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America the Beautiful 2023 Annual Report

*An update on progress made to support locally led
conservation and restoration efforts*

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Letter to America

Dear Reader:

It is an honor to share with you this third annual report on President Biden's *America the Beautiful* initiative, a decade-long, locally led campaign to conserve and restore the lands and waters on which we all depend, and that bind us together as a country. This report describes the exciting progress that has been made this year to deliver on the ambitious conservation agenda that the President launched in 2021.

From restoring wetlands and building new parks to reconnecting wildlife habitat and expanding access to the outdoors, conservation efforts are accelerating across the country, to the benefit of families and communities everywhere. Much of this work is being made possible by the President's Investing in America agenda, which, through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, is delivering \$1.4 billion for ecosystem restoration, aquatic connectivity, invasive species control, availability of native seeds for restoration, and much more. The President's Inflation Reduction Act, the largest climate investment in history, has also been instrumental in driving the progress that you will read about in this report, including expanding urban tree cover, restoring our public lands for wildlife and recreation, and using nature-based solutions to bolster climate resilience in coastal communities, to name a few.

As we reflect on the third year of the *America the Beautiful* initiative, we remain committed to the belief that everyone should have access to the benefits of nature; that every community's contributions to the stewardship of our lands and waters should be supported, encouraged, and celebrated; and that the work we do to conserve our resources should honor and reflect all of this nation's stories, cultures, and traditions. In March of 2023, we were proud to host the first Conservation in Action Summit at the Department of the Interior and to hear the President articulate his ambitious and inclusive vision for conservation, celebrate our nation's extraordinary conservation accomplishments under his administration, and to challenge us to do all we can to help support and accelerate locally led, collaborative conservation.

The enormous strides we have made together over the past year make me and my colleagues in the Biden-Harris administration confident and optimistic about our collective ability to achieve the ambitious conservation goals President Biden has challenged us to pursue. As the President noted during the first Conservation in Action Summit, "There is nothing beyond our capacity if we work together." We look forward to continuing to share updates on our country's proud conservation efforts as we continue our work to build a better future for all.

Sincerely,



Brenda Mallory
Chair, White House Council on Environmental Quality

I. Introduction

In 2023, the U.S. Federal family continued to support and advance locally led conservation and restoration efforts as part of the *America the Beautiful* initiative across the nation. As summarized in the *America the Beautiful 2022 Annual Report*, this call to action was born out of Executive Order 14008 on *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad* that President Biden signed during his first month in office. The President charged the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior (DOI), Agriculture (USDA), and Commerce (DOC), along with the Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), with the goal of conserving at least 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030.

As part of the *America the Beautiful* initiative, the Biden-Harris administration committed to produce annual, publicly available reports. This report—the third on *America the Beautiful*—provides an overview of activities that occurred in 2023 consistent with the goals and principles of the initiative.



President Biden at the 2023 White House Conservation in Action Summit. *Photo by DOI.*

Background on the America the Beautiful Initiative

For years, scientists have sounded the alarm about the extinction crisis that threatens the health of the natural systems that supply our food, water, fiber, fuel, and other resources and support an amazing diversity of life. This nature crisis exacerbates—and is exacerbated by—the impacts of climate change that are rapidly altering our terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems. Nature-deprived communities across the nation bear the brunt of nature loss and climate change, resulting in disproportionate impacts to their health and well-being.

The *America the Beautiful* initiative is designed to strengthen the nation’s economy by addressing the interconnected climate and biodiversity crises and improving equitable access to nature. The initiative builds on America’s long tradition of collaborative stewardship to build a future where every person in the country can experience the opportunities provided by our nation’s cherished lands and waters. Locally led and

partnership-driven, *America the Beautiful* supports conservation and restoration efforts across the country.

Following the President's Executive Order in January 2021, the Federal Government conducted listening sessions to inform the *America the Beautiful* initiative. A wide range of stakeholders provided input that supported the development of the *America the Beautiful* initiative. As reflected in the initial report from May 2021, the input reflected significant agreement and shared values across many stakeholders, leaders, geographies, and political perspectives on the value of natural places and healthy ecosystems in the fight against climate change, in protecting clean drinking water and clean air, and in safeguarding an abundance and diversity of wildlife. The feedback also emphasized the belief that the country can and should be doing more to support and accelerate locally led conservation efforts of all kinds across the country, as well as the need to expand access to the outdoors and nature for all communities.

The input also illuminated strong agreement on a set of principles adopted as the foundation of the initiative. These eight principles guide the work that the Biden-Harris administration has done and will continue to do to advance conservation and restoration:

- Pursue a collaborative and inclusive approach to conservation;
- Conserve America's lands and waters for the benefit of all people;
- Support locally led and locally designed conservation efforts;
- Honor Tribal sovereignty and support the priorities of Tribal Nations;
- Pursue conservation and restoration approaches that create jobs and support healthy communities;
- Honor private property rights and support the voluntary stewardship efforts of private landowners and fishers;
- Use science as a guide; and
- Build on existing tools and strategies with an emphasis on flexibility and adaptive approaches.

Additionally, stakeholders helped identify six areas ripe for successful collaboration through the initiative: creating more parks in underserved communities; supporting Tribally led conservation and restoration priorities; expanding collaborative conservation of fish and wildlife habitats and corridors; increasing access for outdoor recreation; rewarding voluntary conservation efforts of fishers, ranchers, farmers, and forest owners; and creating jobs by investing in restoration and resilience.

Within the Biden-Harris administration, the *America the Beautiful* Interagency Working Group is co-chaired by CEQ Chair Brenda Mallory, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, and Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo. Together, they help coordinate and advance conservation and restoration work across the government—with many additional agencies playing significant roles.

In year one, USDA made big investments to support conservation outcomes on private lands, enrolling more acres in Farm Bill conservation programs and making its programs easier to use and more responsive to the needs of farmers, ranchers, and other landowners. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) designated the Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary in Lake Michigan, initiated the designation process for the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary off the coast of California and expanded the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. Additionally, DOI led action to facilitate Tribal co-stewardship on public lands, made big investments in new parks and outdoor spaces through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and furthered work with States and Tribes to conserve wildlife corridors. The first year, too, marked restorations of national monuments, including Bears Ears, in which President Biden reaffirmed the principle that once a place is protected, it is to be protected forever.

Progress continued in year two with the enactment of the Inflation Reduction Act, which reflects the most ambitious action taken on combatting the climate crisis in the nation's history. Thanks to the historic funding, the administration launched the America the Beautiful Challenge as a "one-stop shop" competitive grant program to support conservation and restoration projects across the nation. On the policy front, the administration issued a new executive order on strengthening the nation's forests, communities, and local economies; a plan for implementing nature-based solutions; first-of-its-kind government-wide guidance for Federal agencies to recognize and include Indigenous Knowledge; and interagency commitments to the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR), and the Nature in Communities Committee. President Biden welcomed three new national parks, signing the Amache National Historic Site Act, the Brown v. Board of Education National Historical Park Expansion and Redesignation Act, and the Blackwell School National Historic Site. He also designated the first national monument of this administration, Camp Hale – Continental Divide National Monument in Colorado. The administration strengthened the system of protected public lands and waters with the establishment of the Lost Trail Conservation Area in Montana as the 568th unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), and the Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve in the Long Island Sound. Additionally, the Federal family continued to strengthen public engagement, standing up the Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council and a Marine and Coastal Area-based Management Advisory Committee.

Overview: Year Three of America the Beautiful

In 2023, the Biden-Harris administration celebrated a wide range of locally led, partnership-driven efforts across the nation under the *America the Beautiful* initiative. Building upon the strong foundation laid in 2021 and 2022, the administration supported conservation of lands and waters through historic investments, new policies and initiatives, and new national parks, wildlife refuges, and other conservation actions.

Historic Investments

Through President Biden's Investing in America agenda, historic investments are continuing to grow the American economy from the bottom up and middle out—from \$392 billion for upgrading public infrastructure and investing in clean energy, to driving over \$600 billion in private sector manufacturing and clean energy investments in the United States, to creating good paying jobs and building an economy that will combat climate change, make communities more resilient, and address some of the legacies of racism and injustice.

Combined, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act represent the largest investments in climate resilience in the nation's history. On the two-year anniversary of the signing of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, for example, DOI released a new analysis estimating that new and existing Department programs supported by the historic law supported 17,669 jobs on average and contributed an average of \$2 billion to the economy each year.

Recently, in coordination with the release of the Fifth National Climate Assessment, President Biden announced more than \$6 billion in investments to make communities across the country more resilient to the impacts of climate change, including by strengthening America's aging electric grid infrastructure, reducing flood risk to communities, supporting conservation efforts, and advancing environmental justice.

These investments build on the significant resources provided through the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), a bipartisan investment that improves visitor experiences, bolsters climate resilience, and invests in the economy by creating good-paying jobs strengthening our national parks, wildlife refuges, recreation areas, and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)-funded schools. For example, since 2021, Interior-led GAOA projects have supported an average of 17,000 jobs and generated an average of \$1.8 billion for local economies annually.

The Federal family also celebrated the second year of the America the Beautiful Challenge (ATBC), a competitive grant program made possible through President Biden's Investing in America agenda, with funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, other Federal conservation programs, and private sources. This year, the Biden-Harris administration joined the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and public- and private-sector partners in announcing \$141.3 million in grants through the ATBC. The 74 new grants announced support landscape-scale conservation projects across 46 States, three U.S. territories, and 21 Tribal Nations, and generate at least \$12 million in matching contributions for a total conservation impact of more than \$153 million. Approximately 40 percent of 2023 grants and funding will support projects implemented by Indigenous communities, in line with President Biden's Justice40 Initiative and emphasis on incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in addressing the climate and biodiversity crises.

This year, too, USDA issued more than \$1.77 billion to agricultural producers and landowners through its Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a critical piece of the Department's efforts to support climate-smart agriculture and forestry on working lands. The CRP's more than 667,000 participants received payments from USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) for their voluntary conservation efforts on more than 23 million acres of private land, and between September 2021 and October 2023 CRP grew by 21 percent in terms of acres enrolled.

The USDA also announced a commitment to invest at least \$500 million over the next five years in wildlife conservation, leveraging its private lands conservation programs through its Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) effort. The funding will help deliver a series of cohesive Frameworks for Conservation Action, which establish a common vision across the partnership of public and private interests and goals for delivering conservation resources in a given ecosystem, combining cutting-edge science with local knowledge.

Additionally, DOI announced a restoration and resilience framework to guide strategic investments, catalyze coordination, drive meaningful outcomes, and advance climate resilience. Through President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, the Department is working to implement a more than \$2 billion down payment to restore the nation's lands and waters.

New Policies and Initiatives

The Biden-Harris administration celebrated and announced new approaches and avenues for supporting conservation and restoration nationwide in line with the guiding principles and goals of the *America the Beautiful* initiative. The administration launched the American Climate Corps to train young people in clean energy, conservation, and climate resilience skills, to create good-paying jobs, and to tackle the climate crisis. This Corps will mobilize a new, diverse generation of more than 20,000 Americans. Seven Federal agencies – the Departments of Commerce, the Interior, Agriculture, Labor and Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, and AmeriCorps – entered into a formal Memorandum of Understanding that will serve as a blueprint for the multiagency initiative.

The Biden-Harris administration followed through on the promise made on World Ocean Day in 2022 to develop and implement a first-ever, whole-of-government Ocean Climate Action Plan. The plan released this year outlines three goals that mobilize the Federal Government and civil society to take effective and innovative ocean climate action: create a carbon-neutral future, without emissions that cause climate change and harm human health; accelerate solutions that tap the power of natural coastal and ocean systems to absorb and store greenhouse gases, reduce the climate threat, and protect communities and ecosystems against unavoidable changes; and enhance community resilience to ocean change by developing ocean-based solutions that help communities adapt and thrive in our changing climate.

Consistent with direction from Executive Order 14072, *Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies*, in December 2023, USDA announced a proposal to amend all 128 forest land management plans to conserve and steward old-growth forest conditions on national forests and grasslands nationwide. This will provide consistent direction across the Forest Service on how to conserve and restore old-growth forest conditions across the nation, and marks the first time that the Forest Service has adopted a nationwide forest plan amendment to guide new management direction on all national forests at once. Also, in December 2023, the Forest Service initiated the process to update the Northwest Forest Plan for climate resilience, including for mature and old forest ecosystems. In April 2023, USDA and DOI released the joint report "Old-Growth and Mature Forest: Definition, Identification, and Initial Inventory on Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service Lands." The report established a comprehensive definition framework and an initial inventory that shows the distribution of mature and old-growth forests across lands administered by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In addition, the Forest Service published the "Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for National Forest and Grassland Climate Resilience," asking for public input into how the Forest Service should adapt its current policies to protect, conserve, and manage national forests and grasslands for climate resilience. In response to Executive Order 14072, USDA and DOI also worked together to develop a "Reforestation Targets and Federal Cone and Seed Collection Strategy," which recognizes the urgency to increase the rate of reforestation and to integrate the best available science and technology in the deployment of climate-informed reforestation techniques.

