

Issue Brief for Congress

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National Park Management and Recreation

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National Parks and Recreation

SUMMARY

The 107th Congress is considering legislation on and conducting oversight of issues related to lands managed for recreation, especially National Park Service (NPS) lands. The Administration also is focusing on park and recreation issues through budgetary, regulatory, and other actions. Several key issues are covered in this report.

Maintenance Backlog. One issue for Congress is determining the appropriate funding level to maintain park units, and whether to appropriate new funds or use funds from existing programs for park maintenance. In his FY2003 budget, President Bush restated his commitment to eliminating NPS's multi-billion dollar maintenance backlog by FY2006, and requested a total of \$663 million for FY2003 for all regular and deferred construction and maintenance. The NPS is continuing efforts to define, quantify, and eliminate its backlogged maintenance. Congress has included money for some NPS maintenance backlog needs in FY2003 Interior appropriations bills.

Motorized Recreation. Motorized recreation, notably the use of personal watercraft (PWC) and snowmobiles in NPS units and commercial air tours over them, has fueled debate over the balance between recreation on, and protection of, park lands. Recent controversies focused on regulatory actions that restrict use of these vehicles. For instance, in 2000, the NPS prohibited PWCs in 66 NPS areas and is reevaluating such use in another 21 areas. Clinton Administration actions to enforce regulations limiting snowmobile use in national parks were controversial. The June 29, 2001, settlement of a lawsuit by the current Administration to overturn a phase-out of snowmobile use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John

D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway requires NPS to take certain actions to decide whether to keep or modify the ban. Grand Canyon National Park is at the center of a conflict over whether to limit air tours over national parks. An August 2002 appeals court decision directs the FAA to use NPS "natural quiet" standards and consider commercial flight-generated noise impacts in developing air tour overflight regulations. Bills have been introduced to encourage safe use of PWCs; to ban snowmobile use, or to overturn the ban, in most parks; and to govern air tours at parks.

Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. The "Fee Demo" Program was created to allow the NPS and other land management agencies to test the feasibility of supplemental self-financing through new fees. In its FY2003 budget, the Bush Administration proposed making the program permanent. P.L. 107-63 extended the program for 2 years and gave agencies discretion to establish any number of fee projects, among other changes. Other measures are under consideration, including to establish a permanent program.

The National Trails System. While designation of trails is often popular, issues remain regarding funding, expansion, and quality of trails. Congress is considering legislation to amend the National Trails System Act to include a new category of trails; to provide authority to acquire land for certain trails, but only from willing sellers; and to study certain routes, as well as authorize other studies, for possible additions to the System. As part of President Bush's National Parks Legacy Project, park trails would be increased, and under the President's Conservation Partners Initiative, teams of concerned citizens and NPS staff will restore and preserve parklands, including trails.



MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The full House and the Senate Appropriations Committees have agreed to measures (H.R. 5093 and S. 2708 respectively) providing higher levels of funds for NPS construction in FY2003 than was requested by the President. On June 19, 2002, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing on bills to make the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program permanent.

The settlement of a suit over a rule regulating the use of personal watercraft (PWC) prohibits PWCs from areas where they are now allowed unless the NPS takes certain actions. The NPS is re-examining the snowmobile ban in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the Rockefeller Parkway. A draft supplemental environmental impact statement released in February 2002 reviews four options without designating a preferred alternative.

An August 2002 appeals court decision directs the FAA to use NPS "natural quiet" standards and consider commercial flight-generated noise impacts in developing air tour overflight regulations.

S. 498, which would amend the National Trails System Act by adding "National Discovery Trails" as a new category of long distance trails, and by designating "the American Discovery Trail" the first coast-to-coast trail, passed the Senate on August 3, 2001. On May 16, 2002, a House subcommittee held hearings on a companion bill, H.R. 36.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The National Park System is perhaps the federal land category best known to the public. The National Park Service (Department of the Interior, DOI) manages 385 units, including 56 units formally entitled "national parks" and a host of other designations. The System has more than 84 million acres.¹ The NPS has an appropriation of approximately \$2.38 billion (FY2002), employs about 21,000 permanent and seasonal employees, uses an additional 90,000 volunteers, and has more than 285 million visitors yearly.

The NPS statutory mission is multi-faceted: to conserve, preserve, protect, and interpret the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the nation for the public and to provide for their use and enjoyment by the public. The mission's dichotomy of use and preservation can sometimes be inherently contradictory, and NPS spokespeople have asserted that preservation is the ultimate priority. In general, activities which harvest or remove resources from units of the System are not allowed. The NPS also supports the preservation of natural and historic places and promotes outdoor recreation outside the System through grant and

¹ This figure includes an estimated 4.3 million acres of private land. NPS policy is to acquire "in-holdings" from willing sellers or to create special agreements to encourage land owners to sell.

technical assistance programs. The emphasis is on cooperation and partnerships with state, municipal, and local governments as well as foundations, corporations, and other private parties to protect National Park System units and to advance NPS programs. Congressional and management attention continually centers on how to balance the recreational use of parklands with the preservation of park resources. Another focus has been on determining appropriate levels and sources of funding to operate and maintain NPS facilities and to manage NPS programs.

