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National Park Service Appropriations: Ten-Year Trends

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Summary

The National Park Service (NPS) generally receives appropriations in the annual Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. Over the past decade (FY2011-FY2020), NPS received both regular (annual) appropriations and, in some years, supplemental appropriations to address damage from natural disasters. The agency also has mandatory sources of funding. NPS's regular appropriations declined in the early part of the decade and increased thereafter, in both nominal and inflation-adjusted dollars. The FY2020 regular appropriation was 29% higher than FY2011 in nominal dollars and 11% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars. NPS also received supplemental appropriations for response to damage from hurricanes and other natural disasters in FY2013 (P.L. 113-2), FY2018 (P.L. 115-123), and FY2019 (P.L. 116-20). These funds were provided outside of regular appropriations laws and were not subject to discretionary spending caps.

During this period, NPS's discretionary appropriations generally were organized in six accounts. Appropriations fluctuated over the decade for all the accounts. Five accounts received more funding in FY2020 than FY2011 in inflation-adjusted dollars. These included accounts that fund construction and major repairs, federal land acquisition and outdoor recreation assistance to states, grants to states and tribes for historic preservation activities, assistance to nonfederal entities for natural and cultural resource preservation, and grants to spur partner donations for park improvements. One account—NPS's largest, which funds basic park operations—received less funding in FY2020 than FY2011 in inflation-adjusted dollars.

A significant issue for NPS throughout the decade was the agency's multibillion-dollar backlog of deferred maintenance (i.e., infrastructure maintenance and repairs that were not performed as scheduled or as needed). Combined funding for two budget activities that primarily address the backlog (within larger budget accounts) grew in inflation-adjusted terms over the decade. In addition, enactment of the Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152) in August 2020 provided a new source of mandatory spending to address NPS deferred maintenance.

The funding changes took place in the context of relative stability in the size of the National Park System, which was about 85 million acres throughout the decade, with a total growth of 1% from the beginning to the end of the period. The system consists of roughly 81 million acres of federal land, with the remainder nonfederal. Although system acreage remained relatively stable, 29 new units—many of relatively small size—were added to the system during the decade. NPS staffing levels declined by 16% over the decade. Visits to the parks generally increased over the 10-year period, peaking at approximately 331 million visits in 2016. However, visits to date in 2020 are lower than the previous year, especially for months during which the nation was affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Contents

NPS Discretionary Appropriations Totals.....	1
Individual NPS Accounts	3
Operation of the National Park System Account.....	5
Construction Account.....	7
Land Acquisition and State Assistance.....	8
Historic Preservation Fund.....	9
National Recreation and Preservation Account.....	10
Centennial Challenge	11
NPS Appropriations in Context	12
Size of the National Park System	13
Visits to the National Parks	14
National Park Service Staffing.....	15
Concluding Summary.....	17

Figures

Figure 1. NPS Discretionary Appropriations, FY2011-FY2020	1
Figure 2. NPS’s FY2020 Discretionary Appropriations by Account.....	3
Figure 3. Appropriations for NPS’s Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) Account, FY2011-FY2020.....	5
Figure 4. Appropriations for Two NPS Budget Activities That Primarily Address Deferred Maintenance, FY2011-FY2020.....	6
Figure 5. Appropriations for NPS’s Construction Account, FY2011-FY2020.....	7
Figure 6. Appropriations for NPS’s Land Acquisition and State Assistance (LASA) Account, FY2011-FY2020.....	9
Figure 7. Appropriations for NPS’s Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) Account, FY2011-FY2020	10
Figure 8. Appropriations for NPS’s National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) Account, FY2011-FY2020.....	11
Figure 9. Appropriations for NPS’s Centennial Challenge Account, FY2011-FY2020.....	12
Figure 10. Size of the National Park System, FY2011-FY2020.....	13
Figure 11. Annual Recreational Visits to the National Park System, 2011-2020.....	15
Figure 12. NPS Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff, FY2011-FY2020.....	16

Tables

Table 1. NPS Discretionary Appropriations, FY2011-FY2020.....	2
Table 2. NPS Appropriations by Account, FY2011-FY2020.....	4
Table 3. Size of the National Park System, FY2011-FY2020.....	14
Table 4. Annual Recreational Visits to the National Park System, 2011-2020.....	15
Table 5. NPS Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff, FY2011-FY2020.....	16

Contacts

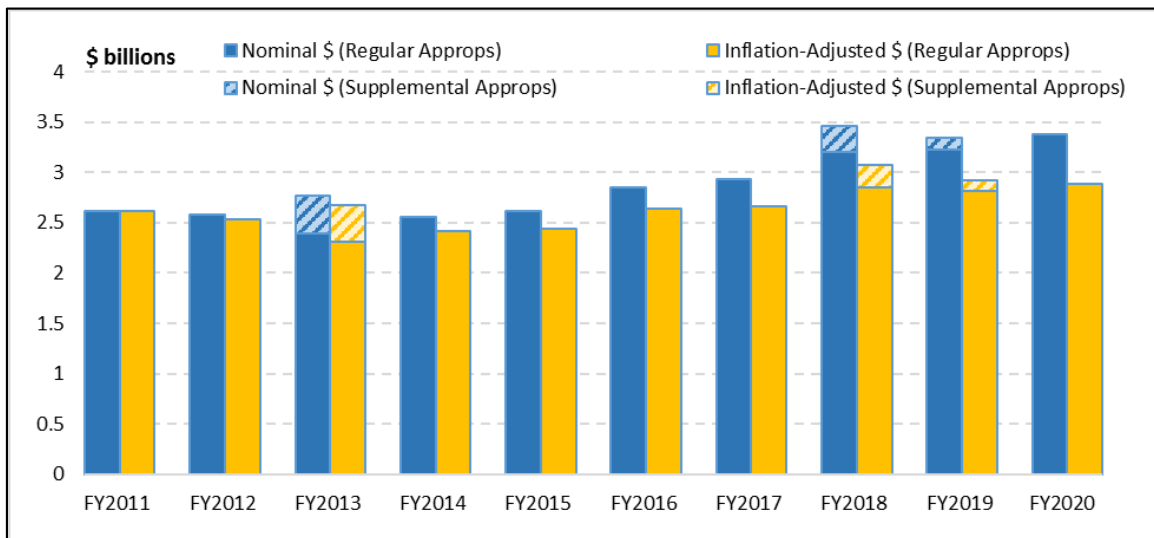
Author Information 18

The National Park Service (NPS) administers the National Park System, which covers 85 million acres of land and consists of 422 diverse units included for their natural, cultural, and recreational importance. NPS generally receives appropriations in the annual Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. This report examines trends in the agency’s discretionary appropriations over the past decade (FY2011-FY2020) and related issues and congressional actions. It also discusses changes in the size of the National Park System, numbers of recreational visits to the parks, and NPS staffing levels during that period.

NPS Discretionary Appropriations Totals

NPS’s discretionary appropriations fluctuated during the past decade (FY2011-FY2020). Regular discretionary appropriations (which exclude supplemental appropriations) totaled \$2.611 billion in FY2011 and \$3.377 billion in FY2020. The FY2020 figure was 29% higher than FY2011 in nominal dollars and 11% higher when adjusted for inflation. In both nominal and inflation-adjusted dollars, the general trend was an annual decline in regular appropriations between FY2011 and FY2013, and increases thereafter (**Figure 1** and **Table 1**). NPS received supplemental appropriations for response to natural disasters in FY2013 (P.L. 113-2), FY2018 (P.L. 115-123), and FY2019 (P.L. 116-20). These funds were provided outside of regular appropriations laws and were not subject to discretionary spending caps.¹

Figure 1. NPS Discretionary Appropriations, FY2011-FY2020
(\$ billions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2011 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2011-FY2014 and FY2019-FY2020 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2015-FY2018 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2017-FY2020.

Notes: See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

¹ The figures and tables in this report generally reflect rescissions and supplemental appropriations to date, including from P.L. 113-2 in response to Hurricane Sandy (FY2013), P.L. 115-123 in response to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria (FY2018), and P.L. 116-20 in response to Hurricanes Florence and Michael, Typhoons Yutu and Mangkhut, and other natural disasters (FY2019). Amounts for FY2013 also reflect the 2013 budget sequestration and an across-the-board rescission of 0.2%. The data exclude permanent budget authorities and generally do not reflect scorekeeping adjustments. Adjustments for inflation (shown in 2011 dollars) use the GDP Chained Price Index from the White House Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables*, Table 10.1, “Gross Domestic Product and Deflators Used in the Historical Tables—1940-2023,” at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>.

