ORPHANED WELLS PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS

November 2026

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act 42 U.S.C. § 15907

Prepared by the Orphaned Wells Program Office
U.S. Department of the Interior



A field of sunflowers planted on land reclaimed after a well was plugged in North Dakota.

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Section 1: Orphaned Wells Program Overview

Orphaned Wells Program At-a-Glance

Figure 1: Orphaned Wells Program Milestone Timeline

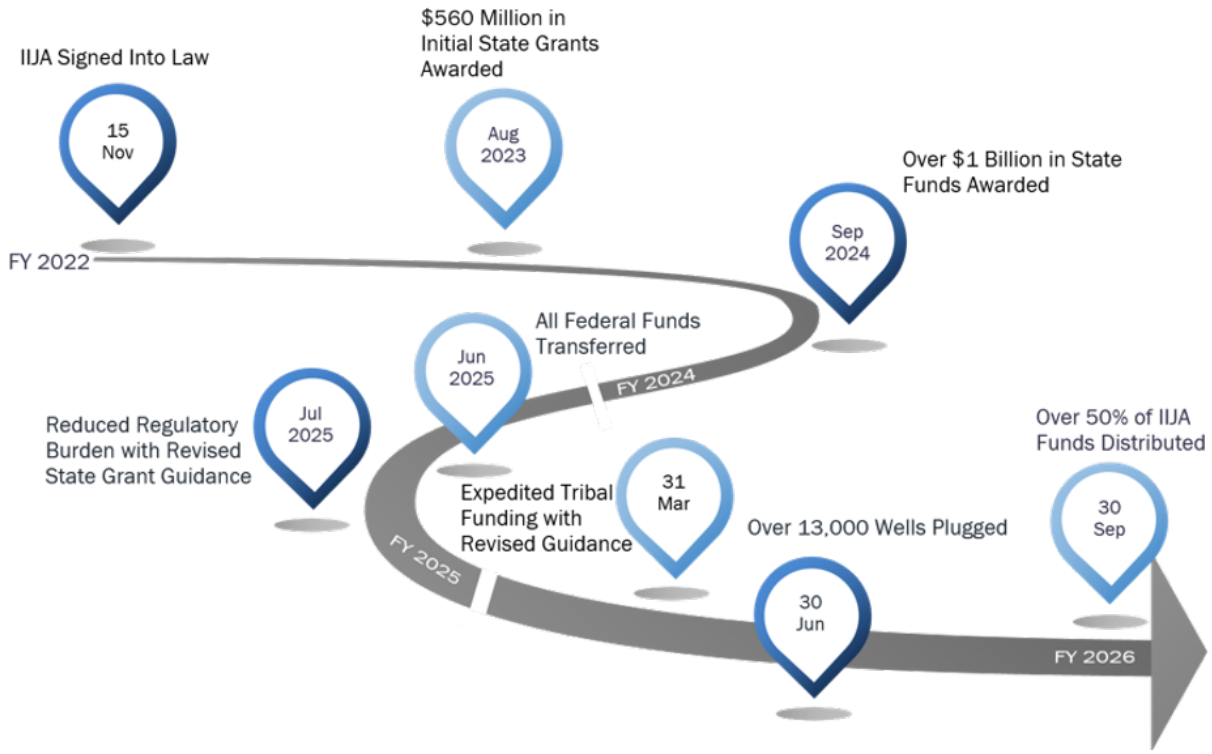
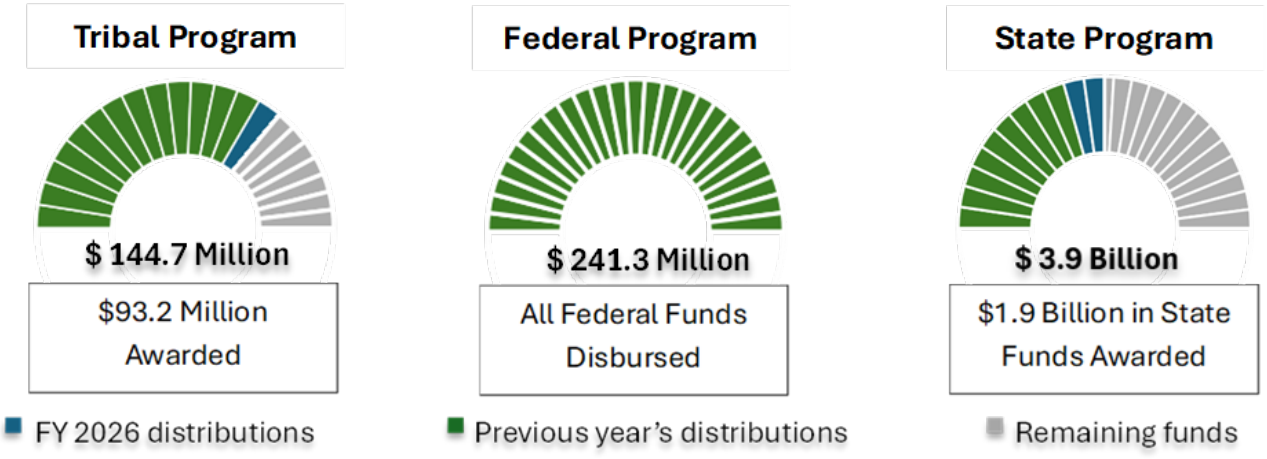


