



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

INSPECTOR GENERAL'S STATEMENT

Summarizing
the Major
Management
and Performance
Challenges Facing
the U.S. Department
of the Interior

FISCAL YEAR 2022





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

Memorandum

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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 2022*
Report No. 2022–ER–027

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 the DOI's *Agency Financial Report* for fiscal year 2022. 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: Tommy Beaudreau, Deputy Secretary, DOI
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Source: iStockphoto

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Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH

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

Our fiscal year (FY) 2022 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 the DOI's mission. For example, infrastructure-related challenges include ensuring accountability and managing funding availability as well as ensuring the health and safety of DOI employees and the public. Additionally, we recognize that climate change is a cross-cutting issue that presents challenges related to how the 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 the DOI's programs and offices, as well as U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reviews—including the GAO's [High Risk List](#). We link to our reports related to the challenge areas throughout this document.

The Office of Inspector General's (OIG's) oversight responsibilities are commensurate with the full range of the DOI's own programs and operations. These programs and operations are implemented through the DOI's 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.

CHALLENGE AREA

Managing Spending

The DOI's [FY 2023 budget request](#) includes more than \$18 billion to carry out its wide-ranging programs under the following categories: addressing climate challenges and building resilience; creating jobs to meet environmental and energy challenges; strengthening tribal nations; advancing and incorporating science across the DOI; promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion of underserved communities; and building agency capacity.

The DOI manages 20 percent of the Nation's lands and waters—many of which have historic

or cultural significance—including approximately 43,000 buildings and 83,000 structures 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, the DOI must manage significant spending, including contracts and financial assistance in the form of grants and cooperative agreements. Below, we summarize the DOI's challenges, plans, and progress in managing spending related to contract and grant oversight, deferred maintenance, and infrastructure.

Contract and Grant Oversight

The DOI is charged with managing significant financial assets, including contracts, grants, property, and other resources. According to [USAspending.gov](#), the DOI awarded approximately \$5.2 billion in grants and \$6.5 billion in contracts, totaling \$11.7 billion in FY 2022. Our prior audit work has consistently identified deficiencies in contract oversight, pre-award processes, and post-award monitoring. Additionally, the GAO [recently reviewed](#) the DOI's competitive grant award process and found that some grant programs lacked documentation to support certain award decisions.

The DOI also received \$635.9 million in disaster relief funding in FY 2022. These funds are available for emergency response activities related to drought, wildfires, hurricanes, and other natural disasters. Financial awards for emergency response activities are generally high risk because they are awarded quickly and often without

Our previous work has consistently identified issues with inadequate oversight and failure to follow Federal regulations for contracts and grants that were awarded using emergency funds. For example, in our 2021 inspection, *Pandemic-Related Contract Actions*, we found eight unfulfilled contract actions because the BIA did not receive goods as contracted. These unfulfilled contract actions resulted in \$771,254 in funds that could be put to better use.

competition, therefore requiring enhanced oversight. The DOI will continue to face challenges managing its contracts and grants to prevent fraud, waste, and mismanagement, particularly with the significant increase in funding opportunities.

OIG HIGHLIGHTED WORK (ISSUED FYs 2020–2022): CONTRACT AND GRANT OVERSIGHT

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)

The U.S. Department of the Interior Needs To Improve Support for Price Reasonableness Determinations and Justifications for Sole-Source Awards (Report No. 2020–FIN–008)

Summary: Alleged Misappropriation of Grant Funds by the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (Report No. 20–0118)

Summary: Company Improperly Billed Hours to National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant Overseen by the DOI (Report No. 20–0431)

Lessons Learned From Oversight of the Coastal Impact Assistance Program Grants (Report No. 2020–ER–057)

Risk Assessment of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Grant Closeout Process (Report No. 2019–FIN–037)

Recommendation Progress

Of the 32 recommendations we made to the DOI and its bureaus and offices, 21 are closed.

Deferred Maintenance

For years, the DOI has stated that it has not had sufficient funding for annual maintenance for its varied resources and assets—including national parks, historic sites, and Indian schools—and that this can pose a risk to public and employee health and safety. When maintenance and repairs are not completed on schedule, work may be delayed, or deferred, until later—the DOI refers to this as deferred maintenance. According to the DOI's [Agency Financial Reports](#), the estimated cost of its deferred maintenance has increased from \$16 billion in FY 2015 to almost \$31 billion in FY 2021 (see Figure 1).

