

**U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
May 8, 2025**

**Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Doug Burgum, Department of the
Interior
from Senator Martin Heinrich**

Question 1: In order to have robust waterfowl populations in the United States that can be sustainably hunted, waterfowl need intact stopover and breeding habitat across the continent. The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) supports this effort. When will the Department release frozen NAWCA funding?

Response: The Department is currently reviewing grant funding to ensure alignment with Administration priorities.

Question 2: The President's proposed budget cuts include steep reductions in funding for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). How will the Bird Banding Lab continue to function amidst these cuts and the plan to fire approximately 1,000 USGS staff?

Response: The 2026 Budget does not request funding for the Bird Banding Lab in order for the bureau to focus on core mission activities.

Question 3: The USGS partners with the Department of Agriculture to study Chronic Wasting Disease's (CWD) transmission and distribution. Given the drastic cuts to the USGS budget, how will the Department continue to manage the spread of CWD so that sportsmen know their local deer and elk populations are not at risk?

Response: The 2026 Budget does not request funding for the Ecosystems Mission Area in order for USGS to focus on core mission activities. The Department recognizes Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a significant concern to sportsmen and wildlife managers. The Department is committed to working with State and Federal agencies, and other partners to facilitate consensus-based actions to address CWD.

Question 4: The Fish and Wildlife Service has stopped all international law enforcement activity that combats wildlife trafficking and poaching. What analysis did the Fish and Wildlife Service do before deciding to abandon all monitoring and prevention of zoonotic disease spillover caused by illegal wildlife trafficking and poaching?

Response: The FWS has not stopped law enforcement activity that protects wildlife and plan resources in accordance with the laws of the United States and international treaties. The FWS continues to implement the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which addresses issues related to the illegal trade of wildlife and plants within the CITES framework, and to participate in various CITES committees and working groups. At U.S. borders and points of entry, the FWS's Office of Law Enforcement (OLE)'s wildlife inspectors and K9 teams actively monitor and interdict illegal wildlife trade and zoonotic pathogens shipments, including those in transit. FWS wildlife inspectors ensure that shipments comply with Federal laws related to humane transport and conduct proactive enforcement operations with FWS special agents and interagency partners. OLE special agents

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
May 8, 2025

and attaches continue to play a pivotal role in enforcing Federal wildlife statutes, protecting native species from exploitation, and training law enforcement officials at various levels, all while working to prevent zoonotic disease spillover from the illegal wildlife trade.

Question 5: The Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge contributes \$17 million to the local economy and welcomed over 300,000 visitors in a year – in large part due to the Festival of the Cranes. And every fall, the Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge hosts the Dragonfly festival. Yet, neither of them has enough staff to operate the refuges, let alone host the festival, which brings visitors from all over the world. These refuges are crucial for habitat, wildlife, and local economies.

Please provide a list of all terminated Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge System positions and locations, and a list of all remaining Refuge System positions and locations.

Response: The Administration's goal is to make the Federal government more efficient and accountable. As I have previously noted, Department employees have not been terminated. Employees who have elected to participate in the Deferred Resignation/Retirement Program or Voluntary Early Retirement Authority have done so voluntarily. The Department looks forward to continuing to meet our mission while implementing workforce efficiency strategies.

Will you commit to working with my office to ensure that these refuges are appropriately funded and staffed to benefit local economies, promote tourism, and create jobs?

Response: The Department is committed to ensuring the National Wildlife Refuge System is appropriately funded and staffed to carry out its core mission. We would be happy to work with you to that end.

**U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
May 8, 2025**

**Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Doug Burgum, Department of Interior
from Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley**

Question 1: Given the severe and ongoing staffing reductions within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – including a reduction of over 40% at the Columbia River Gorge Hatchery Complex – and the May 2, 2025 “Personnel Actions Freeze” memorandum prohibiting new hires, reassignments, and changes in duty stations, how does the Department specifically plan to meet its legal and trust obligations under congressional mandates, federal court orders – such as the 2018–2027 *United States v. Oregon* Consent Decree – and Treaty commitments to Columbia Basin Tribes?

- Specifically, how will the Department ensure continued operation of critical fish hatcheries that support endangered salmon and steelhead recovery efforts and fulfill the Treaty-reserved fishing rights of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Community of Oregon, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Yakama Indian Reservation, and Nez Perce Tribes?

