



ANNUAL REPORT ON TRIBAL CO-STEWARDSHIP

**Implementation of Joint Secretarial Order 3403:
Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility to Indian Tribes in
the Stewardship of Federal Lands and Waters**

Background

At the Tribal Nations Summit in November 2021, President Biden unveiled the “Tribal Homelands Initiative,” a joint effort between the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and the Interior (DOI) focused on improving Federal stewardship of public lands, waters, and wildlife through bolstering the role of Tribal communities in Federal land management. Following the creation of the initiative, Secretaries Tom Vilsack and Deb Haaland signed Joint Secretarial Order 3403 (Order) “Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility to Indian Tribes in the Stewardship of Federal Lands and Waters.” This Order establishes that both the USDA and the DOI will manage Federal lands and waters in a way that protects the treaty, religious, subsistence, and cultural interests of federally recognized Indian Tribes and is consistent with the nation-to-nation relationship between the United States Government and federally recognized Tribes and the U.S. Government’s trust obligations. It also describes how the Departments will carry out their obligations. The Order directs each Department to pursue agreements with Tribes to collaborate in the co-stewardship of Federal lands and waters under each Departments’ purview and, where consistent with applicable law, support opportunities to consolidate Tribal homelands and Tribal stewardship of those resources. In November 2022, Joint Secretarial Order 3403 was amended to include the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), providing increased opportunity for co-stewardship of Federal waters.

To ensure the USDA monitored and fulfilled its obligations under the Order, the Department established the inaugural Joint Secretarial Order (JSO) implementation team in late 2021. Representing senior leaders from across the Department (Office of the Secretary, Office of the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Office of Tribal Relations, and the Office of the General Counsel) and key offices within USDA Forest Service (Office of the Chief; State, Private, and Tribal Forestry; National Forest System; and Office of Tribal Relations), in partnership with field leaders (regional foresters and forest supervisors), the team has worked over the past 2 years to increase meaningful and durable opportunities for co-stewardship.

Year Two Accomplishments and Progress

In 2022, USDA made important progress in implementing JSO 3403. Building on this foundation in 2023, USDA continued to make significant advancements in providing opportunity for co-stewardship of the Nation's forests and grasslands. For example, the USDA Forest Service and Tribes executed more than 120 co-stewardship agreements, representing a total investment of approximately \$68 million, more than triple the \$19.8 million invested in fiscal year 2022. These agreements include approximately \$37 million in 12 self-determination agreements, up from approximately \$4.3 million in fiscal year 2022. In addition to significantly increasing the number of co-stewardship agreements, the Forest Service also made notable policy adjustments recognizing the importance of Indigenous Knowledge and providing Tribes with improved access to USDA programs. This report highlights some of USDA’s 2023 accomplishments.

Embedding Tribal Co-Stewardship in the USDA Forest Service

This year USDA continued its efforts to improve relationships with Tribes and affirm its commitment to expanding the respectful application of Indigenous Knowledge into Federal land decisions by making several key organizational and policy changes. This section highlights some of the steps taken to meet our duty to uphold our general federal trust and treaty responsibilities to Tribal Nations and enhance Tribal engagement.

Renaming USDA Forest Service State, Private, and Tribal Forestry

The USDA Forest Service has begun to implement a new way of working to build trust and create innovative opportunities with Tribal Nations, beginning with renaming the State and Private Forestry Deputy Area. By changing the name to State, Private, and Tribal Forestry, the USDA Forest Service is publicly and intentionally emphasizing its commitment to working with Tribal Nations. This includes a focus on co-stewardship of the Nation's forests and grasslands, respectful application of Indigenous Knowledge, and protection of sacred sites.

