globe. These programs efficiently use taxpayer dollars, granting them an outsized impact because they consistently leverage two to four times as much in matching funds from organizations like WCS, foreign governments, local NGOs, and private foundations.

Funding from the MSCF provides front-line protection against zoonotic disease by supporting projects that prevent or reverse the conditions that lead to pathogen spillover events. These events increase when humans come into closer contact with wildlife through the destruction and degradation of wildlife habitats, particularly forests, or at live wildlife markets where animals are crowded for sale and slaughter. In both situations, wildlife is likely to be severely stressed, which further increases the potential for pathogen spillover to occur and for human disease outbreaks. Biodiversity loss can also contribute to zoonotic disease spillover by removing buffer species that protect against diseases jumping into human populations.

WCS has had great success on projects using funds from the MSCF. Since 2014, WCS has co-administered the Republic of Congo's Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (NNNP), through a public-private partnership agreement with Congo's Ministry of Forest Economy and with strong collaboration with Indigenous peoples and community leaders in the neighboring villages of Bomassa and Makao. With some financial support in recent years from the African Elephant Conservation Fund and the Great Ape Conservation Fund, the NNNP has become one of the few areas where populations of elephants and great apes have remained stable. The Park has created long-term jobs, which are rare in the region, and has brought substantial benefits to neighboring communities through the creation of schools and health centers, and access to clean water.

**FWS—International Affairs—\$31 Million:** The FWS IA program supports efforts to conserve our planet's rich wildlife diversity by protecting habitat and species, combating illegal wildlife trade, and building capacity for landscape-level wildlife conservation. The program provides oversight of domestic laws and international treaties that promote the conservation of plant and animal species by ensuring that international trade and other activities do not threaten their survival in the wild. Within IA, the FWS Regional Programs for Africa, Eurasia, and the Western Hemisphere seek to address grassroots wildlife conservation problems from a broad, landscape perspective, building regional expertise and capacity while strengthening local institutions. The IA program works with the MSCF, supporting the conservation of species that are not specifically addressed by the Fund and funding conservation of entire habitats, even in cases where they cross political boundaries.

WCS asks that the subcommittee increase funding for the program to \$31 million so that it can continue to support efforts to conserve landscapes and vulnerable species and better address the crises facing the planet. In 2022, FWS IA launched the Species Conservation Catalyst Fund (SCCF), to serve as a 'conservation accelerator,' focusing on select species to fully map and understand threats along the wildlife trafficking chain and identify strategic points of intervention. Increased appropriations will support this fund to allow FWS IA to respond to evolving threats, identify species of greatest concern, and launch targeted, high impact projects to reverse the trajectory of population declines. The initial rounds of funding focused on saiga antelope, cheetah, and songbirds—all species highly vulnerable to overexploitation from illegal wildlife trade. The list of vulnerable species is ever-increasing, though, and additional funding is critical for the SCCF to be nimble and responsive by adding new species and programs.

Support from the SCCF and FWS IA more broadly has already shown success with a remarkable recovery of the Saiga antelope within its range in Kazakhstan, where the population has grown to the point that the IUCN Red List status assessment of has been changed from Critically Endangered to Near Threatened. WCS continues to work with partners in Mongolia and Uzbekistan toward the recovery of the species in those nations.

**FWS—Office of Law Enforcement—\$110.8 Million:** The U.S. remains one of the world's largest markets for wildlife and wildlife products, both legal and illegal. A small group of dedicated officers at OLE are tasked with protecting fish, wildlife, and plant resources by investigating wildlife crimes—including commercial exploitation, habitat destruction, and industrial hazards—and monitoring international trade to intercept illegal products like wildlife and timber and facilitate legal commerce. As the United States developed and implemented a comprehensive strategy to combat the growing crisis of wildlife trafficking over the last several years, most of the new responsibilities placed on FWS are enforced by OLE, and WCS supports increasing funding to \$110.8 million for the agency per the President's request. A primary need for additional funding is to strengthen OLE's presence at the U.S. border to protect against the importation of wildlife that may serve as a host of pathogens that could cause dangerous diseases of zoonotic origin.

Recent increases in the OLE budget have enabled the agency to deploy 12 FWS attachés in targeted U.S. embassies overseas in countries including Tanzania, Gabon, Peru, China, and Thailand, where wildlife trafficking has proven to be a serious problem. Law enforcement attachés are experienced criminal investigators who specialize in wildlife and natural resource investigations and have provided extensive support to local authorities engaged in wildlife trafficking investigations. Several investigations of transnational organized crime networks involved in the trafficking of elephant ivory, rhino horn, reptiles, and other wildlife and wildlife parts between Africa and Asia have been initiated as a direct result of attaché intervention, and attachés have assisted extensively in fostering intelligence sharing and investigative support between affected countries.

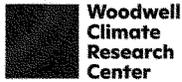
**FWS—Endangered Species Recovery Challenge Grants—\$15 Million:** Funding provided to the USFWS for recovery efforts of endangered species has been limited for decades. And although the Service has accomplished some great successes—recovery of the bald eagle and the brown pelican, for example—hundreds of species are in desperate need of help to prevent extinction. The Recovery Challenge Grants program provides matched funds from USFWS to support projects conducted by outside partners like zoos and aquariums accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums to develop and implement recovery plans and high priority recovery actions for endangered species. With limited funding for recovery, it is more important than ever to invest federal funding in programs that leverage the significant resources and expertise of outside partners to help the USFWS accomplish its objectives in the most effective way. Increasing funding for endangered species through the Recovery account and the Recovery Challenge Grant program specifically would recognize the positive impact this funding has had on recovery goals and encourage the continued prioritization of these important functions.

**USFS—International Forestry—\$22 Million:** WCS supports the President's request for \$22 million for the International Forestry program (FS-IP). With estimates ranging broadly from \$51 billion to \$150 billion, the trade in illegal timber threatens the world's forests, reduces biodiversity, and severely affects countless local communities that rely on forests for food, employment, and wealth. The trade also affects the U.S. economy, which has lost approximately \$1 billion per year and over 200,000 jobs due to illegal logging. FS-IP works to level the playing field by reducing illegal logging and improving the sustainability and legality of timber management overseas, translating to less underpriced timber undercutting U.S. producers. Through partnerships with USAID and the Department of State, FS-IP helps to improve resource management in countries of strategic importance to U.S. economic and national security. This work maintains biodiversity in important

natural strongholds and helps some of the world's last intact forests continue to play a key role in sequestering carbon, reducing the effects of climate change.

With technical and financial support from FS-IP, WCS has been conserving the biologically rich Southern Forest Complex in the southern part of Myanmar. The region comprises tropical rain forests inhabiting globally endangered species like Indochinese tiger, Asian elephant, and Malayan tapir. Furthermore, about six hundred kilometers of coastline edged with mangrove forests allows for a considerable variety of biodiversity, including marine species such as sea turtles and cetacean species such as whales and dugong. In this landscape, WCS promotes a participatory approach to landscape level land-use planning advocating for the establishment of a Community Based Conservation Corridor along the Myintmoletkhet range, supporting local communities to conduct biological monitoring surveys within their traditional village boundaries, within or around protected areas.

WCS appreciates the opportunity to share its perspective and to make a case for modest increases in federal investments in conservation in the FY25 Interior, the Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. Conservation of public lands is an American tradition and, as far back as 1909, Theodore Roosevelt recognized that the management of our natural resources requires coordination between all nations. Continued investment in conservation will reaffirm our global position as a conservation leader, while improving national and global security and building capacity and good governance in developing countries.



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**Outside Witness Testimony in Support of Fiscal Year 2025  
Funding for the Bureau of Land Management Alaska Fire Service &  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge System,  
Department of the Interior**

Submitted to the House Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives

Submitted by  
Dr. Peter Frumhoff, Senior Science Policy Advisor, Woodwell Climate Research Center

**May 10, 2024**

On behalf of the Arctic Research Program at Woodwell Climate Research Center (“Woodwell Climate”), I am pleased to provide this written testimony to the House Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies for the official record. Woodwell Climate respectfully requests the Subcommittee to (1) **approve \$492,374,000 in funding for the Bureau of Land Management Alaska Fire Service (BLM AFS) in Fiscal Year 2025 (FY 2025) so that it may meet its fire suppression mission amidst intensifying fire regimes in the Arctic and boreal regions; and (2) adopt the following report language:**

*“Department of the Interior – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – National Wildlife Refuge System. The Committee recognizes the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission recommendations to prioritize and deploy resources to address extreme wildfires in the U.S. As extreme fire regimes intensify across the U.S., there is an urgent need to understand evolving ecosystems and related data gaps in the Arctic and boreal forests. A standardized monitoring of the wildlife refuges is a prerequisite to designing and implementing effective and appropriate changes in fire management that the Fish and Wildlife Service and partner agencies are considering. The Committee directs the Fish and Wildlife Service through the National Wildlife Refuge System to conduct a study on ecological change due to fire regimes in Alaska wildlife refuges.”*

These requested actions are informed by Woodwell Climate’s leading scientific research into cost-effective approaches for fire management in the high-latitudes; as this testimony explains further, a decision by the Subcommittee to allocate additional resources for the BLM AFS and the National Wildlife Refuge System managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) will enable the U.S. government to mitigate immediate and long-term costs of Alaskan wildfires on infrastructure, ecosystems, human health, and the global climate.

Woodwell Climate Research Center

### Accounting for the Costs of Intensifying Arctic-Boreal Wildfires in Alaska

Record-breaking wildfires across the U.S. in recent years have highlighted the need for the federal government to reconsider the efficacy of existing fire management approaches and expenditures. This is particularly true for fires in Alaska, where rapid temperature rise in the region has led to pervasive intensification of wildfires in boreal forest, which have doubled the annual burned area compared to the mid-20th century. Wildfires in boreal forests pose significant implications for the U.S. carbon budget, as they contain roughly two-thirds of global forest carbon, and Alaska wildfires currently contribute to half of all U.S. fire carbon emissions each year.<sup>1</sup>

Woodwell Climate is collaborating closely with U.S. government agencies in Alaska to more accurately estimate the distinctive and outsized carbon emissions of these escalating fires, including the projected emissions from circumpolar wildfire and fire-permafrost interactions. Our latest research suggests that such emissions may reduce the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates of remaining carbon budgets to stay within 1.5 to 2°C of global warming by ~10% or more.<sup>2</sup>

Limiting boreal wildfire emissions to pre-climate change levels through targeted suppression and other management approaches would both provide a significant natural climate solution and support a suite of co-benefits for Alaskan communities and those in the lower 48 who are likely to experience smoke exposure as northern fires intensify. Recent fire seasons have demonstrated the myriad of detrimental impacts caused by intensifying wildfires, including severe degradation of air quality, disruptions to air transport and travel, and damage to infrastructure (such downstream negative economic impacts are estimated at \$30 billion to \$200 billion per year in the lower 48). In addition to limiting these deleterious impacts, increased arctic-boreal fire management would create jobs and give fire managers desperately needed resources.

Our research has found that fire management in Alaska is effective at reducing wildfire carbon emissions at a cost of ~\$13 per ton CO<sub>2</sub> of avoided emissions – comparable to or more cost-effective than many other climate mitigation measures.<sup>3</sup> Yet federal fire management in the state is also *severely* underfunded – receiving only 4% of federal resources for fire management. The Subcommittee therefore has a critical opportunity to reconcile this significant discrepancy by allocating additional funding to BLM AFS and FWS in FY 2025.

<sup>1</sup> Circumpolar boreal fires emitted roughly 1.8 Gt CO<sub>2</sub> in 2021 alone. See Zheng, B., Ciais, P., Chevallier, F., Yang, H., Canadell, J. G., Chen, Y., van der Velde, I. R., Aben, I., Chuvieco, E., Davis, S. J., Deeter, M., Hong, C., Kong, Y., Li, H., Li, H., Lin, X., He, K., and Zhang, Q.: Record-high CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from boreal fires in 2021, *Science*, 379, 912–917, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.ade0805>, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Treharne, R., Gasser, T., Rogers, B. M., Turetsky, M. R., MacDonald, E., Smith, T., and Natali, S.: Comprehensive assessment of permafrost carbon emissions indicates need for urgent action to meet Paris Agreement temperature goals, *Nat. Clim. Change*, in prep.

<sup>3</sup> Phillips, C. A., Rogers, B. M., Elder, M., Cooperdock, S., Moubarak, M., Randerson, J. T., and Frumhoff, P. C.: Escalating carbon emissions from North American boreal forest wildfires and the climate mitigation potential of fire management, *Science Advances*, 8, eabl7161, <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abl7161>, 2022.

Woodwell Climate Research Center

#### **Supplemental Funds for the Bureau of Land Management Alaska Fire Service**

Woodwell Climate urges the Subcommittee to appropriate \$492,374,000 for the BLM AFS in FY2025, supplementing the AFS' FY2024 funding by \$10 million. This increase is necessary to enable the AFS to effectively respond to intensifying fire regimes in the Arctic and boreal; work with communities and state/local partners to reduce wildland risk, professionalize the AFS workforce, and otherwise support effective management of escalating wildland fires.

For over 30 years, the BLM AFS has been dedicated to providing efficient and cost-effective fire suppression services for all DOI lands and those conveyed in Alaska under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. Activities of the BLM AFS include, *inter alia*, implementing various services within the framework of approved fire management plans and through agreements with the respective land managers or owners, developing fire and aviation policy guidance and interpretation for BLM Alaska, leading the statewide fire and aviation programs, providing fuels management direction, conducting fire ecology research, and assisting with fire planning and policy interpretation. The BLM AFS also provides logistical and operational support to agencies, incident management teams, and individual firefighters; oversees initial and extended attack fire-related resources; and distributes wildland fire information to the public and news media during the fire season.

Yet *despite* intensifying fire seasons, the BLM AFS budgets have remained at level or decreased over the past decade; current funding levels are directly impeding BLM AFS' ability to fully staff positions and meet its fire suppression mission against a backdrop of increasing fire activity. Unfortunately, Woodwell Climate's robust scientific research indicates continued escalation of this activity under our current climate trajectory.

Woodwell Climate therefore recommends that the Subcommittee approve this modest funding increase of \$10 million in FY2025 for BLM AFS to measurably improve its fire management response for the subsequent fire season. The supplemental funding would better equip BLM AFS amidst a changing fire and climate regimes in the Arctic and boreal regions, including longer fire seasons and thawing permafrost. With the Subcommittee's support, BLM AFS will be able to deploy more robust fire suppression efforts throughout Alaska, support active fuels management, and work with local communities and state and federal partners to reduce wildland fire risk in Alaska, among other needs.

#### **Directed Fish & Wildlife Funding for Research of Alaska Wildlife Refuges**

Woodwell Climate appreciates that increased fire activity across the U.S. and projected escalation of fire regimes in the coming years has prompted a demand for improved fire management and preparedness. The federal government has consequently approved dedicated funding for strengthening wildfire response in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, and funded a Report of the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission, which calls for bipartisan support of innovative approaches to wildfire management, additional Congressional appropriations for proactive measures, and allocation of additional funding for hazard data sets. While this progress is welcomed, notably absent from these efforts is sufficient scoping of fire impacts on the ecological systems in the Arctic-boreal

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region.

Fire ecologists at Woodwell Climate and across the federal government focusing on the Arctic-boreal region agree that understanding such ecological impacts is a prerequisite for identifying new and cost-effective methods of fire management in Alaska. Accordingly, Woodwell Climate has recommended report language to this Subcommittee that directs FWS to complete a baseline monitoring report on the ecological impacts of expanding wildfire on wildlife refuges in Alaska. As new fire management proposals are deployed so will ongoing monitoring of the refuges that deliver data on fire management protocols. This information will ultimately enable FWS to measure the appropriateness and effectiveness of various fire management interventions in comparison to the impact they have on ecological systems in the region. Capturing this information is increasingly important as fire regimes intensify in high latitude forests.

Woodwell Climate is uniquely positioned to recommend this report language to the Subcommittee, as our organization has collaborated with FWS and BLM AFS on a historic and foundational decision to enhance the fire suppression status of 1.6 million acres of Yedoma permafrost-rich land on the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge in January 2023. Yedoma permafrost has particularly high ice and carbon content, and is highly vulnerable to post-fire thaw, degradation, and carbon emissions. This decision was the result of iterative consultation with Alaska Native residents within the refuge who are impacted by increasing smoke pollution and disruption to subsistence activities. It also addresses a growing concern for the loss of old growth habitat within the refuge.

Support from this Subcommittee to advance studies of the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge and others in Alaska would represent a monumental step in advancing arctic-boreal fire management and policy and indicate that carbon and permafrost protection from intensifying wildfires is a specific federal priority. Over the next few years, Woodwell Climate scientists intend to collaborate with FWS and BLM AFS to estimate the avoided carbon emissions from reduced wildfires and permafrost thaw by combining data on suppression costs with modeled estimates of landscape fire progression. The requested report language and directive of this Subcommittee will signal support for this work, thereby ensuring that a new era of federal fire management is more responsive to climate, health, and economic considerations.

#### **Conclusion**

**Woodwell Climate requests that the Subcommittee approve a \$10 million supplemental to BLM AFS for FY25 and to approve report language that directs the US FWS, through the National Wildlife Refuge System, to conduct a study on ecological change due to fire regimes in Alaska wildlife refuges.** On behalf of Woodwell Climate, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions about Woodwell Climate or the Arctic Program's scientific research.

# Tribal Public Witness Statements

**CHAIRMAN ROBERT MIGUEL, AK-CHIN INDIAN COMMUNITY****U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES**

May 8, 2024

Good morning Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee,

It is a pleasure to be here with you all once again. Thank you on behalf of the entire Ak-Chin Indian Community for providing us with this opportunity to share our Community's funding priorities for the 2025 fiscal year. We appreciate your time, and we deeply value your partnership on these important issues and programs.

My name is Robert Miguel, and I have served as Chairman for the Ak-Chin Indian Community for more than eight years. Our Community is relatively small with more than 1,100 members, but we are growing quickly. That growth presents us with an exciting time as a Community. We have a young Membership, and we are located about 40 miles south of Phoenix, Arizona—one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country. In my time as Chairman, I have seen our Community overcome unprecedented challenges to achieve transformative successes. That success will help us attain the exciting future we are building towards, and I thank the Subcommittee for sharing in many of those success stories.

The Ak-Chin Indian Community's funding priorities for the upcoming year include increasing support for our public health programs; public safety and justice initiatives; social services and education; and infrastructure capital improvements and maintenance. We also seek additional funding and resources for the underfunded and backlogged 105(l) lease program. In addition to highlighting the necessary increases in funding, we must also address the logistical challenges created by the processes in which funds are currently administered. This includes emphasizing the vital importance of ensuring advanced appropriations for both IHS and BIA funding, showing how the grant process and match requirements burden an already complicated application system, and requesting government agencies expand their work to collaborate with the Tribes towards self-governance and greater funding efficiency.

**Public Health**

The health and safety of our Community Members is our top priority. Our Ak-Chin Community is exploring opportunities to open and operate our own clinic, and the existing clinic needs funds to maintain and expand the direct care services it is able to perform on site. We also request increased funding for purchased/referred care, which is necessary to allow for the many treatments and services the currently operating clinic is not equipped to handle. Increasing funding for both direct and purchased/referred care is vital to ensuring the health and wellbeing of our Community.

**Public Safety and Justice**

Our Community's law enforcement, court, and detention center is in need of additional funding,

and we respectfully request an increase in funding for public safety in Indian Country. Law enforcement plays a critical and specialized role in our Community. Our Community Membership benefits when the police are wholly integrated into the fabric of our communities as trusted neighbors and friends. This requires significant programming and resources, but in turn creates a safer and more cohesive Community and more effective law enforcement. Our public safety programs provide on-ground support for our Community Members, and growing neighboring communities increase the need for additional law enforcement personnel, facilities, and equipment. We also prioritize training to effectively protect and serve the Ak-Chin Indian Community and our visitors. We are appreciative of recent increases in appropriations, and respectfully request that the Subcommittee maintain its commitments to the Ak-Chin people with appropriate increases in public safety and justice funding in FY2025 and moving forward.

#### **Social Services & Education**

We also seek increased funding for Health and Human Services, including our Social Services. The behavioral and mental health issues confronting Indian Country are well-documented and addressing these challenges is a major component of our work to promote the Community's health and safety holistically. As a Community with many young Members, we know it is particularly important to adequately fund social services to help strengthen families and provide the next generation with a happy and healthy home to grow and thrive.

We also understand education's role in ensuring the brightest future for our young Members. Ak-Chin is grateful to receive Johnson-O'Malley funds, which directly benefit our school-aged children, and we rely on those funds to prepare our young people for success in the classroom. We request continued funding for social services and education to help our Community Members realize their bright future.

#### **Infrastructure Improvements and Maintenance**

We are proud of our Community's fast growth, and we recognize that growth taxes the infrastructure in our Community. Funding is necessary to address these issues—for maintenance of existing resources, and for capital projects to expand and improve our infrastructure. Unfortunately, current funding levels are entirely inadequate to meet even maintenance needs.

Take our roads as just one example. Our roads serve as vital arteries in and out of our Community for our Community Members and our neighbors alike. We have seen an explosion of traffic on our roads that far outpaces the funding we receive to maintain them. With this shortfall we have only enough funds to offer short-term, band-aid fixes to patch up potholes and only the most immediate safety issues. We desperately need funds to address the underlying issues in our roads and repave them to create fixes that will last for years. Providing adequate funding for both maintenance and capital projects will allow us to create lasting solutions and more efficiently direct our maintenance work moving forward.

Internet access offers another example of how our growth necessitates additional funding needs to serve our Community Members. We are grateful for the Biden Administration's broadband grants to Tribes, which enabled the Ak-Chin Indian Community to offer expanded internet coverage on

our land. But already new neighborhoods are expanding out beyond even our expanded coverage, and additional funds are needed to keep up our growing communities and provide coverage to our newly built neighborhoods. We are proud of the resiliency and hard work of our young people, but no student should be forced to drive to a McDonald's parking lot late at night to submit a work assignment for school because internet coverage does not extend to their home. Broadband is no longer a luxury in this society; it is a necessity that allows our Community Members to compete with the fast-paced nature of the rest of our world. Accordingly, we request increased funding for infrastructure maintenance and capital projects in the upcoming year to meet the increased demands of our growing Community and the necessities of today's society.

#### **105 (I) Lease Operations and Maintenance**

The Ak-Chin Indian Community is a Self-Governance Tribe with a Compact with the BIA. The Compact facilitates the Federal Government's trust relationship and responsibility to the Community through Tribal self-governance for many of the programs I have discussed. The Indian Self-Determination Education and Assistance Act 105(I) lease program allows the reimbursement of facility costs when part of a facility is used to carry out self-determination programs, functions, services, or activities. Our expansive self-governance programs increase the effectiveness of Tribal government services while cutting bureaucracy that we must navigate.

Many of our facilities that house Self-Determination programs eligible for 105(I) leases need repairs, but we have experienced serious difficulty and delay using the program. We request additional funding for repairs under 105(I) leases, as well as funding for the office itself. In our experience, the office appears backlogged and underfunded, and it is our hope that additional resources would result in funds being approved more quickly and efficiently.

If adequately funded, the 105(I) program offers an exciting opportunity to ensure that funds earmarked for important programs like public health services go directly to treating patients and serving our Community Members. Instead, we sometimes find ourselves with major facility issues, like a leaking roof, that require us to direct funds to address these facility costs. We hope that additional funding will be provided to the program to allow Tribes to more efficiently and effectively direct funds that directly benefit their Tribal Members.

#### **The Vital Importance of Advanced Appropriations**

Advanced appropriations are a vitally important development supporting Tribal self-governance and effective budget management. Advanced appropriations allow our government to most efficiently allocate resources and prepare for future challenges and opportunities alike. Uncertainty is expensive, and that is a concept the federal government understands judging from their use of advanced appropriations when funding many other agencies. Nothing about BIA or IHS make this untrue as applied to these agencies, yet until recently the government excluded Tribes from joining agencies receiving advanced appropriations.

We ask that advanced appropriations for IHS funds are made mandatory moving forward, and that BIA adopt advanced appropriations for funding. Advanced appropriations allow for better planning, and more efficient and the best targeted use of funds. This is not simply a matter of

paperwork; ensuring advanced appropriations of funding directly impacts our Community Members' lives. We respectfully request advanced appropriations to ensure that Tribes are not forced to move money to cover funding shortfalls right when their people need funds the most.

#### **Promoting Efficiency in Grant and Funding Processes**

We are grateful for the relationship and shared successes we have achieved with the Federal Government. Since becoming Chairman, I have seen real and meaningful improvements to the funding process and the Federal Government's partnership with the Tribes. We are appreciative of the Biden Administration's Executive Order 14112 on Tribal Self-Determination and believe it is evidence of a growing commitment to respect Tribal autonomy and promote our shared interests.

In this vein, we have seen promising improvements to the appropriations and funding process, but work remains to be done here. Bureaucratic red tape, complicated and opaque application processes, and costly delay still prevent an efficient funding process and frustrate Tribal goals. Competition through the grant application process is particularly challenging, and creates a zero-sum game for Tribes while further burdening projects with difficult conditions like matching funds requirements in grant applications.

To address this inefficiency and delay, we believe that since the majority of the federal funding is currently distributed through grants, perhaps federal funding could be distributed in the form of formula-funded base dollars; to flow directly through Self-Determination Contracts and Self-Governance Compacts. This change would keep with the Administration's initiative and the Federal Government's work to better respect Tribal sovereignty while cutting administrative costs and particularly burdensome funding delays.

Moving federal grant funds to Self-Determination Contracts and Self-Governance Compacts is a more efficient and effective method of funding vital programs like the ones I have outlined today, and these programs directly benefit our Community Members. And we have already seen that this method of distribution works with the success of the COVID Relief Fund. For that fund, Tribal Governments provided requested information including self-certified Tribal Enrollment to the Federal Government that led to success in sending out record funds quickly to Tribes that desperately needed it during that uncertain time. We remain grateful for the Administration's Executive Order 14112 and enhanced partnership with the agencies, but we hope to see these encouraging changes implemented permanently.

#### **Conclusion**

Again, thank you Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree for allowing me to discuss the Ak-Chin Indian Community's priorities. We are grateful for your time and your partnership on these critical initiatives, and I hope this Subcommittee will continue to build on previous funding authorizations that have led to increases in Tribal funding. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of these issues to our Community's priorities and continued growth, and how additional funding can support the Ak-Chin Indian Community. Thank you.

May 9, 2024

**Ricky Sylestine, Chairman**  
**Alabama-Coushatta Tribe**  
**Public Witness Hearing – American Indian & Alaska Native Day**  
**Testimony**

On behalf of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, I would like to raise an ongoing inequity that has faced our Tribe for over a decade. Specifically, we are seeking resolution from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to ensure that the Tribe is eligible to receive federal funding for our Tribal law enforcement activities.

In 1953, Congress passed Public Law 280, which mandatorily placed Indian tribes in six states (“Mandatory Public Law 280 States”) under the Act and granted those states criminal jurisdiction for crimes occurring on tribal lands. Texas was not one of those states. In 1968, pursuant to legislation included under the Indian Civil Rights Act, Congress granted concurrent criminal jurisdiction between tribes, states, and the federal government to those tribes/states who opted in (“Optional Public Law 280 States”). For those tribes/states that decided to opt in to concurrent federal jurisdiction, they would be eligible to receive federal funding for Tribal law enforcement activities.

On August 18, 1987, legislation restoring the federal recognition to the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas was signed into law. Prior to passage of the legislation, both BIA and the General Accounting Office (GAO) confirmed that the United States would maintain concurrent jurisdiction on the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe’s Reservation under Section 206(f) of the Tribe’s Restoration Act.

Notwithstanding this information, in 2013, Dan Deerinwater, the then Regional Director for the Southern Plains BIA Office, informed the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe that it was his belief that there was no federal criminal jurisdiction on the Tribe’s reservation and, therefore, he did not believe the Tribe was eligible to receive Federal funding in support of its Tribal Police Force. Since that time, the Alabama-Coushatta have tried to correct this error with the BIA with no resolution so far.

As directed by the Tribe’s Restoration Act, Texas assumed criminal jurisdiction over the Tribe’s reservation under the optional basis section of Public Law 280. Further, Congress specifically carved out civil and criminal jurisdiction over gaming matters in the Restoration Act, making such matters the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal government. Under these facts, the State of Texas’ assumption of civil and criminal jurisdiction over the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe’s trust lands does not preclude the United States from exercising concurrent criminal jurisdiction over crimes occurring on the reservation under either the General Crimes or Major Crimes Act. In fact, the United States Department of Justice formally recognizes this concurrent jurisdiction in the United States Attorney’s Manual (Title 9, Criminal Resource Manual § 668).

Finally, it is worth highlighting that the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, who had their federal recognition restored under the same legislation with identical language as the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe, operate under a different BIA regional office (the Southwest Region) and have been receiving federal funding for law enforcement services based on the concurrent jurisdiction provided in the Restoration Act.

It is clear that the Southern Plains regional office erred back in 2013, but it is frustrating that 11 years later, this error has yet to be corrected by BIA. We are seeking inclusion of the following report language, supported by Representative Morgan Luttrell, who represents our Tribe in Congress, to be included in the Interior Appropriations bill to force the BIA to correct this error:

*“Notwithstanding any historical limitations on the level of funding, the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas shall be eligible for Public Safety and Justice funding through either a self-determination contract or self-governance compact pursuant to the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (Public Law 93-638) or any other applicable federal law.”*

On behalf of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe, we appreciate the opportunity to raise this issue with the Committee and appreciate your consideration of this request. We look forward to a successful resolution with BIA.



Written Testimony of Rachel Conant, Executive Director, Alzheimer's Impact Movement and Vice President, Federal Affairs, Alzheimer's Association on behalf of the Alzheimer's Association and Alzheimer's Impact Movement.

**Prepared for the United States House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
American Indian/Alaska Native Public Witness Hearings  
May 7 and 8, 2024**

The Alzheimer's Association and Alzheimer's Impact Movement (AIM) appreciate the opportunity to submit outside witness written testimony on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 appropriations for Alzheimer's and related dementia activities at the Indian Health Service. Specifically, we request \$6 million for the Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Program at the Indian Health Service (IHS).

**Alzheimer's Impact on American Families and the Economy**

As too many of us know from personal experience with family or friends, Alzheimer's is a progressive brain disease that damages and eventually destroys brain cells, leading to a loss of memory, thinking, and other cognitive functions. Ultimately, Alzheimer's is fatal. We have yet to celebrate the first survivor of this devastating disease.

Nearly 7 million Americans age 65 and older are currently living with Alzheimer's, and an estimated one in three American Indians and Alaskan Native Elders will be diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Between 2014-2060, the number of American Indians and Alaska Native peoples aged 65 and older living with dementia is projected to increase over five times. The total cost for all individuals with Alzheimer's or other dementia is estimated to cost \$360 billion in 2024 for health care, long-term care, and hospice care (not including unpaid caregiving). The U.S. taxpayer-funded federal health care programs Medicare and Medicaid are expected to cover about \$231 billion, or 64 percent, of these costs this year. Unfortunately, these costs are projected to increase annually, reaching a staggering \$1.1 trillion in 2050. It is clear that Alzheimer's and other dementia threaten to bankrupt families, businesses, and our health care system.

**Investing in Alzheimer's Funding at IHS**

The Healthy Brain Initiative's Road Map for Indian Country, a strategy for American Indian and Alaska Native People to improve brain health in their communities, was created with input from experts and elders from American Indian and Alaska Native tribes. This feedback and input revealed that Alzheimer's and related cognitive health issues are a serious and growing problem that should be approached with sensitivity to the unique social, economic, historical, and cultural attributes of American Indian and Alaska Native peoples. In FY23, Congress appropriated \$5.5 million for Alzheimer's funding for Indian Health Service (IHS). The funding appropriated for Alzheimer's and related dementia activities at IHS has allowed the agency to use the strategy and structure of the road map as a guide to award funding to eight new tribal health organizations in 2023 through the Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Program. This is in addition to the four tribal health organizations that were given grant awards in 2022. The organizations that received

funding in 2022 are the Indian Health Board of Minneapolis (MN), the Indian Health Council, Inc. (CA), the Nez Perce Tribal Health Authority (ID), and the Northern Valley Indian Health (CA). In 2023, the Absentee Shawnee Tribal Health System (OK), Cherokee Nation Health Systems (OK), the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes (OK), the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon (OR), the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe (NV), the Kenaizte Indian Tribe (AK), the Norton Sound Health Center (AK), and the Seattle Indian Health Board (WA) all received funding. To continue the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of Alzheimer's and other dementias in tribal nations, the Alzheimer's Association and AIM urge Congress to provide \$6 million for Alzheimer's Activities at IHS in FY25.

Activities supported by the requested \$6 million in FY25 would enable the IHS to expand the number of tribal health organizations that receive awards and would allow IHS to continue to implement locally developed models of culturally appropriate screening, diagnostics, and management of people living with Alzheimer's and other related dementia, and eventually, with enough funding, be able to shift away from competitive funding towards a block grant model. This funding also supports the Dementia ECHO program, designed to support clinicians and caregivers to strengthen their knowledge and care around dementia for tribal patients, providing more access to areas where there is little to no access to health services.

As the need for these services grow, additional appropriations will ensure that there will be increased opportunity for expansion of this work. In November 2024, the updated HBI Road Map for Indian Country, will be released which will further opportunity for coordinated impact to improve brain health in tribal and urban Indian communities. This updated strategy with increased funding would allow further increases and developments in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of Alzheimer's and other dementias in tribal nations.

#### **Conclusion**

The Alzheimer's Association and AIM appreciate the steadfast, bipartisan support of the Subcommittee and its priority-setting activities and look forward to working with you this Congress. We urge the Subcommittee and Congress to provide \$6 million in funding for Alzheimer's and related dementia activities at IHS. This funding will reaffirm Congress's commitment to help members of tribal communities living with Alzheimer's by prioritizing research and public health resources in the fight against this disease. These resources are critical in order to explore new breakthrough treatments, provide hope for the millions of families living with Alzheimer's, and keep pace with the steadily mounting impact of Alzheimer's disease on our nation's budget.

American Academy  
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

May 10, 2024

Comments of  
**Allison Empey, MD, FAAP**  
**Chair, AAP Committee on Native American Child Health**

On behalf of the  
**American Academy of Pediatrics**

Testimony before the  
**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related  
Agencies**

**“American Indian and Alaska Native Programs”**

**Allison Empey, MD, FAAP**- American Academy of Pediatrics  
"American Indian and Alaska Native Programs", 5/10/2024

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Honorable Subcommittee Members:

My name is Dr. Allison Empey, and I am submitting the following testimony on behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics, which represents 67,000 pediatricians around the country. I am the Chair of the AAP Committee on Native American Child Health, a group of leading national experts on this issue. In addition to my role within the AAP, I am a practicing pediatrician at Doernbechers Children's Hospital, an Associate Professor and Vice Chair of Equity Diversity and Inclusion at Oregon Health & Science University Department of Pediatrics, and Director of Wy'east at the Northwest Native American Center of Excellence. I am a citizen of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde located in Oregon and work one day per week at my own tribal clinic. Through my work at Grand Ronde Health & Wellness Clinic as the sole pediatrician I get to serve my people and help care for some of the most underserved patients - Native American children. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to submit written testimony today on behalf of the AAP to discuss the critical importance of robust federal investment in American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) child health. I thank the committee for its ongoing commitment to funding this work, especially the inclusion of more than \$4.6 billion in advance appropriations for Fiscal year 2025 for the second time, and respectfully request sustained and increased funding and continued advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service (IHS). **The AAP specifically requests at least as much as the \$8 billion for IHS discretionary resources in the President's budget request, and we also support the President's budget proposal to make all IHS funding mandatory beginning in 2026.**

For over 50 years, the AAP has formally conducted work on AI/AN child health. Our commitment to these issues is embodied in the work that we do through a contract with IHS. Each year, our Committee conducts annual consultative site visits to review all aspects of child health services and public health programs at two to three sites in a different IHS Area. Our experts provide immediate technical assistance to sites to support improved care, working closely with Tribal and IHS facility leadership and child health staff. In addition, we provide guidance to IHS on service units' model programs that the Agency can promote and disseminate, as well as the key challenges they face.

During our visits, we also regularly encounter serious challenges, including significant prenatal drug exposure, challenges in accessing needed health services, especially for behavioral health, and difficulty recruiting and retaining talented health providers. When a service unit lacks a pediatric champion, children's needs can quickly lose the priority attention they deserve. That can lead to a reactive approach; responding to emergencies rather than providing needed preventive care. Wherever we travel across the country, these complexities constitute the story in Native communities; serious challenges, but also inexhaustible and committed people who are making a major difference in the lives of those for whom they care.

**Challenges to the Provision of Care to AI/AN Children:** We know that Native children face substantial inequities rooted in social determinants of health that stem from the historical trauma Native communities have faced throughout our history. Poverty, alcohol use disorder, substance use disorder, chronic illness, child abuse, and other poor health and social conditions are symptoms of these underlying health crises in Native communities, not their cause. In medical terms these are preventable diseases. We know that children thrive when they have safe, stable, and nurturing relationships with adults in their lives. It is essential that public policy support Native children by

**Allison Empey, MD, FAAP**- American Academy of Pediatrics  
"American Indian and Alaska Native Programs", 5/10/2024

providing access to services to meet their health and developmental needs. We must also endeavor to lift children and their families out of poverty to support their lifelong health.

I see the health crises that arise from these social conditions firsthand. For example, one of my patients struggles with severe obesity. His single mother has limited healthy, affordable options in our rural community, and during the rainy and winter season, there are limited safe areas for play. Medical and public health professionals are doing amazing work to improve the health of Native children and their families but need funding to support that work.

We appreciate that through a constrained fiscal environment this Subcommittee has continued to recognize the importance of investing in the IHS and other programs serving the needs of AI/AN children. However, at current funding levels there is still significant unmet need, and the health inequities Native children face represent a crisis we must address. The AAP urges the Subcommittee to maintain its commitment to AI/AN child health needs in FY 2025 with strong investments in the IHS.

**FY 2025/6 Appropriations:** IHS provides essential health services and public health programs serving AI/AN children. Nearly one-third of the AI/AN population is under the age of 18, compared to 24 percent of the total U.S. population. This means that high-quality child health care is foundational to the success of IHS. The AAP appreciates that Congress recently provided IHS with more than \$4.948 billion in FY2024 annual appropriations and more than \$4.684 billion in FY2025 advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service (IHS), and more than \$958 million in FY2024 annual appropriations and more than \$500 million in FY2025 advance appropriations for the Indian Health Facilities account. While this represents a continuation of increased funding for IHS, we unfortunately know all too well that there remains substantial unmet need in the Agency's ability to meet the health needs of those for whom it cares, particularly children. A U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, the most recent on this issue available, found that in FY 2017, IHS per capita spending was \$4,078. That is significantly lower than per capita spending within the Veterans Health Administration, Medicare, and Medicaid, which were \$10,692, \$13,185, and \$8,109 that same year, respectively.

This significant funding disparity directly impacts children's health. This is especially true for subspecialty care, including mental health, substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, and developmental-behavioral services. Currently, there is a lack of sufficient funding for Purchase/Referred Care services provided away from an IHS or tribal health facility, and the limited funds available often run out before they can provide children access to specialty care. Congress should consider opportunities to support IHS efforts to enroll AI/AN children in Medicaid so that they have access to the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment benefit and IHS/Tribal clinics have access to crucial reimbursements. In addition, Congress should significantly increase appropriations for IHS. We urge the Subcommittee to provide the largest possible funding increase for IHS in Fiscal Year 2024 to ameliorate this disparity and support the health needs of Native children, at least as much as the \$8 billion in the President's budget request.

**Advance Appropriations for IHS:** Over the last decade, the AAP has supported the provision of advance appropriations for IHS, which would provide the agency with two years of appropriations authority at a time rather than one. The AAP appreciates that in the FY24 appropriations package, for the second time ever, Congress provided IHS with advance appropriations for FY 2025. This will enable

**Allison Empey, MD, FAAP**- American Academy of Pediatrics  
"American Indian and Alaska Native Programs", 5/10/2024

IHS to augment the value of its funding through longer term planning, improved budgeting, and better contracting options. These improvements will benefit children through better health service delivery and more cost-effective public health programming. We continue to hear about the challenges in continuing the provision of pediatric health services funded through IHS during the most recent government shutdown. Funding uncertainty impedes access to needed pediatric supplies, fueling patient and elders concerns regarding running out of medication, and personal stress of financial uncertainty for IHS providers, which is why advance appropriations is vital for the health and well-being of AI/AN children.

The new advance appropriations will enable IHS to better recruit and retain pediatric health care providers through better planning for appropriate hiring. This will increase the proportion of AI/AN children receiving quality care from a dedicated medical home. Public health interventions that generate child health improvements will also benefit from budget continuity and the improved planning it would facilitate. All of this is possible without additional cost to the federal government, as demonstrated by the successful implementation of this policy at the Veterans Health Administration in 2009. Ultimately, mandatory funding for IHS would provide the greatest stability to live up to U.S. treaty obligations, and the AAP supports the President's budget proposal to make IHS funding mandatory beginning in 2026. As an immediate step, continuing advance appropriations will make significant progress in protecting Native children and the professionals who care for them from this instability, and the AAP urges Congress to continue providing robust advance appropriations for IHS.

***IHS Workforce Recruitment and Retention:*** Effective recruitment and retention programming is central to ensuring IHS has the workforce necessary to meet the health needs of Native children. I teach and mentor Native students at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) interested in practicing pediatrics. The burden of student loan debt is a clear and compelling factor in the decisions they make.

We deeply appreciate the value of the Indian Health Service Health Professions Scholarship Program and Health Professions Loan Repayment Program, which are key tools for recruiting and retaining health providers. We appreciate that Congress has continued to prioritize funding for these programs, and increased funding under the Health Professions account by \$5,000,000 in Fiscal Year 2023. Unfortunately, unlike similar programs at the National Health Service Corps, these IHS programs are also taxed. This reduces the impact of loan repayment and scholarships at IHS by over \$7 million, based on the most recent data, diluting the reach of these important Congressional investments. We urge you to continue investing in these crucial programs and to support their tax exemption.

The federal government has done a tremendous job making education available to Native students. To build upon this success, we suggest further efforts to work with educational institutions to ensure that their student bodies accurately reflect the patient populations they serve. Federal funding to educational institutions offers important opportunities to ensure that our medical schools are intentional in building a diverse next generation of health care providers. It is particularly important to improve the training, recruitment, and retention of specialty care providers such as pediatric behavioral specialists, to address significant unmet needs throughout IHS.

**Allison Empey, MD, FAAP**- American Academy of Pediatrics  
"American Indian and Alaska Native Programs", 5/10/2024

**ICWA:** The AAP is a steadfast supporter of ICWA, a 46-year-old federal law that protects the wellbeing of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children, and the AAP is grateful the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brackeen v. Haaland* recognized this and upheld ICWA. ICWA reaffirms the rights of Tribal nations to be involved in child welfare matters, while also keeping AI/AN children connected to their community and culture. ICWA was enacted in 1978 in response to the longstanding crisis of AI/AN children being removed from their families and communities. It has been recognized as a gold standard of child welfare law and has been crucial for promoting the maintenance of familial and cultural ties that support the health, development, and wellbeing of AI/AN children.

Appropriate ICWA implementation is important for minimizing child trauma and promoting optimal parent-child attachment and facilitation of maintained connection to extended family and culture. The AAP supports effective implementation of ICWA and supports efforts to strengthen this gold standard policy to protect AI/AN children.

**Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and People:** Violence against AI/AN women, girls, and two spirit individuals is a public health crisis that inflicts wide-ranging harms on AI/AN children and families. Children and adolescents are uniquely vulnerable to violence, including dating violence, interpersonal violence, trafficking, and other harmful forms of exploitation. Congress should consider opportunities to support IHS engagement in this public health threat to AI/AN women, girls, and communities. Health professionals and health systems have a crucial role to play in the prevention, identification, and treatment of violence against women and children and a collaborative response can best leverage resources from law enforcement, tribes, health professionals, and local communities to protect AI/AN women and girls.

**Conclusion:** Thank you again for the opportunity to provide public comment today on the important issue of AI/AN child health needs. Native children need the important health services and public health programs funded through IHS. We thank you again for your ongoing commitment to Native communities and families like my own and urge you to provide the funding necessary to meet the health needs of AI/AN children.



AMERICAN INDIAN  
HIGHER EDUCATION  
CONSORTIUM

**Tribal Colleges & Universities:** *Educating, Engaging, Innovating, Sustaining, Honoring*

**Statement of Ahniwake Rose, In-Coming President & CEO  
American Indian Higher Education Consortium  
Prepared for the U.S. House Of Representatives Interior Appropriations Subcommittee  
Public Witness Days on American Indian and Alaska Native Programs  
May 8, 2024**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Committee. My name is Ahniwake Rose, and I'm the incoming President of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Department of Interior's Fiscal Year 2025 Budget.

As a citizen of the Cherokee and Muscogee Creek Nations and a resident of Oklahoma, I want to congratulate Chairman Cole on his election to be chair of the House Appropriations Committee.

The work you do is critically important to Indian Country and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). On behalf of AIHEC and the Tribal Colleges, I thank the subcommittee for preserving key funding for the Tribal colleges last year during the fiscal year 2024 Appropriations process. The initial funding levels discussed would have forced TCUs to scale back vital programs and services students rely on to complete their programs. Funding reductions threaten TCU accreditation status, further stretch overtaxed faculty and staff—already wearing multiple hats—or eliminate faculty and staff positions in areas of the country with some of the highest unemployment rates.

**TREATIES AND TRUST**

I'm here today to remind you of your sacred trust responsibility and to share concrete examples of how investments by this subcommittee impact American Indian and Alaska Native students, Tribal colleges, and Indian Country.

