

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations for
Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations for
Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations for
Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations for
Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies

Dear Appropriators for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies,

On behalf of twenty six organizations, representing Americans across the country who love and depend on our lands and waters, we urge Congressional and Senate leadership and committee appropriators to protect critical funding to ensure adequate Latino representation across conservation sites and within hiring practices for The Department of Interior and National Park Service.

While the FY 2024 budget is low and additional investment is needed, we appreciate the overall commitment in the proposed budget towards improving the quality of equitable outcomes for The Department of Interior's workforce and managed lands such as highlighting the need for racial justice and the "inclusion of underserved communities". To further support these goals, we have identified three areas of improvement regarding the proposed FY 2024 budget:

1. Advancing equitable hiring practices and removing barriers to career pathways within DOI and its umbrella agencies to ensure fair and equitable representation of Hispanics and Latinos in employment through the Federal Government;
2. Ensuring adequate funding for the maintenance of existing Latino Heritage sites and public lands in close proximity to communities of color and;
3. Ensuring accurate and equitable representation of Hispanic and Latino histories at conservation and recreation sites under DOI jurisdiction.

The Department of Interior is a critical agency charged with the stewardship of some of the United States' most critical cultural and environmental resources including over 480 million acres of lands. We expect that all agencies within DOI, especially the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management which administer public lands significant to Hispanic and Latino cultures and histories, are accountable and adequately funded to meet the directives of various executive orders and agency memorandums intending to establish increasingly equitable outcomes for underserved communities, including but not limited to:

- [Executive Order 13171](#) - Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government - Recognizes that Hispanics are underrepresented in the federal workforce and directs federal agencies to maintain programs for the recruitment and career development of Hispanics in Federal employment.
- [Executive Order 13985](#) - Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Government: Directs federal agencies to assess whether and to what extent their programs perpetuate systemic barriers to opportunities and benefits for people of color and other underserved groups
- [Executive Order 14045](#) - Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunities for Hispanics: Directs agencies to design plans and measurable actions to advance educational equity and economic opportunity for Hispanic and Latino communities.
- [Executive Order 13583](#) - Establishing a Coordinated Government-wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce: Directs executive departments and agencies to develop and implement a more comprehensive, integrated, and strategic focus on diversity and inclusion as a key component of their human resources strategies.
- [Executive Order 11478](#) - Equal Employment Opportunity in the Federal Government: Prohibits discrimination in employment because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, handicap, or age; promotes the full realization of equal employment opportunity through a continuing affirmative program in each executive department and agency.
- [Presidential Memorandum on Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Our National Parks, National Forests, Marine Protected Areas, and other Public Lands and Waters](#) - Expands on Executive Order 13985 to further direct agencies to pursue additional efforts to create and maintain a diverse and inclusive Federal workforce.
- [Department of Interior Secretary Order 3406](#) - Creates a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Council that will ensure that the Department prioritizes action on the advancement of DEIA and further its implementation of the DEIA executive orders.

Advancing equitable hiring practices and removing barriers to career pathways within DOI and its umbrella agencies to ensure fair and equitable representation

We support DOI's increased funding to expand the total number of full-time equivalent staff (FTEs) up to 1,369 FTEs through 2023. A fully-staffed workforce is essential to successfully meet the nation's environmental goals, yet at the end of 2020, Interior's

staffing was at a 10-year low, with 60,558 FTE (OS-10). Although progress has been made on the aforementioned commitments to diversity DOI's workforce composition, much work is needed to ensure this projected expansion includes Latinos and other members of underserved communities. For example, a 2021 DOI assessment of workplace composition further revealed that:

- 26.2 percent of the total DOI workforce in FY 2021 was identified of race and ethnicity categories other than “White” or “Not Identified.” In comparison, the Civilian Labor (CLF) benchmark from 2014 to 2018 was 32.5 percent
- 6 of 11 agencies fall below the DOI average of 26.2 percent for workforce representation from race and ethnicity categories other than “White” or “Not Identified” in FY 2021
- 65.7 percent of the promotions in 2021 were issued to employees in the category “White”
- Of the 887,383 applications received for DOI job opportunities that were audited in FY 2021, 78.4 percent of the applicants were “White”
- 81.6 percent of selected applicants in FY 2021 were “White”

As such, we support the \$20+ million dedicated to advancing DEIA initiatives within DOI and its umbrella agencies. Congress must approve the Biden Administration's proposed budget allocations to ensure timely advancement and adequate resourcing of these efforts. Specifically, we support the following allocations in the proposed FY 2024 budget:

- increase of \$11.1 million as part of a Department Wide Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) initiative
- increase of \$3.2 million to address resourcing and compliance gaps identified by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) .
- increase of \$7.0 million for the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights; Office of Human Capital; and Office of Collaborative Alternative Dispute Resolution.

