

Federal Parks & Recreation

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Parks establishment kicks off NPS Centennial; money?

At long last the Park Service and its friends - including two First Ladies - yesterday (April 2) began a campaign to spruce up the National Park System for its Centennial in 2016, and beyond. Still to be determined is where the money will come from to pay for the Centennial.

In a ceremony in New York City, First Ladies Michelle Obama and Laura Bush joined Interior Department officials in promoting the parks to all ages and races, not just older whites who make up the majority of visitors.

"I'm honored to join the Find Your Park movement to encourage people to re-engage - or engage for the first time - with the national parks and their programs," said Mrs. Bush.

"National parks belong to all Americans, and I am excited to help the National Park Service and the National Park Foundation introduce more Americans to the great natural beauty, cultural heritage and historic meaning that you can find in parks," said Mrs. Obama.

Emphasizing the Centennial theme of "Find Your Park", NPS Director Jonathan Jarvis said, "As a new generation responds to Find Your Park, I am confident that this campaign will have a powerful impact that will last into our next 100 years." The Park Service and the National Park Foundation initially announced the launch March 30, followed by the opening ceremony April 2.

Whether the campaign will translate into extra money for the parks - either through contributions or Congressional appropriations - remains to be seen.

As part of the campaign Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell said last month that American Express has committed \$5 million to a nationwide effort to get kids outdoors. The campaign will take place in 50 cities around the country.

Congress may help out. The Senate March 27 accepted without a vote a Park Service policy amendment to a Congressional budget resolution (S Con Res 11) from Sens. Maria Cantwell (D-Ore.) and Rob Portman (R-Ohio). It encourages authorizing and appropriations committees to set aside money for the NPS Centennial.

Specifically, the Cantwell-Portman amendment directs the Senate to make room in the Congressional budget for a Centennial Challenge program that would match private contributions with federal contributions. The amendment is largely symbolic because line committees would have to write and move Centennial legislation.

Cantwell and Portman said in a fact sheet that Congress successfully tried such a challenge in fiscal years 2018 and 2010 with federal contributions leading to private donations of \$50 million.

Said the fact sheet, "Over the last century, the park system has grown and aged, but funding has not kept pace to provide the level of service necessary for visitors to have unforgettable experiences. The result is a mounting list of needs and reduce park visitor experiences, just as the parks are expecting a significant increase in visitors for the 2016 Centennial."

Among the companies that have committed to support the National Park Foundation's fund-raising efforts are American Express, Budweiser, Subaru, REI, Humana, Disney, Coleman, Coca-Cola and Accenture. Notably absent among the supporters are those huge corporations that most young people identify with, including Apple, Google and Facebook.

A frustrated association of Park Service concessioners bemoans a flat record of visitation to the national

parks. In a White Paper the National Park Hospitality Association said that visitation has been virtually unchanged over the last 25 years (292,800,082 in 2014) while the nation's population has grown by 30 percent.

"Stagnant park visitation reflects more leisure choices today *but is also the result of reduced visitor activity choices* - potential visitors choose other destinations," said the association. "There are fewer park campsites, fewer lodging rooms, fewer restaurant seats, fewer ranger-led walks, fewer tours and outings."

The association added, "Visitor services eliminated by NPS have not been offset by new outdoor activities and special events. Yet new visitor services could generate non-appropriated funding which would supplement and leverage the nearly \$3 billion in general funds received by the agency each year."

The Park Service and its partners will now take the Find Your Park campaign around the country, with stops in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.

NPS noted at the New York City event that "fewer than 13 percent of park visitors are under the age of 30" and only 38 percent of Americans are familiar with what the Park Service does. So as part of the campaign First Ladies Obama and Bush will try to connect with youths and encourage them to Find Your Park.

At the New York City event the national park establishment cited five famous people who supposedly connect with the young to describe their experiences with the parks. The five include Bill Nye, Bella Thorne, Roselyn Sanchez, Terrence J. and Mary Lambert. Thorne appeared at the ceremony.

For instance television personality Terrence J. said, "As a city kid, there was something truly magical about finding my park at Yosemite National Park which has a vastness and natural beauty I've never experienced before. It also inspired me to explore parks in urban areas that focus more

on culture and history. National parks aren't always the sprawling landscapes you normally think about... and many of them are closer than you think."

Congress in December did approve modest boosts for the Centennial in a fiscal year 2015 appropriations law (PL 113-235 of Dec. 16, 2015) and in an omnibus public lands bill (PL 113-291 of December 19.) The appropriators approved \$25 million for NPS operations and \$10 million for matching endowment grants. That's new money.

The fiscal 2015 Obama administration budget recommends for the Park Service Centennial a \$326 million increase in regular appropriations and \$500 million in a new fund to address maintenance.

The maintenance program would require Congressional approval and might dovetail with the Cantwell-Portman amendment. Some of the \$500 million could be used by other Interior land management agencies, as well as the Forest Service.

