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National Park Service: FY2023 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 (DOI), 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, and funds for NPS assistance to nonfederal entities.

FY2023 Appropriations

The Biden Administration requested \$3.607 billion in FY2023 discretionary appropriations for NPS. The request was 10% higher than NPS's FY2022 appropriation of \$3.265 billion enacted in P.L. 117-103. (The FY2022 total does not include \$229.5 million provided in P.L. 117-43 as supplemental funding in response to natural disasters.) The FY2023 request included increases for some accounts and level funding or reductions for others compared with FY2022 (**Table 1**). NPS also estimated \$1.143 billion in mandatory appropriations for FY2023, an increase of 5% over estimated NPS mandatory funding for FY2022. These mandatory appropriations include, among other funds, entrance and recreation fees, concessioner fees, donations, and land acquisition and state assistance funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF, 54 U.S.C. §§200301 et seq.). The LWCF funding had been provided in discretionary appropriations through FY2020 but was made mandatory in the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152). The 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.

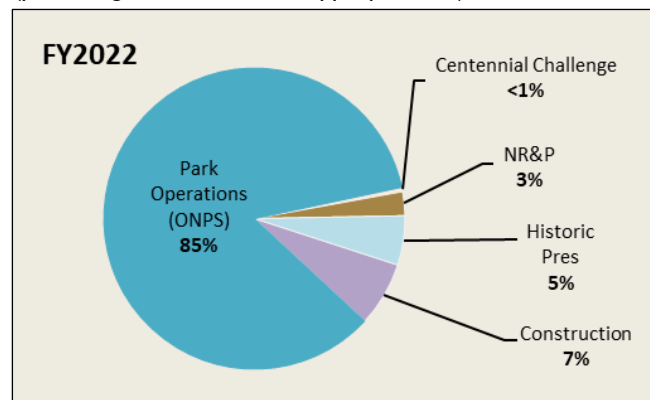
On July 1, 2022, the House Committee on Appropriations reported H.R. 8262 (H.Rept. 117-400), with \$3.643 billion for NPS for FY2023. On July 20, 2022, the House passed

H.R. 8294, a consolidated bill with the same amount for NPS. The amount is 1% higher than the Administration's request and 12% higher than the FY2022 appropriation. On July 28, 2022, S. 4686 was introduced in the Senate with \$3.578 billion in FY2023 discretionary appropriations for NPS. This is 1% less than the FY2023 request and 10% more than FY2022. The Senate Appropriations Committee also released a draft explanatory statement for the bill.

NPS's Appropriations Accounts

NPS has five 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 Discretionary Appropriations Accounts (percentages reflect FY2022 appropriations)



Source: Joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-103.

Notes: ONPS = Operation of the National Park System; NR&P = National Recreation and Preservation. FY2022 data do not reflect supplemental (emergency-designated) appropriations in P.L. 117-43 to address natural disasters.

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

Account	FY2022 Enacted (P.L. 117-103)	FY2023 Request	House-Passed H.R. 8294	% Change from FY2022	Senate S. 4686	% Change from FY2022
Operation of the Nat'l. Park System	2,767.0	3,086.6	3,089.9	+12%	3,044.2	+10%
Construction	226.0 ^a	279.3	279.3	+24%	241.2	+7%
Historic Preservation Fund	173.1	151.8	170.8	-1%	191.9	+11%
Nat'l. Recreation and Preservation	83.9	74.6	88.2	+5%	85.4	+2%
Centennial Challenge	15.0	15.0	15.0	—	15.0	—
Total	3,265.0	3,607.3	3,643.3	+12%	3,577.8	+10%

Sources: Data from House Committee on Appropriations. Totals may not sum precisely due to rounding.

a. Does not include supplemental funding provided in P.L. 117-43 to address natural disasters.

NPS's *Construction* account covers repair, replacement, and improvement of existing facilities as well as new construction. Projects are evaluated based on criteria related to the condition of assets, their importance to park purposes, and project benefits and risks. The account also covers other construction activities and planning.

