

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

**FIRST ANNUAL REPORT ON
TRIBAL CO-STEWARDSHIP**

*Implementing Joint Secretarial Order 3403 on
Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility to Indian Tribes in the
Stewardship of Federal Lands and Waters*

NOVEMBER 2022



LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES

Last November, we were proud to commit our Departments to advance the practice of co-stewardship of our public lands and waters with Tribal nations. As part of President Biden's Tribal Homelands Initiative, we signed Joint Secretarial Order 3403 (Order). Simple in its goal, the Order acknowledges that Tribal nations can and must play an important role in the management of lands and waters the Federal Government has been entrusted to manage for the benefit of all Americans.

At its core, the Order recognizes the Federal Government's unique nation-to-nation relationship with Tribal nations and that public lands and waters are the ancestral homelands of Native American and Alaska Native Tribes, and the Native Hawaiian community. Indigenous people have stewarded these places since time immemorial, predating the formation of the United States and its land management agencies.

As we care for these lands and waters, we must honor our treaty and trust responsibilities to protect Tribal sovereignty and revitalize Tribal communities, including protecting access to resources for subsistence, and cultural and spiritual practices. We must also preserve the wildlife, resources, and sacred sites that hold significance to Tribal nations.

We have made important progress in our first year of implementing the Order, including announcing a number of agreements that help solidify the Government's commitment to Tribal co-stewardship. Equally important, we are building the infrastructure at our Departments to strengthen this critical work—from making available legal analyses on the many authorities that underpin co-stewardship, to formulating guidance for land management agencies, to creating better pathways for public-private partnerships to support co-stewardship.

More work lies ahead to usher in a new era of Tribal co-stewardship of public lands and waters. Namely, we must build additional capacity—in both the Federal Government and Tribal governments—to develop and implement agreements for meaningful co-stewardship of public lands and waters.

We believe that our respective first-ever annual reports, consistent with the Order, demonstrate that Tribal co-stewardship, in its many shapes and sizes, benefits Tribes; the greater American public; and the land, water, and wildlife that bind us together. We look forward to reporting on our progress in the years to come.

Respectfully,



Deb Haaland
U.S. Secretary of the Interior



Thomas J. Vilsack
U.S. Secretary of Agriculture

I. BACKGROUND

Since time immemorial, Indigenous peoples have stewarded North American waters and lands while building vibrant cultures and communities. Today, virtually all lands the U.S. Government holds as Federal public lands were once Indigenous territory. Through treaties, statutes, and executive orders, the United States assumed obligations of trust to protect Tribal sovereignty and promote Tribal self-determination. Those obligations include ensuring Tribes have a role in protecting and managing the millions of acres of Federal public lands that were once Tribal homelands. To honor these obligations and secure effective stewardship of all Federal lands and waters, the United States should ensure that Tribes sit at the table with Federal land managers for the benefit of all Americans.

In November 2021, President Biden announced the “Tribal Homelands Initiative” (Initiative), a collaborative effort to improve stewardship of public lands, waters, and wildlife by strengthening the role of Tribal communities in Federal land management. The Initiative, spearheaded by the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture, seeks to ensure the Federal Government elevates the role of Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (Indigenous Knowledge), protects sacred sites, and honors trust and treaty responsibilities to Tribal governments. The Initiative also seeks to restore Tribal homelands by improving the land-into-trust process.

One of the key components of the Initiative is ensuring that Tribal governments play an integral role in decision making related to the management of Federal lands and waters through consultation, capacity building, and other means consistent with applicable authorities. To that end, on November 15, 2021, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland and Agriculture Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack signed Joint Secretarial Order 3403 (Order), entitled “Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility to Indian Tribes in the Stewardship of Federal Lands and Waters.” The Order directs the two Departments to ensure that their decisions relating to Federal stewardship of lands, waters, and wildlife include consideration of how to safeguard the treaty, spiritual, subsistence, and cultural interests of Tribes. It also directs the Departments’ agencies to facilitate agreements with Tribes to collaborate in the co-stewardship of Federal lands and waters and to strengthen Tribal homelands. This document constitutes the first annual report (Annual Report) on actions taken to fulfill the Order.