DoT highway bill would keep TAP going, boost fed roads

The Obama administration March 30 put flesh on its recommendation that Congress write a six-year surface transportation bill this spring.

As it had forecast when it submitted a fiscal year 2016 Congressional budget February 2, the administration asked Congress to keep alive in a transportation bill a program that feeds park and recreation activities.

That is, the administration recommended that Congress allocate \$847 million to the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) in fiscal year 2016, up \$27 million from a fiscal 2015 allocation of \$820 million. The program pays for a group of outdoor initiatives.

The bill would have the TAP allocation, which would receive two percent of highway account money from the Highway Trust Fund, increase

marginally each year after that.

The 361-page draft bill that the administration submitted to Congress March 30 also recommends a \$277 million increase in spending on federal agency and Indian roads for fiscal year 2016, from \$1 billion in fiscal 2015 to \$1.277 billion in fiscal 2016. Much of that increase would be used for large, expensive projects.

By category the Indian and federal agency account would distribute \$507 million to tribal roads, \$370 million to federal lands (80 percent Interior Department, 15 percent Forest Service and five percent Corps of Engineers), \$250 million to a federal lands access program and \$150 million for nationally significant federal land tribal projects.

The last nationally significant project program is new. The administration said the \$150 million would "support construction, reconstruction, or rehabilitation of large, nationally significant transportation infrastructure within or accessing federal or tribal lands, including national parks and forests."

Under an existing surface transportation law, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), the umbrella recreation-related TAP program finances such individual programs as Recreational Trails, Transportation Enhancements, Scenic Byways, and Safe Routes to School.

Congress extended MAP-21 on Aug. 8, 2014, through May 31 of this year with a temporary law (PL 113-159). That puts Congress and the President under the gun to come up with a multi-year replacement for MAP-21 over the next two months.

We understand that one game plan now circulating on the Hill would (1) approve a three- or four-year patch to keep MAP-21 or its successor going with a combination of existing gasoline taxes and tax reforms. At the same time Congress would (2) establish a blue ribbon commission to recommend sources of money in the out-years.

Like military-closure laws the commission proposal would give Congress only two choices - accept a commission's recommendation or reject the recommendation. Congress would not have the option of revising it.

The key to a renewal of the law - and a key to the extension of recreation programs - is as always finding a source of money to supplement dwindling gasoline tax revenues. That's where the tax scheme called repatriation comes in.

Says a Department of Transportation white paper on its bill, "The Administration proposes to fund the GROW AMERICA Act through a pro-growth, business tax reform, without adding to the deficit. As part of transitioning to a reformed business tax system that will encourage firms to create U.S. jobs instead of shifting jobs and profits overseas, the Administration's proposal will impose a one-time 14 percent transition tax on the up to \$2 trillion of untaxed foreign earnings that U.S. companies have accumulated overseas. Revenue from this proposal - along with projected fuel tax receipts - will pay for the GROW AMERICA Act."

As *FPR* has reported Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee Chairman James Inhofe (R-Okla.) has said that moving a highway bill is his top priority this year.

House Transportation Committee Chairman Bill Shuster (D-Pa.) has been less public about his plans.

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Ranking Democrat Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) said January 29 they would introduce legislation to capture the foreign tax revenues.

Last year the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) made official what everyone sort of knew - the Highway Trust Fund is in dire condition. CBO said that 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.

Other proposals for raising the billions needed that have emerged in recent months include an increase in the gasoline tax, from Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.)

For the last 20 years the gasoline tax has remained at 18.5 cents per gallon, not even keeping up with inflation. On February 3 Blumenauer again introduced a bill (HR 680) that would increase the gasoline tax by 15 cents per gallon over the next three years.

Whichever way Congress goes outdoor programs financed by MAP-21 are going to be at risk from critics who charge that spending on recreational activities at a time when road and bridge money has been depleted is not wise.

At a surface transportation hearing in the House February 11 Rep. Brian Babin (R-Texas) led the critics when he objected to the use of surface transportation money for trails.

Babin doesn't necessarily represent mainstream Republican thinking. Still, he voiced a "concern about spending highway money for trails and enhancements that has long circulated in rural areas."

Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx stood up for bike and pedestrian trails at the hearing. "I happen to think these are good investments, but I understand the point," he told Babin. "I think bike and pedestrian investments - the small amount the federal government is putting in those things - is actually worth it."

House, Senate budgets ice money; are policy differences

The Senate March 27 approved a fiscal year 2016 Congressional budget (S Con Res 11) that at once freezes domestic spending and encourages line committees to dispose of federal lands.

The House approved a counterpart

budget (H Con Res 27) March 25 that would also freeze spending in fiscal 2016.

But the big action was in the Senate where literally dozens of policy statements were inserted into S Con Res 11.