In August 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act (Pub. L. No. 116–152) became law and authorized up to \$1.9 billion per fiscal year from 2021 to 2025 to reduce deferred maintenance on public lands

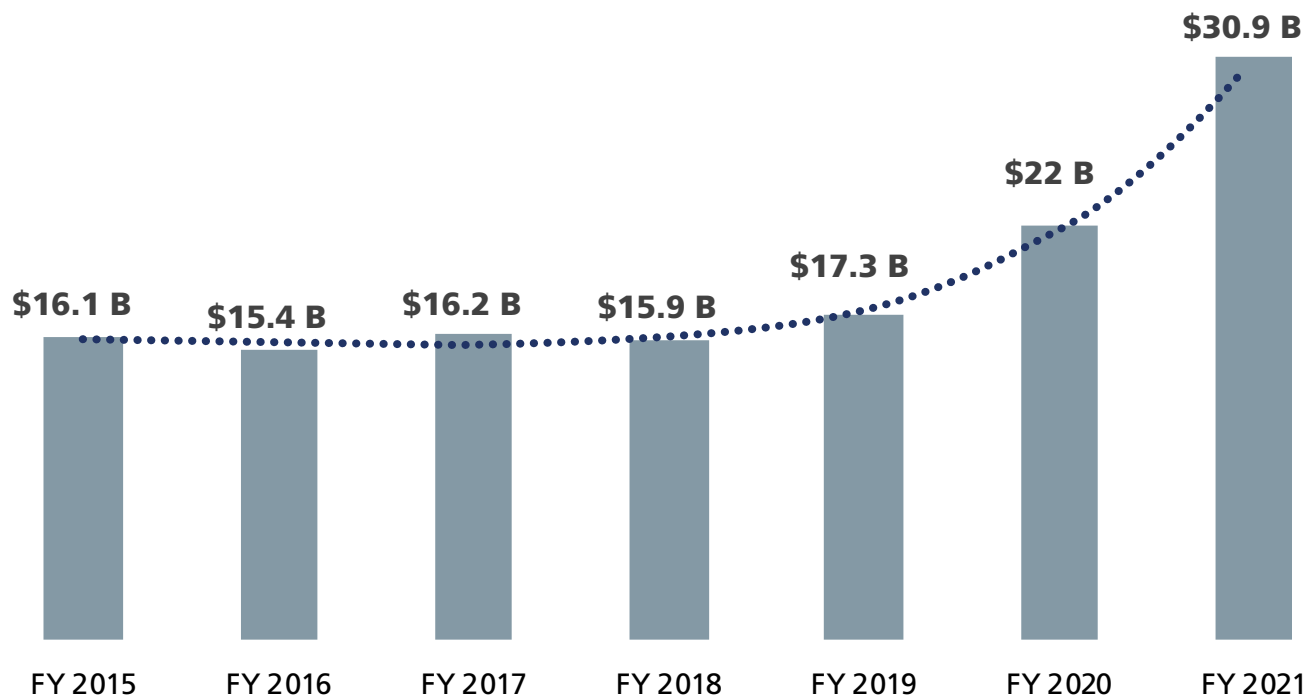
In our 2022 inspection, *The U.S. Department of the Interior Needs a Strategy To Coordinate Implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act*, we found that the DOI completed four of the six steps in Secretary's Order No. 3383. We found that the DOI did not, however, develop a strategy to maximize the impact of the Act or develop best management practices for deferred maintenance projects, which puts the DOI and its bureaus at risk of repeating the same practices that led to the continued increase in deferred maintenance.

and at Indian schools through the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund. As of

September 30, 2022, the DOI had obligated more than \$1.58 billion in Great American Outdoors Act funding. As of October 3, 2022, the DOI had initiated 222 projects under the Act with an estimated budget of \$2.6 billion to address the DOI's deferred maintenance and launched a [website](#) with additional project information.

With this additional funding, the DOI will likely face challenges ensuring it can promptly deploy the funding, prioritize projects, maintain staffing and resource capacity, and establish sufficient oversight. We are performing work to assess the NPS and BIE processes for addressing the deferred maintenance.

Figure 1: DOI Deferred Maintenance Increase FYs 2015–2021



OIG HIGHLIGHTED WORK (ISSUED FYs 2020–2022): DEFERRED MAINTENANCE

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

The U.S. Department of the Interior Needs a Strategy To Coordinate Implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act (Report Number 2021-CR-031)

Verification Review – Recommendations 1–15, 19, and 21 From the Evaluation Report Titled Condition of Indian School Facilities (C-EV-BIE-0023-2014) (Report No. 2020-CR-026)

Big Bend National Park Mismanaged More Than \$250,000 in Equipment Purchases (Report No. 2019-ER-042)