Response: Working together with the affected Tribes, FWS is undertaking a multi-phased effort to ensure continuity of operations at the Columbia River Gorge Complex, in accordance with the US v. Oregon Consent Decree. We are maintaining fish welfare and meeting salmon production targets with current FWS staffing. When activities, such as spawning, require additional staff, FWS is working with the US v. Oregon Parties to solicit additional help from States and Tribes. FWS continues to hire seasonal employees to implement its mission as it embraces new opportunities for optimization and innovation in workforce management.

- The Tribes have indicated that current staffing levels are insufficient to maintain operations, and Tribal governments are being forced to compensate for federal shortfalls at their own expense. How does the federal government plan to reimburse the Tribes for the staff and other resources that they are using to cover the federal government’s shortfall?

Response: FWS is undertaking a multi-phased effort to ensure continuity of operations at the Columbia River Gorge Complex. We are maintaining fish welfare and meeting salmon production targets with current FWS staffing. FWS continues to hire seasonal employees to assist with peak spawning season. FWS has not requested nor received funding from Tribes for our hatchery operations. Questions about compensation to Tribes are best addressed by NOAA, which has the lead for distribution of mitigation funds under the US v. Oregon Consent Decree.

Question 2: I am aware that the Department prematurely opened a Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) and Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) portal for Bureau of Indian Affairs staff from May 9–16, 2025, before the scheduled Tribal consultations on “Workforce Optimization” had even begun. This occurred amidst growing concern that these actions are prelude to a significant Reduction in Force (RIF), which has not been shared with Congress.

- What explanation can you provide for taking action to reduce the BIA workforce before engaging in tribal consultation?

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
May 8, 2025

Response: The Deferred Resignation/Retirement Program (DRP) and Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) are voluntary and effective tools to allow Indian Affairs to implement workforce efficiency strategies. We conducted the DRP/VERA as many Indian Affairs employees expressed interest in this voluntary opportunity. Once consultation is complete and the written comment period has ended, Indian Affairs will develop a consultation summary before developing a reorganization plan for workforce efficiency. It is important to note the DRP/VERA implementation is distinct from a Reduction in Force.

- How does the Department reconcile this legal and moral obligation to engage in meaningful government-to-government consultation with Tribes, particularly when these workforce reductions will directly undermine the already under-resourced BIA's ability to meet treaty and trust responsibilities?

Response: The Deferred Resignation/Retirement Program (DRP) and Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) are voluntary and effective tools and are distinct from broader reorganizations or workforce efficiency strategies. Critical occupations in areas including public safety which includes law enforcement, social services, and engineering positions for infrastructure, were exempted from participation in the DRP. Other areas like realty functions related to permitting were also excluded. As Indian Affairs moves forward with workforce efficiency planning following consultation, we will continue to evaluate appropriate program staffing levels.

Question 3: Given the Department of the Interior's solemn obligation to uphold the federal government's trust and treaty responsibilities to Tribes – including the duty to conduct early, meaningful, and robust government-to-government consultation – why has the Department failed to schedule an in-person Tribal consultation in the Pacific Northwest, a region home to many federally recognized Tribes likely to be significantly impacted by the proposed restructuring of Indian Affairs?

Response: The Department has conducted nine total consultations, seven in-person and two virtual. All the in-person consultations (except Bismarck, ND) supported a virtual participation capability so that Tribal leaders could provide input at any of the consultations. Northwest Tribal leaders participated in multiple sessions both in person and virtually.

- Further, will Tribes be provided a genuine and fully informed opportunity to engage in additional consultation once a detailed restructuring plan is available, rather than being asked to respond to sweeping changes they have not seen, through an expedited and seemingly procedural process that risks undermining the trust relationship and the Department's legal obligations?

Response: Tribal consultation will be conducted consistent with standards required by law and as needed to uphold the Department's trust responsibility. The Department will continue

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
May 8, 2025

fulfilling its longstanding commitment to consult with Tribes as we work through designing and implementing program improvements and efficiencies.

Question 4: Tribal law enforcement programs under the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) are critically underfunded and understaffed, especially in Public Law 83-280 states like Oregon where jurisdictional challenges complicate public safety efforts. The Department’s proposed “skinny budget” recommends cutting \$107 million from BIA Public Safety and Justice programs to “reduce redundancies” and “improve accountability,” a move that risks undermining the safety of tribal communities and the federal trust responsibility.

