



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

AUG 29 2023

The Honorable Tom Tiffany  
Chairman, Natural Resources Subcommittee  
On Federal Lands  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tiffany:

Enclosed is a response to the follow-up question addressed to Mr. Mike Reynolds, Deputy Director for External and Congressional Affairs at the National Park Service, from the March 28, 2023, legislative hearing on multiple bills. These responses were prepared by the National Park Service.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to you on this matter.

Sincerely,

Christopher P. Salotti  
Legislative Counsel  
Office of Congressional and  
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Joe Neguse  
Ranking Member

**Questions for the Record  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
Legislative Hearing  
March 28, 2023**

**Questions from Rep. Westerman**

- 1. This Committee has heard from people across this country about the closure of amenities on land managed by the Department of the Interior (DOI).
  - a. For all DOI managed federal lands, please provide the number of closures since 2000 for campsites, campgrounds, and day use areas. Please provide the number of closures of miles of trails, roads, and routes that served a recreational purpose, such as horseback riding, hiking, and motorized vehicle activities, since 2000 across DOI managed federal lands.****

**Response:** The National Park Service (NPS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) do not maintain a system for comprehensively tracking the number of permanent or temporary closures of campsites, campgrounds, day use areas, trails, roads, and routes. Closures may occur for a wide variety of reasons, including, but not limited to, weather, national disasters, public safety, damaged infrastructure, construction, seasonal wildlife protection and conflict management, and other administrative needs. Each agency's asset management system tracks infrastructure maintenance and repair but does not record data on closures that occur related to maintenance or other reasons.

Additionally, closures have yet to result in a significant reduction in visitation Department-wide. In FY 2022, NPS received 312 million recreation visits, up 15 million visits (5%) from 2021. While lower than in 2018 and 2019 (318 million and 327 million recreation visits, respectively), service-wide visitation has essentially recovered to pre-pandemic levels. NPS worked to mitigate, as much as practicable, the impact of any COVID-related closures on visitation. BLM also experienced a visitation increase at its sites in FY 2022, receiving 81 million visitors, 1 million more than in 2021 and 19 million more since the start of the trend in 2015, an increase of 29%. Visitation to FWS's national wildlife refuges has steadily increased from 45.7 million visits in FY 2011 to more than 67 million visits in FY 2022 – a 46% increase.

NPS, BLM, and FWS are highly conscious and proud of our responsibility and privilege of maintaining recreational access to federal lands for the American people and ensuring underserved communities and future generations retain these opportunities.



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

AUG 31 2023

The Honorable Young Kim  
Chair, House Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Indo-Pacific  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Kim:

Enclosed are responses prepared by the Office of Insular Affairs to the question for the record submitted to the Department of the Interior's witness, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Insular and International Affairs Keone Nakoa, following his appearance before your subcommittee at the March 23, 2023, hearing on *Renewed U.S. Engagement in the Pacific: Assessing the Importance of the Pacific Islands*. We apologize for the delay in our response.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to you on this matter.

Sincerely,

Christopher P. Salotti  
Legislative Counsel  
Office of Congressional and  
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Ami Bera  
Ranking Member

Questions for the Record  
Subcommittee on Indo-Pacific  
House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Oversight Hearing on “Renewed U.S. Engagement in the Pacific:  
Assessing the Importance of the Pacific Islands”  
March 23, 2023

**Question from Representative Radewagen**

**The Marshall Islands Journal states that the Bikini Atoll local government cannot meet payroll or make scheduled payments of nuclear testing compensation to the people of that island atoll. Yet, Bikini has a Claims Trust Fund and Resettlement Trust Fund to address the legacy of the nuclear testing program. What are the mechanisms to ensure current or future U.S. funding under the Compact for nuclear test related measures, including for communities still displaced from their homelands, or to relieve human hardship and suffering, are managed transparently reported publicly?**

**Response:** Initially, we wish to clarify that there is a distinction between the Bikini Claims Trust Fund, which was established under the Compact, and the Bikini Resettlement Trust Fund, which is a measure the U.S. has taken under domestic legislation to address the nuclear legacy in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). As explained in more detail below, the Bikini Claims Trust Fund is not currently the subject of Compact negotiations and is not within the authority of the Department of the Interior, while the Resettlement Trust Funds are not governed by the Compact terms.

