

National Park Service (NPS) Appropriations: Ten-Year Trends

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Summary

The National Park Service (NPS) receives appropriations in the annual Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. Over the past decade (FY2014-FY2023), NPS received both regular (annual) appropriations and, in some years, supplemental appropriations to address damage from hurricanes and other natural disasters. NPS's regular appropriations fluctuated during the decade but increased overall in both nominal and inflation-adjusted dollars. The FY2023 regular appropriation of \$3.475 billion was 36% higher than FY2014 in nominal dollars and 7% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars. NPS also received disaster-related supplemental appropriations in FY2018, FY2019, FY2022, and FY2023. These funds were provided outside of regular appropriations laws and were not subject to discretionary spending caps. In addition to regular and supplemental discretionary appropriations, the agency also has mandatory sources of funding, including both NPS-specific funding and allocations from Department of the Interior (DOI)-wide accounts.

During the FY2014-FY2023 period, NPS's discretionary appropriations generally were organized in six accounts. Funding for five accounts increased over the decade in inflation-adjusted dollars. These included NPS's largest account, which supports basic park operations, along with accounts that fund construction and major repairs, grants for historic preservation activities, assistance to nonfederal entities for natural and cultural resource preservation, and "Centennial Challenge" grants to spur partner donations for park improvements. A sixth account, with funding for federal land acquisition and outdoor recreation assistance to states, was shifted after FY2020 from discretionary to mandatory spending.

The funding changes took place in the context of a 10% increase in park visitation over the decade, despite a drop in visits in 2020 as the nation was affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The size of the National Park System remained roughly stable in terms of acreage, but 23 new units (many of relatively small size) were added to the system. Notwithstanding the growth in NPS appropriations, agency staffing levels declined by 3% over the decade.

A significant issue for NPS throughout the decade was the agency's multibillion-dollar backlog of *deferred maintenance*—infrastructure maintenance and repairs that were not performed as scheduled or as needed. For two discretionary budget activities (within larger budget accounts) that primarily address both regular and deferred maintenance, the combined funding grew in inflation-adjusted terms. In addition, enactment of the Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152) in August 2020 provided a new source of mandatory spending to address NPS deferred maintenance.

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The National Park Service (NPS) administers the National Park System, which covers 85 million acres of land and consists of 428 diverse units included for their natural, cultural, and recreational importance. NPS is part of the Department of the Interior (DOI) and receives appropriations in the annual Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. This report examines trends in the agency's discretionary appropriations over the past decade (FY2014-FY2023). It also discusses changes in NPS staffing levels, numbers of recreational visits to the parks, and the size of the National Park System during that period.

NPS Discretionary Appropriations Totals

NPS's discretionary appropriations generally increased during the past decade (FY2014-FY2023), with some fluctuation. Regular discretionary appropriations (which exclude supplemental appropriations) totaled \$2.562 billion in FY2014 and \$3.475 billion in FY2023. The FY2023 figure was 36% higher than FY2014 in nominal dollars and 7% higher when adjusted for inflation (**Figure 1** and **Table 1**). The regular appropriations generally increased from year to year (in nominal dollars) but declined in FY2021, partly owing to the August 2020 enactment of the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152), which shifted some funding previously provided through discretionary appropriations to mandatory spending (see text box, below). NPS received supplemental appropriations for response to natural disasters in FY2018 (P.L. 115-123), FY2019 (P.L. 116-20), FY2022 (P.L. 117-43), and FY2023 (P.L. 117-328).¹ These funds, provided outside of regular appropriations, were not subject to discretionary spending caps. The FY2023 supplemental appropriation (\$1.500 billion) was considerably higher than those of other years.

Mandatory Appropriations in the National Park Service's (NPS's) Budget

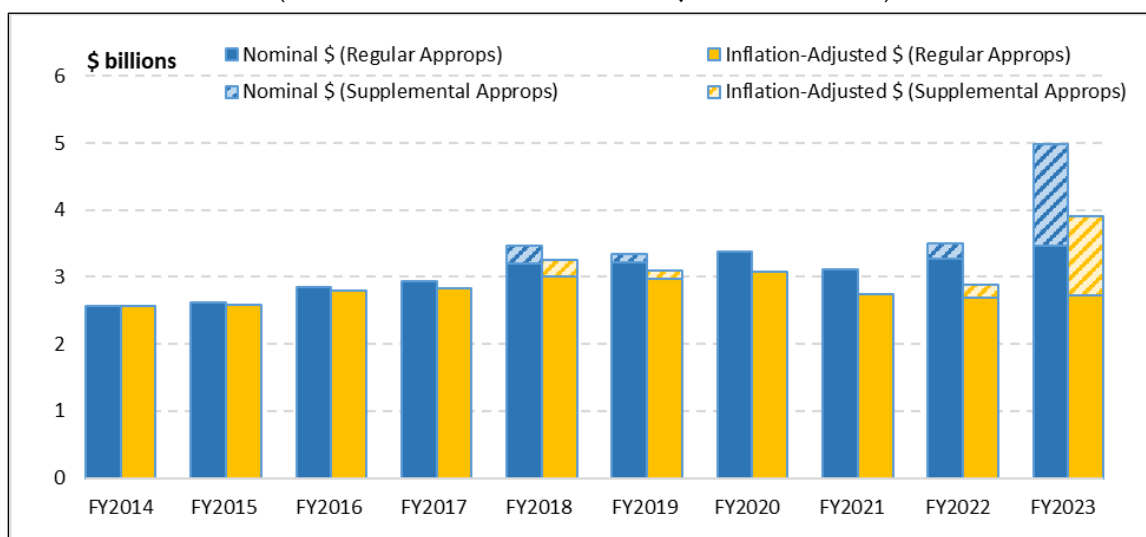
Much of NPS's funding comes from discretionary appropriations, which are controlled by annual appropriations laws. However, NPS also receives mandatory appropriations under various laws, which allow the agency to spend money without further action by Congress. NPS estimated its mandatory appropriations for FY2023 at \$1.220 billion. The mandatory funding includes, among others, recreation fees, concession franchise fees, receipts from leasing, direct cash donations, and funding for NPS land acquisition and assistance to states from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF, 54 U.S.C. §§200301 et seq.). Through FY2020, the LWCF funding had been provided as discretionary appropriations in NPS's Land Acquisition and State Assistance (LASA) account, but it was made mandatory by the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152). Separately, in FY2022, NPS received mandatory appropriations of \$700 million from P.L. 117-169, commonly known as the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA), for employee hiring (\$500 million) and deferred maintenance (\$200 million).

NPS also receives allocations from accounts in the Department of the Interior, which do not appear in either mandatory or discretionary appropriations totals in NPS budget justifications. In FY2023, these included NPS's share from the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF), the deferred maintenance fund established by the GAOA. NPS may receive up to \$1.330 billion annually for five years (FY2021-FY2025) from the LRF and has received the maximum each year to date. NPS also received an FY2023 allocation from the Department of the Interior (DOI) of \$195 million for conservation, resilience, and ecosystem restoration, from funds provided by the IRA (in addition to the IRA funding described above). Other DOI allocations to NPS in FY2023 included \$339 million from the Federal Lands Transportation Program under P.L. 117-58, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

¹ The figures and tables in this report generally reflect rescissions and supplemental appropriations to date, including from P.L. 115-123 in response to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria (FY2018); P.L. 116-20 in response to Hurricanes Florence and Michael, Typhoons Yutu and Mangkhut, and other natural disasters (FY2019); P.L. 117-43 in response to wildfires, hurricanes, and other natural disasters in calendar years 2019-2021 (FY2022); and P.L. 117-328 in response to wildfires, hurricanes, and other natural disasters occurring in and prior to calendar year 2023 (FY2023). The data exclude permanent budget authorities and generally do not reflect transfers or scorekeeping adjustments. Adjustments for inflation (shown in 2014 dollars) use the GDP Chained Price Index from White House Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables*, Table 10.1, "Gross Domestic Product and Deflators Used in the Historical Tables—1940-2023," at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/historical-tables/>.