- Given and that the FBI proposed a similar reduction in funding for any program that could support this effort, how does the Department plan to ensure that the BIA Office of Justice Services can deliver meaningful improvements in accountability and service to Tribal communities facing chronic resource shortages?

Response: Reducing redundancies in management to make the service more efficient will allow available resources to be shifted to needed “Boots on the Ground” and prioritize the critical frontline vacancies across Indian Country. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Justice Services evaluating Central Office functions such as the Division of Drug Enforcement, Missing and Murdered Unit, and Internal Affairs to more respond to tribal needs and emergency situations.

- Will you commit to working with Tribes to fully assess and address tribal law enforcement’s true funding needs before implementing cuts that could further jeopardize public safety?

Response: The Department will continue to fulfill our longstanding commitment to consult regularly with Tribes as we work through designing and implementing program improvements and efficiencies.

Question 5: Given that the Department’s proposed Reduction in Force may disproportionately impact key personnel at the Bureau of Reclamation’s (BOR’s) Umatilla Field Office in Hermiston – which manages critical infrastructure such as McKay and Cold Springs Reservoirs, diversion dams, and pumping plants essential to the congressionally authorized Umatilla Basin Project, a unique collaborative effort involving the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the State of Oregon, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Bonneville Power Administration, BOR, and local irrigation districts that supports both irrigated agriculture and fisheries restoration – what steps is the Department taking to ensure this office retains adequate staffing and resources to maintain reliable water delivery to farmers, support fisheries restoration efforts, and protect the economic health of the Umatilla Basin without disruption to irrigators, Tribal partners, and environmental restoration?

- Will the Department commit to consulting closely with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, local irrigation districts, and other stakeholders to assess and address current and future staffing or resource gaps at the Umatilla Field Office before implementing any additional reductions, to ensure the continued success of this

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
May 8, 2025

vital collaborative project and prevent negative impacts on both agricultural and environmental priorities in the basin?

Response: The Department of the Interior recognizes the importance of managing infrastructure critical to the Umatilla Basin Project, which supports irrigated agriculture, Tribal partnerships, and fisheries restoration. The Department is committed to meeting its trust and treaty responsibilities and to working closely with Tribal, State and local partners and stakeholders as we move forward on implementing efficiencies as we meet our mission requirements.

We note that the Umatilla Project sees an increase in the President's FY 2026 Budget compared to FY 2025 (\$85K).

Question 6: As I mentioned in the hearing, it is essential that our public lands remain in public hands, so they are accessible to all Americans, both now and in the future. Will you state your position on whether the Department has the authority for the disposal or sale of public lands without an opportunity for public input or without following the federal land use planning processes required by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act, and other statutory authorities?

Response: Quite simply, any sale or disposal of federal lands under the current jurisdiction of the Department will be done in accordance with law.

Question 7: I want to ascertain the Department's readiness for the 2025 fire season:

- On May 21, 2025, what was the total number of wildland firefighters by bureau? What was the number of employees holding "red cards"? Please include employees that have accepted employment offers as of that date, even if the first day of employment had not yet occurred.

Response: The Department is ready for the 2025 fire season. As of May 21, 2025, Interior had a total 4,571 wildland fire personnel, including firefighters and support personnel who are critical to incident response and other important wildland fire management.

The total number of employees qualified to respond to wildfires (i.e., those who hold "red cards") as of May 21, 2025, was 7,109. This number includes Interior's public safety personnel (e.g., law enforcement officers), as well as wildland firefighters and support personnel. It also includes personnel who support wildfire incident response as a collateral duty when called upon.

Between January 20 and May 21, 2025, 2,504 people accepted offers of employment from Interior's wildland fire management program.

- On May 21, 2024, what was the total number of wildland firefighters by bureau? What was the number of employees holding "red cards"? Please include employees that have

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
May 8, 2025

accepted employment offers as of that date, even if the first day of employment had not yet occurred.

Response: As of May 21, 2024, Interior had a total 4,839 wildland fire personnel, including firefighters and support personnel who are critical to incident response and other important wildland fire management.

The total number of employees qualified to respond to wildfires (i.e., those who hold “red cards”) as of May 21, 2024, was 6,454. This number includes Interior’s public safety personnel (e.g., law enforcement officers), as well as wildland firefighters and support personnel. It also includes personnel who support wildfire incident response as a collateral duty when called upon.

Between January 20 and May 21, 2024, 3,045 people accepted offers of employment from Interior’s wildland fire management program.

