

Meeting of the Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council  
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(Captions provided by a live Captioner.)

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VICE CHAIRMAN JOHN DEVNEY: Thank you everybody for making the trip. It is good to see you. Obviously we held our first meeting virtually so it's wonderful to be together with everyone this morning. I think the way I would like to start is go around the room and have everybody introduce themselves and we will hear from Mr. Deputy Secretary Tommy Beaudreau and Mr. Robert Bonnie.

JOEL WEBSTER: Good morning, Joel Webster with Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. Nice to see everyone.

DAN FORSTER: Good morning. Dan Forster.

MICHAEL CROWDER: Michael Crowder from Eastern Washington state and the immediate past president of the National Association of Conservation Districts.

LYDIA PARKER: I am Lydia. I am the CEO of Hunters of Color.

MARSHALL JOHNSON: Marshall Johnson, chief conservation officer.

COLIN BECK: Good morning, everyone. Colin Beck.

COLE MANNIX: Coming from Helena, Montana.

KEITH TIDBALL: Good morning, Keith Tidball, veterans rep. Good to see you all.

LAND TAWNEY: Morning, Land Tawney.

ANDREW SCHMIDT: Andrew Schmidt.

ROBERTA SALAZAR-HENRY: Good morning, everybody Roberta Salazar Henry. I represent the state government.

DOUG HOBBS: Good morning, I am Doug Hobbs, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. I am the

Designated Federal Officer for the Hunting & Wildlife Conservation Council.

MATT FILSINGER: Good morning Matt Filsinger, I am supporting Doug Hobbs.

SIMON ROOSEVELT: Good morning, Simon Roosevelt from New York New York.

VICE CHAIRMAN JOHN DEVNEY: Serving as your Vice Chair of the Council, chief policy officer. I think we will go around the room so everyone knows who our guests are here.

>>: (Indiscernible by captioner)

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>>: (Indiscernible by captioner)

>>: Good morning, everyone Bradley Kinder.

>>: Good morning, Corey Roegner, Deputy Division Chief.

>>: I'm here with...

LAUREN WARD: Morning everyone I am Lauren Ward. Work with working lands, private landowners.

>>: (Indiscernible by captioner) TRCP ...

CYNTHIA MARTINEZ: Good morning I'm Cynthia Martinez and I'm chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

>>: (Indiscernible by captioner)

>>: Good morning everyone (Indiscernible by captioner).

>>: (Indiscernible by captioner).

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Thank you everybody for joining us. Before we hear from our special invited guests this morning I want to extend appreciation to Doug and Matt the great work they have done getting the committee and. Anybody who has been involved with these knows there is an incredible amount of work that needs to go on. They need to keep everyone moving and Matt and Doug have done an exceptional job just want to extend my thanks right away this morning working with the subcommittees which of course is where the good work starts. With that, Mr. Deputy Secretary.

DEPUTY SECRETARY TOMMY BEAUDREAU: Thanks, John and let me reiterate the welcome. Really appreciate everyone joining us and also the appreciation for the support staff. A couple thoughts right off the top and then I will turn it over to Robert for a couple of his thoughts as well. First, the agenda looks terrific. As folks have heard me say -- sorry this conference room is recently remodeled and I think over teched in some ways. I don't know maybe it will eventually iron itself out.

The agenda looks terrific. This is exactly the type of work that I know Secretary Haaland and were hoping this counsel would undertake. This is incredibly complicated work that we have in front of us and its recognition of the importance and the complexity of the work that we pull together this, you know, broad but focused group of experts. So profound appreciation for everybody's commitment to this counsel and its work.

Everybody here has very significant day jobs and a lot of responsibility and so to take this on top of the good and hard work that is happening every day is both really appreciated but also a testament to what can be accomplished when we work together through our democracy. So again, on a fundamental level profound appreciation for what everyone is doing.

In terms of the agenda, I find it incredibly exciting at this moment in time to be able to pull together this group to talk about the conservation opportunities that we have in front of us. It is a historic moment to have in the federal government whether it is through GAOA or the bipartisan and for structural law or the Inflation Reduction Act, these opportunities to bring resources to bear out on the landscape this is the problem that we wanted to have. So often in our conversations over time we run into huge challenges in terms of the scarcity of dollars and resources. So lots of good ideas, partnerships and plans but a brick wall in terms of resources. That's not to say all of our problems are solved in that regard but we do have unprecedented resources to do conservation and to do it the right way through partnerships and local communities and genuine well-thought-out planning efforts.

So that is overwhelming in a lot of respects, but it is, as I said, exactly the type of problem that we want to have. We want to work through our various partnerships and through this body to come up with the strategies of how to wring the most in terms of ... This is one of the reasons why this counsel at this moment in time is as critical as it is. I'm very happy that we have pulled together a group of friends to brief all of you on our programs, what we have in flight, a current thinking of how to deploy dollars for the implementation of these programs. That said and that's an important foundation. That is part of our responsibility to make sure we are well coordinated and make sure everybody is up to speed at the same time. What I feel is necessary to plug into that is the work that is already being done in the planning on the landscape and the partnerships. We do not have to reinvent the wheel here, there are professionals in the organizations represented in this body who have been doing this work for decades. And now is the opportunity to try to unlock as much of that planning and work as possible and so that is why I view the work of this body is critical to the implementation of GAOA, BIL and IRA.

Just in terms of the last point and you guys have heard me say this over and over again but the reason I keep saying it is because I profoundly believe it. It is the work of the Council and the folks we together represent that will in my mind demonstrate to the American people that there is a lot of common ground when it comes to conservation. There's actually a lot more that unites us in our values and our goals and what we want to see for public lands in the United States than divides us.

And so the politics will continue to happen. That is, you know, that is our system. And there is a lot to be valued in it but underneath that rhetoric is the work in the unity represented around this room where people of diverse perspectives and of diverse sets of expertise can come together and actually deploy resources and come up with policy solutions that are in the best interest of the United States and the communities we represent.

So that is incredibly gratifying and reassuring work. And so for my small part in this effort to be able to convene and work with all of you, is just again on a fundamental level really reassuring that we can work together on behalf of things we cherish and the values that we all share.

So thank you so much. I apologize on getting pulled in a couple of different directions today so I will turn it over to Robert and unfortunately, I have to step away. But one of the things I'm looking forward to having looked at the agenda for today is the next convening really taking advantage of the opportunity to hear from all of you on the proposals and recommendations that are starting to flow out of this body. So there is a lot of work to do. We all feel the pressure of time and I just, again, really really appreciate everyone taking this on. Thanks very much and over to Robert.

UNDER SECRETARY ROBERT BONNIE: Let me just reiterate what Tommy said just the importance of this organization. The importance of your input and how we appreciate your engagement. That said, about 8 PM last night I'm contemplating the fact that I'm 0 for 7 so far this turkey season. I thought if there was one organization that would give me a pass to go turkey hunting on a Monday morning it's all of you. I stepped off my back porch this morning about 6 AM and I listened. There were no turkeys gobbling so I'm here.

Seriously, good to be with all of you all. I think I would reiterate what Tommy said about there are enormous opportunities we have right now. And as I think about the next 18 months for us at USDA it's going to be a lot about execution. It's about executing and you all play an incredibly important role in that. If we are going to get it right, we're going to build a type of bipartisan support people are going to build partnerships on the ground to do that, your organizations, your communities are going to be incredibly important. It cuts across everything that I'm about to say.

Tommy mentioned bipartisan in the law, Inflation Reduction Act and the USDA hardships and climate smart commodities. We have a lot of big-ticket items that will

move substantial resources for conservation, and we will need all of your help to do it. On the Forest Service side, Forest Service colleagues are here and I know Rob is on the agenda later but enormous challenges later in the West as it relates to wildfire and enormous opportunities for the first time in a long time the Forest Service has resources to actually do something about it.

Forest Service has lived in a scarcity of resources for decades. You see consolidation and national forest. You see the challenges fighting fire while trying to manage forces. The first time in a long time we will need you on the ground to help design projects, to help do the restoration that has to be done other. And Forest Service, in the coming days, will be out with more policy. I think all of your views will be incredibly important on lots of attention these days to old-growth and mature forests, underlined that the major threats there right now our catastrophic wildfire and bugs.

Timber harvesting is no longer the threat to old-growth forests in the West. In fact, if we think about thinning and reintroduction of fire that is really the keystone of the wildfire strategy that the administration has put forward and all of your membership, engagement on the ground and engagement with the press and with the public is going to be really important.

The other side of the house, my part of the house, Farm Production and Conservation, obviously we've got significant new resources through the Inflation Reduction Act practice enormous overlap between many of the things you all care about and practices that will benefit the climate. Forest conservation, nutrient management to reduce runoff. There are a ton of opportunity for us. We are going to hire new staff in NRCS, but we will never be able to hire enough staff. We are going to rely on partnerships, conservation districts, hunting and fishing groups. If you think about on the Forest Service side the number of stewardship contracts that wildlife groups are helping implement it is the same for us on the NRCS side. We need your help on the ground for designing projects and ensure we got the right practices and in your engagement on all that.

NRCS is doing cool stuff on wildlife migration West. Joel and others are engaged in another. The ability to stack conservation program equipment and help protect those working lands that are so important as winter range and corridors. Lots of opportunities for you all. We need your help and engagement. We are looking for ways that we can double down on working lands wildlife to make commitments about the funding look for ways we can expand that some more from us in the coming days on that in coming weeks on that.

Again, both looking two ways that we can make the commitment of staff, the commitment of resources, development of new tools, pulling in the form services agency and CRP as part of that effort. So more to come on working lands for wildlife and important engagement for all of you.

Let me just end with a couple of things. It is a Farm Bill year and you all know that.

There will be big conversations about what happens to those new resources that USDA got in the Inflation Reduction Act. That's going to be an important point of debate. I think we at NRCS recognize the importance of improving the processes of RCCP ability to engage with partners and engagement programs to make it easier for folks to get into the program. Lots of attention on that to ensure we can utilize the resources and spend them both appropriately and timely.

I think the conservation reserve program will also be an important conversation in the Farm Bill. You look at CRP right now crop prices are high so what you are seeing is acres that come to the program to the general sign of our slowly going out of the program. We are not signing up as many new acres for cropland as our leaving the program. But, we are looking at ways to bring in new acres through our grasslands program and others. So the opportunity here is to look at ways we can focus those sign-ups on the most important wildlife acres. Again, I think that is a place where you all can play an important role in the may be a conversation to be had in the Farm Bill about how we allow so more flexibility with grasslands and target enrollments in the ways that I think could really benefit wildlife could help us deal with potholes in the northern Great Plains, the land between the levees and the Lower Delta. There is a ton of potential opportunity for us if we are creative about that engages part of that conversation. Let me end it there and again reiterate how important all of your engagement is in the next couple years. It's all about execution for us and partners are going to be absolutely critical for us to be successful. I appreciate the opportunity to be with you all today and like Tommy I have to bug out of here. Not immediately but by 10:00. Thanks.

JOHN DEVNEY: Thank you, Robert. I want to reflect on what we heard this morning as our role is an important one. And we are going to see today that there has been some great work done in committee and I think you heard Colin and I say this in our first meeting and since is that each and every one of you is brought here because you represent time, talents and expertise that can be of service to the two secretaries. So we're going to hold you to that. We want good participation in subcommittees. We will hear some great work that has already come out of that, but we have an important job.

I appreciate Robert and Tommy sort of reaffirming that. Reaffirming our role. Reaffirming the importance and also reaffirming the fact that we are at a very interesting point of time in history when the good work that we can do with the agencies can catalyze incredible good for things we all care about whether that's mule deer or upland birds or communities around the country, we have a rare opportunity so let's take advantage of it.

Just to give everybody a brief overview of the meeting this morning. We are going to get a good number of reports this morning from some of the folks within the agencies and bureaus which will help us get up to speed on sort of how these historic opportunities are being dealt with at the agency level.

And then, we are going to go through a bunch of that stuff here this morning between

10:15 AM and lunchtime and we have a lot of great folks to bring us up to speed. Shortly after that we will break for lunch and then we will come back in here for more of those reports. And then I want everybody to be listening as we are hearing those reports about what you perceive as the opportunities. What you are hearing from the folks within the bureaus and agencies and suggesting point of impact for all of us. The organizations and constituencies we represent.