History

The establishment of several national parks preceded the creation in 1916 of the National Park Service (NPS) as the park system management agency. Congress established the nation's first national park — Yellowstone National Park — in 1872. The park was created in the then territories of Montana and Wyoming “for the benefit and enjoyment of the people,” and placed “under the exclusive control of the Secretary of the Interior” (16 U.S.C. §§21-22). In the early years, Yellowstone was guarded by the Army. In the 1890s and early 1900s, Congress created several other national parks from western public domain lands, including Sequoia, Yosemite, Mount Rainier, Crater Lake, and Glacier. The effort to set aside more national parks intensified as wild nature and scenic and cultural areas were vanishing with the closing of the frontier. Parks have always been popular with the public. In addition to the desire to preserve nature, there has also been interest in promoting tourism. Western railroads, often recipients of vast public land grants, were advocates of many of the early parks and built grand hotels in them to support their business.

At the same time, there were efforts to protect the sites and structures of early Native American cultures, particularly in the Southwest, along with other special sites. In 1906, Congress enacted the Antiquities Act to authorize the President to proclaim national monuments on federal lands that contain “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest” (16 U.S.C. §431). (For more information on national monuments, see CRS Report RS20902, *National Monument Issues*.)

There was no system of national parks and monuments until 1916, when President Wilson signed a law creating the NPS to manage and protect the national parks and many of the monuments then in existence and those yet to be established. That law — the “Organic Act” — provided that the NPS “shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations . . . to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (16 U.S.C. §1). A major step in developing a system of park lands more national in scope occurred in 1933, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt transferred 63 national monuments and historic military sites from the Forest Service and War Department to the NPS.

Overview of Issues

The 107th Congress is considering legislation or conducting oversight on several NPS-related issues. Four major issues are covered in this report: funding for NPS maintenance, regulation of motorized recreation, the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program, and issues related to the National Trails System. While in some cases the issues discussed here are

relevant to federal lands other than parks and to other agencies, this report does not comprehensively cover issues primarily affecting other federal lands. For background on federal land management generally, see CRS Report RL30867, *Federal Land Management Agencies: Background on Federal Land and Resource Management*. Information on BLM and Forest Service lands is contained in CRS Issue Brief IB10076, *Public (BLM) Lands and National Forests*. Information on appropriations for the NPS is included in CRS Report RL31306, *Appropriations for FY2003: Interior and Related Agencies*.

NPS-related issues not detailed in this brief include protection from outside threats, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), heritage areas, the creation of new park units, and funding for anti-terrorism activities. First, while parks historically were “buffered” from much human impact by their remote locations and adjoining wild lands, the situation has changed. How to protect park resources from outside threats such as detrimental land uses, growing populations, contaminated water, and tourist attractions, while at the same time recognizing the benefits of growth, development, and tourism to surrounding communities, presents difficult issues for Congress. Second, the LWCF is the principal federal source of money for the NPS (and other agencies) to acquire new recreation lands. Policy issues include the size of the fund, need for an annual appropriation, and the congressional role in choosing lands to acquire. (For more information on LWCF, see CRS Report 97-792 ENR, *Land and Water Conservation Fund: Current Status and Issues*.) Third, the NPS assists non-federal efforts to protect and manage “heritage areas” which Congress designates on non-federal lands — sometimes in lieu of establishing NPS units. Whether to create heritage areas, and whether to establish a uniform program with procedures and criteria for heritage area designation, are among the issues. Fourth, how national park units are created and what qualities make a potential area eligible to be an NPS unit are of continuing interest. (For more information on creating NPS units, see CRS Report RS20158, *National Park System: Establishing New Units*.)

Fifth, the NPS manages high profile natural and commemorative sites, including many of the monuments in Washington, D.C., and is thus undertaking new security initiatives in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The agency received funds under the Emergency Supplemental Appropriation for FY2001 (P.L. 107-38) for emergency response costs in New York City and Washington D.C., and under the Emergency Supplemental Appropriation for FY2002 (P.L. 107-117) for increased security at nationally iconic “symbols of democracy” sites, enhanced preparedness for possible attacks, and constructed security improvements at Washington D.C. monuments and memorials. The agency received additional supplemental funds for security for FY2002, as provided by PL 107-206, signed by the President August 2. Additional funding for anti-terrorist activities is included in the regular annual appropriations laws. (For more information on anti-terrorism funds and activities, see “Funding to Combat Terrorism” in CRS Report RL31306).

Current Issues

Maintenance Backlog (by David Whiteman)

Background. One issue for Congress is determining the appropriate level of funds to adequately maintain park units and whether to appropriate new funds or to use funds from

existing programs for park maintenance. In addition to protecting its natural resources, the NPS has an extensive physical maintenance obligation, with an infrastructure that includes thousands of miles of roads, trails, bridges, tunnels, thousands of buildings (many historic), as well as scores of water and waste systems. In the past, agency budgets and appropriated funds have not covered all of the repair and maintenance needs of the NPS. In submitting its FY2002 budget, the agency estimated its maintenance backlog at \$4.9 billion. The estimate is based on initial reviews and other partial information, making the precise amount of its backlog difficult to determine. Another agency source estimated the backlog in FY2001 as ranging roughly between \$4 and \$7 billion. Public concern about deteriorating facilities led Congress to increase overall NPS appropriations each year since FY1996 and to provide the maintenance backlog with new funding sources. (See "Recreational Fee Demonstration Program" below.)

Although other federal land management agencies also have large maintenance backlogs, the NPS backlog has received the most attention. The Interior Department and some environmental and park advocacy groups attribute the multi-billion dollar backlog to decades of funding shortfalls and budgetary constraints. Other factors contribute to the maintenance backlog, among them the creation of new park units, additional management responsibilities for the NPS, increased visitors, and aging infrastructure. There appears to be increasing bipartisan support for addressing the maintenance backlog.