Recommendation Progress

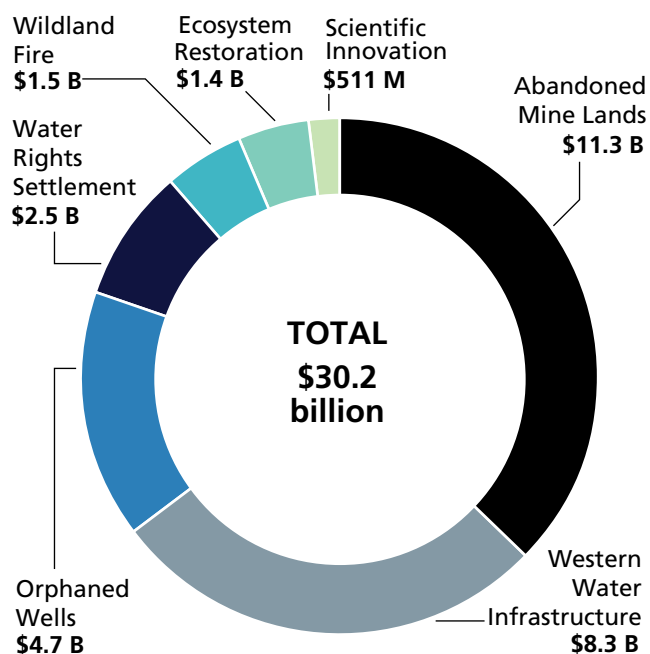
Of the 9 recommendations we made to the DOI and its bureaus and offices, 1 is closed.

Infrastructure

As the steward for America's public lands, the DOI manages critical infrastructure that is instrumental to protecting the Nation's natural resources, supporting American jobs, and providing water to the Western United States. In November 2021, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Pub. L. No. 117–58, became law and provided an investment to rebuild the Nation's aging infrastructure. The legislation distributes \$30.2 billion to the DOI and seven of its bureaus and offices to restore critical habitats, address the drought crisis, assist with wildland fire management, and help communities prepare for extreme weather events. Specifically, the DOI received \$11.3 billion for abandoned mine land reclamation, \$8.3 billion for Western water infrastructure, \$4.7 billion for orphaned well remediation, \$2.5 billion for Indian water rights settlement projects, \$1.5 billion for wildland fire management, \$1.4 billion for ecosystem

restoration, and \$511 million for scientific innovation (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: DOI IIJA Funding



Our July 2022 flash report on the orphaned wells program identified risk areas and outlined the DOI's initial spending plan. Oil and gas wells are considered "orphaned" if they are abandoned before required activities were completed (e.g., capping the well, removing and disposing of equipment and wastes, and other site reclamation). Millions of Americans live within a mile of an orphaned well, which can pollute backyards, recreational areas, and public spaces. The IIJA requires the DOI to create and administer a program to plug, remediate, and reclaim orphaned wells on Federal, State, tribal, and private lands. States could apply for an initial \$775 million in DOI IIJA grant funding in FY 2022. The DOI has also announced \$33 million to fund remediation for 277 high-priority orphaned wells on BLM, FWS, NPS, and U.S. Forest Service lands in FY 2022.

In 2022, the DOI launched an IIJA [website](#) and submitted official bureau and office spend plans to Congress. These plans outlined how they intend to initiate new programs and expand existing work to deliver results by building resilience to the effects of drought and wildfires, creating jobs that address legacy pollution, strengthening tribal water infrastructure and climate resilience, and identifying domestic supplies of mineral resources needed to advance new technologies. With the influx of IIJA funding, the DOI will face challenges ensuring it can promptly deploy the funding, maintain staffing and resource capacity, produce reliable information, and establish appropriate program controls.

OIG HIGHLIGHTED WORK (ISSUED FYs 2020–2022): INFRASTRUCTURE

Flash Report: Orphaned Wells Program
(Report No. 2022–INF–024)

CHALLENGE AREA

Delivering Core Services

Each DOI bureau and office has a unique mission and set of responsibilities to deliver core services in support of the DOI mission. These services support DOI responsibilities that include managing public lands, protecting the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage, conserving land and water, addressing the impacts of climate change, and upholding tribal trust and related responsibilities. The DOI must balance competing priorities—for example, balancing

different land uses such as conservation, energy production, recreation, forestry, and habitat protection. To accomplish its mission, the DOI relies on secure information systems and reliable data. Below, we summarize the DOI's challenges, plans, and progress in delivering core services related to IT security, data quality, energy, water and power management, and responsibility to Native Americans.

IT Security

The DOI relies on complex, interconnected information systems to carry out its daily operations and spends about \$1.7 billion annually on its portfolio of IT assets, according to the [Federal IT Portfolio Dashboard](#). In its 2020–2025 [Information Resource Management Strategic Plan](#), the DOI recognized the challenges in delivering technology and information resources to mission programs and the public while relying on an IT landscape that supports a geographically dispersed workforce serving a complex and diverse mission set. Our work has found that the DOI continues to face challenges in implementing an enterprise IT security program that balances compliance, cost, and risk while enabling bureaus to meet their diverse missions. Additionally, the [FY 2021 annual independent Federal Information Security Modernization Act audit](#) issued by our office identified necessary improvements and made 60 recommendations intended to strengthen the DOI's information security program as well as those of the bureaus and offices. The DOI faces challenges in managing its complex information systems and operating a secure infrastructure to

protect Federal computer networks and data from cyber threats.