Mandatory Appropriations in the National Park Service's Budget

Most of NPS's funding comes from discretionary appropriations, which are controlled by annual appropriations laws. However, NPS also receives mandatory appropriations under various laws, which allow the agency to spend money without further action by Congress. Altogether, for FY2020, NPS estimated mandatory spending of \$0.741 billion, while the agency's discretionary appropriations for FY2020 were \$3.377 billion. Based on the NPS estimates, mandatory appropriations would constitute approximately 18% of NPS's total FY2020 budget.

NPS's mandatory appropriations include recreation fees, concession franchise fees, receipts from leasing, and direct cash donations, among others. In August 2020, P.L. 116-152, the Great American Outdoors Act, provided a new source of mandatory appropriations for NPS for five years, FY2021-FY2025. The law established the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund to address deferred maintenance of five agencies. The fund consists of certain federal revenues from conventional and renewable energy development, and it is capped at \$1.9 billion annually. NPS is to receive 70% of the available funding to address its deferred maintenance backlog, which was estimated at \$11.92 billion for FY2018. Because future energy revenues are unknown, it is uncertain how much money will be generated for NPS during the fund's lifetime. In using the mandatory funding, NPS must submit lists of priority deferred maintenance projects to Congress with annual budget justifications, and appropriations acts may specify alternate allocations. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11636, *The Great American Outdoors Act, P.L. 116-152*.

Table I. NPS Discretionary Appropriations, FY2011-FY2020

(\$ billions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2011 dollars; includes supplemental appropriations)

	Appropriation in Nominal \$	Appropriation in Inflation-Adjusted 2011 \$	% Change Since Previous Year	
			Nominal	Inflation-Adjusted
FY2011	2.611	2.611	—	—
FY2012	2.580	2.532	-1%	-3%
FY2013	2.775 ^a	2.674	+8% ^a	+6%
FY2014	2.562	2.422	-8% ^a	-9%
FY2015	2.616	2.446	+2%	+1%
FY2016	2.852	2.643	+9%	+8%
FY2017	2.932	2.669	+3%	+1%
FY2018	3.460 ^b	3.078	+18% ^b	+15%
FY2019	3.351 ^c	2.924	-3% ^{b,c}	-5%
FY2020	3.377	2.890	+1% ^c	-1%
Change Over Decade	+0.766	+0.279	+29%	+11%

Sources: Data for FY2011-FY2014 and FY2019-FY2020 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2015-FY2018 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2017-FY2020.

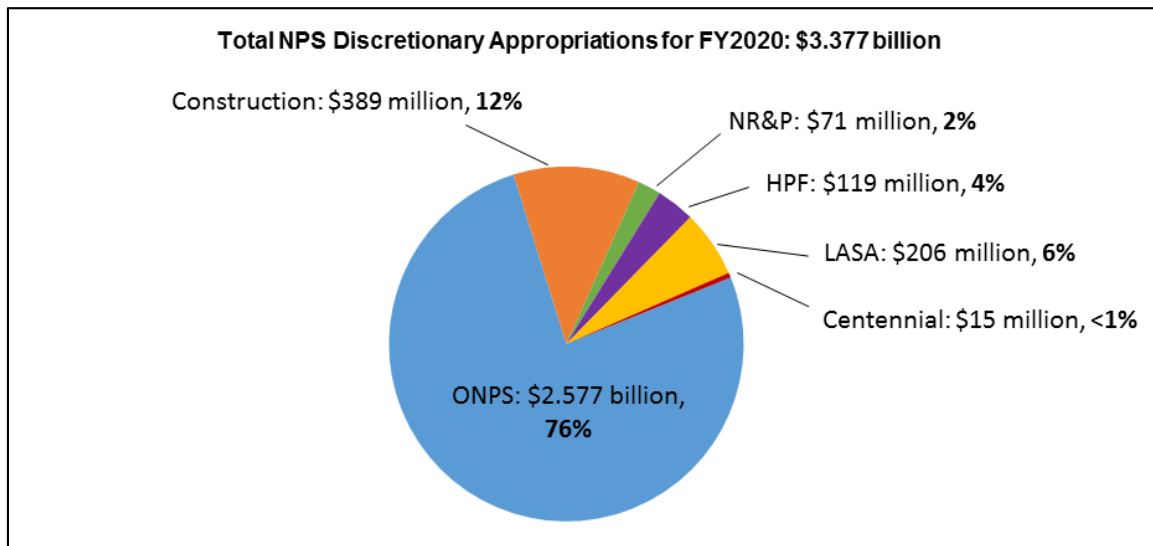
Notes: Figures include supplemental appropriations. See footnote 1 for additional information on this table.

- The FY2013 total of \$2.775 billion includes regular appropriations of \$2.398 billion and supplemental appropriations of \$0.377 billion. Excluding the supplemental, the regular appropriation for FY2013 represents a 7% decrease from the FY2012 amount in nominal dollars. Also, excluding the supplemental, the FY2014 appropriation is a 7% increase over FY2013 in nominal dollars.
- The FY2018 total of \$3.460 billion includes regular appropriations of \$3.202 billion and supplemental appropriations of \$0.258 billion. Excluding the supplemental, the regular appropriation for FY2018 represents a 9% increase over FY2017 in nominal dollars. Excluding supplementals for both FY2018 and FY2019, the FY2019 appropriation is a 1% increase over FY2018 in nominal dollars.
- The FY2019 total of \$3.351 billion includes regular appropriations of \$3.222 billion and supplemental appropriations of \$0.128 billion. Excluding supplementals for both FY2018 and FY2019, the FY2019 appropriation is a 1% increase over FY2018 in nominal dollars. Also, excluding supplementals, the appropriation for FY2020 is a 5% increase over FY2019 in nominal dollars.

Individual NPS Accounts

During the decade, NPS’s appropriations were primarily organized in six accounts that cover basic park operations (Operation of the National Park System, or ONPS, account); construction and repair of infrastructure (Construction account); land acquisition by both NPS and the states (Land Acquisition and State Assistance account);² grants to states and localities for historic preservation (Historic Preservation Fund); assistance to state, local, tribal, and private land managers (National Recreation and Preservation account); and matching grants primarily to address the high backlog of deferred maintenance on NPS infrastructure (Centennial Challenge account).³ By far the largest share of NPS’s discretionary appropriations—76% in FY2020—went to the ONPS account, which covers basic park operations (Figure 2 and Table 2).

Figure 2. NPS’s FY2020 Discretionary Appropriations by Account



Source: Joint explanatory statement for P.L. 116-94.

Notes: ONPS = Operation of the National Park Service; NR&P = National Recreation and Preservation; HPF = Historic Preservation Fund; LASA = Land Acquisition and State Assistance. These data exclude permanent budget authorities and generally do not reflect scorekeeping adjustments. Figures are in nominal dollars. Percentages may not sum precisely due to rounding.

² The Land Acquisition and State Assistance account constitutes NPS’s portion of appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The LWCF is the principal source of funding for four federal land management agencies—NPS, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—to acquire lands. In addition, the LWCF funds grants to states for outdoor recreation purposes, which are administered by NPS. During the decade covered by this report, LWCF funding was provided through the annual appropriations process, but in August 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152) designated all funding from the LWCF as mandatory spending. For more information on the LWCF, see CRS Report RL33531, *Land and Water Conservation Fund: Overview, Funding History, and Issues*, by Carol Hardy Vincent. On the Great American Outdoors Act, see CRS In Focus IF11636, *The Great American Outdoors Act, P.L. 116-152*, by Carol Hardy Vincent, Laura B. Comay, and Bill Heniff Jr.

³ The backlog was estimated at \$11.92 billion for FY2018, the most recent year available. For more information, see CRS Report R44924, *National Park Service Deferred Maintenance: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Laura B. Comay. The Centennial Challenge account was funded in FY2010 (under the title “Park Partnership Grants”) and each fiscal year since FY2015.