Administrative Actions. In his FY2003 budget, President Bush restated his commitment to eliminating the NPS's multi-billion dollar maintenance backlog by FY2006, but did not specify each year's funding for this purpose. Rather, for FY2003, the President proposed \$322.4 million for construction, and another \$529.4 million for facility operation and maintenance, for a total of \$851.8 million. Excluding facility operation, the President seeks a total of \$663 million for all NPS construction and facility maintenance, which would include both regular (cyclical), as well as deferred maintenance. The request includes an increase of \$17.6 million in the Operations account for repairs and rehabilitation, and a \$25 million increase for cyclic maintenance so that backlogged maintenance does not increase.

The elimination of the NPS maintenance backlog, proposed as a campaign promise, was initiated by President Bush in his FY2002 budget when \$4.9 billion was requested over 5 years to eliminate the backlog through a combination of transportation fund money, appropriated funds, and revenues from recreation fees. Of the total sought, \$2.7 billion was for park road and bridge needs, funded from gasoline taxes, while \$2.2 billion was for the nonroad backlog funded from annual appropriations and revenues from the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. Of the \$2.2 billion, for deferred maintenance the President requested \$440 million per year for 5 years, beginning with FY2002. The FY2002 request was comprised of \$340 million in appropriations and \$100 million in revenues from the Fee Demo Program. Because the President's FY2003 budget proposed only total funding for regular and deferred maintenance (\$663 million combined), it is unclear whether the President continues to seek \$440 million for deferred maintenance for FY2003.

Some park and environmental groups advocate additional funds for park operations to meet ongoing maintenance needs so as to prevent the backlog from increasing. Park advocates have assembled a coalition, which they report includes a third of all Senators and 84 House Members, to promote nearly tripling the proposed increase of \$97.5 million for operations of the national park system in FY2003.

The Clinton Administration's FY2000 budget proposal first highlighted an Interior Department-wide campaign to prioritize maintenance needs over a 5 year period. For each year since, the NPS has submitted a Five Year Maintenance and Capital Improvement Plan identifying deferred maintenance projects in priority order, with emphasis on critical health and safety projects, and resource protection.

The NPS has two efforts underway to define and quantify its maintenance needs. First, the agency is implementing a computerized facility maintenance management system for planning and tracking facilities management, with baseline information on facility conditions. It will be used in part to list maintenance needs, assign repair work, and identify completed maintenance projects. Some park units are using the system, and the NPS anticipates use by all parks at the end of FY2003. Second, in December 1999, the Interior Department required bureaus to assess the condition of their facilities. NPS is undertaking a comprehensive review of its facilities to identify maintenance needs. The agency anticipates that the assessment will be completed in FY2006 and may reveal higher than estimated deferred maintenance costs. Similar assessments will be conducted every 5 years.

The Interior Department's Inspector General reported to the Congress in December, 2001 on the Department's facilities maintenance management. Among the report's recommendations is the establishment of a single maintenance budget funded through one appropriation for the entire department. As an intermediate step, the report proposes the establishment of single line item budgets for maintenance in each bureau, under the oversight of a Chief Maintenance Officer for all departmental maintenance budgets. The FY2003 request for the NPS partially consolidates maintenance accounts.

Legislative Activity. House-passed (H.R. 5093) and Senate Committee-approved (S. 2708) bills providing appropriations for FY2003 for Interior and Related Agencies contain higher levels of funds than the President's request for construction and for facilities operations and maintenance. The House passed \$325.2 million for construction, and \$537.7 million for facilities operation and maintenance, for a total of \$862.8 million. The Administration asserted that the House-passed construction level includes unrequested construction projects which divert resources from priority maintenance needs. The Senate Committee on Appropriations approved \$361.9 million for construction, and \$533.8 million for facilities operation and maintenance, for a total of \$895.7 million.

The FY2002 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (P.L. 107-63) provides \$363 million for the NPS maintenance backlog. Together with \$100 million from Fee Demo revenues, there is \$463 million in FY2002 to address the NPS maintenance backlog. Other 107th Congress legislation (H.R. 359, S. 224, and S. 930) would fund some park maintenance with bonds secured by a surcharge over, or set aside from, park entrance fees.

Motorized Recreation: Personal Watercraft and Snowmobiles (by Kori Calvert)

Background. The NPS Organic Act of 1916 set forth a dual mission that embodies the ongoing conflict between preservation and recreation: to protect, preserve and leave unimpaired the natural and cultural resources in the agency's care while promoting visitor use and enjoyment of them. Motorized recreation, notably the use of personal watercraft (PWC) and snowmobiles on NPS lands and commercial air tours over them, has fueled the

preservation/recreation debate. Critics of motorized recreation point out that many types of non-motorized recreation are allowed in park units and cite environmental concerns with motorized uses, including noise, air, and water pollution; damage to land, plants, and wildlife; and public safety. Supporters of motorized access argue that technological advances will enable manufacturers to produce cleaner, more efficient machines, and point to the economic benefits to communities serving users. Recent controversies have focused on regulatory actions that would restrict recreational use or “access” of these vehicles, often in specific park units.