Let's be thinking about that this morning. We will conclude this morning and early afternoon, we will conclude our work then with the subcommittee report outs and actions that the Council will take. Some actions the Council will take today. I just want to give a shout out, thanks, my appreciation and Colin's appreciation for the good work happening in the subcommittees. There has been good work done. I expect there will be excellent work done in the coming months as some the committees have been stood up. What that, are there any questions anybody may have about the agenda for what the structure of the meeting will be today? Hearing none, Doug we are a little early for our public comment section, how do you want to handle?

MICHAEL CROWDER: Robert, the paper that I gave you this morning is a separate issue but is very close to what our subcommittee, the private land subcommittee, you will be receiving a letter most likely today that will prove that and you will most likely get that. It is a question regarding the IRA practices. What is the method, the best way to present that argument to you, your staff, the agency to have new practices considered for IRA?

UNDER SECRETARY BONNIE: Here is the issue, the IRA dollars, the new IRA dollars into our four existing big conservation programs. EQIP, RCPP, CSP inner easement program. But they are tied to climate mitigation. We have to make sure the practices are producing significant climate benefits. We started this year so our dollars are rolling out right now for the first year of the IRA dollars.

We put together a list of eligible practices. That list is not written in stone. The idea is to make sure over time we have the right practices on that that produce both climate benefits but obviously we are interested in the co-benefits you all know about. This process will be a rolling process. We've got the practices set for this year, but we are in process right now thinking about what can we add, you know, how do we refine the list practices that we have? The most important thing is for us to be able to prove there are legitimate climate benefits there.

And so, data is going to be really really important. At the same time, you know that NRCS prides itself on being a science-based agency. But there is a lot of innovation happening very fast in this space on the greenhouse gas side, emissions, there is all this really interesting technology. Somewhat influence what you all care about some of it may not.

The point in me saying that is we have got to be able to adapt the list practices to reflect what is going on. The hope here is we can adapt over time and try to create a process

where we take in information and make sure we continue to update the list of practices. Your input right now or at any time is welcome as we go through that and as you have science and other things that can underscore the climate benefits that is all welcome.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Mr. Sedgwick?

UNDER SECRETARY BONNIE: No doubt wetlands and grasslands. There places where places in the West where we need to nix the grass before we replant natives or forced ration in the West where we need to do thinning in order to preserve the long-term resiliency of the spores. There are places where we will have drop-off in carbon in the short-term. That is okay, we need the science to be able to talk about what other resiliency gains over the long-term. What are the long-term carbon gains and so as you all see science related to that experience and otherwise, I think we are very interested.

ED ARNETT: If I may? Robert, just a quick follow-up on the science piece. Is NRCS or department coordinated with USGS? Is it corn it with the forest range and experiment Tatian services are they collecting it internally, monitoring working with universities or is it all the above?

UNDER SECRETARY BONNIE: I don't know if there is a formal relationship with USGS. We honestly welcome there input. I will say that internally in USDA, so as part of the IRA we received \$300 million for MMRV, measurement monitoring reporting and verification. We are building and that seems like a lot of money, it's a big job. So we are building across USDA, NRCS, Ag research service, national ag district service, poor service and other parts of the department where we are trying to build a far more robust inventory and monitoring system on carbon soils, methane, nitrous oxide and so lots of focus on this. More is going to come on that. You will hear more from us on the coming weeks on this. But that is a place where we very much welcome engagement from all of you as it applies specifically to those practices, you know, being able to point to specific signs that talks about the long-term climate gains is going to be important.

>>: Thank you.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Any more questions for the Under Secretary?

JOEL WEBSTER: I will throw one at him since we have time. Robert, really appreciate the corridors work and looking to get the conservation on the ground there. Can you speak in your mind about potential opportunities to grow that pilot and do that elsewhere?

UNDER SECRETARY BONNIE: You all know we have Arthur Middleton half time on staff. And Bidisha Battacharrya in my office. And we have career staff that you all know Tim Griffith and others that are working on this. We went to hit it out of the park in Wyoming. We have a really good partnerships with the governor there. MOU, I mean the opportunity here is to build something that is bipartisan and it can last whatever administration whatever 24 - 48 we want to build something that has bipartisan support.



It is important we knock it out of the park in Wyoming. And others implementation issues, staffing issues and how we coordinate. At the same time, we are looking elsewhere. There are opportunities to think about creditor issues in places like Montana. How do we do a better job of addressing those and working with producers on issues related to all the habitat but on predation as well. We have State conservationists in Idaho that is interested in this, Curtis has been thinking about this. So there are opportunities there.

Part of the calculation when you think about new places to go is who are the partners on the ground and who are the folks that can help you implement and, you know, again, we can add staff but you'll notice we all run the CRP program and align partnership with ducks, pheasants and other folks and we run a lot of other programs in partnership with all of you all. So that capacity on the ground matters. As you think about the long-term efforts around wildlife so many of the resources in our NRCS programs are allocated at the state level. You all can help create demand for those projects and create projects that are really good for agriculture and forestry while they are really good for wildlife. That is part of the charge here too, I think.

>>: Thank you, Robert, for all you do. You will have a lot of willing partners help you spend a big pot of money.

>>: Come on! I didn't say -- no, I didn't miss.

>>: My grandfather had a friend who came down to his place to hunt one time he's an outstanding turkey hunter. Called a turkey and had it about 20 yards and missed. He stood up and flung his shotgun. No misses. We never found that shotgun.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Thank you, Robert. Doug just pointed out that I was oblivious to the fact that we have a bunch of good folks that are either members or alternates who are participating virtually. If we could go through and do nice introductions like we did for the folks in the room. Thank you. Go ahead, Mark.

MARK HENNELLY: Mark Hennelly with California Waterfowl Association.

WAYNE HUBBARD: Wayne Hubbard.

>>: Jim.

BLAKE HENNING: Rocky Mountain Elk and in Missoula, Montana.

>>: Matt Wegner, Weston Ranch near New Braunfels, Texas.

>>: Good morning, Betty Jewett.

>>: Can you do that real quick again we had a hard time hearing you.

BETTY JEWETT>>: Betty Jewett acting Director for Great American Outdoors Act program. Washington office but I sit in Georgia.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Thank you, Betty. Andrew, do you want to identify yourself?

ANDREW EARL: Good morning, everyone Andrew Earl with the Texas Wildlife Association. I'm not a member or an alternate just joining as a guest this morning. Good to see you all.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Anybody else?

SARAH SAWYER: Good morning. This is Sarah Sawyer, I'm acting Assistant Director in the biological physical resources staff in the Forest Resources.

>>: Rosemarie from BLM is on.

ROSEMARIE SPANO: Good morning. My name is Rosemarie Spano. I'm from the Bureau of Land Management. I'm here to present later this morning about our Great American Outdoors Act program.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Thank you. Did we miss anyone who is participating virtually? All right. We are at the point of our agenda where we solicit input and comments from the public. Just to remind everybody that this is a federal advisory Council and there are important rules of the road in terms of how we work and how we work with members of the public. We always make an accommodation to hear input from members of the public.

Doug and I spoke this morning. We had no pre-populated questions or input. Where we had lots of it in our December meeting. We will give it a minute or two. I don't think I saw anybody get any guests, but we will give it a minute or two since we posted that as a 9:45 AM agenda item I want to make sure the public has an opportunity to engage. Under Chair's discretion, I'm going to suggest if people want to take a quick bathroom break or refill their coffee or get a drink of water, we will reconvene at 9:45 AM for the public comment period.

(BREAK)

**Vice Chairman Devney:** All right everybody. Let's get back to our seats. This is what happens when you give an unscheduled break. Let's get back to our seats. Just wanted to check and see if there was anyone participating virtually as a guest that has any comments for consideration by the Council? If you do, please identify yourself, name, affiliation and raise the issue that you choose to raise. Thank you. Hearing none we are going to proceed into reports from the various bureaus and agencies.

The first general subheading we are going to deal with this morning's briefings on departmental agency implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act, Inflation

Reduction Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure and Jobs Act. Our first guest this morning from the Department of Interior is Sarah Greenberger, the Associate Deputy Secretary.

SARAH GREENBERGER: Thank you so much for being here and for inviting me to let you know how we are doing, what we are excited about on this really historic opportunity that we have to invest in restoration and resilience to demonstrate the impact that this kind of investment can have for people, for communities, for wildlife, for habitat. I think I cannot go any further without just a broader thank you to many of the folks in this community who are responsible for us having this opportunity both for ensuring that restoration and resilience were included in the bipartisan it was to act pointing out that, you know, natural infrastructure is infrastructure. That it has many of the same job benefits as other kinds of investment in infrastructure with all sorts of other benefits for health and communities and for ecosystems.

In the same is true of course for the Great American Outdoors Act which again is a historic opportunity to invest in our public lands. So thank you. We take that responsibility to make good use of the money you secured with us to demonstrate the kind of impact it can have and to be able to tell that story so that we can see that kind of investment in the future both in their reauthorization of GAOA and hopefully for larger investments including Recovering America's Wildlife Act in the future.

When we talk about the restoration and resilience money for the department, we talk about it as a \$2 billion investment between both bipartisan and for sure law and Inflation Reduction Act. It is probably an under calculation because it does not include the money that has gone to the office of wildland fire which of course includes restoration and resilience dollars as well as the billions of dollars that has gone to the Bureau of Reclamation. That includes some first-time new programs for restoration and resilience as well as for the money that is going into abandoned mine land reclamation as well as orphan well reclamation. Maybe not technically restoration taken all the way to that level of repair but it sets the groundwork for opportunities that we can leverage for some of these other dollars.

Given all of that this 2 billion what we realized as I think we were moving to set up many different programs across all of our bureaus and offices is that there is really a sort of disincentive because all of the programs have different rules. They have different sideboards. They have different timelines to thinking together how we can leverage those dollars for landscape level impact until a bigger story how it is affecting people's lives on a larger scale and the language that resonates rather than acres that we see is important but does not really illustrate the difference that this kind of investment can make. Something we have been working on is a restoration and resilience framework to try and create both a narrative and structural context for the investments that we make. That is something that we put out in public earlier in March along with announcing a secretarial order on bison restoration. It is meant to articulate some big picture goals that will illuminate the work and the investments we make across programs.

Those are addressing climate change impacts, restoring healthy lands and waters and enhancing community's quality of life through addressing pollution and recreation. These sound very straightforward and unsurprising but again they give us sort of a way to articulate what we are doing in some of the places where we are going to do it. So a focus on wildfire, drought and coastal resilience for climate. A focus on rivers, wetlands, grasslands and islands and cultural resources when we are talking about lands and waters and a focus again on outdoor spaces, recreation and legacy pollution when we are talking about quality of life.

We have really been encouraging as we put together project list both departmental programs and others to think about to think about portfolios as bigger impacts and set up project by project and think across the different funding streams and a way to incentivize that and create some areas of focus both to be sure we are having this kind of impacted scale and we can tell the story over time. We have identified some Keystone initiatives. A lot of thought and sort of evolution and trial and error and what we would call them.

I think we wanted to be clear that these are places that we want to show as flagships that illustrate the goals that we are talking about, right, those three high-level goals but these are not the only things we will find. You don't have to be in a Keystone initiative to get any funding from these three laws.

But we did want to pick some places while all of them impact all of the goals that would really again illuminate one piece of the strategy. We wanted to pick places that align with some larger priorities like the biodiversity crisis, coast stewardship, equity that will be locally led and really be implementing a collaborative conservation strategy, a design that was in place or in progress, a place that we had money. There are a lot of really important places but our authorities are limited especially in the East we don't have an enormous amount of resources so we wanted to pick places where we thought we could drive dollars at a large scale and have that kind of transformational impact.

I don't know if folks have seen this, but we identified some priority or sort of flagship initiatives for drought. It is for wildfire sagebrush, for coast the salt marsh; for rivers the Arctic Yukon effort around salmon restoration. In the grasslands we of course articulated the secretary's focus on bison but will be looking for a broader grasslands focus around restoration. And then the islands we have already been making some really significant investments in forest for restoration knowing there is an imminent extinction crisis there but there's broader efforts around the department around islands and maintaining biodiversity that we think with smaller investments can have a really large biodiversity impact.

And for quality of life Appalachia. Again, we have a lot of money going to Appalachia for abandoned mine land and orphan well reclamation and we will be looking for opportunities in partnership with folks working on the ground there to leverage that with additional dollars we can put towards restoration and resilience.

