ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC & LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES

FY 2026 APPROPRIATIONS PRIORITIES

INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES

PRELIMINARY REQUEST

AGENCY	ACCOUNT	APLU FY2026 REQUEST
U.S. Geological Survey	Water Resources Research Act	$18 million
	Cooperative Research Units	$32 million
Environmental Protection Agency	Office of Science and Technology (S&T)/STAR Research and Fellowships	$876 million
National Endowment for the Humanities	National Endowment for the Humanities	$225 million
Interior	Joint Fire Science Program	$20 million

U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY (USGS)

WATER RESOURCES RESEARCH ACT (WRRA) PROGRAM

APLU FY2026 REQUEST: $18 MILLION

FY2026 PBR = TBD; FY2025 = TBD; FY2024 = $15.5 MILLION

APLU requests $18 million for the USGS Water Resources Research Act (WRRA) Program in FY26 to provide vital support to stakeholders, states, and federal agencies for long-term water planning, policy development, and resource management. The WRRA program addresses topical issues such as harmful algal blooms, drought, aquatic invasive species, and soil erosion.[1]. WWRA authorizes National Institutes for Water Resources (NIWR) at land-grant universities across the nation, resulting in a presence in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam.[2] The NIWR facilitates research by offering Annual Base Grants, National Competitive Grants, and Coordination Grants and operating the NIWR-USGS Student Internship Program, supporting undergraduate and graduate skills development for workforce needs. This funding level ensures Institutes can attract water scientists, develop the USGS-related workforce and expand regional partnerships to leverage multiple stakeholders to address national water concerns.

The Institutes collaborate with over 150 state agencies, 180 federal agencies, and more than 165 local and municipal offices and support over 350 students in training, over 200 research projects, and more than 550 researchers per year. Increased funding will allow WRRA and the USGS to support special research topics such as aquatic invasive species (AIS), hyoxia, and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) that threaten our nation's waterways. As the nation's

[1] https://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/1488/cir1488.pdf
[2] https://water.usgs.gov/wrri/index.php

water challenges to clean, safe, and accessible water increase, additional resources will leave the Institutes poised to grow their partnership with the USGS to tackle critical water problems.

COOPERATIVE RESEARCH UNITS (CRU)
APLU FY2026 REQUEST: $32 MILLION
FY2026 PBR = TBD; FY2025 = TBD; FY2024 = $28.2 MILLION

APLU requests $32 million for the USGS Cooperative Research Unit (CRU) Program in FY26 to advance science-based fish and wildlife research, provide cost-effective and non-duplicative applied science and research, and train the next generation of wildlife biologists to address pressing local and regional wildlife needs. APLU also supports an increase to expand initiatives for youth involvement in science and resource management to further the next generation workforce.

The USGS CRUs consist of 43 units presently operating in 41 states. Each unit is a collaborative partnership between the USGS, the state natural resource agency, the host university, and the Wildlife Management Institute. CRU research programs are guided by these management agencies so the science and decision-making tools they develop uniquely meet the needs of state and federal agencies and non-governmental players. CRUs are the research arm of state fish and wildlife and federal natural resource agencies, providing them with the science to support sustainable hunting, fishing, and trapping seasons that drive the American system of conservation funding. Additionally, the units work with university students to develop the conservation workforce pipeline, help decision-makers make complex conservation decisions, and provide technical assistance between natural resource agencies and universities.

In FY22, CRU scientists were engaged in over 800 research projects, many targeting conservation efforts for our nation's most important and iconic species such as elk, white-tailed deer, mule deer, pronghorn, moose, black bear, mountain lion, turkey, Canada goose, sage grouse, northern bobwhite, rainbow trout, Chinook salmon, and largemouth bass. These projects supported 1,100 students and staff and garnered an additional $25 to 40 million in state and federal research funding.[3] APLU urges Congress to support the Units with funding of $32 million for FY25 to protect and sustain our nation's valued fish and wildlife resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA)

OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (S&T)
APLU FY2026 REQUEST: $876 MILLION
FY2026 PBR = TBD; FY2025 = TBD; FY2024 = $758.1 MILLION

APLU urges Congress to fund the Environmental Protection Agency's Science and Technology account (S&T) at $876 million in FY26, of which $50 million is requested for the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Program. STAR is EPA's primary competitive extramural program

[3] https://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/1505/cir1505.pdf

which provides grants to individual investigators and institutions. APLU asks the EPA to use $10 million of the proposed funding for STAR to reestablish the STAR Graduate Fellowship program to support master's and doctoral students. Through a competitive peer review process, STAR projects develop the environmental and public health science needed to achieve clean water and air. The requested increase to the S&T account would provide greater support to STAR research and restore the STAR Graduate Fellowship program.

In 2017, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) assessed the program, finding that STAR has valuable scientific impact and that its merits extend to public health decisions, reductions in regulatory compliance costs, workforce development, and research infrastructure.[4] Despite these merits, funding for STAR has deteriorated consistently from a peak of $138 million in FY02 to $28.6 million in recent years. In FY21, Congress encouraged the EPA to revitalize STAR by exploring programmatic changes recommended by NASEM, which included reinstating the STAR Graduate Research Program as well as developing a mechanism for investigator-initiated research. Unfortunately, S&T funding has declined, limiting EPA's capability to make changes.