As to the questions raised about the Bikini Claims Trust Fund, that fund is governed by the terms of the Agreement Concluded Pursuant to Section 177 of the Compact of Free Association (“Section 177 Agreement”). The Section 177 Agreement constituted the “full settlement of all claims, past, present, and future” in any way related to the U.S. nuclear testing program, so that the United States is not negotiating amendments to the Section 177 Agreement. Since the Section 177 Agreement is part of an international agreement, further questions relating to the administration and oversight of that fund should be directed to the Department of State. The Department has had no role in the administration of the Bikini Claims Trust Fund and as such is not in a position to answer questions concerning its oversight and administration.

The Bikini Resettlement Trust Fund was not established under the Compact of Free Association but rather pursuant to separate domestic legislation. As such, the oversight and administration of the Bikini Resettlement Trust Fund is governed by P.L. 97-257, P.L. 100-446, and the Bikini Resettlement Trust Fund Agreement.



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

AUG 28 2023

The Honorable Bruce Westerman  
Chairman, Natural Resources Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Westerman:

Enclosed are responses to the follow-up questions addressed to Assistant Secretary Carmen G. Cantor from the May 25, 2023, oversight hearing on *Examining the President's FY 2024 Budget Request for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Office of Insular Affairs*. These responses were prepared by the Office of Insular Affairs.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to you on this matter.

Sincerely,

Christopher P. Salotti  
Legislative Counsel  
Office of Congressional and  
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Raúl Grijalva  
Ranking Member

**Questions from Chairman Westerman**

**Question 1: Following up on your response to the question on grant double-dipping, can you provide specific details on what mechanisms are in place to prevent overlapping grant payments and confirm that spending is fiscally responsible?**

**Response:** Applicants for Office of Insular Affairs' (OIA) grants are required to include a statement indicating if there is any overlap between OIA Federal applications and any other Federal application, or funded project, in regard to activities, costs, or time commitment of key personnel. If any such overlap exists, the applicant is required to provide a complete description of overlaps or duplications between their OIA proposal and any other federally funded project or application in regards to activities, costs, and time commitment of key personnel, as applicable. The applicant is also required to provide a copy of any overlapping or duplicative proposal submitted to any other potential funding entity and identify when that proposal was submitted, to whom (entity name and program), and when the applicant anticipates being notified of their funding decision. If at any time a proposal is awarded funds that would be overlapping or duplicative of the funding requested, the applicant must immediately notify the point of contact at OIA. The Federal overlap statement is included on a checklist of mandatory items that OIA utilizes when reviewing all applications for sufficiency.

During OIA's grant review process, any overlap or duplication of funding between the proposed project and other active or anticipated projects may impact selection and/or funding amount. OIA also funds projects on a reimbursable basis so that payments to grantees are not automatic. This allows OIA grant managers to review all requests for payment to ensure that the spending is fiscally responsible, in line with the approved budget for the project, that the project is progressing adequately, that financial and narrative reports are being submitted timely, and receipts/invoices are reviewed to ensure adequacy of supporting documentation. If during this review, OIA has concerns with any of the above items, OIA will withhold payment until any issues can be resolved.

**Question 2: The FY 2024 OIA budget continues to promote taxpayer money for renewable energy only. The Administration is, again, flat out ignoring an all-of-the-above energy strategy. Will you commit to addressing that concern and expand support for access to all reliable energy options?**

**Response:** Public Law 109-58 enacted in 2005 directed the Secretary of the Interior to draft long-term energy plans for the insular areas with the objective of reducing their reliance on energy imports, increase energy conservation and energy efficiency, and use native energy sources. The Energizing Insular Communities (EIC) program provides funding for projects that reflect the energy priorities of the Territory governors and their existing energy plans which may include both renewable and traditional energy investments to improve reliability. The EIC application instructions state that proposals for energy supply and energy efficiency should incorporate commercially available technology and *may* include renewable energy technology.

Questions for the Record  
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs  
House Natural Resources Committee  
*FY 2024 Budget Request for the Office of Insular Affairs*  
May 25, 2023

Many renewable energy technologies are easier and more cost-effective to expand and scale-up in the Territories, which makes these projects more attractive to the Territory energy stakeholders when deciding what projects to pursue. Looking at fiscal year 2022 funding from this program, roughly half of the funds were spent on renewable energy projects, and the other half supported demand-side energy priorities such as lighting retrofits and grid-efficiency projects.

