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National Park Service: FY2024 Appropriations

The National Park Service (NPS) administers the National Park System, which includes 425 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 overall staffing levels supported by NPS appropriations, funding to address NPS's backlog of deferred maintenance, allocations for NPS land acquisition, and funds for NPS assistance to nonfederal entities.

FY2024 Appropriations

The Biden Administration requested \$3.764 billion in FY2024 discretionary appropriations for NPS. The request was 8% higher than NPS's FY2023 appropriation of \$3.475 billion in P.L. 117-328, Division G. (This FY2023 total does not include \$1.500 billion provided in P.L. 117-328, Division N, as supplemental funding in response to natural disasters.) The FY2024 request included increases for some accounts and level funding or reductions for others compared with FY2023 (**Table 1**). NPS also estimated \$1.200 billion in mandatory appropriations for FY2024, a decrease of 2% from estimated NPS mandatory funding for FY2023. These mandatory appropriations come from entrance and recreation fees, concessioner fees, donations, and other sources, and also include land acquisition funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF, 54 U.S.C. §§200301 et seq.), designated as mandatory appropriations by the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152). NPS's 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.

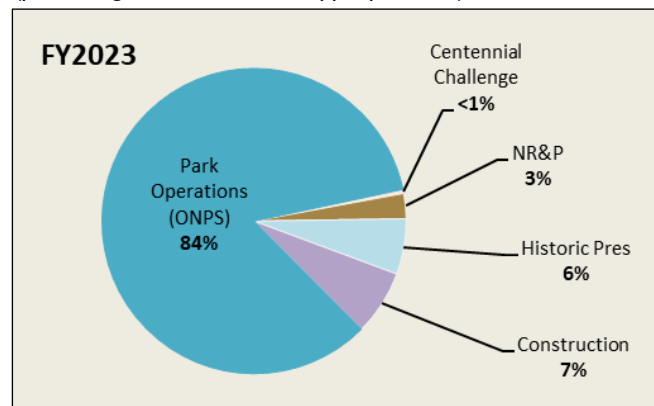
On July 24, 2023, the House Committee on Appropriations reported H.R. 4821 (H.Rept. 118-155), with \$3.039 billion

for NPS for FY2024. The amount is 19% less than the Administration's request and 13% less than the FY2023 appropriation. On July 27, 2023, the Senate Committee on Appropriations reported S. 2605 (S.Rept. 118-83), with \$3.457 billion for NPS for FY2024. This is 8% less than the Administration's request and 1% less than the FY2023 appropriation (**Table 1**).

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 FY2023 appropriations)



Source: Joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-328.

Notes: ONPS = Operation of the National Park System.

NR&P = National Recreation and Preservation. FY2023 data do not reflect supplemental (emergency-designated) appropriations in P.L. 117-328, Division N, to address natural disasters.

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

Account	FY2023 Enacted (P.L. 117-328)	FY2024 House-Reported Request	H.R. 4821	% Change from FY2023	Senate-Reported S. 2605	% Change from FY2023
Operation of the Nat'l. Park System	2,923.4	3,189.8	2,654.0	-9%	2,935.0	+<1%
Construction	239.8 ^a	286.6	114.6	-52%	232.9	-3%
Historic Preservation Fund	204.5	177.9	175.4	-14%	195.2	-5%
Nat'l. Recreation and Preservation	92.5	95.2	80.0	-14%	93.4	+1%
Centennial Challenge	15.0	15.0	15.0	—	15.0	—
Total	3,475.3^a	3,764.5	3,039.0	-13%	3,457.0^b	-1%

Source: H.Rept. 118-155 and S.Rept. 118-83. Totals may not sum precisely due to rounding.

a. Does not include supplemental funding provided in P.L. 117-328 to address natural disasters, which is designated as emergency spending outside of discretionary spending limits.

- b. Total reflects rescissions of \$14.5 million in unobligated balances from the Centennial Challenge and Construction accounts.

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 and visitor experience. 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 March 2023 testimony before the House Appropriations Committee, the NPS Director highlighted declines in NPS staffing since FY2011. NPS full-time equivalent (FTE) staff levels have declined by an estimated 12% since that time, per agency budget justifications. The estimated decline for the past decade (FY2014-FY2023) is smaller, at 3%. During that period, 26 new units were added to the system. (See CRS Report R42757, *National Park Service (NPS) Appropriations: Ten-Year Trends*.) Across all accounts, NPS's FY2024 request would support a 7% increase in FTE staff (from an estimated 19,390 to 20,759). Proposed funding reductions in H.R. 4821 and S. 2605 could impact staffing levels. Separately, P.L. 117-169, commonly known as the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, appropriated \$500.0 million, available through FY2030, to hire NPS employees.

Deferred Maintenance

NPS's backlog of deferred maintenance (DM), estimated by NPS at \$22.3 billion as of the end 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 FY2023, P.L. 117-328 provided \$262.7 million for these two budget subactivities. For FY2024, S. 2605 would provide the same amount, and H.R. 4821 does not provide detail at the level of these subactivities. 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-FY2023, funding met the annual cap of \$1.9 billion, with 70% (approximately \$1.3 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 FY2024, the House and Senate committees would allocate the funds as proposed by NPS. 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. For FY2023, NPS received \$105.8 million from the LWCF for its own land acquisition (in addition to funds for state grants). The GAOA requires that agency budget submissions include program and project allocations for the LWCF funds, and appropriations acts may specify alternate allocations. For FY2024, the House committee would allocate \$105.4 million and the Senate committee \$98.7 million for NPS land acquisition. 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 stakeholders contend that NPS assistance to nonfederal sites and programs should be reduced, to focus on NPS's "core" mission of managing national parks. In particular, some argue that national heritage areas, which are nonfederally managed, should be self-sufficient. Congress has increased NPS funding for heritage areas in the past decade and new areas have been added. NPS's NR&P and HPF budget accounts are used primarily for nonfederal assistance. Combined, they represented less than 10% of total NPS funding in FY2023. For FY2024, the House and Senate committees would decrease combined funding for these accounts, while keeping them at a similar percentage of the NPS total. See CRS Report RL33462, *National Heritage Areas: Background and Issues for Congress*; and CRS Report R45800, *The Federal Role in Historic Preservation: An Overview*.

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