



## **BILL SUMMARY: Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Fiscal Year 2026 Appropriations Bill**

*Bill rejects dramatic cuts proposed by Trump, House Republicans; delivers key funding for Tribes, clean air and water*

**Washington, D.C.** – The Fiscal Year 2026 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act provides \$41.45 billion in total funding.

### **Key Points & Highlights – Protecting Public Lands**

**Public Lands:** The bill rejects President Trump’s efforts to shortchange America’s cherished landscapes and ensures that funding for operations of the National Park System, the National Wildlife Refuge System, National Conservation Lands, and the National Forest System is fully protected at enacted levels. The bill provides the funding necessary to maintain personnel at prior year levels and requires the necessary staffing levels to be able to provide visitor services, Tribal consultation, ensure public safety, and carry out the science necessary to respond to growing natural threats and increased visitation.

**National Park Service:** The bill provides \$3.27 billion for the National Park Service, including \$2.87 billion for the operation of the National Park System, which is equal to the enacted level and is \$145 above the level in House Republicans’ bill and \$875 higher than the level requested by President Trump. The bill provides the resources to sustain fiscal year 2024 staffing levels—rejecting staffing cuts made since January—and to support a full complement of seasonal staff during fiscal year 2026. The bill also provides \$168 million for the Historic Preservation Fund and protects all 433 national park units from being sold off or otherwise eliminated from the National Park System.

**Forest Service:** The bill provides \$6.17 billion for the Forest Service, excluding additional funding for the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve. Of this amount, \$3.7 billion is provided for the Forest Service’s non-wildland fire management responsibilities and provides sufficient funds to sustain appropriate staffing levels. The bill rejects the steep \$1.4 billion cuts to the Forest Service’s non-fire budget proposed by President Trump. The bill provides funding for the Forest Service to improve forest restoration and fire risk reduction efforts on federal lands and through cross-boundary partnerships. It also provides \$175 million for hazardous fuels reduction projects, \$31 million for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, and \$6 million for the Legacy Roads and Trails program to prioritize fish passage improvements and

repurposing unnecessary roads as trails. The bill continues funding for state grant programs and federal and cooperative research that were proposed for termination in President Trump's budget request, including an increase of \$8 million for State and Volunteer Fire Assistance Grants, and a total of \$8 million for Joint Fire Science research.

**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 the Great American Outdoors Act. 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.

**Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT):** The bill fully funds payments to counties through the PILT program, which are estimated at a total of \$550 million.

### **Key Points & Highlights – Protects Full Funding for Wildland Firefighting**

**Supporting Federal Wildland Firefighters:** The bill provides funding for the permanent pay fix and job series for federal wildland firefighters to prevent a devastating pay cut for the firefighting workforce. The pay fix was enacted as part of the fiscal year 2025 continuing resolution and began as a temporary bonus for Forest Service and Department of the Interior firefighters provided in the Infrastructure and Investment in Jobs Act. The bill bars consolidation of federal wildland firefighting into one agency in fiscal year 2026 and specifically provides funding to continue wildland firefighting using the longstanding practice of funding both the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior to allow Congress to consider legislative proposals for such a major change.

**Wildfire Suppression:** The bill fully funds essential wildfire preparedness and suppression efforts by providing \$4.25 billion for wildfire suppression, of which \$2.85 billion is for the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund. The Reserve Fund provides 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. This funding level—in addition to carryover balances—will meet projected needs for fiscal year 2026 wildfires.

### **Key Points & Highlights – Protects Full Funding for Tribal Programs**

**Tribal Programs:** In total, the bill provides \$12 billion for Tribal programs across the Department of the Interior and the Indian Health Service. Overall, the bill rejects President Trump's proposed cuts of nearly \$1 billion from Tribal programs, and sustains funding for Tribal governments to provide basic governmental services across Indian Country.

**Indian Health Service (IHS):** The bill provides \$8 billion in total resources for IHS—a program increase of \$87.1 million over fiscal year 2024—to maintain critically important health care services and maintain staffing for doctors, nurses, and health services staff at existing and newly opened facilities.