**Question 3: The U.S. and the Freely Associated States currently are negotiating the renewal of the Compacts of Freely Association (COFA). The decrease in the OIA FY 2024 budget reflects the expiration of the current COFA agreements but does not include any future COFA spending under the new Compacts. What changes in COFA spending are you expecting, given the amounts provided in the MOUs with FSM, Palau, and RMI that were signed earlier this year?**

**Response:** In response to these unprecedented and extraordinary times, the FY 2024 President's Budget for the State Department requests mandatory resources to out-compete China, strengthen the U.S. role in the Indo-Pacific, and advance American prosperity globally through new investments. The PRC is the United States' only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it. This Out-Compete China mandatory proposal requests \$7.1 billion over the next 20 years to amend and extend the Compacts of Free Association with the Freely Associated States of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau, including \$6.5 billion for economic assistance and \$634 million for U.S. postal services to the Freely Associated States.

**Question 4: Earlier this month, OIA issued a press release announcing Administration support for the Compact Impact Fairness Act (CIFA). The press release stated that the 94,000 FAS citizens who qualify to be counted for purposes of allocating the current Compact Impact grant program are living in states and territories, with more than 50 percent living in the continental U.S. and that 43 percent are now U.S. citizens. It is not clear how the 43% of your 94,000, who are now U.S. citizens qualified as nonimmigrants under the expiring Compact Impact program, but isn't it true that the CIFA bill if approved will not apply 43% of that population of 94,000 persons of FAS heritage who are already U.S. citizens and already eligible for all CIFA programs if otherwise qualified?**

**Response:** Under the existing Compact Impact program, the definition of compact migrant has been interpreted to include FAS citizens, as well as their children under the age of 18, even in cases where the children are born in the U.S. and as such are U.S. citizens. Therefore, it is correct that those who are already U.S. citizens, are already eligible for these Federal programs. CIFA's focus is on extending eligibility of Federal programs to those FAS citizens who are not currently U.S. citizens and who do not have access to these Federal programs regardless of the U.S. jurisdiction in which they choose to reside.



**Questions from Ranking Member Grijalva**

**Question 1: How many employee vacancies does the Office of Insular Affairs currently have?**

**Response:** As of June 1, 2023, the Office of Insular Affairs has 9 full-time equivalent vacancies.

**Question 2: What are areas of priority related to staffing for the Office of Insular Affairs?**

**Response:** The Office of Insular Affairs maintains three divisions: Policy, Budget and Grants Management, and Technical Assistance. These divisions support the execution of the Secretary's responsibilities with respect to the U.S.-affiliated insular areas and focus on general program, political, and economic analysis, managing technical assistance grants, budget formulation and presentation, chief financial officer activities, and strategic planning. The Office of Insular Affairs prioritizes filling vacant positions.

**Question 3: What additional resources could the Office of Insular Affairs utilize to effectively assist the U.S. Territories within its jurisdiction with preparing timely and adequate financial reports?**

**Response:** The U.S. Territories experience challenges with preparing timely and adequate financial reports due to logistics and financial limitations for attracting and maintaining an adequate number of qualified staff. The U.S. Territories would benefit from long-term assistance to maintain an adequate number of qualified staff and hire professional consulting services (as needed) to fill gaps and provide increased onsite training and reviews to provide technical advice and confirm progress.

**Question 4: Several territories have had longstanding challenges in producing timely and reliable financial data. Given the importance of this data to accurately illustrating the current financial and economic conditions of the territories, how can Interior assist the territories to resolve this persistent challenge?**

**Response:** The U.S. Territories experience challenges with preparing timely and adequate financial reports due to logistics and financial limitations for attracting and maintaining an adequate number of qualified staff. The U.S. Territories would benefit from long-term assistance to maintain an adequate number of qualified staff and hire professional consulting services (as needed) to fill gaps and provide increased onsite training and reviews to provide technical advice and confirm progress.



Questions for the Record  
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**Question 5: The two most recent single audit reports indicate a dramatic increase in American Samoa's liabilities. One explanation attributed to this increase is a rise in bank deposits to the Territorial Bank of American Samoa (TBAS), a commercial bank owned by the American Samoa Government which started in 2017. The publicly owned status of the TBAS has also prevented its deposits from being insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). What is the reason for keeping the bank structured as American Samoa Government-owned and what risks does this pose to the fiscal health of the territorial government?**

**Response:** The American Samoan Government (ASG) has initiated meetings with the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the FDIC to discuss the risk and challenges of not having an FDIC-insured commercial bank operating in American Samoa. ASG has requested guidance and technical assistance from Treasury and FDIC on the feasibility of TBAS obtaining FDIC insurance and certification, and discussion among the parties are ongoing.