Table 2. NPS Appropriations by Account, FY2011-FY2020
(\$ millions, in nominal dollars and inflation-adjusted 2011 dollars)

	ONPS	Construction	LASA	HPF	NR&P	CC	Total ^a
FY2011	2,250.050	184.646	94.810	54.391	57.245	—	2,611.142
FY2012	2,236.568	155.366	101.897	55.910	59.879	—	2,579.620
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,194.968</i>	<i>152.476</i>	<i>100.002</i>	<i>54.870</i>	<i>58.765</i>		2,531.639
FY2013	2,097.261	453.885 ^b	96.567	100.486 ^b	56.747	—	2,774.946^b
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,021.064</i>	<i>437.395</i>	<i>93.059</i>	<i>96.835</i>	<i>54.685</i>		2,674.128
FY2014	2,236.753	137.461	98.100	56.410	60.795	—	2,561.519
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,114.787</i>	<i>129.966</i>	<i>92.751</i>	<i>53.334</i>	<i>57.480</i>		2,421.845
FY2015	2,277.485	138.339	98.960	56.410	63.117	10.000	2,616.501
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,128.689</i>	<i>129.301</i>	<i>92.495</i>	<i>52.725</i>	<i>58.993</i>	<i>9.347</i>	2,445.527
FY2016	2,370.724	192.937	173.670	65.410	62.632	15.000	2,852.413
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,196.383</i>	<i>178.749</i>	<i>160.899</i>	<i>60.600</i>	<i>58.026</i>	<i>13.897</i>	2,642.649
FY2017	2,425.126	209.353	162.029	80.910	62.638	20.000	2,932.120
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,207.605</i>	<i>190.575</i>	<i>147.496</i>	<i>73.653</i>	<i>57.020</i>	<i>18.206</i>	2,669.124
FY2018	2,477.969	567.304 ^c	180.941	146.910 ^c	63.638	23.000	3,459.762^c
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,204.386</i>	<i>504.670</i>	<i>160.964</i>	<i>130.690</i>	<i>56.612</i>	<i>20.461</i>	3,077.783
FY2019	2,502.711	442.704 ^d	168.444	152.660 ^d	64.138	20.000	3,350.657^d
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,184.030</i>	<i>386.333</i>	<i>146.995</i>	<i>133.221</i>	<i>55.971</i>	<i>17.453</i>	2,924.004
FY2020	2,576.992	389.345	206.121	118.660	71.166	15.000	3,377.284
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,205.319</i>	<i>333.191</i>	<i>176.393</i>	<i>101.546</i>	<i>60.902</i>	<i>12.837</i>	2,890.187

Sources: Data for FY2011-FY2014 and FY2019-FY2020 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2015-FY2018 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2017-FY2020.

Notes: ONPS = Operation of the National Park System account; NR&P = National Recreation and Preservation account; HPF = Historic Preservation Fund account; LASA = Land Acquisition and State Assistance account; CC = Centennial Challenge account. Data include supplemental appropriations. See footnote 1 for additional information on this table.

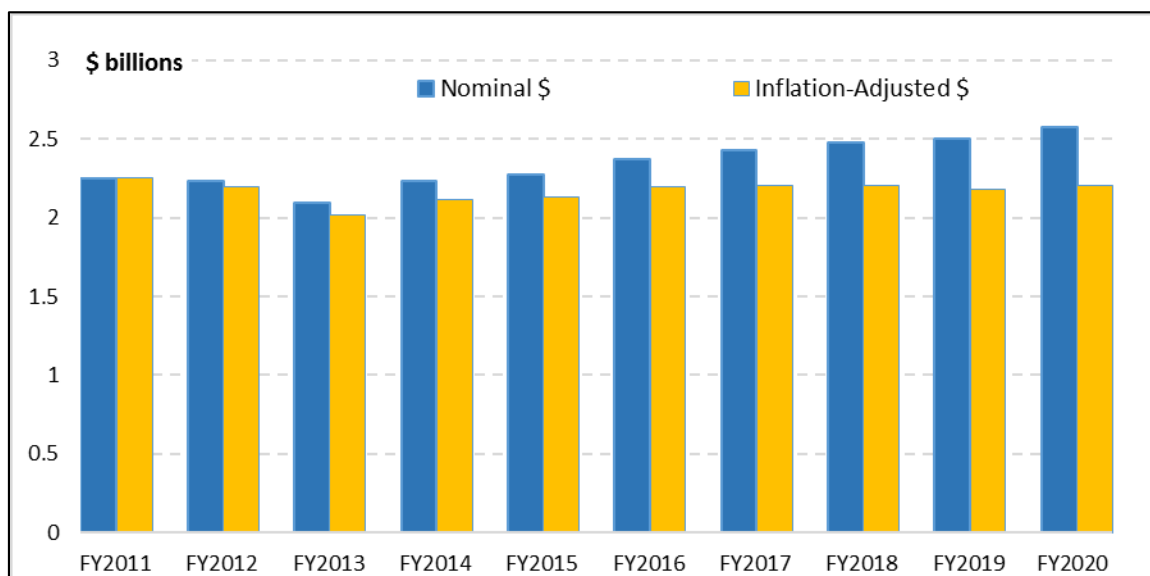
- Totals reflect annual rescissions of LWCF contract authority of \$30.0 million for FY2005-FY2013 and \$28.0 million for FY2014-FY2017. Because these rescissions are not included in the amounts for individual accounts, the figures for the individual accounts do not add up to the totals shown. Congress did not enact the rescissions in FY2018-FY2020 appropriations.
- The FY2013 total of \$2.775 billion includes regular appropriations of \$2.398 billion and supplemental appropriations of \$377.3 million (after sequestration). Supplemental FY2013 appropriations for specific accounts (after sequestration) were \$329.8 million for Construction and \$47.5 million for HPF. See NPS budget justification for FY2015, with FY2013 final appropriations totals, at <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/upload/FY-2015-Greenbook-Linked.pdf>.
- The FY2018 total of \$3.460 billion includes regular appropriations of \$3.202 billion and supplemental appropriations of \$257.6 million. Supplemental FY2018 appropriations for specific accounts were \$207.6 million for Construction and \$50.0 million for HPF.
- The FY2019 total of \$3.351 billion includes regular appropriations of \$3.223 billion and supplemental appropriations of \$128.0 million. Supplemental FY2019 appropriations for specific accounts were \$78.0 million for Construction and \$50.0 million for HPF.

Operation of the National Park System Account

Appropriations for the largest NPS account, entitled Operation of the National Park System (ONPS), support the activities, programs, and services that form the day-to-day operations of the National Park System. ONPS funding was \$2.250 billion in FY2011 and increased to \$2.577 billion in nominal dollars in FY2020 (see **Table 2** and **Figure 3**). When adjusted for inflation, however, this represents a decrease of 2%. As a percentage of total NPS appropriations, the ONPS share decreased over the decade from 86% of total funding in FY2011 to 76% in FY2019. The ONPS account was not affected by supplemental appropriations during the decade.

Figure 3. Appropriations for NPS's Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) Account, FY2011-FY2020

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2011 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2011-FY2014 and FY2019-FY2020 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2015-FY2018 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2017-FY2020.

Notes: See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

The majority of ONPS funds are provided directly to individual park units. Activities under the account include resource stewardship, visitor services, park protection (including the U.S. Park Police), facility operations and maintenance, park support, and “external administrative costs” for services provided by outside entities.⁴ Among these activities, funding for three activities (resource stewardship, visitor services, and park protection) decreased over the decade in inflation-adjusted dollars, whereas funding for two activities (facility operations and maintenance, and park support) grew in inflation-adjusted dollars. Funding for external administrative costs was nearly even in FY2020 as compared with FY2011, when adjusted for inflation.⁵

⁴ The *park support* activity includes administering, managing, and supporting the operations of park units. *External administrative costs* include employee compensation payments, unemployment compensation payments, centralized information technology costs, telecommunications, postage, space rental from the General Services Administration, and departmental program charges.

⁵ These calculations use amounts from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. In inflation-adjusted dollars, the percentage decreases in funding over the decade were as follows: resource stewardship, -12%; visitor services, -8%; park protection, -13%; external administrative costs, minus less than 1%. The increases in inflation-adjusted dollars were as follows: facility operations and maintenance, +7%; park support, +3%.

