



# **Losing Our Heritage**

Budget Cuts and Workforce Reductions are  
Undermining our Environment and Our Economy

March 29, 2017

## Introduction

Our land management agencies have seen their budgets cut and their workforces dwindle for years. This has led to many tough decisions: reduced visitor services and recreational investments, reduced scientific research and monitoring, compromised conservation and management decisions, growing maintenance backlogs, and other impacts. There is a significant and growing need for Congress and the Administration to invest in conservation programs, yet the Administration's proposed FY18 budget would exacerbate current trends, decimate our public lands, undermine our environment, and stifle our economy.

Over the past several decades, investments in conservation have fallen dramatically. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office [projects](#) that in the next decade federal spending on non-military programs will fall to the lowest level ever recorded, as a percentage of GDP.

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### *Investments in Conservation Have Been Falling for Decades*

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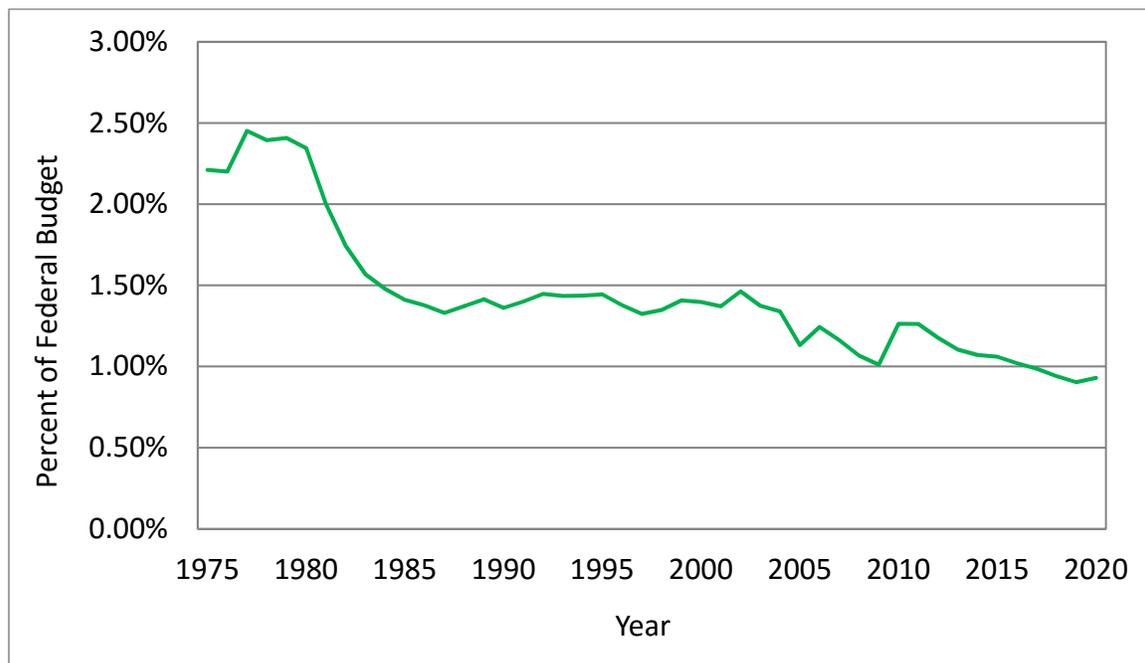


Figure 1: Function 300 Spending as a Percent of Overall Budget (FY1975 – FY2020)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Function 300 is the federal budget function that includes programs whose primary purpose is environmental protection and enhancement; recreation and wildlife areas; and the development and management of the nation's land, water and mineral resources. Source for all data is from the Office of

In total, conservation and natural resource programs account for barely 1 percent of the federal budget, yet they provide invaluable benefits: clean air for children to breathe, clean water for families to drink, healthy public lands that support a booming outdoor recreation economy, vibrant wildlife populations, resilient ecosystems, and renewable energy that powers a clean, sustainable future. These benefits are foundational to the U.S. economy, and create high quality American jobs that cannot be exported.