Administrative Actions, Personal Watercraft. PWCs are high-speed, very shallow draft, and highly maneuverable watercraft “operated by a person or persons sitting, standing, or kneeling on the vessel rather than within the confines of the hull” (36 CFR §1.4). Often used to perform stunt-like maneuvers, PWCs include watercraft known by their brand and generic names as jet ski, sea doo, surf jet, water sled, wavejammer, wetjet, waverunner, and wet bike. Representing a small but fast growing segment of the recreational boat market, PWCs reportedly account for a disproportionate number of accidents. In an effort to manage their use, the NPS published a final rule on March 21, 2000, effective April 20, 2000, prohibiting PWC use from 66 of the 87 NPS-administered parks, seashores, and recreational areas where motorized boats are allowed (65 *Fed. Reg.* 15077). The rule allowed PWC use to continue until April 22, 2002, at 21 areas where it was already occurring while the NPS evaluated whether to permanently authorize PWC use and develop and finalize special regulations, as appropriate. The rule recognized that PWC use might continue in certain National Recreation Areas, such as Lake Mead and Glen Canyon, where the establishing legislation emphasized motorized water-based recreation as a primary purpose.

Bluewater Network and its parent organization, Earth Island Institute, filed a lawsuit against DOI and NPS over the PWC rule in August 2000. The negotiated settlement, finalized in April 2001, prohibits PWCs from the 21 NPS areas where they are not allowed unless the Park Service initiates a park-specific rulemaking process, prepares an environmental analysis as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and solicits public comment. PWCs may continue to operate in these 21 park units during the rulemaking process, which must be completed for 13 units by April 22, 2002. Eight National Recreation Areas have until September 15, 2002, to finalize PWC regulations. A federal district court approved the settlement and dismissed a motion to intervene from two watercraft industry associations.

On April 16, 2002, NPS announced it would permanently prohibit PWC use in five park units, effective April 22, 2002. These units had completed an environmental review process and favored PWC bans: Cape Cod National Seashore, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, Cumberland Island National Seashore, and Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. A federal judge denied an injunction sought by PWC users and manufacturers to overturn these bans on April 19, 2002. Eight additional park units subject to the April 22, 2002, deadline were to close to PWCs then and remain closed until the PWC-use environmental assessments and regulatory rulemaking process is completed. The eight National Recreation Areas with the September 15, 2002, deadline are to close temporarily then if the public review process is not completed. On July 22, 2002, park officials stated that the NPS will temporarily ban personal watercraft from these areas on September 15 because the agency will not complete the rulemaking process, including the environmental reviews, by that date.

Legislative Activity, Personal Watercraft. The House Resources Committee reported a technical corrections bill (H.R. 3853) on April 9, 2002 (H.Rept. 107-389). The bill includes a provision that allows PWC use to continue in 21 park units until December 31, 2004, providing NPS a two-year deadline extension to complete environmental impact assessments. Bill supporters argue that the Clinton Administration did not provide funds for the assessments. Critics contend that the Resources Committee failed to call any hearings on the PWC controversy and that a technical corrections bill is not the appropriate vehicle for a controversial PWC provision. Broader legislation (H.R. 702) encourages safe, responsible use of personal watercraft generally.

Administrative Actions, Snowmobiles. In January 1999, a coalition of environmental organizations filed a rulemaking petition to ban snowmobiles from all park system units. NPS reviewed the level of snowmobile use and the extent of compliance with existing statutes and regulations in 42 NPS units that allowed recreational snowmobiling. The survey indicated a history of non-enforcement and prompted the April 26, 2000, announcement that NPS would begin immediately the strict enforcement of existing, long-standing regulations on snowmobile use. With limited exceptions, this renewed enforcement would have substantially reduced snowmobile use in national parks units. Exceptions included Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, park units in Alaska, Voyageurs National Park in Minnesota, and access to private land within or adjacent to a park. The NPS snowmobile prohibition was both praised and reviled in the press and prompted several congressional hearings. By July 2000 the Interior Department backed away from its strict enforcement stance with a clarification — there would be no snowmobile ban in park units pending a formal rulemaking and public comment period. Snowmobile practices prior to the April 2000 announcement would continue throughout the 2000/2001 fall/winter season.

The Clinton Administration issued final rules on snowmobile use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway (66 *Fed. Reg.* 7260, January 22, 2001) that would phase out snowmobile use beginning with the 2003/2004 winter season, with limited exceptions, and phased in a replacement of snowmobiles with multi-passenger “snow coaches.” The Bush Administration announced in April 2001 that it would allow the rule to stand.

At the same time, the Administration continued to negotiate settlement of a lawsuit by the International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association and others to overturn the Yellowstone ban and re-open the rulemaking process. The June 29, 2001, settlement agreement requires NPS to prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement (66 *Fed. Reg.* 39197, July 27, 2001) on snowmobile use in Yellowstone by early 2002 and to decide whether to keep or modify the ban by November 2002. The environmental study [<http://www.nps.gov/grte/winteruse/intro.htm>], released in February 2002, reviews four options for action without designating a preferred alternative: implementing the phase-out, delaying implementation for one additional year, allowing continued unguided snowmobiling, or allowing limited guided snowmobile tours. The latter two alternatives include noise and emissions restrictions.

On March 29, 2002, NPS proposed to delay implementation of the snowmobile phase-out at all 3 park units until the end of the 2003-2004 winter use season (67 *Fed. Reg.* 15145), citing additional time needed to complete the environmental review and regulatory rule-making process. During a June 25, 2002, public meeting with state and county officials from

Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming and other stakeholders, the NPS announced its preliminary intent to define a preferred alternative that allows some level of continued snowmobile use. Specific requirements addressing noise, air pollution, traffic volume, and the use of guides are still being worked out. An agreement announced on August 2, 2002, extends the NPS Record of Decision deadline to March 15, 2003, providing 4 additional months to analyze over 350,000 public comments and any significant new data submitted regarding the winter use plan.