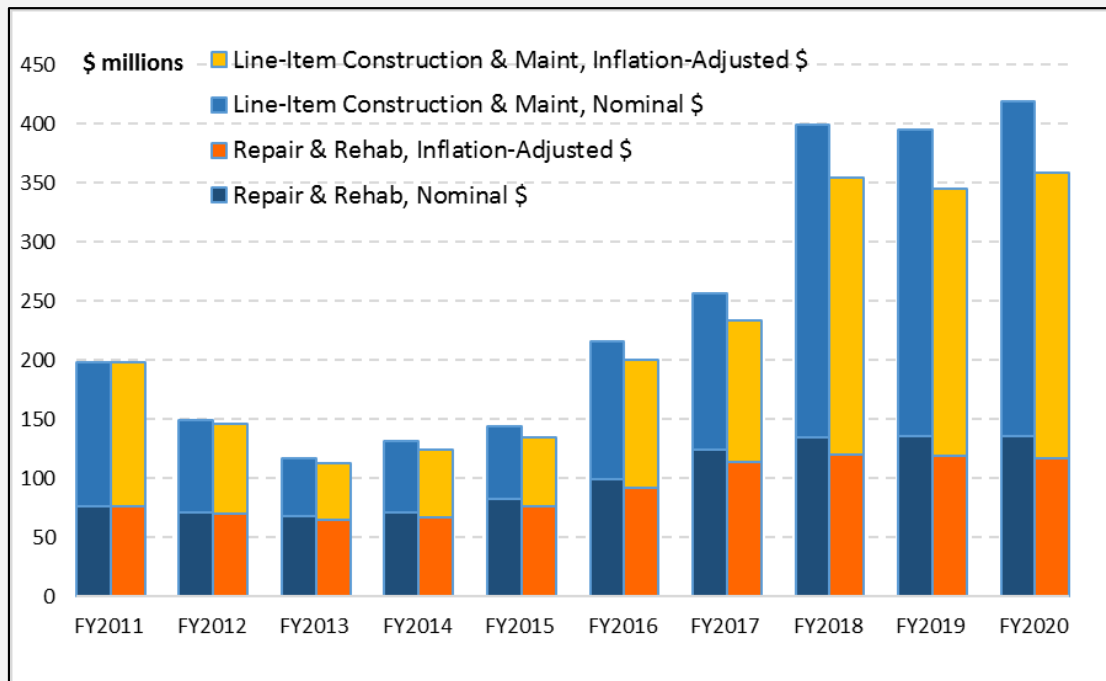
NPS Infrastructure: Funding for Deferred Maintenance

NPS's substantial backlog of deferred maintenance (DM)—infrastructure maintenance and repairs that were not performed as scheduled or as needed—has been an ongoing concern for Congress. The backlog grew in nominal dollars from an estimated mid-range figure of \$11.04 billion in FY2011 to an estimated \$11.92 billion in FY2018, the most recent year for which NPS estimates are available. This is a growth of 8%, but in inflation-adjusted terms, the estimated backlog shrank by 9% during this period.⁶ The bulk of the DM needs (52% in FY2018) are in transportation assets such as paved roads, bridges, and tunnels.

Discretionary appropriations provide a significant portion of the agency's funding to address DM, and funding also comes from other sources. For example, road and bridge improvements are partly funded by allocations from the Department of Transportation; and under the Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152), the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund will provide varying amounts of mandatory funding for NPS DM for FY2021-FY2025. Within NPS's discretionary appropriations, two budget activities provide the primary support to address DM: the *line-item construction and maintenance* activity within the Construction account and the *repair and rehabilitation* subactivity within the Operation of the National Park System account. Funding for these two budget activities combined (**Figure 4**) rose by 52% in inflation-adjusted dollars over the decade. Although these two activities provide the bulk of NPS discretionary funding for DM, they also cover other maintenance activities outside of DM. Further, certain other budget accounts contribute funding to projects on the DM backlog.

Figure 4. Appropriations for Two NPS Budget Activities That Primarily Address Deferred Maintenance, FY2011-FY2020

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2011 dollars)



Source: Annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS, and NPS budget justifications for FY2013-FY2021.

Notes: Funding does not include supplemental appropriations to the Construction account for disaster recovery. See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

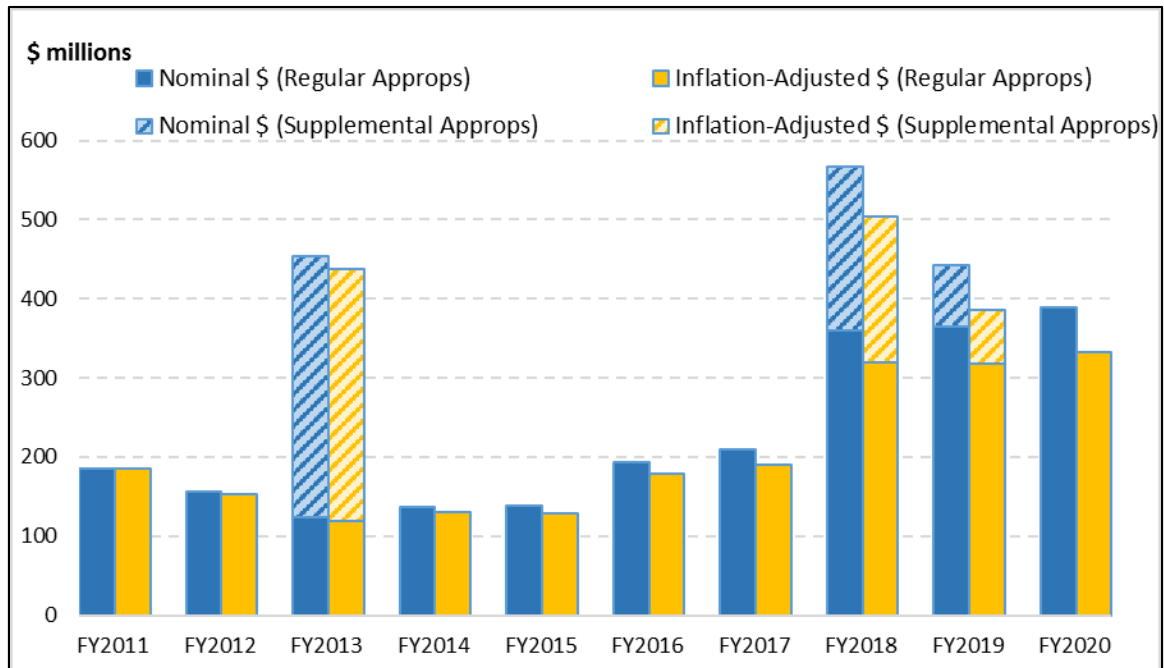
For more information on NPS deferred maintenance, see CRS Report R44924, *National Park Service Deferred Maintenance: Frequently Asked Questions*; and CRS Report R43997, *Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY2009-FY2018 Estimates and Issues*.

⁶ Unlike other inflation adjustments in this report, the inflation adjustment for deferred maintenance is calculated using an index from the Bureau of Economic Analysis that specifically reflects inflation associated with nondefense

Construction Account

The second-largest NPS account, titled Construction, funds repairs and improvements to existing facilities as well as new construction projects, among other activities. Appropriations for the Construction account declined in the first few years of the decade (excluding supplemental appropriations) but grew thereafter, and the FY2020 appropriation was 80% higher than FY2011 in inflation-adjusted dollars (Table 2 and Figure 5). Supplemental appropriations for hurricane recovery in FY2013, FY2018, and FY2019 increased the account totals for those years. The Construction account represented 7% of the total discretionary appropriation for FY2011 and 12% in FY2020.

Figure 5. Appropriations for NPS's Construction Account, FY2011-FY2020
(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2011 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2011-FY2014 and FY2019-FY2020 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2015-FY2018 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2017-FY2020.

Notes: See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

Among the specific activities funded in the Construction account, the largest is *line-item construction and maintenance* (see box above), which covers construction of new facilities and rehabilitation and replacement of existing facilities. Appropriations for this budget activity nearly doubled in inflation-adjusted dollars between FY2011 and FY2020 (growth of 99.9%). According to NPS, the activity “focuses on projects that repair, replace, or improve high priority mission critical and mission dependent assets, and ensures that investments are reasonable, cost effective, and fiscally sustainable over the life-time of the investment.”⁷ Other activities funded in the Construction account include emergency and unscheduled construction, repair and replacement of

infrastructure. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Table 3.9.4, “Price Indexes for Government Consumption Expenditures and Gross Investment,” for nondefense structures, annual indexes, at <https://apps.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?reqid=19&step=2#reqid=19&step=2&isuri=1&1921=survey>.

⁷ NPS, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information, Fiscal Year 2021*, p. Const-9, at <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/fy2021-budget-justification-nps.pdf>.

employee housing, dam safety, equipment replacement, construction planning and program management, development of general management plans for park units, and preparation of special studies of areas (for instance, to assess their potential for inclusion in the National Park System).

