



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
**FISCAL YEAR 2025 ANNUAL EVALUATION PLAN**



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## INTRODUCTION

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The U.S. Department of the Interior plays an integral role in how the United States conserves and manages natural resources and cultural heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people. Interior is the steward for 20 percent of the nation's land: managing national parks, national wildlife refuges, and other public lands. Interior works closely with states, tribes, and other partners to help accomplish shared natural- and cultural-resources management goals across the country and abroad. Interior also has an important and unique mission to uphold and honor the United States' trust responsibilities and commitments to tribes and Alaska Natives.

Interior's evidence-building activities and evaluation results help inform program operations, policy, and regulations, as well as provide insight into the impact of resource allocation on achieving program objectives. Interior is presenting its Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Annual Evaluation Plan, per requirements of the Foundations for Evidence-Building Policymaking Act of 2018. The FY 2025 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 and/or outcomes of a program and to further organizational learning and improvement. The planned evaluations will also assist in answering priority learning questions included in [Interior's learning agenda](#). These evaluation plans support evidence-building for decision-making to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Interior as outlined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance [M-19-23](#) and [M-21-27](#).

## SIGNIFICANT PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Interior's [Evaluation Policy](#) allows latitude for bureaus and offices within the Department to define "significant" program evaluations based on their own needs. However, Interior 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, an agency priority goal, a cross-department 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

Interior published its first Annual Evaluation Plan in FY 2023. Although many of the proposals were not ultimately funded, Interior has made progress in evaluation planning. The Department is also continuing work toward designing and implementing program evaluations for programs that received funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law or Inflation Reduction Act in accordance with OMB [M-22-12](#).

### FY 2023 Annual Evaluation Plan Update

In the FY 2023 Annual Evaluation Plan, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service) put forth a planned significant program evaluation related to its International Affairs program. This evaluation sought to investigate two main questions: what factors predict highest impact and performance that can be used to inform grant-making decisions; and what is the effectiveness and frequency of conservation interventions supported by FWS financial assistance awards for foreign species conservation in Africa, Asia, and/or Latin America. The Service will continue to build upon this evaluation planning and implementation through FY 2025. In early FY 2024, the Service began the procurement process for a contractor to conduct evidence-building work.

### FY 2024 Annual Evaluation Plan Update

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement is planning to evaluate the Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization program, as described in Interior's FY 2024 Annual Evaluation Plan, during FY 2025.



Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, Colorado Photo by Patrick Myers, DOI

## EVALUATION TOPICS IN FY 2025

During Interior's budget formulation process for FY 2025, Interior organizations identified resources for evidence-building work. Interior's Office of Planning and Performance Management will continue to work with program leads to mature and refine plans for use of these resources for program evaluations. In FY 2025, Interior has identified the following areas for significant program evaluations:

- ▶ Kapapahuliau Climate Resilience Program
- ▶ National Park Service Youth Programs
- ▶ USGS Laboratories

These topics touch on Administration priority areas, including well-being for Native Hawaiians, engaging youth in natural resource conservation, and instilling confidence and satisfaction in federal programs.

In addition to these significant program evaluation proposals, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is in planning stages for an evaluation. BOEM is proposing an evaluation of its Environmental Program based on a framework from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine outlining attributes that characterize a first-in-class environmental program. This independent evaluation will assess the program's attributes in relationship to those described in the National Academies' framework, as well as any process improvements the program needs to undertake in order to achieve or maintain first-in-class status. BOEM plans to develop evaluation questions, initiate a contracting process, and design methodologies in FY 2025. A final evaluation plan will be highlighted in Interior's FY 2026 Annual Evaluation Plan.

The remainder of this report provides specific information on each of the proposed significant program evaluations in FY 2025.

