

Federal Parks & Recreation

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Volume 32 Number 5, March 7, 2014

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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 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 Association of Partners of Public Lands endorsed the challenge program. "The President's Centennial Initiative recognizes the enormous value of private philanthropy to the future of the NPS including \$100 million a year for Centennial Challenge projects for three years," said APPL Executive Director Dan Puskar.

"Matching every federal dollar with one private sector dollar, this funding has the potential to support signature projects through critical collaborations with not-for-profit park partners," he added.

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

Dead on arrival? All the increased conservation spending in the budget request may go for naught because (1) the extra money would have to come from new taxes and (2) Congressional Republicans (and some Democrats) will not vote for new taxes.

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."

And House Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers (R-Ky.) said the proposed budget violates a December budget agreement between Congress and the President. That agreement called

for total government spending of \$1.014 trillion (\$492.4 billion of which would be domestic.)

Said Rogers, "It is extremely disappointing that the President's proposal today blatantly disregards the budget limits for fiscal year 2015 - spending roughly \$60 billion in additional funds - and ignores the hard-fought compromise he so recently endorsed." He said he would keep total spending at the \$1.014 billion level.

But Jewell said of the bottom line for the department request: "The result is a budget that insures we are living within our means, maintains core capabilities and affords targeted increases in our priorities. . ."

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.

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 separate article page 7.)

Parks report: Absolutely coincidentally, the day before the administration introduced the fiscal 2015 budget 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. (See separate article page 6.)

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." (See separate article page 9.)

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."

Said Steve Kline, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership director of government relations, "In its fiscal 2015 budget, the administration demonstrates that it understands the value of the outdoors-dependent economy fueled by hunters and anglers. We now urge Congress to build upon this momentum by prioritizing funding for programs critical to natural resources conservation and the continuation of our nation's outdoor traditions."

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).

We have not included proposed land acquisitions from LWCF financed by a new guaranteed fund because that is so speculative.

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

We have not included proposed increases in state grants financed by a new guaranteed fund because that is so speculative.

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 \$1.496 billion in fiscal 2014.

FWS OPERATIONS: For operation of the Fish and Wildlife Service the administration recommended \$1.260 billion compared to a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$1.188 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.

FIRE FIGHTING: For the Forest Service the administration proposes \$2.265 billion for regular wildfire programs, compared to a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$2.162 billion. The administration would eliminate an emergency fire fighting account called FLAME that put up \$315 million in fiscal 2014. Instead the budget would pay for emergency fires above a baseline outside of regular appropriations and through a disaster account.

For the Interior Department the administration proposes \$794 million in regular wildfire programs compared to \$741 million in fiscal 2014. It would also eliminate \$92 million from FLAME for extraordinary emergency fire fighting and replace it with the new disaster account.

House rec fee bill includes most key FLREA provisions

The House subcommittee on Public Lands has begun to dig into the details of the next iteration of a federal agency recreation fee law.

Subcommittee staff under the lead of chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) has written a discussion draft bill that would largely extend the existing law that authorizes entrance fees, user fees, lifetime passes and distribution of revenues back to agencies.

Among other things the draft would add the Corps of Engineers to the program that now applies to the Park Service, the Forest Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Bureau of Reclamation.

The draft also addresses - although does not satisfy - complaints of recreation visitors that the Forest Service and BLM sometimes charge fees for access to backcountry areas. The draft specifies where the agencies may and may not assess day use and facility fees.

Western Slope No-Fee Coalition President Kitty Benzar, a leader of the active recreationists, still objects to the draft bill as too many fees in too many places. "It would return us to the days of Fee Demo: all fees all the time on anyone doing anything anywhere," she said. Fee Demo preceded the existing rec fee law that Congress enacted in 2004.

The subcommittee had scheduled an initial hearing for March 4, but the meeting was canceled because of a death in Bishop's family. Bishop is expected to reschedule the hearing in April.