USDA Forest Service Releases Action Plan on Strengthening Tribal Consultation and Nation-to-Nation Relationships

Acknowledging that the millions of acres managed by the USDA Forest Service are the ancestral homelands of American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Nations, and the tragic history involving the forced displacement of Indigenous people, the USDA Forest Service continued its commitment to general federal trust and treaty responsibilities this year with the release of [“Strengthening Tribal Consultations and Nation-to-Nation Relationships: A USDA Forest Service Action Plan”](#) in February 2023. This plan represents an organizational shift in USDA Forest Service culture, beginning with reflection on agency policies, programs, and practices and the real-life implications they have on Indigenous peoples. It includes clear goals and expected outcomes to hold the agency accountable for the implementation of the action plan. Divided into four focus areas, the plan directly addresses barriers identified by Tribes through consultation. Focus areas incorporated into the report include (1) strengthening relationships between Tribes and the USDA Forest Service, (2) fulfilling general trust and treaty obligations, (3) advancing Tribal relations within the Forest Service, and (4) enhancing co-stewardship of the Nation's forests and grasslands. Regarding the latter, the Forest Service established and staffed a new subdirectorate within the agency's Office of Tribal Relations in the State, Private, and Tribal Forestry Deputy Area. This action underpins and reinforces progress made through implementation of JSO 3403. This subdirectorate was established for the express purpose of providing expertise, training, and support in executing agency business with Tribes and focuses on the entire suite of allowable USDA Forest Service authorities across all agency program areas.

Improving Access to USDA Programs

In April 2022, USDA released a new Equity Action Plan in support of Executive Order 13985, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support to Underserved Communities.” The plan outlines actions USDA will take to advance programmatic equity to improve access to programs and services for

underserved stakeholders and communities. The Equity Action Plan includes a commitment to removing the unique barriers for Indigenous and Tribal access to USDA programs and services, promoting Tribal self-determination principles, and incorporating Tribal values and Indigenous perspectives into Federal policies.

USDA Forest Service Issues Match Waiver Policy

In 2023, collaboration between the Office of the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment (Dr. Homer Wilkes) and the Office of the Chief of the USDA Forest Service (Randy Moore) led to a policy change that recognizes the importance of partnerships in accomplishing mission-critical work. To better enable work with partners, the Forest Service reviewed its grants and agreements process and found that policy requirements for cash matching or substantial cash contributions were an impediment to expanding work with partners at the appropriate scale. In some cases, existing policies created insurmountable barriers for partners, including Tribes, to contribute their expertise and capacity in enhancing the health and resilience of America's forests and grasslands.

After a review of existing policies, the USDA Forest Service took several actions to make partnering easier, as well as more accessible and equitable. Agency policy now makes clear that a partner with an established formal agreement may satisfy match requirements by providing cash, real or personal property, services and in-kind contributions, or a combination thereof. The value of "services and in-kind contributions" that partners bring includes but is not limited to (1) access to networks and communities that are underrepresented or underserved, (2) access to Indigenous Knowledge, (3) networks and relationships that increase social license for wildfire risk reduction and treatments, (4) creativity and innovation that can support effective public outreach and education and facilitate safe and inclusive recreation experiences, (5) experience managing work projects to improve forest health and climate resilience, (6) capabilities to support project design and management and provide subject matter expertise that complements the skills of agency employees or fills a gap in agency capacity, and more.

Policy match requirements (meaning any match requirements not required by statute) are waived for all agreements with Tribes, as encouraged in Executive Order 13175, "Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments." Agreements with Tribes help the agency meet its general trust responsibilities and deliver on priorities, including equity and co-stewardship, by providing benefits without the need for any additional cash matching.

USDA Engages Youth Through Indian Service Youth Corp

In partnership with the USDA Forest Service's Office of Tribal Relations and reforestation team, USDA established the USDA Forest Service Indian Service Youth Corp (ISYC). The ISYC provides paid experience with conservation work on both public and Indian lands for individuals ages 16-30 (up to age 35 for veterans). Since February 2023 the agency has allocated \$5 million and six multi-year agreements under the program with two agreements in direct partnership with Tribes. These investments have helped over 200 Indigenous students gain necessary skills that may provide an advantage when applying for Federal conservation jobs.

USDA Forest Service Plans Release of Inventory for Land Conveyance Authorities

Recognizing that the USDA Forest Service manages forests and grasslands that are the ancestral homelands of American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes, USDA is compiling a list of statutory authorities available to entities and Tribes interested in land exchanges, purchases, and, in limited circumstances, transfers. The intent of this inventory is to provide Forest Service line officers and Tribes with an increased understanding of policy tools that can be used when working with Tribes on exchanges, purchases, or land transfers.

