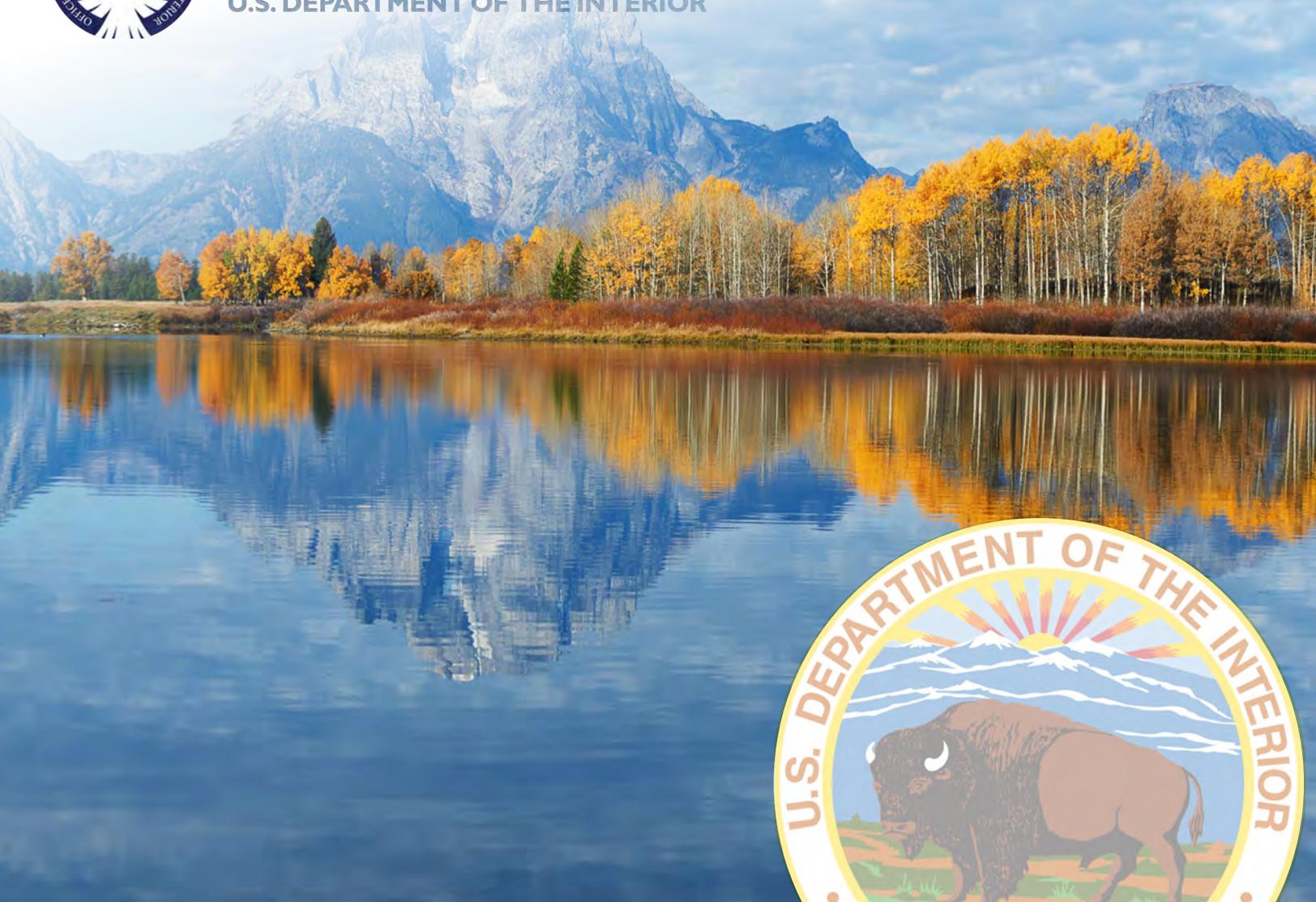




OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



Inspector General's Statement



OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

OCT 29 2024

Memorandum

To: Deb Haaland
Secretary of the Interior

From: Mark Lee Greenblatt 
Inspector General

Subject: Final Report – *Inspector General’s Statement Summarizing the Major Management and Performance Challenges Facing the U.S. Department of the Interior, Fiscal Year 2024*
Report No. 2024-ER-013

In accordance with the Reports Consolidation Act of 2000, we are submitting what we have determined to be the most significant management and performance challenges facing the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) for inclusion in DOI’s *Agency Financial Report* for fiscal year 2024. We have organized this report around three main challenge areas—“Managing Spending,” “Delivering Core Services,” and “Ensuring Health and Safety”—but note that some topics span multiple challenge areas.

If you have any questions, please call me at 202-208-5745.

cc: Laura Daniel-Davis, Acting Deputy Secretary, DOI
Rachael Taylor, Chief of Staff, DOI
Mili Gosar, Deputy Chief of Staff, DOI
Bivan Patnaik, Acting Director, Office of the Executive Secretariat, DOI
Preston Heard, Deputy Director, Office of the Executive Secretariat, DOI
Tonya R. Johnson-Simmons, Deputy Chief Financial Officer and Director, Office of Financial Management, DOI



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INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH

In accordance with the Reports Consolidation Act of 2000, we are reporting what we have determined to be the most significant management and performance challenges facing the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI). Pursuant to the statute, this report is required to be included in DOI's *Agency Financial Report*.

As in recent years, our fiscal year (FY) 2024 report is organized in three sections: "Managing Spending," "Delivering Core Services," and "Ensuring Health and Safety." In each section, we summarize topics relevant to the challenge area. Some topics span multiple challenge areas, serving as a reminder of the complex nature of DOI's mission. For example, DOI must balance competing priorities, such as considering different and potentially competing land uses like conservation, energy production, recreation, forestry, and habitat protection. These substantive priorities often overlap across multiple DOI bureaus, sometimes leading to a decentralized approach. For instance, we continue to recognize DOI's response to climate change as a cross-cutting issue that presents challenges related to how DOI fulfills its responsibility to Tribal communities; manages land use, water resources, and wildlife and their habitats; and adapts to the frequency and severity of natural disasters.

This report is primarily based on our work and general knowledge of DOI's programs and offices as well as U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reviews, including GAO's [High Risk List](#). We reference [our reports](#) related to the identified challenge areas throughout this document.

The Office of Inspector General's (OIG's) oversight responsibilities are commensurate with DOI's

expansive set of programs and operations. These oversight responsibilities are reflected in the audits, evaluations, inspections, and investigations that we undertake. For example, we set forth anticipated FY 2024 audits, inspections, and evaluations in our [Oversight Plan for FY 2024](#). DOI itself implements its programs and operations through its 11 bureaus:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
- Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)
- Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)
- Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE)
- Bureau of Trust Funds Administration (BTFA)
- National Park Service (NPS)
- Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
- U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)

In addition to these bureaus, there are a number of offices that fall under the Office of the Secretary and other components, including the Office of Natural Resources Revenue (ONRR), Office of Wildland Fire, Office of Law Enforcement and Security, and Office of Insular Affairs (OIA).



CHALLENGE AREA

Managing Spending

According to DOI's FY 2025 [budget request](#), Congress appropriated DOI \$17 billion¹ in FY 2024 to continue carrying out its wide-ranging programs and operations under the following categories: addressing climate challenges and building resilience; creating jobs and meeting energy and environmental challenges; strengthening Tribal Nations; promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion of underserved communities; and building agency capacity. In addition to those appropriated funds, in the last several years DOI has received billions of dollars in supplemental funds from disaster relief appropriations, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA),² the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA),³ and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA);⁴ a significant portion of these funds remains available for future use.

DOI manages 20 percent of the Nation's lands and waters—many of which have historic or cultural significance—including approximately 130,000 buildings and structures, 65,000 miles of public roads, and a wide variety of other constructed assets valued at more than \$400 billion, such as visitor centers, schools, power generating facilities, housing, campgrounds, fire stations, roads, trails, and water and wastewater treatment plants. To maintain these assets and accomplish its mission, DOI must manage significant spending, including contracts and financial assistance in the form of grants and cooperative agreements. Below, we summarize DOI's challenges, plans, and progress in managing spending related to infrastructure, contract and grant oversight, and deferred maintenance.

Infrastructure Spending

As the steward for America's public lands, DOI manages critical infrastructure that it describes as essential to protect natural resources, support American jobs, and provide water to the Western United States.⁵ In November 2021, the IIJA was enacted with the intent of addressing aging infrastructure. The legislation provides more than \$30 billion to DOI to address legacy pollution, invest in water and drought resilience, assist with wildland fire management, restore critical habitats, and help communities prepare for extreme weather events. DOI also received funds from the IRA, which provides an additional \$6.6 billion for similar programs aimed at water management and conservation efforts in high-drought areas. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of DOI's IIJA and IRA appropriations.

DOI reported that, as of July 25, 2024, it has hired more than 450 staff across bureaus and offices to implement new programming, and it has hosted stakeholder meetings to hear directly from States, Tribes, and local communities to determine where funding is needed most. On its [project map website](#), DOI reported it had announced funding of more than \$11 billion for over 2,060 IIJA projects Nationwide. This is an increase of almost \$4 billion since our report last fiscal year. DOI continues to face challenges in ensuring it can promptly deploy IIJA funding, maintain staffing and resource capacity, produce reliable information, and establish appropriate program controls.

¹ U.S. Dep't of the Interior, *Fiscal Year 2025 The Interior Budget in Brief*, at A-16 (Mar. 2024). Specific amount can be found under "2024 CR," "Net, Current Authority (w/o transfers, shifted base appropriations, supplementals, and cap adjustment)."