Figure I. National Park Service (NPS) Discretionary Appropriations, FY2014-FY2023

(\$ billions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2014 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2014-FY2022 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2024. Data for FY2023 are from P.L. 117-328 (FY2023 Consolidated Appropriations), Divisions G and N.

Note: See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

Table I. NPS Discretionary Appropriations, FY2014-FY2023

(\$ billions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2014 dollars; excludes supplemental appropriations)

	Appropriation in Nominal \$	Appropriation in Inflation-Adjusted 2014 \$	% Change Since Previous Year	
			Nominal	Inflation-Adjusted
FY2014	2.562	2.562	—	—
FY2015	2.615	2.585	+2%	+1%
FY2016	2.851	2.796	+9%	+8%
FY2017	2.932	2.825	+3%	+1%
FY2018 ^a	3.202	3.014	+9%	+7%
FY2019 ^b	3.223	2.975	+1%	-1%
FY2020 ^b	3.377	3.077	+5%	+3%
FY2021	3.123	2.752	-8%	-11%
FY2022 ^c	3.265	2.691	+5%	-2%
FY2023 ^d	3.475	2.732	+6%	+2%
Change Over Decade^e	+0.914	+0.171	+36%	+7%

Sources: Data for FY2014-FY2022 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2024. Data for FY2023 are from P.L. 117-328 (FY2023 Consolidated Appropriations).

Notes: Amounts exclude supplemental appropriations. Totals may not sum precisely due to rounding. See footnote 1 for additional information on this table.

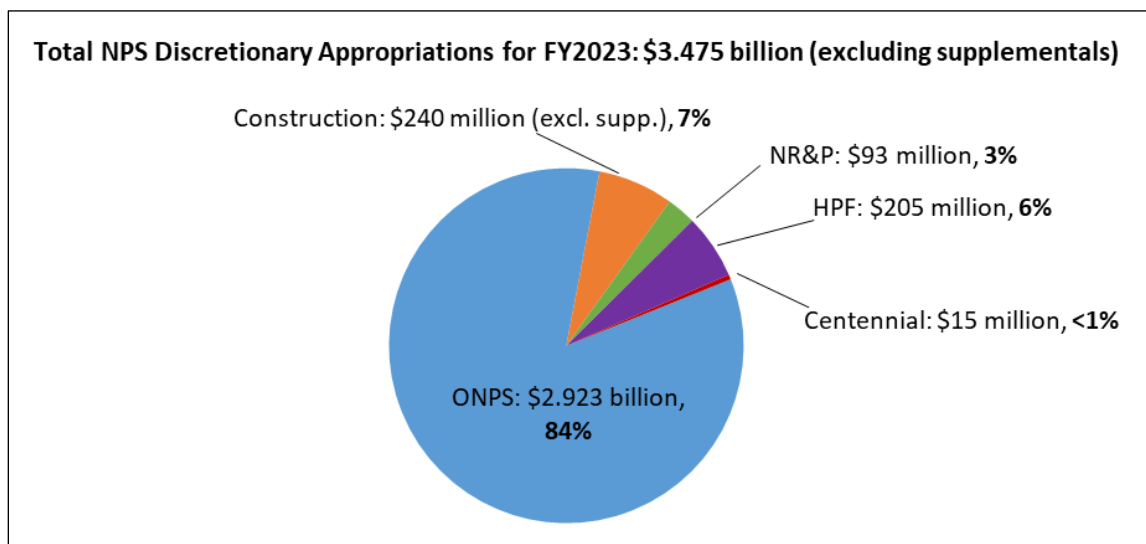
- a. In addition to the FY2018 regular appropriation of \$3.202 billion, Congress provided supplemental appropriations of \$0.258 billion in response to natural disasters. With the supplemental included, the total appropriation for FY2018 represented an 18% increase over FY2017 in nominal dollars and a 15% increase in inflation-adjusted dollars.

- b. In addition to the FY2019 regular appropriation of \$3.223 billion, Congress provided supplemental appropriations of \$0.128 billion in response to natural disasters. With the supplementals for both FY2018 and FY2019 included, the FY2019 appropriation was 3% less than FY2018 in nominal dollars and 5% less in inflation-adjusted dollars. With the FY2019 supplemental included, the FY2020 appropriation was 1% higher than FY2019 in nominal dollars and 1% lower in inflation-adjusted dollars.
- c. In addition to the FY2022 regular appropriation of \$3.265 billion, Congress provided supplemental appropriations of \$0.229 billion in supplemental appropriations in response to natural disasters. With the supplemental included, the FY2022 appropriation was a 12% increase over FY2021 in nominal dollars and a 5% increase in inflation-adjusted dollars.
- d. In addition to the FY2023 regular appropriation of \$3.475 billion, Congress provided supplemental appropriations of \$1.500 billion in response to natural disasters. With the supplementals for both FY2022 and FY2023 included, the FY2023 appropriation was 42% more than FY2022 in nominal dollars and 36% more in inflation-adjusted dollars.
- e. Excludes supplemental appropriations for FY2023 in response to natural disasters. Including the FY2023 supplemental, the increase was \$2.414 billion (+94%) in nominal dollars and \$1.350 billion (+53%) in inflation-adjusted dollars.

Individual NPS Accounts

During the decade, NPS's appropriations were organized in up to six accounts that covered basic park operations (Operation of the National Park System, or ONPS, account); construction and repair of infrastructure (Construction account); grants for historic preservation (Historic Preservation Fund); assistance to nonfederal land managers (National Recreation and Preservation account); matching grants for NPS projects and programs (Centennial Challenge account); and NPS land acquisition and outdoor recreation grants to states (Land Acquisition and State Assistance account). The largest share of NPS's discretionary appropriations—84% in FY2023, excluding supplemental appropriations—went to the ONPS account, which covers basic park operations (**Figure 2** and **Table 2**).

Figure 2. NPS's FY2023 Discretionary Appropriations by Account



Source: Joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-328.

Notes: ONPS = Operation of the National Park Service; NR&P = National Recreation and Preservation; HPF = Historic Preservation Fund; Centennial = Centennial Challenge; supp. = supplemental appropriations. Figures are in nominal dollars. Percentages may not sum precisely due to rounding.

Table 2. NPS Appropriations by Account, FY2014-FY2023

(\$ millions, in nominal dollars and inflation-adjusted 2014 dollars; excludes supplemental appropriations)

	ONPS	Construction	HPF	NR&P	CC	LASA	Total ^a
FY2014	2,236.753	137.461	56.410	60.795	—	98.100	2,561.679
FY2015	2,275.773	138.339	56.410	63.117	10.000	98.960	2,614.789
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	2,249.978	136.771	55.771	62.402	9.887	97.838	2,585.152
FY2016	2,369.596	192.937	65.410	62.632	15.000	173.670	2,851.285
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	2,323.484	189.183	64.137	61.413	14.708	170.290	2,795.800
FY2017	2,425.018	209.353	80.910	62.638	20.000	162.029	2,932.018
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	2,336.119	201.678	77.944	60.342	19.267	156.089	2,824.533
FY2018	2,477.969	359.704 ^b	96.910 ^b	63.638	23.000	180.941	3,202.162^b
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	2,332.365	338.568	91.216	59.899	21.649	170.309	3,014.004
FY2019	2,502.711	364.704 ^c	102.660 ^c	64.138	20.000	168.444	3,222.657^c
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	2,310.400	336.680	94.772	59.210	18.463	155.501	2,975.025
FY2020	2,576.992	389.345	118.660	71.166	15.000	206.121	3,377.284
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	2,347.655	354.696	108.100	64.833	13.665	187.777	3,076.725
FY2021	2,688.287	223.907	144.300	74.157	15.000	[-23.000] ^d	3,122.651
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	2,369.400	197.347	127.183	65.360	13.221	[-20.272]	2,752.239
FY2022	2,767.028	225.984 ^e	173.072	83.910	15.000	— ^d	3,264.994^e
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	2,280.771	186.271	142.658	69.164	12.364	—	2,691.228
FY2023	2,923.424	239.803 ^f	204.515	92.512	15.000	— ^d	3,475.254^f
<i>Inflation-Adjusted</i>	2,298.352	188.530	160.787	72.732	11.793	—	2,732.192

Sources: Data for FY2014-FY2022 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2024. Data for FY2023 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-328.

