

Federal Parks & Recreation

Bulletin # 2: March 4, 2014

Dear Subscriber:

The attached bulletin from Federal Parks & Recreation newsletter reports on the following:

- * **Administration again asks significant NPS, conservation money**
- * **Obama asks major surface transportation spending hike**

NOTE: This bulletin is a supplement to your regular edition of Federal Parks & Recreation. It is NOT your regular issue. The next issue will be published March 7.
The Editors

Obama budget calls for NPS Centennial, LWCF increases

In its fiscal year 2015 budget request to Congress March 4 the Obama administration proposed significant new spending to upgrade the National Park System in anticipation of its Centennial in 2016.

The budget appears to recommend up to \$640 million in new spending in fiscal 2015 alone, and would sustain most of that spending over three years.

Said Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell at a budget briefing, "The budget proposes a three-pronged cultural initiative through a combination of budget increases and legislation, proposals that will enable the Park Service to attract and host more visitors, add more philanthropy to the national parks and help build institutional capacity for the next 100 years."

Specifically, the administration proposed \$40 million in increased appropriations for the Park Service. That would be followed by legislation that would provide up to \$400 million per year from a new Congressional Centennial initiative. Finally, in the third prong NPS could compete for some of \$200 million per year in government-wide

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P.O. Box 41320 • Arlington, VA 22204

Phone: (703) 553-0552 • Fax: (703) 553-0558 • E-Mail: james@resourcespublishing.com • www.plnfpr.com

Opportunity, Growth and Security Initiative money.

“To help achieve the President’s America’s Great Outdoors goals, the Budget proposes to invest in an historic effort to upgrade and restore national parks, while engaging thousands of youth, veterans, and others and leveraging private donations to build a legacy for the second century of NPS,” says the budget. “In particular, the Budget - including mandatory, discretionary, and Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative resources -will allow NPS to ensure that 1,700 (or 20 percent) of the highest priority park assets are restored to good condition.”

Included in the immediate \$40 million budget increase is a \$10 million Centennial Challenge program that would have nonfederal partners match appropriations dollar-for-dollar. In the legislation Jewell referenced above the administration would also ask Congress to approve \$100 million per year for three years to again be matched by philanthropic contributions.

The Centennial spending is apiece with an administration budget request that would increase outdoor spending pretty much across-the-board.

LWCF full funding: As it did last year the administration made a strong pitch for full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at \$900 million per year. That is roughly the same pitch that House Republicans routinely reject.

Nevertheless, for fiscal 2015 the administration requested \$187 million for federal land acquisition and \$48 million for state grants from the fund. That money would come from appropriations. The budget would also use LWCF appropriations for a group of other conservation programs managed by the Interior Department and the Forest Service.

Supplementing \$350 million in regular appropriations, the administration asked for a guaranteed, permanent LWCF fund that would put up an additional \$550 million in fiscal 2015, for a total of \$900 million. Under the administration plan all \$900 million for LWCF would be guaranteed in fiscal 2016.

Said Jewell, “The budget continues the nation’s historic commitment to America’s cultural and natural heritage, proposing full permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. It has been one of the most effective tools to expand access for hunting and fishing and to create ball fields and other places for children.”

In a related move the administration also recommended that Congress put up \$25 million for the long-moribund Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery (UPAR) program.

However, the administration made similar recommendations for LWCF and UPAR last year only to be ignored by House Republicans in their version of a fiscal 2014 appropriations bill. Eventually Congress settled on \$167.4 million for the federal side of LWCF, \$48 million for state grants and nothing for UPAR.

House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (R-Wash.) criticized such proposals. He said today, "Instead of the federal government buying even more land it can't afford, let's properly maintain and manage the land we already own."

The Obama administration said the LWCF proposal is part of a broader signature recreation initiative called America's Great Outdoors.

Presidents, Congressional Democrats and Congressional Republicans have been attempting for time immemorial to secure guaranteed funding for LWCF, which presently is subject to the whims of Congressional appropriators. Those past proposals have all foundered on the need for new offset revenues.

Highway money: Separately, the Obama administration proposed legislation today (March 4) that would boost surface transportation by more than half of the next four years, perhaps insuring that recreation programs related to transportation thrive.

As part of his fiscal year 2015 budget request Obama proposed a restructuring of the tax code to boost total surface transportation funding from the current \$46 billion per year level to \$75 billion. (*See following article.*)

Parks report: Absolutely coincidentally, the day before the administration introduced the fiscal 2015 budget Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell held a press briefing to announce that the Park Service produced \$14.7 billion in economic activity in gateway communities.

"Parks are a great investment for local communities," she said at a press conference. "For every dollar Congress invests in the national park System on behalf of our American people the parks produce more than \$10 in economic activity."

The report itemizes the economic activity generated by each of the 401 units of the National Park System.

Fire program: The administration proposed a major new emergency fire-funding plan that would move any annual fire suppression costs above 70 percent of the 10-year average to emergency disaster funding.

As such, the extra money – as much as \$412 million per year – would no longer come from an Interior and Related Agencies spending bill. The money instead would be allocated from an emergency disaster account, just as hurricane and flood appropriations are now. That in turn could prevent borrowing by the Forest Service from line programs to pay for fire fighting in costly fire seasons.

The all-Republican Idaho Congressional delegation praised the plan. "The Administration's support will be key in getting votes to pass this legislation to treat the most devastating of wildfires as the disasters that they are," said Sen. Mike Crapo (R-Idaho.) "We can protect both firefighting and restoration efforts and provide more certainty for land planners and job creators alike in improving our public lands once this

legislation is made law.”

Federal land managers: In addition to the new levies and the fire-fighting account, the Obama administration in general recommended at least level spending in fiscal 2015 for land management agencies.