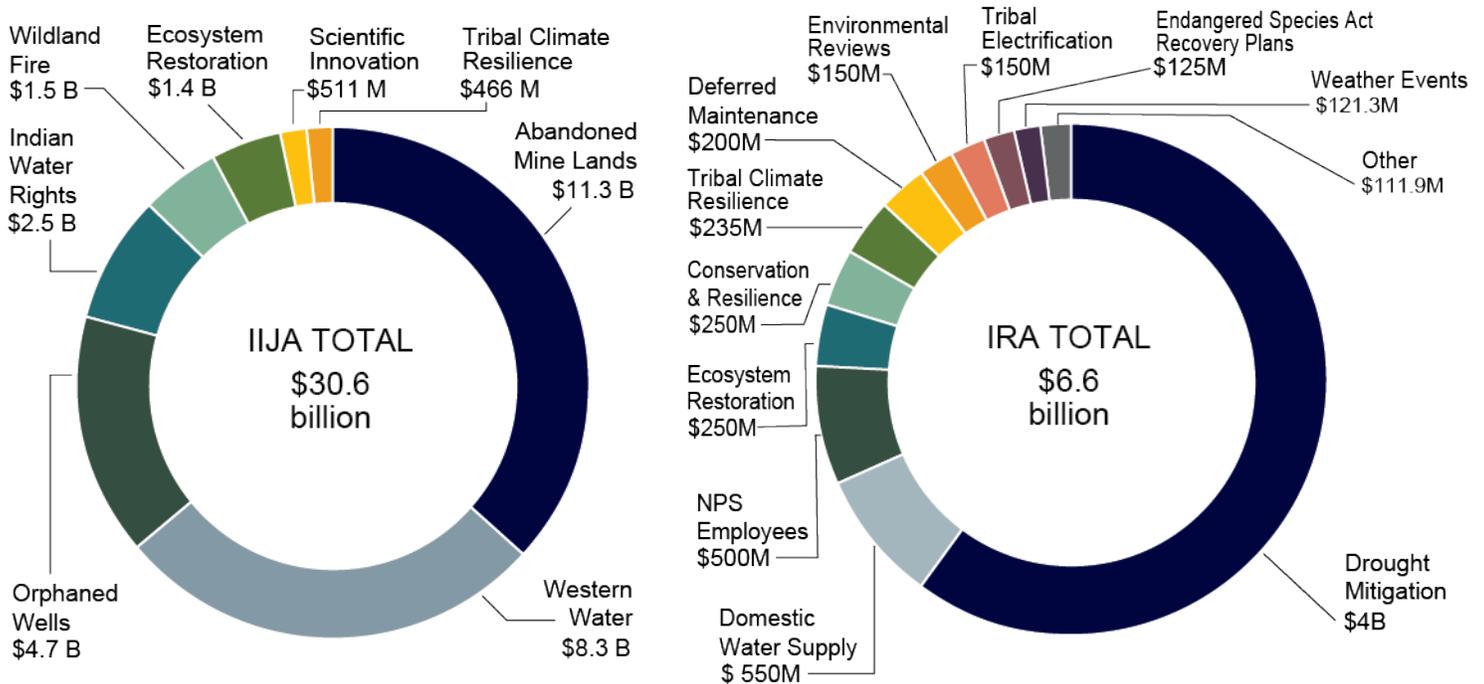
² Pub. L. No. 117-58.

³ Pub. L. No. 116-152.

⁴ Pub. L. No. 117-169.

⁵ BOR considers the following States to be the "Western United States": Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Figure 1: DOI IIJA and IRA Appropriations by Major Program⁶



For example, in a September 2024 evaluation, *The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement Should Improve Efforts for Expending Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Funds*, we found that OSMRE was not adequately prepared to expend the \$11.3 billion in IIJA funds it received and that it continues to expend funds without effective processes in place. Specifically, OSMRE did not conduct comprehensive risk assessments of grant applicants before making awards, did not properly identify and analyze risk associated with single audit findings of grant recipients, and did not consider other relevant risks.

In our August 2024 *Flash Report: The National Park Service’s Inflation Reduction Act Hiring Efforts and Activities*, we reported on the \$500 million in IRA funding available for NPS to hire employees to serve in units of the National Park System or national historic or national scenic trails. We provided information on how NPS plans to (1) use IRA funding to hire employees, (2) report on the status of implementation, and (3) oversee the funding expenditures and hiring, as well as information on the challenges NPS stated it is facing in implementing the hiring authorized in the IRA.

According to DOI’s FY 2025 budget request, DOI will continue to expend IIJA and IRA funds to promote new jobs and advance local economies. DOI further

stated that these funds are providing significant additional support to address longstanding health and safety risks from abandoned coal mines and orphaned oil and gas wells; advance clean energy development and carbon reduction efforts; accelerate the completion of Indian water rights settlements; and strengthen the resilience of critical ecosystems, Tribal Nations, and communities in the face of unprecedented risks from extreme weather events, devastating drought, and threats of wildfires.

In our October 2023 *Flash Report: Ecosystem Restoration and Resilience Programs – The U.S. Department of the Interior Prepares to Spend \$1.36 Billion*, we provided information regarding ecosystem restoration and resilience programs. Funding for these programs is used to restore habitat connectivity for aquatic species, advance habitat restoration, address the threat of invasive species, provide conservation of at-risk and listed endangered species, and deliver benefits to ecosystems. We identified and discussed potential program risks, such as overlapping funding and capacity limitations across bureaus, offices, and external partners. The report also describes the Office of the Secretary funding for ecosystem restoration projects as well as each major FWS-administered program identified in the IIJA: the National Fish Passage Program, Klamath Basin Restoration, Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem, Delaware River Basin Restoration Program, and Lake Tahoe Invasive Species Management.

⁶ The “Other” category groups the following programs receiving less than \$100 million each: Climate Change Technical Assistance, Native Hawaiian Climate Resilience, Emergency Drought Relief for Tribes, 3D Elevation Program, Canal Improvement Projects, and OIG Oversight.

OIG Oversight

In addition to the published work below, we are currently performing work that assesses the Orphaned Wells Office's oversight of State funding, the use of abandoned mine lands and orphaned wells funds by multiple individual States, the funding NPS and FWS are receiving from IRA § 50223, and the USGS Earth Mapping Resources Initiative.

OIG Published Work FYs 2022-2024

Flash Report: The U.S. Department of the Interior's Supplemental Funding to the Pacific Islands (Report No. 2024-INF-001)

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement Should Improve Efforts for Expending Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Funds (Report No. 2023-INF-014)

Flash Report: The National Park Service's Inflation Reduction Act Hiring Efforts and Activities (Report No. 2024-ISP-011)

Flash Report: The Bureau of Reclamation's Drought Mitigation Plans and Activities (Report No. 2023-WR-032)

Flash Report: Ecosystem Restoration and Resilience Programs – The U.S. Department of the Interior Prepares to Spend \$1.36 Billion (Report No. 2022 INF-050)

The Bureau of Indian Affairs' and the Office of Insular Affairs' Support for Climate Adaptation Practices (Report No. 2022-ER-019)

Flash Report: The U.S. Department of the Interior's Infrastructure Investment for Aging Infrastructure and Dam Safety (Report No. 2022-INF-049)

The Bureau of Land Management Made Progress in Implementing Corrective Actions To Improve Its Idle Well Program (Report No. 2022-CGD-020)

Flash Report: Orphaned Wells Programs – The U.S. Department of the Interior's Efforts To Collect Data To Meet Annual Orphaned Wells Programs Reporting Requirements (Report No. 2022-INF-042)

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement Made Progress in Implementing Corrective Actions To Improve Its Oversight of the Abandoned Mine Lands Program, but Some Recommendations Remain Outstanding (Report No. 2022-CR-022)

Flash Report: Abandoned Mine Lands Program – The U.S. Department of the Interior Prepares to Spend \$11.3 Billion (Report No. 2022-INF-037)

Flash Report: Orphaned Wells Programs – Breaking Down Responsibilities for Addressing Orphaned Wells (Report No. 2022-INF-043)

Flash Report: Orphaned Wells Program – The U.S. Department of the Interior Prepares to Spend \$4.7 Billion (Report No. 2022-INF-024)

Recommendation Progress

Of the **22** recommendations we made to DOI and its bureaus and offices in the above reports, **3** are closed.





Contract and Grant Oversight

One key DOI responsibility is managing its significant funding, which is often accomplished using contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements. According to [USAspending.gov](https://www.usaspending.gov), DOI awarded \$8.1 billion in contracts and approximately \$12.4 billion in financial assistance totaling \$20.5 billion in FY 2024 (as of August 30, 2024). DOI told us that it faces substantial risks regarding grant oversight; with more than 6,000 grant recipients, tens of billions of dollars could be at risk of fraud, waste, and mismanagement.

Our FY 2024 work has continued to identify substantial risks regarding grant oversight. In a December 2023 evaluation, *The National Park Service Should Increase Monitoring and Oversight To Protect the Integrity and Recreational Value of the Land and Water Conservation Fund State Side Program*, we found that NPS did not adequately monitor States' administration of Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) intended to conserve lands and water resources for increased and improved outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the United States. We found that NPS did not maintain an accurate or complete real property listing to account for LWCF project sites in all States as defined by statute⁷ or ensure that States conducted post-completion inspections to verify LWCF sites were used in accordance with the law, which requires the sites be maintained for outdoor recreation in perpetuity for present and future generations. In addition, NPS also failed to conduct program reviews to assess States' effectiveness in administering LWCF funds, did not collect and analyze State financial and performance reports in some cases to determine whether active projects met grant financial and performance goals, and did not track States' eligibility to receive LWCF funds. NPS' failure to enforce LWCF requirements and address State challenges also provides no assurance that States and territories efficiently administered the LWCF program. In addition, without adequate oversight and monitoring, LWCF funds may be subject to mismanagement, which threatens the success of the program.