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## Conservation and Natural Resources Just 1% of Federal Budget

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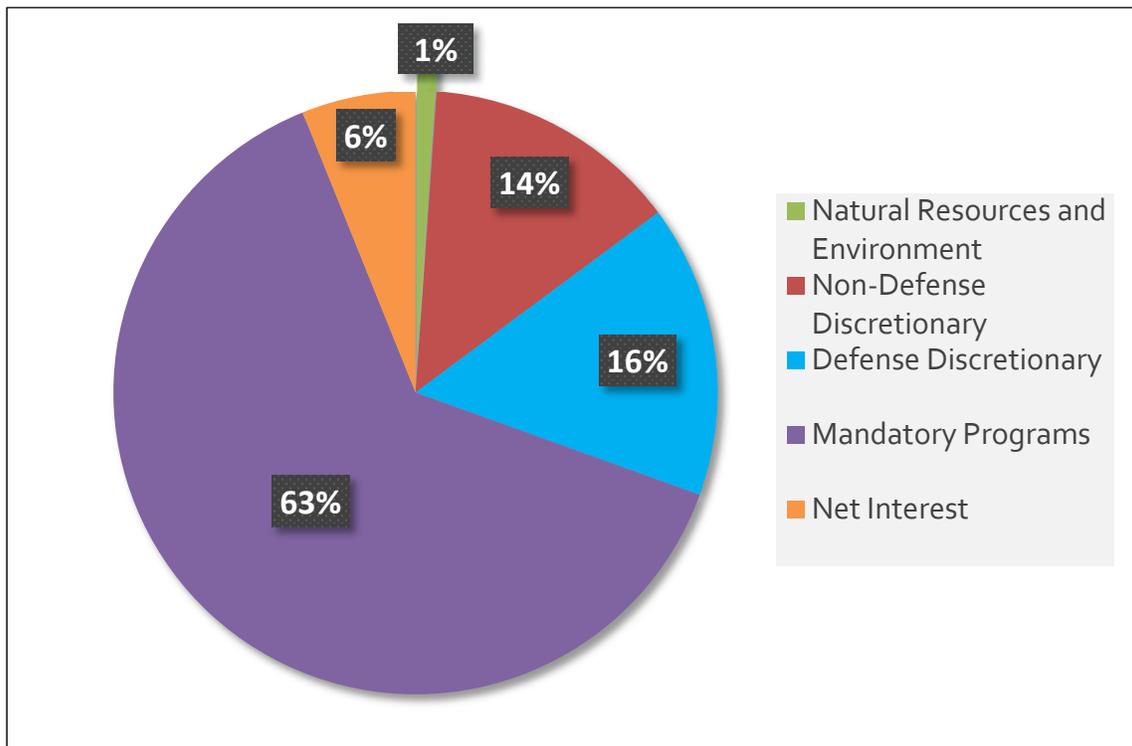


Figure 2: Percent of FY15 Federal Budget by Spending Category<sup>2</sup>

Americans deserve a federal budget that protects public health, prioritizes conservation, and ensures the world we leave our children is cleaner, healthier and more sustainable than the one we inherited. Yet the President’s budget proposal would reduce critical funding in these areas to the lowest levels ever seen. Our federal agencies are doing everything in their power to meet their obligations, and they have been tremendously successful in doing more with less, tightening belts in every way possible before making decisions that impact program funding. Nevertheless, years of funding and staffing constraints have taken their toll.

