

September 29, 2025

National Park Service: FY2026 Appropriations

The National Park Service (NPS) administers the National Park System, which includes 433 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 related to NPS appropriations include the overall staffing levels supported by the appropriations, funding to address NPS deferred maintenance (DM), allocations for land acquisition, and NPS assistance to nonfederal entities.

FY2026 Appropriations

The Trump Administration requested \$2.116 billion in discretionary appropriations for NPS for FY2026. The request was 37% lower than NPS's FY2025 discretionary appropriation of \$3.337 billion enacted in P.L. 119-4. The FY2026 request included decreases for four accounts compared with FY2025 and proposed elimination of one account (**Table 1**). DOI additionally estimated more than \$1 billion in mandatory appropriations for NPS for FY2026. NPS receives mandatory appropriations from entrance and recreation fees, concessioner fees, donations, and other sources. NPS's mandatory appropriations also include land acquisition and state assistance funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF; 54 U.S.C. §§200301 et seq.). The NPS mandatory total does not include NPS's share from the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF)—the DM fund established by the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152)—which is allocated from a DOI department-wide account. NPS received more than \$1 billion annually from the LRF for each of FY2021-FY2025. FY2025 is the final year of LRF funding.

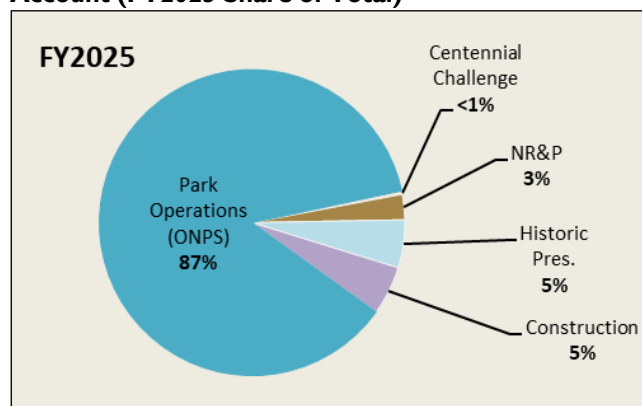
On July 24, 2025, the House Committee on Appropriations reported H.R. 4754 (H.Rept. 119-215), with \$3.124 billion for NPS for FY2026. This amount is 48% more than the Administration's request and 6% less than the FY2025 discretionary appropriation. Also on July 24, 2025, the Senate Committee on Appropriations reported S. 2431

(S.Rept. 119-46), with \$3.270 billion for NPS for FY2026. This is 55% more than the Administration's request and 2% less than FY2025 (**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's Discretionary Appropriations by Account (FY2025 Share of Total)



Source: House and Senate Appropriations Committee tables.

Notes: ONPS = Operation of the National Park System; NR&P = National Recreation and Preservation; Historic Pres. = Historic Preservation Fund. Percentages do not sum precisely to 100 due to rounding.

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.

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

Account	FY2025 Enacted (P.L. 119-4)	FY2026 House Committee- Request Reported H.R. 4754	% Change from FY2025	Senate Committee- Reported S. 2431	% Change from FY2025
Operation of the Nat'l Park System	2,894.4	1,994.0	-6%	2,869.4	-1%
Construction	172.3	99.5	-21%	140.8	-18%
Historic Preservation Fund	168.9	11.0	—	168.2	-<1%
Nat'l Recreation and Preservation	89.6	12.0	—	91.6	+2%
Centennial Challenge	12.0	—	—	—	-100%
Total	3,337.2	2,116.5	-6%	3,270.1	-2%

Sources: House and Senate Appropriations Committee detailed tables. Values may not sum to totals due to rounding.

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. Some funding goes to state and tribal historic preservation offices as formula grants to preserve cultural and historical assets. Congress also has provided 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 sales of federal recreation passes to seniors.

Issues for Congress

NPS Staffing Levels

In May 2024 testimony before the House Natural Resources Committee, the former NPS Director highlighted a nearly 15% decline in NPS full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing levels since FY2010. More recently, over the past decade (FY2016-FY2025), NPS's FTE levels were estimated to fall by 6%, based on budget data. According to the President's Budget Appendix, NPS's FY2026 request would support 13,598 FTE staff, a 26% reduction in FTE levels compared with FY2025 estimates. (FTEs supported by H.R. 4754 and S. 2431 are unknown.) Separately, P.L. 119-21, the FY2025 budget reconciliation act, rescinded unobligated balances from a \$500.0 million mandatory appropriation enacted in P.L. 117-169 to hire NPS employees. The amount of unobligated funding is not readily available.

Staffing capacity supported by appropriations does not necessarily measure the number of positions filled at any given time. For example, some observers have reported widespread vacancies in NPS staff following Administration initiatives in 2025 to reduce the size of the federal workforce to achieve efficiencies.

Deferred Maintenance (DM)

NPS's DM backlog, estimated by NPS at \$22.986 billion as of the end of FY2024, has been a focus in the appropriations process. Despite legislation and agency actions aimed at addressing the backlog, it has grown over the past decade, including a 59% increase between FY2020 and FY2021 that NPS attributed partly 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. Congress also may consider funding for preventive (e.g., cyclic and routine) maintenance that could help keep DM from accumulating.

Two discretionary appropriations activities ("Line-Item Construction and Maintenance" in the Construction account and "Facility Operations and Maintenance" in the ONPS account) have been primary sources of discretionary funds for NPS preventive and deferred maintenance. For FY2025, P.L. 119-4 provided \$994.8 million for these two budget activities combined. For FY2026, H.R. 4754 would provide \$800.4 million, and S. 2431 would provide \$969.7 million plus \$3.2 million in congressionally directed spending.

For FY2021-FY2025, mandatory spending for NPS DM derived primarily from the LRF. To address DM of five federal agencies, the LRF received deposits over five years of \$1.9 billion annually (the maximum authorized for each year, based on federal energy revenues). Of the total, \$1.3 billion annually (70%) was allocated to NPS. In the 119th Congress, S. 1547 would reauthorize LRF funding through FY2033, with specified changes. 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 Report R48136, *National Park Service Deferred Maintenance: Overview and Issues*; and CRS In Focus IF12888, *The Great American Outdoors Act* (GAOA): *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 FY2026, H.Rept. 119-215 would provide \$97.7 million for NPS's own land acquisition (not including state grants), and S.Rept. 119-46 would provide \$90.5 million. DOI requested \$10.2 million for NPS land acquisition for FY2026 and proposed to repurpose \$241.6 million from the LWCF to address NPS DM. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF12256, *Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)*: *Frequently Asked Questions*.

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, while Congress has increased heritage area funding over the past decade as new areas have been added. Two NPS discretionary accounts (NR&P and HPF) provide funding for nonfederal assistance. Combined, they represented less than 10% of total NPS funding in FY2025. For FY2026, H.R. 4754 and S. 2431 would fund these two accounts at or near FY2025 levels, while the NPS request would significantly decrease funding (**Table 1**). 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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