Years before Columbus arrived, an estimated 10 million people lived on this land, speaking hundreds of languages and living in diverse and vibrant cultures shaped by millennia of history and tradition. Beginning in 1785, Tribal Nations relinquished their sacred lands—over one billion acres—in exchange for treaty promises. It is from these treaties that the federal trust responsibility grows. Authorized by the U.S. Constitution and repeatedly re-affirmed, the trust responsibility establishes a clear relationship between Tribes and the federal government, which applies to all branches of the government.

Many of the treaties included a trust responsibility to provide education.

To us, education meant equality, opportunity, and hope for our children and grandchildren as Tribal people within the context of our Tribal identity. But that is not what happened. Education was used as a weapon to eliminate our language, crush our culture, and assimilate our spirits.

**TRIBAL COLLEGES EMERGE**



Yet our spirit remained resilient. In the 1960s, Tribal leaders and educators pushed for self-determination and Tribal sovereignty and, with that, greater control over educational systems to ensure that they reflected their unique cultural values, languages, and traditions.

In 1973, six Tribally controlled colleges established AIHEC to provide a support network as they worked to influence federal policies on American Indian higher education. We advocated for, and in 1978 successfully passed, the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act to provide federal support and assistance to Tribally controlled colleges and universities.

Today, AIHEC represents 35 accredited TCUs across the United States, operating more than 90 campuses and sites in 16 states. We recently welcomed one new member from California as an associate member as they seek accreditation. These institutions serve students from over 250 Federally Recognized Indian Tribes and embody a vital component of Tribal higher education.

Over 80 percent of Indian Country is served by TCUs. Tribal colleges not only serve students, but they also serve over 160,000 American Indians, Alaska Natives, and other rural residents each year through a wide variety of academic and community-based programs. All TCUs offer certificates and associate degrees; 22 offer bachelor's degrees; 9 offer master's degrees; and one offers a doctoral degree. Our programs range from liberal arts to technical and career programs. And as open enrollment, community-based institutions, Tribal colleges welcome all students and proudly became a part of this nation's land-grant family in 1994.

#### **BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS**

We appreciate the Department of Interior's effort to increase Tribal education programs by an estimated \$154.6 million (11 percent). We recognize that investing in our Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) K-12 schools is essential to reducing education and opportunity gaps for American Indian students, and we support the requests of our sister organization, the National Indian Education Association, for this important work.

We only wish that Tribal post-secondary education was included as part of those proposed increases by the Department of Interior.

Despite the invaluable contributions of TCUs and the federal trust responsibility, the Department of Interior's FY2025 budget proposes flat funding for most Tribal colleges. The federal government has never fully funded TCU institutional operations as authorized under the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act. This chronic underfunding undermines the mission and impact of TCUs. For example, at Northwest Indian College, 50 percent of faculty salaries come from grant applications, which require ongoing management and applications, diverting resources from the school's core mission. Significant cuts in funding would impact teaching and Tribal college student success.

Moreover, we are disappointed that the Department of Interior ignored the guidance of this subcommittee on provisions relating to contract support costs for the Tribal colleges. In fiscal years 2020- 2022, AIHEC inserted report language directing the BIE to provide support costs for Tribal colleges in their annual budget request. Despite the directive, the Department of Interior has failed to do so.



We look to this subcommittee to address these needs and uphold the federal government's trust responsibility to provide education for tribal college students.

At the Department of Interior, we request **\$168.9 million for Post-Secondary Programs** within the Operation of Indian Education Programs and an **additional \$35 million to address Tribal College Facilities Improvement and Repair**.

***Post-Secondary Programs***

AIHEC requests \$168,982,000 under Post Secondary Programs, forward funded, to support the Nation's Tribal College and University System. This funding is essential to ensure the continued success and impact of TCUs in advancing educational equity, excellence, and economic opportunity for Native Americans.

For the colleges authorized by the Tribal College Act, we request a total of \$110 million. These funds are for institutional operations under Title I (\$92.2 million) and Title II (\$17 million), along with TCU Endowments (\$109,000) and technical assistance (\$701,000) of the TCU Act. This funding would provide the Congressionally authorized amount of \$10,907\*/Indian student for the first time since the enactment of the TCU Act more than 40 years ago (\*\$8,000 per Indian student adjusted for inflation). This request also provides an additional \$100,000 for needed technical assistance, which has been level-funded for 15 years despite growing numbers of developing TCUs and increased demands for accountability and student success.

For Tribal career and technical institutions authorized under Title V of the TCU Act, we request \$15 million. For the Institute of American Indian Arts, we request \$13.9 million and for BIE's two postsecondary institutions (Haskell Indian Nations University and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute), we request \$30 million.

TCUs are resilient, resourceful, and proud to lead the nation in many areas, including preparing an American Indian and Alaska Native workforce of nurses, land managers, and teachers for Tribal-serving schools. For example, half of all American Indian or Alaska Native special education teachers in Montana are graduates of Salish Kootenai College. There are eight Tribal colleges—two in Montana and two in Minnesota—that have early education partnerships to enhance early childhood development initiatives, build the American Indian/Alaska Native educator pipeline, promote cultural continuity, and provide vital resources and support to families within Indigenous communities, fostering a strong foundation for future generations.

TCUs prepare professionals in high-demand fields, including agriculture and natural resources management, information technology, and building trades. By teaching the job skills most in demand on our reservations, TCUs are laying a foundation for Tribal economic growth, which is the *only* way to move Tribes and Tribal citizens to self-sufficiency.

Tribal Colleges and Universities continually seek to instill a sense of hope and identity within American Indian and Alaska Native youth, who will one day lead Tribal Nations. Unacceptably, the high school dropout rate for Native students remains around 50 percent. TCUs work with local schools to create a bridge for Tribal students as early as elementary school, encouraging them to stay focused on achievable goals, finish high school, and go on to the local TCU. TCUs



offer dual credit courses for high school students, provide math teachers for local high schools to improve course delivery, and host weekend academies, after-school programs, and summer camps for middle and high school students.

At the other end of the spectrum, TCUs offer GED/HiSET training and testing and have 2+2 partnerships to bridge programs with regional universities. All are solid steps to bolster future prospects for American Indian and Alaska Native youth and break the cycle of generational poverty. For these critical national and tribal objectives, AIHEC is requesting \$168,982,000 under Post-Secondary Programs, forward funded, to support the Nation's Tribal College and University System.

#### ***Education Construction***

For TCUs to realize their goals of strengthening Tribal nations with a modern workforce, TCUs must have the facilities and infrastructure capable of educating and training students in a safe environment. It simply cannot be done on the scale needed in classrooms with leaking roofs and substandard electrical wiring; outdated computer labs; students sleeping in cars and trucks because there are no dorms; and the slowest – yet most expensive – Internet access of any institution of higher education in the country.

The Senate Interior Appropriations report has requested that the BIE develop a consistent methodology for determining TCU operating and maintenance needs. The report's results will likely expand on the needs identified in a July 2021 AIHEC survey, which revealed many chronic unmet facilities and infrastructure needs, including a lack of student and faculty housing, inadequate classroom space, insufficient libraries, and outdated laboratories.

Leech Lake reservation, the largest in Minnesota, requires students to drive over an hour to get to class if they have reliable transportation. Due to the size and lack of housing on the reservation, Leech Lake Tribal College has identified the need for dormitories to address many of the challenges faced by its students. Little Big Horn College in Montana is renting or borrowing space for its career and technical programs in electrical, plumbing, HVAC, Welding, and Agriculture technology. Northwest Indian College, serving the communities of Bellingham, Washington and Lapwai, Idaho would like to build its cybersecurity program to address Tribal community and business needs. The college also has \$20 million in deferred maintenance costs and needs \$35 million to complete its campus master plans.

In the aggregate, AIHEC's survey calculated \$400 million (total) in deferred maintenance and rehabilitation costs and \$2.7 billion (total) to complete existing master plans. To begin to address TCU infrastructure needs, AIHEC requests \$35 million be allocated in FY25.

#### **CONCLUSION**

AIHEC appreciates the committee's continued commitment and support to Tribal education. Through this process, you have the opportunity to ensure that post-secondary education is equitably funded. I urge this committee to prioritize the funding needs of TCUs in the FY25 budget, recognizing the critical role they play in fulfilling the federal government's trust responsibility to Tribal Nations and advancing the educational and economic well-being of Native communities. Thank you.



**American Psychological Association Services, Inc.**  
 Public Witness Written Testimony Submitted May 9, 2024  
**By Katherine B. McGuire**  
 Chief Advocacy Officer  
 to the  
 United States House of Representatives  
 Committee on Appropriations  
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

**Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations**

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APA Services is the companion organization of the American Psychological Association, which is the nation's largest scientific and professional nonprofit organization representing the discipline and profession of psychology, as well as over 157,000 members and affiliates who are clinicians, researchers, educators, consultants, and students in psychological science. Through the application of psychological science and practice, our association's mission is to make a positive impact on critical societal issues across the states. Many programs funded in the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill provide essential support for our nation's public health programs by helping to provide critical access to essential mental and behavioral health services to American Indians and Alaska Natives.

**APA Services urges Congress to provide the following funding levels.**

**The Indian Health Service**

**APA Services urges Congress to provide at least \$8.2 billion for the Indian Health Service (IHS).** The IHS provides federal health services to American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN). As the main federal health care provider for AI/AN people, its main goal is to improve their health care to the highest extent possible. The agency provides a health service delivery system for approximately 2.6 million American Indians and Alaska Natives who belong to the 574 federally recognized tribes.<sup>1</sup>

Increased funding is essential for the IHS since this population has a life expectancy of approximately 5.5 years less than the U.S. all races population and often has a disproportionate

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<sup>1</sup> Indian Health Service, (October 2019). Indian Health Disparities. Retrieved from: <https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/factsheets/disparities/>.

disease burden when compared to other populations.<sup>2</sup> For example, American Indians and Alaska Natives die at higher rates than other Americans as a result of intentional self-harm/suicide, chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, diabetes, unintentional injuries and assault/homicide.<sup>3</sup>

COVID-19 also highlighted how AI/AN communities were especially vulnerable to COVID-19, partly due to the long-term inequalities, high rates of poverty and high rates of underlying medical conditions within these communities. Now more than ever, it is important that Congress continue to address the needs of the most vulnerable. If more resources are not provided, the substantial number of health needs for AI/AN that already exist will become even greater.

### Mental Health

**Within the Indian Health Services, APA Services recommends \$139 million be allocated to mental health services.** This program is currently funded at \$130 million. AI/AN communities often lack access to adequate health care, including behavioral health. Particularly striking are the suicide rates among adolescents and young adults in these communities. Suicide rates for AI/AN individuals between the age of 15 to 24 years old was 39.7 per 100,000, compared with the overall U.S. rate of 9.9 per 100,000. This rate is more than 3 and half times the suicide rate for males of all races in the age group. The suicide rate for AI/AN females in the same age group was lower than males at 20.2. per 100,000. However, this rate was still nearly six times the rate for females of all races.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, during 2015-2020, 3,397 suicides among AI/AN individuals and 179,850 suicides among non AI/AN were reported. About three quarters (74.6%) of AI/AN suicide decedents were under the age of 44, compared to less than half (46.5%) of non AI/AN decedents.<sup>5</sup>

Given the prevalent mental health concerns following COVID-19, mental health resources are even more critical now for all communities, especially those that have extensive histories of high rates of mental health concerns such as American Indians and Alaska Natives.

### Alcohol and Substance Use

**Within the IHS, APA Services requests at least \$291 million be allocated to alcohol and substance use programs.** This program is currently funded at \$267 million. High rates of alcohol and substance use in AI/AN communities are well documented.<sup>6</sup> This serious behavioral

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, (2017). *Suicide Clusters within American Indian and Alaska Native Communities: A review of the literature and recommendations*. HHS Publication No. SMA17-5050. Rockville, MD. Retrieved from: <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma17-5050.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Stone, D., Trinh E., Zhou, H., Welder, L., End of Horn, P., Fowler, K., Ivey-Stephenson, A., (September 2022). *Suicides Among American Indian or Alaska Native Persons- National Violent Death Reporting System, United States 2015-2020*. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 2022; 71:1161-1168. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7137a1.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Indian Health Service, (2023). *Behavioral Health*. Retrieved from: [https://www.ihs.gov/sites/newsroom/themes/responsive2017/display\\_objects/documents/factsheets/BehavioralHealth.pdf](https://www.ihs.gov/sites/newsroom/themes/responsive2017/display_objects/documents/factsheets/BehavioralHealth.pdf).

health issue has a strong impact on the health of individuals and families. AI/AN communities are much more likely to report past-year alcohol and substance use disorders than any other race.<sup>7</sup>

This population is also more likely to require alcohol use treatment than persons of any other ethnic groups.<sup>8</sup> These programs can be extremely helpful for individuals struggling with alcohol addiction, however there is often a lack of availability of culturally sensitive treatment programs.<sup>9</sup> The IHS is especially positioned to ensure such programs contain culturally sensitive components in the treatment plans.

### **Indian Health Professions**

**Within the IHS, APA Services requests \$81.3 million for the Indian Health Professions account.** This program is currently funded at \$80.6 million. We emphasize the importance of having psychologists who are aware of the cultural sensitivities of this community and can best address this community's needs. The Indian Health Professions account includes the American Indians Into Psychology Program (INPSYC). The primary goals of the program are to increase the number of AI/AN with doctoral degrees in psychology and enhance the cross-cultural understanding and competence of non-AI/AN about AI/AN psychology. Together, these aims will help ensure the development and maintenance of AI/AN psychology career recruitment programs to encourage AI/AN to enter the field of psychology.

More specifically, the program recruits and trains individuals to be psychologists. It also provides scholarships to individuals enrolled in schools of clinical psychology to pay tuition, for books, fees and stipends for living expenses. Additionally, the program seeks to directly engage with tribal communities in order to provide greater exposure to the field of psychology. Finally, the program provides stipends to undergraduate and graduate students pursuing careers in psychology and training opportunities for psychology graduate students in tribal communities.<sup>10</sup>

With the higher rates of suicide and other behavioral health concerns for this community, APA Services values the importance of increasing the number of AI/AN psychologists.

**For these reasons, APA Services recommends \$81.3 million for the Indian Health Professions Account.**

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> American Addiction Centers. (February, 2024). Alcohol Addiction Resources for Different Demographics and Populations. Retrieved from: <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/alcoholism-treatment/native-americans>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Indian Health Service. American Indians Into Psychology Program. Retrieved from: [American Indians into Psychology Program | Student Opportunities \(ihs.gov\)](https://www.ihs.gov/american-indians-into-psychology-program/)

## ASSOCIATION OF VILLAGE COUNCIL PRESIDENTS

Thaddeus Tikin Jr., Chairperson | Vivian Korthuis, CEO | AVCP.org

### Administration

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VIVIAN KORTHUIS,  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO)  
ASSOCIATION OF VILLAGE COUNCIL PRESIDENTS (AVCP)

March 9, 2024

Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY: [IN.Approp@mail.house.gov](mailto:IN.Approp@mail.house.gov)

**RE: *Written Testimony Regarding the FY 2025 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), Indian Health Services (IHS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Budgets***

To Whom It May Concern:

The Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) is the largest tribal consortium in the United States with 56 federally recognized Tribes as members. We are headquartered in Bethel, Alaska, which is the hub community of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (YK-Delta) located in southwest Alaska. There are 48 villages in the YK-Delta, which are spread along the Yukon River, Kuskokwim River, and the Bering Sea Coast – an area the size of the State of New York. The population in our region is approximately 27,000 and growing, with a median age of 25. The YK-Delta is “off-the-road system” where travel into our region is by plane or barge alone, and travel within the region is by small aircraft, boat, snow machine trails, or the ice road. Chair Simpson, ranking members, and other distinguished subcommittee members, quyana (thank you) for this opportunity to request an additional \$10 million in FY 2025 funding specifically for our AVCP programs as described below.

AVCP’s mission is to work together with Tribes to support sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and Our Way of Life. In Our Way of Life, all aspects of our existence are woven together. This is why AVCP takes a holistic approach to wellness in our region by offering braided programs and services that support healthy families and communities. The Tiwahe demonstration program has been critical to the growth and advancement of this mission in the past 10 years.

unaput umyuallgukut pinirluteng-llu, Tegganerput qigcikliki pirpaktuki-llu, ayagyuaput-llu ciuliqagcimaut yuuyarakun.  
ur Tribes are united and strong, our Elders are respected and valued, and our youth are guided by Yuuyaraq.

ciachak, Akiak, Akiakuk, Andreafski, Aniak, Almautluak, Bethel, Bill Moore’s Sl., Chefornak, Chevak, Chuathbaluk, Chuloonavick, Crooked Creek, Ak, Emmonak, Georgetown, Goodnews Bay, Hamilton, Hooper Bay, Lower Kalskag, Upper Kalskag, Kasigluk, Kipnuk, Kongiganak, Kotlik, Kwethluk, sigillingok, Lime Village, Marshall, Mekoryuk, Mtn. Village, Napaimute, Napakiak, Napaskiak, Newtok, Nighlmute, Nunakuyak, Nunam Iqaa, anapitchuk, Ohogamiut, Oscarville, Painiut, Pilot Station, Pitka’s Point, Platinum, Quinhagak, Red Devil, Russian Mission, Scammon Bay, Sleethmule, Mary’s, Stony River, Tutluskak, Tuntululiak, Tununak, Umkumiut

The Tiwahe Initiative was established in 2015 to improve the health and well-being of families in tribal communities and to reduce poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and associated outcomes such as youth suicide. AVCP is one of six Tiwahe Pilot Sites. Through Tiwahe, AVCP entirely redesigned its service delivery model to provide wrap-around services to families at the village level and developed and expanded critical culturally grounded prevention and wellness programming, all of which has significantly benefitted our tribal members throughout this vast region. Tiwahe has also supported critical funding for the growth and development of our region's tribal courts. We are also pleased that Tiwahe has provided an increase in Social Services and ICWA funding for all Tribes, with additional demonstration programs to include the Housing Improvement Project (HIP), Job Placement and Training, and Public Safety, as well as allowing us to braid all our services in a way that makes sense.

We appreciate your ongoing funding of the original six Tiwahe sites, and we request the same support in FY 2025. We much appreciated your providing new funding in 2022 and 2023 to add a total of four new demonstration sites (now 10 sites representing 65 tribes). In addition, BIA provided \$200,000 in one time funding this year to each of 12 additional Tiwahe Incubator tribes/consortia, to assist them in developing Tiwahe implementation plans, so that they will be ready to onboard as full Tiwahe demonstration sites in FY 2025 if Congress provides the additional funds requested by the Administration.

The President's FY 2025 budget requests an increase of \$28.6 million across several Tiwahe budget lines, to expand Tiwahe to benefit more tribes. This funding increase includes additional funding to expand Tiwahe Services to 13 additional Tribes/Tribal Organizations as well as 15 additional Tiwahe incubator sites. The funding also will provide for two (2) new FTEs to support a National Tiwahe Program Office to allow for stronger coordination and reporting among the Tiwahe Tribes and BIA and one (1) FTE that will help in building Tribal capacity in managing Tiwahe ICWA programs, services, functions and activities. These FTEs are essential to build the capacity needed to support the current Tiwahe Initiative sites and continued expansion of the Tiwahe Initiative to new sites. We are excited to see these initiatives progress. We recognize that additional funding is requested to support recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites, increase in request for the Tiwahe housing program, increase in funding to support Tribal Justice Support (TJS) which will provide technical assistance and direct funding opportunities to Tribes seeking to develop and operate holistic communities including healing to wellness courts.

In addition to the President's FY 2025 requested increases discussed above, AVCP requests **an additional amount of \$10 million for AVCP** to be utilized as follows:

An additional **\$4 million in Tiwahe Job Placement/Training funds** to support the continued expansion of wrap-around services at the village-based.

An additional **\$2 million in Tiwahe Family Wellness and Prevention funds** to support the expansion of AVCP's culturally based wellness programming to the entire region.

3. An additional **\$4 million in Tiwahe Public Safety funds** to develop and implement preventive solutions to promote the safety and well-being of our families and communities in Alaska, a state where Tribes have historically received no federal public safety funding.

In early 2021, the Tiwahe tribes submitted to Congress a comprehensive series of Tiwahe reports, including an independent evaluation by FHI 360, and BIA soon after submitted its Final Tiwahe Report to Congress. These reports provided compelling evidence that Tiwahe is a success and should be expanded to more tribes. Congress has acknowledged this and said: the reports document significant achievements, including a reduction in attempted and completed suicides, recidivism, and removal of children from the community. At the same time, the reports note earlier parent/child reunifications, language revitalization, and improvements to housing and homelessness among other improvements. For the fiscal year 2023, Congress provided additional funds to expand Tiwahe to other sites across various programs. Unfortunately, Congress was unable to provide funds in FY 2024 to further expand Tiwahe. It is critical that in FY 2025, the additional funding requested by the Administration is provided to bring funding parity to the four new Tiwahe sites, and to provide funding for the 12 new Tiwahe Incubator sites to be onboarded as full Tiwahe sites in FY 2025. We would be happy to meet with the Subcommittee, along with Indian Affairs staff, to further explain these critical and timely needs.

Thank you for accepting and considering my testimony, and for your support for Tribes throughout Indian Country. If you have questions, I am happy to answer them or provide any additional information. You can reach me at (907) 543.7304 or [vkorthuis@avcp.org](mailto:vkorthuis@avcp.org).

Sincerely,

ASSOCIATION OF VILLAGE COUNCIL PRESIDENTS



Vivian Korthuis  
Chief Executive Officer

TESTIMONY OF HON. MARVIN WEATHERWAX JR.,  
MEMBER OF THE BLACKFEET TRIBAL BUSINESS COUNCIL  
BEFORE THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES

May 7, 2024

Good Afternoon Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Marvin Weatherwax Jr. and I am a member of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council. I also serve as Chairman of the Coalition of Large Tribes and serve as a member of the Montana State Legislature in House District 15.

Before I go any further, I want to extend my thanks and gratitude for the leadership Committee Chairman Tom Cole and Congressman Ryan Zinke with respect to our Youth Center Appropriations Request from last year—that will be essential to the healing of Blackfeet children.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of funding for wastewater infrastructure for the Blackfeet Tribe. The Blackfeet Tribe is seeking funding to construct critical wastewater infrastructure for the Blackfeet Indian Reservation which spans more than 1.5 million acres and is home to over 17,000 tribal members in five Reservation communities.

We view the need for wastewater infrastructure as a priority to fulfill the purposes of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation under our Treaty of 1855—namely to be the permanent homeland for our Blackfeet people.

The Blackfeet Tribe has been subjected to enormous amounts of land loss stemming from the failed federal policy of the Dawes Act. The loss of our Reservation land base occurred during the starvation winter of 1883, when our Chiefs were coerced to sign another treaty to receive rations in exchange for 130,000 acres of land.

In 1911, the Blackfeet were subject to the “Blackfeet Allotment” where another 156,000 acres were sold as “surplus” to non-Indians.

Our Tribe asserts our Treaty rights consistent with original Blackfeet Treaty Reservation boundaries which spanned from the eastern front of the Rocky Mountains to Yellowstone National Park, bordered by the Yellowstone River on the South all the way to what is now central Alberta, Canada.

As of today, our Tribe has lost 90% of our original Reservation due actions of the U.S. Federal Government. Of note, we lost land to the establishment of Glacier National Park and the creation of a National Forest which includes lands sacred to the Blackfeet – the land known as Badger Two Medicine area.

The existing Blackfeet Indian Reservation lands includes the headwaters of the St. Mary’s River, which is a tributary to the Mississippi River. The Army Corps of Engineers, without any consultation with the Blackfeet Tribe constructed a major pipeline project to divert water to support off-reservation, non-Indian communities downstream. These non-Indian communities water their crops, cattle and provide clean domestic water for their communities and have done so for decades with Blackfeet water, without even acknowledgement, much less any compensations. of our senior rights to that very water.

After nearly four decades of negotiations and work, in 2016, the United States enacted the Blackfeet Water Rights Settlement Act. However, this Act does not include funding for

wastewater. At the time, the Blackfeet Tribe was informed by the Administration, that wastewater funding was not eligible to be included in an Indian water settlement.

The Secretary's Indian Water Rights Office has now thought better about the United States' investment in and approach to tribal water rights, and now supports wastewater funding in Indian Water Rights Settlements, as evidenced by: the Montana Water Protection Act (Confederated Salish & Kootenai Indian Water Rights Settlement) enacted by Congress in 2020; and Administration's support for the Fort Belknap Indian Community Indian Water Rights Settlement Act (2023), both of which have language supporting wastewater.

All Blackfeet tribal communities suffer from dilapidated infrastructure and associated challenges, such as boil-order mandates, expensive water-hauling and bottled water purchases. The Blackfeet Tribal leadership has expended huge amounts of tribal resources to address emergency shut-offs, tribal office closures of essential governmental services, putting tribal member health, safety, and welfare at risk due to water main breaks and non-drinkable water. Pallets of bottled water, and portable toilets have become all too normal for the members and residents Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

The ability to update and provide new water and wastewater infrastructure will improve Tribal member health outcomes where clean water and reliable wastewater has been shown to improve nutrition by accessing clean water and decreasing reliance on sugary drinks and avoiding contaminated drinking water. Additionally, having clean water and reliable wastewater systems allow Tribal members tend to be less exposed to illness, for obvious reasons. Finally, the cost savings realized in avoiding bottled water and hauling water allows limited resources to be put to better use for things like food and housing.

The Blackfeet people believe funding for wastewater should be authorized and appropriated in order to achieve the same goals and objectives of any Indian Water Rights Settlement: satisfying the purposes of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation as a permanent homeland for the Blackfeet people.

The Blackfeet Tribe, like other tribes, has water and wastewater needs that remain unaddressed. Authorizing funding of this nature will demonstrate the U.S. Government's commitment to fulfillment of its Trust responsibility to Indian Tribes, and its specific Treaty obligations to our Tribe.

The Secretary's Indian Water Rights Office utilizes an antiquated and ineffective system to administer Federal Indian Water Rights. Tribes would benefit greatly if the Office was fully funded and staffed properly to better advocate, negotiate and implement Indian Water Rights Settlements.

The authorization of wastewater funding is a small step but important step by the United States to honor our Treaty and to reverse the failed federal policies. Consistent with current federal Indian policy, the successful implementation of the Blackfeet Indian Water Rights Settlement Act can improve Tribal self-determination and self-sufficiency by providing water and wastewater for communities within our Reservation lands, thereby increasing the Tribe's ability to make beneficial use of the water.

This completes my testimony. Once again, on behalf of the Blackfeet Tribe, I appreciate the opportunity to provide our perspective on the Blackfeet Wastewater fix. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure its success on our Reservation.

**Testimony of Robert J. Clark, President/CEO of Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation,  
“American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Days”  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
May 10, 2024**

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**Recommendations:**

1. Provide full funding and advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service (IHS)
2. Reduce dependence on competitive grants for Indian Country
3. Permanently exempt the IHS from cuts, sequestrations, and rescissions
4. Ensure mandatory funding for Contract Support Costs (CSC) and section 105(*l*) leases.
5. Amend Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) to clarify CSC provisions.
6. Fund Critical Infrastructure investments for the IHS.
7. Increase funding and extend self-governance to the Special Diabetes Program for Indians.
8. Increase funding for behavioral and mental health programs.

**Introduction.** Thank you, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to share our funding priorities for FY 2025. My name is Robert Clark and I am the President/CEO of the Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation (BBAHC). BBAHC was created in 1973 to provide health care services to Alaska Natives of Southwest Alaska. We began operating and managing the Kakanak Hospital and the Bristol Bay Service Unit for the IHS in 1980 as the first Tribal organization to do so under ISDEAA. BBAHC is a co-signer to the Alaska Tribal Health Compact with the IHS under the ISDEAA and is now responsible for providing and promoting health care to the people of twenty-eight Alaska Native Villages.

We are grateful for the historic investments Congress has made in the Indian health system in recent years via the CARES Act, American Rescue Plan Act, and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The direct funding model and successful implementation of these laws prove that when Tribal sovereignty is honored, Tribal communities thrive. We would also like to thank this Subcommittee for its bipartisan effort to protect the IHS from cuts during the 2024 appropriations process. Furthermore, we urge you to remember that Congress’ trust and treaty responsibility to provide for the health and wellbeing of Tribal Nations exists irrespective of any self-imposed budgetary caps. It is imperative that this Subcommittee appropriate the full amounts necessary to fulfill its obligations. To that end, I offer the following recommendations for your consideration for FY 2025 appropriations for the IHS.

**Provide Full Funding for the Indian Health Service:** The IHS and its Tribal partners under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act strive to provide Tribal people with access to high quality and comprehensive medical services, in line with the federal government’s trust and treaty obligations. However, chronic underfunding of the Indian health system has had detrimental impacts on our communities. Alaska Natives are disproportionately affected by obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, substance-use disorder and other largely preventable conditions. We therefore urge the Subcommittee to work towards full and mandatory funding for the IHS, in line with the IHS Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup.

The Workgroup has calculated it will take \$54 billion to fully-fund the IHS. We understand that this represents a dramatic increase in funding; however, it is essential that Congress address the true needs of the Indian health system. We support their full request and reiterate the following four priorities for program expansion as follows:

- 1) Hospitals and Clinics: \$13.6 billion

- 2) Mental Health: \$4.5 billion
- 3) Alcohol & Substance Abuse: \$4.9 billion
- 4) Dental Services: \$3.2 billion

**Continued Support for Advance Appropriations for IHS:** If full, mandatory appropriations cannot be achieved for FY 2025, we continue to support advance appropriations for the IHS in the short-term. This year's tumultuous appropriations cycle clearly demonstrates why advance appropriations are critical—IHS clinical services remained continuous throughout the volatile political process. We urge the Subcommittee to extend advance appropriations to all IHS accounts, including Electronic Health Records Modernization, Health Care Facilities Construction, and Sanitation Facilities Construction for FY 2026.

**Reduce Dependence on Federal Grants:** We also support moving away from competitive grants for federal funding mechanisms. Grants unfairly pit Tribes and Tribal organizations against each other for resources we are all entitled to. The federal trust responsibility does not require that we jump through a myriad of hoops and onerous applications to see that services are provided to our people. Too often, Indian Country is under-resourced to apply for federal grants and comply with their reporting requirements. Our staff must divert time to apply and report, thereby diluting the usefulness of the resources. Instead, we request wide-spread, formula-based funding across all programs. Tribes and Tribal organizations must also be granted the flexibility needed to respond to the specific needs of their own communities, not those prescribed by federal grants. This also means appropriating enough resources so funds are provided in meaningful amounts across all Tribes and Tribal organizations. We join other Tribal leaders in calling for broad based funding for Indian Country.

**Permanently Exempt the IHS from Cuts, Sequestrations, and Rescissions:** As demonstrated above, the Indian health system is chronically underfunded, with current appropriations sitting around one-seventh of need. Nevertheless, Congress routinely threatens and enacts additional budget cuts, sequestrations, and rescissions affecting the IHS. As recently as FY 2024, this Congress rescinded \$350 million marked for public health infrastructure from the IHS. Furthermore, the IHS is the only federally funded services providing direct patient care not exempt from sequestration.

We remind this Subcommittee again that its trust obligations to Tribal Nations exist regardless of any self-imposed budget control measures. In fact, the IHS budget remains so small in comparison to the national budget that cuts, rescissions, and sequestrations do not result in any meaningful savings in the national debt, but they do devastate Tribes and their citizens. We urge Congress to ensure that any budget cuts, whether automatic or explicit, hold the Indian health system harmless.

**Mandatory Funding for Contract Support Costs and 105(I) lease payments:** We appreciate the Subcommittee's commitment to ensuring that CSC and section 105(I) lease payments are fully funded. However, these line items continue to take up a larger and larger percentage of the IHS discretionary budget, thereby leaving little room to expand other services given tight budget environment. We strongly agree with the Subcommittee's words in the explanatory statement for the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94) regarding 105(I) costs which said, in part: "Obligations of this nature are typically addressed through mandatory spending, but in this case since they fall under discretionary spending, they are impacting all other programs funded under the Interior and Environment Appropriations bill, including other equally important Tribal programs."

Therefore, we ask you to continue to advocate with your colleagues on authorizing committees to enact mandatory appropriations for CSC and 105(l) lease costs. Doing so will ensure that other areas of the IHS budget are held harmless by these costs and true increases in critical services line items can move forward. This will enhance care for Tribal patients and reduce health disparities.

**Amend ISDEAA to Clarify CSC provisions.** We also request that the committee consider amending the ISDEAA to clarify that when agency funding paid to a Tribe for program operations is insufficient for contract and compact administration, CSC will remain available to cover the difference. In the recent court decision *Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc. v. Dotomain*,<sup>1</sup> a federal appeals court held that costs for activities normally carried out by IHS are ineligible for payment as CSC—even if IHS transfers insufficient, or even no, funding for these activities in the Secretarial amount. Under this new ruling, if facility costs are higher for a Tribe or Tribal Health Program than for IHS, the former is forced to cover the difference by diverting scarce program dollars. Recently, this serious misinterpretation of the ISDEAA that has been applied to one Tribal organization resulting in a 90% reduction of CSC reimbursement threatens Tribal self-governance and self-determination. Therefore, we call upon Congress to provide a legislative fix to clarify the intent on Congress for this matter, and ensure consistency with precedent.

**Fully fund critical infrastructure investments:** We were disappointed to see that this Subcommittee approved cuts to Electronic Health Records Modernization, Health Care Facilities Construction, and Sanitation Facilities Construction in FY 2024. The Indian health system's infrastructure is among the oldest and most dilapidated in the country. This is especially true in Alaska, where more than half of homes in thirty-one Alaska Native communities lack proper sanitation infrastructure. Additionally, we continue to experience significant challenges finding adequate housing for staffing for health professionals in our community. As you know, health staffing shortages across the Indian health system are dire, and providing adequate living spaces for professionals is directly linked with our ability to recruit and retain staff.

Therefore, we request that this Subcommittee restore and fully-fund these accounts. To implement an interoperable Electronic Health Records and telehealth system, \$801 million is needed for FY 2025. As you are aware, this investment is especially critical as the Veterans' Administration and Department of Defense move to modernize their systems. It is also critical that Congress make significant investments in Health Care Facilities Construction and Sanitation Facilities Construction. IHS and Tribal facilities are severely outdated, and we appreciate Congress' investment in IHS sanitation facilities through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Yet, with a multi-billion-dollar backlog and growing inflation, funding to close out the list is not keeping pace with need. This creates situations where facilities are unfit and unsafe. Therefore, consistent with the Workgroup's request, we recommend \$2.8 billion for Health Care Facilities Construction and Equipment and \$2.2 billion for Sanitation Facilities Construction in FY 2025.

**Extend Self-Governance Funding Options to the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) and increase funding to \$250 million/year.** While we understand that SDPI is not under the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee, we appreciate that Congress included a short-term extension of SDPI in FY 2024 appropriations at a \$160 million annualized rate. We recognize that this is the first increase for SDPI in two decades. Communities like ours across Indian Country rely on SDPI resources to address the alarming rates of diabetes and diabetes-related health complications among

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<sup>1</sup> *Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc. v. Dotomain*, 10 F.4th 892 (D.C. Cir. 2021).

our people. SDPI's success rests in the flexibility of its program structure that allows for the incorporation of culture and local needs into its services. Consistent with this model, Congress should authorize SDPI participants the option of receiving their federal funds through either a grant (as currently used) or self-governance funding mechanisms under ISDEAA.

Additionally, SDPI has not had a meaningful increase in funding since FY 2004 despite its overwhelming success. Short term reauthorizations continue to destabilize this program and make staffing and program continuity difficult. For this reason, we recommend permanent reauthorization for SDPI at a minimum base of \$250 million per year with annual adjustments for inflationary increases. We urge you to work with your Congressional colleagues to enact this important priority.

**Behavioral Health:** Our community, like all of Indian Country, has been devastated by the ongoing fentanyl and opioid epidemic. Nevertheless, funds for these services are extremely limited. For example, in FY 2024, Congress only appropriated \$2 million to fund essential detoxification related services. That's less than \$1 per IHS patient. We urge the Subcommittee to dedicate resources to detoxification and reemphasize the importance of fully-funding the following accounts: Health Care Facilities Construction, Alcohol & Substance Use, and Mental Health. We also fully support the President's Domestic Supplemental Request, which includes a \$250 million investment in the IHS to address the fentanyl and opioid epidemic. Recognizing that Indian Country cannot wait any longer, Congress should consider this request as soon as possible.



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**Chuck Hoskin Jr.**  
*Principal Chief*  
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**Bryan Warner**  
*Deputy Principal Chief*  
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**Submitted Testimony of Chuck Hoskin, Jr., Cherokee Nation Principal Chief**  
**U.S. House Committee on Appropriations**  
**Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
**May 7, 2024**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Interior subcommittee:

Osiyo. On behalf of the citizens of Cherokee Nation, I thank you for this opportunity to share some thoughts on the fiscal year 2025 appropriations process. The subcommittee, in formulating and considering its FY25 Interior Appropriations measure, should:

- Improve healthcare access and increase Tribal self-determination by **encouraging the Indian Health Service to open a new round of applications for the Joint Venture Construction Program**, which remains the gold standard approach for innovative and cost-effective health care infrastructure development in Indian country;
- Promote public safety in eastern Oklahoma by **continuing to provide direct funding for the Tribes impacted by the *McGirt* decision**;
- Ensure the Indian Health Service is properly and lawfully spending taxpayer resources by **conducting robust oversight of IHS spending decisions**, particularly around the agency's use of "new tribes" funding to support a Tribe that was recognized more than 70 years ago;
- Alleviate growing budget pressures on IHS and the Interior Appropriations bill, and address Tribal health inequities by **reclassifying Tribal Contract Support Costs from discretionary to mandatory funding**.

With a population of more than 463,000, Cherokee Nation is the largest Native American tribe in the United States. Approximately 143,000 of our citizens reside on our Treaty-guaranteed land, a 7,000-square mile reservation covering 14 counties in northeast Oklahoma. The remainder of our citizens are spread across the United States, living in all 435 congressional districts.

We are the economic engine of northeast Oklahoma, employing more than 11,000 people and providing for the 513,000 men, women, and children that live within our reservation boundaries and the communities located on our land. Cherokee Nation and its businesses have an annual economic impact on northeast Oklahoma that exceeds \$3 billion, and that impact is not limited to Cherokee Nation citizens. We remain steadfast in our commitment to grow our regional economy, helping our non-Cherokee friends and neighbors improve their quality of life.

We are currently operating under the largest budget in Cherokee Nation history, a record \$3.8 billion in strategic investments that will help Cherokee families become happier, healthier, stronger, and safer. We are moving forward with historic investments in mental health, drug treatment, career readiness, housing, language preservation and revitalization efforts, and public safety, and continuing to build out the largest tribally-operated health care system in Indian Country.

Our world-class facilities receive more than 2 million patient visits each year, and we have strategically built clinics and health care centers so that no Cherokee Nation citizen living on the reservation is more than 30 minutes away from care. Still, we know there is far more work to be done.

Cherokee Nation has successfully utilized IHS's landmark Joint Venture Construction Program three times—most recently by investing \$260 million to build and equip Nu-Wo-Ti-i, a 469,000-square foot outpatient center in Tahlequah—and stands ready to use the program once again to increase access to quality health care in northeast Oklahoma.

As you know, the IHS Joint Venture Construction Program represents a collaborative approach to healthcare infrastructure development. Tribes alleviate the upfront burden on IHS by taking on construction, expansion, or renovation costs, and IHS provides staffing funds for the facility over a 20-year span.

The program's benefits are proven:

- **Improved Healthcare Access:** The program leads to the development of modern healthcare facilities closer to tribal communities, reducing travel time and improving access to essential medical services.
- **Sustainable Infrastructure:** The program supports the development of durable and sustainable healthcare infrastructure that can accommodate the evolving needs of tribal communities over time, contributing to the long-term health and well-being of indigenous populations.
- **Economic Growth:** Joint Venture projects stimulate tribal economies by creating job opportunities and boosting economic activity through expanded healthcare positions and construction-related spending.
- **Enhanced Tribal Self-Determination:** By partnering with tribes in the planning and construction of healthcare facilities, the program empowers tribal communities to take control of their healthcare infrastructure, aligning with principles of self-governance, sovereignty, and tribal culture.

Each time we have expanded our capacity through a joint venture project, patient demand has almost immediately filled up that capacity. This speaks to the great unmet needs for care on our

reservation and the potential for additional joint ventures. So, in FY25 the subcommittee should include report language encouraging IHS to open a new round of joint venture applications.

Next, I would like to thank the subcommittee for its attention to public safety and justice issues in connection with the historic *McGirt* decision. *McGirt* and the subsequent *Hogner* decision that reaffirmed the continued existence of the Cherokee Nation reservation—and our exclusive jurisdiction over our land—changed the complexion of law enforcement and criminal justice in eastern Oklahoma.

Cherokee Nation maintains one of the largest and best justice systems in Indian country, but our needs and responsibilities continue to grow. Since the *McGirt* decision Cherokee Nation has dramatically scaled up its criminal justice system, boosting spending by \$35 million annually to strengthen our law enforcement capabilities and meet the massive 380 percent increase in felony and misdemeanor case filings. Where prior to *McGirt* we filed fewer than 100 criminal cases per year, since *McGirt* we have filed more than 10,000.

The costs of sustaining the large criminal justice system needed on our reservation are substantial, and so I am exceedingly grateful for the direct resources you provided to the *McGirt*-impacted tribes through the FY22, FY23, and FY24 appropriations bills. I ask that you provide the impacted tribes another round of *McGirt*-specific funding again in FY25.

Third, I urge you to provide strong oversight over IHS through the appropriations process to ensure that the agency is properly using taxpayer resources. I request that the subcommittee give special attention to IHS's request (as found on Page CJ-96 of IHS's Fiscal Year 2025 Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees) to provide \$6 million in "New Tribes" funding to "support the delivery of health care services for the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma." This funding is an improper use of federal dollars, unnecessary, and redundant, and the subcommittee should reject IHS's request.

This is at least the third time IHS has sought to use "New Tribes" funding to fund the United Keetoowah Band—a tribe recognized more than 70 years ago. IHS's FY24 request sought at least \$5 million for this purpose, and in the FY19 cycle IHS used the "New Tribes" account to grant "\$99,000 for [UKB's] estimated 1,299 members. In the congressional justification accompanying the FY19 request IHS acknowledged New Tribes funding is typically requested "when a new Tribe is federally-recognized or reinstated." Now, with no real explanation or legal or policy justification, in FY25 IHS is inexplicably going back to the well for a third time. This is wrong—IHS should not be allowed to circumvent its own policies when granting federal dollars to the UKB or any other tribe.

Again, the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians is not a new tribe. This alone should prevent IHS from seeking funding under the "New Tribes" account, which, per the agency's own policy, is utilized for "new or restored Federally Recognized Tribes." The UKB is neither a new tribe nor a restored tribe.

Moreover, Chapter 4 of the Indian Health Manual, the document IHS deems “the reference for IHS employees regarding IHS-specific policy and procedural instructions,” states a “New Tribes” appropriation request “will be included in the budget cycle immediately following the new or restored Tribe’s recognition.” Again, this request comes more than 70 budget cycles after recognition.

Not only is this funding improper—it is completely duplicative. Cherokee Nation maintains the largest tribally-operated health care system in Indian Country, and the existing health care infrastructure and array of services that already exist in northeast Oklahoma—particularly, in the city of Tahlequah—renders another line of funding unnecessary and wasteful.

Cherokee Nation, in partnership with IHS, has made significant fiscal investments to ensure that all tribal citizens within the Cherokee Nation Reservation—UKB citizens included—will receive the highest quality health care for generations to come. A new UKB-run health care clinic would not provide any services that are not already being provided to UKB members by Cherokee Nation’s health system—patient statistics show that approximately 94.4 percent of UKB’s user population currently receives care from Cherokee Nation.

Congress should not waste already scarce IHS dollars by funding redundant health care services in an area that already contains the best tribal health care system in the country. I urge you to carefully consider this unjustified request, and keep this funding out of the final FY 2025 Interior Appropriations bill.

Finally, while legally required pursuant to the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act and Supreme Court decisions, Contract Support Costs (CSC) are currently paid for under discretionary spending caps. Inclusion of the CSC account that is mandatory in nature under discretionary spending caps has resulted in a net reduction on the amount of funding provided for Tribal healthcare programs.

On March 25, 2024, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in *Becerra v. San Carlos Apache Tribe* and *Becerra v. Northern Arapaho Tribe*. The issue of the case is whether the IHS must pay CSC not only to support IHS-funded activities but also to support the Tribe’s expenditure of income collected from third parties. The outcome of the case is unknown, but it could have a significant impact on IHS funding.

Immediately moving CSC to mandatory is good risk management for the United States because, regardless of the forthcoming CSC Supreme Court decision, the amount is already mandatory in nature and there is a mechanism for controlling costs. Since the amount is already mandatory in nature, there is nothing added to the mandatory budget by moving this authority to the mandatory side of the federal ledger.

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**TESTIMONY OF COUNCIL MEMBER CAROLE LANKFORD OF THE  
CONFEDERATED SALISH AND KOOTENAI TRIBES OF THE FLATHEAD  
RESERVATION TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES ON THE IHS, BIA  
AND EPA FY 2025 BUDGET  
May 7, 2024**

My name is Carole Lankford and I am a member of the Tribal Council of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation. We appreciate the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee for its dedication to the needs of Indian Country and the opportunity to present testimony concerning these important appropriations.

For thousands of years the Bitterroot Salish, Upper Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai people thrived in portions of what is now Montana, Idaho, and British Columbia. Under the Hellgate Treaty of 1855, the Flathead Reservation was reserved as our permanent homeland and encompasses over 1.2 million acres in western Montana situated around the southern half of Flathead Lake, the largest freshwater lake west of the Great Lakes. Our Tribes are made up of approximately 8,000 enrolled tribal members, with approximately 5,000 tribal members living on the Reservation. Our Reservation has a total Reservation population of roughly 30,000 people.

