

# Democrats Highlight Bipartisan Achievements to Address Western Drought and Wildfires

Sending Office: Committee on Natural Resources

Dear Colleagues,

As communities across the country, and especially in the West, continue to grapple with yet another year of extreme drought and wildfire, it is critically important to understand the historic investments this Congress has already made to fight drought, wildfire, and the climate crisis.

In November, the House passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, now known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), which provided billions of dollars in supplemental funding for the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to address drought, wildfire, and ecosystem restoration needs.

## **For Drought and Wildfires, the BIL Provided:**

- **\$918 million** in funding under Title I (Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies) to USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for watershed and flood programs.
- **\$7.81 billion** under Title VIII (Natural Resources-Related Infrastructure, Wildfire Management, and Ecosystem Restoration) to DOI and USDA Forest Service (USFS) to reduce wildfire risk and support ecosystem restoration.
  - **\$2.36 billion for DOI**
  - **\$5.45 billion for USFS**
- **\$8.3 billion** in funding under Title IX (Western Water Infrastructure) to the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), a water management agency within DOI.

## **Wildfire Risk Reduction (\$3.369 billion)**

- \$600 million for Federal wildland firefighter salaries and expenses
- \$500 million for Community Wildfire Defense Grants
- \$500 million for hazardous fuels
- \$500 million for prescribed fire
- \$500 million for fuel breaks
- \$200 million for contracting labor, including Youth and Service Corps
- \$200 million for long-term post-fire restoration
- \$100 million for Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program
- \$100 million for fire response pre-planning and training
- \$40 million for communications technology and reverse-911 notifications
- \$20 million for satellite wildfire detection
- \$20 million Joint Fire Science Program
- \$20 million for the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes
- \$10 million for ground-based wildfire detection
- Additional funding for wildfire risk mapping, firewood banks and local acquisition of slip-on tanker units
- **For more information on how USFS will prioritize this funding to reduce wildfire risk to communities, visit: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/wildfire-crisis>.**
- **For more information on DOI's implementation of Wildland Fire Management funding included in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, visit: <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/wildland-fire-mgmt-bil-spend-plan-final-508.pdf>.**
- **For more information on implementation of firefighter pay and classification provision implementation, visit: <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2022/06/21/fact-sheet-supporting-wildland-firefighting-workforce#:~:text=INCREASING%20PAY&text=In%20June%202021%2C%20President%20Biden,through%20incentives%2C%20awards%20and%20bonuses>.**

## **Ecosystem Restoration (\$2.13 billion)**

- \$400 million for voluntary ecosystem restoration grants to states, territories, tribes
- \$400 million for wood products infrastructure
- \$300 million for Ecological Health Restoration Contracts and Stewardship Contracts
- \$200 million for Good Neighbor Agreements with states and tribes
- \$200 million for detection, prevention, eradication of invasive species
- \$200 million for the National Seed Strategy
- \$200 million for revegetation and hazard mitigation on mined lands
- \$100 million for recreation sites on federal and Indian forest land
- \$80 million for aquatic-focused landscape-scale restoration programs
- \$50 million to reduce aquatic impacts of timber harvesting activities
- **For additional information on DOI's implementation efforts, visit: <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/biden-harris-administration-announces-more-68-million-bipartisan-infrastructure-law>.**

## **NRCS Watershed Programs (\$918 million)**

- \$500 million for Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations
- \$118 million for the Watershed Rehabilitation Program
- \$300 million for the Emergency Watershed Protection Program

### **Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) (\$500 million)**

This BIL provision provides additional funding for WFPO which provides technical and financial assistance to state and local organizations to plan and install measures to prevent erosion, sedimentation, flood damage, and to conserve, develop and use land and water resources, including water storage. **For more information on the program, visit: [https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/landscape/?&cid=nrcs143\\_008271](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/landscape/?&cid=nrcs143_008271)**

### **Watershed Rehabilitation Program (\$118 million)**

This BIL provision provides additional funding for the Watershed Rehabilitation Program that provides technical and financial

assistance for planning, design and implementation of rehabilitation projects for dams built under WFPO. **For more information on the program, visit:** <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/landscape/wr/>

#### **Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) (\$300 million)**

This BIL provision provides funding to EWP which provides technical and financial assistance to reduce risks when a watershed is impaired by a natural disaster. **For more information on the program, visit:** <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/landscape/ewpp/>

#### **Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership Program (\$180 million)**

Congress has formally authorized the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership (JCLRP) between USFS and NRCS to provide assistance to landowners to implement an all-lands approach to reduce wildfire risk, protect water quality or supply, or improve habitat for at-risk species. **For more information on JCLRP projects, visit:** <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/pr/programs/landscape/?cid=nrcseprd1423755>.

