EXAMINING THE PRESIDENT'S FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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OVERSIGHT HEARING ON EXAMINING THE PRESIDENT'S FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Wednesday, April 19, 2023
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Bruce Westerman [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Westerman, Lamborn, Wittman, Gosar, Graves, LaMalfa, González-Colón, Fulcher, Stauber, Curtis, Tiffany, Carl, Rosendale, Bentz, Moylan, Hunt, Collins, Luna, Duarte, Hageman; Grijalva, Napolitano, Sablan, Huffman, Gallego, Neguse, Levin, Porter, Leger Fernández, Stansbury, Peltola, Ocasio-Cortez, Mullin, Hoyle, Kamlager-Dove, Magaziner, Velázquez, Dingell, and Lee.

The CHAIRMAN. The Committee on Natural Resources will come to order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare recess of the Committee at any time. Good morning, everyone. I wanted to welcome Secretary Haaland, Members, and our guests in the audience to today's hearing. Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member. Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee Rule 3(o). Without objection, so ordered.

I now recognize myself for a 5-minute opening statement. Again, I want to extend my thanks to Secretary Haaland for being here today. Welcome back to the Committee; it has been a while. It is great to see a full house. The Committee has returned to its in-person proceedings and regular order of this Congress.

STATEMENT OF HON. BRUCE WESTERMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARKANSAS

The CHAIRMAN. We are here to discuss President Biden's budget for the upcoming year and how the Department of the Interior plans to use the funds that it is requesting from Congress. I have significant concerns about these proposals, starting with the fact that the Biden administration has yet to provide transparency on the staggering amount of money it has already allocated to Federal agencies via the Inflation Reduction Act and the Infrastructure Investment in Jobs Act.

While this Administration seems content to just throw money at a problem and call it a day, we know oversight is essential to ensure each taxpayer dollar is spent responsibly.

Take the Great American Outdoors Act as an example. Congress advanced funding to decrease the $17 billion maintenance backlog in our national parks and public lands. Yet, in 3 years since then-President Trump signed this legislation into law, DOI's backlog has ballooned by more than $14 billion to roughly $31 billion.

Somehow, DOI has managed to spend billions of taxpayer dollars to make a problem significantly worse. It is high time we get to the bottom of these discrepancies and find some answers instead of pouring more and more money into a black hole.

Unfortunately, lack of oversight was a status quo last Congress, as the Committee refused to hold oversight hearings on a number of important topics, including DOI's growing deferred maintenance issues.

The Biden administration's performance was not much better. In fact, we received no response to nearly 80 percent of oversight requests sent in the 117th Congress. Secretary Haaland, I sincerely hope that you can answer our questions today. No Federal agency should be cloaked in mystery, particularly when it comes to spending American's hard-earned dollars.

I would be remiss if I didn't also address the Biden administration's ongoing war on the American economy, which dramatically impacts both industries and communities across the country. From Day 1, DOI has shut down pipelines, delayed federally mandated onshore and offshore leases, repealed common-sense ESA and NEPA streamlining regulations, shuttered mining projects, and much, much more.

Secretary Haaland, here in the United States we access our resources more cleanly, safely, and responsibly than anywhere else in the world. I hope to hear from you on what this Administration's plan is moving forward to provide American workers with certainty, reduce permitting roadblocks, and help us build right here at home.

Unfortunately to date, the Biden administration's policies have focused on increasing our dependence on foreign adversaries such as Russia, China, and Iran for the natural resources we can and should be producing domestically.

In addition to strengthening our adversaries, failing Democrat policies are shutting down our economy, killing jobs, and hurting American families across the nation. I know that I, and my Republican colleagues, have many other questions on things like the Steel and Defined 30x30 Initiative, plans to address western drought and catastrophic wildfires, and how DOI plans to effectively manage access to the vast Federal estate that we have in this country.

It has been almost 2 years since we had a chance to discuss these issues in person with you, Madam Secretary, so I thank you again for appearing before the Committee, and I look forward to a robust discussion with you today. I yield back on my time, and I now recognize Ranking Member Grijalva for a 5-minute opening statement.

STATEMENT OF HON. RAÚL M. GRIJALVA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and before I go any further into a statement, I want to acknowledge you and the colleagues on this Committee on your side on the aisle. In particular, their concerns about the Chinese government potentially benefiting from the policy decisions we make here in the United States.

One of the decisions I am especially concerned about is the impending land transfer of the sacred Oak Flat area from Arizona's Tonto National Forest to the Resolution Copper Mine owned by foreign mining conglomerates Rio Tinto and BHP. Not only does Rio Tinto have a nasty record of human rights violations, which many of my Republican colleagues in this very room have repeatedly decried, but we also know that Rio Tinto's majority shareholder is the Chinese government.

Given the many concerns shared by both sides of the aisle on this issue, I want to reiterate my April 4 request for a markup on Save Oak Flat from Foreign Mining Act, and I ask unanimous consent to enter that request into the record.

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection.

[The information follows:]

Letter to Chairman Westerman requesting markup, dated April 4, 2023

BRUCE WESTERMAN OF ARKANSAS
CHAIRMAN

VIVIAN MOEGLEIN
STAFF DIRECTOR

RAÚL M. GRIJALVA OF ARIZONA
RANKING DEMOCRAT

LORA SNYDER
DEMOCRAT STAFF DIRECTOR

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

April 4, 2023

Hon. Bruce Westerman, Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC

Dear Chairman Westerman:

I am writing to request that you schedule a Natural Resources Committee markup on H.R. 1351, the Save Oak Flat From Foreign Mining Act. My legislation would protect Oak Flat—or Chi'chil Bildagoteel, a sacred site for the San Carlos Apache Tribe and other tribal communities in Arizona, located within theNational Forest—from foreign mining companies Rio Tinto and BPH.

You have clearly stated your support for domestic energy and mineral production and disapproval of dependence on foreign mining. Considering H.R. 1351 before this Committee would allow us to confirm that Americans alone should determine how we develop our resources, rather than the Chinese Communist Party, aligning with your statements during Committee meetings and H.R. 1 debate on the House Floor.

"The way we push back against China and the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] is we produce our energy and minerals here. And we for sure don't let China come to America and own any kind of lease on federal lands—or private lands. We produce it ourselves; we send it to our allies."—Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR), House Natural Resources Committee, on voting YES to Ogles Amendment No. 31 to H.R. 1.

In 2015, section 3003 of the Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 (NDAA) authorized a land exchange for 2,422 acres of Forest Service land to foreign mining companies, Rio Tinto and BPH, for the development of the Resolution Copper mine in Arizona.

Rio Tinto's largest shareholder is Chinalco, a state-owned holding company for the People's Republic of China.[1] In addition, it is more than likely that copper from Oak Flat will be traded on the global market, to the benefit of the Chinese Communist Party. Rio Tinto will extract copper from U.S. soil through destructive means and ship it overseas to be processed and sold—with no return for the American people. We cannot take Resolution Copper and Rio Tinto's promises to the citizens of Arizona and the country at their word. This proposed mine would not only desecrate and destroy Oak Flat's tribal cultural and religious heritage sites but also drain the already scarce water resources in the region and put water quality at risk from the failure of Rio Tinto's proposed tailings dam.

Rio Tinto and BPH have grievous track records of bad faith and destructive mining practices. In 2020, Rio Tinto was condemned for their mining practices that blew up a 46,000-year-old sacred site in western Australia.[2] In addition to their lack of regard for sacred sites, Rio Tinto saw the failure of four tailings dams at their QMM mine in Madagascar between 2010 and 2022, leaving the community with water contamination and fishing bans due to water quality impacts.[3] In 2015, a BPH mine was responsible for the collapse of a tailings dam in Brazil. Five million cubic meters of iron ore waste and mud rushed downstream, tragically leaving 19 dead and causing significant environmental destruction.[4]

Why should we let foreign mining companies with a history of operational failures and environmental destruction establish the Resolution Copper mine in Arizona?

My legislation, H.R. 1351, would repeal the land transfer that would allow foreign mining companies Rio Tinto and BPH to establish the Resolution Copper mine within the Tonto National Forest's Chí'chil Bildagoteel Historic District, also known as Oak Flat. My legislation would protect this sacred site from foreign-owned Chinese Communist Party-backed mining operations and the citizens of Arizona from the planned bad-faith mining practices.

You have emphasized your support for efforts that prevent the Chinese government from extracting American resources on both federal and private lands. It only makes sense for the Committee to support my Save Oak Flat From Foreign Mining Act, which will prohibit this Chinese Communist Party-backed copper mine from seeing the light of day.

I hope to see the Committee include H.R. 1351 in the next markup, and I thank you for your attention and consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

RAÚL M. GRIJALVA, RANKING MEMBER
Committee on Natural Resources

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[1] Market Screener, *Rio Tinto* (Apr. 2023) (online at https://www.marketscreener.com/quote/stock/RIO-TINTO-5254/company/).

[2] The Guardian, *Rio Tinto blasts 46,000-year-old Aboriginal site to expand iron ore mine* (May 2020) (online at https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/may/26/rio-tinto-blasts-46000-year-old-aboriginal-site-to-expand-iron-ore-mine).

[3] Earthworks, *Mining Industry Still Falls Short on Tailings Safety* (Jan. 2023) (online at https://earthworks.org/blog/mining-industry-still-falls-short—on-tailings-safety/#:~:text=There%20have%20been%20four%20reported,but%20was%20denied%20by%20QMM).

[4] USDA, *Resolution Copper Project and Land Exchange Environmental Impact Statement—Samarco, BHP and Vale Agree to Pay $5B in Damages/or Brazil Mining Disaster* (Mar. 2016) (online at https://www.resolu1ionmineeis.us/documents/boadle-eisenhammer-2016).

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With that, I would like to turn my attention and offer my heartfelt welcome back to you, Secretary Haaland. No matter the context, your presence in this room has always brought a sense of assurance and purpose, and we thank you for that.

I can't help but think back to when you were on this side of the dais. Your historic election, which made you one of the first two Native American women to ever serve in the U.S. Congress, was a beacon of hope in one of our democracy's darkest times.

Your calm, principled leadership as the Committee's Vice-Chair proved invaluable as we fought back against one of the most corrupt, regressive, and extremist administrations in U.S. history.

So, it is no surprise when the time came for President Biden to nominate someone who could steer the Interior Department back on course, he chose you, but to say the least, cleaning up the previous administration's mess has been an unenviable task.

The Interior Department you inherited had been purposely and systematically gutted, demoralized, and diminished. After all, hollowing out Federal agencies is a critical component of the MAGA Republican signature playbook. To alleviate any doubt in that assertion, look no further than the GOP's recent budget proposal—assuming you can tease it out from the chaos and confusion Republicans are creating with their own needless debt ceiling hostage crisis.

As Speaker McCarthy announced earlier this week, my Republican colleagues stand ready to pass a budget that would make devastating deep cuts to Federal agencies and programs that Americans rely on every single day. These cuts would deliver irreparable blows across the government, damaging our economic potential, national security, and quality of life. At Interior, specifically, these reckless cuts put Americans directly in harm's way.

As Secretary Haaland detailed in a letter to the Appropriations Committee, the Republican's extreme budget proposal would undermine the agency's ability to fight wildfires, disrupt our efforts to address drought and secure water resources in the West, reduce support for Tribal Nations, create visitor safety issues at our national parks, and in an especially interesting turn of events, curtail American energy development by gutting the very Federal permitting offices that my colleagues consistently complain about as being too slow.

In doing so, the MAGA agenda can achieve its ultimate goal, hobbling the Interior Department to the point of dysfunction, and then scapegoating that dysfunction as an excuse to give Big Oil and other polluting industries more loopholes, more handouts, and less accountability, putting the fox squarely in the henhouse.

As we go forward with today's hearing and listen to what I am sure will be plentiful, and at times perhaps theatrical, critiques of President Biden's proposed budget, it is important that we keep this in mind.

Needless to say, the budget and the policies Secretary Haaland is presenting today are a direct affront to the backward pro-polluter agenda Republicans are trying to ram through. Much to the GOP's chagrin, the President's budget request is instead a comprehensive, forward-thinking proposal. It is a plan that empowers

Interior with the resources it needs to operate at full capacity, and it builds on the momentum Secretary Haaland has already gained in tackling climate change, elevating tribal consultation, and building the clean energy future we all need and must have.

Madam Secretary, I want to thank you for being here today, but even more than that, I want to thank you for your tireless commitment to public service, for having the courage of taking the helm at Interior when you did, and for having the vision to rebuild the Department in a way that reckons with the troubles of our past, meets the needs of our present, and prepares for the challenges of the future. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. I will now introduce our witness. With us today is Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, no stranger to our Committee, and also sitting with her at the dais is Deputy Secretary of the Interior Tommy Beaudreau and the Director of the Office of Budget, Ms. Denise Flanagan. Secretary Haaland, even though you remember the Committee, I will remind you that under Committee Rules, you must limit your oral statements to 5 minutes, but your entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

And, again, to begin your testimony, please press the "on" button on the microphone. We still use the timing light system. When you begin, the light will turn green. At the end of 5 minutes, the light will turn red, and I will ask you to please complete your statement. I will also allow Secretary Haaland to testify before Member questioning. I recognize you for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. DEB HAALAND, SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, WASHINGTON, DC

Secretary HAALAND. Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Grijalva, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Interior's Fiscal Year 2024 budget request. I am pleased to return to this Committee today accompanied by our Deputy Secretary Tommy Beaudreau, and the Director of the Department's Budget Office, Denise Flanagan.

Our 2024 budget totals $18.9 billion in current authority, an increase of $2 billion from the 2023 level. First, I want to highlight several important proposals. These include significant reforms to support the wildland fire workforce, mandatory funding for future Indian water rights settlements, expanding Good Neighbor and Stewardship Contracting authorities to include the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Parks Service, $6.5 billion over 20 years from the Department of State to fund economic assistance under the compacts of free association.

Let me begin with our Indian Affairs budget request. This Administration has made a steadfast commitment to strengthen government-to-government relationships with Tribal Nations, with a total request of $4.7 billion for Indian Affairs programs, investments will address missing or murdered Indigenous peoples, the legacy of Federal Indian boarding schools, and Native language revitalization.

In response to concerns by tribal leaders for public safety in their communities, the budget includes an increase of nearly $86 million above 2023. We also request $1.6 billion for Indian education programs, notably the 2024 request for BIE construction will support seven school projects.

Turning to wildland fire, the 2024 budget honors President Biden's commitment to address this issue and to assist firefighters supporting an additional 370 Federal and 55 tribal fire personnel. Complimenting the pay reforms, we also include a $46.4 million increase for fuels management activities above 2023.

These investments are crucial as wildfires were noticeably higher in 2022 than the 10-year average. Our budget's investments for reclamation in combination with the bill and Inflation Reduction Act will ensure reliable water and power to the American West. The reclamation request is nearly $1.45 billion, which is anticipated to be augmented by over $2.4 billion in other funds. Priorities include WaterSMART funding and dam safety. These funds will ensure we stay as nimble as possible in the face of drought in a changing climate.

Stewardship of our natural resources is a core mission for us. Interior manages about 20 percent of America's lands and is responsible for protection and recovery of more than 2,300 endangered or threatened species. Our request covers $3.2 billion in annual funding for conservation efforts that supports key initiatives such as wildlife quarters and youth corps partnerships. The request also includes $140 million for Fish and Wildlife Service partnership programs that support voluntary conservation on public and private lands.

At the Department, science is our foundation. The USGS works with partners across the country to maintain 20,000 groundwater monitoring wells, 11,800 stream gauges, and 3,800 quake sensors, and directly monitors 70 volcanoes. The budget includes $128 million that supports nine regional climate adaptation science centers with university partners. We are also looking forward to the Landsat Next Mission that will take advantage of new technologies for global imaging data.

When it comes to energy, we are excited to be on our way to achieve the Administration's goals to deploy 30 gigawatts of offshore wind capacity by 2030. As of last month, BOEM has conducted 11 wind energy lease sales for areas in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. That is more than 2.5 million acres of commercial wind energy lease areas. The budget for BOEM's renewable energy program includes a $12 million increase for permitting.

Onshore, BLM is also making progress to permit 25 gigawatts of renewable energy on public lands by 2025. BLM has permitted more than 126 renewable energy projects, processed by more, and is working to support much needed transmission lines.

To meet these needs, we include $72 million for BLM's renewable energy program. At the end of 2020, Interior staffing was at a 10-year low of around 60,500. When fully enacted, the budget would support an increase of 4,000 personnel to over 68,000. Regarding infrastructure, our request includes more than $3 billion for operation and maintenance. In addition, there is $1.6 billion in mandatory funding available each year through 2025 through the Legacy Restoration Fund. At the end of 2023, our LRF program will have initiated 276 projects touching all 50 states, Washington DC, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Those projects will address $3.4 billion of our deferred maintenance backlog, creating an average of 17,000 jobs per year.

Overall, the President's budget for Interior invests in programs to strengthen our nation for all Americans. We look forward to doing this work together. Thank you, and we are pleased to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Haaland follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DEB HAALAND, SECRETARY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Committee, 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. This Committee plays an important role in the success of the Department of the Interior (DOI). As the 118th Congress begins, I look forward to working with you 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. 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 long-standing 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 though 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.

The Bureau of Reclamation's FY 2024 budget provides the foundation to meet its mission, and to manage, develop, and protect water resources, consistent with applicable State and Federal law, and in a cost-effective and environmentally responsible manner in the interest of the American public. Reclamation remains committed to working with a wide range of stakeholders, including water and power customers, Tribes, State and local officials, and non-governmental organizations, to meet its mission. Reclamation is requesting a gross total of $1.45 billion in Federal discretionary appropriations, which is anticipated to be augmented by over $2.4 billion in other Federal and non-Federal funds for FY 2024.

Within the FY 2024 budget request, there is $33.0 million for the California Bay Delta account and a total of $48.5 million is budgeted for the Central Valley Project Restoration Fund. Reclamation's Dam Safety Program helps ensure the safety and reliability of Reclamation dams to protect the downstream public, and the proposed budget requests $105.3 million for specific Extraordinary Maintenance (XM) activities across Reclamation in FY 2024. This request is central to mission objectives of operating 4 and maintaining projects to ensure delivery of water and power benefits.

The FY 2024 request also includes $62.9 million for the WaterSMART Program, through which Reclamation works cooperatively with States, Tribes, and local entities as they plan for and implement actions to address current and future water shortages, including drought. The investments described in our FY 2024 budget for Reclamation, in combination with BIL and the Inflation Reduction Act implementation and prior year efforts will ensure that Reclamation can continue to provide reliable water and power to the American West, including staying as nimble as possible in response to the requirements of drought and a changing climate.

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.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO THE HON. DEB HAALAND, SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

The Honorable Deb Haaland did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Questions Submitted by Representative Westerman

BLM's Proposed Rule on Conservation and Landscape Health

Question 1. In the recently published Conservation and Landscape Health proposed rule, BLM has two statements that appear to contradict each other. The proposal says conservation leases are "not intended to provide a mechanism for precluding other uses, such as grazing, mining and recreation. Conservation leases should not disturb existing authorizations, valid existing rjghts, or state or Tribal land use management." The proposal also says that once a lease has been issued, the "BLM shall not authorize any other uses of the leased lands that are inconsistent with the authorized conservation use."

1a) Will conservation leases be in addition to other leases or issued in a way excluding other uses of the land?

1b) How will BLM determine lands eligible for a conservation lease?

1c) What will take priority if conservation leases overlap with other possible land use, such as the potential for oil and gas development leases or areas for timber or grazing?

Question 2. The Inflation Reduction Act provided $500 million for NPS and BLM for conservation, resiliency, and restoration projects. Recently, your staff briefed my staff on the implementation of this funding. The NPS and BLM are carrying out landscape sized projects to restore and conserve land, including post fire work. DOI confirmed their ability to carry out this conservation work without the need for any new rules, regulations, or authority. Why is the BLM pushing forward a proposed rule focusing on conservation and creating conservation leases when conservation work has been ongoing without such a rule?

Question 3. How does the BLM statutorily justify the addition of a "conservation lease" and giving this designation an equal standing as other uses defined within FLPMA while maintaining the requirements of FLPMA's multiple-use and sustained-yield framework?

Question 4. Is the overall intent of this proposed rule to reduce the acreage available for FLPMA mandated uses just as grazing, energy development and transmission?

Question 5. How much staff time was used to write the recent proposed rule on conservation and landscape health?

Question 6. How many taxpayer funds were used to write the recent proposed rule on conservation and landscape health?

Question 7. Everything this rule allows BLM to do, they can already do.

7a) Why spend staff time, resources, and taxpayer funds to create a rule that provides no new authority to do things already being done?

7b) If you can implement conservation practices through other means, why is this necessary unless you are trying to retire multiple use through the back door?

Question 8. How will the BLM evaluate and manage the conservation efforts that are laid out in the proposed rule? Will this process be done through RMPs and various land management plans, as prescribed by FLPMA, currently governing public land use?

Question 9. It is clear BLM is already engaging in meaningful conservation work through stewardship agreements and other activities.

9a) How many BLM acres have been conserved, restored, or treated with mitigation measures each year in the past 10 years?

9b) How many acres does BLM expect this new proposed rule would include?

Question 10. The recent proposed rule on conservation and landscape health defines conservation as "meaning maintaining resilient, functioning ecosystems by protecting or restoring natural habitats and ecological function."

10a) Will you provide any other definitions of "conservation" used by BLM?

10b) How much BLM land is currently considered "conserved" by BLM's proposed definition in this rule?

Question 11. How many ACECs have been designated each year for the past 10 years?

Question 12. How many acres have been designated as ACECs each year for the past 10 years?

Question 13. Currently, ACECs can be nominated by anyone who believes an area is special enough to be protected. The agency's website says that these nominations are then "evaluated through . . . extensive public involvement" yet the proposed rule removes the requirement to publish the opportunity for comment in the Federal Register. How will the agency take into account the public and local communities' input if the public comment period is removed?

Question 14. In the recent proposed rule, the agency states, ". . . public lands are increasingly degraded and fragmented due to adverse impacts from climate change and a significant increase in authorized use."

14a) How has climate change led to fragmented lands?

14b) What is the agency referencing as "authorized use"?

Question 15. In the briefing BLM staff provided Congress last week, they made it clear that grazing is compatible with conservation. How will the BLM proposed rule ensure grazing is not disturbed, displaced, canceled, or otherwise impacted by any conservation leasing system?

Question 16. During the hearing, Representative Lee wanted certainty that the BLM's proposed rule would not hinder renewable energy projects on BLM land. You responded, "Conservation and clean energy go hand in hand on BLM lands" and assured the proposed rule would not slow down these projects.

16a) How will you measure the conservation factor of different types of energy and mineral production?

16b) If conservation is purported to go hand in hand with clean energy—such as large-scale solar projects that can cover large swaths of land and prevent grass and trees from growing, would conservation then go hand in hand with conventional energy projects that have minimal surface area disruption?

16c) While you said that the rule would not slow down renewable energy projects, would renewable energy projects be able to move forward on lands included in a conservation lease?

Question 17 In developing the BLM's proposed rule, what stakeholders did you consult—such as existing leaseholders, stakeholders, state and local BLM staff, and state and local governments?

Question 18. Will you commit to hosting multiple in person stakeholder sessions where BLM can hear from those impacted by this proposed rule?

Question 19. Sadly, we see BLM has often failed to maintain healthy landscapes across much of the west. Areas are overrun and destroyed by wild horses and burros. Lack of active management on our timber and grasslands has led to catastrophic wildfires. The inability to actively manage lands has only furthered invasive species. These examples are the responsibility of the BLM and cannot be attributed to other multiple uses. How would this proposal help BLM be a better steward of places like overstocked Herd Management Areas and overgrown, wildfire prone areas?

Question 20. Will those that secure a conservation lease insist that after they have paid money to acquire these leases that they remain in conservation status in perpetuity, even after the initial 10-year lease?

Question 21. If an oil and gas lessee is paying to produce energy with a royalty to the taxpayer and a solar right of way holder is paying rent to produce energy, is a prospective conservation lease holder paying to retire the land from multiple use?

Question 22. Could BLM issue a conservation lease on surface estate when an oil and gas developer has leased the minerals below that surface?

Question 23. Would an oil and gas company have to obtain a conservation lease or compensatory mitigation to develop minerals already leased below the surface?

Question 24. If conservation use is to be on equal footing as other uses, why does the proposed rule state that the authorized officers will seek to prioritize actions that conserve (6102.l(b))?

Question 25. Can you commit that the compensatory mitigation procedures outlined in the proposed rule would not be utilized with any existing lease holder, such as a company that holds an oil and gas lease? Can you commit to the Committee that your proposal would only be for future leaseholders, not those currently holding a lease?

Question 26. Is active forest management consistent with the BLM's definition of "conservation", as proposed in this rule?

Question 27. Can the Department commit that this rule will not affect the ability of the agency to manage its lands to reduce hazardous fuels to respond to wildfire, insects, disease, drought, and/or overstocked and unhealthy forests or rangelands?

Question 28. Is the Department considering placing any restrictions on the management of "old growth and mature forests" as part of this rulemaking?

Southern Border

Question 29. How much of the southern border is DOI land?

Question 30. How are you prioritizing Southern Borqer Fuels Management Initiative projects? How much land has been treated so far and how much land is anticipated to be treated?

Question 31. Federal lands along the border are specifically targeted by criminals, drug smugglers, and human traffickers because they are remote, uninhabited, and less frequently patrolled. There are devastating environmental consequences of illegal immigration. Illegal immigrants leave behind trash, including human waste, medical products, abandoned vehicles, and plastic. What is the Department's commitment to ensuring the safety and conservation of federal land at the southern border?

Question 32. Has DOI conducted an estimate of how much money Mexican drug cartels are making annually as a result of illegal cannabis growth on DOI lands?

Question 33. What is the effect of illegal methamphetamine production and marijuana cultivation on threatened and endangered species and critical habitat?

Question 34. Does DOI have an estimate of how many new illegal methamphetamine production and marijuana cultivation sites are established each year on DOI lands? Approximately how many sites are going undetected annually?

Question 35. Please provide the following information for illegal methamphetamine production and marijuana cultivation sites addressed by DOI staff and partners each year over the 2000–2022 period:

35a) The number of illegal sites identified.

35b) The DOI units where illegal cultivation sites were identified (delineated by bureau and individual unit).

35c) The states where illegal cultivation sites were identified on DOI lands.

35d) The pounds of trash removed.

35e) The miles of plastic irrigation line removed.

35f) The number of containers of banned and illegal pesticides removed.

35g) The gallons of water diverted as a result of illegal sites.

35h) The value of illegal marijuana seized from illegal cultivation sites.

35i) The value of illegal methamphetamines seized from illegal sites.

35j) The number of illegal cannabis plants removed.

35k) The total amount of money spent addressing illegal sites.

35l) The number of arrests made in connection with illegal methamphetamine production or marijuana cultivation on DOI lands.

30x30/"America the Beautiful"

Question 36. The FY 2024 budget for the Department of the Interior continues to support the 30 by 30 Initiative, which seeks to "conserve" 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030.

36a) Since we are now 3 years into the implementation of this Initiative, can you please tell the Committee the baseline metrics for how many acres of land and water are considered "conserved" right now?

36b) Since DOI began implementing the 30 by 30 Initiative, how many new acres of land and water are considered "conserved"? Please provide locations for any such acres and information on what actions transitioned those acres from not conserved to conserved.

36c) Is DOI currently counting private lands toward the 30 by 30 goal?

36d) Does the administration plan to in the future count private lands toward the 30 by 30 goal?

36e) How does DOI define "conservation" for the purposes of 30 by 30?

36f) How does DOI define "restoration" for the purposes of 30 by 30?

36g) How does DOI define "30 percent of lands and waters" for the purposes of 30 by 30?

36h) How does DOI define "equitable access" for the purposes of 30 by 30?

36i) How does DOI define "underserved communities" for the purposes of 30 by 30?

36j) Can DOI please provide examples of what is and is not considered "conservation" for the purposes of 30 by 30?

36k) Over 1 year ago, the administration announced the $1 billion "America the Beautiful Challenge" Fund with only $440 million in identified funding. Yes or no, will DOI use any taxpayer resources to back fill the remaining $560 million that have not been identified yet for this Fund?

36l) Please explain the methodology and criteria for how projects are selected for funding under the America the Beautiful Challenge Fund.

36m) Is DOI requesting any funds in its FY 2024 budget that it plans to use or transfer to support the America the Beautiful Challenge Fund? If yes, please provide the amounts and accounts DOI is proposing this money come from.

36n) Can funds from the America the Beautiful Challenge Fund provided by DOI be used by a recipient to fund projects that acquire new federal land?

36o) Can funds from the America the Beautiful Challenge Fund provided by DOI be used by a recipient to cover the costs of litigation in which the recipient is suing the federal government?

36p) Can funds from the America the Beautiful Challenge Fund provided by DOI be sent to a recipient who is under active investigation by Congress?

36q) Can funds from the America the Beautiful Challenge Fund provided by DOI be sent to a recipient with a history of human rights abuses?

36r) Can funds from the America the Beautiful Challenge Fund provided by DOI be sent to a recipient who also accepts funds from a hostile foreign nation?

36s) What procedures has DOI put into place to monitor waste, fraud, and abuse of funding it provides to the America the Beautiful Challenge Fund?

36t) Are national monument designations under the Antiquities Act of 1906 consistent with the principals of 30 by 30?

36u) Are wilderness areas consistent with the principals of 30 by 30?

36v) Are mineral withdrawals consistent with the principals of 30 by 30?

Wildlife Corridors

Question 37. On March 21, the Council on Environmental Quality released new "Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Ecological Connectivity and Wildlife Corridors." The guidance document shows your office—the Office of the Secretary of the Interior—as well as the Fish and Wildlife Service, were part of the interagency working group developing the guidance. You have been aware of this forthcoming direction from the White House.

37a) How is the implementation of this guidance reflected in the DOI's budget submission for FY24?

37b) If it is not reflected in your budget, how will it impact the budget request you submitted?

Energy and Mineral Development

Question 38. For the last year, President Biden and Secretary Granholm have called on the oil and gas industry to increase U.S. production to help meet U.S. and global demand and both have acknowledged that oil and gas will be needed for decades to come.

38a) Do you agree with President Biden and Secretary Granholm that oil and gas will be needed for decades to come?

38b) What are you doing to resume regular lease sales and expedite permitting timelines to increase U.S. production?

38c) Have you met with Secretary Granholm and/or the White House to develop an energy plan to increase oil and gas production to and reduce gasoline and utility prices for American families?

Question 39. Congress gave the BLM the ability to save the agency time and resources by Section 390 of the Energy Policy Act by allowing for full compliance with NEPA by categorically excluding from redundant analysis those areas that met certain agreed upon requirements. Can you provide the amount of Applications for Permit to Drill (APDs) (broken out by Field Office) over the last 5 years that have benefited from the use of the statutorily authorized categorical exclusions under Section 390?

Question 40. Can you speak to the Bureau's process and analysis for evaluating the current number of active or pending APDs to permitting staff ratios, and the process for ensuring that staffing numbers remain in parody with application volumes?

Question 41. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 and more specifically, the BLM's Onshore Order No. 1, require DOI to approve or deny an APD within 30 days upon receipt of a complete APD package or defer the decision and list the actions needed for approval; however, the current review process frequently requires many months if not multiple years.

41a) What percentage of APDs has BLM approved within 30 days of receipt under this administration?

41b) What is currently the reported BLM backlog of unprocessed APDs? Please provide a record of this by State Office, along with trends of such permit backlog over the past two Administrations.

41c) What is the current APD issuance average timeline by Field Office?

Question 42. The BLM recently released its oil and gas statistics and within that data it states that in 2022 BLM waited on operators for an average of 162 days. Can you define what is categorized as "waiting on an operator" and whether court delays or other matters outside of an operators control are included within this number?

Question 43. The BLM and the EPA both recently issued regulations related to methane. These complex and lengthy rules have potential regulatory overlap, and the same industries were asked to assess these rules simultaneously with some public meetings even occurring at the same times. Why did the Department choose not to extend the comment period for the BLM's "Waste Prevention, Production Subject to Royalties, and Resource Conservation" Rule?