Figure 2: Funding Awarded by Program through FY 2026



Background

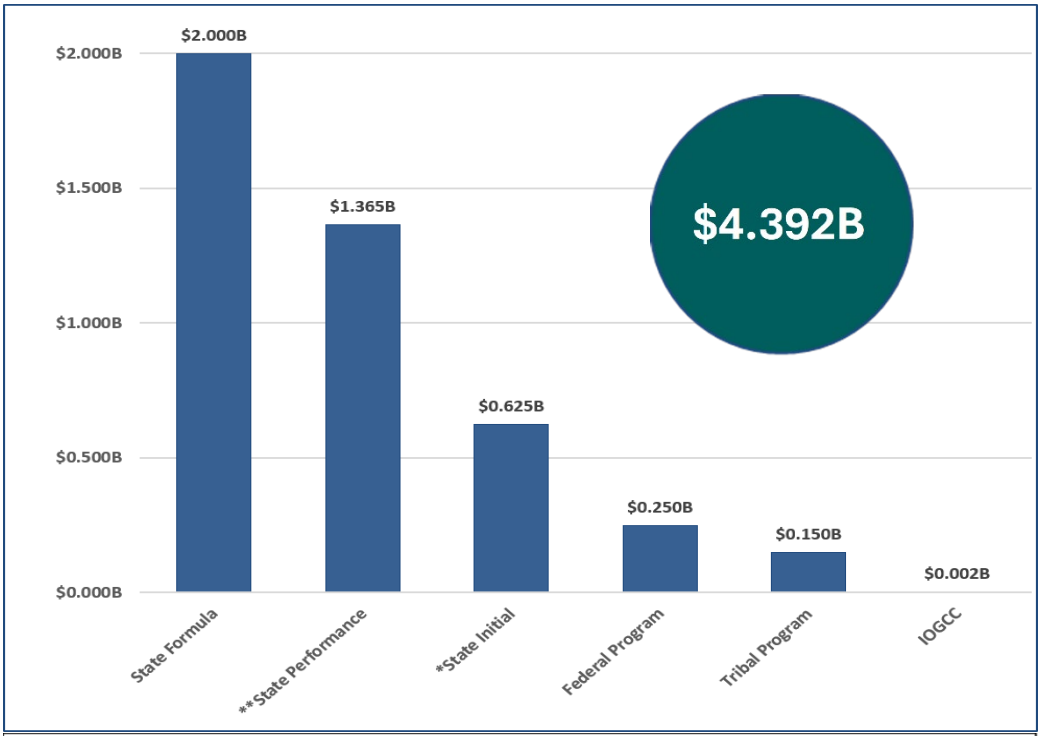
The Department of the Interior's (Department) Orphaned Wells Program Office (OWPO) oversees a comprehensive, coordinated program to support the plugging of orphaned wells on Tribal, federal, state and private land. The authority and funding to address the Nation's inventory of orphaned oil and gas wells is granted through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), 42 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 15907 "Orphaned Well Site Plugging, Remediation, and Restoration," signed into law on November 15, 2021.

Under the IIJA, orphaned wells are generally defined as wells not used for an authorized purpose and for which no operator can be located, or where the operator is unable to plug the well and restore the site. States may apply their unique state definitions for orphaned wells on state and private lands.

As shown in Figure 3, Section 40601 of the IIJA provides $4.677 billion to support orphaned well site plugging, remediation, and restoration through three distinct programs:

- Tribal Program – $150 million for wells on Tribal lands
- Federal Program – $250 million for wells on federal lands and waters
- State Program – $4.275[1] billion for wells on state and private lands

Figure 3: Appropriated IIJA Funds Allocated by Program Area



*State Initial Grant funding transferred $150 million in FY 2026 to support Wildland Fire.
** State Performance Grant funding transferred $135 million in FY 2026 to support Wildland Fire.

[1] Public Law 119-74, required the Department transfer $285 million from IIJA, Orphaned Wells Program unobligated balances to the Wildland Fire Program. Reducing the total IIJA provided funding from $4.677 billion to $4.392 billion.

The OWPO funding recipients (recipients) have broad discretion in how they use awarded funds. Recipients may use funding, consistent with Tribal, federal, and state priorities for the purposes outlined in the IIJA, including but not limited to plugging, remediating and reclaiming orphaned wells; identifying and characterizing undocumented orphaned wells; and remediating land adjacent to orphaned wells and decommissioning or removing associated pipelines, facilities and infrastructure.

In addition to program funding, the IIJA authorizes $2 million in funding for the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission (IOGCC) for consultation and coordination activities. The IOGCC is a multi-state organization that provides a forum for states to coordinate regulatory practices, share information, and advocate for state-level leadership in the responsible development of oil and natural gas resources.

Distribution of FY 2026 IIJA Funds

From the passage of the IIJA in FY 2022 through the end of FY 2026, the OWPO distributed approximately $2.21 billion in IIJA funds to Tribal, federal and state recipients, providing direct support to 27 states and 18 Tribes.

These investments support a wide range of activities essential to addressing the Nation's orphaned well backlog, including inventorying and characterizing wells, conducting plugging operations and completing associated remediation and restoration work.

Over 50% of IIJA funds have been awarded or distributed through FY 2026.

In total, this represents more than half of all IIJA funds. Of this amount, the OWPO distributed $338.3 million during FY 2026 alone, reflecting continued momentum in program implementation. Table 1 provides a breakdown of funds distribution by program area.