## KAPAPAHULIAU CLIMATE RESILIENCE PROGRAM

Priority Area	Bureau
<p><b>Strategic Goal 1: Promote Well-Being, Equity, and Justice for Tribes, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Insular Communities</b></p> <p><b>Strategic Objective 1.2: Tribal, Native Hawaiian, and Insular Communities Are Safe and Healthy</b></p>	<p><b>OS/PMB/PEM/ONHR</b></p>

### Program Description

Interior launched the Kapapahuliau Climate Resilience Program in November 2023. This program provides \$20 million in initial funding available through the Inflation Reduction Act (P.L. 117-169) to enhance the ability of the Native Hawaiian Community (NHC) to navigate the effects of climate change through coping, adaptation, and transformation in ways that maintain the integrity and identity of the Native Hawaiian people. Kapapahuliau is centered around five Guiding Principles: (1) Aloha ‘Āina (love for the land) – the Hawaiian Islands and its environment are essential to NHC identity; (2) Native Hawaiian Organizations (NHO) currently represent the collective NHC; (3) Climate threats and impacts require multi-sector and multi-generational approaches; (4) Native Hawaiian climate resilience must incorporate cultural knowledge systems and ingenuity; and (5) Kuleana (Right & Responsibility) to advance NHC resilience through dialog and shared learning.

### Evaluation Questions

The evaluation intends to assess the effectiveness, achievements, outcomes, gaps, roadblocks, and remaining challenges of climate adaptation and resilience efforts that engage or serve the NHC. The evaluative process will encompass an indigenous model of understanding outcomes through the lens of three separate phases listed below:

1. How have Kapapahuliau outcomes met coping response, adaptation, and transformation priorities for climate change? Should the federal government be focusing on any new initiatives that continue support for climate adaptation efforts, and if so, what are they?
2. To what extent have the activities and projects implemented by NHOs fostered climate resilience across the broader NHC by protecting physical infrastructure, conserving cultural and natural resources, improving community health and wellness, generating and using scientific and indigenous knowledge, and building climate change literacy?
3. To what extent was the Kapapahuliau Program designed and implemented in a manner supportive of NHOs’ capacity to access future federal financial assistance, as well as financial assistance from other government, non-profit, or private entities? What programmatic barriers or opportunities exist with respect to capacity building for NHOs? How effective were the mechanisms for funding in providing NHOs with opportunities for climate adaptation? To what extent was the Kapapahuliau Program effective in responding to NHC concerns and obtaining feedback?

### **Data and Information Needed**

Existing datasets will be accessed from federal, state, and local/county government agencies; academia in Hawai'i; and various non-governmental organizations – particularly those datasets that involve climate-related research and analysis. Additionally, the evaluation will involve the collection of new data specifically related to the implementation of the Kapapahuliau Program.

### **Design/Methods**

Evaluation methods are under development. It is likely that the evaluation will involve a combination of document reviews, data or statistical analysis, interviews with Native Hawaiian Organizations, focus groups, recordation of observations at annual Native Hawaiian Organization gatherings, and structured surveys.

### **Challenges and Mitigation Strategies**

Among the challenges facing the evaluation include:

- Completion and solicitation of a Request for Proposal (RFP) for qualified evaluators who are interested in and meet the terms and conditions of the statement of work;
- Ability of the evaluator to have familiarity, connectivity with, and capacity to understand issues within the Native Hawaiian Community;
- Ability of the evaluator to access existing datasets to conduct analyses;
- Ability to satisfy applicable Paperwork Reduction Act clearance requirements for the collection of new data via surveys, focus groups, and structured interviews;
- Timing of Native Hawaiian Organization grant and cooperative agreement awards vis-à-vis the contracting of evaluator to ensure sufficient time to negotiate and implement the evaluation statement of work; and
- The ability of Interior's Office of Native Hawaiian Relations to convene annual gatherings of Native Hawaiian Organization awardees and facilitate these gatherings in such a manner that will provide useful information for the evaluator.

Mitigation strategies and actions to address these and other challenges will involve active day-to-day program oversight and coordination with relevant agencies. Additional strategies include providing an accurate Statement of Work and necessary qualifications for anticipated contracted services.

### **Dissemination and Use**

It is expected that the evaluation findings will be assembled into one or more reports, intended to be shared and made available internally for Interior and other federal agencies. Findings will provide actionable information for Interior to improve future financial assistance programs and climate adaptation strategies for the Native Hawaiian Community. Additional analysis of findings will be prepared and made available for the Native Hawaiian Community and the general public.