Question 44. In BLM's "Waste Prevention, Production Subject to Royalties, and Resource Conservation" Rule and EPA's NSPS OOOOb/c Rule, both agencies are both proposing similar requirements in some cases. Not only does it create duplicative requirements on the same facilities AND for the same purposes, but also *in the cost-benefit analysis each agency is claiming the same emission reduction and benefits of the same action occurring (i.e. double counting). Can you explain how BLM is expecting emission reduction if the EPA rule already requires the same action occur?*

Question 45. In regards to certain permits to drill:

45a) Why is the BLM not issuing permits to drill on the 3,300 valid leases sold between February 2015 and December 2020 after the settlement agreement issued by Judge Contreras' court, as allowed by such agreement?

45b) The court has never vacated these leases and there are no legal restrictions on issuing permits. Can you please provide this Committee with a State-by-State breakdown of how many permits are currently deferred due to this litigation?

Question 46. When will the Supplemental Environmental Assessment Analysis for Greenhouse Gas Emissions Related to Oil and Gas Leasing in Seven States from February 2015 to December 2020; DOI-BLM-WO-3100-2023-0001-EA be complete?

Question 47. With regard to the Expression of Interest provisions in the IRA:

47a) How does the DOI plan to spend money associated with the Expression of Interest provisions contained in the Inflation Reduction Act?

47b) Is there a plan to refund the EOI fees if multiple companies submitted EOI fees, and one of those companies lost in a multi-bidder scenario? If not, what is the plan for those funds?

Question 48. BLM's APD reports are missing for October and November 2022, due to a database reconciliation error.

48a) Why are these reports not available on the Bureau of Land Management's website?

48b) Please provide these reports to the Committee.

Question 49. In response to questioning at the hearing, you stated that BLM has approved 20 new mines or mine modifications or expansions since 2021.

49a) What were those new mines, mine modifications, or mine expansions?

49b) How many were related to projects for critical minerals?

Question 50. Have there been any new coal leases or lease modifications approved, either for thermal or met coal, under your leadership at the Department of the Interior?

Question 51. How many coal lease or lease modification applications are currently pending before the Department of the Interior, and how long have those applications been pending?

Wildfires and Forest and Rangeland Management

Question 52. Please provide the amount of acreage treated by the Department (delineated by bureau) to reduce hazardous fuels on DOI lands for each of the past 10 years.

Question 53. How many acres of land does DOI plan to treat in FY 2024 on its lands?

Question 54. Why does the Department not publish hazardous fuels reduction treatments completed in prior years on a publicly available website?

Question 55. Will the Department commit to publishing hazardous fuels reduction treatments it completes on an annual basis on its website?

Question 56. How many acres of DOI land does the Department plan to treat to reduce hazardous fuels on its lands over the next 5 years?

Question 57. When the Department is reporting hazardous fuels reduction treatments it completes, does the Department ever record the same acre more than once? If yes, what is the acreage the Department treated last year, only accounting for each acre treated once?

Question 58. The FY 2024 budget proposes extending Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and Stewardship Contracting to NPS and USFWS.

58a) How will GNA help these agencies reduce wildfire risk and restore forest and rangeland health?

58b) How will Stewardship Contracting help these agencies reduce wildfire risk and restore forest health?

DOI Telework and Personnel Policies

Question 59. With regards to BLM onboarding procedures:

59a) Can you provide an overview of the current onboarding process for new hires within the BLM?

59b) Will you provide an assessment of the current onboarding timeline associated with candidate recruitment for listed BLM positions? Please break out the results by State office and further by field office.

Question 60. On July 23, 2021, the Department of the Interior released Personnel Bulletin No: 21-07, which outlined a Telework Program, not to be confused with a remote or mobile work programs, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The policy applies to all DOI employees, including supervisors. In the 4th District of Arkansas, many of my constituents, from farmers to front line health care workers to grocery clerks stayed on the job, not missing a beat, in person, day in and day out over the last three years. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the 70,000 plus employees of the Department of the Interior. Even in my hometown of Hot Springs, the local NPS Administration buildings remain frustratingly closed to visitors.

60a) Despite record investment in infrastructure, deferred maintenance, and staffing, reports of understaffing and closures continue. How many employees, or percentage of employees, are expected to report to their primary duty stations, not at home, in person, on a daily basis?

60b) What percentage of public lands that are authorized to collect fees, such as parks and campgrounds, are currently staffed full-time, with hours that mirror the pandemic baseline?

60c) For areas that are no longer open or have shorter hours, what factors do you attribute the ongoing closures to?

Question 61. Two weeks ago, President Biden signed Dr. Gosar's bill into law ending the COVID-19 public health emergency and the Office of Management and Budget released guidance to Departments to bring employees back into the office. You testified during the hearing that you have not yet issued guidance directing DOI employees to return to the office.

61a) Will you commit to issuing guidance to DOI employees to return full-time to in-person work? If yes, when will you issue this guidance?

61b) Please tell the Committee how many DOI employees worked in person at the Department of the Interior on April 19, 2023 and what percentage worked virtually from home.

National Parks

Question 62. As the National Park Service continues to implement the Great American Outdoors Act and address its outstanding maintenance backlog, what steps is the Service taking to ensure that its construction and maintenance cost estimating data is accurate and up to date?

Question 63. The Department's deferred maintenance backlog has grown to a staggering $31 billion, a $14 billion increase since the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act.

63a) Have you issued any guidance to your senior department leadership or the heads of individual bureaus to start more aggressively implementing deferred maintenance projects to reduce the backlog?

63b) What is the Department doing to ensure that deferred maintenance backlogs at DOI agencies start decreasing?

Question 64. During the hearing, you testified that you transferred $200 million to the Presidio in accordance with the "Congressional intent" of the Inflation Reduction Act.

64a) Please explain why you believed this to be "Congressional intent".

64b) How did the Department come to the understanding this was the intent of Congress?

64c) Did the Department evaluate the fact that Congress specifically amended the language in the final, passed version of the Inflation Reduction Act to remove all references to the Presidio in determining "Congressional intent"?

64d) Did the Department evaluate any statements or amendments made during the September 2021 Committee markup of a draft version of budget reconciliation instructions (which later became the Inflation Reduction Act) when determining "Congressional intent"?

64e) Does the Department have any written policy on how it typically assesses and implements laws based on "Congressional intent"?

i) If yes, please provide that policy and explain how this transfer was consistent with the written policy.

ii) If no, please provide a justification of why the Department spent $200 million of taxpayer funding based on a concept for which it has no written policy.

64f) Did anybody in the White House direct this transfer of funding or was this a decision made by the Department?

64g) Why did DOI not use the proper process typically used by NPS to select priority deferred maintenance projects under the Great American Outdoors Act?

64h) If DOI had used the process NPS typically uses to select deferred maintenance funding, would the $200 million have still been transferred to the Presidio?

64i) Prior to the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act, was the Department planning to transfer any taxpayer funding to the Presidio Trust?

Question 65. I have heard concerns from Members of the Montana delegation and would like to ask the following question on behalf of Congressman Zinke:

The rights of private property owners in Glacier National Park have been in the news recently. As you may be aware the Park has been locking private landowners out of their property and homes and going so far as to instruct the local public utility Co-op to turn off their electricity for months at a time. These are the very same homes these citizens pay property taxes on. These are citizens who under the Glacier Park enabling act are entitled to "the full use and enjoyment' of their land. And yet the Park has locked them out and denied them basic rights of access and enjoyment which should be available to all citizens. Do you condone the Park's actions of taking away the rights of these citizens and property owners?

Questions Submitted by Representative Grijalva

Question 1. In the hearing, Republicans claimed the administration is proposing major cuts to wildland fire funding. Would you please explain?

Questions Submitted by Representative Bentz

Question 1. Section 7.5.2 of the 2016 Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement[1] *commits the Bureau of Reclamation to accept title to Keno Dam when the Klamath River Renewal Corporation gives notice that removal of the J.C. Boyle facility is ready to commence. Sections 7.5.1 and 7.5.2 provide several items of due diligence, "with specific focus on addressing water quality, fish passage, transfer of title to the Keno facility from PacifiCorp to Interior, future operations and maintenance, and landowner agreements." Section 7.5.2 also conditions transfer of Keno Dam on the completion of necessary improvements to meet Department of the Interior Directives and Standards.*

Reclamation's FY 2024 budget justification states that title to the dam will be transferred in FY 2024. The budget justification also requests $2.5 million for several Keno Dam studies that are required prior to Reclamation taking ownership. Specifically, the budget justifications state that "funding will support required studies and assessments associated with Keno Dam operations and maintenance needs, to include a condition assessment report (including seismic studies), appraisal study report (including physical design modeling for volitional fish passage options

[1] https://klamathrenewal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2016.12.31-Executed-and-Amended-Final-KHSA.pdf

on alternative structures), and completion of a feasibility study."[2] Estimates shared with the Committee suggest that the costs range from $80 to $100 million. With that in mind:

1a) Given that Section 7.5 has been part of the KHSA for over thirteen years, what studies, if any, has Reclamation already completed? Please provide a copy of those studies to the Committee. If not, will Reclamation complete these studies, which "are required prior to Reclamation taking ownership,"[3] prior to taking ownership of Keno Dam in FY 2024 as stated in the Budget Justifications?

1b) If Congress provides no specific funding for identified studies, how will that affect Reclamation's plans to take title of Keno Dam? For example, will the agency request reprogramming of all or some of the funding necessary from other accounts?

1c) Without additional funds from Congress, or a determination/denial of reprogrammed funds, what actions will Reclamation complete in order to take title Keno Dam?

1d) What improvements to Keno Pam has Reclamation identified as being necessary or potentially necessary for operations and maintenance needs?

1e) Has Reclamation completed any estimate of the costs associated with the improvements referenced in question (d)? If so, provide a copy of the estimates.

1f) Does Keno Dam currently have adequate anadromous fish passage necessary taking into consideration the pending Klamath dam removals?

1g) Does Reclamation anticipate taking title prior to any improvements to Keno Dam?

Question 2. For these questions, the term "Keno Costs" includes studies, improvements, rehabilitation, upgrades, operation and maintenance, and fish passage modifications including both investment and operation and maintenance.

2a) Does the Department of the Interior guarantee that the "covered contractors" under the Klamath Power and Facilities Agreement will not be responsible for paying any Keno Costs incurred?

2b) Has the Department of the Interior identified who will pay for the Keno Costs? If so, who?

2c) What level of certainty, regarding the incurred Keno Costs, does Reclamation expect to have when it takes title to the facility?

Question 3. As it pertains to the entire Klamath River, has Congress been asked, or will Congress be asked, to provide funding for mitigation of the impacts to recreation connected to the Klamath dam removals, or the addition of any kind of new recreation facility that would not have been needed or proposed but for dam removal, and if so, what is the cost and when was or will the request for additional funding be made?

Question 4. A 2008 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service final rule applied the agency's Wildlife Import/Export Licensing requirements to U.S. commercially-harvested ocean squid, calamari if you will, which are marine species managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service, not Interior. Since that time Congress, NOAA, and two Regional Fishery Management Councils with jurisdiction over this resource have taken issue with Interior's questionable definition of shellfish; the ongoing treatment of a sustainably-managed, edible seafood product as if it were a Lacey Act, CITES or ESA-listed species; and the associated inspection program which we are told is both cumbersome and costly to the U.S. fishing industry on the East and West Coasts. Clearly, this is a persistent issue and the intransigence of Interior to address industry concerns is well-documented. Please provide the Committee:

4a) The specific nature and amounts of fees Interior has collected annually over the past 5 years from the U.S. domestic squid industry under this program.

4b) Documentation sufficient to show how those funds are used.

4c) Documentation sufficient to show any formally documented instance of edible U.S.-harvested squid being a danger to the marine environment or conservation under the Lacey Act, CITES or ESA.

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[2] USBR, FY 2024 Budget Justification at page 433.
[3] USBR, FY 2024 Budget Justification at page 382.

Question 5. In its July 2022 Feasibility Report on the Reintroduction of Sea Otters to the Pacific Coast, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service concludes this effort is feasible. In this report, the agency estimates the cost to U.S. taxpayers to be upwards of $43 million.

5a) Does this amount include the costs of research and annual population monitoring beyond 10 years?

5b) Does this amount include the costs associated with NEPA analyses or for any future rulemakings and public engagement?

5c) The same report states that "additional work is needed to reduce uncertainty in the area of risk with regard to the potential socioeconomic impacts of sea otter reintroduction." How did Interior reach the conclusion that this action is feasible absent such critical budgetary and social and economic impact information resulting from a population expansion of such highly protected marine species in Oregon and California?

Question 6. Within FLPMA there are certain Grant lands with specific management requirements that are unlike the Public lands. Will the management objectives for these federally designated Grant Lands be maintained?

Questions Submitted by Representative Case

Question 1. How does the Department of the Interior's budget further efforts to improve meaningful consultation between the federal government and the Native Hawaiian community as required by Executive Order 13175 dated November 6, 2000?

Question 2. The Department of Interior's budget does not include a request for either mandatory or discretionary Compact Impact funding. What are the current estimated financial impacts on states and localities from hosting citizens of the Freely Associated States and what proposed policies does the Biden administration support to mitigate these impacts?

Question 3. Hawai'i continues to be home to a large number of endangered species yet overall receives a low proportion of total endangered species funding. How does the Department of Interior's budget seek to ensure that endangered species funding is equitably distributed among all listed species?

Questions Submitted by Representative Fulcher

Question 1. During the Committee on Natural Resources hearing concerning the FY24 Interior Department budget, I touched briefly on geothermal energy, however, I did want to clarify with you on one item concerning geothermal energy.

Question 2. Geothermal energy is a carbon-free and baseload electricity resource, yet the permitting process for geothermal is more prone to delays than wind, solar, and other renewable resources. It is critical that the Department pursue common sense reforms to the permitting process for geothermal, such as expanding the use of categorical exclusions for resource confirmations. Is the Department working on updating its regulations to streamline the permitting process for geothermal resource confirmations? If so, what is the time frame to finalize such regulations?

Questions Submitted by Representative González-Colón

Question 1. I commend the Department of the Interior (the Department) for including a proposed allocation of $41,662,000 to repair historic walls of the San Juan National Historic Site's fortifications as one of its Fiscal Year 2024 Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) projects. However, I note that according to information published by the National Park Service, the deferred maintenance and repair backlog at park was approximately $587 million as of September 30, 2022.

In Fiscal Year 2021, the Department proposed and secured congressional approval for an allocation of $8.2 million under the GAOA LRF to stabilize the cliff at the San Fernando Bastion in the San Juan National Historic Site. What is the status of that project and projected timeline for completion?

Question 2. In addition to the GAOA LRF funding, what other initiatives is the Department pursuing to address and reduce the $587 million deferred maintenance backlog at the San Juan National Historic Site?

Question 3. In Fiscal Year 2023, the Department proposed and received congressional approval for an allocation of $3,763,000 under the GAOA LRF to replace the headquarters and visitor center of the FWS's Caba Rojo National Wildlife Refuge. The Department had previously secured $5,237,000 in Fiscal Year 2022 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for this project.

What is the status of the project and projected timeline for completion? What efforts is the Department pursuing to ensure it is carried out in a timely manner?

Question 4. According to information shared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) with my office last year, the deferred maintenance backlog for the National Wildlife Refuges in Puerto Rico totaled more than $15 million. Per the FWS, this figure represented "an increase from the February 2021 total of $4.8 million due to the most recent Comprehensive Condition Assessment conducted at Vieques NWR in Fall 2021, which captured new deficiencies from real property assets that the Service has inherited from the Navy."

What is the current deferred maintenance backlog for each of the five National Wildlife Refuges in Puerto Rico? What efforts is the Department currently pursuing to address and reduce it, particularly for the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge?

Question 5. The FWS is including $8 million for Maintenance Action Teams at multiple National Wildlife Refuges as one of its Fiscal Year 2024 GAOA LRF projects. Does the Department anticipate some of that funding will impact projects at the National Wildlife Refuges in Puerto Rico? If so, how much funding would be allocated for such projects and what is the estimated deferred maintenance that would be addressed?

Question 6. In Puerto Rico, the FWS administers five National Wildlife Refuges: the Caba Rojo, Culebra, Desecheo, Laguna Cartagena, and Vieques National Wildlife Refuges. In total they span over 22,000 acres, including approximately one-quarter of the Culebra archipelago's total land mass and approximately two-thirds of Vieques. In addition to preserving important ecosystems, they support outdoor recreation activities vital for our tourism economy. However, I am extremely concerned about a staffing shortage. I understand the FWS currently only has 10 employees to oversee the five National Wildlife Refuges in Puerto Rico, whereas ten to twelve years ago it had 28 employees. This shortage creates a series of challenges that prevent the FWS from effectively managing the sites, protecting their wildlife and natural resources, and providing services to visitors who support the local tourism and outdoor recreation economy.

What efforts, if any, is the FWS currently pursuing to address staffing needs at the National Wildlife Refuges in Puerto Rico?

Question 7. Last December, Congress appropriated $275 million in disaster relief funding to the FWS to address damages from recent hurricanes and natural disasters. In September 2022, Hurricane Fiona significantly impacted the Caba Rojo and the Laguna Cartagena National Wildlife Refuges in southwestern Puerto Rico, as well as some of the FWS-supported Puerto Rican Parrot aviaries.

Can you provide an update on the status of the $275 million in supplemental funding provided to the FWS, including where those funds will be invested? Have any of those resources been made available to address hurricane-related damages at the FWS's sites and facilities in Puerto Rico?

Question 8. Last year Congress amended the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to provide the Secretary of the Interior authority to conduct offshore wind leasing in federal waters off the U.S. territories. According to the Fiscal Year 2024 budget request, the Department will begin moving forward with its lease planning process in Puerto Rico in the current fiscal year (Fiscal Year 2023.)

During the hearing you mentioned the Department and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) plan to initiate the area identification process by forming an Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force. Could you provide additional information about the work this Task Force will carry out, including a timeline of planned efforts, and any ongoing or planned engagement with other federal agencies, state authorities, and local energy stakeholders such as the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority and LUMA Energy?

Question 9. The Caba Rojo National Wildlife Refuge is home to the Caba Rojo Salt Flats, a system of shallow and hypersaline lagoons that are considered the most important stopover for migratory birds in the Eastern Caribbean. The salt flats are also an important economic asset for southwestern Puerto Rico, attracting thousands of visitors and supporting a local salt mining operation. Due to recent storms and seismic activity in the region, the coastal features (mangroves, dunes, berms) that protected the system have been compromised by erosion, resulting in extensive flooding to the salt flats, in turn negatively impacting habitat quality and the viability of the local salt extraction activities. Hurricane Fiona's impact in September 2022 resulted in further damage and flooding to the Caba Rojo Salt Flats. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service secured an initial $1.2 million to implement the necessary restoration efforts. An additional $5 million was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation through the America the Beautiful Challenge, which includes funding allocated to the Department of the Interior by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Could you provide an update on the status of the restoration project at the Caba Rojo Salt Flats? What is the expected timeline and what efforts is the Department pursuing—with its local partners—to carry out the project in a timely manner now that the necessary funding has been secured?

Question 10. In both Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023—at my request—Congress provided the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) a $500,000 increase to update the combined national seismic hazard model for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which was last published in 2003. As you know, the national seismic hazard model for the contiguous 48 States is regularly updated every 6 years, and USGS has been working on updating the models for Alaska and Hawaii. These models describe the likelihood and potential impacts of earthquakes and serve as the basis for seismic provisions in building codes. According to information previously shared by USGS with my office, maintaining the funding level through Fiscal Year 2024 would allow them to deliver a draft Puerto Rico-U.S. Virgin Islands seismic hazard map in 2024 and a final, updated model in 2025. However, I am concerned the Department's Fiscal Year 2024 budget request for USGS now proposes a $500,000 reduction and would delay the release of the updated seismic hazard model for the two territories until the end of 2026.

Could you please explain why the Department is proposing this $500,000 reduction and delaying the release of the updated Puerto Rico-U.S. Virgin Islands seismic hazard model until the end of 2026?

Question 11. Is the Department pursuing any efforts to align future updates of the seismic hazard models for the territories with the maps for all 50 States? What additional resources would USGS require to achieve this? I note that House Report 117-400, accompanying the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2023 directed USGS to explore and submit a report on this issue.

Questions Submitted by Representative Huffman

Secretary Haaland, I want to share a few observations about recent Department actions regarding tribal consultation and gaming and get your thoughts on how we can ensure Tribal governments are properly consulted moving forward. Tribal economic development is of course important to me, but doing it the right way and ensuring the rights and sovereignty of other tribes are respected is equally important.

Question 1. The Department is currently considering several controversial off-reservation gaming projects—in or near my district—where frankly, there has been a lack of transparency about what rules are being used using to process these applications, or even considering novel legal theories for the benefit of an individual project.

Question 2. In some of these instances, the Department has not consulted with Tribes that will either have their land or government resources impacted by these projects. And;

Question 3. The Department is actively considering new regulations that would make it easier to obtain land far off existing reservations for tribal gaming by removing a requirement for "greater scrutiny" the farther a project is from a Tribe's existing land base.

Taken together, I see a concerning pattern. Will you commit to working with me, and more importantly the Tribes I represent, to ensure that off-reservation gaming projects are considered in a transparent manner, through legal means available to all Tribes, and with respect to the views of the Indigenous inhabitants of the region?

Questions Submitted by Representative LaMalfa

Question 1. What steps is DOI taking to address the ever-increasing presence of illegal marijuana grow sites on federal lands, and can the Secretary agree that this is a high public and environmental safety concern?

Question 2. In communication with the National Parks and monuments in my district, their big ask from us, is of course, more funding for staff. I have read that the National Parks have seen a 20% increase in visitation, but because of insufficient federal funding, NPS has lost 3,500 employees, or 16% of its staff capacity. From a safety perspective and effectiveness perspective such statistics are unacceptable. Recent regulatory changes to parks seasonal hiring has made retaining and rehiring seasonal employees more difficult. Is your office working at resolving these regulatory challenges? What steps are you taking to make rehiring seasonal employees easier?

Question 3. Are seasonal regulatory hiring constraints harming Wildland firefighter seasonal staffing?

Question 4. Is there concern that purchasing lands for tribes with Land & Water Conservation Funds will curtail their use in the future in a way that will prevent tribes from using these lands in a different way in the future?

Question 5. It's my understanding that a lot of the funding for this program has only been put toward planning costs. Shouldn't the bulk of any money Congress chooses to appropriate for this purpose go toward implementing plan and providing tribal communities tools to use to address changes in their community?

Question 6. What experience, if any, does Director Sams have working for the National Park Service?

Question 7. When a national park is established by Congress, Congress drafts enabling legislation that explains the purpose of the park and the justification for why taxpayer dollars are being allotted to its administration. Historically, projects that would not specifically meet the requirements of enabling legislation would rarely if ever receive funding. But now, under this administration, DEI and racial justice funding has worked its way into mandatory annual spending of parks, despite the fact that parks explicitly asked for permanent adjustment requests to fund staffing levels or infrastructure update needs, not DEI projects and fulfilling political agendas. These parks are in great need to complete deferred maintenance, improve visitor safety and carry out the basic functions the Park was entrusted to do. Do you read and consider enabling legislation when making decisions to fund DEI and racial justice programs over fundamental operational needs of the National Park Service?

Question 8. I have learned that $13,594,000 in additional funding for racial justice programs was approved last year on top of the funding already set aside for DEI Question: is DEI a new statutory authority that justified base increase request? And how does this massive funding diversion contribute to visitor experience or address the critical infrastructure backlogs?

Questions Submitted by Representative Wittman

Question 1. The Chesapeake Bay is critical to the environmental and economic health of our region and the Commonwealth. Authorized in the bipartisan America's Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Act, the Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense WILD grants assist in administering habitat restoration, conservation, clean water, flood protection and other ecosystem services in our nation's largest estuary. Unfortunately, this program was not included in the Presidents FY 24 budget.

1a) What was the reasoning for this program's exclusion?

1b) What is the Department of Interior doing to ensure the health and sustainability of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed?

Question 2. The Fish and Wildlife Service designates ports for the importation and exportation of wildlife and wildlife products. A 2019 study recommended increasing the total number of designated ports from 17 to 46. Despite this study, the Fish and Wildlife Service has failed to issue designations to the recommended number and currently only has 18 designated wildlife ports. From Fall 2019 to Spring 2021, the 0MB Unified Agenda proposed an additional list of designated ports, which included Norfolk, Virginia. In Fall 2021, the FWS removed the proposed designated ports from the Unified Agenda citing issues due to the daily challenges Wildlife Inspectors faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2a) With President Biden Announcing the termination of the COVID-19 national emergency on May 11, how does the Presidents FY24 budget request address the need for additional designated ports?

2b) What challenges remain in preventing the list of additional FWS designated ports?

2c) When should we expect a Notice of Proposed Rule Making listing additional FWS designated ports?

Question 3. Since coming into office, the Biden Administration has taken steps to depress domestic energy production, causing prices to skyrocket and making America reliant on our adversaries for energy.

3a) How does the U.S. Department of the Interior plan to engage with industry stakeholders and local communities to increase sustainable and responsible access to domestic minerals and natural resources for renewable energy projects?

3b) What specific plans does the U.S. Department of the Interior have in place to facilitate and expedite the exploration, extraction, and development of natural resources and minerals on public lands, which are essential for the construction of critical infrastructure projects?

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Madam Secretary. We will now move to Member questions. I remind Members that you will have 5 minutes for questions. We will start with the Majority, and alternate from one side of the dais to the other. I now recognize the gentleman from Colorado, Mr. Lamborn, for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for having this hearing. Madam Secretary, it is good to see you again. I remember when you used to sit right over there, and we had some good discussions.

Let me ask you about a 9th Circuit case, and then I want to ask you about forestry. In the 9th Circuit case, *Center for Biological Diversity v. Bernhardt*, the litigants argued, "if oil is produced from a project, the total supply of oil in the world will rise, increasing global supply will reduce prices."

Now, they go on to say once prices drop, foreign consumers will buy and consume more oil, so that part of the situation they don't like, but they do recognize that more supply leads to lower prices. This citation was used against your Department in the 2022 District Court case opposing Lease Sale 257.

Both the Center for Biological Diversity, as well as Friends of the Earth, have said in their briefs that increasing oil supply will lower energy costs. Do you agree or disagree with groups like that, or anyone when they say that more energy, oil, and gas supply will lower costs.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much, and it is nice to see you too, Mr. Lamborn, thank you. What I can say is that on Federal lands, oil production is up. It is at an all-time high currently. So, we feel we are doing our job to move those permits forward, and there are almost 7,000 permits available for drilling that haven't been used. Oil production is at an all-time high on Federal lands.

Mr. LAMBORN. Now, let me take issue with that, Madam Secretary. Despite rhetoric from this Administration and its Democratic Members here in Congress, anti-energy and anti-human policies have increased the cost of energy. When President Biden promised to end fossil fuels, production immediately decreased, as well as research, development, and exploratory spending.

There is uncertainty that affects people's decision making out there in the business world. So, the result is this has reduced supply and raised prices. Even worse, this Administration has doubled down on its unreliable, renewable commitments which rely on cycling natural gas to make up for periods when the renewables are not producing. This increases the cost of energy.

A lot of things here, let's get into it. Do you think that wind and solar are reliable enough or not reliable enough to provide baseload energy?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Lamborn, and, of course, we are working very hard on a transition to clean energy, because we feel—well, of course, we want to reach the President's goals for clean energy and that will take some work, so all of us are working on that.

I want to reiterate the fact that oil production on Federal lands is at an all-time high. There are many factors that go into what the cost of gasoline is, and I certainly understand raising my child as a single mom that things are difficult sometimes, and we are doing our part to help reduce those energy costs by opening transmission lines, by moving clean energy forward. I know that that can be very cost effective, and we are going to work hard to get there.

Mr. LAMBORN. I understand that you have long-term goals, I recognize that. But to reach those goals when certain measures of the Administration reduce supply and increase prices, that has a human cost. Would you agree with me that raising the cost of energy for the consumer out there, working families, single moms, everybody else, has a human cost to it?

Secretary HAALAND. I recognize, Mr. Lamborn, that there are many factors that go into what the price of gas is, and for our part, the work that we are required to do in the Department of the Interior, leasing land, issuing permits for the oil industry, oil production is at an all-time high on Federal lands. There is more to it than that.

State and private lands also produce oil, and we don't have control over every single aspect of our energy, but for our part, we are doing our part, we are working hard, we are processing those permits. There are thousands of permits that haven't been used, and a lot goes into what the price of gasoline is. It is not just what the Department of the Interior is doing.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back, and I recognize the gentlelady from California, Mrs. Napolitano for 5 minutes.

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. Hello. Good to see you, Madam Secretary. I have a couple of questions. One deals with the Colorado River

Basin. It is crucial we invest in infrastructure in tracing water because of the drought conditions in Southern California, and all the six Western states. Can you tell the Committee how the budget cuts proposed by the House Republicans related to the debt ceiling would impact funding for water infrastructure projects that the community needs to get through the challenge?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, thank you so much for the question, and yes, any budget cuts with respect to how we are managing this terrible drought in the West will have a negative affect on the communities that we serve. I am proud to have Deputy Secretary Beaudreau with me today, who has been the lead on many of these issues with respect to the Colorado River. If you would like for him to sort of answer more of the question in detail, I would be happy to turn the mic over to Tommy.

Mr. BEAUDREAU. Thanks very much. The Secretary is absolutely right, especially in these times of unprecedented drought and the strain that is on the system. What is needed is further investment in the Colorado River System in order to provide greater water delivery capacity and efficiency.

That is exactly what the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act are helping accomplish. To move backward by cutting our budget with respect to bureau reclamation and water delivery has the potential to severely impact the 40 million people who rely on that basin for fundamental needs such as drinking water and agriculture.

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. The other question I have is on the advanced large scale water recycling projects that I authored last year. Can you share an update on what progress has been made so far, and when will the money start to go out, will it be next year after the draft criteria is finalized?

Secretary HAALAND. I beg your pardon, Congresswoman, would you repeat the question please?

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. It is the new program that was started in the last Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, a new program to advance large scale water recycling projects, provide drought proof supply to the communities. The project was the Large Water Recycling Project Investment Act.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes. Thank you so much for that, and I know that water recycling—we are using every tool in the toolbox, of course, and know that we all have to pitch in to make sure that these things work.

But with respect to the large scale water recycling program, the notice of funding opportunity for the program was released on December 23, 2022, with applications being due on February 28, 2023. A funding opportunity to allocate bill funding for this program is expected in early June, so just in a couple of months from now, and the Fiscal Year 2023 bill spend plan for reclamation includes $50 million for projects to be allocated under this particular program.

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. When will the money start going out?

Secretary HAALAND. It looks like the funding of the allocation will start in early June, so in a few months.

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. Thank you very much. I yield back to Mr. Grijalva, the Ranking Member.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you, Mrs. Napolitano. I just want to ask for unanimous consent to enter into the record on the impression that was given that the previous Congress did not do any oversight hearings or the Administration didn't participate.

My consent request is to enter into the record a chart showing that when we were in the Majority, Democrats in the last Congress, we called at least one administrative witness in one out of every three hearings that we had. That is 17 different hearings.

And I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a resolution from the Republicans that aims to cut funding to the Office of the Inspector General by 20 percent, which is not what one does when they are really concerned about oversight, and unanimous consent to enter into the record a letter from the Fish and Wildlife Service in response to a document request from the Republicans. It is about a program meant to help employees with mental health and stress, which costs less than $12,000 for six workshops. This was the focal point of their oversight, so if the Majority is serious about oversight, the evidence up to this point doesn't indicate that at all, and I yield back to the gentlelady.

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection.

[The information follows:]

Chart of Administration Witnesses in the 117th Congress

Chart - During the 117th Congress, Democrats on the National Resources Committee questioned 29 Agency witnesses in 17 hearings. Committee Republican attendance at these hearings was only 25% on average.