Table 1: IIJA Funds Distributed through FY 2026

Orphaned Wells Program IIJA Funding					
Program Description	**OMB Apportioned**	**Administrative, OIG and Wildland Fire**	**Total Program Amount**	**Transferred or Awarded in FY 2026**	**Cumulative FY 2022-2026 Distribution**
Federal Program	$250 M	$8.7 M	$241.3 M	-	$241.3 M
State Program[2]	$4.3 B	$435 M	$3.9 B	$326 M	$1.9 B
Tribal Program	$150 M	$5.3 M	$144.7 M	$12.3 M	$93.2 M
IOGCC Funding	$2 M	$0.07 M	$1.93 M	-	-
Totals	**$4.7 B**	**$449.1 M**	**$4.3 B**	**$338.3 M**	**$2.2 B**

[2] Public Law 119-74 required the Department to transfer $285 million from IIJA, Orphaned Wells Program unobligated balances to the Wildland Fire Program.

Section 2: Supporting Presidential Priorities

13,108 orphaned wells plugged nationwide with IIJA funds through June 30, 2026.

Orphaned wells are found in rural, urban and agricultural areas across the United States. Orphaned wells can harm public health and interfere with current and future energy development. Plugging orphaned wells directly supports the Administration's priority to unleash American energy (Executive Order 14154), promote American Energy Dominance (Executive Order 14213) and Declaring a National Energy Emergency (Executive Order 14156).

Orphaned wells left unplugged can lower reservoir pressure required for oil and gas production, allowing hydrocarbons to leak away from active wells, degrading production efficiency and contaminating active reserves, which creates costly problems for drilling and production operations. They can also cause hydraulic fracturing operations to fail, which can delay oil and gas production operations. Orphaned wells pose safety risks to workers and the American public. They can blowout or leak dangerous gases, which could cause death, substantial property damage, and expensive consequences for people, businesses, and the oil and gas industry. By providing necessary funding to plug orphaned wells throughout the country, the OWPO helps protect and preserve oil and gas resources by sealing potentially detrimental subsurface pathways. This ensures energy companies can extract resources safely and efficiently, without risking contamination or loss of production.

In addition to the physical effects on current energy extraction, orphaned wells can hinder future hydrocarbon development. In some cases, approval to drill new wells is restricted by the presence of existing wells, including orphaned wells. Since many orphaned wells lie within active and developing oil and gas fields, plugging and remediating these sites helps unlock access to new development areas and enables better, more efficient well placement.

Beyond the negative effects on energy production, orphaned wells pose significant risks to natural resources. Leakage from unplugged wells can cause valuable resources to migrate to the surface or into ground water aquifers, potentially damaging surrounding ecosystems and contaminating America's water supply. Orphaned wells can reduce land value, limit land use, disrupt ecosystems and often litter properties with dilapidated infrastructure, threatening wildlife, particularly in wetlands and other sensitive areas. With IIJA funding, the OWPO enables the restoration of these areas for public enjoyment and other beneficial use.

Additionally, the OWPO supported the Administration's priority to streamline regulatory requirements and "be prudent and financially responsible in the expenditure of funds"[3]. In FY 2026, the OWPO focused on efforts to improve grant guidance, streamline processes, and increase shovel-ready projects, resulting in an increase in wells plugged and lands restored.

[3] *Executive Order 14192, Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation*, 31 Jan. 2025. FR Doc. 2025-02345.

Section 3: Tribal Orphaned Wells Program

The IIJA allocated $150 million to the Tribal Orphaned Wells Program (Tribal Program) for well plugging, remediation, and reclamation on Tribal lands. Portions of this amount were allocated to the OWPO as administrative funding (3.0 percent) and to the Office of Inspector General for oversight purposes (0.5 percent), leaving $144.7 million in direct funding for the Tribal Program. The Tribal Program is designed to support Tribal capacity building and fund well plugging, remediation and reclamation activities through three types of funding:

$93.2 million awarded through September 2026 to 18 Tribes and for ILOG Contracts.

1) **Development Grants** can be used for well identification, eligibility, monitoring, assessment, training, and capacity building.

2) **Implementation Grants** can be used to fund identification, eligibility determination, plugging, remediation and reclamation of orphaned wells and well sites.

3) **In Lieu of Grant (ILOG) Funding** is the mechanism through which Tribes may request that the Department administer and conduct plugging, remediation and reclamation activities related to eligible orphaned wells on their behalf.

Tribal Program Funding, Activities and Oversight

The OWPO has awarded $93.2 million to 18 Tribes, including $10.5 million for five grants, and $3.4 million in ILOG funding to plug and remediate wells on Tribal lands.

