

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

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

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

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

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

This budget allocates important mandatory funding available through the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), including \$1.6 billion for deferred maintenance projects through the

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

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

### ***2024 Legislative Proposals***

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

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

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

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

against the cost of land and resource management services provided through the agreement. The budget also proposes appropriations language to extend current Good Neighbor Authority for BLM and USFS which expires at the end of FY 2023 by 1 year.

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

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

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

## **Strengthening Tribal Nations**

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

### ***Investing in Tribal Communities***

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

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

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

During Tribal consultations and listening sessions on Federal Subsistence Management programs, Tribal participants consistently pointed to the adverse impacts the changing climate is having on Alaska Native subsistence practices and Alaska Native communities and the need to expand Tribal co-management partnerships and incorporate indigenous knowledge into subsistence management. In response to these recommendations, the 2024 budget proposes to

transfer the functions of the Office of Subsistence Management from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the Office of the Assistant Secretary—Indian Affairs, along with an increase of \$2.5 million for the program. The budget includes additional increases in the land management bureaus—FWS, NPS, and BLM—to support resource management associated with Alaska Native subsistence.

### ***Advancing Indian Education***

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

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

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

### ***Meeting Financial Tribal Trust Responsibilities***

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

forward to working with Congress to ensure BTFA is fully recognized as a bureau to allow the organization to focus on its mission of serving Indian Country.

## **Addressing Climate Challenges and Building Resilience**

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

### ***Wildland Fire Reforms***

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

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

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

The 2024 budget also addresses challenges concerning recruiting and retaining wildland firefighters with an increase of \$10.0 million for Interior (and another \$10.0 million for the

Department of Agriculture) to establish a comprehensive joint Interior-Agriculture program to enhance firefighters' mental and physical health and well-being. The budget also includes a \$22.0 million increase to repair, renovate, and construct housing for wildland firefighting personnel, which can be inadequate or unaffordable in certain geographic locations. To further build fire program capacity, the budget increases funding for aviation contracts and uncrewed aerial systems support by \$20.0 million, program management for incident support by \$18.3 million, and increases funding for Tribal contract and administrative support and Reserved Treaty Rights Lands projects by \$9.0 million.

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

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

### ***Supporting Community Resilience***

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

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

The 2024 budget includes \$120.3 million for the USGS Groundwater and Streamflow Information Program, which maintains a nationwide network of streamflow and water level information collected from more than 31,000 sites. The information from the network is available online to help States, Tribes, natural resource managers, scientists, and emergency managers across the country with monitoring for floods and drought and with forecasting water

availability for crops and natural resource management. The USGS request also includes \$74.7 million for Water Availability and Use Science programs, which includes funding to apply fire and drought science to support natural resource management.

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

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

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

### ***Conservation and Healthy Lands***

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

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

The 2024 budget also invests in conservation programs which greatly leverage Federal efforts by engaging a wide variety of partners. The request includes \$140.3 million, an increase of \$34.2 million from 2023 enacted, for FWS partnership programs including Partners for Fish and



Wildlife, Candidate Conservation, Coastal Programs, and Migratory Bird Joint Ventures programs. These programs support voluntary conservation on public and privately-owned lands—a key focus of the America the Beautiful initiative.

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

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

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

### ***Leveraging Science***

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

The 2024 budget includes \$1.8 billion for USGS programs and operations, an increase of \$288.3 million from the 2023 enacted amount. To provide timely, relevant, and useful information about the Earth and its processes, USGS works with a variety of partners across the country to maintain

roughly 20,000 groundwater monitoring wells, more than 11,800 stream gages and 3,800 earthquake sensors, and USGS directly monitors 70 volcanoes.

The 2024 budget includes \$128.0 million for the USGS Climate Adaptation Science Centers and Land Change Science Program, which provide information, tools, and science applications to meet current and emerging challenges that threaten the sustainability of natural resources and our cities, infrastructure, and rural communities. USGS has nine Regional and one National Climate Adaptation Science Centers across the country, which are affiliated with university partners. The centers work with a wide range of resource managers and other partners to address specific climate-related challenges to natural and cultural resources.

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

## **Creating Jobs and Meeting Energy and Environmental Challenges**

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

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

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

FWS will continue to advance electronic permitting efforts in 2024, and the budget proposes to consolidate all ePermitting efforts into a single activity to better manage the program's resources and provide additional visibility to this important effort. The program helps applicants properly identify and submit complete application packages and supports more efficient and effective processing. Although FWS has achieved a secure and modern system that enables permit applicants to apply and pay processing fees for permits online, work remains to be done to build and optimize features to better achieve efficiency and streamlining.

### ***Moving Forward With Clean Energy***

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

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

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

The 2024 budget includes \$64.5 million for BOEM's Renewable Energy program, an increase of \$21.6 million above the 2023 enacted level. This request includes a \$12.0 million increase to support permitting. The budget includes \$92.8 million for BOEM's Environmental Programs, an

increase of \$10.4 million, which includes funding for environmental review associated with renewable energy projects.