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
May 8, 2025

**Questions for the Record Submitted to The Honorable Doug Burgum, Secretary,
Department of the Interior
from Senator Gillibrand**

Question 1: Mr. Secretary, two months ago Congress passed and President Trump signed into law the continuing resolution for fiscal year 2025. That bill included important funding for State and Tribal historic preservation offices (SHPOs and THPOs) through the Historic Preservation Fund. This funding enables these offices to fulfill their federally mandated duties, including supporting the listing of sites on the National Register, facilitating Historic Tax Credit projects and helping federal agencies meet their obligations under the National Historic Preservation Act.

However, the Department has yet to release a notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) for State and Tribal historic preservation offices to apply for these funds. For SHPOs, this situation has become dire: with many states' fiscal years ending in June, some state offices already have had to lay staff off. Important preservation projects are being delayed. As a result, States and Tribes face the possibility of losing parts of their history.

I understand that the NOFO is currently awaiting approval at OMB and OPM. What steps will you take to make sure that the NOFO is approved immediately so that State and Tribal preservation offices can continue performing their critical – and federally required – work to preserve and protect our heritage? And can you commit to a date when our nation's SHPOs and THPOs will see this year's NOFO?

Response: As I mentioned in my hearing with the Appropriations Committees, we are in regular communication with OMB on executing the funding provided in the FY 2025 appropriations act.

Question 2: As you are aware, 2026 will be the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and our nation's founding. This event, the semiquincentennial, is a momentous occasion to celebrate our nation's founding and the historic sites—like those in New York—that memorialize those events.

For the last several years in preparation for this event, this subcommittee has appropriated funding within the National Park Service's Historic Preservation Fund specifically set aside for grants to sites associated with the nation's 250th anniversary. The Semiquincentennial Grant Program has funded important preservation projects in New York like rehabilitation of Old Fort Niagara and restoration of the original meeting house of the New York Senate. The administration's "skinny" budget would essentially gut the Historic Preservation Fund, and if enacted presumably take with it this vital program.

What do you envision as the Department of the Interior and National Park Service's role in facilitating the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the nation's founding? How does the Historic Preservation Fund—as the nation's main source investment in preservation of historic places—figure into that vision?

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
May 8, 2025

Response: As the proud steward of America's treasured historical places, the National Park Service joins the nation in celebrating the 250th anniversary of American independence in 2026. From Independence Hall in Philadelphia to the Statue of Liberty in New York, at Revolutionary War battlefields from Lexington and Concord to Yorktown, and at monuments and memorials honoring our nation's founders, national parks across the country will serve the American people by embracing our mission to provide opportunities for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.

As you noted, the Semiquincentennial grant program was created by Congress in 2020 to support the preservation of sites and structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places that commemorate the founding of the nation. Appropriated funds support the physical preservation of a broad variety of cultural resources associated with the country's 250th anniversary. To date, \$27 million has been awarded for 56 projects in 18 states, with another \$7 million in awards to be distributed this year.

The legislation establishing the America250 Commission emphasizes engagement in four cities with a significant NPS presence. The NPS is planning programs and events in these cities. A Community Volunteer Ambassador in each city will work with parks and communities to enrich efforts to educate and inspire. The NPS is also supporting and planning activities on the National Mall and in the Washington, D.C. area and at Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Many of the Signature Cities are also host sites for the World Cup, including places like Liberty State Park in New York City, adjacent to the Statue of Liberty.

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
May 8, 2025

**Questions for the Record Submitted to Doug Burgum, Department of Interior
from Senator Baldwin**

Question 1: The Rights Protection Implementation (RPI) line item in the Interior and Environment Appropriations bill helps fulfill federal treaty, trust, and contract obligations to tribes. In the Great Lakes region, the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission implements comprehensive conservation, natural resource protection, and law enforcement programs.

The Continuing Resolution did not allow the RPI line item to keep up with inflation and cost-of-living increases. Shortfalls in funding have impacted the commission's conservation law enforcement division, which has led to a 45% warden vacancy rate within the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission and has made it impossible to compete with state and federal counterparts.

Will your budget include funding for the Rights Protection Implementation to cover the current cost of full implementation?

Response: While future funding levels remain to be determined, it is notable that the Rights Protection Implementation line item has increased in funding by 22.2% (+\$8.9M) during the most recent 5-year timeframe from FY 2019 through FY 2024.