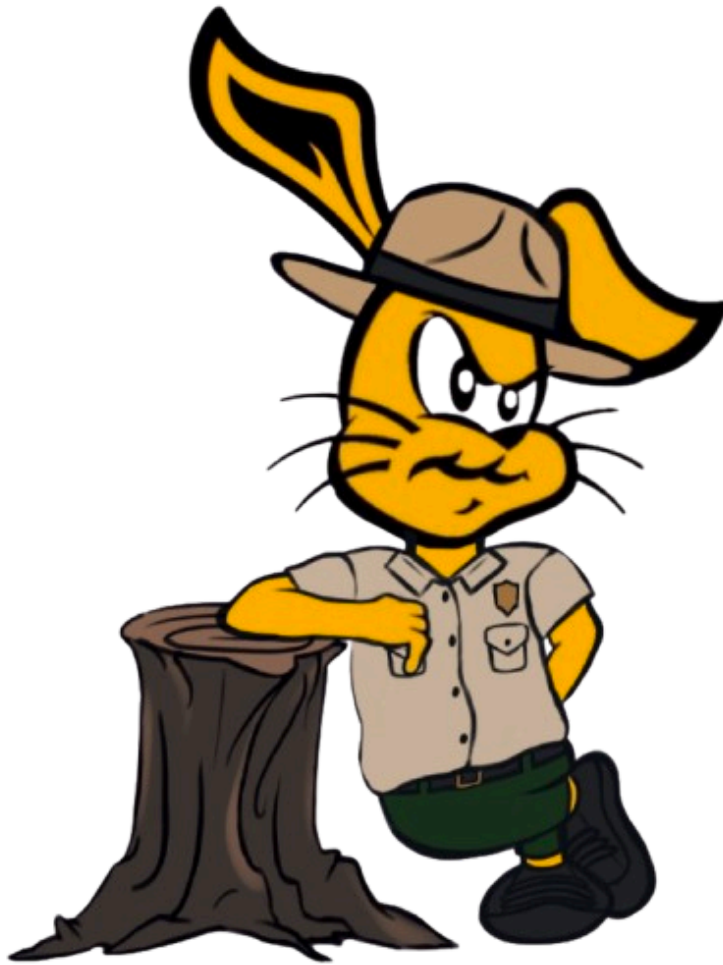


Background Guide

Specialized National Park Service: Managing Budget Cuts



BunnyMUN IV

L.B. POLY - October 25, 2025

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HEAD CHAIR LETTER

Hello Delegates!

My name is Ella Shelton-Frates, and I'll be one of your chairs for BunnyMUN this year! I'm a senior, and this is my second year doing MUN, as well as my first year serving on the Poly MUN cabinet as treasurer. I play tennis on Poly's Varsity Tennis team and am involved in several extracurricular activities, including Inner City Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles (ICYOLA) and the LA Metro Youth Council.

I'm so glad that all of you are getting a head start on the MUN experience! As someone who started MUN a little later, I wish I had gotten more into it in my freshman year! I encourage all of you to continue MUN, either through the club or class, when you get to high school! MUN, especially at Poly, is an incredible experience with lots of support from peers and mentors. If you have any questions about MUN, high school, or life, feel free to ask me or my fellow chairs! We're here to support you, and are so excited you're participating in BunnyMUN!

Sincerely,

Ella Shelton-Frates

National Park Service: Managing Budget Cuts | Co-Head Chair |

esheltonfrates@gmail.com

HEAD CHAIR LETTER

Dear Delegates,

I'd first like to thank you for taking the time to read this background guide. I know middle school can be a busy time, and reading may not be everyone's favorite activity. However I promise you that you'll come out having learned something new. My name is Elan and I'll be your other chair for debate. This year I'm a senior, and I've been involved with MUN for 2 years, also serving as a Webmaster on the Cabinet. I have nothing but good things to say about the program, and I hope that you all will find it fulfilling as well! I play for varsity water polo and swim here at Poly, and I run a cookie selling side hustle in my spare time.

Now all this may seem scary or overwhelming, but my fellow staff and I are here to help you through it. Nervousness is a natural first feeling, but you making the first step to join us at this conference already puts you ahead of everybody else. MUN can seem daunting at first glance, but when you really break it down it's one big discussion that can even be entertaining. Our number one priority is to make sure debate is fun, interesting, and on-topic. So bring yourself, your research, and your ideas and you'll be set! I look forward to seeing you in committee, good luck!

Sincerely,

Elan Martinez

National Park Service: Managing Budget Cuts | Co-Head Chair | elan32108@gmail.com



VICE CHAIR LETTER

Hey Delegates!