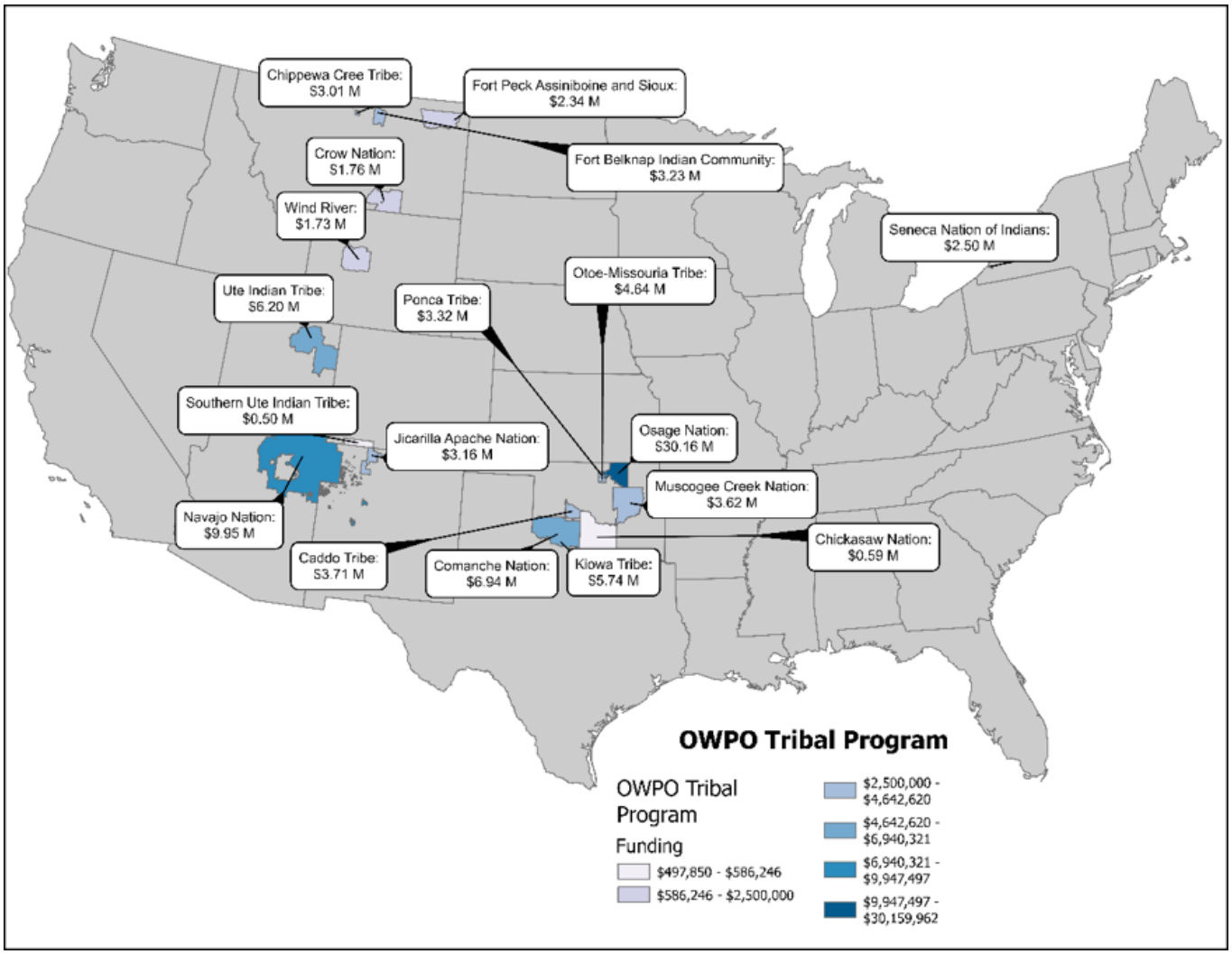
Through September 30, 2026, recipients have plugged 127 wells with Tribal Program funding (see Figure 4). Tribes have identified over 600 wells to be plugged under Phase 1 and Phase 2 grants. Additionally, over 1,000 wells are in the process of being assessed for plugging eligibility.

In support of Tribal well plugging operations, the OWPO provides technical assistance and program oversight through standardized reporting, risk assessments, and site visits. In FY 2026, the Tribal Program completed three site visits focused on building working relationships and providing technical assistance in support of Tribal plugging operations.

To ensure compliance with Tribal Program requirements and reduce administrative burden on the Tribes, the OWPO developed a series of Operational Bulletins to improve the communication of program expectations. Oversight improvements included setting programmatic milestones, expanding site visit protocols and record keeping, instituting after-action reviews, and updating the semiannual reporting process to focus on assessing risk. As nine awards ended their period of performance in FY 2026, the Tribal Program instituted a decision process for considering extension requests resulting in the return of more than $500,000 in unspent grant funding.

All remaining grant funds will be made available under a Phase 3 funding opportunity estimated to be announced in FY 2027. The Tribal Program will continue to assist Tribes in the grant application process and ensure adequate oversight and accountability through post award monitoring.

Figure 4: Map of Tribal Funding Awarded Through September 30, 2026

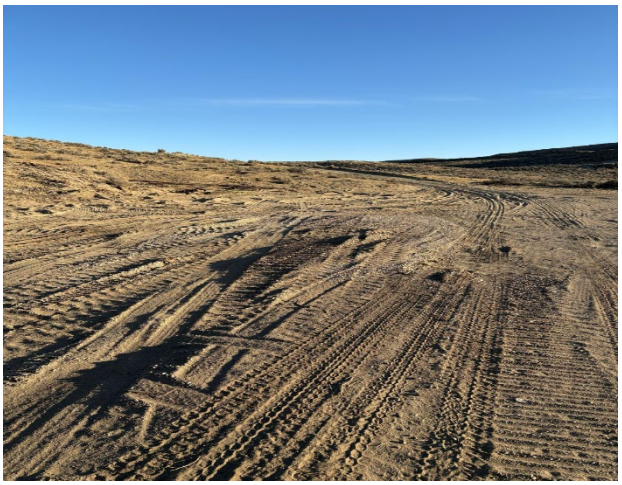


Tribal Program Success Story

In February 2026, to improve timeliness and reduce costs, the OWPO assumed responsibility for plugging wells under the Phase 2 ILOGs. The OWPO, in coordination with the Interior Business Center (IBC), the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), was able to move the Wind River ILOG project forward from initial contracting through the successful plugging of six orphaned wells in seven months. The OWPO will build upon this success when implementing the Ute Mountain Ute Phase 2 ILOG as well as future ILOGs.



A well that has been orphaned for almost 30 years on the Wind River Reservation.



The same land after well-plugging. The soil is graded to reflect the original contour of the land and will be seeded.

