



FY 2021 Appropriations Update: House Appropriations Committee Approves Interior and Environment Funding Bill

Lewis-Burke Associates, LLC – July 13, 2020

On July 10, the U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Committee voted along party lines (30-19) to approve the fiscal year (FY) 2021 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies (Interior-Environment) Appropriations bill which provides funding for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and the National Endowments for the Arts (NEA) and Humanities (NEH), among other agencies. Interior-Environment Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Betty McCollum (D-MN) noted in her opening statement at the Committee markup that the House bill would prioritize efforts to address health disparities highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially with regard to Native American communities. In addition, numerous members used their opening remarks to tout the bill's investments in geographic programs, including those focused on the cleanup and conservation efforts in the Great Lakes region, Puget Sound, and Chesapeake Bay. The next step for this bill is a vote on the House floor, likely to take place later this month

The overall House Interior-Environment bill totals \$36.76 billion, an increase of \$771 million over FY 2020, per the Appropriations Committee press release. Unlike last year's bill, which called for substantial increases to USGS, EPA, NEA, and NEH, the FY 2021 spending measure would enable more modest growth to these agencies, reflecting the more constrained budget environment that has characterized the FY 2021 appropriations process. The Committee again rejected the Trump Administration's proposed elimination of the NEH and NEA and would instead provide a \$7.75 million increase for each agency. In addition, the Committee rejected the significant cuts proposed by the Administration to EPA and USGS.

U.S. Geological Survey

The House bill would provide the U.S. Geological Survey with \$1.29 billion, which is \$22.0 million, or 1.7 percent above the FY 2020 level, and \$321.8 million or 25.8 percent above the President's FY 2021 budget request. The Committee accepted but modified the President's proposed budget restructure "to provide more detail and ensure program and funding transparency." Except for a small cut to Facilities and rearranging of some accounts, funding across USGS mission areas would remain flat or see modest increases. The bill would accept the proposed restructure that would move programs from Land Resources into Ecosystems and Core Science Systems, while rejecting the proposed restructure to Water Resources. The Committee also rejects the proposed elimination of Environmental Health and instead would provide flat funding relative to the enacted level and move this account into Ecosystems.

The bill would fund the **Natural Hazards** account at \$173.6 million, 1.6 percent above the current enacted level and 25.8 percent above the budget request. The Committee rejected the Administration's proposed 67 percent cut to the **ShakeAlert earthquake early warning** (EEW) program. In the bill, ShakeAlert would receive \$25.7 million for "continued development and expansion" of the system and "capital costs associated with the buildout of the ShakeAlert EEW." The House funding level would be

flat compared to the total FY 2020 enacted level that included \$19 million for continued development of the program and \$6.7 million for capital costs. The Committee notes that USGS is “encouraged to continue its collaboration with California, Oregon, and Washington to advance this program.” The Committee would fund “deferred maintenance and modernization for the Advanced National Seismic System, Regional Seismic Network Support, and the Seismic Network” at no less than the enacted level. The House bill would essentially provide flat funding of \$7.2 million for the **Global Seismographic Network** which would be 33 percent above the President’s request. The report language says that USGS should “continue its development of an early earthquake warning system and its expansion into locations that will benefit from early detection and characterization of earthquakes and tsunamis, to include the Caribbean Basin.” Additionally, the USGS Geomagnetism program, part of the interagency U.S. National Space Weather Program (NSWP), would receive a \$25,000 increase above the FY 2020 enacted level of \$4 million to “ensure that all 14 magnetic observatories remain open and operating.”