Our work has also identified oversight issues regarding FWS Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) grants pursuant to the

Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act and the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act.⁸ According to FWS, in 2024, these grants together provided more than \$1.5 billion annually⁹ to States, territories, and the District of Columbia for wildlife and sport fish restoration and hunter education. For example, in our January 2024 audit of the New York Department of Environment Conservation, Division of Fish and Wildlife, we found that the State did not ensure that WSFR grant funds from FWS and State hunting and fishing license revenue were used for allowable fish and wildlife activities and did not comply with applicable laws and regulations, FWS guidelines, and grant agreements. For FYs 2022 through 2024, we performed audits of FWS WSFR grants awarded to Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Guam, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Virginia, and Wyoming. In FY 2023, we made 91 recommendations with more than \$5 million in monetary impact across 10 audits of these WSFR grants.

DOI will continue to face challenges managing its contracts and grants to prevent fraud, waste, and mismanagement.

In a March 2024 audit, *The National Park Service Did Not Adequately Oversee the Guard Services Contract at the Statue of Liberty National Monument*, we found that the Contractor providing guard services at the Statue of Liberty National Monument was not meeting various contract terms and conditions. Specifically, we observed two contract employees engaged on their personal cell phones rather than monitoring screening machines, and neither the Contractor nor NPS could identify the whereabouts of 17 separated contract employees' DOI ID cards. We found that these underlying issues occurred because the Contractor did not adhere to the terms of the contract and because DOI's oversight of the contract was insufficient. Given the crucial role of the security personnel's duty to monitor and protect the millions of annual visitors to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, the Contractor must comply with the contract terms to help ensure that potential threats to visitors and property are detected and addressed.

⁷ Pursuant to 54 U.S.C. § 200301(2), the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are defined as "States" for the purposes of LWCF.

⁸ Formally known, respectively, as the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, 16 U.S.C. § 669, as amended, and the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, 16 U.S.C. § 777, as amended.

⁹ In the amounts of \$1,178,312,039 for Wildlife Restoration and \$381,827,198 for Sport Fish Restoration.

OIG Oversight

In addition to the published work below, we are currently performing work that assesses grant administration. For example, we are reviewing the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's administration of a cooperative agreement to implement the Hurricane Sandy Coastal Resiliency Competitive Grant Program, as well as conducting additional audits of FWS WSFR grants.

OIG Published Work FYs 2022-2024

The National Park Service Did Not Adequately Oversee the Guard Services Contract at the Statue of Liberty National Monument
(Report No. 2022-CGD-052)

Progress Made by the U.S. Department of the Interior in Implementing Government Charge Card Recommendations, Fiscal Year 2023
(Report No. 2024 FIN-002)

Summary: Former BIA Employee Defrauds Government by Misusing Government Credit Cards
(Report No. 18-1084)

The National Park Service Should Increase Monitoring and Oversight To Protect the Integrity and Recreational Value of the Land and Water Conservation Fund State Side Program
(Report No. 2021-ER-026)

Independent Auditors' Reports on the Tribal and Other Trust Funds and Individual Indian Monies Trust Funds Financial Statements for Fiscal Years 2023 and 2022 (Report No. 2023-FIN-020)

Independent Auditors' Report on the U.S. Department of the Interior's Financial Statements for Fiscal Years 2023 and 2022 (Report No. 2023-FIN-021)

Summary: Contractor Wrongfully Obtained Over \$10 Million in Buy Indian Act Contracts from BIA and BIE (Report No. 22-0007)

Internal Control Within the U.S. Virgin Islands' Accounting System for U.S. Department of the Interior Hurricane Supplemental Funds
(Report No. 2020-CGD-003)

The Bureau of Indian Affairs Can Improve the Closeout Process for Public Law 93-638 Agreements
(Report No. 2020-CGD-060)

Indian Affairs Acquisitions Can Improve Administration and Oversight of Contract No. 140A1620C0007
(Report No. 2022-CGD-010)

Issues Identified With Target Range Grant, North Atlantic Appalachian Regional Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Report No. 2021-ER-029-A)

The Bureau of Indian Affairs Great Plains Region Did Not Oversee CARES Act Funds Appropriately
(Report No. 2021 FIN-032)

Progress Made by the U.S. Department of the Interior in Implementing Government Charge Card Recommendations, Fiscal Year 2022
(Report No. 2023 FIN-006)

Summary: Nonprofit Official Misused \$233,636 in Federal Funds (Report No. 22-0157)

The Omaha Tribe Did Not Account for CARES Act Funds Appropriately (Report No. 2021-FIN-032-B)

Availability of Administrative Funds for Land and Water Conservation Fund State Side Grants
(Report No. 2021-ER-026-A)

The Bureau of Indian Education, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians Need To Improve Accountability for Federal Funds (Report No. 2020-CGD-001)

The Three Affiliated Tribes Did Not Account for CARES Act Funds Appropriately
(Report No. 2021-FIN-032-C)

The U.S. Department of the Interior Could Expand Its Use of Contracting Flexibilities and Should Establish an Acquisition Policy for Future Disasters
(Report No. 2020-CGD-006)

The National Park Service and the U.S. Geological Survey Did Not Consistently Obtain or Maintain Evidence of Management Review and Approval of Modifications Made to Construction Contracts
(Report No. 2020-FIN-007)

Fulfillment of Purchase Card Orders
(Report No. 2021-FIN-022)

Pandemic-Related Contract Actions
(Report No. 2021-FIN-010)

Recommendation Progress

Of the **98** recommendations we made to DOI and its bureaus and offices in the above reports, **44** are closed.



Deferred Maintenance

Deferred maintenance is defined as maintenance and repairs that were not performed when they should have been and were put off or delayed for a future period. According to DOI's [Agency Financial Report 2023](#), deferred maintenance was estimated at \$32.8 billion for FY 2023, an increase of \$2.7 billion from FY 2022. DOI has seen a two-fold increase in reporting of its deferred maintenance since FY 2015 (see Figure 2).

Our oversight work found that DOI and its bureaus face challenges accurately and reliably estimating the cost of deferred maintenance. For example, in a 2023 evaluation, *The National Park Service Faces Challenges in Managing Its Deferred Maintenance*, we found NPS was unable to effectively identify and manage its deferred maintenance, in large part due

In our March 2024 evaluation, *Indian Affairs Is Unable To Effectively Manage Deferred Maintenance of School Facilities*, we found that Indian Affairs was unable to effectively manage deferred maintenance due, in part, to funding delays, processing work orders based on a monetary threshold, limited project management capacity, and unreliable work order data. For example, we identified approved deferred maintenance work orders that, even 22 years after approval, were still not funded. In addition, at schools we visited, we found that more than half of the deferred maintenance work orders we reviewed were listed as open in the system, even though the work had been addressed. The poor condition of BIE school facilities is a longstanding concern. Without reliable deferred maintenance data and standardized policies and procedures, Indian Affairs and BIE cannot appropriately prioritize deferred maintenance projects or accurately estimate costs of deferred maintenance at Indian education facilities.

Figure 2: DOI Deferred Maintenance Costs FYs 2015-2023



to inaccurate and unreliable data in NPS' Facility Management Software System. We concluded that these deficiencies cast doubt on NPS' deferred maintenance estimates—possibly underestimating the figures in some cases and overestimating in others. For example, we identified approximately 214,000 work orders that were three years or older that were not classified as deferred maintenance, resulting in a potential \$2.6 billion underestimation of NPS' deferred maintenance. NPS told us that it was in the process of implementing a new condition assessment process that would enable NPS to assess the condition

of its assets in a timelier fashion than traditional condition assessments. Without accurate estimates, DOI will not have the quality information required to make informed decisions when addressing deferred maintenance.

As we discussed in our previous management challenge reports, GAOA authorized up to \$1.9 billion per fiscal year from 2021 to 2025 to reduce deferred maintenance on public lands and at Indian schools through the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund. According to [DOI's GAOA website](#),

GAOA has funded 326 projects across 50 States and multiple U.S. territories to address an estimated \$5.1 billion in deferred maintenance and repairs. For FY 2025, DOI [proposed](#) 83 GAOA projects to address deferred maintenance for BLM, FWS, NPS, and BIE.

GAO has published reports in the last year attributing increases in deferred maintenance to factors such as funding constraints, labor and material cost increases,

the size and age of agencies' real property portfolios, as well as construction supply chain issues and inflation, which raised costs and delayed projects.

We expect that DOI will continue to face challenges ensuring that it can promptly deploy funding, prioritize projects, maintain staffing and resource capacity, and establish sufficient oversight.

OIG Oversight

In addition to the published work below, we are currently performing work that assesses NPS' management of sewage and wastewater systems and GAOA construction cost estimates.