Hearing Date	Hearing Title	Administration Witnesses	Administration Witness List	Committee Republican Attendance	% of Committee Republicans
4/27/2021	"Wildlife Trafficking and the Growing Online Marketplace."	1	1) Deputy Director for Policy, FWS	5	24%
5/25/2021	"The Status of Drought Conditions Throughout the Western United States."	2	1) Senior Counsel to the Secretary, DOI; 2) Acting Chief Scientist, NOAA	5	24%
6/17/2021	"Examining Federal Facilities in Indian Country."	2	1) Deputy Director for Management Operations, IHS; 2) Deputy Assistant Secretary for Management, AS-IA	3	14%
6/23/2021	"Examining the Department of the Interior's Spending Priorities and the President's Fiscal Year Budget 2022 Proposal."	2	1) Secretary of the Interior (Haaland), DOI; 2) Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Policy, Management, and Budget, DOI	20	95%
7/21/2021	"Examining the President's Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Proposal for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration"	4	1) Depupty Commissioner of Operations, BOR; 2) Associate Director of Water Resources, USGS; 3) Dep Director for Program Management Policy, FWS; 4) Administator, NOAA	8	38%
10/15/2021	"Colorado River Drought Conditions and Response Measures "	1	1) Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, DOI	2	10%
10/21/2021	"Runit Dome and the U.S Nuclear Legacy in the Marshall Islands."	2	1) Associate Under Secretary for Environment, Safety, and Security, DOE; 2) Director of the Office of Insular Affairs, DOI	3	14%
11/16/2021	"Plugging in Public Lands: Transmission Infrastructure for Renewable Energy."	1	1) Senior Counselor to Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals, DOI	5	24%
3/8/2022	"Examining the History of Federal Lands and the Development of Tribal Co Management."	1	1) Director, NPS	13	62%
3/8/2022	"Klamath River Basin Conditions and Opportunities."	1	1) Deputy Director for Program Management and Policy, FWS	4	19%
3/31/2022	"Benefits of the Legacy Pollution Clean-Up Programs in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law."	1	1) Dep Asst Sec for Lands and Minerals Mgmt @ DOI	5	24%
4/5/2022	"Investing in Wildfire Management, Ecosystem Restoration, and Resilient Communities: Examining the Biden Administration's Priorities for Implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law."	3	1) Director, Office of Wildland Fire, DOI; 2) Deputy Chief of State and Private Forestry, USDA; 3) Chief Executive of Intergovernmental Relations, USDA	7	33%
4/28/2022	"Preventing Pandemics Through U.S. Wildlife-borne Disease"	1	1) Associate Director for Ecosystem, USGS	2	10%
6/28/2022	"Examining the Policies and Priorities of the Bureau of Indian Education."	2	1) Director, BIA; 2) Assistant Director, GAO	3	14%
7/28/2022	"Preventing Polluters from Getting Government Contracts: Bureau of Land Management's Corporate Exclusions Lists."	2	1) Ispector General, DOI OIG; 2) Deputy Director for Operations, BLM	1	5%
9/8/2022	"Power in the Pacific: Unlocking Offshore Wind Energy for the American West."	2	1) Pacific Regional Director, OEM; 2) Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense of Real Property, DOD	1	5%
9/20/2022	"Examining Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta: The Implications of the Supreme Court's Ruling on Tribal Sovereignty."	1	1) Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, DOI	4	19%
	Total Administration Witnesses	29	Average Committee Republican Attendance	5	25%

Source: 117th House Natural Resources Committee Hearing Transcripts

H.R. 2333 (Rep. Biggs)—118th Congress

BiggsIN30

(Original Signature of Member)

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2333

To provide for a limitation on availability of funds for U.S. Department of Interior, Office of Inspector General for fiscal year 2024.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. BIGGS introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee On__________

A BILL

To provide for a limitation on availability of funds for U.S. Department of Interior, Office of Inspector General for fiscal year 2024.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. LIMITATION ON AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS FOR U.S. DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR, OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024.

Notwithstanding any other provision of the law, amounts authorized to be appropriated or otherwise available for U.S. Department of Interior, Office of Inspector General for fiscal year 2024 may not exceed $52,486,000.

Letter from Fish and Wildlife Service to Chairman Westerman, dated March 31, 2023

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240

March 31, 2023

Hon. Bruce Westerman, Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Westerman:

I write in response to your March 14, 2023, letter regarding the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) support for employee training and career development programs that support the work of dedicated natural resource professionals in accomplishing the Service's important mission. We appreciate your interest in this important topic.

The Service has a workforce of over 8,000 employees stationed across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and many U.S. territories, as well as nearly a dozen countries globally. Our employees are dedicated professionals and committed public servants who serve as leaders and trusted partners in fish and wildlife conservation throughout the world. To meet our responsibility of supporting the conservation and management of fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the American people, ensuring the health, safety, and wellbeing of those employees is a top priority of the Service. The Service has found that investing in our employees helps them be more productive in carrying out their day-to-day duties in support of the Service's mission on behalf of the American people. Providing resources to support employee health, safety, and wellness also enables the Service to recruit and retain an effective and dedicated workforce.

Certain of the Service's regional offices have on occasion offered access to a limited number of voluntary, virtual workshops titled "Acknowledging Ecological Grief and Building Resiliency." These voluntary workshops met a request from a number of Service employees seeking assistance in managing work-related stress. The workshops were conducted by outside consultants, approved on a case-by-case basis by leadership in the Service's regional offices and supported through base funds set aside for general employee training and development. Since 2021, the Service's regional offices offered their employees access to six such workshops, with a total cost of $11,600. Copies of invoices received by the Service in connection with these workshops accompany this response. No additional workshops are currently planned.

If you of your staff would like to follow up on this or any other matter, please contact me or Perrin Cooke, Oversight Counsel with the U.S. Department of the Interior at perrin_cooke@ios.doi.gov.

Sincerely,

MARTHA WILLIAMS,
Director

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired. I now recognize the gentleman from California for 5 minutes, Mr. Lamborn—excuse me, Mr. LaMalfa.

Mr. LAMALFA. I'm the other Doug.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thanks again, Mr. Chairman. And welcome, Madam Secretary. Good to see you again. Good to always have a chance to work and speak with you. A lot of conversation beginning about so-called clean energy and such, and I just wanted to ask right out of the chute, what is the basis for CO_2 levels that the Department is working off of? What percent of our atmosphere is CO_2 at this point that so many decisions are being based upon?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, thank you so much for the question, and, of course, so much of the work we do is based on science. I am more than happy to have the U.S. Geological Survey or another such bureau get with you on those specific levels.

Mr. LAMALFA. On the current CO_2 level of our atmosphere?

Secretary HAALAND. I don't have that current CO_2 level with me, but we are happy to follow up on that specific question with your staff.

Mr. LAMALFA. OK, thank you, Madam Secretary. Let me shift gears to the Klamath Basin, of course, something we have had quite a bit of conversation about and the water usage up there. The Klamath Project was created over 100 years ago for agriculture in that basin and such, and there has been a lot of dispute, especially in recent years, over what the allocation is going to be between that and flushing down the stream for fish, or what is kept in the lake for sucker fish.

Now, a lot of the data for what the lake levels should be was based in a period between 1904 and 1912, when it was the wettest period in recorded history on the level of the basin. So, it would seem that current flow rates that are being demanded are way above what the pre-dam lake was delivering to the river.

Would it be fair to think that that outlier data should be reconsidered since that was a window of, again, the wettest period on record recorded for the lake in many, many years of showing other trends. Wouldn't it be fair to reconsider that outlier data?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, thank you so much for the question, and I know you have had many, many conversations with our Commissioner, Camille Touton, who does a really wonderful job at the Bureau of Reclamation, and that staff who has worked on the Klamath Basin, living, eating, and breathing this issue, I know that they have a system that they work off of, and, of course, we are always happy to make sure that we can meet with you and convey that information to you.

Mr. LAMALFA. And I do appreciate that, and now——

Secretary HAALAND. But the Department is committed to supporting the Klamath Basin communities amid a fourth consecutive year of drought. I know there has been a lot of moisture in California. That doesn't mean that the drought is over. The extreme hydrological conditions over the last several years have made operations of the Klamath Project extremely challenging. We are working through those every time. I am working——

Mr. LAMALFA. I'm sorry, but as time narrows down here, what we are talking about statistically is a short period of time over 100 years ago on really high lake levels, high inflow levels that don't seem to run on the average here. Let me take that to another portion of my question, then, is that the Bureau insisted that the historic lake level was 4,140, or 2.6 feet higher than what the USGS has accepted as the number is 4,137.8.

So, the higher elevations are critical in determining what the water rights are, and what is going to be sent downstream. So, again, we have a dispute as to what the lake level was, and the data that it is being based upon. So, would you commit to commissioning a new study by a non-political body to address these current discrepancies with BOR and USGS?

Secretary HAALAND. I am more than happy to take your concerns, and we know how concerned you are about this issue, back to the Bureau of Reclamation, and we, of course, will be happy to do whatever the Committee asks of us, we will work to respond in a timely manner.

Mr. LAMALFA. All right. I appreciate that, there was improved water allocation in a really great water year on the lake, but it is still about 50 percent of what growers should get. And then, over on the Trinity Lake side, I want to touch on that as well, is that it was deemed a wet year, yet the lake is only 37 percent while surrounding lakes are about to come to 100 percent, and they have more than doubled the amount of water flowing out of that lake down the river, and it is even starting to flood some people's homes.

So, I would like to forward that information, or at least threaten to do so. If it goes much higher, it is right at the base of people's homes there in that Trinity River so-called restoration project. There is so much water flowing out of that lake it is going to ruin their needs for the summer, et cetera. So, I want to bring more attention to that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman for the indulgence. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from the Northern Mariana Islands for 5 minutes.

Mr. Sablan.

Mr. SABLAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Madam Secretary. Your Deputy and Budget Director, welcome. Good morning. Let me start first by commending and recognizing the Biden administration's recognition of insular affairs programs.

Some of the programs in your Administration of the budget for four insular areas, the Energizing Insular Communities Program, which I still think requires a plan, but nonetheless, I recognize that the additional help in the technical assistance program as well, and Madam Secretary, the Capital Improvement Project, which started with covenant funding for the Northern Marinas particularly, was started at $27.7 million some 40 years ago, and has remained at that number until this year, we are trying, we see a budget increase of $4 million. Thank you very much. Thank you to the Department for listening. Of course, more listening is needed, but thank you.

Madam Secretary, could you please tell us if other departments or agencies will follow your Department seriously, then start to waive match requirements for the insular areas? At the IGIA meeting in February, you announced that OMB has directed all Federal departments and agencies to conduct a review of the law to see if there were any authorizing statutes that could bar waiving local match requirements for Federal grants to the Marianas and other insular areas.

Congress has already waived the local match requirement for amounts below $200,000, but OMB directed Federal granters to work to implement the law's waiver for amounts greater than $200,000 absent an agency specific statute that conflicts. Will other Federal granters follow Interior's lead of additional waiver?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Mr. Sablan, and, of course, I am happy to take that message back to the White House, and we recognize the importance of reducing the financial burden on these communities, and increasing flexibility for the grant funding for underserved communities.

I know it is a relatively small portion of our budget, but it really goes a long way in the communities that these grants serve. So, we are happy to——

Mr. SABLAN. No, thank you for your effort, you decision also, but we look forward to seeing the response from the other several agencies and departments. So, Madam Secretary, can you give us an update on when Congress can expect to receive the final compact's bilateral agreements?

The second round of financial assistance under the compacts of free associations which govern the relationships between the United States and the Federated States of Micronesia, then the Republics of the Marshall Islands and Palau are coming to an end in 2023, and next year in 2024. I commend your Department and Office of Insular Affairs for your efforts in supporting Special Envoy Joseph Yun in achieving signed memoranda for understandings for three compact countries on the basic levels of compact funding for the next 20 years.

However, there isn't much time left before the end of this Fiscal Year when authorizations for funding to the Marshal Islands and FSM will expire. When the compact agreements are transmitted to Congress, will they include the Administration's proposed funding sources?

We need to prevent a repeat of the Palau compact renewal, which took 7 years to approve again, because of differences between the Administration and Congress funding sources, one time we were talking about even passport fees.

At this time, we need this agreement signed and approved by Congress. It is in our interest at this time. Without going into too much, can you tell us when we can expect this, please?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much. I know how important this is to you, and it is also very important to us. Assistant Secretary Cantor, who I know you are in touch with, is working closely with Ambassador Yun, and compact negotiations are moving forward with the Ambassador and the State Department. They are ongoing. We are making progress with the FSM and Palau, and my team has been meeting with FSM in Washington, DC to finish these negotiations on some of the subsidiary agreements under the compacts.

So, what I can tell you is that they are moving forward. We are pleased with the progress, and we are happy to have Assistant Secretary Cantor stay in touch with your office as to timing.

Mr. SABLAN. Thank you very much, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes for 5 minutes the gentleman from Idaho. Mr. Fulcher, you are recognized.

Mr. FULCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Secretary, good to see you again. Thank you for being here, and from my home state of Idaho, it is good to interact with you today. We have a lot of challenges on Federal lands in my state, and you are certainly invited at your convenience to come pay us a visit sometime. I think that would be very fruitful. It would be good to show you some things that are true and happening or not happening on the ground, as the case may be.

But you made a statement to Congressman Lamborn a few minutes ago that oil production on Federal lands is at an all-time high, and, admittedly, I don't know what metric that might be measuring, but that is not the perception. I can tell you that the confidence of the oil companies, at least for any kind of new permits, is probably at an all-time low.

So, let's just assume that what you said is accurate, it is at an all-time high, and we certainly need it, because we are growing and our energy sources are definitely in question. Are you committed to keeping it that way?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much, Congressman. We are—of course, we are following the law, and we are committed to moving the applications for permits to drill forward as expeditiously as possible, and we have done that since I have been in this position. We have career staff who take their jobs very seriously and they are moving those forward.

Mr. FULCHER. So, that might be surprising to some, but that should be comforting to some if that is in fact the case. So, I thank you for committing to that on the record, and I can tell you what some alternatives sources are in Idaho—and again, would love to see you there at some point. We have geothermal, we have hydro, we have nuclear. A number of those permits are in process. It does appear that—I won't say being flat out ignored, but there is just not a lot of focus there. Can I ask you to touch on geothermal, on hydro, nuclear, what is the attitude toward those sources, especially as it comes to on Federal land?

Secretary HAALAND. The attitude in our Department is that we want to use every tool in the tool box, and we are happy if a geothermal company comes to us and wants to lease and permit something, we take that seriously.

We know that this is an all-hands-on-deck moment for energy transition, and certainly using our natural resources will help move us away from this terrible climate crisis that we are experiencing. It also creates jobs in rural communities, which I know is the case in your state. So, I am more than happy to visit. Please just get in touch with us, and we are happy to plan a visit.

Mr. FULCHER. Well, again, with that said, that general message has not been the case, that we have not received that from other members of the agencies. So, just know that I appreciate you putting that on the record. We did pass, I might add, what is called the Clean Act as part of H.R. 1. That was a bipartisan, highly supported piece of legislation that streamlines geothermal exploration. So, we encourage that to be followed through as we move forward with geothermal in particular. That is a great one.

I want to shift gears, because I don't have much time left. The Lava Ridge Project. I don't know if you are familiar with the Lava Ridge Energy Project. That is a very large wind project in Idaho.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes.

Mr. FULCHER. And we are told by power experts in the region that in order to match the output, because it is not based on power, we will need to have three to four times the peaking power production to match an equal amount of baseload. Are you familiar with the Lava Ridge Project and is that something you are supportive of?

Secretary HAALAND. I would love to learn more about that project. We know that we are in a transition, and we are all going to work hard to get there.

Mr. FULCHER. That is a real concern in my district, and I wanted to just close with a statement before I ran out of time—it is a different subject. The BLM has a proposal on a conservation and health landscape rule, and I can't help but think that the BLM's proposal will result in some further backlogs if that is adopted in the management of species, and create new bureaucracies in the multiple use system.

I believe that the Administration should truly be focused on elevating all the forms of energy, and not cutting off productive land uses, and I just want to put that on the record and share that with you, Madam Secretary. I look forward to seeing you in Idaho. Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Secretary HAALAND. I understand. Thank you, Mr. Fulcher.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Nevada. Ms. Lee, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Ranking Member Grijalva. It is a pleasure to welcome Secretary Haaland, especially as a Member representing the district that thanks to your very strong support is now home to America's newest national monument.

The Avi Kwa Ame National Monument and its 500,000-plus acres is now part of nearly 50 million acres of land in my state that is stewarded by BLM. That is about 70 percent of Nevada all told, and a very full plate for an agency that is lacking a full staff.

In December 2021, the BLM Director, Tracey Stone-Manning, said that her top priority for the Bureau in 2022 was fixing staff shortages, and you told me that very same thing in the appropriations hearing last year, adding that you were working on ways to expedite hiring for positions that support operations.

Obviously, this was welcome news as local officials in Nevada have emphasized that it can take years for BLM to process some straightforward requests that should instead be taking weeks or months. Can you please detail the progress that the Interior Department is making in fixing these staff shortages, including the successive efforts to expedite hiring where essential in day-to-day operations?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much, Congresswoman, and yes, we are very pleased about Avi Kwa Ame, and I was really happy to see you there. And, interestingly, when I was in the car with Director Stone-Manning, we had that very conversation when we were in Nevada about staffing, and, of course, you know that staffing went down considerably during the last administration, and it has taken a very long time to move that back up.

So, it has had real impacts on Western communities and on the communities that you serve. All I can say is that we are working hard at it. That is a still a priority of Director Stone-Manning. It is incredibly important that we have the folks on the ground to steward these lands.

Thankfully for Avi Kwa Ame, as you know, it will be co-stewarded by the tribes in Nevada. So, we will have that help there, but certainly that is why our budget request is so important. That will allow this important work to continue, and we will continue to make this a priority.

Ms. LEE. Thank you. I appreciate that commitment. I want to turn now to some BLM regulations. The Bureau has proposed a new public lands rule for allowing for 10-year conservation leases to designate conservation as a formal use of public lands on par with energy development, grazing, and recreation. This has been characterized as a seismic shift in lands management.

As you know, I am a committed supporter of conservation, but I am also committed to reaching another critical goal, which is transitioning to 100 percent renewable energy by 2035, and I want to be certain that BLM's rulemaking will not end up slowing down the right kind of energy development right at precisely the wrong time when we need to be speeding it up. So, could you explain how this proposed rule counts for the increasingly urgent need to expedite renewable energy development on Federal lands?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Congresswoman, and we believe very strongly that conservation and clean energy go hand-in-hand on BLM lands. The rule does not intend to slow down any of these projects, and in fact we are like-minded that we do need to ramp up our clean energy projects. We have had many successful efforts on helping clean energy projects identify the right areas.

It is placing them in the right areas, making sure that the stakeholders are at the table early on so that we have consensus going forward. Sometimes that will slow down the process when not everyone is on the same page. So, everything we do is in furtherance of a healthy environment, and those clean energy projects are top of mind for us, and I will tell you that this particular rule has no intention of slowing down any clean energy projects on BLM lands.

Ms. LEE. Just one other thing. Obviously, we are looking at some proposed budget cuts. Could you explain how these would affect BLM's progress in managing Federal lands, especially in the West?

Secretary HAALAND. I think BLM was one of the hardest hit bureaus in the Department of the Interior during the last administration. Hundreds of people resigned, and it is difficult to staff up that, those hundreds of years of collective experience and knowledge. We are working on that.

The budget will help us tremendously at making sure that we can prioritize that with the BLM. I mean, in every way, shape, and form, our public lands belong to every single American, and we want to make careers in this public service available to as many people as possible.

So, I can just tell you that we are committed to that idea. The drought isn't going away, the climate crisis isn't going away any time soon. It is an all-hands-on-deck moment, and we take that very seriously.

Ms. LEE. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Utah. Mr. Curtis, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CURTIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Madam Secretary. Like my colleagues, I enjoyed serving with you here and co-chairing the Public Lands Subcommittee. Let me bring up a difficult issue. Shortly after your appointment, you and I found ourselves on a different side of a very contentious issue in the state. For those of you who are not familiar, it was the Bears Ears land designation.

Just quickly, round one of the designation was President Obama designated 1.3 million acres as a monument. Round two was President Trump repealing that designation. Round three, which is where you came in, is President Biden re-establishing those boundaries.

Now, this may be an oversimplification, but the argument, in essence, was we must do this to protect and preserve this area. We don't trust the state, we don't trust the county, we don't trust the elected officials to do this as they have done it for many, many decades. We have to do it here from Washington, DC.

Today, there is far more looting, far more grave robbing, vandalism in this area. And by the way, I want to preface all of this with, your agency BLM folks on the ground are amazing. We love and appreciate them. I don't want to diminish them in any way, but not a single penny of resource has been sent their way after this 1.3 million acre designation that the Federal Government took on as a responsibility to preserve and protect.

At the time of the designation, there were two BLM agents, law enforcement agents, that patrolled that area. Today, I could be wrong, but I think there are two agents managing—imagine, 1.3 million acres. Today, not a single sign has gone up, not a single fence has gone up, nothing is any different, except for the fact that the monument designation brought the attention to the world of this area, and now they are coming, and we don't have the resources to protect this.

Your budget, if I read it correctly, has $3 million for every single brand new designation across the country. How in the world does the Federal Government propose to do what it said it was going to do when it made this a monument designation and took the stewardship away from the local people?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, thank you very much for the question, and you are absolutely right. As we have been discussing, there is a shortage of staff particularly in the West.

Mr. CURTIS. But it is not staff, it is budget. Like, you don't even have the budget if you had the staff. And this is pre-budget. This is not counting any budget cuts or anything. This is the Federal Government made a decision several years ago to designate this as a 1.3 million acre monument to preserve it, and has not even tried to put resources in to do that, and the argument on the ground is, by the way, we are doing that quite well as local and state government.

We feel like we preserve and protect that area in a magnificent way, and now the Federal Government has taken it over without adding any resources. How do we justify that? How do I go back to these people and say the people who thought they knew better than you, who thought they were better stewards than you, have ignored you, and have not done anything in this area?

Secretary HAALAND. I absolutely appreciate your comments, Mr. Curtis. I will absolutely take those to heart and have discussions with my staff at the Department. I understand your concerns and they are my concerns as well.

Mr. CURTIS. Well, I know you well enough to take that quite sincerely, and I want you to know that means a lot to me that you would make that commitment. And I think we as lawmakers and policy makers need to understand it is not as easy as waving a wand and protecting all of this area because we have designated it. That comes with a tremendous responsibility. We are taking that responsibility away from the state, and we are going to take that, and I think when we make these decisions, we have to step up for that, right? If we really want to preserve and protect this area in a way that it was different than before. So, thank you for your commitment. We will take you up on that.

Let me switch gears just quickly. Almost 20 years after the passage of the Energy Policy Act in 2005, it is Title V on Indian Energy, we still do not have enough petroleum engineers, geologists, and staff within the Bureau of Indian Affairs to support development of Indian energy resources. As you know, I have five tribes in my area, particularly the Utes and the Navajos. These are not gaming tribes. They rely on natural resources. What steps can we take in Interior to bring more energy experts into the Bureau of Indian Affairs?

Secretary HAALAND. I appreciate that comment as well, and I take it to heart, Mr. Curtis. I will take that back, we will have a discussion on it.

Mr. CURTIS. OK, we would love to work with your team on my tribes, and be an asset and help them, because as you well know, it is a difficult lot moving forward in many of these cases, and I would love to team with you on that, and thank you for coming today and being here.

Secretary HAALAND. Absolutely, and thank you as well for caring about the tribes in your state, and we will absolutely be in touch, thank you.

Mr. CURTIS. Thanks, Madam Secretary, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Michigan. Mrs. Dingell, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. DINGELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and like everyone else, it is great to see you, Madam Secretary. Secretary, one of my top priorities is ensuring that as a country, we have the capacity to reach our full potential when it comes to building out electric vehicles and the charging infrastructure.

Which means we have to strengthen our domestic supply chains for critical minerals from mining and processing to recycling. We also know that our current mining law, which has not been meaningfully updated in 150 years, tips the scales toward mining companies and away from communities who need to have a fair say in the decision making if we are going to build a strong enduring mining industry in the United States.

So, Madam Secretary, what initiatives is the Department of the Interior taking to ensure we have a strong, safe, environmentally sound mining industry to buttress our domestic supply chains for EV development and employment to meet our clean energy goals?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much, Congresswoman, and I am very pleased to have sitting next to me our Deputy Secretary, Tommy Beaudreau, who is the Chair of the inter-agency work group on mining reform, and if it is OK, I would love for him to answer this question in detail.

Mr. BEAUDREAU. Thank you very much, Secretary Haaland. For all the reasons you have said, this is one of the highest priorities in the Administration. I met with the White House about it just last week. We do have a substantial challenge in front of us under the General Mining Law of 1872.

Suffice to say, the policy priorities of the Grant administration are not necessarily the same as the challenges we face today. So, there is room to partner with Congress on addressing that. One of the reasons why we have been as successful as we have been with renewable energy is the ability to do leasing and deconfliction. So, having that type of authority in the Department, I think, would accelerate our ability to develop domestically reliably-sourced materials to help the clean energy economy, and I look forward to working with you on all of that.

Mrs. DINGELL. I was going to ask you if there were any updates from the inter-agency working group on mining law reform, but I think all of us here want to work together on this issue, and on the permitting, but we made an announcement last week that I have concerns on, quite frankly, and we are not going to get there without really addressing this issue. So, I want to say that.

But I am also concerned about how the Republican's proposed budget could hurt the progress that the Department has made in terms of advancing our goals to develop these mineral supply chains. Could one of you comment on that?

Mr. BEAUDREAU. Again, the resources issues across all of our responsibilities, I think, are critical to being able to meet the moment, as the Secretary said, on all of the challenges facing the United States relative to public lands, and that includes permitting. We are doing the best that we can with the resources we have, shifting people around, providing guidance and priority, but to be in this setting and talk about the need to do better and do more, while at the same time, talking about resource cuts, is an incongruity that I think is obvious.

Mrs. DINGELL. Well, let's stay on permitting, which is another subject I feel very strongly on, and really do want to work with the Chair and others on. In the Inflation Reduction Act, we provided the Department of the Interior with $150 million to increase staffing capacity and resources for permitting activities. Either one of you, how will these resources help advance effective and efficient permitting on an accelerated timeline?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much, Congresswoman, and in concert with existing authorities, these resources will increase capacity and improve efficiencies for environmental planning and consultation. The goal is to better support the implementation of the infrastructure investments now underway.

Our budget proposal would apply to all applicable Federal agencies government-wide, and would expand the authority for Federal agencies to transfer bill funding to the Fish and Wildlife Service to accelerate and improve environmental reviews for infrastructure projects and energy solutions.

Mrs. DINGELL. And I want to get one more question in on that. Due to reconciliation rules, we couldn't adequately fund the ESA consultation and related permitting activities in the IRA. The Administration's budget request includes a legislative proposal to provide additional resources for the ESA consultation. Can you tell this Committee why these resources are needed for the ESA related permitting, which the goal we all have is to make it faster?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Congresswoman, and we are happy to talk more about this with your office.

Mrs. DINGELL. We all need to hear it.

Secretary HAALAND. In addition to increasing the funding for the ESA planning and consultation work, the budget also proposes to expand authority for Federal agencies to transfer funds provided under the bill to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time is expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin. Mr. Tiffany, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TIFFANY. Welcome, Secretary Haaland. Yesterday, the National Park Services Director Chuck Sams testified that $200 million from the Inflation Reduction Act for deferred maintenance had been transferred to the Presidio Trust at the direction of the Department of the Interior's Assistant Secretary. Did you direct anybody in your senior leadership to tell the National Parks Service Director to transfer $200 million in IRA funds to the Presidio Trust?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much for the question, and it was our understanding, Congressman, that that was the intent of Congress at the time, so that is why we did that.

Mr. TIFFANY. Actually, Director Sams testified in regard to that point that you just made, that it did not follow the established process, that he understood it to be congressional intent that despite the fact that the IRA does not explicitly state this funding will be used for the Presidio, he understood it to be congressional intent.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes, we understood it to be congressional intent. That is correct for the Presidio funding.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, did you or anybody in senior leadership have conversations with Speaker Pelosi's office about this?

Secretary HAALAND. No, I did not have any conversations with Speaker Pelosi's office, but we understood it to be congressional intent. I mean, these are public lands that belong to all Americans. We want to do the best job possible.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, is Director Sams lying to us? He said this was done at the direction of the Department of the Interior's Assistant Secretary. That is what he said yesterday.

Secretary HAALAND. No, he's—thank you for the question, and the Assistant Secretary, of course, understood that it was—I'm not sure if I understand your question correctly, but we understood that it was congressional intent for this funding to go to the Presidio, which is public lands, and belonging to every single American, and I believe that is how the Assistant Secretary understood it.

Mr. TIFFANY. But the language did not say it is explicitly—in the IRA, it does not explicitly state this funding shall be used for Presidio. How did you know it was congressional intent, then, if it didn't explicitly say that?

Secretary HAALAND. We are happy to get back with you on any absolute specifics to do with this issue.

Mr. TIFFANY. I have to move on to some other questions here. But, I would really appreciate that. We want to do some follow up on this, because there are clearly two answers that are in conflict here. I will say this though in conclusion in regard to this issue, is NPS, to us, stands for the National Park Service. We are very concerned that this has become Nancy's Park Service, with a quarter of the funding for deferred maintenance going to one Representative's district, 1 out of 435 got a quarter of the funding for deferred maintenance. What does that do to the rest of our national parks? Would you agree that in any good faith negotiation, it is important for all parties to know the fair value of what is at stake? So, when parties are negotiating that everything beyond the table, right? Would you agree with that?

Secretary HAALAND. In what respect, Mr. Tiffany?

Mr. TIFFANY. You want to make sure that all the information is on the table, and then you can have a good faith negotiation. That is generally true, would you agree?

Secretary HAALAND. Sure.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes. Are you aware of the ongoing situation in my district between the Lac du Flambeau Tribe and town residents?

Secretary HAALAND. I am familiar with it, yes. Somewhat familiar. I have read several articles, and I know that our Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs went to Wisconsin to speak with the Tribe, and I know that they have been working hard to get a resolution to the issue.

Mr. TIFFANY. Does the Department plan to release the appraisal for the four roads in question? I sent a letter on January 31, and they won't release the appraisals. Are you going to plan to release the appraisals?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you. According to our solicitor, we are not at liberty to release those appraisals, and, of course, we follow the advice of our attorneys.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, how do you have a negotiation that works in good faith if you can't have the appraisals out in front of you? I ask that as a rhetorical question. Do you support the Tribe, and I would emphasize this is a Tribal Council.

There are many tribal members in Lac du Flambeau that do not agree with what happened here. Do you support the Tribe putting barricades on the roads like they did at the end of January when it was 25 below? We had a record setting winter for snow stranding 65 people. Do you support the Tribal Council putting barricades on those roads when they went up?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I know I don't need to tell you this, but we understand that, and I know you know this too, that the Lac du Flambeau is a sovereign Indian Nation, and we can't mandate that they do anything or not do anything, but what we have done is we have worked to try to resolve the issue, and as I mentioned, Assistant Secretary Newland went to the Tribe to see how we could assist in moving a resolution to the issue, and I know that we all want it to be resolved.

Mr. TIFFANY. I would just close with this, Mr. Chairman. The Lac du Flambeau Tribal Chairman was here just a month ago before the Appropriations Committee, and he said the Bureau of Indian Affairs has failed both the Tribe and the local community. His words, not mine. I am hoping the Bureau of Indian Affairs will get their act together on this issue. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California. Mr. Levin, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEVIN. I thank my friend, Chairman Westerman, and I thank my friend, Secretary Haaland. It is wonderful to welcome you back here to the House Natural Resources Committee. Thank you for all your leadership. It is so important to provide that sustained funding for the Department of the Interior for all the critical initiatives that you have helping to protect our public lands, promoting domestic clean energy production, providing outdoor recreation, and responsibly managing our Western water resources, which are more important than ever.

I want to start off by discussing the importance of reforming our Federal oil and gas leasing program in order to promote the responsible stewardship of our nation's natural resources. Last year, we passed the Inflation Reduction Act, and it made historic and much needed changes to the Federal onshore oil and gas leasing program.

Based on provisions of a bill that I had introduced, the Restoring Community Input and Public Protections in Oil and Gas Leasing Act, specifically, the IRA ended non-competitive leasing for oil and gas sales, raising annual rental rates, and increasing the minimum bid for public lands. All those changes were very overdue, very common sense, and create more balance for bringing Federal lands in line with what states and private landowners are already charging. And even after the IRA, states like Texas and Oklahoma still charge higher royalty rates on the state lands than are charged on the Federal lands.

And according to Taxpayers for Common Sense, this is not some left wing group, it is not a right wing group, it is Taxpayers for Common Sense. What we did in the IRA will not raise prices at the pump or consumer energy prices. I will say that again, will not raise prices at the pump or consumer energy prices. We have that independent analysis if anyone wants to see it.