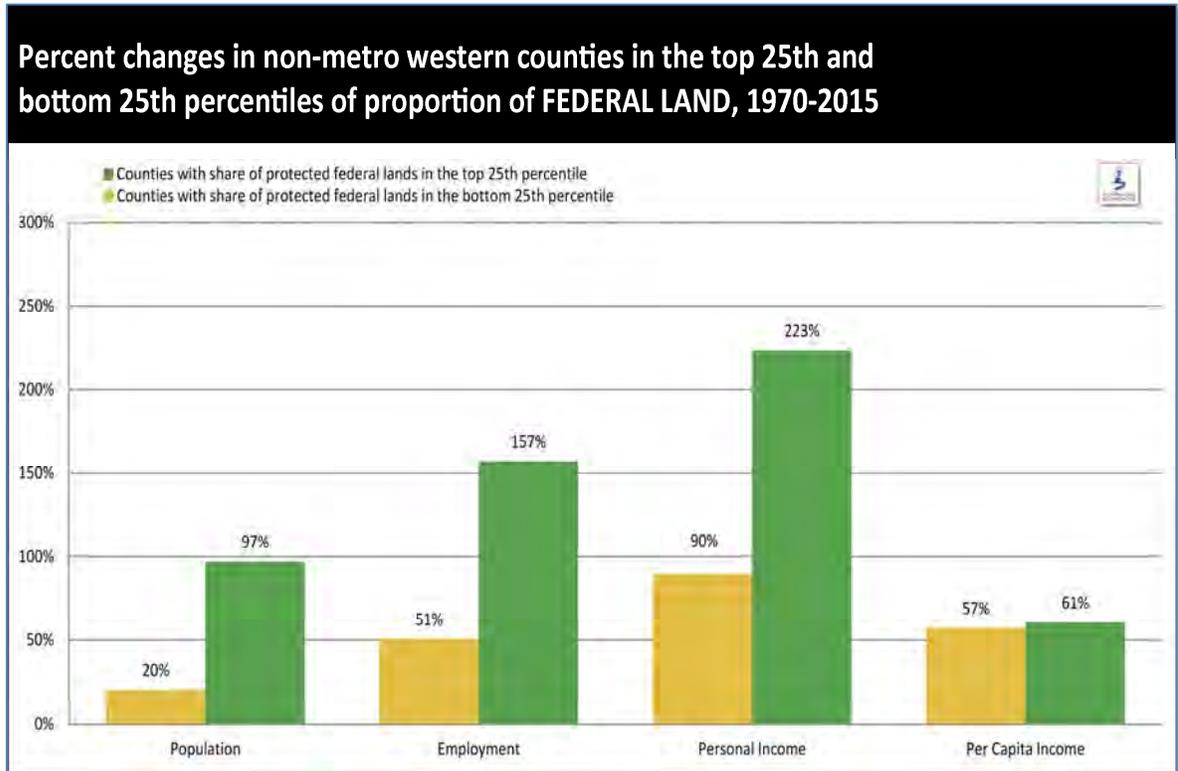
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Management & Budget’s Historical Table 3.2, “Outlays by Function and SubFunction”. Data for future years is projected.

<sup>2</sup> Source for all data is from the Office of Management & Budget’s Historical Tables 3.2, 8.5, and 8.7.

## Good Jobs and Healthy Communities

Our public lands are an economic boon for communities all over the country. A recent [study](#) from Headwaters Economics shows that rural counties with a high percentage of public land had faster growth in employment and personal income than counties with a low percentage of public lands. The report also found that access to outdoor recreation opportunities attracted entrepreneurs and a skilled workforce across a wide range of industries.



Source: Headwaters Economics – [Federal Lands in the West: Liability or Asset?](#)

One major reason for the strong growth in employment and personal income in counties with more public lands is the hundreds of millions of visitors our public lands receive every year. Tourism on public lands generates billions in consumer spending, and directly supports hundreds of thousands of jobs. In recent years, our parks, forests, refuges, and BLM lands have become more popular than ever.

According to the [latest study](#) of federal outdoor recreation trends by the National Center for Natural Resources Economic Research, non-motorized outdoor recreation activities like hiking and skiing have seen a 30 percent increase in participation just since 2008. This translates into significant additional consumer spending, and direct and indirect job creation, particularly in the communities located near our public lands.

Nationally, outdoor recreation is an economic powerhouse, driving more consumer spending than pharmaceuticals, motor vehicles, and household utilities. The latest Outdoor Industry Association [report](#) on the outdoor recreation economy showed that nationally outdoor recreation in the U.S. directly supports 6.1 million jobs, generates \$646 billion in consumer spending annually, and contributes almost \$80 billion in state and federal tax revenue annually.

To put that in perspective, that's enough tax revenue to cover the entire budget of the National Park Service for over 25 years.

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## *Over 900 Million Visits to Public Lands Annually*

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**Table 7.** 2012 Economic contributions of visitor spending for recreation on federal lands and waters (2012 dollars).

Agency	Recreation Visitation (millions)	Visitor Spending (billion \$)	Jobs (thousands)
National Park Service	283	15	243
Bureau of Land Management	59	3	58
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	47	2	37
Bureau of Reclamation	28	1	26
Forest Service	161	11	194
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	NR <sup>1</sup>	5	135
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	360	13	187
<b>All FICOR Agencies</b>	<b>938</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>880</b>

<sup>1</sup> NR = not reported  
 Source: English 2014

Source: National Center for Natural Resources Economic Research – [Federal Outdoor Recreation Trends](#)

Undermining federal investments in our public lands, conservation, environmental restoration, and the outdoor recreation economy makes no economic sense. Federal dollars invested in these programs have outsized impacts on the ground, often leveraging matching state and private funds.

