

October 7, 2020

## National Park Service: FY2021 Appropriations

The National Park Service (NPS) administers the National Park System, which includes 421 units valued for their natural, cultural, and recreational importance. System lands cover 81 million federal acres and 4 million nonfederal acres. As part of the Department of the Interior, NPS receives funding in annual appropriations laws for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. Selected issues for Congress include the total level of NPS appropriations, funding to address NPS's backlog of deferred maintenance (DM), and funds for NPS assistance to nonfederal entities.

### FY2021 Appropriations

The Trump Administration requested \$2.793 billion in FY2021 discretionary appropriations for NPS. The request was 17% less than NPS's FY2020 appropriation of \$3.377 billion, enacted in P.L. 116-94. The request included reductions for all NPS accounts as compared with FY2020. NPS's budget justification also estimated \$0.749 billion in mandatory appropriations for NPS for FY2021, an increase of 1% over estimated NPS mandatory funding for FY2020. These mandatory appropriations come from entrance and recreation fees, concessioner fees, donations, and other sources. In July 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152) established additional mandatory spending for NPS, including a fund to address agency DM needs. The GAOA also designated, as mandatory spending, agency funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF; 54 U.S.C. §200301), previously provided through discretionary appropriations.

On July 14, 2020, the House Committee on Appropriations reported H.R. 7612 (H.Rept. 116-448), with \$3.224 billion for NPS for FY2021. On July 24, 2020, the House passed H.R. 7608, a consolidated bill with the same amount for NPS (Table 1). The amount is 15% higher than the Administration's request and 5% lower than the FY2020 appropriation. The House bill contains increases or level funding for most NPS accounts compared with FY2020 but

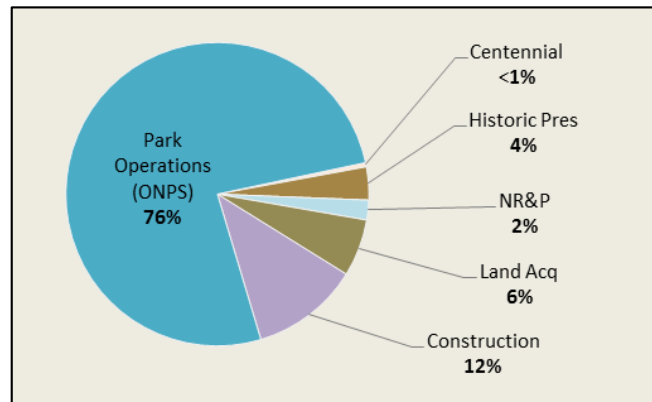
would reduce funding for accounts that address construction and land acquisition, two activities affected by mandatory spending in the recently enacted GAOA.

Because regular FY2021 appropriations were not enacted by the start of the fiscal year, a continuing resolution, P.L. 116-159, provides appropriations at FY2020 levels through December 11, 2020.

### NPS's Appropriations Accounts

NPS has six discretionary appropriations accounts (Figure 1). The majority of NPS discretionary appropriations typically have gone to the Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) account to support day-to-day activities, programs, and services at park units. These include resource stewardship, visitor services, park protection, facility operations and maintenance, and administrative costs.

**Figure 1. NPS Appropriations Accounts**  
(percentages reflect FY2020 appropriations)



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

**Notes:** ONPS = Operation of the National Park System.  
NR&P = National Recreation and Preservation.

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

Account	FY2020 Enacted (P.L. 116-94)	FY2021 Request	% Change from FY2020	House-Passed H.R. 7608	% Change from FY2020
Operation of the Nat'l. Park System	2,577.0	2,516.7	-2%	2,776.6	+8%
Construction	389.3	192.6	-51%	223.9	-42%
Land Acquisition and State Assistance	206.1	8.6	-96%	-2.0 <sup>a</sup>	-101% <sup>a</sup>
Historic Preservation Fund	118.7	40.7	-66%	136.4	+15%
Nat'l. Recreation and Preservation	71.2	33.9	-52%	74.3	+4%
Centennial Challenge	15.0	0	-100%	15.0	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,377.3</b>	<b>2,792.6</b>	<b>-17%</b>	<b>3,224.3</b>	<b>-5%</b>

**Sources:** Data from House Committee on Appropriations and NPS FY2021 budget request. Totals may not sum precisely due to rounding.

- a. For the Land Acquisition and State Assistance account, H.R. 7608 provides no new funding and contains a rescission of \$2.0 million. This account has in past years been supported by funding from the LWCF, which was made mandatory spending by the GAOA (see above).