NPS administers historic preservation programs through its *Historic Preservation Fund* (HPF) account. Under the National Historic Preservation Act (54 U.S.C. §§300101 et seq.), the HPF receives \$150 million annually from offshore energy revenues, but monies are available only as provided in appropriations acts. Most funding goes to state and tribal historic preservation offices as formula grants to preserve cultural and historical assets. Congress also has provided 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 (54 U.S.C. §§103501 et seq.), which matches donations for projects or programs that further the NPS mission or visitor experience. Deferred maintenance is prioritized. The fund also receives offsetting collections from senior pass sales under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (16 U.S.C. §§6801 et seq.).

Issues for Congress

NPS Staffing Capacity

In May 2022 testimony before the House Appropriations Committee, the NPS Director highlighted the decline in agency staffing over the past decade. NPS full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing levels declined by 9% between FY2013 and FY2022, while 25 new units were added to the system. (See CRS Report R42757, *National Park Service (NPS) Appropriations: Ten-Year Trends*.) The House and Senate bills both would meet NPS funding requests in the ONPS account to “build park capacity.” Across all accounts, NPS’s FY2023 request would support an 8% increase in FTE staff (from 18,930 to 20,495). Also, the Senate-passed Inflation Reduction Act (amending budget reconciliation legislation, H.R. 5376) would appropriate \$500.0 million, to remain available through FY2030, to hire NPS employees, and contains other NPS funding.

Deferred Maintenance

NPS’s backlog of deferred maintenance (DM), estimated at \$21.83 billion as of the first quarter of FY2022, 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, including a 59% increase between FY2020 and FY2021 that NPS attributes primarily to changes in its methods for estimating DM. Congress may continue to assess NPS’s progress in addressing DM, including the balance of discretionary and mandatory funding provided for this purpose.

Two discretionary appropriations subactivities (“Line-Item Construction and Maintenance” in the Construction account

and “Repair and Rehabilitation” in the ONPS account) have been primary sources of discretionary funding for NPS DM. For FY2022, P.L. 117-103 provided \$272.7 million for these two budget subactivities; for FY2023, House-passed H.R. 8294 would provide \$270.7 million and S. 4686 would provide \$262.7 million. Portions of other NPS discretionary budget activities also are used for DM.

The majority of mandatory spending for NPS DM derives from the GAOA (P.L. 116-152), enacted in 2020. To address DM of five agencies, the GAOA established the LRF, which receives deposits over five years based on amounts of federal energy revenues. For FY2021 and FY2022, funding met the annual cap of \$1.900 billion, with 70% (\$1.330 billion) allocated to NPS. NPS must submit, in annual budget justifications, lists of DM projects to be funded from the LRF. Appropriators may specify alternate allocations. For FY2023, the House would allocate the funds as proposed by NPS, while the Senate committee draft would add one project as congressionally directed spending. Separately, allocations from the Highway Trust Fund support NPS road repair and improvements, including DM. Other mandatory funding sources, such as recreation fees, also have been used for NPS DM. 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*.

Land Acquisition Funding

The GAOA shifted LWCF land acquisition funding from discretionary to mandatory spending. Allocation of the funding remains an issue in the appropriations process, as the GAOA requires that agency budget submissions include program and project allocations for the LWCF funds, and appropriations acts may specify alternate allocations. For FY2023, in addition to projects proposed by NPS, the House included one NPS land acquisition as community project funding. The Senate committee draft followed the NPS request. For more information, see CRS Report RL33531, *Land and Water Conservation Fund: Overview, Funding History, and Issues*; and CRS In Focus IF11636, *The Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152)*.

NPS Assistance to Nonfederal Sites and Programs

Some Members of Congress and other stakeholders have questioned whether NPS assistance to nonfederal sites and programs should be reduced, to better focus on the agency’s “core” mission of managing national parks. In particular, some have encouraged national heritage areas, which are nonfederally managed, to develop plans for self-sufficiency, but Congress has increased heritage area funding over the past decade. Two NPS discretionary accounts (NR&P and HPF) provide funding for nonfederal assistance. Combined, they represented less than 10% of total NPS funding in FY2022. For FY2023, the House and Senate bills would increase combined funding for the two accounts. See CRS Report RL33462, *Heritage Areas: Background, Proposals, and Current Issues*; and CRS Report R45800, *The Federal Role in Historic Preservation: An Overview*.

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