



441 G St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Comptroller General
of the United States

Accessible Version

May 9, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Priority Open Recommendations: Department of the Interior

Dear Secretary Burgum:

Congratulations on your appointment. The purpose of this letter is to call your personal attention to four areas based on GAO's past work and 14 open priority recommendations, which are enclosed.¹ Additionally, there are 121 other GAO open recommendations that we will continue to work with your staff to address.

We are highlighting the following areas that warrant your timely and focused attention. Specifically:

Improving oversight of oil and gas activities. Interior has faced challenges with effectively overseeing oil and gas production as well as managing related risks. We have highlighted the need for Interior to improve its [Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources](#) on our High Risk List for several years.² Specifically, Interior faces challenges related to the compliance data systems to support the collection, accounting, and verification of revenues—including royalties paid by companies—from oil and gas production at federal lease sites. For example, Interior has yet to implement leading practices in executive-level IT governance for its major IT investments, as we recommended. Interior has also not completed recommendations to assess the cost and benefits of developing a royalty gap model and to periodically estimate royalty gaps to inform agency decision-making. Addressing these recommendations would improve its compliance activities to verify federal oil and gas royalties, potentially increasing collections by tens of millions of dollars per year.

We have also outlined Interior's challenges with filling vacancies and maintaining the workforce it needs to manage oil and gas resources and verify their production and royalties.

¹GAO considers a recommendation to be a priority if when implemented, it may significantly improve government operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue.

²GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, [GAO-25-107743](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 25, 2025).

Implementing recommendations to address these issues would help Interior's ability to ensure the public receives a fair return for resources extracted from federal lands and waters.

Interior also has yet to complete and implement updated regulations for offshore decommissioning, including establishing deadlines to help ensure timely decommissioning of inactive wells and platforms. Further, Interior has yet to update requirements to limit safety and environmental risks from active and decommissioned pipelines and fully implement its recently updated financial assurance regulations, as GAO recommended. Taking these steps would better enable Interior to collect and account for energy revenues, ensure the integrity of active offshore pipelines, and address fiscal and other risks of decommissioning.

Resolving the ownership of submerged lands in Alaska. Under federal law, a state generally owns the unreserved submerged lands beneath waters that were navigable as of the date of statehood—which for Alaska was 1959. Alaska has identified about 150 waterways of potential ownership interest to the state. We have recommended that Interior should coordinate with the U.S. Forest Service to secure an independent third-party facilitator to help the agencies and the State of Alaska work toward an agreement on a collaborative approach for managing submerged lands in Alaska while ownership of the lands is being resolved. By implementing this recommendation, Interior could help reduce intergovernmental conflicts and minimize uncertainties for citizens of the state of Alaska and members of the public.

Conducting strategic workforce planning and oversight. Strategic workforce plans should align human capital programs with emerging mission goals and develop long-term strategies for acquiring, developing, and retaining staff to achieve programmatic goals. We have highlighted the need for Interior to improve [Strategic Human Capital Management](#) on our High Risk List for several years. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has yet to adopt our recommendation to finalize and implement an agency-wide strategic workforce plan since it made substantial changes to its organizational structure in 2016. We recommended that Interior develop a strategic workforce plan for staff responsible for carrying out functions related to Interior's management of trust funds. Doing so will help Interior better understand the resources it needs to carry out its trust functions and provide services to beneficiaries.

Ensuring timely delivery of tribal real estate services. Accurate and complete data are needed to determine application processing times and the extent to which the agency is meeting regulatory and internal deadlines for mortgages, leases, and rights-of-way for Tribes. We have highlighted the need for Interior to [Improve Federal Management of Programs that Serve Tribes and Their Members](#) on our High Risk List for several years. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has yet to implement our recommendation to conduct regular oversight and review of data entered into its Trust Asset Accounting Management System (TAAMS) to determine what data are needed to measure processing times and whether it is meeting its deadlines. Doing so could help BIA assess the timeliness of its delivery of real estate services to Tribes and their citizens with minimal delay, including areas where BIA needs to improve processing times.

Please see Enclosure 1 for additional details about the status and actions needed to fully implement all 14 open priority recommendations of the 135 total recommendations that remain open. This includes priority recommendations for managing liabilities associated with federal property and improving surveillance of human health risks posed by wildlife.

