

Statement of Interior Subcommittee Chairman Mike Simpson  
Department of the Interior FY13 Budget Hearing  
Secretary Ken Salazar  
February 16, 2012

The Committee will come to order.

Mr. Secretary, I'd like to welcome you, along with David Hayes, and our good friend, Pam Haze, to today's subcommittee hearing addressing the fiscal year 2013 budget priorities for the Department of the Interior.

My colleagues and I hope to cover a lot of ground with you today. From our conversations, I know that you are continuing to set an ambitious agenda for the Department on many fronts. I've said on many occasions that while we don't agree on every issue, I do appreciate the fact that we can work together to find common ground.

I'd like to begin by making several points on a few specific issues before we receive your testimony. There are some things in your budget request I can support strongly and some things, frankly, that I'm concerned about. This is the beginning of a long process so we have some time to work through these issues.

As you know, Indian Country is a top priority of mine—and a top priority of this subcommittee. I'm pleased that you've proposed full funding for contract support costs within BIA, and that you're continuing to focus on strengthening law enforcement. I hope we can work together to provide adequate funding for education and to improve the condition of our tribal schools. Ms. McCullum was right when she said last year that children know how a community feels about them by the shape that their school is in.

I'm also pleased with the proposed increase for implementation of sage grouse conservation and restoration efforts. This is a positive step toward preventing future listing of the species and complements some of the sage grouse work already being done on the ground.

We'll likely have some conversations about your proposal to decrease funding for Rangeland Management and to increase fees on grazing. These are issues Western Members and I care deeply about.

Likewise, I'm concerned with the way that your budget request addresses the PILT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) program.

In western states like Idaho, where the federal government owns nearly two-thirds of the land, the PILT program is critical to local communities. PILT is a matter of fairness to many rural counties across the country; it's the federal government's responsibility to be a good neighbor by meeting its obligations to state and local governments.

Congress made PILT a mandatory program in 2008, and fully funded it for five years, outside of the discretionary funding process and outside of the jurisdiction of this subcommittee.

While that authorization expires at the end of this fiscal year, the federal government's obligation to fund PILT does not. I'm particularly concerned that the Department has requested a year-long extension of the mandatory authorization without providing any details on how to pay for it.

Like many western Members and Senators, I'm concerned that the authorizing committees may not act on extending PILT before this authorization expires. I look forward to working with you to find a long-term solution to this perennial issue.

Your overall LWCF request is more reasonable this year as compared to last year but, though reduced substantially, it's still almost 40 percent above the fiscal year 2012 enacted level. I remain concerned that these increases, if enacted, would occur at the expense of other critical areas like construction accounts—which are down 16 percent in your budget request—and hazardous fuels funding which is reduced by \$39 million. A reasonable person could conclude that the Department is increasing land acquisition too quickly and at the expense of other very important and deserving priorities.

Reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfires is always a top priority for the Congress and the Department. Last year, however, the Committee was very concerned about the constraints put on the use of hazardous fuel dollars. These funds help clear brush and prevent forest and

rangeland fires. The Department and OMB were requiring 90% of these dollars be spent in the wildland urban interface. The problem is that much of the land managed by the Department is not in the wildland urban interface. For example, many of our national parks, BLM rangeland, and Fish and Wildlife Refuges are in remote areas—this doesn't mean we shouldn't protect parks like Yellowstone or Yosemite from catastrophic wildfire.

The FY12 Omnibus specifically directs the Department to remove this requirement and instead allow the agencies to allocate funds based on the highest priority projects in the highest priority areas. I was dismayed to hear that the Department and OMB are still pursuing this requirement despite the report language and numerous meetings on this issue. Mr. Secretary, I hope that you will work with me to correct this problem and comply with the FY12 language.

Last year, I mentioned that increased funding for the former-Minerals Management Service (MMS) was not a blank check, and the same is true this year. Funding has been significantly increased for the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE, or Bessey) for the second year in a row.

I want to commend you and the Department for some of the progress made thus far on approving permits and plans. Still, we've hardly scratched the surface in meeting our full potential in oil and gas exploration and production—both onshore and on the outer continental shelf.

There is also still a lot of work to do in hiring much-needed engineers and inspectors. At your request, we included language in the FY12 bill authorizing the Department to hire inspectors and engineers at a higher pay scale competitive with the oil and gas industry. As a result, the bureaus now have both the funding *and* the tools you told us they need. With gas prices on the rise again, the public and the Congress will have no patience for more delays. It's time for the bureaus to get to work.

In closing, Mr. Secretary, no hearing with you would be complete without expressing thanks to your fine professional staff. David Hayes has been very helpful on a number of issues over the last year. And, as I've said before, our subcommittee couldn't do its work without Pam Haze. Thanks to you both for all you do.

With that, I'm happy to yield to the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Moran, for any opening remarks he would like to make.