To brief interest groups and solicit their opinions committee staff February 28 met with about 40 recreation leaders at a session chaired by Wayne Allard, vice president for government relations of the American Motorcyclist Association and former Republican senator from Colorado.

Of Benzar's concerns about backcountry fees American Recreation Coalition President Derrick Crandall said, "I think everyone at the meeting was pretty much in agreement that in most cases fees should only be assessed at developed front-country sites with clear recreation facilities."

One area of concern for the attendees was the inclusion of the Corps of Engineers in the program. The attendees supported application of the program to the Corps but they worried that the existing Congressional budget law would require most fee money to be sent to the U.S. Treasury, and not be retained for Corps rec projects, as other agencies now do.

The Corps presently collects about \$45 million per year in fees but can't spend the money on its facilities. Under the federal budget law if the

Corps were included in the federal rec law, it would not be able to use any of the first \$30 million it collected in a year. So the legislators would have to find a budget offset for the \$30 million, no easy task in the best of times.

The format of the 21-page bill is logical although the details can be tricky. It lays out day use fees for BLM and the Forest Service; entrance fees for national parks, national wildlife refuges and Bureau of Reclamation areas; recreation fees for all agencies; special use fees such as off-highway vehicles and snowmobiles; passes; and distribution of revenues (80 percent returned to agencies).

One brief sentence would include the Corps in the program, perhaps as a marker with more wordage to come.

Passes may be a touchy subject. The subcommittee draft would retain an America The Beautiful federal lands pass at \$80 per year. The Western Slope No-Fee Coalition would reduce that to \$60.

The recreationists would also extend a senior citizen lifetime pass for \$10 at the age of 62. But some recreation officials such as Crandall said that such a sweeping pass penalizes younger visitors. "There was no agreement on what to charge seniors," he said, admitting it would take "political courage" to increase the fee.

The draft committee bill is available at: http://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/3-04-14_flrea_discussion_draft.pdf.

Congress bought itself time to rewrite the existing law, the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), by including in an interim fiscal year 2014 appropriations spending law (PL 113-46 of October 16) a one-year extension. The law is now due to expire on Dec. 8, 2015.

FLREA, enacted on Dec. 8, 2004 as PL 108-447, Section 804, was only good for 10 years. The law brings in about \$270 million per year and most of the money is used to improve recreation facilities.

The Park Service reaps about \$179 million per year, or about eight percent of its recreation budget; the Forest Service takes in about \$66 million, or 25 percent of its recreation budget; the Bureau of Land Management receives \$18 million, or 25 percent of its recreation budget; the Fish and Wildlife Service grosses \$5 million, or one percent of its rec budget; and the Bureau of Reclamation receives less than \$1 million.

NPS estimates economic impact of parks just at budget time

Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell March 3 reconfirmed the common knowledge that national parks are economic engines for communities around the country.

Jewell released a new report that said park visitors spent \$14.7 billion in 2012 in local gateway regions, defined as with 60 miles of parks.

Summed up the report, "The contribution of this spending to the national economy was 243 thousand jobs, \$9.3 billion in labor income, \$15.8 billion in value added, and \$26.8 billion in output. The lodging sector saw the highest direct contributions with more than 40 thousand jobs and \$4.5 billion in output directly contributed to local gateway economies nationally."

By a great coincidence Jewell and NPS Director Jon Jarvis released the report the day before the Obama administration submitted its fiscal year 2015 budget request. That budget recommends an appropriation of \$2.284 billion for Park Service management as well as hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade the National Parks System in anticipation of its Centennial in 2016.

"Parks are a great investment for local communities," said Jewell. "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."

While she was at it Jewell reminded Congress of the cost to gateway communities when the government closed

last year between October 1 and 17.

"We recently had a striking reminder of the importance of parks to our local economies and that was when we didn't have parks during the government shutdown last October," she said at a press conference. "National Park Service economists have taken a look at the impacts and that resulted in nearly 8 million fewer national park visitors and a loss of \$414 million in visitor spending in gateway communities."