We also provide in Enclosure 2 additional information on Interior's recommendation implementation rate; the implemented, closed, and new priority recommendations since our June 2024 letter to Secretary Haaland; Interior-specific information relevant to our audit of the

consolidated financial statements of the U.S. government; and relevant management challenges from GAO's High-Risk List that apply to Interior, such as [Ensuring the Cybersecurity of the Nation](#) and [Improving the Management of IT Acquisitions and Operations](#). In response to legislation enacted in December 2022, this enclosure also includes information on any additional congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations and address any underlying issues relating to such implementation.

Copies of this letter are being sent to the appropriate congressional committees. The report will also be available on the GAO website at [Priority Recommendations | U.S. GAO](#). We also plan to send a separate letter specifically focused on open recommendations and key issues related to information technology. This letter will be sent to your Chief Information Officer.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the issues outlined in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me or Mark Gaffigan, Managing Director, Natural Resources and Environment, at gaffiganm@gao.gov. Contact points for our offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this letter. Our teams will continue to coordinate with your staff on addressing these priority recommendations and the remaining 121 open recommendations. I appreciate Interior's continued commitment and thank you for your personal attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
of the United States

Enclosures – 2

Enclosure 1

Priority Open Recommendations to Department of the Interior

Improving Oversight of Oil and Gas Activities

Offshore Oil and Gas: Updated Regulations Needed to Improve Pipeline Oversight and Decommissioning. [GAO-21-293](#). Washington, D.C.: March 19, 2021.

Year Recommendation Made: 2021

Recommendation: The Director of the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) should take actions to further develop, finalize, and implement updated pipeline regulations to address long-standing limitations regarding BSEE's ability to (1) ensure the integrity of active offshore oil and gas pipelines and (2) address safety and environmental risks associated with their decommissioning.

Actions Needed: Interior agreed with this recommendation. As of September 2024, BSEE indicated that it continues to work toward publishing updates to its pipeline regulations and anticipates publishing a proposed rule by September 2025.

To fully implement our recommendation, BSEE needs to finalize and implement updated pipeline regulations that better define how the bureau is to address safety and environmental risks associated with decommissioning pipelines and better reflect the complexities of modern deep water pipeline operations. Updating these regulations will better enable BSEE to ensure the integrity of active offshore pipelines and address risks associated with their decommissioning.

High-Risk Area: [Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources; U.S. Government's Environmental Liability](#)

Director: Frank Rusco

Contact Information: ruscof@gao.gov

Offshore Oil and Gas: Strategy Urgently Needed to Address Cybersecurity Risks to Infrastructure. [GAO-23-105789](#). Washington, D.C.: October 26, 2022.

Year Recommendation Made: 2023

Recommendation: The BSEE Director should immediately develop and implement a strategy to guide the development of its most recent cybersecurity initiative; such a strategy should include (1) a risk assessment; (2) objectives, activities, and performance measures; (3) roles, responsibilities, and coordination; and (4) identification of needed resources and investments.

Actions Needed: Interior agreed with this recommendation. As of April 2024, Interior had finalized a cybersecurity strategy and initiated some actions to implement it. BSEE anticipates completing actions to fulfill the intent of this recommendation by the end of fiscal year 2025.

To fully address our recommendation, implementation of the strategy should include the following: (1) identification of cybersecurity risks; (2) relevant practices to address those risks; (3) the bureau's role in addressing the risks; (4) milestones for activities, such as formalizing relationships with other federal agencies and industry organizations; (5) resource needs, such as appropriate staffing levels; and (6) performance measures to assess results. Effectively

implementing this strategy will help ensure BSEE addresses cybersecurity risks to offshore oil and gas infrastructure.

High-Risk Areas: [Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources](#); [Ensuring the Cybersecurity of the Nation](#)

Director: Frank Rusco

Contact Information: ruscof@gao.gov

Offshore Oil and Gas: Interior Needs to Improve Decommissioning Enforcement and Mitigate Related Risks. [GAO-24-106229](#). Washington, D.C.: January 25, 2024.

Year Recommendations Made: 2024

Recommendations: The Secretary of the Interior should:

- (1) ensure the BSEE Director completes planned actions to identify, propose, finalize, and fully implement changes to decommissioning regulations and guidance, including by clarifying decommissioning criteria and deadlines for idle infrastructure in all regions and for end-of-lease infrastructure in the Pacific Region, and addressing any other identified limitations; and
- (2) ensure the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) Director completes planned actions to further develop, finalize, and fully implement changes to financial assurance regulations and procedures that reduce financial risks, including by requiring higher levels of supplemental bonding, and addressing other known weaknesses.