This Annual Report includes information regarding how the Interior Department is implementing the Order, including making public a comprehensive legal report on current authorities that can support both co-stewardship and Tribal stewardship. The legal report is the first time the Interior Department has catalogued, in one place, the many paths by which Bureaus and Offices can pursue co-stewardship.

The Annual Report also enumerates landmark agreements that the Interior Department’s Bureaus and Offices have entered into since the Order was signed more than a year ago—each of which provide clear benefits to Tribes, the Federal Government, and to public lands, waters, and wildlife. To best capture the full scope of work across the Interior Department, this Annual Report also includes examples of agreements in place before the Order’s signing that contribute to a strong foundation for additional co-stewardship with Tribes.

As this Annual Report demonstrates, the Interior Department views collaborative stewardship as a broad concept that supports a variety of arrangements. Co-stewardship is taking many forms, including contracts for operation and maintenance of Federal lands and waters and related facilities, interpretative services, creation of bilingual signage, conservation agreements, management plans, access and harvest/collection agreements, reintroduction and management of fish and wildlife populations, development of Tribal seed nodes, natural resource management plans, youth education programs, agreements related to the administration of Federal sites, incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge, and more.

II. YEAR ONE: Progress Toward Fulfillment of Joint Secretarial Order 3403

Pursuant to the Order, the Interior Department has undertaken a number of steps to ensure that its Bureaus and Offices manage public lands and waters in a manner that seeks to protect the treaty, religious, subsistence, and cultural interests of federally recognized Indian Tribes and the Native Hawaiian community. From analyses of policies to funding agreements, what follows is a summary of Interior Department actions to advance co-stewardship and uphold the United States unique treaty and trust obligation to federally recognized Indian Tribes and their citizens.

Building the Foundation to Support Co-Stewardship

A critical component of success is ensuring that Bureaus and Offices have the necessary tools and support to pursue co-stewardship agreements. Over the past year, the Interior Department has finalized key policies and resources to bolster the foundation for long-lasting and meaningful co-stewardship with Tribes.

- **Co-Stewardship Authorities:** Consistent with the Order, the Interior Department has made public a legal report by its Office of the Solicitor on current land, water, and wildlife treaty responsibilities and authorities that can support co-stewardship and Tribal stewardship. The report is intended for use by staff in the Interior Department's Bureaus and Offices, and their colleagues in the Office of the Solicitor, as a resource for exploring and developing opportunities for collaborative and cooperative stewardship arrangements. The report covers a wide range of authorities, from Bureau- and Office-specific statutes and regulations, to authorities that apply Departmentwide, to doctrines and authorities that are relevant to all Federal agencies, such as the Freedom of Information Act and the Administrative Procedure Act. The report also includes guidance on how treaties work and when to work closely with the Office of the Solicitor in determining specific rights in question.
- **Land Management Agency Guidance:** On September 13, 2022, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) each released guidance to improve their Federal stewardship of public lands, waters, and wildlife by strengthening the role of Tribal governments in Federal land management. Their guidance outlines how each of these Bureaus will facilitate and support agreements with Tribes to collaborate in the co-stewardship of Federal lands and waters.

- **Implementation Support:** The Interior Department is chartering two intra-Departmental bodies to fulfill the policies and objectives of the Order. The Committee on Collaborative and Cooperative Stewardship will represent the Interior Department’s land management Bureaus in working with the Department’s regional executive teams to ensure that all Bureaus and field units implement co-stewardship in an integrated and coordinated way. Working alongside the committee, the Office of the Solicitor Working Group on Collaborative Stewardship will provide a forum for Associate, Regional, and Field Solicitors to identify, discuss, and coordinate on co-stewardship-related legal issues.
- **Indigenous Knowledge:** The Interior Department has helped to lead an interagency effort to implement the White House’s first-of-its kind memorandum to initiate new Federal guidance on Indigenous Knowledge. The November 2021 memorandum directs Federal agencies to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into Federal scientific and policy processes. Upcoming draft implementation guidance will provide the Interior Department’s Bureaus and Offices with best practices to engage Tribes, and to elevate the role of Indigenous Knowledge in Federal land management, scientific research, grantmaking, and other decisions.
- **Self-Governance Funding:** The Interior Department will conduct Tribal consultation regarding the annual publication of the list of programs, services, functions, and activities of Bureaus and Offices (except for the Bureau of Indian Affairs) that are eligible to be planned, conducted, consolidated, and administered by self-governance Tribes, including Tribal consortia, pursuant to a compacting agreement. The upcoming consultations regarding Title IV of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act will help inform consistent interpretation and implementation across the Interior Department for improved transparency and certainty around compacting authorities.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** The Interior Department is establishing an Office of Strategic Partnerships within Indian Affairs to build partnerships, leverage resources, and promote innovative solutions for Indian Country. The office will work to bring awareness of the needs and unique status of Indian Tribes and to build sustainable public-private partnerships and further conservation, education, and economic development in Indian Country. The office will help connect Tribes with philanthropic organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to support technical assistance and capacity building, including co-stewardship agreements.