Additionally, BLM issued a proposal for public comment that would guide the balanced management of America's public lands for the benefit of current and future generations. The proposed Public Lands Rule would, among other things, provide tools for BLM to improve the resilience of public lands in the face of a changing climate; conserve important wildlife habitat and intact landscapes; plan for development; and better recognize unique cultural and natural resources on public lands.

At the 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Biden-Harris Administration unveiled the first-ever U.S. Ocean Justice Strategy to advance environmental justice for communities that rely on the ocean and Great Lakes for economic, cultural, spiritual, recreational, and food security purposes. For the first time, the Federal Government outlined how it will integrate principles of equity and environmental justice in federal ocean activities, including conservation, management of marine resources, and infrastructure projects.

New National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, and Other Conservation Actions

National Monuments

President Biden took action to establish four additional national monuments that protect historically and culturally significant areas and conserve our nation's treasured outdoor

spaces. At the White House Conservation in Action Summit in March, President Biden established two new national monuments: Avi Kwa Ame National Monument in Nevada and Castner Range National Monument in Texas. Avi Kwa Ame honors Tribal Nations and Indigenous peoples while conserving our public lands and growing America’s outdoor recreation economy. In Texas, Castner Range expands access to the outdoors for the El Paso community while honoring our nation’s veterans and servicemembers.

In July, President Biden signed a proclamation establishing the Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley National Monument in Mississippi and Illinois. The new national monument will help tell the story of the events surrounding Emmett Till’s murder, their significance in the civil rights movement and American history, and the broader story of Black oppression, survival, and bravery in America.



President Biden and Vice President Harris at the signing of the Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley National Monument. *Photo by White House.*

In August, President Biden established the Baaj Nwaavjo I’tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument in Arizona. This designation, which marked the fifth new national monument established by President Biden, honors Tribal Nations and Indigenous peoples by protecting sacred ancestral places and their historically and scientifically important features, while conserving our public lands, protecting wildlife habitat and clean water, and supporting local economies.

National Wildlife Refuges

In 2023, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland established two new national wildlife refuges, building on decades-long, locally led efforts to conserve habitat for species and maintain recreational access. The Wyoming Toad Conservation Area in Wyoming and the Paint Rock River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Tennessee are the 569th and 570th units of the NWRs, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

Other Conservation Actions

In addition to these new designations, many agencies advanced locally led, partnership-driven conservation efforts nationwide. In January 2023, the Biden-Harris administration announced actions to protect the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and surrounding watershed in Minnesota, and the Bristol Bay

ecosystem in Alaska. These actions are among a series of steps the administration has taken to conserve and restore some of America's most cherished lands and waters that are sacred to Tribal Nations.

The USDA finalized protections for the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, the world's largest intact temperate rainforest. The final rule repealed the 2020 Alaska Roadless Rule and restored longstanding roadless protections to 9.37 million acres of roadless areas that support the ecological, economic, and cultural values of Southeastern Alaska.

Responding to concerns regarding the potential impacts of mining on the area's watershed, fish and wildlife, Tribal and treaty rights, and robust recreation economy, Secretary Haaland withdrew public lands in the Superior National Forest in northeastern Minnesota from disposition under the United States mineral and geothermal leasing laws for a 20-year period, subject to valid existing rights. This action helps to protect the Rainy River watershed, including the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the 1854 Ceded Territory of the Chippewa Bands, from the potential adverse impacts of new mineral and geothermal exploration and development.

Additionally, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a Final Determination under the Clean Water Act to help protect Bristol Bay, the most productive wild salmon ecosystem in the world. With this action, the Biden-Harris administration protected certain waters that are important to sustaining Southwest Alaska's salmon resources from disposal of dredged or fill materials associated with developing the Pebble deposit.

The administration continued this momentum to advance landscape-scale conservation actions throughout the rest of the year. In March, President Biden used his executive authority to complete protections for the entire Beaufort Sea Planning Area in Alaska from future extractive development. The withdrawal ensures protections for important habitat for whales, seals, polar bears, as well as for subsistence purposes.

In June, Secretary Haaland took action to protect the cultural and historic resources surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park from new oil and gas leasing and mining claims. President Biden first announced efforts to protect the greater Chaco landscape at the White House Tribal Nations Summit in November 2021. The newly issued public land order withdrew public lands within a 10-mile radius of the park for 20 years, subject to valid existing rights, and responded to decades of efforts from Tribes, elected officials, and the public to better protect the sacred and historic sites of Tribal communities currently living in northwest New Mexico.

In September, the administration announced significant steps to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Arctic Refuge) and more than 13 million acres in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). In the Arctic Refuge, Secretary Haaland authorized the cancellation of the remaining seven oil and gas leases issued by the previous administration in the Coastal Plain. The leases were suspended in June 2021 following the

issuance of an earlier Secretary's Order that identified legal concerns. The BLM also initiated a rulemaking to establish maximum protection for more than 13 million acres of ecologically sensitive, designated Special Areas in the NPR-A in recognition of their significant natural and historical values.

Additionally, this year NOAA continued to work on designations of six new national marine sanctuaries and two national estuarine research reserves. In March 2023, President Biden directed DOC to explore designation of a national marine sanctuary for the Pacific Remote Islands, and NOAA began the public scoping process in April. These islands and surrounding waters and reefs are home to an abundant and diverse array of marine life, as well as a rich cultural history of early Micronesian and Polynesian voyagers and World War II battles to present day exploration and research. NOAA received strong support for the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary off the coast of California during public scoping and released draft designation documents for further public comment, as well as a draft Indigenous Collaborative Management Framework to continue active and inclusive engagement with Tribes and other Indigenous community groups. Also, NOAA is nearing final designation for the Lake Ontario national marine sanctuary, which will protect the rich maritime heritage of the area, expected to be complete in early 2024. Sanctuary designation for Hudson Canyon, the largest submarine canyon along the U.S. Atlantic coast, moved forward with continued engagement with interested Tribes and with the establishment of a community-based advisory council. Designation processes are also ongoing for proposed sanctuaries in Lake Erie and Papahānaumokuākea (Northwestern Hawaiian Islands), and for proposed national estuarine research reserves in the Atchafalaya Basin in Louisiana and the Bay of Green Bay in Wisconsin.

II. Progress in Six Focus Areas

This section highlights work accomplished in 2023 to advance the six areas of focus within the *America the Beautiful* initiative. As in the past annual reports, the compilation here does not include all the efforts underway nor recognize all the ongoing partnerships with local, State, and Tribal governments as well as non-governmental organizations that advance partnership-driven, locally led conservation and restoration. Instead, it offers a snapshot of highlighted accomplishments from across the Federal family to both celebrate the work that has been accomplished and inform and inspire future conservation and restoration.

Creating More Parks and Safe Outdoor Opportunities in Nature-Deprived Communities

In 2023, the Biden-Harris administration built on the foundation laid in 2021 and 2022 and continued to create more parks and safe outdoor opportunities in nature-deprived communities. Examples include:

- **Executive Order on Revitalizing Our Nation’s Commitment to Environmental Justice for All:** During his first week in office, President Biden launched the most ambitious environmental justice agenda in the nation’s history. To continue delivering on that vision, in 2023, President Biden signed an executive order further embedding environmental justice into the work of Federal agencies to achieve real, measurable progress that communities can count on.
- **Nature in Communities Committee:** In its first full year, this interagency committee of 10 Federal departments and agencies continued working to advance the vision set out in the Memorandum of Understanding on Promoting Equitable Access to Nature in Nature-Deprived Communities as signed last year. This work included developing language and guidance that agencies can include in requests for proposals or notices of funding opportunities; developing resources for agency staff, grant recipients, and communities to integrate green infrastructure into their planning and programs; and holding roundtables in Chicago and New Orleans and engaging with community-based organizations, national organizations, and Federal, State, and local agencies.
- **Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership:** The National Park Service (NPS) announced that it will distribute nearly \$22 million in funding through the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) program for the redevelopment or creation of five new local parks that will serve communities across the nation. In addition, the NPS also announced a funding opportunity for more than \$224 million in grant funding for next year, which represents the largest grant funding since the launch of the program, for local communities across the United States for the creation of new parks and trails, or substantial renovations to existing parks through the ORLP program.

- Urban Tree Cover and Access to Green Spaces:** In 2023, the Forest Service announced more than \$1 billion in competitive grants to plant and maintain trees, combat extreme heat and climate change, and improve access to nature in cities, towns, and suburbs where more than 84 percent of Americans live, work, and play. Communities in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and several U.S. territories and Tribal Nations received funding, covered by the Justice40 Initiative and made possible by President Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act.



USDA Secretary Vilsack and CEQ Chair Mallory celebrating an historic investment to expand urban tree cover. *Photo by USDA.*

- Urban Waters Federal Partnership:** Led by EPA, this existing partnership among 15 Federal agencies continued its work throughout 2023 to help reconnect communities with their waterways by improving coordination and collaboration with community-led revitalization efforts and promoting their economic, environmental, and social benefits. This year, EPA, USDA, and DOI announced the Walnut Creek Watershed/Raleigh as the 21st Urban Waters Federal Partnership location, bringing resources together to work collaboratively with local partners to restore the Walnut Creek watershed and mitigate flood risk, support healthy people and ecosystems, enhance recreational opportunities, strengthen local economies, and create jobs. Additionally, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) announced an investment of \$1.5 million to improve urban waterways with science-based projects, which local partners will match with nearly \$1.5 million in additional funds as part of the partnership.
- Community, Equity, and Resiliency Initiative:** In 2023, EPA announced the launch of this initiative, a groundbreaking effort to help communities across the nation navigate EPA’s Inflation Reduction Act investments and other new funding opportunities made possible by President Biden’s Investing in America agenda. This new initiative will facilitate community-driven partnerships and provide a space for communities to learn, connect, and cultivate ideas on how to access the historic resources, especially in low-income and disadvantaged communities.
- Bureau of Indian Education Tribal Community Schoolyards:** At the 2022 White House Tribal Nations Summit, DOI announced a new partnership between BIE and Trust for Public Land to create culturally informed education spaces with a pilot of nine schools. In 2023, three schools signed memorandums of understanding, and

the new schoolyards in Tribal communities will combine nature, physical activity, education, Native languages, and cultural heritage based on local community engagement in the design process.

- **Urban Bird Treaty Program:** In 2023, the FWS Urban Bird Treaty Program contributed \$180,000 to support projects in seven cities, representing more than \$310,000 from FWS and its partners combined that engage communities in habitat restoration and bird monitoring, education, and recreation and improve access to nature for diverse and underserved communities.
- **Urban Wildlife Conservation Program:** The DOI announced a \$1 million investment for conservation partnerships at Deer Flat NWR in southwest Idaho's Treasure Valley, which is part of FWS's Urban Wildlife Conservation Program supporting 101 urban refuges across the country that host more than 11.7 million people per year.
- **National Historic and Natural Landmarks:** Secretary Haaland designated 16 new National Historic Landmarks and two new National Natural Landmarks, including Glenwood Caverns and Iron Mountain Hot Springs in Colorado and John Boyd Thacher State Park in New York. The designations reflect the importance of the sites in sharing America's rich history and extraordinary natural features.
- **Land Use Innovation Grants:** In 2023, the NPS, EPA, and Groundwork USA, a national nonprofit serving a network of local groundwork trust organizations, continued working on the commitment made and inaugural funding awarded in 2022 to improving the natural and built environments of low-resource communities, through this grant initiative helping communities transform brownfields into parks, trails, and greenspace.
- **NOAA Environmental Justice Strategy:** In 2023, NOAA released its Fisheries Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy to increase coordination, communication, and engagement with underserved and underrepresented groups. Additionally, through Natural Resource Damage Assessment, NOAA and DOI secured nearly \$93 million through settlements with polluters to restore natural resources, often in disadvantaged communities disproportionately affected by pollution. In 2023, construction began for creation of a five-acre riverfront park in the City of East Newark that will compensate the public for natural resource injuries by providing waterfront access and green space for communities along the lower Passaic River, a waterbody long impacted by industrial pollution.
- **Mitigating Heat:** In 2023, the National Integrated Heat Health Information System (NIHHIS) at NOAA issued a competitive funding opportunity from Inflation Reduction Act funds to expand the creation and implementation of actionable, place-based climate information for community heat resilience. The \$5 million award will create two new NIHHIS Centers of Excellence to provide technical and other assistance in developing community science observations to inform equitable heat resilience action, and in planning, taking action on, and evaluating equitable heat resilience including through promoting equitable access to nature.