Actions Needed: Interior agreed with these recommendations and indicated that it planned to implement them through two rulemakings. In the agency's comments to GAO, BSEE stated that it was working to determine the scope of the decommissioning rule. As of December 2024, BSEE planned to publish a proposed rule by June 2025. BOEM published a proposed financial assurance rule in June 2023 and published the final rule in April 2024. BOEM has outlined a planned timeline for the rule's implementation, which BOEM estimates could be completed as late as August 2026.

To fully implement our recommendations, Interior needs to further develop, propose, finalize, and fully implement updated regulations on offshore decommissioning requirements—including for idle infrastructure. In addition, Interior needs to fully implement updated regulations on financial assurance requirements. Updating and implementing these regulations will strengthen BSEE's ability to effectively enforce decommissioning deadlines and improve BOEM's efforts to mitigate federal fiscal exposure from decommissioning liabilities.

High-Risk Area: [Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources](#); [U.S. Government's Environmental Liability](#)

Director: Frank Rusco

Contact Information: ruscof@gao.gov

Federal Oil and Gas Royalties: Opportunities Exist to Improve Interior's Compliance Program. [GAO-24-103676](#). Washington, D.C.: August 9, 2024.

Year Recommendations Made: 2024

Recommendations: The Director of Interior's Office of Natural Resources Revenue, in coordination with Interior's Statistical Official, should:

- (1) assess the costs and benefits of developing a plan and implementation timeline to create a royalty gap model of adequate rigor, including the collection of additional data, as needed, to inform decision-making and strategic planning of compliance efforts; and
- (2) periodically estimate a royalty gap to inform decision-making and strategic planning of compliance efforts.

Actions Needed: Interior agreed and partially agreed with our recommendations, respectively. As of August 2024, the agency stated that it would initiate a study to assess the costs and benefits of conducting a royalty gap model, including the collection of additional data. Based on this study, the agency added that it may establish a process to periodically estimate royalty gaps to inform decision making and strategic planning efforts. To fully implement our recommendations, Interior should clearly document the steps it took to assess the costs and benefits creating a royalty gap model and, as appropriate, the frequency with which it would be estimated.

High-Risk Area: [Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources](#)

Director: Frank Rusco

Contact Information: ruscof@gao.gov

Oil and Gas: Interior Urgently Needs Leadership and Oversight to Address IT System Development Failure. [GAO-24-107223](#). Washington, D.C.: September 10, 2024.

Year Recommendation Made: 2024

Recommendation: The Secretary of the Interior should direct Interior's Chief Information Officer to strengthen IT leadership and oversight by implementing leading practices in executive level IT governance for major IT investments, including the Automated Fluid Minerals Support System (AFMSS) 2 replacement.

Actions Needed: Interior agreed with this recommendation. As of February 2025, the agency had made progress in strengthening existing practices and establishing new practices for executive-level IT governance for major IT investments, including issuing a policy for managing cost, schedule and performance baselines and conducting detailed reviews of IT investments.

To fully implement our recommendation, Interior should continue to adopt the specific leading practices we summarized in our report for effectively controlling and reviewing IT investments. These practices included, among other things, ensuring that program officials are actively engaged with stakeholders and have the necessary knowledge and skills, involving users and stakeholders in the development of requirements, and testing system functionality by end users prior to formal end user acceptance testing.

High-Risk Areas: [Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources](#); [Improving the Management of IT Acquisitions and Operations](#)

Director: Frank Rusco

Contact Information: ruscof@gao.gov

Resolving the Ownership of Submerged Lands in Alaska

Alaska Land Management: Resolving Ownership of Submerged Lands. [GAO-23-106235](#). Washington, D.C.: July 27, 2023.

Year Recommendation Made: 2023

Recommendation: The Secretary of the Interior should ensure that the Directors of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service coordinate with the Chief of the Forest Service to secure an independent third-party facilitator to help agencies within the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture and the State of Alaska work toward agreement on a collaborative approach for the management of submerged lands in Alaska while ownership is being resolved.

