

Updated January 26, 2021

National Park Service: FY2021 Appropriations

The National Park Service (NPS) administers the National Park System, which includes 423 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. This amount 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.

P.L. 116-260, enacted on December 27, 2020, contained \$3.123 billion for NPS, 8% less than the FY2020 regular appropriation and 12% more than requested by the Administration. The law included increases for some NPS accounts compared with FY2020 appropriations in P.L. 116-94 (**Table 1**) but decreased or eliminated funding for two accounts, both covering activities that received mandatory appropriations in the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152), enacted in August 2020.

In earlier action, on July 14, 2020, the House Committee on Appropriations had 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. On November 10, 2020, the Senate Committee on Appropriations released a draft bill with \$3.122 billion for NPS for FY2021. Because regular FY2021 appropriations were not enacted by the start of the

fiscal year, several continuing resolutions provided funding at FY2020 levels before enactment of P.L. 116-260.

NPS also receives mandatory appropriations. NPS's budget justification estimated \$0.749 billion in mandatory appropriations for FY2021, a 1% increase over estimated NPS mandatory funding for FY2020. These mandatory appropriations come from entrance and recreation fees, concessioner fees, donations, and other sources. In August 2020, the GAOA 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.

NPS's Appropriations Accounts

NPS has six discretionary appropriations accounts. However, in FY2021, one account—Land Acquisition and State Assistance—did not receive discretionary appropriations (**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.

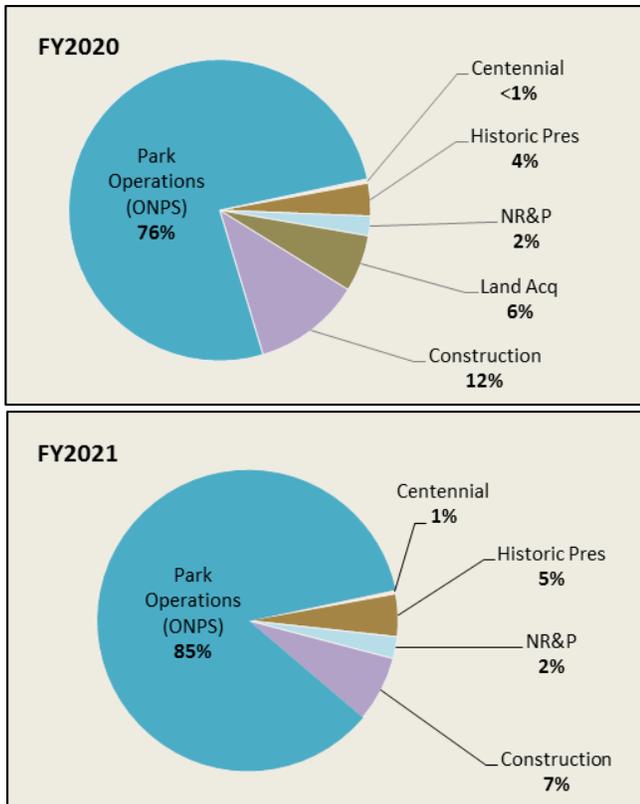
NPS's *Construction* account covers rehabilitation and replacement of existing facilities as well as new construction. NPS prioritizes DM in project planning. Projects are evaluated based on department-wide criteria related to the condition of assets and their importance to the park's purposes. The account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

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

Account	FY2020 Enacted (P.L. 116-94)	FY2021 Request	House-Passed H.R. 7608	Senate Comm. Draft	P.L. 116-260	% Change FY2020-FY2021
Operation of the Nat'l. Park System	2,577.0	2,516.7	2,776.6	2,648.6	2,688.3	+4%
Construction	389.3	192.6	223.9	249.0	223.9	-42%
Land Acquisition and State Assistance	206.1	8.6	-2.0 ^a	-2.0 ^a	-23.0 ^c	-111%
Historic Preservation Fund	118.7	40.7	136.4	138.0	144.3	+22%
Nat'l. Recreation and Preservation	71.2	33.9	74.3	74.0	74.2	+4%
Centennial Challenge	15.0	0	15.0	15.0	15.0	—
Total	3,377.3	2,792.6	3,224.3	3,122.3	3,122.7	-8%

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, the legislation provides no new funding and contains a rescission. In past years, this account has been supported by funding from the LWCF, which was made mandatory spending by the GAOA (see above).

Figure 1. NPS Appropriations Accounts, FY2020 and FY2021

Sources: Joint explanatory statements, P.L. 116-260 and P.L. 116-94.

Notes: ONPS = Operation of the National Park System. NR&P = National Recreation & Preservation. Figures do not show rescissions.

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 available some funding 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 receives offsetting collections from the sale of senior passes under the Federal Lands Recreational Enhancement Act (16 U.S.C. § 6801).

In past years, NPS's *Land Acquisition and State Assistance* (LASA) account 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 August 2020, the GAOA made all funding from the LWCF mandatory spending. The discretionary account received no funding for FY2021 and had a \$23.0 million rescission.

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 sources of funding for NPS DM. For FY2021, P.L. 116-260 provided \$267.8 million for these two budget sub-activities. In FY2020, P.L. 116-94 had provided \$418.9 million. Portions of other NPS discretionary budget activities also are used for DM. In addition, allocations from the Highway Trust Fund support NPS road repair and improvements. Other sources, such as recreation fees, also have been used.

The GAOA (P.L. 116-152), enacted in August 2020, provided a 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 receives 70% of the funding. NPS must submit lists of priority DM projects to Congress with annual budget justifications. Appropriators may specify alternate allocations for the funding. For FY2021, the maximum was deposited and was allocated by Congress in the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 116-260. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11636, *The Great American Outdoors Act, P.L. 116-152*; and CRS Report R44924, *National Park Service Deferred Maintenance: Frequently Asked Questions*.

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) fund such nonfederal assistance; they represented less than 10% of total NPS funding in FY2021. Funding for both accounts rose compared with FY2020. The Administration had proposed reductions and the elimination of some types of assistance, including NPS grants to national heritage areas, which are nonfederally managed. The FY2021 budget justification encouraged heritage area managers to seek sustainable funding from local and private beneficiaries.

Laura B. Comay, Specialist in Natural Resources Policy

IF11661

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.