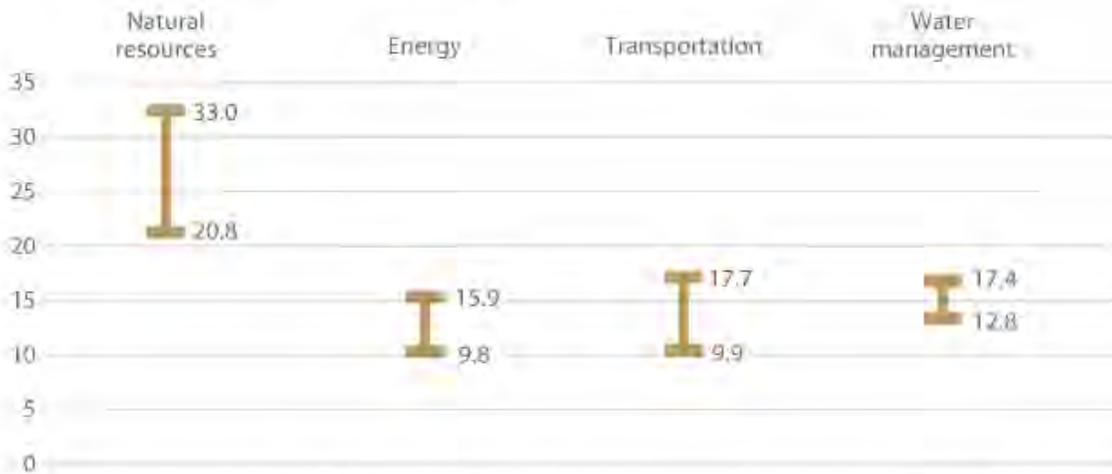
A [recent study](#) from the Center for American Progress showed that investments in natural resource restoration and outdoor recreation creates more jobs than

investments in many other sectors. Again, in many cases, these jobs are created in rural communities located in or around our public lands.

FIGURE 1

### Number of direct and indirect jobs created per \$1 million invested, by sector

Investments in natural resource management—including restoration and recreation—create more jobs than investments in other infrastructure



Sources: U.S. Department of the Interior, *The Department of the Interior's Economic Contributions – Fiscal Year 2011* (2012), available at [https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/migrated/ppa/upload/2011-Econ-Report-FINAL-07\\_09\\_2012.pdf](https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/migrated/ppa/upload/2011-Econ-Report-FINAL-07_09_2012.pdf); Todd K. BenDor and others, "Defining and evaluating the ecological restoration economy," *Restoration Ecology* 23 (3) (2015): 209–219, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/rec.12206>; Robert Pollin, James Heintz, and Heidi Garrett-Peltier, "How Infrastructure Investments Support the U.S. Economy: Employment, Productivity and Growth" (Amherst: Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2009), available at <http://www.peri.umass.edu/publication/item/295-how-infrastructure-investments-support-the-u-s-economy>.



Source: Center for American Progress – [America's Forgotten Forests](#)

## **Bureau of Land Management**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees more than 245 million acres of public land, almost one-eighth of all land in the United States, and [over a third](#) of the nation's energy and mineral resources.

The BLM has faced staffing shortages and budget cuts for years, which has made meeting their objectives increasingly difficult. The President's FY18 budget proposal would slash funding for the BLM by a further 12 percent. This includes a cut of over \$120 million in funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a popular bipartisan program to safeguard natural areas, water resources and our cultural heritage, and to provide recreation opportunities to all Americans.

The BLM's budget has barely kept pace with inflation over the past decade, and since 2005 their staff has been cut by [over 10 percent](#). As with other land management

agencies, the BLM has seen an increase in visitation, additional demand for visitor services, ever expanding responsibilities, additional safety concerns for both visitors and staff in the field, and growing pressure from increasing baseline operational costs like inflation and cost of living adjustments.

This has placed enormous pressure on the agency, leading to mounting maintenance backlogs, delays in permit processing, reductions in visitor services, and other issues. The pressures the BLM currently faces would be further exacerbated by the unprecedented budget cuts being proposed by the Trump administration, and land management challenges will only get more severe as the administration begins to implement their long-term plan to further reduce the federal workforce.

