



Statement of Chairman Bruce Westerman

House Committee on Natural Resources before the Committee on House Administration
Tuesday, February 28, 2023

Chairman Steil, Ranking Member Morelle, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to present the Committee on Natural Resources' budget request for the 118th Congress. I recognize the challenging task you have in allocating resources among the committees and appreciate this opportunity to testify.

Before I outline our budget request for this Congress, I first want to familiarize you with the makeup of the House Committee on Natural Resources, which I am honored to lead. The committee's five subcommittees have jurisdiction over American energy and minerals, insular and tribal affairs, federal lands and waters, wildlife, and fisheries, as well as oversight of the Department of the Interior and agencies within the Department of Commerce and Agriculture. This broad purview includes everything from federal forests, national parks, water supplies for reclamation projects, the Indian Health Service, mineral laws, grazing, land grants, wildlife refuges and research, all insular areas, and international fishing agreements. Second only to taxes and tariffs, oil and natural gas leasing still remains the largest source of revenue to the U.S. Treasury's coffers.

Getting even more granular, the committee oversees the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, National Trails System, national heritage areas and other national units established for conservation or recreational development. We have jurisdiction over mining and geothermal leasing, as well as development of oil and natural gas resources of the Outer Continental Shelf and public lands. The committee's scope covers the generation and marketing of electric power from Federal water projects, rights of way over public lands for energy-related transmission, recreational and commercial fisheries management, and coastal and marine environments, estuarine protection and coastal barriers.

In addition, we are honored to oversee all matters regarding the Federal trust responsibility to Native Americans and their sovereignty. The committee is responsible for U.S. relations with Native Americans, Native Alaskan, and Native Hawaiians, including the 574 federally recognized Indian tribes with approximately 2 million members. We also have jurisdiction over all insular areas and Freely Associated States, including American Samoa, Guam, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of Palau, Puerto Rico, and the



U.S. Virgin Islands. This purview will be especially important this Congress, as the Compacts of Free Association are set to be renegotiated this year and next.

Given this expansive scope, I'm proud to note that, regardless of political party, the Natural Resources Committee is one of the busiest, if not *the busiest*, House Committee by volume. During the 117th Congress, we ordered 124 bills reported, first amongst all standing committees. We filed 88 bill reports, more than any other committee. We held a total of 109 hearings and 21 full committee markups. Republican Members and staff traveled to 21 different destinations and Democrat Members and staff traveled to 25 destinations all over the U.S. and its territories advancing the agenda of the committee. These efforts are critically important to Members and the American people we serve. Yet while the Committee on Natural Resources is at the top of the list for legislative activity and has jurisdiction spanning the Arctic Circle to the Marianas Trench, we fall to number 11 amongst committees when it comes to funding levels.

We have a robust agenda at the Committee on Natural Resources' reach this Congress, so I'm providing some further context for this budget request. The committee will hold the Executive Branch accountable in our efforts to strengthen America's environment and economy, promote access to public lands and natural resources, and enhance conservation through innovation. Oversight will be a priority, as the committee oversees a multitude of agencies that last year spent a combined \$43.4 billion. The committee will also review all laws and programs within our jurisdiction to assess their application, administration, execution, and effectiveness while providing transparency and accountability. Through such examination, we will continually seek to eliminate waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement and ensure every taxpayer dollar is well-spent.

The committee will also focus on:

- Promoting responsible land management, access, forest health, and wildfire prevention;
- Saving a national treasure, our Giant Sequoias, as they face continue threat of catastrophic wildfire;
- Examining deferred maintenance at our national parks and public lands;
- Managing our fisheries responsibly;
- Increasing water supplies, water storage, and drought resiliency;
- Examining the ongoing drought impacting communities throughout the seven-state Colorado River region;
- Advancing American energy and minerals production and the jobs and economies they support;



- Examining ways to streamline the leasing and permitting of renewable energy and conduct oversight of the administration's actions that hinder renewable energy and infrastructure development;
- Modernizing environmental laws like the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA);
- Improving economic opportunity and stability in Indian Country and the U.S. territories;
- Conducting oversight of the implementation of the Compacts of Free Association and assistance provided by the Department of the Interior's Office of Insular Affairs.

As you can see, we have a lot to do! To continue to advance the important work of the committee this Congress, we are requesting a budget increase of more than 9%, based on our authorized levels for 2022. We will continue to dedicate the majority of our budget to personnel compensation, and this year's request will help us retain and build a deep bench of expert staff to handle the many diverse issue areas within the committee's broad geographic and subject matter jurisdiction. As with any transition into the majority, we are working diligently to expand our team and continue to support all our Members and their priorities. Ranking Member Grijalva has requested an increase in the salary allocation for the minority budget for the same purpose.

I hope my description of the committee's jurisdiction helps you to see that the Committee on Natural Resources traverses not only the country, but also the globe, and our ability to govern is informed by experiencing firsthand the effects of the federal government's policies outside of the beltway. It is critical we hear from the communities affected and understand matters on a local level. To this end, I have already planned an aggressive schedule of field hearings for both sessions of the 118th Congress. The Committee on Natural Resources will bring Congress to the people. Indeed, we have already executed one field hearing, and look forward to hearing about the issues faced by the American people, our lands and waters, and recognize that those will not always be found in Washington. Field hearings, on-site educational opportunities, and oversight visits for Members are among the highest priorities for the committee this Congress. This activity will generate a significant increase in travel and is the main driver in the committee's increased budget request.

On February 13th, the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held the first of this year's field hearings in Odessa, Texas, addressing how federal energy production supports local communities. Members and staff also participated in field tours in Hobbs, New Mexico, where they toured an oil rig and natural gas hydraulic fracturing site, as well as the Career and Technical Education Center. This was the first of at least 10 field hearings and educational tours



I plan to conduct this year, and it took place less than two weeks after the committee officially organized. This affirms my commitment to getting out of Washington and into the field.

In addition to my commitment to take the business of the Committee on Natural Resources to the American people, I am also committed to making the committee work for Congress. As republican leader of the committee, I committed to improving and focusing on Member services. To that end, last Congress the committee tracked 4,500 interactions with Republican Members, who introduced more than 300 bills and held 15 Republican forums. In the 118th Congress, the committee will increase Members services and our focus on advancing local issues to find solutions for the American people.

The Committee on Natural Resources also pioneered the use of an electronic voting system for our markups. This system has been an effective and efficient tool in advancing committee business. Now that we are back to operating in-person, we have returned to using this system to its full potential. Today's budget request would ensure that the electronic voting system and other useful technologies are appropriately supported this Congress. We seek to maintain and improve operations of equipment necessary to handle the committee's frequent hearings, publications, and other needs.

The committee has successfully incorporated the use of cost-saving measures and efficiencies while still operating at the highest levels and advancing important legislative priorities. Our field hearing was the first time we were able to benefit from the support of the House Recording Studio technicians to support us in the field. Their technical know-how served as an invaluable resource, and we look forward to calling on them again to support future field hearings. The staff has also maximized use of the Committee on House Administration's educational series as well as Staff Academy courses for internal training and professional development. Finally, the use of House-wide subscription services has been a benefit and cost saving measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to develop and explain this budget request. It is a critical task and your decision will directly impact the work we do at the Committee on Natural Resources. I respectfully ask for your favorable consideration and look forward to answering any questions you may have.