



## **U.S. Department of the Interior**

### **2023 White House Tribal Nations Summit Progress Report**

On December 6-7, 2023, the Department of the Interior hosted the [2023 White House Tribal Nations Summit](#). The Summit provided an opportunity for Biden-Harris administration and Tribal leaders to discuss ways the federal government can invest in and strengthen nation-to-nation relationships as well as ensure that progress in Indian Country endures for years to come.

During the two-day event, President Biden, Vice President Harris, Secretary Deb Haaland, Cabinet members, and other senior Administration officials announced a number of new actions that build on the Biden-Harris administration's progress to strengthen Indian Country. The Administration will continue to promote nation-to-nation partnerships; strengthen the understanding of and respect for Tribal sovereignty and Indigenous history; protect the health, safety, and welfare of Indigenous women, children and families; and make it easier for Tribal Nations to access federal funding.

Secretary Haaland and the Interior Department have made [strengthening Indian Country a top priority](#). A [report](#) detailing major announcements and progress in Indian Country across the Administration can be found on the White House website. Key milestones and progress specific to the work of the Interior Department under Secretary Haaland's leadership include:

#### **RESTORING AND PROTECTING TRIBAL HOMELANDS**

##### **New Regulations to Improve Fee-to-Trust Process**

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs announced a final rule to update the federal regulations governing fee-to-trust, or land-into-trust, acquisitions that transfer land title to the United States to be held in trust for the benefit of a Tribe or individual Tribal citizen. Consistent with President Biden's commitment to make it easier for Tribes to place land into trust, this final rule will make this process simpler, more efficient, and less expensive.

##### **Increasing Tribal Co-Stewardship of Lands and Waters**

The Department released its second annual report on Tribal co-stewardship, which outlines implementation of Secretary's Order 3403 and highlights the agreements entered into in the past year. Since S.O. 3403 was signed, the Administration has celebrated several significant and innovative co-stewardship arrangements providing Tribes a greater role in the management of federal lands and waters that have cultural and natural resources of significance and value to their respective communities. Secretary Haaland announced that in the past year, the Administration has signed nearly 200 new co-stewardship agreements with Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations and consortiums. At last year's Summit, 20 agreements had been signed.

### **Hanford National Monument Sacred Sites Memorandum of Understanding**

The Departments of the Interior and Energy entered into a Secretarial Memorandum of Understanding to establish a collaborative framework to improve protection of/access to Laliik or “Rattlesnake Mountain,” located within the Hanford nuclear site in Benton County, Washington. This effort will increase access to conduct traditional harvesting and enable cultural and ceremonial activities for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Nez Perce Tribe, Yakama Tribes, and the Wanapum Band.

### **Land Buy-Back Report**

The Department [announced the conclusion of the Land Buy-Back Program](#) for Tribal Nations, a decade-long effort to consolidate and return land to Tribal ownership. Over the course of the program, nearly 3 million acres in 15 states were consolidated and restored to Tribal trust ownership and \$1.69 billion was paid to more than 123,000 interested individuals. Appropriated funding for the Buy-Back Program ended in November 2022, pursuant to the Settlement and Claims Resolution Act of 2010. As part of the Program’s conclusion, the Department released a report outlining the history, best practices and lessons learned through its implementation.

### **Boundary Waters Withdrawal**

[On January 26, 2023, Secretary Haaland signed Public Land Order 7917](#), withdrawing approximately 225,504 acres in the Superior National Forest in northeastern Minnesota from disposition under the United States mineral and geothermal leasing laws for a 20-year period, subject to valid existing rights. This action will help protect the Rainy River watershed, including the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the 1854 Ceded Territory of the Chippewa Bands, from the potential adverse impacts of new mineral and geothermal exploration and development.

### **HEARTH Act Ordinance Approvals**

Under the Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Home Ownership Act, or HEARTH Act, Tribes with Secretary of the Interior-approved Tribal leasing regulations are authorized to negotiate and enter into leases without further approvals by the Federal Government. To date, 105 Tribal leasing regulations have been approved by the Secretary of the Interior.

## **INVESTING IN INDIAN COUNTRY**

### **Orphaned Wells Cleanup to Reduce Impacts of Methane Pollution in Tribal Communities**

As a part of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investments in cleaning up methane pollution, \$150 million is set aside for Tribal orphaned well cleanups. In September 2023, the Department awarded \$39 million in BIL funding to 10 Tribes to plug hundreds of orphaned oil and gas wells and remediate legacy pollution in Tribal communities. Additionally, the Department has awarded \$560 million to support Tribal communities and states that have plugged 6,000 orphaned oil and gas wells. Another round of funding—\$50 million—has been released to Tribes to plug, remediate, and restore orphaned wells and well sites on Tribal lands. These activities will help reduce methane emissions, clean up legacy pollution, and provide cleaner air and water for Tribes.