Formalizing Co-Stewardship Agreements with Indian Tribes

Collaborative stewardship of Federal lands and waters with Tribal nations is not a new concept or practice. In fact, there already exist hundreds of arrangements across the Interior Department where Indian Tribes and individual land management units are working together—in some cases, for decades—on stewarding lands, waters, and wildlife.

As this Annual Report demonstrates, co-stewardship agreements are diverse in nature—they span the Nation, encompass a wide variety of activities, take various forms of legal agreements, and are negotiated with Tribes, Tribal consortia, Tribal nonprofits, and Alaska Native Corporations.

Individually, these agreements reflect unique and compelling facts regarding how Tribal co-stewardship improves outcomes for the specific land management unit and the people it serves. In the aggregate, the agreements are a testament to the continuum of effective and durable management of lands, waters, and wildlife that co-stewardship can provide for the benefit of all Americans.

A representative sample of the Interior Department's existing collaborative agreements—penned before the Order in November 2021—include the following:

- **Acadia National Park:** Acadia National Park has been involved in a multiyear project with the Wabanaki Nations of Maine on traditional gathering of sweetgrass within the park. The interdisciplinary work focuses on Wabanaki stewardship approaches through centuries of learned Indigenous Knowledge, as well as cultural protocols to assert Indigenous sovereignty within natural and cultural resource management on ancestral lands. This research project aims to provide a template of culturally appropriate engagement between Native American gatherers and national parks. The project has shed light on how plant gathering has a positive impact on the plant colonies when gathered in a culturally appropriate traditional manner, and the benefits of incorporating Indigenous Knowledge at the initial stages of a project.
- **Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council:** Since 2000, the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council, an arrangement of FWS, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and 10 regional Tribal consortia—the Association of Village Council Presidents; Bristol Bay Nation Association; Chugach Regional Resources Commission; Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission; Kawerak, Inc.; Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association; Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak; Maniilaq Association; North Slope Borough; and Tanana Chiefs Conference—have co-managed with a conservation and regulatory purpose. The Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council conserves migratory birds through the development of recommendations for the subsistence spring/summer harvest in Alaska. Subsistence regulations recommended by the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council are finalized and published by FWS. The FWS is providing additional funding to the partnership to convene a discussion on how to strengthen co-management relationships.
- **Grand Portage National Monument and Isle Royale National Park:** The Grand Portage National Monument has a unique relationship with the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (Band) and the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (Tribe). The Band and Tribe donated the land that ultimately became the Grand Portage National Monument, and Congress ensured in the enabling legislation that members of the Band and Tribe would work in the national monument and that cultural and historic uses would continue on the land.

In 1999, under the Tribal Self-Governance Act, the Band and NPS reached an initial agreement that maintenance of the park site would be conducted by Band employees. Today, the Band and NPS have extended collaborative stewardship of the park beyond maintenance to include other divisions, such as interpretation and resource management.

In 2018, the Band and NPS created the Grand Portage Conservation Crew. The youth organization now provides resource management at Grand Portage National Monument, Grand Portage Reservation, and Isle Royale National Park. Some of the crew's practices and projects include preservation of historic structures, archaeological and wildlife surveys, plant restoration, and timber stand improvement.

