



**Congressional  
Research Service**

Informing the legislative debate since 1914

---

# National Park Service (NPS) Appropriations: Ten-Year Trends

Updated July 12, 2022

**Congressional Research Service**

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R42757

## Summary

The National Park Service (NPS) receives appropriations in the annual Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. Over the past decade (FY2013-FY2022), NPS received both regular (annual) appropriations and, in some years, supplemental appropriations to address damage from hurricanes and other natural disasters. NPS's regular appropriations fluctuated during the decade but increased overall in both nominal and inflation-adjusted dollars. The FY2022 regular appropriation of \$3.265 billion was 36% higher than FY2013 in nominal dollars and 14% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars. NPS also received disaster-related supplemental appropriations in FY2013, FY2018, FY2019, and FY2022. These funds were provided outside of regular appropriations laws and were not subject to discretionary spending caps. With supplementals included, FY2022 appropriations were 26% higher in nominal dollars and 5% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars than FY2013. In addition to these regular and supplemental discretionary appropriations, the agency also has mandatory sources of funding, which are estimated to provide nearly one-quarter of total agency funding for FY2022.

During the FY2013-FY2022 period, NPS's discretionary appropriations generally were organized in six accounts. Funding for four accounts increased over the decade in inflation-adjusted dollars. These included NPS's largest account, which supports basic park operations, along with accounts that fund grants for historic preservation activities, assistance to nonfederal entities for natural and cultural resource preservation, and "Centennial Challenge" grants to spur partner donations for park improvements. One account, covering construction and major repairs, decreased in inflation-adjusted dollars when supplemental appropriations are included, but increased if they are excluded. A sixth account, with funding for federal land acquisition and outdoor recreation assistance to states, was shifted after FY2020 from discretionary to mandatory spending.

The funding changes took place in the context of a 9% increase in park visitation over the decade (through calendar year 2021), despite a drop in visits in 2020 as the nation was affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The size of the National Park System remained roughly stable in terms of acreage, but 25 new units (many of relatively small size) were added to the system. Notwithstanding the growth in NPS appropriations, agency staffing levels declined by 9% over the decade.

A significant issue for NPS throughout the decade was the agency's multibillion-dollar backlog of *deferred maintenance*—infrastructure maintenance and repairs that were not performed as scheduled or as needed. For two budget activities (within larger budget accounts) that primarily address both regular and deferred maintenance, the combined funding grew in inflation-adjusted terms. 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.

## Contents

NPS Discretionary Appropriations Totals .....	1
Individual NPS Accounts .....	3
Operation of the National Park System Account.....	5
Construction Account.....	6
Historic Preservation Fund.....	8
National Recreation and Preservation Account.....	9
Centennial Challenge .....	10
Land Acquisition and State Assistance Account .....	11
NPS Appropriations in Context.....	13
Visits to the National Parks .....	13
National Park Service Staffing.....	14
Size of the National Park System.....	15
Concluding Summary.....	16

## Figures

Figure 1. NPS Discretionary Appropriations, FY2013-FY2022 .....	2
Figure 2. NPS’s FY2022 Discretionary Appropriations by Account .....	3
Figure 3. Appropriations for NPS’s Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) Account, FY2013-FY2022 .....	5
Figure 4. Appropriations for NPS’s Construction Account, FY2013-FY2022 .....	6
Figure 5. Appropriations for Two NPS Discretionary Budget Activities That Primarily Address Maintenance and Repairs, FY2013-FY2022 .....	7
Figure 6. Appropriations for NPS’s Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) Account, FY2013-FY2022.....	9
Figure 7. Appropriations for NPS’s National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) Account, FY2013-FY2022 .....	10
Figure 8. Appropriations for NPS’s Centennial Challenge Account, FY2013-FY2022.....	11
Figure 9. Appropriations for NPS’s Land Acquisition and State Assistance (LASA) Account, FY2013-FY2022.....	12
Figure 10. Annual Recreational Visits to the National Park System, 2013-2022.....	13
Figure 11. NPS Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff, FY2013-FY2022 .....	15

## Tables

Table 1. NPS Discretionary Appropriations, FY2013-FY2022.....	2
Table 2. NPS Appropriations by Account, FY2013-FY2022 .....	4
Table 3. Annual Recreational Visits to the National Park System, 2013-2022 .....	14
Table 4. NPS Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff, FY2013-FY2022.....	14
Table 5. Size of the National Park System, FY2013-FY2022 .....	15

## **Contacts**

Author Information..... 17

The National Park Service (NPS) administers the National Park System, which covers 85 million acres of land and consists of 423 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 (FY2013-FY2022). It also discusses changes in NPS staffing levels, numbers of recreational visits to the parks, and the size of the National Park System during that period.

## NPS Discretionary Appropriations Totals

NPS’s discretionary appropriations generally increased during the past decade (FY2013-FY2022), with some fluctuation. Regular discretionary appropriations (which exclude supplemental appropriations) totaled \$2.398 billion in FY2013 and \$3.265 billion in FY2022. The FY2022 figure was 36% higher than FY2013 in nominal dollars and 14% higher when adjusted for inflation. The regular appropriations increased to a peak in FY2020 before declining (**Figure 1**), partly owing to the August 2020 enactment of the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152), which shifted some funding previously provided through discretionary appropriations to mandatory spending (see **text box**, below). NPS received supplemental appropriations for response to natural disasters in FY2013 (P.L. 113-2), FY2018 (P.L. 115-123), FY2019 (P.L. 116-20), and FY2022 (P.L. 117-43).<sup>1</sup> These funds were provided outside of regular appropriations and were not subject to discretionary spending caps. With supplementals included, there was greater fluctuation in annual totals but still an overall increase during the decade. Accounting for the supplementals in both FY2013 and FY2022, the appropriations at the end of the decade were 26% higher in nominal dollars and 5% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars than at the start (**Figure 1** and **Table 1**).

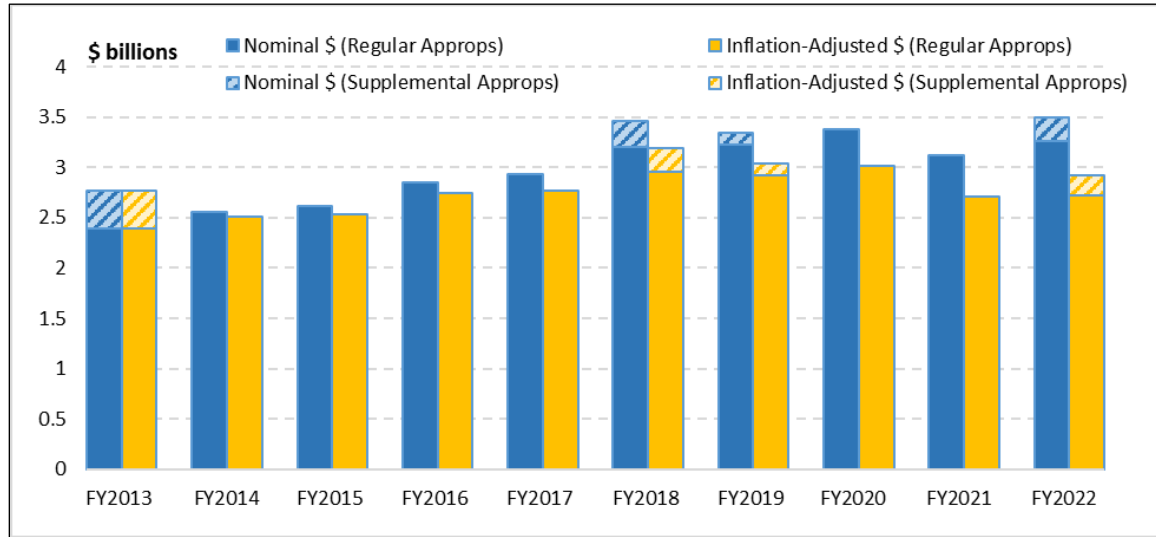
### Mandatory Appropriations in the National Park Service’s Budget

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. NPS estimated mandatory spending for FY2022 at \$1.093 billion, while the agency’s discretionary appropriations for FY2022 were \$3.494 billion, including supplementals. Based on the NPS estimate, mandatory appropriations would constitute approximately 24% of NPS’s total FY2022 funding.