The Senate bill among other things recommends that Congress transfer expenses for fighting the one percent of most expensive fires out of line appropriations bills and into disaster funding. And it recommends that the payments-in-lieu of taxes (PILT) program be granted guaranteed funding in perpetuity.

The fire and PILT amendments matter because they would have Congress shift fire and PILT money out of regular money bills, making room for more spending on conservation and agency management.

The House budget contains neither the emergency fire provision nor the PILT provision.

During a long and torturous Senate session March 26 and 27 that ended at 4:23 in the morning senators accepted without a vote a Park Service policy amendment from Sens. Maria Cantwell (D-Ore.) and Rob Portman (R-Ohio). It encourages authorizing and appropriations committees to set aside money for a Park Service Centennial program. (*See related article page one.*)

No Senate floor amendment was needed for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) because, coming out of committee, S Con Res 11 already carried a recommendation that it be made permanent. (*See following article.*)

Again, the House budget did not include a comparable LWCF provision.

The amendments accepted by the Senate are largely symbolic, simply making room in the budget for subsequent actions by Congress on individual legislation. That is, unless Congress puts together something called a "reconciliation bill" to implement the budget recommendations later this year.

Congress rarely does assemble such monster reconciliation bills because they would fail because of their own weight after a veto. Nonetheless, a reconciliation bill could be of great importance in the Senate because passage would only require a majority vote, not a 60 percent margin, as is the case for individual bills.

Meanwhile, the House approved its own budget March 25 that includes few of the Senate policy amendments, but that would join the Senate in holding down domestic spending and encouraging disposal of federal lands. A House-Senate conference committee will now have to resolve differences between the two resolutions. The Congressional budget does not go to the President.

The League of Conservation Voters which maintains a conservation-voting scoreboard urged all members of Congress to reject S Con Res 11 and H Con Res 27. "These budgets make drastic cuts to non-military investments that would harm our economy and jeopardize the ability of the Environmental Protection Agency, Interior Department, Energy Department and other agencies to fulfill their mission to protect our health, safeguard our natural resources, and grow clean energy," said the league.

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP) seconded the motion. TRCP Government Relations Director Steve Kline said, "Conservation dollars represent less than one percent of the total federal budget and have no meaningful impact on the federal deficit, but defunding conservation would have profoundly negative long-term impacts. In some cases, sportsmen and land managers would lose three dollars in matching funds for every dollar cut."

The outdoor policy receiving the most attention on the Senate floor was the advisability of selling off federal lands. The Senate approved a lead amendment that was sponsored by Senate Energy Committee Chairman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) in a close 51-to-49 vote. It favors disposal of the federal estate through sale, transfer or exchange to state and local governments. (*See related article page 8.*)

Monuments: The Senate debated fiercely but did not vote on an amendment from Sen. Steve Daines (R-Mont.) that would have required a President to consult with state and local governments before designating national monuments, if Congress separately approved substantive legislation to do that. Daines withdrew the amendment.

But before he did Daines said, "My amendment simply holds this and future administrations accountable to what they said they would do, and it protects the voice of the people in decisions such as this. Protecting the voice of the people should not offend Members of this body."

Countered Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), "Some Members of Congress – frankly, it is a minority – believe we should repeal or gut (the Antiquities Act). They advocate weakening the Presidential authority that in the past has protected the Grand Canyon and even the Statue of Liberty."

The Daines amendment would not by itself have changed the law affecting monument designations, but it does say that Congress should pass legislation that would require state and local approval of monuments.

A half-dozen such bills have been introduced in the House and Senate this year led by Murkowski's S 437 that would require Congressional approval of any national monument.

LWCF plug part of Senate budget, renewal bill emerges

The Senate March 27 recommended the extension of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in a fiscal year 2016 Congressional budget resolution (S Con Res 11).

However, the budget is purely advisory and line committees would still have to do the heavy lifting in subsequent legislation to extend LWCF, which is due to expire September 30.

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), who sponsored a Senate Budget Committee

amendment backing LWCF, said inclusion of reauthorization in the budget was a positive step.

In wrapping LWCF in a package with two county assistance programs Wyden said, "These programs are economic investments in rural America, providing consistent, reliable resources that counties can use to prosper. Secure Rural Schools, Payments in Lieu of Taxes, and programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund are three parts of the rural economic trifecta, each supporting rural counties' ability to provide critical services and boost their economies."

Supporters of LWCF took other steps last week in support of the renewal of the venerable, 50-year old program.

Six Democratic senators led by Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) introduced legislation (S 890) March 27 that would permanently reauthorize LWCF, with guaranteed funding. No Republican senators cosponsored the bill, even though Republican support is absolutely essential for such legislation in the Senate.

An aide to Cantwell said her boss is "optimistic we will get bipartisan support, given the Republican interest out there."

Cantwell introduced the bill now because the Senate Energy Committee has scheduled a hearing on LWCF for April 22, the aide said.

