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National Park Service: FY2015 and FY2016 Appropriations

The National Park Service (NPS) administers the National Park System, which covers 84.5 million acres of land and includes 407 diverse units valued for their natural, cultural, and recreational importance. NPS receives appropriations in annual appropriations laws for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies.

P.L. 113-235 provided NPS with a total of \$2.615 billion in discretionary appropriations for FY2015.

For FY2015, P.L. 113-235 contained \$2.615 billion in discretionary appropriations for NPS. For FY2016, NPS has requested \$3.048 billion, an increase of \$433.1 million (16.6%) over the FY2015 appropriation. The agency has stated that much of the increased funding would address its growing backlog of deferred maintenance in connection with NPS's upcoming centennial anniversary in 2016.

Table 1. NPS Discretionary Appropriations by Account
(\$ in millions)

Account	FY2015 Enacted	FY2016 Request	% Change
Operation of Nat'l. Park System	2,275.8	2,515.1	+10.5%
Construction	138.3	251.0	+81.5%
Land Acq. & State Assistance	99.0	117.5	+18.7%
Nat'l. Recreation & Preservation	63.1	54.2	-14.1%
Historic Preservation Fund	56.4	89.9	+59.3%
Centennial Challenge	10.0	50.0	+400.0%
LWCF Rescission ^a	-28.0	-30.0	-7.1%
Total^a	2,614.6	3,047.7	+16.6%

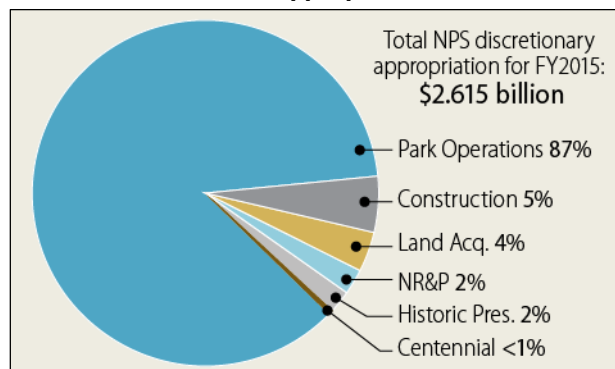
Sources: P.L. 113-235, Division F; House Appropriations Committee detailed tables for the National Park Service.

a. Totals reflect a rescission of Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) contract authority.

NPS's Appropriations Accounts

NPS's FY2015 appropriations were spread across six accounts, as shown in **Table 1**. The largest appropriations share—about 87%—went to the Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) account (see **Figure 1**). This account supports the activities, programs, and services that form the day-to-day operations of the National Park System. The majority of ONPS funding goes directly to individual park units. Activities covered 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.

Figure 1. NPS Appropriations Accounts: Share of Total FY2015 Appropriation



Source: P.L. 113-235.

Notes: The total appropriation includes a rescission of \$28 million in LWCF contract authority, not depicted in the chart.
NR&P = National Recreation and Preservation.

The next-largest amount, 5% of the total appropriation, went to NPS's Construction account. The account's primary activity, Line-Item Construction and Maintenance, covers construction of new facilities and rehabilitation and replacement of existing facilities. Projects are prioritized based on their contribution to NPS "mission factors" and cost-benefit considerations. The account also covers other construction activities and planning functions, including preparation of park general management plans and studies that assess areas for potential addition to the system.

Some 4% of the total appropriation went to the Land Acquisition and State Assistance (LASA) account. This amount represents NPS's share of appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (16 U.S.C. §§4601-4 et seq.), the primary funding source for several federal land management agencies to acquire lands. NPS's share of the funding supports the agency's acquisitions, primarily consisting of "inholdings"—lands that are inside the boundaries of national park units but are not federally owned. It also supports NPS grants to states—and, through them, to localities—for outdoor recreation needs. These 50/50 matching grants are primarily allocated to states by formula. Of the \$99.0 million total appropriated for the account for FY2015, \$50.8 million was for NPS acquisition and \$48.1 million was for state assistance.

The National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) account received about 2% of the total appropriation. This 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. The largest single program in the account is for NPS assistance to national heritage areas (\$20.3 million in FY2015).