The bill would fund **Ecosystems** at \$261 million, an increase of \$91 million or 53 percent. This increase includes the mission area absorbing **Environmental Health, National and Regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers**, and components of the **Land Change Science** account. In contrast to the Administration’s proposed 83 percent cut to the **National and Regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers**, the House bill would increase funding by \$3 million, or 8 percent over the enacted level, “to ensure all centers remain open, operational, and fully functional.” Of this amount, \$4 million would be provided “to support the development of the Midwest Climate Adaptation Science Center, which the Committee expects to be established through a competitive process and hosted in a Midwestern state.” The Committee goes on to say that they remain “concerned that funding for these regional centers and approval of the staffing plan continues to face unnecessary delays. The Survey is directed to expeditiously fill all staffing vacancies in fiscal year 2021 and to prioritize and expedite the distribution of funds to regional centers, including university consortia, to ensure timely obligations.” The Committee again includes the following language that was also included in the FY 2020 report: “The Committee believes the Administration’s attempt to reduce and curtail the activities of these centers is shortsighted and counterproductive at a time when our natural and cultural resources, our communities, and our health are being assaulted by climate change. This increase ensures that all eight regional centers remain open, operational, and fully functional and is a step toward funding them at the authorized level.”

Also within the Ecosystems mission area, this bill rejects the proposed elimination of the **Cooperative Research Units** (CRUs) and would instead provide an increase of \$1 million over the enacted level for a total funding level of \$25 million to, as the Committee states, “support these research institutions and maintain the educational pipeline, including improving and increasing youth involvement in science and resource management.” The Committee again directs “critical vacancies” at research institutes to be filled expeditiously, “specifically vacancies needed to build quantitative fisheries capacity in inland waters of the Upper Mississippi Basin.” The bill directs USGS to establish a new CRU with a “programmatic focus on water scarcity,” to be funded at no less than \$700,000. The Committee would also rename the proposed Biological Threats Research Program to the **Biological Threats and Invasive Species Research Program** “to provide more clarity about the research funded in this program.”

The Committee rejects the proposed budget restructure for the **Water Resources** mission area and notes that if USGS proposes a restructure of this account in FY 2022 that such a proposal “should clearly outline the proposed programmatic changes and easily identify where significant programs will be housed.” The bill would increase funding by \$1 million or 10 percent for the **Water Resources Research Act** program that supports the Water Resource Research Institutes. The Administration had proposed

eliminating this program. The Committee looks for USGS to “continue to engage with universities and other partners to utilize the best available technology to develop advanced modeling tools, state-of-the-art forecasts, and decision support systems for water emergencies and daily water operations.”

The House would fund **Core Science Systems** at \$252 million or 83 percent above the requested amount. The proposed increase would be a result of the House bill’s acceptance of the Administration’s proposal to move **National Land Imaging** from Land Resources into Core Science Systems. The bill would increase funding for the **National Cooperative Geological Mapping Program** by \$6.3 million over the enacted level, with the vast majority of the increase dedicated to “to accelerate new mapping and sustain Phase Three of the National Geologic Map Database” to bring together “detailed national and continental resolution 2D and 3D information.” The bill would provide no less than \$46 million for the **3D Elevation Program**, and the Committee “supports the continued collaboration with partners to leverage the resources provided for 3DEP to achieve the goal of national coverage by 2026.” The Committee urges USGS to continue engaging with universities and other partners “to avoid duplication and utilize the best available technology to develop scalable, automated systems that can rapidly identify emerging hazard threats and provide real-time risk, damage and vulnerability assessments, and planning capabilities onto a website to provide enough precision to aid emergency responders and decision makers.” The Committee also acknowledges the Survey’s “long tradition of supporting university partners through peer-reviewed cooperative agreements and competitively awarded grants.” The House bill rejects the proposed reduction to **USGS Library** funding and would continue funding for the **National Geologic and Geophysical Data Preservation** program at the enacted level.

In the **Energy and Mineral Resources** mission area, the bill would fund the requested level of \$10.6 million for the **Earth Mapping Resources Initiative** (Earth MRI), level with the FY 2020 enacted funding level.

The Committee notes that the COVID–19 pandemic accentuates the importance of “continued research on zoonotic diseases in safe and secure facilities.” The bill includes \$59 million “for discrete projects to renovate and support Biosafety level 2 and 3 Diagnostic Laboratories at the **National Wildlife Health Center** and ensure the facility has the capability to safely investigate outbreaks of wildlife disease.”