Five Republican senators led by Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.) have already sponsored legislation (S 338) this year that would make LWCF permanent and guarantee the \$900 million per year the program has been authorized to spend. Six Democrats cosponsored the Burr bill.

Of the new Democrats-only bill, cosponsor Sen. Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) said, "Congress should pass this bill to permanently reauthorize the program and ensure the LWCF receives full and dedicated funding going forward."

The renewal of LWCF has previously

been a hot topic on the Senate floor. On February 5 sympathetic senators attempted to gain Senate passage of Burr's S 338.

Burr asked the Senate to pass his bill under a Unanimous Consent procedure, which by definition requires the acquiescence of all members. But Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) objected and said reauthorization of LWCF is too important an issue to take up without a thorough scrubbing in committee and on the floor. So Burr and company will have to wait another day.

However, there is optimism among program supporters. When Burr first brought reauthorization legislation to the Senate floor on January 29 in the form of an amendment (SA 92) to a Keystone Pipeline System bill it failed by only one vote, 59-to-40. Sixty votes were needed to pass. And an ailing Sen. Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) missed that vote, so someday the votes may be there.

Significantly, thirteen Republicans voted for LWCF.

There is push back of consequence against the renewal of LWCF. The private property rights group the American Land Rights Association (ALRA) last week put out an alert to its members warning of the Senate interest in renewing the program.

Said ALRA, "LWCF Trust Fund fight has really just begun. The land grabbers will make another try to create this giant LWCF land acquisition Trust Fund. You must help stop them. The Land and Water Conservation Fund must continue to go through the appropriations process with oversight by Congress. No Trust Fund."

In addition, as we have reported the chairmen of the key Congressional authorizing committees - Senate Energy Committee Chairman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) - are not big fans of LWCF.

Murkowski has often suggested using a portion of LWCF money to attack

federal land management agency backlogs, instead of for land acquisition.

Bishop is even more forthright in emphasizing maintenance first. He said at a March 5 committee hearing on the Interior Department's budget request the government should give priority to the maintenance backlog

"Instead of addressing these challenges in a meaningful way, the Administration has proposed millions in new spending and miles of new regulatory red tape that will perpetuate existing management challenges and compound bureaucratic failures," said Bishop. "For example, the budget would seek to spend millions of new taxpayer dollars to purchase more federal lands despite massive maintenance backlogs and increasing catastrophic wildfires measuring in the billions of dollars on existing federal assets."

Despite those objections 200 House members wrote the House Appropriations Committee March 26 to ask for "robust funding" for LWCF in fiscal year 2016 in its 50th year.

The letter writers were led by Reps. Mike Thompson (D-Calif.) and Michael Fitzpatrick (R-Pa.) Several Republicans cosigned the letter.

In submitting its annual budget request to Congress February 2 the Obama administration recommended that Congress (1) appropriate \$400 million for LWCF in fiscal 2016 and (2) by separate authorizing legislation guarantee an additional \$500 million through an extended rewrite of the law.

Here are some of the LWCF-related fiscal 2016 administration budget requests:

* LWCF FEDERAL APPROPRIATION:
For federal land acquisition the administration recommended \$235.8 million compared to a final fiscal 2015 appropriation of \$165.7 million. The breakdown: NPS acquisition, \$64.3 million; BLM, \$38 million; FWS, \$58.5 million; FS, \$63 million; and DoI Valuation Services, \$12 million.

* LWCF FEDERAL (NEW GUARANTEED PROGRAM): This presupposes Congress approves new legislation to guarantee \$900 million per year for LWCF. These recommendations are in addition to the regular appropriations above. The breakdown: NPS acquisition, \$106.7 million; BLM, \$55.4 million; FWS, \$106.3 million; FS, \$64.7 million; and DoI Valuation Services, \$6 million.

* LWCF STATE APPROPRIATION: For state LWCF grants the administration recommended \$53.2 million, compared to a fiscal 2015 appropriation of \$48 million.

* LWCF STATE (NEW GUARANTEED PROGRAM): This allocation presupposes Congress approves new legislation to guarantee \$900 million per year for LWCF. For state grants the proposal would add \$47 million, for a total of \$100 million

Land disposal a hit in the GOP West, but not with rec

The House and Senate both adopted positions last week endorsing the disposal of federal lands to state and local governments.

They acted in the passage of fiscal year 2016 Congressional budgets that the House approved March 25 (H Con Res 27) and the Senate approved March 27 (S Con Res 11). Those positions are advisory to line committees that would still have to move additional legislation to actually authorize any land transfers.

But with Republicans in control of both the House and Senate and with western states demanding the transfer of millions of acres of federal lands to them, the chances of Congress approving such legislation go up.

The Senate approved a lead amendment from Senate Energy Committee Chairman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) March 27 in a close 51-to-49 vote that favors disposal of the federal estate through sale, transfer or exchange to state and local governments.

