



COMMITTEE *on* APPROPRIATIONS

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SUMMARY

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES FISCAL YEAR 2023 APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Washington, D.C. – The fiscal year 2023 Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill provides a total discretionary funding level of \$40.45 billion, which is \$2.45 billion more than the fiscal year 2022 level. In addition, the bill provides \$2.55 billion for the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund, and, in accordance with the Great American Outdoors Act, allocates \$1.9 billion for projects within National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund and \$900 million for projects within the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Finally, in an historic first, the bill provides an advance appropriation for the Indian Health Service which totals \$5.129 billion for fiscal year 2024.

U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), Chair of the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, said:

“This bill funds programs that modernize our water systems; protect our national parks, monuments, and outdoor recreation; promote healthy forests and ecosystems; champion critical projects long-sought by communities and tribes in every corner of America; and so much more, all while creating good-paying jobs. And at a time when wildfires are an ever-growing threat to the West, including my home state of Oregon, this bill makes big investments in preventing and fighting dangerous megafires and the hazardous smoke they produce. Also, at a time when lapses of appropriations and continuing resolutions have become political tools, this bill ensures that Native Americans who receive health care services through IHS are protected from budget uncertainty by including, for the first time, an advance appropriations to IHS to ensure the continuum of health care in unpredictable budget years. I am excited to see how these investments will play a key role in strengthening America for generations to come.”

Key Points & Highlights

National Park Service: The bill provides \$3.475 billion for the National Park Service, an increase of 6.4 percent, or \$210 million, to the fiscal year 2022 level. This funding restores 500 of the 3,000 staff position losses suffered over the past decade that have limited the ability of the Service to address challenges, especially substantial increases in visitation. The bill also more

than doubles funding to address the shortage in housing available for park staff which is impacting the ability of the Service to hire. While the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) provides five years of substantial funding to address the deferred maintenance backlog of our national parks, without sufficient staff to care for and manage the parks, the overall condition of the National Park System will still continue to deteriorate. Finally, the bill provides increases to the fiscal year 2022 levels by \$4.4 million for State Historic Preservation Offices, \$7 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, \$2.5 million for Historical Revitalization grants, and \$2.25 million for Civil Rights preservation grants. Funding for National Heritage Areas is \$29.2 million and funding for Save America's Treasures grants is \$26.5 million.

Tribal Programs: The bill provides \$10.882 billion for tribal programs across the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Indian Health Service (IHS) for fiscal year 2023, an increase of 5.8 percent, or \$596 billion to the fiscal year 2022 enacted level. This includes \$6.928 billion for IHS, an increase of \$297 million to the fiscal year 2022 enacted level, to reduce wait times, build hospitals in areas that currently have insufficient access to healthcare, better equip health facilities with medical equipment such as mammography machines, and modernize health records. These new investments increase health services funding by 5.6 percent by providing \$2.5 billion for hospitals, clinics, doctors, nurses and health services; \$248 million for dental health; and \$127 million for mental health programs. This funding also increases Indian Health facilities investments by providing \$958 million for new hospital construction, new and replacement equipment, and water and solid waste infrastructure improvements for Native American communities.

In an historic first, the bill provides an advance appropriation of \$5.129 billion for fiscal year 2024 to provide budget certainty for a healthcare system that provides health services to 2.5 million individuals across Indian Country. That amount is equal to the fiscal year 2023 amount with the exception of funding provided for Electronic Health Records, Sanitation Facilities Construction, and Health Care Facilities Construction, which are provided only an annual appropriation in recognition of the project-based nature of those accounts. Overall, the vast majority of Indian Health Service funding, and all such funding supporting the provision of health services to Native Americans such as patient care and medical equipment, is provided an advance appropriation. The Committee recognizes that budget uncertainty due to temporary lapses of appropriations and continuing resolutions have an effect on the orderly operations of critical healthcare programs for Native American communities. This budgetary change will enable IHS to continue to provide health services without interruption or uncertainty, improving the quality of care and providing peace of mind for patients and medical providers.