The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) hit at the economic implications of the budget impasse. "During the government shutdown, we heard from the American people about how important these treasured places are to local businesses, jobs and the economy, and how much they love parks and want them open for business, well-staffed, and fully funded," said Craig Obey, senior vice president of government affairs for NPCA.

Obey also reminded Congress that the Park Service Centennial is nearing and will have a cost. "With the National Park Service's historic 100th anniversary just two years away, now is the time to invest in America's national parks," he said.

The report complements a 2012 report from the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) that said outdoor recreation is a major, major player in the nation's economy. OIA said outdoor recreation creates \$646 billion in spending each year, supporting 6.1 million American jobs and almost \$80 billion in taxes.

Jarvis said the Park Service has been conducting analyses of the economic impacts of the national parks for the last 20 years. However, NPS changed its methodology in 2012 so Jarvis said the numbers in the latest report can't be compared to previous reports, other than total visitation. It increased from 278.9 million in 2011 to 282 million in 2012.

Despite the new methodology Jarvis acknowledged that the bottom line results of recent reports are similar.

For instance in 2011 NPS said park visitors spent \$12.95 billion in gateway communities compared to the \$14.7 billion in the new report.

Obama asks major surface transportation spending hike

The Obama administration proposed legislation 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, PL 112-141 of July 6, 2012, expires on October 1.

Boxer said 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.

Senate confirms Connor at DoI; others nominees still waiting

After a seven-month review the Senate February 27 confirmed the nomination of Michael L. Connor to serve as the deputy secretary of the Interior by a 97-to-0 vote. President Obama announced the nomination on July 30, 2013.

Connor, who will be the number-two policy-maker in the department, has served as commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation since 2009. He replaces David Hayes as the chief operating officer of the department.

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell said of her deputy, "Mike is exactly the right person to help lead this Department - thoughtful, smart, organized and full of energy."

The Wilderness Society President Jamie Williams welcomed the nomination. "We look forward to working with Mike Connor to fully fund critical conservation programs and ensure that the U.S. takes a thoughtful approach that balances energy development on public lands with the protection of our

wild places for our current and future generations," he said.

Still waiting confirmation are four other top Interior Department nominees: Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Acting Director Neil Kornze as BLM director; Janice M. Schneider as assistant secretary of Interior for Land and Minerals Management; Tommy Beaudreau as assistant secretary of Interior for Policy; and Rhea Suh as assistant secretary of Interior for Fish and Wildlife.

The Senate Energy Committee on January 16 did approve the Kornze and Beaudreau nominations. However, the full Senate has yet to vote on their nominations.

The committee had scheduled a vote on Suh and Schneider for February 13 but the action was postponed when a snowstorm prevented a quorum. Landrieu's office did not respond to our request for comment on the nominations, but Sen. Lisa Murkowski's (R-Alaska) office said committee leaders would meet to discuss "priorities" shortly.

Ranking committee Republican Murkowski said February 12 she will vote against Suh's nomination. Suh is presently assistant secretary for Policy. Among other things Murkowski said Suh has not adequately answer her questions about an Interior Department decision rejecting construction of a road across a wildlife refuge in Alaska to the community of King Cove.

"Between the lack of answers that we have received, and the lack of policy experience we have observed, I am simply not convinced that Suh is the right person to turn the Fish and Wildlife Service around," said Murkowski.

Despite Murkowski's opposition, former committee chair Wyden endorsed the nominations. "I want it understood that I strongly support both of the nominees," he said.

Only Wyden, Murkowski and Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) made it to the scheduled February 13 mark-up. Murkowski at that time asked for a delay

in the vote on Suh.

Obama requests emergency spending to fight large fires

The Obama administration proposed in its fiscal year 2015 budget request March 4 a recommendation that Congress establish a new emergency fire-fighting account.

The administration proposal follows a bill from Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) by recommending that any annual fire suppression costs above 70 percent of the 10-year average be considered 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, such as recreation management, to pay for fire fighting in costly fire seasons.