And then we have two sort of national efforts that we feel like this unique investment allows us to really jumpstart and set a strong foundation for the future and that's the national seed strategy, native seed work as well as setting up and implementing an early detection and rapid response framework for invasive species.

Those are nine areas where we want to make sure we are setting up teams working across bureaus and offices of each department to think about a near-term strategy to be looking across all of these different programs whether it's in reclamation, Office of Wildland Fire, Fish and Wildlife Service resources some the departmental resources to think about how we can leverage these different programs to have a larger impact and work with curtains and the NGOs, states and local communities, forest service, NOAA and other agencies. As we make a transition from the first year that was focused on getting going to a second year where we can be more strategic and think across programs and setting up sort of an architecture for longer-term impact again in storytelling as well as maybe start to integrate some of the other work we are doing around resilience.

Policies around natural climate solutions, climate adaptation. Thinking about really the rapid ecological transformation we are dealing with in the decision-making context and more methodical and consistent way. That is part of our strategic approach and our focus as we move into the next year of BIL and IRA dollars.

And of course, also GAOA. This is a huge focus for us. This is something we are enormously excited about and feel a significant amount of responsibility to demonstrate we have made good use of the dollars and set ourselves up for reauthorization. Obviously, it will get attention this week in Congress and the hearing. So we appreciate your continued support and help with this program.

But we feel like we have had a really good start in the first three years. We've had 276 projects in all 50 states. Improves the condition of more than 2000 assets across the department including all of our public lands as well as schools, campgrounds, trails, drinking water systems, wastewater, roads and bridges all critical aspects delivering on our responsibility for the American people through our public lands.

And FY24 we proposed another \$1.26 billion for 56 projects and 50% of those projects are in preconstruction phases and the other are ready for construction so we are again, I think, hoping to continue to demonstrate we are putting this money to use. To know that we face some of the same challenges that everyone else does with supply chain increasing costs and all the other factors that continue to make it a challenge but again we are really lucky to be in this historic moment and really looking to all of your partnership to help make good on the investment and tell that story. So thank you. I don't know if there are questions or if you want to move on to the bureaus who will give a lot more specifics?

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Let's take a moment and ask any questions for Sarah?

KEITH TIDBALL: Could you elaborate a little more on the Keystone or cornerstone initiative in the Appalachia, what is on the agenda there especially given quality-of-life concerns?

SARAH GREENBERGER: I think this is a place where we have been doing a lot of work as a department but we have not been coordinating and coordinating with the local NGOs on the ground in the same way we have been on some the other landscapes I mention. But given the really critical -- critically important biodiversity present in Appalachia, we really saw this I think as an opportunity to jumpstart and coordinate better our investment so we are really in Appalachia maybe more in the other landscapes at the front end of thinking through what a coordinated effort would look like and really I think looking next to have conversations with NGOs, states on the ground, start recording again with where have our office of surface mining investments gone and talking to states what might be good opportunities to come in behind that with other dollars we have with the departmental money in this passage and other programs we can layer on.

You pick the one I think we may be most need support and direction and ideas from the community about where we could start and start to build a center of gravity there.

MARSHALL JOHNSON: Can I ask a question? Thank you for that helpful overview, Sarah. Could you elaborate if you can, understanding the administration's bison restoration but maybe high-level thinking around expanded work in the grassland ecosystem?

SARAH GREENBERGER: The secretarial order recently on bison, this is a place we think there is a really important opportunity to accelerate and build on the work that has gone on. There is, I think, a number of places where we are making investment through bureaus on the ground restoration activities, through an apprenticeship program because there is an emphasis and focus on collaboration with tribal communities and expanding herds in collaboration with tribal partners, but they need herd managers. So we are going to be establishing an apprenticeship program but really looking at a strategy. We have a Bureau of bison working group that has been charged with setting up a strategy for how we can grow more herds on federal and tribal lands, maintain genetics. How especially around Yellowstone we can increase quarantine capacity so we can get more bison from Yellowstone to tribal partners.

I think we are a little bit on the front end, Marshall, of thinking through what and having conversations with partners about what those next steps look like. I think in terms of the larger grassland strategy, again, we know there's a lot of work going on in the region with partners thinking through where are the most strategic investments to have a long-term impact and so that is a conversation again that I think is starting as we pull together these teams internally about where can we make those investments? Where are the priority areas?

Having conversations with partners at NRCS who I know have been doing a lot of

strategic work. Again, that is one area where the strategy for us internally is a little bit less developed than it may be places like Sagebrush, withers a conservation design that is in place, and everyone has been looking to saltmarshes similar. I should say we have been having a lot of conversations with the support of the Fish and Wildlife Service who is really driven that process with EFWA who have been thinking through income to help inform us where some of these places are where we should be doing it next.

>>: Thank you.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Sarah, you can certainly kick this over to Steve if more appropriate but Mark Hennelly would be very angry with me if you said Klamath. With that we know it's this almost incredibly intractable issue. Endangered species up, endangered species down. Incredibly important cultural and tribal nexus and then we have the dry refuge in the middle of that.

From your vantage point and again fully appropriate to defer if you like, how do we deal with that incredibly important dry refuge in the middle while we are dealing with all the other incredibly important resources that are part of that basin?

SARAH GREENBERGER: Not only Steve but we have Matt over there in the corner who has been driving our efforts for the department. But I do think we are in a real moment, right? The dams are going to come down and that is going to start soon. I think there's a growing realization in the region, there's been a history of collaboration. There were years of frustration, but I think some readiness to come back and think through what an agreement might look like. It may be different from what they have had in the past and we have resources to invest in the kind of restoration and, you know, with water agreements and other things that might help facilitate it.

I think this is really a moment to address not only the refuge but bring everyone's interest together because as you noted they are also intertwined. Matt, do you have anything you want to add to that?

>>: (Indiscernible by captioner)

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Thank you, Matt. Thank you, Sarah. Any other questions? Mark, do you want to jump in?

MARK HENNELLY: Thank you for that. I did not catch all that. The audio was a little bit off. You know, a couple of the things is in terms of getting the refuge water we need to make sure there is funding available to purchase water rights. There is about 30,000 acres available in the Wood River Valley that could be transferred over to the refuge from willing landowners. Of course, once you have the water right then, you know, that is very secure and you can depend on a year in and year out notwithstanding some of the endangered species issues.

But the other thing is there needs to be a water budget for the refuge. We were

shocked to learn that the refuge has no water budget whatsoever. So even if you are not purchasing water rights there are opportunities to purchase water on the spot market year to year and the refuge right now really has no funding to take advantage of that. So those are two things I think if they were addressed would really help to get the refuge more water on an annual basis. Thank you.

>>: Thank you.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Thank you, Sarah. We are going to get a briefing from Steve Guertin, Deputy Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

STEVE GUERTIN: Hi Steve Guertin, Deputy Director for the Fish and Wildlife Service. Thank you for the opportunity to step down some the larger scale strategic objectives that Sarah talked about from the department level and bring them down to the operating level at one of the component agencies. We will be talking today about our involvement for the bipartisan and for structural law, the IRA, Inflation Reduction Act and the Great American Outdoors Act as well.

You will hear also, I believe, from colleagues at Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management but I will give you an idea how we are moving out smartly with all of this capacity that we have been entrusted with. The first package we will talk about for the Fish and Wildlife Service is our participation in the bipartisan and for our law.

Overall the service received about \$455 million directly appropriated to our operations account and that gave us a big strategic advantage going forward and that this funding was provided to existing on the ground operational components that we already have the partnerships in place, already had momentum going and we do not have to create a whole new program, so to speak, to implement it. We had funding specifically for the Klamath restoration project. We have some funding for Sagebrush eco restoration, Lake Tahoe restoration and national fish habitat partnership.

Notice to use the term restoration over and over. That is what the money is all about habitat restoration on the ground and we are doing that in partnership out there. in addition we are participating in several other programs administered by DOI and we are receiving stepped-down allegations for legacy pollution, for ecosystem restoration and wildfire mitigation. When you add it all up, it's hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars of projects for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Our first component project Klamath Basin Restoration. \$162 million provided over five years. We are interested in the habitat and species there. water quality, water quantity and supporting improvements for waterfowl and salmon and others. Trying to balance out the competing needs of the basin, travel interests and equities, irrigation, commercial and recreational fishing, waterfowl and this suite of projects will do just that. The cornerstone press is a retrofit of our hatcheries there that will allow us to increase production of these in peril species and meet travel responsibilities on the



As well. As mentioned, Matt is the policy lead for this project and we are running up with all the other field agencies and tribes on the landscape to get that done.

Sagebrush, \$50 million over the lifecycle of this. This was directly appropriated into our partner's program out of a region six in Denver, Colorado. Matt Hogan is the policy lead out there for this project. It focuses on invasive, water improvements, community engagement and we are able to get a lot of work done very quickly to support the larger strategic, to keep the sagebrush from being listed in to work on habitat restoration.

Delaware basin we got another \$26 million that came into region five based out of Hadley. It's a long going long-term habitat restoration project. Big interest in water quality and urban restoration in many trust species and that watershed and we are able to get a lot of ground covered focusing on outdoor restoration components and things like that as well. Very important for many fish species as many of you would imagine.

Lake Tahoe in California, \$17 million over five years for BIL. This is a big removal project to restore water quality out there. It's mechanically driven. Very important to tribal partners in fishing equities. We have a lot of cutthroat trout. We are making a lot of progress on the ground restoring some of that to continue the great outdoor restoration opportunities on Lake Tahoe water quality habitat restoration work as well.

The last component that was directly appropriated to us is our Fish Passage Program \$200 million a year. This is a game changer for us. We have ABAAS program that we get about 20-25 million a year and we have been able to work very closely with state counterparts at association of Fish and Wildlife agencies to set priorities here. In fact, last summer AFWA cohosted a symposium with the service of the national conservation training center to set joint priorities at a watershed in basin level and what is very exciting about this work now is we are weaving and not just the \$200 million provided to the little Fish and Wildlife Service but the \$8 billion that was appropriated to eight federal agencies for fish passage, culverts, federal highway work, etc. A lot of work is going on with federal highways, Transportation Department, Forrest Service, Park Service, Bureau rec. a lot of work going on with project dollars that are opening a lot of spawning and habitat presenting trust species and preventing all the other one like that benefit from riparian corridors as well. Big driver of activity and reopening of corridors.

We then received from the department some of these component package. A big one for us is about \$14 million to plug orphaned and abandoned oil and gas wells. This past summer we did about 175. There are a lot of these old facilities on refuge units particular in Louisiana, Texas and some in Alaska as well. This is a big part of habitat restoration for us and we will continue to participate with the department as some of these funds come online each of the succeeding years.

Sarah has been leading for the department the larger ecosystem restoration project in the service that participated in the grant setting and we received almost \$100 million in the first year and we are driving that to on the ground restoration work centered on healthy force. Tackling invasive species. A big one for us is seed strategy for native

pollinators and plants and our team was here about two weeks ago and it was great to meet them in person and hazard mitigation as well. We are working closely to provide some of the science to the department to set these larger Keystone initiative priority project areas and then with our refuge system, fisheries program, private land and coastal programs and others we can help the service delivery and get the projects implemented on the ground.

Cynthia will be here chief of the refuge system can step this down some more. But big money came to the Department for Wildfire Mitigation and with a large management program and the National Wildlife Refuge System. We are in the middle that got almost \$25 million to work on private lands and adjoining refuges to address some wildfire risk out there. That is kind of a high-level view of the hundreds of millions of dollars we received from the IRA. I have run out of fingers and toes counting all the money coming our way, so we are grateful to Congress and the Administration for supporting these key investments and our pledges.

We will do the best we can to get this funding obligated on the ground into good habitat work to benefit hunters, anglers, conservation in general.

Second program came along which has been a boon to us. Big money given to Department of Interior and specifically in the Inflation Reduction Act. We received a quarter million dollars. We are strategically aligning and partnering with all the other agencies to match up levels of effort and integration as best we can. We will talk about the two components that were specifically appropriated to the Fish and Wildlife Service. First was a significant investment of \$125 million. I will say that again \$125 million for habitat restoration on the National Wildlife Restoration System.

This is a big bid for us to get on the ground floor to do some on the ground habitat restoration. We work closely with DOI leadership. OMB and identified seven large landscapes that we will deploy this funding in. It was specifically appropriated to address climate resiliency needs on the National Wildlife Refuge System and on wildlife management areas managed by the state fish and game agencies as well.