Murkowski said that the amendment is advisory. "So nothing in the

language that we have included in this amendment actually sells, transfers or exchanges a specifically identified piece of property," she said. "Any legislation enabled by this spending-neutral reserve fund will have to go through the process and be voted either up or down in regular order."

The amendment excludes from disposal national parks, national preserves and national monuments.

The Alaska Wilderness League said the vote was so close that Murkowski at first didn't have enough support to pass her amendment, so Senate leaders extended the toll until they could find a deciding vote. Said league executive director Cindy Shogan, "This ill-conceived amendment could forfeit our natural heritage to special interests and result in a loss of recreational opportunity and access for all Americans."

Added Backcountry Hunters & Anglers Executive Director Land Tawney, "Public lands are the fabric that binds America together, and last night's vote by the Senate sends an alarming message to sportsmen and - women - along with every citizen who values our publicly owned resources. Nationally, an organized, concerted movement is underway to sell off and limit access to America's public lands and waters. These are not merely the actions of a lunatic fringe. Now is the time to double down and fight back against this ill-conceived idea."

The Senate did not vote on a separate, opposite amendment from Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M) that would have barred the Senate from approving any sale of federal land to balance the budget. Heinrich withdrew the amendment.

"Selling off America's treasured lands to the highest bidder would result in a proliferation of locked gates and no-trespassing signs in places that have been open to the public land used for generations," he said. "This would devastate outdoor traditions like hunting, camping and fishing that are among the pillars of Western culture and

a thriving outdoor recreation economy.”

The House resolution would, like Murkowski’s, have Congress dispose of federal lands. A House Budget Committee report accompanying H Con Res 27 says, “This budget keeps funding for land acquisition under congressional oversight and encourages reducing the Federal estate, giving States and localities more control over the land and resources within their borders.”

In a related action Rep. Crescent Hardy (R-Nev.) introduced legislation (HR 1445) last month that would not allow federal agencies to acquire additional land unless they disposed of an equal amount of land. That ban would only apply if the federal budget were not balanced.

“The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture like to tout how important land acquisition is for conserving species, providing spaces for recreation and preserving culturally significant sites,” said Hardy, who was first elected to Congress in November. HR 1445 is the first bill he has introduced in Congress.

“My bill would allow them to continue to acquire land as a tool for these purposes, but it would require them to focus their efforts on lands that truly need oversight by turning over unnecessary land to those who are best able to manage it – the States.”

Hardy’s legislation arrives on the scene just as the Nevada Senate begins consideration of a resolution to transfer seven million acres of federal land to the state.

As we have often documented movements are afoot in several states to obtain federal lands. They include Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah and Wyoming.

Most notably, Utah passed a law in 2012 (H.B. 148) that lays claim to 31 million acres of federal land in that state.

However, in a series of analyses

the Utah Office of Legislative Research and college professors in the state have questioned the legality of a state takeover as well as the economics of it. For instance, John Ruple, a research associate professor at the University of Utah and coauthor of a major analysis, said of a February report he cowrote:

“If Utah succeeds in taking over federal public lands the state would have no choice but to dramatically increase development. Furthermore, the public would have less, not more, input into land management, and all who utilize what are now public lands – industry and recreation interests alike – would likely see the cost of access increase substantially. In short, the public would suffer from this misguided effort.”

NPS reports growing backlog; senators urge assistance

The Park Service said March 23 its maintenance backlog grew by \$190 million between the end of fiscal year 2013 and the end of fiscal 2014.

The increase in the backlog to the present \$11.49 billion may fuel objections from western Congressmen to the addition of private lands to federal systems until the backlog is paid down.

Most prominently, Senate Energy Committee Chairman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) has talked about using money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to address the maintenance backlog.

As she said on the Senate floor in January, “Another structural change I know some are interested in is to improve management by setting aside some of LWCF funding to address the combined maintenance backlog of federal land management agencies. We have a combined maintenance backlog of as much as \$22 billion, according to the (Congressional Research Service). We have issues related to that.”

The \$22 billion figure mentioned by Murkowski also includes the backlog for other federal land management agencies,

such as the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, as well as NPS.

In the March 23 announcement NPS Director Jonathan B. Jarvis said the \$11.49 billion agency backlog is for deferred maintenance, such as visitor centers, trails, campgrounds and roads and bridges. About half of it is for roads and bridges, which are paid for from a federal surface transportation law.

The administration's Department of Transportation budget for fiscal year 2016 recommended a \$277 million increase in spending on federal agency and Indian roads from \$1 billion in fiscal 2015 to \$1.277 billion. Much of that increase would be used for large, expensive projects.