The all-Republican Idaho Congressional delegation is on board. It had announced the administration's plans February 24 after meeting with Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell.

"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."

Under Secretary of Agriculture Robert Bonnie February 26 confirmed for us the administration plan. "The new emergency fund as proposed by the Obama Administration provides budget certainty to the agency as it plots upcoming forest health projects," he said. "I

salute Agriculture Secretary (Tom) Vilsack and Interior Secretary (Sally) Jewell for their work on this proposal, which has attracted bipartisan support in Congress. We look forward to working with the Interior Department and with our State, Tribal and regional partners in this area."

He repeated the complaint that the Forest Service has been forced to use money from other programs to fight fires, often without compensation. "The President's proposal is an important step toward solving a recurring problem in the Forest Service budget," said Bonnie. "In many recent years, because of severe fire seasons, the Forest Service has run through its fire suppression budget and has had to 'borrow' funds from other budget areas, most notably funds used to restore forest health. This has affected USDA's ability to manage forests in a way that could reduce the incidence of wildfires in the future."

Crapo, Sen. Jim Risch (R-Idaho), Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) and Rep. Raúl Labrador (R-Idaho) met with Tidwell to discuss national forest policy, including fire-fighting money.

The Senate bill (S 1875), with nine cosponsors, addresses the increasingly large portion of Interior appropriations bills devoted to fire fighting. And it addresses the need for agencies to make up underfunding for fire by transferring money from line operations.

Wyden and company introduced their bill Dec. 19, 2013, but not in time to be attached to a fiscal year 2014 appropriations bill (PL 113-76 of January 17). So attention now turns to a fiscal 2015 appropriations bill.

Wyden not so incidentally now chairs the Senate Finance Committee, which has a lot to say about what federal pockets fire-fighting money comes from.

Simpson introduced a House counterpart to the Wyden bill (HR 3992) February 5 with four cosponsors.

"Our bill treats catastrophic wildfires like similar major natural disasters—such as floods and hurricanes—and ensures that money intended for managing public lands, reducing fuel loads, and improving forest health is actually used for that purpose," he said last week. "Changing the way we budget for fire will allow us to continue to fight fires without crippling our ability to prevent future fires from burning out of control."

For the Forest Service the administration proposes \$2.265 billion for regular wildfire programs, compared to a fiscal 2014 appropriation of \$2.162 billion. The administration would eliminate an emergency fire fighting account called FLAME that put up \$315 million in fiscal 2014. Instead the budget would pay for emergency fires above a baseline outside of regular appropriations and through a disaster account.

For the Interior Department the administration proposes \$794 million in in regular wildfire programs compared to \$741 million in fiscal 2014. It would also eliminate \$92 million from FLAME for extraordinary emergency fire fighting and replace it with the new disaster account.

Says the administration request, "In 2015, the Budget proposes to eliminate this account and will fund all suppression activities in the Wildland Fire Management account, with a portion of the suppression funds requested within the discretionary budget cap and a portion of the funds requested in a budget cap adjustment." In other words in the event of emergency fires the total government-spending ceiling would be increased.

House approves Flathead bill to protect Glacier Park

The House passed legislation March 4 to block mineral development in the North Fork of the Flathead River Valley in Montana near Glacier National Park. The measure passed without a vote.

Rep. Steve Daines (R-Mont.) is the

chief sponsor of the bill (HR 2259) that was first introduced by Democratic Sen. Jon Tester (Mont.) and former Sen. Max Baucus (Mont.) as S 255.

Both bills would withdraw a 430,000-acre area from oil and gas leasing and hard rock mining. The proposed withdrawal areas are located in the Flathead National Forest and the Lewis and Clark National Forest.

The Daines bill contains one provision not in the Senate bill - it would specifically say the legislation does not affect uses other than mining and energy development. "(N)othing in this Act restricts recreational uses, livestock management activities, or forest management activities allowed on the date of the enactment of this Act on the eligible Federal land in accordance with applicable law," says HR 2259.

