Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

IN FOCUS

Updated August 28, 2026

The Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA): Frequently Asked Questions

What Is the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA)?

The Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152) established in the U.S. Treasury a new fund—the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF)—with mandatory spending authority to address deferred maintenance (DM) needs of five federal agencies. These agencies are the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), all in the Department of the Interior (DOI), and the U.S. Forest Service (FS), in the Department of Agriculture.

The GAOA also made changes to an existing fund—the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The GAOA made $900.0 million in annual deposits to the LWCF available as mandatory spending. It also made other changes to the LWCF Act (54 U.S.C. §§200301 et seq.).

Did the GAOA Expire?

Under law, the LRF (the fund that was established in the GAOA) received annual funding from FY2021 through FY2025. Provisions of the GAOA pertaining to the LWCF do not expire.

What Funding Did the GAOA Provide the LRF?

The GAOA provided for the LRF to receive up to $1.9 billion annually over five years (FY2021-FY2025). The fund received annual deposits equivalent to 50% of all federal energy development revenues (from oil, gas, coal, or renewable energy) credited in the preceding fiscal year as miscellaneous receipts to the Treasury, up to an annual $1.9 billion cap. For each of FY2021-FY2025, the maximum amount was deposited in the fund. Thus the five-year total (in nominal dollars) to address DM across the five agencies (BIE, BLM, NPS, FWS, and FS) was $9.5 billion.

What Action Related to the LRF Has Occurred in the 119th Congress?

H.R. 9250, as ordered reported by the House Committee on Natural Resources, and S. 1547, as reported by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, would provide deposits to the LRF for FY2027-FY2031 and make other changes. For further discussion, see CRS Insight IN12729, *Legacy Restoration Fund for Deferred Maintenance: 119th Congress Reauthorization Bills*. Among other actions, the House Committee on Natural Resources held hearings related to the LRF in September 2025 and June 2026.

How Is DM Defined?

In a 2025 Handbook, the Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board defines *deferred maintenance and repairs* (DM&R) as "maintenance and repairs that were not performed when they should have been or were scheduled to be and which are put off or delayed for a future period." Agencies and Members of Congress often refer to DM&R as *deferred maintenance* (DM, as used herein) or as the *maintenance backlog*. Agencies generally consider DM separately from other types of maintenance (e.g., day-to-day, cyclic, or emergency maintenance).

How Were LRF Funds Allocated Among Agencies?

Under the GAOA, of the amounts deposited in the fund each year, NPS received a 70% share, FS 15%, FWS 5%, BLM 5%, and BIE 5% (for BIE schools). The GAOA directed the agencies to use the funds for "priority deferred maintenance projects" and stated that, over the term of the LRF, at least 65% of each agency's funds must be allocated for "non-transportation projects" (54 U.S.C. §200402(e)).

To allocate the funds, the GAOA generally directed the President to submit lists of priority DM projects to Congress with annual budget justifications. Appropriations acts could provide an "alternate allocation" that is "consistent with" the percentages defined for each agency (54 U.S.C. §200402(i)). For FY2021-FY2024, annual appropriations laws for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies and the accompanying explanatory statements allocated the funding to specific DM projects, generally matching those proposed by the Administration, with some exceptions. For FY2025, P.L. 119-4, Division A, the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, 2025, did not allocate LRF funding. The GAOA specified that if Congress did not make alternate allocations by the date of enactment of the full-year Interior appropriations law, the funds "shall be allocated by the President" (54 U.S.C. §200402(i)). The Trump Administration allocated FY2025 LRF funding, according to some of the agencies (BLM, FS).

Did the LRF Affect Energy Revenue Payments to States or Other Federal Funds?

The GAOA explicitly provided that LRF deposits would not affect the disposition of energy revenues due to states, trust funds, or special funds (e.g., the LWCF and the Historic Preservation Fund [HPF], 54 U.S.C. §303102). It separately provided that such deposits would not affect revenues otherwise appropriated under federal law, including from the LWCF and HPF and under the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA; 43 U.S.C. §1331 note) and the Mineral Leasing Act (30 U.S.C. §191).

What Is the Current DM for Each Agency?

Total DM for the five agencies (FS and the four DOI agencies) was estimated at $46.2 billion for FY2025. The portion varied widely among the agencies—NPS: $24.2

billion (52%), FS: $10.8 billion (23%), BLM: $6.6 billion (14%), FWS: $3.5 billion (8%), and BIE: $1.0 billion (2%). Transportation assets are the largest category of the total.

What Impact Has the LRF Had on Agency DM?