My name is Gabby and I'm so excited to be your Vice Chair for this years' middle school conference! I just started my junior year and my third year doing MUN, along with my first year in our club's secretariat as Under-Secretary General of Specialized Committees. I play for the varsity girl's golf team and I just received the honor of being Co-Editor in Chief for Poly's newspaper; The High Life. I usually fill my time with either homework or volunteer work, but I love starting new hobbies (pottery and scrapbooking as of now) and adding new skills to my resume!

As someone who was unfamiliar with MUN before starting high school, I can confidently say that all of the delegates attending BunnyMUN IV are already ahead of the game in honing their debate, collaboration, and resolution building skills. One thing that I definitely wish I took seriously sooner was to ask questions and ask them frequently, so never feel ashamed for being curious and be sure to give yourself the best chance to succeed. I look forward to seeing how this committee unfolds and wish you all luck!

Sincerely,

Gabby Gales

National Park Service: Managing Budget Cuts | Vice Chair | gabrielle.gales@gmail.com



HOW TO MUN

So, you're probably wondering: How do I prepare for debate? Well, here are some starting points to begin your country research!

1. Read through this background guide
 - a. find your character in Character Descriptions and read the information given
2. Look for information on your character online (be wary of news sites that may be untrue or overly biased), a few are linked here to help you get started:
 - a. <https://www.energy.senate.gov/members>
 - b. <https://www.doi.gov/interior-leadership>
 - c. <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/organizational-structure.htm>
3. Look at the Questions to Consider and try to answer them (do some research on the internet [.gov/.edu/.org]!)
4. Do more research on the internet for:
 - a. previous character actions
 - b. previous NGO and United Nations actions
 - c. possible solutions

During the committee, all delegates will present an “opening statement.” This is a short introductory speech and will only last about 30 seconds to 1 minute—nothing too bad! You can practice and time your speech using a timer.

These opening statements are written beforehand. They don't have to be memorized, either. You can print or write your speech, then read off the paper.

Your opening statement should include:

1. Your character's position on the issue at hand
2. What your character has done in the past
3. Possible solutions that align with your character's position
 - a. This is what you will discuss in the main part of the committee! Including this in your opening statement is a great way to let other delegates know where you stand.



COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

The United States National Park Service (NPS), an agency within the Department of the Interior, is entrusted with preserving and managing over 400 sites of natural, cultural, and historical importance. These include iconic landscapes such as Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon, historical monuments, and ancestral homelands across the nation. Sites like these represent both the ecological diversity of the United States and the nation's complex historical and cultural heritage. Through the Organic Act signed by former President Woodrow Wilson, the NPS was established in 1916 to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein”. Economically, the NPS is a driver of local and regional development, generating billions of dollars each year in tourism-related revenue and supporting hundreds of jobs in surrounding communities. Socially, it fosters education, civic identity, and national pride, maintaining a crucial part of American outdoor culture.



TOPIC SYNOPSIS

National parks are critical for preserving biodiversity, protecting cultural and historical heritage, supporting tourism, and providing ecosystem services such as clean air, water regulation, and climate stability. They also serve as spaces for recreation and education, contributing to both national pride and local economies. The National Parks Service has been in charge of these green spaces since its inception in 1916, providing crucial wildlife maintenance and guiding park visitors. However, the U.S. government has recently made massive cuts in funding everywhere, but especially for the National Parks Service in an effort to reduce national spending. These cuts often lead to staff shortages, poor maintenance, reduced monitoring against poaching or illegal logging, and the abandonment of research or restoration projects. The result is an erosion not only of natural landscapes and wildlife, but also of the economic and cultural value that parks provide to surrounding communities.

Declining park quality threatens global biodiversity, weakens climate resilience, and places indigenous lands and endangered wildlife at greater risk. For rural areas in particular, whose economies may rely heavily on eco-tourism, the recent funding rollbacks highlight the tension between fiscal responsibility and long-term sustainability. This committee will address the urgent question of how to protect national parks despite shrinking budgets. Delegates are tasked with exploring innovative funding models, balancing political motivations, and finding balanced solutions that secure both environmental protection and economic stability for future generations.

BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION TO NATIONAL PARKS

The National Park System was founded in 1916 by President Woodrow Wilson under the Organic Act. Wilson was inspired by historic figures who cared deeply for conservation, such as John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt. These national parks were created as a countermeasure to the expansion of industrialization, mining, and destruction of the environment, as well as to preserve specific landscapes or sites so beautiful that they deserved special protection from private development. They also serve the vital role of preserving endangered wildlife and ecosystems, as well as public outdoor recreation. Parks do more than serve as a popular tourist attraction, as they also connect people to nature firsthand and raise awareness about ecological and environmental issues.

The National Park Service manages over 400 sites and over 85 million acres nationwide, paid for mostly by Congressional funding and visitor fees. These sites are not exclusive to wilderness, but also consist of monuments, battlefields, historic

places, and seashores, and act as protected areas for beautiful landscapes. Importantly, this means that the parks are governed by a “dual mandate” to both preserve their natural environment and to serve as a public amenity, so park managers have to find a balance between these two values.