The Senate Energy Committee approved S 255 on Sept. 10, 2013.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated no additional costs from the bill.

Existing oil and gas lessees would theoretically continue to hold valid existing rights to develop the properties. However, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has suspended those existing leases.

Daines said the legislation represents a rare point of agreement between Republicans and the state's Democratic senators. "Protecting the watershed and ensuring its value extends for future generations has been a task shared by Governors and legislatures of both parties, our neighboring Canadian Province of British Columbia, as well as our local Chambers of Commerce," he said.

As for the substance, he said, "The Flathead is an area beloved by the local community for recreation and supporting the region's forest-based economy. Last but not least, this watershed is a gateway to one of the crown jewels of the National Park system, Glacier National Park."

Daines is a leading Republican candidate for Baucus's seat. Baucus left his Senate seat last month to become ambassador to China.

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP), a sportsmen's alliance, praised the House Natural Resources Committee when it approved the bill January 28. "Hunting and fishing are big business in Montana, and this legislation has bipartisan support from the entire Montana congressional delegation," said Joel Webster, director of the TRCP Center for Western Lands. "We applaud the House Natural Resources Committee's decision to move this bill one step closer to becoming law."

The North Fork of the Flathead River descends from its headwaters in British Columbia south into Montana, forming the western boundary of Glacier National Park. The river was designated a wild and scenic river in 1976.

While the river itself is protected from development the adjacent valley is not. And between 1982 and 1985 BLM sold 115 oil and gas leases covering 238,000 acres. Subsequently, BLM suspended the leases after the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in 1985 said the leases were issued without adequate environmental review.

Since then at the request of Baucus oil and gas companies have relinquished 76 of the leases covering 182,000 acres, according to the Forest Service, which manages the surface land in the area. BLM sells oil and gas leases.

Notes

NPS Centennial hearing possible. The House subcommittee on Public Lands may hold a hearing next month on broad philosophical issues attendant to the Park Service Centennial in 2016. Subcommittee staff told recreation leaders February 28 that chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) may explore such issues as a Park Service maintenance backlog. In the Senate Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) is working with a number of senators

from both political parties to address the maintenance backlog and the NPS Centennial. While Wyden and company have not committed to any particular legislative provisions, they have been discussing a possible partnership endowment using federal and private money. The Obama administration March 4 proposed an expensive package of new Centennial initiatives, many of which would require Congressional approval (see *article page one.*)

Mrs. Obama, NRPA promote exercise.

First Lady Michelle Obama and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) February 25 jointly announced an ambitious new campaign to get kids eating better and exercising. The coalition between NRPA and a nonprofit group called the Alliance for a Healthier Generation wants to improve the health and wellness of more than 1.5 million kids. They will do that by implementing Healthy Eating and Physical Activity standards in more than 2,000 participating sites. Obama participated in a ceremony at Gwen Cherry Park in Miami, Fla. Obama said of the campaign, "And when the school day ends, they'll head to an after-school program like this one, and they'll get even more nutritious food and even more opportunities to get active." Said Dr. Howell Wechsler, CEO of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, "Creating healthier environments that surround children – in their homes, schools, and communities – is critical to reducing the staggering prevalence of childhood obesity across our country. Out-of-school time providers play an important role in shaping the health of the next generation." The campaign announcement coincides with a report from researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that the incidence of obesity among children aged two to five has decreased significantly. Writing in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the researchers said the obesity rate dropped from 13.9 percent in 2003-2004 to 8.4 percent in 2011-2012. The researchers didn't identify reasons for the improvement. And of course two-to-five-year olds don't participate much in active outdoor recreation. The NRPA campaign harks back to the Obama administration's

signature conservation initiative called America's Great Outdoors. For more information on the new initiative, visit www.NRPA.org.