As a Self-Governance tribe we have for decades carried out all functions of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Services on our Reservation, as well as the functions of the Environmental Protection Agency under the Treatment as States authorities for many years. Local control and wise fiscal management have allowed us to stretch limited resources far beyond the capabilities of the federal government. Despite the efficiencies our Tribal government can achieve, limitations on federal resources present significant challenges for the delivery of services. These challenges have been exacerbated by unprecedented drought, mental health, and addiction facing our communities.

#### **INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE FUNDING**

Our Reservation continues to face a serious mental health and addiction crisis worsened by the introduction of fentanyl and other opioids to our Reservation. Existing resources and methods are inadequate to effectively combat the complexities associated with opioid abuse. We are dedicated to providing needed mental health care and substance abuse treatment. We are engaged in several promising initiatives that, with adequate resources, will produce results. However, full funding for the Indian Health Service is a critical component to adequately address this mental health and addiction crisis.

#### **BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS**

Social Services, Public Safety and Housing. Our Tribal Council has undertaken an aggressive response to the mental health, addiction and housing crisis faced by our people. Perhaps the most significant component of our response is our participation in the Tiwahe Initiative. Tiwahe was established in 2015 to improve the health and wellbeing of families in Tribal communities by reducing poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and associated outcomes, such as youth suicide.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's support for Tiwahe, and strongly encourage additional support for Fiscal Year 2025. The President's 2025 budget requests an increase of \$28.6 million for additional support for Tiwahe Social Services, Housing, Tribal Justice Support, Tiwahe Indian Child Welfare Act programs, services, functions, and activities, including support for Tribal capacity building, and direct funding opportunities to Tribes seeking to develop and operate Healing to Wellness courts. At CSKT we have had tremendous success with our efforts to reduce recidivism and with our drug and wellness courts. Through our participation in Tiwahe, we intend to expand these important programs to help families and individuals struggling with substance abuse to access critical services so that they can be successful in housing, employment, and sobriety.

Since joining Tiwahe we have made significant strides in the development steps leading to a well-coordinated system of change resulting in positive outcomes for our children and families. We have identified the need to create a coordinated service delivery system to break through silos and have implemented a cross-disciplinary team to co-case manage children in need of care and services. We are working to incorporate Tribal language and cultural perspectives into our programming, reviewing our codes and policies to address current challenges, and eager to begin subsequent phases through action and strategic planning.

In addition to the President's FY 2025 requested increases, we also encourage the Subcommittee to provide an additional \$2 million in Tiwahe Job Placement/Training funds and \$5 million to establish a Tribal Economic Development component within the Tiwahe Initiative to further development and deployment of multi-disciplinary socioeconomic solutions. Funding will support Tribes in developing and operating comprehensive, integrated economic and community development programs.

In addition to Tiwahe funding, we support increased resources for social services, housing, Tribal Court, law enforcement and corrections. Homelessness and overcrowding are at all-time highs across Indian country. The housing situation on our Reservation is further complicated by the drug and mental health crisis we face, as eligibility for tribal housing may be impacted by addiction issues and drug and mental health events of one individual may have wide-reaching impacts on all members of that individual's household. The average home price on our Reservation far exceeds what a typical Tribal family can afford with a price tag of \$725,000. Increased federal funds are necessary to enable the Tribal government to increase housing availability for Tribal members on the Reservation. And importantly, housing funding must include the resources for infrastructure to ensure all new housing has water, sewer, electricity, and broadband access.

Social services are critical to the wellbeing of families on the Reservation. For example, we provide services that support Tribal people in entering into and staying in the workforce, as well as parenting programs that help parents acquire the tools and practices of good parenting, which in turn helps keep many children out of the foster care system.

Tribal courts are essential to a strong economy and safe communities. Our Tribal Court system provides an important venue for resolution of conflicts on the Reservation. And our Tribal

Defender's office is leading several cutting-edge efforts to reduce recidivism which include novel approaches to case management and the provision of wraparound services like supportive housing. But these efforts need additional funding. This is especially the case because the Tribal Court system faces additional burdens and significant challenges associated with mental health and addiction.

Similarly, law enforcement and corrections are in dire need of additional funding throughout Indian country, especially as opioid and other illegal substance use increases as people self-medicate to treat mental illness. Most cases handled by our law enforcement and in our jail have a substance abuse component.

In addition, the Tribal Council is facing significant uncertainty as the State of Montana and its political subdivisions are anticipated to seek retrocession of felony criminal jurisdiction under Public Law 280 within the next few weeks. If the State is successful in withdrawing from its public safety obligations, CSKT will necessarily need to assume a dramatic increase in public safety related services. Full funding for law enforcement and corrections is imperative if we are to adequately police our communities.

Importantly, if CSKT is required to assume additional public safety obligations due to State retrocession, existing infrastructure will be wholly inadequate. Our criminal justice programs are spread out among different buildings and locations, hindering collaboration. Funding for tribal justice centers with space aligned with the Tribal restorative justice values and objectives will be vital in consolidating justice-related programs, ensuring adequate detention capacity, implementing effective treatment programs to address addiction and reduce recidivism, and providing vocational and other training and educational services to help people to leave the justice system with the ability to return to their communities and find meaningful work.

Natural Resources: Wildland Fire and Aquatic Invasive Species. We thank the Committee for recent increases in federal wildland fire appropriations and appreciate continued attention to additional funding for future challenges particularly in light of unprecedented drought conditions. We also encourage continued support for parity, equity, and inclusion of tribal wildland fire management programs during the Agency allocation of these funds. Current criteria limits funding to full-time, permanent wildland firefighters. However, due to our remote location and limited resources we regularly rely on part-time and seasonal employees as well as employees with other responsibilities in addition to just firefighting to fight fires when they arise.

CSKT's Division of Fire was stretched to the breaking point during with fires in 2021 and 2022 that ravaged our homelands due in large part to inadequate infrastructure to support an evolving fire landscape. Lack of available space and facilities for permanent and emergency personnel and equipment is a problem that has grown exponentially over the past few years. With dry conditions expected this season we continue to see the critical need for a single engine air tanker base facility, personal facilities, vehicle bays for engines, and training and assessment facilities.

We also are keenly concerned with the detection, prevention and eradication of invasive species and on the resiliency of our Tribal lands. There has been little to no coordinated effort across

the Columbia River Basin for the protection against the introduction of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS), such as the zebra and quagga mussels. Because it only takes one boat to infect an entire watershed, every potential vector is a threat to the entire region. It is therefore critical to empower local parties who are best suited to guard against invasion with additional resources *and* to build strong partnerships throughout the Basin. In our view, federal monetary support and assistance in enhancing coordination are key to adequately protecting the vital water resources of the Pacific Northwest. Because of the interconnectedness of waterways, protection against AIS is an area where federal funds can match or supplement local efforts in a cost-effective manner.

Additionally, and just as importantly, because the Federal Highway system is the primary vector for transmission of invasive species, including AIS, any robust line of defense against invasive species must involve the establishment of permanent check stations on all federal highways in and out of the Columbia Basin. Working in tandem, the Transportation and Interior Departments could ensure that traffic is safely and efficiently moved into check stations, where watercraft can be inspected safely by local staff from Tribes, states, and local governments. These check stations could be constructed in conjunction with rest areas and weigh stations throughout the Basin.

CSKT operates a number of programs that defend against the introduction of invasive species and mitigate the invasions that have already occurred. But funding for our efforts is sparse and inconsistent. We must have adequate resources and support for coordinated efforts among the various sovereigns in the region.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

Finally, we thank the Committee for additional resources provided in recent cycles for Solid and Hazardous Waste and the Brownfields Program. However, we strenuously urge Congress to prioritize adequate funding for the Environmental Protection Agency programs for Tribal communities. Tribal EPA programs steadily decreased for nearly a decade and a half, placing an unreasonable drain on our government and our ability to sustain vital programs to monitor, reduce, and prevent pollution on our Reservation. The federal trust responsibility requires the United States to ensure the Tribes continue to have a livable homeland where pollution levels are safe for people, wildlife, and the environment. Without stable funding, CSKT cannot build sustainable and effective programs to protect our environment and community.

Critical programs for protecting the Tribes' permanent homeland have seen stagnation or decreases in funding over the past decade or so. These critical programs include the Clean Water Act Section 106 Water Quality Program, the Wetland Program Development Grant program, the Clean Air Act Section 103 and Section 105 Air Quality Program, the Underground Storage Tanks and Leaking Underground Storage Tanks Program, and Tribal Federal Insecticide Fungicide Rodenticide Act ("FIFRA") Program.



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**House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
*Public Witness Hearing - American Indian & Alaska Native Day 1*  
 May 7, 2024  
 Testimony of Gloria O'Neill  
 President and CEO of Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Anchorage Alaska

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the Department of Interior budget. I have had the privilege to serve as President and CEO of Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) for 30 years, during the entirety of which CITC has utilized the benefits of Public Law 102-477 to integrate our employment and training and supportive services with holistic, wraparound services that connect individuals and families to life-changing self-determination. I have also seen the benefits that the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Tiwahe program can bring in a similar wrap-around style for child welfare. Lastly, in my capacity as Chair of the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children, I have worked to identify key appropriations changes that will significantly impact outcomes for Native children and youth.

**CITC BACKGROUND:**

CITC serves as the primary education and workforce development center for Alaska Native and American Indian (AN/AI) people in the Anchorage area. Approximately 70,000 AN/AI people – more than 40% of Alaska's total AN/AI population – live in the Cook Inlet region. CITC serves any AN/AI person seeking services, regardless of their Tribal affiliation or original home areas, totaling approximately 12,000 AN/AI people yearly. A vital component of those services is CITC's role as the sole Tribal TANF provider in Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley, which has seen tremendous success in moving people from cash assistance to work largely through its Employment and Training Services Department and 477 Plan.

**1. ADDRESS 477 IMPLEMENTATION:**

Designed to reduce administrative burdens and support Tribal Self-Determination, the 477 Program is a federal initiative that allows Tribes and Tribal Organizations to integrate multiple federally-supported Tribal programs under a single 477 Plan, approved by the Department of the Interior (DOI). In turn, the Tribe or Tribal Organization reports back on an annual basis using a single consolidated reporting form. When allowed to function as Congress intended, the 477 Program is a model of success that we hope will be emulated and expanded across federal programs. However, there are still a few issues in implementation that must be noted for the Committee:

**Expansion of Self Determination and Administrative Flexibility:** DOI, and its Division of Workforce Development (DWD), has over the last year or so stepped fully into its role as Lead Agency under the 477 statute, as amended, and the more recently finalized 2023 MOA. DWD has supported Tribes and

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Tribal Organizations through the Plan approval and amendment processes as more Tribes join the Program and more programs are integrated appropriately with the other federal agencies. Unfortunately, DWD's workload now outstrips their current resources and available personnel. *CITC urges the Committee to work to provide additional resources to be used toward these goals.*

**Reduction in Reporting Burdens:** Another positive development has been the overall simplification in reporting burden imposed on Tribes and Tribal organizations operating 477 Plans. If a Tribe were to operate independently each of the 44 federal programs currently integrated under a 477 Plan, for example, that Tribe would be required to provide at least 153 different individual reports. Under 477, that burden is simplified to a single three-component annual report, and the resources that would have otherwise gone to developing each of those individual reports can instead be used to provide services to the community. However, the current 477 annual report form will expire in November, 2024. CITC supports a Federal/Tribal work group working to produce an updated and simplified form.

**Simplified Grant Renewal Processes:** Several federal agencies, including the Department of Labor (WIOA Program) and the Department of Health and Human Services (CSBG Program), have provided specific instructions or simplified pathways for Tribes and Tribal Organizations seeking to renew their grants while incorporating them into a 477 Plan. *CITC supports these efforts and requests that this Committee direct DOI to work with the other agencies to achieve consistency and flexibility across agencies.*

**Unlawful Holding of Funds by DOJ:** Through the 477 statute, BIA recently approved a Tribe's 477 Plan amendment to integrate DOJ's Tribal Victim Services Set-Aside program. During the plan review process, DOJ rejected integration of these programs, purporting that Tribes may only integrate programs that are authorized specifically for employment and training. This assertion was unfounded, as the Tribe proposed to implement those programs "for the purpose of job training, [job] skill development, assisting Indian youth and adults to succeed in the workforce, and encouraging self-sufficiency," as well as "services related to th[ose] activities" under 25 U.S.C. § 3404(a)(1). Furthermore, Congress explicitly rejected the DOJ's viewpoint when developing the 2017 amendments to the 477 statute (in fact, that was one of the main purposes of the 2017 amendments), and the affected federal agencies did as well in the 2023 MOA. DOJ then took the position (happily reversed prior to a legislative oversight hearing) that it can refuse to transfer the funds even though the Plan amendment has been approved. This is flatly contrary to the 477 statute's funds-transfer requirements, and if allowed to stand, would undermine those funds transfer requirements. *We request that this Committee include language to discourage actions such as those taken by DOJ.*

**Delayed Funds Transfers:** Problems persist with certain agencies and programs regarding transfer of funds to BIA to be passed on to Tribes and Tribal Organizations operating 477 Programs. For example, one Tribal Organization has waited for funds from the Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency for more than a year. Similarly, Tribes and Tribal Organizations waiting for Bureau of Indian Education funds have been delayed by nearly two years. *We request that the Committee include language to address these delays.*

**Frequency of TANF reporting:** The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) has insisted on a quarterly reporting requirement for Tribes and Tribal organizations receiving TANF funds through their 477 Plans, though it is clear that 477 statute requires only one consolidated annual report for all programs. OFA should mandate only one annual report, as required by the legislation. *We strongly urge the Committee to ensure that the TANF program continues to receive reports in the integrated statistical report developed by the federal agencies in conjunction with the 477 Tribal Workgroup.* That report contains all necessary information and keeps TANF in alignment with the requirements of the 477 statute. As OFA is aware, that statute provides that “Notwithstanding any other provision of law” – only one report is required, and separate accounting of individual programs within a 477 Plan is not consistent with that Congressional direction.

**Misunderstanding of the Waiver Process and Opportunity:** Requests for waiver under the 477 statute allow the federal departments to waive both *regulatory and statutory* provisions as long as they are not in opposition to the underlying program requirements. Merely stating that a law requires quarterly reporting does not fulfill the required 477 waiver analysis. Unless in opposition to the underlying program goals and purpose, agency interpretation of allowable waivers must be flexible in order to fulfill the statutory requirement to grant waivers.

**Unlawful Meddling in Tribal Hires:** Citing to the 2 CFR Part 200 Uniform Guidance regulations, some federal agencies, such as the Department of Education, have required federal approval for personnel decisions made by Tribes and Tribal organizations operating pursuant to a 477 Plan. This is contrary to both the letter and spirit of the 477 statute, and nothing in the Part 200 regulations allows or requires this action.

**Inconsistent Compliance Supplement:** The May 2023 OMB Compliance Supplement has detailed requirements regarding the investment of 477 funds. However, 25 U.S.C. § 3413(g)(2) requires only that those funds are “managed in accordance with the prudent investment standard.” *We request that this Committee include language so that OMB updates the compliance report to be consistent with the statute and remove any additional requirements.*

**Lessons from Commission on Native Children:** Finally, CITC calls the Committee’s attention to “The Way Forward: Report of the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children,” for which I served as Chair. Recommendations throughout the report reference the importance and success of braiding and consolidating funding and programs to benefit Native children and youth and improve their outcomes. In particular, Recommendation 25 specifically addresses the benefits of 477 and the importance of expanding its reach, and calls for increased funding to accomplish these goals. Other recommended priorities for this Committee in that report are noted later.

## 2. EXPAND TIWAHE FUNDING:

Tribes and tribal organizations have achieved success when they have secured adequate funding to transform their child welfare systems with thorough integration of cultural values and traditions. The Tiwahe Initiative within the BIA provides Tribes the opportunity to accomplish this change. The Commission also recommended full funding for this crucial program. Through Tiwahe, Tribes and

Tribal organizations have the flexibility to combine Bureau funds related to child welfare – including social services, ICWA, Housing Improvement, anti-recidivism, law enforcement, and courts – into a consolidated, multiyear program to effectuate meaningful change for Native children and families.

Red Lake Nation, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Association of Village Council Presidents, and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, among 65 others, have all shown significant improvements in their comprehensive Tribal child welfare and justice systems utilizing this innovative initiative. To wit, Pascua Yaqui effectively expanded its presence in Arizona state courts and built its tribal court system to address child wellbeing. Similarly, Red Lake Nation created a new system for child welfare, Ombimindwaa Gidinawemaaganinaadog (Uplifting all of our Relatives), a culturally aligned and whole-family approach to support and sustain adult recovery. From 2017 to the present, this new system led to a 63% reduction in the number of children in out-of-home placement.

### **3. COMMISSION ON NATIVE CHILDREN RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Commission specifically recommended expansion of 477 and Tiwahe. In addition, the Commission identified the following initial expansion of appropriations (among others) that would have significant effects on transforming outcomes for Native children and youth:

- Fund a comprehensive Indian Child Welfare Act training program for state child welfare agencies and courts developed and delivered by Native professionals.
- Direct in appropriations that “all funds allocated for juvenile corrections/detention/probation officers can be used for counselors, coaches, and community-based juvenile prevention and supervision activities so that secure detention is not a requirement of personnel funds,” and reverse the direction that all treatment must be funded through IHS and SAMHSA, not the BIA.
- Fund specific programs to be delivered in public, tribal and BIE schools about trauma, suicide and substance abuse.
- Fund short-term investments to support Native entities’ capacity for third-party billing.
- Increase funding for salaries and benefits to attract higher quantity and quality workforces in social services, healthcare, juvenile justice, courts, and education, such that salaries and benefits meet local standards and match other federal employees.
- Fund and remove barriers to Native and non-Native professionals serving Native communities such as described in S.3022.

### **CONCLUSION**

1. If its full potential is realized, PL102-477 provides an unparalleled opportunity to streamline funding and programs for the maximum benefit to American Indian and Alaska Native people.
2. Fully funding Tiwahe, in order to make this integrated funding available in the child welfare context, will have outsized impacts on Native child and youth wellbeing.
3. Attention to implementing the Commission on Native Children’s appropriations recommendations will bring the long-needed changes that will transform the future for Native children and youth.



The Honorable John Tester  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Matt Rosendale  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Steve Daines  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ryan Zinke  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Montana Congressional Delegation:

On behalf of the Crow Tribe of Indians, I would like to bring your attention to the proper funding and implementation of the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act, which was signed into law December 2022. As you are aware, the STOP Act marks a significant effort to protect Tribal cultural heritage from illegal trafficking and sale. Proper implementation will require adequate funding within the fiscal year 2025 appropriations bills. These resources will enable the Department of Interior and its associated agencies to:

- Conduct proper training for enforcement personnel.
- Establish and maintain a robust database for monitoring and protecting cultural items.
- Facilitate effective reparation processes and support voluntary return initiatives.
- Enhance interagency collaborations essential for the STOP Act's success.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of if I can answer any questions regarding the STOP Act and its implementation.

Sincerely,

Frank White Clay

Chairman Crow Tribe of Indians

## Fort Belknap Indian Community



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Fort Belknap Indian Community  
(Tribal Govt.)  
Fort Belknap Indian Community  
(Elected to administer the affairs of the community and  
to represent the Assiniboiné and the Gros Ventre Tribes  
of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation)

**TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE JEFFERY STIFFARM  
PRESIDENT OF THE FORT BELKNAP INDIAN COMMUNITY**  
**Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related  
Agencies**  
**Regarding the FY 2025 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE),  
Indian Health Service (IHS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Budgets**  
**May 7, 2024**

Thank you and the distinguished Subcommittee members for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Nakoda and Aaniiih Tribes of Fort Belknap Indian Community. Our Tribe has over 8,000 enrolled members, and a 675,147 acre Reservation held in trust by the United States. Federal appropriations are the primary way in which the United States fulfills its trust responsibility and honors its obligations to Tribes. Per the 2022 Census, Fort Belknap has an annual income of \$15,764, with 34.4% of our population lying below the poverty line. In the Census report, the main language of the Nakoda and Aaniiih people is English. Our Tribe requests an additional \$8 million in FY 2025 funding for our programs as described in more detail below.

**Fully Fund and Expand the BIA Tiwahe Initiative.** The Tiwahe Initiative was established in 2015 to improve the health and wellbeing of families in tribal communities by providing a comprehensive and integrated approach to address the interrelated problems of poverty, violence, and substance abuse. Fort Belknap Indian Community joined the Initiative in 2016, a year after its establishment. Tiwahe includes two components: (1) a recurring funding increase for all tribes that operate Social Services and ICWA programs, and (2) additional funding for a demonstration program at 6 tribal locations (representing 61 tribes and Alaska Native villages). Tiwahe includes the BIA programs of Social Services, ICWA, Courts, Housing (HIP), Job Placement & Training, and Public Safety RRI.

Tiwahe has allowed FBIC to strengthen several interrelated programs by filling in the gaps that existed for many years. Tiwahe has strengthened and revamped the Aaniiih Nakoda Healing Wellness Center (formerly Social Services), by developing and enhancing policies and procedures for Child Welfare, Foster Care Licensing, Title VI-E, Domestic Violence and Shelter Policies, Adult Protection Services, ICWA, Child Protective Team Procedures, Batterer's Intervention Specialist Program Development, and a Foster Child/Youth Receiving Home Policy and Planning Development. Training and form development was included in this effort to aide in enabling employee confidence and job retention. Tiwahe's major impact has been the ability to fund cultural programming that has been infused with traditional and western programming and services provided by our Tiwahe funded employees.

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of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation)

Tiwahe Job Placement/Training has allowed us to hire several On the Job Training (OJT) employees who have or will be placed in permanent positions. This helped reduce reliance on TANF and other public assistance. Tiwahe and RRI has surpassed its goal to reduce juvenile recidivism through the use of culturally relevant alternative sentencing. The Family Interventionist Program has been able to increase family reunification through family strengthening activities and services while promoting self-sufficiency for low-income families.

Cultural programming has proven to assist in these successes here in the Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC). With increased funding we are hopeful to continue the successes with reintroducing the languages of the Nakoda and Aaniiih tribes.

FBIC's Tribal Court system is one of the most underfunded programs on the reservation. The lack of funding exacerbates drug abuse for our people and outlying areas. FBIC has a current fentanyl crisis which is increasing crimes, including but not limited to murders and rapes. With an increase in Tiwahe funding for Tribal courts, FBIC can strive to reduce these crimes happening to our people who are struggling. Additional Tiwahe dollars will assist with alternative sentencing for adults, cultural reintroduction for all, and we are hopeful that prevention efforts will be enacted.

FBIC is grateful for continued funding of the 6 Tiwahe sites, and request the same support in FY 2025. Having achieved significant benefits under Tiwahe, we were also pleased to see Congress enact additional funding for four new Tiwahe pilot tribes and twelve new Tiwahe incubators. As the Subcommittee prepares the FY 2025 budget, we urge you to provide additional funding to support these efforts. Tribes, Congress, and the Administration are united in their support for expansion of Tiwahe.

FBIC would appreciate if Tiwahe was designated as a permanently funded program and the BIA Base funds the existing Tiwahe tribes' current funding; an increase in Tiwahe funding to add more pilot tribes each year to continue benefitting Indian country; and if additional across-the-board funding for all tribes under Social Services and ICWA were provided. Tiwahe has helped transform FBIC in the way we assist our families by infusing culture and improving access to services, and we strongly support its expansion and the potential positive changes it can provide for all of Indian Country.

**Testimony of Darlene Hollum, Chair, Hoh Tribe  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Days**

My name is Darlene Hollum, and I serve as the Chair of the Hoh Tribe (Tribe). The Hoh Indian Reservation (Reservation) is located along the Pacific Ocean (Ocean) on the Olympic Peninsula in the state of Washington. My testimony focuses on the following: (1) the Tribe's support for the Administration's request for \$48.837 million for Tribal Climate Resilience, Trust-Natural Resources Management, Indian Affairs; (2) the Tribe's request for BIA law enforcement funding as we have no police officers; (3) the Tribe's request for mandatory funding for BIA and IHS; (4) the Tribe's request for a 638 contract for Purchased/Referred Care (PRC) given IHS failures in administering this program; (5) the Tribe's concerns with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) off-shore wind activities along our coastline; and (6) the Tribe's support for the Administration's FY25 request for at least \$85 million for the STAG Categorical Grant Tribal General Assistance Program (GAP), EPA.

**History/Background.** The Tribe has approximately 300 Members, and we have a land base of 940 acres. Our ancestral homelands span the coastal range of the Olympic Mountains into Canada. We historically travelled by canoe on the Ocean up and down the coast. Following the signing of the Treaty of Olympia (Treaty) on January 25, 1856, the Hoh were relocated by the federal government to the Reservation which is hemmed in by the glacially-fed Hoh River to the north, the Ocean to the west, and Olympic National Park to the south. Given our isolated geographical location, the Tribe has long faced serious challenges in our efforts to meet the dire housing, health care, public safety, broadband, economic, and other basic needs of our community. According to the latest U.S. Census 5-year survey from 2018-2022, the poverty level on the Reservation is approximately 60%.

**Need for Increased BIA Funding for Community Relocation.** The Ocean and the River are vital to our culture and traditions but also pose dangerous threats to our community. 90% of the Reservation is located within a 100-year flood plain, and 100% is located within a tsunami zone. All of our Reservation facilities and homes are at or below 40 feet elevation and within inundation zones if a major tsunami were to strike. According to a Washington State Department of Natural Resources tsunami zone map, the residents of our lower village would have 15 minutes or less to reach safety if a tsunami were to strike. With the changes in climate over the years, winter and spring floods now regularly deluge Reservation homes, government facilities, and utility structures. The Tribe has been struck by 26 disaster events, the majority of which were severe weather or flood incidents. Tribal citizens regularly work together to sandbag around Reservation homes and tribal facilities to combat flooding. Flooding restricts further development and causes ongoing problems with existing structures.

To protect the health and safety of our citizens, the Tribe implemented the Hoh Highlands Development Project to move residents and tribal facilities to higher ground. Under the Hoh Indian Tribe Safe Homelands Act passed by Congress in 2010, the BIA placed 471 acres of new land at higher elevation into trust for the Tribe's benefit and safety. For 14 years, the Tribe has worked to secure funding to build new homes on our Highlands to move residents in the lower village out of harm's way but had previously been unsuccessful given minimal federal funding available for

community relocation. We are grateful for the efforts of this Subcommittee and the Interior Department to allocate funding to the BIA for Tribal Climate Resilience and Relocation. The BIA recently awarded us a grant to build at least 9 new homes on our Highlands to finally move some families to safety. While this funding is a huge step for our community, there are more residents as well as governmental and community facilities that still need to be relocated from the lower village to the Highlands. For these reasons, we strongly support the Administration's request in FY25 for an increase of \$13.846 million for a total of \$48.837 million for Tribal Climate Resilience, Trust-Natural Resources Management, Indian Affairs and request additional funding on top of the Administration's request given lives are at stake.

**Need for Law Enforcement Services.** The federal government has a Treaty responsibility to provide public safety for the Tribe. However, BIA has not provided sufficient funding to enable us to hire even one police officer despite our repeated requests. We request the Subcommittee's assistance in urging BIA to provide the Tribe with adequate funding so we can hire sufficient law enforcement personnel. We recognize that BIA law enforcement is severely underfunded as set forth in "Report to Congress on Spending, Staffing, and Estimated Funding Costs for Public Safety and Justice Programs in Indian Country, 2021", which states that law enforcement in Indian Country is underfunded by \$1.47 billion. The Tribe requests that the Subcommittee fully fund law enforcement at the level of need of \$1.724 billion, as identified by the BIA.

**Need for Mandatory Funding for IHS and BIA.** Congress has an obligation to provide adequate funding for essential tribal governmental services. We deeply appreciate the Subcommittee's efforts to ensure that funding for BIA and IHS was not cut like other agencies in FY24. Given the historic underfunding of IHS and BIA, we request that Congress significantly increase funding for essential tribal governmental services. The Tribe recognizes that consistent funding increases in a sustained way over many years will likely not occur as long as Congress treats funding for IHS and BIA as "discretionary" despite its obligations to provide adequate funding. We support the Administration's request that Congress classify funding for IHS as "mandatory" and request the same for BIA, acknowledging that the Administration's FY25 budget requests that only contract support costs be treated as "mandatory" funding. The Tribe recognizes that making budgetary/appropriations paradigm shifts will take time; so, we support, in the meantime, advance appropriations for not only IHS but also BIA, especially given the dysfunctionality and uncertainty in the appropriations process over the past decade.

**Tribe's Need to Administer its own Purchased/Referred Care.** There is no IHS health clinic or healthcare services provided on the Reservation and the Tribe relies on IHS's PRC program to ensure that our Tribal citizens can receive health care services from private health care providers. Given our remote location, it takes an ambulance about 45 minutes to respond to a call on the Reservation and about 45 minutes to get the patient to the hospital in the closest town of Forks located over 25 miles away. Forks itself is a small rural community, with only one pharmacy, one optometrist, and one dentist.

For decades, IHS managed the Hoh Tribe's PRC Program from over 400 miles away at the IHS Colville Service Unit. Those decades were marked by mismanagement/ineptitude, resulting in a severe lack of healthcare services for Tribal citizens. Finally, in 2021, IHS transferred the PRC responsibilities for the Tribe to the IHS Portland Region in an attempt to address these issues.

Despite the transfer, these problems continue. Over the past couple of years, the Tribe has met with officials from IHS at the national and regional levels to express our deep frustration over IHS's continuing failures to our Tribal citizens.

Below are examples illustrating the magnitude of IHS incompetency in administering PRC for the Tribe:

- **Delinquent payments to providers.** Chinook Pharmacy, Forks Hospital, West End Outreach, and Bogachiel Clinic have notified the Tribe in the past about unpaid bills. At one point, Chinook Pharmacy hadn't received a payment in 6 months and threatened to cut off prescriptions for Tribal citizens. One of the two dentists in town was forced to close due to financial insolvency, in part because of the lack of payment from IHS. The only other dental office is not accepting Hoh tribal patients due to overdue payments. The only eye care provider in town has refused to sign an updated service contract due to these longstanding payment issues. As a result, Tribal Members must travel 1.5-2 hours to Elwha, 2.5-3 hours to Silverdale or Bremerton, 3 hours to Olympia, or 4 hours to Seattle or Tacoma to see a dentist or eye doctor. This is a severe hardship on Tribal citizens, especially elders and children, and those without transportation.
- **Failure to provide P.O. numbers when requested.** Tribal citizens have had to cancel medical appointments due to fear of being stuck with large bills. This issue has delayed critical care appointments and jeopardizes their health. Tribal citizens have also been forced to pick and choose which prescriptions they can fill due to cost.
- **Processing delays and lack of communication.** IHS staff assigned to Hoh consistently fail to process paperwork and applications, even after being sent the information in multiple ways and multiple times. IHS forced the entire Hoh population to submit new applications for coverage due to their inability to organize, track, and process application documents. There is also a persistent lack of communication from IHS in response to requests from the Tribe and from Tribal citizens.
- **Lack of support to Tribal members.** Tribal citizens have been sent to collections and are unable to get answers or follow up from IHS about their coverage. Patients are frequently told to send and re-send documents and are unaware of the services for which they are eligible. IHS personnel fail to reply to email and voicemail.
- **Inability to access PRC funds and critical medical care.** IHS consistently fails to execute provider agreements, blocking citizens from accessing critical specialty care.

IHS claims that the program is underfunded and this is the sole reason for the problems referenced above. But many of the problems relating to PRC for Hoh relate to failures of IHS personnel to execute basic work functions and an utter lack of fundamental organizational skills, controls, accountability, and oversight.

Due to these serious problems with IHS personnel, the Tribe has requested for several years that IHS enter into a 638 contract with the Tribe so that we can exercise self-determination and administer PRC for our Tribal citizens. Even though other tribes in the region administer their own PRC, IHS has dragged its feet in response to our request. We have requested information from IHS on numerous occasions regarding the amount of PRC funding allocated to the Tribe but IHS refuses to provide this information. We seek the Subcommittee's assistance in helping us find out, as a threshold matter, what IHS's PRC allocation is for the Tribe and urging IHS to

enter into a 638 contract with the Tribe for PRC. Otherwise, Hoh citizens will continue to needlessly suffer without healthcare due to IHS ineptitude.

Further, the Tribe is currently working to open a clinic on the Reservation and a clinic in the town of Forks (where many Tribal Members live given lack of housing and lack of broadband services on the Reservation) to provide health care services to Tribal Members. The clinics would provide basic services, including vaccinations, diabetic care, check-ups, and urgent care. The Tribe is also working to secure funding for EMS services for the Reservation and the surrounding community. The Tribe requests the Subcommittee's assistance in helping us secure sufficient funding for these clinics and EMS services.

**Opposition to BOEM's Actions to Develop Off-Shore Wind along the Pacific Coast.** We are deeply concerned that offshore-wind farms will devastate the Hoh people as our culture, traditions, and livelihoods have always been intertwined with the Ocean. Under our Treaty, the Tribe reserved the right of "taking fish, at all usual and accustomed fishing grounds and stations." This right was confirmed by federal courts in *U.S. v. Washington*. Our marine usual and accustomed fishing areas have been confirmed by the federal court. *Makah Indian Tribe v. Quileute Indian Tribe*. The Supreme Court has ruled that treaties are the supreme law of the land (*Worcester v. Georgia*) and impose the "highest responsibility" on the government and create a special fiduciary duty and trust responsibility upon all federal agencies to protect treaty rights (*Seminole Nation v. U.S.*).

Our tribal members fish both commercially and for subsistence within our federally adjudicated marine usual and accustomed fishing area. Within this area of the Outer Continental Shelf, we are co-managers of fisheries resources and the habitats that support them with our federal, state, and other tribal partners. We support the recommendations of the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Pacific Fishery Management Council on the need for scientific analyses and data on the potential impacts that off-shore wind farms would have on fisheries. Once these analyses/compilations are completed, we request that BOEM conduct a programmatic review under federal law and consent-based consultations with the Tribe to ensure our Treaty resources and practices are fully protected. We request the Subcommittee's assistance in directing BOEM to protect our Treaty resources and our way of life.

**Need for Increased EPA Funding for Tribal General Assistance Program.** The Tribe supports the Administration's FY25 budget request of \$85.009 million for GAP – a proposed increase of \$10.259 million from FY24. This funding is our only source of revenue that allows us to monitor and collect data on the water quality of the Hoh River and its tributaries - our lifeblood - to protect aquatic life, such as salmon and char, which are essential to maintaining our traditional ways of life. The Tribe's Hoh River Watershed Monitoring Program conducts the most extensive water quality monitoring found in the entire Hoh River watershed. GAP funding has helped the Tribe incorporate new core capacities, including developing an EPA-Tribal Environmental Plan, enhancing staff expertise through training opportunities, and adding baseline environmental data through the inclusion of new tributaries in our monitoring network. GAP provided the necessary resources so that the Tribe could successfully achieve status as Treatment as a State (TAS) under the Clean Water Act. In sum, GAP is critical for the Tribe and we request that the Subcommittee significantly increase funding for this critical program.

**TESTIMONY OF CODY DESAUTEL, PRESIDENT  
INTERTRIBAL TIMBER COUNCIL  
PRESENTED TO THE  
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE FOR THE INTERIOR,  
ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES ON  
FY 2025 APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE B.I.A., DOI WILDLAND FIRE  
MANAGEMENT,  
MAY 8, 2024**

**Introduction and Summary**

I am Cody Desautel, President of the Intertribal Timber Council (ITC) and Executive Director of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation in Washington State. The ITC is a 48-year-old association of forest owning tribes and Alaska Native organizations dedicated to improving the sustainable ecological and economic management of our 19.3 million acres of timberland and woodland held in BIA trust.

Indian forest management creates \$3 for every \$1 of investment. Indian forestry employs nearly 20,000 people. It manages wildlife habitat, aquatic resources, and forests to provide sources of food and medicine for Indian people. Management of Indian forests also generates significant revenue for tribal governments to fund essential governmental services, such as social services, law enforcement, and education.

80% of all the timber produced from Department of Interior lands come from Indian forests. Yet, this harvest level is only half the sustainable annual targets set by tribal governments. Imagine what tribes – big and small – would be able to do with twice the revenue and economic activity they see from current funding levels.

Every ten years, an independent team of scientists review the management of tribal forests and presents their report to Congress, as mandated by statute. The fourth Indian Forest Management Assessment Team report was finalized and presented to Congress last summer. IFMAT IV noted that harvest levels had dropped from 730 million board feet in 1991 to 342 million board feet in 2019, which was the lowest harvest level since the Depression era. Over that same time forested trust land has increased from 15.6 million acres to 19.3 million acres, which is an increase of almost 24 percent.

The 2023 IFMAT report –and those that preceded it--documents the significant and persistent inequity of federal funding for Indian forest management versus other federal forests, such as the U.S. Forest Service and BLM. Based in the IFMAT report's finding, BIA Forestry is funded at about \$2.89 per acre for tribes without hazardous fuels funding and \$4.89 for those who receive hazardous fuels funding.

Compare that to an estimated \$12.24 for National Forest System lands and \$41.41 for western Oregon BLM lands. Thus, forests managed by the BIA for tribes receive four times less than the Forest Service and 14 times less than BLM forests.

With respect to wildfire-related funding, the IFMAT report found that BIA receives \$3.98 per acre for preparedness -- compared to \$10.88 per acre for the U.S. Forest Service. The BIA received \$2.34 per acre for hazardous fuels reduction, while the Forest Service receives \$3.53 per acre. Also, much of this funding is competitive, which makes it difficult to build the capacity needed within tribal programs to treat landscapes at scale with funding uncertainty.

The IFMAT report documents that:

*"[BIA] forestry funding, in real terms, has declined 21% over the last 30 years. During this 30-year period Indian forest trust lands have increased from 15.6 million acres to 19.3 million acres, meaning that on a per-acre basis, funding, in real terms, has declined by almost 36% over the last 30 years. Some tribes have expressed that they have not had a budget increase in 30 years; others have had budgets or services reduced."*

The result of this inequity is catastrophic on Indian communities. The IFMAT report found reduced funding to BIA for forest management resulted in \$400 million is foregone timber revenue to tribes between 2010-2019. That means \$400 million was not generated to provide essential social, educational, and public safety services to some of the most vulnerable Americans. In addition to the \$400 million in foregone timber revenue, uncharacteristic wildfires have caused additional unquantified losses to timber, wildlife, aquatic, and cultural resources. Those impacts and losses could have been mitigated or reduced with fully funded and staffed programs. The Colville Tribe for example has lost over 1 billion board feet of timber since 2015, with a current market value of approximately \$500 million.

The IFMAT report found that budget parity between BIA-responsible forests, National Forest System and BLM forests would require an additional \$96 million per year for BIA Forestry and \$42 million in additional wildfire funding. In addition, the IFMAT report noted an additional \$1.33 billion needed for upgrading 46,900 miles of roads located on Indian trust lands. The report also noted an additional \$313 million to address the backlog of planned treatments that were not initiated, such as 500,000 of planting, and 500,000 acres of pre-commercial thinning. Other funding issues identified in the report include law enforcement, wild horse and burro management, and facilities.

For comparison, the BLM was appropriated \$141,972,000 for the wild horse and burro program in the Consolidated Appropriations Act for 2024. That is more than twice what all Indian forests receive nationwide.

This funding inequity can no longer be ignored. The ITC requests that Congress prioritize funding for Indian forests in its FY2025 appropriations bill. This is an urgent matter and tribes continue to pay the price of each additional year of funding inequity.

Unfortunately, the now-enacted FY24 appropriations law reduces BIA "Trust/Natural Resources Management" by nearly \$11 million from the FY23 enacted level. That includes a consequent \$3.1 million cut to BIA Forestry -- bringing funding down to \$62 million.

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<sup>1</sup> Indian Forest Management Assessment Team, "Assessment of Indian Forests and Forest Management in the United States (2023), p.55

This was a significant move in the wrong direction.

President Biden's FY25 budget justification includes a proposed \$3.1 million increase in BIA Forestry, which would reverse the reduction in the FY24 enacted bill. Given inflation, flat funding continues to move tribal forest management backwards.

### **Recommendations for FY 2025**

#### **BIA**

In light of the findings of congressionally-chartered IFMAT report, the ITC requests that this committee make a historic decision to fund Indian trust forests on parity with National Forest and BLM funding. This would require an *increase* in base level BIA Forestry funding by \$96 million, for a total of approximately \$162 million.

#### **DOI Office of Wildland Fire Management**

The Bipartisan Infrastructure bill provided \$500 million in boosted pay and benefits for federal wildland firefighters. However, the law inadvertently neglected to include tribally contracted firefighters who are fighting federal fires on federal lands just like their non-tribal counterparts. Many tribes contract this function from the Department of the Interior. Yet the disparate treatment between tribal and non-tribal firefighters has complicated recruitment and retention of them in Indian Country.

Since June 2022, the ITC has requested the Interior Department resolve this inequity. DOI has provided Congress with draft legislative language to address the situation, but no solution has been enacted as we go into yet another fire season.

I urge this Committee to work with the Administration to identify and fund a mechanism that respects the role of tribal firefighters in the federal budget and system.

Likewise, as noted in the IFMAT report, parity with other federal forest management agencies would require an increase of \$42 million in fire preparedness funding.

The ITC would also request that the Department of Interior fuels budget be returned to fiscal year 2023 levels.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR,  
ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

**TESTIMONY OF CHIEF DOUGLAS LANKFORD, MIAMI TRIBE OF OKLAHOMA  
REGARDING NEED FOR FUNDING FOR INDIAN COUNTRY DETENTION  
FACILITY SERVING NORTHEAST OKLAHOMA INDIAN COUNTRY**

*Aya akima eecipoonkwia weenswiaani niila myaamia.* My name is Chief Douglas Lankford of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma. I want to thank the Subcommittee for this opportunity to testify in support of an appropriation to fund a safe and secure detention facility that provides for suitable space to divert detainees in need of chemical dependency and or mental health care. In summary, the need for a facility is acute and immediate, especially as the Tribes of Northeast Oklahoma Indian country assume their full sovereign role in public safety across some 200,000 acres of contiguous Indian country. To that end, I am requesting \$26,849,750 from the United States Department of the Interior to build the facility.

Following the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, 591 U.S. \_\_\_\_, 140 S. Ct. 2452 (2020), criminal law enforcement in northeast Oklahoma is characterized by the unique cooperation between tribal, county, and city governments to ensure effective law enforcement and to promote public safety and quality of life in the region. Interjurisdictional law enforcement and judicial services are working efficiently. The missing piece is a suitable facility for detention. The region needs a facility to safely house offenders and address high recidivism rates driven by unaddressed chemical dependency and untreated mental health conditions. Members of the Northeast Oklahoma Tribal Consortium have previously sought a CTAS 2022 grant<sup>1</sup> and 2024 congressional appropriations for this project. We renew the appropriations requests for FY 2025.

The Northeast Oklahoma Tribal Consortium – Wyandotte Nation, Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Shawnee Tribe, Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma, Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, and Seneca-Cayuga Nation – was formed to prepare for and respond to the restoration of tribal criminal jurisdiction resulting from the United States Supreme Court’s decision in *McGirt*. The Consortium Tribes all have a seat of government located in Northeastern Oklahoma, and all have joined in a *Statement of Shared Interests and Goals*, which enumerates goals and underpins actions taken to prepare for the restoration of tribal criminal jurisdiction. The Consortium’s service area comprises roughly 200,000 contiguous acres of Indian country. Combined, the Consortium’s tribes have a population of approximately 29,726 members.<sup>2</sup>

Ottawa County (“County”) is located in the northeastern corner of Oklahoma. Land in the County is entirely within the reservations of the Northeast Tribal Consortium, Modoc Nation, and Cherokee Nation. The City of Miami (“City”) is the county seat and the largest municipality in Ottawa County. The City is located entirely within the Ottawa and Miami Reservations. The Tribal Consortium, City, and County (“Governmental Partners”) have agreed to work together to address public safety in Northeast Oklahoma and prioritize provision of a safe detention facility.

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<sup>1</sup> Consolidated Tribal Appropriations Solicitation

<sup>2</sup> Wyandotte Nation - 6,874, Miami Tribe of Oklahoma - 6,371, Shawnee Tribe - 3,695, Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma - 3,323, Eastern Shawnee Tribe - 3,751, Seneca-Cayuga Nation - 5,712

The Governmental Partners' service area is policed by City, County, Tribal, and Bureau of Indian Affairs police forces.<sup>3</sup> Tribal law enforcement forces are cross deputized with the City of Miami Police Department, the Ottawa County Sheriff's Department, and the BIA OLES. The service area, like other jurisdictions in the County, see that a significant number of criminal offenders present with untreated chemical dependency and mental health issues. The service area generally lacks rehabilitative treatment for people struggling with chemical dependency and mental health conditions. The Ottawa County Jail offers no programming to help offenders struggling with substance abuse, which generates unnecessarily high rates of recidivism.

The current detention facility available to the Governmental Partners, the Ottawa County Jail, is inadequate and does not meet many of the standards required to house federal or tribal detainees. It is our understanding that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Office of Justice Services (OJS) will not house their detainees in this facility because of its condition. There is no juvenile detention facility in the County, and there are no mental health or chemical dependency facilities in the Governmental Partners' service area. The Ottawa County Jail is inadequate in size, condition, and staffing, fails to identify and divert individuals presenting with untreated addiction and/or mental health conditions, and does not segregate detainees by offense level, mixing low level offenders with hardened criminals.

The unacceptable conditions are made worse by the age and poor design of the facility; patchwork repairs do not last long. For example, the doors within the facility are not able to be secured the way they were intended, requiring locking mechanisms to be welded on the outside to keep inmates in their pods. In some cases, inmates have bent the hinges and tampered with the locks to the point they can easily get out of secured areas. Inmates are continually breaking the glass that separates the pods by hitting the glass with food trays. Some of the glass panes are so damaged that inmates have free access to the hallway. Inmates have been able to pick at the concrete walls to the point that they have made holes to the outside, and until recently, the recreational yard has had an open top where people from the outside have been able to throw contraband from the street into the facility.