Using our science-based approach we have identified these key areas where we will now go forward and do on the ground habitat restoration. An example would be in the Prairie pothole region a big investment there in North and South Dakota, Iowa, Eastern Montana. That will all be about grassland restoration. You cannot drive across those states without tripping over state or federal waterfowl production areas, wildlife management areas, etc. We are stepping up operations on that going forward.

Another big investment in the Carolinas, Alligator River, a lot of state game lands down there as well. In the project area we will partner of and do habitat restoration. I heard you talking a little bit about the bison restoration component of this as well. We have a number of herds in places like National Wildlife Refuge, Wichita Mountains, we will do a lot of habitat and grassland restoration there. Fencing projects and things like that. We have a great partnership. There is actually a tribal management herd on that geography

we work with in partnership. All of these projects are going to benefit the larger restoration goals called forth in the authorized legislation and all of them will work closely with our AFWA partners to make sure we get a nexus so we can deploy some of the projects on the WMAs.

JOEL WEBSTER: Sorry to interrupt. I just wanted to ask a question about the \$125,000,000 refuges and state WMAs. I know that something that has come up in the subcommittee and recommendations around that announcement. Can you speak a little bit to some of the coordination going on there between the refuge system and the WMAs.

STEVE GUERTIN: Like many of the OMB driven processes we were not at liberty to share the actual project lists until they came through the end of that process. But where we were coordinated on a larger level with AFWA, on the development of joint

Approaches that are of importance to those organizations. We know for example big one was the sage and for the Southeast it was corridor connectivity in the Northeast it was the forest. We have tried to align these big building blocks of packages as close as we could with some of the AFWA champion geographic planning areas. The northern forest would be deployed in our regions three and region five. There's going to be a lot of overlap there with the states as well. A good example would be potentially the work we are doing in New England with the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge which is a series of stepped down easements and with a lot of state land intermingled. That is the high-level planning. Now we are issuing our stepped-down project guidance to the regional directors to start specifically contacting their corresponding leadership team at the regional association as well as the state fish and game agencies to talk about the specific projects.

We have done some preliminary work last fall with OMB. I think we were envisioning 15-20% may ultimately benefit state managed lands as we go forward with project implementation. But does that answer your question?

>>: Yeah.

STEVE GUERTIN: Go back to the Fish Passage we are working closely each year going forward on the joint priorities for the Fish Passage projects because we get that money each year. This is the one time shot with the IRA funding. Once we step forward there will not be years two, three and four for that. That's a great question. Thank you. There was also \$125 million appropriated specifically for endangered species recovery actions and it was subdivided into half the funding to work on species that do not have a recovery plan and half for on the ground implementation action. There are about 1600 listed species. 380 do not have a current recovery plan. This funding will allow us to start actually developing those and step down into program guidance.

We are still doing the work prioritizing those in the holding having briefed leadership at

OMB, we have briefed the Hill staff. In general terms we are going to prioritize the first group are projects where we have already done the projects species status review or SSA. So the foundational sciences already developed and will be easier to move forward into the recovery planning based on that science and now we are working through leadership channels here calling out the first project list for the actual on the ground recovery actions that will take place. This will be a pretty significant investment of \$63 million to help us work on the ground. As you all know, this will be focused on partnerships and strategic alignment where we can do and will do the best we can to match this up with all the other components of the IRA and BIL funding that is coming along.

Also in the IRA the department received about \$150 million overall to support the environmental review permitting for the component agencies and we were fortunate after working with department leadership at OMB we are getting almost a third of that almost \$43 million for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This funding is specifically to support project review for these big construction and engineering and infrastructure projects the department is undertaken for the IRA. It is a big help to us because these agencies are responsible for their own compliance with ESA, but we are a big help to help move forward and we will use that funding to hire several dozen consultation biologists as well as to make investments to improve our IPaC system. It allows project components to go into the system and almost like you are getting prequalified for a mortgage, work through a lot of the science and hotspots and identify areas where you will need to talk to us about getting environmental review and compliance put in place.

It will also fund some complaints work with MBTA, Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Against have the funding for the future resiliency projects. And half for recovery implementation. Here's where I was talking about running out of fingers and toes to count all the investments the services get.

We are also participating in the Great American Outdoors Act which specifically provides \$95 million a year for our refuge deferred maintenance backlog. Not to make light of the subject, we have a backlog as all the agencies do and Cynthia can talk more about that with you this afternoon. 1.2-1.3 billion dollars here. We work with federal highways to try to bring in these budget dollars to help us keep that access open, roads, trails, kiosks, visitor centers. The underlying infrastructure on the refuge system. Water control structures. We do so much internal plumbing there. Keep those maintained an operator to support habitats, support access. This \$95 million has helped significantly as we reduce that backlog and we are going after high priority packages that will help us reduce the backlog, have high public visitation and meet some of the mission imperatives as well.

A couple pictures here of replacing aging buildings, rehabilitating public use assets, critical infrastructure, etc. We do the best we can to focus these where they will make the most significant impact. Lowering in the cement blocks and help us reduce our deferred maintenance backlog. And our next line what has been exciting about this is we are doing a lot of the work internally with our own management action teams of

trained service wage grade workers highly skilled with heavy equipment operating in know how we do work on the ground. We put deployable teams together and we go refuge to refuge getting a lot of this work done for probably half the cost, even better savings, but doing it in-house rather than going to the contract process as well.

But it allows us after these deferred maintenance projects and keep infrastructure moving keep access coming. Again, we greatly appreciate this opportunity. We have several members from our leadership. From Department of Fish and Wildlife and Parks and several folks from the service. Glad to take any questions and thank you for your support and interest.

>>: Thanks very much. I share the enthusiasm for the number of fingers and toes needed to get a handle on the resources. One thing that I see or do not see is any specific callouts, this is not a gotcha, this is a question for future discussion, any specific callouts where we might be dealing with the need for human capital investment especially in the recruitment, retention, engagement sort of space. Can you muse a little bit on what your thoughts might be on whether there might be opportunities in all of these awesome pots of money that will help what we want to do in terms of real infrastructure -- how can we focused target and focus resources on contract recruitment, retention recruitment, etc.

STEVE GUERTIN: The way this money was appropriated Congress and administration envisioned it would largely be project level projects like the Klamath for the big resiliency projects. There was very little freeboard or authority in the authorizing legislation and then the subsequent appropriations that allow us to tap into this for human capital and for partnership effort.

We work very closely with our leadership team in the department at the OMB and have been able to get some support to do some modicum of contract specialists in human capital people to hire the people to do the work in this big deal with the permitting funding allows us to bring on biologists as well and then the president's budget for this fiscal year has a request to have a similar authority for the BIL funding for the other agencies to transfer authority to hire these conservation biologists to support this permitting work. Where we are trying to advocate for the human capital of the investment in wildlife biologists, rangers and planners is in the president's budget and the Biden Administration has asked for an almost \$300 million increase for the Fish and Wildlife Service that would allow us to hire almost 800 employees for our workforce to do this work going forward.

We are very hopeful to get traction with that on the Hill for those people to be on the refuge system running the hunt program. As to your question as well as how we can use this money for the larger goal of recruiting, retention, reactivation. We are heavily involved with the R3 campaign. We work a lot with the groups like recreational boating and fishing foundation, with AFWA, to put together opportunities that support just that. As far as I'm aware we are not allowed to charge that kind of effort against the BIL or the IRA. That is based appropriations.

Our Director just met a week and half ago talking about R3 and other initiatives. We are shifting focus to support that. As well as your group we have the Federal Regulations open now for the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council to get that reactivated by this summer. That will provide our secretary with a similar level of leadership, engagement and direction on the sportfishing boating group as well.

This charter had expired at the end of last year. We had to get this reactivated going forward. We are all ears going forward to support the larger R3 effort. I hope that answers your question. Thank you.

>>: A follow-up question on funding for state and federally managed wildlife areas. A lot of those areas tend to be places where tribes either have reserved Treaty rights of their unceded tribal lands or the tribes have other interests. The tribes also intend to have indigenous knowledge that can contribute to the management of those areas. Can you speak a little bit to how you are partnering with tribes directly in the management of those areas and you feel you have authorities in place that you need to partner directly with the tribes?

STEVE GUERTIN: Sure. Thanks for your question. This whole process started off last winter over a year ago. Secretary Haaland herself led the larger tribal consultation with the BLM that came online and led a nationwide conservation with all of her leadership team and then step down regionally and locally as well. The tone was set from day one that this department was going to work closely with tribal partners and try to consult with them. As the funding packages came in online at the operational level and then in the Fish and Wildlife Service our Director has issued a revised guidance to us to work more closely with the tribes and make sure they are informed. We are using all the existing forms we have. Partner advocacy groups, setting up webinars and seminars and things like that and as we stepped these down into the project level the expectation for our leadership team out in the regions is paramount to our success is connecting with trouble partners in these landscapes and making sure their views and ideas are being upheld.

The way the language is written for these none of these called out for us to specifically give capacity or project dollars to the tribes except for areas like Klamath where it's built in. What we are trying to do with the fish passage funding for example his work very closely within the geography of AFWA and states in trouble partners and we are seeing success getting them on the RFPs that come in for the actual projects. With the IRA funding since it so specifically appropriated to the refuge system into state WMAs, we would have to partner with tribes on a level of effort, policy interest more of a thing. But probably not pushing dollars over to the tribes.

The goal is working partnership in the landscape with tribes. I hope that answers your question.

COLIN BECK: Are you looking into 638 contracting directly with tribes to implement

some of these? Are you familiar with that term?

STEVE GUERTIN: I would have to get back to you on that. The language it came to us was very specific. There's a significant investments were made to the Bureau of Indian affairs for a lot of related climate resiliency projects and habitat restoration. What we are trying to do hear without funding is going under that chain of command and match up with those packages rather than try to drive our funding. They have their own fund source right now is a simpler way of saying it. So we are trying to partner up with their efforts.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Any of the questions for Steve?

ROBERTA SALAZAR-HENRY: Can you talk a little bit about how this funding is working with the state wildlife management areas?

STEVE GUERTIN: 125 million or all of it?

ROBERTA SLAZAR-HENRY: The 125 MILLION.

STEVE GUERTIN: We work with AFWA and the regional association sets on the development of this larger landscape prioritization scheme that has called out these key interests to AFWA. What we're doing now is we announce the seven resiliency project areas. And stepping them down to respective regional associations as well as with the individual states on where we can do the project work in those geographies.

I think I earlier talked about in the prairie Potholes for example there's so much intertwining of the state management lands with the waterfall management areas and waterfall production areas. And then in the sound another good project area where there's a lot of corresponding state game lands and that geography. We will be working with those component states on the actual project selection in there. Cynthia can share more what our operations guidance still hasn't cleared but they are building it. We can talk more conceptually where that is going.

>>: Thank you, Steve.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Now we get to play the game how badly can the Vice Chairman butcher last names. We have two presenters from BLM today. You will have to give me some grace here. Tomer Hasson and Rosemarie Spano. Thank you and we appreciate having you today.

TOMER HASSON: Hi everybody I'm Tomer Hasson. I am senior policy advisor to the Director here at BLM. I will just add my thanks for the invitation for being here and the appreciation for all you guys do and bring to this conversation. I wanted to start being as transparent as I can about the funding coming to BLM. We internally talk about the BIL and IRA investments is bringing \$1 billion into the organization. For an agency with an annual discretionary budget of \$1.5 million dollars that's a significant amount of

resources.

As we have seen from the presentation it is not one chunk of funding. It's coming through two different bills in a number of concessions in those bills. I thought I would go to this pretty quickly. The first is the ecosystem restoration funding out of BIL. This is the funding that Sarah was talking about. We expect around \$130 million coming into BLM through that funding. There's an asterisk there because we have a few more rounds of funding to be distributed. We have two programs in BIL that comes through OWF to do burn area rehabilitation work and fuels management work. Collectively those are about \$500 million so about half of the funding that BLM receives will come in through the fields and fire program.

And then two sections and IRA. Section 221 and 222. These sections are largely for conservation, resilience climate types of activities. These sections were designated for National Park Service and BLM. BLM secured \$290 million through those sections for a total of about \$1 billion. There is also 50303 which Steve just spoke to. This is the environmental permitting section of IRA and BLM secured \$41 million there. That section is largely around environmental permitting for energy related issues.