Land Acquisition and State Assistance

The Land Acquisition and State Assistance (LASA) account represents NPS's share from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF; 54 U.S.C. §§200301 et seq.). The LWCF, funded mainly from offshore oil and gas revenues, is the primary source for land acquisition funding for the four major federal land management agencies—NPS, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In addition, the LWCF supports grants to states (and, through states, to localities) for assistance with recreation planning, acquiring recreational lands and waters, and developing outdoor recreational facilities.⁸ These 50/50 matching grants, administered by NPS, generally are allocated to states by formula, although in recent years a portion of the state funding also has been appropriated for a competitive grant program.⁹

Under the LWCF Act, the LWCF receives deposits of \$900 million annually, primarily from offshore oil and gas revenues.¹⁰ During the decade covered by this report, this funding was available only to the extent provided in discretionary appropriations acts, and at no point during the decade was the “full funding” appropriated. In August 2020, enactment of the Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152) shifted all funding under the LWCF Act to mandatory spending.¹¹

During the FY2011-FY2020 period, discretionary appropriations for the LASA account—including both NPS federal land acquisition and assistance to states—increased overall, with a notable growth in the second half of the decade (**Figure 6** and **Table 2**). The appropriation was \$94.8 million in FY2011 and \$206.1 million in FY2020 in nominal dollars.¹² Adjusted for inflation, this is a growth of 86%. The LASA account represented approximately 4% of the total NPS appropriation in FY2011 and 6% in FY2020.

The increase in funding for the account is primarily attributable to higher appropriations for the state assistance program in recent years. The FY2020 appropriation for NPS federal land acquisition was 7% higher than FY2011 when adjusted for inflation, while the appropriation for NPS assistance to states was 200% higher. State assistance was roughly \$40 million-\$50 million annually for FY2011-FY2015 and more than doubled in nominal dollars, reaching \$110 million-\$140 million, for FY2016-FY2020. For land acquisition by NPS, the funding ranged between \$44 million and \$69 million during the decade.¹³

⁸ In addition to the state grants and federal land acquisition grants discussed here, a portion of the LWCF also has been used to fund other programs. For more information on the LWCF, see CRS Report RL33531, *Land and Water Conservation Fund: Overview, Funding History, and Issues*, by Carol Hardy Vincent, and CRS Report R44121, *Land and Water Conservation Fund: Appropriations for “Other Purposes”*, by Carol Hardy Vincent.

⁹ For FY2020, \$25.0 million (out of a total of \$140.0 million for state assistance) was for competitive grants.

¹⁰ The state grant program of the LWCF also receives mandatory funding from offshore oil and gas revenues under the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-432).

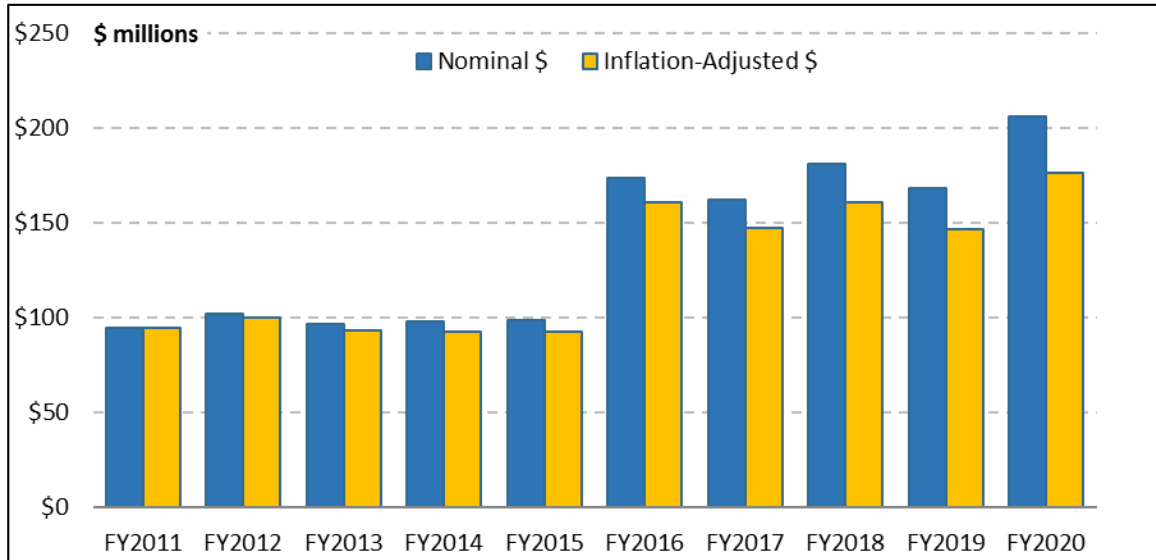
¹¹ For more information on the Great American Outdoors Act, see CRS In Focus IF11636, *The Great American Outdoors Act, P.L. 116-152*, by Carol Hardy Vincent, Laura B. Comay, and Bill Heniff Jr.

¹² The LASA account did not receive supplemental appropriations during the decade.

¹³ The appropriation for NPS federal acquisition also includes an amount for the American Battlefield Protection Program's (ABPP's) battlefield acquisition grants to states (54 U.S.C. §308103), even though this portion of the money is not for federal acquisitions. In FY2020, the amount for ABPP grants was \$13.0 million (nominal dollars), and in

Figure 6. Appropriations for NPS's Land Acquisition and State Assistance (LASA) Account, FY2011-FY2020

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2011 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2011-FY2014 and FY2019-FY2020 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2015-FY2018 data are from NPS budget justifications for FY2017-FY2020.

Notes: See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

Historic Preservation Fund

The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), established in 1976, is administered by NPS through appropriations to the agency's HPF account. In accordance with the purposes of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA),¹⁴ the fund primarily provides grants-in-aid to state and tribal historic preservation offices for conservation of cultural and historical assets and sites. These grants are awarded by formula and require a 60% federal–40% state matching share. The HPF is funded by revenues from oil and gas activities on the U.S. outer continental shelf. Funding was reauthorized through FY2023 in P.L. 114-289.

The HPF receives \$150 million annually in deposits from offshore oil and gas revenues, but the funding is available only to the extent appropriated by Congress. Annual appropriations from the account were less than the deposited amount throughout the decade, except in FY2019 (counting supplemental appropriations). Regular appropriations for the account were relatively steady in the early part of the decade and then grew in the latter part (**Figure 7** and **Table 2**). The FY2020 appropriation was 87% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars than the FY2011 appropriation. The HPF account represented approximately 2% of the total NPS appropriation in FY2011 and 4% in FY2020.

The largest activity in the HPF account is grant funding for state historic preservation offices, which declined by 3% in inflation-adjusted terms over the decade. Grants for tribal historic preservation offices, on the other hand, rose by 47% after adjusting for inflation. The account also

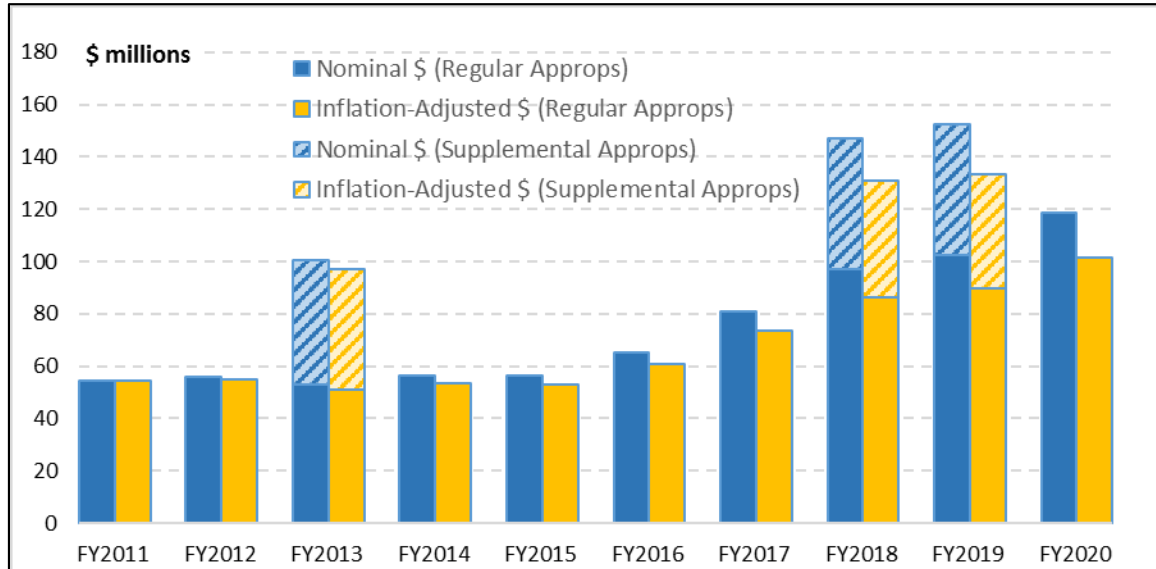
FY2011 it was \$9.0 million. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11329, *American Battlefield Protection Program*, by Mark K. DeSantis.