To compound matters, it is our understanding that inmates are not able to be separated by standard classifications, which mixes those charged and convicted of lower-level crimes in with more serious offenders. This can cause dangerous situations for inmates and staff. Appropriate segregation of detainees is a best practice for law enforcement, reduces instances of harm to low-level detainees from more dangerous detainees, and avoids in-incarceration recruitment of lower-level detainees into further crime. Separation by classification also provides a better rehabilitative environment for low-level detainees that need chemical dependency and mental health treatment. Conditions for inmates are simply poor. The Consortium hopes to address these and other inadequacies in the facility that will hold the Consortium's inmates.

Equally important, the Governmental Partners' service area lacks facilities for chemical dependency treatment. We propose to efficiently address these deficiencies through a combined detention and rehabilitative treatment center. The rate of recidivism nationally among Native

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<sup>3</sup> Tribal forces for Wyandotte Nation, Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, and Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma; BIA forces for Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma, and Seneca-Cayuga Nation.

Americans is estimated to be 33% higher than non-native populations according to one Department of Justice report. Locally, recidivism creates a huge drain on economic resources and taxes an already overmatched detention facility. Repeat offenders fill court dockets and, in many cases, take primary bread winners out of the home. It is the Governmental Partners' hope to create a safe and secure detention facility that not only addresses detention needs, but also solves a much greater local need, which is to provide an opportunity to our members to reclaim life and dignity lost to chemical dependency.

There is a solution that is not theoretical. The Consortium Tribes have a facility design, construction plan, and a budget for construction and operations. The proposed facility will house 170 pretrial and convicted adults of both sexes involved in cases before any of the Consortium Tribe's courts or federal court. Most offenders will stay in the facility for one to three years, depending on the crime.<sup>4</sup>

We propose a facility that includes space for rehabilitative detention. Many offenders in Indian country detention facilities come into incarceration with untreated chemical dependency and mental health issues. A recent government study<sup>5</sup> confirmed the high cost and dramatic impacts substance abuse and mental health have on Indian country detention facilities. The findings show for American Indians and Alaskan Natives, in the year prior to their arrest:

- 71% suffered physical, sexual, or emotional victimization
- 69% suffered with alcohol or other drug use disorders
- 65% suffered with mental health disorders
- 54% with an internalizing disorder (depression, anxiety, trauma, suicide ideation)
- 46% with an externalizing disorder problem (ADHD)
- 49% suffered with some sort of physical health problems

Based on these statistics, we have prioritized justice for the community, by planning for offender incarceration, and care for offenders, by providing appropriate, safe housing for court-ordered incarceration, and an opportunity to treat the addictions and mental health factors that contributed to their criminality.

In planning for a detention facility, the Consortium considered a variety of options, including building separate treatment and detention facilities and supporting the renovation of Ottawa County Jail. However, the proposed combined detention and treatment facility is the most efficient, cost-effective use of the Consortium's and federal government's resources. The existing Ottawa County Jail is a linear design which is approximately 35 years old and for all practical

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<sup>4</sup> Tribal courts are limited by the Indian Civil Rights Act. 5 U.S.C. 13021, et seq. to sentences of up to 1 year in jail and up to a \$5,000 fine. Under the Tribal Law and Order Act, Pub. L. No. 111-211, 124 Stat. 2258 that authority is increased for qualifying tribes to sentences of up to 3 years in jail and up to a \$15,000 fine and those sentences can be stacked where defendants are convicted or plead to multiple crimes.

<sup>5</sup> *National Native Global Appraisal of Individual Needs (GAIN)*, a Profile of Behavioral and Health Needs, conducted by Chestnut Health Systems, Normal IL., for a federal government agency, 2020.

purposes cannot be renovated to current detention standards. The Consortium's proposed facility will meet all current codes, will provide for better security, more efficient staffing, and more efficient use of utilities. With the use of pre-manufactured cells, the proposed facility would eliminate damage to the detention area, which increases longevity and lowers maintenance cost.

Additionally, the Consortium's vision for ensuring a cost-effective design includes several steps that prioritize our recidivism reduction strategies. The anchor of our healing to wellness approach would be to utilize an assessment tool during initial intake that has been identified as one of the most reliable, valid, efficient, and inexpensive behavioral health screeners by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). This tool allows us to link screening, justice case management, and other behavioral health data to provide the appropriate services.

With congressional funding, the Consortium will fully design a permanent modular facility detention center with programming for chemical dependency and mental health treatment and a small court space for arraignments. This facility will comply with the BJA's minimum standards for permanent modular structures. The Ottawa County Jail is crumbling and understaffed. Given the circumstances, the Consortium sees a new detention facility with chemical dependency and mental health treatment capability to be the most efficient means of addressing two large gaps in the current system.

The proposed facility will be safe and cost-effective. It will have a central control room elevated to the mezzanine level which will provide sight and sound observation of all day rooms and cells. The staff will have actual eyes-on for viewing inmates 24/7, in addition to having cameras that will record activity in all spaces. The design segregates multiple classes of inmates, men and women, and will have a separate chemical dependency and mental health diversion space. The facility will also have kitchen, laundry, and inmate property storage areas. Cells will be equipped with shower, lavatory and toilet to be used by the occupants, which will aid in better Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) conformance.

Planning is the first step to having a quality facility that can provide detention and treatment services. This project requires a variety of activities to be completed over approximately 15 months. Once planning activities are complete, construction and move-in will take an additional 15 months. The Consortium Tribes, in consultation with its non-tribal governmental partners, have estimated annual operating costs to be approximately \$2,808,462. The Consortium will seek additional funding through federal grants and contracts with local entities to support operational costs. The Consortium Tribes would be happy to share planning documents upon request.

## MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATION

Written Testimony of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation  
For the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Days.  
May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024

On behalf of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation (MCN), thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony at the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies concerning appropriations over the Department of Interior (DOI), Indian Health Service (IHS), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Affording tribal nations the platform to share feedback and suggestions for improvement over the annual fiscal year appropriations cycle is crucial to improving and reshaping federal budget strategies to best serve tribal nations and uphold treaty rights. As the 4<sup>th</sup> largest federally recognized tribe in the United States, with a reservation spanning nearly 5,000 square miles and divided into eight districts corresponding with the counties of Creek, McIntosh, Muskogee, Okfuskee, Okmulgee, and portions of Wagoner, Tulsa, Rogers, Hughes, Seminole, and Mayes, MCN represents the interests of over 100,000 enrolled citizens and thousands of other Native Americans who reside within our reservation boundaries.

The funding requests and recommendation provided in this testimony are grounded in our commitment to tribal sovereignty and our government-to-government relationship with the U.S. Federal Government that has deep rooted financial obligations, guaranteed in treaties and agreements entered into with MCN. It is our intention that MCN's testimony can serve as a starting point for improved dialogue and partnership between Congress and tribal nations.

Recently, Congress and the current Administration have made strides towards improving funding avenues, for tribal nations; the FY 2025 Budget Request represents the most forward-thinking presidential budget and policy proposal for tribal programs to date. However, a substantial funding-gap still exists for Native American programs at DOI, IHS and the EPA, and there is ample amount of work to be done to fulfill the federal government's treaty obligations. Accordingly, MCN urges the House Committee on Appropriations to improve how funding levels are determined, delivered to their respected agency, and classified. Actions like these will reaffirm Congress' commitment to Tribal Self-Governance and support strong Tribal governments, economies, and communities by enacting measures that address the structural deficiencies across the Federal system.

## I. DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR – BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS (BIA)

The BIA is one of the primary agencies responsible for providing services throughout Indian Country, either directly or through compacts or contracts, the operation of these programs and services is essential for the health, safety, and social and economic well-being of MCN and surrounding Native communities. Unfortunately, chronic underfunding of tribal programs has perpetuated systemic issues in Indian Country that could be reduced or eliminated by increasing funding for tribal programs to meet treaty and trust obligations.

The following subsections provide a select number of the recommendations from the Muscogee (Creek) Nation for specific program areas:

### A. PUBLIC SAFETY & JUSTICE

After *McGirt* (2020), MCN experienced unprecedented growth in criminal and civil jurisdiction which led to a rapid expansion of our court systems, law enforcement (LHP), and detention services. MCN has received increases in funding to address law enforcement needs; however, the appropriated levels are inadequate and fall short on treaty obligations because for LHP to operate at full capacity the program would need to receive an annual funding allocation of \$12 million. Therefore, MCN would like the committee to consider increasing the yearly amounts appropriated for these services.

Additionally, funding for detention services should be increased because of the sizeable costs associated with building and maintaining the infrastructure and operations of a detention center. In FY24, MCN received \$7,953,098 for detention services and we would request this figure become the baseline amount funded annually by congress, subject to increases to meet demonstrated need.

### B. EDUCATION

Indian Education programs are historically funded at lower levels compared to their local state, and federal counterparts; despite education being a key determinant in fiscal mobility and childhood development. MCN would request that the House Committee on Appropriations increase the baseline funding amount appropriated to educational activities and programming,

Specifically, MCN would like to implore congress to increase the per-student amount of funding Johnson O'Malley (JOM) programs receive. Currently, MCN's JOM program receives a rate of \$60 per student, but for this figure to be representative of the true cost and competitive the amount would need to be raised to \$200 per student—this increased rate would lower the existing gap between JOM and Title VII funding which receive student rates of over \$175.

## II. INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE

The Muscogee (Creek) Nation strongly urges Congress to re-classify appropriations made to IHS as mandatory spending and establish a complimentary mechanism to automatically adjust spending to keep pace with population growth, inflation, and healthcare costs. Moving IHS funds to mandatory funding would ensure that the appropriations Congress provides for Indian healthcare can be used efficiently and strategically by MCN to best serve our community.

At MCN our Department of Health has a proven track record of utilizing IHS funding to operate community hospitals, a long-term acute care facility, and physical rehabilitation centers that serve both tribal citizens and the general public. We currently lead the Nation in tribally offered healthcare solutions, uplifting both rural and urban, native and non-native communities alike. However, this work can be advanced by increasing funding to meet treaty obligations and by reclassifying funds as mandatory spending.

Until such time that IHS is provided mandatory direct appropriations, advance appropriations for the IHS are consistent with the trust and treaty obligations reaffirmed by the United States in the Indian Health Care Improvement Act

## III. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

As place-based peoples, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation has sacred histories and maintain cultural practices that tie the tribe to their current land bases and ancestral territories. As a result, tribal peoples directly, and often disproportionately, suffer from the impacts of environmental degradation. This is why the MCN recommends the House Committee of Appropriations explore creative ways to increase fiscal and infrastructural support for climate resiliency initiatives and clean energy expansion.

Additionally, MCN would recommends an increase in appropriations to the EPA Tribal General Assistance Program.

TESTIMONY OF RYAN WILSON (OGLALA LAKOTA)  
PRESIDENT NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO SAVE NATIVE LANGUAGES  
BEFORE THE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES  
FY 2025 Budget  
May 8<sup>th</sup> 2024

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**Request:** We request (20 million) for Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Living Languages Grant Program at the Office of Indian Economic Development at Department of Interior. Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) Native American Language Immersion (**5million**).

**Introduction.** Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, Members of the Committee. My name is Ryan Wilson (Tatanka Wasaka'), President of the National Alliance to Save Native Languages. I am honored to be here to testify today before the Subcommittee to provide the views of the Alliance on the importance and benefits of Native language immersion programs in the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) system and the BIA Living Languages Grant Program.

**Proposed Continued Funding for BIA Living Languages Grant Program (LLGP).**

The National Alliance to Save Native Languages request **20 million** for the LLGP program at the Office of Indian Economic Development DOI. In FY 2020 DOI awarded 15 million in grants to 45 Tribes and tribal organizations under the LLGP initiative in grants ranging from \$59,000-\$200,000. 59 Tribes applied out of the 574 federally recognized tribes in FY 2023. The Alliance views this initial funding as a positive and necessary step in creating a foundation for consistent investment in LLGP and we thank this Subcommittee for their bipartisan support in establishing this new investment.

The Alliance views the initial approach and program design as loadable but too broad, lacking clearly defined outcomes and verification of language community capacity. The Alliance proposes a tiered grant program that would provide entry level tribes competing for planning, development, implementation, and documentation of their own funding stream at 2.5 million. This is in recognition that all tribes are in different language environments with different capacity to engage in impactful revitalization strategies.

Tribes competing and winning these entry tiered grants should be given an opportunity upon successful completion to engage in heightened grants with greater capacity requirements. The Alliance is recommending that tribes with language capacity to legitimately engage in the goals of LLGP language revitalization compete in a separate tier for awards up to \$350,000. We request 17.5 million for this proposed tier.

To deepen the impact, build community language infrastructure, assist tribal communities in committing to longitudinal goals of revitalization the awards need to be larger and focused on less tribes. Language revitalization investments from the federal government should not be focused on tribal parity or equality of opportunity in funding but based on capacity of language tribes. Limited resources require focused investments to save language stock.

The Alliance wishes to recommend that tribes who have lost their remaining speakers or recovering languages from recordings, dictionaries and archives be allowed to form a consortium of language family tribes and compete for the proposed higher tiered grants of \$350,000. Several of the awardees while different Tribes share dialects of the same language. None of the current language funding programs in HHS and DoE have invested in regional restoration plans for tribes with the same languages. While this approach may seem nuanced it is exactly the creativity needed to potentially bring back living speakers to tribal communities who have long been without any.

***Request for continued funding Bureau of Indian Education Native American Language Immersion 5 million.***

The Alliance is requesting that the Subcommittee restrict these funds to BIE funded schools that have committed to 900 hours of immersion instruction. This proposed requirement will establish standards and guide corresponding site base leadership decisions in personnel, dedicated classroom space, and school culture in hosting immersion tracks.

The current iteration of the program conflates language instruction as a course and immersion as a medium of instruction. Grant money is also used for culturally based education which is important but unless delivered in the tribal language and in immersion setting should not be funded from this program. *Greater BIE oversight and fidelity to accepted constructs of immersion should be included in report language this will ensure that Congressional intent is honored.*

The BIE Native American Language Immersion initiative is congruent with President Biden's Indian Education Executive Order, the Native American Languages Act, the Snyder Act and other authorizations that fund BIA/BIE. In actuality the authority has always existed, but BIE needed Congress to direct them to engage in meaningful cultivation of true immersion opportunities.

The next logical step in addition to funding is that the Secretary of Interior promulgate a policy of Native Language development. In order to further the Federal Government's commitment to improving the educational outcomes of American Indian and Alaska Native students and improving the quality and performance of schools and education programs for American Indians and Alaska Natives, a comprehensive Native Language Development and Culturally Based Education policy is needed to: (1) help tribal governments meet the linguistically unique educational needs of their children, including the need to preserve, revitalize, and use their Native languages; (2) promote American Indian and Alaska Native tribal language immersion schools and develop capacity of tribal communities to build successful immersion schools; protect tribal language immersion schools from the promulgation of adverse rules, assessments, and regulations from federal agencies that are incongruent with existing statutes concerning Native language use; and (4) promote intergovernmental (tribal/federal) collaboration and partnership.

The Immersion effort in BIE started in the FY2017 omnibus when this Subcommittee included the initial 2 million investments within BIE education program enhancements for capacity building grants to expand language immersion opportunities. We thank this Subcommittee for breaking ground and request that report language include an assessment of immersion investments since the FY 2017.

By assessing and evaluating these key investments it will instruct BIE where improvements can be made in delivery of this program, where immersion support is appropriate across the 182-school system and what the impact has been on Native learners in immersion.

***Need for Increased Federal Support***

Both the LLGP and BIE Immersion program need increased federal support. Not only is the Alliance 25 million request credible in the eyes of Indian country but it is commensurate with the current need.

As language programs emerge from the COVID era a new reality confronts Tribal nations who suffered disproportionately. The loss of language speakers, heritage keepers, language instructors and ceremonial leaders has been staggering. The cumulative effect from program and instruction stoppage, loss of language capacity and general loss of momentum has exacerbated an already existing crisis. We are truly in a race against the clock, for some tribal communities a critical mass of speakers still exists, community ownership and values of language acquisition is strong, Tribal commitment is strong and leadership in both BIE systems and tribal governments are desirous of partnering with Interior to build impactful language revitalization efforts.

BIE schools and communities that wish to engage in the development of tribal language immersion schools need consistent annual federal support. Provided that BIE meet criteria and reporting requirements they should be funded annually. Interior would never consider offering a school wide math program on a competitive basis and only funded a year at a time. If BIE is to build purposeful immersion programs language instructors and support staff must receive a commitment from site-based leadership that there is an institutional commitment to immersion in the school for both reason of immersion integrity and continuity. How can BIE site-based leaders and BIE school boards make long term commitments to immersion if their funding source is on a year-to-year competitive basis. The Subcommittee can increase institutional commitment at BIE schools by directing BIE to engage in grants of up to 5 years for Immersion schools.

This federal support must be additional to and separate from that which currently exists to support BIE school operations. If Congress is to carry out its commitments to self – determination, sovereignty, and protection and revitalization of Native languages, it must provide consistent resources for Native language immersion schools.

The LLGP is a bold initiative funded at 15 million (2020-24), the Alliance request this investment be elevated to 25 million with all 574 Tribes being eligible for components of LLGP. The Federal Boarding School Report has brought to light and documented the incredible length the federal government engaged in investments and policy directives to eradicate Indian languages, culture, and religions. The federal government did so by targeting Indian children. Tribal communities continue to live with the devastating consequences of these federal policies funded in the billions of dollars by Congress and carried out by the executive branch. With the vast majority of Native languages extinct or on the verge of extinction the fierce urgency of now is at our doorstep. “Our” means all of us, not only are these sacred languages treasured by Indian country, but they are American treasures as well.

The investments made to separate Tribal nations and their most vulnerable members from their sacred birth right was substantial, and equal or greater investment to revitalize Native languages is appropriate.

***American Indian Religious Freedom Act.***

Congress sought to promote dual objectives in a single statute when it passed AIRFA in 1978. The first was to unequivocally state that First Amendment is guaranteed To American Indian and Alaska Native Peoples. The second was to declare a policy that ***“henceforth it shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut, and Native Hawaiians, including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites”***.

Protecting and investing in Native language revitalization is a necessary precursor to protecting and preserving Native religions and ceremonies. AIRFA itself is a repudiation of past policies of ceremonial and religious abridgment.

The Alliance has as others have offered perspectives with documented research and anecdotal research regarding the academic benefits of immersion and resiliency of bi-culturally competent Native youth. What we have not done until today is offer to this Subcommittee that our entire ceremonial structure and religious practices are contingent on the

Transfer of our languages the transmittal of Native language is inextricably linked to the transmittal of all our ceremonial and religious rights.

I thank this Subcommittee for holding these important hearings the only venue of its kind in the United States Congress where tribal leaders and grassroots stakeholders can come together and articulate the funding needs of Indian country and have ownership in the federal government’s execution of its Trust obligations.

**Written Testimony of Larry Wright, Jr.  
Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians  
For the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
May 10, 2024**

On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on FY 2025 funding for the Department of the Interior (DOI), the Indian Health Service (IHS), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Founded in 1944, NCAI is the oldest and largest national organization composed of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal nations.

The funding requests in this testimony are rooted in the promises made by the U.S. Government in treaties and agreements with tribal nations. The 2018 *Broken Promises Report* from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) found that “[f]ederal funding for Native American programs across the government remains grossly inadequate to meet the most basic needs the federal government is obligated to provide.”<sup>1</sup>

Congress and the Administration have recently taken some initial steps toward making good on the federal government’s promises to Tribal Nations. For example, NCAI commends Congress for providing advance appropriations for certain IHS accounts. This change in how funding is budgeted and appropriated for Indian Health programs has helped in preventing negative impacts on health care services in our tribal communities that result from the uncertainty displayed in the recent federal budget process (e.g., continuing resolutions and government shutdowns). Advance appropriations for the IHS is good governance that saves money and saves lives.

Additionally, the President’s FY 2025 Budget Request to Congress called for a historic shift in the paradigm of nation-to-nation relations that seeks to restore the promises made between our ancestors and the United States in several key programs. It included requesting mandatory funding for: IHS, DOI Contract Support Costs, and Section 105(1) Tribal Leases; along with a myriad of investments in Indian healthcare, education, public safety, natural resource management, and infrastructure. The FY 2025 Budget Request represents the most forward-thinking presidential budget and policy proposal for tribal programs to date.

However, there is much more to be done by the federal government to truly fulfill the promises made to tribal nations. Congress and the Administration must build on these initial steps. Accordingly, NCAI urges Congress to fully fund the U.S. Government’s treaty and trust obligations. It also urges Congress and the Administration to continue to improve how funding is delivered to the BIA, IHS

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Broken Promises: Continued Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans*, at 4, (2018), <https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/2018/12-20-Broken-Promises.pdf>

and other federal programs that serve Tribal Nations by providing advance appropriations until such time that all trust and treaty obligations are accounted for, and provided as, mandatory spending.

#### **I. Bureau of Indian Affairs**

The BIA is one of the primary agencies responsible for providing services throughout Indian Country, either directly or through compacts or contracts with Tribal Nations. The operation of these programs and services is essential for the health, safety, and social and economic well-being of Tribal Nations and surrounding communities. Unfortunately, chronic underfunding of Tribal programs perpetuates systemic issues in Indian Country that could be reduced or eliminated by funding Tribal programs in amounts that meet the federal government's treaty and trust obligations to Tribal Nations.

NCAI recommends \$23.706 billion for Indian Affairs programs in FY 2025, consistent with the official FY 2025 recommendation of the Tribal/Interior Budget Council (TIBC).<sup>2</sup> Within TIBC's FY 2025 recommendations are robust increases for all base-funded programs, and additional funding to address public safety and justice in tribal communities; the economic and social wellbeing of our citizens and all those who visit or do business in our communities; the backlog of school, community, and government infrastructure construction and maintenance; taking land into trust; and addressing climate resiliency in tribal communities and on Indian and federal lands.

The following subsections highlight a few of TIBC's FY 2025 recommendations.

#### **A. Public Safety and Justice**

Among the fundamental components of the federal government's treaty and trust responsibilities to Tribal Nations is the obligation to protect public safety on Tribal lands. Congress has long acknowledged this obligation, which Congress reaffirmed in the Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA) expressly "acknowledging the federal nexus and distinct federal responsibility to address and prevent crime in Indian Country."<sup>3</sup>

The underfunding of Tribal law enforcement and justice systems is well-documented. In 2024, BIA submitted a report to Congress (for FY 2021) estimating that to provide a minimum base level of service to all federally recognized Tribal Nations: \$1.724 billion is needed for Tribal Law Enforcement Programs, \$1.5 billion is needed for Tribal Courts, and \$284.1 million is needed to adequately fund existing Detention Centers.<sup>4</sup> FY 2024 funding levels fall far short of BIA's estimates. The 2018 report, identifies that Public Safety & Justice in Indian Country is funded at a mere 14% of need (\$2.33 billion shortfall), according to the 2021 estimates, this unmet need has fallen further to 12% (\$3.06 billion shortfall). The \$3.06 billion dollar shortfall equated to approximately 25,655 additional personnel required to adequately serve Indian

<sup>2</sup> TIBC Tribal Representatives' *FY 2025 Budget Submission to the Department of the Interior*, May 6, 2022, accessed at:

[https://archive.ncai.org/initiatives/tibc/TIBC\\_-\\_FY\\_2025\\_Tribal\\_Budget\\_Submission\\_-\\_5.1.23\\_FINAL.pdf](https://archive.ncai.org/initiatives/tibc/TIBC_-_FY_2025_Tribal_Budget_Submission_-_5.1.23_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Tribal Law and Order Act, 34 U.S.C. § 10381(j).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Report to Congress on Spending, Staffing, and Estimated Funding Costs for Public Safety and Justice Programs in Indian Country, 2021*, May 5, 2024, accessed at: [https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/media\\_document/2021\\_tloa\\_report\\_final\\_508\\_compliant.pdf](https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/media_document/2021_tloa_report_final_508_compliant.pdf)

country.

In 2018, the USCCR found that there continues to be “systematic underfunding of tribal law enforcement and criminal justice systems, as well as structural barriers in the funding and operation of criminal justice systems in Indian Country” that undermine public safety.<sup>5</sup> Tribal justice systems must have resources so they can protect women, children and families, address substance abuse, rehabilitate first-time offenders, and put serious criminals behind bars. Well-functioning criminal justice systems, basic police protection, and services for victims are fundamental priorities of any government — tribal nations are no different.

The 2021 report to Congress was released after the formulation of TIBC’s FY 2025 recommendation which is why the requested amounts are less than the amounts recommended in the 2021 report. As stated above, NCAI supports TIBC’s FY 2025 recommendations, which include \$2.934 billion for Public Safety and Justice funding, with approximately \$1.379 billion for BIA Law Enforcement and \$1.156 billion for Tribal Courts.

#### **B. BIA Road Maintenance**

Infrastructure remains a critical need in Indian Country. BIA received \$39.19 million for the BIA Road Maintenance Program in FY 2024. BIA has indicated that it has a deferred maintenance backlog in excess of \$400 million. Additionally, the annual funding levels for this program have been relatively flat, especially when compared to the level of deferred maintenance needs. This program is critical to the safety of all those driving on the approximately 29,100 miles of roads and 1,100 bridges in Indian Country that are overseen by BIA. NCAI supports TIBC’s FY 2025 recommendation of \$400 million for the BIA Road Maintenance Program to address deferred maintenance needs in Indian Country.

#### **C. Contract Support Costs and Tribal Leases**

NCAI strongly supports reclassifying the Contract Support Costs and Payments for 105 (I) Tribal Leases as mandatory spending for both IHS and Indian Affairs. Given current 105 (I) trends in IHS and Indian Affairs (IA), Tribal Nations are concerned that CSC and 105(I) costs could have a detrimental impact on overall increases for IHS and IA, including funds for patient care, and trust services. It is with this in mind that the IHS Workgroup and Tribal Interior Budget Council (TIBC) continues to urge that all the IHS and Indian Affairs budgets be provided as mandatory spending, but that CSC and Payments for Tribal Leases are immediately prepared to be moved to mandatory. NCAI and National Tribal advisory groups urge this immediate action to ensure that spending for IHS and Indian Affairs under discretionary caps can prioritize addressing Indian Country inequities made worse by inadequate budgets.

### **II. Bureau of Indian Education**

#### **A. Native Language Preservation**

Native languages are fundamental to Tribal Nations’ histories, cultures, and traditions and Native language instruction in educational and community settings is crucial to Native language revitalization. Tribal Nations and schools serving Native students across the United States have

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Broken Promises: Continued Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans*, at 32, (2018), <https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/2018/12-20-Broken-Promises.pdf>.

identified Native language instruction as an urgent priority for students and community members. NCAI requests that Congress establish a \$40 million annual fund within the Department of the Interior, beginning in FY 2025 for Native language research and programs. NCAI also supports an appropriation of \$13.67 million for BIE Native Language Immersion Grants to expand existing language immersion programs or create new programs.

#### **B. Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP)**

Indian Student Equalization Program (ISEP) Formula Funds provide the primary funding for the core operational functions of Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)-funded elementary and secondary schools, including academic, educational, residential, and guidance and counseling services; teacher and staff salaries; instructional materials, extracurricular activities, and related programming.

Combined with the underfunding of student transportation, facilities operations, facilities maintenance, and tribal grant support costs, BIE-funded schools must often reallocate critical teaching and learning ISEP funding to cover expenditures in these line items to provide safe and adequate learning facilities. This negatively impacts BIE-funded schools' ability to provide appropriate, high-quality education to its students. NCAI is supportive of the TIBC. NCAI recommends \$950 million for Indian Affairs programs in FY 2025, consistent with the official FY 2025 recommendation of the Tribal/Interior Budget Council (TIBC).<sup>6</sup>

#### **III. Indian Health Service**

Since 2003, Tribal leaders, technical advisors, and other policy advisors have met during the annual national Tribal Budget Formulation work session to collaboratively develop an estimate for full IHS funding. The IHS need-based funding aggregate cost estimate for FY 2025 is approximately \$53.85 billion, and the cost estimate for FY 2026 is \$55.93 billion.<sup>7</sup> NCAI supports the recommendations of the IHS National Tribal Budget Formulation Work Group.

NCAI also strongly urges Congress to ensure IHS funding is provided as mandatory spending, with a mechanism to automatically adjust spending to keep pace with population growth, inflation, and healthcare costs. Indian Country is encouraged by the Budget proposal that all resources be mandatory beginning in 2026. Again, mandatory funding would close the gap of long standing service and facility shortfalls over time; improve access to high-quality healthcare.

Until such time that IHS is provided mandatory direct appropriations, advance appropriations for the IHS are consistent with the trust and treaty obligations reaffirmed by the United States in the Indian Health Care Improvement Act. The advance appropriation enacted in the FY 2024 minibus excluded certain accounts in the IHS budget and flat-funded the IHS accounts that it did include. While historic in its inclusion, a flat-funded IHS needs FY 2025 adjustments, at a minimum, for fixed costs and staffing for newly completed facilities and should also include the amounts requested by the IHS National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup. As the process begins to normalize, both IHS and tribal nations have the collaborative tools to produce reliable advance appropriation requests. For this appropriations cycle, tribal nations have already provided official input on the FY 2025 budget to IHS with representatives of the Office of

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<sup>6</sup> Id pg. 2

<sup>7</sup> Workgroup publications available at: [https://www.nihb.org/legislative/budget\\_formulation.php](https://www.nihb.org/legislative/budget_formulation.php).

Management and Budget in attendance.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony. NCAI is grateful for all of the work Congress has done to uphold the Trust and Treaty Responsibility to Tribal Nations, and we look forward to working further to protect and maintain the progress that has been made in recent years for the benefit of all of Indian Country. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Ryan Seelau, Director of Policy and Legal ([rseelau@ncai.org](mailto:rseelau@ncai.org)) or Matthew Vogel, Policy Lead for Budget and Appropriations ([mvogel@ncai.org](mailto:mvogel@ncai.org).)

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry Wright, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Larry Wright, Jr.  
Executive Director, NCAI



NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

**Written Testimony of Tesia Zientek  
President of the National Indian Education Association  
For the House Committee on Appropriations,  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**

**May 8, 2024**

On behalf of the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), the oldest and most inclusive organization founded to advance comprehensive, culture-based educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 funding for the Department of the Interior (DOI), the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

Rooted in treaties between Tribal Nations and the federal government, the US Constitution, and decades of legal precedent, Congress has a direct fiduciary responsibility to provide federal funding for Indian education. Unfortunately, the BIE is chronically underfunded, causing irreparable detriment to our tribal youth, and harming the future economic engines and cultural leaders of our Nations.

Nearly 48,000 Native students across the country are enrolled in schools run by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) or Tribally Controlled Schools which were originally intended to fulfill the federal governments trust and treaty responsibility to Native education. Due to the underfunded, rural, and remote nature of Native communities, Native students often do not have access to high-quality culture-based education options that provide opportunities to thrive. Safe and healthy classrooms that center language and culture are essential to success in education for Native students across the nation. From early childhood through postsecondary education, Native students must have access to programs and resources that provide them the best chances for the future.

Today, it is critically important to bring our schools into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and ground them with all the tools of our ancestral knowledge. Over the past decade, there has been a rapid change in what constitutes safe, high-quality, culturally-relevant, wholistic education. The United States has undergone a major technology boom, a global pandemic, and an unparalleled increased in school-related shooting incidents. All of this, alongside the untreated generational trauma of the federal Indian boarding school system that continues to wreak havoc on the cultural, mental, and emotional health of our children, means we are overdue for a strong investment in Indian education. The investment in our children is an investment in the futures of tribal communities for future economic growth and cultural vitality.

The FY 2024 budget for Indian Education included significant cuts to both Indian education construction and Johnson O'Malley programs, while the rest of the Indian education and Native language accounts were flat funded. This represents a failure to fulfill the trust and treaty obligation to Tribal Nations. We urge this committee to ensure that during the federal budgeting process, the education of our Native children, an obligation that is as old as the United States, is not left on the cutting room floor.

#### **Department of the Interior**

The Department of the Interior (DOI) continues to support tribal education priorities by managing the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) which includes 55 BIE funded and operated schools and 128 BIE funded and tribally-controlled schools. Historically, DOI managed the federal Indian boarding school system which aimed to acculturate and assimilate Natives and ultimately accounted for the loss of over 500 deaths and unquantifiable amounts of cultural knowledge and language. Today, DOI is working to investigate this loss and NIEA looks forward to the work of the federal government to support culturally relevant education and language programs across tribal education systems. This committee must support one of the most critical pieces of this process, providing full funding for Indian Education.

#### **I. Bureau of Indian Education – Operation of Indian Programs, Elementary and Secondary Programs**

NIEA requests \$950 million for Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP) Formula funds. These funds provide the core budget account for BIE elementary and secondary schools by covering salaries for teachers, aides, principals, and other personnel. Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP) funds are often reallocated to cover the program cuts in other areas of education. ISEP must have adequate funding to ensure all program needs are fulfilled and must not be reduced to provide funds for new initiatives that have not been vetted by Tribal Nations. This request supports the Tribal Interior Budget Council (TIBC) recommendation, which is based on average per pupil funding multiplied by the total Weighted Student Unit.

Currently, BIE is working to change the blood quantum minimum with DOI solicitors. There are many students in tribally-controlled schools who are not eligible for the ISEP student counts due to having lower than  $\frac{1}{4}$  blood quantum. The federal government is obligated to fund schools to educate all of their tribal children, whether they are tribal enrollees or descendants, BIE is working to rectify that. Once this is changed, BIE will have a more comprehensive student count which more accurately reflects the number of students served. This will also alter the per pupil funding levels, and will require this committee to adjust the ISEP funding levels similarly.

We also support the TIBC request for \$75 million for ISEP Program Adjustment and the President's budget request for \$25.7 million for Education Program Enhancements, including the President's budget request for \$500,000 for better incorporation for Native language and culture in curriculum. This should also include \$10 million for BIE language immersion programs.

NIEA requests \$109 million for BIE facilities operations and \$100 million for BIE facilities maintenance. BIE schools use facilities operations funding for costs such as electricity, heating

fuels, communications, vehicle rentals, custodial services, and other operating expenses. For years, schools have only received roughly 70 percent of funding needed for these expenses.

For student transportation, NIEA requests \$86 million for Student Transportation. Due to the rural and remote nature of many BIE and TCSs, transportation for students requires more support. Oftentimes schools end up rerouting funding from other sources to cover the difference, as ensuring students arrive safely at school is an essential prerequisite to educating our populations.

For the other 93 percent of Native students that do not attend BIE-funded schools, NIEA requests \$55.2 million for the Johnson O'Malley (JOM) Program to assist with the unique educational needs of Native students in public schools. NIEA and our members were deeply disappointed to find this account was cut in FY 2024. JOM programs provide critical educational resources for after school programs, academic support, dropout prevention, funding for college access testing, the purchase of school supplies, and Native cultural and language enrichment. JOM is supported by its parent committees which determine the needs of Native students in their communities. However, while other BIE program operations, and many other federal education accounts, are forward funded, JOM is not. Disbursements are routinely provided later than needed due to the regularity of continuing resolutions and government shutdowns over the past two decades.

In 1995 the federal government allocated \$98 per student in JOM funding. That investment has steadily declined, while this funding oftentimes remains the only source through which Native students in public schools can engage in basic cultural education activities. Factoring in inflation, that would equate to \$195 per student. It would take additional funds of at least \$230 million to fully address this drastic disparity.

Tribal Education Departments and Agencies (TEDs/TEAs) are responsible for administering and implementing education priorities of Tribal Nations and are equal partners with state and federal education entities serving Native students. However, as Tribal Nations lack parity with states, local governments, and the federal government within the tax code, TEDs and TEAs do not receive tax revenue to fund their programs. Instead, TEDs and TEAs use Tribal Education Department Funding under BIE. NIEA supports the Tribal Education Departments National Association (TEDNA) request for \$10 million dollars for this account.

Another essential funding stream for running a Tribally Controlled School (TCS) is the Tribal Grant Support Costs account. NIEA requests \$114.5 million for FY 2024. This is to support necessary administrative costs and ensures Tribal Nations have the resources to expand self-determination and local tribal control over their education programs. NIEA urges this committee to provide mandatory appropriations for Tribal Grant Support Costs. Tribal Grant Support Costs fund the administrative costs of existing tribally operated schools and are required to be covered by the federal government. If these are not covered, the BIE must move discretionary funding to cover these costs.

## **II. Bureau of Indian Education – Education Construction**

As mentioned earlier, the Education Construction funding was cut by \$33 million in FY 2024, which represents a 12% reduction to one of the most necessary and already underfunded accounts

within the BIE. While we know the Great American Outdoors Act has provided some additional funding for school construction, it is nowhere near enough to cover this loss. NIEA requests \$430 million for Education Construction in FY 2025, but acknowledges that the Tribal Interior Budget Council's request of \$6.2 billion is appropriately address the need for high quality education facilities and to bring BIE schools up to a quality which would be considered adequate for the federal education trust responsibility. Better school buildings lead to improved conditions for learning, academic outcomes, and student achievement. Education construction provides long-term investments in better economic growth.

But there is another route which would truly uphold the federal trust responsibility, providing mandatory appropriations for 105(l) leases and ensure a cleaner process for lending access for tribally controlled schools. If tribes and their schools are able to build their facilities themselves, then not only are the communities in better control of determining what their children are most in need of, but the construction process for the entire BIE system will be more efficient. But the current status if 105(l) leases in the discretionary budget will only continue to crowd out other line items of the Interior appropriations bills as more schools and tribal programs apply for leases. Further, because of the uncertainty of the amount of leases the federal budget can handle creates hesitancy in lenders for construction projects aimed at 105(l) leases. Tribally controlled schools should be able to construct and repair facilities on their own terms, with the certainty that the federal government will uphold their end of the agreement. Mandatory appropriations for 105(l) leases will ensure that eventually the education construction account only serves schools without the means to build their own schools and the schools BIE directly operates.

### **III. Bureau of Indian Affairs – Community and Economic Development**

NIEA requests \$25 million for Native Language Revitalization under the Community and Economic Development – Economic Development (TPA) account. This not only supports funding for tribally-run Native Language program projects currently administered by the Office of Indian Economic Development (OIED), as well as funding for language instruction and immersion for students not enrolled in BIE schools, ensuring these students have language and cultural instruction available to them regardless of which type of school they may attend.

#### **Conclusion**

The federal trust responsibility to all Native students is an example of the promises that make this country unique. Native culture and language are within the foundation of the United States, alongside the land we have known for generations. This subcommittee should honor its first promises, and support the above recommendations to provide only the highest quality education to Native students across the country and provide the essential supports for future of our communities.

**Testimony of Brooke Kwiik Mallory, Chair, Native Village of Eyak**  
**“American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Days”**  
**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
**May 10, 2024**

**Recommendations:**

1. Provide full funding and advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service (IHS)
2. Reduce dependence on competitive grants for Indian Country
3. Permanently exempt the IHS from cuts, sequestrations, and rescissions
4. Ensure mandatory funding for Contract Support Costs (CSC) and section 105(l) leases.
5. Increase funding and accepted applications for the Joint Venture (JV) Program
6. Amend Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) to clarify CSC provisions.
7. Fund Critical Infrastructure investments for the IHS.
8. Increase funding and extend self-governance to the Special Diabetes Program for Indians.
9. Increase funding for behavioral and mental health programs.

**Introduction.** Thank you, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to share our funding priorities for FY 2025. My name is Brooke Kwiik Mallory and I serve as the Chair of the Native Village of Eyak. The Native Village of Eyak is a federally recognized Tribal government located in Cordova, Alaska, on the southeast shores of Prince William Sound in the North Gulf Coast. The Tribe is a co-signer to the Alaska Tribal Health Compact with the IHS and operates a wide range of health care programs, including primary care services and behavioral health. We focus on self-determination and self-governance as a means of improving the lives and health of our Tribal citizens. We are not only responsible for providing quality, available health care services, but also for promoting opportunities and partnerships for our citizens, protecting our traditional land and natural resources, and for strengthening our culture.

We are grateful for the historic investments Congress has made in the Indian health system in recent years via the CARES Act, American Rescue Plan Act, and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The direct funding model and successful implementation of these laws prove that when Tribal sovereignty is honored, Tribal communities thrive. We would also like to thank this Subcommittee for its bipartisan effort to protect the IHS from cuts during the 2024 appropriations process. Furthermore, we urge you to remember that Congress’ trust and treaty responsibility to provide for the health and wellbeing of Tribal Nations exists irrespective of any self-imposed budgetary caps. It is imperative that this Subcommittee appropriate the full amounts necessary to fulfill its obligations. To that end, I offer the following recommendations for your consideration for FY 2025 appropriations for the IHS.

**Provide Full Funding for the Indian Health Service:** The IHS and its Tribal partners under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act strive to provide Tribal people with access to high quality and comprehensive medical services, in line with the federal government’s trust and treaty obligations. However, chronic underfunding of the Indian health system has had detrimental impacts on our communities. Alaska Natives are disproportionately affected by obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, substance-use disorder and other largely preventable conditions. We therefore urge the Subcommittee to work towards full and mandatory funding for the IHS, in line with the IHS Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup.

The Workgroup has calculated it will take \$54 billion to fully-fund the IHS. We understand that this represents a dramatic increase in funding; however, it is essential that Congress address the true needs

of the Indian health system. We support their full request and reiterate the following four priorities for program expansion as follows:

- 1) Hospitals and Clinics: \$13.6 billion
- 2) Mental Health: \$4.5 billion
- 3) Alcohol & Substance Abuse: \$4.9 billion
- 4) Dental Services: \$3.2 billion

**Continued Support for Advance Appropriations for IHS:** If full, mandatory appropriations cannot be achieved for FY 2025, we continue to support advance appropriations for the IHS in the short-term. This year's tumultuous appropriations cycle clearly demonstrates why advance appropriations are critical—IHS clinical services remained continuous throughout the volatile political process. We urge the Subcommittee to extend advance appropriations to all IHS accounts, including Electronic Health Records Modernization, Health Care Facilities Construction, and Sanitation Facilities Construction for FY 2026.

**Reduce Dependence on Federal Grants:** We also support moving away from competitive grants for federal funding mechanisms. Grants unfairly pit Tribes against each other for resources we are all entitled to. The federal trust responsibility does not require that we jump through a myriad of hoops and onerous applications to see that services are provided to our citizens. Too often, Tribes are under-resourced to apply for federal grants and comply with their reporting requirements. Our staff must divert time to apply and report, thereby diluting the usefulness of the resources. Instead, we request wide-spread, formula-based funding across all programs. Tribes must also be granted the flexibility needed to respond to the specific needs of their own communities, not those prescribed by federal grants. This also means appropriating enough resources so funds are provided in meaningful amounts across all Tribes. We join other Tribal leaders in calling for broad based funding for Indian Country.

**Permanently Exempt the IHS from Cuts, Sequestrations, and Rescissions:** As demonstrated above, the Indian health system is chronically underfunded, with current appropriations sitting around one-seventh of need. Nevertheless, Congress routinely threatens and enacts additional budget cuts, sequestrations, and rescissions affecting the IHS. As recently as FY 2024, this Congress rescinded \$350 million marked for public health infrastructure from the IHS. Furthermore, the IHS is the only federally funded service providing direct patient care not exempt from sequestration.

We remind this Subcommittee again that its trust and treaty obligations to Tribes exist regardless of any self-imposed budget control measures. In fact, the IHS budget remains so small in comparison to the national budget that cuts, rescissions, and sequestrations do not result in any meaningful savings in the national debt, but they do devastate Tribal Nations and their citizens. We urge Congress to ensure that any budget cuts, whether automatic or explicit, hold IHS and our people harmless.

**Mandatory Funding for Contract Support Costs and 105(I) lease payments:** We appreciate the Subcommittee's commitment to ensuring that CSC and section 105(I) lease payments are fully funded. However, these line items continue to take up a larger and larger percentage of the IHS discretionary budget, thereby leaving little room to expand other services given the tight budget environment. We strongly agree with the Subcommittee's words in the explanatory statement for the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94) regarding 105(I) costs which said, in part: "Obligations of this nature are typically addressed through mandatory spending, but in this case, since they fall under discretionary spending, they are impacting all other programs funded under the Interior and Environment Appropriations bill, including other equally important Tribal programs."

Therefore, we ask you to continue to advocate with your colleagues on authorizing committees to enact mandatory appropriations for CSC and 105(*l*) lease costs. Doing so will ensure that other areas of the IHS budget are held harmless by these costs and true increases in critical services line items can move forward. This will enhance care for Tribal patients and reduce health disparities.

**Support Expansion of the IHS Joint Venture Program.** The IHS Joint Venture program provides Tribes with a critical opportunity to build new facilities and to enhance health services for their patients. Under this project, Tribes can build or acquire a facility with non-IHS funds, and the IHS commits to funding the additional staffing and operations costs associated with the new or expanded facility. The program has been very popular, with close to forty facilities built, acquired, or renovated since 1992. Yet, despite the remarkable success of this program, projects like ours remain unfunded by IHS. Recently, the Native Village of Eyak was on the top ten list of projects, having received a high-score in the application. But we were not funded because the IHS only funds the top five projects. We request that the Committee direct IHS to fund all high-scoring applicants for JV construction projects.

Additionally, the JV Program currently leaves Tribal facilities without necessary maintenance and replacement funds. The Indian Health Care Improvement Act requires that the Tribe lease the facility to IHS for 20 years at no cost. The JV facility is eligible to receive a share of IHS's perennially insufficient Maintenance and Improvement (M&I) funding, but is not eligible for a lease under section 105(*l*) of the ISDEAA. This leads to the anomaly that non-JV facilities can be fully funded under 105(*l*), receiving either fair market rental or the cost elements set out in the regulations, while JV facilities are stuck with nothing but M&I. We request that Congress amend the Indian Health Care Improvement Act to correct this issue. We are happy to provide any technical assistance necessary.