#### **Repairing Existing Public Lands by Adding Necessary Trees (REPLANT) Act**

This BIL provision removes the \$30 million annual cap on the Reforestation Trust Fund (RTF) and specifies that the Secretary of the Treasury shall transfer to the RTF an amount equal to the tariffs collected on imported wood product. With the REPLANT Act, USFS anticipates spending between \$140 to \$260 million per year for reforestation and related work. It is estimated this will result in an increase in reforestation treatments to almost 500,000 acres/year, including 200,000 acres of planting – a more than 300% increase. Reforestation provides one of the main tools for national forests to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.

#### **Forest Service Legacy Road and Trail Remediation Program (\$250 million)**

Amends the Forest Roads and Trails Act to codify the Forest Service Legacy Road and Trail Remediation (LRT) Program to restore fish passages, decommission certain National Forest System (NFS) roads and trails, and implement certain projects to improve the resilience of NFS roads, trails, and bridges to extreme weather events, flooding, or other natural disasters. **For more information about LRT investments, visit:** <https://www.legacyroadsandtrails.org/>.

#### **Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission Act**

Establishes a commission, consisting of federal officials and nonfederal members, to study and provide recommendations to Congress regarding a range of wildland fire management issues, including issues related to aerial wildland firefighting equipment.

#### **Secure Rural Schools (SRS) and Community Self-Determination Payments**

The BIL reauthorizes SRS payments for FY2022, FY2023, and FY2024, and set the payment level as equal to the payment made in FY2017 (around \$282 million). Payments can be used for a variety of purposes including roads and schools (Title I), for projects on or benefitting the federal lands within the county (Title II), and for community wildfire preparedness planning county emergency services, search and rescue, and for related training and equipment. **For more information on SRS payments to counties, visit** <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2022/04/15/president-biden-usda-forest-service-announce-more-238-million>.

#### **Aging Infrastructure Account (\$3.2 billion)**

The Aging Infrastructure Account was authorized in 2020 to provide funding for significant extraordinary maintenance needs at Reclamation's aging facilities. This account will provide funds through repayment contracts to carry out major repair and rehabilitation projects. **For more information on funding opportunities, visit:** [www.usbr.gov/newsroom/#/news-release/4066](http://www.usbr.gov/newsroom/#/news-release/4066).

#### **Water Storage, Groundwater Storage, and Conveyance Projects (\$1.05 billion)**

Water storage, groundwater storage, and conveyance projects with an existing feasibility study or construction authorization are eligible for funding. The project must be found feasible and with benefits proportionate to federal investment. Project selection will follow an internal formulation process. **For more information on funding opportunities, visit:** [www.usbr.gov/bil](http://www.usbr.gov/bil).

#### **Rural Water Projects (\$1 billion)**

Congress authorized Reclamation to develop several water supply projects serving rural and tribal communities in locations across the West. This is an existing program and funding will be distributed to already-authorized projects. **For more information on funding opportunities, visit:** [www.usbr.gov/bil](http://www.usbr.gov/bil).

#### **Water Recycling and Reuse Projects (\$550 million)**

Water recycling projects help stretch limited water supplies by making new recycled water supplies available. This funding will provide grants under Reclamation's Title XVI authority to support planning, design, and construction of water recycling and reuse projects. Funds will be made available through an external application process. **For more information on funding opportunities, visit:** [www.usbr.gov/watersmart/title](http://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/title).

#### **Dam Safety Projects (\$500 million)**

Reclamation's Safety of Dams program was established to ensure Reclamation dams do not present unacceptable risk to people, property, and the environment. BIL funds will be distributed to high-priority safety projects following an internal formulation process. In March 2022, Reclamation allocated \$100 million in BIL funds for dam safety modifications at B.F. Sisk Dam in California. **For more information on funding opportunities, visit:** [www.usbr.gov/bil](http://www.usbr.gov/bil).

