

On February 10, the President released his FY2021 budget request. The request includes \$146B for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including \$23B in discretionary funds (-\$4B, a 14.8% decrease from the enacted 2020 levels) and \$128B in mandatory funding (+\$3B, 2.4% increase from FY2020). Mandatory programs include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and child nutrition programs, as well as crop insurance and many of the conservation programs. Under the Rural Utilities Service, the Water and Waste Disposal Program would receive \$1.3B for direct loans and \$614M for grants “to improve and expand the water and waste disposal facilities in rural America.” Included is \$40M for rural technical assistance and \$19M for the Circuit Rider Program.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) would see discretionary funding of \$830M, a reduction of \$185M (-18%), mostly due to a proposed reduction for the Watershed Rehabilitation and Watershed Flood and Prevention Operations Programs. The Snow, Soil and Plant Surveys, part of NRCS discretionary funding, all receive slightly increased funding (totals of \$11M, \$80M, and \$10M, respectively). “The Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting Program is critical to predicting water supplies for western crop irrigation and animal drinking supplies, as well as, predicting potential snow melt that may contribute to springtime flooding.” In addition, the budget would allocate \$1.8B (+2.8%) in mandatory funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). It would eliminate the Conservation Stewardship Program authorized under the 2014 Farm Bill and replace it with a new dollar-capped program more closely aligned with EQIP.

The USDA budget for the U.S. Forest Service includes \$4.4B for wildfire mitigation and \$2B for active forest management, including requests of \$510M for hazardous fuel mitigation work, \$385M for forest products, and \$2.4B in additional fire suppression resources. “Hazardous fuel removal is pivotal in ensuring Federal forests and watersheds are sustainable, healthy, and productive, which would help make them safer and more resilient to the destructive impacts of wildfire.”

For the Department of the Interior (DOI), the budget requests \$12.7B (a \$2.5B, 16% decrease from enacted 2020 appropriations). To address a backlog of deferred maintenance for buildings, trails, roads, and water systems on forests, parks and other public lands, as well as tribal schools, the budget proposes a \$6.5B Public Lands Infrastructure Fund. “The Fund would be supported by the deposit of 50% of the proceeds received from Federal offshore and onshore energy leases over the 2021-2025 period, subject to an annual limit of \$1.3B.” Notably, a portion of onshore proceeds is now disbursed to States and to the Reclamation Fund. Another \$314M would go toward National Park Service (NPS) deferred maintenance backlogs, \$11M for collaborative activities with States and communities adjacent to NPS lands, and \$5B for land management operations of the NPS, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). It maintains core funding for FWS to conduct consultations, to facilitate infrastructure development projects and ensure threatened and endangered species receive the protections intended by the Endangered Species Act. It requests \$1B for wildfire programs, including fuels management and wildfire suppression.

The DOI budget proposes \$971.2M for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), with \$180.8M for the Water Resource Mission Area. The budget supports development of the ground control system to keep pace with NASA’s planned 2021 launch of Landsat 9. The satellite includes thermal infrared imagery that water managers employ to monitor water use. The budget invests \$200M at USGS and the Bureau of Reclamation “for science to sustain and enhance ground and surface water quality and quantity, and to develop technologies to respond to the water resources challenges facing the Nation.”

The budget requests \$1.1B for the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) to operate, maintain, and rehabilitate existing water resources infrastructure in the western U.S. There is \$107.1M for dam safety (an increase of \$14.3M), \$437.3M for construction and management of water supply projects, and \$18.2M to fund WaterSMART (a decrease of \$116M). It requests \$156M for the USBR and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) “to implement enacted Indian water rights settlements in support of Federal trust responsibilities to Tribes.” It also includes \$6M “to improve coordination and application of expertise to analyze Indian water settlements more effectively and expediently to strengthen Department-wide capabilities in the Secretary’s Indian Water Rights Office and achieve an integrated and systematic approach to Indian water rights negotiations.”

For the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), the budget requests \$6B (a \$1.7B, 22% decrease from enacted 2020 appropriations). The Construction Program would be funded at \$2.2B and includes 12 commercial navigation projects, seven flood risk management projects, and four aquatic ecosystem restoration programs. Operations and maintenance would receive \$1.99B, flood risk management \$1.2B, investigations \$102M, and aquatic ecosystem restoration \$350M. The Corps regulatory program for protecting wetlands and the nation's waters would receive \$200M. It provides \$250M for innovated partnerships with non-federal sponsors. It recommends extending the pilot program under 2014 WRRDA §1043, with \$250M enabling the Corps to transfer appropriated funds to non-federal sponsors that are able to construct authorized projects more quickly and efficiently.

The budget requests \$6.7B for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (-\$2.4B, a 26% decrease from enacted 2020 appropriations). The budget supports "strategic investments in [water] infrastructure repair, replacement and modernization by providing funding to states, municipalities, and private entities to finance high-priority infrastructure investments," including \$1.98B for Clean and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (-28.2%), \$82M for America's Water Infrastructure Act programs (+86%), and \$25M for the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program (-58%). WIFIA funds could provide \$2B in direct credit assistance, and when combined with other sources, leverage a \$4B total water infrastructure investment.

Harmful algal bloom (HAB) research and policy development, including a new grant program, would receive an additional \$22.4M and 5.5 FTEs to address the "significant health and economic risk" that HABs pose to American communities. The program would provide data standards and geo-referencing expertise for EPA's research, predictive modeling and monitoring tools and analyses, and policy approaches to target and reduce nutrient pollution that causes HABs and impacts water quality across the country.

Additional water quality efforts include support for the Per- and Polyfluoralkyl Substance (PFAS) Action Plan (\$6M and 5.0 FTE) for development of analytical methods, toxicity values, and additional treatment and remediation options that will help States and communities address PFAS exposures. The budget also supports reducing lead exposure through the Lead Exposure Reduction Initiative (\$45M). The budget requests less research funding for Safe and Sustainable Water Resources at \$31.9M (-28.8%) and would take away all funding for Congressional priorities on Water Quality Research and Support Grants. It would also eliminate many of the programs that provide educational, conservation, and partnership support for wetland and waterway protection.

The budget provides \$25.2B for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), a 12% increase above 2020 appropriations. This includes \$1.7B (-\$203M) for earth science, including the upcoming launches of Landsat-9, Sentinel-6, NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR), the Surface Water and Ocean Topography Mission (SWOT), and for other related programs, data systems, analysis, and missions.

On February 12, *E&E News* reported that Congress has no appetite for the steep cuts in discretionary funding requested by the Administration and are planning to stick to levels agreed upon in the bipartisan fiscal accord reached last summer. "What we will be looking at is trying once again to have a relatively regular appropriations process since we have agreed on what the cap is supposed to be for this year," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), effectively rejecting the Administration's budget plan.