Environmental Protection Agency

The House bill would provide the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency with \$9.38 billion, an increase of \$318.3 million or 3.5 percent above the FY 2020 enacted level and \$2.67 billion or 39.9 percent above the request. All EPA accounts would grow under the House bill, though the vast majority of additional funding relative to FY 2020 would be dedicated to the Environmental Programs and Management and State and Tribal Assistance Grants accounts. Spending on geographic programs in particular, such as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, would be augmented.

The **EPA Science and Technology account (S&T)** would receive \$745.3 million, an increase of \$28.9 million or four percent above the FY 2020 enacted level and \$260.6 million or 53.8 percent above the request. All S&T research accounts would benefit from the increase, with the four main research programs—Air and Energy, Chemical Safety and Sustainability, Sustainable and Healthy Communities, and Safe and Sustainable Water Resources—each receiving between \$3 million and \$4.5 million in additional funding. The total S&T allocation would also include a \$30.1 million transfer from the Hazardous Substance Superfund account to support ongoing relevant research.

Most relevant to the external research community, the House bill would grow **Science to Achieve Results (STAR)** by \$1.4 million for a total of \$30 million, the first increase to the program in several years. STAR is EPA's primary mechanism for funding external research, but the program has received declining or stagnating budgets since 2002 and has been flat funded at \$28.6 million for the past four fiscal years. The report accompanying the bill includes language directing EPA to use STAR funding to support research into the use of green stormwater infrastructure as a means to prevent water-borne pollutants from entering estuaries. The additional funding provided in FY 2021 would help EPA fulfill a congressional directive to reestablish the **STAR Graduate Fellowship** program, which was eliminated in 2016 following a consolidation of federal student support programs during the previous administration. STAR Graduate Fellowships helped defray the costs of obtaining advanced degrees in environmental and environmental health sciences.

The bill would provide \$7 million to support water quality and availability research by nonprofit organizations through **National Priorities** grants, \$1 million more than in FY 2020. These grants are independent of STAR, and preference is generally given to research proposals that include a national scope and a 25 percent match. The report mandates that at least \$1 million be used for "research related to coronavirus."

The House bill would also provide \$2.5 million for intramural research on the **intersection of pollution exposure and coronavirus health outcomes**. The report notes recent findings that communities of color are currently suffering disproportionately from COVID-19 and are more likely to be exposed to air pollution, and directs the Office of Research and Development to coordinate with the Office of Environmental Justice on an associated research plan.

The full Committee adopted an amendment, offered by Representative David Price (D-NC), during markup that would prevent EPA from using any funds to implement its proposed rule entitled **Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science**. The rule, which EPA first proposed in 2018, would require EPA to only use publicly available research data to formulate new regulatory policy.

While the agency has justified the rule based on the need to ensure transparency in the regulatory process, the EPA Science Advisory Board identified several shortcomings that could undermine its scientific value and feasibility. In addition, the rule has been met with considerable opposition by the environmental research community based on concerns that it would severely curtail the number of air and water quality studies able to be used to justify regulatory action. This is due to the complications around clinical trial patient data relating to health outcomes associated with air and water quality. The confidentiality measures to protect these individuals would prevent the use of these studies in determinations of policy. Excluding otherwise valuable research, critics argued, could have far-reaching and detrimental consequences, including an erosion of the scientific validity of future regulations.

National Endowment for the Humanities and National Endowment for the Arts

For FY 2021, the House would provide both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts \$170 million each, an increase of \$7.75 million for both agencies. Once again, the House has rebuffed the President's budget request, which proposed the elimination of both agencies.

In the accompanying report to the House bill, the Committee recognized the importance of NEH’s role in programs to advance civil discourse through dialogue programs. The Committee would direct funding to benefit cross-cutting agency initiatives, including: “the celebration of the U.S. Semiquincentennial, the advancement of civic education, and NEH’s ‘Standing Together’ initiative which promotes a deeper understanding of the military experience and supports returning veterans and their families.” Similar to past years, the Committee also commended NEH for supporting cultural preservation for American Indian and Alaska Native communities, as well as its partnerships with Tribal communities.