USDA Forest Service Clarifies “Base Property” Eligibility Criteria

The USDA Forest Service reviewed rangeland management program policies and identified a need to clarify base property requirements. Specifically, Tribal trust land can be used for satisfying the base property requirement for obtaining livestock grazing permits on national forests and national grasslands. This change in policy increases opportunities for Tribal members to apply for grazing permits on Federal land and is directly responsive to a barrier identified by Tribes through consultation.

USDA Forest Service Develops Tribal Keystone Agreements

To enhance partner involvement in tackling the wildfire and climate crises, in 2023 the USDA Forest Service initiated development of several keystone agreements that allow the agency to execute high-priority projects quickly and efficiently. During 2023, several new significant keystone agreements were put into place. The Forest Service has committed \$100 million to the development of keystone agreements with Tribes or Tribal organizations. In the coming months, the Forest Service will execute one or more Tribal keystone agreement(s) for technical assistance, active engagement, and outreach in the delivery of agency programs and services. The agency has been working with numerous Tribal organizations and through national consultation to expand agreements designed to increase Tribal workforce capacity and engagement in co-stewardship.

USDA Forest Service Creates Community Navigator Program

In fiscal year 2023, the USDA Forest Service launched its first ever community navigator program aimed at improving access to funding opportunities and technical assistance for underserved communities, including Tribes and Indigenous communities. Serving as a national resource, community navigators support Forest Service programs receiving funding from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). Navigators are initially focused on helping Tribes and underserved communities apply for community wildfire defense grants and IRA-related urban and community forestry awards and forest landowner support provisions. In March 2023, the USDA Forest Service announced it was accepting applications for the second round of funding under the Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program. To increase Tribal participation, a separate notice of funding opportunity was issued specifically for Tribes. The USDA Forest Service plans to increase the number of

community navigators in early 2024 into specific regions, including Puerto Rico, Alaska, New Mexico, the South, and Northeast.

USDA Forest Service Releases Financial Resources Guide

In preparation for the 2023 White House Tribal Nations Summit, the USDA Forest Service has created a financial resources guide that includes information on available Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act resources that can be used in support of co-stewardship. With the addition of this guide and community navigators, the Forest Service is providing additional easy-to-access information to Tribes on the range of grants and funds that are available.

USDA Forest Service Co-Stewardship Agreements with Tribes

In 2022 the USDA Forest Service was honored to announce nearly 60 new co-stewardship agreements. The agency doubled that number in 2023, with more than 120 new agreements that tripled the fiscal year 2022 investment (\$19.8 million) with approximately \$68 million in Tribal agreements.

Multiple existing authorities enable the Forest Service to enter into co-stewardship agreements with Tribes. One key co-stewardship authority is the Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004 (TFPA), which includes special consideration for cultural, traditional, and historical affiliation of Tribes with the land and their Indigenous Knowledge and skills. In the 2018 Farm Bill, the USDA Forest Service was granted a demonstration authority to enter into self-determination agreements “to perform administrative, management, and other functions of programs of the TFPA of 2004” under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (TFPA 638). In 2023, the USDA Forest Service invested \$36.7 million in 12 new TFPA self-determination agreements, up from approximately \$4.3 million in 4 agreements in fiscal year 2022.

This year, co-stewardship agreements between Tribes and the USDA Forest Service span the full range of Tribal priorities and USDA Forest Service mission critical work, with the most common being for watershed and habitat improvements, restoration, invasives management, and fuels reduction. Fire-centric investments include development of fire crews and wildfire defense planning. Incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge runs throughout—in traditional plant management and ethnobotany, cultural interpretation, and traditional methodologies and techniques—as does workforce and youth capacity building. Other agreements invest in infrastructure, including equipment purchases to support Tribal wood enterprise and biomass heating systems as well as Tribal nurseries.