But it will raise hundreds of millions of dollars in additional revenue that could go toward all sorts of things, like infrastructure improvements that will benefit everybody, not just a handful of oil and gas companies. So, Secretary Haaland, with that as a background, from your perspective, how will the reforms from the IRA improve the return for taxpayers on our public lands?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much for the question, and thank you for your work in this area. Of course, I don't have to say this, the climate crisis is upon us, and whatever we can do, every tool in the toolbox that we can use to move our clean energy forward, that is good for our land, it is good for our people, and we are happy to always work with you, Congressman, to move to restore the balance that we need to our public lands.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you, and as a follow up, I understand that BLM has drafted proposed rules to implement the changes in the IRA, specifically around oil and gas leasing. Those are currently at the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. Just wanted to get the current status of those regulations and when we might be able to expect to see proposed rules published.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much. The draft regulation is under review, and we hope to have the proposed rule published this summer. We are happy to stay in touch about that.

Mr. LEVIN. Excellent. I look forward to that. In addition to making clear about how the reforms will be implemented, the rulemaking represents an important opportunity for BLM to look to the future and further improve the onshore oil and gas leasing program.

Will the regulations that are currently pending describe how the Department of the Interior intends to evaluate and adjust the royalty rate, rental rate, and minimum bid in the years after the 10-year period that is specified in the IRA?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, what I can say about this issue is that it is really important to ensure that Americans who these public lands belong to get a fair return for the resources that are on those lands. Every American owns every piece of public land, so it is important for us to make sure that we are doing the best we can for the American people.

Mr. LEVIN. Well, we certainly appreciate that, Secretary. Very grateful to your commitment and the commitment of the professionals at Interior and BLM for responsibly implementing these common-sense reforms that we made in the Inflation Reduction Act.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you.

Mr. LEVIN. And I urge the Administration to expedite this regulatory process so that the IRA's reforms are durable, clear, and fully protective of the American taxpayer, and that they promote the conservation of our public lands. I thank the Secretary, and I will yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Alabama. Mr. Carl, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Secretary, thank you for being here today. In your testimony earlier, you said Interior programs are important to the national economy, generating jobs, supporting local economy growth, building residual changes to our climate, and managing important resources.

I must say, everything I have seen from your Department says just the opposite, and I stand to differ with you on that one. How can you claim in your testimony you believe that the Interior programs are important to this nation, economy, and jobs to our local economy, when the actions that have been taken are just the opposite?

Secretary HAALAND. I feel that we have done an excellent job of ensuring that we include local communities in the value of our public lands.

Mr. CARL. Let me ask you another quick question. Can you give me a simple yes or no answer? Does met coal, is it exempt from coal leasing moratoriums?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I know how important this issue——

Mr. CARL. Yes or no, ma'am. That is all I'm looking for.

Secretary HAALAND. I want you——

Mr. CARL. That is all I'm looking for, yes or no.

Secretary HAALAND. I want you to know that the BLM has made me aware of how important this issue is to you.

Mr. CARL. I'm glad you have someone to talk to you, because I have called your Department numerous times. I can't get phone calls returned.

Secretary HAALAND. I will make——

Mr. CARL. Mr. Beaudreau sitting right beside you, I have called him twice, I have left him four messages through other people. I finally got one of your staff to call me back, and when you can't get your own staff in these departments to call back a Congressman, ma'am, that is wrong. What does that tell me? That tells me that they are not interested in hearing my voice, or anything I have to say.

So, pardon me if I seem a little edgy this morning, but I think this was well out of your control. I don't think you have control on what is going on here. I have a permit from this company laying on someone's desk, 98 percent completed. It is a met coal project. It should be already released. It should have been processed, we should have the thousand people on the ground working it this day, but I can't get your staff to return a phone call, and I can't get you to tell me if met coal is not part of that coal moratorium.

So, how do you think we feel in this country when we are dealing with bureaucrats just like this? And it goes on for months and years. This is 2½ years this process has been going on.

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I am going to make sure that somebody calls you back, and I apologize that your calls haven't been returned, but we will make sure that we do that very soon.

Mr. CARL. Last time we met here, you and I had a conversation and you were going to call me back on a meeting down in the Gulf Coast. I have yet to hear from a soul. Not one person.

So, ma'am, your words don't carry a lot of faith in me, so I would appreciate if you would give me the courtesy of having someone to give me a call. Your Department has become this huge forest fire, and you are consuming everything you touch. You are burning it up. This is coming from constituents and businesses that are trying to run their businesses. This company is not even in my district, and I am fighting for them, you know why? Because these are

Alabama jobs. These are people that are related to the people that live in my district, but it is important that our people and our districts believe in the Federal Government. When they get to a point that they are scared to death of us, that is when we have quit. We have failed them. We need to go home. We need to start over. We need to fire people and get some people that actually know how to return a phone call. I am a salesman. I may call you and give you bad news, but I will return your phone call, that is for sure.

So, I am asking you, please do something. Just don't pay lip service to crawl through this meeting, then I don't hear anything until next year. I think your budget is bloated. I think it is being misused in the wrong places, and I think you know that. I think you are sitting here trying to avoid that from some of your answers. I am watching your body language. I am a salesman, I read bodies. I am real good at that, and you are a nervous wreck, and I appreciate that. I'm sorry, and I would be too, but you have to get control of your people around you, ma'am. I'm telling you, because you have people that have an agenda that does not fit what this country needs. With that, Mr. Chairman, I turn back to you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from California. Mr. Huffman, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome back, Madam Secretary. It is always great to see you. You have already received several questions from the other side of the aisle about the great uncertainty in the fossil fuel industry due to this Administration's policies, despite the climate crisis, they appear to be worried about the poor oil companies who are rolling in record profits that they have squeezed out of U.S. consumers at the expense of the planet.

Madam Secretary, I am worried about a different kind of uncertainty, that uncertainty that is being experienced by young people all over America about whether they will have a livable planet, about whether they should even think about bringing children into the world, given what the science tells them is coming if we don't much more rapidly decarbonize.

And as grateful as I am for the major steps forward on climate action we have taken under this Administration, I think you know how I feel about the business as usual for the fossil fuel industry that continues to take place under this Administration, particularly the Willow carbon bomb, which I believe was a terrible decision.

But as strongly as I disagree with those things, I do want to acknowledge how refreshing it is to have you as the Secretary of the Interior. For too long, for decades really, we have allowed a very corrupt revolving door to exist at Interior where people make lots of money in special interests that profit from our public lands and public resources, then spend a little time at Interior, and then monetize that going through the other side of the revolving door.

Your predecessor was the poster child for that, but you are there for the right reasons, and I'm glad, like the Ranking Member said, I'm glad you are there. I'm proud of your public service. I was going to ask you about permitting, but Representative Dingell beat me to it. We know that the main reason for delay in upgrading transmission lines and bringing clean power on-line is the lack of agency resources that are preventing us from speeding up environment reviews and permitting processes, and we have put significant funds on the table through the Inflation Reduction Act.

The only thing I will add to the discussion you had with Representative Dingell on that is that it is critically important for offshore wind, and you visited my district, and we got to talk about a very exciting offshore wind project in Humboldt County.

Thank you for that, and the auction was very successful, we are excited to bring that and all the jobs that are going to come with it on-line. The transmission is going to be the big bottleneck, and so maybe even more important than the offshore wind project itself, getting the transmission upgraded is the key, and I thank you for what I know will be your very focused attention on that.

I want to move to the Central Valley Project Improvement Act. Last December, you rescinded a terrible Trump administration decision that concluded that environmental restoration in areas harmed by the Central Valley Project was deemed complete, so that your predecessor's former clients no longer had to pay a CVPIA restoration surcharge. That is an indefensible conclusion. You can certainly look at the struggling fish and wildlife in the Central Valley Project Watershed. You can look at the struggling wildlife refuges, and you did the right thing by reversing that, and I want to thank you for that. You found there was no basis for it, and you instructed the Bureau of Reclamation to collect the full mitigation and restoration charges owed.

Representative Porter and I have previously written to you expressing our concern about how Reclamation is doing cost accounting for that. The way they are doing it would appear to shift hundreds of millions of dollars in environmental compliance costs from Central Valley Project contractors to Federal taxpayers.

So, I just want to ask you, what progress are we making in properly allocating and collecting the hundreds of millions of dollars owed by Central Valley Project contractors to get this situation right?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Congressman. Reclamation will continue to collect the required mitigation and restoration charges from water and power contracts as directed by law, and they will also continue to take actions to support restoration and enhancement of the Central Valley Project's natural environment.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Can we get an update though on the specific cost accounting?

Secretary HAALAND. Absolutely. I will ask Camille's team to give your office a call shortly.

Mr. HUFFMAN. I appreciate that.

Secretary HAALAND. And Congressman, if I could say something very quickly about the transmission lines. Earlier this year, we broke ground on the Ten West transmission line in Arizona—it was for solar power in the middle of the desert, lots of solar panels there.

And the reason that went through so quickly and so well is because the BLM director in Arizona really made sure that all the stakeholders had a say from the very start of the project moving forward.

So, we feel like that is a great model for moving things expeditiously through. We agree with you. So, this transition, it is happening now. And we are learning best ways to cut time on these things, and I suspect that future projects will be as expeditious as this one, and we will work to make them even faster, but thank you.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Thank you, Madam Secretary.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you.

Mr. HUFFMAN. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from California. Mr. Duarte, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DUARTE. Hello, Madam Secretary. Thank you for being here today. I am from California, from the Central Valley. It is no secret that we have our share of water problems, too little and too much here recently.

We have historic levels of rain, and the other years we have hardships of drought. A lot of the precious water resources we have in both wet and dry years are being flushed out to the ocean to restore salmon and the delta smelt. We have been doing this for several decades now, 40 years, and 20 years of maximum flows that have depleted our groundwater, destroyed irrigated landscapes. We have agricultural removal, we have food costs coming. In the South Valley, we have respiratory illness and pediatric respiratory illness in very disadvantaged communities at levels we have never seen before. We are literally creating a dustbowl with some of these practices. How were you committed to measuring success, and do you have a program to take a look at some of these fish flows through the delta and compare them to their negative impacts, and give us kind of a cost benefit analysis and maybe adjust them.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much for the question, and any specific details, of course, we are happy to follow up with your office on that. But what I can say is that Camille Touton, our Reclamation Commissioner, who I hope you have had an opportunity to speak with at some point, takes all of these things very seriously. We know that a lot of folks have the misconception that the drought is over, but we know that——

Mr. DUARTE. Well, no, I mean—sorry, ma'am, Madam Secretary, but the facts are pretty clear. We have been flushing very, very large, gargantuan amounts of our precious water out to the ocean since the early 1990s to attempt to restore salmon and restore delta smelt. I mean, I hope this is on your radar, on your personal radar. I mean, California is a huge food resource for America and for the world. My district is in a very economically disadvantaged—it is a Voting Rights Act district. It is 80 percent Hispanic, lots of farm workers out of work.

I really hope that as Secretary that you would take personal interest in the really abject failure of the fish flows program for both the salmon and the smelt, and at this point in your service, have at least some large bullet points of how you would criticize this, and how you hope to improve it.

And we will talk about forests next, because that is another abject failure in single species management for restoration, and our forests are overgrown and burning all the same. So, please tell me you have California on your radar personally, and explain to me even in a pixelated way what you intend to do to criticize what you are doing, and either defend it or change it.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you. I appreciate the question. What I was going to get to was the fact that with all of this water, we do store as much as possible. Reclamation has a program where they are recharging ground water, so a lot of irrigators have taken advantage of that program, and there have been millions of acre-feet that have been used to recharge the groundwater, so we are working. We have conversations with folks on the ground in all of those areas.

Mr. DUARTE. Sure. Well, let me add to that, please. California water infrastructure hasn't been added to significantly in 40 years. We haven't. If you take kind of a top list, build Auburn, raise Shasta, put in Temperance Flat, put in Sites, all the big water projects that could really move the needle in terms of California flood control, habitat restoration, agriculture, housing affordability, water sustainability is housing affordability. It would be about $12 billion. California has a $3.6 trillion annual GDP.

So, for .3, for one-third of 1 percent of California's annual GDP, we could catch ourselves up with two or three generations worth of water infrastructure, and solve the environmental pressures, solve the flood control pressures, solve the economic pressures, as well as the human health and welfare pressures in the Central Valley, and I really wish I could hear some details from you, if not now, in the future, of how you intend to make it happen.

We have put H.R. 1 through to get NEPA reform that will allow these projects to go forward in a reasonable manner, meaning not 40 years with no progress, and I am hoping that you will be a full partner. It is not very much money when we look at the overall economy of California, and we are hoping you will partner in making this happen. Thank you.

Secretary HAALAND. We are absolutely happy to work with you. Thank you, Congressman.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from California. Mr. Mullin, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MULLIN. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Madam Secretary. Extreme weather events like the atmospheric rivers that my district in California has been seeing for the last several months are expected to increase in frequency and severity as a result of climate change. Subsequently, the flooding, sea level rise, and other damage to private and public property as a result of these events will also increase.

As severe weather events become more frequent and dangerous, low-income home owners will continue to rely on Federal assistance in recovering after disasters, but often lack resources to properly weatherize their homes to get in front of these kinds of events.

So, the process of establishing defensible space to protect from wildfires and natural land management solutions to protect from sea level rise and flooding is increasingly expensive. So, my question Madam Secretary, is how can Congress and DOI best support these kinds of resilience and weatherization efforts, particularly for lower income homeowners who may not have the means to be hardening those homes and getting ready for what is to come with these extreme weather events?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much for the question, and we recognize that it is the communities who can least afford the change that are forced to change, and that is true with so many Native communities on the coasts in Alaska and across the West Coast.

But at DOI, our focus with regard to these communities has been assistance with climate driven relocations for tribes, forest management for wildfire, and ecosystem restoration to build more resilience from drought and disasters. In 2022, Interior committed $115 million for 11 communities to support community driven relocation. Three tribes with shovel ready plans. We are focused on these communities.

In addition, the budget includes $63 million for the USGS Coastal and Marine Hazards Program, and that will leverage field research, high resolution data and modeling to help these communities and we are happy to give you a full accounting of how we are doing our best to help those communities.

Mr. MULLIN. All right, and thank you, Madam Secretary. I yield back my remaining time to Ranking Member Grijalva.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you very much. I just want to put in the record a response to the Presidio question. Among the many investments that are prioritized in the Inflation Reduction Act, including $200 million for deferred maintenance at the Presidio of San Francisco, and a unit of the National Parks Service owned and operated by Presidio Trust, and it is accurate that the Presidio Trust is intended to be financially self-sufficient.

However, it is not eligible for funding under the Great American Outdoors Act, and it required some assistance to deal with the lingering affects of the pandemic. It is a clear need to support a national park unit that belongs to all Americans.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle shouldn't be surprised by this allocation. We debated and voted nearly two dozen of their amendments right here in this Committee during the discussion of the IRA. So, attacks on this investment are misguided, they are misplaced, and we should treat this public unit as we do with any shared heritage of history in the Parks Service, and with that, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. And without objection, the document is accepted into the record. Did the gentleman from California yield back? The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Montana. Mr. Rosendale, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Secretary Haaland. Trust in government is paramount if our system is to work. Transparency is a main component establishing that trust. I was really appreciative of the representative from California raising the issue of corruption and self-enrichment on the back of taxpayers.

So, my first question to you is, could you tell me when you plan to fulfill the January 2 FOIA request from Protect the Public's Trust about communication between DOI, BLM, and your daughter in reference to lobbying efforts and activities involving your daughter and members of your staff, and the protests which turned into a riot at Interior Headquarters, which seems your daughter has participated in?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Mr. Rosendale. We have career staff who handle all of our FOIA requests. We get thousands and thousands of FOIA requests, so I recognize that they all can't be attended to immediately, but they will get to those FOIA requests in a timely manner.

Mr. ROSENDALE. No offense, Madam Secretary, but it has been nearly 6 months' time since that request has gone out, and what is being requested is electronic documents that certainly can be transferred and shared very easily.

And we are not talking about anything of a national security issue, where people have to go back through and evaluate it. So, why is it taking us so long to generate these documents on such a sensitive subject where I would think that you would want it to be public to show that you are a good, transparent public servant?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Mr. Rosendale. Of course, ethics is incredibly important to me, as it is to my entire team at DOI.

Mr. ROSENDALE. It is, and it is not only the fact and the actions that take place, Secretary, but it is also the perception of. The perception of, and this is what helps us build our pillars for the trust in our government. So, again, what is taking so long, and when can we anticipate those documents being provided?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you. As I mentioned, there are career staff who handle all the FOIA requests. They have a process. I will make sure that they are working on the process.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Thank you. I would appreciate if you would go back and see if we could not make that a priority.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Recently, you had a proposed plan to guide the balanced management of public lands, a new rule that has come out. And within that, this tool has the potential—and I am taking it directly from the BLM document—The tool has the potential to expand opportunities to accelerate restoration of big game migration corridors, or establish carbon markets, for example, and directly in response to comments from state and industry partners on a need for a reliable path on public lands on which to pursue compensatory mitigation to facilitate development projects.

Those lands are governed by the Taylor Grazing Act, which is a law, not a rule. The Taylor Grazing Act specifies an act to stop injury to the public grazing lands by preventing overgrazing and soil deterioration to provide for their orderly use, improvement, and development to stabilize the livestock industry dependent upon the public range. By what authority do you propose a rule which is in such conflict with the law?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I want to assure that it is our job to follow the law in everything that we do, and——

Mr. ROSENDALE. So, why would you propose a rule change that is in such clear contrast with the law, especially after we have just seen the U.S. Supreme Court recently decided in *West Virginia v. the EPA* that Congress, not agencies, had the final authority based upon the major questions doctrine.

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, the public lands rule is currently under public comment. It is not final yet. So, we will get all those public comments in and be able to incorporate those in.

Mr. ROSENDALE. I understand that it is under consideration right now, and I assure you I will be providing extensive comments against this, but what I am asking is why would you propose a rule change that is in such clear contrast with the law that is already in place when we have just had a recent decision from the Supreme Court that says Congress, not the agency, has the final authority.

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, the proposed rule is under public comment now and is not final, it really does work to put conservation and other public lands are multiuse. It is putting all of those uses on equal footing.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Thank you very much. Well, they are not supposed to be equal footing, and we need to abide by the law, not the rule, and I will be submitting those comments and hopefully they are incorporated. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentlelady from New Mexico. Ms. Leger Fernández, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you so much, Chair Westerman, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Secretary Haaland. I can't be more grateful to have you here with us today to share your expertise.

What we are really seeing across the country is that you have elevated trust in our Federal agency, especially after there had been such decimation of the personnel in the Department of the Interior, and if we don't have the people to do the job, they can simply not do what is needed to protect our public lands and our public resources. I am very grateful that you constantly remind us that these resources that are being—whether they are being taken out of the ground or pumped up, or solar, or wind, right? Those resources are public resources. They belong to every single citizen, and we have an obligation to make sure that the full American public benefits from the exploitation of those resources. You are a champion for our rural and tribal communities, for natural and cultural resources, and for our beautiful country and planet. Thank you for that.

I want to talk about some of the really great progress that we are seeing from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, especially let's touch a little bit about something that really impacts states around not just New Mexico, but also states in Louisiana and Pennsylvania, and many other places, and that is the Orphan Wells Cleanup.

It included $4.7 billion to clean up orphan wells, consistent with my Orphan Wells Cleanup and Jobs Act. We just avoided an additional $560 million spread across 24 states to ramp up that plugging and cleanup efforts. But we keep finding more and more abandoned wells, and we know that cleaning up these abandoned wells creates jobs in those local communities, which is also key.

Mr. Chair, I would like to place into the record a recent *Washington Post* article titled, "There could be millions of abandoned wells in the U.S. Plugging them is a monumental task."

Dr. GOSAR [presiding]. Without objection. So ordered.

[The information follows:]

Washington Post article

There could be millions of abandoned wells in the U.S. Plugging them is a monumental task.

washingtonpost.com, April 11, 2023 by Brady Dennis

The Biden administration has supercharged existing efforts by putting billions toward the problem. While exact figures are tough to come by, experts believe hundreds of thousands of orphan wells remain around the country.

OIL CITY, La.

The events that led Joe Tolbert to Well #173054 on a recent Tuesday began years ago, when President Biden promised to plug hundreds of thousands of abandoned oil and gas wells that “pose an ongoing threat to the health and safety of our communities.”

Congress set aside an unprecedented $4.7 billion to fund the idea in late 2021, and by last fall the Interior Department began sending an initial $25 million to two dozen states to stamp out wells from Alabama to Alaska that were contaminating groundwater and leaking planet-warming gases.

Louisiana, home to more than 4,500 “orphan” wells—named so because often no viable owner exists—was among those to receive the infusion of federal money. The state hired outside contractors, who sought out local crews with the equipment and experience needed to do the difficult work of dismantling a long-festering environmental scourge, one well at a time.

That’s how, on a gray morning in northwest Louisiana, in an area known as the Caddo Pine Island Oil Field, Tolbert and his three sons were once again among the cypress swamps and tall pines, pouring a half-mile’s worth of concrete that would officially end the life of Well #173054.

“We’re dedicating everything to this right now,” said Tolbert, 58, who owns Tolbert Construction in nearby Oil City. He previously spent years servicing wells in this once-prosperous corner of the state, but that work fluctuated with the industry’s inevitable peaks and downturns.

“It’s been an up-and-down ride,” he said, noting that there’s even a road called the Boom or Bust Byway that runs through town. Since January, his small business had found reliable work plugging dozens of rusty, leaking wells that litter this rugged landscape.

The push from the federal government to wrangle a problem that historically has received little attention marks a historic shift that could have profound impacts. Dedicating billions of dollars to target the most troublesome wells around the country has the potential to result in significantly fewer toxic substances, such as arsenic and benzene, polluting groundwater.

Also, while individual orphan wells don’t typically leak large amounts of methane, collectively they account for a significant source of the potent greenhouse gas. So plugging the worst offenders has a clear climate benefit, scientists say.

“The more we plug and the faster we plug, the more methane we are capturing,” said Ben Diebold, executive vice president for disaster services at Lemoine, one of the two firms with which Louisiana has contracted.

Still, a daunting task lies ahead.

Merely locating orphan wells can be arduous, and plugging them is tedious, time-consuming and expensive. To follow a crew like Tolbert’s is to understand how the work is a mixture of sweat, science and improvisation. They must navigate swampy roads or thick forests with heavy equipment to access the wells, remove miles of steel piping, set underground plugs to prevent fluid from flowing, fill strawlike holes with cement and remove the well head, and restore the land to something resembling normal. The whole endeavor takes days, and can cost $30,000 to plug a single well—and sometimes far more.

Multiply that times the staggering number of wells around the country, and it’s clear that the current funding, while monumental compared to anything in the past, will only begin to chip away at the problem.

The money pouring into states to do this work is "supercharging" the modest efforts that previously existed, said Adam Peltz, a director and senior attorney at the Environmental Defense Fund who has worked on the issue for years.

But, he added, "We are only scratching the surface on this."

'We really only know where a fraction of them are'

The wells are everywhere.

They're in backyards and buried under thorny thickets in suburban woods. Rusted pipes rise from the farmland of Texas and New Mexico, from an Amish community in Kentucky, from the bayous in Louisiana and the dense forests in Pennsylvania and Ohio. They have been found under sidewalks and driveways, houses and apartment buildings—and in at least one Wyoming schoolyard.

Some wells are a century or more old, dating to an era when there was little to no regulation throughout much of the country. Others were drilled more recently, and abandoned over time as fossil fuel companies or small speculators went belly up or simply left them idle. Until recently, states had few incentives to identify the aging wells and scant resources to plug them.

Last year, researchers at EDF and McGill University published an analysis of more than 120,000 documented orphan wells in 30 states. Using census data, it detailed how 14 million people live within a mile of an orphan well, including 1.3 million adults with asthma.

According to the analysis, Ohio had the highest number of orphan wells on its books, at more than 20,000, followed closely by Pennsylvania. But state officials and the researchers behind that work acknowledge that such numbers only begin to capture how many actually exist.

"We really only know where a fraction of them are," Peltz said.

The Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission estimates the number of undocumented orphan wells to be between 310,000 and 800,000, though due to poor record keeping during much of the industry's century and a half of production, that number is likely even higher.

According to its most recent national inventory, the Environmental Protection Agency estimates the actual number of abandoned wells around the country could be in the millions, and that the methane that leaks from them each year accounts for nearly 3 percent of the U.S. total.

As states scour their records and their landscapes for long-forgotten wells to add to the lists of those that need capping, the federal government is doing the same.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law included $30 million to help establish a research consortium aimed at helping develop technologies and best practices for locating orphan wells, measuring the amount of methane leaking from them and prioritizing which to plug.

That has allowed Natalie Pekney, an engineer with the National Energy Technology Laboratory, and other Energy Department researchers to undertake a unique kind of detective work.

They have used drones, electromagnetic field detectors and other remote sensing technology to scour for orphan wells on public lands from Pennsylvania to Oklahoma. They have pored over topographical maps and historical photos, hiked through creeks and hacked through brush trying to pinpoint wells.

Sometimes, Pekney said, "They are really hard to find even if you can navigate within 30 meters."

After they locate a well, they measure any methane emissions from it and record its GPS coordinates. The idea, she said, is not to hunt down every well across the country, but rather to develop tools and methods that states can use to more strategically find existing wells and plug the most egregious environmental offenders.

"This is a methane emissions source we know how to mitigate," she said. "We can go out and do it."

'The more the merrier'

Curtis Shuck, a former oil and gas executive, jokes that he got into the well-plugging game "long before orphan wells were cool."

What began with an epiphany several years ago after he witnessed abandoned wells dotting an old oil field in northern Montana soon became a nonprofit known as the Well Done Foundation, whose work has been funded primarily by philanthropic donors and corporate sponsors.

Shuck believes there is a financial model to support the work, even though it can cost into six figures to plug troublesome wells, depending on the difficulty of accessing their location and other circumstances. He is confident that donors will back the work because there are immediate, tangible benefits in preventing pollution and reducing methane emissions.

His foundation also has backed a carbon accounting methodology that, if adopted by the American Carbon Registry, could offer an incentive for businesses that want to offset emissions. Already, the nonprofit is plugging or monitoring wells in about a dozen states and has plugged 25 wells so far, with plans to keep expanding.

"This market-based solution has to be one of the tools in the toolbox," Shuck said, because even the hefty funding from Congress is not enough to solve the sprawling problem.

Peltz, from Environmental Defense Fund, said there's plenty of work to go around.

"The problem is so vast that we need all participants," he said. "Anyone who wants to plug a well and is competent, the more the merrier."

In coming months, states will be scrambling to plug as many leaky wells as possible and measure the emissions they are preventing, in part because if they prove adept at the task, larger rounds of potential funding lie ahead.

At the same time, the federal government is also busy extinguishing old wells in national parks and wildlife refuges.

The National Park Service says it has identified roughly 1,800 oil and gas wells across at least 47 parks, and has undertaken more than two dozen projects to restore the land using money from the infrastructure law.

"We consider our grounds team to be like Indiana Jones," Julia Brunner, branch lead of the agency's Energy and Minerals Program, said in a release about the program. "They are out there in the wilderness with hatchets, sometimes fighting off alligators to find these wells."

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service last fall said that it had received more than $13 million to remediate 175 orphan wells across six national wildlife refuges in Oklahoma and Louisiana. That work is also underway.

But erasing the backlog is a tall order, in part because of the remote location of some wells, and also because their number is not static.

"There are wells that are going into orphan status as we speak," Jimmy Laurent, the agency's Southeast regional energy coordinator, said in an interview.

Patrick Courreges, spokesman for the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources said the funding the state generates through a fee on oil and gas production—typically about $10 million annually—has allowed the state to plug roughly 150 wells a year. Meanwhile, an oil and gas downturn in recent years has caused the number of abandoned wells to surge past 4,500.

"We've been losing ground," Courreges said.

That is a key problem some other states are also trying to address.

While oil and gas operators in most states must submit "financial assurance" plans for how they intend to pay for plugging wells when they cease being productive, those plans often do not cover the full costs if companies walk away or go bankrupt.

Regulators in Colorado last year crafted tougher rules intended to keep more wells from slipping into orphan status, and imposed new funding requirements paid for by the industry to cover the costs for those that do. Officials in states such as Utah, Louisiana and Pennsylvania are considering measures with similar goals, Peltz said.

"This is all doable," he said, adding that sensible regulation and enforcement can prevent many active wells from becoming the "next generation" of orphan wells. "The policy tools to fix it are known."

'A long time coming'

In Louisiana, there are high hopes for the months ahead.

With the federal money flowing, the state and its contractors have already plugged more than 100 wells this year, and some workers say 500 or more might be possible depending on the weather and any problems they encounter. "We want to show bang for the buck," Courreges said.

Amid the race to plug wells, there are reminders of how difficult it will be to tackle them all, and of the dilemmas in choosing which to target.

Outside a house he owns on Bellaire Avenue in Shreveport, Rickey Jordan is still waiting for the state to plug the orphan well he discovered in 2017. Well #22697 pokes out from the soil about 15 feet from where his daughter and two grandchildren sleep. The kids are no longer allowed to play in the backyard.

"This is not an abandoned oil field. It's a subdivision," Jordan says one day as he surveys the site in the quiet, predominantly Black neighborhood.

Records show the well dates back to 1939. Jordan has periodically detected gas leaking from it, and last June one state inspector also detected leaking gas, according to a report. Workers did come to weld a metal cap and install a valve, but Jordan struggles to understand why the state is focused on plugging wells in rural swaths of the state rather prioritizing plugging those in places like his backyard, where people live.

"I don't consider it harmless. I consider it a nuisance, an intrusion," he said. "I worry about my property value."

The most recent inspection of the well last summer provides one reason why the job will be tricky. An inspector noted that the well sits "among the roots of a 75 year old live oak" and concluded, "With the proper equipment the well could be plugged, but difficult."

Courreges said one reason for the early focus on the state's northwestern oil fields is because they are an obvious target. Nearly three quarters of documented orphan wells are in that part of Louisiana, and many are relatively shallow. "They say a squirrel once could have jumped from here to Texas on the oil derricks and never touched the ground," he said one day as he drove through Oil City.

For now, Joe Tolbert and his sons are just thankful for the work, and glad to be part of addressing a problem that has lingered for generations.

"It needs to be done. It was a long time coming," he said.

Still, Tolbert knows the spring rains will come and turn already rough dirt roads around the oil fields to muck, and the work will slow. That, and the fact that such a long backlog exists, means there is plenty to do as long as the funding remains.

"There are still wells out here that nobody even knows about," he said. "We're not going to run out of wells to plug."

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you. Secretary Haaland, I think we are very concerned in DC about two major fiscal issues. One is the impending crisis that is only a crisis if we do not raise the debt limit. That is normally done on a regular basis.

It is a made-up crisis that we might be taken to that brink. But the other piece is the proposed cuts to our agencies, to what Americans need to get the job done. Could you tell me if they had the proposed cuts that Republicans have talked about, what would that do to our ability to clean up orphaned wells?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, thank you so much for the question, and I would first just like to say that right now, there are over 10,000 well sites that are in the process of being plugged. That is on state and private lands. So, we recognize how important this is to the future of our country.

Of course, reduction of the historic funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for orphan well cleanup would be a very large mistake for all the reasons that you mentioned, and above those, one of the most important is the jobs that this program creates. I know that this funding is already making a tremendous difference on the ground. I was recently in Texas where there was actually bubbling up oil. So, these are places that we know we can clean up. Legacy pollution is really a problem for many issues, but I am grateful that President Biden has seen the value in cleaning up these mistakes of our past.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you, and another area that I am very concerned about is the proposed cuts, what that would do to the Bureau of Indian Education, or also to the law enforcement. You have pointed out that right now the law enforcement is funded at maybe 17 percent of need, and the budget cuts would perhaps reduce the number of law enforcement in an area that is already underserved, as well as teachers in the Bureau of Indian Education, can you just touch quickly on what the proposed budget cuts would do for law enforcement?

So, as we are making sure that we have better law enforcement in Indian Country, as well as teachers, can you touch quickly on that, because I am running out of time?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, of all the issues that tribes bring to us, law enforcement is one of the top issues that they are struggling with and therefore we are struggling with it. If the budget cuts go through, we could lose 1,500 tribal law enforcement personnel. That is tribal law enforcement officers, plus the support personnel, and it could also lead to 500 fewer teachers. There would also be delay in BIE school repairs in the building of schools for children.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. So, these are real budget cuts that are going to impact people in their safety and in their ability to teach our children. Thank you very much Madam Secretary, I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentlelady from New Mexico. The gentleman from Minnesota is recognized.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Secretary Haaland, thank you for joining us today. Late last month, you testified in front of the Appropriations Committee, my friend and colleague Mr. Reschenthaler asked you about the mineral withdrawal in my district. You said, and I quote, "Well, we did a mineral withdrawal in the boundary waters." Secretary Haaland, do you understand why this statement that you made under oath is false?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, it is my understanding that we made a decision in this area.