OIG Published Work FYs 2022-2024

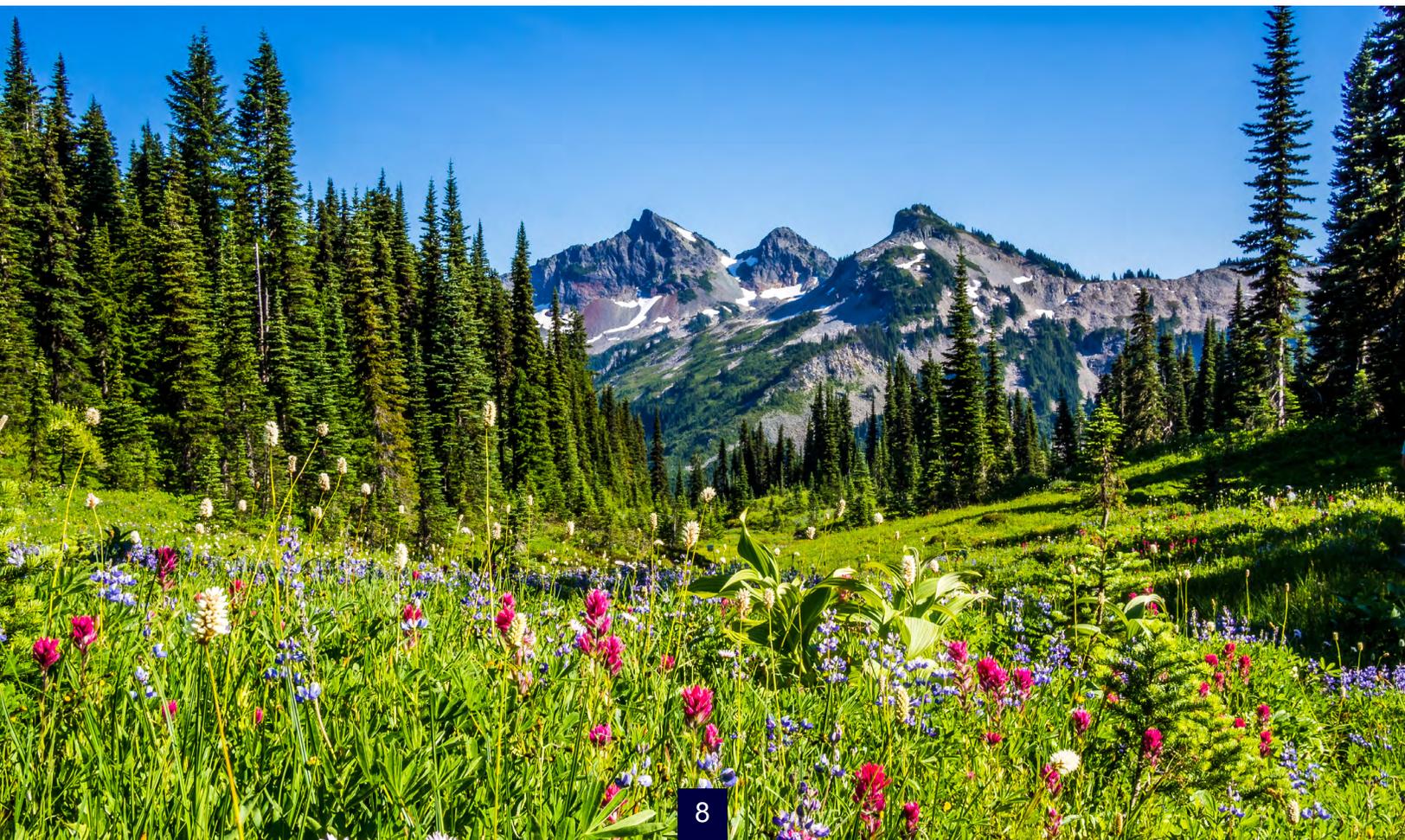
Indian Affairs Is Unable To Effectively Manage Deferred Maintenance of School Facilities
(Report No. 2022-CR-036)

The National Park Service Faces Challenges in Managing Its Deferred Maintenance
(Report No. 2020-CR-066)

The U.S. Department of the Interior Needs a Strategy To Coordinate Implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act (Report No. 2021-CR-031)

Recommendation Progress

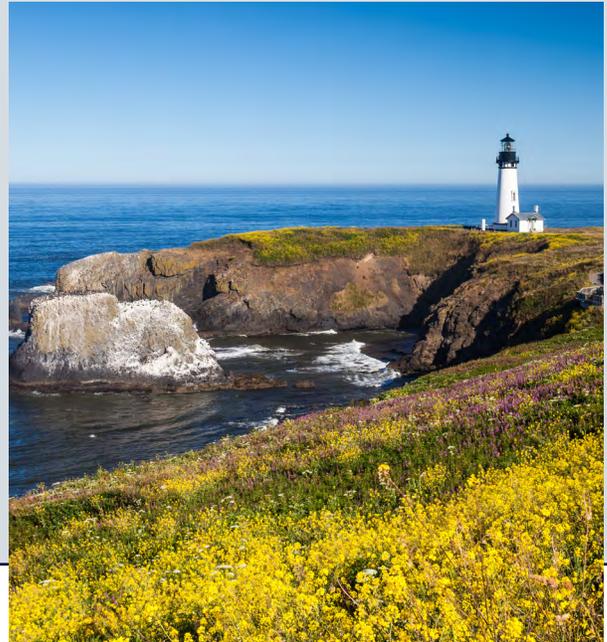
Of the **19** recommendations we made to DOI and its bureaus and offices in the above reports, **5** are closed.



CHALLENGE AREA

Delivering Core Services

Each of DOI's eleven bureaus and offices serves a unique role and has specific responsibilities to deliver core services in support of DOI's mission. These core services support DOI's ability to fulfill its responsibilities to external stakeholders—such as managing public lands, protecting the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage, conserving land and water, and upholding Tribal trust and related responsibilities. These services also extend to internal DOI customers; for example, DOI relies on secure information systems and reliable data to accomplish its mission. Below, we summarize DOI's challenges, plans, and progress in delivering core services related to cybersecurity, data quality, energy, water and power management, and responsibility to Native Americans.



Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity continues to be a high-risk area for Federal agencies and cyber events continue to pose serious risks to both individuals and organizations, including DOI. DOI relies on complex, interconnected information systems to carry out its daily operations and spent about \$2 billion in FY 2024 on its portfolio of IT assets, according to the [Federal IT Portfolio Dashboard](#). In its 2024-2029 [Information Management and Technology Strategic Plan](#), DOI identifies five strategic goals to support its complex and diverse mission and geographically dispersed workforce and ensure DOI's ability to meet emerging Federal cybersecurity mandates to protect new and legacy systems from compromise.

Our work likewise has described ongoing challenges and the importance of implementing an enterprise cybersecurity program that balances compliance, cost, and risk while enabling bureaus to meet their diverse missions. Additionally, the FY 2023 annual independent Federal Information Security Modernization Act audit issued by our office identified necessary improvements and made 29 recommendations intended to strengthen DOI's information security program as well as those of the bureaus and offices. Overall, we expect DOI will continue to face challenges in improving management

of its complex information systems and operation of a secure infrastructure to protect its Federal computer networks and data from cyber threats.

In our February 2024 evaluation, *The U.S. Department of the Interior Needs To Better Protect Data Stored in the Cloud From the Risk of Unauthorized Access*, we found that weaknesses in DOI's cyber risk management and contractor oversight practices put sensitive personally identifiable information (PII) for tens of thousands of Federal employees at risk of unauthorized access. As part of a weeklong exercise, we emulated a sophisticated adversary attempting to exfiltrate (steal) sensitive data from a DOI system, which is hosted in a cloud. Using the same techniques as malicious actors, we successfully exfiltrated over a gigabyte of fictitious sensitive PII from the system. As we conducted more than 100 tests, we monitored DOI's computer logs and incident tracking system in real time. Over the course of the week, none of our tests were prevented by DOI's data loss prevention solution or recognized as malicious activity by DOI IT security analysts. Operating in the cloud without meeting key IT security requirements potentially puts DOI systems—and the sensitive information and PII they contain—at increased risk of compromise.

OIG Oversight

In addition to the published work below, we are currently performing work that assesses DOI's software vulnerability identification and remediation practices; cybersecurity threat-hunting efforts; active directory configuration and management; and artificial intelligence and machine learning development, operations, and security.

OIG Published Work FYs 2022-2024

The U.S. Department of the Interior Needs To Better Protect Data Stored in the Cloud From the Risk of Unauthorized Access (Report No. 2022-ITA-025)

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Cyber Risk Management Practices Leave Its Systems at Increased Risk of Compromise (Report No. 2020-ITA-030)

P@s\$w0rds at the U.S. Department of the Interior: Easily Cracked Passwords, Lack of Multifactor Authentication, and Other Failures Put Critical DOI Systems at Risk (Report No. 2021-ITA-005)

Recommendation Progress

Of the **29** recommendations we made to DOI and its bureaus and offices in the above reports, **6** are closed.

GAO High-Risk Areas

[Ensuring the Cybersecurity of the Nation](#)

[Improving the Management of IT Acquisitions and Operations](#)



Data Quality

As we have reported in recent years, DOI continues to rely on a wide variety of data to perform its mission, and the quality and accuracy of this data impacts how DOI accomplishes its mission. Both DOI's [FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan](#) and [Information Management and Technology Strategic Plan FY 2024-2029](#) acknowledge the importance of reliable data and reliable information to the development and improvement of sound programs and equitable program delivery. The plans also describe DOI's strategy to fully use the breadth of its data to support planning and decisions and to harness technologies to expand data management to make it searchable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable for staff, collaborators, and the public. These goals are consistent with GAO's analysis, which states that information such as data, statistics, and studies can provide important insights to Federal agencies and that agencies should use that data and evidence to understand and improve program performance ("[Improving Federal Programs Through Data and Evidence](#)"). Additionally, a 2023 GAO report, [Evidence-Based Policymaking: Practices to Help Manage and Assess the Results of Federal](#)

[Efforts](#), states that agencies should build a portfolio of high-quality, credible sources of evidence—rather than a single source—to support decision making.