Importantly, the bill rejects President Trump’s proposal to eliminate advance appropriations for IHS, which were provided in a historic first in fiscal year 2023. The bill provides an advance appropriation for fiscal year 2027 of \$5.3 billion to ensure budget certainty for a health care system that provides health services to 2.5 million people across Indian Country. This advance appropriation will provide the funding IHS needs to provide essential health services to patients in the following fiscal year. Finally, the bill provides the funding necessary for staffing at newly constructed facilities and to ensure that IHS has the health care providers needed to meet increased patient demand.

**Supporting Tribal Self-Governance and Essential Services:** Rejecting President Trump’s proposed \$911 million cut, the bill provides an increase of \$22.2 million for a total of \$1.91 billion in funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ operations of Indian programs. These are the essential government services for critical areas like roads, housing improvement, natural resources protection, Tribal courts, economic development, and social services. This funding is the lifeblood for Tribal governments exercising self-determination and is crucial to upholding the federal government’s trust responsibility.

**Tribal Public Safety and Justice:** The bill rejects President Trump’s proposed \$107 million cut to Tribal public safety and justice programs and instead boosts funding to support and invest in these programs by providing an increase of \$3.2 million above fiscal year 2024 for a total of \$558.8 million. This funding supports police services, special initiatives to address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons cases, Tribal courts, and hiring of detention and corrections officers.

**Maintaining Investments in Tribal Schools:** The bill rejects President Trump’s proposed \$187 million cut to funding for Tribal schools and instead maintains \$1.37 billion for the Bureau of Indian Education to support a school system of 183 schools and 33 Tribal colleges and universities delivering educational services to nearly 57,000 students. The bill provides \$1.1 billion for education programs and operations for teachers and school staff. This includes funding to support school operational requirements, staffing, operating costs, Native language programs, scholarships, and support for school connectivity and remote learning capabilities. The bill also provides \$1.3 billion for construction of educational facilities to help keep pace with maintenance and build critical new facilities. These investments in school facilities are critical to improve educational opportunities and service delivery for Native American students.

**Tribal Sovereignty Payments:** The bill fully funds Tribal Sovereignty Payments, which consist of contract support costs and 105(l) lease payments, including the increased contract support costs associated with third-party billing for IHS as a result of the June 2024 Supreme Court ruling on *Becerra vs. San Carlos Apache Tribe*. These are required payments that provide funding for Tribes' administrative overhead costs for self-governance under the *Indian Self-Determination Education and Assistance Act*. Ranking Member Merkley strongly supports reclassifying these costs to align with a series of court rulings finding that they are a mandatory obligation of the federal government, which is also important so that growth in these costs does not threaten funding for other critical tribal programs.

### **Key Points & Highlights – Investing in Clean Air and Water**

**Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):** The bill provides \$8.64 billion in essential funding for EPA's critical responsibilities to protect our environment and the American people's health—\$1.6 billion above the level in House Republicans' bill and \$4.5 billion above the level requested by President Trump. The bill protects funding levels for scores of EPA programs—including clean water and clean air programs—and rejects the steep cuts that President Trump proposed in his budget request. It provides targeted increases to programs like certain geographic programs, wildfire smoke grants, and the Tribal drinking water program.

The Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, which provide funding for water and wastewater projects, are funded at the fiscal year 2024 levels of \$2.76 billion; this is \$660 million above the level in House Republicans' bill and \$2.46 billion above the level requested by President Trump. The Hazardous Substance Superfund program continues to receive additional funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

The bill also protects categorical grant programs that states rely upon, such as state and local air quality management, brownfields projects, and the pollution prevention program—nearly all of which were eliminated in the president's budget request.

The bill also requires EPA to maintain its Office of Research and Development to ensure cutting-edge research, such as research into the risks from hazardous chemicals like PFAS or contaminated water, continues.

### **Key Points & Highlights – Cultural Programs**

**Cultural Programs:** The bill protects essential funding for key cultural institutions and programming. It rejects President Trump's proposed elimination of the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities and instead continues \$207 million each for the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities. It provides \$1.044 billion for the Smithsonian Institution, and prevents the closure of the National Museum of the American Latino, which President Trump proposed to shutter, as well as the American Women's History Museum.