In related developments, in September 2001 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed emission standards to reduce pollution from nonroad recreational vehicles. They would require snowmobile manufacturers to reduce hydrocarbon and carbon monoxide emissions by 30% in 2006 and 50% in 2010. (For additional information, see CRS Report RL31149, *Snowmobiles: Environmental Standards and Access to National Parks*.)

Legislative Activity, Snowmobiles. Legislative debate over snowmobile bans is reflected in several 107th Congress bills. A House bill (H.R. 1465) would prohibit snowmobile use in most national parks, with exceptions; and a Senate bill (S. 365) would overturn the snowmobile ban in most national parks and direct EPA and NPS to develop noise and emission standards for snowmobiling. H.R. 5044 and S. 2697, both introduced June 27, 2002, require implementation of the Clinton Administration final rulemaking to phase out snowmobiles in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway. Two measures pertaining to snowmobile use in Denali National Park and Preserve (H.R. 4677 and S. 2589) also have been introduced. The House Small Business Committee held a field hearing in January 2002 on the economic concerns of Yellowstone area small businesses and communities that serve snowmobilers.

Motorized Recreation: Aircraft Overflights (by Kori Calvert)

Background. Minimizing noise to protect the natural condition is an important element of the NPS mission to preserve natural resources and enhance visitor enjoyment. However, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has the authority to control airspace and the aircraft overflights that may jeopardize a park unit's natural quiet, impair visitor enjoyment, and raise safety concerns. This creates a conflict between resource protection and aviation access authorities (and their constituencies). Grand Canyon National Park, with some 90,000 scenic overflights a year, has been the focal point of the conflict between groups seeking to limit overflights and air tour operators whose economic stability (with ripple effects on local businesses) may depend on providing overflights. Air tour defenders argue that vehicular traffic accompanying some 5 million Grand Canyon visitors a year is more detrimental to the park environment than overflights.

The 1975 Grand Canyon National Park Enlargement Act (P.L. 93-620) directed the Secretary of the Interior to recommend regulatory actions to address aircraft activity that caused "a significant adverse effect on the natural quiet and experience of the park...." This law led to early acoustic research on aircraft noise-related impacts. Following the collision of two tour aircraft over the Grand Canyon a decade later, Congress enacted the National Parks Overflights Act of 1987 (16 U.S.C. 1a-1 note). It directed NPS to recommend a flight control plan for Grand Canyon National Park that would provide a "substantial restoration of the natural quiet" and prohibited flights below the canyon's rim. It also mandated an NPS study on the effects of all aircraft overflights. The resulting 1994 report to Congress

examined military flights, general aviation, and commercial air tours over national parks; measured overflight effects on natural quiet, wildlife, safety, park visitors, and cultural and historical resources; identified parks with significant overflight problems; and provided legislative and regulatory recommendations to resolve park and airspace use issues, including flight restrictions and use of quieter aircraft. An August 2002 appeals court decision directed the FAA to use NPS “natural quiet” standards and consider commercial flight-generated noise impacts in developing air tour overflight regulations.

Administrative Actions. In a presidential memorandum issued April 22, 1996 (61 *Fed. Reg.* 18229), President Clinton directed the Secretary of Transportation, in consultation with appropriate department and agency heads, to develop regulations to address the impacts of transportation, including overflights, on national parks. The memorandum also set 2008 as the date to substantially restore natural quiet at Grand Canyon National Park.

That mandate, and overflight requirements in the National Parks Air Tour Management Act of 2000 (49 U.S.C. 40128 note), have segued into an ongoing and contentious rulemaking process. Controversial park-specific regulations include two FAA final rules published April 4, 2000, that cap the annual number of commercial air tour overflights at Grand Canyon at 90,000 (65 *Fed. Reg.* 17736) and impose increased flight-free zones and restrictive routing over the Canyon (65 *Fed. Reg.* 17708) [<http://www.nps.gov/grca/overflights/index.html>]. New routes and airspace restrictions for the canyon’s west end Special Flight Rules Area (SFRA) have been in effect since April 19, 2001. To address air tour operators’ safety concerns, east end SFRA airspace changes are delayed until February 20, 2003 (66 *Fed. Reg.* 63294). The industry seeks exemptions to air tour caps, curfews, and air route restrictions if quiet aircraft technology is used. The FAA did put together a working draft on quiet aircraft (66 *Fed. Reg.* 64778, Dec. 14, 2001) but has not issued proposed regulations.

Legislative Activity. A measure has been introduced (S. 1151) that identifies quiet technology standards for air tour operators at Grand Canyon National Park. Retrofitted planes and helicopters with quiet engines and propellers would be allowed in newly restricted Grand Canyon areas. A second bill (S. 712) would ban all scenic commercial flights over Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park or within one mile of park boundaries. No action has been taken on these bills.

The National Parks Air Tour Management Act of 2000 requires the FAA and NPS to work with air tour operations, American Indian tribes affected by commercial overflights, and the public to create management plans for air tours at individual park units and within a half mile of their boundaries. Each plan could prohibit or limit air tours, such as by route and altitude restrictions. Additional provisions required the FAA to establish quiet aircraft technology standards for the Grand Canyon within one year and to designate Grand Canyon routes or corridors for aircraft and helicopters using quiet technology. Quiet aircraft would not be subject to existing caps on Grand Canyon overflights.