Sleeping Bear bill passes. The House approved legislation (S 23) March 4 that, after a long struggle, would designate 32,000 acres of wilderness in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan. The House action gave final Congressional approval to the legislation without a formal vote. President Obama is expected to sign the measure. The Senate had approved it June 18, 2013, without objection. The sponsor of the House version of the bill (HR 163), Rep, Dab Benishek (R-Mich.) said the passage of the bill was not easy. He said that when the Park Service began to draw up a map for wilderness in the area in 1981 it included county roads and beaches. In 2009 the Park Service completed a plan for the area. Said Benishek, "This plan ensures that all county roads will remain in control of the local governments, and beaches and historic sites will be excluded from the wilderness map." Said Lynn McClure, senior Midwest regional director for the National Parks Conservation Association, "Today's designation, a result of strong public participation, will preserve visitor access and hunting and fishing opportunities, while protecting the fragile dunes, bluffs, and forest in the park."

FWS promotes urban visitation.

The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) said last month it has launched a new initiative to increase visitation to wildlife refuges near urban areas. FWS will focus particularly on increasing visitation among ethnic people in refuges within 25 miles of urban areas of 250,000 people or more. FWS says minority groups are underrepresented among visitors to refuges, as they are in national parks. The FWS initiative is made up of these pieces: (1) standards of excellence to lure visitors from cities, (2) partnerships with conservation groups, (3) a director's order that encourages field offices to reach out to urban populations and (4) a training academy at the National Conservation Training Center in West

Virginia to focus on urban issues.

Bill to retain Corps fees in.

Four senators and eight House members introduced legislation February 27 to authorize the Corps of Engineers to allow non-federal operators who manage recreation sites to invest the recreation fees they collect at the sites. The Corps has traditionally allowed the reinvestment of the fees, but on Sept. 12, 2013, the agency issued new guidance forbidding the practice. The Corps acted after a finding by the Congressional Budget Office held that the practice was not legal. Not much money is involved, just \$2.2 million per year, but several bipartisan Congressional delegations were aroused. "Our parks are a popular attraction for Arkansas families and visitors, bringing much-needed jobs and funds to our state. It makes no sense to prevent these dollars from being reinvested in our local communities and economy," said Sen. Mark Pryor (D-Ark.) He cosponsored the Senate bill (S 2055) with Sens. John Boozman (R-Ark.), Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) and Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) Rep. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) is the lead sponsor of the House bill (HR 4100). This fee issue is different from a broader initiative to authorize the Corps to retain entrance and user fees under the federal recreation fee law, the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA). Sens. Boozman and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) introduced legislation (S 400) on Feb. 28, 2013 to include the Corps under FLREA and to allow the agency to retain some of \$45 million per year in fees it collects. And the staff of the House Public Lands subcommittee is circulating a draft rec fee bill to replace FLREA that would include the Corps. (See separate *FLREA* article page 4).

Court rules for NPCA on coal. A federal judge last month ruled that the Office of Surface Mining (OSM) erred in replacing a regulation that required a buffer zone between coal mining operations and streams. Ruling for the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), Judge Barbara J. Rothstein in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia said a new OSM rule failed to consider adequately the impact of

mining on endangered species in the stream. NPCA is concerned because more than 2,000 miles of streams in four central Appalachian states have been damaged by coal mining. The decision by Rothstein, a Democratic appointee, won't have much immediate practical effect because states for the most part regulate coal mining on nonfederal land in the Appalachians. In addition the Obama administration itself doesn't like the rule and has not pushed states to enforce it.

Yosemite plan posted. Yosemite National Park formally announced in the *Federal Register* February 26 the completion of a management plan governing the heavily-used valley. After a 30-day grace period after EPA announces the receipt of the EIS accompanying the plan NPS will issue a record of decision. As we reported in the last issue of *FPR* the plan appears to satisfy the park's biggest critic - Rep. Tom McClintock (R-Calif.) The plan, developed after a decade-long legal struggle, is required for the management of the Merced River. But because the river courses through the middle of the valley the plan also addresses uses throughout the valley, such as camping, hiking and commercial recreation activities. After Yosemite proposed a Merced plan on Jan. 8, 2013, McClintock, who represents the Yosemite area in the House, went ballistic. He said the proposed plan would change the *raison d'être* for Yosemite by removing recreation amenities. They include horseback riding, bicycle rental, swimming pools and an ice skating rink. But McClintock said the final plan would allow those activities to continue. From the other side the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) appeared willing to accept the concessions NPS made to more intensive commercial uses of the valley. The plan is available at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/mrp.htm and http://parkplanning.nps.gov/mrp_feis.