So collectively \$1 billion coming in into BLM for a variety of different types of activities but related activities. For BLM this is, as Steve said from Fish and Wildlife Service, this is really about restoration of the public landscape.

So what are we doing with the billion dollars? It is a lot of what we have been doing. There is nothing new in the types of treatments and activities we will pursue with the funding. We are going to address catastrophic wildfire both in forest and range systems. There will be funding spent on restoring aquatic systems particularly in dry landscapes. These are the streams and what meadows, river scapes with particular emphasis on the low-tech beaver dam analog and the like where we can get a lot of bang for the buck and engage a lot of people in that work.

We will be conserving habitat for threatened and invasive species and lastly we will be promoting resilient recreation.

We all know well that the public landscape is loved sometimes loved to death. We have seen more than a thousand percent increase in recreation activities since COVID. We'll be using part of this funding to invest in the recreation program to address the impacts.

We will be facilitating the work in the manner we usually do. We will be facilitating work through contracts through BLM offices to get the work done. We will be developing financial agreements and partnership agreements at the national level and at the state level to engage you all in this work. We will be building co-stewardship opportunities with tribes and a significant amount of the funds particularly through IRA is going to be dedicated for funding activities through youth cores both general youth cores in Indian youth service core.



At this point I would mention we have five NOFOs on the street right now where we are very much looking for your alls engagement and developing agreements.

We will be doing agreements in a manner that we have not been able to do before when were talking about scale. If I remember correctly, the minimum request for proposals for those agreements is \$1 million and the max is \$10 million. For BLM that is a significant investment in partnership agreements.

That is what we are doing that we've always done. As we are doing that though, I think there is a recognition that we have to do things a little bit differently. And I should stop here and mention that all of that work is going to be done in concert and building towards the goals that Sarah articulated through the broader restoration and resilience initiative.

As we are doing the work, we recognize at BLM we have to do the work at scale. We have the funds to do it at scale now. I think we all recognize the postage stamp conservation activity of doing a couple hundred acres here in a couple hundred acres there is not going to get us where we need to be but focusing on landscape scale of restoration activities is difficult. We will be focusing at facilitating this work on large projects that we can commit to over many years or co-locating smaller projects in a particular area and we will talk about that in a second.

That is one thing we know we need to do with the funds. The second thing we need to do is we need to facilitate the restoration work in an integrated way. This, I think, is getting to the crux of what BLM is really trying to do. We have a variety of different restoration programs at BLM. We have a range program, aquatics program, feels management program and I think what we recognize is we want to facilitate restoration and facilitate restoration in a way that is durable over time and we need to really integrate the programs.

I think a good example of that is in the fire programs. We have money now particularly in a burn area rehabilitation programs where we come in post fire, we do great emergency stabilization work but that is only going to take that landscape so far. Those programs are not meant to bring back native systems. We have to then come in with the restoration programs after a certain amount of years 3-5 years and facilitate actual restoration work to get us to a functioning system. That takes coordination.

Another example is we will be facilitating a lot of aquatic work. And particularly in dry landscapes. Once we do that work, we then need to ensure we are managing, for example, burrows so they don't come in after the aquatic restoration work is done in impact the restoration values that we are seeking to achieve.

Likewise, when we are doing restoration work, we have to coordinate with the rights of way program so we are restoring a particular area we are then not permitting and compatible use at a future date. So we have to look at a landscape over the long-term. We have to look at it away that it's integrated across our programs to make sure we

have a long-term vision and we build work towards that vision across a variety of different funding programs in a variety of different management programs that we have at BLM. Because we want to do things at scale and we want to do things in an integrated way it seems to us the best way to do that is choose focal landscapes. Areas where we can really invest ourselves in that we are focused in pursuing restoration work over the long-term.

So that is what we have been intending to do over the last couple months is essentially identify area of prioritized restoration investment. And in doing so we have some considerations. We are largely identifying these focal landscapes... We are largely identifying these focal landscapes through our state offices. These are folks who are closest to the ground who have the best sense of what is happening, has the best sense of what BLM needs to be investing and how BLM needs to be investing in particular geographies.

As the states have gone to identify focal landscapes, we asked them to think about a variety of different things. Here's some criteria for them to consider. Number one and Tracy Stone-Manning, our Director, has been very clear on this. We watch transformational outcomes. We need to be able to justify the work, we need to be able to identify for broader audiences what is the ROI for investing in BLM. What is our return on investment.

We want to be able to say this is a significant amount of funding that has come into the Bureau. This is what we have done with it and talk about it in a way that is compelling. We're looking for transformational outcomes. We are looking for landscapes that can support a variety of different types of investments. These are complicated landscapes, we all know that. Yes, I think we will identify certain places where we need to do hundreds of thousands of acres of treatments one way like Juniper clearing but for the most part these landscapes need a variety of different types of investments so we are looking for landscapes that can support a different variety of types of investments. We're looking for places that we will have durability in these investments. We are looking at resilience and resistance areas.

Places that, like I said, are not necessarily going to be areas we will plow up for other reasons and then areas we feel will be durable and a climate lens. Importantly, we are looking for areas that will have state, tribal, partner and stakeholder support and leverage. It's going to be critical. We are looking for areas of great storytelling. We are going to be investing in these places and communication strategies.

As Sarah has mentioned, we know we need to be able to talk about these places and investments outside of miles and acres. So we're looking for places with great stories. We are looking for places that have existing conservation strategies. We do not need to reinvent the wheel here. There has been a tremendous amount of work that is already out there for identifying the types of places we should invest in. We clearly want to be contributing to departmental and administrative priorities. We are looking at sister agency investments. It would not surprise you that a significant number of these focal

landscapes will be in sage, the sage ecosystem so in that context we are speaking with CS about investments through SGI. And as we just heard from Steve, Fish and Wildlife services had investments in their systems.

And then lastly, and this is particularly important, we need to talk about capacity. We need to deliver these funds. The Bureau in many places is down 30% for FTEs as you guys all know well dealing with one district office or one field office is not like dealing with another district field office at BLM or land management agency.

We have to be really cognizant about the BLM field and our readiness to move this funding. It's a lot of money for us. We want to move it over the next couple years. We want to illustrate a significant investment to on the ground work and that takes a lot of work. So we are considering capacity as we are identifying where to spend funds.

Our hope is to be able to convey the Bureau's investment through a focal landscape approach sometime this summer. Our Director is in Idaho this week, actually touring some BIL projects. We thought we would put Idaho on the map as an example of the type of place that we will be looking to invest in.

This is Southwest Idaho. This is the Lower Snake River. I'm sure there are lots of folks in the room that have a better sense of this landscape than I do. It is an important landscape for a variety of reasons. We have wintering habitat for mule deer and antelope and some migrating corridors.

Is about 5.5 million acres. So it's important areas for big-game and migratory corridors. We have PSA critical habitat here particularly the pepper grass critical habitat that we'll be working with Fish and Wildlife Service on.

South of here this is an important area for sage, the blue areas come from the sagebrush conservation design that was developed by Fish and Wildlife Service, USGS and AWFA, South of this

Is the concentration of sagebrush and sage-grouse populations. This is a critically important area for sage.

As folks also may know this is the area of the Soda Fire from 2015, 280,000 acres burned. 200,000 of which was really important sage areas. The Soda fire in BLM and federal response is a good example of what we are talking about when we are talking about integration across our emergency stabilization work and restoration work. So continued response to Soda fire is going to be critical investment in this focal landscape.

And then folks may know this is also an area of a large restoration program a restoration project for Idaho office. This is the BOSH restoration project. 600,000 acres we have committed to since 2019. Significant investment Juniper removal in this area. Moving forward we will see a significant investment in wet metalwork in the sage systems. There is also a significant investment for SGI. I think this is the type of

example I have seen NRCS working hand in glove with BLM on the public and private estate and working across boundaries.

The dots represent projects that have been funded through the ecosystem restoration funding through the department in '22 and '23. You can see is sort of our intent is to identify areas and really begin to invest in those areas so we are co-locating projects trying to achieve landscape scale change.

And then these are projects that are coming in from our fuels program. As I noted, a significant amount of funding that BLM has is the fuels work. The orange dots are projects that have been done and the yellow dots are projects that we are planning to do.

Our intention is to be able identify particular places to work. Our hope is to be able to identify between 15 and 20 of these types of landscapes all over the west. Ensure that we are working collectively inside the landscapes to move them forward and identify what needs to be done. Facilitate the work through partners and in partnership and then tell great stories about the work that we will be doing.

I hope that gives a sense in the flavor of how we are thinking about our work moving forward. Happy to take any questions.

JOEL WEBSTER: Good to see you and thanks for coming. I have a question on the aquatic systems of and I know you mentioned wild horses and burrows and thinking about that stuff long-term. I spend a lot of time on BLM land in Southwest Montana and I see the BLM come in and they will do an exclusion fence around an area in July and August and the snow flies in October and the elk run through the fence in November and December and it's down by spring when it's time for the cows to come back and nobody comes back and maintains it so it has a five-month value. And it's something that I just noticed over and over and over again. And landscapes whether our elk could not be as big of an issue but I'm curious how you think of the long-term maintenance how that works so it's not a flash in the pan?

TOMER HASSON: Thank you for the question. What will be doing as we are identifying these landscapes for investment we are asking state offices to a develop essentially what I'm determining investment strategies. So many plans for how they are going to be managing those landscapes with the IRA funding. As a component of the investment strategy, we are asking for the field offices managing those landscapes to talk about management to talk about long-term management and to the extent that you have some areas or some questions will you want our field offices and district offices to be noting how we are going to deal with this particular issue moving for. That's the type of question we can put in guidance to incorporate in their investment strategies.

JOEL WEBSTER: I feel like Blake has jumped up to respond to me.

ED ARNETT: Are you responding to Joel, Blake, or am I going to follow-up on horses.

BLAKE HENNING: No, I had a different question.

ED ARNETT: I thought Joel was going down the path I was going to ask Tomer about the durability and factoring in feral horses and burrows into the mix is there any attempt to identify those areas to increase gathers or other management to ensure the durability. You know where we are going with this. Obviously, that can be a conflicting group of critters relative to the return on investment.

TOMER HASSON: These are the questions we are having now with our program. What is great is if we can identify focal landscapes then we can identify the overlap with herd management areas and then open up conversations about what needs to get done. And have some real conversations about how to sequence the work. There was not direct funding in any of these thoughts for gathers, or additional gathers outside of our current program of work. Having said that, we recognize if we are going to be investing in a place and if Wild horses and burrows is going to be a limiting factor we need to open up the conversation find the resources to be able to sequence of events to ensure we are achieving some durable restoration success. So it's definitely on our radar.

I am happy to say though that some of the preliminary indications for the types of, the areas we are looking at investment in focal landscapes, we actually have minimal overlap with herd management areas. We definitely will have some in Nevada, it is hard not to. And maybe in Utah but I do not think we are seeing significant overlap between areas where we want to invest in those HMAs.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Blake, do you want to go ahead?

BLAKE HENNING: Thank you. I appreciate the presentation and like seeing the Oahi and the BOSH mention. My question really is just about capacities, particularly stopping capacity. Does BLM have any plans to raise that capacity? I know there are strains out there, as there is with everyone, but I'm curious about your plans to address the kind of thing with staff?

TOMER HASSON: Thanks for the question. Staffing is a huge issue for the BLM. And we definitely do plan on addressing some capacity issues with these funds. We are going to be facilitating some administrative holdback for capacity development with these funds and use that holdback funding to primarily address gaps in HR, in grant management officers and in contract officers, GMO's COs and HR positions. We need the COs and CMOs facilitating the work engaging with partners and engaging with partners is going to be a way for us to deliver the funding number one, quickly. Because we need to deliver the funding quickly. We need to obligate the funds quick but I also think to deliver the funds in a meaningful way.

We cannot do that without more GMO's and COs so we will be investing some of the administrative holdback funding for those positions. And some of the funding will be

sending out to the field for focal landscapes. Part of that funding those district and state officers can use the funding for capacity building as well. We know we need to bring a variety of different ologists into the Bureau. Archaeologists, ecologists, hydrologists to facilitate the planning and permitting work to actually move the funding and we are in a lot of conversations right now internally about how to invest in our capacity and how to do that efficiently.

