

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Fiscal Year 2024 **Annual Evaluation Plan**

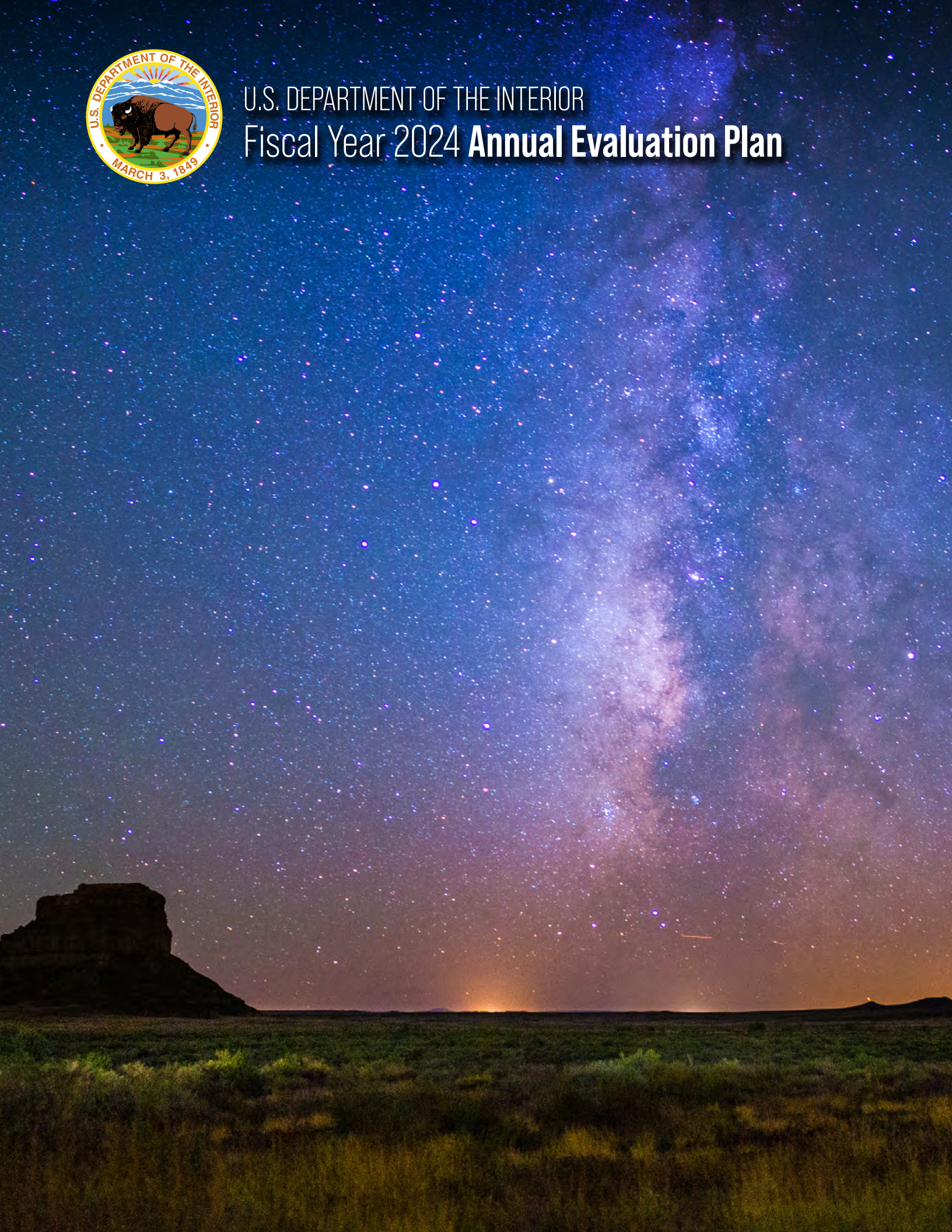


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INTRODUCTION

The Department of the Interior (Interior) is presenting its Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Annual Evaluation Plan, per requirements of the Foundations for Evidence-Building Policymaking Act of 2018. The FY 2024 Annual Evaluation Plan provides summary information on proposed significant evaluations planned during the fiscal year. Evaluations will use systematic data collection and analysis to address questions related to the implementation of a program and to further organizational learning and improvement. The planned evaluations will also assist in answering priority evidence-building questions included in Interior’s learning agenda. These evaluation plans support evidence-building for decision-making to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department as outlined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance [M-19-23](#) and [M-21-27](#).

SIGNIFICANT PROGRAM EVALUATION

Interior’s Evaluation Policy allows latitude for bureaus and offices to define “significant” program evaluations. However, the Department generally defines a significant program evaluation as an assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of programs, policies, or organizations intended to assess their effectiveness and impacts supporting or connected with Interior’s learning agenda, a Interior agency priority goal, a cross-Interior or cross-government priority or initiative, or undertaken as a result of prior findings by Congress, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), or the Office of the Inspector General (OIG).



