

Dear Subscriber:

The Bush administration requested another big increase in Park Service operations spending in its fiscal year 2009 budget today, eight percent over fiscal 2008. At the same time the budget proposed major, major spending reductions for the Forest Service and conservation programs. Congressional Democrats may hope to rearrange spending in appropriations bills but there is only so much they can do within total spending constraints formed by the President's veto threats. The highlights of the fiscal 2009 request:

- * Administration asks \$161 million boost for NPS ops,
- * Administration asks big cuts in conservation spending,
- * Administration asks big cuts in non-NPS agency spending.

NOTE: This is a supplement to your regular edition of Federal Parks & Recreation. It is NOT your regular issue. The next issue will be published February 9.

The Editors

BUSH BUDGET REQUEST WOULD CONTINUE NPS OPERATIONS HIKES

The Bush administration submitted a fiscal year 2009 budget request to Congress February 4 that honors Secretary of Interior Dirk Kempthorne's promise to spend \$300 million per year to ready the Park Service for its Centennial in 2016.

The budget proposes a big \$161 million increase in Park Service operations spending for fiscal 2009 over a fiscal 2008 appropriation. The increase swells to \$261 million when an extra \$100 million for a Centennial Challenge matching fund is counted. Compared to two years ago in fiscal 2007 that's a \$468 million increase, largely for a \$3 billion, ten-year Centennial Initiative.

The Centennial Initiative is the doing of Secretary Kempthorne, most everyone agrees. At a budget briefing today, *FPR* asked Kempthorne if he had personally gone to bat for NPS before the Office of Management and Budget. Kempthorne smiled and said, "Yes. Yes. We can't tell you all the details, though."

While the administration budget would help NPS operations, it would hammer most other park and rec programs. It would slash spending for land management agencies. It would slash spending for conservation programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund. And it would slash spending for Congress's favorite program - construction. (See articles below.)

House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Nick Joe Rahall (D-W.Va.) was offended by the administration budget. "This budget axes forest programs, undercuts our wildlife refuges, puts programs to save endangered species under the knife, neglects the needs of our National Parks, and puts a stopper in important water programs," he said.

The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) praised the Administration for the proposed \$161 million NPS operations increase, but criticized administration reductions for other service programs. "The \$161-million operating increase is an important step toward restoring our national parks, but cutting other critical Park Service funding will impede these efforts to fully restore the park system by its 2016 centennial," said NPCA President Tom Kiernan.

Reductions to construction, recreation and preservation, and land acquisition line items, among others, offset the operations increase to such a degree that, NPCA said, the total fiscal 2009 budget for NPS is only \$14 million above the fiscal 2008 appropriation.

Kempthorne focused on the NPS operations budget at the briefing, "In 2008 we received an increase of \$122 million, or six percent of park operations," he said. "Our 2009 request tops that with an increase of \$161 million, or eight percent. Together these increases total more than \$283 million, or 14 percent. Never in our history have park operations seen such increases for two successive years. Americans, mark your calendars. By 2016 we will celebrate a park system truly unparalleled anywhere in the world."

Within the NPS operations boost, the budget proposes a \$55 million increase in NPS operations maintenance, from \$656.7 million in fiscal 2008 to \$712.2 million in fiscal 2009. However, for NPS construction the administration proposed a \$46 million decrease, down from \$218.5 million in fiscal 2008 to \$172.5 million in fiscal 2009.

For the Everglades ecosystem recovery the Interior Department budget for all agencies would put up \$3.5 million less than in fiscal 2008, \$69.4 million in fiscal 2009 compared to \$73 million. But the Corps of Engineers would increase Everglades spending by \$54 million in fiscal 2009 to \$185 million.

Here's a breakdown of a few NPS programs in the fiscal 2009 budget request:

* NPS OPERATIONS: \$2.132 billion, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$1.971 billion.

* NPS OPERATIONS MAINTENANCE: \$712.2 million, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$680.8 million.

* NPS CONSTRUCTION: \$172.5 million, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$218.4 million, and

* NPS REC & PRES: \$45.4 million, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$67.4 million.

BUSH BUDGET REQUEST WOULD REDUCE SPENDING FOR CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

The Bush administration February 4 was even more begrudging to conservation initiatives vis-à-vis Park Service operations in its fiscal year 2009 budget than it was in fiscal 2008.

In its annual budget request the administration once again recommended no money for grants for the state side of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), matching fiscal 2007 and 2008 requests of no money. (Congress ignored the administration's request in fiscal 2008 and approved \$24.6 million for the program.)

For the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery (UPAR) program the administration asked for no money for the third consecutive years. More ominously for both the state LWCF and UPAR programs the administration recommended no administrative money in fiscal 2009 to keep the programs alive.