**Amend ISDEAA to Clarify CSC provisions.** We also request that the committee consider amending the ISDEAA to clarify that when agency funding paid to a Tribe for program operations is insufficient for contract and compact administration, CSC will remain available to cover the difference. In the recent court decision *Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc. v. Dotomain*,<sup>1</sup> a federal appeals court held that costs for activities normally carried out by IHS are ineligible for payment as CSC—even if IHS transfers insufficient, or even no, funding for these activities in the Secretarial amount. Under this new ruling, if facility costs are higher for a Tribe than for IHS, the Tribe is forced to cover the difference by diverting scarce program dollars. Recently, this serious misinterpretation of the ISDEAA that has been applied to one Tribal organization resulting in a 90% reduction of CSC reimbursement threatens Tribal self-governance and self-determination. Therefore, we call upon Congress to provide a legislative fix to clarify the intent of Congress for this matter, and ensure consistency with precedent.

**Fully fund critical infrastructure investments:** We were disappointed to see that this Subcommittee approved cuts to Electronic Health Records Modernization, Health Care Facilities Construction, and Sanitation Facilities Construction in FY 2024. The Indian health system's infrastructure is among the oldest and most dilapidated in the country. This is especially true in Alaska, where more than half of homes in thirty-one Alaska Native communities lack proper sanitation infrastructure. Additionally, we continue to experience significant challenges finding adequate housing for staffing for health professionals in our community. As you know, health staffing shortages across the Indian health

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<sup>1</sup> *Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc. v. Dotomain*, 10 F.4th 892 (D.C. Cir. 2021).

system are dire, and providing adequate living spaces for professionals is directly linked with our ability to recruit and retain staff.

Therefore, we request that this Subcommittee restore and fully-fund these accounts. To implement an interoperable Electronic Health Records and telehealth system, \$801 million is needed for FY 2025. As you are aware, this investment is especially critical as the Veterans' Administration and Department of Defense move to modernize their systems. It is also critical that Congress make significant investments in Health Care Facilities Construction and Sanitation Facilities Construction. IHS and Tribal facilities are severely outdated, and we appreciate Congress' investment in IHS sanitation facilities through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Yet, with a multi-billion-dollar backlog and growing inflation, funding to close out the list is not keeping pace with need. This creates situations where facilities are unfit and unsafe. Therefore, consistent with the Workgroup's request, we recommend \$2.8 billion for Health Care Facilities Construction and Equipment and \$2.2 billion for Sanitation Facilities Construction in FY 2025.

**Extend Self-Governance Funding Options to the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) and increase funding to \$250 million/year.** While we understand that SDPI is not under the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee, we appreciate that Congress included a short-term extension of SDPI in FY 2024 appropriations at a \$160 million annualized rate. We recognize that this is the first increase for SDPI in two decades. Communities like ours across Indian Country rely on SDPI resources to address the alarming rates of diabetes and diabetes-related health complications among our people. SDPI's success rests in the flexibility of its program structure that allows for the incorporation of culture and local needs into its services. Consistent with this model, Congress should authorize SDPI participants the option of receiving their federal funds through either a grant (as currently used) or self-governance funding mechanisms under ISDEAA.

Additionally, SDPI has not had a meaningful increase in funding since FY 2004 despite its overwhelming success. Short term reauthorizations continue to destabilize this program and make staffing and program continuity difficult. For this reason, we recommend permanent reauthorization for SDPI at a minimum base of \$250 million per year with annual adjustments for inflationary increases. We urge you to work with your Congressional colleagues to enact this important priority.

**Behavioral Health:** Our community, like all of Indian Country, has been devastated by the ongoing fentanyl and opioid epidemic. Nevertheless, funds for these services are extremely limited. For example, in FY 2024, Congress only appropriated \$2 million to fund essential detoxification related services. That's less than \$1 per IHS patient. We urge the Subcommittee to dedicate resources to detoxification and reemphasize the importance of fully-funding the following accounts: Health Care Facilities Construction, Alcohol & Substance Use, and Mental Health. We also fully support the President's Domestic Supplemental Request, which includes a \$250 million investment in the IHS to address the fentanyl and opioid epidemic. Recognizing that Indian Country cannot wait any longer, Congress should consider this request as soon as possible.

**Testimony of Qaiqpak Christina Hensley, Executive Director, Native Village of Kotzebue**  
**“American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Days”**  
**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
**May 10, 2024**

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**Recommendations:**

1. Increase funding for Tribal Family Courts
2. Fully Fund the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Account
3. Provide Direct Funding for Language Revitalization Activities
4. Provide full, mandatory funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
5. Provide advance appropriations to the BIA
6. Reduce dependence on competitive grants for Indian Country
7. Permanently exempt the BIA from cuts, sequestrations, and rescissions
8. Enact mandatory funding for contract support costs (CSC) and section 105(I) leases

**Introduction.** Thank you, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to share our funding priorities for FY 2025. My name is Qaiqpak Christina Hensley, and I am the Executive Director of the Native Village of Kotzebue. We are a Federally-recognized Tribal government representing the Qikiqtaġruṅmiut, the original inhabitants Qikiqtaġruk (Kotzebue). Qikiqtaġruk is located in northwest Alaska, thirty miles above the Arctic Circle on the Baldwin Peninsula. We operate a variety of programs such as realty, general assistance, child welfare, education, housing, and natural resource management. We are currently working on expanding our Tribal immersion school (Nikaichuat Iḷisaġviat) and establishing a Tribal Family Courts Program.

We are grateful for the historic investments Congress has made in Indian Country in recent years via the CARES Act, American Rescue Plan Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and Inflation Reduction Act. The direct funding model and successful implementation of these laws prove that when Tribal sovereignty is honored, Tribal communities thrive. We would also like to thank this Subcommittee for its bipartisan effort to protect Indian Country from cuts during the 2024 appropriations process. Furthermore, we urge you to remember that Congress’ trust and treaty responsibility to provide for the wellbeing of Tribal Nations exists irrespective of any self-imposed budgetary caps. It is imperative that this Subcommittee appropriate the full amounts necessary to fulfill its obligations. To that end, I offer the following FY 2025 recommendations for your consideration.

**Provide Increased, Sustained Funding for Tribal Family Courts.** Our top priority is to increase funding to Tribal Family Courts. We recently received one-time funding to establish a Tribal Family Courts program for which we are very grateful. Its mission is to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the Kotzebue people and Tribe by addressing problems locally through the application of unwritten cultural traditions and written Tribal ordinances. However, we remain hesitant to launch the program without it being a part of our annual funding agreement. We therefore ask this Subcommittee to increase funding to the BIA’s Tribal Justice Support and Tribal Courts accounts in the amounts of \$45.7 million and \$1.2 billion, respectively. We understand that this represents a dramatic increase in funding; however, it is essential that Congress address the true needs of Tribal justice programs like the one we are standing up.

**Fully Fund the BIA’s ICWA Account.** The Native Village of Kotzebue is currently engaged in multiple efforts to expand and improve our Tribal Family Services Department. However, we face challenges securing the funding necessary to provide the full scope of services that our families

deserve, such as implementing our ICWA program. As you know, ICWA was a landmark law that has since greatly improved the outcomes of Alaska Native and American Indian children and families involved with the child welfare system. The BIA provides base funding to Tribes for their ICWA programs, but appropriations to this account have been woefully inadequate for decades. We are asking you to fully fund the BIA's ICWA account at \$46.2 million.

**Provide Direct Funding for Language Revitalization Activities.** As previously mentioned, we have established an Iñupiaq language immersion school called Nikaitchuat Iļisaġviat. Its mission is to instill within our citizens knowledge of the Iñupiaq language, culture, and identity. However, there is no direct funding available for these activities—we must instead sustain our school on community contributions and grant funding. Not only is this inconsistent with the federal government's trust and treaty responsibilities to Tribal Nations, but it is also problematic because immersion schools require consistent, proper funding to be most effective. We thank Congress for its attention to language revitalization in recent years, but we urge you to do more by establishing a direct funding mechanism for these activities. Specifically, we request an increase in funding to the BIA's existing language programs and authorization for Tribes to receive this funding annually in self-governance agreements, rather than through a competitive grant model.

**Provide Full Funding for the BIA.** In addition to the accounts mentioned above, we urge the Subcommittee to fully fund all Indian Country programs and move them to mandatory spending. The United States' trust and treaty responsibility to Tribes is obligatory and should be treated as such in the federal budget. Discretionary appropriations have never, and will never, result in adequate funding for Indian Country. As it stands, Alaska Natives and American Indians are disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment, crime, substance-use disorder, housing insecurity, poor educational outcomes, and involvement with the child welfare system. This is an affront to our dignity and sovereignty. We ask the Subcommittee to rectify this by fully funding the Indian Affairs budget at \$23.7 billion, in line with the Tribal Interior Budget Council.

**Support for Advance Appropriations for the BIA.** If full, mandatory appropriations cannot be achieved for FY 2025, we support the provision of advance appropriations for the BIA in the short term. This year's tumultuous appropriations cycle clearly demonstrates why advance appropriations are so critical—BIA programs were regularly in a state of uncertainty due to Congress' reliance on continuing resolutions. The federal government's trust and treaty responsibilities should not be held hostage by unrelated political disputes in Washington, D.C. We urge the Subcommittee to extend advance appropriations to all Indian Affairs accounts.

**Reduce Dependence on Federal Grants:** We support moving away from competitive grants for all federal funding mechanisms. Grants unfairly pit Tribes against each other for resources we are all entitled to. The federal trust responsibility does not require that we jump through a myriad of hoops and onerous applications to see that services are provided to our citizens. Too often, Tribes are under-resourced to apply for federal grants and comply with their reporting requirements. Our staff must divert time to apply and report, thereby diluting the usefulness of the resources. Instead, we request widespread, formula-based funding across all programs. Tribes must also be granted the flexibility needed to respond to the specific needs of their communities, not those prescribed by federal grants. This also means appropriating enough resources so funds are provided in meaningful amounts across all Tribes. We join other Tribal leaders in calling for broad-based funding for Indian Country.

**Permanently Exempt the BIA from Cuts, Sequestrations, and Rescissions:** As demonstrated above, the BIA is chronically underfunded, with current appropriations sitting around one-tenth of need. Nevertheless, Congress routinely threatens and enacts additional budget cuts, sequestrations, and rescissions affecting the BIA. We remind this Subcommittee again that its trust and treaty obligations to Tribes exist regardless of any self-imposed budget control measures. In fact, the BIA budget remains so small in comparison to the national budget that cuts, rescissions, and sequestrations do not result in any meaningful savings in the national debt, but they do devastate Tribal Nations and their citizens. We urge Congress to ensure that any budget cuts, whether automatic or explicit, hold BIA and our people harmless.

**Mandatory Funding for Contract Support Costs and 105(l) lease payments:** We appreciate the Subcommittee's commitment to ensuring that CSC and section 105(l) lease payments are fully funded. However, these line items continue to take up a larger and larger percentage of the BIA discretionary budget, thereby leaving little room to expand other services given the tight budget environment. We strongly agree with the Subcommittee's words in the explanatory statement for the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94) regarding 105(l) costs which said, in part: "Obligations of this nature are typically addressed through mandatory spending, but in this case, since they fall under discretionary spending, they are impacting all other programs funded under the Interior and Environment Appropriations bill, including other equally important Tribal programs." Therefore, we ask you to continue to advocate with your colleagues on authorizing committees to enact mandatory appropriations for CSC and 105(l) lease costs. Doing so will ensure that other areas of the BIA budget are held harmless by these costs and true increases in critical services line items can move forward.

**Testimony of Lionel Haskie**  
**Director of Operations – Public Law 638 and Government Relations**  
**Navajo Agricultural Products Industry**  
**to the Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,**  
**and Related Agencies of the United States House of Representatives**  
**American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Day**  
**May 8, 2024**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Lionel Haskie and I serve as Director of Operations – Public Law 638 and Government Relations for the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry. On behalf of the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry, referred to as NAPI, we thank you for allowing us to testify to the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies of the United States House of Representatives today. My testimony today will focus on the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project (NIIP) and the critical need for increased funding for Indian Irrigation Projects that continue to have increasing costs in the FY 2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

In 1970, the Navajo Nation established NAPI to operate and manage the Navajo Nation's industrial agricultural efforts as well as the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project, referred to as the NIIP. The NIIP arises from Public Law 87-483, which was signed in 1962 by President John F. Kennedy. Public Law 87-483 authorized construction of 110,630 acres of farmland and the diversion of 508,000 acre-feet of water from the Navajo Reservoir to NIIP lands in exchange for the diversion of 110,000 acre-feet of water from the Navajo Nation's claim in the San Juan Basin to the Rio Grande Basin.

NAPI, which is wholly owned by the Navajo Nation, has diligently served its dual roles since its inception. NAPI runs a successful farm that employs 300 people annually and an additional 350-375 seasonal workers during harvest, and which produces potatoes, wheat, beans, alfalfa, chili, organic watermelon, organic squash, sumac, corn, and other agricultural products. NAPI also continues to oversee and facilitate the continued operation of the NIIP. There are three (3) contracted farm operations on the NIIP that also employ 100 people annually and an additional 400-500 seasonal workers to grow chipper potatoes, pumpkins, and popcorn.

NAPI's efforts are hindered by the federal government's failure to meet its requirements under Public Law 87-483 and to provide necessary funding for NIIP operation and maintenance expenses as obligated by an existing Public Law 93-638 Indian Self Determination Act contract.

As noted, Public Law 87-483 required the federal government to construct and facilitate the use of 110,630 acres of farmland. The federal government has not fulfilled its obligations and approximately 30,000 acres of farmland remain undeveloped. Additionally, the federal government has not met its obligations concerning NIIP development and failed to provide necessary operation and maintenance costs.

In 2019, the Bureau of Reclamation estimated it would cost \$985 million for the United States to complete its Public Law 87-483 NIIP development obligations. Separately, an assessment

conducted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 2016, solely regarding the NIIP operations and maintenance backlog, estimated over \$175 million in additional necessary remediation costs.

To continue to work towards meeting its outstanding obligations, the federal government must provide the below funding to allow Tribes to operate and maintain the Nation's Indian Irrigation Projects:

- Economic factors compounded by the existing federal funding backlog will drive NIIP's operations and maintenance costs to \$8.7 million for fiscal year 2025. We therefore request that the Natural Resources Management; Irrigation Operations & Maintenance funding be increased to \$25.5 million total in fiscal year 2025.
- Increasing funding for the WIIN Act, Public Law 114-322, Title III, Subtitle B, Irrigation Rehabilitation and Renovation for Indian Tribal Governments and their Economies to \$35 million annually.
- NAPI is ready to complete the development of a significant portion of the 30,000 acres of farmland and relevant infrastructure the federal government has yet to construct (specifically, block 9, stage 2 and 3 of the NIIP). To facilitate this development and to support the federal government in meeting its obligations under Public Law 87-483, we respectfully request that the Resources Management Construction Fund be increased to \$90 million in fiscal year 2025, and that \$30 million be specifically allocated for irrigation construction funding, and that the NIIP receive no less than \$12 million.

NAPI continues to be hindered in its operation and management of its agricultural efforts and the NIIP due to the federal government's continued failure to fulfill its obligations under Public Law 87-483 and Public Law 93-638. As a result, valuable Navajo Nation lands remains unfarmed, Navajo Nation water rights entitlements go unused, and NAPI is forced to cover continued federal government operations and maintenance funding short falls. Because the federal government has yet to meet its obligations under Public Law 87-483 for over 60 years, the Navajo Nation is unable to reap its full entitlements under the law and the NAPI farm is hindered in meeting its economic potential. The measures requested today will support the federal government in meeting its legal, trust, and moral obligations concerning the use and completion of the NIIP as well related farming operations. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.



## Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board

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NPAIHB

**Testimony of Nikolaus Lewis**  
**The Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board**  
**Before**  
**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
**American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Hearing – FY 2025**  
**May 8, 2024**

Greetings Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Nikolaus Lewis, and I serve as a Council Member on the Lummi Indian Business Council, the elected governing body of the Lummi Nation, and as Chair of the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPAIHB or Board). I thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide testimony on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Indian Health Service (IHS) budget to the Subcommittee.

NPAIHB was established in 1972 and is a tribal organization under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA), P.L. 93-638, that advocates on behalf of the 43 federally-recognized Indian tribes in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington on specific health care issues. The Board's mission is to eliminate health disparities and improve the quality of life for American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) by supporting Northwest Tribes in the delivery of culturally-appropriate, high-quality health care. "Wellness for the seventh generation" is the Board's vision. This Subcommittee is critical to making this a reality. We thank the Subcommittee for continuing to support increased funding for IHS every year.

In August 2023, the NPAIHB organized a National Tribal Opioid Summit that convened over 1,000 Tribal leaders, providers, community member, including federal and state officials, to discuss opioid prevention, care and treatment, data, and law and justice policy priorities in Tribal communities.

Based on the Summit, we make the following Indian Health Service funding recommendations related to opioids and substance use:

***Increase Funding for Substance Use, including Prevention Services.*** Portland Area Tribes have long recognized how deeply opioid and substance use disorders impact their tribal communities and the healing that can occur when our relatives receive effective treatment and support on their recovery journeys. IHS and Tribally operated programs must support an integrated behavioral health approach to collaboratively reduce the incidence of substance use disorders in AI/AN communities. IHS substance use funding is used to provide a comprehensive array of preventive, educational, and treatment services that are community-driven and culturally competent. These collaborative activities strive to integrate substance use treatment into primary care. Additional funding focusing on harm reduction and peer support is desperately needed. For FY 2025, the IHS Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup recommends \$4.86 billion for Substance Use subaccount.

***Increase facilities funding, including for medical facility construction, dual-diagnosis facilities, and medically supervised withdrawal / detoxification for adults and youth.*** The need for new healthcare facility construction at IHS was estimated to be \$23 billion in 2021 (up 59% from 2016). There is an additional \$1.5 billion backlog in maintenance to existing IHS facilities. IHS facilities are often not appropriate or available for the current needs of the patient population when it comes to opioid use disorder (OUD) and substance use disorder (SUD). In FY 2025, this Subcommittee should allocate \$5 billion for Health Care Facilities Construction specific to OUD services such as detox facilities.

***Increase funding for Tribal data analytics at Tribes and of TECs.*** Many Tribes do not have sufficient funding to employ health data analysts, biostatisticians, or epidemiologists. The priority is the provision of clinical services rather than data analysis. In FY 2025, more funding is needed for Tribes to hire analysts to evaluate data and drive community-based recommendations using Tribal specific data. In addition to funding staff at Tribes to do this work, each Tribal Epidemiology Center would benefit from stable ongoing funding to support substance use disorder and behavioral health analytics.

For FY 2025, we also make the following ongoing recommendations from Portland Area Tribes:

***Provide Mandatory, Full Funding for IHS.*** Advance appropriations will resolve some of the challenges presented by annual discretionary funding but will not address the issue of funding adequacy. At the core of Indian health policy are the federal government's trust responsibility and treaty obligations. To address unfulfilled trust and treaty obligations towards tribes and end unacceptable health disparities of AI/AN people, the IHS needs full and mandatory funding. Determining a figure for full funding that meets the true level of need deserves a thoughtful, measured, and tribally-driven approach that keeps pace with population growth and both medical and non-medical inflation. The National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup recommended, and our Area supported, the request of \$53.85 billion to fully fund the IHS in FY 2025.<sup>1</sup> Looking ahead to FY 2026, the National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup met in February 2024 and recommended \$63 billion to fully fund the IHS in FY 2026.

***Provide Mandatory Appropriation for ISDEAA Section 105(l) Leases and Contract Support Costs (CSC).*** Although we are appreciative of the Subcommittee's support in securing an indefinite appropriation for 105(l) lease agreements and CSC, we request that this Subcommittee commit to moving 105(l) leases and CSC to mandatory appropriations accounts to ensure that these appropriations are funded year after year without impacting programmatic increases to IHS and tribal health facilities. Portland Area Tribes are experiencing decreases in funding annually due to the rising annual cost of 105(l) leases and CSC.

***Increase Funding for Purchased and Referred Care (PRC).*** Portland Area Tribes have to purchase all specialty and inpatient care because there is no IHS hospital in the Portland IHS Area. The PRC program makes up over one-third of the Portland IHS Area budget. When there is no increase or consideration of population growth and medical inflation, Portland Area Tribes are forced to cut health services. Areas with IHS hospitals can absorb these costs more easily because of their infrastructure and large staffing packages. Substantial PRC funding is a top priority for us. As long as the PRC program remains severely underfunded, the ability for AI/ANs to access specialty and inpatient health care will be threatened. Every year PRC is the second rated funding priority of the National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup – a top priority of Portland Area Tribes - and receives only nominal annual increases. In FY 2025, we request that this Subcommittee honor the request of the National Tribal Budget Formulation Committee and fund PRC at \$9.14 billion.

***Fund Expansion of Community Health Aide Program.*** NPAIHB has successfully established a Community Health Aide Program (CHAP) in the Portland IHS Area, working closely with tribes to set up the Portland Area CHAP Certification Board and to build education programs. Students are attending our Dental Health Aide Therapists (DHAT) and Behavioral Health Aides (BHA) education programs, and Community Health Aide education program is in development. Stable

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<sup>1</sup> National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup Recommendation, *Indian Health Service Fiscal Year 2025 Budget, FINAL FY2025 Budget (nihb)* (last visited Apr. 12, 2024).

funding is necessary to ensure that the programs are accessible to our students and can best meet the health care needs of the tribes they will serve. For FY 2025, we request \$60 million for continuation of the national expansion with \$10 million for Portland Area to continue to expand CHAP.

***Increase Funding for Mental Health*** In our Area and nationwide, there are high rates of depression and anxiety in our communities. Portland Area Tribes need funding to address mental health provider shortages and expand services. NPAIHB is particularly concerned about our AI/AN youth. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for AI/AN adolescents and young adults. AI/AN suicide mortality in this age group (10-29) is 2-3 times greater, and in some communities 10 times greater, than that for non-Hispanic whites. For FY 2025, the IHS Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup recommends \$4.46 billion for Mental Health subaccount.

***Fund Behavioral Health Facilities Construction.*** Northwest Tribes have prioritized the need for Youth Regional Treatment Centers (YRTC) to address the ongoing issues of substance abuse and co-occurring mental health issues among AI/AN youth through the provision of clinical services, post-treatment follow-up services, and transitional living. While there are two tribal facilities providing enhanced behavioral health services to adults in the Portland IHS Area, the Healing Lodge of the Seven Nations in Spokane and Native American Rehabilitation Association of the Northwest in Portland, more facilities are needed. In FY 2025, this Subcommittee must fund an expansion of facilities to specifically address the need for behavioral health services not just in the Portland Area but across Indian Country.

***Increase Small Ambulatory Program and Joint Venture Construction Program Funding.*** Portland Area Tribes do not support funding for new facilities construction under the current IHS Healthcare Facilities Construction Priority System because the structure of the existing system does not benefit Northwest Tribes nor equitably benefit Areas nationally. For FY 2025, the National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup recommended a continuation of vital resources for the Small Ambulatory Program (SAP) with funding at \$50 million and also recommended expansion of the Joint Venture Construction Program (JVCP) with funding for staffing and equipment. NPAIHB requests that the Subcommittee provide future increases accordingly.

***Create New Source of Funding for Health Care Facilities Construction at \$14.5 billion.*** In its recommendations for FY 2025, the National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup recommended at least \$14.5 billion in facilities construction funding be made available outside of the current IHS Healthcare Facilities Construction Priority System (HFCPS) as a new, equitable source of funding that will provide access to construction funds and demonstration projects under the Indian Health Care Improvement Act at 25 U.S.C. § 1637. The Portland Area Facilities Advisory Committee (PAFAC) completed a pilot study in 2009 to evaluate the feasibility of regional referral centers in the IHS system, and determined the Portland IHS Area needed three regional specialty referral centers. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services partnered with IHS to identify funds to construct the first facility in Puyallup (Washington State). This innovative facility will provide services such as medical and surgical specialty care, specialty dental care, audiology, physical and occupational therapy, as well as advanced imaging and outpatient surgery. Some Tribes in our area request that the facility include inpatient mental health/substance use treatment. It is anticipated that this facility will provide services for approximately 50,000 users within the regional service area as well as an additional 20,000 in telemedicine consults. For FY 2025, funding to complete the first facility is needed in the amount of approximately \$150 million. In addition, we request funding for the two remaining regional specialty referral centers to ensure these services can be accessed by IHS beneficiaries throughout the Portland IHS Area.

***Make Health IT Modernization Project Funding Available to Tribes.*** The IHS Health Information Technology (IT) Modernization Program is a multi-year effort to modernize health IT systems for IHS, Tribal, and Urban Indian health care programs into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The software currently supported by IHS was implemented 38 years ago. If this software was a person, it could run for President. Northwest Tribes are in a double bind – we want the IHS Health IT Modernization program to be fully funded, and the new EHR implemented because Northwest Tribes receiving services directly from IHS need health IT systems that support 21<sup>st</sup> century care for our people. Conversely, many tribes in the Northwest have made significant investments of time, talent, and cash to modernize their health IT systems because their leadership exercised their rights under self-governance and realized we cannot afford to wait when the health of our people is at stake. Tribes must be reimbursed by IHS for the funds they have spent to purchase Health IT systems, and all Tribes must have access to 21<sup>st</sup> century technology in their health care delivery systems. For FY 2025, we request that this Subcommittee hold the IHS accountable, through report language, for the prudent use of appropriated funds, and ensure funding be made available to both implement the IHS Health Technology Modernization Program as rapidly as possible and also direct IHS to reimburse and provide ongoing financial support for Tribal health facilities that have already purchased and implemented commercial off-the-shelf EHR systems.

***Increase Funding for HIV and HCV Initiatives.*** From 2013 through 2017, rates of new diagnoses of HIV for AI/AN people increased to 7.8 per 100,000 – although rates decreased or stayed stable for all other racial and ethnic groups. Chronic Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) is the leading cause of cirrhosis, liver cancer, and liver transplants in the United States. AI/ANs have more than double the national rate of HCV-related mortality, and the highest rate of acute HCV infection. Current funding levels for HIV and Hep C initiatives will not end these epidemics in Indian Country and must be increased in FY 2025 to \$25 million.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide recommendations on the Indian Health Service budget. I invite you to visit IHS, tribal health programs, and urban Indian organizations in the Northwest to learn more about the utilization of IHS funding and the health care needs in our Area. I look forward to working with the Subcommittee on our requests.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, please contact Laura Platero, NPAIHB, at [lplatero@npaihb.org](mailto:lplatero@npaihb.org) or (503) 416-3277.

**Norton Sound Health Corporation**

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Testimony submitted to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,  
 Environment and Related Agencies -May 3, 2024

The requests of the Norton Sound Health Corporation (NSHC) for the FY 2025 Budget include:

**Indian Health Service (IHS):**

- Recognize Alaska Native communities of 10,000 or less to be treated as entire Native communities in the IHS Sanitation Deficiency System (SDS), thus eliminating the notion of pro rata contribution for incidental benefits ineligible costs for sanitation projects.
- Recommend IHS fund an operation and maintenance (O&M) program to support and maintain sanitation infrastructure.
- Request appropriations in the FY2025 Budget for the operation and maintenance of sanitation facilities and make funding available through ISDEAA self-governance agreements.
- Fund construction of employee housing quarters and prioritize healthcare facilities without current facilities.
- Support funding opportunities for Tribal Health to construct daycare facilities.

**Department of Transportation (DOT):**

- Increase the number of funded DOT Essential Air Service trips by helicopter for passengers to Diomede, Alaska.
- Support funding for fourteen villages in Bering Strait Region, eligible for Essential Air Services, to increase daily flight capacity by existing airline.

**Federal Aviation Administration (FAA):**

- Revise the mandatory requirement that only FAA personnel can reset Automated Weather Observing Systems (AWOS) when they go down in rural Alaska.

Headquartered in Nome, Alaska, Norton Sound Health Corporation is owned and managed by the 20 federally recognized tribes of the Bering Strait region. Our tribal system includes a regional hospital, nursing home, and 15 village-based clinics, which we operate under an Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) agreement<sup>[1]</sup>. Our rural and remote Arctic region remains unconnected by roads, and we are 500 air miles from Alaska's economic hub of Anchorage. Our service area encompasses 44,000 square miles.

***Funding for Water & Sewer Projects and Operation and Maintenance:***

*Recognize Alaska Native communities of 10,000 or less to be treated as entire Native communities in the IHS Sanitation Deficiency System (SDS), eliminating the notion of pro rata contribution for incidental benefits ineligible costs for sanitation projects.*

We face a \$261 million sanitation need in the Bering Strait region. Five communities in our area, Diomede, Wales, Shishmaref, Stebbins, and Teller, still lack any connection for running water

<sup>1</sup> We serve the communities of: Brevig Mission, Council, Diomede, Elim, Gambell, Golovin, King Island, Koyuk, Mary's Igloo, Nome, St. Michael, Savoonga, Shaktoolik, Shishmaref, Solomon, Stebbins, Teller, Unalakleet, Wales, and White Mountain

and sewer. The community of Gambell is 70% served, with 43 homes in the village remaining unconnected to water and sewer. Ongoing sewer and water upgrades and maintenance backlogs remain concerns in seven communities. An estimated 520 homes in the Bering Strait region have no running water or flush toilets, which research correlates with increased healthcare expenditures and lower overall quality of health.

In the authorizing statute (Indian Health Care Improvement Act) for the IHS, Congress reaffirmed the Indian Health Service as the agency with “primary responsibility and authority to provide necessary sanitation facilities,” and furthermore, “it is in the interest of the United States and it is the policy of the United States, that all Indian communities and Indian homes, new and existing, be provided with safe and adequate water supply systems and sanitary sewage waste disposal systems as soon as possible” (25 USC 1632). These services to Norton Sound communities cannot come soon enough. Basic human needs that most Americans take for granted do not exist in many of our communities.

We are opposed to the decision of the IHS to implement in the FY2018 Sanitation Facilities Construction appropriation using a methodology to serve Alaska Native homes. The error in this methodology is the premise that our Alaska Native villages are ‘non-Indian.’ Our unserved communities are primarily (over 90%) Alaska Native. The SDS policy places Indian communities in the same category as “non-Indian” communities, requiring that tribes find contributions for ineligible buildings such as public schools, clinics, tribal buildings, and teacher housing. All community buildings benefit the Native community, including schools, which often serve as the community’s evacuation center and primary gathering place for healthy community activities. Schools and teachers’ homes are often the only facilities connected to sewer and water, creating significant sanitation inequities in a community.

- ***Recommend IHS fund an operation and maintenance (O&M) program to support and maintain sanitation infrastructure and request \$200M in appropriations in the FY2025 Budget and make funding available through ISDEAA self-governance agreements.***

The National Congress of American Indians passed Resolution ANC-22-041, which recommends that IHS fund sanitation infrastructure operation and maintenance (O&M) as authorized in 25 USC 1632 (b). The FY 2024 Tribal Budget Recommendations include a request for O&M funding by the National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup. In addition, Congress’s unprecedented amount of financing for the construction and repair of sanitation facilities through the IJA underscores the need to protect the federal investment and ensure the maximum life cycle and sustainable operation of these sanitation systems for as long as possible. O&M costs should also be used for existing systems to keep projects that are already complete off the SDS list in the future. Congress has provided IHS funding to train operators but not a designated O&M fund. IHS must request appropriations in the FY 2025 budget for the operation and maintenance of sanitation facilities systems, and further such funding should be made available through the ISDEAA self-governance agreement.

***Funding for employee housing quarters.***

Since NSHC opened its new hospital facility in 2013, the workforce in Nome and the villages has increased by 12 percent and 23 percent, respectively. Unfortunately, the construction project did not include housing quarters when the facility was built.

NSHC owns 29 apartment units in Nome but still leases over 70 apartment units from various landlords to meet the needs for adequate housing for new hires, locum physicians, nurses, clinicians, health aides in training, and students. NSHC's usage of such a large portion of currently available Nome housing has created a significant housing shortage for Nome.

This housing shortage has prevented NSHC from filling critical healthcare positions and created further impediments to hiring a permanent local workforce. Typhoon Merbok exasperated the already limited housing situation in Nome when the flood destroyed housing units, and the subsequent fire destroyed a local hotel, which was housing homeless individuals and families.

The approved Port Project for the City of Nome will result in an influx of people to the community while vacant housing is currently nonexistent. NSHC proposes constructing four 20-unit apartment buildings to meet its growing Nome workforce needs adequately. By owning its housing, NSHC could release 70 apartment units, which would be available to Nome Port Project laborers, teachers, and homeless individuals and families. The total cost to build four 20-unit apartment buildings is anticipated to be 73.25 M. The NSHC Board funded the \$250,000 design and \$13 M for the foundation, furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FF &E). The site work will begin in the summer of 2024. NSHC will dedicate \$3M received through the FY23 Omnibus bill, **which leaves a \$57M Legislative and Federal Ask.**

In the surrounding villages, the ability to recruit and retain a permanent provider to work at the local clinic and live in the community is contingent on housing. There is also a need for more housing for local employees. While NSHC has received some funding to construct housing in some of its villages, other communities still face challenges with inadequate housing: Gambell, Stebbins, Teller, White Mountain, Brevig Mission, Shaktolik, and Elim. NSHC will be building two duplexes in Gambell this summer, 2024. The total cost of the project is 6.25M. The NSHC Board has funded the design at \$250,000; the foundation work at \$1.75M, and the FF&E at \$500,000, **which leaves a vertical construction Legislative and Federal Ask of \$3.75M.**

***Funding for Tribal Health to construct daycare facilities.***

The Bering Strait region needs childcare providers. Childcare is a basic need that hinders recruitment, retention, and family financial sustainability. NSHC aims to address its workforce childcare needs through a Nome-based facility currently in the conceptual design phase for a 7,460-square-foot building. The facility would be available to employees and patients for drop-in appointments and village-based health aides during training sessions. The project, estimated at \$10.35 M, received \$2.2M from the FY23 Omnibus Bill.

***Funding for additional air transportation to Diomedes and other fourteen villages in Bering Strait Region.***

- ***Increase the number of funded DOT Essential Air Service trips by helicopter for passengers to Diomedes, Alaska.***

Diomedé's residents and critical personnel, such as medical staff, rely heavily on the 52 trips funded annually by DOT EAS. However, the demand for seats on the 8-passenger helicopter is high, with four weekly seats utilized for healthcare needs. Patients use three of these seats, while critical healthcare workers use one. NSHC's new health clinic, which opened in October 2020, requires ongoing maintenance, and the village's clean water and sanitation program needs frequent staff visits to provide for the island's needs. While an on-site medical provider has increased the level of service available in Diomedé, patients must still travel for needed imaging, procedures, and specialist visits. Flight cancellations due to inclement weather conditions can displace community members for extended periods when there are no vacant seats on the next available flights. This situation has caused residents to hesitate to attend much-needed medical care outside of Diomedé, fearing displacement. Despite these changing needs, the level of EAS has remained stagnant since its establishment. **NSHC calls on DOT EAS to increase the seats available to community members by funding one additional monthly trip at an annual cost of \$174,000/year.**

- ***Support funding for fourteen villages in Bering Strait Region, eligible for Essential Air Services, to increase daily flight capacity by existing airline.***

Another critical concern is the need for more access to small airline travel in the region. Twenty years ago, the area had three small airline carriers, providing many options and opportunities to travel from rural villages to the hub of Nome and Anchorage. Over the past five years, the number of small airlines has reduced to one, with only two available flights per day to each community. Limited flights impact medical travel, especially for last-minute needs due to urgent situations requiring patients to see a physician in the hub of Nome. These communities are EAS eligible and this may be the only way to expand service for the region. **NSHC urges DOT to provide funding to expand EAS for each of the fourteen villages in the Bering Strait Region.**

***Revise the mandatory requirement that only FAA personnel can reset Automated Weather Observing Systems (AWOS) when they go down in rural Alaska.***

NSHC requests that the FAA prioritize keeping rural airports in Alaska operational. Unavailable AWOS readings due to inoperable weather equipment are the number one reason why airplanes cannot fly into villages. Patient travel is already severely limited since the region has only one airline. Our emergency medevac flights experience the same restrictions. Due to heightened airport security, the FAA requires only FAA personnel to reset AWOS systems when the electrical power goes out. In rural Alaska, power outages are common due to the inclement weather and dated equipment. Each local airport has direct-hire DOT personnel. Recommend the FAA partner with DOT to provide the necessary security clearance to these individuals to allow them to reset the local airport AWOS systems when they go down. **NSHC urges the FAA to consider this request to empower local direct-hire DOT personnel to reset AWOS Systems.**

We appreciate your consideration of the concerns and requests of the Norton Sound Health Corporation.

**TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE  
CHAIRWOMAN, CORRINA BOW OF THE PAIUTE INDIAN TRIBE OF UTAH  
Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related  
Agencies  
Regarding the FY 2025 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE),  
Indian Health Service (IHS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Budgets  
May 7, 2024**

The Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah consists of five constituent bands, the Cedar, Indian Peaks, Kanosh, Koosharem, and Shivwits; and are located in the Southwest to Southcentral portion of Utah. Our Tribe has roughly 920 members, and approximately 33,935-acre checkerboarded Reservation land held in trust by the United States. The Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah has suffered structural violence and socio-economic disparities throughout our existents with failed federal policies. The Paiutes lived a bleak livelihood and faced near extinction when we were terminated from federal recognition in the 1950's in unjust federal policies that the Paiutes never meet the criteria for. The Paiutes consequently suffered a dramatic diminishing of culture, tradition, and people and through this plight tried to acculturate as directed by federal officials into a society that rejected them. The Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah regained its federal recognition on April 3, 1980. Since becoming federally recognized it has been an enormous struggle to address the loss of land, language, and culture to revitalize who we are by developing sustainable programming that is very dependent on federal contracts and grants. The Tiwahe Initiative has allowed us to be able to dream of sustainable programming. Federal funding for a Tribe like ours is crucial in providing direct services to tribal members that live significantly below the poverty line.

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, a'yuiik (thank you) and the other distinguished Subcommittee members for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah. Federal appropriations are the primary way in which the United States fulfills its trust responsibility and honors its obligations to Tribes. We are asking for you to fully fund the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Services, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Our Tribe requests an additional \$2,747,528.00 in FY 2025 funding for our Tiwahe programs as described in more detail below.

**Fully Fund and Expand the Tiwahe Initiative.** The Tiwahe Initiative was established in 2015 to improve the health and wellbeing of families in Tribal communities by reducing poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and associated outcomes, such as youth suicide. Tiwahe includes two components: (1) a recurring funding increase for all tribes that operate Social Services and ICWA programs, and (2) additional funding for a demonstration program at six Tribal locations (representing 61 Tribes and Alaska Native villages). Tiwahe includes the BIA programs of Social Services, ICWA, Courts, Housing (HIP), Job Placement & Training, and Public Safety Recidivism Reduction Initiative, now called Pathways to Wellness

Our Tribe is a new demonstration site and was not fully funded in FY 2024. We received notification in May of 2023 that our Tribe would be onboarded as a new demonstration site. We are very thankful for the funding we have, and we will receive to be allowed to develop and

operate sustainable programing. Tiwahe has assisted enormously in identifying and strengthening the needs in our ICWA programs. Where barriers had been placed due to limited capacity in funding and staffing in the past, we have been able to expand our program to meet our tribal needs. We will be receiving base funding in FY 2024 with no additional funding Social Services, Indian Child Welfare Act, Bureau of Indian Affairs Housing Improvement Programs, Job Placement & Training, Public Safety Recidivism Reduction Initiative, now called Pathways to Wellness, and Courts. As a newly selected Tribe in the Tiwahe Initiative, we have been able to offer community events that emphasis on the importance of the individual, family, and community. Which is the overall social return on investment that expresses the framework in our tribal programming. Ultimately, braiding together services and programs with the inspiration to develop wrap around services. Tiwahe has been a huge success considering we have only had operational programing for 10 months. This program is new but has already made large impacts for our Pouw'wan (families).

We appreciate your ongoing funding of the original six Tiwahe sites, and we request the same support in FY 2025. We much appreciate your providing new funding in 2022 and 2023 to add a total of four new demonstration sites (now 10 sites representing 65 tribes). In addition, BIA provided \$200,000 in one time funding this year to each of 12 additional Tiwahe Incubator tribes/consortia, to assist them in developing Tiwahe implementation plans, so that they will be ready to onboard as full Tiwahe demonstration sites in FY 2025 if Congress provides the additional funds requested by the Administration.

The President's FY 2025 budget requests an increase of \$28.6 million across several Tiwahe budget lines, to expand Tiwahe to benefit more tribes. This funding increase includes \$17.2 million in Tiwahe Social Services to expand Tiwahe to 13 additional Tribes or Tribal organizations, as well as approximately 15 additional Tiwahe Incubator sites. The funding also will provide for two (2) new FTEs to support a National Tiwahe Program Office to allow for stronger coordination and reporting among the Tiwahe Tribes and BIA and one (1) FTE that will help in building Tribal capacity in managing Tiwahe ICWA programs, services, functions, and activities. These FTEs are essential to build the capacity needed to support the current Tiwahe Initiative sites and continued expansion of the Tiwahe Initiative to new sites.

In addition, a \$7.5 million increase in Tiwahe ICWA funding is requested to support the four recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites, across the board increases to Tribes currently receiving Tiwahe ICWA funding, and potentially adding future sites as well.

In addition, a \$2 million increase is requested for the Tiwahe Housing program, to expand the initiative to the four recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites with the possibility to add new sites as well.

In addition, a \$1.9 million increase is requested in Tribal Justice Support (TJS) as part of a coordinated effort to expand the reach and activities of the Tiwahe Initiative. The Tiwahe Initiative budget proposal includes increased funding for Social Services, Indian Child Welfare Act, Housing Improvement Program, and TJS. With the additional funding, the TJS program will

provide technical assistance and direct funding opportunities to Tribes seeking to develop and operate Healing to Wellness courts.

In addition to the President's FY 2025 requested increases discussed above, we also request an additional \$2 million in Tiwahe Job Placement/Training funds, and \$1 million in Tiwahe Courts funds, to expand the initiative to the four recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites with the possibility to add new sites as well.

We also request an additional \$5 million to establish a Tribal Economic Development component within the Tiwahe Initiative to further development and deployment of multi-disciplinary socioeconomic solutions. Funding will support Tribes in developing and operating comprehensive, integrated economic and community development programs.

The Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah knows the benefit it has been to be selected as a Tiwahe Demonstration site. The Tiwahe Initiative is truly a program that has developed much needed framework to have tribes develop our own successful programming that meet our unique needs and to develop holistic sustainable programming that meets the needs of the individual tribe, tribal member, families, and community. Tiwahe, is the truest form of sovereignty and self-governance in Indian Programming because it allows tribes true sovereignty, as sovereign nations to be empowered in developing and running their own programs.

In early 2021, the Tiwahe tribes submitted to Congress a comprehensive series of Tiwahe reports, including an independent evaluation by FHI 360, and BIA soon after submitted its Final Tiwahe Report to Congress. These reports provided compelling evidence that Tiwahe is a success and should be expanded to more tribes. Congress has acknowledged this and said: the reports document significant achievements, including a reduction in attempted and completed suicides, recidivism, and removal of children from the community. At the same time, the reports note earlier parent/child reunifications, language revitalization, and improvements to housing and homelessness among other improvements. For fiscal year 2023, Congress provides additional funds to expand Tiwahe to other sites across various programs. Unfortunately, Congress was unable to provide funds in FY 2024 to further expand Tiwahe. It is critical that in FY 2025, the additional funding requested by the Administration is provided to bring funding parity to the four new Tiwahe sites, and to provide funding for the 12 new Tiwahe Incubator sites to be onboarded as full Tiwahe sites in FY 2025. We would be happy to meet with the Subcommittee, along with Indian Affairs staff, to further explain these critical and timely needs.

Sincerely,



Corrina Bow

Tribal Chairwoman  
Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah

# PASCUA YAQUI TRIBE

## OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN



### TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE PETER YUCUPICIO CHAIRMAN, PASCUA YAQUI TRIBE OF ARIZONA

Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related  
Agencies

Regarding the FY 2025 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE),  
Indian Health Service (IHS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Budgets  
May 9, 2024

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, Lios enchim aniavu, thank you and the other distinguished Subcommittee members for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. The Tribe is an historic tribe with a small, 2,216-acre Reservation established for the use and benefit of the tribe's 22,000 members. Over 5,000 Yaqui relatives reside on the Reservation, located in Pima County, Arizona. The Tribe has recognized non-Reservation communities throughout Southern Arizona, California, and even Texas. The largest concentrated population of Yaqui people on the U.S. side of the border live on the Pascua Yaqui Reservation and in several Tribally Recognized Communities in Arizona. Many challenges exist to provide for our members the promise of a self-supporting economy offering education and opportunity for all, and the preservation and promotion of the spiritual, cultural, and social values of the Yaqui people. Federal programs designed to support the social and economic well-being of tribes remain chronically underfunded. To fulfill its trust responsibility and honor its obligations to tribes, the United States must appropriate adequate funding. Federal appropriations are the primary way in which the United States fulfills its trust responsibility and honors its obligations to Tribes. Our Tribe requests additional funding in FY 2025 for our programs as described in more detail below.

**Fully Fund and Expand the Tiwahe Initiative.** The Tiwahe Initiative was established in 2015 to improve the health and wellbeing of families in Tribal communities by reducing poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and associated outcomes, such as youth suicide. Tiwahe includes two components: (1) a recurring funding increase for all tribes that operate Social Services and ICWA programs, and (2) additional funding for a demonstration program at six Tribal locations (representing 61 Tribes and Alaska Native villages). Tiwahe includes the BIA programs of Social Services, ICWA, Courts, Housing (HIP), Job Placement & Training, and Public Safety RRI.

Pascua Yaqui became a Tiwahe pilot and demonstration tribe in 2016. The Initiative at Pascua Yaqui was renamed Itom Yoemia (translation: Our Family). Tiwahe and Itom Yoemia represented the interconnectedness of all living things and one's personal responsibility to protect family, community, and the environment. Tiwahe has had an extensive and demonstrated impact across families, services, programs, and departments at the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. Tiwahe has made a fundamental difference in how the Pascua Yaqui Tribe serves and measures service to families that includes direct funding for positions, resources, and services to twelve departments that all serve children and families. In an unprecedented way, Tiwahe has allowed the Tribe to strengthen families in all aspects of their lives and been pivotal in positive outcomes.