- **Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program:** In 2023, NPS staff continued to build on the work of past years to provide free, on-location help through this program to 260 communities and public land managers who are working to create and restore parks, conservation areas, and brownfields. Completed projects helped restore rivers, wildlife habitats, and impaired resources; improve outdoor recreation; develop climate resiliency strategies; and support natural disaster recovery.
- **Community Development Block Grants:** In fiscal year 2023, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided more than \$200 million in funding directed by States, cities, and counties to develop and improve parks and recreational facilities and to plant trees.
- **Choice Neighborhoods Grants:** The HUD awarded \$370 million in fiscal year 2023 through the Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grants to eight communities throughout the country that have completed comprehensive local planning processes and are ready to implement plans to redevelop the neighborhood. Up to 15 percent of funds awarded can be spent on activities to support the targeted neighborhood, including activities which impact the green environment and recreational amenities components such as parks, outdoor plazas, walking trails, outdoor performance space, playgrounds, public art, murals, kayak launch, and other community upgrades.
- **Reconnecting Communities:** The Department of Transportation (DOT) awarded \$185 million in funding for the Reconnecting Communities Program (RCP), the first-ever Federal program dedicated to reconnecting communities that were previously cut off from opportunities by transportation infrastructure. The DOT released a second funding opportunity for the RCP combined with the Neighborhood Access and Equity Program totaling \$3.35 billion, called the Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Program, with similar goals of providing funding for projects that improve walkability, safety, and affordable transportation access and community connectivity, especially in disadvantaged or underserved communities. Under the RCP, the New York State Route 33 Kensington expressway project received more than \$55.5 million to cap more than 4,000 feet of expressway and invest in green spaces, trees, and parkland for nature-deprived communities in the area.
- **AmeriCorps Expanding Access to Green Spaces:** In 2023, AmeriCorps members engaged in expanding, maintaining, and restoring access to parks and public lands. The Conservation Corps North Carolina partnered with local high school students to build a network of walking trails and rain gardens in Princeville, North Carolina, the first Black town to be incorporated in the U.S. As part of the Lake Paradise Pathway Revitalization Project in Illinois, AmeriCorps members cleared trail corridors, developed trails, installed amenities, and established pollinator plots. In Vermont, AmeriCorps members completed several projects to improve the health of Vermont waters, forests, and trail networks and to make the outdoors more accessible to the public.

- **Pollinator Program:** The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) implemented a Pollinator Program in partnership with the General Services Administration in the District of Columbia. The program enhances the pollination of plants in the District of Columbia’s Ward 8, which includes many nature-deprived communities, and beekeepers from the DC Beekeepers Alliance have partnered with DHS to supply and maintain the apiaries.
- **Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grant Programs:** Through hazard mitigation programs such as the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program and Flood Mitigation Assistance program, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides States, local communities, Tribes, and territories funding to address high-level future risks to natural disasters and funds projects such as the Jersey City McGovern Park Resilience Project in New Jersey, which received \$3.84 million to install a stormwater park that will reduce the risk of flooding and provide access to green space. The funding awarded in 2023 included 64 projects that use nature-based solutions for hazard mitigation.

Support Tribally Led Conservation and Restoration Priorities

In 2023, the Biden-Harris administration continued its work to honor Tribal sovereignty and support the priorities of Tribal Nations within the *America the Beautiful* initiative. Examples include:

- **Avi Kwa Ame National Monument:** President Biden signed a proclamation establishing the Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, honoring Tribal Nations and Indigenous peoples by protecting this sacred Nevada landscape and its historically and scientifically important features, while conserving our public lands and growing America’s outdoor recreation economy. Avi Kwa Ame is considered to be among the most sacred places on Earth by the Mojave, Chemehuevi, and some Southern Paiute people. The proclamation calls for BLM and NPS to manage the monument in partnership with Tribal Nations through a co-stewardship agreement.
- **Baaj Nwaavjo I’tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument:** President Biden established the Baaj Nwaavjo I’tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument in Arizona. The new monument conserves nearly one



President Biden established the Baaj Nwaavjo I’tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument. *Photo by DOI.*

million acres of public lands surrounding Grand Canyon National Park and managed by BLM and Forest Service, including thousands of cultural and sacred sites that are important to Tribal Nations in the Southwest – including the Havasupai Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Hualapai Tribe, Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians, Las Vegas Paiute Tribe, Moapa Band of Paiutes, Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, Navajo Nation, San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe, Yavapai-Apache Nation, Pueblo of Zuni, and the Colorado River Indian Tribes.

- **Chaco Region:** The DOI took action to protect the cultural and historic resources surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park from new oil and gas leasing and mining claims. President Biden first announced efforts to protect the greater Chaco landscape at the White House Tribal Nations Summit in November 2021. A new public land order withdraws public lands within a 10-mile radius of the park for 20 years, subject to valid existing rights, and responds to decades of efforts from Tribes, elected officials, and the public to better protect the sacred and historic sites and Tribal communities currently living in northwest New Mexico. The action was informed by extensive public engagement, including significant consultation with Tribal Nations. The Department is continuing to work on a broader discussion around the greater Chaco Landscape through the Honoring Chaco Initiative.
- **Placitas Area:** The DOI announced a proposal by BLM to protect more than 4,000 acres within the Placitas area in Sandoval County, New Mexico, to safeguard sacred Tribal lands, boost important local recreation opportunities, and support wildlife habitat connectivity. The Pueblos of San Felipe and Santa Ana have long sought protections for the Placitas area, which they consider ancestral and sacred lands, and the proposed mineral withdrawal would prevent new mining claims and oil and gas development in the area for a 50-year period, subject to valid existing rights.
- **Advancing Tribal Co-Stewardship Policies:** Since signing Joint Secretarial Order 3403 committing to co-stewardship of Federal lands, waters and wildlife, the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, and Commerce have continued advancing their efforts. At the 2023 Tribal Nations Summit, the Biden-Harris administration made announcements to build on work from this year and further promote support and respect for Tribal Nations through Federal policy by encouraging Nation-to-Nation partnerships with Tribal Nations, improving Federal employees' understanding of Tribal sovereignty and treaty rights, streamlining critical federal processes that Tribal Nations rely on, renewing focus on the health, safety, and welfare of Native women, children and families, and making it easier for Tribal Nations to access and utilize federal dollars to provide vital services to their citizens.
- **Co-Stewardship Agreements:** In 2023, DOI, Forest Service, and DOC completed nearly 200 landmark co-stewardship agreements with Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations and consortiums, with more under development. A representative sample of the agreements include:
 - **Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and BLM:** The Blackfoot Watershed drainage co-stewardship project with the Confederated Salish

and Kootenai Tribes seeks to restore important Tribal cultural plants, camas and bitterroot. The Tribes and the BLM are also addressing Douglas fir encroachment on the habitat areas for these significant cultural plants. The Tribes have provided forestry crews to help with the encroachment and shared Indigenous Knowledge about the cultural plants, so the BLM has a deeper understanding of the plants' meaning to the Tribes.

- **Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate and FWS:** The FWS held an event with the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate to celebrate the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the two governments for the co-stewardship of the Waubay NWR. This collaboration will increase Tribal involvement in protecting, managing, and restoring culturally significant wildlife and plant species, while promoting culturally aware educational opportunities for Tribal members, students, and visitors to the Refuge. The memorandum of understanding commemorates a momentous effort to unite the conservation efforts of FWS with the Indigenous peoples of the area and reflects a shared vision for conservation, stewardship, and respect for cultural preservation.
- **Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma and NPS:** The Castillo de San Marcos National Monument in Florida is working closely with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, Kiowa Tribe, Comanche Nation, and Caddo Nation, to better interpret the 1886 imprisonment of Apache tribal members at Fort Marion. Inspired by the Honoring Historic Footprints Symposium hosted in November 2022, the Tribe and NPS are co-developing interpretive materials, including a brochure, and planning events for 2023.
- **Santa Clara Pueblo and Forest Service:** The Forest Service entered a self-determination co-stewardship agreement with the Santa Clara Pueblo that builds upon the long-standing Tribal Forest Protection Act collaboration with Santa Clara. The 2023 agreement builds workforce capacity in the Pueblo community and meets the Pueblo's need to care for their ancestral homelands through ecological restoration, reforestation, and fuels management that will reduce the risk of wildfire and utilize restoration byproducts to support community fuelwood needs.
- **Winnemem Wintu Tribe and Department of Commerce:** Representing the Department of Commerce's first Tribal co-stewardship agreement, NOAA, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Winnemem Wintu Tribe signed a co-stewardship agreement in May 2023 to restore Chinook salmon, including a call for the Tribe to contribute traditional ecological and practical knowledge of the species to the mountains north of Redding, California.
- **Gravel to Gravel:** In 2023, DOI announced an investment of more than \$16 million over the next four years from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to enhance the resilience of ecosystems and salmon in Alaska's Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Norton Sound region through co-stewardship with Alaska Native Tribes. This investment includes \$5 million in Tribal grants to support Tribes in building a

strong foundation for co-stewardship, bring Tribal partner voices, Indigenous Knowledge, and local expertise into the planning and decision-making process. Through a public-private partnership, Native Americans in Philanthropy provided additional matching funding for the Tribes. These investments serve as a catalyst and a model for additional public and private sector investments in the region and in the foundational planning, science, and restoration projects needed to respond to the salmon crisis and to heal the broader ecosystem through co-stewardship. Through these investments, the Department also launched a new Gravel to Gravel Keystone Initiative, a mountains-to-the-sea restoration approach, unveiled as part of a restoration and resilience framework guiding \$2 billion in investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act to restore lands and waters and advance climate resilience.

- **Bison Restoration:** In 2023, DOI announced several new steps to restore wild and healthy populations of American bison and the prairie grassland ecosystem. Through a new Secretary's Order 3410 and over \$25 million from the Inflation Reduction Act, the Department is empowering its bureaus and partners to use the best available science and Indigenous Knowledge to help restore bison across the country. The funding will support Tribally led efforts to strengthen bison conservation and restoration of grassland habitats. The funding advances the Department's new Grasslands Keystone Initiative, which is also part of the restoration and resilience framework.
- **Salmon Restoration:** In September 2023, President Biden signed a Presidential Memorandum to prioritize the restoration of healthy and abundant wild salmon, steelhead, and other native fish populations to the Columbia River Basin. The Presidential Memorandum recognizes the important benefits that the Columbia River provides to communities and businesses throughout the region. In 2023, the Biden-Harris Administration also announced two historic agreements that support the goals in the Presidential Memorandum. In September, the Administration announced a historic agreement to support Tribally-led efforts to restore healthy and abundant salmon populations in the Upper Columbia River Basin. The agreement between the United States, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, and the Spokane Tribe of Indians will fund efforts to ultimately reintroduce salmon in blocked habitats in the Upper Basin. In addition, in December, the Administration announced a historic agreement to work in partnership with the States of Oregon and Washington; the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Warm Springs, and Yakama Tribes; and environmental non-profit organizations to restore wild salmon populations, expand Tribally-sponsored clean energy production, and provide stability for communities that depend on the Columbia River System.
- **Columbia Estuary Ecosystem Restoration Program:** The Columbia Estuary Ecosystem Restoration Program (CEERP) was established in 2000 by BPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to conserve and restore ecosystems of the

lower Columbia River and estuary. In 2023, BPA and USACE invested approximately \$9 million in restoration and associated research and monitoring and also completed 45.7 acres of habitat reconnection and restoration. The CEERP is part of a multi-state, multi-agency partnership that supports the successful reestablishment of healthy, self-sustaining populations of salmonids in the wider ecosystem. Long-term CEERP objectives of increased estuarine habitat opportunities and quality for salmonid juvenile life stages will also effectively support the success of Tribally led salmon reintroduction efforts in the Upper Columbia River Basin.

- **Indigenous Knowledge in Historic Preservation:** In 2023, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) developed a draft policy statement on Indigenous Knowledge after conducting 12 listening sessions and outreach opportunities in 2023 with Indian Tribes, Native Hawaiian organizations, Federal agency personnel, and State and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers. The policy statement will establish a set of standards and guidelines regarding the role Indigenous Knowledge has in the historic preservation decision-making process, including site management, mitigation of adverse effects to religious or culturally significant landscapes, and consideration of sacred sites and other properties that may be of religious and cultural significance to Tribes.
- **Replacement of Derogatory Names:** The DOI announced the outcome of the Board on Geographic Names' vote to change the name of Mt. Evans in Colorado so that it no longer bears the name of a former governor who was closely linked to the Sand Creek Massacre of Native Americans in 1864.
- **Climate Resilience:**
 - **Climate Resilience and Relocation Planning:** In 2023, through its Tribal Climate Resilience Program, DOI announced the availability of \$120 million in funding through President Biden's Investing in America agenda to help Tribal communities plan for the most severe climate-related environmental threats to their homelands. Tribal communities can use this funding to proactively plan to adapt to these threats and safely relocate critical community infrastructure. This is one of the largest amounts of annual funding made available to Tribes and Tribal organizations in the history of the Tribal Climate Annual Awards Program in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).
 - **Coastal Habitat Restoration and Climate Resilience Priorities:** In the first round of funding competitions in 2023, NOAA awarded more than \$26.3 million for 15 projects to be led by Tribal applicants for fish passage and to build Tribal organizational capacity. In the second round of funding competitions, NOAA will fund up to \$84 million in Tribal Priority Fish Passage Projects and up to \$20 million for Tribes through the Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience for Tribes and Underserved Communities funding competition through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act.