For Park Service operations the administration proposed \$2.284 billion, compared to a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$2.237 billion, not counting new Centennial legislation. For the Park Service recreation and preservation program the administration proposed \$52 million compared to a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$61 million; most of that decrease came from a proposed reduction in heritage area grants.

Conservationists lauded the proposed conservation hikes. Said National Parks Conservation Association Chief Operating Officer Theresa Pierno, “We are thrilled by the president’s robust budget proposal which, if funded, will produce jobs, enhance the experience of visitors and begin addressing many infrastructure needs in our parks.”

The numbers: Here are some of the administration’s recommendations compared to fiscal 2014 appropriations (PL 113-76 of January 17):

LWCF FEDERAL: For federal land acquisition the administration recommended \$187 compared to a final fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$167.4 million. The breakdown: NPS acquisition, \$56 million (2014=\$43.5 million); BLM, \$25 million (2014=\$19.5 million); FWS, \$55 million (2014=\$54.4 million); and FS, \$51 million (2014=\$43.5 million).

LWCF STATE: For state LWCF grants the administration recommended \$48 million, the same as a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$48 million.

STATE WILDLIFE GRANTS: For wildlife grants the administration recommended \$50 million, down by \$8.7 million in a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$58.7 million.

URBAN PARKS AND RECREATION RECOVERY: For urban parks the administration recommended \$25 million compared to no appropriation in fiscal 2014.

NPS OPERATIONS: For operation of the Park Service the administration recommended \$2.284 billion compared to \$2.237 billion in fiscal 2014. That includes only a small fraction of the new Centennial appropriations.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION: For the National Historic Preservation program the administration recommended \$56.4 million, the same as a fiscal 2014 appropriation.

NPS CONSTRUCTION: For NPS construction the administration recommended \$138.4 million compared to a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$137.5 million. Again, that does not include new Centennial money.

NPS REC AND PRES: For NPS recreation and preservation the administration recommended \$52 million compared to a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$61 million.

NPS HERITAGE AREAS: For National Heritage Areas the administration recommended \$8.2 million compared to a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$18.3 million.

BLM LAND AND RESOURCES: For management of BLM lands the administration recommended \$954 million compared to a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$957 million.

BLM RECREATION: For BLM recreation the administration recommended \$68.5 million compared to a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$66.9 million.

FOREST SERVICE: For the National Forest System the administration recommended \$1.640 billion compared to a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$1.496 billion.

WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM: For management of the National Wildlife Refuge System the administration recommended \$476.4 million compared to a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$472 million.

Obama asks major surface transportation spending hike

The Obama administration proposed legislation today (March 4) that would boost surface transportation by more than half over the next four years, perhaps insuring that recreation programs related to transportation thrive.

As part of his fiscal year 2015 budget request President Obama proposed a restructuring of the tax code to boost total surface transportation funding from the current \$46 billion per year level to \$75 billion.

In announcing his proposal last week Obama said, "So all told, my transportation budget will support millions of jobs nationwide. And we'll pay for these investments in part by simplifying the tax code. We're going to close wasteful tax loopholes, lower tax rates for businesses that create jobs here at home, stop rewarding companies for sending jobs to other countries, use the money we save in this transition to create good jobs with good wages rebuilding America. It makes sense."

The administration said the proposal would make available for surface transportation programs \$150 billion in new money, bringing the four-year recommendation for a transportation bill to \$302 billion.

Just before the administration made its pitch House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dave Camp (R-Mich.) outlined his own tax reform proposal that would also prop up surface transportation spending. Camp would establish a new tax on foreign operations of corporations to come up with \$126.5 billion of new revenues for surface transportation spending.

Both the administration and Camp would use the new tax money to supplement the existing 18.5 cents per gallon gasoline tax that gins up about \$34 billion per year for surface transportation.

In early February the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) made official what everyone sort of knew - the Highway Trust Fund is in dire condition. CBO said that come October 1 the Highway Trust Fund would produce only \$34 billion per year from gasoline taxes, yet surface transportation expenditures would amount to \$46 billion, if held level. That's a \$13 billion gap, and it assumes absolutely no increases for individual programs.

So Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chair Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) said at a February 12 hearing that Congress must not only come up with a new surface transportation bill before October 1, it must also find north of \$15 billion in new money to pay for it. The existing law, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), PL 112-141 of July 6, 2012, expires on October 1.

Boxer said at the hearing she aims to propose legislation to the EPW committee in April. She said she hopes to produce a five-year or six-year bill.

Her counterpart House Transportation Committee Chairman Bill Shuster (R-Ohio) in early February laid out this schedule for developing a bill this year: "We hope to take Committee action in the late spring or early summer with the goal to be on the House floor before the August recess. This way there will be time to conference our bill with the Senate's bill."

But the authorizing committees only write the programmatic portion of surface transportation legislation; the Senate Finance Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee must find the money. And that's where the administration and Camp recommendations come in.

President Obama would tax revenues from corporations that have hidden billions of dollars in foreign countries that agree to bring their money home.

Congressional Republican leaders have ideas of their own. Camp offered a tax plan similar to Obama's. Shuster said February 4 in a speech to a group called Building America's Future that he favors a mileage fee rather than a gasoline tax. Other proposals for raising the billions needed have emerged in recent months including: an increase in the gasoline tax (HR 3636 from Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) and taxes on oil wholesaler fees, i.e. the levy that gas stations pay when they buy supplies (Boxer).

The proposals are crucial to outdoor programs because without significant new sources of money Congressional leaders will be tempted to limit surface transportation spending to core highway construction. And they might terminate recreation programs such as transportation enhancements and recreational trails.

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