NPS's Construction account covers rehabilitation and replacement of existing facilities as well as new construction. NPS prioritizes DM in project planning. Projects are evaluated based on department-wide criteria related to the condition of assets and their importance to the park's purposes. The account also covers other construction activities and planning.

In past years, NPS's Land Acquisition and State Assistance (LASA) account has consisted of discretionary appropriations from the LWCF, the primary funding source for the federal land management agencies to acquire lands. The account has covered NPS's own acquisitions—typically nonfederal “inholdings” inside the boundaries of national park units—and NPS grants to states for outdoor recreation needs. In July 2020, the GAOA made all funding from the LWCF mandatory spending.

NPS administers historic preservation programs through its Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) account. Under the National Historic Preservation Act (54 U.S.C. §300101), the fund receives \$150 million annually from offshore energy revenues, but monies are available only as provided in appropriations acts. Most of the funding goes to state and tribal historic preservation offices as formula grants to preserve cultural and historical assets and sites. Congress also has made some funding available for nationally competitive grant programs.

The National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) account funds NPS programs that assist state, local, tribal, and private land managers with grants for outdoor recreation planning, natural and cultural resource preservation, and other activities. The largest single program funded through the account is NPS assistance to national heritage areas.

The Centennial Challenge account supports the National Park Centennial Challenge Fund. Authorized by Congress in 2016 (54 U.S.C. §103501), the fund provides matching grants to spur partner donations for projects or programs that further the NPS mission and enhance the visitor experience. DM is prioritized. The fund also is authorized to receive offsetting collections from the sale of senior passes under the Federal Lands Recreational Enhancement Act (16 U.S.C. §6801).

## Issues for Congress

### Deferred Maintenance

NPS's backlog of DM, estimated at \$11.920 billion as of the end of FY2018 (the most recent year reported), has been a significant issue in the appropriations process. Despite legislation and agency actions aimed at addressing the backlog, it has increased over the past decade. NPS funding to address DM comes from multiple sources and includes both discretionary and mandatory spending. Two appropriations sub-activities (Line-Item Construction and Maintenance in the Construction account and Repair and Rehabilitation in the ONPS account) have been primary sources of funding for NPS DM. For FY2020, P.L. 116-94 provided \$418.9 million for these two budget sub-activities; for FY2021, House-passed H.R. 7608 would provide

\$267.7 million. Portions of other NPS discretionary budget activities also are used for DM. Additionally, allocations from the Highway Trust Fund support NPS road repair and improvements. Other sources, such as recreation fees, also have been used. For more information on NPS DM, see CRS Report R44924, *National Park Service Deferred Maintenance: Frequently Asked Questions*.

In recent years, Congress has debated whether to increase discretionary funding for NPS DM, provide new mandatory funding, and/or direct the agency to use existing funding differently. The GAOA (P.L. 116-152), enacted in July 2020, provided a potentially significant source of new mandatory funding for NPS DM. To address DM of five agencies, the GAOA established a fund receiving deposits of certain federal energy revenues over five years, up to a cap of \$1.9 billion annually. NPS is to receive 70% of the available funding. NPS must submit lists of priority DM projects to Congress with annual budget justifications. Appropriators may specify alternate allocations for the funding. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11636, *The Great American Outdoors Act, P.L. 116-152*.

### Land Acquisition Funding

LWCF funding for NPS land acquisition has been a subject of debate in the annual appropriations process. Some Members have expressed the view that agency funding to acquire new lands is misplaced given maintenance needs for existing lands, whereas others have contended that the funds—which typically are used to acquire nonfederal inholdings within existing park units—help to complete valued parks and may facilitate maintenance efforts. The GAOA shifted LWCF land acquisition funding for NPS and other agencies from discretionary to mandatory spending. Under the GAOA, NPS budget submissions still would include account, program, and project allocations for the agency's LWCF funding and appropriations acts could specify alternate allocations.

### NPS Assistance to Nonfederal Sites and Programs

Some Members, along with the Trump and Obama Administrations, have questioned whether NPS assistance to nonfederal sites and programs should be reduced to focus funding on NPS's “core” mission of managing national parks. Two NPS accounts (NR&P and HPF), along with part of the LASA account, have funded such nonfederal assistance. These monies combined represented less than 10% of total NPS funding in FY2020. For FY2021, House-passed H.R. 7608 would increase funding for both the NR&P and HPF accounts. (Under the GAOA, assistance to states in the LASA account shifts to mandatory spending.) The Administration proposes reductions for these programs and the elimination of some types of assistance, including NPS grants to national heritage areas, which are nonfederally managed. The FY2021 budget justification would encourage heritage area managers to seek sustainable funding from local and private beneficiaries.

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