We want to send the funding out to the states because that is the way the BLM best operates, that is the way we can send funding to the people who best know what is needed on the ground. Having said that, we do not want one state office to say we need any ecologists so we are going to put out a PD, a position description go through and HR process for one ecologists when the New Mexico state office also needs an ecologist. We are looking for ways to centralize our hiring so we can put out HR PDs in a way that is much more efficient than that and have a variety of different state offices glean onto national announcements for positions. That is the top internal work of capacity building thoughts what we are doing right now.

BLAKE HENNING: Thank you, appreciate that.

JOEL PEDERSEN: Tomer, thank you for that. As a follow-up to what you said about distributing money to the states for the focal landscapes, have you considered or will you consider how that will impact partners that want to participate in dealing with potentially many state offices on very similar projects, having to apply several different times through NOFOs through the states and the administrative burden that will put on partners and try to make things easier on us?

TOMER HASSON: Thank you for the question. Our hope, and I want you to tell me if this doesn't solve the issue or seek to address it, we have five national NOFOs that are on the street right now. We are sending a significant chunk of funding out to states to work through vocal local landscapes but not all. We have held back funding to facilitate partnership agreements of the national level, partnership agreements that span states essentially. Those are out on the street now and we are hoping to bring in a number of partnership agreements and again hopefully for BLM at-large levels I don't know they can compete with what the for service can do or the great work we've seen through some of their programs but definitely facilitate large agreements of the BLM for the national level but a lot of the work does happen at the state level so we want our states to be able to facilitate partner agreements at the state level as well.

JOEL PEDERSEN: I think that will be helpful. I think the challenge will always be whether the state offices agree what is national priorities and how that affects the relationship.

TOMER HASSON: Totally. You're speaking to some of what, I think we will have to do some hand holding internal.

>>: Yeah.

COLIN BECK: Hi, Tomer. Colin Beck. I live in Western Oregon. It's a forest management agency there and I have been hearing from our district offices that there is a huge potential for forest restoration in Western Oregon, ONC lands. But the districts there tend to get overlooked when these pulses of funding come through just because forestry is such an outlier for the BLM. I was wondering if you could speak to that a little bit?

TOMER HASSON: Thank you for the question and I do see certainly a focal landscape identified in Western Oregon, particularly Southwest Oregon. We've had some great working road valley...

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Any other questions? Thank you very much, Tomer. Nicely done.

ROSEMARIE SPANO: Good morning, I am Rosemarie Spano. It is a pleasure to visit with you a little bit about the Great American Outdoors Act at the Bureau of Land Management this morning.

Just a little bit of background the Great American Outdoors Act went into place in August 2020. It established public parks and land restoration fund. Sometimes you hear people call it LRF or they just call it GAOA. The BLM portion is \$95 million a year. GAOA provides five years of funding to the Bureaus.

Within this LRF was established to provide deferred maintenance or funding to get these back into -- there was a limitation that no more than 35% of the funding could be used on transportation assets. These are roads, bridges, culverts and parking lots. There was also a cool stipulation in the legislation that promoted accessibility or ADA improvements. That was really exciting.

So you're probably wondering what our assets. Assets are real property, physical structures. They have these sort of specific services or functions. We track them in these asset management systems. All bureaus in the DOI uses the same software. They are typically like buildings and bridges, dams, roads and recreation and administrative type sites facilities and trails. The BLM asset portfolio at the close of FY22 was a little over \$26 billion in the deferred maintenance backlog was \$5.3 billion dollars. This is a pretty big left but the backlog is 5 billion. There is a lot going on here and we are really trying leverage to make the best of our funding.

The Department of Interior initially established sort of these four high-level goals and objectives you see on the slide. This is what the BLM is using is really our selection criteria as we are prioritizing when you have over \$5 billion of fixes or repairs that are needed. We need criteria to help us prioritize. When you are looking at all of this maintenance backlog, and the first bullet under protect those we serve we are really targeting those repairs that improve public safety as well as the safety of our volunteers and workforce.

Maximizing citizen served is about making a big impact. We are targeting high use recreation facilities. Anywhere that we can improve ADA accessibility in our aging infrastructure – expanding access to outdoor recreation. The next goal is improving financial health. This is really the true North of the entire GAOA program. It is targeting deferred maintenance reduction on our assets and we do this by also leveraging other funding sources. I think you heard Mr. Guertin mention we have other appropriations as well as sponsor the land transportation program. By using the multiple sources of funds we can put together these comprehensive type projects and get the most bang for our buck. We are also looking at rightsizing our portfolio which this means divesting unneeded assets and depending on the condition if they are that poor as well just demolition of unnecessary assets.

And then planning for the future. These projects that provide these extreme benefits for conservation as well as promoting recreation and educational opportunities into the future.

Our projects kind of blend into these five different types of categories. I just thought I would put down this distribution of where our projects are following. Buildings and structures can be either administrative or recreational. As well as demolition, recreation assets, transportation assets those are roads, bridges, culverts and parking lots and then water and utilities which is dams and water infrastructure.

I'm just going to go over a few projects that the BLM is either starting or has ongoing and completed just to give you an idea of what we have been doing for the last 2.5 years. We have a pretty large project in the Gila Box Riparian NCA, we're doing a lot of repairs to the recreation site assets as well as roads and vote launches. We are really promoting safe transportation and access within the NCA as well as river put ins, takeouts and these shelters and campgrounds and kiosks in facilities that the user tends to appreciate to improve their time while they are recreating in the NCA.

So this project, the Pleasant Valley Pit Campground in California is now complete. It is a really popular campground because it is close to climbing as well as bouldering. So we get quite a bit of visitation here. There is, I think about 75 different campsite units. You can see picnic tables. We replaced old dilapidated wooden picnic tables with these precast concrete abutments tables that are ADA accessible and then fire rings so we can contain the people's fires at night. And then we also did some improvements in the host facilities and kiosks and signage.

This is a project in the San Luis Valley of Colorado which is near and dear to my heart. We are doing work at Blanca Wetlands as well as the McIntyre and Simpson wetlands. Between us to we have 20,000 acres of ecological habitat for birds, fish and wildlife. We are going to work on placing some artesian water wells and allow the piping in infrastructure where we are moving water to these lakes and playas to sort of really manage this amazing habitat.



But it's also good to note that these facilities also provide recreational opportunities for the public as well as educational opportunities for local students. Pretty cool site.

Next project. Here is another project on the Big Hole River in Montana. You're working on replacing a couple of boat ramps, boat launches and we are expanding some of the big parking lots where we are accommodating the trucks and trailers. You can see this project is in construction. Now it is in winter shutdown. You can see the prep work was done for the new concrete boat ramp and then you can see we got wintered out after the ramp -- the concrete was poured. So we will get this finished off this spring as well as the others.

This is really important you know the Big Hole River provides critical put in and take out access for fishing as well as boating, so good River access points for us.

This is a truss bridge on the South Fork Molalla River that we will be replacing. Roads, bridges and culverts are so important to getting the public deep into the public lands so they can recreate and do the things they are coming to public lands to do.

I think another important piece of our transportation projects has a lot of these roads when we are able to go in into a project or we have that ability to go and replace deficient culverts and so we have lots of culverts primarily in Western Oregon that are undersized so we are now able to go in and remove the old culverts and put in the appropriate sized fish passage culverts. So it's really amazing work that we are able to do across the BLM, just even on our transportation infrastructure.

This is a project of a road at lakes in Montana. What we have been doing in the first three years that we will continue in FY24 and FY25 is we are really focusing on these larger more comprehensive projects that were out of reach just because they were too large to fund within any fiscal year given our appropriations. I cannot stress what a huge opportunity this is to go in and make significant investments and really make all the improvements at a facility or a large rec site. When we talk about facilities we can also talk about the National Interagency Fire Center and key facilities that benefit the public in many ways in addition to our recreation type assets. Projects are all developed on the ground at the local level, they feed up with the state offices and then prioritized for funding at the national level to make sure we are maximizing the impact of GAOA with our deferred maintenance reductions and then targeting the DOI goals and objectives that I reviewed with you as well as the administration priorities.

Here's a link to the DOI GAOA website so you can learn more about the program. There is also links to the Bureau's website as well. On this page I have a link directly to the BLM GAOA website. Thank you for your time. I appreciate any feedback or any questions you guys have.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Thank you, Rosemarie. Any questions?

ROSEMARIE SPANO: Thank you. That last line is a picture of the White House we

recently completed restoration on.

SIMON ROOSEVELT: You mentioned rightsizing the portfolio during your presentation. Could you talk more about what that means?

ROSEMARIE SPANO: Yeah, that is looking at these unnecessary assets. We have a vast portfolio of assets and there are things that now at the local level we are recognizing we don't have the funds to take care of. They are deteriorating and we are not using them. The public isn't using them so they are no longer serving the mission. So we have this opportunity to think smartly about divesting or demolishing those unnecessary assets to right size so we can focus funds on assets we truly know benefit the mission and the public.

SIMON ROOSEVELT: Just a quick follow-up. Do you have a sense of the magnitude of that in dollars?

ROSEMARIE SPANO: It is super small. If you look back, I showed a slide and it's less than 1%. When you're getting rid of assets that's actually -- it's a small investment but the benefits when we are looking at the benefit of the removal of the asset by no longer having to invest in the maintenance or what it would take to get it up to good far exceeds the cost of the removal too.

>>: Thank you.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: Any other questions? Thank you both. Great presentations. Much appreciated. And it looks like we are going to hear from Robert Harper, Betty Jewett and Bradley Kinder from the U.S. Forest Service. Thank you all very much.

ROBERT HARPER: Thank you for your time and commitment to conservation. My name is Robert Harper with the Forest Service. I'm not the All-Star speaker here from the Forest Service but I wanted to offer a few remarks to set some context from some of the specifics you will hear from Bradley Kinder and Betty Jewett. I think it's important to have that context as you start to frame your questions for discussion.

This is really a remarkable time in the Forest Service history. I have been with the federal government for almost 34 years almost all that has been the Forest Service in this moment in time is like any other. It was brought to us by a change in the fire seasons. The fire seasons now, I don't need to tell any of you, or longer, hotter and more severe than they have ever been. Started in fire as a firefighter in a smoke jumper in the late 80s and it's unrecognizable now as to what I experienced as a young man. It's also unrecognizable as to where it occurs and the West. In early days Colorado was not a place that burned and now does regularly. And also in the most unusual ways as we saw at Cameron Peak.

It probably started in the fire season of 2000. I lived in Montana at the time. There's

been a lot of changes in the Forest Service. We spent 20 years modernizing and growing our fire workforce. And we did that in a really constrained environment. The upshot was we have a great fire suppression workforce. The downside was the rest of our workforce declined considerably over that period of time and we are in a bind now as we look at the expectations before us.

Just a little bit of recent history. Fast-forward to the present, November of last year -- November of '21 Congress passes the bipartisan and for structural law. The Forest Service gets about 5.5 billion dollars out of that. It's complicated. Brad will talk about that it's almost like a mini appropriations bill. It comes in lots and lots of little buckets of money. Some big buckets but a lot of little ones.

Then we go to January of last year the chief of the Forest Service, releases a profound strategy. He releases the wildfire crisis strategy. It's a set of expectations and priorities built on something called fire sheds like 250 high priority fire sheds in the West and he identifies 10 priority landscapes because as much money as we have and sometimes as much difficulty we are having spending it still the problem is an order of magnitude bigger. Priorities are everything. The chief establishes priorities in the wildfire crisis strategy is released. Brad will talk about that.

We got to work on that last summer. Last summer the Inflation Reduction Act is passed. The Forest Service it's another 5 billion or so dollars about 2.1 billion comes to the National Forest System side of the house where I work and were brought works.

We got a lot of money. And then just actually January a few months ago, January of this year the chief and secretary released another priority landscape to the west. So we have a lot of money in the system and that comes to that period of time two disaster supplementation we received to address fire in the West most recently in New Mexico and tropical storms in the southeast and of course normal appropriations.

When Brad and Betty talk you will hear about the bipartisan if his law, the Inflation Reduction Act and the Great American Outdoors Act. We have not brought into the mix the disaster supplemental and normal appropriations but you get the sense that is five big buckets of money. There's a lot of resources in the system as you've already heard this morning.