Section 4: Federal Orphaned Wells Program

The IIJA allocated $250 million to the Federal Orphaned Wells Program (Federal Program) for well plugging and reclamation of orphaned wells located on federal land, the removal of legacy oilfield equipment and ongoing inventory efforts to identify and characterize additional orphaned wells. Portions of this amount are allocated to the OWPO as administrative funding (3.0 percent) and to the Office of Inspector General for oversight purposes (0.5 percent), leaving $241.3 million in direct funding for the Federal Program. As of FY 2025, all federal funds were transferred to bureaus within the Department and to the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

346 orphaned wells plugged on federal land through June 30, 2026.

Federal Programs Receiving IIJA Funds

Bureau of Land Management received $35 million to plug 123 wells.

Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement received $46 million to plug 30 wells.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service received $64 million to plug 564 wells.

U.S. Forest Service received $58 million to plug 436 wells.

National Park Service received $39 million to plug 115 wells.

Federal Program Funding, Activities and Oversight

In FY 2026, in alignment with Administration priorities to streamline processes and enhance productivity, the OWPO focused on simplifying fund tracking and requested that each federal entity revise its original project list to focus on shovel ready projects that can be fully obligated by December 31, 2026. During this review, the federal entities identified 153 additional wells they intend to plug without an increase in funding.

- Of the 99 wells on BLM's 2026 priority list, 67 will be funded and plugged through the OWPO. The BLM plans to plug 29 additional wells by moving funds originally slated for remediation to well plugging.
- By focusing efforts on the Allegheny National Forest, the USFS increased the number of wells projected to be plugged by 100, at half the cost originally estimated in 2022.
- The National Park Service (NPS) was able to bring costs in under original estimates, freeing up funding for 22 additional wells, two reclamation projects, a service-wide inspection project and a compliance project.
- Due to cost savings, the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) will be able to add one well to an existing project.

To ensure well-plugging activities are completed on schedule and to standards, the OWPO instituted programmatic milestones and conducted randomized monitoring reviews of 25 percent of all wells plugged. In addition, the OWPO regularly monitors financial and operational aspects of the Federal Program to ensure that funding is expended according to statute and in alignment with the Administration's priorities. These internal controls provide effective oversight and accountability for the IIJA funding.

Federal Program Success Story

BSEE is the lead federal agency for safety and environmental protection on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf; one of the most complex well-plugging environments. The marine environment introduces unique logistical, technical and environmental challenges, including specialized engineering, environmental concerns, access limitations and weather constraints. For example, project timing is a balance between being able to use an operable platform for the plugging process and removing it to access other parts of the platform and equipment for removal. BSEE's successful completion of four planned offshore projects brings the total number of wells plugged to 14, with 16 additional wells planned for plugging in FY 2027 by the Marine Mineral Administration[4].



Workers remove the helicopter landing platform at a well in the Gulf of America.

[4] As of July 10, 2026, the Department reunified the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement into the Marine Minerals Administration.

Section 5: State Orphaned Wells Program

The IIJA established the State Orphaned Wells Program (State Program) to address the environmental, health and safety risks associated with orphaned oil and gas wells on state and private lands. The State Program provides direct funding to states through three primary grant mechanisms: Initial Grants, Formula Grants, and Matching Grants under the Performance Grant authority. These grants support states in developing, expanding and sustaining their orphaned well plugging and site remediation programs.

12,658 wells plugged through June 2026 with State Program funds

Regardless of the type of grant, states may use funding for the purposes stated in 42 U.S.C. § 15907(c)(2), which include: to plug, remediate, and reclaim orphaned wells located on state and private land; to identify and characterize undocumented orphaned wells on state and private land; and to remediate land adjacent to orphaned wells and decommission or remove associated pipelines, facilities and infrastructure.

