



Federal government: parts of the government, usually based in Washington, DC, that make decisions for the whole country

Department of the Interior (DOI): a part of the federal government that manages all land owned by the federal government. Managed by the Secretary of the Interior, who is in the president's Cabinet.

National Parks Service (NPS): part of the Department of the Interior (DOI) that specifically manages national parks

National Park: a scenic or historically important area of countryside protected by the federal government for the enjoyment of the general public or the preservation of wildlife.

Appropriation: when money is split up for different purposes

The Economics of National Parks

By Amelia Josephson. JAN 01, 2016. <https://smartasset.com/taxes/the-economics-of-national-parks>

On March 1, 1872 Congress voted to establish Yellowstone National Park, the first national park. Today, there are 59 national parks and over 20,000 National Park Service employees. Want to know more about these parks and how they're funded? You're in the right place.

The National Park Service

There were national parks before there was a National Park Service. The national parks created in the years following Yellowstone's 1872 designation were managed by the Department of the Interior, the War Department, or the Forest Service, depending on the park.

Then, in 1916 via the Organic Act, Woodrow Wilson created the National Park Service (NPS) within the Department of the Interior (DOI) and gave the NPS the responsibility of managing the national parks and monuments that the DOI already managed.

Later, 1933 saw the transfer to the NPS of all the parks and monuments previously managed by the War Department and the Forest Service, consolidating the National Park Service as we know it.

As of 2015 there are 84 million acres of national park land across 50 states and the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, Saipan and the Virgin Islands.

Where the Money Comes From

In a way, every American who pays federal income taxes contributes to the national parks budget. That's because the federal government foots the bill for the National Park Service.

Each year, the NPS submits a budget proposal that gets wrapped into the budget for the Department of the Interior and the Executive Branch as a whole. That proposed budget then goes to Congress for review.

According to the NPS, the nearly \$3 billion appropriated for the NPS budget falls short of what's needed. In May 2015 the park service said it had delayed \$11.5 billion in necessary maintenance in 2014 due to budget shortfall. Although national parks charge fees, these fees are not nearly enough to fund the national park system, which is why the NPS depends so heavily on Congress' budget appropriations.

Another important source of funding for national parks is the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. The fund takes money from offshore drilling for oil and uses it for the budgets of state and national parks. Congress created the Land and Water Conservation Fund in 1965. The idea was to take money from the extractive industries of offshore oil and gas and put that money into the conservation of land and water via public parks.

On average, the NPS gets \$450 million per year from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The fund is supposed to provide the money for the acquisition of new lands for national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests and trail systems.

America's Most Popular National Parks

According to the director of the NPS, "The national parks return more than \$10 for every \$1 the American taxpayer invests in the National Park Service." In 2014, visits to national parks were up 7% (or 19.2 million visits) over 2013. Visits were down in 2013 because of park closures due to the 16-day government shutdown, an earthquake at the Washington Monument and the effects of Superstorm Sandy.

Several national parks, including Joshua Tree, Rocky Mountain, Grand Teton and Glacier national parks, broke their visitation records in 2014. Which were the most visited parks in 2014, the last year for which the NPS has released statistics? Here's the list of the top 10.

1. Golden Gate National Recreation Area (15,004,420 visits)
2. Blue Ridge Parkway (13,941,749 visits)
3. Great Smoky Mountains National Park (10,099,276 visits)
4. George Washington Memorial Parkway (7,472,150 visits)
5. Lincoln Memorial (7,139,072 visits)
6. Lake Mead National Recreation Area (6,942,873 visits)
7. Gateway National Recreation Area (6,021,713 visits)
8. Natchez Trace Parkway (5,846,474 visits)
9. Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historic Park (5,066,219 visits)
10. Grand Canyon National Park (4,756,771 visits)