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

Sustains critical pay raises for brave federal firefighters and supports wildfire suppression efforts, invests in Tribal communities, and rejects extreme new policy riders and drastic cuts to core environmental and conservation programs

Washington, D.C. – The Fiscal Year 2024 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act provides \$41.2 billion in total funding.

“This bill ensures the country is prepared to combat wildfire by maintaining pay increases for federal firefighters, protecting agency staffing levels to be prepared for wildfire season, as well as investing in wildfire preparedness and suppression efforts,” said Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. **“This bill also continues to ensure that we don’t lose sight of meeting our trust and treaty obligations to Tribes, protecting our lands and waters, and safeguarding clean air and clean water. We held the line to reject new poison pill riders that would have set us back on critical efforts such as addressing climate change and protecting federal lands and endangered species.”**

“As wildfire season grows longer and more severe by the year, our federal firefighters are bravely responding, and this bill honors their sacrifices and vital work by maintaining pay increases they have earned—and by investing in our wildfire prevention and suppression efforts nationwide,” said Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. **“This bipartisan bill delivers essential funding to help keep our promises to Tribes and to support Tribal communities and families—including by continuing to provide advance appropriations so the Indian Health Service can serve patients with certainty. It protects our public lands, wildlife, and**

clean air and water for every American by rejecting steep funding cuts and extreme new riders—allowing Democrats to safeguard America’s natural resources and build on the historic climate action of the Biden administration.”

Key Points & Highlights – Combatting Wildfire

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. To that end, the bill continues the additional pay authority provided by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and protects current staffing levels. The Committee supports proposals to permanently authorize higher base pay for firefighters at the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior and is committed to providing the required resources to implement any compensation reforms enacted in future legislation.

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 to 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 2024 wildfires.

Key Points & Highlights – Tribal Programs

Tribal Programs: In total, the bill provides \$10.88 billion for Tribal programs across the Department of the Interior and the Indian Health Service.

Indian Health Service (IHS): The bill provides \$6.96 billion for IHS—an increase of \$3.6 million over fiscal year 2023—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 2024. The bill provides an advance appropriation for fiscal year 2025 of \$5.19 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 \$61.4 million to staff newly constructed facilities to ensure that IHS has the health care providers needed to meet increased patient demand.

Supporting Tribal Self-Governance and Essential Services: The bill protects essential government services for key areas like roads, housing improvements, natural resources protection, Tribal courts, economic development, and social services by maintaining the fiscal year 2023 enacted levels for Tribal priority allocations. These budget lines are the lifeblood for Tribal governments exercising self-determination and are crucial to upholding the federal government’s trust responsibility.

Tribal Public Safety and Justice: The bill protects funding to support and invest in Tribal public safety and justice programs by providing \$555.5 million—equal to fiscal year 2023—in resources for police services, special initiatives to address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons cases, Tribal courts, and detention and corrections officers.

Maintaining Investments in Tribal Schools: The bill protects the Bureau of Indian Education’s Operation of Indian Education Programs by providing \$1.13 billion, equal to 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 funding to support school operational requirements, staffing, operating costs, Native language programs, scholarships, and support for school connectivity and remote learning capabilities. Protecting 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. These are required payments that provide funding for Tribes’ overhead costs for self-governance under the Indian Self-Determination Education and Assistance Act.

Key Points & Highlights – Protecting Our Environment and Public Lands

Department of the Interior: The bill provides \$14.8 billion in total for the Department of the Interior, excluding additional funding for the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve. This amount includes \$1.41 billion for the Bureau of Land Management, \$1.722 billion for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and \$3.325 billion for the National Park Service. Staffing at the Department is maintained at current levels to protect and manage our national parks, national wildlife refuges, and other federal lands, to conserve and protect wildlife, and more.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): The bill provides \$9.16 billion to protect essential funding for EPA’s critical responsibilities to protect our environment and public health. The bill maintains current staffing levels across all EPA programs—including in the clean water, clean air, climate, and toxic programs—by keeping 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 2023 levels. The bill also maintains the Tribal water grant program, rural water grants, and the wildfire smoke grant program at the fiscal year 2023 levels. It also maintains fiscal year 2023 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 Puget Sound, Columbia River, Great Lakes, Long Island Sound, and Southern New England Estuaries.

Finally, in combination with the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), total Superfund funding for fiscal year 2024 is \$3.02 billion, an increase of \$1.79 billion above the pre-IIJA and pre-IRA spending level.

Forest Service: The bill provides \$6.07 billion for the Forest Service, excluding additional funding for the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve. Of this amount, \$3.76 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 \$175 million for hazardous fuels reduction projects and \$31 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.

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 \$1.09 billion for the Smithsonian Institution.

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