**Questions from Representative Case**

**Question 1: The Biden administration recently signed updated Compacts of Free Association agreements with the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau and continues to negotiate an updated Compact with the Republic of the Marshall Islands. I look forward to our Committee's consideration of those proposed agreements but want to underscore in no uncertain terms the necessity of ensuring that the financial costs to U.S. jurisdictions of hosting Compact migrants is properly and fully borne by the federal government. The proposed Compact Impact Fairness Act (CIFA), introduced in both the House and the Senate, would go a long way toward doing so by extending eligibility for certain key federal benefits to citizens of the Freely Associated States living in the United States. I appreciate Biden administration's expressed support for CIFA, but more is needed to assure that CIFA is passed upon and as a condition of Congress' approval of the Compacts. Will the administration include CIFA as an integral and non-severable part of the proposed renewed Compacts of Free Association when it transmits them to Congress?**

**Response:** The Compact Impact Fairness Act is incorporated into the Administration's legislative proposal for the Compacts of Free Association.

**Question 2: As one aspect of reimbursing Compact-affected jurisdictions for Compact resident services, Congress has directed Compact Impact Aid, both mandatory and discretionary, to some affected jurisdictions. However, that aid currently expires at the end of Fiscal Year 2023. If Congress is unable to approve the updated Compacts including CIFA by the beginning of Fiscal Year 2024, will the Biden administration support a temporary extension of Fiscal Year 2023 Compact impact funding levels, both mandatory and discretionary, to prevent any gaps in funding unless and until the Compacts and CIFA are approved and effective?**

**Response:** The Administration supports its 2024 budget request. Should the Congress appropriate additional funds for Compact Impact, the Office of Insular Affairs will implement accordingly.

**U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Department of Interior  
March 29, 2023**

**Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Deb Haaland, Department of Interior  
from Senator Feinstein**

**Question 1:** Secretary Haaland, I understand that the Forest Service was able to achieve 97 percent of its staffing target for firefighters (GS-09 and below), perhaps due in part to salary increases in the bipartisan infrastructure law.

Secretary Haaland, was the Department of the Interior able to achieve full firefighter staffing last year, both nationwide and in California specifically? What are the current wildland firefighter staffing levels nationwide and in California specifically?

**Response:** The Department of the Interior achieved 98 percent of our 2022 wildland fire hiring target nationwide. The Department employed more than 5,460 personnel, including firefighters and support personnel. In California, the Department employed more than 580 wildland fire personnel during 2022, compared to a target of 639.

As of the end of May 2023, the Department had 4,145 total Federal wildland fire personnel nationwide. Considering the number of temporary and permanent seasonal employees within the wildland fire management program, who are typically hired in early summer, we expect to reach peak employment in July. Our target is to reach a total of 5,800 personnel over the course of the year.

In California, as of the end of May, the Department employed more than 400 wildland fire personnel. The target for California this year is about 670 personnel.

**Question 2:** Recent Department of Interior appropriations have provided significant increases for efforts to manage wild horses and burros across the West, doubling the funding in the past five years. Nevertheless, humane management of these wild horse herds remains a problem, with the size of these herds impacting the native landscape and the health of the horses themselves. Based on a model developed by the Bureau of Land Management, PopEquus, fertility control measures are the most cost-effective ways to keep herd sizes at an appropriate level once the herd has been condensed to the Appropriate Management Level. However, the vast majority of the budget for the Wild Horse and Burro Program still goes toward removal of horses from public lands and upkeep of those horses.

Secretary Haaland, how much of the funding allocated for the Wild Horse and Burro program has gone toward cost-effective fertility control measures?

**Response:** Over the last five years, the BLM has spent approximately \$2.8 million directly on fertility control treatments. Additionally, the BLM spent approximately \$4.2 million on capture and handling costs needed to conduct those treatments, and over \$3.5 million on new research

related to advancing humane and longer-lasting fertility control methods for wild horses and burros.