Mr. STAUBER. Madam Secretary, I have to interrupt you. Do you understand why the answer that you made under oath is false? There is no mining in the wilderness area, and there is no mining in the surrounding buffer zone, either.

As the Secretary of the Interior, and as a former Member of Congress on this Committee, you should have known there was never a proposal to mine in the boundary waters per the 1978 Act. Secretary Haaland, do you recognize the document behind me?

Secretary HAALAND. Would you like me to——

Mr. STAUBER. Do you recognize that document?

Secretary HAALAND. It is——

Mr. STAUBER. For those that don't know, it is the updated list of critical minerals released from your Department last year.

Secretary HAALAND. OK, yes.

Mr. STAUBER. Now do you recognize it?

Secretary HAALAND. Yes, sorry.

Mr. STAUBER. OK. In your exchange with Mr. Reschenthaler, you said in reference to the minerals in the Superior National Forest that you banned, and I quote, "I don't know what kind of minerals were there. I don't think they were critical minerals."

Well, as someone who works, lives, and recreates there, and as someone who has the privilege of representing the people that live there, let me tell you, those minerals that you banned include nickel, cobalt, palladium, platinum, and other group metals. Again, this is a list produced by your own Department, Madam Secretary, and you told Mr. Reschenthaler that, "I don't think they were critical minerals." That is unbelievable.

Secretary Haaland, you claimed the withdrawal that you forced upon my constituents is in the boundary waters. That is wrong. Do you now understand?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I should have said that it was boundary waters watershed.

Mr. STAUBER. OK, so, let's correct that.

Secretary HAALAND. The watershed area.

Mr. STAUBER. Madam Secretary, I only have so much time, let me correct it.

Secretary HAALAND. Of course.

Mr. STAUBER. Then you either misspoke, or misled, in the testimony. Which was it last week?

Secretary HAALAND. I should have added the word watershed, Congressman.

Mr. STAUBER. You don't think that the withdrawal included critical minerals. Again, that is wrong. You had to be told that there were critical minerals. It was only after the hearing that you made the changes, and today, you are making the changes because you had no idea when Mr. Reschenthaler was asking you, you had no idea that the withdrawal was not in the boundary waters, and you had no idea that there were critical minerals that you banned in the boundary waters.

So, how can you as Secretary of the Interior not know where the wilderness is? And how can you not know that your agency withdrew critical minerals? You own this decision to take off-line massive amounts of critical minerals that we need for everyday life, and our strategic national security. Your decision, Madam Secretary, is either purely political, or ignorance. It is either ignoring your own agency's research, or a political move to satisfy your radical anti-mining activists.

This ill-informed decision has left the United States more dependent on China. Now that you have been given the facts, are you willing to rescind your order to withdraw the opportunity to mine critical minerals outside of the wilderness and the buffer zone?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, what I would like to say is that with respect to the mine that you are referring to, it was always called a copper mine, and copper is not on that list.

Mr. STAUBER. It has nickel and cobalt. It is the biggest copper nickel find in the world. In closing, I would like to state for the record, this withdrawal, according to the Forest Service, includes a taconite and copper ban as well, and Madam Secretary, the Iron Range in Northern Minnesota mines iron ore that makes 80 percent of this nation's steel, and you banned taconite.

Taconite is included in the ban that you supported and signed. I will enter my documents into the record, and again, it is frustrating that you made a decision without any knowledge whether there was critical minerals in there, and you made the decision thinking that the mining was going to happen in the boundary waters. You were mistaken. Per the 1978 Act, there was never going to be mining in the boundary waters or the buffer zone.

Again, you had no idea when you made that decision what critical minerals were in there, and furthermore, you had no idea that we had project labor agreements to put union men and women to work for generations, and I yield back.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Chairman, has the time expired, or is there more hyperventilation that we need to endure.

Mr. STAUBER. I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I have given leeway to several others, so I would——

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Chairman, a point——

Mr. HUFFMAN. Thank you for the clarification.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Chairman, if I may, if we would indulge a point of order.

Dr. GOSAR. The gentleman is recognized.

Mr. GRIJALVA. We have significant differences in terms of policy and philosophy on this Committee, no question about it, but berating the Secretary or any witness that we have before us, diminishing and demeaning the victim exactly, but——

Mr. STAUBER. Point of order, Mr. Chair?

Mr. GRIJALVA. I think it is inappropriate, and I would suggest decorum as part of our——

Mr. STAUBER. I request the Ranking Member's words to be taken down. That is factually inaccurate.

Mr. GRIJALVA. I will save us the exercise of going through that and indicate to the gentleman that my comments are directed in general and not specifically to anyone, but if he is offended by them, I apologize for that, but I do not apologize for the call for real decorum in this dais.

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Chair, I respectfully request those words be stricken. That is inaccurate.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Mr. Chair, point of clarification, what specific word is sought to be struck?

Dr. GOSAR. We are getting to that.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. OK.

Dr. GOSAR. I am trying to establish what those are.

Mr. STAUBER. The fact that a Member has berated the Secretary of the Interior?

Mr. HUFFMAN. That was factually correct.

Mr. STAUBER. That is absolutely not correct

Mr. HUFFMAN. And that is being charitable. Berating is being charitable.

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Huffman, I spoke the truth with passion. And when you speak the truth with passion and protecting my constituents, it is with passion.

Dr. GOSAR. We are going to take a 5-minute recess. The Committee stands in recess.

[Recess.]

The CHAIRMAN [presiding]. The hearing will come to order. After some discussions, I think we have reached an agreement where Mr. Grijalva will make a statement and then Mr. Stauber will make a statement. And then, hopefully, we will move on. Mr. Grijalva, I recognize you.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and let me just reiterate the statement that I made earlier. If my colleague feels that that was a direct, personal insult, I apologize for that, and I would do that again. The comments were in general, as to the decorum in general and how we conduct meetings and how we treat our witnesses, but in terms of any personal affront that the gentleman took from my words, I do apologize for that, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Stauber, you are recognized.

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Chair, Ranking Member Grijalva, the respect I have for you, I think we have had personal conversations, I appreciate that. I just don't want anybody to misinterpret maybe my volume for my passion. It is not an insult. I am concerned about energy. I am concerned about critical minerals being mined by child slave labor, and it goes on and on, when we have the ability to do it here. I will yield back, and will continue with the proceedings.

The CHAIRMAN. I thank the gentleman. We will now proceed with questions. I appreciate the cooperation of the Committee to restore order in the Committee, and I now recognize the gentleman from Colorado. Mr. Neguse, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. NEGUSE. Well, I thank the Chairman. I would encourage the Chairman to not take any more bathroom breaks, because when he left the room, it apparently devolved, but in any event—and I want to be careful about characterizing anyone's remarks—I will just stick with, it is good to see you, Madam Secretary.

Welcome back, and I for one am very grateful that you are here. I am grateful that you are leading the Department of the Interior. I think you are doing an outstanding job. It, of course, was a privilege, or one of the privileges of my career, and I know I speak for many of my colleagues here to serve with you on this Committee and on the Subcommittee on Public Lands, and I couldn't be more grateful for the work that you are doing across our country. And, of course, we have been excited to welcome you to Colorado on multiple occasions.

We are grateful for your partnership with Secretary Vilsack in the decisions that ultimately the President made last year regarding public land protections in Colorado, Camp Hale being designated as a national historic site, and the BLM withdrawal at the Thompson Divide.

Of course, we are also grateful for the way in which you have implemented the legislation that we successfully got across the finish line and that President Biden signed into law to protect the Amache site in Southeastern Colorado, and I look forward to telling my young children about that visit one day, which was incredibly powerful and meaningful.

I want to say thank you also for the work that you were doing with respect to wildfire management, and I thought I would approach this in two ways. So, first, we, of course, are very grateful that we were able to come together on a bipartisan basis to make some significant headway in ensuring that our wildland firefighters are getting the compensation that they deserve.

They have been woefully underpaid, as you know, for decades, and we are finally starting to fix it. But more remains to be done, and I will follow up with your office outside of today's hearing, but we have had some letter exchanges with the Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary, the Honorable Joan Mooney, as well as with her counterpart at the Forest Service regarding some of the implementation challenges, and I think, as you probably know, wildland firefighters were expecting as a result of the infrastructure bill that they would have a supplemental pay base increase, and there has been, obviously, some confusion with respect to the implementation of the bill around some of how that is calculated.

So, we will just continue to work with all of you. We understand that more needs to be done at the congressional level as well to ultimately ensure that the President's budget request, which includes significant wildland firefighting pay increases, also is enacted into law.

All that being said, what I want to ask you, Madam Secretary, is I am sure that you are aware of the budget decreases that some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have spoken about publicly. You are generally aware?

Secretary HAALAND. Yes.

Mr. NEGUSE. And I know it has come up today during the hearing, but just to give you a sense, Madam Secretary, the Freedom Caucus has passed a resolution that would call for a $645 million decrease in the wildland fire management line item, which is a Department of the Interior agency-wide line item. Could you describe just in practical terms what that would mean if the Republican budget decrease were enacted into law for our Federal wildland firefighters?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, it is hard to even imagine that, because as you know, and you experience this in your district, wildland fire is a consistent threat, a persistent threat. We no longer have fire seasons. We have fire years, and that is because we are in the crisis of climate change, and it is just going to get worse.

So, it would be the worst thing to decrease the resources we need to fight those wildland fires, and certainly I think all of us can recognize that wildland firefighters are the heroes of our country, and they deserve to be compensated fairly and equally and deserve to have the benefits and the job security that they need.

Mr. NEGUSE. Well, I thank you, Madam Secretary. I couldn't agree with you more. I think the draconian budget cuts that have been proposed by some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are deeply dangerous for the West. I will just speak for the folks in Colorado that I represent, the Rocky Mountain West, the water conservation projects for the Colorado River, which the headwaters of which is in my district, the wildland firefighter pay increases and stabilization measures that we had been fighting for, Representative Porter and I just came from an event with wildland firefighters talking to them about the stakes. So, I would hope that we could pull back from the edge and ultimately come together on a bipartisan basis to ensure that our wildland firefighters are paid appropriately.

And I will look forward to following up with your agency, Madam Secretary, specifically on the supplemental pay increase issue for further clarification.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes. Thank you.

Mr. NEGUSE. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana. Mr. Graves, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GRAVES. Thank you. Madam Secretary, thank you for being here. Madam Secretary, I have not been shy about looking at this Administration's energy policy and finding that it is absolutely incomprehensible. This Administration has released an energy outlook out of the Department of Energy that shows that there is going to be a 50 percent increase in global energy demand.

A 50 percent increase in global energy demand in oil and gas specifically. Yet, you yourself made statements saying that we are not going to produce oil and gas, the President has made statements we are not going to produce oil and gas. The Administration released a budget that explicitly said that they would not fund any projects that benefited oil and gas, or resulted in lower prices for oil and gas. And when I talk to our constituents today, wow, has this Administration been successful in that we have seen gasoline prices that are outrageous.

I would like to remind people that on the day that the President took office, gasoline prices in my home state, the lowest price was a $1.74 a gallon. $1.74 a gallon. Madam Secretary, how in the world is it compatible to have our own Department of Energy saying that oil and gas demand is going to increase, and this Administration effectively stopping lease sales, preventing any new energy from being able to be produced, and just lastly, Madam Secretary, to put things in perspective, you would have to go back to the Jimmy Carter administration to find anything that is even remotely comparable to the number of acres that have been leased under this Administration.

And let me clarify what I mean by comparable. The Jimmy Carter administration leased 100 times more acres than this Administration has in the first 20 months. I have never seen anything like this, and the impact on families across America is profound. Can you explain this to me?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, thank you for the question. First, I will say, and I have said this many times, oil production on Federal lands is at an all-time high.

Mr. GRAVES. Not as a result of actions of this Administration. So, don't take credit for the previous administration, and even the Obama administration's actions. We are talking about future oil and gas demand, we are talking about actions under your Administration. Please, I am not going to hold you accountable for previous administrative actions.

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, our staff has been hard at work on applications for permits to drill. They have been doing that since I have been in office. We are moving forward following the law.

Mr. GRAVES. Madam Secretary, I don't know that they have been hard at work, because we just had—after the White House is out there, the president is out there blaming the energy industry, and saying that folks are sitting on the APDs, and everybody used this statistic over and over and over again, over 9,000 APDs out there approved whenever the Department doesn't even know how many APDs are out there. They came back and said they were, what, 2,600, 2,400 off?

I mean, this is incredible, and as you know, that statistic is not an accurate statistic in that there are so many other actions, approvals, permits that are required to actually produce, many of these APDs are actually in litigation as well. So, it is disingenuous to say that, but I'm sorry, I interrupted you. Please.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you. There are nearly 7,000 permits to drill currently, that are not being used. Pursuant to the IRA, we reinstated Lease Sale 257, 258, last year. Lease Sale——

Mr. STAUBER. But Madam Secretary, those were required by law. Those were not actions of this Administration. You didn't want to do it. The Biden administration didn't want to do it. That was crystal clear. The only reason those lease sales are progressing is because the law requires it, not because of anything that you wanted to do. You fought. You fought in Court against requirements to do it, because we believe that you are not complying with the Mineral Leasing Act, or the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act that requires lease sales.

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, if I could continue, because I just want you to know that we have had lease sales. Lease Sale 259 was held on March 29, 2023. Lease Sale 261 will be held the end of September 2023. So, we are following the law. We are moving permits through the process. There is career staff who take their jobs very seriously, and I appreciate the work they do.

Mr. GRAVES. Madam Secretary, I have 10 seconds left, I want to slide one question in real quick. I am watching emissions go up under all of this that is supposed to be done under the auspices of climate change. How is this helpful? Emissions are going up, not down, under these policies. They are going up, not down.

Secretary HAALAND. Well, we are also working on our clean energy goals, and at some point, hopefully——

Mr. GRAVES. But, none of this is successful. We are becoming more dependent upon foreign countries, prices are going up, and emissions are going up. I have never seen anything like this, and I will just yield back, but again, I want to say, I have never seen such incomprehensible energy policy having such a profound impact on American families across the country. Thank you, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from California. Ms. Porter, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. PORTER. Thank you. I hope you can hear me, Secretary Haaland, at this volume.

Secretary HAALAND. I can, yes. Thank you.

Ms. PORTER. For far too long, oil and gas have skipped out on their responsibilities, leaving abandoned and orphaned wells all over our public lands. We know of about 120,000 oil wells sitting unplugged and idle right now. However, the *Washington Post* recently found that the number of orphaned wells in the United States could be as high as 1 million.

But we are just scratching the surface of an even larger issue. When oil and gas companies get a permit, they make a promise to taxpayers to clean up their mess. They promise to cover the cost of cleanup. Secretary Haaland, when was the last time BLM updated their oil and gas bonding requirement?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, thank you so much. I want to say that there is a proposed rule currently that will implement the changes from the Inflation Reduction Act as well as address BLM's bonding requirements.

Ms. PORTER. I am very glad to hear of some progress on that front, because the last time BLM updated it was 1960. Do you know, Secretary Haaland, what is the average cost of the bond that oil and gas must put up before they can drill?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, I don't have that figure in front of me, but——

Ms. PORTER. OK. So, the minimum bond—and I am going to make sure you can see this. I will read it to you. The minimum bond is $10,000. That is the bond. And then, this is the typical bond cost, $10,000 for a single well. The median cost of doing the bare minimum, just capping it, not cleaning it up, just capping it, is $20,000. The actual cost of doing surface reclamation is $76,000, and the high point here to completely clean it up, and the most expensive wells cost about $145,000 to reclaim. Yet, this is the bond amount. Do you think a $10,000 bond for oil and gas is good enough given these costs?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, I know that depending on where the orphaned oil and gas wells are, it depends on what the cost is. So, it absolutely varies according to where it is. We visited some of those sites in the city of Los Angeles, and those are clearly going to be more expensive than doing it out in a field in Texas.

Ms. PORTER. Are you aware of any wells that can be capped and reclaimed for the 1960 bond amount of $10,000?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, I recognize that everything has increased since the 1960s. So, it stands to reason that these costs, yes, are more expensive today.

Ms. PORTER. Do you, Secretary Haaland, support BLM updating its bonding requirement to reflect the actual cost of clean up?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, we absolutely agree with you that bonding reforms are long overdue, and the BLM is working on that proposed rule for the revision of existing regulations pertaining to fossil fuel leases and lease process, and we hope to have that rule later this year, and we will keep your staff apprised of that.

Ms. PORTER. I appreciate that, because in 2018, the GAO found that bonds for 99.5 percent of wells on public lands are not sufficient to cover clean-up costs. So, according to Columbia University, it can cost us all as taxpayers $24 billion—I had to relook at the number—$24 billion to find and plug just half a million abandoned wells, with taxpayers taking the hit.

So, on behalf of all those who love our Federal lands, on behalf of every American taxpayer, I hope that you will force oil and gas companies to pay to clean up their own messes and update the bonding requirement for extraction.

I want to turn to another topic. In my last hearing as O&I Subcommittee Chair, we had a bipartisan hearing on park overcrowding, and a major problem we uncovered was that the OMB was holding up approval of the collection of information we need at the park level to manage overcrowding, and I sent a letter in March about this to OMB. I have not received a response.

I know you are concerned about overcrowding too. Would you call Administrator Revesz and ask them to accelerate approval to get the Park Administration this critical information they need to make sure that we can protect our public lands and allow Americans to enjoy our parks?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, we are happy to reach out to OMB to ask if they can move this forward.

Ms. PORTER. Thank you so much, Secretary Haaland, I yield back.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Guam. Mr. Moylan, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Secretary, Guam, Hawaii, and CNMI have the largest total number of COFA migrants, and between 2004 and 2018, these three jurisdictions reported $3.2 billion in costs related to being host communities for these COFA migrants.

While during this time period, between 2004 and 2019, they received only $509 million in Federal grants and reimbursements to offset these costs. Not $509 million each, but a total combined. This estimate is about $34 million pool shared, with Guam receiving an average of $13 to $14 million a year.

Madam Secretary, can you commit to working with my office on addressing this inadequate and unfair financial burden placed on Gaum and my constituents by these COFA agreements, agreements which our community had no say in?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, we would be more than happy to reach out to your office and see how we can help to work on this issue together.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you. Changing subjects, Madam Secretary, as you are aware, Guam plays a critical role when it comes to the Indo PACOM theater, and the nation's defense. We are a community of proud patriots with the highest number of enlisted per capita in the nation.

However, our road infrastructure overall is terrible, and while recent Federal funds have helped to a certain extent in repairing certain roads, and please don't get me wrong, we are very appreciative. We are a very appreciative community, but much more work needs to be done.

Madam Secretary, can you explore your existing authority to help direct more discretionary spending toward funding the road and bridge repairs in Gaum through grant programs, and can you commit to working with my office on addressing this issue?

Secretary HAALAND. Again, Congressman, we are so happy to see how we can help with this issue in Guam, and recognize the hardship that it causes to your constituents. We will be happy to reach out.

Mr. MOYLAN. I appreciate that, and for my final question, Madam Secretary, do you plan on visiting Guam in the near future, and I would like to invite you to my district so that you can see firsthand proud patriots of America's soil who are often forgotten.

Forgotten when it comes to certain Federal programs such as supplementary Social Security income, also known as SSI, yet we continue to display our hospitality, and I will be reaching out to your office soon to seek support on legislation to allow the qualified residents of Guam to attain SSI benefits as any other American citizen residing in a U.S. state would receive. But in closing, I do hope that you would accept my offer and visit Guam to truly understand what the needs of the resident of the territory are, a territory under your jurisdiction. I thank you, Madam Secretary.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Congressman. It would be my honor to visit Guam. So, of course, we will see how that fits in with my schedule, but I appreciate the invitation and it would be my honor to visit you there. Thank you.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you, Madam Secretary. Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from New York. Ms. Ocasio-Cortez, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Madam Secretary for joining us today. It is wonderful to see you here testifying. I want to echo a little bit of one of my earlier colleague's comments in that we are very grateful for many of the decisions and policies coming out of the Department, but we are also very concerned about some of this business as usual, to use his words, around oil and gas development.

As was stated several times during this hearing, oil production is at an all-time high under the Biden administration. Higher than even under the Trump administration. And part of that, within the context of that, is the Department's decision around the Willow Project.

There has been overwhelming opposition around the Department's decision to approve the Willow Project, which was picked up after the Trump administration's decision was turned over in an attempt to do the same. This project was first approved under the Trump administration 2020, and tossed out in Court as unlawful. It instructed the BLM to reassess the project's full climate impact and consider alternatives.

When the Biden administration then picked up Trump's failed project for a second approval attempt, it seems to have still failed to meet the court's assessment requirements. In fact, we have heard from the Nuiqsut community leaders that have maintained that the BLM has "completely failed to acknowledge their attempts at consultation," and I would like to submit that letter from them to the record.

[The information follows:]

Willow Project letters

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 13, 2023

Hon. Deb Haaland, Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

We write to express our serious concerns about the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) allowing construction to begin on the Willow Master Development Plan (Willow or Project) in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (Reserve) given pending litigation. Noting vocalized concerns from the President, the Department of the Interior (DOI), the community of Nuiqsut, and the general public about the impacts of the Project, DOI must suspend the Right of Way Permit (ROW) immediately and reject any future filings by ConocoPhillips for an Application for Permit to Drill (APD). Further, we urge DOI to use the contained secretarial authority to pause any permit or other action toward development in the Alaska National Petroleum Reserve (NPR-A) until the agency completes a comprehensive assessment of the implications of future oil from the NPR-A and considers the input of all stakeholders.

On March 14, 2023, groups including Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic, Alaska Wilderness League, and Natural Resource Defense Council (the litigants) filed lawsuits against the approval of the Project. These lawsuits allege that BLM failed to fulfill its mandate and has broad authority to protect the Reserve's environment and people in its previous analysis of the Project. In doing so, the litigants allege that Willow's approval violated the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Petroleum Reserves Production Act, the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act (NPRPA), the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, and the Administrative Procedure Act.[1] DOI has not provided sufficient time to comprehensively review the well-grounded litigation against Willow's approval. Given the extensive claims, DOI should halt any advancement of the Project until the litigation is decided in the courts.

We are mindful of DOI and the White House's apprehension over their authority to suspend permits. However, the NPRPA validates that BLM "*shall* include or provide for such conditions. restrictions, and prohibitions" on activities within the Reserve as it determines necessary to protect the Reserve's surface resources.[2] The statute places no limitations or conditions on this authority. Further, BLM has considerable discretion to suspend all operations on existing leases or units.[3] Under the NPRPA, BLM may suspend operations and production "in the interest of conservation of natural resources" or to mitigate "reasonably foreseeable and significantly adverse effects on surface resources."[4] BLM has the authority to deny or delay an Application for Permit to Drill,[5] and ConocoPhillips' leases reflect BLM's authority to condition, restrict, or prohibit activities.[6]

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[1] https://trustees.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023-03-14-1-Complaint.pdf; https://earthjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/1-complaint.pdf

[2] 42 U.S.C. § 6506a(b) (emphasis added)

[3] *Id*. § 6506a(k)(2) ("The Secretary may direct or assent to the suspension of operations and production on any lease or unit.")

[4] 43 C.F.R. § 3135.2(a)(l), (3)

[5] *Id*. § 3162.3-1(h)(2) (BLM has authority to "[r]eturn the application and advise the applicant for the reasons for disapproval), *id*. § 162.3-1(h)(3) (stating that BLM can respond to an APD by advising the applicant of the reasons why final action will be delayed along with the date such final action can be expected), *see also N. Alaska Evtl. Ctr. v. Kempthorne*, 457 F.3d 969, 976 (9th Cir. 2006) (assuming government could deny a specific application altogether if adequate mitigation measures are not available)

[6] *See* U.S. Department of the Interior, Offer to Lease and Lease for Oil and Gas. Form 3100-11 (Oct. 2008) § 6 (BLM can require additional reasonable mitigation measures as conditions of

Continued

Unfortunately, on April 3, 2023, the U.S. District Court for the Court of Alaska denied the litigants' request for injunction and allowed ConocoPhillips to proceed with initial construction this winter.[7] Construction now underway includes blasting the Arctic tundra with explosives to mine gravel for drill pads. This mining will permanently damage the landscape within the ecosystem and destroy vital habitats for migratory birds, waterfowl, caribou, polar bears and other wildlife, as well as subsistence uses for wildlife in and around the mining area and blast zone.[8] BLM has the authority to stop this construction.

The public health risks also deserve further consideration and necessitate a comprehensive areawide plan. On March 23, 2023, ConocoPhillips proved its equipment unreliable in the State of Alaska hearing on the natural gas leak that occurred last year at the CD1 drill site in the Alpine oil field near Nuiqsut due to a component failure related to melting permafrost. Willow's drills will use the same infrastructure that failed last year. It is unreasonable for DOI to allow an APD before ConocoPhillips proves a similar disaster will not occur, especially considering the impact such a disaster would have on the local community.

As Nuiqsut community leaders Rosemary Ahtuangaruak, Eunice Brower, and Carl Brower wrote to you "The consultation process has been deeply disappointing and contrary to the administration's obligations for tribal consultation and to consider Indigenous knowledge. The City and Native Village of Nuiqsut have provided input to BLM throughout the cooperating agency process which BLM has completely failed to acknowledge."[9]

The ROD fails to acknowledge other voices as well. Between BLM's release of the DSEIS on February 1, 2023 and the ROD's approval, over 1 million people sent letters concerning the Project to the White House, and over 5 million people signed petitions requesting the Project's damage be prevented. A pause on any permit or other action toward development in the NPR-A would allow the time to properly consider their input.

Given the permanent damage ConocoPhillips' preliminary construction efforts will inflict on the surrounding ecosystem and community, necessary steps must be taken to mitigate harm as it undergoes comprehensive review. Suspending the Right of Way Permit and rejecting future filings by ConocoPhillips for an APD permit or other action toward development in the NPR-A until DOI completes a comprehensive assessment of the implications of future oil from the NPR-A would ensure we take the right steps for our future and grant all stakeholders the chance to be heard.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial decision, and we look forward to your prompt action.

Sincerely,

Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Mike Levin
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

approval to "minimize[] adverse impacts to the land, air, and water, to cultural biological, visual, and other resources, and to other land uses or users"), *id*. § 4 ("Lessor reserves the right to specify rates of development and production in the public interest.")

[7] Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic v. Bureau for Land Mgmt., No. 3:23-cv-00058-SLG; No. 3:23-cv-00061-SLG, 2023 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 58502 (D. Alaska April 3, 2023)

[8] DSEIS App. D.2 Page 6

[9] https://ndncollective.org/consultation-process-inadequate-new-letter-from-nuiqsut-community-leaders-to-department-of-interior/

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Cori Bush
Member of Congress

Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress

Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress

Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress

Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

Summer Lee
Member of Congress

Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver II
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

Katie Porter
Member of Congress

Jill Tokuda
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress

March 3, 2023

Hon. Deb Haaland, Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of the proposed Willow Master Development Project (Willow). We are writing to emphasize the problems with the consultation process and the mitigation measures identified in the Willow final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS), and to explain why the administration must deny any version of the proposed project. We write in our individual capacities, based on our experience with this process.

This is not the first time we have explained why these measures are inadequate. But as the City of Nuiqsut and Native Village of Nuiqsut noted in their recent cooperating agency comments to BLM, none of their input or concerns about these measures were documented in the preliminary SEIS. We are disappointed but not surprised to see that BLM has once again ignored their input and comments on the preliminary document and appears to have made no additional changes in response to their concerns before the release of the SEIS. It seems that despite its nod to traditional ecological knowledge, BLM does not consider relevant the extensive knowledge and expertise we have gained over millennia, living in a way that is so deeply connected to our environment.

The long list of mitigation might look impressive to politicians and government decision-makers. To us, it is an attempt to break the importance of our life and culture into fragments that are each a mere technical problem to be solved so the project can go forward. BLM does not look at the harm this project would cause from the perspective of how to let us be us—how to ensure that we can maintain our culture, traditions, and our ability to keep going out on the land and the waters.

BLM's narrow focus on justifying why the project should go forward subverts any meaningful discussion or consideration of why the No Action Alternative should be selected. This was true in the context of the frame the agency applied to every single one of our cooperating agency consultations, and may also be true for a Record of Decision that points to a long list of new measures that promise to make this project acceptable. Each measure is framed as an argument to let the project go forward and represents a monumental misunderstanding about what is required for us to survive.

At a minimum, we request a delay in the release of the record of decision until BLM can engage with the City and Native Village of Nuiqsut meaningfully regarding mitigation to protect our health and subsistence way of life.

I. The consultation process has been deeply disappointing and contrary to the administration's obligations for Tribal consultation and to consider Indigenous Knowledge

The City and Native Village of Nuiqsut have provided input to BLM throughout the cooperating agency process which BLM has completely failed to acknowledge. As BLM states, during the cooperating agency process we met for many days to discuss our concerns with BLM about the impacts of the project. BLM presented the City and Native Village of Nuiqsut with a list of "cooperating agency suggested mitigation measures," but none of these were measures Nuiqsut suggested. The City and Native Village explained extensively why the measures would be ineffective and would not achieve their intended purpose. Yet, the draft SEIS did not mention the information provided. Instead, the draft SEIS simply listed the mitigation measures in an appendix, without any discussion whatsoever.

When the City and Native Village of Nuiqsut received a copy of the preliminary final SEIS, they noticed that BLM again characterized this list as "cooperating agency suggested mitigation measures," and again failed to acknowledge their input. They again pointed out this omission to BLM. However, when the final SEIS was released, we once more discovered that nowhere in the SEIS does BLM acknowledge our extensive input about why the mitigation measures are inadequate. The only mention of our input at all is from the Native Village of Nuiqsut's comments on the first EIS. Nothing the City and Native Village provided during the supplemental EIS process is mentioned.

This administration has committed to support and help advance the priorities of Alaska Native leaders, including those related to sustainable land management and the conservation of natural, cultural, and historical resources.[1] The White House has also committed to elevating Indigenous traditional and ecological knowledge in federal scientific and policy processes.[2] It is essential that BLM consider the information the City and Native Village of Nuiqsut provided about why the mitigation measures designed to protect the caribou migrations, as well as other mitigation measures, will not be effective. It is a matter of our survival.

The disclosure of this information is also required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA requires that the agency make every effort to disclose and discuss in the draft EIS all major points of view on the environmental impacts of the alternatives, including the proposed action.[3]

BLM must also respond to the critiques the City and Native Village of Nuiqsut provided. The agency must disclose all comments and discuss "any responsible opposing view which was not adequately disclosed in the draft [EIS] and shall indicate the agency's response to the issues raised."[4] As the Memorandum on Uniform Standards for Tribal Consultation (Nov. 30, 2022) explains, "consultation requires

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[1] Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful, May 6, 2021 (Principle 4).

[2] Executive Office of the President, Office of Science and Technology Policy, Memorandum for Heads of Federal Departments and Agencies: Implementation of Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge, Nov. 30, 2022.

[3] *In re Big Thorne Project*, 93 F. Supp. 3d 1134, 1147 (D. Alaska 2015), *aff'd*. 857 F.3d 968 (9th Cir. 2017), *and aff'd sub nom. In re Big Thorne Project & 2008 Tongass Forest Plan*, 691 F. App'x 417 (9th Cir. 2017); *see also The Lands Council v. McNair*, 537 F.3d 981, 1001 (9th Cir. 2008) (affirming that agency must "acknowledge and respond to comments by outside parties that raise significant scientific uncertainties and reasonably support that such uncertainties exist.")

[4] *In re Big Thorne Project*, 93 F. Supp. 3d at 1147.

that information obtained from Tribes be given meaningful consideration." The memo also requires federal agencies to maintain a record of tribal input received and an explanation of how Tribal input influenced or was incorporated into the agency action. The SEIS reflects none of these obligations. We participated in the cooperating agency process with good will and exhaustive effort. Unfortunately, we now find it necessary to write publicly, outside of the process, so that you can hear our views directly.