- **Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program:** In fiscal year 2023, the Department of Defense (DoD) entered into Cooperative Agreements with 14 federally recognized Tribes, including nine in Alaska. Through this program, DoD awarded \$15.5 million, which will address environmental impacts to Tribal lands from past military activities.
- **International Workshop on Indigenous Perspectives:** In 2023, as a result of a workshop in 2022 on Indigenous perspectives, the State Department funded the International Visitor Leadership Program for several Indigenous community representatives and protected area agency officials from Chile to the United States. They met with NPS, NOAA, and Native American and Native Alaskan representations to continue discussions on strategies for co-stewardship of marine, coastal, and terrestrial protected areas.
- **Pollution Management Grants:** In 2023, the EPA awarded a total of \$13.8 million in Clean Water Act section 319 funding to support Tribally led efforts to protect and restore waters from nonpoint source pollution. Grants went to seven federally recognized Tribes to support Tribally led efforts to develop and implement the Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan under the Gulf Hypoxia Program.
- **Tribal Transportation Funding:** The DOT supported efforts to improve transportation and access for Tribes across the country. For example, with more than \$589 million in this program available in fiscal year 2023, the funds help support Tribal priorities to improve community access to parks, natural areas, and other outdoor opportunities, including areas of traditional or cultural importance.
- **Tribal Wildlife Grants:** In 2023, the FWS awarded more than \$6.4 million to federally recognized Tribes to benefit fish and wildlife resources and their habitats. The funding will support 36 Tribes for conservation projects across 17 States, benefiting a wide range of wildlife and habitat, including species of cultural or traditional importance to Indigenous communities.
- **Tribal Forest Protection Act:** The USDA announced more than \$12 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in investments in fiscal year 2023 to complete projects in support of the Tribal Forest Protection Act. Projects have been selected to support a range of activities focused on forest and grassland restoration. Work will include vegetation management, hazardous fuels risk reduction, and cultural and ethnobotanical surveys on Indigenous landscapes.
- **Tribal Fish Hatcheries:** The BIA announced the investment of \$10 million through President Biden's Investing in America Agenda to support Tribal fish hatchery programs. The funding expands the bureau's Fish Hatchery Maintenance Program, which provides competitive funding to federally recognized tribes to maintain, enhance, and upgrade fish hatcheries.
- **Tribal Restoration Projects:** The USACE advanced significant efforts in 2023 to support Tribal restoration efforts. Examples include:
 - **Missouri River:** The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe and USACE completed construction on the first project in USACE's Tribal Partnership Program to

investigate potential solutions to shoreline erosion, restore nationally and culturally significant degraded environmental habitat, and re-establish cultural and recreational connectivity to the river and native plants that are culturally important to the Tribe. These features will help restore natural habitats, protect the Tribal land, and provide safe water access for Tribal members to the Missouri River.

- **Elim Subsistence Harbor:** The USACE signed a design agreement for improvements to the Elim Subsistence harbor, located in a remote Inupiat Village north of Nome, Alaska. The project will help make the village more resilient and sustainable in the face of a changing climate and improve the overall long-term viability of the community.

Expand Collaborative Conservation of Fish and Wildlife Habitats and Corridors

In 2023, the Biden-Harris administration continued its work to enhance fish and wildlife habitat nationwide through close coordination and partnership with States, Tribes, local communities, and willing private landowners. Examples include:

- **Bristol Bay Salmon Fisheries:** In 2023, the Biden-Harris administration announced action to help protect the Bristol Bay Salmon Fisheries when EPA issued a Final Determination under the Clean Water Act to help conserve the area, which contains one of the economically and culturally significant wild salmon fisheries in the world.
- **Tongass National Forest:** In 2023, the Biden-Harris administration finalized actions to conserve the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, the world's largest intact temperate rainforest. The USDA's final rule repealed the 2020 Alaska Roadless Rule and restores longstanding roadless protections to 9.37 million acres of roadless areas that support the ecological, economic, and cultural values of Southeastern Alaska.
- **Wildlife Corridors Guidance:** The CEQ issued new guidance to Federal agencies on how to better incorporate ecological connectivity and wildlife corridors into federal planning and decision-making. The guidance highlights the importance of connectivity across terrestrial, marine, and freshwater habitats, encouraging collaboration across management and ownership boundaries with States, Tribes, local governments, and private landowners.
- **Landscape Health and Conservation Proposed Rule:** The DOI published a proposal this year to guide the balanced management of America's public lands for the benefit of current and future generations. The proposed Landscape Health and Conservation Rule would, among other things, provide tools for BLM to improve the resilience of public lands in the face of a changing climate; conserve important wildlife habitat and intact landscapes; plan for sustainable local economic development; and better recognize unique cultural and natural resources on public lands.

- **Action to Protect Alaska’s Arctic**
 - **Beaufort Sea:** The Biden-Harris administration issued a withdrawal of certain areas off the United States Arctic Coast of the Outer Continental Shelf from Oil or Gas Leasing. This withdrawal of approximately 2.8 million acres of the Beaufort Sea ensures the entire United States Arctic Ocean is off limits to new oil and gas leasing.
 - **Arctic National Wildlife Refuge:** The DOI took action to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge by canceling the remaining seven oil and gas leases issued by the previous administration in the Coastal Plain. The leases were suspended in June 2021 following the issuance of Secretary’s Order 3401, which identified legal deficiencies.
 - **National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska:** The Biden-Harris administration is considering actions in the NPR-A to better protect for the more than 13 million acres of Special Areas in the reserve, while supporting subsistence activities for Alaska Native communities.
- **Enhancements of Public Lands and Waters:** The Federal family celebrated the expansion and addition of public lands and waters that improve and connect habitats and corridors as well as increase access to nature and outdoor recreation. Across the Federal family, some highlights of expansions from 2023 include:
 - **Wyoming Toad Conservation Area:** The FWS established the Wyoming Toad Conservation Area in the Laramie Plains of the Wyoming Basin as the 569th unit of the NWRS. The refuge supports the protection of habitat critical for the survival of the Wyoming toad, one of the most endangered amphibians in North America. The area is also important for the conservation of other species, including the white-tailed prairie dog, pronghorn and migratory birds. The acquisition will provide future public access to the Laramie River and opportunities for outdoor recreation, including hiking, fishing, hunting, and wildlife observation.
 - **Paint Rock River National Wildlife Refuge:** The FWS established the Paint Rock River NWR in Tennessee as the 570th unit of the NWRS. The refuge serves as a critical link between nearby State and nonprofit conservation lands in Tennessee and Alabama that help conserve the Paint Rock River watershed and one of the largest contiguous tracts of hardwoods remaining in eastern North America. The Paint Rock River NWR is part of a unique ecosystem with a high diversity of aquatic, terrestrial, and karst habitats that support threatened and endangered species including gray bats, Indiana bats, Tennessee cave salamanders, and Alabama cave shrimp. Its waters are home to 100 species of fish and 50 kinds of freshwater mussels, including some that are found nowhere else in the world.
 - **Middle Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge:** The FWS announced an expanded acquisition boundary for the Middle Mississippi River NWR in Missouri and Illinois, which allows the Service to acquire up to 90,000 acres

of land purchases from interested landowners who are willing sellers within the expanded boundary. The refuge expansion will provide for the protection and restoration of large, connected areas of floodplain hardwood forest. It also will provide additional important habitat for migratory birds and federal threatened and endangered species, as well as land and river access for hunters, anglers and other outdoor enthusiasts. These priorities all contribute to fulfilling the mission of the NWRS.

- **San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge:** The FWS acquired 5,636 acres at San Bernard NWR in Texas, connecting an existing 4,800 acres of NWRS lands to form the largest protected piece of Columbia Bottomlands in southeast Texas. Columbia Bottomlands habitat is a critically important area for millions of migrating birds that use it as a staging area between wintering habitats in the Caribbean and South America and breeding habitats in North America.
- **Green River National Wildlife Refuge:** The FWS acquired 1,335 acres for the Green River NWR in Henderson County, Kentucky. The lands along the Green River experience regular backwater flooding. Thousands of waterfowl winter in the area, including mallards, northern pintails, gadwalls, widgeons, northern shovelers, blue and green-winged teal, wood ducks, Canada geese, white-fronted geese, and snow geese.
- **Shenandoah National Park:** In 2023, NPS officially commemorated the 2022 donation of nearly 1,000 acres of woodlands from the Shenandoah National Park Trust, which includes the headwaters of Naked Creek in the Tanners Ridge area of Page County.
- **Big Cypress National Preserve:** In 2023, NPS acquired more than 14,000 acres for the Big Cypress National Preserve in southern Florida. The freshwater wetland ecosystem provides habitat to a diverse mixture of wildlife and protects the flow of freshwater into estuaries of the neighboring Everglades National Park and Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge.
- **Cape Hatteras National Seashore:** In 2023, the NPS purchased two oceanfront properties at Cape Hatteras National Seashore containing beach homes that faced a precarious threat of being swept away into the ocean. As climate change exacerbates sea level rise, storm intensity and frequency, and erosion, these oceanfront homes pose threats to park resources and visitor safety. The acquisition of threatened structures allows for better protection of wildlife habitat, scenic views, and recreational opportunities at the park.
- **New River Gorge National Park and Preserve:** At New River Gorge National Park and Preserve, the NPS acquired nearly 1,000 acres, including more than 800 acres of unfragmented forest. The acquisition also preserves views of the largest waterfall on the New River.

- **North Umpqua Wild and Scenic River:** The BLM acquired 216 acres along the North Umpqua Wild and Scenic River, which will allow BLM to help maintain and enhance the outstanding nature of the North Umpqua River and support its fish habitat, water quality and quantity, recreation opportunities, and scenic and cultural values.
- **Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument:** The BLM acquired 640 acres with the Cottonwood Creek parcel of the monument. This inholding acquisition alleviates the immediate threat of disease transmission to local desert bighorn sheep, preserves the remote character and natural resources of the area, and assures continued outstanding recreation opportunities.
- **John Day Wild and Scenic River and Oregon National Historic Trail**
The BLM acquired approximately 4,000 acres of property along the lower John Day Wild and Scenic River. This property expands public recreation opportunities along the river, located near McDonald's Crossing in a historic location where thousands of emigrants traveling west on the Oregon Trail traversed the Lower John Day River.
- **Fermilab Prairie:** The Department of Energy (DOE) Fermi National Acceleratory Laboratory in Illinois received a DOE Sustainability Award for its partnership with organizations dedicated to maintaining the health of restored prairie at Fermilab. Through a cooperative research and development agreement, Fermilab has been able to maintain its iconic National Environmental Research Park and 4,000 acres of natural areas containing more than 1,200 acres of restored prairie. Fermilab and its partners help preserve biodiversity of flora and fauna, monitor trends over time, and protect diverse wildflowers that promote pollinators among many other benefits.
- **Oak Ridge Reservation:** Researchers at the DOE Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee have developed high-resolution landscape connectivity models and identified priority management areas on the DOE Oak Ridge Reservation. Researchers worked closely with land management and natural resources personnel to integrate ecological modeling with broader land use priorities, monetary costs, and feasibility.
- **Wildlife Conservation Commitments:** In 2023, USDA announced that it will expand its work on wildlife conservation by investing at least \$500 million over the next five years and by leveraging all available conservation programs, including the CRP, through its WLFW effort. The USDA will update three existing WLFW frameworks in the Sagebrush Biome, Great Plains Grasslands, and Northern Bobwhite, Grasslands and Savannas to newly integrate FSA's CRP, and the USDA will also work with partners on the ground to develop four new frameworks to be released in 2024-25 focused on migratory big game, deciduous forests, aquatic connectivity, and pine ecosystems.

- **Endangered Species Act Anniversary:** The DOI spent 2023 with significant and regular amplification of the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act. In addition to speeches and events featuring Secretary Haaland and other leaders, examples include:
 - **Endangered Species Recovery Planning:** The DOI announced a \$62.5 million investment from the Inflation Reduction Act to help plan for endangered species recovery efforts that will be implemented over the next several years to benefit more than 300 species currently listed under the Endangered Species Act.
 - **Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund:** The DOI announced more than \$40.6 million in grants through FWS to 10 States and the U.S. Virgin Islands to support land acquisition and conservation planning projects on over 7,200 acres of habitat for 65 listed and at-risk species through the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund. These grants will be matched by more than \$17.6 million in partner funds.
 - **Species Recovery Regulations:** The DOI announced significant action to better facilitate species recovery by providing more flexibility for the introduction of threatened and endangered species to suitable habitats outside their historical ranges. The FWS finalized revisions to section 10(j) regulations under the Endangered Species Act that will help improve the conservation and recovery of imperiled ESA-listed species in the coming decades, as growing impacts from climate change and invasive species cause habitats within species' historical ranges to shift or become unsuitable.
- **Mature and Old-Growth Forests:** The USDA and DOI announced actions to foster forest conservation, enhance forest resilience to climate change, and inform policymaking on ensuring healthy forests on federally managed lands administered by the Forest Service and BLM. To support these actions, USDA and DOI worked together to develop several reports, as directed by President Biden's Executive Order 14072, *Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies*, which he signed on Earth Day 2022. The Forest Service also held a public comment period with an advance notice of proposed rulemaking about how the Forest Service should adapt policies to conserve and manage the national forests and grasslands for climate resilience.
- **Northwest Forest Plan Federal Advisory Committee:** The USDA established and appointed members to a new Federal Advisory Committee to provide advice and recommendations on modernizing landscape management across national forests within the Northwest Forest Plan area in Washington, Oregon and Northern California.
- **Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program:** The DOT's Federal Highway Administration announced \$110 million in grants for 19 wildlife crossing projects in 17 states, including four Indian Tribes. The funding is made possible by a new program in President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and can support projects that

construct wildlife crossings over and below busy roads, add fencing, acquire tracking and mapping tools, and more. Projects funded by this program reduce wildlife crashes, which will reduce the economic impact caused by wildlife crashes (such as loss of income, medical costs, property damage, and decline in productivity and quality of life) while simultaneously improving habitat connectivity to sustain the environment and improve the overall safety of the traveling public.