Table 1. USDA Forest Service regional co-stewardship investments in fiscal year 2023

Region ¹	Investment	Region	Investment
Northern (Region 1)	\$1,316,673	Pacific Northwest (Region 6)	\$9,313,587
Rocky Mountain (Region 2)	\$273,904	Southern (Region 8)	\$6,313,452
Southwest (Region 3)	\$27,943,516	Eastern (Region 9)	\$4,327,917
Intermountain (Region 4)	\$1,639,571	Alaska (Region 10)	\$7,113,595
Pacific Southwest (Region 5)	\$11,192,707	Agencywide Total:	\$69,434,922

¹ The USDA Forest Service is organized into nine jurisdictional regions. Region 1 covers the States of Montana and North Dakota, the Idaho Panhandle, and a part of South Dakota. Region 2 includes Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, and the majority of South Dakota and Wyoming. Region 3 is comprised of Arizona and New Mexico, while Region 4 includes Nevada, Utah, and portions of Idaho and Wyoming. Region 5 is California and Hawaii. Region 6 covers the States of Oregon and Washington. Region 8 spans across 13 Southern States from Texas to Virginia and down to Florida, including Puerto Rico. Region 9 includes the Northeast and Midwest from Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri up to Maine. Region 10 is Alaska.

Forest Service Regional Co-Stewardship Agreement Highlights

Northern (Region 1)

Montana—Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes. Three new agreements with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes in fiscal year 2023 strengthened the long-standing and collaborative relationship with the Northern Region: a new Good Neighbor agreement that provides a framework for current and future restoration and two challenge cost-share agreements. The Good Neighbor agreement adds a full-time liaison to facilitate communication and recommendations between the Tribes (resource departments, culture committees, and Tribal Council), and four national forests (Bitterroot, Flathead, Kootenai, and Lolo). The challenge cost-share agreements meet the interests of the Forest Service and the Tribes to develop data about natural and cultural resources on the Tribes' ancestral homelands, which will fill an information need and center these resources and treaty rights in planning, priority setting, and land management decisions.

North Dakota—Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. The Forest Service made the first award in the region to the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians in the form of a community wildfire defense grant (with match waived). This grant will fund a 2-year, Tribe-led project to develop a community wildfire protection plan in one of the most underserved communities in the nation (79.7 percent Native American, with 26.9 percent of those living on or near the reservation at or below poverty level).

Rocky Mountain (Region 2)

Colorado/New Mexico—Southern Ute Tribe. In fiscal year 2023 a TFPA 638 agreement was executed with the Southern Ute Tribe. This agreement supports Tribal ethnobotany and Indigenous Knowledge studies for incorporation into vegetation management, fuels reduction, and forest restoration activities under the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative. All 24 Tribes and Pueblos that are culturally affiliated with the San Juan National Forest will be invited to participate in this work to advance Tribal consultation, collaboration, and shared stewardship goals.

South Dakota—Rosebud Sioux Tribe/Sicangu Lakota, Oglala Lakota Nation, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, and other Tribes. Despite significant, historic challenges in Tribal relationships, and complex issues and interests on the Black Hills National Forest, major milestones were achieved, beginning with co-stewardship of the Pactola/He Sapa Visitor Center. A co-stewardship agreement for jointly developing a natural and cultural interpretation program of the Pactola Visitor Center on the Black Hills National Forest is nearing completion with the Rosebud Sioux Tribe/Sicangu Lakota, Oglala Lakota Nation, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, and other Tribes. This cooperation will maximize opportunities for the participating nations to have a voice in telling their story while developing the next generation of Lakota and Dakota knowledge bearers; provide appropriate representation of Indigenous natural resource values, history, and culture to Black Hills National Forest visitors; support perpetuation and revitalization of cultural literacy and Lakota and Dakota language; and educate agency staff,

members of the local communities, and the visiting public about the living legacy of the participating nations. A memorandum of understanding was negotiated, and interested Tribes are in the process of submitting it to their Tribal Councils for approval.

Southwest (Region 3)

Arizona—San Carlos Apache Tribe. In fiscal year 2022, the San Carlos Apache Tribe received approval of a TFPA proposal with the Apache-Sitgreaves, Coronado, and Tonto National Forests—lands within the boundaries of the National Forest System that are considered ancestral to the San Carlos Apache Tribe and associated with reserved treaty rights and/or that have importance to the Tribe. In fiscal year 2023 a self-determination agreement was executed to restore and improve forest health, wildlife habitat, and watershed conditions. The agreement will create a capable workforce through leadership and forest, fire, and cultural ecology training, which emphasizes the importance of traditional ecological knowledge in decision making.