The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) blamed Congress for the increase in the maintenance backlog for the National Park System. "Today's numbers show the result of Congress's chronic underfunding of our national parks," said Craig Obey, senior vice president for government affairs for NPCA. "Failing to provide for the system's basic maintenance needs has eroded our most treasured natural landscapes and historical sites. Unless Congress takes immediate and substantive action, the products of America's best idea will only continue to fall apart."

NPCA and others are hopeful that the impending National Park System Centennial in 2016 will motivate Congress to appropriate more maintenance money to reinvigorate the parks.

To that end Sens. Maria Cantwell (D-Ore.) and Rob Portman (R-Ohio) March 27 persuaded the Senate to accept an amendment to a Senate budget (S Con Res 11) that encourages authorizing and appropriations committees to set aside money for the NPS Centennial.

The Obama administration's fiscal 2016 budget request recommends for the NPS Centennial a \$326 million increase in regular appropriations and \$500 million in a new fund to address maintenance. The maintenance program

would require Congressional approval. Some of the \$500 million could be used by other Interior land management agencies, as well as the Forest Service.

House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) said the government should give priority to the maintenance backlog at a March 5 committee hearing on the Interior Department's budget request.

"Instead of addressing these challenges in a meaningful way, the Administration has proposed millions in new spending and miles of new regulatory red tape that will perpetuate existing management challenges and compound bureaucratic failures," said Bishop. "For example, the budget would seek to spend millions of new taxpayer dollars to purchase more federal lands despite massive maintenance backlogs and increasing catastrophic wildfires measuring in the billions of dollars on existing federal assets."

Ocean policy not as popular with GOP as with Obama team

Not surprisingly, the Obama administration said March 27 that it has made "tremendous progress" in implementing its National Ocean Policy.

Of an annual status report Beth Kerttula, director of the National Oceans Council, said that "from improving coastal and ocean resilience to providing local communities with tools to plan for a better future, we've made tremendous strides in undertaking our role as responsible stewards of this Nation's great oceans."

That is not how House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) sees it. He called the policy a bureaucratic nightmare. "This translates to red tape, bureaucracy, delays, and a blocking of a myriad of activities offshore and in inland waters that flow into the oceans," he said. "It could also pave the way for sweeping new marine monuments that could shut down a host of economic, energy- even national defense-related activities."

Bishop focused his criticism on a Marine Spatial Planning program authorized by the 2010 policy. He said it "will impede access for both recreational and commercial fisheries, future energy development and other economic drivers for many of our coastal and adjacent states."

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) strongly disagreed and said the policy is absolutely essential to protect the oceans.

Said Sarah Chasis, director of NRDC's Ocean Initiatives Program, "Today's report shows that the National Ocean Policy is helping protect important ocean habitats and wildlife, encourage sustainable use and provide greater certainty for businesses and other ocean users. We are encouraged by the work that's been accomplished to date and look forward to continuing to work together to protect our valuable ocean resources."

The Republican House in the last Congress conducted a guerilla war against the National Ocean Policy, but with little success. The House approved riders to block implementation of the initiative in a fiscal year 2015 Energy and Water Appropriations bill, in a 2015 Interior appropriations bill and in a Water Resources Development Act.

All of those efforts failed when the Senate refused to accept them. However, this year the Senate like the House is controlled by Republicans.

Bishop's predecessor as chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, Rep. Doc Hastings (R-Wash.), frequently subpoenaed documents from the administration to obtain background materials.

Hastings like Bishop said the policy constitutes top-down zoning of the ocean and coast and may restrict business development.

The policy essentially directs federal agencies to do good for the oceans, for instance protect 100,000 acres of wetlands. It does not order any particular agency to take any

particular steps. It does establish a National Ocean Council - essentially made up of all federal agencies - to coordinate things.

Bill would stop FS travel rule; Wallowa-Whitman focus

Rep. Greg Walden's (R-Ore.) bill to block implementation of a Forest Service travel management initiative didn't go anywhere in the last Congress and probably won't go anywhere in this Congress. But you never know.

So Walden on March 23 introduced his bill (HR 1555) to halt all work on the 2005 initiative that has largely been implemented. Among other things each forest used the Travel Management Rule to delineate where off-road vehicles could and could not go.

When Walden introduced a prior version of the measure last year he singled out for criticism a Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Plan. The Congressman said the service did not listen to local citizens in closing roads used "for hunting, camping, firewood cutting, berry picking, or just enjoying a ride through the woods in a truck or ATV."

Walden has no cosponsors of his bill.

At a June 10, 2014, hearing of the House subcommittee on Public Lands the Forest Service objected to the legislation, saying it was unnecessary because (1) most forest plans have been completed and access roads delineated and (2) in the Wallowa-Whitman specific situation the forest has reopened the plan in response to local objections.

Leslie A.C. Weldon, chief of the National Forest System, told the House subcommittee on Public Lands that the forest's willingness to revisit the plan illustrates "the agency's response to public involvement and the impact of public involvement on the designation process."