A [recent survey](#) by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), a national organization representing federal, state and local government professionals, found that 67 percent of BLM employees believe the agency does not have enough resources to accomplish its mission.

As an agency, BLM has enough resources to accomplish its mission.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response
<b>All Responses</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Archaeology	0%	29%	8%	45%	18%	0%
Fire	6%	22%	8%	53%	12%	0%
Management	4%	12%	0%	68%	16%	0%
Range	2%	28%	6%	47%	16%	0%
Science/Ecology	2%	21%	8%	45%	23%	0%

Source: Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility – [2017 BLM Survey](#)

The survey asked how the administration could best improve the BLM; the responses were clear:

- *“No hiring freeze”*
- *“NOT implementing a hiring freeze – that would be a disaster”*
- *“Do not further cut our funding. I have 1.8 million acres of land in my field office to manage and I am the only natural resources staff member”*
- *“Some people are doing 2-3 jobs just to get the job done.”*

- *“Funding to fill vacant positions – more than 20 in our office.”*

Budget cuts and workforce reductions are particularly damaging to local economies; public lands and land management employees are the foundation that drives the massive outdoor recreation economy which generates around [\\$80 billion](#) in state, local, and federal tax revenue every year. The BLM receives almost 60 million visits every year, and visitor spending directly supports [58,000 jobs](#).

In Wyoming alone, the BLM currently has [112 vacancies](#), out of a total of 714 employees. A depleted federal work force, especially in states with large swaths of public land, could lead to larger backlogs of conservation, maintenance, permitting, monitoring, and other projects.

In Alaska, the Glennallen Field Office currently has no permanent Field Manager, a position which oversees a wide range of critical day-to-day operations for the field office. The Arctic Field Office currently has no full-time Wildlife Biologist or Natural Resource Specialist, critical vacancies which impact habitat management, species conservation, and resource monitoring across the entire field office.

In Colorado, the BLM Northwest Colorado District is anticipating their overall budget will be set at the lowest level in nearly a decade. The proposed budget cuts could lead to a shortfall millions below projected operating costs, leading to possible reductions in staff and a slow-down in completing important projects and permitting.

One immediate effect in the Northwest Colorado District, is the inability to fill important vacant positions. The Colorado River Valley Field Office [currently](#) has no permanent Field Manager. This vacancy has a significant impact on a wide range of critical day-to-day operations. The Colorado River Valley Field Office oversees a significant amount of oil and gas permit processing for the state of Colorado, and has a major outdoor recreation program, both of which are undermined as a result of this vacancy.

This is just a snapshot of what is happening across the country. Budget cuts, workforce reductions, the hiring freeze, and looming deeper budget cuts are detracting from the critical conservation work, recreation services, natural resource development, and are undermining the economic contributions that all Americans rely on the Bureau of Land Management to provide.

