



April 4, 2025

RE: FY 2026 Interior, Environment, & Related Agencies Appropriations

Dear Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, & Related Agencies:

The Public Lands Alliance (PLA) respectfully submits this comment concerning the appropriations of major federal land management agencies in fiscal year 2026. On behalf of our members, we are seeking robust investments in the operational funds of the National Park Service (NPS), USDA Forest Service (FS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Our public lands need dedicated staff not only to protect and maintain these important landscapes, but to effectively partner with nonprofit partner organizations and thereby grow critical private support and needed investments.

About PLA

PLA's mission is to connect, strengthen, and represent the nonprofit partners of America's public lands. Our members include philanthropic partners, cooperating associations, conservation corps, outdoor schools, and trails groups that partner with federal and state land management agencies. Our members generate hundreds of millions of dollars annually to support education, recreation, conservation, preservation, volunteerism, and research on parks, forests, wildlife refuges, and monuments.

PLA works with land management agencies to streamline effective partnership agreements, adapt beneficial policies and procedures, and promote the development and long-term success of nonprofit – public lands partnerships. PLA also encourages opportunities authorizing nonprofit partners to leverage and expand upon public funding to achieve their shared missions.

Operational Funds and Staffing

The work that our members undertake in partnership with the NPS, FS, FWS, and BLM cannot be undertaken without appropriate staffing on the units. These partnership agreements and grants outline educational, scientific, historical and interpretive programs and how they are operated with staffing on the units; work cannot not be accomplished without the agreed and appropriate teams in place.

Without rangers, visitor center stores cannot stay open, the stores that raise philanthropic dollars directly for that unit. These philanthropic dollars cannot be raised for deferred maintenance projects if the management agency does not have personnel to conduct and evaluate environmental impact assessments, design developments, or manage construction projects.

Appropriations for public land operations consistently generate economic activity and job creation that far exceeds Congress' initial investment. As an example, the NPS received a total of \$3.8 billion in appropriations in FY 2024, yet according to NPS, park visitors spend about \$26.4 billion in gateway communities and supported 415,000 jobs. This equates to "\$19.4 billion in labor income, with \$32 billion in value added and \$55.5 billion in economic output in the national economy", per the agency's published statistics in 2024. 2024 also saw a record 331,863,358 visitors to NPS units even though the staffing levels have decreased over the past decade to roughly 15,000.

America's public lands are essential to the health and vitality of our nation's \$1.2 trillion outdoor recreation economy. PLA and its members encourage the Subcommittee to consider increasing the operational budgets of NPS, FS, FWS, and BLM such that each agency may return to its staffing levels from 2010, enabling them to continue to expand the outdoor recreation economy and effectively engage with their nonprofit partners.

Nonprofit Partners Leverage Federal Investments

PLA's members have demonstrated a consistent ability to leverage federal investments to meet the missions of America's land management agencies. We ask the Subcommittee to continue funding programs that invite the nonprofit sector to match federal funds, like the National Park Service Centennial Challenge.

PLA also encourages Congress this year to extend the Legacy Restoration Fund established through the Great American Outdoors Act of 2020. PLA supports the efforts of House and Senate Natural Resources leadership to revise the Legacy Restoration Fund authorities to encourage increased private sector philanthropy and investment in tackling deferred maintenance on public lands.

By enhancing and funding programs like these, PLA members will have increased opportunities to aid land management agencies in tackling deferred maintenance, housing, and community engagement.

PLA members and I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss appropriate funding and streamlining for the vitality of DOI partnerships with nonprofit organizations. Please contact Shawn Swearingen, PLA's Director of Government Relations [shawn@publiclandsalliance.org], to schedule a meeting.

On behalf of our membership, PLA is grateful to the Subcommittee for your commitment to using partnerships to ensure land management agency missions are fulfilled. Our members and I look forward to working with you to continue this proud tradition.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Puskar", with a stylized, flowing script.

Dan Puskar
President and CEO
Public Lands Alliance