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BILL SUMMARY: Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations Bill

Bill delivers new investments to support Tribal communities and wildland firefighters, protect our environment and public lands, and ensure Americans have clean air and water

Washington, D.C. – The Fiscal Year 2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act provides \$44.6 billion in total funding.

“This year’s Interior bill delivers for our public lands and our Tribes and will benefit both Oregonians and people across the United States for years to come,” said Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. **“Our effort protects America’s beautiful public lands, honors our trust and treaty obligations to Tribes, addresses staffing shortages at our national parks, and helps combat the ever-growing threat of wildfires, including by giving permanent raises for wildland firefighters. This sends a strong message that the federal government is serious about our country’s and our children’s futures.”**

“This bipartisan bill delivers important new resources to provide more support to Tribal communities, protect our environment and public lands, and fight wildfires in every part of the country. It funds essential work to ensure every American has access to clean air and water and can enjoy our nation’s breathtaking national parks—with new funding to hire more staff and prevent reduced hours at our parks,” said Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. **“This bill honors the courageous work our federal wildland firefighters do by establishing a permanent fix to prevent a devastating pay cut and by providing them with more support. It helps keep our promises to Tribes and increases funding to help Tribal communities serve students, keep people safe, and get the health care they need.”**

Key Points & Highlights – Combatting Wildfire

Supporting Federal Wildland 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 bill includes language establishing a permanent pay fix and job series for federal wildland firefighters and provides full funding to meet these obligations—and prevent a devastating pay cut for the federal firefighting workforce. The bill also creates a \$4 million health and wellness program for federal wildland 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 \$8 million on firefighter housing.

Wildfire Suppression: The bill fully funds essential wildfire preparedness and suppression efforts by providing \$4.145 billion for wildfire suppression, of which \$2.75 billion is for the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund. The Reserve Fund provides the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior an assured amount of funding to be used when major fire activity requires expenditures exceeding regular base suppression operations funding. This funding level—in addition to carryover balances—will meet projected needs for fiscal year 2025 wildfires.

Key Points & Highlights – Tribal Programs

Tribal Programs: In total, the bill provides \$12.65 billion for Tribal programs across the Department of the Interior and the Indian Health Service, an increase of \$1.774 billion above fiscal year 2024.

Indian Health Service (IHS): The bill provides \$8.5 billion in total resources for IHS—an increase of \$1.5 billion over fiscal year 2024—to maintain critically important health care services and maintain current staffing for doctors, nurses, and health services staff.

Importantly, the bill also continues the practice of advance appropriations for IHS, which were provided in a historic first for fiscal year 2023. The bill provides an advance appropriation for fiscal year 2026 of \$5.45 billion to ensure 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 funding IHS needs to provide essential health services to patients in the following fiscal year. Finally, the bill provides an increase of \$91.3 million to staff newly constructed facilities and \$124.1 million to ensure that IHS has the health care providers needed to meet increased patient demand.

Supporting Tribal Self-Governance and Essential Services: The bill provides an increase of \$64.5 million for a total of \$1.963 billion in funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs' operations of Indian programs. This funds essential government services in critical areas like roads and infrastructure, housing improvement, natural resources protection, Tribal courts, economic development, and social services. This funding is essential for Tribal governments exercising self-determination and crucial to upholding the federal government's trust responsibility.

Tribal Public Safety and Justice: The bill boosts funding to support and invest in Tribal public safety and justice programs by providing an increase of \$17.6 million above fiscal year 2024 for a total of \$573.2 million for police services, special initiatives to address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons cases, Tribal courts, and hiring more detention and corrections officers.

Maintaining Investments in Tribal Schools: The bill provides \$1.421 billion, an overall increase of \$55.2 million over fiscal year 2024, for the Bureau of Indian Education to support a school system of 183 schools and 33 Tribal Colleges and Universities that serve nearly 57,000 students. The bill provides \$1.1 billion for education programs and operations, an increase of \$25.2 million over fiscal year 2024, primarily to fund increased salaries for teachers and school staff. This includes funding to support school operational requirements, staffing, operating costs, Native language programs, scholarships, and support for school connectivity and remote learning capabilities. The bill also provides a \$30 million increase over fiscal year 2024 for education construction for a total of \$264.7 million to help keep pace with new schools in need of replacement. These investments will improve educational opportunities and service delivery for Native American students.

