



March 2018

Proposed Budget Could Devastate National Parks

The president's budget, which was released on Feb 12, calls for a 16 percent cut to the Department of the Interior and a 7 percent cut to the National Park Service. Secretary Zinke has said that the massive maintenance backlog at the parks could be helped by deregulating oil and gas extraction on public lands. It appears that he also favors selling off public land more than he wishes to acquire new pieces. The maintenance fund has a backlog of \$11.6 billion. Clearly, the solution is a permanent, dedicated stream of money for maintenance.

On March 7, a new new proposed bill seeks to use revenue from expanded oil, gas and other energy production on federal lands and offshore areas. While its impact on funding is unknown, state governments and environmental groups alike strongly oppose this proposed expansion.

The budget proposal calls for cutting more than 1,700 NPS employees at a time when national park visitation is at its highest level ever. In 2016, the national parks received record visitation rates of nearly 331 million visits. Cuts to park staff could lead to a reduction in services to the public, closed facilities, and heavier workloads for remaining staff.

Acknowledging that this is just a proposed budget and has a long way to go before anything becomes law, National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) President Tony Reardon has raised concerns about the priorities of this administration. "We cannot continue to put off the bare minimum needed to maintain our nation's parks," he said. "It is short-sighted to think that cutting staff at our already short-staffed parks, and opening up these precious areas to energy development is the way to accomplish what needs to be done."

Park Entrance Fees on the Rise

In October 2017, the Department of the Interior, which oversees the National Park Service, announced plans to increase entrance fees at 17 parks during their busiest five-month periods as another way to raise new revenue for infrastructure improvements. Under the proposed fee change,

beginning this year, entries for cars would jump from \$25 to \$70 between May 1 and October 31. Experts agree that perhaps 1 percent of the funds needed for maintenance could be found in doubling fees.

Those parks affected include:

- Arches, Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands, Denali, Glacier, Grand Canyon, Grand Teton, Olympic, Sequoia & Kings Canyon, Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Zion National Parks starting on May 1, 2018;
- Acadia, Mount Rainier, Rocky Mountain, and Shenandoah National Parks starting on June 1, 2018; and
- Joshua Tree National Park “as soon as practicable” in 2018.

As soon as this proposal was announced, NTEU sent a letter to Sen. Lisa Murkowski, Chair of the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. In the letter, President Reardon requested that the fee increases be stopped. “Doubling the fee increases, or more, during peak visiting season at our most highly-visited parks will result in fewer visitors, not because the sites are not compelling and beautiful, but because they will no longer be within reach of the average American family’s finances,” he wrote. “I believe that you feel as my members do – that our national parks should be available to everyone, not just the wealthy.”

You can read the letter in its entirety [here](#).

NPS Members Lobby Congress on NTEU Priorities

NPS employees joined hundreds of other federal employees for NTEU’s annual legislative conference in Washington, DC in early February. In addition to briefings and presentations, union members met with their members of Congress to lobby on NTEU’s four legislative priorities:

Improving Pay: Specifically, asking legislators to cosponsor H.R. 4775 and S. 2295 for a 3 percent pay raise in 2019, and to support meaningful compensation, and equitable and transparent pay systems.

Preserving and Enhancing Employee Benefits: Specifically, to oppose further federal retirement reductions, and to support, H.R. 3269, to roll-back the increased contributions for new hires.

Ensuring a Fair Workplace: Specifically, to oppose H.R. 559 and H.R. 3257, bills that weaken due process rights and penalize frontline employees for unfair management practices; and to support H.R. 4878 and S.2340, legislation to re-instate the National Labor Management Relations Council and agency-level forums to allow for meaningful workplace collaboration, resulting in cost-efficiencies and better program implementation.

Securing Agency Missions: Specifically, to provide sufficient, long-term funding for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2018 and for 2019 to meet their missions for the public, and relief from sequestration.



Chapter President of NTEU Chapter 296, National Park Service Headquarters, Rudy D'Alessandro, right, meets with Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Md., at NTEU's 2018 Legislative Conference.

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