In our 2020 evaluation, *Evil Twins, Eavesdropping, and Password Cracking: How the Office of Inspector General Successfully Attacked the U.S. Department of the Interior's Wireless Networks*, we found the DOI did not deploy and operate a secure infrastructure across hundreds of wireless networks. Without secure wireless networks, the DOI's high-value IT assets are vulnerable to potential breaches, which could cripple DOI operations and result in the loss of highly sensitive data.

GAO High-Risk Areas

[Ensuring the Cybersecurity of the Nation](#)

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

OIG HIGHLIGHTED WORK (ISSUED FYs 2020–2022): IT SECURITY

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Cyber Threat Detection and Defense Controls
(Report No. 2020–ITA–067)

Weaknesses in a USGS System Leave Assets at Increased Risk of Attack
(Report No. 2019–ITA–003)

Evil Twins, Eavesdropping, and Password Cracking: How the Office of Inspector General Successfully Attacked the U.S. Department of the Interior's Wireless Networks
(Report No. 2018–ITA–020)

Recommendation Progress

Of the 22 recommendations we made to the DOI and its bureaus and offices, 19 are closed.

Data Quality

The DOI relies on a wide variety of data to perform its mission. For example, according to the DOI, these data range from information about diversity, access, and equity for its decisions on staffing and contracts to geophysical and water quality information needed for its decisions about wetland management, mineral and resource leases, scientific and environmental research, and recreational site maintenance. The quality and accuracy of data substantially affects how effectively the DOI accomplishes its mission.

Our work, however, has identified data reliability issues across a variety of DOI programs. For example, we have identified concerns within the mineral leasing program, royalty reporting, a previous Freedom of Information Act review

process, and the compensatory mitigation program. The GAO states that information such as data, statistics, and studies can provide important insights to Federal agencies and that they should use that data and evidence to understand and improve program performance (“[Using Data and Evidence to Improve Federal Programs](#)”). In its *FY 2022–2026 Strategic Plan*, the DOI outlined its plans to fully use the breadth of data within the DOI 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. Without complete, timely, and accurate data, however, the DOI will face challenges in fostering accountability and accomplishing its mission efficiently.



Source: iStockphoto

In a 2022 report, *Better Internal Controls Could Ensure Accuracy of the Office of Natural Resources Revenue's Royalty Reporting and Adjustments*, we found that, although ONRR established some internal controls and processes to ensure accurate royalty reporting for adjustments, improvements are needed. Specifically, we found that ONRR did not ensure that reasons for royalty adjustments were accurately identified, was not fully able to identify and monitor royalty reporting risks, and did not have automated processes in place to apply overpayments and reporting adjustments that reduce royalties owed. Federal oil and gas royalty revenue is one of the most significant nontax revenue generators for the Federal Government. Given the significance of these resources, ONRR must ensure that it has accurate data detailing the reasons for adjustments. Correcting the identified deficiencies and enforcing established processes would improve internal controls surrounding royalty adjustment reporting.

OIG HIGHLIGHTED WORK (ISSUED FYs 2020–2022): DATA QUALITY

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 27 recommendations we made to the DOI and its bureaus and offices, 6 are closed.

Energy

The DOI is the steward of Federal energy resources—including oil, gas, coal, hydropower, and renewable energy. According to [ONRR](#), the DOI collects more than \$10 billion in revenues from leases for energy and natural resource development on the Outer Continental Shelf and onshore Federal and Indian lands on an annual basis. Energy and natural resource revenues benefit every American, either directly through payments to tribes and individual mineral owners or indirectly through contributions to Federal and State programs.

Our work has identified an array of challenges in the area of energy. For example, the GAO specifically stated that the DOI continues to face challenges with ensuring that the Federal oil and gas program provides a “fair return” to taxpayers. Energy development can also pose significant risks to the environment, including dust and water runoff, methane emissions, and oil spill contamination. As Federal mineral leaseholders and operators, energy companies must comply with Federal regulations. BSEE inspects and regulates lease operators’ offshore production activities, while the BLM inspects onshore activities. We have previously found issues with BSEE and BLM inspection processes. The DOI faces challenges in managing complex

In a recent management advisory, *Allegations of Safety and Employee Health Hazards and Excessive Flaring at the Cliffside Helium Enrichment Unit*, we investigated serious safety and health allegations from employees and contractors at a BLM helium plant. Multiple witnesses alleged that local BLM management was aware of mismanagement and unsafe operations and, for years, took no action to address concerns. After we briefed BLM leadership, the BLM shut down the plant for an extended period to resolve critical safety issues. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration subsequently [issued](#) 21 “notices of unsafe working conditions” to the facility, including 5 “egregious willful violations.”

GAO High-Risk Area

Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources

energy operations, including collecting revenues; overseeing leasing; and ensuring that development is safe, efficient, and sustainable.