Population growth suppression methods, including fertility control treatments, are most effective once a herd management area is at its appropriate management level (AML), though the Bureau considers fertility control efforts as vital to helping curb the previously compounding growth rate. In FY 2022, only 37 out of 177 Herd Management Areas were at AML. The removal of excess animals from overpopulated herds is a valuable tool to minimize threats to the health of our public rangelands from overgrazing, as well as for preventing risks of starvation and thirst for wild horses, burros, and other wildlife. The program continues to maximize humane care and opportunities for private care placement of these excess animals through adoptions, sales, and transfers as a way to manage off-range costs over time.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Deb Haaland, Department of Interior  
From Senator Van Hollen**

**Question 1:** The Great American Outdoors Act permanently authorized funding to the Land and Water Conservation Fund to support our efforts to conserve lands and improve outdoor recreation opportunities across the Nation. Unfortunately, I understand that the appraisal process remains lengthy, with delays and complexities that can risk the loss of critical conservation opportunities.

Can you provide details on the agency's efforts to address this problem?

**Response:** The Department is committed to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) programs and has taken strong action to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Interior's land acquisition functions which are fundamental to implementing the LWCF.

Interior has established a Department-wide Land Acquisition Working Group (working group) of realty specialists, appraisers, attorneys, and program officers, focused on making improvements in key areas impacting Interior's Federal land acquisition and appraisal processes. The working group is actively addressing issues identified in the FY 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Bill, P.L. 117-328, "...to improve uniform Departmental appraisal policies, utilizing third-party contracting, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of Federal and non-Federal parties" as well as evaluating "options for returning some appraisal or valuation functions to the bureaus...".

A two-day session is planned this Spring (May 23-24) to expressly discuss options for returning appraisal functions currently managed by Interior's Appraisal and Valuation Services Office (AVSO), to interested bureaus. On this subject, the working group's initial efforts focused on identifying issues most likely to result in operational efficiencies; and tackling those with the potential for nearer-term benefits first. This included evaluating options to raise the current \$25,000 threshold ceiling to waive the need for an appraisal allowed in the Uniform Act regulations, up to \$400,000 with the landowner's approval. Increasing the waiver valuation threshold will allow bureaus greater flexibility to conduct waiver valuations for more of their land acquisition needs without requiring appraisals for uncomplicated cases.

The working group initiated a discussion with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) which has jurisdiction over this requirement. FHWA has proposed a new rule to raise the threshold to \$50,000 which could make 14% of Interior land acquisitions eligible for an acquisition waiver. A change in the waiver threshold should help to reduce processing times since more than 50% of the overall valuation time is taken up by the appraisal itself and another 17% is consumed by contracting. For simple, low risk acquisitions under the threshold, it could cut valuation processing time by approximately 67%. AVSO supports an increased use of waiver valuations as allowed by regulation and currently provides training to bureau realty staff in conducting waiver valuations.

The working group has also identified policies and procedures that need to be modified, clarified, or rescinded including a 1995 policy memo issued by the Assistant Secretary, Policy, Management, and Budget that addresses the roles of non-Federal parties in Department of the

Interior land acquisition. As part of this work, Interior's land acquisition working group reached an initial agreement that when appraisals are paid for by non-Federal parties, bureaus can request the non-Federal party be named as an intended user of the appraisal report and AVSO will execute such requests. Interior will memorialize its final decision and other related operational changes in the form of a new policy memo that defines guidelines for real estate transactions involving non-Federal parties.

The Department is also taking action to strengthen Interior's appraisal capacity including realigning appraisal operations on a regional basis to improve efficiency and service. With the help of Special Pay Rate authority for appraisers provided in the FY 2022 and FY 2023 Interior Appropriations bills, as of May 2023, AVSO increased the number of appraisers on-board 22 percent from 2021. AVSO has also secured dedicated legal support and is standing up an appraiser apprentice program to build internal capacity. AVSO is collaborating with the working group to improve its automated systems and processes to simplify how appraisals are requested by the bureaus and to provide bureaus with status tracking reports of pending appraisal actions.

These are examples of the work underway to reevaluate and improve Interior's Federal land acquisition activities. The Department will continue this comprehensive review and will keep the House and Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittees informed as more progress is made.

## Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Deb Haaland, Department of Interior from Senator Fischer

**Question 1:** To date, how much funding has DOI spent implementing the America the Beautiful Initiative?

- Please include what staffing resources have been used to plan, coordinate, implement and track the initiative.
- Please also cite the congressional authorization used to justify any expenditures.