II. The government's management of the NPR-A stifles our voice and threatens our wellbeing

Federal officials ask why other North Slope villages do not outwardly state opposition this project. Those villages get some financial benefits from oil and gas activity but experience far fewer impacts than Nuiqsut. We are at ground zero for the industrialization of the Arctic. The SEIS suggests that to mitigate this imbalance, the NPR-A Impact Mitigation Fund could direct a minimum of 15% of the grant funding to the City of Nuiqsut.[5] This hardly addresses the imbalance in costs and benefits within the North Slope Borough.

The politicians and proponents of oil development are correct that we get some money from oil development in the NPR-A. But think about the purpose of this money, and what we use it for. The very existence of the Impact Mitigation Fund suggests that it is somehow fair for industry to pass along the expenses of harm from oil development—and the responsibility for addressing them—onto us, as long as they've paid us to deal with them. How exactly is that considered a benefit to us? Anyhow, the life, health, and safety and the importance of tradition and culture could never be protected from one development with 15% of the funds available. No dollar can replace what we risk.

But an even bigger reason government officials do not hear all of the opposition that our people have to oil development is because the power of one of the largest companies in the world reaches into every community and household, and into the environmental review process itself, censoring what we say to one another in Facebook groups (which the company administers), censoring our reports of violations (because the company employs the observers),[6] censoring our basic governmental functions (because the company's charitable giving supports our city government),[7] censoring our efforts to express our concerns (because the company organizes and controls the meetings to address these concerns),[8] censoring scientific research (because the company controls, designs, and funds the studies),[9] censoring information about the impacts of their activities (because the company controls, designs, and funds the monitoring and reporting),[10] and censoring our attempts to teach our children how to become leaders and protectors of our land and culture (because the company designs and pays for school programs).[11] The corporate power is so strong and pervasive, it seeped into the process of writing this very letter,

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[5] SEIS suggested cooperating agency measure #37.

[6] SEIS Suggested cooperating agency mitigation measure #35, which would provide information on how to report violations, does not fix this problem. The existence of a complaint procedure does not remove the pressure our people feel to keep quiet.

[7] *See, e.g*. ConocoPhillips, Local Community Giving https://www.conocophillips.com/sustainability/creating-shared-value/global-giving/local-community-giving/ (noting assistance with community civic services); *see also* ConocoPhillips, Listening to Stakeholders on Alaska's North Slope https://www.conocophillips.com/sustainability/sustainability-news/story/listening-to-stakeholders-on-alaska-s-north-slope/ (noting the formation of the Nuiqsut Community Development Foundation, which provides "support" to our community); *see also* ConocoPhillips 2021 Sustainability Report at 123 (noting funding for city administration).

[8] *See, e.g*, suggested cooperating agency measure #37, where ConocoPhillips would conduct inter-community subsistence workshops; *see also* ConocoPhillips 2021 Sustainability Report at 121 {conducting "frequent engagements with communities located closest to our operations from community meetings, open houses, and reports to state and local organizations.")

[9] *See, e.g.*, ConocoPhillips 2021 Sustainability Report at 111 ("collaborating" with BLM's North Slope Science Initiative); *see also id*. at 121 (listing environmental study programs in Alaska including air quality monitoring stations, caribou, bird, and fish surveys, hydrological studies, lake water quality and recharge monitoring, subsistence hunting studies, and tundra rehabilitation) .

[10] *See, e.g.*, SEIS suggested mitigation measures #56, #57, #59, ConocoPhillips 2021 Sustainability Report at 103 (conducting polar bear surveys); *id*. at 111 ("collaborating" with BLM's North Slope Science Initiative, which includes monitoring); *id* at 116 {monitoring caribou impacts).

[11] *See, e.g.*, suggested cooperating agency measure #20, where ConocoPhillips would fund traditional and western scientific education programs in Nuiqsut schools to "help inform and improve the community's understanding of the oil and gas industry development and its associated impacts."

which we were unable to finalize in its original form on behalf of the City and Native Village.

Packaged as suggested mitigation measures in the Willow SEIS, ConocoPhillips would pay for a small amount of our fuel[12] (which we need to travel farther for hunting) and pay for greenhouses[13] and food storage facilities[14] for imported store-bought foods that are too expensive for us to buy anyway (because their activities are chasing our animals away). It would also provide funding to support our healthcare clinic (because their activities are causing us respiratory and other illnesses) and pay for a cultural center[15] (because oil development is destroying our culture). It would pay us $250,000 for much needed search and rescue equipment the moment they begin project construction. Once the processing facility is built (which is designed to make Willow the next Prudhoe Bay of the North Slope), we'd get another $250,000 for search and rescue.[16] Do you know why our search and rescue needs have increased? Because climate change, caused primarily by fossil fuel development, has made our hunting and travel so much more dangerous. Do you know why existing sources of funding are inadequate? Because the State will only providing funding if we go through a pre-approval process (which is not possible when we're responding to emergencies in the middle of the night or on weekends), because our tension with the North Slope Borough means that it has been less supportive of us than it could be, and because ConocoPhillips provides us with rescue vehicles that cannot be repaired in Nuiqsut and are therefore useless as soon as they break down.

How can any of these measures be considered mitigation? They are payoffs for the loss of our health and culture. They are small gestures offered by a company that made $19 billion in profits last year.

Make no mistake. Our community needs financial support, scientific studies and monitoring, and economic development. We face dire threats to our lives daily, including epileptic seizures by children at school and no trained staff to respond, cancer diagnoses, food insecurity, respiratory failure, suicides, drug and alcohol abuse, and accidents that occur when we travel out on the land or on the sea. Many of these problems are caused by oil development, but these social impacts are not captured or adequately disclosed by the SEIS's technocratic monetization of the social costs of carbon nor BLM's brief description of health impacts.

Why is our only option to have ConocoPhillips fund the support we need? Why would any local, state, or federal government allow a company that is responsible for so many of our problems continue creating those problems? Why would any government continue to foster our dependence on a fading industry, instead of investing its attention, resources, and money in creating an economy that is ready for and will be competitive in a post-fossil fuel economy? This is the definition of environmental injustice. It is also the definition of corporate capture, where private industry uses its financial and political influence to provide essential government services and take control of government decision-making and oversight. This dynamic helps explain why BLM considers it "mitigation" to stop industrial traffic to protect caribou and their calves only after the agency has consulted with the company to assess the impacts this would have on operations.[17] Similarly, why does BLM consider such basic obligations as providing an adequate number of inspectors to ensure compliance[18] and gaining site and road access for these inspections to take place[19] as "mitigation" and not simply a core part of its responsibilities? With the financial and political power that create this dynamic, it is not hard to understand why the Mayor of the North Slope Borough, a staunch opponent of the last big development pressures we faced, supports this project. The City of Nuiqsut has had an open invitation to the North Slope Borough Mayor to visit us since the CD-1 gas leak. He has refused to come and discuss our concerns with us, yet he speaks on our behalf to state and federal lawmakers and decisionmakers.

Another reason the government does not hear more about our opposition to this project is that we have expressed our concern for decades, but it has not made any difference. Many of us get discouraged and give up. We have gone through process after process, and the agency is always designing new mitigation, but the facts about what has happened to us and our land over this period are indisputable: the

[12] SEIS suggested cooperating agency measure #52.

[13] SEIS suggested cooperating agency measures #40. This is not a new mitigation measure. ConocoPhillips promised these greenhouses a few years ago, and still hasn't followed through.

[14] SEIS suggested cooperating agency measure #67.

[15] SEIS suggested cooperating agency measure #58.

[16] SEIS suggested cooperating agency measure #4.

[17] Cooperating agency suggested measure #50.

[18] Cooperating agency suggested measure #36.

[19] Cooperating agency suggested measure #55.

infrastructure has surrounded us, the caribou have left our traditional hunting grounds, and our mental and physical health has deteriorated. We have fought to protect our life, health, and safety every step of the way, yet this is where we are. The government acknowledges there are problems, but industrial development is always allowed to continue. Providing us with a process to explain to BLM how this development is harming us, without ever making any real decisions to prevent this harm, demoralizes and depresses us. The processes do not even maintain the pretense of addressing our concerns. They are only defenses of why the project should continue.

Finally, the government does not hear the full opposition to this project because we are told, "the government sold the leases, so this is going to happen anyway." This constant refrain from the federal and state government and ConocoPhillips has penetrated the North Slope Borough's position, so that even our own municipality does not defend us. The SEIS removes many of the legally flawed statements that reinforce this view, but it will take more than their elimination from this SEIS to undo the decades of damage that this incorrect interpretation of BLM's authority has done to our voice. It is time for the administration to assert affirmatively and clearly that it has not only the authority but the obligation to protect us, and that the leases are, and always have been, subject to this obligation.

III. More durable protection for Teshekpuk Lake is necessary but will not sufficiently protect our village

The Department of Interior recently stated it would improve protections for the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area (TLSA). Maybe the administration will even defer the well pad proposed in TLSA (BT2). Protection of TLSA is essential but achieving stronger protection within these lines on a map cannot be made as a tradeoff for sacrificing Nuiqsut. The impacts of Willow would be almost entirely outside of the TLSA. Even one well pad is likely to deflect the spring migration, when caribou are headed to their calving grounds north of Teshekpuk Lake. This migration is imprinted on them, directing them to the place where they will most successfully give birth. Any deflection of this path will threaten their calving success and their population, as well as our nutritional, spiritual, and cultural connection to these animals. Even one well pad at Willow opens the door to western expansion, which BLM recognizes would be devastating for our land, water, air, and animals. Deferral of well pads for now will not stop the exponential industrial development that faces us.[20]

IV. The mitigation measures do not mitigate impacts; instead, they allow development to go forward and measure those impacts as they occur

Many of the SEIS suggested mitigation measures are designed to allow activity to go forward, and to simply study the additional impacts to our village and our resources as they occur. This mechanical approach to studying the harm we undergo feels like a form of human experimentation, especially since the administration is well-aware of the serious impacts to us from the oil development that has occurred thus far. BLM proposes to monitor impacts as they occur, but doesn't identify any thresholds that would be imposed, or any actions that BLM would take if those thresholds were exceeded.

Most concerning are the measures that study our health while letting the project go forward. If BLM knows that our health is deteriorating, how can it in good conscience allow an activity to go forward which will make our health worse? Are we again the government's chosen guinea pigs, in a modern-day Project Chariot? These measures propose to simply continue studying the impacts of contamination and pollution on our food, our air, and our water, while allowing the pollution to continue.[21]

Also deeply disappointing are the measures that would continue observation of activity that threatens our food security, while allowing that activity to go forward.[22] BLM knows our village and others are struggling to put food on the table because of the industrial activity already occurring, and the agency is going to study how that gets even harder, as Willow goes forward.[23]

[20] *See, e.g.*, Cooperating agency suggested measure #2, which would defer BT5 until three years after the construction of the Project's other three drill sites are complete.

[21] *See, e.g.*, ROP A-11, ROP A-12, cooperating agency suggested mitigation measures 18, 25, 27, 30, 31, 39, and 54.

[22] Cooperating agency suggested mitigation measures 1, 2, 5, 24, 38, 42, 43, 48, 56, 57, 59.

[23] The analogy to Project Chariot is not hyperbole. After determining that creating a port at Point Hope with a nuclear bomb was inappropriate, nuclear researchers buried radioactive material in the area and turned their project into a study to measure how much radiation was

Continued

BLM also recommends greenlighting a project that it admits will contribute to climate change and studying those impacts are as they occur.[24] The agency also proposes to measure the tundra damage from Willow, while allowing the project to go forward.[25] These, too, have significant negative impacts on our community.

V. The SEIS does not analyze whether or to what extent the mitigation measures would be effective.

Many measures would mitigate only part of the impacts and BLM does not explain how effective the measures would be, the basis for that determination, and what the remaining impacts would be. Many of them are also vague, which prevents any meaningful analysis of their effectiveness.[26]

Finally, all the Required Operating Procedures (ROPs) can be easily waived, at the complete discretion of the local BLM office. Some of the ROPs are not even included in ConocoPhillips' project design.[27] The SEIS states that "some of these measures are similar to existing NPR-A LSs and ROPs or other requirements and are included to show the Project proponent's commitment to adhering to them."[28] Does that mean that the ROPs that are not included in ConocoPhillips' design features demonstrate the company's lack of commitment to following them? For the design features that are similar, but not identical, to the SEIS ROPs, why has BLM not required ConocoPhillips to modify them, so that they align with the ROPs?

The environmental racism and injustice of oil development on the North Slope must stop. Oil development paid for our utilities, our schools, and so many other advancements we have benefited from. But providing these services is the responsibility of our governments, not private corporations. And we have a right to these services whether we agree to hosting an industrial wasteland in our backyard or not. The municipal, state, and federal government must stop insisting otherwise by delegating this responsibility to the oil industry.

The government also has an obligation to protect us from the harms of the oil industry and must stop expecting us to sacrifice our own lives "in the national interest." Fenceline communities have been asked to do so for too long, and environmental justice requires a new approach.

Quyanaq for your consideration,

Rosemary Ahtuangaruak Carl Brower

Eunice Brower

Additionally, the Alaska Wilderness League has confirmed that they were not consulted at all before the Department released the environmental impact statement, but I would actually like to direct my question to Mr. Beaudreau as the Deputy Secretary of the Department. I am interested in the decision-making process and the contours of the decision-making process around Willow. Who within the Department were some of the key stakeholders? Who were the leaders involved in making this decision?

Mr. BEAUDREAU. The Willow Project was an application before the Bureau of Land Management. So, BLM Alaskan staff conducted the analysis, the supplemental EIS analysis, as directed by the court.

necessary to "render a population dependent after local food sources have become too dangerous." Johansen, Bruce E. *Environmental racism in the United States and Canada: Seeking justice and sustainability*. ABC-CLIO, 2020, p. 257. Now it seems that the government is studying just how much disturbance to caribou is necessary to eliminate our subsistence lifestyle.

[24] Cooperating agency suggested mitigation measures 12, 17.

[25] Cooperating agency suggested mitigation measures 32, 66.

[26] *See, e.g.*, ROP F-1, Additional mitigation measure 3.6, cooperating agency suggested mitigation measures 1, 6, 8, 9, 10, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 29, 33, 34, 35, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, and 52.

[27] *See, e.g.*, ROPs A-11, A-12, B-2, and M-2.

[28] SEIS App I.1 at 18.

Also involved, of course, through the chain of command was the BLM Director, and the Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals. Ultimately, I signed the recorded decision, so it is my signature on that document.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. So, you signed the record of decision around the Willow Project?

Mr. BEAUDREAU. Yes.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Did the White House at any point weigh in on a preference on this decision with you?

Mr. BEAUDREAU. As with all of the matters in front of the Department, we, of course, coordinate with the White House. At the end of the day, though, a permitting decision like Willow is one that rests with the Secretary and her authorities, and as Deputy Secretary, I was the one who signed the recorded decision.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. And did BLM or anyone in the Department provide rationale for not consulting some of the major stakeholders, or failing to consult properly or account properly, such as the consultation from the Nuiqsut community, or the Alaska Wilderness League?

Mr. BEAUDREAU. Again, both Rosemary, the mayor, and Nuiqsut, and folks at Alaska Wilderness League are people that we know well in the Department, and I know well personally. So, I don't mean to contradict, but there has been throughout this process very close communication with Nuiqsut as well as with all interested stakeholders.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Thank you, and one last question. Given the precarious nature of the project's approval in the courts, and given your role in the decision, will the Department consider holding off on approving permits to drill for Willow until the litigation is settled?

Mr. BEAUDREAU. The posture of the Department right now is that the recorded decision has been issued. There has been litigation filed. Absent an injunction from the court, the project has the approvals to conduct the activities reflected in the recorded decision.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Thank you, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Florida. Ms. Luna, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. LUNA. From ensuring the Bureau of Ocean Management continues to follow the moratorium on Florida's offshore energy development to the Fish and Wildlife Service's protection of critical marine species and their habitats, the Department of the Interior plays a substantial role in my district and throughout the state of Florida.

Florida beaches are vital to the success of our coastal communities and the protection of our wildlife. In 2021 alone, Florida's visitors contributed $101.9 billion to the local economy and supported nearly 1.7 million jobs. The moratorium on offshore energy development projects in Florida's beaches and wildlife from disasters like the 2010 BP oil spill, and protects our national security interests, as well as protecting our military readiness and training activities at Eglin's test ranges and complexes throughout the Jacksonville range complex areas.

Similarly, Florida's beaches are home to some of our most beloved marine wildlife, some of which are protected under the Endangered Species Act, but, unfortunately, the erosion of Florida beaches puts many wildlife that are listed under the ESA at risk, making it necessary for routine coastal maintenance.

For example, the Sand Key Project in my district is up for renourishment, and the erosions of beaches like Sand Key can be devastating, because it leaves infrastructure prone to flood damaging, which negatively impacts the local economy, and also demolishes many habitats that endangered species and threatened wildlife rely on.

In fact, the Sand Key Project has directly impacted species like the loggerhead turtles, piping plover shorebirds, Western Indian manatees, Eastern black rails, red knots, wood storks, and American crocodiles, all of which are federally classified as endangered or threatened species, and reside in or around the Sand Key region.

With that being said, my question is for you, Secretary Haaland. The erosion of shorelines affecting natural resources, energy defense, public infrastructure, and tourism. How has the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Ocean Management worked to address the erosion along our nation's coastal beaches, barrier islands, and wetlands?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, thank you, and first I want to thank you for your care and concern about the marine life in your district, and beyond Florida. I went to Florida and had a chance to be in the Everglades, and it really is a magical place.

Honestly, I would be happy to get back with your staff about any specific programs that we have for coastal erosion in your area, and certainly we are always happy to work with you on any ideas or projects that you would like to present to us, and we care deeply about these areas.

Ms. LUNA. This next question is for anyone on the panel. How long does it typically take the Department of the Interior or each bureau to provide the necessary permits for projects like Sand Key where sand placement is critical to the restoration of endangered habitats?

Mr. BEAUDREAU. As the Secretary said, we can provide statistics like that. I will say, as the former Director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, marine minerals and coastal restoration is one of the primary missions of BOEM, working with our partners, including the Army Corps, on those types of projects.

Ms. LUNA. If I can just ask you a real quick question. The Army Corps is giving us pushback, and they are failing to acknowledge that this is actually very endangered habitat. So, we need help on it, because they are giving us some bureaucratic nonsensical answer, and obviously I think you guys might have a little bit of pull there, so we would appreciate your help.

Mr. BEAUDREAU. Well, I will reach out to Mike Connor at the Army Corps, who used to have my job, so I know he appreciates our mission.

Ms. LUNA. I am about to do a protest, like, I am not even kidding. I am about to go to the office and protest, because it is nonsense. OK, is the Department of the Interior or Bureau of

Ocean Energy Management committed to following the offshore energy development moratorium on the Eastern Gulf? As you know from Florida, I would bet you probably can't find a Florida Rep that is going to want anything off our shores. I don't care what it is.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, yes.

Ms. LUNA. OK, good. I like to hear it. Thank you, guys. Chairman, I yield my time.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from New Mexico. Ms. Stansbury, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to take this opportunity like some of my colleagues have before me to welcome our Madam Secretary, and Deputy Secretary, and Director Flanagan, who I had the pleasure of working with in a former life, and to say New Mexico is in the house. We are excited to have you here today, and before I dive into some of the budgetary matters that we are here to talk about today, I do want to just take a moment to acknowledge the incredible work that you have done as a leader within the Department of the Interior, and in the Administration, along with all of you who are serving and all of your staff.

What a difference leadership makes across all areas and all missions and bureaus of the Department, whether that is addressing tribal affairs and being good partners to our sovereign Tribal Nations, addressing the climate crisis, or tackling our conservation and our water issues.

So, with that in mind, I want to just really celebrate some of the big successes that the Department has made over the last couple of years, and also acknowledge some of the proposals in the budget that I am very excited about. In particular, on tribal affairs, the Biden administration, after a 4-year hiatus of the Tribal Nations Conference, has begun to convene and consult once again with our Tribal Nations.

The budget makes significant investments in our Tribal Nations, and the particular initiatives, Madam Secretary, that you have led on around missing and murdered Indigenous women and the boarding school project, and I am excited to also see in the budget full funding for contract support costs, which is vital to our Tribal Nations, and something that I worked on for many years, which is to secure mandatory funding for Indian water right settlements.

And Mr. Chairman, I would like to say it is long past due to get it done. Our tribes are depending on us, and we have to get that across the finish line, and I want to commit to you all today that I am here to be in that fight to make it happen.

On conservation and science, obviously we see significant investments in this budget, especially appreciative of the commitment to the 30x30 Initiative, which Madam Secretary, you have taken such a leadership role. The increase in firefighter salary funding, which we know is so vital for our first responders, and, of course, the comprehensive approach to conservation and water issues in general.

And, of course, the commitment and leadership of the Department in helping to get our climate and clean energy dollars on the ground, which this body passed through our work on the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

So, it is really an extraordinary accomplishment. I am excited. As you all know, I worked at OMB, and I am a bona fide budget nerd. So, I am always excited to read about the initiatives that are in the Department's budget. But I do want to take a couple of moments to touch on some issues that are near and dear to New Mexico's 1st Congressional District, which Madam Secretary, you know oh so well, as the former Congresswoman for our district.

And the first is I want to thank you personally for your support for the To'Hajiilee Community School. We just passed over $90 million to help replace that Community School in the To'Hajiilee community of the Navajo Nation. And as you know, Madam Secretary, that will transform that community not only by bringing dollars to update that facility, but also jobs and really a transformative impact in the community.

But as I think has been stated, that is just one school, and we have an over $4 billion backlog in BIE schools, and I know that there is an increase in this budget for our BIE schools, but it only comes to about one-tenth of the total amount needed to actually address that backlog.

My first question is, and I think I can assume the answer, will you commit to working with us here in Congress to make sure we get full funding to address that backlog?

Secretary HAALAND. Absolutely.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you very much. Secondly, I want to just touch really quickly on four projects that are really vital for our district and our tribal communities, and that is to ask for your support and your help in getting administrative efforts to protect Chaco Canyon across the finish line, administrative efforts to withdraw the Buffalo Tract in New Mexico, to advance the water rights of the Middle Rio Grande Pueblos, which are currently beginning the adjudication process, and to protect Oak Flat, which of course is the sacred land of the Apache people which not only live in Arizona in the Chairman's home state, but also in our state in New Mexico.

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, thank you so much. I know that a lot of the projects and issues that you mentioned, they are being looked at in our Department, and I just appreciate your support and your full support of Tribal Nations across our country. Thank you.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, and Mr. Chairman, I know I am out of time, but I do want to just say I would be remiss if I did not bring up the issue of the Colorado River. The basin states have made extraordinary efforts to try to find a collaborative path forward.

My colleague from California is not here to defend his home state, but we really need to make sure that all of our basin states come together in good faith, and that we do not have a Federal takeover of our waters on the Colorado.

So, I do want to ask for the commitment of the Department to work collaboratively with our states and tribes on the Colorado, as well as the Rio Grande. Thank you very much, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Arizona. Mr. Gosar, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, Secretary Haaland. I am going to ask you a question. Do you think it is important to weigh all factors before making a decision to withdraw lands or waters from mineral production?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much, Congressman. Of course, there is a process.

Dr. GOSAR. Yes or no? I mean, you don't exclude any information, do you?

Secretary HAALAND. We follow the process. We want to hear from all the stakeholders. We do a thorough job.

Dr. GOSAR. OK. Do you know how much money current mineral production provides to the Navajo Nation members every year?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I don't have that figure in front of me.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, let me give it to you. In 2022, almost $40 million of revenue went to Navajo allotees from one company alone. Do you know how much Navajo members stand to lose from restricting future production in the proposed buffer zone in the Chaco Canyon mineral withdrawal, and do you know how much it would cost the government?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I know that we don't—I mean, it is hard to project what those numbers are if those areas have not been under production, but I appreciate the question, and——

Dr. GOSAR. Well, let me give you some examples. The answer is $194 million over 20 years. It would also cost the BLM over a billion dollars in royalties over those 20 years. Now, the mineral estate owned by the Navajo allotees is in a checkerboard pattern with Federal lands, and without the Federal leases and right-of-ways, their minerals won't be developed.

And this is very key, because I supported the Chaco Canyon monument, but I also had a commitment from the now-Senator that there would be access to an easement that would address the allotees. Would you commit to considering these impacts before making a final decision with that withdrawal, and if so, having an easement for those allotees?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I just want to assure you that any withdrawal protects existing rights of those allotees.

Dr. GOSAR. So, access is a part of that?

Secretary HAALAND. What I can tell you is that any withdrawal is protecting the existing rights of the people who live in those areas.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, it should be very simple and that easement for access to those royalties or to those minerals be part of that decision.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Congressman. I know that, as I mentioned, there is a process. Currently, there is a public comment period happening with respect to the issue that you have raised, and there has not been a decision made as of today.

Dr. GOSAR. OK. Why is the Department of the Interior continuing to issue mineral withdrawals, and then throw up other administrative hurdles for minerals that our country already has, like lithium, copper, nickel, and others, while at the same time the President is trying to buy them from other countries with taxpayer dollars from the Inflation Reduction Act? Why are we supporting people like the Chinese when they are using child labor in the Congo? We have it right here. We do it better than anybody else? Why would we not?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, thank you for the question, and I know that as Deputy Secretary Beaudreau mentioned earlier about the work on the inter-agency work group for mining reform, we are working to move this law into the 21st century.

There are places for critical minerals to mine in this country. We are working hard to move some of those forward. The Department has actually permitted 20 new mines or mine modifications since January 2021.

Dr. GOSAR. So, I am glad you said that. Arizona is famously known as the copper state due to our tremendous reserves. Due to the significant supply fluctuations since 2018, copper and other minerals not currently designated as critical by your Department may now qualify under the existing USGS methodology as critical minerals.

As Secretary, you have the authority to re-evaluate the critical minerals list at any time between the required evaluations of every 3 years. Given the severe supply chain risks that have deepened with China's growing global influence, can you commit to a re-evaluation of the current critical minerals list before the required update in 2025?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I know that the United States Geological Survey is mandated by the Energy Act of 2020 to redo that list every 3 years. So, I believe that, yes, 2025 is the next time that they will update that list.

Dr. GOSAR. It says that is the minimum. I mean, as the Secretary, you should be looking at the landscape and you have the ability to change those as a directive, and I think based upon what technology is going through here, this is very important to have. So, I yield back.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from New York. Ms. Velázquez, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member. Secretary Haaland, welcome to the community. As you well know, the renewable energy industry on public lands and Federal waters has incredible potential to accelerate the clean energy transition. I am excited to see the progress so far in my home state of New York, which now has five commercial scale offshore wind projects in active development.

The Inflation Reduction Act, which Democrats passed last Congress, included several boosts to clean energy through a significant amount of funding for permitting. My question to you is, how DOI is using the Inflation Reduction Act funds to encourage sound and streamlined permitting for renewable energy projects on Federal land and waters, specifically offshore wind?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, thank you so much for the question, and, of course, permitting happens because we have experienced staff in place to move those applications forward. We can't do it without staff. If we are able to hire more staff, then it stands to reason that we can get those things done faster.

The Fiscal Year 2024 budget contains significant resources to ensure that we are moving forward to meet the President's goals. It includes $64 million for BOEM's renewable energy program, with a $12 million increase to support permitting.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. So, what is DOI doing to help prepare communities for these emerging clean energy industry in terms of workforce and community outreach, particularly in underserved communities?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, I know that we are working hard to make sure that the new jobs that are going to be available in this clean energy sector, that people are trained for those jobs. That is one of the reasons why union labor is so important in some of these projects, because they do have a training component.

So, of course, as you know, everyone is working right now. We have a very low unemployment rate, but we are always working to make sure that folks are trained for tomorrow's jobs in this sector.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Well, I want to see a real outreach in underserved communities that have faced and deal with the brunt of environmental injustice in those communities. So, they need to reap the benefits at least in terms of job creation that will come with the transition from fossil fuel to energy.

Secretary HAALAND. Absolutely.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. President Biden's Justice40 initiative will ensure that at least 40 percent of the overall benefits of Federal investment in climate-related programs go to disadvantaged communities that have been disproportionately affected by pollution. The Fiscal Year 2024 budget includes $2 million to support these efforts. Can you briefly discuss how the Department is transparently implemented Justice40 across the several programs overseas?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Congresswoman. The Bureau of Reclamation will be awarding $550 million in grants, contracts, or financial assistance agreements for disadvantaged communities for up to 100 percent of the cost, planning, design, or construction of water projects, to provide domestic water supplies to communities or households that did not have reliable access to domestic water supplies.

Additionally, Reclamation will also be distributing $4 billion in grants, contracts, or financial assistance for drought mitigation, to public entities, and to Indian tribes. The Office of Insular Affairs receive $15.9 million to provide technical assistance for climate change planning, mitigation, adaptation, and resilience to the U.S. insular areas and $25 million to the Office of Native Hawaiian Affairs to carry out programs for climate resilience and adaptation activities.

We are very proud of the funding that we have been able to manage moving forward in these communities, and as I mentioned earlier, it is the communities that can least afford it that are having the worst effects of climate change.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. And I hope that you include the territories that are our responsibility.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes, absolutely.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Thank you.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Congresswoman.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Georgia. Mr. Collins, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. COLLINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Haaland, one of my priorities in Congress is holding the government accountable and making it more transparent so that Georgians know where their tax dollars are being spent. Reviewing your budget request, I noticed that it includes $53.6 million to fully transition the Department's light duty fleet to zero emission vehicles.

Secretary, one of the major challenges with all electric vehicle fleets is getting enough critical minerals to make the chips and batteries necessary to make these vehicles run. Right now, the United States imports more than 50 percent of its supply for 25 different minerals from China.

Would you rather we be relying on China and forced labor for these chips, or open up mining in Minnesota, Nevada, and other places, and get those critical minerals from right here in America?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, thank you very much for the question, and as we mentioned earlier, we are working hard to move this issue forward. The inter-agency work group on mining reform is working to expedite some of those permits and so forth, but we recognize that we would like to do more here in our country, and we have also recognized the need for critical minerals. So, we want to do more domestic production. President Biden believes wholeheartedly in energy independence for our country.

Mr. COLLINS. All right. Moving on, then. Secretary Haaland, how many employees does the Department currently have?

Secretary HAALAND. Employees, we are a little over 60,000.

Mr. COLLINS. I think somebody needs to adjust your website, then. On the front page, it says 70,000. Where are these employees located? Are they here in DC?

Secretary HAALAND. We have employees all over the country, Congressman. Here in DC, out West, all over. We have national parks all over the country, wildlife refuges all over the country.

Mr. COLLINS. I was just asking about the majority of them, if they were here in DC?

Secretary HAALAND. I don't think there is a majority in DC. I think the vast majority are out in the field and working on our public lands.

Mr. COLLINS. Let me shift gears for a minute and get to what I was asking for, then. On April 10, President Biden signed Representative Gosar's bill ending the COVID-19 national emergency. Secretary, how soon after he signed that bill did you order all of the Department of the Interior headquarters employees back into the office?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, as I mentioned, a lot of our employees work out in the field. It is their jobs to be on our public lands. With respect to——

Mr. COLLINS. The ones that are in the headquarters, though, have they been ordered back into the office?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you for that. I know that we are working. There are still some members of our team who are teleworking several days out of the week, but for the most part——

Mr. COLLINS. So, you haven't ordered them back into the office yet?

Secretary HAALAND. I have not placed an order to tell everyone to come in 9 to 5, Monday through Friday.

Mr. COLLINS. But most of your testimony today has been about how short staffed you are. I would think that it would be more efficient working from the office in the headquarters instead of from the house.

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman——

Mr. COLLINS. I mean, the pandemic is over. You could have already had them back in the office.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much. With respect to the staff shortages, those are mostly in the BLM, and those are mostly some of the positions out West. I know that some folks are working a hybrid schedule, like the rest of the Federal Government and corporate American. I can assure you that——

Mr. COLLINS. So, I guess my last question is—it doesn't sound like you have ordered them back into the office at all. So, if not, when do you plan on ordering them back into the office?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I really want to assure you that everyone works very hard in my Department. We are working every single day regardless of where we are working. And certainly——

Mr. COLLINS. I don't think it is a matter of working hard. It is a matter of being productive for the American people.

Mr. Chairman, I have no more further questions. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from California. Ms. Kamlager-Dove, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and just thank you for coming back to the Committee to chair. I think there was a question of Secretary Haaland about if she knew where the wilderness is, and sometimes I think this Committee is the wilderness.