¹⁴ P.L. 89-665, as amended; 54 U.S.C. §§300101 et seq. For more information on historic preservation and the HPF, see CRS Report R45800, *The Federal Role in Historic Preservation: An Overview*, by Mark K. DeSantis.

funded various competitive grant programs in particular years. For FY2020, these included grants for sites associated with the African American civil rights movement, grants to preserve sites and stories associated with securing civil rights for “all Americans,” and grants to underrepresented communities. As separate line items, the account also funds grants for historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), historic revitalization, and the Save America’s Treasures program to restore nationally significant historic structures and artifacts.

Figure 7. Appropriations for NPS’s Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) Account, FY2011-FY2020

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2011 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2011-FY2014 and FY2019-FY2020 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2015-FY2018 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2017-FY2020.

Notes: See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

Supplemental appropriations augmented regular appropriations for the HPF account in three years—FY2013, FY2018, and FY2019—and were targeted primarily to hurricane recovery.¹⁵ The funding was mainly to assist recovering states and territories with compliance activities related to Section 106 of the NHPA.¹⁶ Under Section 106, undertakings that receive federal funds or permits—including some hurricane recovery activities—must be evaluated for their potential effects on historic properties.

National Recreation and Preservation Account

The National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) account funds NPS programs that primarily assist state, local, tribal, and private land managers with outdoor recreation planning, natural and cultural resource preservation, and other activities outside the National Park System.

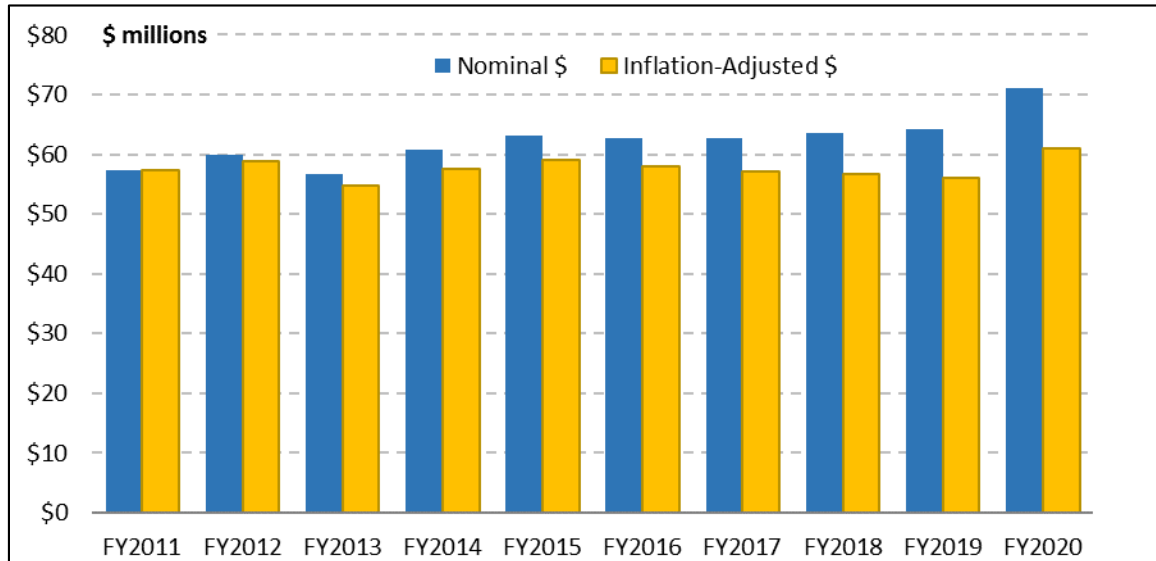
Appropriations for the account were 6% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars in FY2020 as compared with FY2011 (**Figure 8** and **Table 2**). The portion of total NPS funding used for the NR&P account was roughly the same (2%) at the beginning and end of the decade. The NR&P account was not a recipient of supplemental funding during the decade.

¹⁵ P.L. 113-2, P.L. 115-123, and P.L. 116-20. The FY2019 funds also were for response to other types of natural disasters.

¹⁶ 54 U.S.C. §306108.

Figure 8. Appropriations for NPS's National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) Account, FY2011-FY2020

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2011 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2011-FY2014 and FY2019-FY2020 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2015-FY2018 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2017-FY2020.

Notes: See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

A variety of natural, cultural, and recreational assistance programs are funded in the NR&P account. NPS's Heritage Partnership Program, which provides funding assistance to national heritage areas, is the largest single program in the account.¹⁷ Its appropriations grew over the decade by 8% in inflation-adjusted dollars, despite budget requests from the Obama and Trump Administrations for significant reductions. There were 49 heritage areas until Congress established 6 new heritage areas in March 2019 in P.L. 116-9. The NR&P account also has included other programs that assist nonfederal entities, such as the American Battlefield Protection Program;¹⁸ Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program; National Natural Landmarks and National Historic Landmarks Programs; and National Register of Historic Places. The account further covers international park affairs, environmental and compliance review, and grants administration.

Centennial Challenge

The Centennial Challenge account was funded during the latter part of the decade (FY2015-FY2020).¹⁹ The account consists of a matching-grant program to spur partner donations for park improvements, primarily aimed at addressing deferred maintenance.²⁰ The name "Centennial

¹⁷ National heritage areas are established by Congress but are not federally managed, and they are not part of the National Park System. For more on national heritage areas, see CRS Report RL33462, *Heritage Areas: Background, Proposals, and Current Issues*, by Mark K. DeSantis.

¹⁸ The ABPP's planning grants are funded in the NR&P account, while grants to states for battlefield land acquisition are funded in the LASA account.

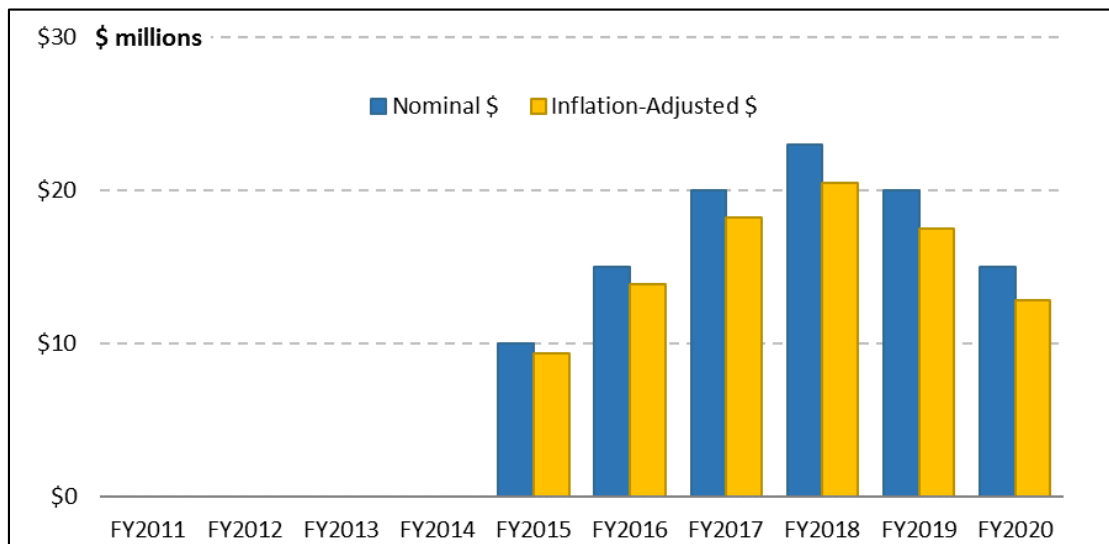
¹⁹ The account had earlier received funding in FY2008 and also was funded in FY2010 under the title "Park Partnership Grants."