Source: NPS

OIG HIGHLIGHTED WORK (ISSUED FYs 2020–2022): ENERGY

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–I)

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–I)

Recommendation Progress

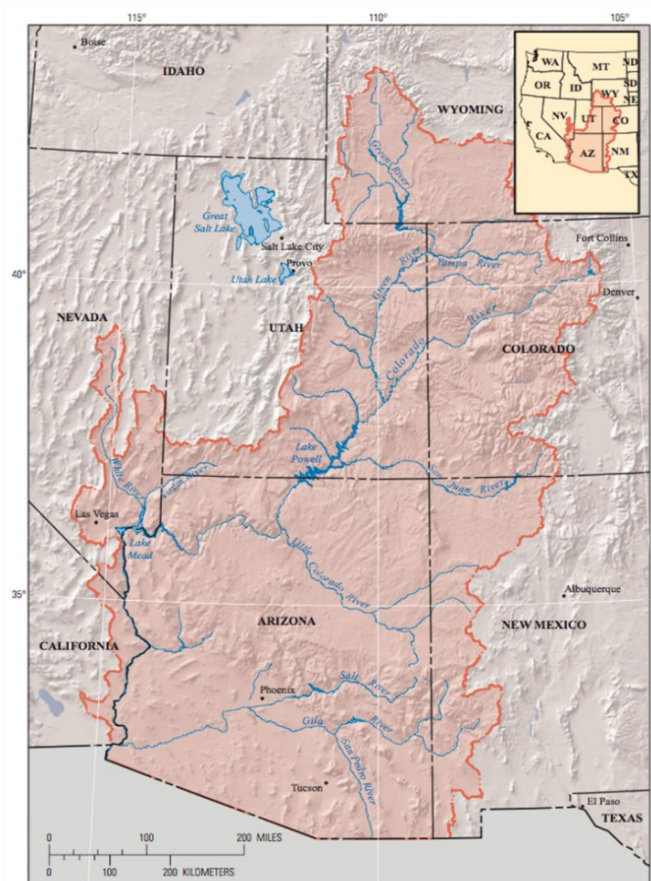
Of the 23 recommendations we made to the DOI and its bureaus and offices, 8 are closed.

Water and Power Management

The BOR is the largest supplier and manager of water in the Nation and the second largest producer of hydroelectric power. Recently, the Commissioner [testified](#) that most Western watersheds have had successive and compounding years of drought. For example, the Colorado River Basin, which covers more than 246,000 square miles in seven U.S. States and Mexico, provides water, power production, fish and wildlife habitat, and recreation, among other uses (see Figure 3). The Colorado River Basin, however, is experiencing the driest 22-year period in more than 100 years of historical records, and water demands have been exceeding natural flows.

The Inflation Reduction Act (Pub. L. No. 117–169) authorized an additional \$4 billion for the BOR 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.

Figure 3: Colorado River Basin



Source: USGS

According to the [BOR](#), in addition to managing water, it owns and operates 53 hydroelectric powerplants, comprising 176 generating units and more than 14 million kilowatts in capacity, which accounts for 23 percent of the hydroelectric generating capacity in the Western United States. The Colorado River hydropower facilities at Lake Mead and Lake Powell, the two largest reservoirs in the United States, can also provide up to 4,200 megawatts of electrical power per year. Revenues from those hydropower facilities are invested in the underlying public infrastructure to ensure continued, reliable operations and benefits throughout the Colorado River Basin. These revenues would be eliminated if water levels in Lake Mead or Lake Powell fall below the minimum elevation needed to run the dams' hydroelectric plants.

During this ongoing historic drought, the DOI faces challenges in managing the delivery of water, protection of fish and wildlife habitat, and the generation of hydroelectric power. We are performing work on the BOR's Central Valley Project, which is a complex, multipurpose

Water levels at Lake Mead have declined since a high of 1,200 feet in 2000. As of August 2022, the lake was filled to just 27 percent of its capacity. The BOR projects that Lake Mead could fall below 1,000 feet of elevation in 2024, and researchers worry it could eventually hit "dead pool"—the point where lake levels fall so low that water can no longer flow downstream through Hoover Dam to users in Arizona, California, and Mexico. In response to these conditions, the BOR announced in August 2022 that Lake Mead will operate in its first-ever Level 2 Shortage Condition, which requires a 21-percent reduction in Arizona's apportionment, an 8-percent reduction for Nevada, and a 7-percent reduction for Mexico for calendar year 2023.

network of dams, reservoirs, canals, hydroelectric powerplants, and other facilities that supplies domestic and industrial water to major urban centers in the Greater Sacramento and San Francisco Bay areas and produces electrical power.

