

**STATEMENT OF DEBRA HAALAND
SECRETARY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Chair Pingree, Ranking Member Joyce, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the President’s Discretionary Request for fiscal year 2022 and discuss other matters of importance to the Department of the Interior.

I would like to start by telling you what an honor and privilege it is for me to be here with you today to represent the Department of the Interior. It is also deeply meaningful for me, as the first Native American Cabinet Secretary, to speak to you from the ancestral homelands of the Anacostan and Piscataway people.

This is my first hearing since my confirmation, and the month I have now spent at the Department of the Interior has provided me with a sincere appreciation for the mission and the work of its tens of thousands of dedicated professionals. One of the most important tasks for me as Secretary is lifting up the voices and the expertise of the Department’s dedicated career employees to inform the decisions that we make. I only wish every American could see the hard work and the singular focus on results that I see on a daily basis from our workforce.

I also take great pride that the Department is also focused on listening to the people we serve—from conducting extensive Tribal consultations on how to strengthen our government-to-government relationships, to engaging a diverse group of industry, labor, environmental justice, natural resource advocates, and Indigenous organizations about the need to reform our outdated fossil fuel leasing system.

This spirit of listening, outreach, and collaboration is the same approach I intend to take in my relationship with the Appropriations Subcommittees. I will honor Interior’s long tradition of working closely and collaboratively with this Subcommittee, and I understand the important role you play in the success of the Department and our programs. I commit to you I will continue

that tradition with the confident expectation that working together we can accomplish great things on behalf the American people.

I am proud of all the work this Administration has already done in a short period of time to address the unprecedented challenges we face as a Nation, including the need to address the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthen the economy, address the existential threat of climate change, and make real and tangible progress on racial justice and equity in all facets of American life.

This includes the passage of the historic American Rescue Plan, which includes billions of dollars in investments to help Tribal Nations weather the pandemic and stabilize their economies, support Tribal schools, as well as address wildlife-related pandemic concerns. After conducting extensive consultation with Tribal Nations on how to distribute funds, the Department is fully focused on implementing the plan and ensuring these funds reach the communities who need them as expeditiously as possible. This is in addition to our daily contributions to the whole-of-government response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which we implement diligently to keep our workforce and the people who visit Federal lands safe.

That said, there is so much more work to do. That's why I am pleased to come before you today to talk about the President's 2022 Discretionary Request. This proposal makes a significant down payment to implement the President's ambitious vision to lift up the Nation by addressing the climate crisis, providing much-needed resources to Tribal Nations, restoring balance on public lands and waters, advancing environmental justice, and investing in a clean energy future.

The President's 2022 Discretionary Request lays out the important role the Department of the Interior will play to accomplish the Administration's goals. The proposal for Interior totals \$17.4 billion, a \$2.4 billion or 16 percent increase from the 2021 enacted level. This request stands in stark contrast to the proposals for Interior during the last four years, which were on average, \$2 billion below the actual amounts appropriated by this Subcommittee.

The President has released his discretionary funding priorities for 2022 which include a range of targeted investments across government to move our country forward. Within Interior, the President's Discretionary Request invests \$4.0 billion, more than \$600 million above current funding, to honor and strengthen our commitments to Tribal Nations across a range of programs.

The request invests in teachers and students in Bureau of Indian Education funded schools, and Tribal programs in clean energy development, and law enforcement and court programs to improve safety. These investments will directly enhance the educational opportunities of over 46,000 K-12 students in Bureau of Indian Education funded schools, support the effective management of the 56 million acres of lands held in trust for the benefit of Tribal Nations – the largest land trust in the world – and strengthen self-determination and self-governance programs to bolster Tribal sovereignty. These investments will complement the American Rescue Plan’s substantial investments in Indian Country, as well as other investments in the Discretionary Request, to support and strengthen Tribal communities.

The Discretionary Request invests in jobs and the environmental quality of energy communities across the country, proposing over \$450 million for Interior to remediate many of the thousands of orphaned oil and gas wells and reclaim abandoned mines on Federal and non-Federal lands. This funding, which more than doubles the enacted 2021 discretionary level, builds on the goal of creating 250,000 good-paying union jobs.