In a July 2024 audit, [USGS Laboratories Remain Vulnerable to Breaches of Scientific Integrity](#), we found that USGS lacks sufficient internal controls in laboratories to identify vulnerabilities and prevent losses associated with breaches of scientific integrity and misconduct. Although it began developing and implementing an overarching USGS quality management system to address potential risks to data and breaches of scientific integrity, we identified several continuing deficiencies in the development of USGS' quality management system and its implementation in laboratories. USGS has reported three serious incidents of scientific misconduct in its laboratories since 1996, two of which involved inappropriate conduct that lasted for several years. Because scientific results, studies, and products from USGS are used by different parties in the Government and the public, breaches of scientific integrity can have significant impacts throughout the scientific community.

Our work continues to identify data reliability issues across a variety of DOI programs. For example, we have identified data concerns related to National Geospatial Data Assets; LWCF real property records; COVID-19 spending; NPS facilities; the mineral leasing program; royalty reporting; DOI's previous awareness review process for Freedom of Information Act requests; and BLM's compensatory mitigation program. For example, in our June 2024 evaluation, *The National Park Service Should Ensure the Land and Water Conservation Fund State Side Program Complies With the Justice40 Initiative and Identify Data Necessary for the Program To Successfully Implement the U.S. Department of the Interior's "Equity Action Plan,"* we found that NPS did not take sufficient steps toward implementing the Justice40 Initiative because NPS had not completed and submitted required information to DOI's Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance that would assist NPS in measuring progress in implementing

Justice40 and ensuring meaningful stakeholder engagement. Two executive orders (EOs)—No. 13985, *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government*, and No. 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*—imposed requirements related to “racial equity” and “environmental justice” on certain NPS programs. EO No. 13985 emphasized the need to collect equity-related data, stating that the “lack of data has cascading effects and impedes efforts to measure and advance equity.” Despite NPS' ongoing efforts, we found that NPS did not identify in its draft implementation plan the data necessary to track, monitor, and report the impact and effectiveness of DOI's priority actions as required.

Without complete, timely, and accurate data, DOI will continue to face challenges in fostering accountability and accomplishing its mission efficiently.

OIG Oversight

In addition to the published work below, we are currently performing work that assesses BIE's work order closeouts.

OIG Published Work FYs 2022-2024

The U.S. Department of the Interior Is Making Progress in Its Management of Geospatial Data but Improvements Are Needed (Report No. 2024-ER-003)

USGS Laboratories Remain Vulnerable to Breaches of Scientific Integrity (Report No. 2022-CR-035)

The National Park Service Should Ensure the Land and Water Conservation Fund State Side Program Complies With the Justice40 Initiative and Identify Data Necessary for the Program To Successfully Implement the U.S. Department of the Interior's "Equity Action Plan" (Report No. 2022-ER-017)

The National Park Service Should Increase Monitoring and Oversight To Protect the Integrity and Recreational Value of the Land and Water Conservation Fund State Side Program (Report No. 2021-ER-026)

The National Park Service Faces Challenges in Managing Its Deferred Maintenance (Report No. 2020-CR-066)

Flash Report: Orphaned Wells Programs – The U.S. Department of the Interior's Efforts To Collect Data To Meet Annual Orphaned Wells Programs Reporting Requirements (Report No. 2022-INF-042)

The U.S. Department of the Interior Has an Opportunity To Protect Its Research and Development (Report No. 2022-CGD-023)

The Bureaus of Indian Affairs and Indian Education Have the Opportunity To Implement Additional Controls To Prevent or Detect Multi-dipping of Pandemic Response Funds (Report No. 2021-ER-015)

The U.S. Department of the Interior Needs To Continue To Strengthen Governance Practices To Improve Its Management of Geospatial Data (Report No. 2022-CGD-026)

Weaknesses in the BLM's Compensatory Mitigation Program Data Management (Report No. 2019-FIN-022)

Lack of Tracking and Unclear Guidance Identified in the U.S. Department of the Interior's Awareness Review Process for Freedom of Information Act Requests (Report No. 2019-ER-057)

The Bureau of Land Management Did Not Review the Federal Exclusions List Before Issuing Federal Mineral Leases (Report No. 2021-CR-007)

Better Internal Controls Could Ensure Accuracy of the Office of Natural Resources Revenue's Royalty Reporting and Adjustments (Report No. 2020-CR-009)

Recommendation Progress

Of the **77** recommendations we made to DOI and its bureaus and offices in the above reports, **28** are closed.

DOI is the steward of Federal energy resources—including oil, gas, coal, and renewable energy—that provide 30 percent of the United States’ domestically produced energy. DOI collected \$22 billion in FY 2022 and \$18 billion in FY 2023 in revenues from leases for energy and natural resource development on the Outer Continental Shelf and onshore Federal and Indian lands. According to the [ONRR Director](#), “[e]very American benefits from the revenues generated from mineral resources, either directly through payments to American Indian Tribes and Individual Indian Mineral Owners or indirectly through payments to the Historic Preservation Fund, the Reclamation Fund, states, and the General Fund of the U.S. Treasury.” Energy development can also, however, pose significant risks to the environment, including dust and water runoff, methane emissions, and oil spill contamination. As we identified in our previous management challenge reports, DOI continues to face challenges in managing complex energy operations, including collecting revenues; overseeing leasing; and ensuring that development is safe, efficient, and sustainable.

As a result of a coordinated effort between our Energy Investigations Unit, DOI, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Attorney’s Office, an oil and gas company with offices in Aztec, New Mexico, and Houston, Texas, agreed to pay \$34.6 million to resolve its liability for alleged False Claims Act violations. The settlement resolves allegations that, when reporting and paying royalties from August 2017 through December 2018, the oil and gas company knowingly made payments to the Federal Government based on estimated volumes and prices without indicating that the payments were based on estimates and without subsequently updating its payments to reflect actual volumes and values, as required. This resulted in a significant underpayment of royalties owed to the United States.

In January 2024, GAO [reported](#) that BSEE did not effectively ensure that industry operators meet decommissioning deadlines for offshore wells and platforms at the end of their useful lives. GAO concluded that BSEE’s administrative enforcement tools and its use of them were ineffective and that these enforcement issues have contributed to widespread decommissioning delays that have

grown into a substantial backlog. For example, GAO found that “[o]ver 75 percent of end-of-lease and idle infrastructure in the Gulf was overdue under BSEE’s deadlines as of June 2023—over 2,700 wells and 500 platforms.” Due to these issues as well as challenges managing BLM’s workforce and collecting what GAO described as DOI’s fair share of revenue from oil and gas produced on Federal lands and waters, GAO included [Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources](#) on its High Risk List.

Increasing renewable energy—including solar, onshore and offshore wind, geothermal, and wave and tidal energy—is a top priority for DOI. For example, DOI [reported](#) that BOEM had approved “the nation’s tenth commercial-scale offshore wind energy project approved under President Biden’s leadership”—these approvals represent more than 15 gigawatts of clean energy, enough to power nearly 5.25 million homes. BOEM also [announced](#) that it held four auctions for offshore wind leases that brought in almost \$5.5 billion in high bids, including a record-breaking sale of a lease off the coast of New York and New Jersey, a sale of a lease off the coast of the Carolinas, and the first-ever sale of offshore leases in the Pacific and Gulf of Mexico. In addition, BLM has a significant renewable energy role in reviewing applications for testing and development of solar and wind energy sites and providing sites on public lands previously identified as solar energy zones for environmentally sound development. In its FY 2024 [budget request](#), BLM proposed funding “to promote and facilitate increased renewable energy development, including \$72.5 million in the Renewable Energy Management program and an increase of \$11.0 million in the Resource Management Planning program.” According to the request, these funds will support BLM siting, leasing, processing rights-of-way applications, and overseeing renewable energy projects and transmission lines connecting to renewable energy projects. Further, BOR owns 77 hydroelectric power plants and operates 53 of those plants¹⁰ to generate approximately 15 percent of the hydroelectric power produced in the United States. Each year, on average, BOR generates about 40 million megawatt hours of electricity and collects more than \$1 billion in gross power revenues for the Federal Government.

¹⁰ The remaining 24 plants are operated and maintained by a non-Federal entity under the provisions of a formal transfer contract or agreement.

OIG Oversight

In addition to the published work below, we are currently performing work that assesses ONRR's civil penalty program and USGS' efforts to construct an energy and minerals research facility.