Having said that, thank you for speaking with us today, and for the important work that you are doing heading the Department of the Interior. I think at the rate that we are headed with these proposed cuts, we would be looking at cutting the meat, the bone, the life out of the Department, which is incredibly important—you all do incredibly important work in terms of protecting our Federal lands and our Federal resources.

I have a question. How is the DOI using BIL and IRA funds to support job creation specifically related to revitalizing communities at the front lines of the energy transition, and, specifically, how would the Republican proposed budget cuts reduce the Interior's job creating power?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much for the question, Congresswoman, and I could say that with regard to renewable energy, we work with states, local communities, industry, and labor to ensure that we develop the workforce to support all of these projects. Offshore wind has the potential to create more than

44,000 jobs and support nearly 33,000 more on top of that. We are also working to make sure that the right incentives are in place to encourage this work. The cleanup of abandoned mine lands has created jobs and closed thousands of dangerous mines.

Those are jobs that folks have lost because mines have closed, or things have shut down, but we are reinvigorating those communities with jobs on our abandoned mine land and orphan well projects. So, we are very proud of the work that we have been able to generate as a result of President Biden's policies and President Biden's budget.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Great, thank you. I have one additional question. While the Department's budget continues to increase its funding request for offshore renewable energy, which we greatly need, and the Administration speaks to the need to addressing our climate crisis, we also just saw the Department's approval of the Willow Oil Project in Alaska.

So, I would like it if you could explain this disconnect. I ask because I represent the District of Los Angeles, which is home to one of the largest urban oil fields in the country, and this is an issue for us.

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, thank you for the question. I went to Los Angeles, so I saw some of those orphaned gas wells in people's backyards, and I saw pictures of what Los Angeles looked like during that time that you speak of.

It is a top priority for us in this Administration to move responsibly with our clean energy transition. Onshore, BLM is processing over 32,000 megawatts of renewable energy capacity, 68 renewable energy projects, solar, wind, geothermal, and five electricity transmission lines, which I spoke of earlier in this hearing. There are over 120 pending applications for onshore solar and wind development with the potential generation of roughly 50,000 megawatts.

So, we are working very hard on this transition. The clean energy industry is very excited about the progress that we have made, and I believe they will continue to make investments into the work that we are doing.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Great. Thank you for that, and I am hoping that you all are preparing for the surge in development as it relates to clean energy, new technologies, implementation, et cetera. How are you going to manage it in terms of environmental impact and staffing capacity?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much, Congresswoman. With respect to that issue, BLM's renewable energy coordination offices, they are called RECOs, are working to expedite cross agency permitting and coordination, and one of the keys to that as I mentioned earlier is making sure that all stakeholders are at the table.

When we start, we have to keep people informed and keep people so that we can all move forward together. The funding increase in the 2024 budget will support increased staffing and program work to increase the pace of renewable energy processing and managing increasing workload volumes. So, we intend to make use of every dime of that 2024 budget to move our country forward.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Great. Thank you so much for that, and also I appreciate your extemporaneous tutorial on body language earlier, and with that, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Oregon. Mr. Bentz, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Madam Secretary, for being here. I am happy to see you here today, but I didn't see anyone from your agency present at our Water Subcommittee hearing in Fresno just 8 days ago, and I was surprised at that, given the situation we face in California, the immense amount of water, some say as much as 5½ feet of water content across the entire Sierra, ready to rush down the hills and flood Sacramento and the Central Valley.

So, I was very surprised not to see you there, or see someone there. The Chair of our Natural Resources Committee, Mr. Westerman, was there, because he realizes, as did the other Congressmen attending, just how incredibly dangerous the situation is for all of California, and also the opportunity that is being squandered as we fail to recognize the need for more storage.

And to that end, I just want to make clear for the record we were disappointed in not seeing your agency there. Now, I understand Camille, I think Camille, Director Touton, is doing a great job given the many, many challenges she faces. I wouldn't have expected her to be there, but there could have been somebody from your Department.

Let me shift away from that and go to the dam removal on the Klamath. Of course, the Klamath, the upper Klamath is in my district. Apparently, the removal of four dams on that river is proceeding.

That has started. The concerns are many regarding the removal of those four dams. In fact, I think the Corps of Engineers and also FERC told me in a roundtable about a year ago when I asked them a series of very pointed questions about their plan, that they really weren't sure of the answers, because they hadn't done this in 20 years, and that is not a good answer, but here are some specific questions.

The first, the Keno Dam is above the rest of the dams. It is not being taken out, but there is about $100 million of deferred maintenance on that dam. Who is going to be responsible for that bill once, as I understand it, the certificate of the license is going to be handed over to the Bureau of Rec, and I am just wondering if PacifiCorp, who owns the project now, is going to be responsible for that $100 million repair bill that that dam carries with it. If not, who?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, thank you for the question, and, of course, just so I can tell you, we really try to meet all requests, and we appreciate being invited to the roundtable, or the field hearing. So, you are talking about the repayment of costs, is that what you are—I'm sorry.

Mr. BENTZ. The dam is worn out, and it needs about, between $80 and $100 million worth of repairs. Before the Bureau accepts the hand off of the ownership of that project, I hope the Bureau is going to protect all of us taxpayers and the water users below that dam from the deferred maintenance costs of the dam.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you.

Mr. BENTZ. So, I am asking, who is going to pay that between $80 and $100 million bill?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you for the question. The Department is committed that the water users covered by the 2016 Klamath Power and Facilities Agreement will not bear the costs associated with operating and maintaining the Keno facility. We remain committed to that, we are happy to stay in touch with you in your office about any of——

Mr. BENTZ. I'm sorry, say that again, who did you just say is not going to be paying the costs?

Secretary HAALAND. I am informed that the water users covered by the 2016 agreement will not bear the costs associated with——

Mr. BENTZ. And that is fine. I am happy to hear that. The second question is, will the U.S. Government have to pay that $80 to $100 million?

Secretary HAALAND. I apologize, Mr. Bentz. I will get back with you with all of those details, if that is OK. We will contact your office shortly after this.

Mr. BENTZ. All right. And I very much want to have that contact in writing so I can share it with everybody else, because there is huge concern that PacifiCorp, and the state of Oregon, and the state of California are trying to offload that incredibly large obligation on the taxpayers, and I just don't think that is right. So, I am looking forward to that.

Secretary HAALAND. I understand.

Mr. BENTZ. Just a few seconds I have left. It seems to me there is $162 million that is being spent on fixing the river. Can you tell us how the Bureau is involved in the expenditure of that $162 million that Senator Merkley obtained for restoration purposes?

Secretary HAALAND. I apologize, Tommy, can you—he knows it better than me.

Mr. BEAUDREAU. No problem at all. We are extremely appreciative of the funding for restoration of a system that needs it, and those investments are long overdue. So, the Bureau of Reclamation is developing the spend plan and the plans for deploying those dollars as we speak.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Rhode Island. Mr. Magaziner, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MAGAZINER. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Secretary, for your work and for joining us today. In Rhode Island, we know that a swift transition to clean energy is possible, that it can save costs for rate payers on their electric bills, reduce emissions, and create jobs. My district is home to the Block Island Wind Farm, the first offshore windfarm in North America. And we are also home to the planned Revolution Wind Farm currently under construction.

When complete, Revolution Wind will provide nearly 1.6 million megawatt hours of clean energy into our grid each year. That is enough electricity to meet roughly a quarter of Rhode Island's total electric demand state-wide. The project will generate clean power for more than 350,000 homes and displace more than 1 million metric tons of carbon pollution, and, importantly, will save Rhode Islanders roughly $100 million on their electric bills compared to the prevailing rate for electricity.

Building off of the success, Rhode Island is currently pursuing an additional procurement for offshore wind that will more than double this capacity and put our state on the path to 100 percent renewable energy by the end of this decade.

Rhode Island stands as proof that clean energy development can be done in a thoughtful way that incorporates community input, protects industry, and safeguards local wildlife. During each review process, Rhode Island and Federal agencies held dozens of meetings, Q&A sessions, community seminars, public comment periods, to give a voice to residents and stakeholders.

And the Inflation Reduction Act will enable more offshore wind and clean energy projects to come on-line and get us closer to the Biden administration's goal of deploying 30 gigawatts of offshore wind capacity by 2030, which will save Americans money on their electric bills, reduce our dependence on foreign energy, put us on the path to energy independence, create 100,000+ good clean energy jobs, and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by more than 70 million metric tons.

Madam Secretary, can you just expand at a high level on what role you see offshore wind playing in achieving American energy independence, and what goals do you have for offshore wind development nationally in the coming years?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much for the question and everything you said. Yes, we are on board with that, and we really want to make sure that we are reaching the goals that the President has set, 30 gigawatts of offshore wind power by 2030.

I feel that we can reach that goal, and we can do that because we are ensuring that we are taking the communities who will be the workforce behind these efforts with us. So, I can say that everything you said, yes, we agree with you, we want to see this come to fruition, namely the way we can lower energy costs for Americans will mean a tremendous amount. As a single mom, I understand what that means. So, 30 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030, that is a goal we have. We would love to surpass that, and we will work hard to get there.

Mr. MAGAZINER. Thank you. The Administration budget includes funding to support effective environmental reviews and accelerate permitting for offshore wind. Can you talk about how important this funding would be in the timely processing of applications while also maintaining high standards for community input and environmental review?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much, Congressman, and yes, the funding for agency staff would ensure that permitting work can be done correctly and efficiently. People actually work on these things, so there is a process to that. The lack of resources causes significant problems.

One, it can lead to slower times. Two, if the process is not done correctly, then the permits can be at risk to challenges and other problems and we want to make sure that things are done right the first time. It is true across the board, including for clean energy, so we feel very committed to doing things in the right manner. If we have the staff, that means we have the opportunity to move those permits forward.

Mr. MAGAZINER. Thank you. And, finally, the House Republican Freedom Caucus has proposed to reduce the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management budget to zero dollars. Can you just briefly describe the impact that that would have on permitting and environmental reviews across the board?

Secretary HAALAND. It would be devastating. And, currently, the clean energy industry—they are committed to these goals, and they have a lot invested in the future of our country. So, I feel we have a commitment to all of the workers who are building these offshore wind turbines, who are doing everything there is involved with that. So, it would be devastating.

Mr. MAGAZINER. Thank you, Secretary. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Puerto Rico. Mrs. González-Colón, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and happy to see you here, Madam Secretary. And thank you for visiting the island during last November, specifically the San Juan National Historic Park. I have so many questions, some of them I will submit for the record. I know you have been here for a long time, but there are many other questions that I will try to focus.

The first one is that in both Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023, my request, Congress had provided the U.S. Geological Survey a $500,000 increase to update the combined National Seismic Hazard Model for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which has been last published in 2003. As you know, the National Seismic Hazard Model for the 48 states is regularly updated every 6 years. So, it has been quite a long time that the territories have not been updated.

I know that the agency is also working on updating the models for Alaska and Hawaii, and these models describe the likelihood of potential impacts of earthquakes and serve as the basis for seismic protections in building codes, and we were just hit in 2019 by another earthquake in the south.

So, according to the information previously shared by the geological survey with our office, maintaining the funding level through the Fiscal Year 2024 would allow them to deliver a draft Puerto Rico-U.S. Virgin Islands seismic hazard map in 2024, and a final one updated model in 2025.

However, I am concerned that the Department's Fiscal Year 2024 budget delayed the release of the updated seismic hazard model for the two territories, U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, until the end of 2026. So, my question will be, why is the Department proposing a $500,000 reduction in delaying the release of the updated Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands maps to the end of 2026?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, I apologize. I am going to check on that with my staff and get back with you, if that is OK, soon after this hearing. I know that is a concern for you, and I just want to make sure that we have all of the——

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. I appreciate it.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes, of course.

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. I appreciate it. Whatever other additional resources you may need or require to achieve this, let us know, but the information we got from the agency was that $500,000 was enough, and we appropriated the funds for this, and now seeing the reduction in the budget plan, it is like, not going according to what we proposed.

The next question that I have is, we were talking a few minutes ago about wind leasing and a goal of conducting offshore wind. During the last Congress, we amended the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to provide you authority to conduct offshore wind leasing in Federal waters of the U.S. territories.

And according to the budget request, the Department will begin moving forward with lease planning processes in Puerto Rico in the current fiscal year. Can you provide us at least more information about what will it consist of, or what sort of work will be carried out this year?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, thank you very much for the question. The Department and BOEM plan to initiate the area identification process by forming an inter-governmental renewable energy task force, which will help ensure early and frequent communication throughout the renewable energy leasing process. We expect to formally propose the formation of the new Puerto Rico task force very soon, and we look forward to working with your office, and the government of Puerto Rico, and its diverse stakeholders on this issue moving forward. So, we will absolutely be in touch about this and appreciate you asking the question.

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. I appreciate that. The first idea of this legislation came from a Member of Congress, Madeleine Bordallo from Guam, and we got the bill, it was approved, and finally we got it passed in a sort of amendment in the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act that was approved during the last year. So, I mean, this is something that we are pushing for. So, my office will be more than eager to help with any stakeholders on the island, and the energy authorities as well.

I will submit some questions for the record, but my last question today is, we saw that the Fish and Wildlife Service administered five national wildlife refuges on the island. We are talking about more than 22,000 acres. However, I am extremely concerned about staffing shortages in those areas. We used to have 28 employees 10 years ago, and now we just have 10. If there is a reason for that, it is complicated to hire in those areas. What is the Department currently doing to address staffing needs in those national wildlife refuges in Puerto Rico?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, staffing is important to us everywhere, and certainly in Puerto Rico. Just to let you know that sites in Puerto Rico will receive funding from the Great American Outdoors Act. The San Juan National Historic Site is estimated to receive nearly $42 million for repair of the walls and I saw those walls and they are——

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. I remember.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes, indeed. So, just know that we care about the wildlife refuges and the national park sites in Puerto

Rico as much as we care about them anywhere. So, we will absolutely keep you updated, and happy to work with you moving forward to make sure that we have the folks there who need to get the work done.

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Thank you, Madam Secretary, and I will submit the rest of the questions for the record.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much.

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Good to see you again.

Secretary HAALAND. Nice to see you too.

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time is expired. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Gallego. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome, Madam Secretary. Earlier this year, California and the other six states in the Colorado River Basin, including Arizona, submitted two separate proposals to address water shortages in the basin.

Based on those proposals, the Bureau of Reclamation recently offered three alternatives. Do nothing, and risk Lake Mead and Lake Powell reaching dead pool. No. 2, proportionately distribute water restrictions during times of water shortages, or place the cuts almost entirely on Arizona, our communities, and our economy.

Since it is pretty obvious which of those I prefer, and which would objectively make the most sense if we are having a serious discussion of water needs in the year 2023, instead of 1923, I would like to ask instead about the review process itself. What were some of the most impactful, alarming, or surprising findings during the Department's recent review process, and what did this review process teach us about long-term solutions in the region?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, thank you so much for the question. I have Deputy Secretary Beaudreau with me who I tasked with working on Colorado River issues. If it is OK, I will have him answer the question.

Mr. BEAUDREAU. Yes, thank you, Representative Gallego, and it was great to see you in Phoenix a couple weeks ago speaking specifically on the investments we are making for sustainability of the Colorado River system. I think the most shocking set of facts that are presented in the supplemental environmental review, is the depletion of the reservoir. And the visuals are there, if you go out to Hoover Dam or Lake Mead and see the bathtub rings, but what is really astounding is the hydrological projections going forward. And that was the purpose of presenting the no action alternative, where in a time of climate change, the most severe impacts to the river system are from doing nothing. And that is a profound statement about the challenges we face in light of changing climate in this sustained drought.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you. Last Congress, Democrats provided significant investments for drought mitigation and climate resilience, including $8.3 billion in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and $4 billion in the Inflation Reduction Act. Can you briefly share how the Department has implemented this funding to address drought mitigation efforts? Secretary Haaland, if you want to start with that one?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you so much for the question, Congressman. The bill is allowing the Department to allocate resources needed to help build a path to a more resilient future, of course, and that is important because climate change is not going away.

Reclamation has allocated approximately $1.7 billion in BIL funds to projects across the West for water conservation, water recycling, more storage, rehabilitation of infrastructure to ensure long-term sustainability in the face of this changing climate.

This includes 82 new WaterSMART projects in the Colorado River Basin, that is for $284 million of the bill funding. It also includes longer term drought resilience projects like $210 million for water storage projects across the West.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you, Secretary, and something that I truly cherish was the day you and I held a hearing together on missing and murdered Indigenous women. And the first ever in Congress, and it was groundbreaking. So, I would like to ask you about that important issue. As we have heard in the Committee many times, American Indian Alaskan Native persons experienced violence at a grossly disproportionate rate in this country. These realities are even worse for Indigenous women and girls, which is why we have worked together in the past legislation addressing this crisis of violence, including my proposal to combat family violence and to provide resources to tribal law enforcement. However, according to the Department's estimates, House Republican's budget cap proposal will result in a loss of over 1,500 tribal law enforcement personnel.

Of course, this would not improve safety on tribal lands. Secretary Haaland, considering this, how will the House Republican's cuts to the tribal public safety funding impact the Department's current work combating this crisis?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, thank you so much for your support on this issue, and I will always appreciate you standing up for tribal communities and specifically for this terrible violence against Indian people.

This proposal would have, of course, real and damaging impacts on our country. If spending for defense programs kept level, then non-defense programs would face steep cuts of 22 percent or more. That is $3.7 billion for DOI. Tribal communities have historically been underfunded. Law enforcement is one of their top priorities. Every time they call us, it is about law enforcement. We know how important that is to them.

But if they are continually underfunded, they cannot sustain these deep reductions that would have terrible results for tribal public safety, justice, law enforcement, and those are the highest priorities for our tribes, and as you said, losing 1,500 law enforcement personnel in Indian Country would be devastating across the country.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you, Secretary. I yield back, and it is good to see you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Wyoming. Ms. Hageman, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Secretary, have there been any new coal leases or lease modifications approved either for thermal or met coal under your leadership at the Department of the Interior?

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you, Congresswoman. I know that this met coal question came up earlier. We are happy to have the BLM or someone from that bureau be in touch with you about that. I couldn't say specifically which projects have been approved or permitted and which haven't.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, are there any outstanding coal lease or lease modification applications currently pending before the Department of the Interior?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, I am more than happy to make sure that we can get that list to you if that is OK with you, but the BLM is committed to the district court that reinstated the coal leasing program moratorium that it will initiate the remedial environmental analysis shortly. So, we are working on this issue.

Ms. HAGEMAN. So, you don't have an answer for my question as you sit here today?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, we will be happy to get back with you about the number of permits, if that is what you are asking.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. Do you know how long the applications that are pending before the DOI have been pending, and what is the reason for the delay?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, I know that our staff works on permitting every day. It is hard to say why some take longer than others. However, I do want to let you know that the BLM has made me aware of the importance of the project that you are talking about.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. Madam Secretary, do you believe energy poverty is a good thing?

Secretary HAALAND. I don't know the term, ma'am.

Ms. HAGEMAN. You have never heard of the phrase, energy poverty?

Secretary HAALAND. I have not heard of that term.

Ms. HAGEMAN. It is probably pretty self-explanatory though, don't you think?

Secretary HAALAND. Well, I think what we are really trying to do with our clean energy goals is make energy more affordable for every single American.

Ms. HAGEMAN. I would like you to answer my question, which is, do you believe energy poverty is a good thing? In other words, that people going into poverty and being unable to afford food, or medicine, or things like that, because of the rising cost of energy. Do you think that is a good thing?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, I understand the challenges that many Americans face. I raised my child as a single mom, and had to decide whether I could pay the rent, or my student loans, or even my gas bill, so I understand that. It is very difficult.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yes, so you agree that energy poverty is not a good thing, is that right?

Secretary HAALAND. I want to say that we are working very hard to make energy more efficient and more affordable, which is why we are moving forward on our clean energy goals.

Ms. HAGEMAN. But that is the case. Coal is an affordable energy, isn't it? It has been for decades.

Secretary HAALAND. I know that our country relied on coal for a very long time, and we are very grateful for so many of the workforce that powered our nation for a very long time.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Right, and coal is an affordable energy, isn't it?

Secretary HAALAND. Ma'am, I want to say that President Biden believes in energy independence for our country, and I believe that using different energy sources around the country will help communities everywhere, and will keep energy more affordable?

Ms. HAGEMAN. Including coal and oil and gas, correct?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, we are in a transition currently to a clean energy future, and I believe very strongly that we will get there, and energy will be more affordable for everyone.

Ms. HAGEMAN. So, then energy poverty is a policy of this Administration from what I can tell from your answers.

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, we are working very hard to make sure that all Americans can access affordable energy, and that is one of the reasons why we are working on hard on this transition.

Ms. HAGEMAN. But your policies do the exact opposite, which increase the cost of energy, correct?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, President Biden truly understands the challenge of working people, and we want to make sure that energy can be affordable for every American.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Madam Secretary, do you know what the recovery criteria is for the Greater Yellowstone grizzly bear?

Secretary HAALAND. I beg your pardon?

Ms. HAGEMAN. Do you know what the recovery criteria is for the Greater Yellowstone grizzly bear?

Secretary HAALAND. What I know is that the grizzly bear, although it may be thriving in some places, it is not thriving in other places.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. Do you know the recovery criteria for the Greater Yellowstone grizzly bear?

Secretary HAALAND. I would be happy to get back with you with that specific answer, ma'am.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, it is roughly 600–700, the recovery criteria. Do you know how many bears are currently living in the Greater Yellowstone recovery area?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, I don't have the number of grizzly bears in front of me at the moment, but I am happy to get back with you.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Were you aware then that there were over 1,100 grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone area?

Secretary HAALAND. I appreciate you sharing that information with me.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. Thank you, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Oregon. Ms. Hoyle, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. HOYLE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Secretary Haaland, for testifying for the Committee today. I represent Oregon's 4th Congressional District in Southwest Oregon, and the

Bureau of Land Management manages over 800,000 acres of timberland in my district.

We are really good at growing trees. The majority of the forest lands in my district are made up of the Oregon and California railroad revested lands, or the O&C lands, and these lands are unique, their history, their location, purpose, are far different than any place else in the country.

The checkerboard pattern of private, industrial, state, tribal, and Federal forest makes it complicated to manage, and even more complicated to protect, especially in this era of climate-driven megafires that threaten communities, wildlife ecosystems, and rural economies.

In 2020, we lost 1.1 million acres and 4,000 homes in Oregon, and we would like to not have that happen again. Because of the unique pattern of ownership, the state of Oregon for years has cooperated with the BLM on a unique fire protection agreement called the Western Oregon Operating Plan.

I think you are familiar with it. The BLM, the state, timber industry partners, jointly pay the shared fire protection agreement for the O&C lands, and the Oregon Department of Forestry uses these funds as wildland firefighting agencies to protect all the lands so that we are not having different people doing different things, and they are renown for their high quality and effective initial attack that reduces the risk of catastrophic wildfires, both with their permanent staff where needed, and contracting with local, high quality private wildland firefighting companies that are familiar with how to fight fires in the Northwest and on the O&C.

It works well, and it keeps 95 percent of all fires from growing over 100 acres. It protects a lot of constituents like myself who live in the wildland urban interface, and, again, it is a very good thing.

Our national forests are faced with an incredible challenge. We have an aging firefighter fighting workforce, and insufficient resources to meet the needs of the catastrophic wildfire season. The issue is, we are nickel and diming and arguing over continuing this contracting with the Oregon Department of Forestry and the BLM because we have a limited amount of money that we put up front for forest fire prevention, and also initial attack. But once it is a mega fire, we have unlimited money.

So, because of an accounting error where we are arguing about the color of money, we are spending a lot of money, and we are losing millions of acres of forest land. So, I know that Congress provided significant wildfire related funding to the BLM in the Infrastructure Law, but if additional funding upfront would make it easier for the BLM to remain a full partner in the Western Oregon Operating Plan, I would love to fight with you for that investment. It is a smarter, better use of taxpayer dollars, and I understand you have committed to Senator Merkley that the BLM will remain in the Western Oregon Operating Plan. I thank you for that commitment. It is very important.

Can you also commit today to working on a long-term solution to address the challenges both in funding and working through anything that would prevent or hinder the BLM's continued participation in the Western Oregon Operating Plan?

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, yes, we are absolutely committed to working with the state of Oregon on a long-term basis. I was really happy to have a chance to be in Oregon with Senator Merkley recently, and, of course, seeing that beautiful country, we are saddened by the wildfires that happened, I believe it was last summer.

So, as I mentioned earlier, these are not fire seasons any longer. They are fire years, and all of us have to diligent. So, yes, working together is the best solution, and we will certainly be committed to that.

Ms. HOYLE. Thank you, and that is important, because we are hearing that Federal officials at the BLM are looking and would like to exit the Western Oregon Operating Plan, or change it significantly, in part because of Oregon's operating procedures, and I have run an agency, and I know bureaucracies can be difficult, and we are committed to working from Oregon to make sure that we have better communication, but the key is the funding, and the fact of the matter is, it is more expensive to fight fires in the O&C lands in the wetter forests, so we cannot compare how much it costs to fight a fire in Arizona to what it costs to fight fires in the O&C lands, and I think we have to really take a look at these things differently, because the next time that we have really bad wildfires, it is not just going to be 4,000 homes. It will be one of our urban areas, and it will make the Paradise California Fire look like a campfire. People will die.

Secretary HAALAND. Yes.

Ms. HOYLE. And we really, really need—I really want your commitment to make sure that not only that you will work on it, but we will put our money where we need to, funding it upfront, and also making sure that we are addressing this beautiful forestland the way that we absolutely need to.

Secretary HAALAND. Congresswoman, I feel confident that BLM will find an agreement with the state and continue to work together to ensure that all parties are fully participating in the agreement. So, we are happy to stay in touch with your office. Please reach out any time, and we want to make sure this is successful.

Ms. HOYLE. Great.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired. I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record the Department of the Interior's budget information for the past two fiscal years for the Office of Wildland Fire.

In fact, this year, the Democrat Administration reduced discretionary funding for the Wildland Fire Management at DOI by $365 million compared to last year, and that is a decrease from $1,029,000,000 in 2022, to $664 million in 2023, and I would like to point out that Republican proposals to go back to 2022 actual spending levels would increase DOI funding by $365 million for wildland fire over what is currently in place this year, and just let me say that again, that is reduced funding for wildland fire by $365 million, and for those keeping track, that is about the same amount of funding the Department sent to parks in Nancy Pelosi's district.

I would like to enter this to correct the record from what my colleagues on the other side of the aisle said earlier about Republicans reducing funding for the Office of Wildland Fire. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

Funding for Wildfire Management

Congressional Research Service
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Funding for Wildfire Management: FY2023 Appropriations for Forest Service and Department of the Interior

Updated February 28, 2023 (IF12142)

Katie Hoover, Specialist in Natural Resources Policy (khoover@crs.loc.gov, 7-9008)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service (FS) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) are responsible for wildfire response and management across federal lands within their respective jurisdictions. Both FS and DOI generally receive discretionary appropriations for wildfire management activities through annual Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations laws. Wildfire management funding for DOI is provided to the department-level Office of Wildland Fire. Wildfire management appropriations fluctuate annually but overall have risen markedly since FY1994 (see **Figure 1**). For more information, see CRS Report R46583, *Federal Wildfire Management: Ten-Year Funding Trends and Issues (FY2011-FY2020)*.

FY2023 Budget Request

The Biden Administration requested a total of $6.525 billion in FY2023 discretionary appropriations for FS and DOI wildfire purposes (see **Table 1**), an increase of $757.1 million (13%) relative to the FY2022 regular enacted appropriation (of $5.768 billion) and $1.024 billion (14%) less than the FY2022 total enacted appropriation (of $7.549 billion). The request included $3.878 billion in the agencies' Wildland Fire Management (WFM) accounts, $2.550 billion pursuant to the wildfire adjustment, and $96.4 million to other FS accounts for other wildfire purposes.

FY2023 Enacted Appropriations

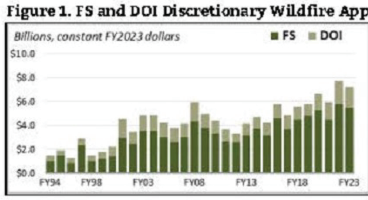
FS and DOI received a combined total of $7.208 billion in FY2023 discretionary appropriations (see **Table 1**). The combined total consists of $5.438 billion for FS and $1.770 billion for DOI. This combined total also consists of $3.958 billion in the agencies' WFM accounts, $2.550

billion pursuant to the wildfire adjustment, and $699.9 million to other FS accounts for other wildfire purposes. One component of the combined total is $713.2 million for hazardous fuels management purposes ($309.8 million for FS and $403.4 million for DOI).

The FY2023 combined total reflects $4.468 billion in regular appropriations provided through the Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY2023 (P.L. 117-328, Division G), and $2.740 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations provided through two laws: the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA; P.L. 117-58, Division J) and the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations, FY2023 (P.L. 117-328, Division N).

Regular FY2023 appropriations were not enacted by the start of the fiscal year, but continuing resolutions provided funding at the FY2022 levels until P.L. 117-328 was signed into law on December 29, 2022.

Figure 1. FS and DOI Discretionary Wildfire Appropriations, FY1994-FY2023



Source: CRS.

Notes: DOI = Department of the Interior; FS = Forest Service. Figures are adjusted to constant dollars using the Office of Management and Budget's GDP Chained Price Index.

Wildfire Accounts and Activities

FS and DOI each have a WFM account. Within their respective WFM accounts, both agencies receive funding for wildland fire preparedness and suppression activities. DOI also receives funding through its WFM account for fuel reduction and other wildfire activities (e.g., site rehabilitation, assistance programs, research, facilities maintenance). FS also receives appropriations for fuel reduction and other wildfire purposes, but most of this funding has been provided through other appropriations accounts, including National Forest System, State and Private Forestry, and Forest and Rangeland Research. Unlike DOI, FS has a separate budget line item in its WFM account for salaries and expenses.

Since FY2020, FS and DOI have received additional funding for suppression through the *wildfire adjustment* (2 U.S.C. §901(b)(2)(F)), also known as the *wildfire funding fix*, a budgetary mechanism that allows for an upward adjustment of the discretionary spending allocations to accommodate a specific amount of additional funding for suppression. A precondition for using the adjustment is that Congress must appropriate a baseline amount of funding for suppression purposes. The baseline is equal to the 10-year suppression obligation average as reported in FY2015 ($1.011 billion for FS; $383.7 million for DOI). For each of FY2020-FY2023, Congress appropriated the baseline suppression funds to the agencies' respective WFM accounts and appropriated the funds provided through the wildfire adjustment to a separate account for each agency, the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund. The wildfire adjustment is available annually through FY2027, and the maximum amount available under the adjustment increases annually.

Table 1. FS and DOI Discretionary Wildfire Appropriations ($ in millions)

Account	FY2022	FY2023				
	Total Enacted	Request	H-Passed H.R. 8294	S-Introduced S. 4686	Ena	
					Regular	Supple
FS, Total	**$5,685.1**	**$4,985.1**	**$4,992.2**	**$4,964.7**	**$3,464.5**	**$**
WFM, Total	2,557.3	2,678.7	2,678.7	2,604.7	946.0	
Salaries and Expenses	*1,302.1*	*1,154.3*	*1,154.3*	*1,154.3*	*914.0*	
Preparedness	*172.0*	*192.0*	*192.0*	*192.0*	*32.0*	
Suppression	*1,011.0*	*1,011.0*	*1,011.0*	*1,011.0*	—	
Other/Unallocated	*72.2*	—	—	—	—	
Hazardous Fuels	—	*321.4*	*321.4*	*247.4*	—	
Wildfire Adjustment	2,120.0	2,210.0	2,210.0	2,210.0	2,210.0	
NFS Hazardous Fuels	465.2	—	—	—	207.0	
Other	542.6	96.4	103.5	150.0	101.5	
DOI, Total	**1,863.7**	**1,539.6**	**1,543.1**	**1,503.3**	**1,003.8**	
WFM, Total	1,533.7	1,199.6	1,203.1	1,163.3	663.8	
Preparedness	*446.5*	*477.2*	*477.2*	*477.2*	*381.8*	
Suppression	*383.7*	*383.7*	*383.7*	*383.7*	—	
Fuels Management	*534.6*	*304.3*	*304.3*	*267.0*	*247.0*	
Other/Unallocated	*169.0*	*34.5*	*38.0*	*35.5*	*35.0*	
Wildfire Adjustment	330.0	340.0	340.0	340.0	340.0	
Total, FS and DOI	**7,548.8**	**6,524.7**	**6,535.3**	**6,467.9**	**4,468.2**	

Sources: CRS, with information from the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations and other budget documents.