NPS’s mandatory appropriations include recreation fees, concession franchise fees, receipts from leasing, and direct cash donations, among others. The mandatory total also includes funding for NPS land acquisition and assistance to states from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF, 54 U.S.C. §§200301 et seq.). Through FY2020, the LWCF funding had been provided as discretionary appropriations in NPS’s Land Acquisition and State Assistance (LASA) account, but it was made mandatory by the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152). NPS’s mandatory total does not include NPS’s share from the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF)—the deferred maintenance fund established by the GAOA—which is allocated from a DOI department-wide account. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11636, *The Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152)*; and CRS In Focus IF12112, *National Park Service: FY2023 Appropriations*.

<sup>1</sup> 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); P.L. 116-20 in response to Hurricanes Florence and Michael, Typhoons Yutu and Mangkhut, and other natural disasters (FY2019); and P.L. 117-43 in response to wildfires, hurricanes, and other natural disasters in calendar years 2019-2021 (FY2022). 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 transfers or scorekeeping adjustments. Adjustments for inflation (shown in 2013 dollars) use the GDP Chained Price Index from 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 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/historical-tables/>.

**Figure I. NPS Discretionary Appropriations, FY2013-FY2022**  
(\$ billions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2013 dollars)



**Sources:** Data for FY2013 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2014-FY2021 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2023. Data for FY2022 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-103 (Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022) and from P.L. 117-43.

**Note:** See footnote I for additional information on this figure.

**Table I. NPS Discretionary Appropriations, FY2013-FY2022**

(\$ billions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2013 dollars; includes supplemental appropriations)

	Appropriation in Nominal \$	Appropriation in Inflation-Adjusted 2013 \$	% Change Since Previous Year	
			Nominal	Inflation-Adjusted
FY2013	2.775 <sup>a</sup>	2.775	—	—
FY2014	2.562	2.513	-8% <sup>a</sup>	-9%
FY2015	2.615	2.536	+2%	+1%
FY2016	2.852	2.743	+9%	+8%
FY2017	2.932	2.771	+3%	+1%
FY2018	3.460 <sup>b</sup>	3.195	+18% <sup>b</sup>	+15%
FY2019	3.351 <sup>c</sup>	3.035	-3% <sup>b,c</sup>	-5%
FY2020	3.377	3.019	+1% <sup>c</sup>	-1%
FY2021	3.123	2.708	-8%	-10%
FY2022	3.494 <sup>d</sup>	2.917	+12%	+8%
<b>Change Over Decade</b>	<b>+0.720<sup>e</sup></b>	<b>+0.142</b>	<b>+26%<sup>e</sup></b>	<b>+5%</b>

**Sources:** Data for FY2013 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2014-FY2021 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2023. Data for FY2022 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-103 (Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022) and from P.L. 117-43.

**Notes:** Amounts include supplemental appropriations. Totals may not sum precisely due to rounding. See footnote I for additional information on this table.

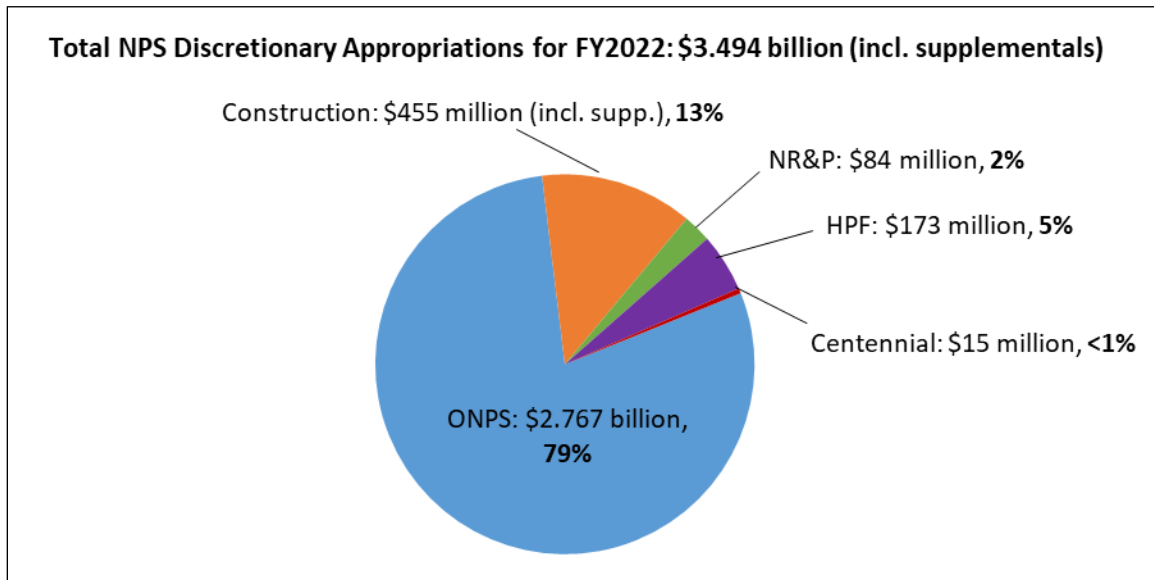
- a. The FY2013 total includes regular appropriations of \$2.398 billion and supplemental appropriations of \$0.377 billion. Excluding the supplemental appropriations for FY2013, the FY2014 appropriation represents a 7% increase over FY2013 in nominal dollars.

- b. The FY2018 total 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.
- c. The FY2019 total includes regular appropriations of \$3.222 billion and supplemental appropriations of \$0.128 billion. Excluding supplementals for both FY2018 and FY2019, in nominal dollars, the FY2019 appropriation is a 1% increase over FY2018 and the FY2020 appropriation is a 5% increase over FY2019.
- d. The FY2022 total includes \$3.265 billion in regular appropriations and \$229.5 million in supplemental appropriations. Excluding the supplemental, FY2022 is a 5% increase over FY2021 in nominal dollars.
- e. Includes supplemental appropriations for both FY2013 and FY2022. Excluding supplementals, the increase was \$0.867 billion (+36%) in nominal dollars and \$0.328 billion (+14%) in inflation-adjusted dollars.

## Individual NPS Accounts

During the decade, NPS’s appropriations were organized in up to six accounts that covered basic park operations (Operation of the National Park System, or ONPS, account); construction and repair of infrastructure (Construction account); grants for historic preservation (Historic Preservation Fund); assistance to nonfederal land managers (National Recreation and Preservation account); matching grants primarily to address the backlog of deferred maintenance on NPS infrastructure (Centennial Challenge account);<sup>2</sup> and NPS land acquisition and outdoor recreation grants to states (Land Acquisition and State Assistance account). The largest share of NPS’s discretionary appropriations—79% in FY2022, counting supplemental appropriations—went to the ONPS account, which covers basic park operations (**Figure 2** and **Table 2**).