- **Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge:** In June 2021, Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge, a unit of FWS, entered into a Title I Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act contract with Koniag, Inc., an Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act Corporation, to support a community affairs liaison position. The new position will serve a critical role in enhancing communication and education programs and services between FWS and Alaska Native stakeholders through the Kodiak Archipelago. This is the first such contract for FWS, and the first with an Alaska Native Corporation.
- **Native Seed and Grassland Restoration Program:** Since 2019, BLM has partnered with the Fort Belknap Indian Community, and other nonprofit and academic institutions, to create a framework for restoring grassland ecosystems and create career paths for Indigenous youth. This 5-year partnership incorporates Indigenous Knowledge into BLM's existing Seeds of Success program and the Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring protocol for evaluating rangeland health. Participants in the program learn about the value of Indigenous Knowledge, scientific seed collection standards, and the Agriculture Department's Natural Resource Conservation Service plant classification codes. Tribal elders support the program by sharing their knowledge and leading ceremonies. The program has successfully trained several youth participants and assessed ecological conditions on BLM and adjacent Tribal land in north-central Montana.
- **Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery:** In 2016, FWS decided not to place the sicklefin redbreast, a type of fish, on the Federal threatened and endangered species list but made it the subject of a candidate conservation agreement under which several organizations pledged to support sicklefin conservation. This partnership includes the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, for whom the sicklefin is a species of high cultural and traditional significance. In 2022, staff at Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery in Georgia loaded more than 10,000 hatchery-raised sicklefin redbreasts into a hatchery truck and drove them to western North Carolina where FWS staff, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, and representatives of the Tribe helped release the fish across five rivers.

In addition to the aforementioned existing agreements, since the Order was signed, the Interior Department has celebrated 13 unique co-stewardship agreements with 18 unique Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and consortia. These landmark co-stewardship agreements include some first-of-a-kind agreements and arrangements that capture the Interior Department's commitment to advancing meaningful co-stewardship of public lands and waters.

- **Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Bison Range:** In 1908, the Federal Government established the National Bison Range in the middle of the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana. The bison herd there descends from a free-ranging reservation

herd started by Tribal members in the 1800s when Plains bison were near extinction. In December 2020, the Montana Water Rights Protection Act restored the bison range's land to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and created a 2-year period for transitioning management of the bison range from FWS to the Tribes.

In June 2021, as part of that process, the Interior Department transferred all lands comprising the bison range, approximately 18,800 acres, to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to be held in trust for the Tribes.

In January 2022, ahead of schedule, the Tribes assumed full management of the bison range. The FWS and the Tribes continue to partner together to ensure the land and resources are managed at a high level, including prioritizing improvements to address deferred maintenance to enhance safety to the public and wildlife.

- **Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve:** The year 2022 was the first year of partnership between Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in Alaska and Ahtna, Incorporated, a regional Alaska Native Corporation, for a summer internship program for Ahtna youth. With funding provided by the NPS Indian Youth Service Corps, the partnership provided the opportunity for Tribal youth to assist in staffing the Ahtna Cultural Center, C'ek'aedi Hwnax 'Legacy House', located in the park's visitor center complex. The program provides interns training and hands-on experience with public service, cultural and natural resource management, facilities management, and interpretation.
- **Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge:** In April 2022, the Rappahannock Tribe reacquired 465 acres at Fones Cliffs, a sacred site to the Tribe and part of their ancestral homelands. Fones Cliffs is located on the eastern side of the Rappahannock River in Virginia and within the authorized boundary of the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge. The land is now owned by the Tribe, is publicly accessible, and is held with a permanent conservation easement conveyed to the FWS.

Fones Cliffs is a 4-mile stretch of white diatomaceous cliffs rising over 100-feet above the Rappahannock River. It is a globally significant Important Bird Area for bald eagles and other migratory birds, with the refuge hosting one of the largest nesting populations of bald eagles on the Atlantic coast. This largely unspoiled landscape is a place of both natural and cultural importance and is a key feature along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

The Tribe plans to create trails and a replica 16th-century village, where Tribal members can educate the public about their history and Indigenous approaches to conservation. In addition, the Tribe plans to expand its Return to the River program, which trains Tribal youth in traditional river knowledge and practices and conducts outreach and education for other communities interested in the Rappahannock River.