Recreational Fee Demonstration Program (by Carol Hardy Vincent)

Background. Congress is considering whether to extend, amend, or make permanent the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program (“Fee Demo,” 16 U.S.C. 460l - 6a note). The program allows the NPS (and the BLM, Forest Service, and FWS) to test collecting new or

increased entrance and recreation user fees. All the funds are retained by the NPS, with 80% kept at the collecting park. The NPS collected receipts under the program of \$126 million for FY2001 and estimates receipts at \$132 million for FY2002. The NPS typically collects far more revenues than the other three agencies combined. The NPS may spend the money without further appropriation, on the repair and maintenance backlog; interpretation; signs; habitat and facility enhancement; resource preservation; maintenance and operation, including the costs of fee collection; and law enforcement. The program, originally authorized to begin in FY1996 as a 3-year trial, has been extended through FY2004 for fee collection with the revenue available to be spent through FY2007.

The NPS (and other agencies) generally favors Fee Demo because it generates substantial revenue and allows discretion in setting fees, determining fee locations, and using the revenues. Critics counter that the fees discriminate against those less able to pay, are a double tax on the recreating public, and, together with other agency fees, confuse the public. The Forest Service's Fee Demo Program has received most of these criticisms.

Administrative Actions. The Bush Administration's FY2003 budget proposes making the Fee Demo Program permanent, and the land management agencies are working to develop a permanent program for the President to propose. For the NPS, the FY2003 budget states that half of the monies collected will be used for deferred maintenance needs. Recently, Fee Demo monies have substantially reduced backlogged maintenance at some NPS units. The Administration's FY2002 budget had proposed extending the Fee Demo Program for 4 years, and stated that at least 60 percent of NPS receipts would be used for deferred maintenance to help eliminate the NPS maintenance backlog. The NPS reports that in the past approximately 60% of Fee Demo funds have been allocated to the maintenance backlog. Specifically, since the outset of the Program, 1,671 of 2,940 approved projects, and \$259.8 million of \$417.4 million have been identified as addressing deferred maintenance needs; these figures include new construction which may result from deferred maintenance. The NPS has asserted that more analysis is needed to determine whether to shift the current 80/20 percent split in funds to increase monies for the agency's deferred maintenance needs.

In reports to Congress, the NPS has described efforts to improve program management. They include: 1) reducing the cost of fee collection; (2) expanding the number of automated fee collection locations; (3) improving the rate of obligating funds; and (4) collaborating with other agencies to simplify fee payments. The agencies recently created an Interagency Recreation Fee Leadership Council to facilitate coordination and consistency among the agencies on recreation fees. The Fee Council has developed seven guiding principles for a permanent fee program, and is developing its first annual work plan.

Legislative Activity. Legislation would create a permanent recreation fee program. S. 2607 authorizes the collection of fees on certain lands administered by the DOI and DOA and seeks to standardize the collection of fees among agencies. It prohibits other recreation fees from being collected on these lands, superseding the fee program in the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act. The bill lists circumstances when fees may not be charged, including for general access to an area. It authorizes 80% of the fees to remain at the collecting site, except that the Secretary of Agriculture or the Secretary of the Interior could reduce that amount to 60% if the revenues collected by an area exceed its needs. The Secretaries are to work jointly to issue certain recreation passes, such as the golden eagle passport covering entrance for one year into one unit, and may issue other annual, regional,

or site-specific passes. S. 1011 provides that between 60%-80% of the collections be retained at the collecting site, as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture or the Secretary of the Interior. The money may be used for a variety of purposes, with priority for deferred maintenance projects. S. 2473 establishes a permanent program for the National Park Service only, with fees established based on a market analysis of factors including benefits and services to the visitor. In general, not less than 80% of fees are to be returned to the collecting site, but the Secretary of the Interior can change the amount to not less than 60% where revenues exceed an area's needs, or to not less than 90% for areas with revenue sharing agreements with states. The bill also seeks to coordinate fees collected under the Park Service's recreation fee program with fees collected for other purposes, such as the National Park Passport and state agency annual passes. At a June 19, 2002 hearing of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on S. 2473 and S. 2607, Administration witnesses testified in favor of a permanent recreation fee program for the four land management agencies.

Another bill (S. 2015) would exempt residents of counties containing Fee Demo Program areas from paying fees imposed under the program. Program impact on local committees has been particularly sensitive for the Forest Service. Measures (H.R. 359, S. 224, S. 930) which would use certain park fees to secure bonds for park capital improvement might affect the Fee Demo Program. Legislation also has been introduced to extend the program to other agencies or to remove the Forest Service. (For a description of these bills, see CRS Report IB10076, *Public (BLM) Lands and National Forests*.)

The FY2002 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (P.L. 107-63) reauthorizes the Fee Demo Program for 2 years—through September 30, 2004, for collection and September 30, 2007, for expenditures. In the joint explanatory statement, the conferees state that the extension is intended to allow the authorizing committees to examine the program and decide whether, and in what form, to continue it. The law also gives agencies discretion to establish any number of fee projects, by eliminating the minimum (10) and maximum (100) number of test sites. It enhances the authority of the agencies to allow discounted or free admission or use of their lands, e.g., for school groups. Additionally, it makes permanent the requirement that the Appropriations Committees approve Fee Demo-funded capital construction projects costing more than \$500,000. The law does not specify a percentage of the funds to be used for maintenance.

In the past, Congress also has been interested in opportunities for the agencies to expand their methods of collecting fees and to reduce the cost of fee collection. How the collections are accounted for and spent has been a focus, including their use for projects rather than general agency operations; the amounts of money spent on deferred maintenance, new construction, preservation of resources, and other needs; and which particular projects are funded. Further, some Members have expressed a concern that Fee Demo was established and has been extended through appropriations laws, and a preference for the appropriate authorizing committees to determine whether to continue the program, and in what form. A GAO report (November 2001) finds that agencies in the program could increase innovation in setting and collecting fees, improve program coordination and consistency, and establish performance measures for program managers.