**Figure 2. NPS’s FY2022 Discretionary Appropriations by Account**



**Source:** Joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-103; and P.L. 117-43.

**Notes:** ONPS = Operation of the National Park Service; NR&P = National Recreation and Preservation; HPF = Historic Preservation Fund; supp. = supplemental appropriations. Figures are in nominal dollars. Percentages may not sum precisely due to rounding.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the National Park Service’s (NPS’s) deferred maintenance backlog, see the text box below (“NPS Infrastructure: Funding for Maintenance and Repairs”). See also CRS Report R44924, *National Park Service Deferred Maintenance: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Laura B. Comay; and CRS In Focus IF12112, *National Park Service: FY2023 Appropriations*, by Laura B. Comay.

**Table 2. NPS Appropriations by Account, FY2013-FY2022**

(\$ millions, in nominal dollars and inflation-adjusted 2013 dollars)

	ONPS	Construction	LASA	HPF	NR&P	CC	Total <sup>a</sup>
FY2013	2,097.261	453.885 <sup>b</sup>	96.567	100.486 <sup>b</sup>	56.747	—	<b>2,774.946<sup>b</sup></b>
FY2014	2,236.753	137.461	98.100	56.410	60.795	—	<b>2,561.679</b>
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,194.302</i>	<i>134.852</i>	<i>96.238</i>	<i>55.339</i>	<i>59.641</i>		<b>2,513.061</b>
FY2015	2,275.773	138.339	98.960	56.410	63.117	10.000	<b>2,614.789</b>
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,207.277</i>	<i>134.175</i>	<i>95.981</i>	<i>54.712</i>	<i>61.217</i>	<i>9.699</i>	<b>2,536.089</b>
FY2016	2,369.596	192.937	173.670	65.410	62.632	15.000	<b>2,851.285</b>
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,279.387</i>	<i>185.592</i>	<i>167.059</i>	<i>62.920</i>	<i>60.248</i>	<i>14.429</i>	<b>2,742.739</b>
FY2017	2,425.018	209.353	162.029	80.910	62.638	20.000	<b>2,932.018</b>
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,291.783</i>	<i>197.851</i>	<i>153.127</i>	<i>76.465</i>	<i>59.197</i>	<i>18.901</i>	<b>2,770.927</b>
FY2018	2,477.969	567.304 <sup>c</sup>	180.941	146.910 <sup>c</sup>	63.638	23.000	<b>3,459.762<sup>c</sup></b>
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,288.514</i>	<i>523.930</i>	<i>167.107</i>	<i>135.678</i>	<i>58.773</i>	<i>21.242</i>	<b>3,195.243</b>
FY2019	2,502.711	442.704 <sup>d</sup>	168.444	152.660 <sup>d</sup>	64.138	20.000	<b>3,350.657<sup>d</sup></b>
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,267.156</i>	<i>401.037</i>	<i>152.590</i>	<i>138.292</i>	<i>58.101</i>	<i>18.118</i>	<b>3,035.294</b>
FY2020	2,576.992	389.345	206.121	118.660	71.166	15.000	<b>3,377.284</b>
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,303.706</i>	<i>348.055</i>	<i>184.262</i>	<i>106.076</i>	<i>63.619</i>	<i>13.409</i>	<b>3,019.128</b>
FY2021	2,688.287	223.907	[-23.000] <sup>e</sup>	144.300	74.157	15.000	<b>3,122.651</b>
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,331.558</i>	<i>194.195</i>	<i>[-19.948]</i>	<i>125.152</i>	<i>64.317</i>	<i>13.010</i>	<b>2,708.283</b>
FY2022	2,767.028	455.456 <sup>f</sup>	— <sup>e</sup>	173.072	83.910	15.000	<b>3,494.466<sup>f</sup></b>
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	<i>2,309.561</i>	<i>380.156</i>		<i>144.458</i>	<i>70.037</i>	<i>12.520</i>	<b>2,916.733</b>

**Sources:** Data for FY2013 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2014-FY2021 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2023. Data for FY2022 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-103 (Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022) and from P.L. 117-43.

**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 for FY2013-FY2017 reflect rescissions of LWCF contract authority of approximately \$30.0 million (annual amounts vary due to sequestration). Because these rescissions are not tied to an individual account, the figures for the individual accounts do not add up to the totals shown. Congress did not enact the rescissions of contract authority in FY2018-FY2022 appropriations. (Separately, the FY2020 and FY2021 appropriations contained rescissions and/or cancellations of unobligated balances from the LASA account.)
- 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.
- 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.
- The Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152), enacted in August 2020, shifted the funding previously provided in the LASA account (i.e., funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund) to mandatory appropriations, so there were no discretionary appropriations to this account for FY2021 or FY2022. For FY2021, appropriators canceled \$23.0 million in unobligated balances from the LASA account.
- The FY2022 total of \$3.494 billion includes regular appropriations of \$3.265 billion and supplemental appropriations of \$229.5 million. The supplemental FY2022 appropriations were provided for the Construction account.



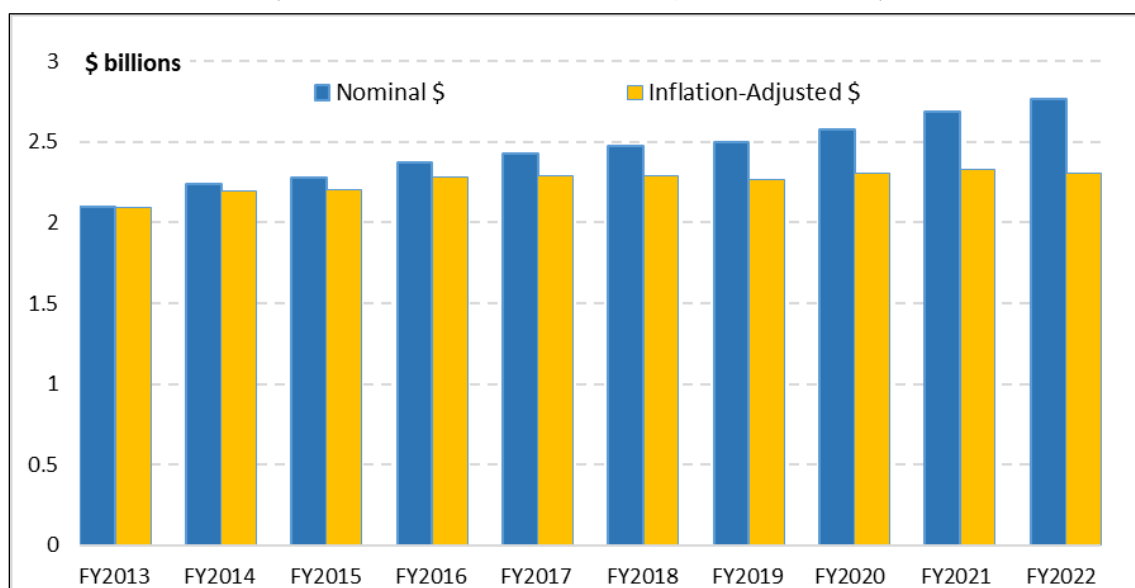
The portfolio of NPS accounts changed twice during the decade. The Centennial Challenge account was not included in FY2013 or FY2014 appropriations but was funded in FY2015 and thereafter. Also, through FY2020, NPS received discretionary appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in the Land Acquisition and State Assistance (LASA) account; but in August 2020, the GAOA designated all funding from the LWCF as mandatory spending, and the discretionary LASA account was not funded in FY2021 or FY2022.