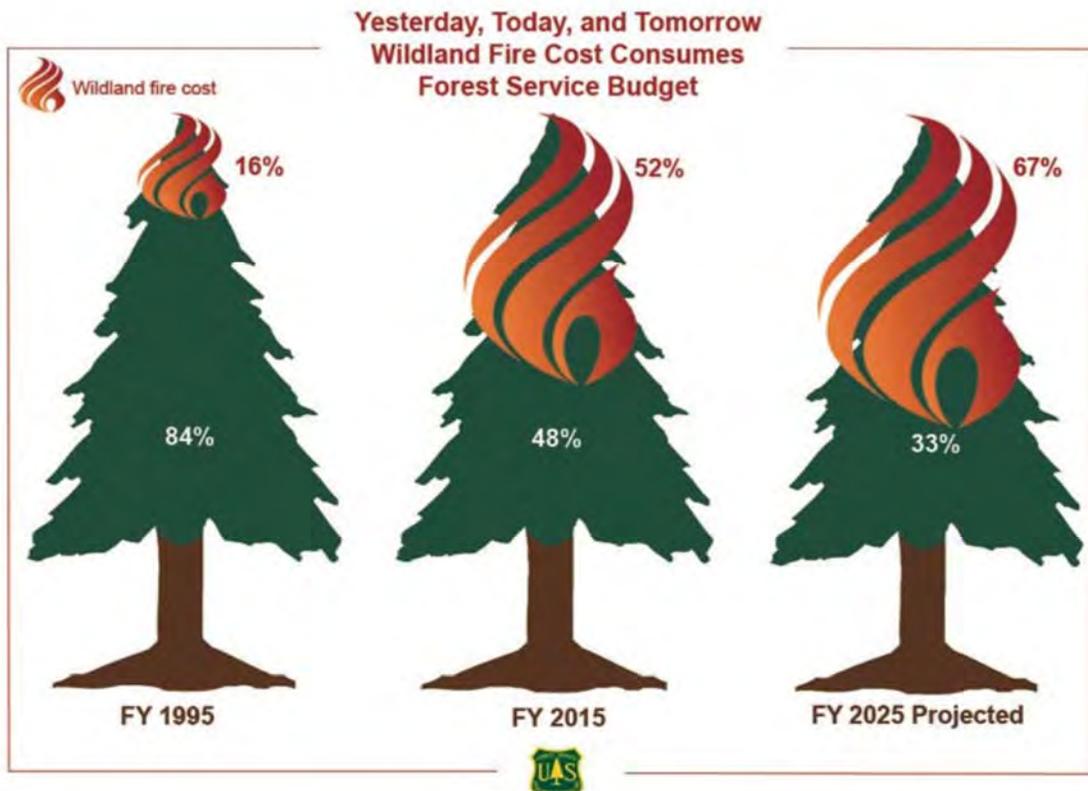
## **Forest Service**

The U.S. Forest Service oversees 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands totaling 193 million acres of public land. Our national forests provide outstanding opportunities

for outdoor recreation, filter our air, purify our water, provide good jobs in rural communities, and are responsible for protecting communities from wildfires that have been steadily getting worse due to compounding factors such as climate change and drought. Over half of all Americans rely on our national forests and grasslands to provide clean drinking water.

The Forest Service has faced significant funding shortages and staff reductions for years. The President’s FY18 budget proposal would slash funding for the Forest Service by a further 12 percent. This includes significant cuts in funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a popular bipartisan program to safeguard natural areas, water resources and our cultural heritage, and to provide recreation opportunities to all Americans.

Since 1994 the Forest Service has lost 30 percent of its workforce, and the growing cost of wildfire suppression has eaten into every other aspect of the agency’s day-to-day work. Currently, over 50 percent of the Forest Service’s budget is spent on wildfire suppression, compared with 16 percent two decades ago, and non-fire personnel have been cut by almost 40 percent since 1998. The President’s budget proposes fully funding the 10-year average of wildfire suppression costs, but proposes no solution to the continued growth of fire suppression costs which is the single most pressing budget constraint the Forest Service faces.



Source: USDA – [The Rising Cost of Wildfire Operations](#)

The mounting cost of fire suppression has placed enormous pressure on the agency, leading to mounting maintenance backlogs, delays in permit processing, reductions in visitor services, and other issues. By fully funding the 10-year average, but simultaneously proposing 12 percent cuts across the board for the Forest Service, critical programs that have already been squeezed by the rising percentage of the Forest Service budget devoted to fire suppression will see even deeper cuts.

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## Recreation and Wilderness Funding Cut 15%

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Source: USDA – [The Rising Cost of Wildfire Operations](#)

Funding for the Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness program has been cut 15 percent since 2001; at the same time, the Forest Service has seen a significant increase in visitation in recent years, and visitation is expected to increase another [30 percent](#) by 2030. This is having direct impacts on the ground. In total, the Forest Service receives over 160 million visitors every year, and visitor spending directly contributes to 194,000 jobs.

