

March 20, 2023

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

Thank you for increasing funding for key Bureau of Land Management (BLM) accounts in the FY2023 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. As you prepare the FY2024 Interior Appropriations bill, **we encourage you to build on that important investment by including at least \$78 million for the National Conservation Lands, and at least \$25 million for BLM's cultural resources account.**

National Conservation Lands

We are grateful for the increase in funding the Committee provided to BLM in the FY2023 Interior Appropriations bill to manage the system of National Conservation Lands, which is made up of nationally significant places designated by Congress or the President for their outstanding historic, cultural, ecological, and scientific values. Congress should further invest in BLM in FY2024 to ensure it can properly manage this system of critical landscapes, which has grown by 106 units and more than 12 million acres since FY2006 when Congress provided the highest funding level for this account.¹

The National Conservation Lands encompass more than 37 million acres of National Monuments, National Conservation Areas (NCAs), and similar designations, as well as Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). This system has more than doubled in size since its inception in 2000², and while the increase Congress provided in FY2023 will provide BLM with critical resources to manage this system, Congress should further invest in BLM to ensure it can complete and implement resource management plans and rebuild the staffing necessary to do this important work.

We urge you to consider these resource management and staffing needs, as well as the ever-increasing demands BLM is responsible for resulting from the increasing popularity of these lands, and provide **at least \$78 million**—an increase of \$16.401 million from FY2023, in funding for managing the National Conservation Lands. Such an increase would reflect a correction of the historic underfunding of the agency responsible for managing some of America's most critical landscapes³. It will also permit increased inventory, monitoring and protection of cultural resources, enhance proper management of all resources and provide a quality visitor experience. We also recommend robust funding for National Scenic and Historic Trails, National Wild and Scenic Rivers, and wilderness areas that are part of the National Conservation Lands and funded through this account and other areas of the BLM's budget.

¹ See Tables 1 and 2

² See Table 1

³ See Table 1 and Graph 1

Cultural Resources

The BLM manages the largest, most diverse, and most scientifically important body of cultural, historical, and paleontological resources of any federal land management agency. However, only about 12 percent of BLM lands have been surveyed for cultural resources. We urge the Committee to provide **at least \$25 million**—an increase of \$4.9 million from FY2023—for the BLM’s cultural resources management account to help BLM fulfill its statutory requirements to inventory and protect cultural resources, manage paleontological resources, and improve government-to-government consultation with Indian tribes.

Along with this modest increase in funding, we also urge the Subcommittee to include \$1 million specifically for the National Cultural Resources Information Management System (NCRIMS). NCRIMS supports ongoing collaboration with state historic preservation officers in the West to standardize and integrate cultural resources data for BLM lands. This effort is a significant and often overlooked preservation success story. It funds predictive modeling and data analysis, in partnership with state historic preservation offices, to support planning for large-scale cross-jurisdictional and other projects. It promotes streamlined land-use planning by making better cultural resource data available early in the planning and project development process. This is especially important as the agency implements the recent infrastructure law, including fuels reduction to minimize wildfire risk, siting of multistate power and transmission lines, and renewable energy projects.

Finally, we appreciate the Subcommittee’s continued understanding of the impacts of the previous administration’s reorganization of the BLM and efforts by the current administration to rebuild this agency. We know much work is underway to restore the agency’s capacity to fulfill its mission, including filling a remarkable number of staff vacancies. We encourage you to specifically address the long-standing vacancies in key cultural resources positions stipulated in the BLM Tribal Relations Manual, including the National Curator/NAGPRA Coordinator, National Tribal Coordinator, and 10 of the 12 state office Tribal Coordinator positions.

Our nation’s public lands contain remarkable and irreplaceable ecological, historical and cultural resources that reflect thousands of years of human connection to our lands. We thank you for your consideration of our request in the FY2024 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Conservation Lands Foundation

Alaska Wilderness League
American Society of Landscape Architects
American Whitewater
Center for Large Landscape Conservation
Creation Justice Ministries
Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
GreenLatinos
HG Conservation Solutions
Hispanic Access Foundation

National Trust for Historic Preservation

National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Outdoor Alliance
Pacific Crest Trail Association
Partnership for the National Trails
Patagonia
Sierra Club
Society of Vertebrate Paleontology
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
The Mountain Pact
The Wilderness Society

Inland Ocean Coalition
Latino Outdoors
League of Conservation Voters
National Audubon Society

Trail Access Project
Trust for Public Land
Vet Voice Foundation

Arizona

Archaeology Southwest
Arizona Heritage Alliance
Arizona Preservation Foundation
Arizona Trail Association
Friends of Arizona Joshua Tree Forest
Friends of Ironwood Forest