²⁰ The account provides the federal share of matching grants for "signature" park projects and programs, primarily aimed at addressing deferred maintenance. "Signature" projects and programs are to be identified by the Interior

Challenge” indicates the fund’s origin as a program to improve the parks in anticipation of NPS’s 2016 centennial anniversary and its second century of park management. Both the George W. Bush and Obama Administrations had proposed discretionary and mandatory funding for the fund prior to its legislative establishment in December 2016 (P.L. 114-289), and Congress had provided discretionary appropriations in some years, starting in FY2008. P.L. 114-289 codified the Centennial Challenge Fund and authorized it to receive federal revenues from certain sales of National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Passes to seniors, in addition to discretionary appropriations. The senior pass revenues are provided as offsetting collections.²¹ Revenues are to be matched on at least a one-to-one basis by nonfederal donations.

During the FY2015-FY2020 period, appropriations for the fund rose and then fell (**Table 2** and **Figure 9**). The FY2020 appropriation was 37% higher than FY2015 in inflation-adjusted dollars.²² The account represented less than 1% of total NPS appropriations in both years.

Figure 9. Appropriations for NPS’s Centennial Challenge Account, FY2011-FY2020
(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2011 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2015-FY2018 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2017-FY2020. Data for FY2019-FY2020 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS.

Notes: See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

NPS Appropriations in Context

Changes in NPS appropriations can be considered in the context of the National Park System’s size, the number of visits to the parks, and NPS staffing levels, among other factors. Over the past decade, the acreage of the National Park System grew by 1%, while 29 new units were added. Visitation peaked in 2016 and was generally higher in the second part of the decade than the first.

Secretary and must “help prepare the national parks for another century of conservation, preservation, and visitor enjoyment” (P.L. 114-289).

²¹ For a discussion of offsetting collections in the federal budget process, see CRS Report 98-721, *Introduction to the Federal Budget Process*, coordinated by James V. Saturno.

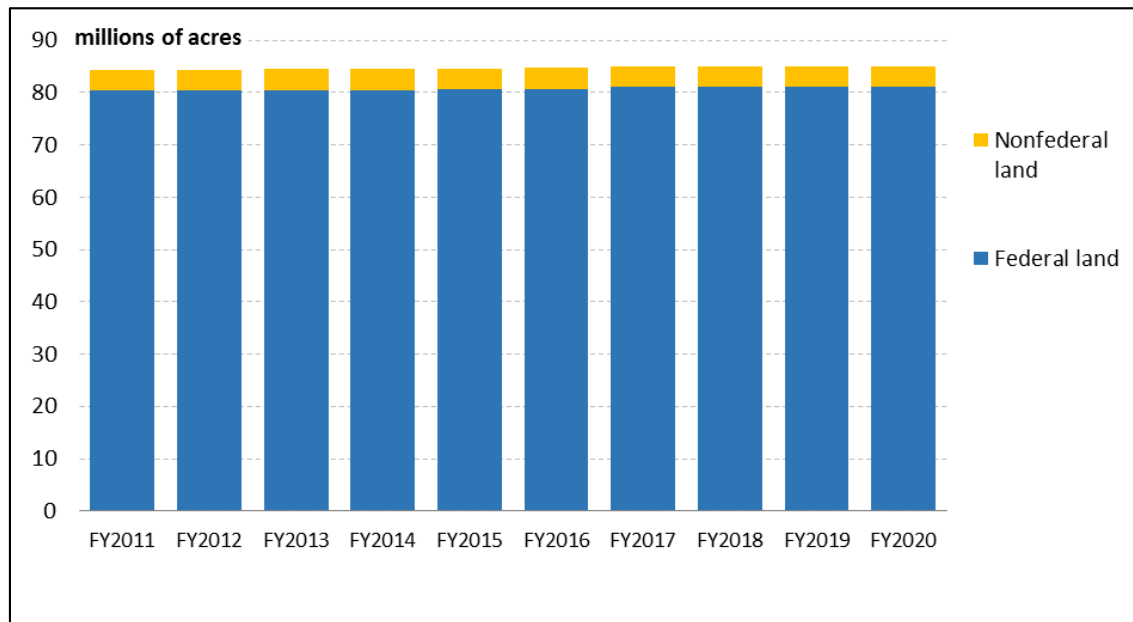
²² The Centennial Challenge account received no supplemental funding during the decade.

Staffing levels fluctuated yearly but averaged around 20,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees and were lower at the end of the decade than at the beginning.

Size of the National Park System

National Park System acreage grew by 1% over the decade, from 84.4 million acres to 85.1 million acres (**Figure 10** and **Table 3**). The percentage of National Park System lands owned by the federal government remained steady, at 95% of total system lands.²³ The remainder—the nonfederal land in the system—includes lands within park boundaries that are owned by state or local governments and by private landowners.

Figure 10. Size of the National Park System, FY2011-FY2020
(in millions of acres)



Source: NPS Land Resources Division, annual summaries of acreage, available at <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/acreagereports.htm>.

Notes: “Federal land” category includes *NPS Fee Acres*, *Less Than Fee Acres*, and *Other Federal Fee Acres*. “Nonfederal land” category includes *Other Public Acres* and *Private Acres*.

A total of 29 units were added to the system in the FY2011-FY2020 period.²⁴ Many were relatively small in acreage, such as Stonewall National Monument in New York (0.12 acres) and

²³ Almost all of the system’s federally owned lands are directly administered by NPS. However, the federally owned portion of the system also includes some NPS “less than fee” acres (e.g., conservation easements or rights-of-way) and some lands managed by other federal agencies, such as the Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Forest Service, or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Taken together, these two types of lands amount to about 1% of the federally owned portion of the system.

²⁴ These units are the River Raisin National Battlefield Park (MI), President William Jefferson Clinton Birthplace Home National Historic Site (AR), Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial (DC), Fort Monroe National Monument (VA), Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park (NJ), Cesar E. Chavez National Monument (CA), Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park (MD), First State National Historical Park (DE), Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument (OH), Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument (NV), World War I Memorial (DC), Valles Caldera National Preserve (NM), Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park (MA and RI), Pullman National Monument (IL), Honouliuli National Monument (HI), Waco Mammoth National Monument (TX), Manhattan Project National Historical Park (TN, NM, and WA), Castle Mountains National Monument (CA),

Belmont-Paul Women’s Equality National Monument in Washington, DC (0.34 acres). The largest units added to the system during the decade were Valles Caldera National Preserve in New Mexico (89,766 acres) and Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument in Maine (87,564 acres). Other acreage changes resulted from boundary adjustments in existing parks.

Table 3. Size of the National Park System, FY2011-FY2020
(in millions of acres)

	Federal Land	Nonfederal Land	Total Acreage
FY2011	80.485	3.900	84.385
FY2012	80.384	4.039	84.423
FY2013	80.473	4.007	84.479
FY2014	80.466	4.011	84.477
FY2015	80.598	4.019	84.616
FY2016	80.728	4.008	84.736
FY2017	81.008	4.031	85.039
FY2018	81.011	4.034	85.045
FY2019	81.095	4.005	85.100
FY2020	81.098	4.014	85.112

Source: NPS Land Resources Division, annual summaries of acreage, available at <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/acreagereports.htm>.

Notes: Federal Land category includes *NPS Fee Acres*, *Less Than Fee Acres*, and *Other Federal Fee Acres*. Nonfederal Land category includes *Other Public Acres* and *Private Acres*. Totals may not sum precisely due to rounding.

Visits to the National Parks

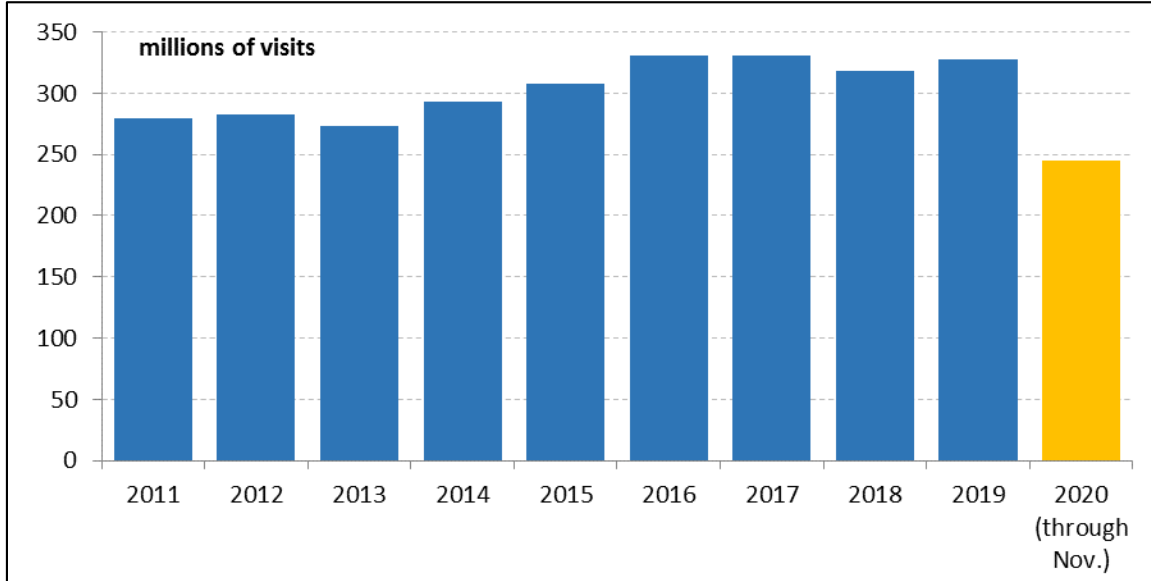
Numbers of recreational visits to the National Park System varied over the past 10 years but generally increased over the decade. The highest numbers of visits were in 2016 (331.0 million visits) and 2017 (330.9 million visits; **Figure 11** and **Table 4**). Visits in 2019, the most recent year for which full-year data are available, were 17% higher than in 2011. Many factors may affect visitation to the parks in a given year, including national economic conditions, weather, changes in population demographics, park closures due to disasters or lapses in appropriations, park promotional campaigns, competing recreational choices, and other factors.