- **Federal Partnerships:**

- **Interagency Coordination on Fish Passage:** President Biden’s Investing in America agenda includes more than a \$3 billion investment in fish passage and aquatic connectivity projects, including funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. Federal agencies are actively coordinating effective delivery of fish passage funding across the nation through regular meetings, information sharing, and interagency review panels for funding opportunities. Examples from this year include:
 - **National Fish Passage Program:** In 2023, FWS announced a \$35 million investment in fiscal year 2023 funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for 39 projects in 22 States, and also announced the availability of up to \$36 million in fiscal year 2024 funding. Funded projects will address outdated, unsafe, or obsolete dams, culverts, levees, and other barriers fragmenting our nation’s rivers and streams. This funding is part of the Department’s five-year \$200 million commitment to restore free-flowing waters, allowing fish migration and protecting communities from flooding rivers and streams through the National Fish Passage Program. As of the end of fiscal year 2023, 18 barriers had been removed and 271 stream miles had been reopened through Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding. When completed, projects funded in 2022 and 2023 will address 212 barriers and open over 6,200 stream miles.
 - **NOAA Fish Passage Projects:** In the first round of funding competitions, NOAA announced nearly \$105 million in funding for 36 new fish passage projects under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, including significant funding to implement fish passage projects that meet Tribal priorities and build Tribal organizational capacity as mentioned earlier. In the second round of funding competitions, up to \$174 million in funding is available for fish passage projects and up to \$84.5 million for restoring Tribal priority fish passage projects.
 - **Coastal Zone and National Estuarine Research Reserve Projects:** In 2023, NOAA announced the distribution of \$109.4 million in funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act to support coastal habitat restoration and conservation projects and capacity-building. This includes 33 projects across coastal States and territories, and at least eight of these projects—totaling more than

\$20 million—will be carried out in partnership with, or directly by, Tribes, including the acquisition and conservation of ecological and culturally significant ancestral lands.

- **The National Fish Habitat Partnership:** A collaboration of Federal, State, and Tribal governments, as well as non-governmental and research organizations, the National Fish Habitat Partnership supports nationwide gains for fish habitat, aquatic communities, and recreational anglers through 20 diverse Fish Habitat Partnerships. In 2023, FWS facilitated the distribution of more than \$5 million to 102 projects through the broad network of Fish Habitat Partnerships across the country, and NOAA supported four specific coastal partnership projects that enhance collaboration with recreational fishing communities, as well as protect and restore important fish habitat. In addition to the funding provided by FWS and NOAA, partners provided more than \$54 million to support these projects, representing a nearly 9:1 leveraged match for projects funded through the partnerships.
- **Culvert Grants:** In 2023, the DOT's Federal Highway Administration announced a total of \$196 million in funding going to 59 Tribal, State, and local governments to fix or remove 169 culvert barriers to improve fish passage. Such projects will not only improve habitat connectivity for fish, but also reduce road flood risk and ensure connectivity for human communities.
- **Collaborative Aquatic Landscape Restoration and Legacy Roads and Trails:** In August 2023, the Forest Service announced more than \$65 million of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investments to improve water quality, roads, trails and fish habitat through the Collaborative Aquatic Landscape Restoration Program and the Legacy Roads and Trails program. Projects enhance the resiliency of aquatic systems to better withstand increased visitation pressure and climate change-related conditions.
- **Forest Service Keystone Agreements:** The Forest Service established several national keystone agreements to support habitats nationwide using Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act funding with multiple partners. Examples include:
 - **Forests and Grasslands:** A \$50 million Keystone Agreement with the National Wild Turkey Federation supports a 20-year national master stewardship agreement to protect communities, improve forest health, wildlife habitat, and water quality on national forests and grasslands.
 - **Watersheds:** A \$40 million Keystone Agreement with Trout Unlimited funds watershed restoration treatments in priority and

- source watersheds to protect natural infrastructure and support wildfire resiliency, while accomplishing Justice40 objectives.
- **Migration Corridors:** A \$60 million Keystone Agreement with the Mule Deer Foundation in the first 5 years focuses on implementing ecological restoration work and leverages investments with other Federal, State, Tribal, and private sector partners. Treatments include habitat management along the important mule deer seasonal migration corridors for the summer range managed by Forest Service and the winter range managed by private landowners.
 - **Reforestation:** A \$20 million Keystone Agreement with American Forests will support climate-smart reforestation on National Forest System lands.
- **Migration Paths:** The DOI announced nearly \$4 million in grants along with \$9.2 million in matching contributions for 13 projects in nine States that will help secure key migration paths and restore critical wildlife habitats. Together, more than \$13 million will be invested to protect pronghorn, elk, mule deer, and other iconic species across the American West. The grants are made possible through the Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big Game Migration Corridors and Habitat Connectivity program established following Secretary's Order 3362. The program is administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in part through annual appropriations funding from the BLM, FWS, and USDA.
 - **Invasive Species Advisory Committee:** Newly appointed members of the Invasive Species Advisory Committee met for the first time since being disbanded in 2019 to discuss strategies to prevent, eradicate, and control invasive species, which impose substantial costs on society and cause damages that impact the global economy, including an estimated \$120 billion in environmental damages and losses annually in the United States. The Council comprises the senior leadership of 12 Federal departments and agencies, and four executive offices of the President. Co-chairs are the Secretaries of the Interior, Agriculture and Commerce. The interagency body provides the vision and national leadership to coordinate, sustain and expand Federal efforts to safeguard the interests of the United States through the prevention, eradication, and control of invasive species, and through the restoration of ecosystems and other assets impacted by invasive species.
 - **National Seed Strategy for Rehabilitation and Restoration:** The BLM continued to advance its public-private collaboration with hundreds of partners to protect native plants and develop native seed for restoration. In 2023, a variety of efforts progressed: BLM signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the NPS and FWS to collaborate in Seeds of Success, a Justice40-covered program that collects native seed across the United States for ecosystem restoration. This agreement nearly doubled the native seed

collecting teams from 36 in 2022 to 60 collecting teams in 2023, and it supported teams from Justice40 communities, including Tribal Nations and underserved populations. The Office of Wildland Fire also approved over \$28 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds for 26 projects to support burned area rehabilitation by proactively developing native seeds and plant materials for all DOI agencies. Additionally, BLM's Plant Conservation and Restoration Program sponsored the 2023 National Native Seed Conference in Washington, D.C., with more than 500 attendees from 48 States and 9 countries to discuss the restoration seed supply chain, and DOI's National Seed Strategy Keystone Initiative focused its fiscal year 2023 funding on native seed collections, native seed commercial production, and ecoregional programs.

- **Recovery and Sustainment Partnership:** This DoD initiative, which manages habitats across the country in collaboration with DOI, continued to support efforts to better address the dynamic between protected species and mission activities. In 2023, the partnership focused on improving the conservation status of more than 40 species and celebrated the recovery of numerous species. In 2023, DoD and FWS continued to implement nine species action plans affecting 40 installations and ranges to address the most urgent conservation needs for DoD mission-priority species that will impact over 100 installations and ranges.
- **Whitebark Pine Restoration:** In 2023, the NPS and American Forests announced the signing of a five-year agreement to help return threatened whitebark pine to its range in the northern Rocky Mountains. The partnership, made possible through funding from the Inflation Reduction Act, supports restoration activities in national parks where whitebark pine grow, and advances the National Seed Strategy.
- **Army Corps of Engineer Partnerships:** The USACE signed and began implementing new national memoranda of understanding with Trout Unlimited and the Back Country Hunters and Anglers. The Trout Unlimited memorandum of understanding provides a foundation for collaboration related to the protection, restoration, and management of cold-water fisheries. The Back Country Hunters and Anglers memorandum of understanding provides a framework to develop and expand interest in wildlife-dependent outdoor recreation and sustainable wildlife habitat.
- **Ecosystem Management and Planning:** The USACE funded more than \$43 million in fiscal year 2023 providing more than \$24 million to manage and improve public lands and waters specific to wildlife and habitat management, more than \$10 million to pest and invasive species management, more than \$7 million to forest management, and more than \$1 million to fisheries management. Work effort associated with this funding resulted in the planned treatment of nearly 400,000

acres for invasive species, the management of over 1.5 million acres for wildlife habitat, and the improvement of nearly 240,000 acres for habitat purposes.

- **National Environmental Research Parks:** The approximately 200,000-acre Savannah River Site (SRS), the first of seven National Environmental Research Parks (NERP) designated by the DOE, continued its efforts to support environmental stewardship and conservation efforts in South Carolina. In 2023, the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, a University of Georgia research unit, collaborated with a wide variety of Federal, State, and private partners to advance habitat restoration and conservation efforts and proposed a bold new undergraduate and graduate experiential learning program called the NERP Scholars Program focused on addressing environmental justice issues surrounding the SRS by providing enhanced educational opportunities to students from local communities.
- **Sustainable Climate-Ready Sites:** The DOE’s Sustainable Climate-Ready Sites Initiative recognizes participating sites for excellence in natural resource and habitat conservation, improvements in adaptation and resilience to climate change, and other environmental benefits. For fiscal year 2023, the voluntary program covered approximately 2.4 million acres of DOE-managed land, and twelve sites signed on to the initiative, representing all DOE program offices with operations on DOE-managed land.
- **State Wildlife Grants:** In 2023, FWS distributed more than \$64 million in fiscal year 2023 annual funding to States, territories, and the District of Columbia through the State Wildlife Grant Program and the nationally competitive State Wildlife Grants that support large landscape-scale species conservation efforts. Both programs support recipients in their work to protect “species of greatest conservation need” that are identified in State Wildlife Action Plans. These projects often contribute to FWS findings of “not warranted” for listing under the Endangered Species Act and to recovery of listed species.
- **Hawaiian Forest Bird Extinction Prevention:** In 2023, DOI committed nearly \$16 million as part of President Biden’s Investing in America agenda to prevent the imminent extinction of Hawaiian Forest Birds and announced the new Hawaiian Forest Bird Conservation Keystone Initiative, which was unveiled as part of the Department’s framework on restoration and resilience.



Secretary Haaland announced funding and efforts to support Hawaiian forest birds during her visit in 2023.
Photo by DOI.

- **Border Barrier Migration Corridor Studies:** In fiscal year 2022, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection awarded mitigation funding for several collaborative wildlife conservation projects in Texas that began implementation in fiscal year 2023. This funding included \$14.5 million to FWS to study impacts of border barriers on ocelot and large mammal migration, and \$1.9 million in mitigation funding provided to USGS to evaluate impacts of border barrier on mammal movement regarding flood waters.
- **Watersheds, Rivers, and Oceans:**
 - **National Marine Sanctuaries:** The NOAA initiated a process to designate a national marine sanctuary in Eastern Lake Erie adjacent to Pennsylvania. Additionally, NOAA released for public comment for the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary and a proposed rule for the proposed Lake Ontario National Marine Sanctuary. The NOAA also began a public process to consider designating the submerged lands and waters surrounding the Pacific Remote Islands as a national marine sanctuary. In addition, NOAA is continuing with efforts to designate national marine sanctuaries in Papahānaumokuākea in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and Hudson Canyon off New York and New Jersey.
 - **Marine and Coastal Area-based Management Advisory Committee:** The NOAA established the Marine and Coastal Area-based Management Advisory Committee, which will advise the Under Secretary on science-based approaches to area-based protection, conservation, restoration, and management in marine and coastal areas, including the Great Lakes. The committee will provide a forum for discussion and advice on area-based management, including opportunities to enhance conservation of biodiversity, climate resilience, and access to nature for underserved communities.
 - **Salmon Habitat:** In 2023, BOR and FWS announced five funding award recipients to implement \$34 million in salmon habitat improvement projects within the Central Valley Project under the Central Valley Project Improvement Act.
 - **Restoration Investments:** In 2023, EPA announced significant resources for restoration of water bodies across the country. For example, EPA's Columbia River Basin Program received \$79 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds and, in 2023, obligated \$72 million of those funds through two rounds of awards. Additionally, EPA is investing \$1.175 million of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law resources in a financial incentive program for property-owners in Delaware through the Chesapeake Bay Program, and EPA announced \$30 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for restoration projects that advance environmental justice in underserved and overburdened communities across the Great Lakes.