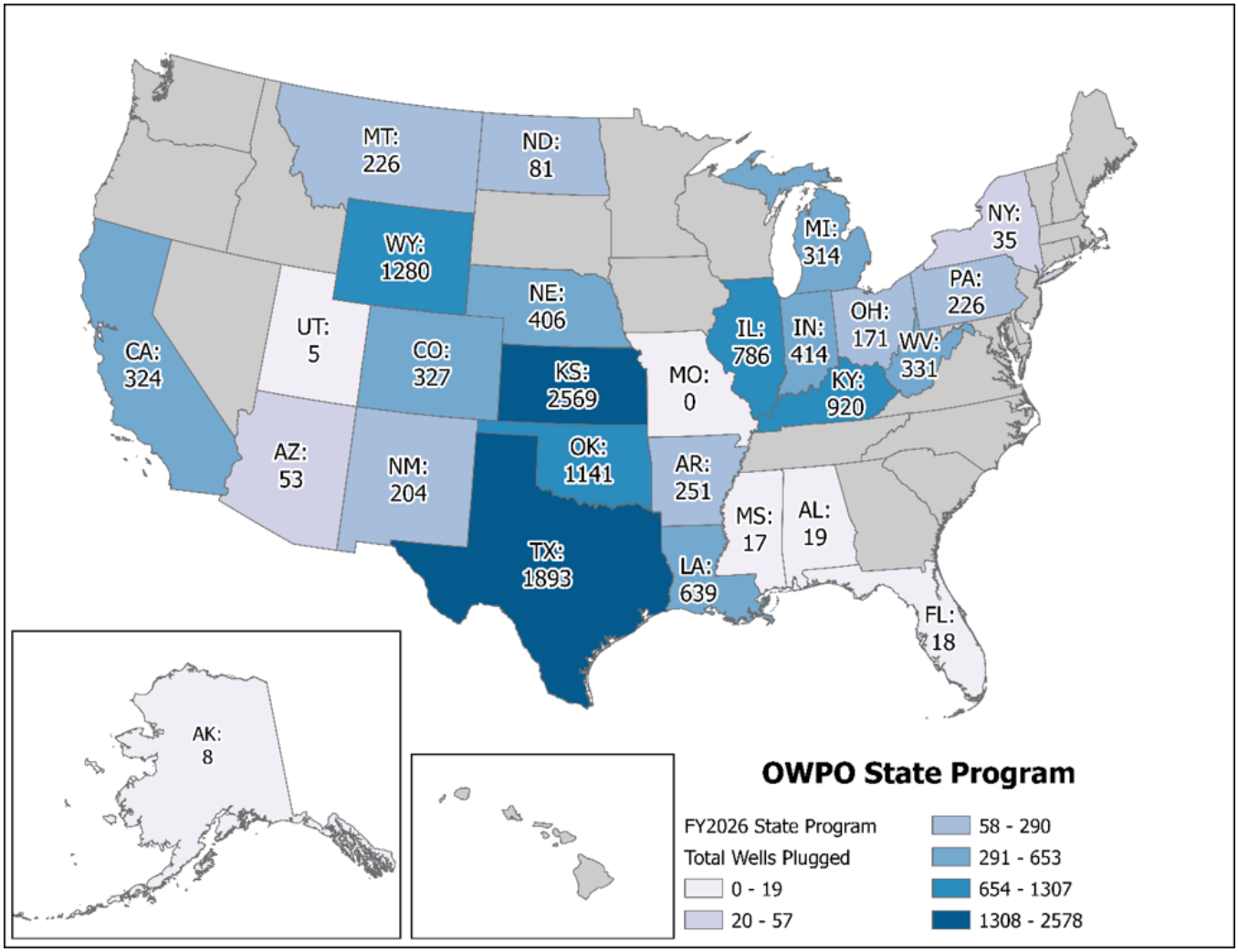
- **Initial Grants** provided early support to help states rapidly scale up their orphaned well programs. Large-scale grants of $25 million and small-scale grants of up to $5 million enable hiring, contractor mobilization, and the launch of new plugging operations. These grants served as the foundation for states to participate in future grant opportunities. 27 states received Initial Grants totaling $575 million.

- **Formula Grants** offer scalable, multi-phase funding to eligible states based on their orphaned wells inventory and demonstrated need. With over $520 million awarded in Phase 1, the program expanded in FY 2025 and awarded over $366 million in Phase 2. The remaining Formula Grant funding became available in FY 2026 and will be awarded to eligible states through FY 2028. These grants help states strengthen state-led orphaned well plugging, remediation and reclamation activities.

- **Matching Grants** (a type of Performance Grant) incentivize states to increase their investment in their own orphaned well programs. For state funding above each state's 2010-2019 average annual funding, states are eligible to receive up to $30 million in Matching Grants. These performance-based awards offer powerful incentives for states to maintain momentum and scale up efforts beyond baseline levels.

The State Program framework provides states with flexibility to build programs that reflect their individual needs while contributing to national goals of unleashing American energy, supporting public safety, and restoring natural resources. Since the State Program began, recipients have successfully plugged 12,658 wells across 27 states (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Map of Orphaned Wells Plugged by State Using State Program Funds



State Program Funding, Activities and Oversight

The IIJA allocated $4.3 billion for the State Program, portions of which were allocated to the OWPO as administrative funding (3.0 percent) and the Office of Inspector General for oversight purposes (0.5 percent). Public Law 119-74 required the transfer of $285 million to the Wildland Fire Program, leaving $3.9 billion in direct funding for the State Program. As of September 30, 2026, the OWPO awarded almost $1.9 billion through the State Program, supporting eligible activities across 27 states (see Table 2).

In May 2026, OWPO published Phase 3 Formula Grant Guidance to make the remaining Formula Grant funding available to eligible states. As with the previously published State Grant Guidance, this guidance aimed to streamline the award process, expedite funding, and strengthen sustained oversight of federal funds. The guidance aligns with the Administration's priorities by reducing unnecessary barriers, maintaining accountability and enabling states to move more quickly to plug orphaned wells and mitigate environmental risks.

- **Initial Grant Award:** While most Initial Grants were awarded at the beginning of the program, in FY 2026, the OWPO awarded one new initial grant to the State of Utah for $5 million. This award allowed Utah to engage in contractor mobilization and the launch of new plugging operations. This grant will also allow Utah to apply for Formula and Matching grant funding opportunities.

- **Formula Phase 2 Grant Awards:** In FY 2026, the OWPO awarded the remaining Phase 2 Formula Grants to six states (Alabama, Colorado, Louisiana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and West Virginia) totaling $245 million - bringing total Formula Grant awards to almost $1.13 billion. These awards are distributed based on a statutory formula designed to strengthen state-led orphaned well plugging, remediation and reclamation activities.

- **Matching Grant Awards:** In FY 2026, the OWPO awarded six Matching Grants to five states (California, two for Colorado, Michigan, Ohio and West Virginia) bringing the total awarded amount to just over $156 million. These awards allow recipients to leverage federal funding for their enhanced investments to alleviate orphaned wells by increasing state spending on well plugging, remediation and reclamation.