Tribal programs provided through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) are collectively funded at \$3.842 billion, an increase of \$297 million, or 7 percent, to the fiscal year 2022 level. This funding makes investments toward supporting Tribal governments in a number of key areas such as public safety and justice programs with an increase of \$33 million, or 6 percent above the fiscal year 2022 level, to support police services, special initiatives to address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women cases, and Tribal courts. This bill also boosts the BIE by \$119 million, or 9 percent, over the fiscal year 2022 level to support a school system of 183 schools and 33 Tribal Colleges and Universities delivering educational services to nearly 57,000 students. Much of the BIE investments are in education

programs and operations with an increase of \$115.9 million or 11.4 percent over fiscal year 2022 enacted. This includes funding to support school operational requirements, staffing, operating costs, Native language programs, scholarships, and support for school connectivity and remote learning capabilities. These investments will improve educational opportunities and service delivery for Native American students.

Wildland Firefighting: The total annual funding for wildfire suppression is \$4.395 billion, of which \$1.395 billion is provided in base suppression operations, \$2.55 billion is provided in the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund, and \$450 million is provided in the disaster supplemental. This is \$550 million (14 percent) more than fiscal year 2022. Since the enactment of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 (Public Law 115-141), which authorized the Reserve Fund, the average annual cost of suppression has exceeded assumptions that informed the funding levels currently assumed in the Reserve Fund. Fiscal year 2021 was the most expensive year on record, with costs exceeding \$4 billion; fiscal year 2022 costs were over \$3.7 billion. This additional funding gives the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior an assured amount of funding to be used when major fire activity requires expenditures exceeding regular base suppression operations funding. As catastrophic fires grow in size and frequency, wildfire suppression funding must keep pace. Finally, the bill also continues the commitment to improve compensation for federal firefighters and convert seasonal positions to full-time.

Forest Service: The bill provides \$3.918 billion for the Forest Service's non-wildland fire management responsibilities, \$222 million more than fiscal year 2022. These increases are provided to radically improve forest restoration and fire risk reduction efforts and to increase year-round staffing to carry out this work. The bill increases hazardous fuels reduction projects to \$207 million to allow the Forest Service to treat more of the highest-risk acres. The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program is increased by 14 percent to \$32 million, which will fund more projects backed by diverse stakeholders to improve forest landscapes. The bill also provides \$6 million for the Legacy Roads and Trails program to prioritize fish passage improvements and repurposing unnecessary roads as trails. Additional increases are provided for grants to states for fire protection and forest stewardship, and for research on fire behavior, invasive pests, and disease.

Bureau of Land Management: The bill provides \$1.494 billion for the Bureau of Land Management, \$83 million or 5.9 percent more than fiscal year 2022. National Conservation Lands, which have been chronically underfunded, are increased to \$61.6 million for national and historic trails, recreation and management planning for new, expanded, and restored monuments, invasive species control, wildfire adaptation, and climate resiliency projects. The wild horse and burro program is provided \$148 million to accelerate removals from degraded and drought-plagued areas, to house horses off-range, and to jumpstart a fertility control program to reduce the future horse population. Additional increases provide resources for wildlife habitat restoration, including in the sagebrush steppe, and abandoned mine and orphaned oil well cleanup.

Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT): The bill fully funds payments to counties through the PILT program, which are estimated at a total of \$515 million.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): The bill provides \$10.135 billion for EPA, an increase of \$576 million to the fiscal year 2022 enacted level. This funding invests in healthy communities and job creation by supporting EPA’s infrastructure grant programs. The funding invests in core environmental programs after years of flat funding, providing increases for EPA enforcement and compliance programs (+\$72 million), clean air programs (+\$32 million), water programs (+\$33 million), and toxic chemical programs (+\$20 million).

Cultural Programs: The bill provides \$207 million each to the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, an increase of \$27 million for each endowment compared to the fiscal year 2022 enacted level. Increases will support popular special initiatives like the National Endowments for the Arts military healing arts program and the National Endowment for the Humanities "A More Perfect Union" initiative to highlight the nation's shared history, and also will go out as grants to the states for local art and humanities programs. The bill provides \$1.114 billion for the Smithsonian Institution, \$82 million more than fiscal year 2022. Funding for the National Gallery of Art is included at \$209.2 million and funding for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is included at \$45.3 million.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF): The bill allocates \$900 million for Federal land acquisition and financial assistance to states provided through the LWCF under GAOA. This program is critical for improving recreational access to our federal lands, protecting iconic landscapes, delivering grants to states and local governments to create and protect urban parks and open spaces, and providing farmers and ranchers with easements to allow them to continue to steward their private lands in the face of development pressures.

National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund: The bill allocates \$1.9 billion for deferred maintenance projects for the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Indian Education, and the Forest Service as part of a five-year deferred maintenance initiative under GAOA.

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