## Operation of the National Park System Account

Appropriations for the largest NPS account, entitled Operation of the National Park System (ONPS), support the day-to-day operations of the National Park System. ONPS funding was \$2.097 billion in FY2013 and increased to \$2.767 billion in nominal dollars in FY2022 (**Table 2** and **Figure 3**). When adjusted for inflation, this represents an increase of 10%. As a percentage of total regular NPS appropriations (excluding supplemental appropriations), the ONPS share was 87% in FY2013 and 85% in FY2022. The ONPS account was not affected by supplemental appropriations during the decade, but with supplementals counted in the overall appropriations totals, the ONPS account represented 76% of total funding in FY2013 and 79% in FY2022.

**Figure 3. Appropriations for NPS's Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) Account, FY2013-FY2022**

(\$ billions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2013 dollars)



**Sources:** Data for FY2013 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2014-FY2021 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2023. Data for FY2022 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-103, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022. 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.<sup>3</sup> Funding for five of these six activities increased over the

<sup>3</sup> *Park support* includes administering, managing, and supporting the operations of park units. *External administrative*

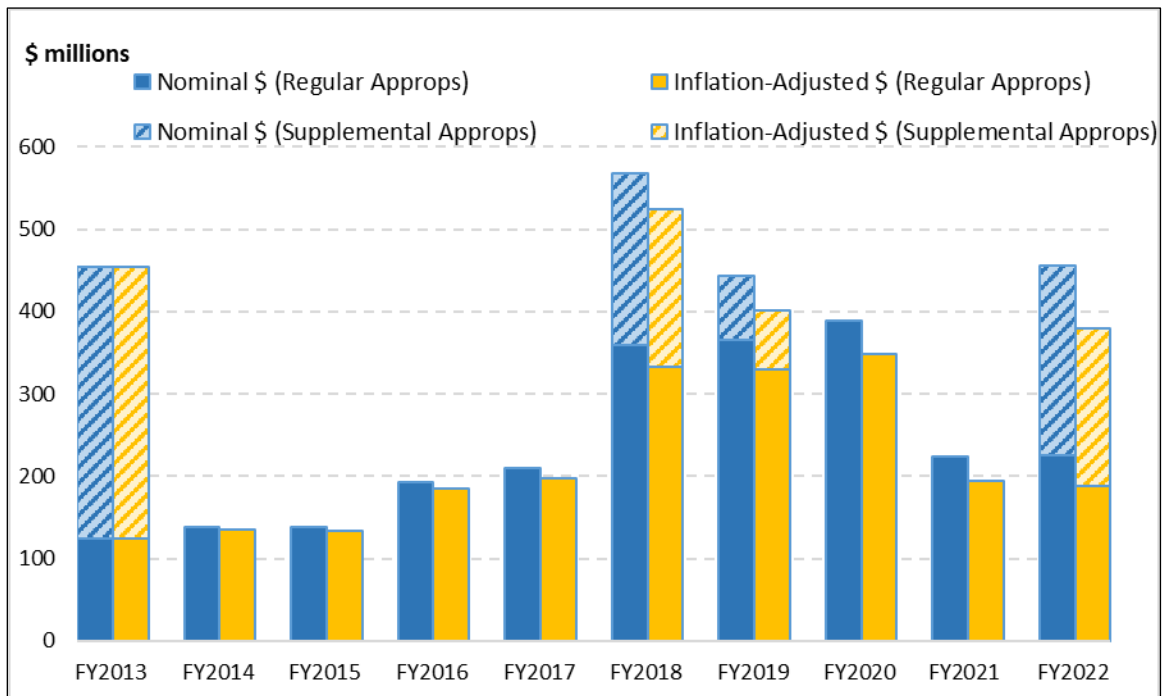
decade in inflation-adjusted dollars, while amounts for one activity (park protection) were nearly level when adjusted for inflation.<sup>4</sup> The greatest percentage increase was for the facility operations and maintenance activity, which grew by 22% in inflation-adjusted dollars.

## Construction Account

The second-largest NPS account, titled Construction, funds repairs and improvements to existing facilities as well as new construction projects and other activities. Regular appropriations for the Construction account generally increased through FY2020 and declined thereafter. Supplemental appropriations for disaster recovery in FY2013, FY2018, FY2019, and FY2022 increased the account totals for those years. The regular appropriations (excluding supplementals) were 52% higher in FY2022 than FY2013 in inflation-adjusted dollars. If supplementals are counted, the FY2022 appropriation was 16% lower than FY2013, adjusting for inflation (**Table 2** and **Figure 4**). The Construction account represented 16% of the total discretionary appropriation for FY2013 and 13% for FY2022, counting supplementals; without supplementals, the percentages are 5% of the total for FY2013 and 7% of the total for FY2022.

**Figure 4. Appropriations for NPS’s Construction Account, FY2013-FY2022**

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2013 dollars)



**Sources:** Data for FY2013 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2014-FY2021 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2023. Data for FY2022 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-103 (Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022) and from P.L. 117-43. See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

costs include employee compensation, unemployment compensation, centralized information technology costs, telecommunications, postage, space rental from the General Services Administration, and department program charges.

<sup>4</sup> In inflation-adjusted dollars, the percentage changes in funding over the decade were as follows: resource stewardship, +3%; visitor services, +7%; facility operations and maintenance, +22%; park support, +11%; external administrative costs, +3%; park protection, - <1%.

### NPS Infrastructure: Funding for Maintenance and Repairs

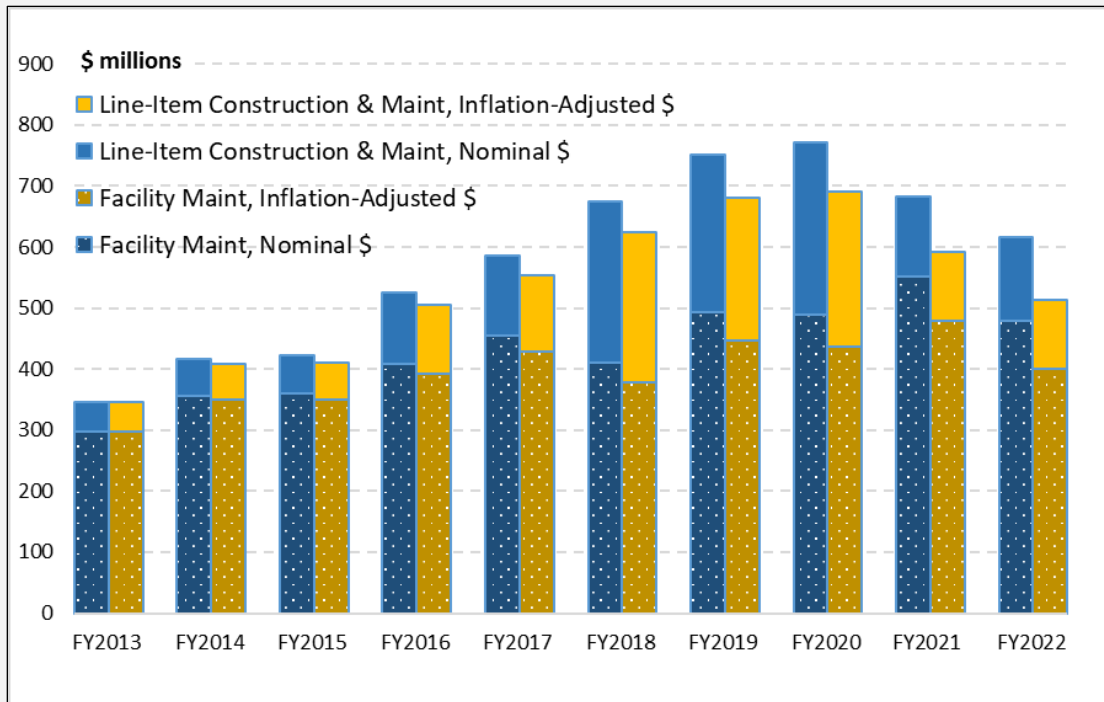
NPS's substantial backlog of deferred maintenance (DM)—infrastructure maintenance and repairs that were not performed as scheduled or as needed—has been an ongoing concern for many in Congress. The backlog grew in nominal dollars from an estimated mid-range figure of \$11.27 billion in FY2013 to an estimated \$21.83 billion as of the end of the first quarter of FY2022. This is a growth of 94% in nominal dollars or 62% in inflation-adjusted terms, and includes a 59% nominal-dollar increase in one year (FY2020-FY2021), which NPS attributes primarily to changes in its methods for estimating DM. In addition to addressing DM, NPS also must budget for ongoing cyclical and routine maintenance to keep infrastructure in good condition and to avoid adding to the DM backlog.

