



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 27, 2023

Press Contacts:

[Dylan Stafford](#) (Murray)

[Martina McLennan](#) (Merkley)

BILL SUMMARY: Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations Bill

Protects our environment, public lands, and Americans' health, funds key efforts to combat wildfires, and invests in Tribal communities

Washington, D.C. – The Fiscal Year 2024 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act provides \$42.695 billion in total funding.

“This Interior-Environment bill is the result of a bipartisan effort to meet our trust and treaty obligations to Tribes, protect our lands and waters, and ensure clean air and clean water—all in the face of tight budget constraints,” said Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. **“This bill maintains strong funding for critical programs that we have built up investments for over the past two years, including \$100 million for environmental justice, \$2.76 billion for aging water infrastructure, and \$5.6 billion for wildfire suppression and preparedness. Ranking Member Murkowski and I also made targeted increases to address some of the most pressing problems across the programs funded in the bill, such as an increase of \$82 million in funding to staff newly constructed Indian Health Services facilities, an increase of \$12.5 million to address Tribal public safety and justice issues including tribal jails suffering from overcrowding and staff retention, \$10 million to support housing for Firefighters and National Park Service staff who are facing skyrocketing housing prices, which is limiting hiring and staff retention, and an increase of \$2 million for protecting people from the health impact of wildfire smoke. Finally, I’m fully committed to making sure that wildland firefighters don’t get a pay cut on September 30th, and I look to a near-term supplemental funding package to lock in that funding.”**

“For communities across our country to thrive, we have to keep investing in tackling the climate crisis and making sure we have clean water, clean air, and thriving ecosystems—and that’s what this bill helps do,” said Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. **“The funding this bill provides is critical in protecting our kids from polluted air and contaminated water, protecting our public lands and essential wildlife, and protecting communities from wildfire, droughts, and other climate threats. And this bill plays a critical role in making sure we keep our promises to Tribes and deliver on key federal investments by sustaining funding for the Indian Health Service and providing new resources to support Tribal families, protect Tribal treaty rights, and more.”**

Key Points & Highlights – Combatting Wildfire

Wildfire Suppression: The bill fully funds essential wildfire preparedness and suppression efforts by providing \$4.045 billion for wildfire suppression, of which \$2.65 billion is provided in the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund. The Reserve Fund provides the Forest Service and Department of the Interior an assured amount of funding to be used when major fire activity requires expenditures exceeding regular base suppression operations funding. The Committee expects this funding level—in addition to carryover balances—will meet the needs for wildfires in fiscal year 2024.

Supporting Federal Firefighters: As catastrophic wildfires grow in size and frequency, it is essential that support for—and investments in—the federal firefighting workforce keep pace. The Committee supports proposals to authorize higher base pay for firefighters at the Forest Service and Department of the Interior and is committed to providing the required resources to implement any enacted compensation reforms in future legislation. The bill creates a \$2 million health and wellness program for federal firefighters to provide support to combat the real danger of injury and fatigue, which is another consequence of year-round catastrophic wildfire. It also directs the agencies to prioritize improvements to fire facilities and to spend at least \$5 million on firefighter housing. Finally, the bill continues a commitment to convert seasonal positions to full-time.

Key Points & Highlights – Tribal Programs

Tribal Programs: In total, the bill provides \$11.207 billion for Tribal programs across the Department of the Interior and the Indian Health Service for fiscal year 2024—an increase of \$325 million over fiscal year 2023.

Indian Health Service (IHS): The bill provides \$7.17 billion for IHS—an increase of \$218.6 million over fiscal year 2023—to provide critically important health care services, build out water and solid waste infrastructure to improve public health, better equip health facilities, build new hospitals, and support doctors, nurses, and health services staff.

Critically, the bill also continues the historic advance appropriations for IHS first provided in the fiscal year 2023 omnibus and provides an advance appropriation for fiscal year 2025 of \$5.22 billion to continue to provide budget certainty for a health care system that provides health services to 2.5 million people across Indian Country. This advance appropriation will provide the vast majority of the funding IHS needs to provide essential health services to patients for the following fiscal year.

The Committee recognizes that budget uncertainty due to temporary lapses of appropriations and continuing resolutions affects the orderly operations of critical health care programs for Native American communities. Continuing this budgetary adjustment into the future will enable IHS to continue to provide health services without interruption or uncertainty, improving the quality of care and providing peace of mind for patients and medical providers alike.