Actions Needed: Interior agreed with this recommendation. As of May 2024, the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior were working to coordinate with the State of Alaska to obtain the assistance of an independent third-party facilitator. As of November 2024, Interior stated that it had coordinated with the relevant federal agencies and had begun communications with the State of Alaska regarding pursuing a facilitated process.

To fully implement our recommendation, Interior, in coordination with the Department of Agriculture, needs to secure an independent third-party facilitator, such as from the John S. McCain III National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution. Next, Interior should employ the facilitator to find collaborative approaches with the State of Alaska to manage submerged lands, which include about 150 waterways of potential interest identified by the state.

Doing so would help Interior demonstrate respect and support for the rights and interests of the State of Alaska. Further, such actions could help Interior reduce intergovernmental conflicts with the State of Alaska, identify measures to accelerate lengthy administrative process for resolving ownership of submerged lands, and ensure its ability to fulfill its land-management mission.

Director: Cardell D. Johnson

Contact Information: johnsoncd1@gao.gov

Conducting Strategic Workforce Planning and Oversight

Bureau of Land Management: Better Workforce Planning and Data Would Help Mitigate the Effects of Recent Staff Vacancies. [GAO-22-104247](#). Washington, D.C.: November 16, 2021.

Year Recommendation Made: 2022

Recommendation: The Director of BLM should develop an agency-wide strategic workforce plan that aligns the agency's human capital program with emerging mission goals and includes long-term strategies for acquiring, developing, and retaining staff to achieve programmatic goals.

Action Needed: Interior agreed with this recommendation. As of February 2024, BLM had developed a draft workforce planning framework and project plan. The agency expects to implement its workforce plan in fiscal year 2025. To fully implement our recommendation, BLM needs to finalize and implement an agency-wide strategic workforce plan. By finalizing such a plan, BLM will better ensure that it has the workforce necessary to fulfill the agency's mission and achieve its goals.

High-Risk Areas: [Strategic Human Capital Management](#); [Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources](#)

Director: Frank Rusco

Contact Information: ruscof@gao.gov

Ensuring Timely Delivery of Tribal Real Estate Services

Tribal Programs: Actions Needed to Improve Interior's Management of Trust Services. [GAO-23-105356](#). Washington, D.C.: April 27, 2023.

Year Recommendation Made: 2023

Recommendation: The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs should develop a strategic workforce plan for the staff responsible for carrying out functions related to Interior's management of trust funds.

Action Needed: Interior agreed with this recommendation. Officials from the Bureau of Trust Funds Administration (BTFA) told us in September 2022 that they were conducting internal negotiations to award a contract for a full workforce analysis and were expected to begin conducting the analysis in 2023. In March 2024, officials told us that they would be unable to hire a contractor due to budget constraints and instead planned to have current BTFA staff produce workforce planning documents. Officials said they expected the plan to be finalized by August 31, 2025.

To fully implement our recommendation, Interior should complete the development of a strategic workforce plan for staff responsible for carrying out functions related to Interior's management of trust funds. Developing such a plan would allow Interior to better understand the resources and workforce it needs to carry out its trust functions and provide services to beneficiaries.

High-Risk Area: [Improving Federal Management of Programs That Serve Tribes and Their Members](#)

Director: Anna Maria Ortiz

Contact Information: ortiza@gao.gov

Tribal Issues: Bureau of Indian Affairs Should Take Additional Steps to Improve Timely Delivery of Real Estate Services [Reissued with revisions on Nov. 6, 2023]. [GAO-24-105875](#).

Washington, D.C.: October 26, 2023.

Year Recommendation Made: 2024

Recommendation: The Director of Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) should conduct regular oversight and review of data entered into its Trust Asset Accounting Management System (TAAMS) to assess the degree to which new lease and right-of-way applications contain all information necessary to measure processing times and whether regulatory and internal deadlines are being met. BIA should also conduct this regular oversight and review of mortgage applications following implementation of the forthcoming TAAMS mortgage module that will replace the Mortgage Tracker.

Action Needed: Interior agreed with this recommendation. As of September 2024, the agency stated it would develop a strategic plan to conduct regular oversight and review realty data entered into TAAMS. In addition, BIA has plans to develop a "Realty Strike Team." This team will identify ways to: (1) support efficient processing of certain real estate services; (2) help improve collaboration between the agency field staff, Tribes, and others; (3) develop and provide policy and regulatory updates to staff that align with current program practices; and (4) identify other needs by the field offices for the processing of services.