Discretionary appropriations, along with allocations from the Department of Transportation for road and bridge improvements, historically provided most of the agency's funding for maintenance and repairs. In 2020, however, the Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152) established the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund with mandatory funding for NPS DM of up to \$1.33 billion annually for five years.

Within NPS's discretionary appropriations, two budget activities provide the primary support to address maintenance and repairs (both regular and deferred): the *line-item construction and maintenance* activity within the Construction account and the *facility maintenance* subactivity within the Operation of the National Park System account. Funding for the two budget activities combined (**Figure 5**) roughly doubled in inflation-adjusted dollars through FY2020 and then declined, for overall growth of 48% in inflation-adjusted dollars over the decade. Other discretionary and mandatory funds from multiple sources also have been used for NPS maintenance and repairs.

**Figure 5. Appropriations for Two NPS Discretionary Budget Activities That Primarily Address Maintenance and Repairs, FY2013-FY2022**

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2013 dollars)



**Source:** NPS budget justifications for FY2015-FY2023; and CRS communication with NPS Budget Office.

**Notes:** Funding does not include supplemental appropriations to the Construction account for disaster recovery, since the supplemental appropriations are not broken down by budget activity.

For more information on NPS maintenance and repairs, see CRS Report R44924, *National Park Service Deferred Maintenance: Frequently Asked Questions*; CRS Report R43997, *Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY2011-FY2020 Estimates and Issues*; and CRS In Focus IFI1636, *The Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152)*.

Among the specific activities funded in the Construction account, the largest is *line-item construction and maintenance*, which covers construction of new facilities and rehabilitation and replacement of existing facilities. Appropriations for this budget activity roughly quintupled in inflation-adjusted dollars between FY2013 and FY2020 before declining in FY2021 and FY2022, for an overall growth of 130% over the decade. 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.”<sup>5</sup> Other activities funded in the Construction account include emergency and unscheduled construction, repair and replacement of 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).

## 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),<sup>6</sup> the fund primarily provides grants-in-aid to state and tribal historic preservation offices for conservation of cultural and historical assets and sites. Some of these grants are awarded by formula, and others are provided through competitive programs. 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 during the first half of the decade but subsequently increased and exceeded the annual deposit in FY2022 (**Figure 6** and **Table 2**). Excluding supplementals, the FY2022 appropriation was 173% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars than the FY2013 appropriation. With supplementals included, it was 44% higher.

Supplemental appropriations augmented regular appropriations for the HPF account in three years—FY2013, FY2018, and FY2019—and were targeted primarily to hurricane recovery.<sup>7</sup> The funding was mainly to assist recovering states and territories with compliance activities related to Section 106 of the NHPA.<sup>8</sup> 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. Counting the FY2013 supplemental, the HPF account represented 4% of the total NPS appropriation in FY2013; excluding the supplemental, it was 2%. The account represented 5% of the FY2022 appropriation and did not receive supplemental funding in that year.

The largest activity in the HPF account is grant funding for state historic preservation offices, which rose by 8% in inflation-adjusted terms over the decade. Grants for tribal historic preservation offices increased by 57% after adjusting for inflation. The account also funded various competitive grant programs in particular years. For FY2022, these included grants for

---

<sup>5</sup> NPS, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information, Fiscal Year 2023*, p. Const-8, at <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/fy2023-nps-greenbook.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

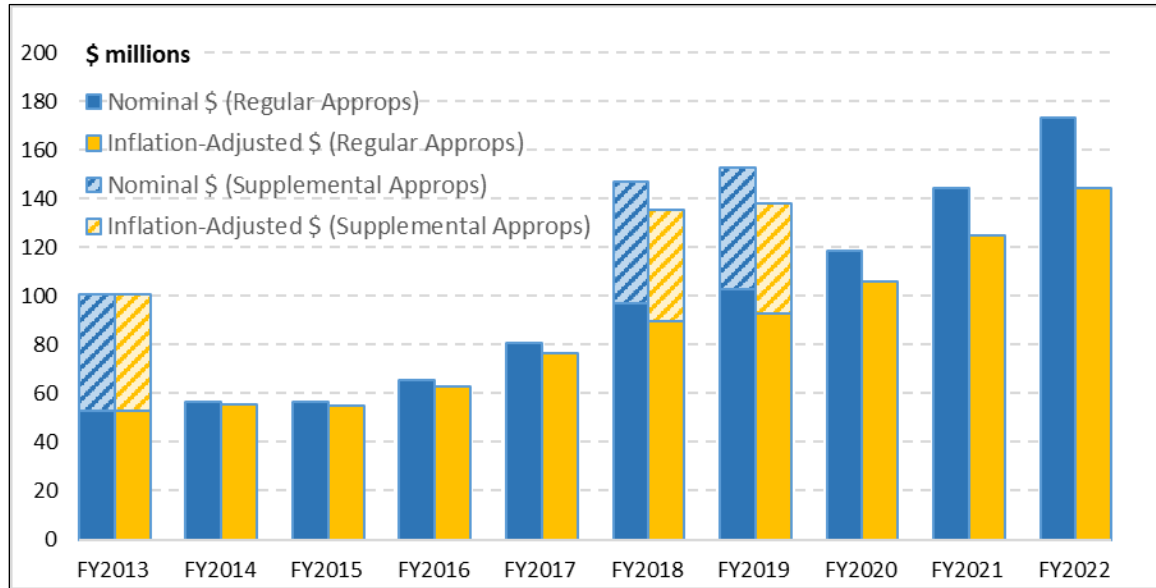
<sup>7</sup> P.L. 113-2, P.L. 115-123, and P.L. 116-20. The FY2019 funds also were for response to other types of natural disasters.

<sup>8</sup> 54 U.S.C. §306108.

sites associated with the African American civil rights movement, grants to preserve the history of equal rights, and grants to underserved communities. As separate line items, the account also funded grants for historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), historic revitalization, the Save America's Treasures program to restore nationally significant historic structures and artifacts, and preservation activities related to the U.S. Semiquincentennial (the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the United States).