OIG Published Work FYs 2022-2024

The U.S. Department of the Interior Made Progress in Implementing Recommendations Related to Rights-of-Way Management (Report No. 2023-CR-027)

USGS Laboratories Remain Vulnerable to Breaches of Scientific Integrity (Report No. 2022-CR-035)

The U.S. Department of the Interior Should Comply with Requirements in Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Section 40206, "Critical Minerals Supply Chains and Reliability" (Report No. 2023-ISP-013)

Summary: Company Failed to Report Production and Pay Royalties for Oil and Gas in Colorado (Report No. 21-0282)

The Bureau of Land Management Made Progress in Implementing Corrective Actions To Improve Its Idle Well Program (Report No. 2022-CGD-020)

The U.S. Department of the Interior Does Not Analyze Effective Royalty Rates (Report No. 2021-CR-042)

Flash Report: Orphaned Wells Programs – The U.S. Department of the Interior's Efforts To Collect Data To Meet Annual Orphaned Wells Programs Reporting Requirements (Report No. 2022-INF-042)

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement Made Progress in Implementing Corrective Actions To Improve Its Oversight of the Abandoned Mine Lands Program, but Some Recommendations Remain Outstanding (Report No. 2022-CR-022)

Recommendation for the Department's Coordination Concerning Cryptomining Operations Impacting Federal and Tribal Resources (Report No. 22-0897)

Flash Report: Orphaned Wells Programs – Breaking Down Responsibilities for Addressing Orphaned Wells (Report No. 2022-INF-043)

Flash Report: Abandoned Mine Lands Program – The U.S. Department of the Interior Prepares to Spend \$11.3 Billion (Report No. 2022-INF-037)

Summary: Oil Producer Trespassed on Federal Land in Colorado (Report No. 21-0867)

The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement Made Progress in Implementing Corrective Actions to Improve Its Oil Spill Preparedness Program (Report No. 2022-CR-009)

Improvements Needed in the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement's Procedures Concerning Offshore Venting and Flaring Record Reviews (Report No. OI-OG-19-0577-1)

The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement Should Implement Policies and Procedures For Any Future Special Case Royalty Relief Programs (Report No. 2021-CR-006)

Better Internal Controls Could Ensure Accuracy of the Office of Natural Resources Revenue's Royalty Reporting and Adjustments (Report No. 2020-CR-009)

The Bureau of Land Management Did Not Review the Federal Exclusions List Before Issuing Federal Mineral Leases (Report No. 2021-CR-007)

Allegations of Safety and Employee Health Hazards and Excessive Flaring at the Cliffside Helium Enrichment Unit (Report No. OI-OG-21-0640-1)

Recommendation Progress

Of the **39** recommendations we made to DOI and its bureaus and offices in the above reports, **25** are closed.

GAO High-Risk Area

Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources





Water and Power Management

As the country's largest wholesale water supplier, BOR maintains 490 dams and operates 294 reservoirs with a total storage capacity of 140 million acre-feet. It also provides 140,000 western farmers—1 out of every 5—with irrigation water for 10 million farmland acres that produce 60 percent of the Nation's vegetables and one quarter of its fresh fruit and nut crops. As the second largest producer of hydropower in the United States, BOR operates 53 hydroelectric powerplants that annually produced, on average, 40 billion kilowatt-hours. In addition to the IIJA funding discussed previously, BOR received an additional \$4 billion in funding through the IRA for drought mitigation in the West, with priority given to Colorado River Basin activities, including compensation for reduction in water diversions and funding for system conservation projects and ecosystem restoration to address drought.

In our 2023 *Flash Report: The U.S. Department of the Interior's Infrastructure Investment for Aging Infrastructure and Dam Safety*, we described risks that may strain water supplies, identified how DOI plans to use IIJA funding, and discussed BOR's oversight strategy of the funds. BOR has asset management responsibility for a diverse portfolio of water- and power-related constructed assets, but a number of its facilities are more than 100 years old. Approximately 90 percent of BOR's dams were built before 1970, with approximately 50 percent of the total dams being built between 1900 and 1950. Pursuant to its [initial spend plan](#), BOR intends to provide \$3 billion in funding for major rehabilitation and replacement

activities related to aging infrastructure and resources. In addition, the spend plan states that BOR will coordinate selection criteria and allocate \$500 million for the Dam Safety Program.

In our August 2024 audit, *Stronger Controls Needed Over the Bureau of Reclamation's Central Valley Project Cost Allocation and Ratesetting Processes*, we found BOR did not effectively design, implement, and operate internal controls necessary to ensure the Central Valley Project's (CVP's) cost allocation and ratesetting processes are accurate. Specifically, BOR did not conduct oversight or develop standard operating procedures for the cost allocation process. We also found incomplete evidence that management performed required reviews of the ratesetting schedules, and we concluded that the ratesetting procedures themselves were outdated and missing in some cases. The cost to construct the CVP totaled approximately \$4.4 billion. Currently, the contractors are responsible for repaying the unpaid balance of approximately \$7.8 million—a portion of the \$1.3 billion cost attributed to the authorized purpose of providing water. In addition, the contractors must pay a proportional share of the CVP's annual operations and maintenance costs, which is approximately \$54 million. Given the significant Federal investment in the CVP, as well as ongoing charges to contractors, BOR must establish appropriate controls to ensure costs are accurately allocated and that water rates are established to sufficiently recoup the remaining construction costs and the ongoing costs to operate and maintain the CVP.

Given ongoing historic drought and low runoff conditions in the Colorado River Basin,¹¹ BOR has initiated a three-component water conservation plan for the lower Colorado River Basin, including:

1. Implementing IRA projects with the short-term goal of retaining higher water volumes in Lake Mead. In calendar year 2023, BOR conserved approximately 500,000-acre feet of water equaling nearly seven feet in elevation in Lake Mead. As of January 2024, BOR has executed 21 system conservation agreements.
2. Implementing water conservation plans that reduce Lower Colorado River water use. Entitlement holders will propose prices and provide an economic explanation justifying the proposed price. As of January 2024, BOR has executed one consumptive use reduction agreement.

3. Conserving the Lower Colorado River system with long-term efficiency improvements, typically associated with construction and infrastructure projects. In May 2023, BOR requested proposals for projects from Colorado River and Central Arizona Project water delivery contract holders or entitlement holders. As of September 2024, three of these projects have been approved.

Both the drought mitigation funds and several key reservoir and water management decisional documents and agreements that govern lake operation in the Colorado River Basin are set to expire in 2026. Even though drought conditions have improved since April 2023, DOI faces challenges in managing the delivery of water, protection of fish and wildlife habitat, and the generation of hydroelectric power.

OIG Oversight

In addition to our published work below, we are focusing our ongoing oversight work on audits of BOR's administration of IRA funding in the Upper and Lower Colorado River Basins. Additionally, we initiated work examining BOR's Salton Sea restoration and drought mitigation measures.

OIG Published Work FYs 2022-2024

Stronger Controls Needed Over the Bureau of Reclamation's Central Valley Project Cost Allocation and Ratesetting Processes
(Report No. 2022-WR-048)

Flash Report: The Bureau of Reclamation's Drought Mitigation Plans and Activities
(Report No. 2023-WR-032)

Flash Report: Ecosystem Restoration and Resilience Programs – The U.S. Department of the Interior Prepares to Spend \$1.36 Billion
(Report No. 2022-INF-050)

Flash Report: The U.S. Department of the Interior's Infrastructure Investment for Aging Infrastructure and Dam Safety (Report No. 2022-INF-049)

Recommendation Progress

Of the **20** recommendations we made to DOI and its bureaus and offices in the above reports, **5** are closed.



¹¹ According to [Congressional Research Service Report No. IN11982](#), Federal and State Governments originally approved the Colorado River Compact with the assumption that river flows would average 16.4 million acre-feet per year. Actual annual flows from 1906 to 2023 were approximately 14.6 million acre-feet and have dropped to 12.1 million acre-feet per year since the basin's drought began in 2000.



Responsibility to Native Americans

DOI is the primary Federal agency charged with carrying out the United States' trust responsibility to American Indian and Alaska Native people, maintaining the Government-to-Government relationship with the federally recognized Indian Tribes, and promoting and supporting Tribal self-determination. DOI's [FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan](#) establishes a framework to fulfill its legal obligations to identify, protect, and conserve Tribal trust resources; carry out its trust relationship with Tribal Nations; and engage in consultation on plans or actions that affect Tribal interests. DOI Indian Affairs—including BIA, BIE, BTFA, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs—is responsible for carrying out DOI's trust responsibilities, which include enhancing quality of life and promoting economic opportunity. DOI Indian Affairs also has the obligation to uphold Tribal sovereignty and provide quality education opportunities in accordance with Tribes' needs for cultural and economic wellbeing.

Our work has identified an array of challenges related to the misuse of financial resources. In an October 2023 investigation, *Summary: Contractor Wrongfully Obtained Over \$10 Million in Buy Indian Act Contracts from BIA and BIE*, we found a contractor falsely obtained 241 contracts totaling more than \$10.7 million from BIA and BIE. We confirmed that the company's President and Owner fraudulently self-certified to be an enrolled member of a federally recognized Indian Tribe. In addition, we confirmed that for at least five contracts, the

contractor failed to comply with at least one of the requirements related to Indian Economic Enterprise and Indian Small Business Economic Enterprise set-aside contracts. In another investigation from December 2023, *Summary: Former BIA Employee Defrauds Government by Misusing Government Credit Cards*, we found that a BIA employee used Government credit cards issued to her and other BIA employees to defraud the Government of more than \$800,000 by making multiple unauthorized purchases of goods and services from legitimate vendors and directed unauthorized payments from Government credit cards into various fictitious vendor accounts she created and controlled.

In September 2023, we finalized an assessment tool to analyze safety and health risk at each of the 183 Indian schools BIE supports and oversees. To determine each school's risk level, we use data sources such as BIE's annual safety and health inspection reports for the last three years; annual budgets; and the facility condition index (value of school/deferred maintenance work orders). This tool has the capacity to update automatically as new information becomes available, and we are actively using it to identify schools for our own series of Indian school inspections. We are currently working on inspections for two schools and plan to issue our first report in the series in fall 2024.





OIG Oversight

In addition to our published work below, we are currently performing work that assesses the safety and health of Indian schools, BIA’s administration and oversight of acquisition functions, and BIE’s analysis of the Indian Student Equalization Program.