Tribal Sovereignty Payments: The bill fully funds Tribal Sovereignty Payments, which consist of contract support costs and 105(l) lease payments, including the increased contract support costs associated with third-party billing for IHS as a result of the June 2024 Supreme Court ruling in *Becerra vs. San Carlos Apache Tribe*. These are required payments that provide funding for Tribes' administrative overhead costs for self-governance under the Indian Self-Determination Education and Assistance Act.

Key Points & Highlights – Protecting Our Environment and Public Lands

Wildland Firefighter and Public Lands Housing Crisis: Wildland Firefighters and National Park Service staff are facing skyrocketing housing prices and lack of available housing—limiting hiring and staff retention of these key employees. The bill provides an increase of \$17 million to support housing for these critical staff. It also includes a provision expanding the Department of the Interior's use of direct hiring to recruit and hire staff already living in local communities to reduce pressure on housing needs.

Public Lands Construction and Maintenance: As visitors flock in record numbers to our public lands, aging infrastructure—such as utility systems, roads, and buildings—continues to deteriorate. The bill restores \$53.2 million in funding for construction and maintenance that was cut in fiscal year 2024 from the National Park System, the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the Bureau of Land Management. The bill also allocates \$1.9 billion of the National Parks and Public Lands Restoration Fund 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.

Department of the Interior: The bill provides \$15.8 billion in total, excluding additional funding for the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve, for the Department of the Interior to protect and manage our national parks, national wildlife refuges, and other federal lands, conserve and protect wildlife, and more. This includes \$1.47 billion for the Bureau of Land Management, \$1.76 billion for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and \$3.49 billion for the National Park Service. Funding increases across the Department will prevent further staffing losses by maintaining current staffing levels, making targeted investments to increase staffing in critical areas, and delivering new funding for other essential priorities, such as information technology, that would otherwise impact staffing.

National Park Service: Over the past decade, national parks have seen a 16% increase in visitation while park staffing has fallen by 23%. The bill provides \$50.3 million to begin to restore staffing levels and support the hiring of 450 park rangers and other national park staff. The bill also provides targeted increases at park units across the country to better tell the story of the struggle for racial justice at our national parks and provides \$2 million for the newly established African American Burial Grounds Preservation Act.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): The bill provides \$9.29 billion in essential funding for EPA's critical responsibilities to protect our environment and public health. The bill provides modest increases across all EPA programs—including in the clean water, clean air, climate, and toxic programs—and keeps all biologists, chemists, researchers, engineers, and other specialists on the job.

The Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, which provide funding for water and wastewater projects, are funded at the fiscal year 2024 levels. The Hazardous Substance Superfund program receives an increase from fiscal year 2024 levels to \$546 million as it continues to receive additional funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act.

The bill provides increases to grant programs, such as state and local air quality management, brownfields projects, and the wildfire smoke grant program. It also makes modest increases above fiscal year 2024 funding for geographic restoration and national estuary programs—helping protect local ecosystems and communities from climate change, habitat loss, and pollution in places like the Columbia River, Great Lakes, Long Island Sound, Puget Sound, and Southern New England Estuaries.

Forest Service: The bill provides \$6.45 billion for the Forest Service, excluding additional funding for the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve. Of this amount, \$4.02 billion is provided for the Forest Service’s non-wildland fire management responsibilities and will sustain current staffing levels. The Forest Service will use these funds to improve forest restoration and fire risk reduction efforts. The bill provides \$208 million for hazardous fuels reduction projects, fully restoring funding from reduced fiscal year 2024 levels, and provides \$34 million for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, which will fulfill the annual commitment for 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.

Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT): The bill fully funds payments to counties through the PILT program, which are estimated at a total of \$600 million.

Key Points & Highlights – Related Agencies

Cultural Programs: The bill sustains essential funding for key cultural institutions and programming. It provides \$209 million each for the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities and \$1.1 billion for the Smithsonian Institution.

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