The bill would direct NEA to give priority to projects that support underserved populations in low-income urban or geographically isolated areas. The House report notes that the Committee strongly supports NEA’s efforts to support STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) education initiatives. The House report also reiterates the Committee’s support for NEA national initiatives with geographic reach and the NEA’s successful “Creative Forces: Military Healing Arts Network” program in order to “assist service members and veterans.”

Interior-Environment Appropriations Bill, FY 2021

As released by the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior-Environment on July 9, 2020

U.S. Geological Survey

(in thousands of \$)

	FY 2020 Enacted	FY 2021 Request	FY 2021 House	House v. FY 2020 Enacted	House v. FY 2021 Request
USGS, total	1,270,957	971,185	1,292,987	22,030 (1.7%)	321,802 (33.1%)
Natural Hazards	170,870	137,999	173,588	2,718 (1.6%)	35,589 (25.8%)
Earthquake Hazards	84,903	60,310	86,539	1,636 (1.9%)	26,229 (43.5%)
Global Seismographic Network	7,153	5,397	7,189	36 (0.5%)	1,792 (33.2%)
Ecosystems	170,544	127,337	261,257	90,713 (53.2%)	133,920 (105.2%)
National and Regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers ¹	--	9,776	41,335	41,335 (%)	31,559 (322.8%)
Land Resources	166,274	0	0	-166,274 (100.0%)	--
National and Regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers	38,335	0	0	-38,335 (100.0%)	--
Energy, Minerals, and Environmental Health	113,536	91,181	0	-113,536 (100.0%)	-91,181 (100.0%)
Energy and Mineral Resources	0	0	91,181	91,181 (N/A)	91,181 (N/A)

¹ The President’s budget request proposed moving this program from the Land Resources Mission Area to the Ecosystems Mission Area; the House bill accepted this proposal for FY 2021.

Water Resources	234,120	180,809	237,443	3,323 (1.4%)	56,634 (31.3%)
Water Resources Research Act	10,000	0	11,000	1,000 (10%)	11,000 (N/A)
Core Science Systems	137,902	212,049	252,291	114,389 (82.9%)	40,242 (19.0%)
Science Support	96,828	94,173	97,245	417 (0.4%)	3,072 (3.3%)
Facilities	180,883	127,637	179,982	-901 (0.5%)	52,345 (41.0%)

Environmental Protection Agency

(in thousands of \$)

	FY 2020 Enacted	FY 2021 Request	FY 2021 House	House vs. FY 2020 Enacted	House vs. FY 2021 Request
EPA, total	9,057,401	6,658,071	9,382,668	325,267 (3.6%)	2,724,597 (40.9%)
Science and Technology	716,449	484,733	745,345	28,896 (4.0%)	260,612 (53.8%)

National Endowment for the Humanities & National Endowment for the Arts

(in thousands of \$)

	FY 2020 Enacted	FY 2021 Request	FY 2021 House	House vs. FY 2020 Enacted	House vs. FY 2021 Request
NEH, total	162,250	33,420	170,000	7,750 (4.8%)	136,580 (409%)
Research Programs	14,500	0	14,500	--	14,500 (N/A)
Education Programs	12,250	0	13,094	844 (6.9%)	13,094 (N/A)
Federal/State Partnerships	50,028	0	52,206	2,178 (4.3%)	52,206 (N/A)
NEA, total	162,250	30,175	170,000	7,750 (4.8%)	139,825 (463%)
Grants	77,760	0	82,410	4,650 (6.0%)	82,410 (N/A)
State and Regional Partnerships	40,798	0	43,238	2,440 (6.0%)	43,238 (N/A)

Sources and Additional Information:

- A press release on the Committee approval of the House bill is available at <https://appropriations.house.gov/news/press-releases/appropriations-committee-approves-fiscal-year-2021-interior-environment-funding>.
- The House Interior and Environment Appropriations bill is available at https://appropriations.house.gov/sites/democrats.appropriations.house.gov/files/FY21%20Interior%20Master%2033_xml.pdf.

- The accompanying report is available at <https://appropriations.house.gov/sites/democrats.appropriations.house.gov/files/Interior%20Report%20Full%20Committee%20Print.pdf>.