The importance of measuring impact to families and tribal programs and departments is critical to our ability to change and adapt. To assist with measuring outcomes, Pascua Yaqui is implementing a tribal-wide culturally based, client navigation system. The Itom Yoemia Navigation System will allow programs to better serve and measure service to the community.

Tiwahe has also had a major impact on our ICWA program. Tiwahe funding integrates and enhances existing staff, support, and services to increase family reunification and preservation. The ICWA team has been able to place children 91% of the time with Tribal families. By locating a Foster Care Social Worker Assistant in a community outside of Tucson, it has increased the Foster Care Program's availability to the community. The worker has increased foster care training by 100% in the Guadalupe community and helped achieve a 40% increase in licensed foster care homes. The increase in foster homes allows us to meet the ICWA placement requirements. Tiwahe has also allowed support for home and safety renovations to keep a child in a home or provide support to licensed Yaqui foster homes. Over 25 families have been assisted through the Tiwahe Housing project. An Enrollment Specialist hired with Tiwahe funding is focused only on child welfare cases and has increased intervention time from 10 days to 3 days. In addition, other gaps are being addressed. Previously, there had been a gap in the ability of child welfare case workers being able to get enrollment applications processed. In FY2021, the Enrollment Department was able to assist with 23 enrollment applications for foster children.

We appreciate your ongoing funding of the original six Tiwahe sites, and we request the same support in FY 2025. And we appreciate your providing new funding in 2022 and 2023 to add a total of four new demonstration sites (now 10 sites representing 65 tribes). In addition, BIA provided \$200,000 in one time funding this year to each of 12 additional Tiwahe Incubator tribes/consortia, to assist them in developing Tiwahe implementation plans, so that they will be ready to onboard as full Tiwahe demonstration sites in FY 2025 if Congress provides the additional funds requested by the Administration.

The President's FY 2025 budget requests an increase of \$28.6 million across several Tiwahe budget lines, to expand Tiwahe to benefit more tribes. This funding increase includes \$17.2 million in Tiwahe Social Services to expand Tiwahe to 13 additional Tribes or Tribal organizations, as well as approximately 15 additional Tiwahe Incubator sites. The funding also will provide for two (2) new FTEs to support a National Tiwahe Program Office to allow for stronger coordination and reporting among the Tiwahe Tribes and BIA and one (1) FTE that will help in building Tribal capacity in managing Tiwahe ICWA programs, services, functions and activities. These FTEs are essential to build the capacity needed to support the current Tiwahe Initiative sites and continued expansion of the Tiwahe Initiative to new sites.

In addition, a \$7.5 million increase in Tiwahe ICWA funding is requested to support the four recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites, across the board increases to Tribes currently receiving Tiwahe ICWA funding, and potentially adding future sites as well.

In addition, a \$2 million increase is requested for the Tiwahe Housing program, to expand the initiative to the four recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites with the possibility to add new sites as well.

In addition, a \$1.9 million increase is requested in Tribal Justice Support (TJS) as part of a coordinated effort to expand the reach and activities of the Tiwahe Initiative. The Tiwahe Initiative budget proposal includes increased funding for Social Services, Indian Child Welfare Act, Housing Program, and TJS. With the additional funding, the TJS program should provide technical assistance and direct funding opportunities to Tribes seeking to develop and operate Healing to Wellness courts or robust Indian Child Welfare Programs.

In addition to the President's FY 2025 requested increases discussed above, we also request an additional \$2 million in Tiwahe Job Placement/Training funds, and \$1 million in Tiwahe Courts funds, to expand the initiative to the four recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites with the possibility to add new sites as well.

We also request an additional \$5 million to establish a Tribal Economic Development component within the Tiwahe Initiative to further development and deployment of multi-disciplinary socioeconomic solutions. Funding will support Tribes in developing and operating comprehensive, integrated economic and community development programs.

In early 2021, the Tiwahe tribes submitted to Congress a comprehensive series of Tiwahe reports, including an independent evaluation by FHI 360, and BIA soon after submitted its Final Tiwahe Report to Congress. These reports provided compelling evidence that Tiwahe is a success and should be expanded to more tribes. Congress has acknowledged this and said: the reports document significant achievements, including a reduction in attempted and completed suicides, recidivism, and removal of children from the community. At the same time, the reports note earlier parent/child reunifications, language revitalization, and improvements to housing and homelessness among other improvements. For fiscal year 2023, Congress provides additional funds to expand Tiwahe to other sites across various programs. Unfortunately, Congress was unable to provide funds in FY 2024 to further expand Tiwahe. It is critical that in FY 2025, the additional funding requested by the Administration is provided to bring funding parity to the four new Tiwahe sites, and to provide funding for the 12 new Tiwahe Incubator sites to be onboarded as full Tiwahe sites in FY 2025. We would be happy to meet with the Subcommittee, along with Indian Affairs staff, to further explain these critical and timely needs.

**Increase Funding for BIA Law Enforcement, Courts, Detention, and Emergency Management.** We need your support to increase funding authorized in the Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA). Since TLOA began, BIA public safety funding has shrunk. The BIA's latest TLOA report says Tribal law enforcement needs \$1.7 billion per year for minimal public safety. That is more than six-times the current funding level. The report also says Tribal courts need \$1.5 billion per year to provide adequate justice for Tribal citizens. That is thirty two-times the current level. We support TIBC recommendations for an additional \$1.1 billion for law enforcement, \$1.1 billion for Tribal courts, and \$103 million for detention, and, **an additional \$30 million for Pascua Yaqui Law Enforcement and Emergency Management construction infrastructure needs to respond to critical incidents, combat our local drug crisis, and to provide critical law enforcement staffing for our Reservation and new lands recently taken into trust.**

**Direct IHS to Pay Both Sec. 105(l) Lease Depreciation and Principal and Interest Payments, Make Sec. 105(l) Mandatory Spending.** Sec. 105(l) leases are a critical tool to ensure federal programs are provided in well-maintained buildings. However, the BIA and IHS do not implement the authority the same. The BIA correctly reads Sec. 105(l) to require the payment of debt service obligations (both principal and interest) of new construction, acquisition, or rehabilitation costs of leased facilities, as well as depreciation. But in 2021, the IHS refused to follow the law and would only pay depreciation, not principal and interest. Then, in 2022 IHS reversed course, and allowed principal and interest payments, but refused to allow depreciation. IHS should be directed to immediately pay both depreciation and principal and interest payments for eligible facilities, just as BIA does to provide consistency for Indian Country. **Pascua Yaqui also calls upon Congress to classify Sec. 105(l) leases, and CSC, as mandatory spending.**

**Increase Funding for Drinking and Wastewater Infrastructure Projects on Tribal Lands.** The Pascua Yaqui Tribe was recently appointed a federal water settlement negotiation team to help resolve our outstanding water claims in Arizona. Pascua Yaqui maintains potable water lines on Reservation trust land and needs additional sanitary sewer lines, a Wastewater Reclamation Facility, and additional grey water infrastructure to increase conservation efforts in Arizona. We are seeking funding to develop and maintain a Wastewater Reclamation Facility and the necessary infrastructure to help us preserve and reuse treated effluent on our Reservation, that will help reduce the use of fresh potable water. We are also requesting funding for the first few years of annual maintenance and operations. **The Construction costs and the first three years of operations and maintenance are \$83.5 million, and we request this amount in FY 2025.**

On behalf of our Tribe, I want to share our gratitude for your efforts to uphold the U.S. trust responsibility. I hope and pray our relationship continues to grow and remains prosperous. As we say back home, Enchy mampo tawak, “it’s in your hands.” Lios aapo enchim “may God be with you.”

**Testimony of Governor Randall Vicente, Pueblo of Acoma  
American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Hearings  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
May 10, 2024**

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**Recommendations:**

1. BIA – \$1.5 million in dedicated funding for NAGPRA implementation.
2. BIA – \$1 million for implementation of the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act.
3. BIA – \$40 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices.
4. DOI – Maintain the funding moratorium for energy leasing in the Greater Chaco Region.
5. DOI – Increase funding for all public lands conservation accounts.
6. IHS – Provide permanent advance appropriations for the Indian health system.
7. IHS – Designate Section 105(l) lease and CSC payments as mandatory funding.
8. IHS – Increase SDPI funding to \$250 million with annual inflation adjustments.
9. IHS – Increase funding for Preventive Health Services.
10. DOI – Support Funding for Indian Water Rights Settlements.
11. BIA – Not less than \$90 million for the BIA Roads Maintenance Program.
12. DOI – Provide targeted funding totaling \$ 59 million for community development.
13. BIA – \$40 million for Mesa Hill Bridge Project under Tribal Transportation Account.
14. BIA OTS – Increase support for traditional irrigation infrastructure projects.
15. BIE – \$15 million to establish Regional BIE Tele-Education Learning Centers.
16. BIA – Not less than \$8 million for the BIA Endangered Species Program.
17. DOI – \$48 million for the BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program.

**I. Safeguard Tribal Cultural Patrimony**

1. \$1.5 Million for Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Enforcement. The provision of dedicated NAGPRA enforcement funding has supported the creation of a new FTE position committed to the protection of Tribal patrimony, as well as Bureau-wide trainings on the law and the harmful consequences that can ensue when it is violated. This is contributing directly to the development of a more culturally competent understanding of the importance of Tribal patrimony to Native peoples for improved law enforcement activities. *We ask that this funding be maintained in FY 2025 and beyond.*
2. \$3 Million for Funding Implementation of the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act. This law, passed in the last Congress, will assure the protection of many sensitive tribal items from illegal export. It is important to put in place the necessary resources in the federal government to enable this law to be implemented. *We request that at least \$1 million be allocated for FY 2025 for the purposes of implementation and enforcement of this law.*
3. \$40 Million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs). The preservation of Tribal sacred and cultural sites is a priority for all Indian Country. Damage of these sites is often irreversible, forever altering the way in which we can express ourselves as indigenous people. More Tribes are establishing THPOs under the National Historic Preservation Act to protect this heritage, yet

Federal funding has not kept pace with this expansion. It is thus difficult for Tribal governments to meet their preservation compliance duties and responsibilities, which include working with other governments on site identification, conducting surveys, compiling data and samples, documenting best practices, and assisting in museums and research centers that preserve and share Tribal material culture. *We request \$40 million for THPO support in FY 2025.*

4. **Maintain the Funding Moratorium Related to Energy Leasing in the Greater Chaco Region.** *We request that Congress maintain the moratorium on oil and gas leasing on federal land in the withdrawal area of the Greater Chaco Region. We request this moratorium span the lifetime of the legislation rather than becoming ineffective upon completion of the ongoing Tribally-led cultural resource studies. However, if a temporal limit must be included, we ask the moratorium stay in place until completion of the studies and the Resource Management Plan Amendment.*
5. **Increase Funding for All Public Lands Conservation Program Accounts.** *Acoma's religious, cultural, social, and ancestral identity is rooted in the land of Bears Ears, Mount Taylor, and Chaco Canyon—among countless other sacred landscapes in the region. Any reductions in the Federal protections accorded to these lands per their status as National Monuments, Forests, Parks, or Wilderness Areas necessarily impacts our cultural and spiritual interests. The failure to provide minimum appropriations to carry out Federal public lands management responsibilities impairs the ability of Interior agencies to fulfill trust obligations and places invaluable Tribal resources at risk. We urge Congress to provide increased funding for public lands conservation programs across the Department of Interior, including the NPS, USFS, USFWS, BIA, and BLM.*

## **II. Promote the Health and Well-Being of Indian Country**

6. **Provide Permanent Advance Appropriations for the Indian Health System.** *We ask for full funding for the IHS on a permanent two-year advance appropriations cycle to fulfill the United States' obligation to provide for Indian health. This advance appropriation has occurred for FY 2024 but needs to be made permanent. We strongly support the IHS Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup's recommendation for \$53.85 billion to fully fund the Indian health system budget. It is vital that this funding be consistently provided on an advance appropriations basis to promote greater stability in services, medical personnel recruitment and retention, and facilities management. Indian health should not be subject to the uncertainties of the annual budgeting process with its risk of continuing resolutions and government shutdowns. Critically, advance appropriations would align Federal funding with trust and treaty obligations. It would also provide the IHS long overdue parity with the Veterans Health Administration. We also urge the Committee to expand advance appropriations to the entirety of the four main appropriations accounts: services, facilities, contract support costs, and payment for Tribal leases.*
7. **Mandatory Funding for Contract Support Costs (CSC) and Section 105(l) Lease Payments.** *We appreciate this Subcommittee's commitment to ensuring that CSC and Section 105(l) lease costs are fully funded by including an indefinite discretionary appropriation in past years. We ask that Congress build on this important work in FY 2025 by designating these accounts as mandatory funding. CSC and Section 105(l) lease funds are already an entitlement under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. Changing the appropriation of these accounts from discretionary to mandatory would bring Federal funding into line with the clear legal requirements of the authorizing statute.*

8. \$250 Million with Self-Governance Funding Mechanism Option for the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI). Indian Country has seen dramatic improvements in the prevention and treatment of diabetes and diabetes-related conditions under SDPI. *For program stability and expansion, we seek an increase in mandatory funding to \$250 million with automatic annual adjustments for medical inflation. We also ask that Congress authorize the use of either a grant (as currently used) or Public Law 93-638 funding mechanisms for SDPI participants consistent with our Tribal sovereignty.*
9. Increase Funding for Preventive Health Services. Acoma's experience with the Acoma-Canoñcito-Laguna Hospital crisis and the vulnerabilities in the Indian health system revealed by the pandemic has taught us the critical value of preventive health. Such services are a cost-effective use of resources to reduce future incidence rates of chronic illness, acute conditions, and associated medical costs. *We urge an increase in funding for IHS Preventive Health Services as an investment in future Indian health.*

### III. Construct Safe Tribal Communities and Infrastructure

10. Support Funding for Indian Water Rights Settlements. The Pueblo of Acoma, along with other parties, has negotiated a water rights settlement with the United States and the State of New Mexico (Rio San Jose Water Settlement) that has just been introduced in the House and Senate. We ask that the Congress support full funding for Indian water rights and would like to note that the President's FY 2025 budget proposal includes funding to "build on Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investments by providing \$2.8 billion in additional mandatory funding to the Indian Water Rights Settlement Completion Fund, as well as \$226 million in discretionary funding to meet existing settlement obligations."
11. Not Less Than \$90 Million for the BIA Road Maintenance Program. Funding for the BIA Road Maintenance program has been chronically below the level of demonstrated need. In FY 2021, the BIA received only \$36.79 million to address a nationwide deferred maintenance backlog of almost \$300 million—an equivalent to *only 12%* of documented need. It costs our Pueblo alone over \$650,000 to maintain the 363.8 miles included on the BIA road inventory within our exterior boundaries (a further 298.2 miles are not on the inventory). We receive insufficient funding to cover these costs and are, thus, forced to use our limited Tribal funds to maintain Federal roads. *Congress must start to alleviate this heavy financial burden by providing not less than \$90 million for BIA Roads Maintenance in FY 2025.*
12. \$59 Million for Community Economic Development Projects. We seek \$59 million in targeted funding to support the development of shovel-ready community economic projects that would greatly benefit our Tribe and our citizens. Specifically, these are (1) full reconstruction of the fifty-year old Haaku Road that has structural failures throughout its length, contributing directly to dozens of vehicle crashes over the years (\$25 million request), and (2) development of the Acoma Business Park corridor that is planned to include a business incubator, retail and service enterprises, post office, and new housing to create jobs and generate revenue (\$34 million request).
13. \$40 Million for Mesa Hill Bridge Project under BIA Tribal Transportation Account. Acoma is bisected by a major transcontinental railway that is level with the existing roadway with minimal safety features. The flat terrain, lack of a fixed schedule for freight trains, and misjudgments on train speed and distance pose a significant public safety risk to motorists and pedestrians. Distressingly, there is no way to avoid the danger. Our healthcare and businesses are located on the north side of the tracks, while our community service facilities—such as Head Start,

residential areas, and government buildings—are in the south. Our people must face the daily challenge of traversing the tracks to bring their children to school or attend medical appointments without the safety of an elevated crossing. Despite the clear threat to public safety posed by this situation, we have faced repeated barriers in accessing the necessary funds to construct the Mesa Hill Bridge. *We urge Congress to provide \$40 million in targeted funding under the BIA Tribal Transportation Program to construct the Mesa Hill Bridge at Acoma Pueblo.*

- 14. Increase BIA Irrigation Infrastructure Funding.** Congress enacted the Pueblo Irrigation Infrastructure Act as Section 9106 of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. This Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the irrigation infrastructure of the Rio Grande Pueblos, including Acoma. It also authorizes funding to address deficiencies identified by that study. The implementation of this Act will favorably impact Pueblo traditional lifestyle and culture, which has been based on agriculture and irrigated lands for hundreds of years. *We urge Congress to increase support for BIA irrigation projects on all New Mexico Pueblos in FY 2025.*
- 15. Establish Regional BIE Tele-Education Learning Centers.** Broadband is an essential service rapidly changing the educational landscape in rural communities. Acoma, however, continues to face significant challenges in this area stemming, in part, from a woefully inadequate municipal infrastructure and limited economic and educational resources. Rural education does not and should not mean limited opportunities for growth and development. We seek to expand Acoma's horizons by connecting Pueblo members with previously unheard-of access to local tele-educational resources. *We ask for targeted funding for regional BIE tele-education learning facilities with an initial allocation of \$15 million to establish the account.*

#### **IV. Protect Wildlife and Natural Resources**

- 16. Not Less Than \$8 Million for the BIA Endangered Species Program.** The effective management and conservation of our natural resources is not limited to the waters, soil, and trees that form the rich landscape of Pueblo Country. We must also account and appropriately care for the diversity of wildlife that is meaningful to our culture and essential to maintaining our ecosystems' equilibrium. The BIA Endangered Species Program provides tribal nations with the technical assistance and financial resources to protect endangered species on tribal lands through natural resources restoration and management, as well as economic development. *We recommend Congress provide at least \$8 million for the BIA Endangered Species Program.*
- 17. \$48 Million for the Tribal Climate Resilience Program and Adequately Fund Cooperative Landscape Conservation Programs.** Across America, communities are facing mounting challenges related to our progressively unstable natural environment. Invasive species, disappearing tree lines, and accelerated rates of erosion are also taking an increasing toll on our agricultural and natural resources. These two Interior programs equip tribal nations with the tools to manage resource stressors, develop adaptive management plans, and engage in intergovernmental coordination. *We request Congress appropriate \$48 million for the BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program and restore adequate funding for Department-wide Cooperative Landscape Conservation programs.*

**Testimony of Michael Chavarria, Governor of the Pueblo of Santa Clara, New Mexico  
American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Hearings  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
May 8, 2024**

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**Recommendations:**

- I. **IHS:** (1) Provide permanent full funding and advance appropriations for the IHS; and (2) \$250 million with a self-governance funding mechanism option for SDPI.
- II. **DOI:** (1) Maintain the funding moratorium for energy leasing in the Greater Chaco Region; (2) \$1 million for implementation of the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act; and (3) Establish Cost Match Waiver for Tribes.
- III. **BIA:** (1) \$40 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices; (2) Maintain \$1.5 million for NAGPRA enforcement; (3) \$320 million for BIA Criminal Investigations and Police Services; (4) \$70 million for Tribal Courts; (5) \$620,000 for juvenile education in BIA detention facilities; (6) Increase funding for all BIA disaster recovery and prevention programs; (7) \$15 million to establish a BIA Emergency Response Fund; (8) \$48 million for the Tribal Climate Resilience Program; and (9) Increase funding for Housing Improvement Program.
- IV. **EPA:** \$100 million for the EPA Tribal General Assistance Program.
- V. **USFS:** \$15 million in priority funding for Tribal Forest Protection Act implementation.
- VI. **BIE:** (1) Increase Tribal Education Department and Sovereignty in Education grant funding; (2) \$200 million for Facilities Operations and \$900 million for Facilities Maintenance; and (3) \$600 million for Indian School Equalization Program.
- VII. **BOR:** Implementation of the Rio Grande Pueblos Irrigation Infrastructure Act.

Introduction. Thank you, Chairperson Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Subcommittee Members for the opportunity to share our funding priorities for the FY 2025 federal budget. My name is J. Michael Chavarria and I am the Governor of the Pueblo of Santa Clara in New Mexico. I offer the following recommendations for your consideration for FY 2025 and urge the Committee to remember that increases must be significantly greater than the rate of inflation for these programs to even tread water, when they need to be expanded.

Provide Full and Advance Appropriations for the Indian Health Service. The Indian Health Service faces annually compounding challenges related to supplies, staffing levels, infrastructure and facilities, and high rates of negative health outcomes among AI/ANs as a result of the chronic failure to fully fund trust and treaty obligations in Indian health. We were very pleased to see the inclusion of advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023. *Santa Clara urges the Committee to support making advance appropriations permanent, expanding advance appropriations for the entirety of the four main appropriations accounts: services, facilities, contract support costs, and payments for Tribal leases, and to support a multi-billion dollar increase to achieve full funding in FY 2025.*

\$250 Million with a Self-Governance Funding Mechanism Option for the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI). *For program stability and expansion, we advocate for an increase in mandatory funding to \$250 million with automatic annual adjustments for medical inflation.*

*We also ask that Congress authorize the use of either a grant (as currently used) or Public Law 93-638 funding mechanisms for SDPI participants consistent with Tribal sovereignty.*

Maintain the Funding Moratorium Related to Energy Leasing in the Greater Chaco Region. *We request that Congress maintain the moratorium on oil and gas leasing on federal land in the withdrawal area of the Greater Chaco Region. We request this moratorium span the lifetime of the legislation rather than becoming ineffective upon completion of the ongoing Tribally-led cultural resource studies. However, if a temporal limit must be included, we ask the moratorium stay in place until completion of the studies as well as the Resource Management Plan Amendment.*

\$40 Million to Support the Vital Work of Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs). *The preservation of Tribal sacred and cultural sites is a priority for all Indian Country. Damage of these sites is often irreversible. More Tribes are establishing THPOs under the National Historic Preservation Act to protect this heritage. Our expert officers identify sites and coordinate with appropriate officials and third parties on their protection, as well as support the work of museum and research centers that house Tribal material culture and repatriated items. We request \$40 million for THPO support in FY 2025.*

\$1.5 Million for Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Enforcement. *The provision of dedicated NAGPRA enforcement funding has contributed directly to the development of a more culturally competent understanding of the importance of Tribal patrimony to Native peoples for improved law enforcement activities. We ask that this funding be maintained in FY 2025 and beyond.*

\$1 Million for Funding Implementation of the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act. *This law, passed in the last Congress, will assure the protection of many sensitive tribal items from illegal export. It is important to put in place the necessary resources in the federal government to enable this law to be implemented. We request that at least \$1 million be allocated for FY 2025 for the purposes of implementation and enforcement of this law.*

\$320 Million for BIA Criminal Investigations and Police Services. *Tribal law enforcement and emergency services personnel strive to provide high-quality and responsive public safety services. They must often do this notwithstanding the effects of serious understaffing and insufficient resources. We urge a minimum of \$320 million for BIA Criminal Investigations and Police Services to effectively serve and protect our community, including additional resources for officer equipment, training, and innovation.*

\$70 Million for Tribal Courts on a Permanent Ongoing Basis. *Our Tribal Court requires additional resources to continue functioning efficiently and to address challenges related to resources, facilities, and court administration. To strengthen our court system, we encourage the Subcommittee to maintain its commitment to public safety and justice on Tribal lands and ask for at least \$70 million for Tribal Courts (TPA).*

Increased Detention Services Funding and \$620,000 for Juvenile Detention Center Education. *Public safety facilities and housing construction programs have been critically needed for many years. In the southwest the situation is particularly acute owing to the lack of any integrated substance abuse behavioral modification detention program since the closure of the Turning Point*

Program in Yuma, Arizona, in 2017. We need culturally-responsive detention services to improve recidivism rates and support long-term rehabilitation. *We request increased funding for BIA detention services and at least \$620,000 for juvenile detention center education.*

Increase Funding for BIA Disaster Recovery and Prevention Programs. The stewardship of natural resources is key to both the economic and cultural well-being of Pueblo people, particularly in this era of increasing climate uncertainty. Santa Clara has been devastated by *three* catastrophic wildfires with the threat of new fires and floods always on the horizon. We have invested heavily in the development of fire preparedness and suppression resources to protect life and property. We understand the fundamental importance of beneficial partnerships with the BIA and other agencies in this effort. Because of this work, we are proud to say that Santa Clara is home to award-winning Tribal forestry and land management departments. Expanding access to BIA disaster programs and deepening the resources available is critical. *We ask for an increase across all these line items.*

\$15 Million to Establish a BIA Emergency Response Fund. Many Tribal governments are hindered by the upfront investment costs and cost-sharing requirements of certain federal emergency response programs. When coupled with bureaucratic delays in distributing funds, it often takes an unacceptable amount of time to receive disaster relief precisely when time is of the essence. We anticipate the need for these resources will only continue to grow and with quick access to funding becoming a top response need. *We recommend an initial amount of \$15 million be allocated to establish a BIA Emergency Response Fund within the Office of Trust Services.*

\$48 Million for the Tribal Climate Resilience Program and Restore Cooperative Landscape Conservation Programs. Across America, communities are facing mounting challenges related to our progressively unstable natural environment. Invasive species, disappearing tree lines, and accelerated rates of erosion are also taking an increasing toll on our agricultural and natural resources. These two Interior programs equip Tribes with the tools to manage resource stressors, develop adaptive management plans, and engage in intergovernmental coordination. *We request Congress appropriate \$48 million for the BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program and restore adequate funding for Department-wide Cooperative Landscape Conservation programs.*

\$100 Million Minimum for the EPA Indian General Assistance Program. EPA resources enable our Pueblo to establish and maintain technical ability to support an array of projects that protect human health and the environment for our people and safeguard the natural resources that provide us with physical and spiritual sustenance. Without these funds, we would face tremendous hurdles in developing and maintaining environmental programs such as water quality monitoring and hazardous waste management. EPA Tribal GAP is an essential program assisting Tribes in developing the internal capacity to manage their own environmental protection programs. *We request Congress provide at least \$100 million for EPA Tribal GAP funding to advance sustainable environmental protection measures in Indian Country.*

\$15 Million in Priority Funding for Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA) Implementation. The TFPA (Pub. L. 108-278) authorizes the Interior Secretary to give special consideration to Tribally proposed Stewardship Contracting or other projects on Forest Service or BLM land bordering or adjacent to Tribal lands to protect trust and federal resources from fire, disease, and other threats. This is a smart policy. Stewardship agreements are an important tool for fighting the ever-growing

threat of wildfires that have devastated the west in recent years. TFPA was authorized, however, without a designated funding mechanism. As a result, efforts to implement its beneficial provisions have been impeded. *We request report language encouraging agencies to prioritize TFPA implementation to the greatest extent possible with at least \$15 million in dedicated funding.*

Increase Funding for BIE Tribal Education Department (TED) and Sovereignty in Education Grants. These funds support the development of TEDs to improve educational outcomes for students and efficiencies and effectiveness in the operation of BIE-funded schools. The goal of the grants is to promote Tribal educational capacity building, which it has achieved in our community through our Department of Youth and Learning and Pueblo-operated Kha'p'o Community School. *To strengthen the exercise of sovereignty in Tribal education additional funding is needed for these grants, particularly as the TED line item has been flat funded for several appropriations cycles.*

\$200 Million for BIE Facilities Operations and \$900 Million for BIE Facilities Maintenance and Construction. To flourish academically and personally, we must provide our children with safe and vibrant classrooms and engaging areas to play, as well as with after-hours wraparound services, but too many Tribal school facilities are in various states of disrepair. The backlog of unmet needs for these accounts has grown exponentially with Interior leadership testifying in July 2019 to a total identified deferred need of \$725 million, but increased costs since then justify \$900 million. *We urge full funding of this unmet need for BIE Facilities Maintenance and for Operations.*

\$600 Million for the Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP). These funds provide the core budget account for BIE-funded schools by covering teacher salaries, aides, principals, and other personnel. ISEP funds are often reallocated to cover the program cuts in other areas of education. ISEP must have adequate funding to ensure all program needs are fulfilled and must not be reduced to provide funds for new initiatives that have not been vetted by Tribes. *We strongly support an influx of investment in the ISEP in FY 2025 to at least \$ 600 million.*

Establish Cost Match Waiver for Tribes. There are many federal programs that require a tribal cost match, frequently in an amount that is beyond the means of many Tribes, resulting in Tribes not being able to take advantage of a particular program or source of funding. *Santa Clara urges the Committee to establish a blanket statutory waiver of all cost match requirements for Tribes similar to existing waivers for Insular Areas under 48 U.S.C. § 1469a (editorial note).*

Implementation of the Rio Grande Pueblos Irrigation Infrastructure Act. In 2009, the United States Congress passed the Omnibus and Public Lands Act authorizing planning and implementation of improvements to irrigation infrastructure for the eighteen Pueblos in the Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico. In February 2022, an amended report was released setting forth many of the needed improvements. *Santa Clara urges this committee to fund these identified improvement needs.*

Increase funding for Housing Improvement Program (HIP). Santa Clara has had an unfunded HIP, as part of our Self Governance Compact with DOI. The BIA has yet to allocate any funds for our HIP program for the past 4-5 years due to the lack of appropriations by Congress to restore program funding. The HIP is an important service to our eligible Tribal members for needed home repair, renovation, replacement and new housing under HIP.

Statement of Chairwoman Wena Supernaw  
Chairwoman, Quapaw Nation  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related  
Agencies  
May 7, 2024

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here to speak to you about the priorities and needs of the Quapaw Nation. My name is Wena Supernaw and I serve as elected Chairperson of the Nation.

I am here today on behalf of our nearly 6,000 enrolled citizens to ask that you help close a dark chapter in our history.

Shortly after the establishment of our Reservation up through the 1960s, our trustee, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, allowed our natural resources to be plundered. The mining activities conducted on our lands produced more than 50% of the lead and zinc used to defend the United States during World War I and from 1917 through 1947 over \$20 billion of ore was extracted from our lands.

They then allowed the plunderers to dump the waste on our land. BIA's actions not only destroyed our ability to use the Reservation, they also poisoned it for generations.

Our pleas for justice fell on deaf ears for more than 100 years. But finally, in 2012, a Congressman from the State of Oklahoma with a deep understanding of our history stepped in. I am incredibly grateful that this outstanding champion

for Indian Country, Congressman Tom Cole, now has the distinguished honor of chairing this very committee.

Congressman Cole's legislation gave the Quapaw Nation and our co-claimants the ability to seek restitution from the United States in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims for the damages alleged in the case of *Thomas Charles Bear, et al., v. United States*.

With the support of our Nation, our co-claimants, and the U.S. Department of Justice, on January 9, 2020 the Court entered a historic settlement of the *Bear* case. The Court recommended that the Nation and our co-claimants receive \$137,500,000 in compensation for the damages. This funding would help us address the generations of damage to our land and trauma to our people.

Sadly, I am here today because more than four years later, the Quapaw Nation and our co-claimants have not seen a dime.

- We have not seen a dime even though more than \$20 Billion in Lead and Zinc deposits were removed from our land by without our permission.
- We have not seen a dime even though portions of our Reservation are so geologically unstable that garbage trucks cannot drive on certain roads out of a fear they may collapse into ubiquitous mines authorized by the Bureau.

- We have not seen a dime from our settlement even though the piles of toxic mining waste that still sit on our reservation are some of the tallest man-made structures that exist for miles.
  
- We have not seen a dime even though the Quapaw people have lived in and next to the Tar Creek Superfund site, one of the most toxic sites in the country.

Congress, in fact this very Committee, can help us turn the page. I ask that you join the Quapaw Nation and our co-claimants in asking the U.S. to finally live up to its trust and treaty responsibilities. An appropriation to settle the *Bear* case will not undo all the damage, but it will help us move forward.

Thank you and I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you today.



**Testimony of Guy Capoeman  
President, Quinault Indian Nation  
to the Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
and Related Agencies of the United States House of Representatives  
American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Day  
May 8, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Guy Capoeman, I am the President of the Quinault Indian Nation's ("Quinault") Business Committee, the elected government of Quinault. I have served as the Tribe's President for the last three years and was recently re-elected as President by our Tribal citizens. Thank you for holding this hearing.

The Quinault Reservation is located on the southwestern corner of the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State and abuts the Pacific Ocean. Our reservation comprises over 200,000 acres and we have over 3,000 tribal members. My testimony today will focus on the following appropriations issues:

1. Increasing funding for the BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program;
2. Increased Project Eligibility for the Department of Interior Community-Driven Relocation Program
3. Establishing funding to address the unacceptable rates concerning murdered and missing indigenous women in our country; and
4. Advanced appropriations for Indian Health Services.

**U.S. Responsibility to Meet its Treaty and Trust Obligations to the Quinault People**

Through treaties, executive orders, and other agreements, Indian Tribes ceded hundreds of millions of acres of their homelands to the federal government. In return, the United States made promises to provide for the education, health, and welfare of Tribal citizens. For the Quinault people, the promises of the United States were detailed in the Treaty of Olympia, which was signed on July 1, 1855, and on January 25, 1856 (11 Stat. 971). The lands and waters of the Quinault Reservation consist of 207,150 acres of pristine forestlands, mountains, rivers, lakes, and 25 miles of relatively undisturbed Pacific coastline. The United States has failed to meet its treaty obligations as federal spending continues to fall short of demand. These funding deficiencies have only been exacerbated by economic factors like inflation, and in aggregate they impede Quinault's ability to provide necessary government services. Since 2021, Quinault has consistently had to supplement inadequate levels of federal funding for numerous programs and needs. My testimony today concerns several specific funding needs to be addressed by the federal government.

**Taholah Village and Queets Village Relocation – Increased Funding for the BIA Office of Tribal Climate Resilience Programs**

As we have previously testified to this Subcommittee, Quinault has two major villages on its reservation, the Village of Taholah and the Village of Queets. Both villages have been significantly harmed, and continue to be threatened further, by climate change. As a result, we are in the process of relocating these villages to higher ground.

Taholah is located in the southern portion of the reservation at the mouth of the Quinault River on the Pacific coast. Taholah consists of two sites known as the “Upper Village” and “Lower Village.” The Lower Village is located below sea level and climate change continues to be the greatest threat to this Village, our citizens, Quinault government operations, and critical Tribal infrastructure and services.

Already, high tides, high winds, and storm surge conditions have led to waves breaking over the seawall that protects the Lower Village from coastal surges. The seawall was breached in 2014, prompting a state of emergency to be declared. While the Army Corps of Engineers replaced the seawall, it is not a permanent solution. We have since had multiple events that have flooded the Village. In the winter of 2022, the Village was again significantly flooded. The flood caused widespread damage and spurred the evacuation of a dozen residential homes and seven government buildings including our courthouse, community center, post office, and community services office spaces.

Last year we testified on how our Tribe formulated a Taholah Village Relocation Master Plan to govern the Village’s relocation. The master plan was adopted by the Quinault Indian Nation Business Committee on June 26, 2017. Since then, we have been building and executing on the vision of the master plan, which incorporates community member input and addresses sustainable practices, cultural beliefs, and improved community facilities. I am happy to report to the Subcommittee that 100% of the infrastructure is complete, however we are still working to develop all of the housing in the new Village and working with Taholah School District. We still need to complete all of phase two and phase three, which includes infrastructure and relocation of all government buildings. The estimated cost for completing the remainder of the relocation will be roughly \$24 million.

We have also begun the process of developing a relocation plan for the Village of Queets. Quinault has identified and secured the land for the relocation of Queets, however we are still developing a finalized Queets Relocation Master Plan and have not begun development.

*To continue the process of relocating Taholah Village and Queets Village to higher ground, our Tribe needs additional funding. Because of the urgent need to expedite the relocation of coastal Tribal villages, we ask the Subcommittee to increase funding to the BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program to \$61 million in fiscal year 2024. This funding will ensure that Quinault and other coastal Tribes can move their populations to safer and higher ground as soon as possible.*

**Increased Project Eligibility for the Department of Interior Community-Driven Relocation Program**

The Quinault Nation was proud to be named one of the Tribes to take part in the newly created Community-Driven Relocation Program pilot program through the Department of Interior. This funding is critically needed as part of the massive Village relocations that are currently underway. The Quinault Nation's hope is that this funding can be available for all Native Nations that face a similar. However, we have had some significant issues utilizing the funding in this program due to construction restrictions.

*The Quinault Nation requests the Subcommittee include language in the FY 2025 Interior bill that will allow increased eligibility and discretion for relocation projects under the Community-Driven Relocation program.*

#### **Murdered and Missing Indigenous People Epidemic**

In 2022, Representative Kilmer introduced the Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act. The bill would implement the recommendations laid out by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' December 2018 report, "Broken Promises: Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans." The report evaluated whether the federal government has met its trust and treaty obligations to Native Nations, particularly as it relates to federal funding. The report determined that the federal government has systematically failed to honor its promises and trust responsibilities.

*Although the Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act has not been enacted into law, we request the Subcommittee look into funding many of the programs the Act would create, including: programs for Native victims of crime, victim advocates for Native victims of all crimes, a national Indian Country clearinghouse on sexual assault, funding for housing, and funding for related education programs.*

#### **Indian Health Services Funding and Advanced Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2026**

The Subcommittee took historic action to protect the health and well-being of Tribal people by including advanced Appropriations for IHS funding in fiscal year 2024 and fiscal year 2025. We thank the Subcommittee Members for their commitment to healthcare for Tribal Nations. As you know, these appropriations will help ensure that IHS services provided to Tribal Nations in fiscal year 2025 are protected from being disrupted due to any delay or interruption of the annual appropriations process. This has been a top priority for Quinault as previous government shutdowns, and similar delays of funding, have disrupted IHS services for Tribal citizens.

*We request that the Subcommittee include advanced appropriations funding for Indian Health Service for fiscal year 2026 at a minimum of \$5.2 billion as part of the fiscal year 2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.*

#### **Conclusion**

The Quinault Indian Nation is taking proactive measures to protect our citizens from the adverse impacts of climate change, ensure their safety, and provide a brighter future for our people. However, Quinault cannot achieve these goals alone and requires the federal government to fulfill

its treaty and trust obligations by providing necessary support. The Quinault Indian Nation respectfully requests that the Subcommittee fund the requests outlined in this testimony to address the urgent needs of the Quinault people. Thank you again for allowing me to testify today.

**Written Testimony of the Ramah Navajo Chapter-Ramah Band of the Navajos**

**F.Y. 2025 FEDERAL BUDGET REQUEST SUPPORT AND CONCERNS FOR DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR (DOI)-BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS (BIA) SUBMITTED TO U.S. HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENTAL AND RELATED AGENCIES  
May 07, 2024**

HONORABLE CHAIRMAN AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

I, Darnell J. Maria, Executive Director for the Ramah Navajo Chapter, hereby submit this written testimony regarding the DOI-BIA FY 2025 Budget.

The Chapter thanks you for holding these hearings on an annual basis. We sincerely appreciate the **U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environmental and Related Agencies**. More work, however, remains to be done. We have identified four (4) priority issues for this year, and respectfully request your sincere consideration and advocacy with appropriate Agencies to address the following issues:

**1) Inadequate Funding of Tribes' 638 Contract Programs as Compared to BIA Programs**

Under P.L. 93-638, tribes directly operate many of the Federal programs that were formally operated by either BIA or Indian Health Services. Tribes decide which programs to operate, not the BIA. Federal law requires that these programs be funded at the same level they would have been funded had the Secretary operated these programs directly. This includes funding for facilities operations and maintenance and replacement of buildings, equipment, and vehicles. These programs, however, continue to be woefully underfunded. Yet, every year, the BIA puts tribes through an "exercise" to prioritize unmet needs and budget requests. Our priorities reach national recognition, but we rarely receive an increase in program funds.

For many years, and at least since 2018, the Chapter has continued to receive its program funds at the same level with only minor increases and even some decreases. When increases are funded by Congress, the tribes often do not receive those increases in the year the funds are apportioned to BIA. BIA withholds those increases and pays them out in subsequent years despite its duty to comply with the Prompt Payment Act. For example, Ramah received FY 2022 Congressionally appropriated increases in FY 2023 for Real Estate and Road Maintenance programs. As another example, although Congress increased appropriations to BIA in FY 2023, we have experienced a decrease in the funding we received from BIA. This funding is important to us as we have been operating at a 25% deficiency for years in operating costs for our contracted programs.

The table below shows over the past six (6) years what funds the Chapter has received:

Contracts	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
CTGP	786,031	785,378	788,386	800,951	800,951	841,284
Fac. O&M	37,125	82,562	61,136	66,322	38,402	20,291
Detention O&M	62,056	60,445	61,401	64,206	64,206	12,754
Law Enforcement	703,848	706,562	708,991	715,976	748,689	763,414
Detention	1,042,927	1,047,654	1,063,131	1,120,117	1,128,575	1,176,857

**TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE NICOLE BOYD, CHAIRWOMAN  
RED CLIFF BAND OF LAKE SUPERIOR CHIPPEWA INDIANS**

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

**Regarding the FY 2025 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE),  
Indian Health Service (IHS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Budgets**

**May 7, 2024**

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, Chi Miigwetch (thank you) and the other distinguished Subcommittee members for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Red Cliff Band. Our Tribe has 7,900 members, and a 14,000-acre Reservation held in trust by the United States. Federal appropriations are the primary way in which the United States fulfills its trust responsibility and honors its obligations to Tribes. Our Tribe requests an additional \$\$\$ in FY 2025 funding for our programs as described in more detail below.

**Fully Fund and Expand the Tiwahe Initiative.** The Tiwahe Initiative was established in 2015 to improve the health and wellbeing of families in Tribal communities by reducing poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and associated outcomes, such as youth suicide. Tiwahe includes two components: (1) a recurring funding increase for all tribes that operate Social Services and ICWA programs, and (2) additional funding for a demonstration program at six Tribal locations (representing 61 Tribes and Alaska Native villages). Tiwahe includes the BIA programs of Social Services, ICWA, Courts, Housing (HIP), Job Placement & Training, and Public Safety RRI.

Our Tribe, the Red Cliff Band, has been a Tiwahe Incubator project since 2023, receiving \$200,000. This funding has been instrumental in strengthening the infrastructure of the “No Wrong Door” model of care across the Tribal system. It further supported the update of the Tribal Action Plan, a community driven guide to addressing the substance abuse crisis. Lastly, the funding supports systemic training and the development of a culturally driven evaluation model.

By approaching systems change in this holistic, intentional manner, the Red Cliff Band has demonstrated the readiness necessary to become a fully funded Tiwahe site. Full funding will allow us to create a comprehensive program aimed at providing opportunities for our members to become stewards of the environment and the land, promoting cultural and spiritual connectedness, and posturing a healthy and holistic lifestyle. The work will continue to be grounded in the perspectives of our population, ensuring that our community’s unique needs and experiences are addressed. By investing in our community, we can create a brighter future for our people. One that is self-determined, holistic, and sustainable. We look forward to the opportunity to work together to create a better future for our community.

We appreciate your ongoing funding of the original six Tiwahe sites, and we request the same support in FY 2025. And we much appreciate your providing new funding in 2022 and 2023 to add a total of four new demonstration sites (now 10 sites representing 65 tribes). In addition, BIA provided \$200,000 in one time funding this year to each of 12 additional Tiwahe Incubator

tribes/consortia, to assist them in developing Tiwahe implementation plans, so that they will be ready to onboard as full Tiwahe demonstration sites in FY 2025 if Congress provides the additional funds requested by the Administration.

The President's FY 2025 budget requests an increase of \$28.6 million across several Tiwahe budget lines, to expand Tiwahe to benefit more tribes. This funding increase includes \$17.2 million in Tiwahe Social Services to expand Tiwahe to 13 additional Tribes or Tribal organizations, as well as approximately 15 additional Tiwahe Incubator sites. The funding also will provide for two (2) new FTEs to support a National Tiwahe Program Office to allow for stronger coordination and reporting among the Tiwahe Tribes and BIA and one (1) FTE that will help in building Tribal capacity in managing Tiwahe ICWA programs, services, functions and activities. These FTEs are essential to build the capacity needed to support the current Tiwahe Initiative sites and continued expansion of the Tiwahe Initiative to new sites.

In addition, a \$7.5 million increase in Tiwahe ICWA funding is requested to support the four recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites, across the board increases to Tribes currently receiving Tiwahe ICWA funding, and potentially adding future sites as well.

In addition, a \$2 million increase is requested for the Tiwahe Housing program, to expand the initiative to the four recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites with the possibility to add new sites as well.

In addition, a \$1.9 million increase is requested in Tribal Justice Support (TJS) as part of a coordinated effort to expand the reach and activities of the Tiwahe Initiative. The Tiwahe Initiative budget proposal includes increased funding for Social Services, Indian Child Welfare Act, Housing Program, and TJS. With the additional funding, the TJS program will provide technical assistance and direct funding opportunities to Tribes seeking to develop and operate Healing to Wellness courts.

In addition to the President's FY 2025 requested increases discussed above, we also request an additional \$2 million in Tiwahe Job Placement/Training funds, and \$1 million in Tiwahe Courts funds, to expand the initiative to the four recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites with the possibility to add new sites as well.

We also request an additional \$5 million to establish a Tribal Economic Development component within the Tiwahe Initiative to further development and deployment of multi-disciplinary socioeconomic solutions. Funding will support Tribes in developing and operating comprehensive, integrated economic and community development programs.

In early 2021, the Tiwahe tribes submitted to Congress a comprehensive series of Tiwahe reports, including an independent evaluation by FHI 360, and BIA soon after submitted its Final Tiwahe Report to Congress. These reports provided compelling evidence that Tiwahe is a success and should be expanded to more tribes. Congress has acknowledged this and said: the reports document significant achievements, including a reduction in attempted and completed suicides, recidivism, and removal of children from the community. At the same time, the reports note earlier parent/child reunifications, language revitalization, and improvements to housing and homelessness among other improvements. For fiscal year 2023, Congress provides additional funds to expand Tiwahe to other sites across various programs. Unfortunately, Congress was unable to provide funds in FY 2024 to further expand Tiwahe. It is critical that in FY 2025, the

additional funding requested by the Administration is provided to bring funding parity to the four new Tiwahe sites, and to provide funding for the 12 new Tiwahe Incubator sites to be onboarded as full Tiwahe sites in FY 2025. We would be happy to meet with the Subcommittee, along with Indian Affairs staff, to further explain these critical and timely needs.

