



National Park Service Budget: Reduced Service, Fewer Rangers



Road closed due to damage, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, 2011 © John Garder/NPCA

Reduced Funding Levels Threaten Park Resources, Visitors and Park-Dependent Businesses

Funding for national park operations was cut six percent in FY 13, on top of a prior six percent cut to the park service budget over the last two years. Consequently, many parks and park facilities are opening later, closing earlier or more frequently, and providing a reduced level of service to the public and less protection to park resources. The magnitude of these compounding cuts has significant implications for our national parks, for park visitors and the park gateway businesses that annually depend on \$30 billion in economic activity and more than a quarter million jobs that our national parks support.

In FY14, we ask Congress to restore park funding and support the Senate Interior appropriations level of \$2.278 billion for park operations.

The entire budget for the National Park Service is a miniscule 1/15th of one percent of the federal budget. Until Congress and the president reach a budget compromise on revenues and entitlements that grows the economy, national parks—and the visitors, businesses and communities that benefit from them—will continue to be victims of a failed budget process.

Why an annualized cut of as much as 6% to park budgets is damaging

Declining budgets prior to this year: A cut of this magnitude came on top of insufficient funding. Parks have already been making do with less, with a park service budget last year that was already 15% below a decade ago in today's dollars and an annual operations shortfall that is more than a half billion dollars. Superintendents were unable to fill vacant positions so that needed work was not getting done to prevent deterioration of facilities, protect resources, and serve national parks' nearly 300 million annual visitors.

For more
information, visit
npca.org/billions

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High overhead: National parks are so popular in part because of the many rangers and other staff who care for resources and serve visitors. On top of substantial personnel costs, parks have considerable infrastructure requiring resources. “Fixed costs,” or overhead including cost-of-living adjustments for staff, rent, fuel, and utilities costs occupy as much as 85 to 90% of superintendents’ budgets, leaving little discretion. Even a small cut is difficult to absorb as a result.

The cut is larger than 6%: The FY13 continuing resolution cut the park operations budget deeper than the annualized 5% cut in the sequester. Absorbing as much as a 6% cut to an annual budget mid-year means an effective cut of twice that amount. The sequester also provides little discretion. Superintendents are given a Hobson’s choice between closed facilities, fewer staff, or other impacts, none of which are good options for either resource protection or visitor services.



Last summer’s budget struggles at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in Alaska meant cutbacks that included ranger station closures. Now with the added impact of sequestration, signs like this are expected to become more common across the system.

Impacts from these cuts:

ACADIA
Major Staffing Shortages
 Acadia has lost **12 seasonal positions**, reduced seasons for **31 other staff members**, and will not be filling **18** originally permanent but now **vacant positions**. The cuts involve everyone from maintenance crew to biologists, affecting park operations deeply.

GLACIER
Closed Campgrounds
 Visitor centers opened **2 weeks late**, and campgrounds **3 weeks late**, affecting visitor numbers and, as a result, park revenue.

FREDERICKSBURG & SPOTSYLVANIA
Fewer Interpretive Rangers
 As a result of staffing shortages this year, **1,000 fewer kids** will participate in educational programs, **4,000 fewer visitors** will experience guided walking tours, and **20,000 fewer visitors** will have access to key historic sites like Chatham Manor on most days of the week.

The impact of the FY13 cuts has been felt differently in every park in the system with impacts to visitor services, resource protection, and maintenance. This year is witnessing at least 900 fewer permanent staff and 1,000 fewer seasonal staff. This means visitor centers with fewer rangers or that have to close for lack of staff; inadequate monitoring of and protections for wolves, bears, turtles and other wildlife; less restroom maintenance and trash pickup; fewer patrols in the back-country to ensure visitor safety and prevent looting of plant life and archaeological resources; and other impacts that compromise resource protection and the safety and enjoyment of the visiting public. Park-specific examples are shift and parks should be contacted for the latest update on sequester impacts.

ISLE ROYALE

Special Events Canceled

A **23% reduction** in staff forced the park to cancel spring programs, local library programs, shows, and special events. Estimates show that more than **10,000 students** and **20,000 visitors** were affected.



GOLDEN GATE

Dirty Bathrooms and Languishing Trails

With only **3 maintenance staff members remaining** of last year's **11**, trails and roads suffer from a lack of upkeep. Staff are collecting trash and cleaning restrooms less frequently, which hurts not only the visitor experience, but visitation itself.



EVERGLADES

Endangered species at risk

17 vacant positions are not being filled this year, making it difficult to monitor endangered species like the Florida panther and manage invasive species like the Burmese python, which is threatening the Everglades' fragile ecosystem.



Non-operations cuts: Many of the impacts to national park budgets discussed above result from cuts to the operations account. Unfortunately, other accounts are suffering as well.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF): Paid for through a small portion of offshore drilling receipts, LWCF is a critical tool for protecting our national parks. Funding supports a landowner-driven process by allowing the park service to purchase properties from willing

sellers inside national parks, preventing incompatible development. Park Service LWCF has declined from \$126 million in FY10 to less than \$100 million in FY13, a decline of more than 20%.

Park Construction: Each million dollars invested in construction creates 14 to 16 jobs, many subcontracted to local communities. And three-fourths of these dollars go directly towards reducing the nearly \$12 billion deferred maintenance backlog. The account has now declined by nearly 70% in today's dollars over the last decade.

...Our businesses and livelihood, and that of our employees and their families, depend on keeping the national parks open and in good condition. Watching the political jockeying in Washington from afar, frankly we are worried about the impact to our businesses. Simply put, even more cuts to national park budgets would be penny wise and pound foolish. Our families and our communities and the nation's economy will suffer without much real fiscal benefit to the federal budget...

--Excerpt from a letter sent by nearly 300 local businesses outside national park units to Congress and the president, February 28th 2013, viewable at www.npca.org/billions. Every dollar invested in the National Park Service fosters \$10 in economic activity.

Adopted Policy: NACo calls on Congress to preserve funding for America's national parks. NACo supports maintaining funding for the National Park Service (NPS), recognizing that national parks provide recreation, economic and tourism opportunities for counties, and gateway communities. NACo also urges Congress to increase funding for the NPS to address the dire backlog of maintenance projects, now totaling \$11 billion, which includes critically needed road access and bridge maintenance projects...

--Excerpt from a resolution adopted July 2013 by the National Association of Counties

...NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that The United States Conference of Mayors supports efforts to connect new and diverse constituents to national parks and protect the land and resources that surround national parks, and affirms its support for preserving the economic stability of our communities by protecting National Park budgets from further cuts.

--Excerpt of a June 2013 adopted resolution by the United States Conference of Mayors

Stop our national parks from falling through the cracks due to a failed budget process. Address our real economic and deficit challenges, rather than cut investments in our communities, economies, and future. In FY14, restore park funding and support the Senate appropriations level of \$2.278 billion for park operations.