Another 2% of the appropriation went to the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF). Through this fund, established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. §470), NPS provides grants to state, local, tribal, and private entities to conserve cultural and historical assets and sites. The grants are normally awarded on a 60% federal/40% state cost-share basis, and they are administered by state and tribal historic preservation offices.

Finally, less than 1% of the FY2015 appropriation went to a Centennial Challenge account, consisting of a matching-grant program to spur partner donations for park improvements in anticipation of the National Park System's 100th anniversary in 2016. This program also received discretionary appropriations in FY2008 and FY2010. Both the George W. Bush and Obama Administrations sought additional mandatory appropriations of up to \$100 million for this fund, but Congress did not enact such legislation. NPS again requested this mandatory funding for FY2016.

Issues in NPS Appropriations

Deferred Maintenance

NPS's growing backlog of deferred maintenance continues to be an issue as Congress considers appropriations for FY2016. The Department of the Interior estimated the NPS backlog for FY2014 at \$9.31 billion to \$13.70 billion, with a mid-range figure of \$11.50 billion. Despite agency efforts to address the backlog through improved inventory and asset management, it has continued to increase.

NPS funding to address deferred maintenance comes from discretionary appropriations and from other sources. Two appropriations subaccounts (one under Construction and the other under ONPS) are partially used to address deferred maintenance. Allocations to the agency from the Federal Highway Administration are used for NPS road construction and repair. Other sources, such as recreation fee collections, may also be used.

Congress has considered whether to increase discretionary funding for NPS deferred maintenance, whether to provide mandatory funding outside the annual appropriations process, and/or whether the agency needs to use existing funding more efficiently. In the 113th Congress, in addition to discretionary appropriations, P.L. 113-40 provided mandatory funding from federal helium sales for NPS deferred maintenance, totaling \$50.0 million over two years (FY2018-FY2019). Funded projects must have a nonfederal cost share. The Administration's FY2016 budget request seeks other new mandatory funding, as well as increased discretionary funding (see below), to address the NPS backlog as the agency's centennial anniversary nears.

NPS Centennial

For FY2015, P.L. 113-235 included \$25.0 million in the ONPS account and \$10.0 million in the Centennial Challenge account for activities related to the agency's 2016 centennial. These activities include preparations for a potentially high number of visitors during the centennial, as well as broader efforts to address deferred maintenance and improve park infrastructure and resource stewardship for

the agency's "second century." For FY2016, NPS requests increases of \$326.3 million in discretionary appropriations and \$500 million in mandatory funding for centennial-related activities.

The 113th Congress discussed in Senate hearings, but did not act on, other potential ways to address NPS funding in connection with the centennial. Proposals focused on funding sources to supplement discretionary appropriations, such as an NPS endowment, increased fees, enhanced donor partnerships, or other types of mandatory appropriations.

Land Acquisition Funding

The extent to which NPS land acquisition funding should be increased, decreased, or redirected continues to be a focus for appropriators. NPS's land acquisition funding is appropriated from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is due to expire on September 30, 2015. At a broad level, some in Congress object to further expansion of the federal estate, whereas others feel that more areas need federal protection. For NPS, some Members have suggested that agency funding to acquire new lands is misplaced when maintenance needs for the existing lands in the system are not being met. Some also assert that certain recent acquisitions have lacked the national value of many iconic sites of the National Park System. Supporters of NPS land acquisition funding have emphasized that the majority of funds are used to acquire nonfederal inholdings within existing park units, and they have contended that such acquisitions help to "complete" valued parks and may even facilitate maintenance efforts.

NPS Assistance to Nonfederal Sites

Both Congress and the Administration have questioned whether some NPS assistance to nonfederal areas should be reduced in light of agency budget constraints. Two agency accounts (the NR&P and HPF accounts), along with a portion of the LASA account, are used to fund NPS assistance to nonfederal entities, although these accounts combined represent less than 10% of the agency's total funding. In FY2016, as in previous years, the Administration has proposed that NPS funding for national heritage areas (which are nonfederally managed) should be reduced by about half to focus funding on the agency's core mission of managing the federal parks. However, Congress has not concurred with NPS requests for heritage area funding reductions in recent years.

For More Information

For more information, see CRS Report R42757, *National Park Service: FY2016 Appropriations and Recent Trends*; CRS Report R43617, *Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies: FY2015 Appropriations*; and CRS Report R43997, *Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY2005-FY2014 Estimates*.

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