



Chairman Ken Calvert

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

**Department of the Interior FY18 Budget Hearing
Secretary of the Interior, Ryan Zinke
Thursday, June 8, 2017**

This morning I'd like to welcome to the subcommittee the 52nd Secretary of the Interior, Ryan Zinke. Joining the Secretary this morning is Olivia Ferriter, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Budget, Finance, Performance, and Acquisition, as well as Denise Flanagan, Director, Office of Budget. Our hearing today will address the fiscal year 2018 budget priorities for the Department of the Interior.

Mr. Secretary, this is your first formal budget hearing before our subcommittee. On behalf of our members, congratulations on your confirmation and welcome back to the House. We look forward to you outlining your goals for the Department and discussing a variety of important issues with us this morning.

Having worked alongside you here in Congress, and knowing of your passion for the outdoors and recreation, I look forward to working with you to address the many challenges facing the Department. As a native Montanan and a westerner, you have a deep understanding of—and bring a welcome perspective to—many of these issues.

Our challenges are diverse and many—addressing the maintenance backlog in our National Parks and across the various Interior bureaus; adequately funding fire suppression; meeting our legal and moral obligations throughout Indian Country; funding PILT; and complex water issues affecting the West and my home state of California. These are some very tough challenges; we stand ready to roll up our sleeves and work with you to seek solutions to these and other issues.

This morning's hearing marks the beginning of a very candid conversation about your Department's funding priorities. Overall, the President's fiscal year 2018 budget request provides \$10.6 billion in discretionary funding for Department of the Interior programs under this subcommittee's jurisdiction, which is \$1.6 billion or 13 percent below the fiscal year 2017 enacted level.

At the outset, let me state the obvious: this is going to be a challenging year. The President has presented a budget proposal that will be closely examined—account-by-account, line-by-line. The budget request for your Department may not be exactly what you would have proposed but ultimately, Congress will have the final say over the fiscal year 2018 budget. This subcommittee is committed to moving the Interior bill expeditiously. We will complete our work.

In bipartisan fashion—under both Republican and Democrat chairmen—this subcommittee has made a concerted effort to address the greatest needs in Indian Country. Education, health care, and law enforcement issues continue to be non-partisan subcommittee priorities; we welcome your active involvement working with us and our American Indian and Alaska Native brothers and sisters.

The challenge of providing adequate wildfire funding remains one of the greatest challenges facing our subcommittee. I want to applaud my good friend, Mike Simpson, for his leadership and continuing efforts to address this issue through his bipartisan legislation which is being re-introduced in the House today. I would encourage you, Mr. Secretary, to lend your voice to supporting the Simpson bill—as you did while serving in the House—and encourage the President to do the same.

Another challenge facing the Department and the subcommittee is the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ESA is a well-intentioned statute that has saved numerous species from extinction. But its authorization has long expired. It's critical that we have an open, realistic discussion in Congress about what is working and what is not.

Like many from the West, I welcome the Department's review of the authority under the Antiquities Act for designating national monuments. As you know from your travels, there is great concern that these designations often disregard the views and concerns of affected communities, local stakeholders, and their representatives in Congress.

Identifying stable, long-term funding for the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program is another major challenge. Until a solution is identified, funding PILT is going to continue putting pressure on program budgets within the Department and across other agencies within this bill.

The National Park Service recently celebrated its Centennial. In the fiscal year 2017 enacted budget, this subcommittee made a substantial investment in our national parks by providing additional funds for park operations and addressing longstanding deferred maintenance issues. We look forward to working with you to ensure these national treasures are adequately funded and to seek avenues to reduce the longstanding maintenance backlog.

Lastly, I'm glad to see that the USGS budget includes full funding for Landsat 9 and that core mission areas including energy and minerals and mapping are mostly spared. That said, I'm concerned that some programs might have been too hastily proposed for termination. The West Coast, and my home State of California in particular, is counting on the Federal government and the expertise of the USGS to make an earthquake early warning system operational. This is a public safety program that will protect millions of lives and critical infrastructure. So, this subcommittee will be taking a close look at the program and how we can keep its momentum going as we consider fiscal year 2018 funding.

In closing, I want to express my appreciation to your outstanding professional staff. Our subcommittee couldn't do its work without your budget shop, the various bureaus, and the talented people sitting next to you and behind you. Thanks to each of you for all that you do.

With that, I'm happy to yield to the gentle lady from Minnesota – Mrs. McCollum – for any opening remarks she would like to make.

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