**Response:** America the Beautiful is an interagency initiative to support voluntary, locally led, partnership-driven conservation and restoration nationwide. Interior is an active Federal partner in supporting the broader initiative driven by our mission and responsibilities for land and resource management. A variety of DOI programs-- authorized by Congress --support the goals of the initiative. As such, the Department does not track funding for it as it would a formal program.

During the hearing, Secretary Haaland gave examples of funding requested for several DOI programs which help to support the objectives of America the Beautiful including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The budget proposes \$79.7 million in FY 2024 for the Partners program, an increase of \$19.5 million above FY 2023 enacted. The program is authorized by the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act (16 U.S.C. 3771-3774) to establish a program that works with private landowners to conduct cost-effective habitat projects for the benefit of fish and wildlife resources in the United States. The projects provide other benefits to the local communities, such as enhancing drought resilience through water conservation projects, strengthening resilience to wildfire, and supporting habitat and migration corridors for game and other plants and animals of cultural significance.

The Partners Program works in all 50 States and territories, to consult with landowners to help them conserve and improve wildlife habitat. Landowner conservation is important because nearly 70 percent of land in the United States is privately owned. Public and private landowners are critical partners in ensuring the health and sustainability of America's fish, wildlife and plant species. Projects are voluntary and customized to meet landowners' needs. Participating landowners continue to own and manage their land while they improve conditions for wildlife.

Many Partners for Fish and Wildlife projects take place on working landscapes such as forests, farms and ranches. FWS efforts focus on areas of conservation concern, such as upland forests, wetlands, native prairies, marshes, rivers and streams and designing projects to benefit Federal trust species including migratory birds, endangered, threatened and at-risk species.

All private landowners interested in restoring wildlife habitat on their land are eligible to participate. Current partners include farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, recreational landowners, corporations, local governments and universities. In addition to private landowners, the program partners with other Federal agencies, State agencies and non-governmental organizations to complete projects on private lands. Participating landowners do not forfeit any property rights and are not required to allow public access.



Another example mentioned at the hearing is the Land and Water Conservation Fund State Grants program managed by the National Park Service, which was permanently reauthorized in the Great American Outdoors Act. The program receives mandatory funding which is allocated annually by Congress through Appropriations. The budget proposes \$305.5 million in FY 2024 for these competitive and formula matching grants to States.

The State grants support the acquisition and development of land and facilities that will provide the public with access to new opportunities to engage in outdoor recreation through a variety of projects such as parks, sports and playfields, swimming and boating areas, trails, and campgrounds. Grants to States also provide for continuing State planning efforts to address outdoor recreation needs. Since 1965, more than \$5.2 billion has been apportioned to the States, resulting in the award of over 45,000 grants. States, Tribes, and localities have matched this amount at least dollar-for-dollar, doubling the Federal investment.

This program has successfully allowed States to take greater responsibility for the protection and development of open space and outdoor recreation resources. The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (54 U.S.C. 2003), provides funds and authorization for funding to the States in planning, acquisition, and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities.

**Question 2:** How does DOI define “conservation” in relation to the America the Beautiful Initiative?

- For private landowners, does the Department only consider land “conserved” if a landowner is participating in a Federal program?
- What is the baseline percentage of land that the Department considers to already be “conserved”?

**Response:** Interior is working with our other Federal partners to engage the public in this question of “how do we define conservation.” Many uses of lands and waters can be consistent with the long-term health of natural systems and help address climate change, and the Department appreciates the continuum of conservation activities occurring across the Nation.

The America the Beautiful initiative relies on broad engagement across the country, including agricultural and forest landowners, fishers, outdoor enthusiasts, Tribal Nations, States, territories, local officials, and other important partners and stakeholders working to identify strategies that reflect the priorities of all communities. Integral to this approach is the voluntary conservation work of fishers, ranchers, farmers, and forest owners which takes place as part or independent of participation in a Federal program. Voluntary conservation work that occurs independently of Federal programs is an important part of America the Beautiful, and recognizing such efforts is best accomplished by building partnerships with individuals or organizations that would like their efforts to be included in the initiative.

With regard to a baseline of land considered to be conserved, the interagency team collected public comments in 2022 and continues to work on next steps.