The National Trails System (by Sandra L. Johnson)

Background. On October 2, 1968, the National Trails System Act (P.L. 90-543), authorizing the National Trails System (NTS), became law. Today, the federal portion of the trails system consists of 22 national trails (8 scenic trails and 14 historic trails) covering almost 40,000 miles, more than 800 recreation trails, and 2 connecting and side trails. More than three decades since the trails system began, issues remain regarding funding, quality, and quantity of trails. The 107th Congress is considering legislation to amend the National Trails System Act to include a new category of trails, provide federal authority to acquire land from willing sellers, and study certain routes as well as authorize other studies for possible additions to the System.

Administrative Actions. On May 31, 2002, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton promoted the use of trails as “pathways to health” by designating 26 new national recreation trails (NRTs) in 16 states. With these additions, the more than 800 NRTs throughout the United States and Puerto Rico total more than 9,000 miles. The National Trails System Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to recognize community trails that qualify as additions to the National Trails System. National scenic trails and national historic trails may be designated only through an act of Congress.

President Bush announced his National Parks Legacy Project — a comprehensive preservation program for the 385 park units, on May 30, 2001. Under the proposal, park trails would increase by 5,200 miles. The President also proposed a “Conservation Partners Initiative,” by which concerned citizens throughout America will team up with the NPS to restore and preserve parklands, including park trails. No further action has been taken on either proposal according to staff at the NPS.

Legislative Activity. On May 16, 2002, House subcommittee hearings were held on H.R. 36, to amend the National Trails System Act, by adding “National Discovery Trails” as a new category of long-distance trails, and by designating the American Discovery Trail (ADT) the first coast-to-coast trail. The Senate bill (S. 498) unanimously passed the Senate on August 3, 2001, and was referred to the House Committee on Resources on September 5, 2001. According to proponents, the ADT is designed to connect many existing trails, and by crossing the major north-south trails it would allow hikers to travel almost anywhere in the country using trails, including in urban areas. Some are concerned about the rights of private property owners adjacent to the ADT. Others have questioned the need for a new category of trails. ADT legislation also was considered in the 105th and 106th Congresses.

On March 7, 2002, hearings were held on the Willing Seller Amendments of 2001 (H.R. 834, S. 1069). Reintroduced in the 107th Congress, S. 1069 and H.R. 834 would amend the National Trails System Act to provide federal authority to acquire land from willing sellers to complete nine named national scenic and historic trails authorized under the Act. Under current law, the federal government generally can obtain land for national trail purposes, even by condemnation. This legislation would allow the federal agencies administering nine specified trails to obtain land from willing sellers only, which would exclude condemnation. The legislation would not commit the federal government to purchase any land or to spend any money, but would allow park managers to purchase land to protect the national trails as opportunities arose and as funds were appropriated. In the 106th Congress, a Willing Seller bill passed the House but was not taken up for Senate floor consideration.

LEGISLATION

Motorized Recreation

H.R. 702 (Saxton)

Seeks to encourage safe use of personal watercraft. It directs the Commerce Secretary to withhold some state grant money under the Coastal Zone Management Act unless states prohibit PWC operation in excess of no-wake speed. It also directs the Transportation Secretary to establish guidelines and standards for PWC operation. Introduced February 14, 2001; referred to Committees on Transportation and Infrastructure and Resources.

H.R. 1465 (Holt)

Prohibits snowmobile use in most national parks, with exceptions. Introduced April 4, 2001; referred to Committee on Resources.

H.R. 4677 (Young, Don); S. 2589 (Murkowski)

Provide for the use of snowmobiles in certain areas of Denali National Park and Preserve. H.R. 4677 introduced May 7, 2002; referred to Committee on Resources. S. 2589 introduced June 5, 2002; referred to Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

H.R. 5044 (Holt); S. 2697 (Reid)

Requires implementation of the final rule to phase out snowmobile use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and John D. Rockefeller Jr. Memorial Parkway. H.R. 5044 introduced June 27, 2002; referred to Committee on Resources. S. 2697 introduced June 27, 2002; referred to Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

S. 365 (Thomas)

Seeks to overturn the snowmobile ban in most national parks, and directs the EPA and the NPS to develop noise and emission standards for snowmobiling. Introduced February 15, 2001; referred to Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

S. 712 (Thomas)

Bans all scenic commercial flights over Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park and establishes a one-mile park boundary buffer zone. Introduced April 5, 2001; referred to Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

S. 1151 (Reid)

Identifies quiet technology standards for air tour operators at Grand Canyon National Park, and allows certain “quiet” planes and helicopters in newly restricted areas. Introduced June 29, 2001; referred to Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

Recreational Fee Demonstration Program & Maintenance Backlog

H.R. 359 (Kolbe); S. 224 (McCain); S. 930 (McCain)

Authorize national parks to collect a surcharge of up to \$2 over existing entrance fees, or set-aside up to \$2 from existing entrance fees, to secure bonds for park capital improvements. H.R. 359 introduced January 31, 2001, and referred to Committee on Resources. S. 224 and S. 930 introduced January 31, 2001, and May 22, 2001, respectively; referred to Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

H.R. 2217 (Skeen)

P.L. 107-63, FY2002 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, extends the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program for 2 years, gives agencies discretion to establish any number of fee projects, and makes other changes to the program. It also contains funds for the maintenance backlog needs of the NPS. Signed into law November 5, 2001.