To fully implement our recommendation, BIA should determine what TAAMS data is needed to measure lease, right-of-way, and mortgage processing times and whether it meets regulatory and internal deadlines. BIA should also develop a process for regularly reviewing TAAMS data—in current modules and in the future mortgage module—to ensure the data are entered completely and regularly, and to identify gaps, if any, in data entry. By regularly overseeing the completeness of TAAMS data, BIA could ensure it has the necessary data to assess the timeliness of its delivery of real estate services to Tribes and their citizens with minimal delay, including areas where BIA needs to improve processing times.

High-Risk Area: [Improving Federal Management of Programs That Serve Tribes and Their Members](#)

Director: Anna Maria Ortiz

Contact Information: ortiza@gao.gov

Managing Liabilities Associated with Federal Property

Federal Real Property: Agencies Should Provide More Information About Increases in Deferred Maintenance and Repair. [GAO-24-105485](#). Washington, D.C.: November 16, 2023.

Year Recommendation Made: 2024

Recommendation: The Secretary of the Interior should ensure that the department works with its component agencies to develop plans to address their deferred maintenance and repair backlogs and identify the funding and time frames needed to reduce them in congressional budget requests, related reports to decision makers, or both.

Action Needed: Interior agreed with this recommendation. In its fiscal year 2025 budget justification, Interior presented additional information regarding deferred maintenance and repairs, including information on the amounts of deferred maintenance and repair that could be addressed by new construction projects as well as more extensive information for several component agencies. In addition, Interior instructed components to provide details on their deferred maintenance and repair backlogs—including proposed funding and timeframes—as part of internal deliberative documents that would be used to inform the fiscal year 2026 budget submission.

However, to fully implement our recommendation, Interior needs to include additional information on the deferred maintenance and repair backlog in congressional budget requests or related reports. By taking these actions, Interior could better inform decision-makers about how funding levels could affect backlog reduction and help evaluate the department's budget requests.

High-Risk Area: [Managing Federal Real Property](#)

Director: Andrew Von Ah

Contact Information: vonaha@gao.gov

Abandoned Hardrock Mines: Land Management Agencies Should Improve Reporting of Total Cleanup Costs. [GAO-23-105408](#). Washington, D.C.: January 13, 2023.

Year Recommendation Made: 2023

Recommendation: The Secretary of the Interior should expand the information available to Congress regarding the agency's fiscal exposure from abandoned hardrock mines by clearly identifying the amount of known cleanup cost estimates specifically for such mines in supplemental reports or other budget materials.

Action Needed: Interior agreed with this recommendation. In January 2023, Interior said that when it reports its environmental liabilities, the department will include the value of known environmental liabilities associated with abandoned hardrock mines in reports related to the

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), supplemental reports, or other budget materials.³ As of March 2024, Interior had taken steps to update the agency's total projected clean-up costs for abandoned hardrock mines but had not yet made the information available to Congress in supplemental reports or other budget materials. Interior plans to make this information available during the development of the fiscal year 2026 Presidential Budget.

To fully implement our recommendation, Interior should provide the amount of known cleanup costs specifically for abandoned hardrock mines to Congress in supplemental reports or other budget materials. By doing so, Interior could provide Congress and the public with a more complete picture of Interior's long-term cleanup responsibilities and the anticipated costs associated with abandoned hardrock mines. This information could help policymakers make fully informed decisions, including about a first-of-its kind abandoned hardrock mine land program called for by the IIJA.

High-Risk Area: [U.S. Government's Environmental Liability](#)

Director: Cardell D. Johnson

Contact Information: johnsoncd1@gao.gov

Improving Surveillance of Human Health Risks Posed by Wildlife

Zoonotic Diseases: Federal Actions Needed to Improve Surveillance and Better Assess Human Health Risks Posed by Wildlife. [GAO-23-105238](#). Washington, D.C.: May 31, 2023.

Year Recommendation Made: 2023

Recommendation: The Director of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) should more fully follow leading practices for collaboration while coordinating with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to develop and implement a national wildlife disease surveillance system. This should include clearly defining common outcomes, involving relevant participants, and identifying resources and staffing.

Actions Needed: In April 2024, APHIS provided us the charter for a steering committee that has been set up to develop a National Wildlife Disease Database. In addition to APHIS and USGS, the steering committee includes additional federal agencies and participants representing state and tribal interests. The charter also defines the long-term outcome of developing a first iteration of the database by September 30, 2026. To fully implement our recommendation, the agencies need to identify how they will track progress toward this goal and identify how the steering committee will be funded and staffed.