Notes: ONPS = Operation of the National Park System account; NR&P = National Recreation and Preservation account; HPF = Historic Preservation Fund account; LASA = Land Acquisition and State Assistance account; CC = Centennial Challenge account. Data exclude supplemental appropriations. See footnote 1 for additional information on this table.

- Totals for FY2014-FY2017 reflect rescissions of LWCF contract authority of approximately \$30.0 million (annual amounts vary due to sequestration). Because these rescissions are not tied to an individual account, the figures for the individual accounts do not add up to the totals shown. Congress did not enact the rescissions of contract authority in FY2018-FY2023 appropriations. (Separately, the FY2020 and FY2021 appropriations contained rescissions and/or cancellations of unobligated balances from the LASA account.)
- The FY2018 total of \$3.202 billion excludes supplemental appropriations of \$257.6 million. Supplemental FY2018 appropriations for specific accounts were \$207.6 million for Construction and \$50.0 million for HPF.
- The FY2019 total of \$3.223 billion excludes supplemental appropriations of \$128.0 million. Supplemental FY2019 appropriations for specific accounts were \$78.0 million for Construction and \$50.0 million for HPF.
- The Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152), enacted in August 2020, shifted the funding previously provided in the LASA account (i.e., funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund) to mandatory appropriations, so there were no discretionary appropriations to this account for FY2021 and subsequent years. For FY2021, appropriators canceled \$23.0 million in unobligated balances from the LASA account.
- The FY2022 total of \$3.265 billion excludes supplemental appropriations of \$229.5 million. The supplemental FY2022 appropriations were provided for the Construction account.
- The FY2023 total of \$3.475 billion excludes supplemental appropriations of \$1.500 billion. The supplemental FY2023 appropriations were provided for the Construction account.

The portfolio of NPS accounts changed twice during the decade. The Centennial Challenge account was not included in FY2014 appropriations but was funded in FY2015 and thereafter. Also, through FY2020, NPS received discretionary appropriations from the Land and Water

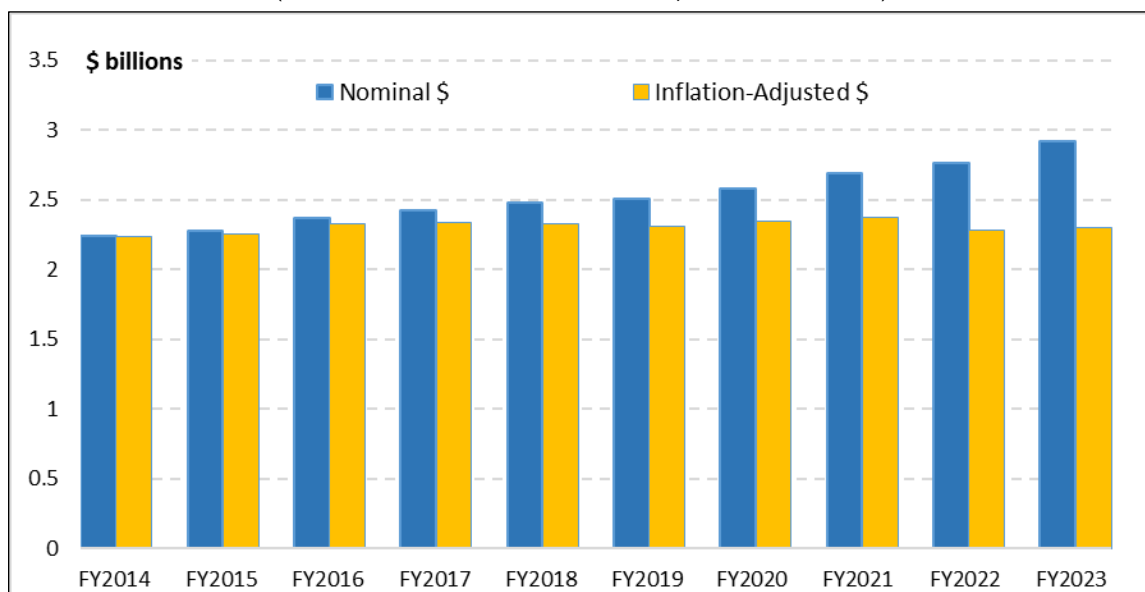
Conservation Fund (LWCF) in the Land Acquisition and State Assistance (LASA) account; but in August 2020, the GAOA designated all funding from the LWCF as mandatory spending, and the discretionary LASA account was not funded in FY2021 or thereafter.

Operation of the National Park System Account

Appropriations for the largest NPS account, entitled Operation of the National Park System (ONPS), support the day-to-day operations of the National Park System. ONPS funding was \$2.237 billion in FY2014 and increased to \$2.923 billion in nominal dollars in FY2023 (**Table 2** and **Figure 3**). When adjusted for inflation, this represents an increase of 3%. As a percentage of total regular NPS appropriations (excluding supplemental appropriations), the ONPS share was 87% in FY2014 and 84% in FY2023. The ONPS account did not receive supplemental appropriations during the decade.

Figure 3. Appropriations for NPS's Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) Account, FY2014-FY2023

(\$ billions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2014 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2014-FY2022 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2024. Data for FY2023 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-328. See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

The majority of ONPS funds are provided directly to individual park units. Activities under the account include resource stewardship, visitor services, park protection (including the U.S. Park Police), facility operations and maintenance, park support, and “external administrative costs” for services provided by outside entities.² Funding for resource stewardship, visitor services, and facility operations and maintenance increased over the decade in inflation-adjusted dollars, while amounts for the other three activities decreased when adjusted for inflation.³ The greatest

² *Park support* includes administering, managing, and supporting the operations of park units. *External administrative costs* include employee compensation, unemployment compensation, centralized information technology costs, telecommunications, postage, space rental from the General Services Administration, and department program charges.

³ In inflation-adjusted dollars, the percentage changes in funding over the decade were as follows: resource stewardship, +5%; visitor services, +5%; facility operations and maintenance, +8%; park support, -2%; external administrative costs, -4%; park protection, -2%.