S. 1011 (Graham)

Contains provisions establishing a permanent recreation fee program, with 60%-80% of the funds retained at the collection site. Introduced June 11, 2001; referred to Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

S. 2015 (Smith, Bob)

Exempts residents of counties containing fee demonstration areas from paying fees under the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. Introduced March 14, 2002; referred to Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

S. 2473 (Thomas)

Contains provisions establishing a permanent recreation fee program for the National Park Service, with 60%-90% of the funds retained at the collection site. Introduced May 8, 2002; Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held hearing on June 19, 2002.

S. 2607 (Bingaman)

Establishes a permanent recreation fee program. Introduced June 11, 2002; Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held hearing on June 19, 2002.

National Trails System**H.R. 36 (Bereuter); S. 498 (Murkowski)**

Set forth requirements to establish and administer national discovery trails and designate the American Discovery Trail as the first national discovery trail. H.R. 36 introduced January 3, 2001; a subcommittee of the Committee on Resources held hearings on May 16, 2002. S. 498 passed Senate August 3, 2001; referred to House Committee on Resources September 5, 2001.

H.R. 37 (Bereuter); S. 213 (Hatch)

Direct the Secretary of the Interior to study the feasibility of designating certain routes and cutoffs for inclusion within the Oregon, Pony Express, California, and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails. H.R. 37 passed House June 6, 2001. On July 31, 2002, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources reported the bill favorably with an amendment in the nature of a substitute. S. 213 introduced January 30, 2001. A subcommittee of Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held hearings on both bills on March 7, 2002.

H.R. 834 (McInnis); S. 1069 (Levin)

Amend the National Trails System Act to clarify federal authority for land acquisition only from willing sellers for the majority of the trails in the System. H.R. 834 passed House March 13, 2001. S. 1069 introduced June 20, 2001. A subcommittee of Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held hearings on both bills on March 7, 2002.

H.R. 1384 (Udall)

Designates the Navajo Long Walk National Historic Trail in areas of Arizona and New Mexico. Passed House October 2, 2001; passed Senate without amendment by Unanimous Consent, August 1, 2002. Signed by President August 21, 2002.

H.R. 1628 (Rodriguez)

Designates El Camino Real de los Tejas as a National Historic Trail. Passed House September 10, 2001; referred to Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources September 12, 2001.

H.R. 1814 (Oliver); S. 1609 (Kerry)

Requires study of the Metacomet-Monadnock-Sunapee-Mattabesett Trail in NH, MA, and CT for addition to the National Trails System. H.R. 1814 passed House October 23, 2001. The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources reported the bill favorably without amendment on July 31, 2002. S. 1609 introduced November 1, 2001, and referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

H.R. 1963 (Costello)

Requires a study of the route taken by American soldier and frontiersman George Rogers Clark during the Revolutionary War to capture the British forts in IL and IN, for addition to the National Trails System. Passed House March 6, 2002; referred to Committee on Energy and Natural Resources March 7, 2002.

H.R. 3691 (Wilson); H.R. 4111 (McInnis); S. 817 (Domenici); S. 1946 (Campbell)

Seek to designate the Old Spanish Trail as a National Historic Trail. H.R. 3691 introduced February 6, 2002 and H.R. 4111 introduced April 9, 2002; both referred to Committee on Resources. S. 817 introduced May 2, 2001; referred to Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. On August 1, 2002, S. 1946 passed the Senate with amendments by Unanimous Consent.

H.R. 3936 (Hansen)

Designates and provides for the management of the James V. Hansen Shoshone National Trail. Passed the House June 17, 2002; referred to Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on June 18, 2002.

CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS, REPORTS, AND DOCUMENTS

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U.S. Congress, House Committee on Small Business, *Protecting Small Business and National Parks: The Goals Are Not Mutually Exclusive*, hearing, 107th Congress, 2nd sess., January 26, 2002, West Yellowstone, MT [<http://www.house.gov/smbiz/hearings/107th/2002/020126/index.html>].

U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, *National Discovery Trails Act of 2001*, S. Report 107-26, 107th Cong., 1st sess., June 5, 2001, Washington, D.C., 2001.

— Subcommittee on National Parks, Historic Preservation, and Recreation, *Snowmobile Activities in the National Park System and Miscellaneous National Heritage Bills*, hearing, 106th Cong., 2d sess., May 18, 25, 2000, Washington, D.C., 2000.

FOR ADDITIONAL READING

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CRS Report 98-981 ENR, *The National Trails System: An Overview*, by Sandra L. Johnson.

CRS Report RL31149, *Snowmobiles: Environmental Standards and Access to National Parks*, by James E. McCarthy.

U.S. General Accounting Office, *Recreation Fees: Management Improvements Can Help the Demonstration Program Enhance Visitor Services*, GAO report GAO-02-10, Wash., D.C., November 2001.

— *Federal Lands: Agencies Need to Assess the Impact of Personal Watercraft and Snowmobile Use*, GAO report GAO/RCED-00-243, Wash., D.C., September 2000.

— *National Park Service, Efforts to Identify and Manage the Maintenance Backlog*, GAO report GAO/RCED-98-143, Wash., D.C., May 1998.

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— *Director's Order #47: Soundscape Preservation and Noise Management*, [<http://www.nps.gov/refdesk/DOrders/DOrder47.html>].

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— 2001 Management Policies, [<http://www.nps.gov/refdesk/mp/>].

— Office of Inspector General. *Audit Report on Deferred Maintenance, National Park Service*, report 99-I-959, Washington, D.C. September, 1999.

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