DM for BLM, FS, FWS, and NPS—the four main federal land management agencies—increased by approximately $19.4 billion (75%) from FY2020 to FY2025, from about $25.8 billion to $45.2 billion in current dollars. The impact of the LRF on these amounts and on DM generally is unclear. One reason is that over time, agencies have changed methods for assessing the condition of assets and estimating DM (e.g., for transportation assets). Also, the accuracy of some agency DM data has been questioned.

LRF projects also can take multiple years to complete, and agency DM estimates may not reflect a DM reduction until a project is completed. Also, new maintenance needs continue to be added even as existing needs are addressed. Fluctuations in DM also may occur due to economic conditions that are not related to agency efforts or within the control of facility managers. These include inflation and market trends related to materials, fuel and labor, and supply chains; changes in agency asset portfolios; and changes in numbers of visitors to federal lands.

Further, total available funding (from all sources) to address agency DM is not readily available, nor is the portion of the total that comes from the LRF. Sources of agency DM funding include annual discretionary appropriations laws, the Highway Trust Fund (for roads), and others.

What Are Some Considerations for Congress in Assessing Whether to Extend the LRF?

In considering proposals to reauthorize deposits to the LRF (e.g., H.R. 9250, S. 1547), Congress could weigh trade-offs in using federal revenues for the LRF versus other purposes, as well as options for alternative funding to address DM needs. Other considerations could include the extent to which the LRF has been effective in addressing DM, and whether agency data are sufficient and accurate to inform congressional assessments of effectiveness, among other issues. For further discussion, see CRS Insight IN12729, *Legacy Restoration Fund for Deferred Maintenance: 119th Congress Reauthorization Bills*.

How Did the GAOA Affect the LWCF?

Under the LWCF Act, $900.0 million is deposited annually into the LWCF. Nearly all of the revenue derives from offshore oil and gas leasing. The GAOA amended the LWCF Act and made the annual deposits mandatory spending. Prior to the GAOA, the annual discretionary appropriations generally were less than $900.0 million, resulting in an unappropriated balance of more than $22 billion in the LWCF.

The GAOA specified that the annual $900.0 million under the LWCF Act is available "to carry out the purposes of the Fund," including accounts and programs funded from the LWCF under P.L. 116-94 (54 U.S.C. §200303(a)). Division D of that law contained LWCF funding for federal land acquisition and outdoor recreation grants to states, as well as other purposes, including the Forest Legacy Program (administered by FS), the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (administered by FWS), the American Battlefield Protection Program (administered by NPS), and the DOI Appraisal and Valuation Services Office. Further, the GAOA specified that the $900.0 million in mandatory spending under the LWCF Act is in addition to mandatory spending of up to $125.0 million annually under GOMESA.

How Are LWCF Funds Allocated?

To allocate the LWCF funds, the GAOA generally requires the President to submit annually to Congress "detailed account, program, and project allocations" for the full amount available (54 U.S.C. §200303(c)). The GAOA provides for alternate allocations by Congress under a procedure similar to that described above for the LRF.

For each of FY2021-FY2024, the Administration proposed an allocation of $900.0 million in LWCF mandatory spending among agencies, accounts, programs, and projects. The appropriations laws for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies and the accompanying explanatory statements contained allocations that in some cases differed from the Administration's proposals. For FY2025, the Administration proposed an allocation of $900.0 million. P.L. 119-4, Division A, did not contain an FY2025 allocation. The GAOA specified that if Congress did not make alternate allocations by the date of enactment of the full-year Interior appropriations law, the funds "shall be allocated by the President" (54 U.S.C. §200303(c)). The Trump Administration allocated FY2025 LWCF funding, according to some agencies. For FY2026, the Trump Administration proposed that $387.0 million (43%) of the $900.0 million be used for DM. The FY2026 appropriations law (P.L. 119-74, Division C) did not provide LWCF funding for DM and contained more funding for land acquisition than sought by the President, among other differences. For FY2027, the President proposed an allocation of the $900.0 million in LWCF mandatory spending for various LWCF programs and purposes, as does H.R. 9171, as reported by the House Appropriations Committee.

What Impact Has the GAOA Had on Federal Land Acquisition and State Assistance?

LWCF programs generally have received more annual funding since the GAOA took effect. Prior to the GAOA—from FY1965 to FY2020—the LWCF programs received $900.0 million (or more) in each of two years, and less than half that amount for most years. The GAOA provided for $900.0 million for each year beginning in FY2021.

For Further Reading

CRS Report R43997, *Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY2013-FY2022 Estimates and Issues*; CRS Report R48136, *National Park Service Deferred Maintenance: Overview and Issues*; and CRS In Focus IF12256, *Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF): Frequently Asked Questions*.

Carol Hardy Vincent, Specialist in Natural Resources Policy
Laura B. Comay, Specialist in Natural Resources Policy

Disclaimer