Friends of the Agua Fria National Monument
Friends of the San Pedro River, Inc.
Friends of the Sonoran Desert
Grand Canyon Trust
Keep Sedona Beautiful

California

Alabama Hills Stewardship Group
Amargosa Conservancy
California Environmental Voters
California Native Plant Society
California Wilderness Coalition
Californians for Western Wilderness
Carrizo Plain Conservancy
Council of Mexican Federations in North America (COFEM)
Fort Ord Recreation Trails (FORT) Friends
Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve
Friends of the Amargosa Basin
Friends of the Desert Mountains
Friends of the Inyo

Friends of the Lost Coast
Los Padres Forestwatch
Mattole Restoration Council
Mojave Desert Land Trust
Outdoor Outreach
Piedras Blancas Light Station Association
Sanctuary Forest, Inc.
Sempervirens Fund
Transition Habitat Conservancy
Trinidad Coastal Land Trust
Tuleyome

Colorado

Audubon Rockies
Colorado Canyons Association
Colorado Wildlands Project
Conservation Colorado
Dolores River Boating Advocates
Friends of Browns Canyon
Friends of the Yampa

Rocky Mountain Wild
San Juan Citizens Alliance
San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance
Western Slope Conservation Center
Wilderness Workshop

Idaho

Birds of Prey NCA Partnership

Montana

Wild Montana

Nevada

Friends of Black Rock High Rock
Friends of Gold Butte
Friends of Nevada Wilderness

Friends of Red Rock Canyon
Get Outdoors Nevada
Nevada Conservation League

New Mexico

Friends of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks
Gila Resources Information Project

New Mexico Wildlife Federation
Rivers & Birds

New Mexico Wild

Upper Gila Watershed Alliance

Oregon

Friends and Neighbors of the Deschutes Canyon Area
 Friends of Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument
 Friends of the Owyhee

Oregon Natural Desert Association
 Soda Mountain Wilderness Council

Utah

Amazing Earthfest
 Bears Ears Partnership

Grand Staircase Escalante Partners
 Utah Dine Bikeyah

Washington

Washington Wild

Wyoming

Wyoming Outdoor Council

Wyoming Wilderness Association

Table 1

Appropriations*			National Conservation Lands **
FY	Enacted (\$M)	+/-	New Acres Added
2023	\$61.599^^	+12.325	346,354
2022	\$49.274	+3.455	
2021	\$45.819	+2	
2020	\$43.819	+4	
2019	\$39.819	+3	1,164,118
2018	\$36.819		
2017	\$36.819		47,624
2016	\$36.819	+5	7,189,857
2015	\$31.819		925,946
2014	\$31.819		443,547
2013	\$31.819		243,710
2012	\$31.819	-0.051	7,212
2011	\$31.870	+0.569	11,001
2010	\$31.301	-29.526	
2009	\$60.827	+8.687	1,419,424
2008	\$52.140	-11.557	106
2007^	\$63.697	-1.434	
2006	\$65.131	+5.542	471,559
2005	\$59.589	-2.687	11,823
2004	\$62.276	+2.437	780,806
2003	\$59.839	-4.450	
2002	\$64.289	+1.041	759,032
2001	\$63.248	+12.095	1,085,539
2000	\$51.153	+1.078	4,079,958
			18,987,616 added

*Source: Congressional Research Service

**Source: Bureau of Land Management

^Up until FY2007, funding for the National Landscape Conservation System was provided under Recreation Management.
 ^^Includes \$11 million for National Scenic and Historic Trails, not previously included in this account. Considering this, the actual increase for the National Conservation Lands in FY2023 was \$1.325 million.