Before its termination, the STAR Graduate Fellowship program served as the workforce pipeline program for graduate student researchers in the environmental (toxicology, pollution chemistry, etc.) and public health sciences. The program helped offset costs associated with obtaining an advanced degree in the environmental and environmental health sciences while exposing promising students to careers in environmental science. APLU requests an increase in S&T to support STAR research and to restore the STAR Graduate Fellowship program.

Report Language

Science to Achieve Results (STAR). — The Committee recognizes the importance of STAR to supporting research that is critical to the Agency's scientific mission and so provides $40,000,000 for activities supported therein. The Committee intends that this increase will enable the Agency to accommodate the following programmatic changes proposed by Congress in the explanatory report accompanying P.L. 116-260: initial implementation of a mechanism for the submission of unsolicited, principle investigator-initiated proposals within STAR to capture innovative research ideas that may exist outside the Agency but that hold potential for advancing its mission; and reestablishment of the STAR Graduate Fellowship program in service of developing the next-generation multidisciplinary environmental science workforce.

[4] https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/24757/a-review-of-the-environmental-protection-agencys-science-to-achieve-results-research-program

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES (NEH)

APLU FY2026 REQUEST: $225 MILLION

FY2026 PBR = TBD; FY2025 = TBD; FY2024 = $207 MILLION

APLU requests $225 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities as a key step in bolstering funding capacity and strengthening the program's impact. NEH is the nation's premier humanities agency, providing critical funding to groundbreaking humanities research. Projects funded by NEH document American history and culture, build domestic expertise in languages critical to national security, and bring together interdisciplinary teams to explore the legal and ethical use of emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI).

NEH grants are awarded on a merit-reviewed basis to organizations and institutions in every U.S. state and territory, providing a vital source of funds for scholars and researchers whose work catalogs, preserves, explains and promotes American history and culture. Yet, funding shortages limit the potential impact and reach of NEH. Federal investment in NEH also spurs local private investment in humanities research, multiplying the return on federal investment and engaging a wide variety of state-based stakeholders. Created in 1977, the NEH Challenge Grants program has raised more than $3 billion in private support for humanities projects by leveraging federal funds at a ratio of three to one. Furthermore, NEH's investment in historic sites and museums across the United States has played a critical role in developing and maintaining local tourist economies.

NEH provides a vital source of funds for researchers whose work catalogs, preserves, and explains American culture and history. It also looks to the future by furthering U.S. interests at home and abroad. Increased investments in sponsored projects are critical to supporting the nation's domestic talent pool of linguists who are preparing the next generation of American scholars with expertise in languages critical to U.S. national security and international competitiveness. Social scientists, legal scholars, and other researchers—all from humanities disciplines—are exploring how new technologies can be used safely and ethically through NEH Humanities Research Centers on Artificial Intelligence and a second funding opportunity: "Dangers and Opportunities of Technology: Perspectives from the Humanities." These funding opportunities underscore how the humanities contribute vital safeguards to advancements in STEM, examining the societal impacts of scientific breakthroughs and supporting safer societies for children and families. Increased investments are necessary to expand upon this important work addressing new technologies.

JOINT FIRE SCIENCE PROGRAM (JFSP)

APLU FY2026 REQUEST: $20 MILLION

FY2026 PBR = TBD; FY2025= TBD; FY2024 = $6 MILLION

APLU urges Congress to fund the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP) at $20 million in FY26, with $10 million in the U.S. Department of Interior Wildland Fire Management budget and $10 million in the USDA Forest Service budget. The devastating 2025 Los Angeles wildfires have emphasized the growing risk of wildfires spreading to developed areas and the urgent need for research in improving wildland fire management and response. JFSP projects address salient issues such as understanding fire effects on resources and communities, analyzing fire behavior, understanding smoke impacts, and identifying drivers of fire costs. JFSP supported research enables local officials with tools that improve preparation, prevention, and resilience before a wildfire even breaks out. APLU requests additional funding to support research that will combat increasing severity of wildfires, reduce damage to property, and protect life.

JFSP operates as a partnership of six federal land management agencies and universities that work collectively to identify and address the most pressing challenges of managing wildfires and the surrounding impacted environment. More than 150 colleges and universities have collaborated on and partnered with JFSP-sponsored research projects funded via competitive awards that require outreach to fire managers and local, state, and regional policymakers, helping connect scientific innovations to on-the-ground practical needs.[5] JFSP also offers Graduate Research Innovation (GRIN) awards to students conducting research in fire science, helping shape the next generation of resource managers and scientists. Increased support to JFSP will strengthen the program's ability to enable wildland managers and government officials in anticipating, mitigating, and responding to the increasing risks of wildfires.

[5] https://www.firescience.gov/ords/prd/jf_jfsp/jf_jfsp/r/134/files/static/v234/JFSP-Fact-Sheet.pdf