OIG HIGHLIGHTED WORK (ISSUED FYs 2020–2022): WATER AND POWER MANAGEMENT

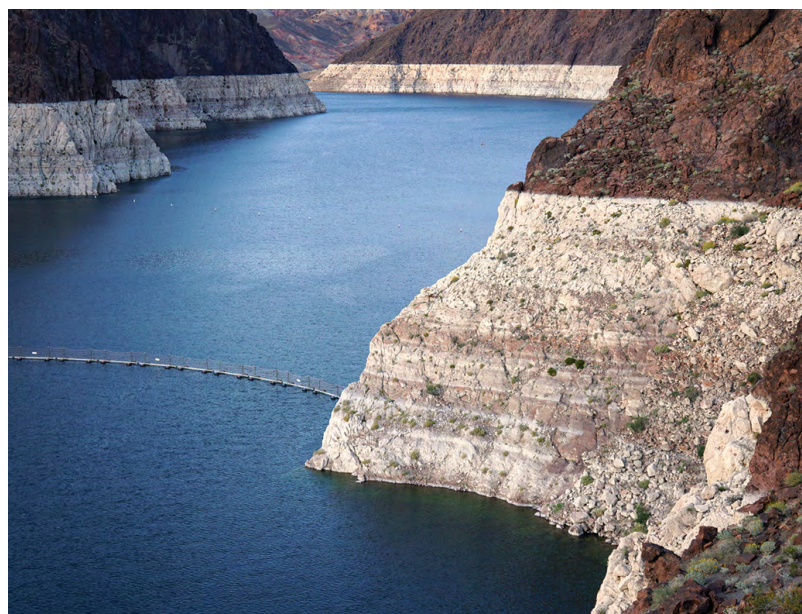
Verification Review – Recommendations for the Report, Improvements Needed in the Bureau of Reclamation's Oversight of Tribal Rural Water Projects, 2016–WR–026
(Report No. 2020–WR–061)

Summary: BOR Employee Diverted Water From Federal Canal to Private Ranch
(Report No. 19–0716)

The Bureau of Reclamation Did Not Effectively Manage the San Luis Demonstration Treatment Plant
(Report No. 2017–WR–048–B)

Recommendation Progress

Of the 7 recommendations we made to the DOI and its bureaus and offices, 4 are closed.



Source: iStockphoto



Source: iStockphoto

Responsibility to Native Americans

The DOI is the primary Federal agency charged with carrying out the United States' trust responsibility to American Indians and Alaska Natives. The DOI's *FY 2022–2026 Strategic Plan* highlighted its policy to fulfill its legal obligations to identify, protect, and conserve tribal trust resources; carry out its trust relationship with tribal nations; and engage in robust, interactive, predecisional, informative, and transparent consultation on a government-to-government basis through all bureaus and offices on plans or actions that affect tribal interests. DOI Indian Affairs—including the BIA, BIE, BTFA, and Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs—carries out the DOI's trust responsibilities.

The BIA's mission is to enhance the quality of life, promote economic opportunity, and carry out the responsibility to protect and improve the trust assets of American Indians, Indian tribes, and Alaska Natives. The BIE's mission is to provide quality education opportunities at 183 BIE-funded elementary and secondary schools, located on 64 reservations in 23 States, which serve approximately 46,000 Indian students. Of these, 53 are BIE-operated, and 130 are tribally controlled under BIE contracts or grants. Our work has, for many years, identified key weaknesses in BIE school facilities and has consistently cited numerous and significant financial management issues at the BIA and BIE that leave federally funded programs and

Over the last decade, Pine Hill School and DOI Indian Affairs have struggled to correct unsafe and poor facility conditions that jeopardize student, staff, and visitor safety. In a 2021 followup inspection, *Facility Improvements Still Needed at Pine Hill School*, we found that the school made progress since our previous visits and that school and Indian Affairs officials implemented 9 of the 12 recommendations from our prior reports. However, we also identified new concerns—for example, the heating and cooling systems had not been inspected by a professional in the past 5 years—that could challenge future efforts to improve conditions.

GAO High-Risk Area

Improving Federal Management of Programs that Serve Tribes and Their Members

operations in Indian Country susceptible to fraud, waste, mismanagement, and abuse. The DOI faces challenges managing the United States' trust responsibilities while maintaining and overseeing the Federal programs that serve Native Americans.

OIG HIGHLIGHTED WORK (ISSUED FYs 2020–2022): RESPONSIBILITY TO NATIVE AMERICANS

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)

Facility Improvements Still Needed at Pine Hill School (Report No. 2019–CR–062)

The St. Stephens Indian School Education Association, Inc., Needs to Improve Financial Accountability for Federal Funds
(Report No. 2019–FIN–058)

The Bureau of Indian Affairs Jeopardized Land Buy-Back Program Accomplishments by Delegating Land Title Authority
(Report No. 2019–WR–024)

Summary: A Secretary of the Credit and Finance Office Defrauded the Oglala Sioux Tribe
(Report No. 15–0758)

Recommendation for Identifying, Protecting, and Ensuring Proper Handling of Tribal Data and Information (Report No. 20–0463)

Summary: Tribe Misapplied More than \$12.4 Million and Still Owes More than \$4.4 Million
(Report No. 18–0132)

Summary: Former President of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe Stole Funds by Forging False Travel Receipts (Report No. 18–0272)

Summary: Oglala Sioux Tribe Member Fraudulently Obtained BIA General Assistance Funds
(Report No. 18–0920)

Weaknesses in the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians' Death Record Process Threaten Proper Distribution of Trust Payments
(Report No. 2018–ER–062)

Recommendation Progress

Of the 45 recommendations we made to the DOI and its bureaus and offices, 18 are closed.