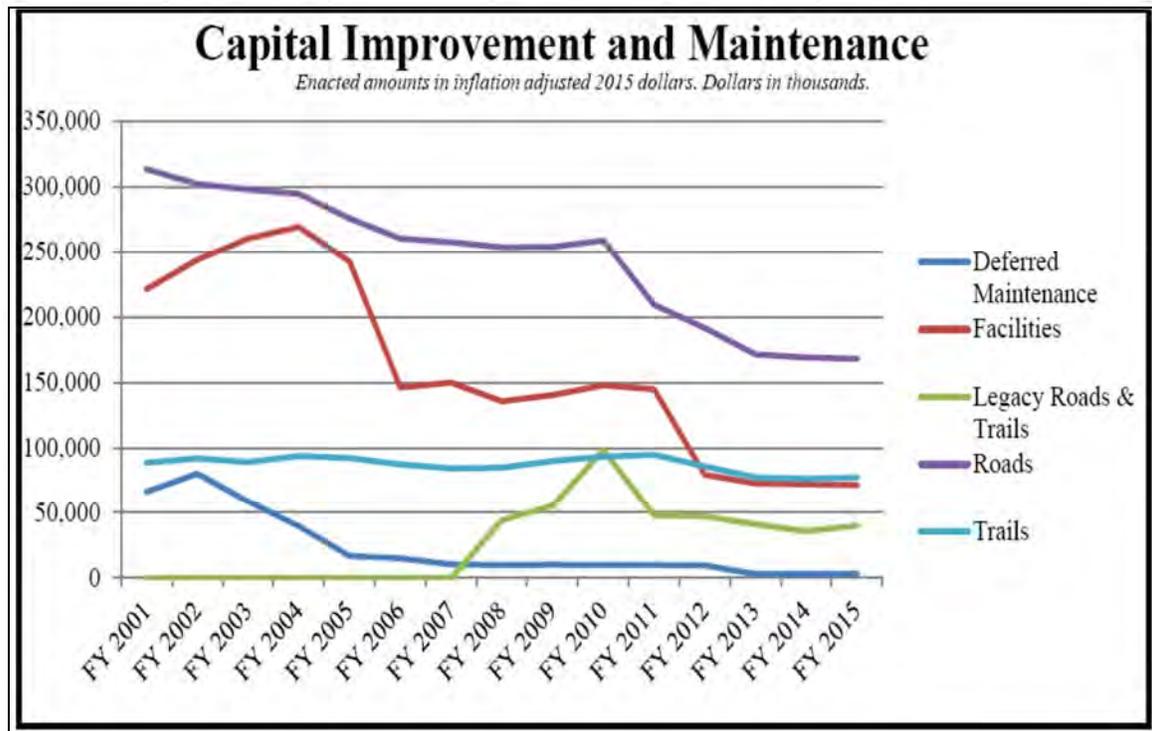
For example, in regions 8 & 9 the Wilderness Program lead position is currently vacant, and the Region 4 wilderness position will soon become vacant. The wilderness program leads oversee all aspects of wilderness management on our national forests, from visitor

use, education and outreach, inventory and monitoring, to maintaining wilderness character and protecting free-flowing wild and scenic rivers which provide clean water to millions of Americans. It will be very detrimental to the management of our national forests if three of the nine Forest Service regions have no wilderness program lead.

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## Deep Cuts to Basic Maintenance Budgets

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Source: USDA – [The Rising Cost of Wildfire Operations](#)

Critical funding for maintaining facilities, roads, trails, and campsites has been cut dramatically in recent years. Funding for deferred maintenance has been cut 95 percent since 2001, the Legacy Roads and Trails program has been cut in half since 2010, and roads funding has been cut 46 percent.

These programs are critical to maintaining the basic infrastructure of the National Forest System. They are essential to address serious public health and safety concerns, maintain public access to rural communities and popular national forests, and protect clean drinking water for millions of Americans.

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## Land Management Planning Cut 64%

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Source: USDA – [The Rising Cost of Wildfire Operations](#)

Land management planning is critical to everything the Forest Service does, allowing forest managers to plan for long term conservation, resource development, and management goals.

On the Cibola National Forest in New Mexico two forest management planning staff have recently retired, and due to the federal hiring freeze they are unable to fill these positions. The Cibola is also about to undertake a forest plan revision, and the reduced capacity in the planning department will make it very difficult to manage the complex and time-consuming plan revision process, and could make it harder to adequately respond to public input on the plan revision.

There are currently approximately 75-80 vacancies across Region 3 that the Forest Service is working to fill. Extrapolated across the nine Forest Service regions, that could mean over 700 vacancies nationally. The Lincoln National Forest is still trying to fill a cave management position in the Guadalupe Ranger District where they are dealing with the devastating White Nose Bat Syndrome. On the Tonto National Forest there are vacant recreation positions which are impacting the Forest Service's ability to provide

the public better information about recreation opportunities and has adversely effected their ability to support regional tourism.

As we have shown, outdoor recreation produces significant economic benefits for communities, especially those near public lands. When our land management agencies are not able to hire recreation staff to partner with communities, it adversely impacts the socio-economic fabric of rural communities that depend on national forests for their livelihoods. By reducing the Forest Service's ability to do their job, it reduces the ability of public lands to contribute to the economic well-being of local communities and their traditional way of life.