Table 2

Additions to National Conservation Lands Since 2006*			
Year	NCL Unit	State	BLM Acres
2022	Numunaa Nobe National Conservation Area	NV	160,224
	Pistone-Black National Conservation Area	NV	3,415
	Cain Mountain Wilderness	NV	14,050
	Clan Alpines Wilderness	NV	128,362
	Desatoya Mountains Wilderness	NV	40,303
2019	John Wesley Powell National Conservation Area	UT	29,868
	Jurassic National Monument	UT	850
	Alabama Hills National Scenic Area	CA	18,610
	Aden Lava Flow Wilderness	NM	27,673
	Ah-Shi-Sle-Pah Wilderness	NM	7,242
	Avawatz Mountains Wilderness	CA	89,500
	Big Wild Horse Mesa Wilderness	UT	18,192
	Broad Canyon Wilderness	NM	13,902
	Buzzards Peak Wilderness	CA	11,840
	Cinder Cone Wilderness	NM	16,935
	Cold Wash Wilderness	UT	11,001
	Desolation Canyon Wilderness	UT	142,996
	Devils Canyon Wilderness	UT	8,675
	Devil's Staircase Wilderness	OR	8,600
	Eagle Canyon Wilderness	UT	13,832
	East Potrillo Mountains Wilderness	NM	12,155
	Great Falls Basin Wilderness	CA	7,810
	Horse Valley Wilderness	UT	12,201
	Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness	UT	54,643
	Little Ocean Draw Wilderness	UT	20,660
	Lower Last Chance Wilderness	UT	19,339
	Mexican Mountain Wilderness	UT	76,413
	Middle Wild Horse Mesa Wilderness	UT	16,343
	Milpitas Wash Wilderness	CA	17,250
	Mount Riley Wilderness	NM	8,382
	Muddy Creek Wilderness	UT	98,023
	Organ Mountains Wilderness	NM	19,916
	Potrillo Mountains Wilderness	NM	105,085
	Reds Canyon Wilderness	UT	17,325
	Robledo Mountains Wilderness	NM	16,776
	San Rafael Reef Wilderness	UT	60,442
	Sid's Mountain Wilderness	UT	49,130
	Sierra de las Uvas Wilderness	NM	111,114
	Turtle Canyon Wilderness	UT	29,029
	Whitethorn Wilderness	NM	9,616
2017	Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument	OR/CA	47,624

2016	Bears Ears National Monument	UT	1,063,000
	Castle Mountains National Monument	CA	20,920
	Gold Butte National Monument	NV	296,937
	Mojave Trails National Monument	CA	1,600,000
	Sand to Snow National Monument	CA	8,300
	California Desert Conservation Lands	CA	4,200,000
2015	Basin and Range National Monument	NV	703,585
	Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument	CA	110,000
	Browns Canyon National Monument	CO	21,586
	Cecil D. Andrus-White Clouds Wilderness	ID	90,775
2014	Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument	NM	496,330
	Pine Forest Range Wilderness	NV	24,015
2013	Rio Grande del Norte National Monument	NM	242,710
	San Juan Islands National Monument	WA	1,000
2012	Fort Ord National Monument	CA	7,212
2011	Elkhorn Ridge Wilderness	CA	11,001
2009	Prehistoric Trackways National Monument	NM	5,280
	Beaver Dam Wash National Conservation Area	UT	63,478
	Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area	CO	210,149
	Fort Stanton-Snowy River Cave National Conservation Area	NM	24,876
	Red Cliffs National Conservation Area	UT	44,859
	Beartrap Canyon Wilderness	UT	40
	Beauty Mountain Wilderness	CA	15,627
	Big Jacks Creek Wilderness	ID	52,000
	Blackridge Wilderness	UT	13,108
	Bruneau-Jarbridge Rivers Wilderness	ID	90,000
	Canaan Mountains Wilderness	UT	44,531
	Cottonwood Canyon Wilderness	UT	11,667
	Cougar Canyon Wilderness	UT	10,409
	Deep Creek and Deep Creek North Wilderness	UT	4,262
	Doc's Pass Wilderness	UT	17,294
	Dominguez Canyon Wilderness	CO	66,280
	Goose Creek Wilderness	UT	98
	Granite Mountain Wilderness	CA	9,808
	La Verkin Creek Wilderness	UT	445
	Little Jacks Creek Wilderness	ID	51,000
	Lower White River Wilderness	OR	2,806
	North Fork Owyhee Wilderness	ID	43,000
	Oregon Badlands Wilderness	OR	29,000
	Owyhee River Wilderness	ID	267,000
	Pinto Mountains Wilderness	CA	25,000
	Pole Creek Wilderness	ID	12,530
	Red Butte Wilderness	UT	1,537
	Red Mountain Wilderness	UT	18,729
	Sabinoso Wilderness	NM	19,625
	Slaughter Creek Wilderness	UT	3,901
	Soda Mountain Wilderness	OR/CA	24,700
	Spring Basin Wilderness	OR	6,400

	Taylor Creek Wilderness	UT	32
	White Mountains Wilderness	CA	229,953
2008	Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse Outstanding Natural Area	FL	86
	Piedras Blancas Light Station Outstanding Natural Area	CA	20
2006	Becky Peak Wilderness	NV	18,189
	Bristlecone Wilderness	NV	14,095
	Cache Creek Wilderness	CA	27,296
	Cedar Mountain Wilderness	UT	100,000
	Cedar Roughs Wilderness	CA	6,287
	Goshute Canyon Wilderness	NV	42,544
	Government Peak Wilderness	NV	6,313
	Highland Ridge Wilderness	NV	68,627
	King Range Wilderness	CA	42,694
	Mount Grafton Wilderness	NV	78,754
	Rocks and Islands Wilderness	CA	6
	South Fork Eel River Wilderness	CA	12,867
	Yuki Wilderness	CA	53,887

*Source: Bureau of Land Management