

**ADMINISTRATION/WATER RESOURCES****White House/America the Beautiful Freshwater Challenge**

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On April 23, during a White House Water Summit, the Biden Administration announced a goal to protect and restore freshwater resources and deliver tribal clean water projects. The announcement read, “[E]very person should have access to clean drinking water and a healthy environment. Since Day One, the Biden-Harris Administration has worked to secure clean water for all, protect our vital freshwater resources, and ensure every community can count on water free of pollutants when they turn on the faucet. The Administration also recognizes that wetlands and other freshwater resources are critical in our fight against climate change.” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ceq/97632-2/>

The White House convened state, tribal, and local leaders from across the country for the Water Summit, during which several goals and initiatives were announced to help build resilience to climate change and ensure every community has access to clean water. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) already provide the largest investment in our Nation’s history, including \$15.4B to enhance the West’s resilience to drought and deliver unprecedented resources to protect river systems across the West.

The America the Beautiful Freshwater Challenge: A Partnership to Conserve and Restore America’s Rivers, Lakes, Streams, and Wetlands sets a goal to protect, restore, and reconnect 8 million acres of wetlands and 100,000 miles of our Nation’s rivers and streams. The Administration’s initiative calls on all states and other governments and entities, including tribes, interstate organizations, cities, and local communities to advance their own policies and strategies for conserving and restoring America’s freshwater systems. Ten states, including California, Colorado, Oregon and Washington, have already signed on, as well as eight Tribes, and 24 local governments.

Participants committed to: (1) protecting drinking water sources including groundwater aquifers; (2) achieving and maintaining fishable and swimmable waterways; (3) enhancing natural ecosystem services provided by healthy freshwater resources; (4) support aquatic biodiversity; (5) honor tribal trust and treaty obligations and ways of life; (6) ensure that freshwater resources continue to support economies; (7) harness and protect security, supply chain, and drinking water benefits of freshwater and estuary resources; and (8) protect access to freshwater and estuary resources. The challenge invites participants to utilize resources such as developing or revising local-level protection goals, expanding partnerships between entities and sectors, expanding incentives, and even utilizing regulatory programs when necessary.

The White House announcement adds, “Our nation’s lakes, rivers, streams, estuaries, and wetlands are fundamental to the health, prosperity, and resilience of our communities and are held sacred by many Tribal Nations. They are not only the sources of clean drinking water that flows into the taps of our homes, but also economic drivers supporting jobs and outdoor recreation across the nation. By absorbing and storing carbon, our nation’s waterways and wetlands - and the forests, grasslands, and farmlands they nourish - play a critical role in the fight against climate change.”

It continues, “Although critically important to both people and nature, our freshwater resources are at increased risk. Through 2019, the U.S. wetlands loss rate increased 50 percent over the prior decade. That was before the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Sackett* decision last year, which dramatically reduced federal protections for wetlands in one of the largest judicial rollbacks of environmental protections in U.S. history.... Many states are already using their own authorities and resources to better protect America’s freshwater systems. For example, ... Washington recently protected almost 1,000 miles of rivers as Outstanding National Resource Waters, one of the highest levels of protection afforded....”

The DOI will provide more than \$70M from President Biden’s Investing in America agenda for 43 projects in 29 states that will address outdated or obsolete dams, culverts, levees and other barriers to the nation’s rivers and streams. This BIL funding will help restore fragmented aquatic habitats and revitalize local economies in communities across the nation while creating new jobs in construction and implementation. Projects receiving funding will reconnect aquatic systems and improve fish passage to help conserve vulnerable species, while building safer infrastructure for communities, increasing recreational opportunities, and improving climate resilience. The funding is also part of an investment of over \$3B across federal agencies in fish passage and aquatic connectivity.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) published the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard (FFRMS) final rule to help communities prepare for and reduce flood damage. This rule strengthens standards by increasing elevations and flood proofing requirements of properties in areas at risk of flooding, where federal funds are used

to develop or provide financing for new construction and substantial improvement within the FFRMS floodplain. This will strengthen resilience to flooding, protect lives and properties, minimize damage and disruption to households, reduce insurance costs and safeguard federal investments - ensuring that federally-funded construction projects are built to withstand current and future flood risks.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced \$123M for state and territorial coastal management programs and national estuarine research reserves to support habitat restoration and conservation. Within this investment, \$36M will be designated for projects being carried out in partnership with or directly by Tribes and Native Hawaiians, including reacquisitions and restoration of ecological and culturally significant ancestral lands. This investment will help to protect critical resources for coastal habitat restoration, create new jobs, and boost resilience to extreme weather events across our Nation's coastal communities.

The Administration also announced the launch of [ClimateCorps.gov](https://www.climatecorps.gov).