State wildlife conservation grants did better. The administration recommended \$74 million, the same as Congress appropriated in fiscal 2008.

In other areas the administration budget asks for a \$111.8 million decrease from fiscal 2008 levels for another conservation program, federal land acquisition.

Between the traditional state and federal sides of LWCF the administration would decrease the total appropriation from \$154.4 million in fiscal 2008 to \$42.5 million in fiscal 2009.

For those with long memories, the new LWCF request falls some \$857.5 million short of the \$900 million per year President Bush promised for LWCF when he was first elected in 2000.

Here's a recap of the Bush administration's fiscal year 2008 budget request for a few outdoor programs, compared to a fiscal 2007 request:

* STATE SIDE OF LWCF: no grant money, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$24.6 million.

* STATE AND TRIBAL WILDLIFE GRANTS: \$73.8 million, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$73.8 million for this program administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

* UPAR: no money requested, compared to the same appropriation in fiscal 2008.

* FED SIDE OF LWCF: \$42.5 million, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$129.7 million. For individual agencies: NPS would receive \$21.8 million, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$44.4 million; the Fish and Wildlife Service would receive \$10.2 million, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$34.6 million; the Bureau of Land Management would receive \$4.5 million, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$8.9 million; and the Forest Service would receive \$6 million, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$41.8 million.

* HISTORIC PRESERVATION FUND grants: \$41.7 million, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$45.8 million.

* SAVE AMERICA'S TREASURES (money comes from the Historic Preservation line item): \$15 million, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$24.6 million.

* NEW PRESERVE AMERICA GRANTS (money comes from the Historic Preservation line item): \$10 million, compared to 2008 appropriation of \$7.4 million.

* NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA GRANTS (money comes from a Recreation and Preservation line item): \$7 million, compared to a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$15.3 million.

BUSH BUDGET REQUEST WOULD SLASH FED AGENCY SPENDING; FS HIT HARD

The Bush administration's fiscal 2009 budget was far less generous to other federal land management agencies than it was to the Park Service. Most agencies and programs would barely receive as much money as they received in fiscal 2008.

Once again, the Forest Service would take the brunt of the reductions, even for wildland fire management.

For fiscal 2009 the administration recommended \$1.345 billion for management of the National Forest System, or \$161 million less than a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$1.506 billion. For Forest Service fire fighting the administration recommended an appropriation of \$1.880 billion, or \$378 million less than a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$2.258 billion. (The numbers are a little misleading because the Forest Service and Interior Department received an extra \$500 million in fiscal 2008 for emergency paybacks.)

Put another way, the administration is requesting \$545 million more for national forest fire programs in fiscal 2009 than for the operation of the National Forest System.

While Congress is of course free to set its own priorities, President Bush's determination to veto any appropriations bill that exceeds his bottom line gives Congress little flexibility if it wants to help the Forest Service. "We will write our own budget but it is a problem," one appropriations committee staff member said of the President's budget request.

"If the President is intransigent on the total, we're running out of maneuvering room," said the staff member. "This is a difficult budget. I don't want to gloss over it, but we hope there will be some flexibility."

Still, Congress won't likely go along with the administration's proposals for the Forest Service. In fiscal 2008 for instance the Bush administration recommended substantial fire appropriations paired with a seven percent reduction in National Forest System appropriations. It asked Congress to decrease forest system spending by \$121 million, to \$1.344 billion in fiscal 2008. But Congressional appropriators rebelled and provided a significant \$148 million more for the National Forest System than the administration requested.

Even the Corps of Engineers with its huge recovery projects in Louisiana and the Everglades was not immune from the budget axe. The administration recommended a \$656 million decrease for combined construction and operations, from a \$4.533 billion appropriation in fiscal 2008 to a \$3.877 billion request in fiscal 2009.

Here are some of the agency requests the administration identified February 4:

- * NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM: \$1.345 billion, a big \$161 million decrease from a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$1.506 billion.

- * NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE OPERATIONS: \$434.1 million, or the same as a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$434.1 million.

- * BLM RECREATION: \$59.1 million, a decrease of \$8.8 million from a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$67.9 million.

- * NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION SYSTEM: \$21.8 million, an increase of \$3 million over a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$18.8 million.

- * CORPS OF ENGINEERS OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE: \$2.475 billion, or \$31 million more than a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$2.244 billion.

- * CORPS OF ENGINEERS CONSTRUCTION: \$1.4 billion, or \$900 million less than a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$2.3 billion.

* FIRE FIGHTING FOREST SERVICE: \$1.880 billion, or \$378 million less than a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$2.258 billion (counting a fiscal 2008 emergency supplemental).

* FIRE FIGHTING INTERIOR: \$850.1 million, or \$206.9 million less than a fiscal 2008 appropriation of \$1.057 billion (counting a fiscal 2008 emergency supplemental).

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