She concluded, "This bill is not needed because the 2005 Travel

Management Rule provides for dynamic management of the forest transportation system. Access can be changed or otherwise managed as needed to address issues that are important to the public and the ecosystem, including issues raised by affected counties."

Whether by coincidence or not, the Wallowa-Whitman forest on March 24 - the day after Walden introduced his bill - announced steps it is taking to revise the management plan. For one thing Region 6 Regional Forester Jim Pena said the forest will gather more information on conditions affecting roads.

Forest Supervisor Tom Montoya added, "Current and future analysis of site specific projects will address the impact of the forest road system on resources while also addressing public access needs - this may include, closing roads and/or lifting of restrictions on portions of Forest roads."

The forest expects to complete a forest plan revision in 2016, at which point it will do more work on designating roads, trails and areas for motor vehicle use, Montoya and Pena said.

Notes

FLTFA has solid House support.

Led by Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-Wash.), a bipartisan group of House members March 26 introduced legislation (HR 1651) that would reauthorize a landmark federal land sales law. The Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA), which expired in July 2011, authorized the sale of public lands identified for disposal, with the revenues used to acquire conservation lands. During FLTFA's 11-year run land managers disposed of 27,000 acres and acquired 18,000 acres with the proceeds. The bill would extend FLTFA through 2022. HR 1659 would also have agencies emphasize recreational access, such as for hunting and fishing, in implementing the law. Among the cosponsors is the ranking Democrat on the House Natural Resources Committee, Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Ariz.), and the second ranking Republican, Rep. Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.) House and Senate committees have made

numerous attempts to reauthorize FLTFA, but complications always seem to pop up, such as the insistence of a fiscal year 2015 House budget that the amount of money to be used for land acquisition be capped at \$60 million. HR 1651 addresses that issue by saying that after 2022 any money left in the till would be transferred to the U.S. Treasury. Said Newhouse, "Streamlining the process that permits states and private owners to purchase federal lands marked for disposal allows for the best possible land-use decisions while enhancing local economic and recreational opportunities. Taxpayers and communities impacted by federal land decisions deserve a transparent process to deal with surplus federal land, and this bill is a fiscally-responsible way to encourage economic development." The bill arrives just as the Senate is fighting a long war over the disposal of federal lands. *(See separate article page 8.)*

McCain, Wyden talking fire? Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) said March 26 that he and Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) are working on compromise emergency fire suppression legislation. Wyden has introduced a bill (S 235) that would shift the cost of fighting the one percent of the worst emergency fires to disaster funding and out of appropriations. McCain has introduced a similar bill (S 508), but McCain would authorize substantial timber sales from fire prevention thinning operations. "Sen. Wyden and I have talked about merging some elements of our two proposals in order to cover both suppression and prevention," said McCain. If a compromise bill would shift \$300 million or \$400 million of disaster funding out of appropriations bills, it might mean more money for conservation programs and federal land managers. And it could limit borrowing from line operations to pay for fire fighting. Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) has introduced a counterpart House bill (HR 167).

Hawaii internment monument in place. Hawaii officials, the Japanese Cultural Center and Interior Department officials designated March 31 a Honouliuli National Monument

in Hawaii, the site of a Japanese-American internment camp during World War II. The Park Service will manage the monument on land donated to the government by the Monsanto company. The department said that Honouliuli was the largest confinement site in Hawaii for Japanese Americans. Honouliuli is the fifth site to commemorate Japanese-American internments in World War II. President Obama approved the monument February 19. Hawaii Gov. David Ige (D), Hawaii's U.S. Sens. Brian Schatz (D) and Mazie Hirono (D), Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell, NPS Deputy Director Peggy O'Dell, state and local officials, and community leaders participated. Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell headed up the proceedings. NPS will manage the site in cooperation with the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i.

Hydro pact short on rec mentions.

Three federal departments renewed an agreement March 24 that promotes the development of hydropower, but it scarcely mentions recreation. In fact the 11-page memorandum of understanding only mentions recreation once that in a catchall sentence that says the agencies are to "Promote an environmentally responsible approach to enhancing hydropower development that recognizes the need to preserve biological diversity, ecosystem function, our natural and cultural heritage, and recreational opportunities, and also recognizes that some geographic locations are not appropriate for new hydropower development." During the Bush administration conservation groups such as American Rivers mounted a national campaign to limit the damage dams do to fish stocks and to recreation pursuits. Still, the Departments of Interior, Energy and Army patted themselves on the back for the success of the first five-year agreement that expired last week. One facet of the agreement is designed to help the Obama administration meet its goal of doubling renewable energy production by 2020. The agreement is available at: <http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=1018386>.

New veterans rec fee bill in.