## NATIONAL PARK SERVICE YOUTH PROGRAMS

Priority Area	Bureau
<p><b>Strategic Goal 4: Serve and Honor the Public Trust</b></p> <p><b>Strategic Objective 4.2: Access to opportunities, services, and resources is equitable and just</b></p>	<p><b>NPS</b></p>

### Program Description

The National Park Service (NPS) Youth Division houses various youth and young adult development programs throughout the United States to meet the needs of the public sector and engage youth in the NPS. These programs develop conservation and environmental leadership skills, provide career opportunities, and support the next generation to preserve and protect public lands and the nation’s legacy. Youth and young adult programs require regular assessment of participant experiences, satisfaction, and outcomes to ensure that NPS continues advancing its public engagement, workforce readiness, and strategic goals.

### Evaluation Questions

How can NPS improve youth and young adult program operations to ensure that diverse participants have safe, inclusive, and engaging experiences with NPS? How effective are NPS youth and young adult programs in preparing participants for careers in natural/ cultural resource preservation and conservation?

### Data and Information Needed

The evaluation team will collect qualitative and quantitative data.

### Design/Methods

The NPS is proposing an evaluation which will examine both program processes and outcomes. To determine whether programs are providing an inclusive and engaging experience for diverse participants (i.e., program processes), the evaluation team will first administer a general survey to collect initial quantitative and qualitative data on participant demographics, participant experiences, program goals, program procedures, and program systems. This data will then be analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and themes in participant experiences and program operations for each individual program. Next, based on the results of the initial survey, the evaluation team will create program-specific interview questions to more deeply explore issues which might be negatively impacting accessibility or participant experiences in particular programs. Issues with program operations are likely to vary widely, however, past interviews have focused on topics like recruitment, travel, site preparation, park location, housing, background checks, accessibility, and NPS park culture.



To assess the effectiveness of NPS youth programs in preparing participants for natural resource careers (i.e., program outcomes), the evaluation team will also incorporate interview questions focused on career interest, technical skills learned, mentorship, and opportunities for conversion to permanent employment. This set of outcome-focused questions will be standardized across programs to provide greater insight into how NPS is guiding career development in the field of natural resource management and generating employment opportunities for diverse program participants.

### Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Communication between multiple different stakeholders in NPS youth programs is a challenge. To mitigate this challenge, the NPS Youth Division will develop a communication plan. The division will also serve as a connection hub to assist with communication across all programs, NPS Youth Services, and the evaluation team. This will include scheduling and connecting to multiple youth programming partners outside the agency and scheduling site visits to observe programs.

### Dissemination and Use

The evaluation team will present the project results in a written report and visual presentation. The report, presentation slides, and raw data will be transferred to the NPS Youth division after completion of the evaluation. Results of the evaluation will inform budget allocation to various youth programs across NPS and identify high-performing youth programs for scale-up. Lastly, because this evaluation employs principles from Collaborative Evaluation (i.e., active and on-going engagement between program staff and evaluators), results will be used to continually modify youth and young adult program design to improve and better support successful participant experiences.



Colorado National Monument Junior Ranger Camp Raptor Week Photo by NPS

## USGS LABORATORIES

Priority Area	Bureau
<p><b>Strategic Goal 4: Serve and Honor the Public Trust</b></p> <p><b>Strategic Objective 4.4: There is confidence and satisfaction in the U.S. Department of the Interior</b></p>	<p><b>USGS</b></p>

### Program Description

The U.S. Geological Survey’s (USGS) laboratory operations consist of more than 1,600 personnel and nearly 500 laboratories in 175 unique locations nationwide. The USGS laboratory operations span all science Mission Areas which include core science systems, ecosystems, energy and minerals, natural hazards, and water resources. USGS laboratory science is critical to water resources decision-makers, critical mineral mapping, and early detection of invasive species, among other concerns of federal, state, and local partners, collaborators, and stakeholders.

### Evaluation Questions

To what extent have quality management and risk-informed internal controls improved the organization’s ability to detect, correct, and prevent laboratory issues? After implementing the National Academies recommendations, are there additional measures, improvements, staffing, or resources that could help improve quality management?

### Data and Information Needed

The evaluator(s) will collect both qualitative and quantitative data on the implementation of new procedures related to quality management and risk-informed internal controls. Data collection is internal to USGS lab information; therefore a Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) clearance will not be needed.