- **Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area:** In May 2022, NPS and the Crow Tribe began implementing an agreement for the Tribe to provide management services of Afterbay and Grapevine Campgrounds in Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area in Montana. The services include managing campground fees, reservations, and light maintenance. The Tribe is also in its fifth year of a 10-year concessions contract to operate Bighorn Canyon's Ok-A-Beh Marina.
- **Bears Ears National Monument:** In June 2022, BLM, the U.S. Forest Service, and the five Tribes of the Bears Ears Commission—the Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, and the Pueblo of Zuni—formalized and celebrated their partnership for co-management of Bears Ears National Monument in Utah.

To implement the collaborative stewardship, BLM, Forest Service, and the five Tribes executed a first-of-its-kind cooperative agreement to guide the shared stewardship of the 1.36 million acres of the monument. This included a ceremony to install new portal signs for the monument, which include the logos for the Federal agencies and each Tribe. The BLM and Forest Service are meeting routinely with the Bears Ears Commission—consisting of one representative identified by each of the five Tribes—to help to co-develop the resource management plan for the monument and have executed financial assistance agreements with the five Tribes to enhance their capacity to engage in the co-stewardship.

- **Lenape National Wildlife Refuge:** In June 2022, FWS signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with three federally recognized Tribes seeking a secure, respectful location on Federal lands in the Delaware River Basin for the reburial of ancestral remains repatriated to the Tribes via the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. The Lenape National Wildlife Refuge Complex worked with three Tribes, which all share Lenape ancestry—the Delaware Nation, the Delaware Tribe residing in Oklahoma, and the Stockbridge-Munsee Community in Wisconsin. The FWS offered the Tribes a reburial site at Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, which is part of the refuge complex. An MOU will guide the reburial process and the future operational relationship between FWS and the Tribes.
- **Dworshak National Fish Hatchery:** In June 2022, the Interior Department transferred all fish production at Dworshak National Fish Hatchery in Orofino, Idaho, to the Nez Perce Tribe. The fish hatchery, located in the heart of the Nez Perce Reservation, has been collaboratively managed by FWS and the Tribe since 2005. The FWS will maintain its longstanding partnership with the Tribe by continuing to provide support to the hatchery through the Idaho Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office and Pacific Region Fish Health Program. The hatchery produces 2.1 million steelhead, 2.55 million spring chinook, and 550,000 coho salmon annually. These are all anadromous fish, meaning they make a 550-mile journey as juveniles down the Snake and Columbia Rivers to the Pacific Ocean, then return as adults to spawn. Steelhead and salmon play a key role in the culture of Native communities that once lived in or near the Clearwater River Basin. The

fish produced provide harvest opportunities for the shared Tribal and non-Tribal fisheries in the Clearwater, Snake, and Columbia Rivers in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) constructed the hatchery to mitigate for the impacts of Dworshak Dam on the North Fork of the Clearwater River and the four lower Snake River dams. The USACE will continue to own the facility.

- **Onondaga Nation Land Transfer:** In June 2022, the Interior Department celebrated a unique settlement agreement as part of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program that returns more than 1,000 acres of ancestral land to the Onondaga Nation—one of the largest returns of land to an Indigenous nation by a State. Onondaga Nation, the State of New York, and FWS entered into an agreement to have Honeywell International, Inc. transfer the title to open space in central New York’s Tully Valley to the Onondaga Nation. The historic agreement recognizes the Onondaga Nation’s longstanding stewardship of the area and acknowledges that its traditional ecological knowledge should guide the Tully property’s restoration and management.

The U.S.-Onondaga-New York partnership that led to the return of this property to the Onondaga people will include a conservation easement with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The easement will prohibit commercial development, provide for the protection and restoration of natural areas in accordance with traditional ecological knowledge, and allow compatible outdoor recreational and educational uses. The Onondaga Nation will develop a management plan in consultation with the trustees, which includes FWS, to determine the type and extent of recreational and public use compatible with re-establishment of culturally and ecologically significant native vegetation and habitats.