The budget for the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) includes \$8.4 million to continue to support offshore Renewable Energy deployment and oversight. BSEE anticipates receiving more than 40,000 wind engineering, construction, and other technical reports for review through the end of FY 2024. BSEE is working closely with BOEM to develop the necessary framework to ensure offshore renewable energy projects are implemented safely and responsibly.

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

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

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

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

## *Conventional Energy*

The budget for BOEM provides \$72.3 million for conventional energy programs to support Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) planning, leasing, and oversight, including inventorying oil and gas reserves, overseeing ongoing activities, ensuring adequate financial assurances for decommissioning liability and risk management, developing and implementing the National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program (National Five-Year OCS Program), reviewing and administering oil and gas exploration and development plans and geological and geophysical permits, and conducting economic analyses and resource evaluation. The budget also includes \$92.8 million for Environmental Studies, supporting conventional and renewable energy activities.

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

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

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

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

develop their carbon sequestration programs to facilitate program implementation upon final rule publication.

### ***Reclamation Jobs***

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

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

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

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

Interior's Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) works with States and Tribes to regulate active coal mines to ensure mining is done in an environmentally-responsible manner occur and to remediate abandoned coal mines to address health and safety hazards. High priority abandoned mine land problems pose an immediate threat to health, safety, and the general welfare of communities and can include clogged streams/stream lands, dangerous piles or embankments, dangerous highwalls, and underground mine fires, and polluted water. OSMRE manages the State and Tribal abandoned mine reclamation grant programs

authorized by the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act and the BIL. In 2022, OSMRE invested nearly \$1 billion in coal communities, including making nearly \$725 million available to 22 States and the Navajo Nation for reclamation as part of the BIL and \$144.0 million available through the traditional, fee-funded, mandatory AML grant program.

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

## **Promoting Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion of Underserved Communities**

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

### ***Increasing Representation and Inclusion***

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

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

The budget for the FWS includes increases of \$3.5 million to advance improved co-stewardship and engagement with Tribes on Indigenous Knowledge research and conservation planning. Implicit in the Marine Mammal Protection Act is the realization that cooperative management of

subsistence harvests between FWS and Alaska Native organizations is more likely to achieve the goals of the Act than management by a Federal agency alone. The budget provides strong support to continue to build these relationships with partners such as the Eskimo Walrus Commission and Alaska Nannut Co-management Council, which is the FWS co-management partner for polar bears.

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

### ***Ongoing Commitment to Diversity and Equity***

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

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

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

- Provide resources to the Department's first-ever DEIA Council to coordinate, develop, and implement policies and initiatives promoting the integration of DEIA across the agency.
- Conduct barrier and workforce analyses and increase equal employment opportunity (EEO) and DEIA training to employees across the agency.
- Address EEO adjudication resourcing and compliance gaps identified by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission resulting from two technical assessments of DOI's EEO program.
- Improve the Department's Public Civil Rights reporting and tracking capabilities.



- Strengthen the Department’s Affirmative Employment Programs, including the development of diversity and recruitment flexibilities and assessment of hiring programs to improve recruitment results.
- Expand capacity for alternative dispute resolution and EEO complaint mediation.

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

## **Building Agency Capacity**

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

### ***Interior’s Workforce and Infrastructure***

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

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

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

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

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

In addition, the budget includes \$53.6 million across multiple bureaus to support a multi-year plan to fully transition the Department's light duty fleet acquisitions to zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs). This funding will be used to conduct fleet planning (including ZEV integration), electric vehicle supply equipment (EVSE) site evaluations, EVSE installation, and ZEV acquisition. This planning helps to ensure ZEVs are integrated into Interior fleet plans; prioritize facilities for deployment; determine infrastructure needs, such as increased electrical supply and access for EVSE; and coordinate installation to ensure Interior can maximize the use of the charging stations across the bureaus and other Federal agencies.

### ***Investing in Technology and Information Management***

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

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

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

The 2024 budget includes \$67.8 million to fund cybersecurity efforts, an increase of \$23.4 million. The budget continues to fund extremely high-priority, recurring operations and maintenance costs for incident remediation activities and provides resources to be directed against emerging threats. The request includes an increase of \$23.4 million to support a Zero Trust (ZT) architecture, which will advance Interior's adaptation of a modern security model

founded on a principle requiring all devices and users, regardless of whether they are inside or outside an organization's network, to be authenticated, authorized, and regularly validated before being granted access. Within the \$23.4 million increase is \$5.0 million for a secure access service edge (SASE) solution, which focuses on securing access points to meet the required ZT security and performance standards.

The 2024 budget proposes appropriations language to establish a nonrecurring expenses fund (NEF), which will allow the Department to transfer unobligated balances of expired discretionary funds from 2024 and subsequent years, no later than the fifth fiscal year after the last fiscal year of availability, to the NEF as no-year funds to support specific purposes. The NEF will provide funding for critical infrastructure projects that may require significant one-time investments, such as information technology modernization projects. Those requirements often do not coincide with the timing of the budget formulation process and are difficult to forecast. In many cases, those costs either cannot be accommodated within existing funds or are emergency requirements that would otherwise require the Department to reprogram existing funds from other priority projects.

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

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

## **Conclusion**

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