Table 2: Funding Awarded to States by Grant Type through September 30, 2026

State Grant Program				
Recipient	**Initial**	**Formula**	**Matching**	**Total Awarded**
Alabama	$5,000,000	$1,681,430	-	$6,681,430
Alaska	$25,000,000	$28,336,497	-	$53,336,497
Arizona	$25,000,000	$4,871,791	-	$29,871,791
Arkansas	$5,000,000	$5,589,721	-	$10,589,721
California	$25,000,000	$88,044,069	$30,000,000	$143,044,069
Colorado	$25,000,000	$54,064,506	$10,841,527	$89,906,033
Florida	$25,000,000	-	-	$25,000,000
Illinois	$25,000,000	$25,000,000	-	$50,000,000
Indiana	$25,000,000	$14,076,668	-	$39,076,668
Kansas	$25,000,000	$33,600,000	-	$58,600,000
Kentucky	$25,000,000	$60,000,000	-	$85,000,000
Louisiana	$25,000,000	$60,000,000	$23,263,107	$108,263,107
Michigan	$25,000,000	$5,873,295	$15,000,000	$45,873,295
Mississippi	$5,000,000	$6,830,345	$2,077,801	$13,908,146
Missouri	$4,806,743	$5,123,494	-	$9,930,237
Montana	$25,000,000	-	-	$25,000,000
Nebraska	$25,000,000	-	-	$25,000,000
New Mexico	$25,000,000	$60,000,000	$5,500,000	$90,500,000
New York	$25,000,000	$44,672,162	-	$69,672,162
North Dakota	$25,000,000	$25,000,000	-	$50,000,000

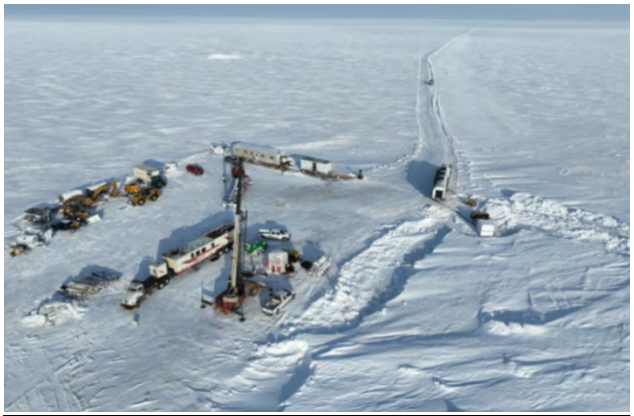
Ohio	$25,000,000	$57,757,052	$30,000,000	$112,757,052
Oklahoma	$25,000,000	$102,613,486	-	$127,613,486
Pennsylvania	$25,000,000	$191,016,185	-	$216,016,185
Texas	$25,000,000	$199,184,393	$30,000,000	$254,184,393
Utah	$5,000,000			$5,000,000
West Virginia	$25,000,000	$58,466,114	$9,584,623	$93,050,737
Wyoming	$25,000,000	-	-	$25,000,000
Total	**$574,806,743**	**$1,131,801,208**	**$156,267,058**	**$1,862,875,009**

To promote program integrity and effective outcomes, the OWPO conducts monitoring through site visits, desk reviews and standardized reporting. The OWPO has conducted 14 site visits, including two in FY 2026 (Arkansas and North Dakota), to assess whether state operations comply with applicable regulatory, legal, and program requirements. States also submit quarterly and annual reports documenting wells plugged, emissions measured, acres restored and community impacts addressed. Together, these oversight activities help track progress, verify performance and ensure program goals are achieved.

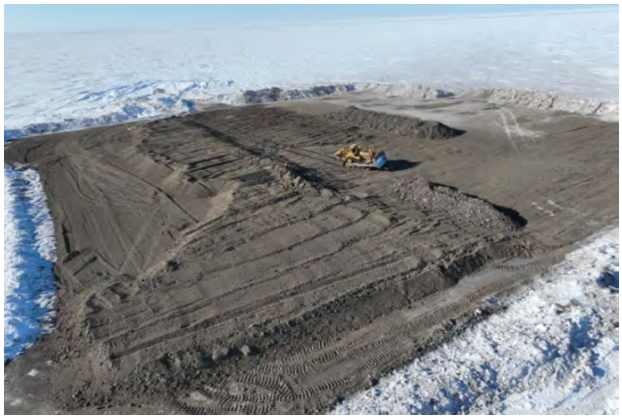
Looking ahead, new Formula and Performance Grants will provide sustained support to states, further promote unleashing American energy and assist stat es in meeting their program goals. As reclamation and restoration projects mature and more wells are permanently removed from the orphaned well inventory, the benefits of this investment in increasing national energy security, cleaner air and water and safer public landscapes will continue to grow. The OWPO will remain focused on tracking outcomes, sharing best practices and ensuring that every taxpayer's dollar delivers measurable results.

State Program Success Story

Originally drilled in 1984, the Burglin 33-1 well remained suspended on Alaska's North Slope for approximately 40 years. In 2026, Alaska used IIJA funding to permanently plug the well and begin remediation of the surrounding site. Located approximately 3 miles southwest of Deadhorse near Prudhoe Bay, the project addresses long-standing environmental liability in an ecologically sensitive Arctic landscape near important polar bear habitat and the Beaufort Sea, which supports bowhead whales and other marine mammals.



Crews work to plug the well in the snow-covered arctic environment.



The ground is remediated after plugging.

Section 6: IIJA Reporting Requirements

Orphaned Wells Inventories in the United States

Multiple organizations have developed their own estimates of orphaned wells, but none have established a comprehensive national inventory. States and Tribes categorize wells differently, using terms such as orphaned, abandoned, or idle, based on their own regulations. These inconsistent definitions create variation in reporting and prevent an accurate assessment of the full scope of the problem. To address these challenges, funding recipients can use the IIJA funding to support the identification and documentation of orphaned wells.