CHALLENGE AREA

Ensuring Health and Safety

Carrying out the DOI mission depends on protecting the health and safety of its workforce and the public. According to its FY 2023 [The Interior Budget in Brief](#), the DOI employs almost 70,000 people and has more than 130,000 volunteers who support and serve more than 500 million visitors to public lands each year at approximately 2,400 locations across the United States, Puerto Rico, and Insular Areas. Ensuring employee and public safety is complex

and spans many DOI responsibilities, 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 the DOI's challenges, plans, and progress on health and safety issues related to wildfire management, law enforcement, and addressing climate impact.

Wildfire Management

Wildfires have devastating impacts to local communities, public resources, ecosystems, life, and personal property. According to [Congressional Research Service Report No. IF10244](#), in FY 2021, nearly 6,000 structures—60 percent of which were residences—burned in wildfires across the United States. In 2021, DOI fire suppression costs totaled \$648 million, with 58,985 fires burning more than 7 million acres across the United States. The DOI's wildfire management program addresses wildfire response for more than 400 million acres of national parks, wildlife refuges and preserves, other public lands, and Indian reservations. The program consists of the Office of Wildland Fire (responsible for oversight) and the four bureaus with wildland fire management responsibilities—the BIA, BLM, FWS, and NPS.

In December 2019, the GAO [reported](#) that wildfires have been increasing in size and severity, exacerbated by abnormally dense vegetation, drought, and other climate stressors. The IIJA authorized an additional \$1.5 billion to the DOI for wildland fire management over the

Wildland fire management includes reducing dense vegetation and fuels to lower the potential for severe wildfires, lessen fire damage, and restore and maintain healthy ecosystems. Each year, the DOI receives funding to reduce overgrown vegetation on public lands, but there are significantly more high-risk acres than the DOI can treat. In 2019, the GAO noted that 54 million acres of DOI lands were at high or very high risk from wildfires; however, the DOI's FY 2018 fuel reduction projects treated 1.3 million acres. The IIJA authorized an additional \$156.3 million for FY 2023 for the DOI to plan and implement fuels management—e.g., mechanical thinning and prescribed burns—and employ contractors, young adults, veterans, and Native American youth.

next 5 years. These funds are to be focused on strengthening the resilience of communities and

ecosystems by making historic investments in forest and rangeland restoration, hazardous fuels management, science, early wildfire detection technology, post-wildfire restoration activities, and Federal wildland firefighters. Separately, with fire seasons now extended throughout the calendar year, the DOI has stated that there is a need for a year-round workforce. The DOI is continuing its efforts to reform its wildland fire workforce and, in 2022, implemented temporary pay improvements for Federal wildland firefighters. The DOI faces challenges in maintaining and recruiting a firefighting workforce, managing ecosystems to

reduce fuels, and responding to active wildfires. We are performing work that assesses the DOI's wildland fire equipment program.

OIG HIGHLIGHTED WORK (ISSUED FYs 2020–2022): WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT

CARES Act Funds for DOI's Wildland Fire Management Program as of June 19, 2020
(Report No. 2020–ER–042)

Law Enforcement

The DOI's law enforcement responsibilities include Indian Country communities as well as resource protection, visitor safety, special event management, and crowd control in areas that require multiple agencies to coordinate. Among executive branch departments, the DOI has the fourth largest law enforcement component, totaling approximately 4,000 law enforcement officers in 5 bureaus and offices: the BIA, BLM, FWS, NPS, and U.S. Park Police (a unit of the NPS with jurisdiction in all Federal parks). The DOI's law enforcement responsibilities, policies, and priorities continue to evolve.

In response to what was described as the combination of rising crime rates in communities around the country and law enforcement staffing shortages and low morale since early 2020, the President issued [Executive Order No. 14074](#), *Advancing Effective, Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice Practices To Enhance Public Trust and Public Safety*, in May 2022. The order includes several law enforcement reforms, including providing Federal law enforcement officers with clear guidance on use-of-force standards, and ensuring body-worn cameras and advanced law

In our 2022 inspection, [The U.S. Department of the Interior and Its Bureaus Have Not Finalized and Implemented Their Body Camera Policies](#), we found that the DOI has never issued a finalized body camera policy, even though its bureaus have been using body cameras since at least 2016. Additionally, three of the four bureaus that had body camera policies at the time of our 2018 report have not updated them to comply with the interim policy the DOI issued in late 2017. As a result, these bureaus continue to operate under policies that are not consistent with minimum standards established in the DOI's interim body camera policy. After we issued our report, the DOI announced several new policies, including one governing body-worn cameras and vehicle-mounted cameras.

enforcement technologies are appropriately used. The Executive Order required issuance of relevant policies within 90 days of its signature. We are performing additional work in this area, but

work to date identified significant safety concerns and other deficiencies at the USPP's dispatch operations center in Washington, DC, which we described as undermining its ability to achieve its

core public safety mission. In addition, the DOI faces challenges in maintaining and recruiting a law enforcement workforce while adapting to changing responsibilities, policies, and priorities.