OIG Published Work FYs 2022-2024

Indian Affairs Is Unable To Effectively Manage Deferred Maintenance of School Facilities
(Report No. 2022-CR-036)

Summary: Former BIA Employee Defrauds Government by Misusing Government Credit Cards
(Report No. 18-1084)

Summary: Contractor Wrongfully Obtained Over \$10 Million in Buy Indian Act Contracts from BIA and BIE (Report No. 22-0007)

The Bureau of Indian Affairs’ and the Office of Insular Affairs’ Support for Climate Adaptation Practices
(Report No. 2022-ER-019)

The Chemawa Indian School Did Not Account for Its Financial Resources, and the Bureau of Indian Education Did Not Provide Financial Oversight
(Report No. 2022-CR-012)

The Bureau of Indian Affairs Can Improve the Closeout Process for Public Law 93-638 Agreements
(Report No. 2020-CGD-060)

Detention Facility Health and Safety Concerns
(Report No. 2022-WR-040-A)

Status of the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation’s Tribal Consultation Process and Activities
(Report No. 2020-WR-016)

Status of the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation’s Properties and Land Use Agreements
(Report No. 2020-WR-016-H)

The Bureau of Indian Affairs Great Plains Region Did Not Oversee CARES Act Funds Appropriately
(Report No. 2021-FIN-032)

The Omaha Tribe Did Not Account for CARES Act Funds Appropriately (Report No. 2021-FIN-032-B)

The Bureaus of Indian Affairs and Indian Education Have the Opportunity To Implement Additional Controls To Prevent or Detect Multi-dipping of Pandemic Response Funds (Report No. 2021-ER-015)

The Bureau of Indian Education, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians Need To Improve Accountability for Federal Funds (Report No. 2020 CGD-001)

The Three Affiliated Tribes Did Not Account for CARES Act Funds Appropriately (2021-FIN-032-C)

The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe Did Not Account for CARES Act Funds Appropriately
(Report No. 2021-FIN-032-A)

Summary: Tribal Administrator Stole Tribal Funds
(Report No. 17-0939)

Recommendation Progress

Of the **76** recommendations we made to DOI and its bureaus and offices in the above reports, **24** are closed.

GAO High-Risk Area

[Improving Federal Management of Programs That Serve Tribes and Their Members](#)

CHALLENGE AREA

Ensuring Health and Safety

DOI is responsible for the protection of the health and safety of its workforce and the public. According to its FY 2025 budget request, DOI employs more than 68,000 people and has more than 165,000 volunteers who support and serve more than 565 million visitors to public lands each year at approximately 2,400 locations across the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Insular Areas. Ensuring employee and public safety is a complex responsibility that touches on many different facets of

DOI's mission, including law enforcement; emergency response; public land management; infrastructure and facilities maintenance; and upholding trust responsibilities or commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Insular Areas. Below, we summarize DOI's challenges, plans, and progress on health and safety issues related to law enforcement and public safety, wildfire management, and climate change.



Law Enforcement and Public Safety

DOI's law enforcement and public safety responsibilities include protecting natural and cultural resources; working with Tribes; managing special events and providing crowd control in areas where multiple agencies must coordinate; and ensuring the safety of employees, volunteers, and visitors on public lands. Among executive branch departments, DOI has the fourth largest law enforcement component, totaling approximately 3,400 law enforcement officers that are assigned predominantly to four bureaus and offices: BIA, BLM, FWS, and NPS (which includes the U.S. Park Police (USPP)).

Concerns about excessive use of force by police have been longstanding, and in May 2022, the President issued EO No. 14074, *Advancing Effective, Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice Practices to Enhance Public Trust and Public Safety*. The order includes guidance regarding use-of-force standards for law enforcement. Much of our work pertaining to law enforcement in recent years has focused on use-of-force issues and public trust in law enforcement.

Specifically, in a December 2023 *Review of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Actions Related to January 6, 2021*, we reported on NPS and USPP actions in preparing for a demonstration at the Ellipse in Washington, DC. Although we found that NPS complied with legal requirements in issuing the permit for the demonstration, our review highlighted several NPS failures. This included safety officials not reviewing the fire and life safety documentation or conducting a site

inspection as required by NPS policy; not complying with notice requirements regarding prohibited items at the Ellipse; and failing to retain pre-demonstration photographs of the event site that could have been used to seek recovery for damages to Federal property. Additionally, we found the permittee intentionally failed to disclose information to NPS regarding its knowledge of a post-demonstration march.

In our August 2024 audit, *Improvements Needed to the U.S. Department of the Interior's and Bureaus' Oversight of Radio Infrastructure*, we found that the bureaus generally did not properly inventory or inspect radio infrastructure as required by the DOI Office of the Chief Information Officer's directive regarding radio communications site standards. Specifically, BIA, FWS, and NPS did not properly track or inventory their radio infrastructure and could not provide complete or accurate inventories from their facilities asset management systems. In contrast, BLM was more effective at inventorying its radio infrastructure due to its implementation of more comprehensive policies and procedures. Further, none of the four bureaus sufficiently completed condition assessments. DOI law enforcement officers, firefighters, and emergency responders rely on radio communications to conduct mission-critical operations and quickly respond to emergency situations. Without regular condition assessments, none of the four bureaus were able to ensure that their radio infrastructure was maintained in accordance with the directive.



In a May 2023 report, *Alleged Excessive Use of Force, NPS, DC*, we also investigated and substantiated allegations that during the operation to disperse protesters in and around Lafayette Park on June 1, 2020, two USPP officers used excessive force against two members of the news media. In another investigation, *Summary: Former USPP Employee Violated Post-Government Employment Law*, we found that a USPP Sergeant sought employment with a company at the same time he oversaw its work associated with a USPP contract. As a result, he pleaded guilty to one misdemeanor count of violating 18 U.S.C. § 208, “Acts affecting a personal financial interest” and was sentenced to 24 months of probation and fined \$1,000.

Given the increased public interest in law enforcement’s use of force and associated techniques and practices,

we also evaluated DOI and bureau taser¹² policies and oversight in a 2023 report, *The U.S. Department of the Interior Can Improve Its Oversight of Tasers*. We found that DOI had not finalized its taser policy, and its interim policy did not address the actions supervisors must take after receiving an incident report on a taser deployment. We also found that supervisors did not perform thorough reviews of incident reports. Further, bureaus provided inconsistent and incomplete taser recertification training. Finally, we found that officers did not routinely test tasers before their shifts, as required by existing bureau policies. Although tasers are classified as less-than-lethal weapons, they still carry the risk of causing serious harm or death; therefore, it is critical for DOI to have consistent and clear policies to prevent or minimize officers’ misuse of tasers and the chances of taser malfunction.

OIG Oversight

In addition to the published work below, we are currently performing work assessing Indian Affairs’ management of BIA-funded and/or -operated detention programs as well as the BIA Missing and Murdered Unit’s efforts to address American Indian and Alaska Native missing persons or murder cases.

OIG Published Work FYs 2022-2024

Improvements Needed to the U.S. Department of the Interior’s and Bureaus’ Oversight of Radio Infrastructure (Report No. 2021-WR-020)

Review of the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Actions Related to January 6, 2021 (Report No. 21-0286)

Summary: Former USPP Employee Violated Post Government Employment Law (Report No. 19-0669)

Alleged Excessive Use of Force, NPS, DC (Report No. 21-0009)

Detention Facility Health and Safety Concerns (Report No. 2022-WR-040-A)

The U.S. Department of the Interior Can Improve Its Oversight of Tasers (Report No. 2019-WR-026)

The U.S. Department of the Interior and Its Bureaus Have Not Finalized and Implemented Their Body Camera Policies (Report No. 2021-WR-019)

U.S. Park Police Supervisor Misused Government Vehicle To Drive to Outside Employment (Report No. 21-0618)

Review of the U.S. Park Police’s Communications Recording System in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area (Report No. OI-SI-21-0171-W)

Safety Concerns and Other Deficiencies at the U.S. Park Police’s Dispatch Operations Center in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area (Report No. 21-0171)

Recommendation Progress

Of the **48** recommendations we made to DOI and its bureaus and offices in the above reports, **17** are closed.

¹² We use the term “taser” to refer to electronic control devices.



Wildfire Management

Wildfires can have devastating effects on local communities, public resources, ecosystems, life, and personal property. According to the [National Interagency Fire Center](#), more than 56,000 wildfires burned around 2.7 million acres in the United States during 2023; 18 percent of these fires burned 1.5 million acres of Federal land, representing a disproportional 54 percent of total acres burned. In 2024, DOI fire [suppression costs](#) totaled more than \$466 million. DOI's wildfire management program consists of the Office of Wildland Fire (responsible for oversight) and the four bureaus with wildland fire management responsibilities—BIA, BLM, FWS, and NPS. The program manages wildfire response for more than 500 million acres of national parks, wildlife refuges and preserves, other public lands, and Indian reservations, and it is part of the Federal interagency wildfire response framework.

In our March 2024 evaluation, *The U.S. Department of the Interior Did Not Ensure Its Wildland Firefighting Bureaus Conducted Routine Vehicle Inspections*, we found that, overall, DOI's wildland firefighting vehicles were not routinely inspected for mechanical and safety issues in accordance with bureau requirements. Specifically, we found that the bureaus that have such equipment (BIA, BLM, FWS, and NPS) were missing the most recent annual and daily inspections for, on average, 51 percent and 56 percent of their vehicles, respectively. Additionally, we noted that there were differing inspection and preparedness review practices across bureaus as well as a lack of Departmentwide policy and oversight from DOI's Office of Wildland Fire, which is responsible for ensuring consistent policy to implement a single, coordinated wildland firefighting program.

