

**Chairman Lisa Murkowski Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies**

**Subcommittee Markup of the FY2017 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Appropriations Bill**

June 14, 2016

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning. I'd like to welcome members here today for the subcommittee markup of the Fiscal Year 2017 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

I noted last year that it was the first time this subcommittee had held a markup in 6 years. Today makes two years in row. This is a trend I plan to continue as long as I'm Chairman and hope my friend and Ranking Member Senator Udall feels the same way. By moving our bill through the process in regular order, we are giving our colleagues an opportunity to express their views about the bill with an open debate and amendment process. That is the essence of what we do in the Senate and the Interior bill should be no different simply because it includes controversial issues.

This bill includes funding for all of the major federal land management agencies -- the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service.

It also provides funding for essential Indian health, education, and resource management programs through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service, as well as funding for important cultural institutions like the Smithsonian Institution, the National Gallery of Art, and the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities. And, it provides funding for the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Administration's request for the 2016 Interior bill is approximately \$33.1 billion including \$1.1 billion of emergency funding. The Subcommittee's allocation is slightly more than \$32 billion dollars. This is roughly \$125 million less than the Subcommittee was allocated last year. However, given that certain cost increases for tribal contract support costs and funding the 10-year average for firefighting must be provided under CBO's scoring rules, the allocation is effectively \$340 million below last year.

Despite our limited resources, we were able to fund a number of increases requested by the administration and supported by many members of the Committee. These include large increases for the Indian Health Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Centennial of the National Park Service, and the water infrastructure accounts of the EPA.

I'd like to give you a brief summary of some of the important funding priorities in this bill. For the Centennial year of the National Park Service, we increase funding by \$66.5 million for new park units and regular and deferred maintenance, which will help address the large backlog that exists in our park system.

For the Forest Service, we provide a \$10 million increase necessary to boost timber outputs and support local economies, as well as a \$15 million increase for the hazardous fuels program to reduce the risk of fire.

In the two main agencies that deliver services for the Indian community – the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service - we did our best to provide as much funding as possible to programs critical to the Indian community and for both agencies, we provided full contract support costs.

Within the BIA, the bill continues funding tribal courts in “so-called” PL-280 states, and substantial increases for education programs, public safety and justice programs, and social service programs.

For the Indian Health Service, we invested an additional \$186 million on the most pressing issues facing Indian Country, including suicide, domestic violence and alcohol and substance abuse programs. We also provide funding for infrastructure improvements at health care facilities around the country.

For Wildland Fire management programs, we have provided a total of \$3.79 billion for the Department of the Interior and the Forest Service. This fully funds the 10 year average for firefighting costs. We also provide \$25 million above the President’s request for hazardous fuels reduction activities to ensure that we are actively making progress in reducing fire risk.

Fire seasons are undeniably getting worse. Last year, I led the charge with many of my colleagues to add \$700 million in emergency funds on the CR for firefighting to repay the Forest Service for amounts that they borrowed from non-fire programs. I also worked to include \$600 million above the 10 year average in the FY 2016 bill so that hopefully there is no need to borrow this fire season but we need a more permanent solution to fire budgeting.

That is why this bill includes a proposal to end fire borrowing at the Forest Service and Department of the Interior. That is something we can all agree upon. Rather than using budget gimmicks to move significant portions of the fire program off-budget, my proposal continues the practice of fully funding the 10-year average for firefighting and provides access to disaster funding through a cap adjustment when those regular suppression funds have been exhausted. I believe maintaining this fiscal discipline is necessary to avoid simply providing a “blank check” to the firefighting agencies without providing cost control incentives.

My proposal to stop fire borrowing should have enormous benefits for both the Department of the Interior and the Forest Service, as land managers will not have to hold back funds in anticipation of fire borrowing, which leads to lost field work seasons, failure to process special use permits, and increased costs for projects that are delayed over longer periods.

Let me move to the most controversial agency in this bill -- the EPA. We took a common sense approach to the EPA’s budget and focused resources on programs that do concrete things to improve the quality of the environment for the public. We fully met the request for an additional \$157 million for the Drinking Water SRF, which builds critical infrastructure for clean drinking water in communities across the country. Instead of following the President’s suggestion to cut

the Clean Water SRF by more than \$400 million, we maintained a robust level of \$1.35 billion. When coupled with the financing authority we provide through the newly established WIFIA program, the agency has a powerful suite of tools to improve the quality of life for people around the country.

On the regulatory side of the EPA budget, this bill makes cuts in areas where the EPA has clearly overstepped its bounds. Several program areas that have issued controversial rules that are currently blocked in court are reduced because I believe it is more important to provide resources to programs that yield tangible results in improving the environment instead of funding more lawyers and bureaucrats to draft rules of questionable legality and dubious environmental benefit.

Finally, this bill also funds PILT at the fully authorized level of \$480 million.

I'd also offer one thought on the policy provisions contained in this bill. The bill includes a number of policy provisions that are important to members of the Senate. Some of the provisions that were included are bipartisan. Others were included at the request of the majority and others were included at the request of the minority. We have had policy provisions in appropriations bills as long as I have been here and this bill continues in that tradition.

One such provision is a parochial issue that is of great importance to me. This bill includes language to allow the construction of a life-saving road from King Cove to Cold Bay. I know my colleagues appreciate how important this issue is to me and my state. I recognize the need to protect the environment, but it should not come at the expense of jeopardizing the lives of those I represent. I included this provision last year but I was not successful in getting it enacted into law. But I will tell you what I have told the people of King Cove, "I will never stop fighting for them and I will use every tool available to me to prevent the further loss of life."

Let me close by expressing my appreciation to the ranking member of the subcommittee, Senator Udall. He and his staff have been a pleasure to work with, and have helped to shape this bill so that it reflects the priorities of members on both sides of the aisle.

Before I turn to Senator Udall, I think I can speak for both of us when I say that if there is no objection we would appreciate it if members could hold off on amendments until the full committee on Thursday. Subcommittee staff will be available to work with all of you in preparing a manager's package for that mark up so we ask that you let us know as soon as possible of any amendments that you may want to offer.

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