### **Indian Water Rights Settlements**

The Department distributed \$2.4 billion in funding for Indian Water Rights Settlements from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The settlements that have received funding are: Ak-Chin Indian Water Community Rights Act Animas-La Plata Project (Colorado Ute), AZ Water Settlements Act Implementation - San Carlos Irrigation Project Rehabilitation, Blackfeet Water Rights Settlement, Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes - Montana Water Rights Protection Act, Crow Tribe Water Rights Settlement, Gila River Indian Community - Pima Maricopa Irrigation Project, Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project, OM&R, Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project, Navajo-Utah Water Settlement, Nez Perce Settlement – Snake River Water Rights Settlement Act, San Carlos Apache Tribe - Distribution System, the Southern Arizona Water Rights Settlement - Farm Extension, the Southern Arizona Water Rights Settlement – Cooperative Fund, and White Mountain Apache Tribe Water Settlement.

### **Bolstering Tribal Water Infrastructure**

In February 2023, the Department provided \$26.33 million through Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for the Garrison-Diversion Unit of the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program in North Dakota for efforts associated with construction of water treatment plants, as well as efforts to support service on the Spirit Lake, Standing Rock and Fort Berthold Reservations; \$15 million for the Fort Peck Reservation – Dry Prairie Rural Water System in Montana to support substantial completion of the project; and \$12 million for the Jicarilla Apache Rural Water System in New Mexico to support progress toward water treatment plant upgrades. Currently, DOI is continuing to implement the \$250 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding for dam safety, water sanitation, irrigation and power systems, and other facilities.

### **Tribal Climate Resilience**

In July 2023, the [Department announced the availability of \\$120 million](#) in funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act to help Tribal communities plan for the most severe climate-related environmental threats to their homelands. Tribal communities can use this funding to proactively plan to adapt to these threats and safely relocate critical community infrastructure. This was one of the largest amounts of annual funding made available to Tribes and Tribal organizations in the history of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Tribal Climate Annual Awards Program.

### **Tribal Electrification Program**

On August 15, 2023, the Department [announced](#) the launch of a new program and availability of \$72.5 million in initial funding through the Inflation Reduction Act to help Tribal communities electrify homes. This investment is a critical step toward the goal of electrifying all homes in Indian Country with renewable energy sources and advances the Biden-Harris Administration's work to reach a carbon-free electricity sector by 2035.

### **America the Beautiful Challenge Grants**

In 2022 and 2023, the Biden-Harris administration joined the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and public-and private-sector partners in announcing a total of more than \$232 million in grants through the *America the Beautiful* Challenge. The \$91 million announced in 2023 landscape-scale conservation projects across states, U.S. Territories and Tribal nations, including 14 Tribally led projects in 2022 and 21 in 2023. Approximately 40% of 2023 grants and funding will support projects implemented by Indigenous communities, representing an unprecedented level of funding dedicated to Tribally led projects for a single grant program at NFWF.

## **FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR TRIBES AND NATIVE ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Buy Indian Act Implementation**

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs announced the distribution of over \$1.6 billion in contracts to Indian Economic Enterprises in Fiscal Year 2023 across the Department, which includes \$1.03 billion awarded to Indian Small Business Economic Enterprises, a historical high for the Department.

### **Access to Capital Federal Funding Clearinghouse**

The White House Council on Native American Affairs (WHCNA) is taking critical steps to improve access to capital across Indian Country, including through the [launch of an online clearinghouse](#) that will serve as a searchable repository for an up-to-date list of all federal funding opportunities, including grants and loans, available to Tribal Nations and Native businesses. The WHCNA and the Interior Department created a central database that will ensure that Tribes are able to easily navigate and access the financial opportunities provided across the federal government. The version of the website being unveiled today has over 500 federal funding programs and will serve as an initial version, with the goal of soliciting feedback to continually improve user experience.

### **New Small Native Businesses Search Tool**

In 2023, BIA developed and released the Small Business Administration's new Small Business Search Tool—streamlining SBA's Dynamic Business Search Tool—which allows enhanced searchability for government certifications and ownership and self-certifications, including any Native American-owned business. SBA provided help with outreach and raised awareness of this new tool.

## **FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

### **Partnership with InterTribal Buffalo Council.**

Interior has partnered with the InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC) to work on bison restoration, and USDA entered into a formal MOU with ITBC to support Tribal bison conservation. In July 2023, funds were provided to the ITBC to support herd development work.