Aquatic ecosystems make a difference in the carbon cycle. The location in this photo is located near Beaver, Alaska approximately 100 miles north of Fairbanks Photo by Mark M. Dornblaser, USGS

### Design/Methods

The USGS is proposing an outcome evaluation. The newly formed Federal Advisory Committee on USGS Science Quality and Integrity will serve as the evaluation team. This team consists of external subject-matter experts with relevant experience in areas such as scientific integrity, quality management, laboratory management, risk assessment, and program evaluation. This will ensure an unbiased perspective for the evaluation. For all laboratories (or for a representative sampling of laboratories, depending on what is feasible), the committee will collect qualitative and quantitative data regarding the implementation of the USGS Quality Management System and risk-informed internal controls from internal documents, USGS staff interviews, focus groups aimed at providing feedback, and a survey of USGS staff. To complete this evaluation, the committee will use a logic model, refined scope of work, achievable work plan, and strong project management and evaluation tools to best answer the evaluation questions. The evaluator(s) will draw from the following documentation:

- National Academies review report to understand the pre-QMS-implementation state of the USGS and determine if the internal controls that were implemented were appropriate
- Quality Management System policy and requirements to compare to the National Academies review
- Survey results from implementation participants
- Laboratory documentation of internal controls and quality-assurance practices
- The USGS software application built to support the Quality Management System, compliance with requirements, and laboratory operations (i.e., “Q-Track”)

For a subset of laboratories (10%) that have yet to implement the new quality management system, the committee will also collect pre- and post-implementation qualitative and quantitative data on specific indicators that best capture systems’ ability to detect, correct, and prevent laboratory issues. The evaluation of these subset laboratories will begin in January 2024 (i.e., before implementation), and conclude at the end of the 2025 calendar year, with data collection occurring regularly over the two years. The committee will use surveys of internal laboratory staff and observed documented evidence (i.e., using laboratory documentation and quality-assurance practices) to assess the degree of understanding of quality management topics and the level of risk controls in place both before and after implementation. Specifically, the following concepts will be evaluated:

- Activity-level and critical-point risk and the extent to which risk evaluation is used to inform controls.
- Whether high-risk routine activities are documented in a reviewed, approved, and version-controlled standard operating procedure.
- Equipment verification and calibrations are performed and documented on critical equipment, and outcomes are evaluated against acceptance criteria.

- Routine laboratory methods in use have previously been validated and the laboratory has verified their ability to perform the method.
- Quality controls are performed at a pre-determined frequency, evaluated against acceptance criteria, and the results are traceable to sample or experimental results.
- Technical training and the effectiveness of training is documented.
- Environmental samples are assigned unique identifiers. These identifiers are used throughout the sample workflow to ensure traceability to equipment performance, method performance, sample information, and results.
- First- and second-level reviews of laboratory results are performed and documented before use.
- When problems arise, risk is evaluated to inform the level of corrective actions and communication needed.

The evaluator(s) will determine if information and data need to be collected in subsequent years to properly address the evaluation questions. The evaluator(s) will then synthesize the information gathered from USGS laboratories, documentation, interviews, and focus groups into observations, best practices, and findings.

### **Challenges and Mitigation Strategies**

The scope of the evaluation includes the three high-level recommendations of the National Academies report, the Quality Management System with approximately 50 requirements developed and implemented by the USGS, and the nearly 500 laboratories nationwide. This scope has been identified as a challenge due to the broad range of science activities, number of laboratories (500) and laboratory staff (1,600), research methods, laboratory sizes (from one to 100 full-time employees, with a median of 2.3 employees working in each laboratory), and workflows that the internal controls were developed to address. To mitigate this challenge, the evaluation team will need to clearly refine and manage the scope of the evaluation to ensure the review is of the highest quality and rigor while evaluating the extent of improvement in detection, correction, and prevention of laboratory issues.

### **Dissemination and Use**

The evaluation committee will post the results to a public-facing website. Recommendations from the evaluation will be used to strengthen the Quality Management System policy, requirements, and implementation.

**U.S. Department of the Interior**  
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Front: Coastal Spray Zone, Kalaupapa National Historical Park, Hawai'i Photo by Hailey Shchepanik, NPS  
Back: Photo from Secretary Haaland's visit to Hawai'i in June 2023 to highlight President Biden's Investing in America Agenda, Indigenous Knowledge and Collaborative Conservation in Hawai'i  
Photo by DOI <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/secretary-haaland-highlights-investing-america-agenda-indigenous-knowledge-and>