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For Immediate Release: April 8, 1993
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President Clinton's fiscal year 1994 budget for the Department of the Interior calls for significant new investments in National Parks and natural resource protection, as well as scientific efforts to help the nation protect endangered species without hurting local economies.

$7.6 billion is requested for programs funded through the annual appropriations process, an eight percent increase over the 1993 enacted level. The budget calls for total spending of $9.5 billion, an increase of more than $500 million over Interior's 1993 funding. Included are significant investments in education, self-determination and safety on Indian reservations and substantial administrative savings throughout the Department.

The Department's shift in priorities from development to a greater balance between conservation and development is reflected in the 18% increase in operations funding-for the Fish and Wildlife Service and the 19% increase for operations of the National Park Service.

"This budget, more than anything else, is an investment budget and it is a sound investment for the American taxpayers," said Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. "This will give us the kind of return that will not only be evident in the next year or two, but will pay off for the next generation as well."

"We're finding the right balance," Secretary Babbitt said. "In the past decade, Interior's leaders assumed this was a development agency, forgetting the responsibility to protect our public lands. This shift in budget priorities helps us fulfill the role of responsible stewards."

The budget request was developed by starting with the current year's appropriations, reflecting the Administration's commitment to work cooperatively with Congress. In the previous two Administrations, Interior's budget requests were continually scaled back to far below the previous year's appropriated amounts. Congress then labored to reinstate funds to reflect long established national priorities.

"This budget uses as its starting point the level of funding Congress provided for us during this current fiscal year," said Secretary Babbitt. "We've taken ideology and gamesmanship out of the equation, and are focusing our energies on the lands and resources entrusted to our care. The usual gridlock is no more."

The budget includes $107 million in savings. Of this, $65 million is saved by reducing the number of positions by 2. 5%, putting the Department on track to meet the President's goal of 4% staff reductions by the end of 1995. Administrative cost reductions of 3% will lead to savings of $42 million; the President has pledged that the Cabinet will reduce administrative costs by 14% over four years.

"We've brought in people with very strong management skills," said Secretary Babbitt. "They will determine where we can cut and where it makes sense to invest. This Department is staffed with high quality career employees, and they can make taxpayer dollars go much further. What has been missing in the past is clear direction and a sense of mission that all employees can share."

Science as an Investment

The budget proposes significant increases for the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), much of it in scientific research and applications which can help the Department work to protect species while at the same time avoid economic disruptions which are sometimes blamed on the Endangered Species Act.

"We've got to use science to help us plan ahead, " said Secretary Babbitt. "Recent leaders in this Department have failed to act, allowing a crisis to develop and letting the courts determine how we protect threatened wildlife. We're refusing to let that continue. These investments in science will help government leaders at all levels to be better at planning ahead. It will give greater certainty to local economies and local investors."

''Quite often people think of government investments only in the sense of roads, bridges and schools," said Secretary Babbitt.

"But some of the greatest returns on spending have come from scientific research. That will be one of the great legacies decades from now when people consider the Clinton Administration's Interior Department."

The FWS' s endangered species program is in line for an increase of $30 million, or 65%. This includes funds for "prelisting" activities which are designed to help protect species before they become officially listed as endangered or threatened. These funds will also be used to draft "recovery plans" for the lengthy backlog of endangered species for which no recovery plans exist.

"These funds may become the building block for a National Biological survey," said Secretary Babbitt, referring to a draft proposal to place much of Interior's research biology functions under one roof. That effort would be done to provide an anticipatory, proactive biological science program to enable land and resource managers to develop comprehensive ecosystem management strategies to minimize conflicts, litigation and economic costs.

A proposed increase of $14.5 million for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) would be used to enhance the National Water Quality Assessment program. Also, a $12.6 million increase in a one-time investment to expand the USGS EROS Data Center will help handle an expected ten-fold increase in the reception, manipulation and distribution of remote-sensing data from NASA satellites.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will also play a much greater role in helping the Department protect at-risk species. The Bureau will receive an increase of $24 million for renewable resources management activities. This includes a $7 million, 58% increase in the Bureau's efforts to improve riparian areas, the green plant corridors along streams.

The Bureau of Reclamation's budget proposes to spend $34 million from the new Central Valley Project Restoration Fund to improve fish and wildlife habitat in California. As authorized by legislation enacted in October 1992, this proposal is financed by additional charges on project beneficiaries.

Investments in Parks and Public Lands

The budget proposes a 19 percent increase for National Park service (NPS) operations, for a total request of $1. 5 billion. The NPS is focusing efforts on restoring existing parks, with funding increases for every existing park.

The budget proposes significant infrastructure maintenance and repair work for the startling number of

parks which have fallen into disrepair. It includes increases to help make the workforce more professional, and offers the first request in a dozen years for the Urban Park and Recreational Fund, which is targeted at developing and maintaining programs and facilities in urban areas. Many of these proposed changes come directly from the recommendations of the NPS 75th Anniversary Symposium, held in Vail, CO.

The Department's budget calls for $144 million in funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, down from $221 million during the current fiscal year. The budget calls for added staff to increase the Department's capability to conduct land exchanges to benefit all bureaus.

"The President is delivering on his promise of protecting and enhancing our National Parks," said Secretary Babbitt. "In the stimulus package, we chose to invest money to address the huge backlog of repairs that have piled up in our Parks. We've continued that approach with this budget. While we would all wish to have more funds for such programs as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, in 1994 we believe the best use of funds is to take care of, and repair, the Parks we now have."

Investments in Tribal Lands

The Department proposes a 64% increase, for a total of $18 million, for the repair of high risk dams on Indian reservations. Of the top 100 high-hazard dams on the Department's list,. 44 are on Indian reservations.

The budget proposes $200 million for Indian Land and Water Claims Settlements. These settlements, agreed to by congress, resolve long-standing claims to water and lands by Indian Tribes.

"This is another case of breaking the gridlock," said Secretary Babbitt. "Under this new system, we bring consistency and predictability to the process. Now, Indian Tribes and allottees, non-Indian water users, water districts and others will know the annual limits on possible payments for all claims. It helps all parties in negotiations."

The Broader Budget Context

"This budget request should be considered in the context of other objectives the Administration is pursuing," said Secretary Babbitt. "We are pushing aggressively to charge market prices for grazing on federal lands, and I'll hold hearings in the West on that topic later this month. We have committed to eliminating below-cost timber sales and will continue to bring market principles to the distribution of federally subsidized water. We' re pushing to gain royalties on hard rock mining, and I'm confident it will happen in this session of Congress."

"A few weeks back, President Clinton appealed to all Americans to make contributions in the national interest, 11 said Secretary Babbitt.” This Administration has no intention of amending that statement to exclude mining corporations, timber companies, cattle ranchers and farmers irrigating with subsidized water."

Moderate visitor fee increases will be instituted in some of the National Parks and other recreation areas. Fees will not be increased at parks close to urban centers, where many users tend to be from poor families. Increases are most likely at "destination parks," where families have often already spent significant amounts of money just to reach the park boundaries.