I wanted to drift in and then they will talk about the provisions in how we are moving out, a little bit about how we are staffed to manage this. The challenges that are not designed all that well in some ways that we are staffed to deliver on what we need to deliver on. I think I saw the chief share some figures with the national association of Counties back in March, maybe February, that last year we led out hard on the hiring. It was a big effort for us. We hired 3300 people which is good. It comes against the backdrop of 2400 retirees. And a lot of the people we hired we are moving up in the system. That's 3300 new people. We had a whole lot more personnel actions.

This is a big deal for us right now capacity and some of you have already asked

questions about the Forest Service and how we are managing them. A couple things I can speak to and it's not just us. For us to deliver on this work we have to have some alignment with Department of Interior and commerce particularly when it comes to ESA consultation. This year we have a high-level senior employee that is in charge of bringing new entry-level people into the agency at that GS-5, 7, 9 level if you're familiar with the federal workforce. That effort is underway now. We're trying to do so in a way that improves equity and diversity in the Forest Service.

That is also against the backdrop of how we make sure we're meeting the intent of the Justice 40 ensuring 40% of federal resources are going to underserved communities. That is a big one. The other part that is worth noting as we got the authority and the bipartisan infrastructural law to transfer money to Fish and Wildlife services to help us increase capacity on ESA consultations. Because we will not meet the chief's expectations in the wildfire crisis strategy which is wanting to treat 20 million acres of federal land and assist in the treatment of 30 million acres of private land in the selected priority landscapes and what was originally 10 years. And those expectations are starting to shorten up on us. We cannot get that done on our own.

Last year we moved about 7.2 million to Fish and Wildlife services and some to NOAA fisheries to hire biologists. We also know that we cannot completely hire our way out of this and we are standing with technical team and innovations team that has yet to be named to help us do consultations more effectively. In a more innovative way that we've done in the past. That is kind of where we are at. I just wanted to set the backdrop before I turn it over to Brad.

Brad will pivot to Betty who is joining virtually and he will lead you through the slides and take you through the specifics of how the agency is moving out on both bipartisan and for law, the IRA and then we will go to Betty for the GAOA. Unless you have any further questions, I will turn it over to Brad.

**BRADLEY KINDER:** Good morning, everyone. As Rob mentioned, my name is Bradley Kinder. I'm the coordinator for the bipartisan and for our and Inflation Reduction Act in the National Forest System of the Forest Service.

Much of what I will talk about today is had a very high level. We did not go into specific details on individual provisions per se but there are about 46 I think in the BIL that pertain to the Forest Service in some way, shape or form either associated with funding for new authorities that we have. This is going to be high level. I will focus primarily on the NFS side of the house. You may know that state private in trouble for street also receives significant funding in the BIL as well and I will try to mention those provisions as we moved to the presentation here.

This just gives you kind of a quick overview of how we structure the briefing today. We will provide a very high level of the funding we received. Then we will talk about some key thematic areas where we are focusing our investments one of which and the most important is the wildfire crisis strategy. We will talk some about the ecosystem

restoration work we are doing primarily reforestation, vegetation, and watershed restoration.

And the third focus area is improving recreation infrastructure and access. We will spend a little bit of time walking through those thematic areas and then we will talk about how we are essentially doing our business associated with these provisions focusing on equity, working with tribes and working with partners.

In terms of funding summary and again this is high level and Rob mentioned this we have 5.5 billion dollars coming to us from the Forest Service from the bipartisan and for structural law focused on restoring ecosystems and reducing wildfire risks to communities.

The IRA similarly provides \$5 billion focused again on wildfire crisis issues and fuels treatments as well as funding to implement a range of different state, private in trouble for street projects including urban and community forestry and support to her forced legacy program.

And then GAOA provided the Forest Service with \$7.7 billion to invest in America's outdoor recreation infrastructure and public lands are suddenly and water conservation. This map just kind of gives you a quick overview of the geographic distribution of some of our investments across the country and National Forest System and in particular this provides information on recent investments under the BIL or IJA or GAOA.

The wildfire crisis strategy I mentioned this is our highest priority in the Forest Service. It is really focused on protecting communities from wildfire. It is a 10-year strategy and is really focused on treating up to an additional 20 million acres on National Forest System lands and treating 30 million acres on federal, state, tribal and private lands and also developing a long-term plan for maintenance beyond that 10-year strategy. We really see the BIL and IRA as a down payment on the fuels treatment and on this crisis strategy.

As the slide shows here, really our focus is investment in 21 landscapes across the western United States focused on high risk fire sheds. If you can look closely at this map you can see where the landscapes are. We initially started with 10 priority landscapes or 10 wildfire crisis strategy landscapes that were announced last year and recently we announced 11 more and you can say on this particular graphic the overlay of those landscapes with both our National Forest System lands as well as the high risk fire sheds.

We are hoping that these investments in these landscapes will address 134/250 high risk Western fire sheds. We are really focused in this arena and we just recently held a landscape workshop in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where we brought together all the supervisors and staff from some of these landscapes to talk about the challenges they are facing and how we will use the investments from the BLM and IRA efficiently and effectively in addressing the wildfire crisis.

The next investment area I will mention is around reforestation and revegetation. Some of you may be aware that BIL also included the repairing existing public land and adding necessary trees for REPLANT Act. Essentially, this particular provision under the BIL removed the cap on the reforestation trust fund and the reforestation trust fund is a fund we received in the Forest Service from tariffs on imported wood products. We have been capped at I think \$30 million but this lifted the cap so that provided significant resources for us as an agency to undertake reforestation.

And so, what we are looking at is trying to utilize these resources to address the backlog we have over the next 10 years in reforestation and we are looking at planting up to 1 billion trees over the next 10 years to address the backlog through the new resources we have from the replant act.

In addition to that we are making investments in some of our nurseries as well as partnerships associated with nurseries and native seed. We just recently announced a \$10 million investment to increase the capacity of our nurseries and seed orchards to address the future needs for seedlings to help promote reforestation. An example here is we established a new agreement with the Chicago Botanical Gardens to train over 1700 seed collectors to address the insufficient supply of native seeds.

So very much looking at trying to ramp up the capacity for revegetation and reforestation. And that is what we are focused on here this year is ramping up the capacity so we can do reforestation into the future with these new resources.

The next focused area for these investments that we're looking at is restoring priority watersheds and utilizing our watershed condition framework to identify the priority watersheds and make investments accordingly. The BIL gave us a new program called a Collaborative Aquatic Landscape Restoration program. In FY22 we invested \$25.5 million across 10 or 11 Collaborative Aquatic Landscape Restoration projects.

The other element of this provision is we have to incorporate a collaboration component to that work. Also associated with restoring priority watersheds we have the legacy roads and trails program. In FY22 we announced \$40 million to a range of different projects across the National Forest System again focused on improving water quality and aquatic habitat but also focused on making our transportation system safer, more sustainable and more durable. That was just in FY22. We have another project list we will be announcing here in FY23 very soon. That should be announced within the next month, I think.

Just wanted to give you a flavor of where some of these investments are being made. This is a map that shows where our investments are in relation to the collaborative aquatic landscape restoration program. For example, we are working in Michigan to address and improve stream function in three priority watersheds in the upper East branch of Ontonagon River in the partnership with the Trout Unlimited in nature Conservancy.

In Utah we are working to restore fish passage of 50 miles of rivers and streams and also working collaboratively with partners.

In Puerto Rico we are working to address water quality in three watersheds through activities like removing invasive species implanting riparian plants. Just wanted to emphasize here is a diverse set of activities and it's very much working in partnership with our partners, with states and tribes.

And then this is the third investment area that I will mention in this is improving recreation infrastructure and access. The BIL gave us some additional resources for recreation sites and cabins. And FY22 we announced over \$37 million in investments across our recreation infrastructure a national forest and grasslands. 19 million of that was focused on recreation sites and \$18 million for cabins.

Our focus has been to add or improve amenities at popular sites and really work to adapt our recreation sites to disturbances, changing climate and to increased capacity needs.

One project in particular that is receiving significant investments is recreation cabins in Alaska. We are working to renovate and construct about 35 public-use cabins on the Chugach and Tongass National Forest. We announced an agreement of \$13.9 million from BIL and NFF is bringing in additional matching funds to help support this work.

I'm going to pivot and asked Betty to present on GAOA and I will come back and close out the presentation then we will have some time for discussion questions.

BETTY JEWETT: Thank you Brad for the introduction. Again, Betty Jewett the acting Director for the Great American Outdoors Act. I'm going to share of the Council a few slides on numbers and stories about how the Great American Outdoors Act is making an impact on our recreation infrastructure and access.

Those of you have probably heard and note that the Great American Outdoors Act of 2020 actually have three components. One was the national parks and public lands that Rose Marie had mentioned earlier or LRF legacy recreation funds that talks about deferred maintenance. And then we had the permanent funding for LW CF, and the force legacy phone.

This is a snapshot of the dashboard which is a public facing dashboard that anyone can see and I can send it to Doug and he can share it with the councilmembers so you can check the status of the legacy restoration fund at any time. Here, you can see we have approved to date as of 2023, 996 projects and they have addressed \$650 million of deferred maintenance. These get updated weekly. This is getting updated on a pretty regular basis. At this point in time 2024 projects actually have been -- are submitted in the president's budget and you can see what those projects are. Those have not been approved yet by Congress but those have been submitted.

We are now working, my strike team is working currently on accepting projects for FY25 and those would be recommended to leadership later this summer.

An example of one of our legacy restoration projects, and one of the things we do look at I wanted to share as we look at priority outcomes. One of the things with LRF is reduced deferred maintenance. We also are asked to address the housing shortage and also the benefits to tribes in underserved communities and also partner contributions and then we also support the Water Fire crisis strategy implementation. As you heard from Brad that is one of our biggest priorities and agency.

Another aspect of priority outcomes is also climate change mitigation and adaptation. One of the big things for legacy restoration funds is deferred maintenance. Roughly 1.5 billion of annual maintenance needs are considered every year for the Forest Service and that is \$7 billion of deferred maintenance and growing every year because we have a backlog as you heard from Rosemarie at the BLM.

So now I'm going to talk a little bit about land and water conservation fund which has got permanent funding with the passage of Great American Outdoors Act. What this is is actually how we secure additional public lands. One of the things that we actually do have focus areas. We look at projects that look at risk unique, natural and cultural resources. We want to strengthen resiliency and biodiversity across the land, water, and ecosystems to climate change impacts. We want to particularly increase access to outdoor recreation which includes hunting. That is a huge aspect that we look at when we look at any of the land proposals for purchase.

The example that I want to share with you today is a project for FY24 that is proposed it's a \$4 million project that is proposing to acquire 2000 acres in Alabama which is included 1800 acres in the Evergreen forest tract if it is acquired it becomes part of the Hollins wildlife management area. That is managed by the state of Alabama and it is actually the top five public lands to hunt in Alabama. It is part of the Talladega Ranger District on the Talladega and Conecuh National Forest and its popular to deer and turkey hunters.

The next part of the program of the Great American Outdoors Act was permanent funding for forest legacy. This is actually the granting program with a competitive process to conserve forest lands that are threatened by conversion to non-forest use. To date we have about 2.97 million acres of forest lands that have been conserved. This is for protection of habitat. Including breeding ground, wintering yards, wintering range and conserving connectivity.

One of the examples and FY24 of a proposed project is 8850 acres of the Black River Ranch which is one of the last remaining large intact forest private owned tracts and Michigan Peninsula. It's part of the pigeon River country state forest is known as the big wild. It contributes -- this is known for its muskrat, beaver, mink and elk viewing and hunting contributes 6.36 million dollars annually to the local economy. It is also known



for its blue ribbon trout streams. It's the only River managed exclusively for negative trout in the Lake Huron Basin.

That is the last example I have from the Great American Outdoors Act. I will turn it back over to Brad.

BRADLEY KINDER: I will mention a few of the things before we open it up for questions and discussion. In terms of how we look at these investments we are also very much focused on trying to implement on some of this administration's priorities related to equity and justice forwarding. We in the Forest Service has developed an equity action plan which is an effort to set a broad set of high leverage actions with a potential recruiting high-impact and enduring systemic change that benefits employees, tribes, partners and the public. So we are constantly looking at equity in the context of these investments in the context of equity. We also have a number of Justice 40 BLM programs. Working with an engaging tribe is also something we are really looking to do tomorrow. We are in consultation with the BIL and IRA and then the other area in which we are trying to ensure these investments support is our climate adaptation plan.