Director: Steve Morris

Contact Information: morriss@gao.gov

³Pub. L. No. 117-58, 135 Stat. 429 (2021).

Enclosure 2

Key Information About the Status of GAO Recommendations and Improving Agency Operations

Department of Interior's Recommendation Implementation Rate

In November 2024, we reported that, on a government-wide basis, 70 percent of our recommendations made 4 years ago were implemented.⁴ Interior's recommendation implementation rate was 52 percent. As of April 2025, Interior had 135 open recommendations.

Implemented, Closed, and New Priority Recommendations

Our June 2024 letter to Secretary Haaland identified 11 priority recommendations.⁵ Since then, one recommendation was implemented, none were closed as no longer valid, and we added four new priority recommendations.

- As of March 2025, Interior implemented our May 2020 recommendation to establish consistent requirements for Bureau of Indian Education schools on making up missed special education and related services and to monitor schools to ensure that they follow these requirements.
- Three new priority recommendations fall into the Improving Oversight of Oil and Gas Activities area; and one new priority recommendation falls into the Improving Surveillance of Human Health Risks Posed by Wildlife area. (See Enclosure 1.)

Financial Statement Audit

As the auditor of the consolidated financial statements of the U.S. government, I am encouraged by the Department of the Interior's progress in fiscal year 2024 in improving its internal control over financial reporting. Two of its three prior year material weaknesses were resolved and the third was downgraded to a significant deficiency. I encourage you to continue improving Interior's internal controls over financial reporting, including actions to address the new material weakness for fiscal year 2024 related to leases. This weakness, as well as related auditor recommendations, is an important issue.

⁴GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report: Fiscal Year 2024*, [GAO-25-900570](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 15, 2024).

⁵GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Department of the Interior*, [GAO-24-107309](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 7, 2024).

High-Risk List

In February 2025, we issued our biennial update to our High-Risk List.⁶ This list identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. It also identifies the need for transformation to address economy, efficiency, or effectiveness challenges. One of our high-risk areas—[management of federal oil and gas resources](#)—directly centers on Interior. Two other high-risk areas—[improving federal management of programs that serve Tribes and their members](#) and the [U.S. government's environmental liability](#)—involve multiple agencies, including Interior.

Several other government-wide, high-risk areas also have direct implications for Interior and its operations. These include improving management of [IT acquisitions and operations](#), improving strategic [human capital](#) management and [personnel security clearance process](#), managing [federal real property](#), and ensuring the [cybersecurity](#) of the nation.

In addition to Interior's high-risk areas, we urge your continued attention to the other government-wide, high-risk issues as they relate to Interior. Progress on high-risk issues has been possible through the concerted actions and efforts of Congress, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the leadership and staff in agencies, including within Interior. In March 2022, we issued a report on key practices to successfully address high-risk areas, which can be a helpful resource as your agency continues to make progress to address high-risk issues.⁷

Congress's Role on GAO Recommendations

We also recognize the key role Congress plays in providing oversight and maintaining focus on our recommendations to ensure they are implemented and produce their desired results. Legislation enacted in December 2022 includes a provision for GAO to identify any additional congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations and address any underlying issues relating to such implementation.⁸

Congress can use various strategies to address our recommendations, such as incorporating them into legislation. Congress can also use its budget, appropriations, and oversight processes to incentivize executive branch agencies to act on our recommendations and monitor their progress. For example, Congress can hold hearings focused on Interior's progress in implementing GAO's priority recommendations, withhold funds when appropriate, or take other actions to provide incentives for agencies to act. Moreover, Congress can follow up during the appropriations process and request periodic updates.

Congress also plays a key role in addressing any underlying issues related to the implementation of these recommendations. For example, Congress can pass legislation

⁶GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, [GAO-25-107743](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 25, 2025).

⁷GAO, *High-Risk Series: Key Practices to Successfully Address High-Risk Areas and Remove Them from the List*, [GAO-22-105184](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2022).

⁸James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 7211(a)(2), 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022); H.R. Rep. No. 117-389 (2022) (accompanying Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, H.R. 8237, 117th Cong. (2022)).

providing an agency explicit authority to implement a recommendation or requiring an agency to take certain actions to implement a recommendation.