The bill also provides an additional \$6.8 million over fiscal year 2023 for new hospital construction, new and replacement equipment, and water and solid waste infrastructure improvements for Native American communities to strengthen public health.

In addition, the bill provides \$81.6 million for staffing newly constructed facilities to ensure IHS has the health care providers to meet increased demand.

Supporting Tribal Children and Families: The bill provides an additional \$4 million specifically to support Tribes in providing essential services to children and families within Indian Country, including \$2 million for Indian Child Family Violence Prevention and \$1 million to assist American Indians and Alaska Natives in asserting their sovereignty under the Indian Child Welfare Act and to protect the rights of children in state welfare and judicial systems.

Tribal Public Safety and Justice: The bill provides \$12.5 million above fiscal year 2023 to support and invest in public safety and justice programs by providing resources for police services, special initiatives to address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons cases, Tribal courts, and detention and corrections facilities.

Investing in Tribal Schools: The bill boosts funding for the Bureau of Indian Education by \$5.6 million over fiscal year 2023 to support a school system of 183 schools and 33 Tribal Colleges and Universities delivering educational services to nearly 57,000 students. This includes additional funding to support school operational requirements, staffing, operating costs, Native language programs, scholarships, and support for school connectivity and remote learning capabilities. These investments will improve educational opportunities and service delivery for Native American students.

Key Points & Highlights – Protecting Our Environment and Public Lands

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): The bill protects essential funding for EPA's critical responsibilities protecting our environment and people's health. It provides \$4 million above fiscal year 2023 for EPA's clean air and climate programs to tackle climate change and ensure families in every part of the country have clean air and water.

The bill also provides \$35 million above fiscal year 2023 for geographic restoration programs. This funding will help protect local ecosystems and communities from climate change, habitat loss, and pollution in places like the Great Lakes, Long Island Sound, Puget Sound, and Southern New England Estuaries.

Additionally, the bill provides modest increases to support EPA grant programs like the Brownfields Program, U.S.-Mexico Border Program, and Wildfire Smoke Preparedness in Community Buildings Grant Program.

Department of the Interior: The bill provides \$15.639 billion in total for the Department of the Interior. This includes \$1.499 billion for the Bureau of Land Management, \$1.804 billion for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and \$3.457 billion for the National Park Service to protect and manage our federal lands and national parks, conserve and protect wildlife, and more. This includes \$5 million to support housing for National Park Service staff who are facing skyrocketing housing prices, which is limiting hiring and staff retention for these key employees.

Forest Service: The bill provides \$6.041 billion for the Forest Service, excluding additional funding for the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve. Of this amount, \$3.917 billion is provided for the Forest Service's non-wildland fire management responsibilities. The Forest Service will use these funds to improve forest restoration and fire risk reduction efforts and to increase year-round staffing to carry out this critical work. The bill provides \$207 million for hazardous fuels reduction projects and \$32 million for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, which will fund more projects backed by diverse stakeholders to improve forest landscapes. The bill also provides \$6 million for the Legacy Roads and Trails program to prioritize fish passage improvements and repurposing unnecessary roads as trails.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF): The bill allocates \$900 million for federal land acquisition and financial assistance to states provided through the LWCF under the Great American Outdoors Act. This program is critical for improving recreational access to our federal lands, protecting iconic landscapes, delivering grants to states and local governments to create and protect urban parks and open spaces, and providing farmers and ranchers with easements to allow them to continue to steward their private lands in the face of development pressures.

National Parks and Public Lands Restoration Fund: The bill allocates \$1.9 billion for deferred maintenance projects for the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Indian Education, and the Forest Service as part of a five-year deferred maintenance initiative under the Great American Outdoors Act.

Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT): The bill fully funds payments to counties through the PILT program, which are estimated at a total of \$515 million.

Key Points & Highlights – Related Agencies

Cultural Programs: The bill protects essential funding for key cultural institutions and programming. It provides \$207 million each for the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities and \$1.095 billion for the Smithsonian Institution, which includes an additional \$2 million each to continue the planning and development of the National Museum of the American Latino and the Smithsonian American Women’s History Museum.

###