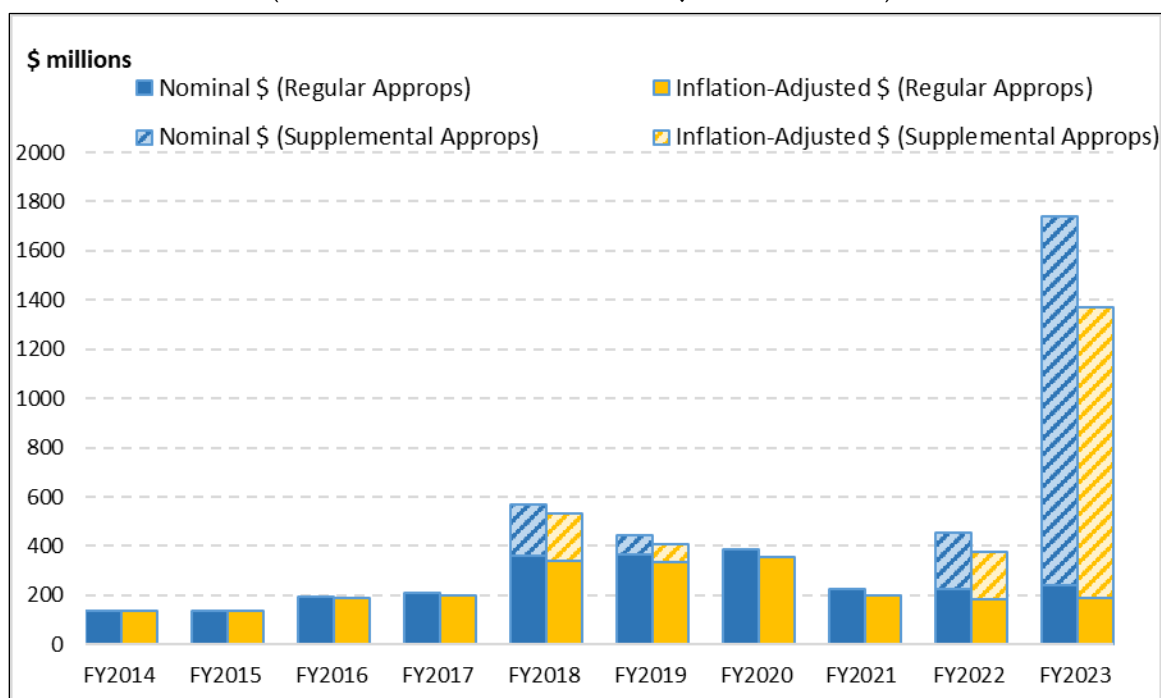
percentage increase was for the facility operations and maintenance activity, which grew by 8% in inflation-adjusted dollars.

Construction Account

The second-largest NPS account, titled Construction, funds repairs and improvements to existing facilities as well as new construction projects and other activities. Regular appropriations for the Construction account were highest in the middle of the decade (FY2018-FY2020) in inflation-adjusted dollars (**Table 2** and **Figure 4**). Comparing the beginning and end of the decade, the regular appropriations (excluding supplementals) were 37% higher in FY2023 than FY2014 in inflation-adjusted dollars. Supplemental appropriations for disaster recovery in FY2018, FY2019, FY2022, and FY2023 increased the account totals for those years. The largest supplemental appropriation was in FY2023, when P.L. 117-328, Division N, appropriated \$1.500 billion to the account for NPS to address the consequences of wildfires, hurricanes, and other natural disasters occurring in and prior to calendar year 2023. The Construction account represented 5% of the total discretionary appropriation for FY2014 and 7% for FY2023, excluding supplemental appropriations; with the FY2023 supplemental included, the Construction account's share of the FY2023 total was 35%.

Figure 4. Appropriations for NPS's Construction Account, FY2014-FY2023

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2014 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2014-FY2022 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2024. Data for FY2023 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-328. See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

NPS Infrastructure: Funding for Maintenance and Repairs

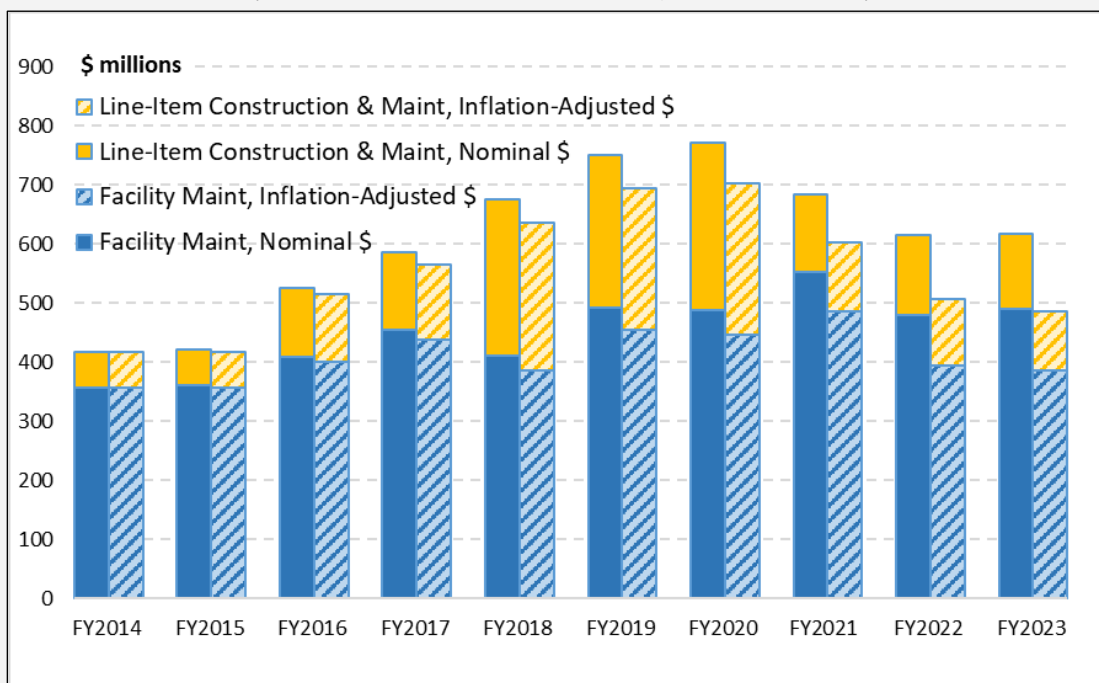
NPS's substantial backlog of deferred maintenance (DM)—infrastructure maintenance and repairs that were not performed as scheduled or as needed—has been an ongoing concern for many in Congress. The backlog grew in nominal dollars from an estimated \$11.493 billion in FY2014 to an estimated \$22.288 billion as of the end of FY2022 (the most recent year available). This is a growth of 94% in nominal dollars or 60% in inflation-adjusted terms, and includes a 60% nominal-dollar increase in one year (FY2020-FY2021), which NPS attributes in part to changes in its methods for estimating DM. In addition to addressing DM, NPS must also budget for ongoing cyclical and routine maintenance to keep infrastructure in good condition and to avoid adding to the DM backlog.

Discretionary appropriations, along with allocations from the Department of Transportation for road and bridge improvements, historically provided most of the agency's funding for maintenance and repairs. In 2020, however, the Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152) established the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund with mandatory funding for NPS DM of up to \$1.330 billion annually for five years.

Within NPS's discretionary appropriations, two budget activities provide the primary support to address maintenance and repairs (both regular and deferred): the *line-item construction and maintenance* activity within the Construction account and the *facility maintenance* subactivity (part of the *facility operations and maintenance* activity) within the Operation of the National Park System account. Funding for these two budget areas combined (**Figure 5**) increased through FY2020 and then declined, for an overall growth of 17% in inflation-adjusted dollars over the decade. Other discretionary and mandatory funds from multiple sources also have been used for NPS maintenance and repairs.

Figure 5. Appropriations for Two NPS Discretionary Budget Activities That Primarily Address Maintenance and Repairs, FY2014-FY2023

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2014 dollars)



Sources: NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2024 and CRS communication with NPS Budget Office. Funding excludes supplemental appropriations. Facility Maintenance is a subactivity within the Facility Operations and Maintenance budget activity.

For more information on NPS maintenance and repairs, see CRS Report R44924, *National Park Service Deferred Maintenance: Frequently Asked Questions*; CRS Report R43997, *Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY2011-FY2020 Estimates and Issues*; and CRS In Focus IFI1636, *The Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152)*.