NPS visitation for 2020 is available through the end of November 2020. The year-to-date total of 245.4 million visitors is 21% lower than the total for the same 11-month span in 2019 (312.0 million visitors). Visitation had been up in the first two months of 2020 as compared with 2019, but it dropped to comparatively lower totals starting in March, coinciding with impacts of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in the United States and the accompanying

Belmont-Paul Women’s Equality National Monument (DC), Stonewall National Monument (NY), Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument (ME), Harriet Tubman National Historical Park (NY), Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument (AL), Freedom Riders National Monument (AL), Reconstruction Era National Monument (SC), Camp Nelson National Monument (KY), Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial (DC), Mill Springs Battlefield National Monument (KY), and Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park (MO). A list of recent additions to the National Park System is at NPS, *Recent Changes in the National Park System*, at <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/recent-changes.htm>.

temporary closure of some park units. The difference was largest in April 2020 as compared with April 2019—a 53% reduction in visitation.

Figure 11. Annual Recreational Visits to the National Park System, 2011-2020
(total visits in millions, by calendar year)



Source: National Park Service, *NPS Stats*, at <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/Reports/National>.

Notes: The figure for 2020 shows visits through November 2020 (245.4 million visits). For comparison with the previous year, visits through November 2019 totaled 312.0 million.

Table 4. Annual Recreational Visits to the National Park System, 2011-2020
(total visits in millions, by calendar year)

Year	Number of Visits (in millions)	Year	Number of Visits (in millions)
2011	278.9	2016	331.0
2012	282.8	2017	330.9
2013	273.6	2018	318.2
2014	292.8	2019	327.5
2015	307.2	2020 (thr. Nov.)	245.4

Source: NPS, *NPS Stats*, at <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/Reports/National>.

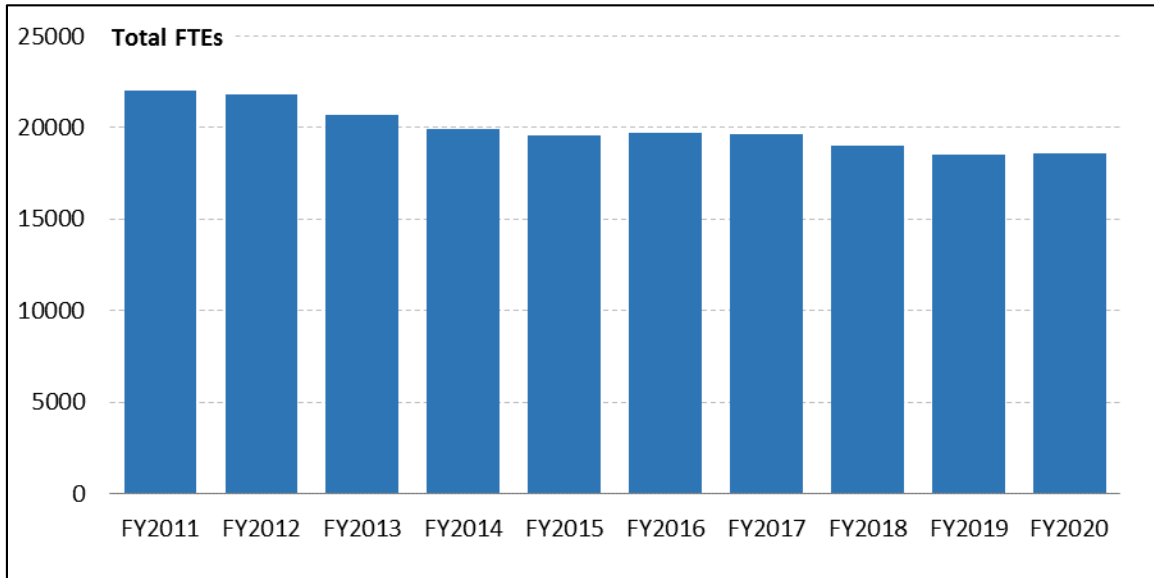
Notes: The figure for 2020 shows visits through November 2020 (245.4 million visits). For comparison with the previous year, visits through November 2019 totaled 312.0 million.

National Park Service Staffing

NPS full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing levels were highest in the earlier part of the decade. FTE staffing ranged from a high of 22,051 in FY2011 to a low of 18,544 in FY2019 (**Figure 12** and

Table 5).²⁵ Staffing for FY2020 (18,567 FTE) was 16% lower than at the beginning of the decade.

Figure 12. NPS Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff, FY2011-FY2020



Sources: FY2011-FY2015 numbers from U.S. Department of the Interior, “Department of the Interior FTE History: Full-Time Equivalent Staff Year (FTE) Actual of Bureaus and Offices,” at https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/fte-_history_table-20161108.pdf. FY2016-FY2020 numbers from NPS budget justifications.

Table 5. NPS Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff, FY2011-FY2020

Year	Number of FTEs	Year	Number of FTEs
FY2011	22,051	FY2016	19,722
FY2012	21,830	FY2017	19,668
FY2013	20,720	FY2018	19,032
FY2014	19,894	FY2019	18,544
FY2015	19,539	FY2020	18,567

Sources: FY2010-FY2015 numbers from U.S. Department of the Interior, “Department of the Interior FTE History: Full-Time Equivalent Staff Year (FTE) Actual of Bureaus and Offices,” at https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/fte-_history_table-20161108.pdf. FY2016-FY2019 numbers from NPS budget justifications.

²⁵ These employment figures, reported in NPS budget justifications, differ from those reported by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). NPS calculates employment by FTEs, defined as the total number of regular straight-time hours (not including overtime or holiday hours) worked by employees, divided by the number of compensable hours applicable to each fiscal year. By contrast, OPM data utilizes “on-board employment” figures, which calculate the number of employees in pay status at the end of the quarter. For more information, see CRS Report R45480, *U.S. Department of the Interior: An Overview*, by Mark K. DeSantis.

Concluding Summary

NPS's regular discretionary appropriations fluctuated over the past decade, with an overall trend of decline in the first few years of the decade and growth thereafter. The FY2020 regular appropriation was 29% higher than FY2011 in nominal dollars and 11% higher in inflation-

adjusted dollars. Supplemental appropriations for disaster relief increased the totals in FY2013, FY2018, and FY2019. The share of total appropriations represented by each individual account in the NPS portfolio also fluctuated, although the account covering park operations represented by far the highest share throughout the decade.

The funding changes took place in the context of a park system of relatively stable size and a staffing level that declined by approximately 16% during the decade. Although park acreage grew only slightly, 29 units were added to the system over the 10-year period. Visits to the parks generally were higher in the second half of the decade than the first and peaked in 2016 at approximately 331 million visits.

A major funding issue for NPS is infrastructure reinvestment. The agency's backlog of deferred maintenance and repairs was estimated at \$11.92 billion for FY2018. The identified backlog amount grew in nominal dollars but declined in inflation-adjusted dollars over the decade. Combined funding for two discretionary subaccounts that mainly address deferred maintenance (within the ONPS and Construction accounts) increased by about 50% in inflation-adjusted dollars over this period. NPS's infrastructure needs have continued to receive attention in the 116th Congress, both within and outside the annual appropriations process.

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