**Figure 6. Appropriations for NPS's Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) Account, FY2013-FY2022**

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2013 dollars)



**Sources:** Data for FY2013 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2014-FY2021 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2023. Data for FY2022 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-103, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022. See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

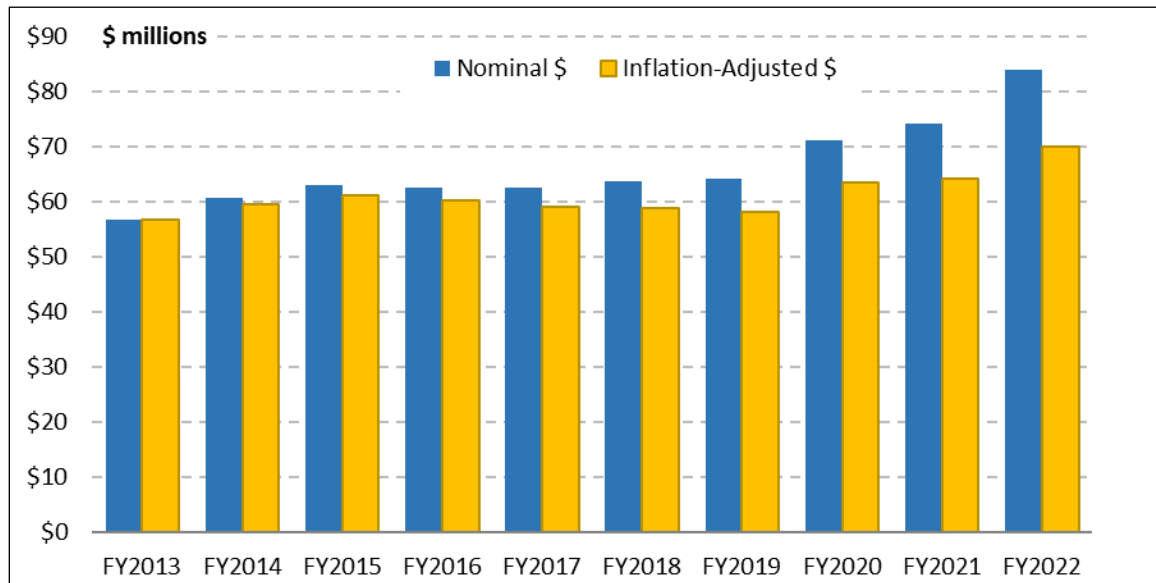
## National Recreation and Preservation Account

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 23% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars in FY2022 as compared with FY2013 (**Figure 7** and **Table 2**). The portion of NPS regular appropriations used for the NR&P account was 2% in FY2013 and 3% in FY2022. The NR&P account was not a recipient of supplemental funding during the decade but with supplementals included in the overall appropriations totals, the NR&P share was 2% of the total in both FY2013 and FY2022.

**Figure 7. Appropriations for NPS's National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) Account, FY2013-FY2022**

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2013 dollars)



**Sources:** Data for FY2013 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2014-FY2021 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2017-FY2020. Data for FY2022 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-103, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022. 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.<sup>9</sup> Its appropriations grew over the decade by 37% 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;<sup>10</sup> 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 and environmental and compliance review.

## Centennial Challenge

The Centennial Challenge account was funded through most of the decade (FY2015-FY2022).<sup>11</sup> The account consists of a matching-grant program to spur partner donations for park

<sup>9</sup> 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.

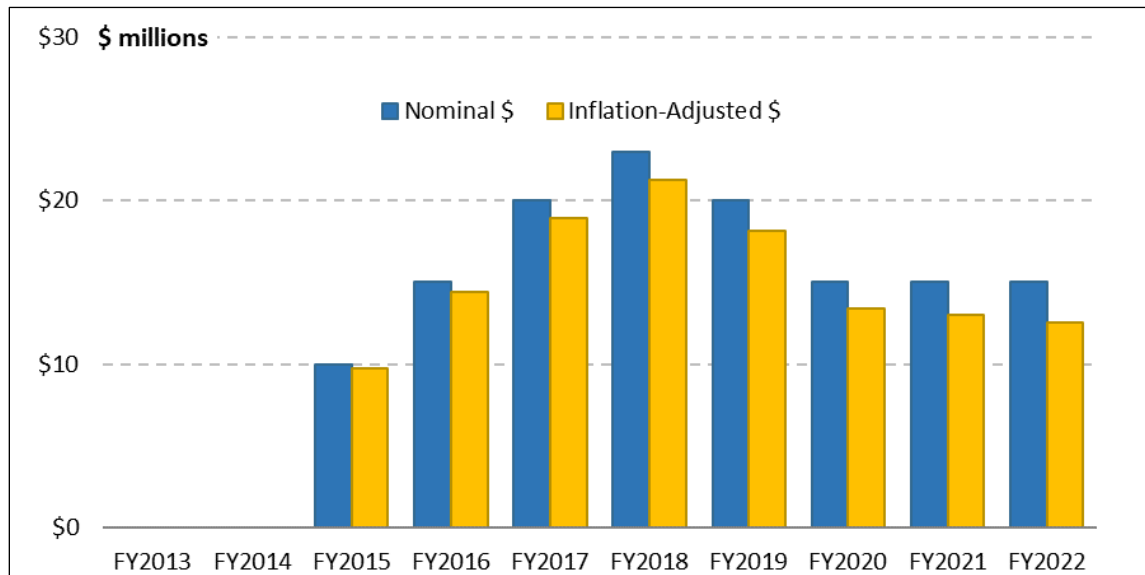
<sup>10</sup> The American Battlefield Protection Program's (ABPP's) planning grants are funded in the NR&P account, while grants to states for battlefield land acquisition, modernization, and restoration are funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (see below). For more on the ABPP, see CRS In Focus IF11329, *American Battlefield Protection Program*, by Mark K. DeSantis.

<sup>11</sup> The account had earlier received funding in FY2008 and in FY2010 under the title "Park Partnership Grants."

improvements, primarily aimed at addressing deferred maintenance.<sup>12</sup> The name “Centennial 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. Revenues are to be matched on at least a one-to-one basis by nonfederal donations.

During the FY2015-FY2022 period, appropriations for the fund rose and then fell (**Table 2** and **Figure 8**). The FY2022 appropriation was 29% higher than FY2015 in inflation-adjusted dollars. The account represented less than 1% of total NPS appropriations in both years (with or without supplementals included in the total appropriation).<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 8. Appropriations for NPS’s Centennial Challenge Account, FY2013-FY2022**  
(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2013 dollars)



**Sources:** Data for FY2015-FY2021 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2017-FY2023. Data for FY2022 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-103, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022. See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

## Land Acquisition and State Assistance Account

Through FY2020, NPS’s LASA account consisted of discretionary appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF, 54 U.S.C. §§200301 et seq.). The LWCF is the primary funding source for the federal land management agencies to acquire lands and funds NPS-