- **Healthy Watersheds:** In 2023, EPA worked to highlight the critical role of land conservation in protecting and restoring waters by publishing a new Watershed Protection Guide for Land Trusts, launching the web-based Funding Integration Tool for Source Water, and delivering trainings aimed at strengthening coordination between clean water programs and the land conservation community.
- **Estuary and Wetlands Conservation and Restoration:**
 - **Northeast Salt Marsh:** In 2023, the FWS, NOAA, and other Federal, State, and local partners celebrated the groundbreaking of the Herring River Restoration Project in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, the largest salt marsh restoration effort in the northeastern United States.
 - **National Estuary Program Grants:** The National Estuary Program led by EPA and partners conserved and restored more than 186,000 acres across 28 nationally designated watershed-based estuarine systems in 2023. In 2023, \$55,499,600 of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds were awarded to the program.
 - **National Estuarine Research Reserve System:** In 2023, NOAA accepted the State of Louisiana's nomination of a site for the National Estuarine Research Reserve System that encompasses portions of the river delta, alluvial floodplains, and estuarine ecosystems of the Atchafalaya Delta. The NOAA is also working with the State of Wisconsin on a reserve designation for a proposed site that encompasses approximately 37,726 acres in portions of the Green Bay estuary, including the Peshtigo River, Lower Bay, and Sturgeon Bay components.
 - **Noyes Cut Ecosystem Restoration:** In 2023, USACE constructed the Noyes Cut Restoration Project in Georgia, which is the culmination of over 80 years of locally led efforts, to restore tidal exchange through two local creeks, correct salinity gradients, and increase connectivity for fish and wildlife in the Dover Bluff area.
 - **Wetland Restoration:** In 2023, DOI celebrated multiple announcements supporting wetland restoration across the country. Examples include:
 - The FWS announced it was awarding \$19.1 million in grants to 22 projects in eight States through the National Coastal Wetland Conservation Grants Program, which leverage \$18.1 million in non-federal project contributions to protect, restore, or enhance 13,752 acres of important coastal wetlands habitats, including several miles of shoreline.
 - The DOI announced that more than \$196 million in funding was approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, providing FWS and its partners the ability to help

conserve or restore 348,600 acres of wetland and associated upland habitats for waterfowl, shorebirds and other birds across North America – including Canada and Mexico. The Commission approved more than \$90 million in North American Wetlands Conservation Act grants that will be matched by more than \$147 million in partner funds. In addition, the Commission approved more than \$32.94 million from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to conserve land on national wildlife refuges.

- **River Conservation:**
 - **Sustainable Rivers Program:** The Sustainable Rivers Program through the USACE focused on improving the health and life of rivers by changing infrastructure operations. In 2022 and 2023, the program engaged 10 new river systems through collaboration with Tribes and stakeholders and now includes more than 12,000 river miles in 45 river systems.
 - **Central Valley Salmon Habitat:** In 2023, BOR and FWS announced five funding award recipients to implement \$34 million in habitat improvement projects to restore salmon within California’s Central Valley under the Central Valley Project Improvement Act.
- **Coastal Restoration:** The Coastal Program within FWS, through cooperative conservation partnerships in priority coastal ecosystems and communities, completed 145 projects in fiscal year 2023 that protected 68,928 upland acres, 9,703 wetland acres, and 131 river miles. Additionally, the program restored and enhanced 4,601 upland acres, 4,455 wetland acres, and more than 14 river miles. Every Coastal Program project dollar was leveraged by approximately 10 non-program dollars for restoration work, and by approximately 215 dollars for protection work, to maximize the benefit to America’s wildlife and people.
- **Coral Reefs:** The DOI announced \$2.7 million in fiscal year 2023 funding under the Office of Insular Affairs Coral Reef Initiative and Natural Resources program to help protect corals and fight invasive species in the U.S. territories and the freely associated states. The NOAA also continued to advance its efforts in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in fiscal year 2023 by, for example, investing over \$2.3 million for the Mission: Iconic Reefs coral reef restoration project. In 2023, in response to a record-setting marine heatwave event in the Florida Reef Tract, NOAA and program partners implemented a coordinated response strategy to rescue and relocate affected corals that are critical to ongoing reef restoration efforts.
- **Highlands Conservation:** In February 2023, FWS announced \$20 million in grants through the Highlands Conservation Act Program. Funds will allow project partners to conserve natural resources in Connecticut, New York, and

- Pennsylvania to create wildlife habitat, enhance recreation, protect drinking water resources, and address climate change.
- **Everglades Restoration:** In 2023, FWS announced the future availability of the Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area Draft Land Protection Plan, Environmental Assessment, and Conceptual Management Plan. This is a part of a public planning process to help determine if and how the NWRs may help conserve important wildlife habitat in Southern Florida.

Increase Access for Outdoor Recreation

In 2023, the Biden-Harris administration continued to support access to the outdoors by enhancing opportunities nationwide for hiking, fishing, hunting, biking, boating, and other activities. Outdoor recreation continues to be an economic powerhouse, and a new NPS report showed visitor spending in communities near national parks in 2022 contributed more than \$50 billion nationwide and supported nearly 380,000 jobs. Additionally, the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation shows outdoor activities like fishing, hunting, wildlife watching, recreational boating, and target shooting generated an estimated \$394 billion from equipment, travel, licenses, and fees in one year.

In 2023, new data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis again affirms outdoor recreation as a major economic driver as past reports have shown. This year, the report showed that outdoor recreation contributed more than \$1 trillion in economic output, accounting for more than two percent of gross domestic product, nearly five million jobs, and more than three percent of U.S. employees in 2022. Examples include:

- **Castner Range National Monument:** President Biden signed a proclamation establishing the Castner Range National Monument in El Paso, Texas. This action will protect the cultural, scientific, and historic objects found within the monument's boundaries, honor our veterans, servicemembers, and Tribal Nations, and expand access to outdoor recreation on our public lands. Located on Fort Bliss, Castner Range served as a training and testing site for the U.S. Army during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The Army ceased training at the site and closed Castner Range in 1966. Once the area is sufficiently remediated to be safe for public access, Castner Range will offer unique opportunities for the El Paso community to experience, explore, and learn from nature.
- **Boundary Waters:** The Biden-Harris administration took action to protect the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and surrounding watershed, a spectacular network of rivers, lakes, and forests in northeastern Minnesota that comprise the most heavily visited wilderness area in the United States. Responding to concerns regarding the potential impacts of mining on the area's watershed, fish and wildlife, Tribal and treaty rights, and robust recreation economy, Secretary Haaland signed Public Land Order 7917 withdrawing approximately 225,504 acres in the Superior National Forest in northeastern Minnesota from disposition under the United States mineral and geothermal leasing laws for a 20-year period, subject to valid existing

rights. This action will help protect the Rainy River watershed, including the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the 1854 Ceded Territory of the Chippewa Bands, from the potential adverse impacts of new mineral and geothermal exploration and development.

- **Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation:** The Biden-Harris administration launched this interagency effort in 2022 to create more safe, affordable, and equitable opportunities for Americans to get outdoors. In 2023, the council—which includes leaders from DOI, USDA, DOC, and DoD—continued its work focusing on improving access to nature, expanding outdoor recreation opportunities, and providing the public with improved and more affordable experiences on America’s public lands and waters.
- **Interagency Task Force on Outdoor Recreation for Veterans:** This task force, established by the COMPACT Act of 2020 and co-chaired by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and DOI, continued coordination between the VA and public land agencies. The task force developed preliminary recommendations to better facilitate the use of public lands for wellness and therapy for veterans through engagement with the Veterans Outdoor Recreation Groups, which provided unique perspectives in this process and helped establish a path forward to completing this work.
- **Blueprint for 21st Century Outdoor Recreation:** The BLM released a new Blueprint for 21st Century Outdoor Recreation intended to guide investments, partnerships, outreach, and program development to address increasing visitation and expand outdoor opportunities on public lands for all.
- **Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council:** The DOI and USDA convened the newly established council for three meetings in 2023. The council received briefings from the Departments and discussed and provided recommendations on a number of topics, including conservation land acquisition, access to public lands, reauthorization of Farm Bill programs, and more.
- **Hunting and Fishing Access and Opportunities:** In 2023, FWS opened or expanded 48 hunting or sport fishing opportunities on approximately 3,000 acres across three refuges. Over 10.8 million acres at 400 wildlife refuges and 36 wetland management districts are currently open to hunting, and fishing is open on 343 wildlife refuges and 35 wetland management districts managed by FWS. Also in 2023, NOAA Fisheries issued a national policy committing the agency to enhance a broadly accessible, diverse array of sustainable saltwater recreational and non-commercial fisheries for the benefit and enjoyment of the nation; six regionally tailored implementation plans identify specific actions and metrics of success to advance the policy and support sustainable, high-quality saltwater recreational and non-commercial U.S. fisheries.
- **Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration:** The FWS announced fiscal year 2023 annual funding through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, including \$1.2 billion for wildlife restoration and hunter education and \$423.9 million for sport

fish restoration representing more than seven percent and six percent increases from 2022 funding, respectively, for State fish and wildlife agencies to conserve and manage fish and wildlife and their habitats for the use and enjoyment of current and future generations.

- **Green Space Around Military Installations:** The DOI and DoD announced a new partnership and \$80 million in investments to preserve land around military installations and improve access to outdoor recreation for millions of Americans. Through this program, the Defense Department's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program secures land adjacent to military bases to serve as buffers to development, enhance recreational access, protect at-risk species, and improve resistance to impacts from climate change and severe weather events.
- **National Survey of Wildlife-Associated Recreation:** The FWS announced the findings of the 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. The survey, coordinated by FWS, shows that U.S. residents over the age of 16 took over 1.7 billion trips in 2022 to participate in outdoor activities like fishing, hunting, wildlife watching, recreational boating, and target shooting. In doing so, outdoor enthusiasts spent an estimated \$394 billion on equipment, travel, licenses, and fees last year alone.
- **Recreational Boating Safety Program:** In fiscal year 2023, the U.S. Coast Guard awarded more than \$121 million to 56 States and territories, and more than \$6 million to 31 nonprofit organizations. Funded projects include efforts to expand established program outreach and information in Spanish and for those with limited English proficiency on boating and recreation safety.
- **National Trails System:** The DOI announced the designation of nine new national recreation trails in nine States, adding 340 miles to the National Trails System. With the new additions of land and water trails, the network now includes more than 1,300 trails with at least one in every U.S. State, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.
- **Transportation Alternatives Program:** The DOT provided \$1.3 billion for smaller scale but critically important multimodal transportation projects at both the State and local level. The Transportation Alternatives Set Aside Program provides funding for a variety of transportation projects, such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities; construction of turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas; recreational trails; and safe routes to school projects. As part of the Transportation Alternatives Set Aside Program, DOT will provide up to \$84 million dollars per year through fiscal year 2026 to advance the work of its Recreational Trails Program to support States in developing, maintaining, and improving access to park and recreation facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational trail users.
- **Recreation Infrastructure:** Across the Federal family, many Departments and agencies invested in recreation infrastructure to help improve access to the outdoors. Some examples include:

- **USACE:** The USACE is continuing the investment of more than \$11 million to support improvements and repairs associated with outdoor recreation opportunities, utilizing more than \$4 million in 2023 received from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and more than \$7 million of the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (DRSAA) in 2023. In fiscal year 2023, USACE was successful in expending over \$12 million dollars for road and parking improvements associated with recreation facilities, utilizing \$1.5 million from DRSAA in supplemental program funds and nearly \$8 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
- **Forest Service:** In 2023, the Forest Service announced more than \$36 million in investments to improve vital recreation infrastructure located on national forests and grasslands, with funding made possible by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
- **NOAA:** In 2023, NOAA started to invest \$50 million from the Inflation Reduction Act in new visitor interpretation facilities and sanctuary offices to enhance the NOAA presence in sanctuary gateway communities, as well as partnering to increase visitor interaction. Additionally, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service dedicated \$20 million of Inflation Reduction Act funding toward improving recreational fisheries data, strengthening State-Federal data exchange, and harnessing the power of video and acoustic surveys for red snapper and other reef fish in the Gulf of Mexico. These investments will address scientific and management uncertainty, benefiting millions of anglers in the world’s largest recreational fisheries.
- **FWS:** In 2023, FWS announced the distribution through the Boating Infrastructure Grant program of more than \$20 million in grant funding to assist States and territories in the construction, renovation, and maintenance of marinas and other boating facilities for outdoor recreation. Grants will support projects in 20 States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- **Land and Water Conservation Fund State-side Projects:** In 2023, DOI announced the distribution of nearly \$300 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to all 50 States, U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia for State-identified outdoor recreation and conservation projects.



Photo of a secluded forest lake in a western national forest. *Photo by USDA.*

Along with this year's LWCF distribution, the NPS released an update to the LWCF Manual that directs States to work more closely with Tribes and underserved communities during the development of their Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans, a requirement for eligibility to receive LWCF funds. It also prioritizes the creation of parks in underserved communities. While Tribes were already eligible to receive LWCF grants, the changes to the Manual are intended to clarify this availability and encourage Tribal governments to apply for these funds.