### **Tribal-Led Bison Restoration**

In September 2023, the Department announced \$5 million, including \$3.5 million from the Inflation Reduction Act, to support the restoration of bison populations and grassland ecosystems in Tribal communities. The funding will support Tribally led initiatives to strengthen bison conservation and expansion, improved management of existing herds, and ecosystem restoration efforts in native grassland habitats.

### **Indigenous Food Hubs Pilot Program**

At the September 2022 White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, the Department announced its Indigenous Food Hubs Pilot Program, which aims to provide traditional Indigenous foods and commit to adopting Indigenous-based land and agricultural management practices to four BIE-operated schools and four BIA-operated detention centers. Currently, DOI's eight selected food hubs—four BIE-operated schools and four BIA-operated detention centers—are fully operational and, in 2023, hired its first nutritionist to join and lead the Indigenous Food Hub program.

### **Agricultural Leasing Regulations**

The Department held a series of three Tribal consultations and public listening sessions to gather important insight from key stakeholders, including Tribes, farmers, ranchers, and intertribal organizations, to consider revisions to modernize the Indian Agricultural Leasing regulations. Agriculture continues to play an important role in Tribal cultures and economic systems. Modernizing the regulations will better enable Tribes and producers to manage their lands, implement sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices, and continue Tribal traditions of self-sufficiency. The Department will continue to receive feedback as it moves toward formally making a proposed rule.

## **EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

### **New Initiative with AmeriCorps to Support the Indian Youth Service Corps**

A new initiative between the Department and AmeriCorps will expand access to Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards as a post-program benefit after completion of service in the Indian Youth Service Corps Program. This new partnership with AmeriCorps will expand access to post-secondary education, support for college tuition payment, opportunities at technical vocational training schools, and student loan debt repayment options. The partnership will streamline the application process for Tribal Nations as well as non-profit youth serving Tribal affiliated organizations to make these benefits more accessible to Tribal youth.

### **New Partnership with the Aspen Institute to Enhance Indigenous Youth Engagement**

The Department has [executed a new Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) with the Aspen Institute's Forum for Community Solutions, Fresh Tracks Program to support Indigenous youth engagement, education and employment initiatives, as well as maximize the benefits of shared learning and resources on strategies and policies. The MOU also aims to efficiently and equitably coordinate philanthropic, private sector, and federal funding to support community-led initiatives. The Aspen Program is currently partnering with the BIA and U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service on the Native Youth Climate Adaptation Congress. Strengthening this partnership will provide an opportunity for further collaboration with the Department's bureaus to support IYSC and other youth programs serving underserved communities.

### **New Resources to Address Legacy of Federal Indian Boarding Schools**

The Mellon Foundation has granted more than \$2.5 million in funding to help support the oral history project launched as part of the Department's [Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative](#). This first-of-its-kind undertaking for the U.S. government will facilitate the collection of a permanent oral history from survivors of the federal Indian boarding school system. This is part of the Department's ongoing work to tell the story of the era of federal Indian boarding school and the federal government's role in establishing the system. The Department and Smithsonian National Museum of American History are in ongoing discussions about how to support this work.

### **National Fund for Excellence in American Indian Education**

Last year, Secretary Haaland announced the renewal of this congressionally chartered, but long unused, non-profit organization to support education opportunities for American Indian students attending BIE schools. The Department is working to reinvigorate the organization to support Tribally led education initiatives, including work on Native language revitalization. The Department [announced a \\$300,000 investment](#) to continue supporting the National Fund's efforts to undertake projects for the direct benefit of students attending BIE schools.

## **HEALING FROM DESTRUCTIVE PAST POLICIES**

### **The Road to Healing**

In response to recommendations from the report, Secretary Haaland launched *The Road to Healing* in July 2022. As part of the nationwide tour, Secretary Haaland, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland and other leaders traveled across Indian Country to allow survivors of the federal Indian boarding school system to share their experiences through oral and written testimony. The 12 stops will help inform Volume II of DOI's report. Transcripts from each visit are [now available on the Department's website](#).

### **Final Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Rule**

The Department announced final revisions to its NAGPRA regulations that provide a systematic process for returning human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony to Tribal Nations and Native Hawaiian Organizations. The regulatory changes streamline the requirements for museums and federal agencies to inventory and identify human remains and cultural items in their collections.