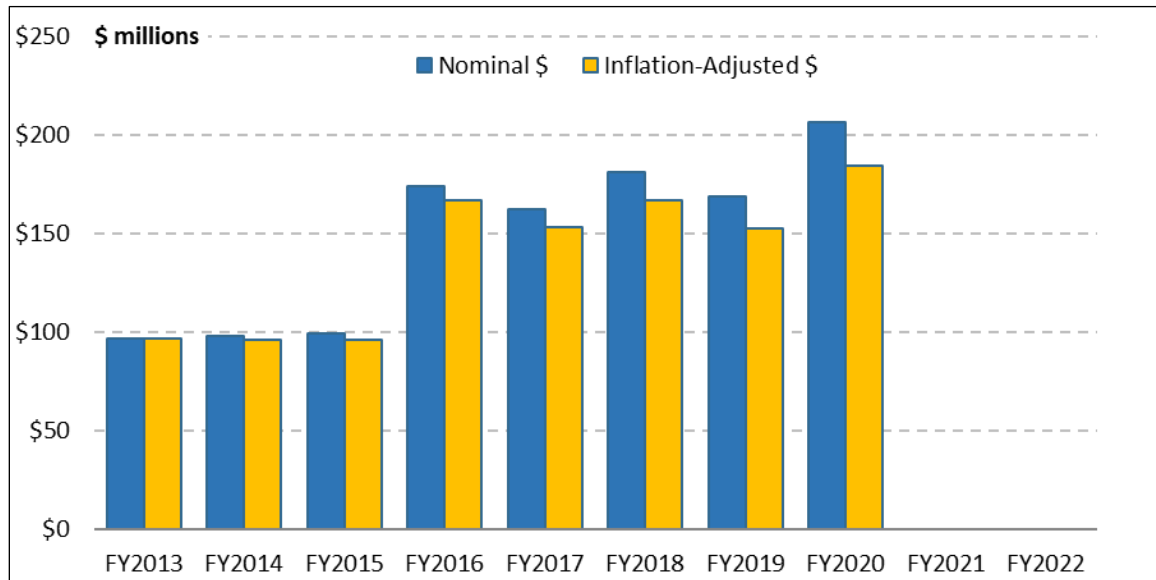
<sup>12</sup> The account provides the federal share of matching grants for “signature” park projects and programs identified by the Interior Secretary and must “help prepare the national parks for another century of conservation, preservation, and visitor enjoyment” (P.L. 114-289).

<sup>13</sup> The Centennial Challenge account received no supplemental funding during the decade.

administered grants to states for outdoor recreation needs.<sup>14</sup> Under the LWCF Act, the LWCF receives deposits of \$900 million annually, primarily from offshore oil and gas revenues.<sup>15</sup> During most of the decade covered by this report, this funding was available only to the extent provided in discretionary appropriations acts. In August 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152) made all funding from the LWCF mandatory spending.<sup>16</sup> Thus, there were no discretionary appropriations for NPS’s LASA account in FY2021 or FY2022.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 9. Appropriations for NPS’s Land Acquisition and State Assistance (LASA) Account, FY2013-FY2022**

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2013 dollars)



**Sources:** Data for FY2013 are from annual House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for NPS. Data for FY2014-FY2020 data are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2022.

**Notes:** See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure. Not reflected in the figure is a cancellation of \$23.0 million in unobligated balances from the LASA account in FY2021.

The LASA account covered NPS’s own acquisitions—typically nonfederal “inholdings” inside the boundaries of national park units—and NPS grants to states for outdoor recreation purposes. During the FY2013-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 FY2016 and after (**Figure 9** and **Table 2**), primarily attributable to higher appropriations for the state assistance program in the later years. Adjusted for inflation, the

<sup>14</sup> For more information on the LWCF, see CRS Report RL33531, *Land and Water Conservation Fund: Overview, Funding History, and Issues*, by Carol Hardy Vincent.

<sup>15</sup> The state grant program of the LWCF also receives additional mandatory funding from offshore oil and gas revenues under the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-432).

<sup>16</sup> For more information, 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. Although the funding is now provided through mandatory appropriations, allocation of amounts remains an issue in the discretionary appropriations process, as the GAOA requires that the President’s annual budget submission include account, program, and project allocations for the LWCF funds, and appropriations acts may specify alternate allocations.

<sup>17</sup> For FY2021, P.L. 117-103 contained a \$23.0 million cancellation of unobligated balances from the account, which is not reflected in **Figure 9**.



appropriation grew by 91% between FY2013 and FY2020. The LASA account represented approximately 4% of the total NPS regular appropriation in FY2013 (or 3% when accounting for supplementals) and 6% in FY2020.<sup>18</sup>

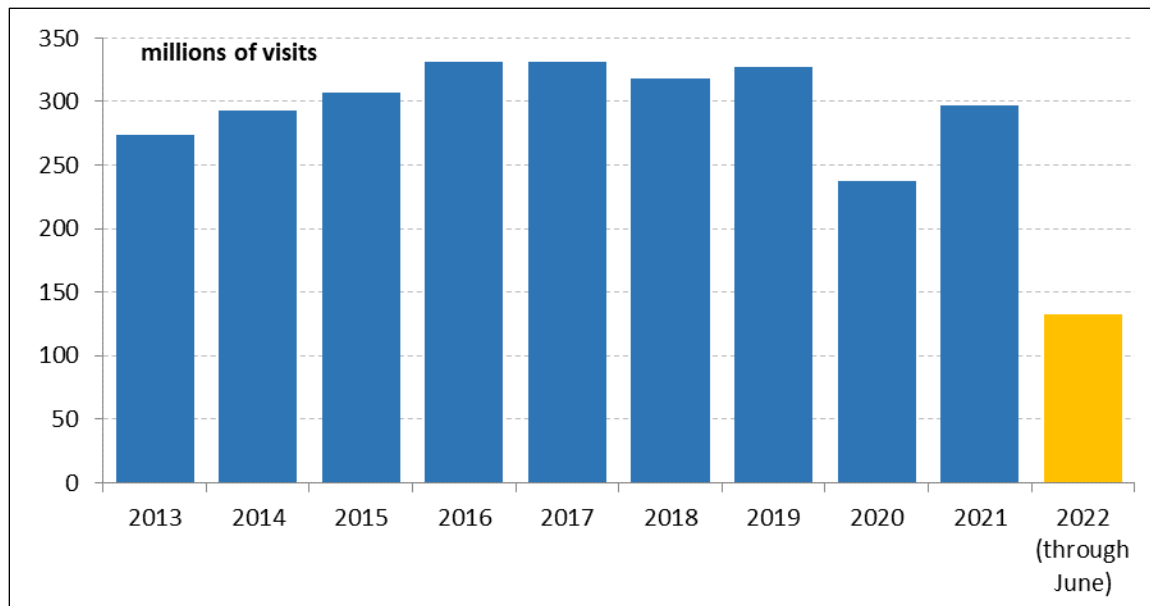
## NPS Appropriations in Context

Changes in NPS appropriations can be considered in the context of changes in the numbers of annual visits to the parks, agency staffing levels, and the National Park System's size, among other factors. Over the past decade, total annual visits to the parks increased, despite a notable drop in visitation in FY2020 related to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Notwithstanding increases in appropriations, NPS staffing levels were lower at the end of the decade than the beginning. The size of the National Park System remained roughly steady in terms of acreage, but 25 new units were added.

### Visits to the National Parks

Numbers of recreational visits to the National Park System varied over the past 10 years. The highest numbers of visits (roughly 330 million each year) were in calendar years 2016, 2017, and 2019 (Figure 10 and Table 3). The visitation numbers dropped significantly in 2020 after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic but rebounded to almost 300 million visits in 2021, making visitation in that year 9% higher than at the beginning of the decade.