Among the specific activities funded in the Construction account, the largest is *line-item construction and maintenance*, which covers construction of new facilities and rehabilitation and replacement of existing facilities. Appropriations for this budget activity more than tripled in inflation-adjusted dollars between FY2014 and FY2020 before declining in FY2021-FY2023, for an overall growth of 64% over the decade (also see text box above). According to NPS, the activity “focuses on projects that repair, replace, or improve high priority mission-critical and mission-dependent assets, and ensures that investments are reasonable, cost effective, and fiscally sustainable over the life-time of the investment.”⁴ Other activities funded in the Construction account include emergency and unscheduled construction, repair and replacement of employee housing, dam safety, equipment replacement, construction planning and program management, development of general management plans for park units, and preparation of special studies of areas (for instance, to assess their potential for inclusion in the National Park System).

Historic Preservation Fund

The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), established in 1976, is administered by NPS through appropriations to the agency’s HPF account. In accordance with the purposes of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA),⁵ the fund primarily provides grants-in-aid to state and tribal historic preservation offices for conservation of cultural and historical assets and sites. Some of these grants are awarded by formula, and others are provided through competitive programs. The HPF is funded by revenues from oil and gas activities on the U.S. outer continental shelf. Funding was reauthorized through FY2023 in P.L. 114-289.⁶

The HPF has received \$150 million annually in deposits from offshore oil and gas revenues, but the funding is available only to the extent appropriated by Congress. Annual appropriations from the account were less than the deposited amount during the first part of the decade but subsequently increased and in recent years exceeded the annual deposit. The FY2023 appropriation was 185% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars than the FY2014 appropriation (**Figure 6** and **Table 2**). The HPF account represented 2% of the total NPS appropriation in FY2014 and 6% of the total in FY2023.

Supplemental appropriations augmented regular appropriations for the HPF account in two years—FY2018 and FY2019—and were targeted primarily to hurricane recovery.⁷ The funding was mainly to assist recovering states and territories with compliance activities related to Section 106 of the NHPA.⁸ Under Section 106, undertakings that receive federal funds or permits—including some hurricane recovery activities—must be evaluated for their potential effects on historic properties.

The largest activity in the HPF account is grant funding for state historic preservation offices, which rose by 4% in inflation-adjusted terms over the decade. Grants for tribal historic preservation offices approximately doubled after adjusting for inflation. The account also funded various competitive grant programs in particular years. For FY2023, these included grants for

⁴ NPS, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information, Fiscal Year 2024*, p. Const-7, at <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/fy2024-nps-greenbook.pdf-508.pdf>.

⁵ P.L. 89-665, as amended; 54 U.S.C. §§300101 et seq. For more information on historic preservation and the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), see CRS Report R45800, *The Federal Role in Historic Preservation: An Overview*, by Mark K. DeSantis.

⁶ As of the date of this CRS report, this appropriations authorization had expired and funding had not been reauthorized.

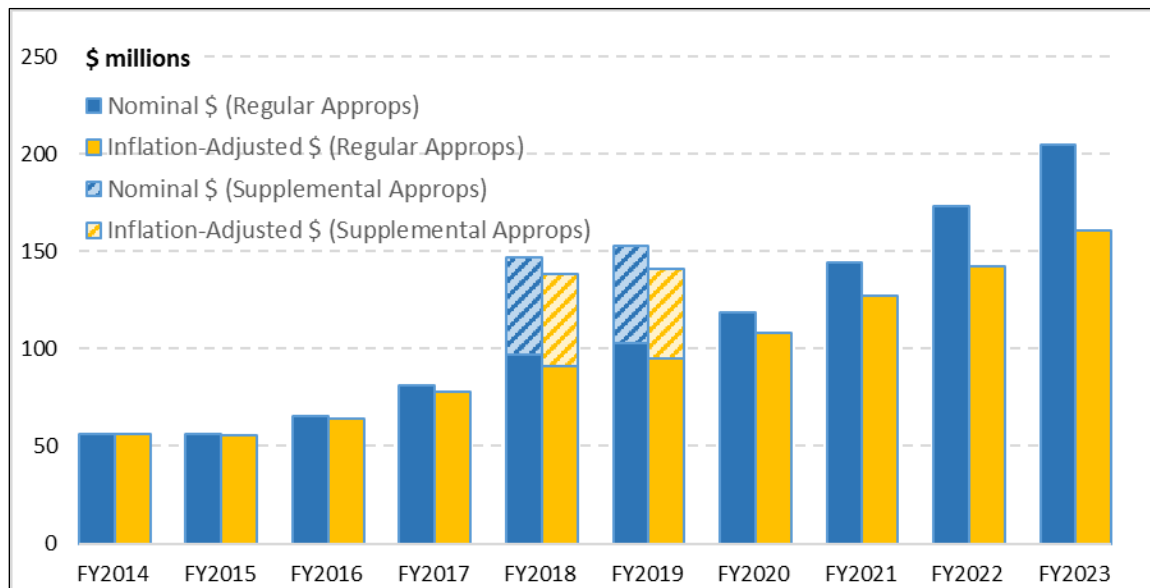
⁷ P.L. 115-123 and P.L. 116-20. The FY2019 funds also were for response to other types of natural disasters.

⁸ 54 U.S.C. §306108.

sites associated with the African American civil rights movement, grants to preserve the history of equal rights, and grants to underserved communities. As separate line items in FY2023, the account also funded grants for historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), historic revitalization, the Save America's Treasures program to restore nationally significant historic structures and artifacts, preservation activities related to the U.S. Semiquincentennial (the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States), and other projects.

Figure 6. Appropriations for NPS's Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) Account, FY2014-FY2023

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2014 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2014-FY2022 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2024. Data for FY2023 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-328. See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

National Recreation and Preservation Account

The National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) account funds NPS programs that primarily assist state, local, tribal, and private land managers with outdoor recreation planning, natural and cultural resource preservation, and other conservation-related activities outside the National Park System. Appropriations for the account were 20% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars in FY2023 as compared with FY2014 (**Figure 7** and **Table 2**). The portion of NPS discretionary appropriations used for the NR&P account was 2% in FY2014 and 3% in FY2023. The NR&P account was not a recipient of supplemental funding during the decade.

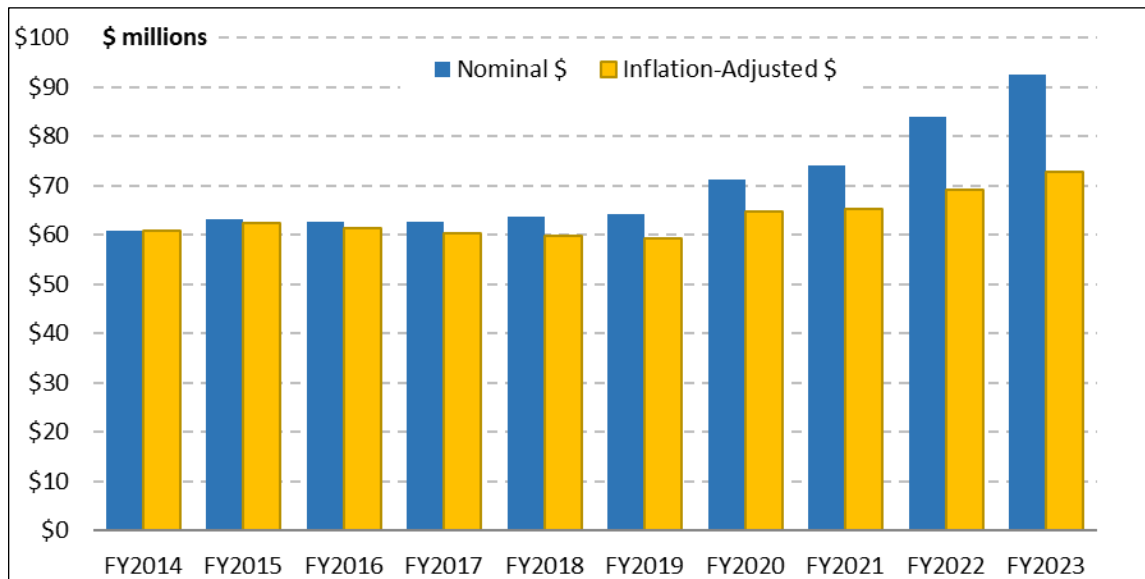
A variety of natural, cultural, and recreational assistance programs are funded in the NR&P account. NPS's Heritage Partnership Program, which provides funding assistance to national heritage areas, is the largest single program in the account.⁹ Its appropriations grew over the decade by 26% in inflation-adjusted dollars, despite budget requests from the Obama and Trump Administrations for reductions. There are 61 national heritage areas, 13 of which were established