Chi-Miigwetch (thank you) for your consideration. The Red Cliff Band looks forward to continuing this very important work under the Tiwahe Initiative.

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE ROSEBUD SIOUX TRIBE  
COUNCILMEMBER SHERE WRIGHT-PLANK**

**BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

**FISCAL YEAR 2025 PUBLIC SAFETY & TRIBAL PRIORITIES**

Honorable Members of the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies,

My name is Shere Wright-Plank, and I have the honor of serving as a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribal Council in South Dakota. Unfortunately, President Scott Herman was not able to attend today's hearing and I have been charged by the Tribe to state our serious needs to the esteemed committee.

Today, I stand before the Committee to present our Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations priorities, focusing on matters of public safety and justice that are paramount to our tribal community.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe has recently declared an Indian Country Law Enforcement Emergency, underscoring the urgent need for heightened attention and resources to address the pressing issues we face. We have actively advocated for this cause, promoting the enactment of NCAI Resolution NO 23-066, which calls on Congress and the President to undertake an Emergency Indian Country Law Enforcement Initiative.

Through engagements such as the Tribal Nation Leader Summit with Attorney General Garland, the DOJ Office of Justice Program, and the BIA Office of Justice Services Meeting, we have gained critical insights. It is evident that the current funding allocated to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Tribal Police, approximately \$565 million, falls significantly short of meeting the real law enforcement needs in Indian Country.

At the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, where we currently have 15 Tribal Police Officers, we urgently require an additional 20 officers and detention personnel to effectively manage community policing and address the escalating rates of violent crime. Our community is in the grip of a profound public safety and public health crisis driven by drug trafficking, violent crime, and inadequate law enforcement protection. The Rosebud Sioux Tribe has half the Tribal Police Officers, with twice Tribal Population, and three times the violent crime that Rosebud suffered back in 2000.

The Great Plains Region, North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska, is facing a public safety and public health emergency resulting from drug trafficking, violent crime and lack of adequate protection of our communities, reflected in the following:

- A severe increase in serious violent crimes, drug-related crime, and drug distribution related violent crimes;
- Native Americans suffer the highest level of fatal opioid drug overdoses;

- Native American methamphetamine abuse and related crimes occur at 3x the national average and drastic increases in hard drugs including fentanyl and heroin;
- homicide rates per 100,000 population at the highest levels in America;
- the Rosebud Sioux Tribe suffers the highest levels of suicide in America; and
- The Rosebud Sioux Tribe has experienced severe increases in aggravated assaults, sexual assaults, and firearms related incidents

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe, in alignment with the 1868 Treaty, implores Congress to fulfill its commitment to ensuring the peace and safety of our community by fully funding Tribal Law Enforcement, Public Safety, and Tribal Administration of Justice under Public Law 93-638. We acknowledge the diligence of this Committee in understanding the legal obligations and the historical context that necessitate federal funding to support and nurture Indian reservation economies.

Our Tribe, with nearly 40,000 tribal members and approximately 30,000 residing on the Reservation, grapples with the repercussions of the public safety crisis daily. While we strive for economic development, the pervasive issue of drug and alcohol abuse continues to hinder our progress.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe Law Enforcement Services (RST LES) is charged with ensuring law & order within the boundaries of Rosebud Reservation and to trust lands in Mellette, Trip, Lyman, and Gregory counties. RST LES responds to over 20,000 calls for service every year. RST LES serves an area of approximately one million acres or roughly 1560 square miles with only twenty-five patrol officers and five criminal investigators. The national average of officer to person ratio is 3.5 officers per every 1000 persons; whereas, the RST LES officer to person ratio is one officer per every 1000 person.

Our RST LES are overwhelmed, and our Tribal Court faces a staggering caseload and backlog, necessitating urgent attention and resources. Additionally, our outdated Tribal Detention facility is operating at capacity, further exacerbating the crisis.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe declared a state of emergency due to the Methamphetamine, Opioid and Fentanyl epidemic plaguing the Rosebud Reservation. The RST LES responds to a high volume of violent crimes in which illegal narcotics, alcohol or both are a contributing factor around 95% of the time. RST LES administration has repeatedly called for a request in base funding. An increase in funding would be utilized to hire twenty more sworn and certified officers and acquire twenty additional patrol units. The additional officers and patrol units will significantly reduce response time and provide RST LES personnel with more time to investigate open cases.

As stated last year by our President, Scott Herman, the BIA Law Enforcement should be at least at \$1.2 billion. As with last year's delayed FY '24 appropriations the funding remains "100% underfunded." While the county grapples with increased drug and human trafficking, Tribes remain a gap in that enforcement effort, a gap that the Federal Government is obligated to close.

Rosebud reiterates that funding for BIA Tribal Police and Justice Systems should be increased as follows:

- \$1.2 Billion for BIA Office of Justice Services and Tribal Police Officers;
- \$150 Million to Redress Murdered and Missing Indian Persons;
- \$300 Million for BIA Detention and Public Safety Construction Program; and
- \$400 Million for Tribal Courts, Tribal Prosecutors, and Probation Officers and diversion programs.

Specifically, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe requires an increase in the Tribal Police Budget of \$3.5 Million for FY 2025 for 20 Tribal Police and Detention Officers.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe needs \$500,000 for our Tribal Courts given our high annual caseload.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe, with the Yankton Sioux Tribe, has also advocated for a regional BIA Law Enforcement Academy for the upper plains to help recruit much needed officers. Artesia is too far from the communities that the officers intend to serve. Sending these recruits such a distance, for an extended period, removes them from the communities they intend to serve and the families they want to protect. A regional academy hosted at the State Law Enforcement Center in Pierre, South Dakota would allow recruits to remain near to their families and communities while joint classes with State officers would build relationships between our law enforcement agencies. This year our advocacy efforts at the State level for support of a regional academy achieved unanimous passage in both the House and Senate of House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 6011, "Urging the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) law enforcement to establish a law enforcement training academy in South Dakota." Following the Resolution, the South Dakota Attorney General immediately offered Tribal governments in the State slots for their officers to train at the State Academy, but they will still need BIA training to complete. We now ask Congress to include report language with funding to provide BIA Training officers to this new regional academy in Pierre. It can start as an BIA addendum to state training and grow, but it must start.

But Law Enforcement isn't our only barrier to economic development.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe requests your help to secure funding for the replacement of the Indian Health Service (I.H.S.) Rosebud Hospital which serves the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. Our Rosebud Hospital is just worn out, it can't keep out the heat during the summer or the cold during the winter, and you know Rosebud has extreme heat—up to 110 degrees in the summer and 20 degrees below zero in the winter. Our Hospital, which is 30 years old, is outdated and has lost functionality: no surgical unit, no Ob-Gyn unit and our Emergency Room was closed by CMS for poor health care in 2016. With the loss of Hospital functionality, we have lost medical staffing and our patient confidence and loyalty.

Due to the poor health care provided to Rosebud Sioux tribal members, our people have endemic poor health status. The Robert Wood Johnson, County-by-County Health

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<sup>1</sup> (20 Tribal Police Officers x \$125,000/officer = \$2.5 Million plus \$1 Million indirect costs)

Assessment shows that Rosebud Sioux Reservation ranks at the bottom of poor health status, poor health care and poor health indicators: Specifically, Rosebud ranks 58 to 61 out of 61 South Dakota Counties studied, where 1 is the top and 61 the bottom of the scale. The life expectancy of a Rosebud Sioux man is 47 years while in contrast an American man's life expectancy is 78 years. Rosebud is the poorest Indian tribe in the United States with the poorest health status in the country, we need urgent help to address the debilitating and fatal health care disparities affecting our people.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe requests that Congress require the Indian Health Service to acknowledge that the United States of America promised to provide "competent physician led health care" in our 1868 Treaty, as the Federal Court of Appeals ruled in *Rosebud Sioux Tribe v. U.S.A., Secretary HHS, et al.*, 9 F.4<sup>th</sup> 1018 (8<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2021). To require I.H.S. to comply with this federal court judgment, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe respectfully requests that Congress include report language in the FY 2025 Appropriations Report, that is:

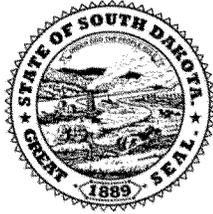
*"I.H.S. is directed to fully fund and staff Rosebud Sioux Hospital and Service Unit, and the Indian health care facilities of sister Sioux Nation tribes signatory to the 1868 Treaty, as necessary to provide competent physician-led health care, including mental health care, to tribal members in accord with Rosebud Sioux Tribe v. U.S.A., 9 F.4<sup>th</sup> 1018 (8<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2021) and the mandate of 1868 Sioux Nation Treaty."*

The Federal Court intended to assign a measure of accountability to the Indian Health Service to require "competent physician-led health care" be provided to our tribal members, yet the I.H.S. has not acted and has not convened with Rosebud to develop a treaty-based health care plan

**As such, the Tribe Requests:**

- Support Administration FY 2025 Request for \$8 Billion for Indian Health Service;
- \$300 Million for I.H.S. Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Rehabilitation;
- \$5 Million for Alcohol and Drug Treatment Programs at the Rosebud Sioux Tribe;
- \$300 Million for Rosebud Sioux I.H.S. Hospital Replacement.

In closing, I express gratitude for the Committee's continued support and urge prioritization of funding for our public safety and justice priorities. The Rosebud Sioux Tribe stands ready to collaborate and work tirelessly to address the pressing challenges facing our community. Together, we can ensure that our people have access to the safety and justice they deserve.



2024 South Dakota Legislature  
**House Concurrent Resolution**  
**6011**  
**ENROLLED**

AN ACT

**A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION, Urging the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) law enforcement to establish a law enforcement training academy in South Dakota.**

WHEREAS, the state of South Dakota recognizes the critical role played by tribal law enforcement agencies in ensuring public safety and upholding the rule of law for all citizens; and

WHEREAS, BIA law enforcement is tasked with maintaining law and order within certain tribal communities in the state, playing a crucial role in fostering secure and thriving environments for Native American residents; and

WHEREAS, the state of South Dakota values collaboration between state and federal entities to enhance public safety initiatives and strengthen the capabilities of law enforcement agencies; and

WHEREAS, the establishment of a BIA law enforcement training academy in South Dakota would provide an opportunity to enhance the skills and training of law enforcement personnel serving Native American communities, thereby contributing to the overall safety and well-being of tribal members; and

WHEREAS, South Dakota is home to nine tribal nations, each with its unique heritage and law enforcement needs, making it an ideal location for a BIA law enforcement training academy that can tailor its programs to the specific challenges and nuances of the region; and

WHEREAS, the state of South Dakota is committed to supporting initiatives that promote professionalism, cultural sensitivity, and excellence in law enforcement to better serve and protect all residents:

**Testimony of Melinda White, Chief Executive Officer, Sage Memorial Hospital  
 “House of Representatives American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Days”  
 House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
 May 10, 2024**

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**Recommendations:**

1. Provide full, mandatory funding for the Indian Health Service (IHS).
  2. Reduce dependence on competitive grants for Indian Country.
  3. Exempt the IHS from rescissions and sequestrations.
  4. Ensure mandatory funding for Contract Support Costs and section 105(l) lease payments.
  5. Restore critical infrastructure investments for the Indian health system.
  6. Address Staffing Shortages through Full Funding and Enactment of [S.3022](#).
  7. Increase funding and extend self-governance to the Special Diabetes Program for Indians.
  8. Increase funding for behavioral and mental health programs.
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**Introduction:** Thank you, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to share our funding priorities for the FY 2025 federal budget. My name is Melinda White, and I serve as the CEO of the Sage Memorial Hospital on the Navajo Nation. The hospital campus included a Critical Access Hospital and outpatient clinic. We also operate a separate outpatient clinic located 28 miles away in Greasewood Springs, Arizona.

We are the first Native-managed private comprehensive health care system in the country and have been managed since 1978 by an independent, entirely Navajo Board of Directors. Sage Memorial Hospital is the only Native American hospital to hold both a license from the Arizona Department of Health Services and Accreditation from The Joint Commission. Today, we are the sole provider of healthcare services for a community of approximately 23,000. We prioritize integration of Native culture with western medicine to provide quality health care to the residents in the Ganado, Kinlichee, Klagetoh, Wide Ruins, Lower Greasewood Springs, Cornfields, Nazlini, and Steamboat chapters of the Navajo Nation.

We are grateful for the historic investments Congress has made in the Indian health system in recent years via the CARES Act, American Rescue Plan Act, and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The direct funding model and successful implementation of these laws prove that when Tribal sovereignty is honored, Tribal communities thrive. We would also like to thank this Subcommittee for its bipartisan effort to protect the IHS from cuts during the 2024 appropriations process. Furthermore, we urge you to remember that Congress’ trust and treaty responsibility to provide for the health and wellbeing of Tribal Nations exists irrespective of any self-imposed budgetary caps. It is imperative that this Subcommittee appropriate the full amounts necessary to fulfill its obligations. To that end, I offer the following recommendations for your consideration for FY 2025 appropriations for the IHS.

**Provide Full Funding for the Indian Health Service:** The IHS and its Tribal partners under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act strive to provide Tribal people with access to high quality and comprehensive medical services, in line with the federal government’s trust and treaty obligations. However, chronic underfunding of the Indian health system has had detrimental impacts on our communities. American Indians and Alaska Natives are disproportionately affected by obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, substance-use disorder and other largely preventable conditions. We therefore urge the Subcommittee to work towards full and mandatory funding for the IHS, in line with the IHS Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup.

The Workgroup has calculated it will take \$54 billion to fully-fund the IHS. We understand that this represents a dramatic increase in funding; however, it is essential that Congress address the true needs of the Indian health system. We support their full request and reiterate the following four priorities for program expansion as follows:

- 1) Hospitals and Health Clinics: \$13.6 billion
- 2) Mental Health: \$4.5 billion
- 3) Alcohol & Substance Abuse: \$4.9 billion
- 4) Dental Services: \$3.2 billion

**Continued Support for Advance Appropriations for IHS:** If full, mandatory appropriations cannot be achieved for FY 2025, we continue to support advance appropriations for the IHS in the short-term. This year's tumultuous appropriations cycle clearly demonstrates why advance appropriations are critical—IHS clinical services remained continuous throughout the volatile political process. We urge the Subcommittee to extend advance appropriations to all IHS accounts, including Electronic Health Records Modernization, Health Care Facilities Construction, and Sanitation Facilities Construction for FY 2026.

**Reduce Dependence on Federal Grants:** We also support moving away from competitive grants for federal funding mechanisms. Grants unfairly pit Tribes against each other for resources we are all entitled to. The federal trust responsibility does not require that we jump through a myriad of hoops and onerous applications to see that services are provided to our citizens. Too often, Tribes are under-resourced to apply for federal grants and comply with their reporting requirements. Our staff must divert time to apply and report, thereby diluting the usefulness of the resources. Instead, we request wide-spread, formula-based funding across all programs. Tribes must also be granted the flexibility needed to respond to the specific needs of their own communities, not those prescribed by federal grants. This also means appropriating enough resources so funds are provided in meaningful amounts across all Tribes. We join other Tribal leaders in calling for broad based funding for Indian Country.

**Permanently Exempt the IHS from Cuts, Sequestrations, and Rescissions:** As demonstrated above, the Indian health system is chronically underfunded, with current appropriations sitting around one-seventh of need. Nevertheless, Congress routinely threatens and enacts additional budget cuts, sequestrations, and rescissions affecting the IHS. As recently as FY 2024, this Congress rescinded \$350 million marked for public health infrastructure from the IHS. Furthermore, the IHS is the only federally funded services providing direct patient care not exempt from sequestration.

We remind this Subcommittee again that its trust and treaty obligations to Tribes exist regardless of any self-imposed budget control measures. In fact, the IHS budget remains so small in comparison to the national budget that cuts, rescissions, and sequestrations do not result in any meaningful savings in the national debt, but they do devastate Tribal Nations and their citizens. We urge Congress to ensure that any budget cuts, whether automatic or explicit, hold IHS and our people harmless.

**Fully fund critical infrastructure investments:** We were disappointed to see that this Subcommittee approved cuts to Electronic Health Records Modernization, Health Care Facilities Construction, and Sanitation Facilities Construction in FY 2024. The Indian health system's infrastructure is among the oldest and most dilapidated in the country. Therefore, we request that this Subcommittee restore and fully-fund these accounts. To implement an interoperable Electronic Health Records and telehealth system, \$801 million is needed for FY 2025. As you are aware, this investment is especially critical as the Veterans' Administration and Department of Defense move to modernize their systems.

It is also critical that Congress make significant investments in Health Care Facilities Construction and Sanitation Facilities Construction. IHS and Tribal facilities are severely outdated, and we appreciate Congress' investment in IHS sanitation facilities through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Yet, with a multi-billion-dollar backlog and growing inflation, funding to close out the list is not keeping pace with need. This creates situations where facilities are unfit and unsafe. Therefore, consistent with the Workgroup's request, we recommend \$2.8 billion for Health Care Facilities Construction and Equipment and \$2.2 billion for Sanitation Facilities Construction in FY 2025.

**Address Staffing Shortages.** The Indian health system is chronically understaffed due to a variety of challenges including underfunding and rural location. We face difficulties recruiting and retaining critical staff, including nurses, because we must compete with the larger non-Tribal health systems nearby. We reiterate our request that this Subcommittee fully fund the IHS at \$54 billion, with \$13.6 billion going to Hospitals and Health Clinics, to ensure Tribal health programs have the funding to offer competitive salaries and benefits. We also urge this Subcommittee to direct resources to staff housing. Finally, we fully support [S.3022](#), as reported by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, to permit IHS loan repayment and scholarship recipients to satisfy service obligations through half-time clinical work for a doubled amount of service time. This puts the IHS at parity with similar loan repayment programs through the Health Resources and Services Administration, which can be cumbersome and difficult to obtain.

**Mandatory Funding for Contract Support Costs and 105(l) lease payments:** We appreciate the Subcommittee's commitment to ensuring that Contract Support Costs (CSC) and section 105(l) lease payments are fully funded. However, these line items continue to take up a larger and larger percentage of the IHS discretionary budget, thereby leaving little room to expand other services given tight budget environment. We strongly agree with the Subcommittee's words in the explanatory statement for the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94) regarding 105(l) costs which said, in part: "Obligations of this nature are typically addressed through mandatory spending, but in this case since they fall under discretionary spending, they are impacting all other programs funded under the Interior and Environment Appropriations bill, including other equally important Tribal programs."

Therefore, we ask you to continue to advocate with your colleagues on authorizing committees to enact mandatory appropriations for CSC and 105(l) lease costs. Doing so will ensure that other areas of the IHS budget are held harmless by these costs and true increases in critical services line items can move forward. This will enhance care for Tribal patients and reduce health disparities.

**Extend Self-Governance Funding Options to the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) and increase funding to \$250 million/year:** While we understand that SDPI is not under the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee, we appreciate that Congress included a short-term extension of SDPI in FY 2024 appropriations at a \$160 million annualized rate. We recognize that this is the first increase for SDPI in two decades. Communities like ours across Indian Country rely on SDPI resources to address the alarming rates of diabetes and diabetes-related health complications among our people. SDPI's success rests in the flexibility of its program structure that allows for the incorporation of culture and local needs into its services. Consistent with this model, Congress should authorize SDPI participants the option of receiving their federal funds through either a grant (as currently used) or self-governance funding mechanisms under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act.

Additionally, SDPI has not had a meaningful increase in funding since FY 2004 despite its overwhelming success. Short term reauthorizations continue to destabilize this program and make staffing and program continuity difficult. For this reason, we recommend permanent reauthorization for SDPI at a minimum base of \$250 million per year with annual adjustments for inflationary increases. We urge you to work with your Congressional colleagues to enact this important priority.

**Behavioral Health:** Our Tribe, like all of Indian Country, has been devastated by the ongoing fentanyl and opioid epidemic. Nevertheless, funds for these services are extremely limited. For example, in FY 2024, Congress only appropriated \$2 million to fund essential detoxification related services. That's less than \$1 per IHS patient. We urge the Subcommittee to dedicate resources to detoxification and reemphasize the importance of fully-funding the following accounts: Health Care Facilities Construction, Alcohol & Substance Use, and Mental Health. We also fully support the President's Domestic Supplemental Request, which includes a \$250 million investment in the IHS to address the fentanyl and opioid epidemic. Recognizing that Indian Country cannot wait any longer, Congress should consider this request as soon as possible.

**Terry Rambler, Chairman, San Carlos Apache Tribe**  
**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior Environment, and Related Agencies**  
**American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Days**  
**Testimony on Public Safety**  
**May 10, 2024**

My name is Terry Rambler, and I am honored to serve as Chairman of the San Carlos Apache Tribe (Tribe), representing over 17,000 enrolled members, located on the San Carlos Apache Reservation (Reservation), which spans more than 1.8 million acres in southeastern Arizona. We thank the subcommittee for this opportunity to submit FY25 testimony. My testimony focuses on the following: (1) the need for increased funding for police services under the BIA's Public Safety and Justice Program at BIA; and (2) our pressing 15-year unmet need for a permanent public safety replacement facility under the BIA's Public Safety and Justice Facilities Replacement Program and BIA's Payment of Tribal Leases Program under Section 105(1) of the Indian-Self Determination and Education Assistance Act (IDEAA).

**Urgent Need for Increased BIA Funding for Police Services**

Historically, the United States Cavalry forcibly removed our people at gunpoint from our ancestral homes in the late 1800s and imprisoned us at a concentration camp, which became our Reservation. Given the long history of brutality and mistreatment against our people at the hands of the United States this violence has been self-perpetuating, plaguing the Reservation with rampant crime including drug trafficking, human trafficking, sexual assault, physical assault, and gun violence. In addition, we suffer many forms of self-harm borne of our historic trauma. Our Tribal Members live in fear due to the high number of violent crimes on the Reservation. In 2022, the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics ranking the Reservation as number 1 in violent crime with 16 homicides. In FY23 we suffered 3,344 crimes on the Reservation and 30,000 calls for service. In the first seven months of FY24, we have suffered 2,336 crimes with approximately 20,000 calls for service. If this level of crime continues, we will see an increase in overall crime of 16% this year. Most alarming is the increase in crimes involving firearms. In the first 7 months of FY24, there have been 121 crimes committed involving firearms compared to 120 in the twelve months of FY23. There have been 588 reports of shots fired across all 5 districts of the Reservation this fiscal year. If this trend continues, we will see a 42% increase in firearms violence this fiscal year.

The San Carlos Apache Police Department (SCAPD) currently operates with 19 sworn police officers, including the Chief of Police and 9 dispatchers, to cover fourteen 12-hour shifts per week, 52 weeks per year, and patrol our 1.8 million-acre Reservation. In addition, SCAPD operations are supported by 7 administrative positions. In order to be fully staffed, the SCAPD needs 44 sworn police officers, including the Chief of Police, supervisors, and patrol officers, and 10 administrative positions. SCAPD is currently one of the lowest paying police departments in Arizona. Recruitment and retention of police officers is a challenge for police departments across the United States. These challenges are even greater for SCAPD due to insufficient funding, low salaries, the rural nature of the Reservation, lack of housing for officers recruited from outside the Reservation, inability to offer signing bonuses, and a demanding and grueling call load. As a result of these challenges, the SCAPD has lost 10 sworn officers in the last year. Current staff is comprised of a group of highly dedicated professionals who are

committed to their mission to protect and to serve. With current levels of staffing, SCAPD is a reactive department responding to calls for services. There is little to no ability to perform community policing, crime prevention, or research and evaluation. When evaluating the level of violence on the Reservation, community policing and crime prevention programs are essential to combat the violence.

The FY25 United States Department of the Interior Budget Justification and Performance Information for the BIA shows the base funding for San Carlos Law Enforcement of \$4,548,697.00. This is a mere 55% of the funding the SCAPD actually needs to operate an effective and efficient police department.

**REQUEST:** The SCAPD requests the following funding: (1) Operational Costs to include 44 sworn personnel and 10 administrative personnel for Salaries and Benefits, **\$5,031,000**; (2) Equipment and Supplies to include, property and supplies, uniforms, equipment leasing, equipment rental, postage, telephone, vehicle and maintenance, utility expense, office supplies and contract services, **\$935,506**; (3) Training and professional development, **\$573,000**; (4) Community Outreach Programs, **\$100,000**; (5) Technology Infrastructure to include upgrades and maintenance, capital projects, and indirect cost, \$1,800,000. This would be a total budget of **\$8,439,506**. The Tribe further requests the Subcommittee provide an additional **\$3,890,809** for costs related to maintaining an effective and efficient police department, strengthening community outreach programs, improving technology and infrastructure, and officer training. Our goal is to create safer, healthier, and more productive communities.

#### **Long-Languishing Need for BIA Public Safety Replacement Facility**

For over 15 years, the Tribe's top priority has been securing funding from the BIA for a permanent public safety replacement facility on the Reservation. The San Carlos people desperately need an adequate facility, especially our brave police officers, judges, public defenders, prosecutors, domestic violence advocates, and other public safety personnel who dedicate themselves every day to keeping our Reservation safe. It is impossible to meet the serious public safety and criminal justice needs on the Reservation without a functioning facility. The Tribe greatly appreciates this Subcommittee's efforts to help address this need with the inclusion of report language as it has done in the past.

Despite the Subcommittee's and the Tribe's efforts, the Department of the Interior's Office of Facilities, Property, and Safety Management (OFPSM) falsely claims that the temporary dilapidated trailers that BIA urged the Tribe's police and tribal courts to move into in 2015 -- after it condemned BIA's public safety building called Building 86 in BIA's inventory -- will "last 30 years" and are, therefore, in "good condition". This is simply not the case.

Instead, these trailers have serious deficiencies, including shoddy sewer and plumbing, lack of electrical power, sub-standard materials, and poor construction. The trailers have gaps between the walls where you can see the outside elements between the gaps from inside. The locks to the front doors often do not work, so people break in frequently. The floors are so flimsy that our police officers cannot store evidence lockers in the trailers because otherwise they would fall through the floors due to their weight. There is often no running water, creating serious public

health issues especially during the pandemic, or electricity for air conditioning. Imagine an elder or young child at the trailers after having just experienced a traumatic situation and not having access to a working bathroom while sitting in a sweltering trailer with no air conditioning in 120-degree weather. Or imagine not having a secure place to store or preserve crucial evidence relating to a homicide or a case involving a missing person. This is unacceptable.

Based upon its misleading narrative, the Department informed the Tribe in 2021 that it planned to rank the Tribe at the bottom of the master priority list for public safety replacement facilities that the Department compiled for this Subcommittee. In addition, the funding level for BIA Public Safety and Justice Construction is woefully insufficient and barely makes a dent in the massive backlog for public safety facilities replacement across Indian Country.

Given the stark realization that the Department will continue to refuse to provide a true permanent replacement public safety facility on the Reservation despite its responsibilities, given that our citizens can no longer keep waiting for a permanent public safety facility, and given the unacceptably low funding levels for BIA Public Safety and Justice Facilities Replacement Construction, the Tribe is currently exploring the Payment of Tribal Leases Program under Section 105(l) of ISDEAA for a permanent public safety facility where the Tribe would take out a large loan to construct a public safety facility and then BIA would lease the facility. The combined failures of Congress and BIA to provide adequate permanent tribal public safety facilities are extremely disappointing. Now, the Tribe must struggle to take out a construction loan to replace a facility that the federal government should have replaced over 15 years ago.

REQUEST: We respectfully request that the Subcommittee direct the Department to provide a true permanent public safety replacement facility for the Reservation and that the Subcommittee consider making the Section 105(l) Program mandatory funding under the U.S.'s treaty and trust obligations so there is sufficient funding for tribes across the country to utilize this program. The Tribe also urges the Subcommittee to make Contract Support Costs at BIA mandatory funding.



## **Self-Governance Communication & Education Tribal Consortium**

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**Written Testimony of The Honorable W. Ron Allen, President, Board of Directors,  
Self-Governance Communication & Education Tribal Consortium (SGCETC) and  
Tribal Chairman/CEO, Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe  
to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related  
Agencies on the FY 2025 Budgets for BIA, IHS and EPA**

March 10, 2024

On behalf of SGCETC, I submit this written statement regarding funding priorities for the FY 2025 budgets for the Departments of the Interior’s (DOI) Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Indian Health Service (IHS) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The fiduciary responsibilities of the United States to Tribal Nations arise from commitments made in treaties and agreements, in exchange for which Indians relinquished vast tracts of homelands and resources.<sup>1</sup> More than 380 Tribal Nations have entered into Self-Governance agreements with the DOI and/or IHS to transfer Federal resources and programs from Federal to Tribal administration to better serve the needs of their citizens and communities. Tribal Nations that elect to administer Federal programs through Self-Governance agreements know that increased Tribal control and decision-making authority results in improved social and economic well-being at the local level.

Tribal Nations assuming administration over programs once administered by Federal agencies, do so knowing that this does not abrogate the Federal government’s treaty and trust obligations. It empowers Tribal governments as sovereign nations to best determine the needs of their citizens and communities while bolstering Tribal economies and job creation for Indian country and surrounding non-Native communities. As such, we offer the following recommendations:

### **Increase Base Budgets and Recurring Funding for Indian Programs and Reduce Reliance on Grant Funding**

Across the board, Federal Indian programs are significantly underfunded. The lack of adequate funding puts the lives of Tribal citizens at risk and limits the services provided by Tribal governments. Increases in base budgets for Indian programs will allow Tribes to fund core Tribal government programs and will provide an opportunity for additional Tribal Nations to participate in Self-Governance.

<sup>1</sup>Pub. L. No. 114-178, § 101, 130 Stat. 432 (2016) (codified at 25 USC § 5601).

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SGCETC supports the growing sentiment expressed by Tribal Nations that we do not want our funding sources to be increasingly supplemented by grants. Short-term competitive grants hinder Self-Governance because it creates uncertainty in planning, imposes extensive regulations and reporting requirements, and restricts the use of indirect costs. Tribal Nations are not non-profit organizations and should not be treated as such. The signers of the over 400 treaties between Tribal Nations and the United States did not sign with the intent of being dependent on grants. Lives were not lost, nor land ceded for our needs to be dependent on the review of a grant application package.

**Reclassify Section 105(l) Costs as Mandatory Spending**

Pursuant to the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA), most Tribal Nations now administer programs that were previously administered by the Federal government, which results in the need for Tribal facilities to house these programs. Section 105(l) of the ISDEAA, 25 USC § 5324(l), provides that the Secretaries of DOI and HHS must enter into leases with an Indian Tribe or Tribal organization for the administration and delivery of services under the ISDEAA. Section 105(l) requires both Secretaries to compensate each Indian Tribe or Tribal organization for infrastructure costs, including rent, depreciation, operation and maintenance, and other reasonable expenses. Tribal Nations across the country are successfully entering into Section 105(l) agreements with both DOI and HHS to be compensated for the use of Tribal facilities that are needed to fulfill Federal responsibilities.

Tribal Nations commend Congress in recognizing the Federal government's obligation to fully fund 105(l) leases. The next step in fostering this progress is by reclassifying Section 105(l) lease funding from discretionary to mandatory spending.

**Reclassify Contract Support Costs (CSC) as Mandatory Spending**

Contract Support Costs (CSC) are legally required pursuant to the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act and Supreme Court decisions, but they are currently paid for under discretionary spending caps. Inclusion of the CSC account that is mandatory in nature under discretionary spending caps has resulted in a net reduction on the amount of funding provided for Tribal programs. Immediately moving CSC to mandatory is good risk management for the United States because the amount is already mandatory in nature and there is a mechanism for controlling costs. Since the amount is already mandatory in nature, there is nothing added to the mandatory budget by moving this authority to the mandatory side of the Federal ledger.

**Advance Appropriations for Tribal Programs and Services**

We are grateful that Congress enacted Advanced Appropriations for the Indian Health Service for FY2024; however, we now urge Congress to extend advanced appropriations to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). Providing appropriations one year in advance for the BIA and BIE will mitigate the adverse financial effects of Federal budgetary uncertainties and allow Tribal Nations to

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engage in more effective strategic planning, spend funds more efficiently, grow our Tribal economies and businesses and increase the quality of care and well-being of our Tribal citizens and communities.

**Encourage IHS to Open a New Round of Applications for the Joint Venture Construction Program**

The IHS Joint Venture Construction (JVC) Program represents a collaborative approach to healthcare infrastructure development. Tribal governments alleviate the upfront burden on IHS by taking on construction, expansion, or renovation costs, and IHS provides staffing funds for the facility over a 20-year span. The program has proven successful. Among other benefits, the JVC program leads to the development of modern healthcare facilities closer to Tribal communities—reducing travel time and improving access to essential medical services. In addition, the JVC program stimulates Tribal economies by creating job opportunities and boosting economic activity through expanded healthcare positions and construction-related spending. Lastly, by partnering with Tribal governments in the planning and construction of healthcare facilities, the program empowers Tribal communities to take control of their healthcare infrastructure, aligning with principles of Self-Governance, sovereignty, and Tribal culture.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our recommendations with the Subcommittee.

**TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE LONNA STREET**  
**CHAIRWOMAN, SPIRIT LAKE TRIBE**  
**Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related**  
**Agencies**  
**Regarding the FY 2025 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE),**  
**Indian Health Service (IHS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA Budgets**  
**May 10, 2024**

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, pida miye (thank you) and the other distinguished Subcommittee members for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Spirit Lake Tribe. Our Tribe has members, and a acre Reservation held in trust by the United States. Federal appropriations are the primary way in which the United States fulfills its trust responsibility and honors its obligations to Tribes. Our Tribe requests an additional \$10 million in FY 2025 funding for our programs as described in more detail below.

**Fully Fund and Expand the Tiwahe Initiative.** The Tiwahe Initiative was established in 2015 to improve the health and wellbeing of families in Tribal communities by reducing poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and associated outcomes, such as youth suicide. Tiwahe includes two components: (1) a recurring funding increase for all tribes that operate Social Services and ICWA programs, and (2) additional funding for a demonstration program at six Tribal locations (representing 61 Tribes and Alaska Native villages). Tiwahe includes the BIA programs of Social Services, ICWA, Courts, Housing (HIP), Job Placement & Training, and Public Safety RRI.

At our Tribe, Spirit Lake, we have assumed control of our child protection services (2018). The Spirit Lake Tribe began our Tiwahe work by focusing on child protection services and social services; as additional funding was provided, we added housing and employment and job training to broaden the areas of well-being supported by Tiwahe. The Spirit Lake Tribe worked through department leaders as well as the National Tiwahe Coordinator to assess our needs, define our goals and create our initial Tiwahe Plan. Like all the Pilot Communities, the Spirit Lake Tribe Plan was built on the twin goals of supporting families through coordinated service delivery and integrating culture into our services.

We appreciate your ongoing funding of the original six Tiwahe sites, and we request the same support in FY 2025. And we much appreciate your providing new funding in 2022 and 2023 to add a total of four new demonstration sites (now 10 sites representing 65 tribes). In addition, BIA provided \$200,000 in one time funding this year to each of 12 additional Tiwahe Incubator tribes/consortia, to assist them in developing Tiwahe implementation plans, so that they will be ready to onboard as full Tiwahe demonstration sites in FY 2025 if Congress provides the additional funds requested by the Administration.

The President's FY 2025 budget requests an increase of \$28.6 million across several Tiwahe budget lines, to expand Tiwahe to benefit more tribes. This funding increase includes \$17.2 million in Tiwahe Social Services to expand Tiwahe to 13 additional Tribes or Tribal organizations, as well as approximately 15 additional Tiwahe Incubator sites. The funding also will provide for two (2)

new FTEs to support a National Tiwahe Program Office to allow for stronger coordination and reporting among the Tiwahe Tribes and BIA and one (1) FTE that will help in building Tribal capacity in managing Tiwahe ICWA programs, services, functions and activities. These FTEs are essential to build the capacity needed to support the current Tiwahe Initiative sites and continued expansion of the Tiwahe Initiative to new sites.

In addition, a \$7.5 million increase in Tiwahe ICWA funding is requested to support the four recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites, across the board increases to Tribes currently receiving Tiwahe ICWA funding, and potentially adding future sites as well.

In addition, a \$2 million increase is requested for the Tiwahe Housing program, to expand the initiative to the four recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites with the possibility to add new sites as well.

In addition, a \$1.9 million increase is requested in Tribal Justice Support (TJS) as part of a coordinated effort to expand the reach and activities of the Tiwahe Initiative. The Tiwahe Initiative budget proposal includes increased funding for Social Services, Indian Child Welfare Act, Housing Program, and TJS. With the additional funding, the TJS program will provide technical assistance and direct funding opportunities to Tribes seeking to develop and operate Healing to Wellness courts.

In addition to the President's FY 2025 requested increases discussed above, we also request an additional \$2 million in Tiwahe Job Placement/Training funds, and \$1 million in Tiwahe Courts funds, to expand the initiative to the four recently onboarded Social Services Tiwahe sites with the possibility to add new sites as well.

We also request an additional \$5 million to establish a Tribal Economic Development component within the Tiwahe Initiative to further development and deployment of multi-disciplinary socioeconomic solutions. Funding will support Tribes in developing and operating comprehensive, integrated economic and community development programs.

In early 2021, the Tiwahe tribes submitted to Congress a comprehensive series of Tiwahe reports, including an independent evaluation by FHI 360, and BIA soon after submitted its Final Tiwahe Report to Congress. These reports provided compelling evidence that Tiwahe is a success and should be expanded to more tribes. Congress has acknowledged this and said: the reports document significant achievements, including a reduction in attempted and completed suicides, recidivism, and removal of children from the community. At the same time, the reports note earlier parent/child reunifications, language revitalization, and improvements to housing and homelessness among other improvements. For fiscal year 2023, Congress provides additional funds to expand Tiwahe to other sites across various programs. Unfortunately, Congress was unable to provide funds in FY 2024 to further expand Tiwahe. It is critical that in FY 2025, the additional funding requested by the Administration is provided to bring funding parity to the four new Tiwahe sites, and to provide funding for the 12 new Tiwahe Incubator sites to be onboarded as full Tiwahe sites in FY 2025. We would be happy to meet with the Subcommittee, along with Indian Affairs staff, to further explain these critical and timely needs.



## Squaxin Island Tribe

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**Testimony of Kristopher K. Peters, Chairman  
Squaxin Island Tribe  
Submitted to the House Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Subcommittee  
On the Fiscal Year FY 2025 Budgets for the  
Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Service, Environmental Protection Agency and U.S.  
Fish and Wildlife  
May 10, 2024**

On behalf of the Squaxin Island Tribal Leadership and citizens, it is an honor to provide our priority funding requests and recommendations for the FY 2025 Budgets for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Indian Health Service (IHS) and Environmental Protection Agency. We applaud the Committees' work to include advance appropriations for the IHS in the FY 2023 omnibus spending package and we will work with Congress to also include the BIA and BIE. We will also continue to advocate and urge Congress to shift funding for all Tribal programs to mandatory direct appropriations. Overall, we urge Congress to exempt Tribal program funding from sequestrations, rescissions, and disproportionate cuts.

**SQUAXIN ISLAND TRIBE Specific Requests:**

1. **+\$3.7 Million Retention Ponds Upgrade - EPA**
2. **+\$20 Million Deschutes Estuary Restoration – Phase I**
3. **+\$1.8 Million - Northwest Indian Treatment Center (NWITC) Residential Program in IHS**
  - A. **+\$1.5 million – Medicine Building**
  - B. **+\$300,000 – Sustain Operations**
4. **+\$900,000 Shellfish Management Program – BIA**

*SUPPORT NATIONAL and REGIONAL FY 2025 BUDGET Requests and Recommendations by the National Congress of American Indians, National Indian Health Board, National Indian Education Association, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission*

**Squaxin Island Tribe Background**

We are native people of South Puget Sound and descendants of the maritime people who lived and prospered along these shores for untold centuries. We are known as the *People of the Water* because of our strong cultural connection to the natural beauty and bounty of Puget Sound going back hundreds of years. The Squaxin Island Indian Reservation is in southeastern Mason County, Washington and the Tribe is a signatory to the 1854 Medicine Creek Treaty. Our treaty-designated reservation is approximately 2.2 square miles of uninhabited forested land, surrounded by the bays and inlets of southern Puget Sound. The Tribe has a current enrollment of 1,123 and an on-reservation population of 426 living in 141 homes. Squaxin has an estimated

service area population of 2,747; a growth rate of about 10%, and an unemployment rate of about 30%.

**Squaxin Island Tribe Specific Requests/Justifications:**

**1. +\$3.7 Million – Squaxin Island Retention Ponds Upgrade (EPA STAG - Congressional Direct Spending Request)**

Our water conservation plan includes the use of retention ponds to store reclaimed water from our Membrane Bioreactor for irrigation. The purpose of the retention ponds is to control the outflow of reclaimed water for infiltration into the earth, improve water quality and support a healthy ecosystem. The use of reclaimed water conserves cold clean water for human consumption as well as salmon habitat and can satisfy most water demands, because it is highly treated to ensure water quality appropriate for most uses except for drinking. The current retention pond storage capacity is twenty-three million gallons. An additional twenty-three million gallons of reclaimed water storage is needed to limit winter infiltration needs and to have enough summer irrigation water. Efforts to build the additional storage were delayed by the COVID outbreak, but the urgency and need for these upgrades have escalated.

Reclaimed water retention ponds are man-made, sloped ponds that collect reclaimed water and some stormwater. The water undergoes additional treatment in the retention pond in the form of filtering and settling of sediments and released very slowly in the winter season, and rapidly in the summer season. The soil and rock matrix of the earth serves as a natural filter and treatment medium for the reclaimed water. Without the retention ponds, release of reclaimed water could not be controlled, and it would result in some discharge to local streams.

The Salish Cliffs Golf Course serves an important purpose of receiving, filtering, and infiltrating the Tribe's reclaimed wastewater into the earth. Without the golf course, the Tribe would have to discharge to Skookum Creek or Little Skookum Inlet. Discharging surface water would affect aquatic life and limit the opportunities of Tribal members and the public to recreate and to consume shellfish from Skookum Inlet. Two components of the reclaimed water disposal system need upgrades:

- A. Replace liner of current reclaimed water retention pond. The liner is reaching the end of its useful life.
- B. Build additional reclaimed water storage in the form of a second retention pond. The need for a second retention pond comes from the fact that the golf course cannot store enough reclaimed water in the winter to hold for summer irrigation. Golf course operators still must apply reclaimed water to the golf course during the rainy season because they cannot store enough. In the dry season, they use up all of the stored reclaimed water.

**2. +\$20 Million Deschutes Estuary Restoration Project – Design & Permitting Phase I (EPA and USFWS)**

The Restoration Project will improve ecological conditions, achieve state water quality standards, improve climate resilience, and restore recreational boating and fishing in the waterbody. In addition to the removal of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Dam, an approximate 500-foot-wide opening will be created to reintroduce tidal flows to the project area and restore 260 acres of estuarine conditions and salt marsh habitat at the mouth of the Deschutes River.

Capitol Lake was part of the Deschutes Estuary, where freshwater from the Deschutes River would mix with saltwater over expansive tide flats. The Deschutes Estuary has long-standing cultural and spiritual significance to local Tribes, particularly the Squaxin Island Tribe. An estimated 35,000 cubic yards of sediment is transported by the Deschutes River (and Percival Creek) into the Capitol Lake Basin each year, shallowing the Lake and resulting in conditions that are visibly altered. Following construction of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Dam, construction sediment accumulation reached up to thirteen feet thick in some areas. Water quality monitoring began in the 1970s in response to excessive growth of aquatic plants, dense algal mats, and reduced water clarity, which are caused by high nutrient levels.

In the late 1980s, management strategies were implemented to address aquatic invasive species which currently consists of more than a dozen different plant and animal species in Capitol Lake. In 2009, the presence of the invasive New Zealand mudsnail resulted in official closure of the waterbody to all public uses. This includes restricted access by the Squaxin Island Tribe to their usual and accustomed fishing grounds and stations.

In October 2022, a final Environmental Impact Statement was issued, and the Estuary Alternative was identified as preferred for long-term management of Capitol Lake because it will achieve project goals and has the greatest ability for long-term support. Some benefits of the project will include:

- Provide productive habitat for shellfish, salmon, and other anadromous species, including aquatic species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act;
- Serve as a key step in restoring productive migratory fisheries in south Puget Sound and advancing Orca recovery;
- Address chronic water quality violations by improving dissolved oxygen conditions in Budd Inlet;
- Increase climate resiliency across downtown Olympia by reducing maximum flood elevations by one foot compared to conditions with the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Dam in place;
- Produce habitat that will better sequester carbon than existing conditions; and,
- Celebrate the Pacific Northwest through native plantings, interpretive signs, and tribal art installations.

**3. + \$1.8 Million Increase for Northwest Indian Treatment Center (NWITC) Residential Program - "D3WXbi Palil" meaning "Returning from the Dark, Deep Waters to the Light" (IHS)**

The Squaxin Island Tribe's Northwest Indian Treatment Center, D3f bi Pa lil, is a residential treatment facility that serves Native Americans with chronic substance abuse patterns related to unresolved grief and complex trauma, including generational trauma. NWITC is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF International) and is a recognized national model of treatment for trauma in the presence of addiction, uniquely integrating the best practice of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) with Plant Medicines. This culturally infused best practice, based on the NWITC program, has been adapted in many Tribal communities since its development. DBT is a model of treatment with good research results for the treatment of substance abuse and mental health conditions. NWITC has these urgent needs:

- A. **Medicine Building – this project is shovel ready with cost estimated at +\$1.5 million** - This building will support and expand the reach of the activities of the DBT/Plant Medicine program. It will be a place of medicine making, but also have video capacity linking this program to other Tribal medicine programs and creating a library available to Tribal behavioral health programs and NWITC alumni. The result will be better support for alumni, but also will help build capacity virtually in Tribal communities in the Northwest.
- B. **NWITC Recovery Support Team and Outreach - +\$300,000** - The pandemic attributed to a high relapse rate in Tribal communities served by NWITC. Even though the NWITC has a Recovery Support Team who actively supports alumni for one-year post treatment, in the current environment this is insufficient. NWITC requires a staff position to provide the DBT/Plant Medicine training/coaching in the Tribal communities in which alumni live. Costs include an FTE position, accommodation expenses for alumni to participate. In past events, NWITC has verified this as the most successful approach for teaching/coaching alumni.