### **Making BIE Tribal Schools Voter Registration Sites**

In 2022, New Mexico and Kansas became the first-ever states to designate the Department's two post-secondary schools: Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute and Haskell Indian Nations University, respectively, under the National Voter Registration Act. The states' designations will ensure that Haskell and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute students

and community members have access to voting information and opportunities to register to vote. In September 2023, the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute announced the establishment of its first-ever on-campus Voter Registration Office to start the new school year and, to complete the full implementation of the President’s Executive Order 14019, “Promoting Access to Voting.”

## **INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, KNOWLEDGE, AND CULTURE**

### **Centering Indigenous Knowledge in the Department’s Work**

The Department published guidance on the inclusion and protection of Indigenous Knowledge in decision making and scientific research. A new chapter in the agency’s Departmental Manual formalizes Indigenous Knowledge as a foundational piece of the Department’s mission and formally recognizes Indigenous Knowledge as one of the many important knowledge systems that contribute to the well-being of the United States and to the collective understanding of the natural world. While the Department’s bureaus and offices have at times historically included Indigenous Knowledge in certain actions or scientific research, this new chapter will facilitate and encourage the Department’s consistent, broad and equitable inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge internally and externally.

### **National Park Service Study on Indian Reorganization Act Period**

The Department announced that the National Park Service is initiating a new Theme Study that will help tell the story of the Indian Reorganization Period (1934–1950). This study will provide a national historic context and a list of properties for possible future National Historic Landmarks. This builds on the [Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative](#) and other efforts by DOI to ensure that Native American history is part of American History.

### **Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act**

In December 2022, President Biden signed the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act of 2021 into law. The Department convened 8 consultation sessions with Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian Organizations between May and August 2023 to discuss what should be included in the STOP Act regulations. Since then, the Departments of the Interior, State, Justice, and Homeland Security have been in the process of drafting new regulations to implement the STOP Act, including a process to obtain an export certification and standing up working groups. The four agencies anticipate meeting the statutory deadline of late December 2023 to release these regulations to prohibit the exportation of Native American cultural items and archaeological resources that have been illegally obtained.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY AND JUSTICE**

### **Law Enforcement Hiring**

Ensuring Tribal communities are safe remains a core responsibility of the United States. The BIA provides funding and direct services to Tribes for law enforcement, Tribal courts, and detention services. Recruiting and retaining law enforcement personnel is a historical challenge, but one

the Department remains committed to solving. To that end, the BIA has taken steps to better recruit and retain law enforcement by increasing law enforcement pay so that it is on par with the rest of the Department, utilizing incentives such as recruitment bonuses, and shortening the time to hire so that job applicants receive timely job notifications, and expanding recruitment efforts.

#### **Bureau of Indian Affairs Law Enforcement Pay Parity**

BIA is focused on improving the recruitment and retention of BIA law enforcement. BIA's foremost strategy on staffing is a pay parity initiative to bring BIA law enforcement pay levels in line with other federal law enforcement, resulting in up to an additional \$30,000 annually for BIA law enforcement officers.

### **HEALTH CARE**

#### **BIE's Behavioral Health and Wellness Program**

Over the past year, the Bureau of Indian Education has successfully grown its Behavioral Health and Wellness Program (BHWP). The BHWP provides students and staff at all Bureau-funded schools and programs with Indigenous focused, evidence-based and trauma-informed behavioral health and wellness supports. Services are tailored to meet the unique and diverse mental, cultural, spiritual, emotional, and social needs of Indigenous communities served by BIE. Services include tele-behavioral health counseling focused on providing short-term, solution-focused, and culturally sensitive virtual counseling, a BIE-specific 24/7 call line, and crisis support. BHWP's clinical team is primarily staffed with Indigenous clinicians, who have direct experience serving Native communities.

### **NEW TRIBAL OFFICES**

#### **Office of Strategic Partnerships**

The Department established Office of Strategic Partnerships within the BIA to build partnerships, leverage resources, and promote innovative solutions. Interior, in collaboration with Native Americans in Philanthropy, is working on partnerships to support Native-led conservation, economic development, and education.

#### **Office of Indigenous Communications & Technology**

The Department established the Office of Indigenous Communications & Technology to assist Tribal Nations and entities in managing, developing, and maintaining broadband infrastructure; creating new electromagnetic spectrum leasing mechanisms; providing technical assistance for the establishment of wireless, digital, and technological projects on Tribal lands; and developing technological services that can foster partnerships between Tribes and the tech industry (i.e., electric vehicles, light detection and ranging, and career opportunities in the tech industry for Indigenous participants). The Department is currently working on establishing the office's organizational structure, mission, and policy development goals, and announced two new positions including its Director and Senior Attorney Advisor positions.