⁹ National heritage areas are established by Congress but are not federally managed, and they are not part of the National Park System. For more on national heritage areas, see CRS Report RL33462, *National Heritage Areas: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Mark K. DeSantis.

since 2019.¹⁰ The NR&P account also has included other programs that assist nonfederal entities, such as the American Battlefield Protection Program;¹¹ Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program; National Natural Landmarks and National Historic Landmarks Programs; and National Register of Historic Places. The account further covers international park affairs and environmental and compliance review.

Figure 7. Appropriations for NPS's National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) Account, FY2014-FY2023

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2014 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2014-FY2022 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2024. Data for FY2023 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-328. See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

Centennial Challenge

The Centennial Challenge account was funded through most of the decade (FY2015-FY2023).¹² The account consists of a matching-grant program to spur partner donations for park improvements, with a priority on addressing deferred maintenance.¹³ The name “Centennial Challenge” indicates the fund’s origin as a program to improve the parks in anticipation of NPS’s 2016 centennial anniversary and its second century of park management. Both the George W. Bush and Obama Administrations had proposed discretionary and mandatory funding for the fund prior to its legislative establishment in December 2016 (P.L. 114-289), and Congress had provided discretionary appropriations in some years, starting in FY2008. P.L. 114-289 enacted the Centennial Challenge Fund into law and authorized it to receive federal revenues from certain

¹⁰ These 13 national heritage areas were established in P.L. 116-9 and P.L. 117-339.

¹¹ The American Battlefield Protection Program’s (ABPP’s) planning grants are funded in the NR&P account, while grants to states for battlefield land acquisition, modernization, and restoration are funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (see below). For more on the ABPP, see CRS In Focus IF11329, *American Battlefield Protection Program*, by Mark K. DeSantis.

¹² The account had earlier received funding in FY2008 and in FY2010 under the title “Park Partnership Grants.”

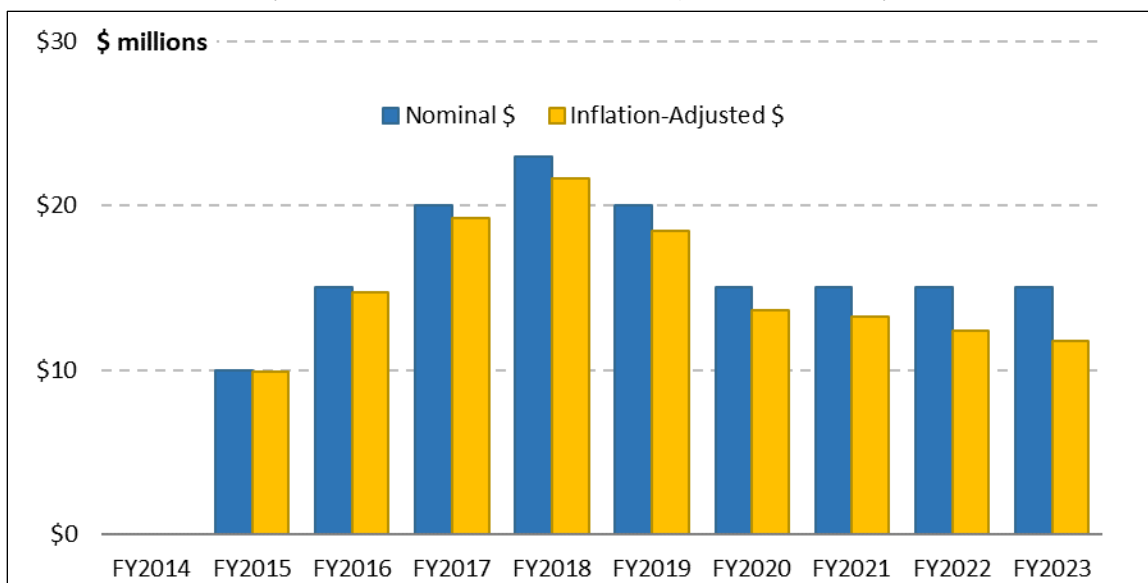
¹³ The account provides the federal share of matching grants for “signature” park projects and programs identified by the Interior Secretary and must “help prepare the national parks for another century of conservation, preservation, and visitor enjoyment” (P.L. 114-289).

sales of National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Passes to seniors, in addition to discretionary appropriations. The senior pass revenues are provided as offsetting collections. Revenues are to be matched on at least a one-to-one basis by nonfederal donations.

During the FY2015-FY2023 period, discretionary appropriations for the fund rose and then fell (Table 2 and Figure 8). The FY2023 appropriation was 20% higher than FY2015 in inflation-adjusted dollars. The account represented less than 1% of total NPS appropriations in both years and did not receive supplemental appropriations.

Figure 8. Appropriations for NPS's Centennial Challenge Account, FY2014-FY2023

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2014 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2014-FY2022 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2024. Data for FY2023 are from the joint explanatory statement for P.L. 117-328. See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure.

Land Acquisition and State Assistance Account

Through FY2020, NPS's LASA account consisted of discretionary appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF, 54 U.S.C. §§200301 et seq.). The LWCF is the primary funding source for the federal land management agencies to acquire lands, and it also funds NPS-administered grants to states for outdoor recreation needs.¹⁴ Under the LWCF Act, the LWCF receives deposits of \$900 million annually, primarily from offshore oil and gas revenues.¹⁵ During most of the decade covered by this report, this funding was available only to the extent provided in discretionary appropriations acts. In August 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152) made all funding from the LWCF mandatory spending.¹⁶ Thus, there were no discretionary appropriations for NPS's LASA account in FY2021-FY2023.

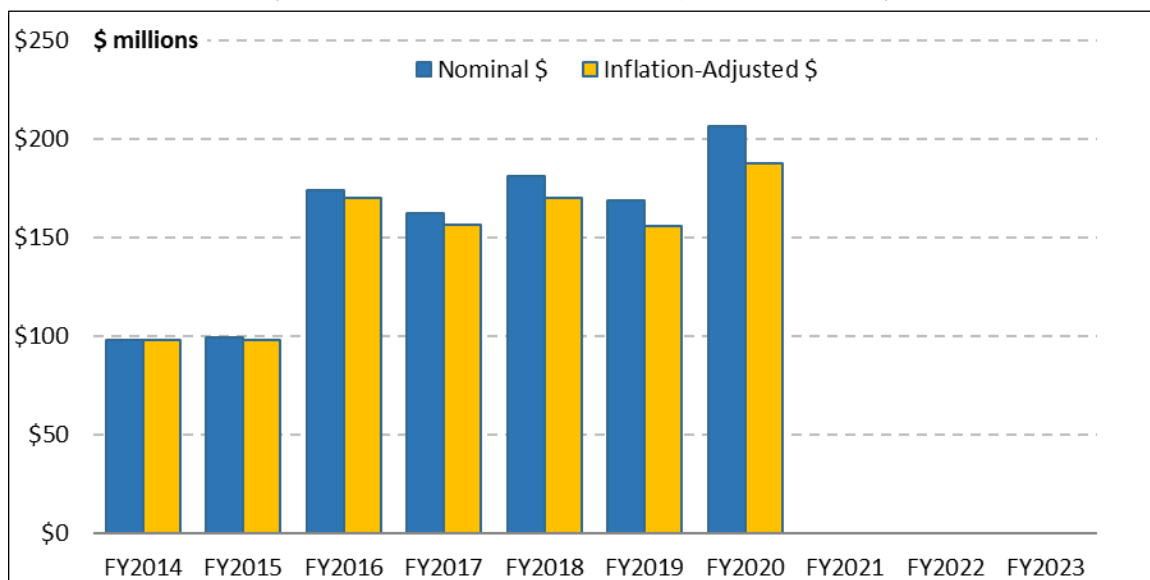
¹⁴ For more information on the LWCF, see CRS Report RL33531, *Land and Water Conservation Fund: Overview, Funding History, and Issues*, by Carol Hardy Vincent.