**4. +\$900,000 – Shellfish Management (BIA – Fish Hatchery Maintenance Program)**

The Squaxin Island Tribe faces an ongoing budget deficit to maintain and operate the shellfish program at its current level of operation—a level that leaves 20% of treaty-designated state lands and 80-90% of private tidelands unharvested due to the lack of funding. To address this shortfall and enable effective growth and development of the program, an annual minimum increase of \$900,000 is requested. Shellfish have been a mainstay for the Squaxin Island people for thousands of years - for subsistence, economically and for ceremonial purposes. The Tribe's right to harvest shellfish is guaranteed by the 1854 Medicine Creek Treaty. Today, we are unable to fully exercise our treaty rights due to the lack of Federal support for our shellfish management program.

Thank you for considering these FY 2025 funding priorities and requests for the Squaxin Island Tribe.



**Testimony of Chairman Julius T. Murray, III  
Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation**

**U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations**

**May 7, 2024**

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Appropriations. Our testimony focuses on funding needed for energy development, law enforcement, infrastructure, and access to broadband. The United States, including Congress, must fulfill its trust and treaty obligations to Indian tribes and address chronic underfunding of federal programs supporting tribes.

The Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation is in northeastern Utah and is the second largest in the United States covering roughly 4.5 million acres. The Tribe has approximately 2,700 members and over half of our members live on the Reservation.

**INVESTMENT IN INDIAN ENERGY**

Energy mineral development on our Uintah and Ouray Reservation and the Uintah Basin as a whole has been truncated by severe deficiencies in federal investment in this mineral rich region. Our testimony does not just touch on issues important to our Tribe. Rather, these are issues that impact the nation as a whole. Continued neglect and misguided vilification of oil and gas development in the Uintah Basin presents an existential threat to the sustainability of the nationwide energy economy that supports countless jobs for American families. We are calling on Congress to invest in energy development in the Uintah Basin for the economic and environmental betterment of the nation.

Our Tribe relies heavily on revenue from oil and gas development on its Reservation. In fact, more than 91 percent of our Tribal government revenues come from energy development. We use these revenues to fund our government and provide essential services to our members through 60 Tribal departments and more than 450 Tribal employees. Energy development on our lands supports thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in economic development. Despite having developed strong and longstanding partnerships with our industry partners, the Tribe cannot tap into the full potential of its vast mineral estate due to limited access to refineries capable of processing black wax and yellow wax crude. The relative remoteness of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, combined with limited means of transportation, have forced the Tribe to rely on refineries in Salt Lake City with limited capacity to process crude oil.

This is not a new issue. In 2013, a consortium of counties and agencies in Utah commissioned the Uintah Basin Energy and Transportation Study. The Final Report for this study forecasted up to \$29 billion in lost production revenue over the course of 30 years (beginning in

2012), directly attributable to transportation constraints in the Uintah Basin. This lost production value is not just lost profits for oil producers; it includes substantial opportunity costs encompassing lost tax revenues, private rents, royalties and jobs. This report was published over a decade ago, yet no meaningful transportation improvements have been implemented.

The proposed Uintah Basin Railway Project would have significantly expanded access to proven refineries in the Gulf Coast by connecting the Uintah Basin to the National Rail Network. Our Tribe was unwavering in its support for this project from its inception. However, rather than side with our Tribe, the original occupants of the State of Colorado, Colorado Senator Michael Bennet and Representative Joe Neguse sided with environmental advocacy groups who opposed the project for no other reason than to indiscriminately vilify oil and gas production in all its forms. This has unfortunately shown to be a death knell for this important project. Worse yet, the Biden Administration has done next to nothing to advocate for this project, standing idly by while members of Congress reinforce uninformed stances about the purported environmental harms that the rail project will inflict.

It is, to say the least, ironic that environmental advocacy groups and their supporters in Congress have entirely ignored the environmental benefits that this type of infrastructure could bring. Not only would access to rail decrease the trucks on the nation's highways, it would also grow the nationwide market for a waxy crude, a low-sulfur, solid substance that presents far fewer environmental hazards than other more prevalent forms of crude oil being produced and refined throughout the United States. By deferring to uninformed environmental advocacy groups, the Biden Administration and its supporters in Congress are undermining the Administration's own environmental policies.

The Biden Administration is more concerned with creating blanket penalties on all oil and gas production than promoting the expansion of the market for environmentally favorable waxy crude. This is aptly illustrated through the proposed Waste Emissions Charge for Petroleum and Natural Gas Systems. The Environmental Protection Agency states in the Proposed Rule that the rule "will neither impose substantial direct compliance costs on federally recognized tribal governments, nor preempt tribal law," yet has failed to reconcile this statement with the significant negative impact on royalties payable to the Tribe through the production and sale of Tribal oil and natural gas. As currently proposed, this Proposed Rule will drive up costs of production through the imposition of a regulatory fee on emissions in excess of 25,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent, per year, pursuant to the requirements applicable to each category of emissions sources. This Proposed Rule should be seen for what it is: an attempt to penalize all oil and gas production regardless of its compliance with existing environmental regulations.

Energy development in Indian Country also continues to be hampered by staffing shortages at the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In the past decade, there have been two telling Government Accountability Office (GAO) Reports on the resource and capacity issues at the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) hindering energy development in Indian Country. GAO Report 15-502 discussed, among other issues adversely impacting energy development, how some BIA offices lack the skills or adequate staff resources to effectively review energy-related documents. GAO Report 17-43 reemphasized this staffing issue, stating that "[w]ithout current workforce information on key

skills needed for energy development, tribal goals and priorities, and potential workforce resource gaps, BIA may not have the right people with the right skills doing the right jobs in the right place at the right time and cannot provide decision makers with information on its staffing needs going forward.”

Even though BIA resources and staffing issues relating to energy development in Indian Country have been repeatedly flagged by GAO, these issues remain on a severe downward trend. Since the latter of the aforementioned GAO reports was published, for example, over half of the contractor workforce at the Division of Energy Mineral Development has been laid off as a result of severe diminishment in the Division’s passback budget. Exacerbating this issue are the increasingly onerous procedures and requirements for hiring new staff, which renders it impossible to fill essential positions with qualified staff in a timely manner.

#### **FUNDING FOR BIA LAW ENFORCEMENT AND DETENTION STAFF**

The BIA and its Office of Justice Services (OJS) lack the funding to fulfill the United States’ treaty and trust responsibilities to maintain safety in our tribal communities. The Uintah and Ouray Reservation is the second largest Indian reservation in the United States, comprised of 4.5 million acres. On average, we have a total of three officers per shift to patrol this entire area. This is not sufficient to patrol and respond to calls for help on a Reservation larger than the State of Connecticut.

Providing law enforcement to our Reservation is a federal responsibility. Due to the lack of funding for BIA Law Enforcement, the Tribe has provided funding for additional Tribal officers to supplement the availability of the BIA. Currently, there are 15 law enforcement officers available to patrol the entire reservation and the Tribe is required to fund half of those officers to ensure public safety given BIA shortfalls. The Tribe also provides over 50% of on-reservation law enforcement services, including radios, patrol vehicles, and other necessary equipment.

Funding for detention services is also inadequate. Congress stopped the appropriations to the BIA and the Department of Justice for law enforcement, detention, and tribal court construction when the Ute Tribe was near the top of the construction priority list. Consequently, after the BIA Detention center was condemned and forced to close in 2006 due to unsafe conditions the Tribe was forced to expend \$36 million of its own Tribal funds to build a new Tribal Justice Center on our Reservation. The Tribe contributed another \$1 million of our own funds to cover the costs of start-up costs including necessary equipment and supplies.

The Tribal Justice Center was completed in 2016 using BIA Division of Facilities Management approved plans, which complied with all applicable federal size and use specifications. The Tribe entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the BIA to authorize federal occupancy of the building and detention areas of the building in exchange for a federal contribution to the operation and maintenance of those spaces. Even though the Tribal Justice Center holds a federal certificate of completion, federal certificate of occupancy, and a federal health and safety compliance certificate, it remains mostly empty due to the lack of funds to provide sufficient BIA Detention Officers to staff the building.

The Tribal Justice Center is a 100 bed facility, to which the BIA has been granted oversight through the MOA. The BIA has implemented four phases with the goal of ultimately reaching full capacity. The facility remains at the first phase of implementation permitting the detainment of only 10 inmates at a time and BIA does not even have the funding to operate at this phase. Phase one requires a staff of 13 Correction Officers, however the BIA is only able to employ a total of four Correction Officers due to a lack of funding.

Our Tribal members, instead of being housed in a detention facility on their reservation, are shipped off the reservation to county jails which the BIA pays to rent bed space. The BIA pays county detention facilities every two weeks to send 30 or more adults and 10 youth to county detention facilities when our Tribal Justice Center has the capacity to hold these individuals. Scarce funding that is needed to staff the Tribal Justice Center is being diverted to off reservation facilities. These Tribal members are detained outside of our jurisdiction, without access to Tribal services, and far away from their families and the Tribal Court. Additionally, prisoners are often released from jail or not picked up on warrants due to the lack of space and additional costs of housing them off our Reservation. This creates a public safety issue for our Tribe.

An additional challenge to the recruitment of Correction staff and Law Enforcement Officers is the lack of housing. BIA employees have to rely on government housing which is generally maintained by the BIA. However, the Consumer Pricing Index regulates the amount a tenant is charged by considering the surrounding areas average rent prices off the Reservation and applying that rate to the Reservation. Due to recent oil and gas production, the application of the Consumer Price Index results in extremely high rental rates compared to what is common in most rural areas. The cost of rent is too expensive. In 2020, the Tribe built four homes for BIA law enforcement officers in Myton, Randlett, Fort Duchesne, and White Rocks, but these homes have never been occupied due to the high rent that is required and the lack of funding.

Congress chronically underfunds BIA law enforcement and detention services. The base funding must be increased by three to five times the current levels to meet the Tribe's needs. We respectfully request that this Subcommittee honor its treaty, trust, and law enforcement obligations to the Ute Indian Tribe and provide additional funding for the BIA that is needed to provide law enforcement officers and fully staff the Tribal Justice Center at the needed capacity.

#### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

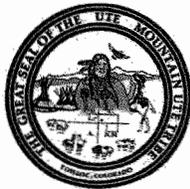
The Uintah Indian Irrigation Project (UIIP) requires critical federal funding for repair and rehabilitation due to decades of deferred maintenance, disrepair, and deterioration. Recently, the D.C. Circuit Court has confirmed that the United States has a trust obligation to the Tribe in the management and administration of the UIIP. It is of paramount importance that Congress allocates the necessary federal funding to ensure that its solemn trust obligation to the Tribe is met.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Congress must uphold its trust and treaty responsibilities to the Ute Indian Tribe and other tribes. Chronic underfunding of programs supporting Indian tribes continues to plague our ability to develop our resources, promote our economies, and provide safe communities.

*UTE MOUNTAIN UTE TRIBE*

P.O. Box 248  
Towaoc, Colorado 81334-0248  
(970) 565-3751



**TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE MANUEL HEART  
CHAIRMAN, UTE MOUNTAIN UTE TRIBE**

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

**Regarding the FY 2025 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE),  
Indian Health Service (IHS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Budgets**

**May 7, 2024**

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, mique (thank you) and the other distinguished Subcommittee members for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe (Ute Mountain). Ute Mountain has a little over 2,100 members, and a 600,000 acre Reservation held in trust by the United States, these lands are located in Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico. Federal appropriations are the primary way in which the United States fulfills its trust responsibility and honors its obligations to Tribes. Our Tribe requests an additional 53.5 million in FY 2025 funding for our programs as described in more detail below.

**Fully Fund and Expand the Tiwahe Initiative.** The Tiwahe Initiative was established in 2015 to improve the health and wellbeing of families in Tribal communities by reducing poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and associated outcomes, such as youth suicide. Tiwahe includes two components: (1) a recurring funding increase for all tribes that operate Social Services and ICWA programs, and (2) additional funding for a demonstration program at six Tribal locations (representing 61 Tribes and Alaska Native villages). Tiwahe includes the BIA programs of Social Services, ICWA, Courts, Housing (HIP), Job Placement & Training, and Public Safety RRI.

At Ute Mountain, we have had shortfalls with funding which impact services we could provide for our families' needs. Ute Mountain has not had a home improvement program (HIP) for years

with a stock of around 700 homes in both locations, our homes are dilapidated, overcrowded and in need of renovation. With the Tiwahe funds, we have been able to start addressing the homes, looking at health and safety. Upgrading the electrical, plumbing and adding ADA for the handicap and elders. With that amount of homes needing attention, we still need more funding to continue that work until all our homes are up to par. As our community is growing, we are in need of more homes. We are applying for funding to build more homes as well.

We have been successful with our language preservation work and created an online dictionary as well as an online learning platform, working with our elders and Ute speakers to increase the usage of the language among all ages. We are also working with the local college, Fort Lewis College, to teach our members how to teach and write the Ute language. Collaboration with our departments to streamline services to the community members.

We appreciate your ongoing funding of the original six Tiwahe sites, and we request the same support in FY 2025. And we much appreciate your providing new funding in 2022 and 2023 to add a total of four new demonstration sites (now 10 sites representing 65 tribes). In addition, BIA provided \$200,000 in one time funding this year to each of 12 additional Tiwahe Incubator tribes/consortia, to assist them in developing Tiwahe implementation plans, so that they will be ready to onboard as full Tiwahe demonstration sites in FY 2025 if Congress provides the additional funds requested by the Administration.

The President's FY 2025 budget requests an increase of \$28.6 million across several Tiwahe budget lines, to expand Tiwahe to benefit more tribes. This funding increase includes \$17.2 million in Tiwahe Social Services to expand Tiwahe to 13 additional Tribes or Tribal organizations, as well as approximately 15 additional Tiwahe Incubator sites. The funding also will provide for two (2) new FTEs to support a National Tiwahe Program Office to allow for stronger coordination and reporting among the Tiwahe Tribes and BIA and one (1) FTE that will help in building Tribal capacity in managing Tiwahe ICWA programs, services, functions and activities. These FTEs are essential to build the capacity needed to support the current Tiwahe Initiative sites and continued expansion of the Tiwahe Initiative to new sites.

In addition, a \$7.5 million increase in Tiwahe ICWA funding is requested to support the four recently on boarded Social Services Tiwahe sites, across the board increases to Tribes currently receiving Tiwahe ICWA funding, and potentially adding future sites as well.

In addition, a \$2 million increase is requested for the Tiwahe Housing program, to expand the initiative to the four recently on boarded Social Services Tiwahe sites with the possibility to add new sites as well.

In addition, a \$1.9 million increase is requested in Tribal Justice Support (TJS) as part of a coordinated effort to expand the reach and activities of the Tiwahe Initiative. The Tiwahe Initiative budget proposal includes increased funding for Social Services, Indian Child Welfare Act, Housing Program, and TJS. With the additional funding, the TJS program will provide technical assistance and direct funding opportunities to Tribes seeking to develop and operate Healing to Wellness courts.

In addition to the President's FY 2025 requested increases discussed above, we also request an additional \$2 million in Tiwahe Job Placement/Training funds, and \$1 million in Tiwahe Courts funds, to expand the initiative to the four recently on boarded Social Services Tiwahe sites with the possibility to add new sites as well.

We also request an additional \$5 million to establish a Tribal Economic Development component within the Tiwahe Initiative to further development and deployment of multi-disciplinary socioeconomic solutions. Funding will support Tribes in developing and operating comprehensive, integrated economic and community development programs.

In early 2021, the Tiwahe tribes submitted to Congress a comprehensive series of Tiwahe reports, including an independent evaluation by FHI 360, and BIA soon after submitted its Final Tiwahe Report to Congress. These reports provided compelling evidence that Tiwahe is a success and should be expanded to more tribes. Congress has acknowledged this and said: the reports document significant achievements, including a reduction in attempted and completed suicides, recidivism, and removal of children from the community. At the same time, the reports note earlier parent/child reunifications, language revitalization, and improvements to housing and homelessness among other improvements. For fiscal year 2023, Congress provides additional funds to expand Tiwahe to other sites across various programs. Unfortunately, Congress was unable to provide funds in FY 2024 to further expand Tiwahe. It is critical that in FY 2025, the additional funding requested by the Administration is provided to bring funding parity to the four new Tiwahe sites, and to provide funding for the 12 new Tiwahe Incubator sites to be on boarded as full Tiwahe sites in FY 2025. We would be happy to meet with the Subcommittee, along with Indian Affairs staff, to further explain these critical and timely needs.



Mr. Manuel Heart, Tribal Chairman  
Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

**TESTIMONY OF SERRELL SMOKEY  
CHAIRMAN, WASHOE TRIBE OF NEVADA AND CALIFORNIA  
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES  
MAY 10, 2024**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the House Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding issues of importance to our Tribe. My name is Serrell Smokey, and I am the Chairman of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, a federally recognized Indian tribe located in the Lake Tahoe Basin of Nevada and California.

**Background**

The Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California is organized under the provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act of June 18, 1934 (48 Stat. 984), as amended, and its Constitution and Bylaws of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, adopted on June 23, 1990, and approved by the Secretary of the Interior on July 20, 1990. The Washoe Tribe consists of four communities: three are in Nevada and one is in California. Our Tribe also exercises jurisdiction over the Pine Nut Allotments. In total, the Tribe is responsible for approximately 5,400 square miles of territories spread throughout three counties in Nevada and California. The locations of our communities present unique challenges and the chronic underfunding of Indian Country programs has a significant impact on our Tribe and citizens. Today, our Tribe faces a dire public safety and law enforcement crises due to capacity issues; our water treatment system is antiquated and in need of a substantial upgrade; and health care for our citizens continues to be below an acceptable standard. While our Tribe has made significant progress in recent years, our pursuit of excellence for our citizens has not waned.

**Public Safety Crisis**

Our Tribe currently faces a public safety crisis due to capacity issues in our law enforcement department. Due to lack of appropriate funding, our law enforcement department cannot compete with state retirement programs. Our tribal colonies are geographically separated by several miles and there is a significant need to fill these positions. Also, overdoses, deaths and other drug related crimes continue to be on the rise in Washoe Country. We respectfully request this Subcommittee to reset our base funding for law enforcement and fully fund our law enforcement so that we may have the tools necessary to provide safe and secure tribal lands for our citizens. We respectfully request funding in the amount of \$1M to begin to address this crisis.

**Water Treatment Needs**

Water is the foundation of life. Our Tribe needs funding to upgrade our six water systems. We respectfully ask the Subcommittee to provide \$1M in funding to address our aging and inadequate water treatment systems. New federal regulations for testing our water is expensive and requires certifications our water employees do not currently have.

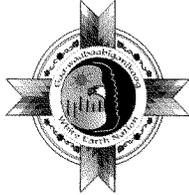
**Provide Direct Funding to our Tribe**

We respectfully request this Subcommittee to provide direct funding to our Tribe across all accounts under its jurisdiction. Funding that passes through State and Federal entities is

reduced due to each agency taking a cut. Carve-outs like these result in less resources and fewer opportunities for our citizens. Tribes are often left with the scraps and forced to cut other meaningful programs to make up these deficits. Providing funds directly to us is a more efficient use of federal dollars and promotes the advancement of tribal sovereignty.

**Authorize Tribes to 638 Contract Tribal TANF under ISDEAA**

There is no better tool than the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (“ISDEAA”) for supporting the successful transfer of governance from the federal government to tribal nations. 638 Compacts give tribes autonomy and flexibility to operate their programs as they see fit. Our Tribe operates the only TANF program in the State of Nevada and also provides services in the California Bay Area. Tribal TANF should operate like other federal programs pursuant to 638 compacts and contracts under ISDEAA.



## WHITE EARTH RESERVATION

CHAIRMAN Michael Fairbanks SECRETARY-TREASURER Michael LaRoque  
 DISTRICT I Henry Fox DISTRICT II Eugene Sommers DISTRICT III Cheryl "Annie" Jackson

WRITTEN TESTIMONY  
 SUBMITTED TO THE  
 HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED  
 AGENCIES

HENRY FOX, VICE-CHAIRMAN, RESERVATION BUSINESS COUNCIL  
 WHITE EARTH NATION

On behalf of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe (the "Band"), as the Vice-Chairman of the Reservation Business Council, I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee today. My name is Henry Fox and my testimony will address fiscal priorities and needs of the White Earth Nation and Indian Country. I respectfully submit the following written testimony for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies for your consideration.

Established by the Treaty of 1867, the White Earth Reservation is a 36 mile by 36 mile square in northwestern Minnesota. Our homelands are very important to us but lagging investment in infrastructure over the last several decades has created serious need within our communities. This testimony will focus on roads, Tribal Management/Acquisition of the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge and I.H.S. Funding

### ROADS

First, I will address the reservation roads program by highlighting funding levels as well as BIA policies. Despite having a very large, rural land base with many reservation roads and isolated communities, the White Earth Nation does not receive anywhere near the necessary funding to build or maintain roads for their citizens, thus jeopardizing public health and safety. We understand that federal funding is limited, but we believe that BIA policies on distributing existing monies also play a key role in these budget shortfalls.

Under the operation and maintenance of BIA roads, transportation facilities located on Indian Reservations and within tribal communities are maintained largely by the tribe. Roads maintenance program funds are administered at the BIA Region offices for the maintenance of roads identified as part of the BIA roads system. The BIA road system is part of the National Tribal Transportation Facility Inventory (NTTFI). As public roads, BIA roads and bridges are often major corridors that provide critical access for tribal communities through which medical, educational, commercial, and recreational services and opportunities are delivered or made available to tribal members and the general public.

The White Earth Reservation has a large land base, and the Band finds it increasingly difficult to maintain the current roads/bridges in the inventory to acceptable standards. While the Band once received about \$5 million (plus) dollars in annual allocation, the amount the Band now receives has decreased to approximately \$1.5 million. This is a 70% reduction in funding yet there is no reduction in the Band's responsibility or cost. Desperate for adequate funding, the Band often must position the Tribal Road Department to make difficult decisions to choose which projects to fund over others. Typically, the Band must seriously consider whether to convert or revert the Band's roads back to aggregate with a failing surface type or a failing road bed condition. Either decision has unavoidable risks associated with it.

With the recent increase of construction costs and equipment repair, the needs of the Band have become progressively difficult. The maintenance formula is only pennies to a dollar compared with our local counterparts for cost per mile to maintain. We simply cannot continue to upgrade and maintain our roads under the current system. The allocation system must be fair to all.

Based on the Band's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) to meet future residential expansion and economic growth, we require a total of thirty million dollars (\$30,000,000.00) for road repairs and upgrades. These repairs and upgrades will not only assist the Band in meeting our goals within our LRTP but provide safer transportation within the Reservation boundaries. Many roads Band members use to travel to their homes and between communities are gravel or dirt roads and this investment will help make our roads safer and more well suited to our northern climate.

Despite having a very large, rural land base with many reservation roads and isolated communities, the White Earth Nation does not receive anywhere near the necessary funding to build or maintain roads for their citizens, thus jeopardizing public health and safety. We understand that federal funding is limited, but we believe that BIA policies on distributing existing monies also play a key role in these budget shortfalls.

#### **TRIBAL MANAGEMENT/ACQUISITION OF THE TAMARAC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

My second topic is the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge. The Collier agreement of 1935 was an agreement between the Biological Service (now the US Fish & Wildlife Service) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to create the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge within the White Earth Reservation. The White Earth Band of Ojibwe is now seeking to manage these lands again. The first step to this should be a co-stewardship and co-management agreement between the Band and the USFWS. On January 26, 2023, White Earth sent a letter on this topic to Secretary Deb Haaland and the congressional delegation was briefed. We believe that the White Earth Band of Ojibwe can better administer these lands, many of which contain important cultural and historical heritage areas and patrimony. We respectfully request that funding be included in FY 25 Interior Appropriations to help fund a 638 self-determination contract between the USFWS and the Band to execute an imminent co-management agreement for the Tamarac. While funding for 638 contracts is mandatory for BIA programs, 638 contracts with other agencies are discretionary and are heavily impacted by the availability (or lack thereof) of appropriated funds.

The terms of the Collier Agreement have not been fulfilled to the satisfaction of the White Earth Band. The Federal Government bears the burden of protecting the best interests of the Band and its members, however, the Federal Government has failed to meet its obligations with respect to allotments in the Refuge area. Many allotments within the Refuge area were sold by the Federal Government on behalf of the original allottee at values far below the then market rate. For instance, the allotment owner for O-1789 accepted \$280 for her entire 80-acre allotment which is a rate of \$3.50 per acre. Other parcels received a rate of \$10-\$15 per acre. This discrepancy shows that Indian beneficiaries were deprived of their land at below-market value. While White Earth members can hunt, fish, and gather within the Refuge, we believe the Band would be an ideal steward for these lands and welcome that opportunity.

#### **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

My third topic is to highlight the urgent need for increased financial support for the White Earth Tribal Police Department (WETPD) to address its acute recruiting and retention challenges. Despite its unwavering commitment to safeguarding the White Earth Reservation community, the WETPD has faced significant obstacles due to limited resources. In response, the department made the difficult decision to cut positions to

reallocate funds towards enhancing wages in a bid to compete with neighboring law enforcement agencies. However, this approach has further strained the department's ability to maintain adequate staffing levels, exacerbating recruitment and retention difficulties.

The WETPD's struggles with recruiting and retention are primarily rooted in its inability to offer competitive salaries and benefits compared to other law enforcement agencies. While the department's dedication to serving the community is unwavering, the financial constraints have hindered its ability to attract and retain qualified officers. The decision to cut positions to boost wages was a necessary step to address this issue. However, without additional financial support, the WETPD remains at a disadvantage, perpetuating staffing shortages and impeding its effectiveness in fulfilling its mission.

Moreover, the ramifications of underfunding the WETPD extend beyond staffing challenges to impact public safety and community trust. A shortage of officers compromises the department's capacity to respond effectively to emergencies, investigate crimes thoroughly, and engage in proactive community policing efforts. Furthermore, high turnover rates disrupt continuity within the department and erode trust between law enforcement and tribal members. Therefore, increased funding is urgently needed to address these critical issues and ensure that the WETPD can recruit and retain a dedicated workforce committed to protecting and serving the White Earth Reservation community.

In light of these pressing concerns, I urge the BIA to allocate additional financial resources to support the recruiting and retention efforts of the WETPD. By investing in the department's capacity to offer competitive compensation packages, we can bolster recruitment efforts, reduce turnover, and enhance public safety in tribal communities. It is imperative that we take decisive action to address these urgent challenges and uphold the safety and well-being of all tribal members on the White Earth Reservation.



## WHITE EARTH RESERVATION

CHAIRMAN Michael Fairbanks SECRETARY-TREASURER Michael LaRoque  
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WRITTEN TESTIMONY  
 SUBMITTED TO THE  
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 AGENCIES

MICHAEL LAROQUE, TRIBAL SECRETARY-TREASURER  
 WHITE EARTH NATION

On behalf of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe (the "Band"), as the duly elected Tribal Secretary-Treasurer, I am grateful for the opportunity to share with our some of our needs to ensure that our concerns and voices are heard on these issues. My name is Michael LaRoque and I am serving as the Tribal Secretary-Treasurer on the Reservation Business Council. Thank you for this opportunity to address infrastructure needs in Indian Country. I respectfully submit the following written testimony for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies for your consideration.

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My third topic is to highlight the urgent need for increased financial support for the White Earth Tribal Police Department (WETPD) to address its acute recruiting and retention challenges. Despite its unwavering commitment to safeguarding the White Earth Reservation community, the WETPD has faced significant obstacles due to limited resources. In response, the department made the difficult decision to cut positions to

reallocate funds towards enhancing wages in a bid to compete with neighboring law enforcement agencies. However, this approach has further strained the department's ability to maintain adequate staffing levels, exacerbating recruitment and retention difficulties.

The WETPD's struggles with recruiting and retention are primarily rooted in its inability to offer competitive salaries and benefits compared to other law enforcement agencies. While the department's dedication to serving the community is unwavering, the financial constraints have hindered its ability to attract and retain qualified officers. The decision to cut positions to boost wages was a necessary step to address this issue. However, without additional financial support, the WETPD remains at a disadvantage, perpetuating staffing shortages and impeding its effectiveness in fulfilling its mission.

Moreover, the ramifications of underfunding the WETPD extend beyond staffing challenges to impact public safety and community trust. A shortage of officers compromises the department's capacity to respond effectively to emergencies, investigate crimes thoroughly, and engage in proactive community policing efforts. Furthermore, high turnover rates disrupt continuity within the department and erode trust between law enforcement and tribal members. Therefore, increased funding is urgently needed to address these critical issues and ensure that the WETPD can recruit and retain a dedicated workforce committed to protecting and serving the White Earth Reservation community.

In light of these pressing concerns, I urge the BIA to allocate additional financial resources to support the recruiting and retention efforts of the WETPD. By investing in the department's capacity to offer competitive compensation packages, we can bolster recruitment efforts, reduce turnover, and enhance public safety in tribal communities. It is imperative that we take decisive action to address these urgent challenges and uphold the safety and well-being of all tribal members on the White Earth Reservation.

House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
American Indian/Alaska Native Public Witness Hearings

Request for Federal Funding for Detention Facility and Public Safety  
in Northeast Oklahoma  
Fiscal Year 2025

Written Testimony of Wyandotte Nation  
Chief Billy Friend  
May 3, 2024

**Problem.** For many years, the State of Oklahoma and the federal government treated reservations in Oklahoma as disestablished, but this wrongful assumption was recently corrected. The federal government and Tribal Nations now need significantly more resources to provide law enforcement and public safety services throughout newly-affirmed Indian Country in Oklahoma. Most pressing for us, there is not an adequate detention facility in Northeast Oklahoma in which to house offenders, and this deficiency is a major barrier to Tribal Nations' exercise of criminal jurisdiction on their lands. Additionally, there are not sufficient resources for detainees struggling with chemical dependency and mental health issues, resulting in serious recidivism challenges.

**Reservation Affirmations.** The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, 140 S. Ct. 2452 (2020), concerning the Muscogee (Creek) reservation, that reservations in Oklahoma are subject to the same exacting test for disestablishment as Tribal Nations' reservations elsewhere. Since that ruling, multiple other Tribal Nations' reservation boundaries have been affirmed, empowering Tribal Nations in Oklahoma to exercise their territorial jurisdiction. On March 7, 2024, the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals in *Oklahoma v. Fuller*, Case No. S-2023-409, affirmed what we already knew to be true: the Wyandotte Reservation—the seat of our government and the land on which our Ancestors sought refuge and created a home—continues to exist. This shifted the Wyandotte Nation's jurisdictional footprint in Oklahoma from approximately 760 acres of trust land to over 20,000 acres of reservation land. Many Tribal Nations near us have also had their reservation boundaries affirmed, including the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma, Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma, Quapaw Nation, and Cherokee Nation. We expect the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma and Seneca-Cayuga Nation to receive affirmations soon.

**No Existing Detention Facilities.** The Tribal Nations in Northeast Oklahoma have exercised jurisdiction over their trust lands even prior to the decision in *McGirt*, and therefore they have some public safety infrastructure in place. At present, some have agreements whereby they place offenders at the local county jail. However, we cannot understate the deteriorating condition of this facility and the lack of staff and services available there, in addition to its small size. Beyond the local county jail, no Tribal Nation operates a local detention facility, nor does the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs.

**Cooperation.** Many of the Tribal Nations located in Northeast Oklahoma have cooperated closely on their exercise of criminal jurisdiction post-*McGirt*, including the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma, Seneca-Cayuga Nation, Shawnee Tribe, and Wyandotte Nation. This Tribal Consortium has also worked closely with the Oklahoma Attorney General and District Attorney, Ottawa County, and City of Miami. These governmental units have a healthy working relationship and a desire to coordinate to create a safe community for all, and they all support bringing more federal public safety resources into the area.

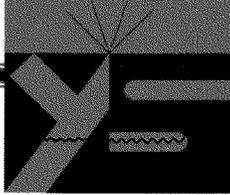
**Past Efforts to Secure Detention Facility.** Prior to many of the reservation affirmation decisions, the Tribal Consortium in 2022 submitted and was denied a Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation (CTAS) grant application to build a new detention facility. As part of the CTAS grant application process, the Tribal Nations designed a shovel-ready project that they would have operated jointly to provide detention and rehabilitative services. The Tribal Nations also made appropriations requests for this facility last year, along with other funding requests related to public safety.

#### **Requests for Fiscal Year 2025.**

- **Congressionally Directed Spending for Detention Facility.** The Department of the Interior Budget Justification for Fiscal Year 2025 recognizes the need for funding to support “the detention and corrections needs for Tribes” in the wake of *McGirt*. The Wyandotte Nation seeks a congressionally directed spending item to fund construction and operation of a detention facility in Northeast Oklahoma—either by the Tribal Nations in accordance with the plans set forth in their CTAS grant application or by the Department of the Interior to house offenders prosecuted in Tribal as well as federal courts. According to the CTAS grant application, construction costs were estimated at \$26,849,750, and annual operating costs were estimated at \$2,808,462.
- **McGirt Funding for Tribes.** In recent legislation, Congress has appropriated \$62 million to the Department of the Interior to allocate to Tribal Nations to implement public safety changes resulting from *McGirt*. This funding must be increased, and indeed the Budget Justification recognizes “other Tribes which collectively span the eastern half of the State of Oklahoma” have now had their reservations affirmed and will be sharing in this money. Additionally, the Department must allocate sufficient monies to each Tribal Nation with an affirmed reservation. Its current allocation methodology would only provide \$135,370 to the Wyandotte Nation, which is woefully insufficient. The Wyandotte Nation is seeking at least \$154 million for Public Safety and Justice monies in the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriation legislation to flow to *McGirt* Tribal Nations.
- **Funding for Office of Justice Services’ Law Enforcement in Oklahoma.** The federal government is responsible for providing law enforcement services in Indian Country, including policing and detention services. Some of the Tribal Nations in Northeast Oklahoma have contracted or compacted for portions of these services, including the Wyandotte Nation. The Wyandotte Nation is seeking increased funding for Public Safety and Justice monies in the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriation legislation to better fund the Department of the Interior’s Office of Justice Services’ law enforcement in Oklahoma.

- **Funding for Northern District of Oklahoma U.S. Attorney's Office.** The federal government is also responsible for prosecuting federal crimes in Indian Country. In the past, Congress has appropriated funding to the Department of Justice for increased workloads resulting from *McGirt*, including at the U.S. Attorney's Offices. The Wyandotte Nation is seeking increased funding for Salaries and Expenses for U.S. Attorneys within the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriation legislation to provide the Northern District of Oklahoma U.S. Attorney's Office the support it needs to prosecute crimes in Indian Country.

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U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES

CHAIRMAN ROBERT FLYING HAWK

May 10, 2024

Greetings Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Robert Flying Hawk and I am the Chairman of the Yankton Tribe Business and Claims Committee. I also serve as the Treasurer of the Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Health Board as well as the Great Plains Representative on the Centers for Disease Control Tribal Advisory Committee. The Yankton Tribe appreciates this opportunity to propose funding priorities for the Fiscal Year 2025 Federal Budget. **Our top priority is to reopen our 24-hour emergency services and hospital at our local Indian Health Service (IHS) service unit and we request your support in this initiative.**

Like many in the Great Plains, the *Ihanktonwan* or "Yankton" band of the *Oceti Sakowin* (Seven Council Fires) or "Sioux" is a resilient treaty tribe having entered into numerous treaties with the United States as well as other tribes. The first known treaty between the "Sioux Nation" and the United States was in 1805, and the Sioux Nation granted nine square miles to the United States at the mouth of the St. Croix River near St. Anthony Falls for the establishment of a military post. One of the purposes of Fort Saint Anthony, later (and currently) known as Fort Snelling, was to keep Native American lands free from white settlement. The United States affirmed its trust responsibility in 1815, when the Yankton entered into a treaty of "peace and friendship" with the United States, who was represented by William Clark, by the Tribe's acknowledgment that it would be under the protection of the United States. In 1825, Yankton and the United States again agreed by treaty that all trade and intercourse with Yankton shall be regulated by the United States. Perhaps unknown to the Tribe, the United States had declared for many years preceding these treaties that no sale or grant of Native American lands would be valid unless it was made in a public treaty that was held under the authority of the United States. Indian Nonintercourse Acts of 1790, 1793, 1796, 1799, 1802, and 1834. This review of treaties and statutes underscores the United States' choice to undertake the statutory and trust responsibility to provide health care to tribal citizens into context. Through its treaties, tribes have prepaid for health care. Treaty agreements and statutory and trust responsibilities include a duty to ensure that care is provided in accordance with minimum standards of care. Naturally, providing adequate funding for the IHS is necessary to meet these standards of care.

The IHS is the principal health care provider and health advocate for all native peoples within the country and, in that role, the IHS provides health care and related services to over 2.56 million Native Americans and Alaska Natives from 574 different federally recognized tribes in 12 regions.

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According to the IHS' own fact sheet that was issued most recently in 2020, the per capita health care expenditure for its user population is \$4,078 compared to the U.S. National Health Expenditure of \$13,493 per person. This roughly equates to \$0.30 spent on Native Americans for every \$1.00 spent on the U.S. general population. I hope these figures adequately demonstrate how inadequate and dire the funding is for the IHS.

The Tribe appreciates the Administration's requests of a 16 percent increase over FY 2023 for IHS at \$8 billion. We continue to advocate for full funding for IHS. The funding levels for health care are quite often the difference between life and death for our people. After funding specific items or projects, past budgets left little to no funding remaining for the IHS to attempt to remedy the severe shortcomings that it has been experiencing for years. These shortcomings include lack of direct services for our citizens such as a 24-hour emergency room and hospital, lack of monies for purchase referred care, lack of services for opioid and methamphetamine users, among many others. Although funding is not the key to solve all concerns at IHS, adequate funding is incredibly important to remedy current issues.

#### ***Advanced Funding for IHS***

As an initial matter, we must express our sincere appreciation that the Congress included FY 2024 advance appropriations from the Indian Health Services in its FY 2023 omnibus spending package. Prior to this change, IHS was the only federal healthcare provider without basic certainty of funding from one year to the next. However, we note that advance appropriations each year are not guaranteed and we therefore continue our advocacy and ask that you take the next step to include mandatory direct appropriations for the IHS pursuant to the United States' treaty and trust obligations.

#### ***Service Unit Inpatient and Emergency Room***

In 1992, the IHS hospital at the Wagner Service unit was closed to inpatient care, yet there was no increase in funding for contract health services ("CHS") (now known as purchase referred care). IHS removed services and provided no additional funding to purchase the services elsewhere. It was unthinkable, not only to our tribal citizens that depend on the inpatient care, but also on the Wagner Service Unit that was left to balance the books without any increase in CHS or other funding to bridge the gap. The Tribe was against this decision not only as an immediate concern but also with concern for the future viability of the Wagner Service Unit. In spite of the Tribe's objections, the IHS made the decision to stop inpatient care. Next, the IHS made the decision to close the 24-hour ER, and to open an urgent care facility in its place. The Tribe was forced to challenge the closure. While the Tribe was initially successful in its lawsuit, once the IHS met the statutory requirement that it produce a report to the Congress, it was free to close the ER.

In 2005, the IHS commissioned such a report to conduct a final evaluation of the Wagner Service Unit. "The Sharpless report recognized there would be significant hardships to tribal citizens if the emergency room were closed, but nevertheless recommended partial closure of the Wagner emergency room by replacements with an urgent care facility. The report notes that 'it could be forecasted that lives would certainly be lost' if the Wagner emergency room closed." *Yankton Sioux Tribe v. United States Dep't of Health & Human Services*, CIV 07-3096 (8th Cir. 2008). In March 2008, the IHS closed the 24-hour emergency room and compensated the Wagner Service

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Unit budget by adding \$64,000 for “Priority I” care for the remainder of the year.<sup>1</sup> There have not been additional funds awarded to the Wagner Service Unit budget since that time to compensate for the additional CHS or purchase referred care services. It then became the norm that tribal citizens would seek emergency health care at the local non-IHS community emergency room. Tribal citizens were forced to seek this care even without knowing whether the IHS had the funds available to pay for those emergency services or whether the tribal member would become personally liable for payment of those medical bills. Unfortunately, it is more frequently the latter, leading many of our tribal citizens to simply attempt to wait until the Wagner Service Unit IHS clinic opens rather than face the possibility of medical bills that could cripple their household’s finances. Similarly, if tribal citizens are in need of CHS/purchase referred care and they do not meet the “Priority I” threshold, they are forced to suffer through the pain until funding becomes available. The real-life implications are that it is common-place to meet tribal citizens that live for months at a time or permanently with broken limbs and other ailments that are not treatable at the Wagner Service Unit clinic and yet do not amount to Priority I. This state of healthcare would be unacceptable in any other context, yet it is what our tribal citizens face every day. Eventually, the prediction contained in the Sharpless report was realized when a tribal member lost his life in the parking lot while waiting for the IHS to open.

It was widely reported that funding was the reason the IHS closed the 24-hour emergency room because the facility did not meet the emergency room criteria as defined by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and therefore the facility would not receive reimbursement from Medicare and Medicaid for those patients eligible for that third-party coverage. The Wagner Service Unit has a difficult time attracting and retaining licensed medical professionals. IHS allows non-licensed medical professionals that hold degrees from medical schools outside of the U.S. to practice in IHS facilities as long as there is a licensed doctor at the facility. There have been times when we did not even have that. IHS would bridge this gap by temporarily re-assigning commission corps, but that is a temporary fix and it is costly. We need to attract permanent licensed doctors to our service unit. I would also like to point out that while funding was the reason the IHS closed the 24-hour emergency room, there are more employees at IHS now than there were when the 24-hour emergency room was open. The IHS has experienced intermittent hiring freezes which have exacerbated the situation. When any rumors of budget cuts in HHS and IHS funding circulate, we have noticed IHS essentially shuts down recruitment efforts. We already start out at a disadvantage because the salary is often below what a doctor could receive elsewhere, but coupled with the remote location and the possibility of reductions in staff, salary freezes, and limits on procurement, it becomes nearly impossible. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not inform

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<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to 42 C.F.R. 136.23(e), each Area establishes the medical priority of care when CHS/purchase referred care is insufficient (it is insufficient every year). Priority I is emergent or acutely urgent care services that IHS defines as “diagnostic or therapeutic services that are necessary to prevent the immediate death or serious impairment of the health of the individual, and which, because of the threat to the life or health of the individual necessitate the use of the most accessible health care available and capable of furnishing such services. Diagnosis and treatment of injuries or medical conditions that if left untreated, would result in uncertain but potentially grave outcomes.”  
[https://www.ihs.gov/chs/index.cfm?module=chs\\_requirements\\_priorities\\_of\\_care](https://www.ihs.gov/chs/index.cfm?module=chs_requirements_priorities_of_care)

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you that the lack of 24-hour emergency services and in-patient hospital services at our IHS service unit have been negatively affecting not only our tribal law enforcement, but also the local non-IHS hospital. These effects were predicted in the Sharpless report, yet the closures still happened. We operate our own law enforcement under an Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act Contract and the federal government operates a detention facility on our reservation. Law enforcement is required to seek medical care for certain inmates when conducting intake overnight. This is to ensure the safety of those inmates as well as to protect the liability of law enforcement and the detention facility. However, IHS refused to pay the purchase referred care costs of the medical treatment leaving law enforcement with a large bill and the local non-IHS hospital with large accounts receivables. The local non-IHS hospital is currently refusing to see our law enforcement detainees due to these funding issues. This set-up is not working for any of the interests involved.

The Tribe seeks solutions that will serve the best interest of the Tribe and its citizens. **In the context of health care, the Tribe asks for your help in reopening the 24-hour emergency care at the Wagner Service Unit as well as help in reopening the in-patient hospital services even as modestly as a few beds. It is also imperative that IHS recruit and maintain licensed medical doctors.**

#### ***Referred Care***

Because our service unit consists of a small clinic, every day our people receive “referrals” from IHS physicians to specialists, labs, and hospitals. Tribal citizens used to go to those referrals assuming that any costs incurred would be borne by the IHS. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case. At Yankton, we have an ever increasing number of tribal citizens who have received thousands of dollars in medical bills in the mail that they did not expect, and that they cannot pay. This has become so prevalent that we now have tribal citizens who are refusing to seek the referral care that is necessary to protect their health, and in some cases even their life, because they fear the possibility of being bankrupted by unpaid medical expenses. This is especially true for our veterans. In addition to fully funding purchase referred care needs, we are asking that IHS implement a policy that includes a process to notify a patient in advance when IHS is not prepared to pay for a referral care visit and related costs. The IHS needs to acknowledge that unpaid medical bills can literally bankrupt a family, and our people have a right to make an informed decision about the care that they choose to seek. It can even be as simple as indicating the amount of coverage IHS is offering on the referral form itself. That way our citizens can make informed decisions. The opening of a 24-hour emergency room and in-patient hospital would also alleviate the strain on purchase referred care monies.

#### ***Conclusion***

The Yankton Tribe is well aware of how hard this Committee fights day in and day out to preserve tribal priorities in the federal budget, including IHS Services, DOI services and programs, and more. We sincerely thank you for your time and hard work regarding these issues, and I hope the testimony I have provided you with today will stand as a stark reminder of the importance of these federal programs and services to tribal people. In many cases, it is the difference between life and death. The decisions you make that are reflected in the federal budget directly impact the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of Yankton tribal citizens. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit written testimony.

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