PROGRESS ON PRIOR YEAR SIGNIFICANT PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

The Department of the Interior published its first Annual Evaluation Plan in FY 2023. Thus, the Department is in the process of determining evaluations that can proceed from the FY 2023 plan with available funding. The Department is also considering how to design and implement program evaluations for programs that received funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in accordance with OMB M-22-12.

EVALUATION TOPICS IN FY 2024

Interior has identified the following areas for significant program evaluations in FY 2024:

- ▶ Beneficiary Service Improvements
- ▶ Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization Program
- ▶ Utah Lake Drainage Basin Water Delivery System

These topics touch on Administration priority areas, including strengthening our relationship with and support to tribal communities; supporting economic development through land reclamation; and ensuring that the western United States has an adequate supply of water in the face of drought and climate change. The remainder of this report provides specific information on each of the proposed significant program evaluations in FY 2024.



Green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) hatchling, Cape Lookout National Seashore, Photo by NPS

BENEFICIARY SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

| PRIORITY AREA | BUREAU |
|---|--------------------|
| <p>Strategic Goal 1: Promote Well-Being, Equity, and Justice for Tribes, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Insular Communities</p> <p>Strategic Objective 1.3: Tribal, Native Hawaiian, and Insular Communities Have Economic Security and Growth</p> | <p>BTFA</p> |

Program Description: The Beneficiary Service program ensures that trust beneficiaries have available and equitable customer service. The Bureau of Trust Funds Administration (BTFA) provides a variety of tools for beneficiaries to be provided information including periodic statements of performance, the Trust Beneficiary Call Center, Fiduciary Trust Offices throughout the country, and virtual options including online account access.

Evaluation Question: To what extent were the beneficiary service improvements made in alignment with Interior’s High Impact Service Provider actions effective?

Data and Information Needed: The evaluator will collect beneficiary feedback via survey of trust beneficiaries.

Design/Methods: BTFA is proposing an outcome evaluation with primary data coming from beneficiary surveys. This effort will be coordinated with any beneficiary service High Impact Service Provider efforts or any other collection efforts for beneficiary service feedback, including operational metrics (e.g. volume of completed transactions). BTFA will contract with an evaluator to assist the bureau in defining and measuring effectiveness of beneficiary service improvements. Considerations may include saving a beneficiary’s time by effectively delivering an expected and valued service, building trust in BTFA, increasing satisfaction, and/or reducing the need for beneficiaries to engage with BTFA staff (to include cost-effectiveness for Interior).

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies: Funding to support efforts to gain adequate numbers of beneficiaries to complete surveys is critical for valid evaluation results. If beneficiary feedback does not produce a large enough sample to analyze the impact of the improvements, the usefulness of evaluation results will be limited. BTFA plans to use existing resources like Fiduciary Trust Officers, field staff and Trust Beneficiary Call Center (TBCC) staff to enhance the likelihood of evaluation success. BTFA will also utilize any previous beneficiary surveys as part of the evaluation analysis to enhance the quality.

Dissemination and Use: Results of this evaluation will be disseminated to BTFA Beneficiary Service Council, BTFA senior leaders, and program managers. Results will also be shared with Interior senior leaders for consideration as part of decision-making processes that affect beneficiaries. The results will inform the future Beneficiary Service program improvements and identify opportunities to better meet customer needs and expectations.

ABANDONED MINE LAND ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION PROGRAM

| PRIORITY AREA | BUREAU |
|---|---------------------|
| <p>Strategic Goal 2: Conserve, Protect, Manage, and Restore Natural and Cultural Resources in the Face of Climate Change and Other Stressors</p> <p>Strategic Objective 2.1: Lands, Waters, And Heritage Are Conserved For Present and Future Generations</p> | <p>OSMRE</p> |

Program Description: Each year since FY 2016, Congress has appropriated funding for the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) to administer the Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) Program. The program provides grants to states and tribes for “economic and community development in conjunction with the reclamation priorities in section 403(a) of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) of 1977.” Eligible states and tribes are defined in the law and currently include Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia (based on having the highest amount of unfunded “Priority 1” and “Priority 2” coal-related abandoned mine land problems in Appalachia) and the Hopi Tribe, Crow Tribe, and Navajo Nation (as the federally recognized tribes with abandoned mine land programs). The AMLER program has made more than \$912 million in grants available to states and tribes between 2016 and 2023.

Evaluation Question: What improvements could be made to the AMLER project solicitation, submission, review, approval, and reporting processes to improve program efficiency? To what extent has AMLER funding contributed to local economic development?