The Discretionary Request promotes racial justice and equity in underserved communities by embedding environmental justice and racial equity goals into programs across the Department, with discrete investments in key areas, such as an additional \$20 million to expand access to the over 70 national park units that preserve and tell the story of historically underrepresented and marginalized groups, and to increase support to local and State efforts to preserve sites that document the struggle for equal opportunity. The investments include funding for a voting rights center honoring the legacy of Civil Rights leaders, including that of the late Representative John Lewis, at the Selma Interpretive Center.

Through the 2022 Discretionary Request, and other means, the Administration is taking decisive action to address the existential threat of climate change. The Discretionary Request provides an additional \$550 million over 2021 enacted levels to decrease climate pollution, accelerate clean energy deployment, and expand efforts around climate adaptation and ecosystem resilience among all the Department’s land management agencies. These investments will directly benefit Americans by helping to limit climate-induced disruptions, including for coastal communities,

the outdoor recreation economy, and people whose lives and livelihoods are intertwined with Interior-managed lands and resources.

These efforts will be supported by an investment of \$200 million in climate-related science to improve our understanding of climate impacts and how best to implement mitigation, adaptation, and resilience efforts. The Discretionary Request also provides an additional \$200 million for science-driven conservation to align management of the Nation's natural resources with America's climate, biodiversity, and clean energy needs. These investments support the goal of conserving 30 percent of land and water by 2030, including through voluntary actions and incentives that support the stewardship efforts of farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners. The funding request will also support the Civilian Climate Corps to develop the next generation of conservation workers and create a new pathway to good-paying jobs.

To address the growing threat of wildfire to public health and community safety, the Discretionary Request proposes a robust increase of \$100 million in Interior's hazardous fuels and burned area rehabilitation programs. This funding will support efforts to manage vegetation and reduce the intensity, severity, and negative effects of wildfire, in line with the Administration's science-based approach to risk management, and complementing our other efforts to improve land health and resilience to climate change and reduce carbon emissions. As we head into what is likely to be a very challenging wildland fire season due to historic levels of drought in the West, these important investments in risk reduction continue to be top of mind.

The 2022 funding request proposes to rebuild core functions and capacities within Interior which have diminished in recent years with investments in USGS science and staffing, and the core operations of parks, wildlife refuges and public lands.

The President's 2022 Discretionary Request recommends investments for Congress to consider as part of the appropriations process, but I also want to take a moment to discuss how this proposal complements the recently released American Jobs Plan. The investments in the 2022 request provide a key opportunity for the Administration and Congress to work together to restore levels of investment in programs at the Department and across government, and to lay a foundation for core programs that improve the life of everyday Americans. At the same time, the

American Jobs Plan lays out the President's comprehensive, long-term strategy to create millions of good jobs, rebuild our country's infrastructure, and position America to out-compete others. They both play a critical role in the President's vision to Build Back Better.

Interior also plays an important role in the America Jobs Plan. The Plan proposes a \$16 billion investment to address orphan wells and abandoned mine lands, which will put hundreds of thousands to work in union jobs plugging oil and gas wells and restoring and reclaiming abandoned coal, hardrock, and uranium mines. At the same time, this investment will reduce the methane and brine that leaks from these wells. The Plan invests \$10 billion in the Civilian Climate Corps, to put a new generation of Americans to work conserving and restoring public lands and waters, increasing reforestation, increasing carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protecting biodiversity, improving access to recreation, and addressing the changing climate.

The American Jobs Plan's inclusive investments will support our Nation's rural and Tribal communities through targeted funding as part of broader efforts to expand broadband coverage and improve roads, bridges, and water systems. The Plan also calls for a \$5 billion Rural Partnership Program for economic development in rural regions, including Tribal Nations. These historic investments will help to revitalize rural and Tribal communities and address environmental injustices.

The President believes we must use every lever at our disposal to meet the moment and make necessary progress. I firmly believe we have the opportunity of a lifetime to strengthen our country, protect our environment, and improve our way of life for generations to come.

I look forward to working with you to achieve these goals. Thank you again for having me, and am pleased to answer any questions you may have.