

WSTPC 2007 ISSUE PAPER: FEDERAL LANDS BUDGETS

BACKGROUND: Although generous to the National Park Service, the President's proposed fiscal 2008 budget is much less so to the other Federal Land agencies. Worst hit is the Forest Service Recreation and Wilderness Program, which would be cut nearly 13 percent from 2007. Following are the administration's recommended spending levels for next year (beginning 10/1/07).

NPS Operations: \$2.0 billion

NPS Operations Maintenance: \$698.5 million

NPS Construction: \$201.6 million

NPS Recreation and Preservation: \$48.9 million

National Heritage Area Grants: \$10 million

Federal Side of Land Water Conservation Fund: \$64.1 million

State Side of LWC: \$0 million

Fish & Wildlife Service Refuge Operations: \$398.4 million

BLM Recreation: \$65.3 million

Forest Service Recreation and Wilderness: \$231.4 million

Forest Service Trails \$66.4 million

In contrast, the House and Senate are moving towards approval of budget resolutions that would allow fiscal 2008 budgets with almost a five percent increase in funding for natural resources and environmental programs. The Senate on March 23rd approved a budget resolution for 2008 with an increase for Natural Resources and the Environment of \$1.56 billion, from \$31.3 billion in fiscal 2007 to \$32.9 billion for 2008. The House Budget Committee on March 21st approved a 2008 budget resolution with a slightly lower increase to \$32.8 billion. Although the Congressional Budget consists only of spending guidelines for the appropriations committees, it does set fairly firm spending ceilings for the committees to follow.

Further darkening the budget outlook for the Forest Service is the huge portion of its budget being consumed by fire fighting suppression costs. Fifteen years ago, about 12% of the FS budget was devoted to fire suppression; in 2008 approximately 45% of the FS budget will go to that purpose.

Tourism interests are also concerned that the National Park Service Tourism Office is severely underfunded, with a budget consisting entirely of the compensation of one person, the Director of Tourism.

President's Centennial Initiative. The President's \$2.4 billion National Park Service budget for Fiscal Year 2008 calls for the largest increase in park operations funding ever proposed and leveraged public-private investments that could generate as much as \$3 billion to help the Parks prepare for their 100th birthday in 2016. The proposed budget includes 3,000 new seasonal employees, continues increases for park maintenance and targets specific cultural and natural resource improvements. This initiative has started with the President's recommendation of a \$230 million increase in fiscal 2008 over 2007 in park operations funding.

This is described as the first financial infusion for the President's National Parks Centennial Initiative. It includes \$100 million in discretionary funds for parks each year of this ten-year period and another \$100 million a year to match equivalent donations for signature projects and programs. Combined with as much as \$100 billion in private donations, it could mean \$3 billion for the parks over the next ten years.

The National Parks Conservation Association and other environmental and conservation organizations have strongly endorsed this initiative but Democratic leaders of the House and Senate Resource Committees have expressed discomfort with such reliance on private sector fundraising to support the parks.

The WSTPC has submitted official comments to Interior Secretary Kempthorne urging that the Centennial Initiative include a clear and explicit goal of reversing more than a decade and a half of declining visitation to the parks; that the Initiative be implemented in close consultation and cooperation with state tourism offices and that it encourage more collaboration between the national parks and businesses in gateway communities.

ISSUE: Adequate funding for Federal land agencies.

IMPORT: For every western state, the national parks, forests and other Federal lands are prime tourism attractions. Deterioration of Federal lands will discourage visitation and damage the economies of many western states and communities.

STATUS AND OUTLOOK: Federal agency 2008 budgets are now before the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee, which should decide those budgets by mid-summer and then the Senate Appropriations Committee will begin its deliberations with final 2008 budgets due to be approved in September prior to the 10/1/07 start of the 2008 fiscal year.

WSTPC POSITIONS: The WSTPC supports adequate funding for the Federal land agencies to ensure they continue to provide high quality visitor experiences.

The WSTPC supports adequate funding for the NPS Tourism Office to enable that office to work closely with national park staff and the tourism industry to increase and enhance responsible tourism on the national parks.

The WSTPC supports the President's Centennial National Park Initiative but urges that it include a strong commitment to reverse more than a decade and a half of declining visitation to the parks. to involve state tourism offices in its implementation and to encourage more collaboration between the national parks and gateway communities.

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