¹⁵ The state grant program of the LWCF also receives additional mandatory funding from offshore oil and gas revenues under the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-432).

¹⁶ For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11636, *The Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152)*, by Carol Hardy Vincent, Laura B. Comay, and Bill Heniff Jr. Although the funding is now provided through mandatory (continued...)

Figure 9. Appropriations for NPS's Land Acquisition and State Assistance (LASA) Account, FY2014-FY2023

(\$ millions, in nominal and inflation-adjusted 2014 dollars)



Sources: Data for FY2014-FY2020 are from NPS budget justifications for FY2016-FY2022.

Notes: See footnote 1 for additional information on this figure. Not reflected in the figure is a cancellation of \$23.0 million in unobligated balances from the LASA account in FY2021.

The LASA account covered NPS's own acquisitions—typically nonfederal “inholdings” inside the boundaries of national park units—and NPS grants to states for outdoor recreation purposes. During the FY2014-FY2020 period, discretionary appropriations for the LASA account—including both NPS federal land acquisition and assistance to states—increased overall, with a notable growth in FY2016 and after (**Figure 9** and **Table 2**), primarily attributable to higher appropriations for the state assistance program in the later years. Adjusted for inflation, the appropriation grew by 91% between FY2014 and FY2020. The LASA account represented approximately 4% of the total NPS regular appropriation in FY2014 and 6% in FY2020, and did not receive supplemental appropriations.

NPS Appropriations in Context

Changes in NPS appropriations can be considered in the context of changes in the numbers of annual visits to the parks, agency staffing levels, and the National Park System's size, among other factors. Over the past decade, total annual visits to the parks increased, despite a drop in visitation in FY2020 related to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Notwithstanding increases in appropriations, NPS staffing levels were lower at the end of the decade than the beginning. The size of the National Park System remained roughly steady in terms of acreage, but 23 new units were added.

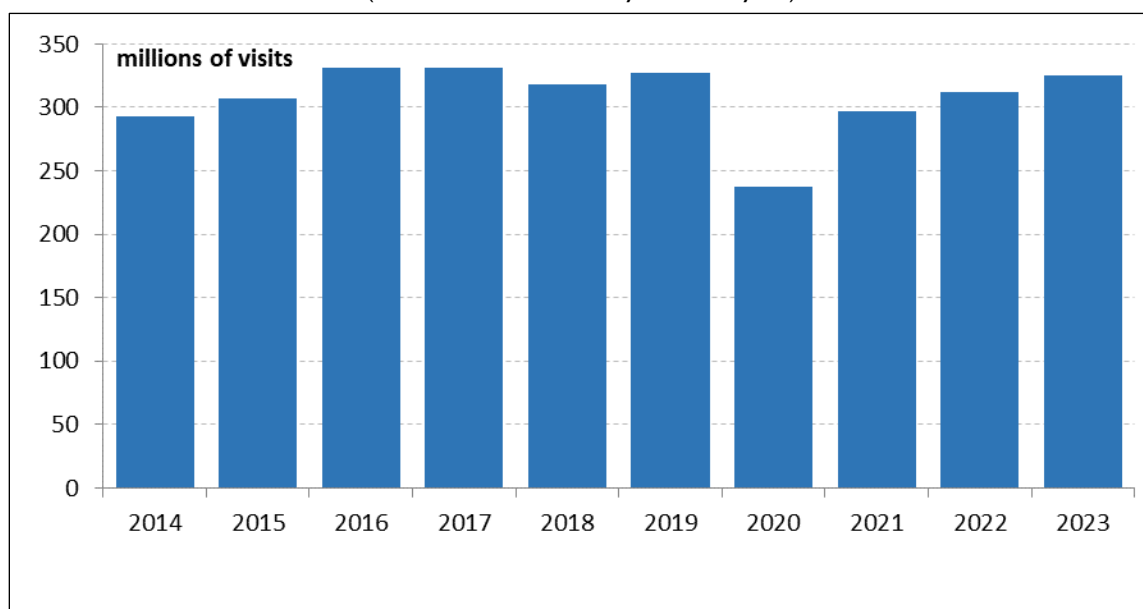
appropriations, allocation of amounts remains an issue in the discretionary appropriations process, as the GAOA provides that appropriations acts may specify alternate allocations to those proposed by the President.

Visits to the National Parks

Numbers of recreational visits to the National Park System varied over the past 10 years. The highest numbers of visits (roughly 330 million each year) were in calendar years 2016 and 2017 (**Figure 10** and **Table 3**). The visitation numbers dropped significantly in 2020 after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic but rebounded to approximately 325 million visits in 2023, making visitation in that year 11% higher than at the beginning of the decade. Many factors may affect visitation to the parks in a given year, including national economic conditions, weather, changes in population demographics, park closures due to disasters or lapses in appropriations, park promotional campaigns, competing recreational choices, and other factors.

Figure 10. Annual Recreational Visits to the National Park System, 2014-2023

(total visits in millions, by calendar year)



Source: NPS, *NPS Stats*, at <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/Reports/National>.

Table 3. Annual Recreational Visits to the National Park System, 2014-2023

(total visits in millions, by calendar year)

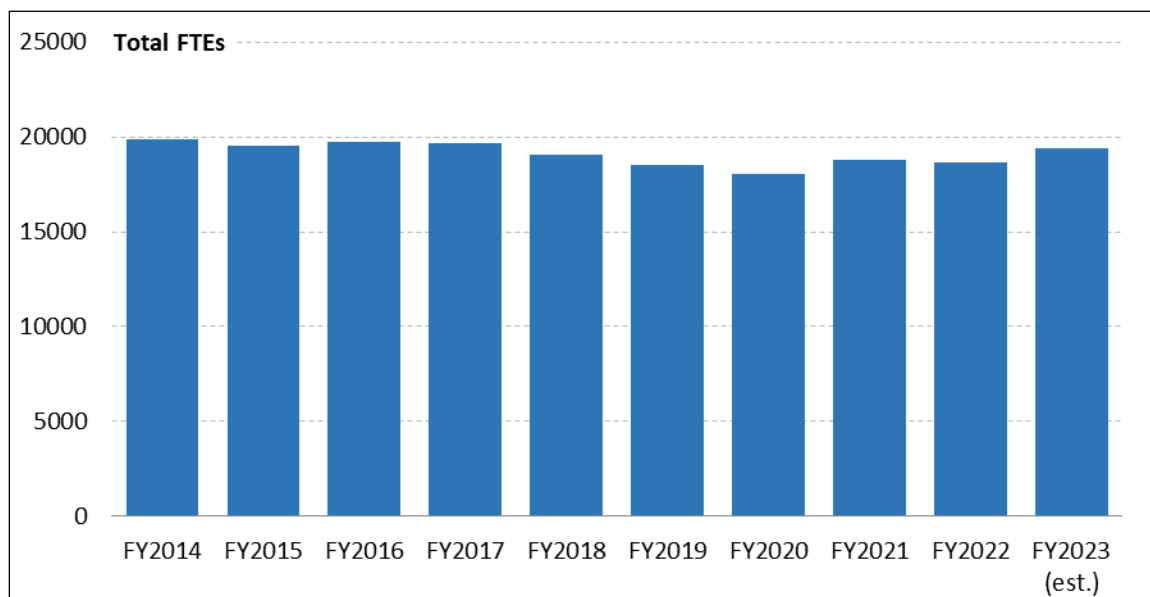
Year	Number of Visits (in millions)	Year	Number of Visits (in millions)
2014	292.8	2019	327.5
2015	307.2	2020	237.1
2016	331.0	2021	297.1
2017	330.9	2022	312.0
2018	318.2	2023	325.5

Source: NPS, *NPS Stats*, at <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/Reports/National>.