Ensure adequate funding for the maintenance of existing Latino heritage sites and public lands in close proximity to communities of color

We are supportive of the increase of \$266.3 million for operational capacity and visitor services for the public. We hope this increased funding can support visitor services and the backlog of maintenance for Latino-serving sites under DOI's jurisdiction such as César E. Chávez National Monument, etc. Towards this end, we also support the proposed \$3 million allocation to support start-up costs for sites recently added to the National Park System, in particular the \$250,000 for the Blackwell School National Historic Monument (NPS Overview-7). We also support the \$8.2 million for new and critical responsibilities at parks and offices (NPS Overview-8), in particular the \$215,000 for César E. Chávez National Monument for interpretation and education capacity (NPS Overview-9,12).

Ensuring accurate and equitable representation of Hispanic and Latino histories at conservation and recreation sites

The FY24 National Park Service appropriations for National Recreation and Preservation programs, and the Historic Preservation Fund indicate specific program funding related to African American, Japanese American, Indigenous American, and Native Hawaiian histories and cultural resources including but not limited to historic sites, landscapes, ecosystems, parks and rivers. We celebrate and commend the Park Service's work to elevate the stories of underserved communities but we are struck by what past NPS budgets have meant for the minority groups that are not explicitly identified from the Historic Preservation Fund, National Recreation and Preservation Fund, and other program appropriation. At worst, the exclusion of other racial and ethnic groups of color makes a statement that those who are excluded do not matter and have not contributed to United States history. Hispanic and Latino Americans, Middle-Eastern Americans, and Alaska Natives have been excluded from meaningful investments in the Historic Preservation Fund and the National Recreation and Preservation appropriations year after year during the Biden Administration.

Despite the robust framework of policy direction, Latinos, communities of color, and other underrepresented identity groups such as the LGBTQ+, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and other communities are not currently equitably represented in lands managed by DOI and its umbrella agencies. For example, less than eight percent of designated landmarks specifically represent the stories of Native Americans, African Americans, American Latinos, Asian Americans, women and other underrepresented groups.

Moreover, the National Park Foundation reports that only 24 of the more than 400 National Park units specifically preserve Latino/a/x history; most represent the history of Spanish colonization rather than recognizing contemporary history and the multitude of Latino and Hispanic cultures. Moreover, there are 190 Latino Heritage Sites out of the nearly 96,000 sites in the National Historic Register that are managed by the National Park Service and many are tied to Spanish colonial or military history such as the Cabrillo National Monument (CA), Old Spanish National Historic Trail (NV), San Antonio Missions National Historical Park (TX), and San Juan National Historic Site (PR). Additionally, while states like California, New Mexico, and Texas have many sites, other states with significant Latino populations have much less Latino Heritage Sites such as Illinois, New York, and Arizona. Other states do not have any Latino Heritage Sites at all such as Connecticut, Delaware, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Finally, there is little evidence that any of the 1,000 marine protected areas preserve Latino/a/x history and stories.

We were dismayed to see that land acquisition for the National Park Service was reduced by nearly \$30 million. While the Land and Water Conservation Fund and Great American Outdoors Act have provided much-needed additional funding for various park and site protections, Congress must ensure land acquisition funding is increased in order to reach the long-term goals set through the America The Beautiful Initiative. Increased land acquisition funding will also support DOI's goals of expanding the

equitable representation of various historically marginalized communities in conservation and recreation site designations.

Establish funding specifically for Latino Heritage Sites

As is, the NPS budget does not meet its declared intention to fund "new and critical responsibilities at parks preserving the stories of underrepresented communities and for interpretive projects that tell these stories". We recommend a one-time allocation of funds in the FY2024 budget to allow the Department of Interior, in close collaboration with agency staff and conservation, historical, and community experts to conduct a national systematic review of existing parks, recreation areas, and historic sites to identify areas to include Latino and Hispanic history where appropriate, including potential sites for new federal protections.

We are in the midst of a climate emergency, mass extinction, and public health crisis. The integrity of our natural resources and lands are critical to the well being of the United States and its territories now more than ever. These crises are inextricably tied to the inequitable representation of America's diverse cultures and peoples across land management leadership, staffing, and historical and scientific interpretation of our public lands.

Please act now to ensure that our public lands reflect all of the faces of America—past, present and future—by advancing the appropriations requests supported herein by the following organizations:

Arte Sana
Californians for Western Wilderness
Chispa Arizona
Chispa Florida
Coalición de Derechos Humanos
Earthjustice
ECODiversity
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Justice Coalition for Water
Fuerte Arts Movement
GreenLatinos
Hispanic Federation
LA Nature for All

Latino Outdoors
Latinos in Heritage Conservation
La Trenza
Los Padres ForestWatch
Madrean Archipelago Wildlife Center
Next 100 Coalition
Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project
Outdoor Outreach
Plastic Pollution Coalition
QLatinx
Sierra Club
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services