

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AJR 9 (Wallis) – As Amended June 12, 2025

SUBJECT: National parks: federal funding

SUMMARY: Urges the President and Congress to immediately restore full and consistent funding and staffing for the National Park Service (NPS) and makes findings regarding the iconic nature of the state's national parks, the popularity of these parks, and the impact of reducing the NPS workforce on the local economy, NPS employees, and park visitors.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Provides that the purpose of national parks is to conserve and to provide for the enjoyment of the scenery, natural and historic objects, and wildlife in the National Park System (System) in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations (54 United States Code § 100101).
 - a) Declares that national parks, though distinct in character, are united through their interrelated purposes and resources into one System as cumulative expressions of a single national heritage;
 - b) Declares that individually and collectively, national parks derive increased national dignity and recognition of their superb environmental quality through their inclusion, in one System, preserved and managed for the benefit and inspiration of all the people of the United States.
 - c) Reaffirms that the protection, management, and administration of the System shall be conducted in light of the high public value and integrity of the System and shall not be exercised in derogation of the values and purposes for which the System has been established, except as directly and specifically provided by Congress.
- 2) Declares that it is a national policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings, and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States (54 United States Code § 320101).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This resolution is keyed non-fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** According to the author, "[This resolution] calls for the urgent restoration of full and consistent funding for [NPS] by the federal government. California's national parks are more than scenic landscapes; they are vital economic engines, historical treasures, and environmental sanctuaries that enrich the lives of millions. From Joshua Tree National Park to Yosemite, these parks contribute billions to our economy, support thousands of jobs, and promote conservation, recreation, and education.

Yet, recent federal funding cuts, staffing reductions, and hiring freezes have severely undermined park operations, limiting access, endangering visitor safety, and delaying critical

maintenance. These challenges threaten not only the integrity of our parks but also the communities that rely on them for economic stability.

By urging federal action, [this resolution] reaffirms California's commitment to safeguarding these cherished natural spaces. It calls upon Congress and the President to make national park funding a priority, ensuring that these public lands remain accessible, well-maintained, and properly staffed. Protecting our parks is an investment in our future—one that upholds environmental stewardship, supports local economies, and preserves the legacy of America's great outdoors for generations to come."

- 2) **Background.** In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the National Park System Organic Act (Organic Act) which established NPS under the Department of the Interior in law. The Organic Act provided leadership and organization to operate the 14 national parks and 21 national monuments already under the supervision of the Department of Interior. Notably, the Organic Act declares that national parks be "preserved and managed for the benefit and inspiration of all the people of the United States."

Ten years earlier, President Theodore Roosevelt had signed the Antiquities Act, which grants the president the authority to proclaim and reserve historic landmarks and structures as "national monuments." Nearly a quarter of NPS park units originated in whole or in part from the Antiquities Act.

"National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst."
— Wallace Stegner, novelist, environmentalist, historian

National parks in California. California is home to more national parks and more park units (e.g., National Monuments, National Historic Sites, National Recreation Areas, National Preserves) than any other state, and includes some of the nation's most iconic national parks: Channel Islands, Death Valley, Joshua Tree, Kings Canyon, Lassen Volcanic, Pinnacles, Redwood, Sequoia, and Yosemite. Yosemite and Joshua Tree are consistently some of the most visited national parks nationwide. Although not a national park, Golden Gate National Recreation Area is one of the most visited NPS properties; in 2024, it received 17,187,508 visitors—more than any other NPS property in the nation. Because of the bounty of natural beauty, national parks in California also generate more economic output, across all categories (i.e., visitor spending, jobs, labor income, and value added) than any other state, according to the 2023 NPS Visitor Spending Effects Report.

The first 100 days and beyond. On January 20, 2025, President Trump ordered a freeze on hiring federal employees (which has recently been extended through July 15, 2025). Although this hiring freeze later exempted 5,000 seasonal employees (which was later extended by memo to 7,700 employees), 1,000 NPS employees were fired. Although federal judges in California and Maryland ordered the administration to reinstate more than 16,000 probationary employees across six agencies, including the Interior, the U.S. Supreme Court swiftly blocked the ruling.

Despite this uncertainty, the Secretary of the Interior, Doug Burgum, ordered on April 3, 2025, that all national parks and national historic sites to remain open "for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people and to ensure that [NPS] will provide the best customer service experience for all visitors" unless a closure or reduction in hours is approved by the

NPS director and assistant secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. On April 4, 2025 (one day after the order to remain open), employees across the Department of the Interior were offered buyouts or early retirement. In addition, the Trump Administration has reportedly asked the NPS, among other agencies, to develop a plan for a 30% reduction in payroll.

All of this is expected to leave national parks understaffed. The National Park Conservation Association notes that, “In just over three months, the Trump administration has pushed out nearly 13% of the National Park Service’s workforce, triggering a full-blown staffing crisis.” National parks across the country have already altered available programming and reduced park unit accessibility in response to this hiring whiplash. Additionally, there are concerns that the lack of NPS staffing will result in degraded natural resources. National park units have already implemented many staff-saving measures, including: the delay of Yosemite’s entrance reservation system, the discontinuation of all ranger tours at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, and the cancellation of guided cave tours at Carlsbad Caverns, just to name a few.

On May 2, 2025, the Trump Administration released its budget plan for 2026, which recommends reducing the NPS budget by over \$1 billion, including reducing the operations budget by \$900 million and the construction budget by \$73 million.

- 3) **Related legislation.** S.949 (Kelly) of 2025, referred to as the “Protect our Parks Act of 2025,” requires the Secretary of the Interior to ensure all units of the System are fully staffed to ensure visitor safety and enjoyment and to protect natural and cultural resources at units of the System; ensure all maintenance staff positions at NPS are filled; and reinstate any individual who was involuntarily removed or terminated from employment with NPS. S949 has been referred to the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

SJR 16 (Padilla), Res. Chapter 208, Statutes of 2024, urges the President to use the Antiquities Act of 1906 to establish the Chuckwalla, Joshua Tree, and Kw’atsán National Monuments.

SJR 17 (Allen), Res. Chapter 209, Statutes of 2024, urges the President to use the Antiquities Act of 1906 to establish the Sáttítla National Monument.

AJR 23 (Bigelow), Res. Chapter 210, Statutes of 2017, strongly encourages Congress to support the NPS Legacy Act of 2017 (S. 751 and H.R. 2584) to create a reliable, predictable stream of resources to address deferred maintenance needs in the System.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

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