The OWPO, working with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), created a centralized database that compiles data from Tribal, federal and state partners. The database tracks the number of wells plugged with IIJA funding and includes information on emissions, habitat restoration, water quality, costs and well locations when reported.

This year, the OWPO provided funding to USGS to update their authoritative source, the *Documented Unplugged Orphaned Oil and Gas Well* dataset that was originally published in 2022. The August 2022 inventory documented 117,672 orphaned wells. Using the same methodology, USGS documented 130,122 orphaned wells. This increase is attributed to improved data collection, refined classification criteria, updated databases and expanded field inspections, much of which is supported by IIJA funding. The new dataset can be found at https://energy.usgs.gov/dowdb/.

To prevent future orphaned wells, many Tribal, federal and state partners estimate undocumented orphaned wells, which can refer to anything from a completely unknown well to one that requires additional research or field verification. In some instances, these undocumented orphaned wells are also classified as wells at risk of becoming orphaned. With OWPO funding, the USGS developed a methodology to estimate the number of wells “at risk of becoming orphaned.” Once USGS publishes it, this methodology will provide a foundation for proactive monitoring and mitigation. The planned publication date is 2027.

The OWPO has developed and made publicly available several data resources, including an interactive map of all wells plugged with IIJA funds. In addition, the OWPO maintains a publicly available database containing wells plugged information as reported by funding recipients with well name, well type, latitude and longitude, funding recipient, funding type, and well plugging witness date. This information is available at https://www.doi.gov/maps-data.

Emissions from Orphaned Wells

The IIJA requires the Department to report on an annual basis an estimation of the quantities of methane and other gases emitted from orphaned wells and the emissions reduced from plugging, remediating, and reclaiming orphaned wells.

Methane emission estimates are derived by calculating the change in measured emissions before and after well plugging. For wells without direct measurements, the average change observed in the measured wells is applied to estimate their emissions. Applying the estimated

methane emissions rate to an estimated orphaned wells inventory of 130,122, the OWPO estimates that the potential universe of documented and undocumented orphaned wells may emit nearly 59.7 million grams of methane per hour into the atmosphere.

With over 13,000 orphaned wells plugged with IIJA funds through June 30, 2026, the OWPO estimates that well plugging has prevented 417,248 metric tons of methane emissions over the lifetime of the program. This equates to a reduction in approximately 513,988 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions over the lifetime of the program and the removal of 122,330 gasoline-powered passenger cars from the road.

Economic Opportunities

The IIJA requires the Department to report the number of jobs created through plugging, remediation and reclamation of orphaned wells. In Fiscal Year 2026, the $338 million in expenditures contributed $486 million to the U.S. economy and supported over 2,938 jobs.

Habitat Restoration

The IIJA requires the Department to report on the acreage of habitat restored through grants used to plug, remediate, and reclaim orphaned wells and to remediate and reclaim adjacent lands. Authorized funding use includes the restoration of land surrounding an orphaned well, ensuring that former well sites are returned to conditions that support beneficial use. Restoration activities may include removing rusted tanks and equipment, clearing dilapidated buildings and other deteriorated infrastructure, remediating contaminated soils, and reseeding native vegetation to promote the recovery of natural habitat.

Grant recipients report acres of restored land to the OWPO quarterly, for most wells plugged. In instances in which this metric is not reported, the OWPO estimates acreage affected per well site based on the median of previously reported well restoration data. As reported through June 30 of this year, 6,554 acres have been remediated and made available for beneficial use. These reclaimed acres stretch across a variety of different land types. Former orphaned well sites are now used for farming and agriculture, provide native species habitat in national forests, parks and other public recreation areas, and support current and future energy development. Restoring orphaned well sites and making land available for beneficial use is creating multiple ancillary opportunities and economic benefits.

Each well site is unique and so are the benefits of reclamation for those that interact with the land. In North Dakota, IIJA funds were used to remediate orphaned well sites in Bottineau County. The wells were located on agricultural land, deeming several acres of cropland unusable. Upon remediation of the well sites by the North Dakota Department of Mineral Resources, the landowners cultivated the former well sites and access roads and expanded their usable cropland by multiple acres. Staff from the OWPO visited one of these sites in August 2026 to see the once unusable land thriving. The sunflowers at this site, featured in this report’s cover photo, will be harvested to produce vegetable oil; a notable example of IIJA

funds successfully returning previously contaminated land to productive use.



OWPO staff honor America 250 at a successfully remediated orphaned well site in North Dakota.



Sunflowers grow in a once-contaminated field, now remediated through IIJA funding.

Section 7: Looking Ahead

Orphaned Wells Program Outlook

The progress achieved to date by plugging orphaned wells and restoring surrounding lands has delivered meaningful benefits to communities across the country. The work of the OWPO to eliminate the hazards of orphaned oil and gas wells has strengthened American energy production, protected public health and safety, and helped to restore lands and waters for beneficial use. The OWPO's increased efficiency in awarding funding and emphasis on shovel-ready projects has increased the number of wells plugged and improved accountability for the use of public funding.

In the years ahead, as the remaining IIJA funding is distributed and recipients continue to plug and remediate orphaned wells nationwide, the OWPO will intensify its review and oversight procedures to safeguard public investments. Through more rigorous reporting requirements, enhanced data analysis, and consistent oversight and evaluation of recipient activities, the OWPO will strengthen its stewardship of federal resources.

Additional program information is available and will be updated regularly on the Department's Orphaned Wells Program Office website, https://www.doi.gov/orphanedwells.