In fact, last Earth Day there was the executive order on climate change in forest and that was followed by the USDA secretary memo and climate and stewardship of American forests and grasslands which articulates a need to consider climate resilience and stewardship in her BIL investment so we are continuing to look at how to meet that particular commitment and those criteria.

And then we are doing our work through shared stewardship in partnership with our NGO partners, our partners on the ground, states and tribes. That brings me to the last slide. One strategy we have developed the term Keystone has gained popularity here I guess and the context of these investments. Keystone agreements is something we are implementing in the Forest Service which are large-scale national level agreements accessible for individual forests and regions and for long-term implementation up to 5-20 years and below on this line is our current list of Keystone agreements with some of the national level partners.

We are also actively pursuing and looking at a similar Keystone agreement for tribes who are with the tribal organization but really the idea is to provide surge capacity to the field to implement these investments in a wildfire crisis strategy in particular and also reduce the administrative workload associated with engaging in partnerships.

And so, this has been a major focus of ours here in the last few months and there's actually a meeting later this week among Keystone partners to talk about how we will implement and work together and ensure we engage local level partners a small through those Keystone agreements.

With that, I will close it out. We have our contact information if you need more information on anything we presented or did not present today. Happy to carry questions back to the agency if there are particular provisions that you might be

interested in that we did not talk about. Thank you.

>>: Start over here.

LUCAS MARTINEZ: First off, as a native Puerto Rican I want to say thank you so much for the three watershed projects that are occurring in Puerto Rico. I was excited to hear about that. I also want to express my gratitude for the presentation and for speaking about Justice 40. I know we talked a little bit about workforce staffing development which I believe falls under a covered program under the Justice 40 but the other component am interested in is also procurement practices or strategies. Has there been any discussion on that as it pertains to -- these are investments in our great outdoors but also they are an investment in our communities. Have there been discussions on how to invest in local businesses, small businesses, minority owned businesses, women-owned businesses? I would just love to know where we are at in that process?

BRADLEY KINDER: Let me frame this up around the Justice 40 commitments and what we look at in terms of the BLM and IRA investments. We are very much focused on looking at metrics and indicators and fulfilling some of those Justice commitments. One of those is looking how our national forests and grasslands are investing in underserved communities through grant agreements or through contracts. So it has definitely been something we have tried to emphasize to our field in terms of the importance of investing in underserved communities. There is also a metric we are considering when it comes to the reporting when it comes to Justice 40 that will be going to the department and White House in the future.

BETTY JEWETT: That's a great question and one of the things we are doing as part, I wouldn't call it part of our priority outcomes but it's generally one of the emphasis in part of our strategies and how we do contracting and implement our contracting. We look at small minority owned businesses and we do contracting. As part of her emphasis as we maneuver forward through awarding the \$885 million worth of contracts that we are awarding in there. that is part of our strategy in terms of meeting our Justice 40 outcomes.

>>: George, do you have a question?

GEORGE DUNKLIN: Could you expand a little bit give us some examples on Keystone agreement that you're talking about? There were some partners there but just a couple examples of what that really implies.

BRADLEY KINDER: Doug, can you pull up that slide quickly and we can talk through these partners are. So these Keystone agreements are really going to fall into two different categories master stewardship agreement semester participating agreements. We are trying to align the work with the authorities that we have. But essentially the list you have here -- we did not necessarily obligate funding when establishing these agreements. They are essentially broad national level agreements that then provide the opportunity for our individual forests grasslands and regions to essentially develop

supplemental project agreements under these master agreements.

And so the range of partners that we identified to support these Keystone agreements is really designed to support a diversity of work when it comes to the BIL and IRA investments but also the wildfire crisis strategy. There are two that I actually managed or stood up and one was the National Forest Foundation Agreement and the other the national Fish and Wildlife foundation. Now the National Forest Foundation Agreement we tried to make it as broad as possible so work could include anything from an environmental analysis to actual fuels treatment on the ground and semester stewardship agreement. So we have to work within those authorities but we are trying to diversify this set of activities under each of those agreements and make them available for our region said forests again with the idea of reducing that administrative load for those units.

That's kind of the general reasoning behind the Keystone agreements. Does that answer your question or is there anything specific you want to dive into?

LAUREN WARD: Thank you that was a great presentation. Enjoyed hearing about the work you have going on including the Keystone agreements. I wonder if you have considered trying to form one with any private forest owner group any of those types of organizations at the national level?

BRADLEY KINDER: We have not yet, to my knowledge. That has not been within the realm of consideration on the NFS sign on the National Forest System side but on the state private trouble for street system side I think that could be a potential opportunity. So, you know, it might be worthwhile having a conversation with those folks I am happy to connect you if you'd be interested.

LYDIA PARKER: Lydia with Hunters of Color, thinking about the wildfire reduction or hazardous fuel reduction and welfare crisis strategy in particular the beyond 10 years looking to the future, I'm reminded of the late great comedian Charlie Hill that said whenever there is a problem on this land ask the Indians because we have the owner's manual. Just thinking about who has been doing long-term forest management the longest on this land especially on the West Coast. I guess my question is how are you empowering tribes and traditional ecological knowledge to lead that long-term strategy?

BRADLEY KINDER: Yeah, you know, I think tribes are an integral part of the way we plan these appeals treatments. Often times in the forest service as you probably know we look to our regions the national forest and grasslands to help lead the charge, so to speak on the local level tribal consultation and tribal engagement when it comes to how these funds are invested. To the extent possible at the national level, we are encouraging that engagement to take place, the consultation so that there is not only that integration in terms of information but also, you know, thinking about how we leverage the existing tools and resources we have to work with tribes. Within the bipartisan structure law there's a provision for the trouble force infrastructure act and that has been a tool that we are increasingly look at to help support the wildfire crisis

strategy. So trying to work with tribes to do work on National Forest System lands and that is one opportunity that our regions and forests are taking advantage of it as well.

And then at the national level obviously we have also been engaged to tribal consultation under the BIL and IRA and both of which have a very, very strong emphasis on feels and feels mitigation. Thank you.

KEITH TIDBALL: I echo the thanks for the presentation. I have two related questions having to do with accessibility and I'm coming with these questions from the standpoint of being the veteran service organization representative for the Council.

The first is one of your initiative areas of focal areas had to do with access and wondering to what extent the access planning includes actual accessibility especially for disabilities ambulatory in this future planning. That is the first question and maybe you don't have that immediately available but I think there are some opportunities to discuss that further.

And then the second has to do again with the Keystone agreements, notably no one specifically called out veteran services organizations among the Keystone agreements yet. There will be some great opportunities to partner going forward with some of those organizations or a coalition of those organizations. I'm interested in you or your colleagues' response to those and also extended a hopeful handshake in terms of how we might pursue those things going forward.

BRADLEY KINDER: Absolutely. That is great. I will probably hand this over to Betty to handle the accessibility question but you know one of the provisions the 37 million that I mentioned is focused on recreation sites and cabins in one piece of that, maybe accessor accessibility is not explicitly mention in that provision but the idea is we are making those sites and adapting those sites to make them more accessible. I think this is worth further positions and absolutely on your Keystone agreement point I think there is a lot of opportunity there that the set of partners we currently have is not the end-all be-all. Betty, do you want to address that question too?

BETTY JEWETT: Sure. What I'm hearing from you is there is an access from a vehicular or trail access from a hunter perspective and there is also the accessibility from a facilities. From a facility standpoint, whenever there's different maintenance or work done there is an accessibility requirement that we do make the sites more accessible. From a road or trail accessibility those are actually very localized issues that have to be addressed to their tribal management decision-making that happens. So when projects are actually getting funded we do actually take a look at it but that is very localized decision-making that happens on each of the national forests.

I think what we can do is the national office has asked some questions and that to me goes down to really the equality ask that you are asking of us and it goes to the Justice 40 but also to really some equality questions in terms of how to make the national forest on public lands more accessible.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: We are going to entertain two more questions before we break for lunch. I'm going to start with Wayne and then Joel and then we will close for lunch.

WAYNE HUBBARD: Thank you. I'm so honored to be here and listen to the information that has been going on with this meeting. As a person in an organization that has worked with the Forest Service for over 18 years now. And I deal with primarily diverse audiences. How are you getting information out to these diverse communities that there are opportunities. Under the administration that is really pushing for this Justice 40 but as someone who really advocates and promotes for the U.S. Forest Service out in the community, they are not aware of any opportunities or it's kind of over their heads. I would like to hear how you guys are reaching out or potentially reaching out to these diverse communities. Is there a strategy?

BRADLEY KINDER: That is a great question. I think there's a lot of work to be done in that arena. To a large extent we are, you know, feeding information of these opportunities up to the White House. I know there is a tribal playbook that the White House has developed that list opportunities for tribes is one example. But I think we need to do better. Our state, private, trouble forestry unit is actively involved in pushing out notice of funding opportunities and I think there is one that is coming out on urban and community forestry here very soon. It in terms of that communication and engagement with underserved communities, minority communities, you know, we often look to our local national forests and grasslands on the NFS side at least with the understanding that they know the context, they know the communities that they engage and, you know, we are looking to them to engage with those underserved communities and the locales which they operate. But Wayne, if you have ideas for how we improve our approaches, we would be all ears to make sure we are reaching the communities we are looking to reach especially with the Justice 40 commitments. Betty, do you want to add anything to that?

BETTY JEWETT: Sure. This is actually year four of the Great American Outdoors Act implementation and we have a communication strategy. We have a wonderful public facing dashboard and storyboard. We rely on partnerships to help us with that and also local units to really try to tell the story that the great work the Great American Outdoors Act in is doing for the public. If there are any suggestions on how we could do better, we would love to hear more about that. But we are doing a number of things through communication strategy to get more information out there but there is always more we can do particularly if I'm hearing there's places that don't know we're doing this great work.

WAYNE HUBBARD: Absolutely. I want to thank you guys for the work you are doing. I was thinking about it from a recruitment and retention. There's so many communities that if they knew these opportunities were there they would jump into it or even look at universities or junior colleges will look at how can we support it, advocate for it or even work for the organization. That is something I might come round-robin with you guys a

little bit later. Thank you for your time.

>>: Thanks.

JOEL WEBSTER: This is Joel with TRCP. I'm thinking about the public lands subcommittee and one focus areas being public access and Betty I have a question for you but let me preface it real quick. One of the things our community worked hard on with LWCF is making sure 3% of LWCF dollars are dedicated for public access and expanding access. I know through full funding through GAOA that number is been appropriated much higher than that in this 60 something million dollars across the different federal agencies. I was actually in a meeting the other day was somebody and they were talking about a project that they plan to fund through rec access dollars. I don't recall out that project but it really wasn't a rec access project.

In the Dingell Act Section 4105 that requires federal agencies to greater priority list of lands that are inaccessible or have difficult access and use that as a priority list for acquiring access and I'm curious if you can talk a little bit about what the Forest Service might be doing to use those rec access dollars in a way that's different.

BETTY JEWETT: I have to admit the LWCF is not my program area. I just happened to be presenting some of the information for one of my partners which is Barbara Johnson but I actually sit on the committee that actually grades and recommends projects for LWCF each year, so I get to look at the criteria that the regions in the forest submit projects in. I know there is probably a very small percentage of time when certain forests or regions aren't, maybe like you said, hitting the mustard. But I know many of the cases at least 90% of the cases the projects that we move forward or recommend to move forward at least from an LWCF what I call primary area really do try to address some sort of access for hunting, fishing and other kinds of recreational components because we have such a need there across the public lands aspect. And then we do look at what we consider some of the Dingell Act recommendations. We also look at projects that have wide public support. We look at the letters of support that maybe organizations like yourself submit in.

If they do not have a wide public support, they do not get scored very high. To speak to that particular project, I would have to know and I would have to follow up with Barbara to find out specifically what that was but I can understand your concern. Because there is a huge need out there for access. We know that access to our public lands is a big deal across the country. I've had the pleasure of working at least in eight national forests across my career. It is a huge issue and I can hear your concern.

VICE CHAIRMAN DEVNEY: All right. With that, we are running a little late. I want to thank Robert, Brad and Betty. Great presentations. I really want to give you credit, that dashboard is a pretty remarkable tool. You should be proud of yourselves in terms of providing the American public the direct manageable feedback on what you are accomplishing. That is the neat way to do it and I sincerely appreciate it. Thank you for great presentations. What that we will break for lunch. And I thank everybody for a

productive morning session.

(LUNCH BREAK)

(End 12:22 PM EST)