National Park Service Staffing

NPS full-time equivalent (FTE) staff levels were highest in the earlier part of the decade but saw growth in FY2023, owing in part to mandatory appropriations in the IRA for NPS employee hiring.¹⁷ FTE staff ranged from a high of 19,894 in FY2014 to a low of 18,060 in FY2020 (Figure 11 and Table 4).¹⁸ Estimated staffing for FY2023 (19,390 FTE) was 3% lower than at the beginning of the decade.

Figure 11. NPS Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff, FY2014-FY2023



Sources: FY2014-FY2015 figures from DOI, “Department of the Interior FTE History: Full-Time Equivalent Staff Year (FTE) Actual of Bureaus and Offices.” FY2016-FY2023 figures from NPS budget justifications.

Table 4. NPS Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff, FY2014-FY2023

Year	Number of FTEs	Year	Number of FTEs
FY2014	19,894	FY2019	18,544
FY2015	19,539	FY2020	18,060
FY2016	19,722	FY2021	18,814
FY2017	19,668	FY2022	18,622
FY2018	19,032	FY2023	19,390 (est.)

Sources: FY2014-FY2015 figures from DOI, “Department of the Interior FTE History: Full-Time Equivalent Staff Year (FTE) Actual of Bureaus and Offices.” FY2016-FY2023 figures from NPS budget justifications.

¹⁷ For more information, see the text box in this report titled “Mandatory Appropriations in the National Park Service’s Budget.”

¹⁸ These employment figures, reported in NPS budget justifications, differ from those reported by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). NPS calculates employment by FTEs, defined as the total number of regular straight-time hours (not including overtime or holiday hours) worked by employees, divided by the number of compensable hours applicable to each fiscal year. By contrast, OPM data utilizes “on-board employment” figures, which calculate the number of employees in pay status at the end of the quarter. For more information, see CRS Report R45480, *U.S. Department of the Interior: An Overview*, by Mark K. DeSantis.

Size of the National Park System

National Park System acreage grew by 1% over the decade, from 84.5 million acres in FY2014 to 85.2 million acres in FY2023 (**Table 5**). The percentage of National Park System lands owned by the federal government remained steady, at 95% of total system lands.¹⁹ The remainder—the nonfederal land in the system—includes lands within park boundaries (sometimes known as “inholdings”) that are owned by state or local governments and by private landowners.

Table 5. Size of the National Park System, FY2014-FY2023

(in millions of acres)

	Federal Land	Nonfederal Land	Total Acreage
FY2014	80.466	4.011	84.477
FY2015	80.598	4.019	84.616
FY2016	80.728	4.008	84.736
FY2017	81.008	4.031	85.039
FY2018	81.011	4.034	85.045
FY2019	81.095	4.005	85.100
FY2020	81.098	4.015	85.112
FY2021	81.104	4.012	85.116
FY2022	81.130	4.005	85.134
FY2023	81.158	3.996	85.154

Source: NPS Land Resources Division, annual summaries of acreage, at <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/acreagereports.htm>.

Notes: Federal Land category includes NPS Fee Acres, Less Than Fee Acres, and Other Federal Fee Acres. Nonfederal Land category includes Other Public Acres and Private Acres. Totals may not sum precisely due to rounding.

A total of 23 units were added to the system in the FY2014-FY2023 period.²⁰ Many were relatively small in acreage, such as Stonewall National Monument in New York (0.12 acres) and Belmont-Paul Women’s Equality National Monument in Washington, DC (0.34 acres). The largest units added to the system during the decade were Valles Caldera National Preserve in New

¹⁹ Almost all of the system’s federally owned lands are directly administered by NPS. However, the federally owned portion of the system also includes some NPS “less than fee” acres (e.g., conservation easements or rights-of-way) and some lands managed by other federal agencies, such as the Bureau of Reclamation or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Taken together, these two types of lands amount to about 1% of the federally owned portion of the system.

²⁰ These units are the Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument (NV), World War I Memorial (DC), Valles Caldera National Preserve (NM), Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park (MA and RI), Pullman National Monument (IL), Honouliuli National Monument (HI), Waco Mammoth National Monument (TX), Manhattan Project National Historical Park (TN, NM, and WA), Castle Mountains National Monument (CA), Belmont-Paul Women’s Equality National Monument (DC), Stonewall National Monument (NY), Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument (ME), Harriet Tubman National Historical Park (NY), Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument (AL), Freedom Riders National Monument (AL), Reconstruction Era National Monument (SC), Camp Nelson National Monument (KY), Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial (DC), Mill Springs Battlefield National Monument (KY), Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park (MO), Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument (MS), New Philadelphia National Historic Site (IL), and Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley National Monument (IL and MS). A list of recent additions to the National Park System is at NPS, *Recent Changes in the National Park System*, at <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/recent-changes.htm>.

Mexico (89,766 acres) and Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument in Maine (87,564 acres). Other acreage changes resulted from boundary adjustments in existing parks.

Concluding Summary

NPS's regular discretionary appropriations fluctuated over the past decade, with an overall trend of growth in both nominal and inflation-adjusted dollars. The FY2023 regular appropriation (excluding supplemental appropriations) was 36% higher than FY2014 in nominal dollars and 7% higher in inflation-adjusted dollars. Among the six NPS accounts in use during the decade, the account covering basic park operations consistently received the highest share of the total appropriation. NPS received supplemental appropriations for disaster relief in FY2018, FY2019, FY2022, and FY2023, and also received mandatory appropriations from multiple sources and allocations from DOI-wide accounts in each year.

NPS's overall funding growth occurred in the context of a 10% increase in park visits over the decade. Visits to the parks peaked in 2016, 2017, and 2019 at approximately 330 million visits for each of those years. Notwithstanding the growth in NPS appropriations, agency staffing levels declined by 3% over the decade. Although park acreage grew by only 1%, 23 units were added to the system over the 10-year period.

A major funding issue for NPS is infrastructure reinvestment. The agency's backlog of deferred maintenance and repairs was estimated at \$22.288 billion as of the end of FY2022, the most recent year available. The estimated backlog grew over the decade by 60% in inflation-adjusted dollars, although some of the growth was attributed to changes in the agency's methods for estimating deferred maintenance. For two discretionary subaccounts (within the ONPS and Construction accounts) that mainly address both regular and deferred maintenance, the combined funding increased by 17% in inflation-adjusted dollars over this period. In addition, the Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152), enacted in August 2020, provided a new source of mandatory spending to address NPS deferred maintenance.²¹ NPS's infrastructure needs have continued to receive attention in the 118th Congress, both within and outside the annual appropriations process.

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²¹ For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11636, *The Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152)*, by Carol Hardy Vincent, Laura B. Comay, and Bill Heniff Jr.

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