Notes: FY2022 Total Enacted reflects regular and supplemental appropriations provided in P.L. 117-43, 117-58, and P.L. 117-103. FY2023 Regular Enacted reflects appropriations provided in P.L. 117-328; FY20 Supplemental Enacted reflects appropriations provided in P.L. 117-58, and P.L. 117-328. WFM = Wildlar Fire Management; NFS = National Forest System. Totals may not add due to rounding.

Preparedness

Preparedness includes the range of tasks necessary to ensure readiness for wildfire response.

Prior to FY2021, both FS and DOI used preparedness funds to maintain and train baseline personnel; manage infrastructure, equipment, and resources (e.g., aviation assets, engines, communication equipment); develop, maintain, and advance technological tools to enhance decisionmaking capacity; and prepare and execute fire management plans, cooperative agreements, and interagency coordination. Starting in FY2021, many of these activities for FS are covered in the salaries and expenses WFM budget line item.

Suppression

Suppression is the work associated with extinguishing or confining a fire. Suppression appropriations are used primarily for wildfire response, including funding aviation asset operations, conducting other support functions in direct support of wildfire incidents, and funding postfire emergency stabilization activities. In FY2023, some suppression funding was allocated for presuppression activities. Baseline suppression funding is provided to FS's and DOI's respective WFM accounts, and funds provided pursuant to the wildfire adjustment are transferred to the WFM account as needed.

Fuel Reduction

Fuel reduction is manipulating or removing wildland fuels (e.g., vegetation) to reduce potential wildfire risk. Federal fuel reduction funding may be used for projects (or *treatments*) on federal lands, to provide assistance for projects on nonfederal lands, or to otherwise accelerate and incentivize fuel removal from federal lands. Fuel reduction activities are funded within DOI's Fuels Management activity (WFM account) and FS's Hazardous Fuels activity (National Forest System account). FS requested to move the Hazardous Fuels activity to its WFM account for FY2023; P.L. 117-328 did not adopt this proposed change. FS and DOI also receive funding through other accounts and programs that may be used for fuel reduction; thus, funding provided to each agency's respective Fuels program does not reflect the total funding available for these activities.

Other Wildfire Activities

FS and DOI receive appropriations for several other wildfire-related activities. For DOI, funding is provided within the WFM account for postfire rehabilitation, wildfire science and research, and facilities maintenance. For FS, budget line item funding is provided to other accounts for wildfire assistance programs, wildfire science and research, burned area recovery, and postfire restoration activities. In previous years, however, some of these activities did not receive line item appropriations and were funded through allocations and other indirect sources.

The CHAIRMAN. I now recognize the gentleman from Texas. Mr. Hunt, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HUNT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you so much, Madam Secretary, for being here. Thank you for your time. We really, really appreciate it. Wind and solar are booming, and I know that because I am from Texas, and when I drive across my great state, I could see the industry growing at a pretty rapid pace.

In your written statement, you state that your budget builds on the, "tremendous growth accomplished by renewable energy programs last year." My question for you is, should growth in the oil and gas industries keep pace with the growth in the wind and solar industry?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, I think the idea is to move our clean energy transition forward in a way that it can help a lot of Americans to have more affordable energy costs, but I think the idea of a transition is to move to a clean energy economy, and that way we don't have so much dependence on a finite resource, such as oil.

Mr. HUNT. OK, do you think the workers in oil and gas industry deserve the same level of certainty in the future as workers in the wind and solar industries?

Secretary HAALAND. I want to assure you that we are always in communication with every piece of activity on our public lands. We are in touch with the folks whose industries they affect.

Mr. HUNT. Well, the Biden administration says that we will be moved off of gas powered government vehicles by the year 2035, so I would argue that that is the direct opposite of job certainty. But as an Apache helicopter pilot and somebody that has spent a lot of time in the military, I don't think that is possible. And I am going to tell you why. I am not a big fan of the word transition at all, to be honest with you.

Secretary HAALAND. OK.

Mr. HUNT. The reason why I am not a big fan of the word transition is because actually according to Bill Gates, if every single American drove an EV tomorrow, we would only reduce the demand of a barrel of oil by 8 percent, which means that the microphone that I am speaking in, the glasses on your face, the clothes on your back, literally everything that we use is a byproduct of our industry, and you made a statement as well. You said as we move forward, we will continue to have oil and gas continue to be part of the mix.

What do you mean by being part of the mix, and for how much time do you think we are going to be part of the mix, because I think it is going to be for a very long time, at least in my lifetime.

Secretary HAALAND. Of course, it is hard for me to predict how long into the future that fossil fuels will be a part of our energy mix, but as I mentioned, the idea is to move more to a clean energy future. That provides a lot of jobs for folks, and we will continue to make sure that we can have jobs for folks in that industry.

Mr. HUNT. So, do you think that the Federal Government should do more to regulate the oil and gas industry?

Secretary HAALAND. I am not quite sure I understand what you mean by that, but we have certain obligations to anything that——

Mr. HUNT. Well, I guess what I am asking is, do you think we should stifle, as in the Federal Government reach into the private sector to stifle the growth of one industry in order to promote another industry?

Secretary HAALAND. For our part of the Department of the Interior, we manage our public lands. So, we only have management authority over our public lands. Not on any state or private land.

Mr. HUNT. Right.

Secretary HAALAND. So, it is up to those folks what they do, but for our part, we have to manage our public lands according to the law, and with respect to the best management practices, because they belong to all the Americans.

Mr. HUNT. Yes, ma'am. So, would you support an equitable approach to the growth of wind and solar potentially on Federal lands, and also allowing us to continue to drill for natural gas and oil on Federal lands at an equal pace without the government infringing upon those sectors?

Secretary HAALAND. Well, with respect to gas, leasing gas/oil permits, those move forward. We follow the law. Somebody submits a permit to drill, we in good faith move that permit forward in a process. So, we aren't working to stifle anyone. We are working very hard to make sure that everybody is treated fairly.

Mr. HUNT. OK, and lastly, I am going to shift gears here real quick. I only have a few more seconds here. In your written testimony, you said the Interior continues to work across the Department to expand equity, diversity, and inclusion. What exactly does that mean?

Secretary HAALAND. It means that we want our Department to look like America. We want everyone to have an opportunity to be a part of our really wonderful Department that cares for our public lands and our cultural heritage.

Mr. HUNT. Let me add one more thing, and then I will close on this, ma'am. The word that I think is missing from the statement though is also qualified. Qualified. When I flew on a plane from Houston here today, I did not peek my head in the cockpit and say, I hope every pilot met their diversity inclusion goals.

What I really wanted to make sure is that the people that were in front of that plane could fly it, so we didn't crash it. So, I understand the idea of being more inclusive. I understand the idea of being more diverse. I have been black for my entire life, but I also want to make sure that we also talk about the most qualified person gets the job, and with that, I yield back my time, sir, thank you.

Secretary HAALAND. Absolutely, thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired. Ranking Member Grijalva, it appears we have gotten to the final two, and I hope we can maintain decorum and order.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Well, unless you lose control, Mr. Westerman. I am doing OK right now.

The CHAIRMAN. I recognize you for 5 minutes.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Secretary. You confirm to me your class and your demeanor in this whole hearing, and I appreciate it very much, and the Committee members appreciate it. Last week, Madam Secretary, I stood alongside tribal representatives of the Grand Canyon Tribal Coalition as they renewed a long-standing campaign to permanently protect their Grand Canyon homelands.

In a nod to this Administration's demonstrated commitment to elevating Indigenous voices in public land management, the Tribe called on President Biden to use his authority under the Antiquities Act to designate more than 1 million acres in the area as national monuments. The tribes have served as the principle protectors, guardians, stewards of the Grand Canyon, their real and spiritual home, since this time.

And they simply want these special and sacred lands to have the permanent protections they deserve. So, while you are here with us, today I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to the lands that make up the tribes' proposed national monument at the Grand Canyon, so you can be there, experience the area that you know well yourself, and hear firsthand from the tribes why the protection of these lands is so important to them, to Arizona, and in fact to the nation and to the millions of visitors all over the globe who wish to preserve this international icon for generations to come. So, we will extend that invitation, Madam Secretary, and we hope that you will consider it and accept it. So, I leave that with you.

Secretary HAALAND. Thank you very much, Ranking Member. I would want nothing more than to travel to the Grand Canyon. I know it is a sacred place for many tribes, and I appreciate it being so important to you as well. So, yes, we would love to visit, and we will work on that.

Mr. GRIJALVA. And I know you are not promoting a policy of energy poverty for the people of this nation, and while the word transition might be uncomfortable for some, it is a reality, and as we transition into clean, renewable for the sake of the planet, the sake of the lands you protect and the waters you protect, the sooner, the better.

And in terms of the poverty question, it is interesting that the budget that is being proposed, or talked about, or teased out by the Republican Majority and the Speaker talks about people not having food stamps and nutrition.

It talks about the elderly and disabled not having the support that they need to keep their heating and cooling on in this climate changed weather of ours. It talks about reducing the number of kids and families of single parents on Medicaid and other programs that provide healthcare. Rental assistance, attention to the homeless. So, if we are talking about poverty, there is going to be ample opportunity for the Republican Majority to show their concern about helping those that are not in a position, unfortunately, to be helped, and that the rest of us have a responsibility to them.

I have questions about permitting and permitting reform, and for a moment, I ask unanimous consent to put a study in that it is the policies of reform and change in gas and oil does not jump the price of gas on the pump. It has become methodological now, but it is not fact. The other issue is——

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection.

Mr. GRIJALVA. So noted, sir, but I am not the Chairman, you can object or not. Anyway, I just want to send those requests, because I think that the permitting issue is a ruse to try to weaken other kinds of laws, whether it be NEPA, Endangered Species, bedrock environmental laws.

It is thinly veiled, that is the excuse, child labor is an excuse, while Republican governors across this country are promoting the reduction in child labor laws in their own states. So, I leave you with that, and my sincere thank you for the work that you are doing, that your staff is doing, and I yield back to the Chairman, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. I have a couple of items to submit to the record here. The first is the Section 70203, labeled the Presidio Trust, it is from the draft IRA bill that was heard in this Committee in September 2021, and it does have language in it that says in addition to the amounts otherwise available, there is appropriated to the Presidio Trust for Fiscal Year

2022, out of any money in the Treasury or not otherwise appropriated $200 million to remain available until September 30, 2026, and, again, this was the draft bill that was heard in this Committee. It was highly objected to by our side of the aisle for a special—not even an earmark for Speaker Pelosi, but just a direct expenditure for the Presidio.

So, we objected to that, and also, I am submitting into the record Public Law 117-169 from August 16, 2022, also known as the IRA Act. This is the law that was passed. It says under Section 50224 under the National Parks System Deferred Maintenance, in addition to amounts otherwise available, there is appropriated to the secretary for Fiscal Year 2022 out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, $200 million to remain available through September 30, 2026 to carry out priority deferred maintenance projects through direct expenditures or transfers within the boundaries of the National Park System. That is the law, without objection, it is so ordered.

[The information follows:]

Sec. 70203 Presidio draft IRA bill, dated September 2021

SEC. 70203. PRESIDIO TRUST.

(a) PRESIDIO TRUST DEFINED.-With regard to this section, the term "Presidio Trust" means the entity established under section 103(a) of title I of division I of Public Law 104-333 and under the requirements placed upon that entity by section 104(a) of title I of division I of Public Law 104-333.

(b) IN GENERAL.-In addition to amounts otherwise available, there is appropriated to the Presidio Trust for fiscal year 2022, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, $200,000,000, to remain available until September 30, 2026, for carrying out projects identified by the Presidio Trust in accordance with the purposes identified under the first section of Public Law 92-589 (16 U.S.C. 460bb).

Public Law 117-169, the IRA Act, dated August 2022

136 STAT. 2052 PUBLIC LAW 117–169—AUG. 16, 2022

Subtitle B—Natural Resources

PART 1—GENERAL PROVISIONS

43 USC 3006 note.

SEC. 50211. DEFINITIONS.

In this subtitle:

(1) SECRETARY.—The term "Secretary" means the Secretary of the Interior.

(2) UNITED STATES INSULAR AREAS.—The term "United States Insular Areas" means American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the United States Virgin Islands.

PART 2—PUBLIC LANDS

SEC. 50221. NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS CONSERVATION AND RESILIENCE.

In addition to amounts otherwise available, there is appropriated to the Secretary for fiscal year 2022, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, $250,000,000, to remain available through September 30, 2031, to carry out projects for the conservation, protection, and resiliency of lands and resources administered by the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management. None of the funds provided under this section shall be subject to cost-share or matching requirements.

SEC. 50222. NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS CONSERVATION AND ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION.

In addition to amounts otherwise available, there is appropriated to the Secretary for fiscal year 2022, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, $250,000,000, to remain available through September 30, 2031, to carry out conservation, ecosystem and habitat restoration projects on lands administered by the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management. None of the funds provided under this section shall be subject to cost-share or matching requirements.

SEC. 50223. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE EMPLOYEES.

In addition to amounts otherwise available, there is appropriated to the Secretary for fiscal year 2022, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, $500,000,000, to remain available through September 30, 2030, to hire employees to serve in units of the National Park System or national historic or national scenic trails administered by the National Park Service.

SEC. 50224. NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM DEFERRED MAINTENANCE.

In addition to amounts otherwise available, there is appropriated to the Secretary for fiscal year 2022, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, $200,000,000, to remain available through September 30, 2026, to carry out priority deferred maintenance projects, through direct expenditures or transfers, within the boundaries of the National Park System.

The CHAIRMAN. So, Secretary Haaland, I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for questions. It is clear in the law that it was not the intent of Congress for $200 million to go to Presidio Park. Actually, would you agree or disagree with the fact that it was $200 million in the hearing and the final law for Presidio, and in the final law, it specifically did not say Presidio. How would you say that has congressional intent for $200 million to go to Presidio Park?

Secretary HAALAND. Congressman, first, I would just like to say that we are all very proud to have the Presidio as a public land that belongs to all Americans.

The CHAIRMAN. But do you believe that is the intent, or not intent?

Secretary HAALAND. It is my understanding that we merely implemented the Congressional intent on the deferred maintenance provision in the Inflation Reduction Act with respect to the Presidio.

The CHAIRMAN. So, the law specifically does not say Presidio. You have testified earlier that you or no one in your staff spoke to Former Speaker Pelosi's office, so how did you determine that it was Congressional intent to send all $200 million of deferred maintenance to Presidio Park?

I mean, the perception is that this was a payoff to Speaker Pelosi for getting the IRA passed, that this is an issue she pushed, and continued to push, and got it stuck into the IRA, and then her friends in the Administration turned around and sent that money to Presidio, even though there was high objection from Congress for putting that money specifically there. So, how do you dispel that perception?

Secretary HAALAND. Chairman, I want to assure you that we follow the law on every single thing that we do. I cannot speak to the specifics of the situation at this time.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, there were $200 million specifically sent to your agency for maintenance backlog, and all of it went to the Presidio Park, which was not the intent of Congress.

I want to move on. You have talked about a climate crisis, and there is also a perception that this Administration has put an all out attack on domestic energy. I think the actions of this Administration and your Department would substantiate that, but you have presented a different picture here today. You have said that under your leadership, there is more production of oil and gas on Federal lands than ever before. Is that correct?

Secretary HAALAND. Yes, Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. So, do you take credit for that, or do you think that is because of actions that have happened before, or does the Biden administration take credit for that?

Secretary HAALAND. Well, I mean, I don't think we go to work every day thinking about who is going to get credit for what. We are just doing our jobs, and when permits come through——

The CHAIRMAN. So, how much of that production would you say has happened on permits issued under this Administration?

Secretary HAALAND. Well, we have certainly approved many applications for permits to drill. That is our job. We are following the law with respect to that. If land is leased, and folks have rights to the land, and they submit an application for a permit to drill, we have to process it.

The CHAIRMAN. And do you think there is an energy crisis in our country? You have talked about a climate crisis. Do you think there is an energy crisis?

Secretary HAALAND. Chairman, I know that President Biden is committed to energy independence for our country. That is the reason why we are going gangbusters on our clean energy transition. Those are viable sources of energy that we are working to lift up.

The CHAIRMAN. So, at the end of March, we passed H.R. 1, the Lower Energy Cost Act. We had a press conference later in the afternoon. The country's focus was shifted toward the Manhattan DA and under the radar the next day, OPEC announced a supply cut on oil.

And, today, gasoline prices are 6.8 percent higher than they were at the end of March because OPEC has control of the dial on the price at the gas pump. Are you committed to producing more energy in the United States, of all the above energy, and the world didn't get the memo on the transition. This is global consumption of energy by fuel source.

The transition that gets talked about here is what you—I can hardly see from where I am sitting, wind and solar, from here to here, it is all carbon emitting sources. That is what is happening on the world market today. You have talked about removing dams in Mr. Bentz's district. The largest component of non-carbon emitting energy is hydropower.

Yet, this Administration gives lip service, tries to create the perception that it is about all of the above energy, that we are producing more energy on Federal lands than ever before, yet I think we are ignoring the facts, and there is not an all out effort to increase all forms of energy.

I know 30 gigawatts of wind power by 2030, guess what, China built 38 gigawatts of coal power plants last year, and they will build that many again this year. So, that is a tiny drop in the bucket to get to the point that we need to get to.

So, my final question, are you committed to an all of the above energy strategy that lowers cost for Americans? Are you committed to reducing the permitting debacle that keeps not just traditional energy projects from happening, but from new energy sources such as wind and solar, can we work together to make those things happen?

Secretary HAALAND. Chairman, we are always willing to work with you and your office. Our door is open. Please reach out to us when you would like. We are committed to energy independence for our country. We believe very strongly that for our part in the Department of the Interior, moving our clean energy sources forward are one component of our vast energy production resources, and, of course, we are willing to work with anyone to make sure that our country is set for the future.

I really do have to say that all of this is because climate change is the crisis of our lifetime. We have an obligation to future generations to make sure that we have a planet for them to live on, and that is why I am here, and that is why I am working incredibly hard to make sure that we can realize that transition, that we can have differing energy sources.

We can't continue to be a one industry country. We are expanding, we are proud of the expansions we are making. We are going to continue to work very hard, and certainly all the career staff who are working diligently to move any and all permits forward, they will continue with your help on our budget, and we appreciate very much you listening to me today as well.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Secretary, and I will just close by saying that I think we are all working toward the most affordable, reliable, and cleanest energy for the future, but we have to use common sense in that, and we can't ignore the data, ignore the facts, and ignore the logic, and get blinded by an emotional argument that is very real, but we also need to be realistic in the policies that we make, and the way that those policies are executed. Again, thank you for your valuable testimony, and thank you to the Members who participated today.

There may be some additional questions by members of the Committee, and we will ask you to respond to those in writing. Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Committee must submit questions to the Committee Clerk by 5 p.m. Eastern Time on April 22. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for these responses. If there is no further business, without objection, the Committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:04 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Submission for the Record by Rep. Grijalva

Accountable.US

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
for the
HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
hearing on
"EXAMINING THE PRESIDENT'S FY 2024 BUDGET REQUEST
FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR"
on
APRIL 19, 2023
prepared by
KYLE HERRIG
PRESIDENT AND CEO
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Thank you to Chair Westerman, Ranking Member Grijalva, and members of the Committee for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record of the hearing entitled "Examining the President's FY 2024 Budget Request for the Department of the Interior" and the testimony of the Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary U.S. Department of the Interior.

Accountable.US is a nonpartisan organization that shines a light on corporations and special interests that too often wield unchecked power and influence in Washington and beyond. We conduct investigations and bring attention to our findings to help create an economy that works for everyone, a democracy that functions, and a sustainable environment for future generations. We believe corporations and special interests have too much power and the people have too little. It is our mission to change this.

In our view, the House majority is doing Big Oil's dirty work under the guise of "oversight" after having received more than $47 million in campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry. Even after Big Oil reported a record-breaking $451 billion in profits, the House passed the Polluters Over People bill, H.R. 1. The bill would cut the offshore oil drilling rate and make even more of our public lands available for their private profit. It does nothing to address a key underlying driver of high energy costs: Big Oil's greed.

We were disappointed that the Committee majority launched partisan attacks against Secretary Haaland and President Biden's widely popular conservation initiatives while parroting extremist rhetoric. The House MAGA majority's barrage of unfounded attacks get us no closer to solving the nation's critical energy and environment issues. Like so many others, this House hearing devolved into political theater, with members of the majority using public resources to grandstand and demonstrate their fealty to industry donors.

Here are some important facts for the record, based on Accountable.US research:

- Onshore oil and gas production on public lands is up under the Biden administration. The US produced more oil in 2022 from federal onshore sites than any time in the past decade.
- 90% of land managed by the Bureau of Land Management is open for drilling.
- Over half of the 26 million acres of federal land currently under oil and gas leasing is sitting unused.
- The Biden administration approved more permits to drill on public lands in two years than approved during the entire Trump administration.
- The oil and gas industry has given $46,995,088 to Republicans currently in the U.S. House of Representatives since the start of their careers.
- The MAGA majority has no serious policy proposals in this area: GOP Rep. Andy Biggs introduced literally hundreds of bills that would clawback critical funding to improve permitting and hamper public lands management, including mitigating wildfires.
- Big Oil is thriving and in no need of more government giveaways. In 2022, 27 of the largest oil companies reported a record-breaking $451 billion in profit after price-gouging consumers.
- These same Big Oil corporations have rewarded shareholders with $163 billion in dividends and stock buybacks while sitting on thousands of approved federal drilling permits.
- The Biden administration has approved thousands of permits to drill oil on federal land since entering the White House.

Members of the Committee's majority used this hearing to advocate for Big Oil priorities and attack popular conservation initiatives that protect America's lands. Instead of wasting time on Fox News-ready political stunts, they should side with the American people and give conservation a seat at the table.

Thank you for your consideration.

Submission for the Record by Rep. Levin

TAXPAYERS for COMMON SENSE

ISSUE BRIEF

October 2021

Oil & Gas Reform Won't Raise Prices at the Pump

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The federal oil and gas leasing system is antiquated, costs taxpayers billions of dollars a year, and badly needs reform. Thankfully, proposals to reform the management of oil and gas development on federal lands and waters are gaining traction in Congress and have been included in recommendations for the fiscal year (FY) 2022 budget reconciliation process. The better news is that by ensuring a fair return for the oil and gas resources we own, **implementing reforms will increase taxpayer revenues but will NOT impact the price of gasoline at the pump.** Here's why:

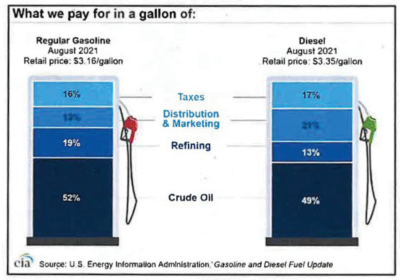
1. Gas prices depend on the global price of oil, consumer demand, and NOT changes in federal leasing policy

The price of gasoline is determined by countless domestic and international factors. However, the terms for leasing federal land and water to produce oil and natural gas – like royalty and rental rates – are not a major factor in the price of gasoline at the pump.

The price of crude oil is a dominant factor in the price of gasoline, but far from the only one (see graphic below). For example, the uptick in the price of gasoline in August 2021 was largely unrelated to crude oil price, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). Instead, the increased price at the pump was due to "high summer driving demand, low gasoline stocks, refinery disruptions from Hurricane Ida, and relatively high ethanol costs."[1 2]

Even when those short-term drivers of gas prices return to baseline levels, the underlying price of crude oil is determined in the global market by forces like Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) production agreements, economic activity driving oil demand, geopolitical events in high producing regions, and even the strength of the U.S. dollar, which is used for all oil transactions around the globe.

Total U.S. oil supply does impact global oil prices, but U.S. production remains at near all-time highs. In the second quarter (Q2) of 2011, U.S. drillers produced 5.6 million barrels per day (mmb/d). In Q2 2021, production was double that at 11.3 mmb/d. In fact, the U.S. petroleum trade deficit (the value of petroleum exports less the value of petroleum imports) was the smallest on record in 2020.



In part because of increasing oil production in the U.S. and in OPEC countries – at roughly triple the U.S. rate – EIA projects that both oil commodity prices and U.S. gasolines prices will decline in the short term. Passing much-needed reforms to management of oil and gas development on federal lands and waters would do next to nothing to change those trends.

2. Higher royalty rates will increase taxpayer revenue with little or no effect on oil and gas production

In the FY 2016 Omnibus, Congress directed the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to review studies that modeled the effects of raising federal royalty rates on outcomes like production and federal revenue. GAO reviewed studies by the Congressional Budget Office, the Council of Economic Advisers, and one prepared for the Bureau of Land Management.[3] GAO also interviewed stakeholders such as officials from federal and state agencies, industry groups, and non-governmental organizations.

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[1] U.S. EIA, *Short-Term Energy Outlook*, September 2021, pg. 10

[2] Ethanol costs, including the price of corn and the RIN market, affect oil prices because the Renewable Fuels Standard requires refineries to blend biofuels (mostly corn ethanol) into all gasoline; 10% of most U.S. gasoline is ethanol.

[3] GAO-17-540, "Oil, Gas, and Coal Royalties: Raising Federal Rates Could Decrease Production on Federal Lands but Increase Federal Revenue," Jun 20, 2017

Photo credit: Richard Masoner via flickr

One of the studies used 2016 production data to assess the effect of increasing royalty rates to 22.5% – which no one is proposing – and found production could decrease by less than 2%. Similarly, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) found that any reduction in oil and gas production caused by federal leasing reform would be "negligible" over 10 years, especially in states that already charge a higher royalty rate than the federal government.

Looking specifically at raising the onshore royalty rate to 18.75% – in parity with offshore royalty rates – in its 2016 report,[4] CBO found that compared with parcels owned by other jurisdictions, the profitability of exploring speculative parcels on federal land might drop. But so long as the federal royalty rate remained equal to or below the royalty rates of nearby state and private lands, that any subsequent decrease in production on federal lands would in all likelihood be small.

After interviews with officials from state offices in Colorado and Texas, GAO reported that:

> "the history of increasing royalty rates for oil and gas production on state lands suggests that increasing the federal royalty rate would not have a clear impact on production. In particular, officials from Colorado and Texas said that they have raised their state royalty rates without a significant effect on production on state lands. In February 2016, Colorado increased its royalty rate for oil and gas production from 16.67 percent to 20 percent, and, according to state officials, there had been no slowdown in interest in new leases as of August 2016. In fact, Colorado state officials said they were unsure whether the higher royalty rate played much of a role in companies' decision making. Additionally, Texas officials told us that over 30 years ago, Texas began charging a 25-percent royalty for most oil and gas leases on state lands, and this increase has not had a noticeable impact on production or leasing." (GAO-17-540, p. 21-22)

Reports from the Colorado State Board of Land Commissioners indicate companies bid on the first leases with the increased 20% rate rather than wait for them to be re-offered with an 18.75% rate: 91 of the 102 tracts offered between August 2017 and May 2018 were sold on first offer, and just 3 of 9 tracts re-offered sold.

As states that increased their royalty rates reported, the royalty rate for a lease plays little role in companies' decisions on where to produce and when. According to CBO, oil and gas companies

[4] CBO, "Options for Increasing Federal Income from Crude Oil and Natural Gas on Federal Lands," April 2016

are primarily influenced by physical factors and market forces. The probability of finding oil or gas, the expected amount, the extraction costs, the current and expected future prices for oil and gas, and the firms' costs of capital all have a large influence on a company's decisions. Factors within a given leasing system, like the royalty rate, have a lesser impact.

The GAO review also found that raising the federal royalty rate could increase net federal revenue between $5 million and $38 million per year.

3. Reforms will have no impact on gas pump prices – by the numbers

The sale of oil produced on federal lands and waters does not dictate the global price of oil. Even if it did, the effect of increasing royalty rates would be imperceptible. Some simple math demonstrates why:

- Increasing the onshore royalty rate – the most consequential reform proposed – would have **no impact on current leases or current production**. Higher rates would only kick in for new leases, which usually take years to develop.
- The vast majority of federal oil and gas is produced on leases that were issued decades ago. Roughly half of onshore oil and gas royalty receipts in 2013 came from leases issued more than 50 years prior. Just 6% of oil and gas royalty payments came from leases issued in the last 10 years. For simplicity, **let's assume 6% of onshore production would be subject to the higher royalty rate in 10 years**.
- Oil production from federal lands made up just 7.6% of total U.S. oil production in 2020. Even ignoring international markets, federal oil sales have a small effect on U.S. supply.
- The cost of crude oil determines just 52% of the price of gasoline.

If...

Congress increases the royalty rate for leases on federal lands from 12.5% to 18.75%,

6% of onshore oil production is subject to the new rate in 10 years,

The entire supply chain is somehow able to pass on the increased royalty cost in the form of a 7.69% price increase,

That price increase affects just 7.6% of all U.S. crude oil used to make gasoline, and

The price of crude oil affects 52% of the price at the pump,

Then...

A gallon of gas costing $3.00 would suddenly cost $3.00055.

That is, even under the impossible scenario in which oil and gas companies could pass on the increased royalty cost to customers a decade after oil and gas reforms are instituted, the resulting increase in the price of gas would be less than 6% of one cent.

4. Oil and gas reforms will decrease liabilities and increase revenues

So, what will the oil and gas reforms do for taxpayers?

Oil and gas leasing reforms like raising royalty and rental rates will raise revenues for taxpayers.

The federal onshore oil and gas royalty rate is 12.5%, well below the offshore rate of 18.75%, and the rates charged on state lands. Had the offshore rate been charged on all oil and gas produced from federal lands, **taxpayers could have received up to $12.35 billion more over the last decade**.

The current rental rates are set at $1.50/acre for the first half of the lease term and $2.00/acre for the second half of the lease term. The rates were set in 1987 and have never been adjusted for inflation since then. Had the rates kept up with inflation, taxpayers would have received roughly $330 million more in rental revenues from FY2011 to FY2020. Like rent, the minimum amount companies can bid at auctions for federal oil and gas leases, set at $2/acre, hasn't been updated since 1987. From FY2011 to FY2020, taxpayers would have received $5 million more had minimum bids been adjusted for inflation. The ambitious infrastructure bill (H.R. 3684) and reconciliation package can benefit from pay-fors like raised rates in the oil and gas leasing system.

Oil and gas bonding and reclamation reform will reduce taxpayer and environmental liabilities and increase industry accountability

Abandoned oil and gas wells pose environmental and public health risks. They can leak methane gas, contaminate surface water and groundwater, fragment habitats, erode soil, and interfere with agricultural land use, etc. It is in the national interest to ensure these wells are properly reclaimed. Strengthening management of idled wells on federal lands can ensure that operators do not let nonproducing wells sit idle and pollute the environment without addressing them for years.

Ensuring that oil and gas companies post bonds sufficiently large to pay for reclamation in case they go bankrupt is the best way to hold the industry accountable and protect taxpayers from paying for industry messes. Current bond minimums were set in the 1950s and 60s, have never been adjusted for inflation, and no longer reflect actual reclamation costs. Adjusted for inflation, today's $10,000 minimum bond for an individual lease was the equivalent of $87,436 in coverage when the minimum was set in 1960. The rate of $25,000 for statewide bonds originally provided the equivalent of $240,531 in coverage in 1954, and the $150,000 nationwide bond minimum provided $1,443,184 in coverage. Raising bond minimums will increase industry accountability and protect taxpayers from more industry liability.

Other reforms like closing the noncompetitive leasing loophole can get taxpayers better and more efficient use of our valuable public lands

Noncompetitive leasing allows companies (and land speculators) to get leases without paying a bid by submitting a noncompetitive offer the day after a competitive auction, for any parcel that didn't sell the day before. Oil and gas companies have disproportionately used the noncompetitive system to avoid paying the $2/acre minimum bid on parcels with more acreage. Over the last 10 years, 2.3 million acres – an area roughly twice the size of Rhode Island – have been leased with no bid. BLM records indicate that lands leased noncompetitively rarely ever entered production. Millions of acres of federal land are currently locked up in nonproducing oil and gas leases. Eliminating the noncompetitive leasing system can lead to more optimal uses like recreation, wildlife viewing, fishing, grazing, timber, etc.

Photo credit: Jonathan Cutrer via flickr