- **Redwood National Park:** Over the past 12 years, the Yurok Tribe, in collaboration with Federal, State, Tribal, and interested parties, has led an effort to return condors to the Pacific Northwest. The Tribe completed extensive environmental assessments, contaminant analyses, and community outreach to reintroduce condors, or Prey-go-neesh, to the redwoods and ancestral homelands of the Yurok people for the first time in 130 years. In May 2022, the first condors arrived at Redwood National Park in California and took flight. In July 2022, the park and Tribe executed a funding agreement for the Tribe to continue their groundbreaking work on condor restoration, as well as trail repair and maintenance, and air-quality monitoring.
- **Kawerak, Inc. Co-Stewardship Funding Agreements:** In October 2022, BLM signed a multiyear, self-governance funding agreement to transfer a portion of BLM’s cultural resource activities and functions to Kawerak, Inc., a Tribal non-profit consortium representing 20 Tribal governments in the Bering Strait region of Alaska. Kawerak represents nearly one-quarter of the Federal lands managed by the Anchorage Field Office.

This groundbreaking self-governance agreement regarding cultural resources is the first-of-its-kind between BLM and Tribes in Alaska. It provides annual funding for fiscal years 2023 through 2025 to be used for the Kawerak Social Science Program to provide

cultural resource information and inventories to appropriately inform BLM's land management planning and decisions.

In May 2022, the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve in Alaska also entered into a 5-year annual funding agreement with member Tribes of Kawerak, Inc. The agreement outlines projects that member Tribes will conduct at the park, including repairs and maintenance work at facilities, as well as preserving and sharing cultural knowledge.

- **Effigy Mounds National Monument Sister Park Agreement:** In November 2022, NPS celebrated the first sister park agreement between a Tribe and NPS. The Tribal Sister Park Agreement between Effigy Mounds National Monument in Iowa and the Ioway Tribal National Park (Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska) will promote cooperation and support for the mutual benefit of both parties and enrich the experience and capacity of the personnel at both parks. The relationship allows the parties to share experiences and approaches in areas such as park planning, preservation practices, interpretation and education, and facility design. This will be accomplished through the exchange of managerial, technical, and professional knowledge; information, data, and technology exchange; exchanges of staff; joint training; and sharing best practices through working cooperatively for mutual benefit.
- **Joshua Tree National Park:** In November 2022, Joshua Tree National Park celebrated an agreement with the Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians that enables the park and Tribe to collaborate on interpretive and educational services, natural and cultural history training, mutual aid for search and rescue and wildland fire operations, joint protection of the Chemehuevi Cemetery, and other opportunities in California. The park and Tribe are also planning for a trail connecting the reservation with the park, as well as interpretive media for signage both on the reservation and within the park.

Consolidating Tribal Homelands

In addition to advancing co-stewardship on public lands and waters, the Interior Department is making progress to identify opportunities to consolidate Tribal homelands and empower Tribal stewardship of resources.

Acquisition of land into trust is one of the most important functions the Interior Department undertakes on behalf of Tribes. Trust lands are a primary locus of Tribal authority, and many Federal programs and services are available only on reservations or trust lands. Taking land into trust on behalf of Tribes is critical for Tribal sovereignty, self-determination, preservation of history and culture, economic development, well-being of Tribal citizens, and helping to right the wrongs of past policy.

This year, the Interior Department issued draft proposed changes to the relevant regulations (25 C.F.R. Part 151) that would lead to a more efficient, less cumbersome, and less expensive fee-to-trust process by clarifying the Secretary of the Interior's authority to take land into trust for Tribes, reducing application processing time, and establishing clear decision-making criteria. The proposed amendments also place an express focus on taking land into trust for conservation purposes.

The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking incorporates feedback from Tribal consultations held earlier in the year, and the Interior Department will hold Tribal consultations on the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in December 2022.

III. CONCLUSION

In many ways, 2022 marked a banner year for the Interior Department to advance co-stewardship with Tribal nations. Between landmark agreements across the country and progress to implement the Order through the land management agencies, the Interior Department is making good on the President's vision for the Tribal Homelands Initiative.

In the coming year, in addition to solidifying additional co-stewardship agreements, the Interior Department will also focus on institutionalizing infrastructure—including through the Office of the Solicitor—to ensure consistent interpretation and implementation of co-stewardship agreements. The Interior Department is also working to develop and provide appropriate training opportunities for employees.

There is incredible enthusiasm across the Interior Department—from the field offices to headquarters—on the immense opportunities to uphold the Federal Government's treaty and trust responsibilities to Tribes and better steward public lands and waters through a new era of co-stewardship.