NPS honors two friends groups.

The Park Service February 27 issued Director's Partnership Awards to two partners of the National Park System - one for a specific project and one for long-term service. For the specific project NPS honored Pacific Historic

Parks for raising \$56 million toward the replacement of the USS Arizona Memorial Visitor Center with a Pearl Harbor Visitor Center. The center is expected to host 1.7 million visitors per year. For long-term service NPS honored the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy for its contributions to Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Those include a \$34 million capital campaign to convert the asphalt of Crissy Field to a wetland and shore promenade.

Boxscore of Legislation

Appropriations fiscal 2015

No bill yet. President Obama submitted a budget request to Congress March 4 that would in general increase natural resources spending. For NPS Centennial it proposes hundreds of millions of dollars in increases.

Appropriations fiscal 2014 (All agencies)

HR 3547 (Lamar Smith). President Obama signed into law January 17 as PL 113-76. Law appropriates modest across-the-board increases for park and rec programs.

Congressional Budget Fiscal 2014

HJ Res 59 (Rogers). President Obama signed into law December 26. Sets slightly higher spending limit than in fiscal 2014.

Federal land recreation fees

No bill yet (Bishop). Bishop draft now circulating that would continue entrance fees, user fees and passes. Obama budget asks Congress to approve permanent law.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

S 338 (Baucus), HR 2727 (McKinley). Baucus introduced February 14. McKinley introduced July 18. Baucus would guarantee \$900 million per year to program in perpetuity. McKinley would guarantee state grants received at least 40 percent of annual appropriations.

Urban park fund

HR 2424 (Sires). Sires introduced June 18. Would authorize HUD grants and HUD loans to provide assistance to urban parks.

National recreation commission.

HR 1834 (Grijalva). Grijalva introduced

May 6. Would establish a national rec commission with members appointed by Congress and the White House.

National monuments

HR 250 (Chaffetz), HR 382 (Foxx), HR 432 (Amodei), HR 1434 (Daines), HR 1439 (Labrador), HR 151 (Pearce), HR 757 (Stewart), HR 1459 (Bishop), HR 1495 (Gosar), HR 2192 (Nunes), S 104 (Vitter), S 472 (Heller). House hearing April 16. Would require Congressional approval or state approval of national monuments under the Antiquities Act.

National heritage areas

HR 445 (Dent). Dent introduced February 1. Would establish national policy and national standards for heritage areas.

Montana wilderness/recreation areas

S 37 (Tester). Tester introduced January 23. Would designate 666,260 acres of wilderness, six recreation areas totaling 288,780 acres and special management areas totaling 80,720 acres.

Farm bill

S 954 (Stabenow), HR 2642 (Lucas). House approved conference bill January 29. Senate approved conference bill February 3. Would establish new farm policy for five years and finance conservation programs.

Sportsmen's packages

HR 3590 (Latta), S 1996 (Hagan). House approved February 5. Hagan introduced February 4. Measures include numerous individual bills, including designation of public lands as open-unless-closed to hunting and fishing.

Hunting federal lands

S 170 (Murkowski), HR 1825 (Benishak). Murkowski introduced January 29. Included in sportsmen's packages above. House approved February 4. Would declare BLM and FS lands open to hunting and fishing unless specifically closed.

WRDA (Everglades)

S 601 (Boxer), HR 3080 (Shuster). Senate approved May 15. House approved October 23. Both would authorize new projects, including Everglades restoration.