**Figure 10. Annual Recreational Visits to the National Park System, 2013-2022**  
(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 2022 shows visits through June 2022 (132.4 million visits). For comparison with the previous year, visits through June 2021 totaled 127.7 million.

<sup>18</sup> The LASA account did not receive supplemental appropriations during the decade, but the FY2013 overall total was affected by a supplemental.

**Table 3. Annual Recreational Visits to the National Park System, 2013-2022**  
(total visits in millions, by calendar year)

Year	Number of Visits (in millions)	Year	Number of Visits (in millions)
2013	273.6	2018	318.2
2014	292.8	2019	327.5
2015	307.2	2020	237.1
2016	331.0	2021	297.1
2017	330.9	2022 (thr. June)	132.4

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

**Notes:** The figure for 2022 shows visits through June 2022 (132.4 million visits). For comparison with the previous year, visits through June 2021 totaled 127.7 million.

NPS’s recreational visits for 2022 are available through the end of June 2022. The year-to-date total of 132.4 million visits is 4% higher than for the same six-month span in 2021 (127.7 million visits). 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.

## National Park Service Staffing

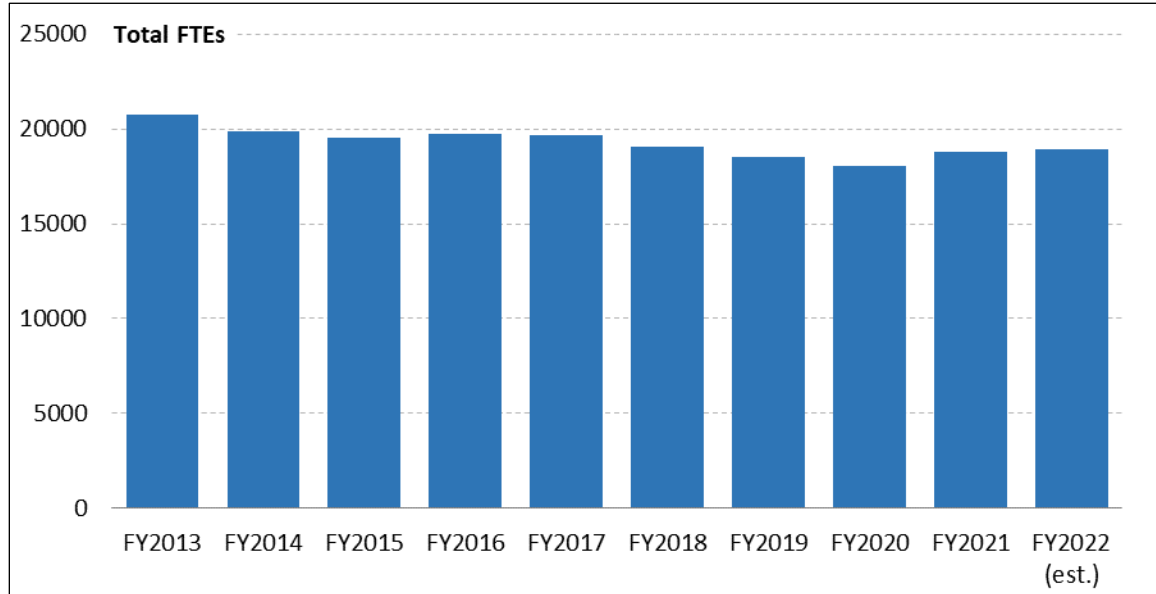
NPS full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing levels were highest in the earlier part of the decade. FTE staffing ranged from a high of 20,720 in FY2013 to a low of 18,060 in FY2020 (**Table 4** and **Figure 11**).<sup>19</sup> Estimated staffing for FY2022 (18,930 FTE) is 9% lower than at the beginning of the decade.

**Table 4. NPS Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff, FY2013-FY2022**

Year	Number of FTEs	Year	Number of FTEs
FY2013	20,720	FY2018	19,032
FY2014	19,894	FY2019	18,544
FY2015	19,539	FY2020	18,060
FY2016	19,722	FY2021	18,814
FY2017	19,668	FY2022	18,930 (est.)

**Sources:** FY2013-FY2015 figures from U.S. Department of the Interior, “Department of the Interior FTE History: Full-Time Equivalent Staff Year (FTE) Actual of Bureaus and Offices.” FY2016-FY2021 figures from NPS budget justifications. FY2022 figure from CRS communication with NPS Budget Office, June 7, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

**Figure 11. NPS Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff, FY2013-FY2022**

**Sources:** FY2013-FY2015 figures from U.S. Department of the Interior, “Department of the Interior FTE History: Full-Time Equivalent Staff Year (FTE) Actual of Bureaus and Offices.” FY2016-FY2021 figures from NPS budget justifications. FY2022 figure from CRS communication with NPS Budget Office, June 7, 2022.

## Size of the National Park System

National Park System acreage grew by 1% over the decade, from 84.5 million acres in FY2013 to 85.1 million acres in FY2022 (**Table 5**). The percentage of National Park System lands owned by the federal government remained steady, at 95% of total system lands.<sup>20</sup> 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.

**Table 5. Size of the National Park System, FY2013-FY2022**  
(in millions of acres)

	Federal Land	Nonfederal Land	Total Acreage
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	4.015	85.112

<sup>20</sup> 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 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.

	Federal Land	Nonfederal Land	Total Acreage
FY2021	81.104	4.012	85.116
FY2022 (thr. March)	81.109	4.011	85.120

**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.

A total of 25 units were added to the system in the FY2013-FY2022 period (to date).<sup>21</sup> Many were relatively small in acreage, such as Stonewall National Monument in New York (0.12 acres) and 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.

## Concluding Summary

NPS’s regular discretionary appropriations fluctuated over the past decade, with an overall trend of growth in both nominal and inflation-adjusted dollars. The FY2022 regular appropriation (excluding supplemental appropriations) was 36% higher than FY2013 in nominal dollars and 14% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars. NPS received supplemental appropriations for disaster relief in FY2013, FY2018, FY2019, and FY2022. With the supplementals included, the total appropriations grew by 26% in nominal dollars and 5% in inflation-adjusted dollars. Among the six NPS accounts in use during the decade, the account covering basic park operations consistently received the highest share of the total appropriation.

NPS’s overall funding growth occurred in the context of a 9% increase in park visits over the decade. Visits to the parks peaked in 2016, 2017, and 2019 at approximately 330 million visits for each of those years. Notwithstanding the growth in NPS appropriations, agency staffing levels declined by 9% over the decade. Although park acreage grew by only 1%, 25 units were added to the system over the 10-year period.

A major funding issue for NPS is infrastructure reinvestment. The agency’s backlog of deferred maintenance and repairs was estimated at \$21.83 billion as of the first quarter of FY2022, a growth of 62% over the decade in inflation-adjusted dollars. For two discretionary subaccounts (within the ONPS and Construction accounts) that mainly address both regular and deferred maintenance, the combined funding increased by 48% in inflation-adjusted dollars over this

<sup>21</sup> These units are the 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 (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), Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park (MO), and Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument (MS). 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>.

period. In addition, the Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152), enacted in August 2020, provided a new source of mandatory spending to address NPS deferred maintenance. NPS's infrastructure needs have continued to receive attention in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, both within and outside the annual appropriations process.

## **Author Information**

Laura B. Comay  
Specialist in Natural Resources Policy

---

## **Disclaimer**

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.