Arizona—White Mountain Apache Tribe. The White Mountain Apache Tribe has entered a TFPA self-determination agreement for restoration, watershed protection, and forest health improvement. This work will restore and improve forest health on a cultural landscape with Tribal significance. Through consultation, Tribal elders will have an opportunity to provide input on cultural and heritage issues related to forest health and treatment. The Tribe also received a grant from the Wood Products Infrastructure Assistance program to transition away from mature product markets toward a more profitable and sustainable organization focused on other wood products and innovation. Finally, the Tribe received a Cooperative Forestry Assistance grant to manage the Tribe's forest resources with due consideration of social and cultural values in the Mt. Baldy area. This area is important to the White Mountain Apache Tribe due to its cultural significance, water resources, threatened and endangered species, and economic and recreation values.

New Mexico—Santa Clara Pueblo. The Santa Clara Pueblo and Santa Fe National National Forest entered into an agreement that supports the Rio Chama Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP). Through the agreement, the Tribe and USDA Forest Service will increase Tribal workforce capacity and supply vegetation materials needed to increase the pace and scale of watershed and forest restoration through support of the Tribal nursery. This agreement further supports Tribal self-determination and input in CFLRP decision-making processes, incorporates Indigenous Knowledge into forest and watershed restoration practices, and facilitates intergenerational connections within and between the Tribal communities by engaging the next generation of natural and cultural resource management and leaders and workforce.

Intermountain (Region 4)

Idaho—Shoshone-Bannock and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes have each entered into agreements with the Boise National Forest in the Southwest Idaho Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscape. These agreements include fuels reduction projects and job training that will help protect communities and important cultural

resources by using Tribal resources to reduce wildfire risk on the National Forest System. These projects will also remove biomass and wood and repurpose it for firewood. On-the-job training is being provided to members and staff of both Tribes, and cooperative planning and implementation will help ensure that Indigenous Knowledge is incorporated into projects. Additionally, the Boise National Forest manages recreation sites that are culturally significant to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. To simultaneously manage for recreation and protect these sites, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and Boise National Forest have also entered an agreement to jointly develop cultural site interpretive displays and outfitter resource information that will educate visitors and enhance their experience.

Nevada/California—Washoe Tribe. The Intermountain Region awarded a \$1 million grant to the Washoe Tribe through the Wood Products Infrastructure Assistance program. These funds will support the Washoe Tribe Elder Share Wood program. The Washoe Tribe calls their firewood bank “Share Wood” and supplies elders and others in need with up to four cords of free firewood per year. The Tribe is combining this grant with funds received from the Alliance for Green Heat to purchase a firewood processor, supplies, and storage sheds. In addition to serving their own people, the Washoe Tribe plans to distribute hundreds of cords of firewood to neighboring Tribes.

Pacific Southwest (Region 5)

California—Klamath River Basin Tribes. USDA has committed to invest \$25 million in the Klamath River Basin. This area is critically significant for water, fish habitat, and the vitality of the culture and well-being of Tribes in the Klamath River Basin. This investment will be used to address multiple Tribal priorities, including reduced wildfire exposure and risk, improved watershed condition and fish habitat, and opportunities for capacity building. As work progresses the agreement will be expanded to additional Tribes and national forests in the area, and a future investment in a Tribe-led, long-term restoration plan.

Pacific Northwest (Region 6)

Oregon—The Cow Creek Umpqua Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians. The Cow Creek Umpqua Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians received a grant from the USDA Forest Service Wood Products Infrastructure Assistance program for a Forest Health Resilience Enhancement Project. The Tribe is seeking to optimize the use of forest residuals generated as a byproduct of forest restoration and fuel treatment projects. These funds will help to create a profitable enterprise with a sustainable return on investment that ultimately includes the sawmill, chipper, and potentially a fuel pellet production facility (an option in the second phase of this project), as well as long-term employment opportunities for residents and Tribal members.