In Washington State on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, the Methow Valley Ranger District is currently without a permanent archaeologist or a recreation services lead, and the district shares a NEPA coordinator with the neighboring district. The district also has only one Law Enforcement Officer to cover roughly 2 million acres of public lands. These staffing shortfalls have undercut outdoor recreation and visitor services, and will make it more difficult for important environmental impact studies and planning work to be completed.

Currently about 10 percent of positions on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest in Washington State are vacant. Other important positions are currently being covered by acting or part-time staff, including the Range and Botany Manager and the Heritage Program Manager.

This is just a snapshot of what is happening all across our national forests. Budget cuts, workforce reductions and the growing portion of Forest Service resources that are required to address worsening wildfires are detracting from the critical services that all Americans rely on the National Forest System to provide.

## **National Fish and Wildlife Service**

The Fish and Wildlife Service manages over 560 national wildlife refuges and over 150 million acres of public lands. They are tasked with protecting endangered species, conserving and restoring critical habitat, maintaining healthy fisheries, and protecting international migratory corridors.

Investments in the Fish and Wildlife Service, and in the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) especially, have a significant multiplier effect on the ground. A [recent report](#) from the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) showed that every dollar invested in the NWRS generates \$4.87 in economic activity, a return on investment of 388 percent.

Instead of investing in the Fish and Wildlife Service, the President's FY18 budget proposes slashing their funding by a further 12 percent, and proposes eliminating the National Wildlife Refuge fund, which directs funding to states and counties to help cover the costs of protecting critical wildlife habitat. This in turn increases access to hunting and fishing opportunities which directly contributes to job creation and the outdoor recreation economy.

A recent [survey](#) by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), a national organization representing federal, state and local government professionals, interviewed managers of the National Wildlife Refuge System; 94 percent of refuge managers responded that staffing at their refuge was inadequate to meet their core missions.

When asked how the administration could help the NWRS, the answers were clear:

- *“Addressing the chronic funding shortages that prevent us from adequately staffing our refuges.”*
- *“Providing resources to address our maintenance backlog and better serve the members of the public”*
- *“Not do an across-the-board federal govt. cut which would devastate our tiny agency”*
- *“Increasing funding for the NWR system so we can hire employees to accomplish our mission”*
- *“The loss of staff has impacted all aspects of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The system no longer shines like it did 20-30 years ago”*

Years of constrained budgets for the Fish and Wildlife Service have made meeting their core objectives increasingly difficult.

For example, at the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge the Refuge Manager is currently covering three different positions. In addition to all the normal duties of a Refuge Manager, they are also covering the Deputy Refuge Manager position, which is currently vacant and cannot be filled due to the hiring freeze. The Deputy Manager position is responsible for overseeing all the species conservation and biological work, law enforcement and visitor safety, and refuge maintenance needs.

On top of this, the Refuge Manager is also currently the acting Superintendent of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument, a newly designated

national monument which now must undertake the management and research planning that comes with setting up a new national monument.

## **Conclusion**

As has been shown, there are numerous pressures on the budgets and workforces of our public lands agencies. The trends we are seeing are similar across agencies: dwindling resources, further workforce reductions, and growing demands on visitor services and critical conservation programs.

This report is not meant to be an exhaustive list of the impacts that budget cuts and workforce reductions are having on the day-to-day operations of our land management agencies. It is simply a snapshot of the reality on the ground for our land managers and the communities and economies across the country that depend on our public lands.

It is alarming that the President's budget proposal completely ignores the unmistakable benefits of investing in conservation and our public lands, and instead proposes to exacerbate recent trends by further reducing funding for our land management agencies and undermining both conservation and our economy. Furthermore, the Administration's push to continue drastic workforce reductions for these agencies will place even more constraints on the ability of land managers to meet their core objectives, and is in direct contradiction to the expressed needs of land managers.

It is imperative that the damaging trends we are seeing are reversed. The metrics clearly indicate that investments in our natural resources, conservation, restoration, and outdoor recreation have massive direct and indirect benefits for our economy, job creation, and public health. Americans deserve federal investments that protect public health, prioritize conservation, and ensure the world we leave our children is cleaner, healthier and more sustainable than the one we inherited.

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