Rep. Richard Nugent (R-Fla.) introduced

legislation (HR 1505) March 19 that would authorize lifetime passes for all veterans to all federal recreation lands and national parks for \$10. The veterans would have to be honorably discharged. Under current law veterans with a 100 percent disability are eligible for a lifetime free pass to federal lands, including national parks. Sens. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) and Susan Collins (R-Me.) have introduced a bill (S 119) that would entitle all veterans with any kind of a service disability to a lifetime free pass to federal recreation lands. The bills would constitute a minor issue in an expected, much larger federal recreation fee bill. House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) intends to write this year legislation to replace the existing law - the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancements Act of 2004 (FLREA). Last year when he was chairman of the subcommittee on Public Lands Bishop pushed a bill (HR 5204) through the House Natural Resources Committee to rewrite FLREA. A number of committee members from both sides of the aisle were reportedly reluctant last year to complete HR 5204 because it could lead to new and/or higher fees on visitors to federal lands. That led to speculation that this year Congress would opt for a one- or two-year extension of FLREA. Congress last year extended FLREA through September 2016.

Giant Utah wildland bill due.

Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) and Rep. Alan Lowenthal (D-Calif.) are expected to introduce shortly legislation to designate 9.4 million acres of wilderness in southern Utah's Red Rock country. First introduced in 1989, the legislation would protect mostly Bureau of Land Management land in the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and adjacent to Capitol Reef National Park, Canyonlands National Park and the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. In that the legislation scarcely moved when Democrats controlled one or both houses of Congress, its chances with Republicans controlling both houses are even slimmer. Nevertheless, Utah elected officials have betimes struck deals with environmentalists on designating wilderness lands in Utah.

FS planning committee to meet. A Forest Service planning board will meet next April 28-30 in Washington, D.C. On the agenda are climate change, adaptive management, restoration and outreach. The National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule Committee was formed to advise the service on implementation of its March 2012 planning rule. That rule guides individual national forests in revising their forest plans. The advisory committee is made up of representatives of many interests.

Cantwell promotes FS visits. The ranking Democrat on the Senate Energy Committee, Sen. Maria Cantwell (R-Wash.), said March 24 that the National Forest System needs a comprehensive new management plan that encourages visitation. "In recent years, I've seen a lot of attempts to fix various problems in a piecemeal fashion," she said at a committee hearing on the Forest Service budget. "But what's really needed is a 21st Century management plan. We need a strategy that will improve the health of our national forests, conserve important areas and encourage recreation. Public input needs to be unambiguous in this plan." That won't be easy because the service has gone through unending trials and tribulations over the last 40 years in writing a broad planning rule.

'Partners Outdoors' preps agenda. A federal land management agency-sponsored Partners Outdoors Conference scheduled for June has identified three areas of emphasis. The conferees will focus on digital strategies, 21st Century outreach and youths. The conference will be hosted by the Forest Service, the Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management in association with the National Association of State Park Directors and the recreation industry. More info is available at www.funoutdoors.com.

Conference calendar

APRIL

12-16. **National Outdoor Recreation Conference** in Annapolis, Md. Contact: The Society of Outdoor Recreation

Professionals, P.O. Box 221, Marienville, PA 16239. (814) 927-8212. <http://www.recpro.org>

15-19. **Society for American Archaeology Annual Meeting** in San Francisco, Calif. Contact: Society for American Archaeology, 900 2nd St., N.E., Suite 12, Washington, D.C. 20002-3557. (202) 789-8200. <http://www.saa.org>.

27-29. **National Hydropower Association Annual Meeting** in Washington, D.C. Contact: National Hydropower Association, 25 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Suite 450, Washington, D.C. 20001. (202) 682-1700. <http://www.hydro.org>.

MAY

3-6. **National Ski Areas Association National Convention and Trade Show** in San Francisco, Calif. Contact: National Ski Areas Association, 133 South Van Gordon St., Suite 300, Lakewood, CO 90228. (303) 987-1111. <http://www.nsaa.org>.

3-6. **National Sporting Goods Association Management Conference** in Austin, Texas. Contact: National Sporting Goods Association, 1601 Feehanville Drive, Suite 300, Mt. Prospect, IL 60056-6035. (847) 296-6742. <http://www.nsga.org>.

JUNE

10-13. **International Snowmobile Congress** in Niagara Falls, N.Y. Contact: International Association of Snowmobile Administrators at <http://www.snowiasa.org/>

19-22. **U.S. Conference of Mayors Annual Meeting** in San Francisco, Calif. Contact: U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1620 I St., N.W., Fourth Floor, Washington, D.C. 20006. (202) 293-7330. <http://www.usmayors.org>.

24-26. **Western Governors' Association Annual Meeting** in Lake Tahoe, Nev. Contact: Western Governors' Association, 1515 Cleveland Place, Suite 200, Denver, CO 80202. (303) 623-9378. <http://www.westgov.org>

27-July 1. **National Scenic & Historic Trails Workshop** in Nashville, Tenn. Contact: Partnership for the National Trails System at www.pnts.org