DOI continues to face challenges we have previously reported, including maintaining and recruiting a firefighting workforce, managing ecosystems to reduce fuels, and responding to active wildfires. In a 2022 [report](#), GAO identified seven barriers to recruitment and retention and found that in FY 2021, more than half of the Federal firefighters were employed as seasonal firefighters. In addition to previous increases to firefighters' pay, DOI has taken several steps to address workforce challenges

including implementing a new occupational series for Federal wildland firefighters intended to identify, define, and provide for their unique duties and responsibilities and foster more standardized career trajectories and specified occupational paths. DOI [reported](#) that it is developing a joint Federal Wildland Firefighter Health and Wellbeing Program with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and anticipates significant progress on this front in 2024. Additionally, in 2023, DOI conducted fuels management activities on 2.59 million acres intended to manage vegetation to reduce the intensity, severity, and negative effects of wildfire. DOI's wildland fire management budget request notes that in recent decades, the average wildfire has become larger, costlier, and more complex, and wildfires increasingly occur in the United States year-round.

We believe that DOI is likely to continue to face increased costs associated with responding to wildfire activity, which is exacerbated by abnormally dense vegetation, increased development in or near wildlands, drought, and other climate stressors. DOI's [FY 2025 budget request](#) for the wildland fire management program includes a proposed \$1.6 billion to increase firefighter pay, enhance support for firefighter health and wellbeing, expand firefighting capacity, and provide increased housing for wildland fire personnel, as well as other wildfire funding increases beyond workforce reforms.

OIG Oversight

We are currently performing work that assesses DOI's wildland fire fuels management programs.

OIG Published Work FYs 2022-2024

The U.S. Department of the Interior Did Not Ensure Its Wildland Firefighting Bureaus Conducted Routine Vehicle Inspections (Report No. 2022-ER-021)

Recommendation Progress

Of the **6** recommendations we made to DOI and its bureaus and offices in the above report, **0** are closed.

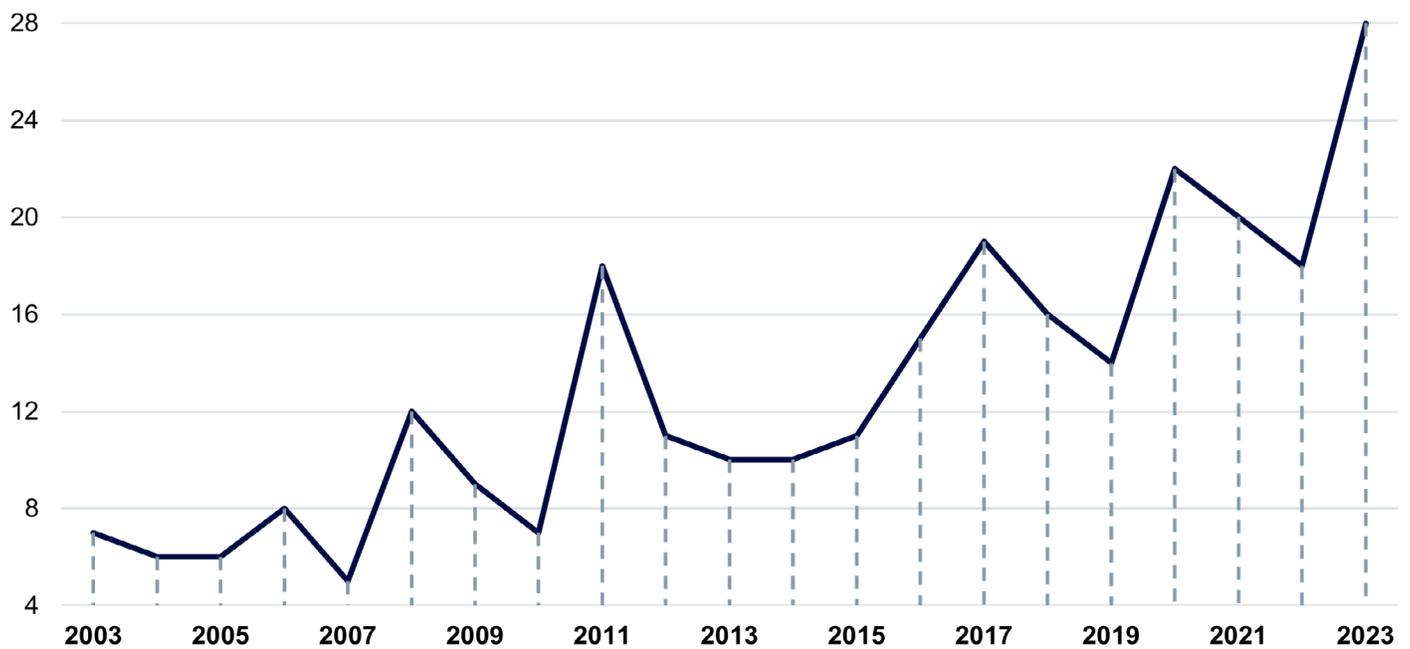


Climate Change Response

According to the U.S. Government’s [Fifth National Climate Assessment](#), due to climate change, extreme weather events such as heatwaves, heavier rainfall, intense hurricanes, and wildfires, have become more frequent and severe. These events expose Federal real property assets—including office buildings, levees, roads, and bridges—to physical damage that can require substantial resources to repair or rebuild. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [reported](#) that calendar year 2023 had the highest annual disaster count in the last 44 years with 28 separate billion-dollar weather and climate disaster events throughout the country (see Figure 3).

In our March 2024 *Flash Report: The Bureau of Reclamation’s Drought Mitigation Plans and Activities*, we provided information on BOR’s use of IRA funding to mitigate drought, described risks, identified how BOR has stated it plans to use IRA funding to mitigate drought, and discussed BOR’s oversight and reporting strategy for the funds. We reported on oversight risks related to lack of experience, financial standing of recipients, and verifying conserved amounts in addressing drought mitigation activities. We also identified the potential risk that funding for specific long-term projects may not be obligated by FY 2026, and that they may accordingly not be initiated.

Figure 3: Number of United States Weather and Climate Disasters Exceeding \$1 Billion¹³ in Damage 2003-2023



DOI told us that in addition to the effects of climate change on real property, climate change affects core elements of DOI’s mission, including energy and mineral development, livestock grazing, recreation, and carrying out the United States’ special relationships with American Indians, Alaska Natives, and the Native Hawaiian community. DOI continues to face challenges in effectively and efficiently implementing its policies that respond to the effects of climate change. In our May 2024 *Flash Report: Status of the U.S. Department of the Interior’s 2019 Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief*, we reported on the Additional

Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act, 2019 (Pub. L. No. 116-20), which included funds for expenses related to the consequences of Hurricanes Lane, Florence, and Michael, and of Typhoons Mangkhut and Yutu. The Act provided DOI with approximately \$327 million. We found that NPS, FWS, BOR, and OIA have obligated more than 80 percent of their 2019 disaster relief appropriations through contracts, grants, and other procurements as of September 30, 2023. We also reported on DOI bureau and office challenges in awarding and expending the 2019 disaster relief funds.

¹³ According to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#), these disaster cost assessments were developed using the most comprehensive public and private sector sources and represent the estimated total costs of these events. All cost estimates are adjusted based on the Consumer Price Index.



DOI has taken steps to address the challenges related to its climate change response. In June 2024, DOI released its updated [Climate Adaptation Plan](#), which includes a risk assessment that uses historical data and future projections to measure DOI exposure to the impacts of climate change. It also includes an implementation plan that describes how DOI will build on recent actions to address climate hazards in the years to come. Since September 2023, DOI has released several Departmental Manual (DM) policies that focus on climate adaptation and

resilience by making the types of climate information used across DOI more consistent. For example, [522 DM 1](#) emphasizes the increasing need for adaptive management;¹⁴ [523 DM 1](#) was revised to reestablish DOI’s climate adaptation policy; [526 DM 1](#) was revised to reinforce the need to apply high-quality climate information and consider climate uncertainty in resource management planning and decision making; and [604 DM 1](#) was revised to strengthen consideration of climate change in landscape-level decision making.

OIG Oversight

In addition to the published work below, we are currently performing work that assesses BLM’s management of applications for wind and solar energy development.

OIG Published Work FYs 2022-2024

Flash Report: The U.S. Department of the Interior’s Supplemental Funding in the Pacific Islands
(Report No. 2024-INF-001)

Flash Report: Status of the U.S. Department of the Interior’s 2019 Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief
(Report No. 2023-CR-029)

Flash Report: The Bureau of Reclamation’s Drought Mitigation Plans and Activities
(Report No. 2023-WR-032)

Flash Report: Ecosystem Restoration and Resilience Programs – The U.S. Department of the Interior Prepares to Spend \$1.36 Billion
(Report No. 2022-INF-050)

The Bureau of Indian Affairs’ and the Office of Insular Affairs’ Support for Climate Adaptation Practices
(Report No. 2022-ER-019)

The U.S. Department of the Interior Could Expand Its Use of Contracting Flexibilities and Should Establish an Acquisition Policy for Future Disasters
(Report No. 2020-CGD-006)

Recommendation Progress

Of the **15** recommendations we made to DOI and its bureaus and offices in the above reports, **5** are closed.

GAO High-Risk Area

[Limiting the Federal Government’s Fiscal Exposure by Better Managing Climate Change Risks](#)

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¹⁴ When it [announced](#) these policies, DOI described adaptive management as the “process of regularly evaluating the effects of management actions on resources to improve outcomes.”



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