Incentivize and Reward the Voluntary Conservation Efforts of Fishers, Ranchers, Farmers, and Forest Owners

In 2023, the Biden-Harris administration has remained faithful to its commitment to support healthy rural economies, advance climate-smart, sustainable agriculture practices, and keep working lands and waterfronts productive. The Federal family has continued to appreciate conservation as a continuum, recognizing the varied and important contributions of voluntary conservation efforts from fishers, farmers, forest owners, ranchers, and other landowners. Examples include:

- **Conservation Reserve Program:** In 2023, USDA issued more than \$1.77 billion to agricultural producers and landowners. The CRP's more than 667,000 participants received payments from USDA's FSA for their voluntary conservation efforts on more than 23 million acres of private land.
- **Big Game Conservation:** The USDA and the State of Wyoming formalized a partnership and a pilot project to support voluntary conservation of private working lands underpinning important migratory big game populations in fiscal year 2023. This pilot program delivered over \$21 million in assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. Nearly 308,000 acres of working lands were made more sustainable for ranching and wildlife and 17 conservation easements over 11,830 acres of working lands will be maintained as open space for migratory wildlife perpetually. Wyoming also witnessed a 30 percent increase in Grassland Conservation Reserve Program participation, with 25 percent located in the migratory big game priority areas. Based on this success, USDA is expanding the Wyoming migratory big game pilot into a national landscape initiative in 2024, to include Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana.
- **Climate-Smart Practices:** The USDA made more than \$3 billion in funding from the Inflation Reduction Act available for agricultural producers and forest landowners nationwide to participate in voluntary conservation programs and adopt climate-smart practices in fiscal year 2024. These funds provide direct climate mitigation benefits, advance a host of other environmental co-benefits, and expand access to financial and technical assistance for producers to advance conservation on their farm, ranch, or forest land through practices like cover cropping, conservation

tillage, wetland restoration, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, tree planting and more.

- **Private Lands Investments:** In fiscal year 2023, NRCS continued to make major investments to support private lands conservation through its Farm Bill conservation programs. These funds provide direct climate mitigation benefits, advance a host of other environmental co-benefits, and expand access to financial and technical assistance for producers to advance conservation on their farm, ranch, or forest land through practices like cover cropping, conservation tillage, wetland restoration, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, tree planting and more.
- **Small Acreage Forests:** In 2023, the Forest Service made \$150 million available to help underserved and small acreage forest landowners connect to emerging voluntary climate markets. These markets can provide economic opportunities for landowners and incentivize improved forest health and management.
- **WaterSMART Initiative:** The USDA announced a \$25 million investment in three new priority areas and 37 existing priority areas in the West as the result of a collaboration with the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This year, BOR's WaterSMART programs have announced over \$305 million in funding to 181 projects that help farmers, ranchers, and local communities conserve water and build drought resilience.
- **Environmental Water Resource Projects:** In 2023, DOI announced a \$51 million investment in 30 new Environmental Water Resource Projects in 11 States through the BOR. These collaborative projects focus on water conservation, cooperative watershed management, and restoration efforts that will result in significant benefits to ecosystem or watershed health.
- **Sentinel Landscapes Partnership:** The partnership, founded in 2013 and implemented through coordination between DoD, USDA, and DOI, empowers private landowners around military installations to advance sustainable management practices on their farms, ranches, and forests. In 2023, the partnership designated two new sentinel landscapes in Virginia and South Carolina, bringing the total number of sentinel landscapes to 12. To date, the program and associated contributions have permanently conserved more than 610,000 acres of land and enrolled 3 million acres of land in technical assistance programs.
- **Partners for Fish and Wildlife:** In 2023, FWS supported landowners in their voluntary efforts to conserve wildlife habitat, through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, by offering financial and technical assistance to interested landowners and helping to keep working lands in working hands. In fiscal year 2023, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program completed 1,895 projects, restoring and enhancing 167,229 upland acres, 15,565 wetland acres, 216 river miles, and 67 fish passage structures. Every Partners for Fish and Wildlife project dollar leveraged approximately five non-program dollars to maximize return on investment.

- **Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances:** In 2023, FWS continued to support these collaborative agreements that provide non-Federal landowners with additional incentives for engaging in voluntary conservation to support non-listed species. For example, the latest agreement, signed on September 15, 2023, is the Quail Country programmatic agreement that covers 28 Georgia and 7 Florida counties for 12 species; one landowner has already enrolled 100 acres under this agreement. In total, the program’s 62 active agreements involve 48 States and more than 724 landowners, cover more than 27 million acres and 93 stream miles, and support 128 species.
- **Safe Harbor Agreements:** In 2023, FWS finalized two new safe harbor agreements, which support the voluntary efforts of non-Federal landowners whose actions specifically contribute to the recovery of species listed as endangered or threatened. The two recent additions, one for California red-legged frog and the other for northern spotted owl, bring the current total to 118 active agreements with 737 landowners, covering more than 6.4 million acres and 84 linear miles of stream and providing conservation benefits to 152 species.
- **Wildlife Conservation Initiative:** In 2023, FWS, National Alliance of Forest Owners, and the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement, Inc., announced a memorandum of understanding that formalizes the Wildlife Conservation Initiative, a collaborative partnership focused on advancing the conservation of at-risk and listed species within private working forests nationwide.
- **Tidal Channel Restoration:** In 2023 the USACE continued its work in Puerto Rico on both the vegetation and solid waste removal contracts established in 2022 to provide \$163 million for restoration of Cano Martin Peña tidal channel to support the revitalization of eight impoverished communities settled along the tidal channel and significantly improve the aquatic ecosystem.
- **Gulf of Mexico Watershed:** The EPA’s Gulf of Mexico Division funded \$14.5 million in 2023 through its Farmer to Farmer program for 11 projects to help reduce impacts of excess nutrients on the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem. These projects work cooperatively with farmers, ranchers, and landowners to demonstrate and increase adoption of innovative nutrient reduction strategies.
- **Marine Species Conservation:**
 - **Species in the Spotlight:** Through its “Species in the Spotlight” initiative, NOAA continues taking targeted actions to halt the decline of the nine species most at-risk of extinction in the near future. In 2023, NOAA continued implementing action plans through voluntary measures and public-private partnerships to, for example, rehabilitate Hawaiian monk seal pups.
 - **Species Recovery Grants:** These grants from NOAA support States, Tribes, and territories in implementing high priority recovery actions, including management, research, monitoring, and/or outreach activities, that have

direct conservation benefits for species listed as threatened or endangered. In fiscal year 2023, NOAA awarded \$6.3 million across 26 multi-year awards.

- **Marine Mammal Rescue Grant Program:** This NOAA grant program provides funding for communities to develop or continue conservation efforts such as marine mammal stranding response, rehabilitation, and scientific research regarding marine mammal health. In fiscal year 2023, NOAA awarded \$4 million across 50 grants to recipients in 20 States and one Tribe.



NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad meets with partners at the Ohio Chagrin River Floodplain Land Conservation project to learn about restoration plans funded under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. *Photo by NOAA.*

Create Jobs by Investing in Restoration and Resilience

In 2023, the Biden-Harris administration advanced many efforts to strengthen the nation’s resilience to sea level rise, flooding, extreme wildfires, droughts, storms, and other climate-related impacts while also supporting activities like restoration, reclamation, and reforestation in the nation’s natural systems. For example, marking the two-year anniversary of President Biden signing the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, DOI released a new analysis that estimates that investments from the historic law supported on average 17,669 jobs and contributed an average of \$2 billion to the economy each year. This and related work create and deliver economic benefits to communities nationwide, a central focus of the *America the Beautiful* initiative. Examples include:

- **America the Beautiful Challenge Grants:** The Biden-Harris administration joined the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and public-and private-sector partners in announcing \$141.3 million in grants through the America the Beautiful Challenge. The 74 new grants support landscape-scale conservation projects across 46 States, three U.S. territories, and 21 Tribal Nations, and will generate at least \$12 million in matching contributions for a total conservation impact of more than \$153 million. Approximately 40 percent of the 2023 grants support projects implemented by Indigenous communities. This investment represents an unprecedented level of

funding dedicated to Tribally led projects. Through a public-private partnership with Native Americans in Philanthropy that leverages \$1.5 million in private dollars, Tribes will be able to access more than \$50 million in new public funding to address critical conservation projects.

- **American Climate Corps and Youth Opportunities:** This year, the Biden-Harris administration launched the American Climate Corps, a workforce training and service initiative that will ensure more young people have access to the skills-based training necessary for good-paying careers in the clean energy and climate resilience economy. The American Climate Corps will mobilize a new, diverse generation of more than 20,000 Americans – putting them to work conserving and restoring our lands and waters, bolstering community resilience, deploying clean energy, implementing energy efficient technologies, and advancing environmental justice, all while creating pathways to high-quality, good-paying clean energy and climate resilience jobs in the public and private sectors after they complete their paid training program. As part of this commitment, the Interior Department joined other Federal agencies – including the Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, Labor and Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, and AmeriCorps – in formally entering into an agreement to serve as the blueprint for the multiagency program. Examples of existing programs that provide meaningful opportunities include:
 - **AmeriCorps Projects:** In 2023, over 14,000 AmeriCorps members carried out environmental stewardship and disaster response activities, introducing them to careers in restoration and resilience. As a first major partnership under the American Climate Corps, the White House announced a \$15 million agreement between AmeriCorps and the Forest Service to establish the new AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps Forest Corps. Additionally, in 2023, AmeriCorps invested \$111 million in grant funding to support 156 organizations to carry out conservation, climate, and disaster services projects in rural and urban communities across the country. State leaders, including the Governors of Michigan and Washington, launched



Youth crew members repair a bridge as part of a trail project. *Photo by DOI.*

Statewide climate corps to engage AmeriCorps members in conserving public lands, increasing access to green spaces, and addressing climate change.

- **Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grant Program:** EPA is leveraging historic funding from President Biden’s Investing in America agenda to increase pathways for young people into environmental justice careers through the American Climate Corps. EPA’s \$2 billion Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grant Program announced in November 2023 includes an option for community-based organizations to propose their own Climate Corps program for youth in disadvantaged communities to pursue careers in greenhouse gas and air pollution reduction, along with other strategies to take climate action, reduce pollution, and increase community resilience.
- **Indian Youth Service Corps Program:** The DOI announced a \$15 million commitment through President Biden’s Investing in America agenda to the Indian Youth Service Corps (IYSC) and other programs supporting the next generation of conservation and climate stewards. The DOI also announced its first IYSC grants to eight projects involving more than 20 Tribes and Tribal organizations; these first grants awards were designed to help develop Tribal capacity in conservation, natural resource management, and climate resilience and also provide Tribes and Tribal organizations with funding to enable them to invest in, train, and recruit a new generation of skilled Indigenous workers. The IYSC, announced by Secretary Haaland last year, is a partner-based program designed to provide Indigenous youth with meaningful, Tribally-led public service opportunities to support the conservation and protection of natural and cultural resources through construction, restoration, or rehabilitation.
- **Urban Wildlife Conservation Program:** In 2023, FWS Urban Wildlife Conservation Program bolstered the efforts of 27 urban national wildlife refuges by providing training, coaching, mentoring and youth internships to engage in co-designing conservation with systematically excluded communities. These efforts are part of the \$26.7 million FWS invested in fiscal year 2023 in long-term internships or fellowships with more than 494 young adults to support restoration projects and conservation activities across public and partner lands.
- **NOAA Ocean Guardian Youth Ambassador Program:** The pilot NOAA Ocean Guardian Youth Ambassador Program launched in January 2023 with over 250 students from across the United States and U.S. territories. Nearly 100 youth ambassadors submitted ideas for action through this program, and many have reported on their stewardship projects or events at their school or in their communities.
- **Great American Outdoors Act:** The Act continues to provide historic investments in America’s iconic public lands and BIE schools by addressing critical overdue

maintenance needs. These investments are rehabilitating or restoring thousands of assets for generations of visitors, employees, and volunteers. Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) projects funded in fiscal year 2023 at both DOI and the Forest Service are expected to contribute approximately 18,700 jobs and \$2 billion in Gross Domestic Product. By the end of 2023, DOI has awarded more than \$2.3 billion of LRF funds across 228 projects, and Forest Service has awarded \$461 million across 700 projects. The following are examples of major project accomplishments funded by the LRF:

- **NPS:** In fiscal year 2023, NPS funded 24 projects across 22 States and territories for the LRF, bringing total projects in the first three years to 104, with an average project budget of more than \$29 million. This includes Rehabilitate Seawalls and Shoreline Landscape at the Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park at the National Mall and Memorial Parks in Washington DC. Rehabilitation of the Old Faithful Wastewater Collection and Treatment system at Yellowstone NP in Wyoming and Stabilize and Rehabilitate Alcatraz Island Historic Structures at Golden Gate NRA in California.
- **BLM:** Building on previous years, BLM awarded more than 30 construction contracts to improve facilities and infrastructure on public lands in the Western States. Additionally, BLM completed 18 projects with noticeable public benefits. For example, in Wyoming, BLM reshaped the Hyattville Logging Road, improving drainage and removing boulders from the roadway increasing safety for those travelling the road.
- **FWS:** In 2023, FWS continued work on 35 LRF projects at national wildlife refuges in over 20 States, Puerto Rico, and Midway Atoll NWR. Several primary visitor center and administrative headquarters projects are complete at the Crab Orchard NWR, Tule Lake NWR, and Bombay Hook NWR. These facilities provide opportunities for improved visitor contact and environmental education. Installation of new public use boat ramps have been completed at Kenai NWR and Dale Bumpers NWR. The LRF-funded FWS Maintenance Professional workforce has completed numerous public use improvements to heavily utilized boardwalks, trails, and wildlife observation facilities at national wildlife refuges across the nation.
- **Forest Service:** At the end of fiscal year 2023, the Forest Service had completed 218 deferred maintenance projects across 80 national forests in 32 States with 775 additional projects underway. Once completed, these LRF-funded projects will address approximately \$650 in backlog maintenance, spanning 127 national forests and 7 the Forest Service research stations across 43 States and Puerto Rico. This work involves 518 active partnerships and leverages more than \$200 million in partner contributions. Projects address numerous priorities by supporting small businesses and rural economies—97 percent of contracts are with small businesses and 46 percent are disadvantaged small businesses—as well as

investing in infrastructure to help communities adapt to and manage impacts of climate change and to help protect communities with the highest wildfire risk.

