



July 23, 2024

National Park Service: FY2025 Appropriations

The National Park Service (NPS) administers the National Park System, which includes 429 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, allocations for land acquisition, and NPS assistance to nonfederal entities.

FY2025 Appropriations

The Biden Administration requested \$3.576 billion in discretionary appropriations for NPS for FY2025. The request is 8% higher than NPS’s FY2024 discretionary appropriation of \$3.325 billion enacted in P.L. 118-42. The FY2025 request includes increases for three accounts and reductions for two accounts compared with FY2024 (Table 1). NPS also estimated \$1.240 billion in mandatory appropriations for NPS for FY2025, a decrease of 1% from estimated NPS mandatory funding for FY2024. 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.

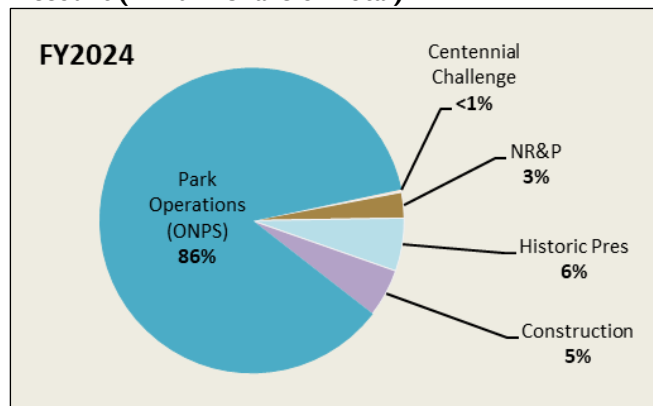
On July 11, 2024, the House Committee on Appropriations reported H.R. 8998 (H.Rept. 118-581), with \$3.115 billion for NPS for FY2025. This amount is 13% less than the Administration’s request and 6% less than the FY2024 appropriation. H.R. 8998 would decrease funding for four

accounts and provide level funding for one account compared with FY2024 (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 (FY2024 Share of Total)



Source: Joint explanatory statement for P.L. 118-42.

Notes: ONPS = Operation of the National Park System. NR&P = National Recreation and Preservation. Totals may not sum precisely 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	FY2024 Enacted (P.L. 118-42)	FY2025 Request	% Change from FY2024	House Committee- Reported H.R. 8998	% Change from FY2024
Operation of the Nat'l. Park System	2,888.4	3,090.4	+7%	2,709.2	-6%
Construction	172.3	237.2	+38%	135.6	-21%
Historic Preservation Fund	188.7	151.4	-20%	168.9	-10%
Nat'l. Recreation and Preservation	91.2	84.4	-7%	89.6	-2%
Centennial Challenge	12.0	13.0	+8%	12.0	—
Total	3,325.1^a	3,576.4	+8%	3,115.3	-6%

Sources: H.Rept. 118-581. Totals may not sum precisely due to rounding.

- a. Total reflects rescissions of \$27.5 million in unobligated balances from the Construction account.

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 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 May 2024 testimony before the House Natural Resources Committee, the NPS Director highlighted a nearly 15% decline in NPS full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing levels since FY2010. More recently, over the past decade (FY2015-FY2024), NPS's FTE staffing levels fell by 3%, according to agency data. During that decade, 23 new units were added to the system. NPS's FY2025 request would support 19,912 FTE staff, a 5% increase over the estimated FY2024 level of 18,899 FTE. (FTE levels supported by H.R. 8998 are unknown.) Also, 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 \$23.263 billion as of the end of FY2023, 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 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.

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 FY2024, P.L. 118-42 provided \$191.6 million for these two subactivities, a 27% drop from FY2023. For FY2025, H.R. 8998 would provide \$57.8 million for Line-Item

Construction and Maintenance—28% less than FY2024—and did not specify amounts for Repair and Rehabilitation.

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-FY2024, 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, appropriators allocated the project funding as proposed by NPS, and for FY2025, the House Appropriations Committee's H.Rept. 118-581 also would do so. 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 FY2024, NPS received \$429.9 million in mandatory appropriations from the LWCF for both NPS's own acquisitions and grants to states. For FY2025, the House committee would allocate \$400.9 million, according to H.Rept. 118-581. 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. In FY2024, appropriators included funding for most but not all of the federal land acquisition projects proposed in NPS's budget justification. For FY2025, the House committee would fund seven of NPS's nine proposed projects. 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, 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 FY2024. For FY2025, both the NPS request and H.R. 8998 would decrease funding for the two accounts (**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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