

Budget Proposal Threatens National Parks

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Cuts to Interior Department, EPA puts parks, park resources in jeopardy.

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WASHINGTON – The Trump Administration’s FY2018 budget proposes serious cuts to the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that, if enacted, would jeopardize the protection, maintenance and operation of national parks across the country.

The budget blueprint proposes a 12% cut to Interior and a 31% cut to EPA. While the Interior proposal includes an increase in funding for park maintenance, it cuts Interior construction programs. It also includes deep cuts to land acquisition and historic preservation programs that are essential to national parks.

National parks rely on the EPA to implement and enforce laws like the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act so visitors can breathe healthy air, swim in clean water and enjoy scenic vistas unmarred by haze pollution. However, the massive cut to the agency’s budget would jeopardize those efforts. The proposed budget cuts to EPA will make it impossible to protect and restore our national parks from air and water pollution and climate change by eliminating critical programs like the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the Chesapeake Bay Program.

The budget proposal comes as the Park Service faces many challenges, exacerbated in part by years of underfunding. They include a \$12 billion deferred maintenance backlog, reduced staffing that has made it harder for parks to handle record-breaking crowds and reductions in visitor services and interpretive programs essential to the park visitor experience.

Below is a statement by John Garder, Director of Budget and Appropriations for National Parks Conservation Association:

“The Administration’s proposed budget is a non-starter for our national parks, our environment, and our cultural heritage, and should be dead on arrival in Congress. Agencies like the National Park Service and EPA cannot take care of our treasured landscapes and historical landmarks with further cuts to what are already shoestring budgets.

“Many details are lacking, and while it does include increased funding to tackle parks’ \$12 billion deferred maintenance backlog, the deep cuts to the Department of the Interior and key EPA clean water and enforcement programs demonstrate how irresponsible this budget is. The cuts to land acquisition, water restoration and historic preservation programs are nothing short of alarming. Cutting this funding fails to recognize how essential these programs are to protecting national parks, our natural resources and our cultural heritage.

“Our parks face many challenges that require more funding, not less. This budget proposal, if enacted, would threaten the air, water, wildlife habitat, historic protections and interpretative services critical to national park sites. We all want our children and our grandchildren to be able to experience national parks the way they deserve to. It is up to Congress to stand up for them and reject any additional cuts that would jeopardize America’s treasures.”

Proposed budget cuts that would threaten parks include:

- Cuts to land acquisition program that helps protect parks from development within their borders. The Land and Water Conservation Fund is critical to protecting areas within national parks from commercial and residential development and enjoys broad bipartisan support. Cutting this funding fails to recognize the program’s success as one of America’s most effective conservation tools protecting national parks and other public lands important to Americans.

- Elimination of funding for the National Heritage Area program, a \$19 million program which supports historic and cultural resource preservation at sites all across the United States through innovative public-private partnerships. They include Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, which helped fund a shuttle system that has increased heritage tourism revenue throughout the Niagara region and at local historical assets like Old Fort Niagara, and Augusta Canal National Heritage Area, which finances preservation of the canal with revenue generated from a restored hydropower power plant.
- Elimination of funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, an important federal funding source that has provided \$300 million annually for communities and park restoration projects in the region, is used to restore habitat for birds and fish, control invasive species, and reduce runoff from cities and farms to improve water quality for the more than 30 million Americans that depend on the lakes for their drinking water.
- Elimination of the Chesapeake Bay Program. With more than 50 national parks in the watershed, eliminating the Chesapeake Bay Program threatens the overall health of the Chesapeake by stopping the progress made to restore native oysters, which help filter and remove pollution. These cuts would also stop the implementation of the bipartisan Chesapeake Bay Clean Water Blueprint - a historic and comprehensive pollution reduction plan for restoring clean water in the region's streams, creeks and rivers.
- Elimination of the South Florida geographic program, which helps ensure clean water flows through Everglades National Park and Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge by monitoring and enforcing the pollution limit and working with the State of Florida on the Stormwater Treatment Areas, a successful state-federal partnership that has resulted in improved water quality for the Everglades.
- Elimination of opportunities for local input and environmental review of energy development near national parks and other sensitive areas. Administrative reforms such as the elimination of Planning 2.0 are already threatening the air, water, wildlife and visitor experience at iconic parks such as Zion, Mesa Verde, and Carlsbad Caverns, and further cuts to programs that facilitate a balance between energy development and park protection will only exacerbate these problems.

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About National Parks Conservation Association

Since 1919, the nonpartisan National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice in safeguarding our national parks. NPCA and its more than one million members and supporters work together to protect and preserve our nation's natural, historic, and cultural heritage for future generations. For more information, visit www.npca.org.