#### **WaterSMART Grants (\$400 million)**

Through WaterSMART, Reclamation provides grant opportunities for projects focused on water efficiency, drought resilience, environmental benefits, small-scale water management improvements, and development of water management tools. Of the \$400 million provided, \$100 million is set aside specifically for projects that improve the condition of a natural or nature-based feature. There will be multiple WaterSMART funding opportunities in FY2022 and subsequent years. **For more information on funding opportunities, visit:** [www.usbr.gov/watersmart](http://www.usbr.gov/watersmart).

#### **Large Scale Water Recycling and Reuse Projects (\$450 million)**

This newly authorized program will provide grant funding to support planning, design and construction of large-scale water recycling and reuse projects (total project costs of \$500 million or greater) in partnership with local project sponsors. Priority will be given to projects that serve multiple purposes, including fish and wildlife enhancement, and projects that are multi-state or regional in nature. A competitive grant program is being established by Reclamation. **Additional information on funding opportunities is expected later this year.**

#### **Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan Projects (\$300 million)**

Funding to implement the Colorado River Basin Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) may be used for projects to establish or conserve recurring Colorado River water supplies. Of this, \$250 million can be used to contribute to supplies to Lake Mead and other Lower Colorado River reservoirs, or to improve operational efficiency in the Lower Basin. Additionally, \$50 million is available for DCP implementation in the Upper Basin. Funding will be provided via an internal formulation process. **For more information on funding opportunities, visit:** [www.usbr.gov/bil](http://www.usbr.gov/bil).

#### **Desalination Projects (\$250 million)**

Reclamation's desalination construction program provides federal funding for ocean or brackish water desalination projects. Reclamation has an existing selection process and evaluation criteria to select eligible external projects for funding. **For more information on funding opportunities, visit:** [www.usbr.gov/watersmart/desalination](http://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/desalination).

#### **Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Projects (\$250 million)**

The Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration program was authorized in 2020. This program will support voluntary, collaborative restoration projects by providing funding to eligible applicants for the design, study and construction of projects for improved fish passage and aquatic habitat restoration. A competitive grant program is being established by Reclamation. **Additional information on funding opportunities is expected later this year.**

**Small Surface Water and Ground Water Storage Grants (\$100 million)**

Small water storage and groundwater storage projects are defined as projects that have storage capacity between 2,000-30,000 acre-feet and increase surface water or groundwater storage or convey water, directly or indirectly, to or from surface water or groundwater storage. A competitive grant program is being established by Reclamation for small water storage and groundwater storage projects. **For more information on funding opportunities, visit: [www.usbr.gov/bil](http://www.usbr.gov/bil).**

**Cooperative Watershed Management Program (\$100 million)**

This program provides grants for watershed management projects to encourage a diverse set of stakeholders to form local solutions for local water management needs. Implementation and project selection will follow existing processes and criteria. **For more information on funding opportunities, visit: [www.usbr.gov/watersmart/cwmp](http://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/cwmp).**

**Multi-benefit Watershed Health Projects (\$100 million)**

The BIL provided Reclamation with a new authority and funding for projects to improve watershed health. Funding will support the design, implementation, and monitoring of habitat restoration projects that improve watershed health in river basins adversely impacted by Reclamation projects. A competitive grant program is being established by Reclamation. **Additional information on funding opportunities is expected later this year.**

**Colorado River Endangered Species Programs (\$50 million)**

The BIL provided funding for four programs that benefit endangered species in the Colorado River Basin. The program that most directly benefits California is the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program. **For more information on funding opportunities, visit: [www.usbr.gov/bil](http://www.usbr.gov/bil).**

If you have question about any of these programs or other ongoing efforts to respond to drought and wildfire, please do not hesitate to contact us or members of either committee staff.

Signed,

Representative Raúl Grijalva  
Chair  
Committee on Natural Resources

Representative David Scott  
Chair  
Committee on Agriculture

Representative Joe Neguse  
Chair  
Subcommittee on National Parks,  
Forests, and Public Lands

Representative Abigail D. Spanberger  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Conservation and  
Forestry

Representative Jared Huffman  
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Subcommittee on Water, Oceans,  
and Wildlife