Data and Information Needed: The evaluation can draw from the following program data/reporting:

- ▶ Grant reports and draw down details from the state/tribe/OSMRE
- ▶ AMLER reports/tracking spreadsheets by the state/tribe/OSMRE
- ▶ OSMRE AMLER Guidance Document on Project Eligibility
- ▶ National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents and authorization to proceed (ATP) letters
- ▶ Data metrics provided by project applicants
- ▶ OSMRE’s Enhanced Abandoned Mine Land Inventory System (e-AMLIS)
- ▶ Deeds and forms involving the purchase of real property with AMLER funds
- ▶ Federal and state-level staff interviews to assess process efficiencies and project outcomes
- ▶ Local and regional economic data (e.g. jobs, unemployment rates, poverty rates)
- ▶ Surveys and interviews with program beneficiaries

The OSMRE Division of Reclamation Support will identify OSMRE staff and/or external partners that the evaluators can contact for specific information.

Design/Methods: OSMRE is proposing a process/implementation evaluation for the AMLER program. The evaluator will conduct document reviews, data or statistical analysis, and interviews. The program will ensure adherence to Interior's Evaluation Policy by informing staff of the requirements of the Evidence Act and following the standards for relevance and utility, rigor, independence and objectivity, transparency, equity, and ethics.

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies: Data may be incomplete or missing and processes may be inconsistent between the various states and tribes. Additionally, some AMLER projects are small, which can make evaluating economic impacts difficult using local and regional data alone. The evaluators can mitigate these challenges by collecting data/information from multiple documents/sources for comparison and to fill in blanks, interviewing staff to contextualize what data/processes are unavailable/inconsistent, surveying and interviewing program beneficiaries, and including context for the data and processes in the final analysis of the study.

Dissemination and Use: The findings from the evaluation will be provided to the applicable offices within states/tribes/OSMRE. The information can be used to improve the AMLER guidance document and AMLER/grant reports and inform state and tribal project development and selection processes. A summary with key takeaways will be posted on the OSMRE website for public awareness and transparency.



A single tiger lily blooms in a meadow, Photo by NPS

UTAH LAKE DRAINAGE BASIN WATER DELIVERY SYSTEM

| PRIORITY AREA | BUREAU |
|---|---------------------|
| <p>Strategic Goal 3: Sustainably Balance the Use of Resources While Supporting Communities and the Economy</p> <p>Strategic Objective 3.3: Land, Water, and Non-Energy Mineral Resources Support the Diverse Needs of Communities</p> | <p>CUPCA</p> |

Program Description: The Central Utah Project (CUP) was originally authorized in 1956 as a participating project of the Colorado River Storage Project. The Central Utah Project Completion Act (CUPCA) was enacted to provide for the orderly completion of the CUP through a partnership with the State of Utah. CUPCA authorizes water resource protection, conservation, and development for delivery of water to communities for municipal, industrial, fish and wildlife purposes. The CUPCA program supports the Interior FY 2022 -2026 Strategic Plan and the Secretary’s goals by striving to provide residents of the western United States with a sustainable water supply to address impacts of drought and climate change (3.3.1) and helping communities benefit from a balanced approach to using and conserving resources (3.3.2). The Interior FY 2023 budget provided \$12.4 million for continued construction of the Utah Lake Drainage Basin Water Delivery System (Utah Lake System). The Utah Lake System will include 55 miles of large diameter (60-inch to 96-inch) welded steel, cement mortar lined, and cement mortar coated pipelines and hydroelectric facilities. Once complete the pipelines will deliver 60,000 acre-feet of water for municipal, industrial, fish, wildlife, and Endangered Species Act purposes. Under this project water will be provided to communities suffering from the impacts of the prolonged drought.

Evaluation Questions: Is the project completing its objectives in the timeframe expected? To what extent has the project been able to balance community and environmental needs? What level of support for the project exists with the state of Utah, local communities, and conservation groups? How may support influence the project’s effectiveness?

Data and Information Needed: Required data will be found in the following:

- ▶ Central Utah Water Conservancy District monthly and quarterly financial reports
- ▶ Central Utah Water Conservancy District construction progress reports
- ▶ Bureau of Reclamation construction reports
- ▶ Utah Reclamation Mitigation and Conservation Commission monthly reports

Contacts will include representatives from the Central Utah Project Completion Act Office, Central Utah Water Conservancy District, Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District, South Utah Valley Municipal Water Users Association, and the Utah Reclamation Mitigation and Conservation Commission. The evaluator may convene a focus group to assess support and areas of influence among key stakeholders.

Design/Methods: The evaluation would be conducted as an outcome evaluation through document review, interviews and observations. The program will adhere to Interior's evaluation policy by ensuring that Interior representatives are include at each stage of the evaluation.

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies: No challenges are anticipated to the evaluation.

Dissemination and Use: It is anticipated that the study would be shared with the Joint lead agencies consisting of the Central Utah Project Completion Act Office, Central Utah Water Conservancy District, and Utah Reclamation Mitigation and Conservation Commission. The evaluation would also be used in joint lead agency meetings and budget formulation planning.



Colorado River Basin, Photo by USBR



U.S. Department of the Interior
Office of Planning and Performance Management
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240