OIG HIGHLIGHTED WORK (ISSUED FYs 2020–2022): LAW ENFORCEMENT

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

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)

Review of U.S. Park Police Actions at Lafayette Park (Report No. 20–0563)

The Bureau of Indian Affairs' Coronavirus Response at Indian Country Detention Facilities
(Report No. 2020–WR–044)

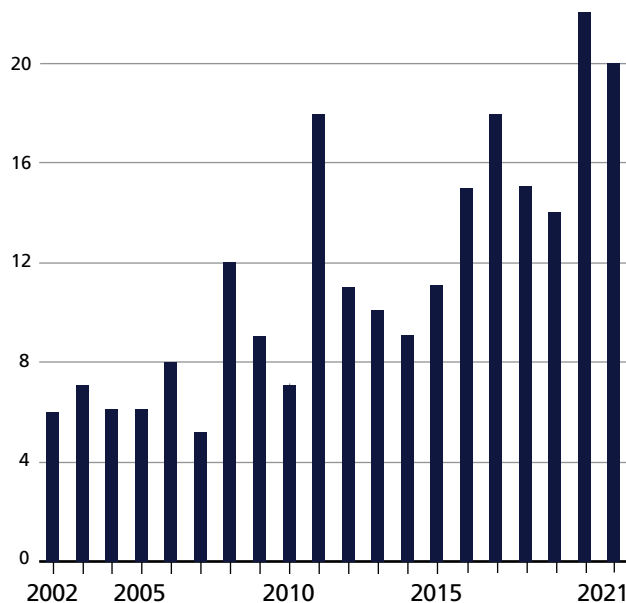
Recommendation Progress

Of the 13 recommendations we made to the DOI and its bureaus and offices, 2 are closed.

Agency Actions To Address Climate Impact

According to the *Fourth National Climate Assessment*, climate change is causing potentially harmful effects on marine and other animal life, increased high temperature extremes and heavy precipitation events, warming and rising seas, more frequent flooding, and increasing wildfires. Natural disasters can expose Federal real property assets—including office buildings, levees, roads, and bridges—to physical damage that can require substantial resources to repair or rebuild. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, climate change is a contributing factor to increasing extreme weather that leads to \$1 billion disasters. In 2021, the United States experienced 20 separate weather and climate disasters where overall damages reached or exceeded \$1 billion (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Number of United States Disasters Exceeding \$1 Billion in Damage 2002–2021



In its 2021 *Climate Action Plan*, the DOI emphasized its role in protecting and mitigating impacts to public and tribal lands and its goals of ensuring that climate adaptation and mitigation strategies are implemented effectively and equitably. As discussed earlier, the IIJA provides funding to help address climate change and restore ecosystems. The Inflation Reduction Act authorized an additional \$5.8 billion for the DOI to address climate issues, such as the drought crisis in the West, climate resilience, and assistance to tribal and Native Hawaiian communities and Insular Areas. The DOI faces challenges in effectively and efficiently implementing its policies that confront the effects of climate change on its mission, programs, operations, and personnel. We are performing work that assesses whether the BIA and Office of Insular Affairs' climate change activities are meeting the DOI's goals for resilience and adaptation.

GAO High-Risk Area

Limiting the Federal Government's Fiscal Exposure by Better Managing Climate Change Risks

The Fourth National Climate Assessment notes that tribes can be uniquely and disproportionately affected by rapidly changing climates and extreme weather events due to the location of tribal lands and the tribes' high dependence on their lands and natural resources to sustain their economic, cultural, and spiritual practices. The BIA forecast that Alaska Natives will need \$3.45 billion over the next 50 years to address climate-related infrastructure threats. Nearly all tribes have economies linked to climate-sensitive resources or are located in (1) coastal and river flood plains—which are prone to climate-related sea level rise, high-tide flooding, coastal erosion, and high storm surge—or (2) areas prone to extreme weather events.



Source: iStockphoto



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Who Can Report?

Anyone with knowledge of potential fraud, waste, abuse, misconduct, or mismanagement involving the DOI should contact the OIG hotline. This includes knowledge of potential misuse involving DOI grants and contracts.

How Does it Help?

Every day, DOI employees and non-employees alike contact the OIG, and the information they share can lead to reviews and investigations that result in accountability and positive change for the DOI, its employees, and the public.

Who Is Protected?

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