- **Restoration and Resilience Framework:** The DOI unveiled a restoration and resilience framework to guide strategic investments, catalyze coordination, drive meaningful outcomes, and advance climate resilience. Through President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, the Department is implementing a more than \$2 billion investment to restore our nation’s lands and waters. This new framework will help ensure that investments from these two laws are focused strategically to solve key conservation challenges and advance climate resilience. For example, the framework has helped guide many DOI projects in 2023, such as:
 - **Ecosystem Restoration:** The DOI invested \$125 million this year from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to restore our nation’s lands and waters. The funding, to be spent over the next four years, will support 240 locally led projects through BIA, BLM, BOR, NPS, Office of Insular Affairs, FWS, and USGS.
 - **NPS Climate Resilience:** The DOI announced more than \$44 million through the President’s Investing in America agenda to meet critical ecosystem resilience, restoration, and environmental planning needs for the NPS in fiscal year 2023.
 - **BLM Restoration Landscapes:** The DOI announced plans to allocate \$161 million provided in the Inflation Reduction Act to ecosystem restoration efforts and resilience on the nation’s public lands as part of President Biden’s Investing in America agenda. This work, led by BLM, focuses on 21 “Restoration Landscapes” across 11 western States and will range from restoring wildlife habitat in the sagebrush steppe of the high desert to re-creating wetland meadows to repairing watersheds on former industrial timberlands. The announcement of funding from the Inflation Reduction Act complements the approximately \$40 million that BLM has already deployed from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for restoration activities, including, for example, \$4.5 million to improve sagebrush habitat on both public and private lands.
 - **BLM Resilient Recreation:** The BLM invested \$3.2 million of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds to complete resilient recreation infrastructure for projects, such as new campgrounds, hiking trails, picnic areas, and shoreline restoration.
 - **National Wildlife Refuge System and State Wildlife Management Areas:** The DOI announced a more than \$120 million investment from the Inflation Reduction Act to rebuild and restore units of the NWRS and partnering State Wildlife Management Areas that have been affected by adverse weather events. The investment prioritizes projects that promote coastal resilience

and climate adaptation, address invasive species threats, and provide for additional data collection needed to support successful natural resource resilience.

- **Keystone Initiatives:** The framework includes a commitment to nine keystone initiatives, which address climate change impacts, including through restoring the Klamath Basin, salt marshes and core sage brush areas; supporting habitat for salmon, bison and Hawaiian forest birds that hold cultural, subsistence, and ecosystem significance; and enhancing communities' quality of life in Appalachia by improving outdoor spaces and addressing legacy pollution. The framework also invests resources towards the National Early Detection and Rapid Response Network and National Seed Strategy. Advances in this work are highlighted throughout this report.
- **Policies to Strengthen Adaptation and Resilience Efforts:** The DOI announced the publication of new policies to strengthen the Department's ability to meet its mission in the face of a changing climate. In a first-ever effort to factor the climate crisis into all operations, four new Departmental Manual policies clarify and make more consistent the types of climate information used across the Department in order to strengthen and enhance mission-critical decisions and activities.
- **Actions in Support of Nature-Based Solutions:** The Interior Department announced new steps to utilize nature-based solutions in its efforts to tackle the climate crisis, including the launch of a new tool called the DOI Nature-based Solutions Roadmap that provides the Department and public with guidance on the implementation of nature-based solutions.
- **Policy Recognizing Role of Ecosystem Health in Climate Resilience:** In 2023, DOE issued revisions to its Departmental Order on sustainability recognizing the significance of ecosystem health as an element of climate resilience and mission assurance and directing DOE programs to include ecosystem values in land management planning.
- **Policy Statement on Climate Change and Historic Preservation:** The ACHP adopted in 2023 a policy statement on climate change, recognizing the environmental and economic value of historic and culturally significant sites and recognizing the Federal Government's role in ensuring that these sites will be rehabilitated to mitigate climate impacts and, where applicable, adapted to respond to climate change-related threats.
- **Wildfire Mitigation:** In 2023, USDA announced \$197 million in wildfire mitigation through the Forest Service's Community Wildfire Defense Grant program. The Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission also released a report outlining a comprehensive, consensus-based set of recommendations to Congress to address the nation's wildfire crisis. Additionally, DOI announced over \$468 million in new allocations from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to help increase wildland fire management efforts on more than 2.5 million acres of land in fiscal year 2023, a 30 percent increase over fiscal year 2022 accomplishments. The

funding will advance collaborative wildfire risk management efforts with private landowners, Tribes, States and local governments, help communities acquire slip-on tank units to operate vehicles as fire engines, support special pay supplements for Federal wildland firefighters and expand remote sensing for wildfire detection. These investments build on the nearly \$180 million from DOI allocated in fiscal year 2022.

- **Tackling Legacy Pollution:** The Biden-Harris administration advanced efforts to address orphan wells, abandoned mine lands, and remediation sites:
 - **Brownfields Cleanup:** The EPA Brownfields Program helps revitalize communities by cleaning up and repurposing contaminated sites. In fiscal year 2023, the program assessed 1,894 sites—over 200 more than in the previous year—while cleaning up 170 properties. This work exceeded the successes of fiscal year 2022, leveraging 17,443 jobs and making 18,670 acres available for reuse, often including parks or other open space.
 - **Orphan Well Clean Up:** As part of the historic \$4.7 billion investment authorized through President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to identify and address orphaned oil and gas wells across the nation, DOI launched a new Orphaned Wells Program Office to ensure accountable and effective implementation of the new program. Building on investments made in fiscal year 2022, DOI announced \$64 million to clean up 207 well sites on Federal lands, and \$40 million to clean up well sites on Tribal Lands. Through initial grants made to States, nearly 6,000 orphaned wells have been plugged on State and private lands.
 - **Reclamation of Abandoned Mine Lands:** In 2023, DOI made available \$725 million of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law grant funding to States and Tribes for abandoned coal mine land remediation. These funds will support reclamation work that creates good-paying union jobs and addresses safety and environmental hazards posed by abandoned mine lands.
- **Coastal Resilience:**
 - **Climate-Ready Coasts Initiative:** In 2023, through Inflation Reduction Act funding, NOAA announced approximately \$562 million in funding to support the Climate-Ready Coasts initiative. This includes investments in nearly 150 projects across 30 coastal and Great Lakes States and territories to make communities and the economy more resilient to climate change. The Climate-Ready Coasts initiative is focused on investing in high-impact, nature-based infrastructure projects that create climate solutions by storing carbon; build resilience to coastal hazards such as extreme weather events, pollution and marine debris; restore coastal habitats that help wildlife and humans thrive; and provide employment opportunities.
 - **Climate Resilience Regional Challenge:** In 2023, NOAA launched a first-ever \$575 million Climate Resilience Regional Challenge to help coastal and Great Lakes communities, including Tribal communities in those regions,

become more resilient to extreme weather and other impacts of the climate crisis. The funding supports innovative coastal resilience and adaptation solutions, such as building natural infrastructure, planning and preparing for community-led relocation, and protecting public access to coastal natural resources, that protect communities and ecosystems from sea level rise, tidal flooding hurricanes, storm surge, among other severe climate impacts.

- **Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience Projects:** In the first round of the Biden-Harris Administration's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act funding competitions, NOAA awarded more than \$265 million in funding for 38 transformational habitat restoration and coastal resilience projects this year, as well as an additional \$20.4 million in funding in future years. This significant level of investment provides an extraordinary opportunity for NOAA to continue making an impact for fisheries, protected resources, and coastal communities. In the second round of funding competition, up to \$240 million in funding is available for transformational habitat restoration and coastal resilience. The NOAA also awarded nearly \$25 million in funding for 35 new projects that will advance the coastal habitat restoration priorities of underserved communities.
- **Regional Restoration:** Several examples from 2023 of significant regional efforts include:
 - **Gulf States:** In 2023, DOI announced the distribution of over \$353 in fiscal year 2022 energy revenues to Gulf States to support coastal conservation and restoration projects, hurricane protection programs, onshore infrastructure projects, and activities to implement marine and coastal resilience management plans.
 - **Delaware River Watershed:** In 2023, FWS announced more than \$14.9 million in funding through the Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund, in partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, for 36 conservation projects in the Delaware River Watershed. The support includes more than \$4.5 million from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for six projects that will improve public access, recreational opportunities and water quality, as well as enhance shoreline and wildlife habitat.
 - **Klamath Basin:** In 2023, BOR and NRCS announced 11 projects totaling \$6 million to be awarded as part of three Klamath Basin Salmon Restoration grant programs. Partnering with NFWF to administer funds, the grants will be combined with \$9,395,146 in matching contributions for a total conservation impact of nearly \$15 million.
 - **Great Lakes:** In 2023, FWS announced more than \$2.9 million in fiscal year 2023 funding through the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act, and the thirteen selected projects address key conservation and restoration needs in the basin across four States.

- **Lake Tahoe:** In 2023, FWS announced \$3.1 million in fiscal year 2023 funding from the President’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to support the Lake Tahoe Invasive Species Program and prevent and combat the spread of aquatic invasive species in Lake Tahoe. The funds will support existing cooperative agreements with the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and augment a historic effort to restore the Lake Tahoe Basin ecosystem.
- **Marine Minerals Program:** The Marine Minerals Program within the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management manages more than 40 active contracts advancing and improving the National Offshore Sand Inventory within Federal waters in the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. The projects provide information and data for coastal planners and communities to prepare for, mitigate, and respond to climate change and natural disasters. National Offshore Sand Inventory projects facilitate proactive management of sand and sediment exploration and leasing and advance investments in coastal protection, resource evaluation, and environmental research to build resilience for communities and infrastructure along our Nation’s coast.
- **Stream Crossing and Stream Restoration Projects:** The Forest Service National Stream and Aquatic Ecology Center led and implemented advanced technical training, project support and mentoring on road-stream crossing, stream and floodplain restoration, and dam removal projects across national forests. Through the selected projects, more than 300 resource specialists were trained and supported for 100 road infrastructure and stream and floodplain restoration projects.
- **Addressing Natural Disaster Risks:** In fiscal year 2023, FEMA Agency announced \$3 billion in selections for climate resilience funding as part of President Biden’s Investing in America agenda. This funding includes \$2.3 billion for critical resilience projects funded by the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program to help communities increase resilience to heat waves, drought, wildfires, flood, hurricanes, and other hazards by preparing before disaster strikes, and \$711 million for Flood Mitigation Assistance for individual and community-scale flood mitigation.
- **Promoting Resilient Transportation:** In 2023, DOT announced \$848 million in funding availability for the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation Discretionary Grant program to ensure surface transportation resilience to natural hazards, including climate change, sea level rise, flooding, extreme weather events, and other natural disasters through support of planning activities, resilience improvements, community resilience, and evacuation routes, and at-risk coastal infrastructure.

III. Conclusion

As in years past, the historic call-to-action set by President Biden in Executive Order 14008 and the Federal family's commitment to advancing locally led, partnership-driven conservation and restoration through the *America the Beautiful* initiative have spurred action nationwide. During the first year of the initiative, the Biden-Harris administration developed its foundational and inclusive vision and created strong momentum with unprecedented funding. In the second year, the administration completed broad public engagement and continued supporting efforts nationwide.

Now, at the completion of its third year, the administration has continued to make effective use of transformative investments, advance thoughtful policies and tools for restoration, and take actions to conserve special places. Looking ahead, the Biden-Harris administration will continue to capitalize on the Investing in America agenda and engage with States, Tribes, underserved and overburdened communities, and other key stakeholders to build a better America for all for present and future generations.