Southern (Region 8)

North Carolina—Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Led by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the USDA Forest Service is participating in a coalition of Tribal, Federal, State, and nonprofit and public partners working toward restoration of the Oconaluftee River. The Oconaluftee River flows through Eastern Band of Cherokee lands, and reconnecting the river is a step toward restoring this once vital and thriving fishery. This work will reconnect 549 miles

of river and streams and expand habitat for the sicklefin redhorse a threatened species in North Carolina and a species of cultural significance for the Cherokee people. This work and the Forest Service's financial contribution support the TFPA and Good Neighbor agreements executed by the Tribe and National Forests in North Carolina in fiscal year 2022. This Tribal/Forest Service partnership focuses on shared priorities of ecological and cultural importance on the Eastern Band of Cherokee's ancestral landscape, including enhancing climate resiliency and improving watershed condition, function, aquatic organism passages, and water quality.

Texas—Comanche Nation. The National Forests and Grasslands in Texas entered a Supplemental Good Neighbor Agreement with the Comanche Nation for archeological assessments and surveys. Certified heritage resource technician paraprofessionals in the Comanche Tribal Historic Preservation Office will work with the USDA Forest Service in areas that are culturally sensitive to Native American Tribes on the Caddo-Lyndon B. Johnson National Grasslands.

Texas—Jena Band of Choctaw. The National Forests and Grasslands in Texas and Jena Band of Choctaw recognize the need to improve habitat for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, reduce hazardous fuels, control southern pine beetle risk, and restore longleaf and shortleaf pine. This collaboration with the Jena Band of Choctaw will consist of marking and timber cruising and heritage surveys but may progress to other sale preparation activities with additional training.

Eastern (Region 9)

Minnesota—Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. On May 2, 2023, the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (the Bands) and the Superior National Forest entered a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to provide for co-stewardship and protection of the Bands' treaty-reserved rights under the Treaty of 1854. This agreement—the first of its kind between the Band and the Forest Service—recognizes the Bands as original stewards of lands now encompassing the Superior National Forest and outlines procedures to ensure that Tribal input is incorporated into USDA Forest Service decision making. This includes robust processes for meaningful and early Tribal consultation on USDA Forest Service decisions that may impact the Bands' treaty-reserved rights. It also includes provisions for designation and protection of culturally sensitive areas within the national forest, coordination on forest management objectives, and Tribal-Forest Service training. The Bands and the Forest Service also commit to jointly pursuing funding opportunities to support co-stewardship within the Superior National Forest. Through this agreement, the Bands will assist the Forest Service using deep, place-based Tribal traditional ecological knowledge to support shared goals of protecting and enhancing the land and water for future generations.

Alaska (Region 10)

Alaska—Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes. The Forest Service recognizes the importance of the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area within the Tongass National Forest to Tlingit and Haida people and acknowledges the value of Tlingit and Haida Indigenous Knowledge in the administration of the recreation area. To that end, the Alaska Region and Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes entered a historic memorandum of understanding (MOU) for co-stewardship of the Federal lands of the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area. This MOU will ensure that management decisions affecting those lands and waters consider the expertise and traditional, cultural, and historical knowledge of the Tribes wherever possible.

Conclusion

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has made tremendous strides to engage Native American Tribes at the highest levels to promote co-stewardship. These actions confirm a deep-seeded commitment to upholding our nation-to-nation and general trust responsibilities. This year the Department celebrates a threefold increase in co-stewardship investments with Tribes and the clearing of specific programmatic barriers hindering access to certain USDA programs and financial resources. The implementation of the community navigators program, new educational information and additional resources, and large keystone investments in Indian Country all lay the groundwork for even more opportunities for collaboration and growth next year. While the Department is proud of the work completed through Joint Secretarial Order 3403, there is still more to be done. Efforts are ongoing to pinpoint and remove unique barriers faced by Indian Tribes and Indigenous communities in accessing USDA programs—looking toward the future, ensuring all employees understand that the Government’s treaty responsibilities remain a priority. The Department looks forward to 2024 and working alongside Tribal leaders and partners in the stewarding of our Nation’s lands and waters.