The first ever National Park, Yellowstone, established in 1872, created a model for the rest of the parks to follow. These parks have been coined as "America's best idea", given that they have been effectively promoting conservation, education, and awareness for decades.

CONSERVATION EFFORTS AND BENEFITS OF PARKS ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY

National parks have a number of environmental and economic benefits. They protect endangered species and promote biodiversity, while also providing research opportunities for scientists to study climate change, wildlife, and ecological health. Parks also support conservation programs that reintroduce native species to bring them back to standard population or remove invasive ones. Additionally, fire management programs run by the NPS are key to prevent wildfires and keep forests safe. Most parks have an educational program which not only teaches visitors about the environment, but also how to preserve it.

National parks see about 300 million visitors annually, significantly contributing to tourism and stimulating economies on a local level. When visitors come to see the parks, they also pay for nearby lodging, transportation, and food, and their spending boosts the local economy. The parks also create jobs for the local economy, not only through hiring their own staff, but also because stronger local businesses drive hiring. This effect is also encouraged by festivals, tours, and events held near and inside of the parks. All of this activity also plays a strong role in raising nearby property values. Communities gain so much from parks economically that for every \$1 paid into the NPS, \$10 is generated in economic activity.



HISTORY OF FUNDING

In the earliest days of the National Park Service, the organization was almost entirely funded by philanthropic donations and influential families. This trend has largely held true over time, as the National Park Service is now funded largely by philanthropy, but also in part by federal donations.

The history of donations to the National Park Service began before the service's creation. Before the park service was created in 1916, the wealthy Kent family donated to what would become the Muir Woods National Monument in 1907. Museums created by the park service were also originally funded by philanthropic interests. Later on, the influential descendants of oil magnate John D. Rockefeller, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and his son, Laurance S. Rockefeller contributed significant funds to the park system. These men made significant strides in supporting the park service, contributing to maintenance, establishment of protected areas, and museums. In 1935, Congress established the National Park Trust Fund Board to accept gifts from donors. This was



replaced in 1967 by Congress with the National Park Foundation in order to make donating easier and to better organize donated funds. This continued the legacy of donations to the National Park Service as one of its main sources of funding.

Initiatives have also been enacted by Congress to fund the National Park Service, including the 1964 Land and Water Conservation Fund and the 2020 Great American Outdoors Act. The Land and Water Conservation Fund allowed for the expansion and protection of outdoor recreational spaces, and gave money to state and local governments so they could maintain their outdoor spaces and natural resources, including National Parks. The Great American Outdoors Act established the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund to provide funding for maintenance of



national parks and outdoor spaces, and provided more money to the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Major budget cuts to the National Park Service have mostly occurred in the past few years. These cuts include staffing freezes in 2017 and, starting in 2025, severe staffing freezes and firings, cuts to maintenance funds, and plans for lessening funding over the next few years.

BUDGET CUT STATISTICS AND CONSEQUENCES

Recent budget cuts to the National Park Service have already had serious impacts, and even steeper reductions are on the horizon. Since January 2025, the agency has lost nearly a quarter of its permanent workforce, with more than 1,000 probationary employees laid off in February and hundreds more taking buyouts or resigning. The 2026 federal budget proposal would slash the NPS budget by an additional



\$1.2 billion—almost 40% of current funding—including \$900 million directly from operating budgets. These reductions come at a time when the NPS is already grappling with a \$22 billion backlog in deferred maintenance. Staff shortages and shrinking resources are forcing parks to scale back visitor resources and cut research programs.

The consequences of these cuts are wide-ranging. Visitors are already seeing reduced hours at visiting centers, cancellations of campsite reservations, and slower responses to safety concerns. With fewer rangers and scientists, the parks' ability to monitor wildlife, protect landmarks, and manage fragile ecosystems is slowly failing. This raises risks not only for natural and cultural resources, but also for visitor safety, as overcrowding, understaffed emergency response teams, and deteriorating facilities create more hazards. These issues are threatening jobs and local economies, and in the



long term, continued underfunding could lead to lasting damage to ecosystems, loss of historical artifacts, and a worsened reputation for America's parks.



CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

National Park Service

Jessica Bowron

Jessica Bowron is the acting director of the National Park Service, sworn in by the current U.S. president, Donald Trump. Her appointment marks a new era for the NPS, as she has promoted a fiscally conservative approach to the parks, suggesting work-arounds within the newly proposed budget. Bowron has been involved in NPS finances since she began work for the organization in 2007, serving as the Chief of Budget Formulation and Budget Execution Lead for the NPS Fire and Aviation Program.

Charles Sams

Charles Sams is the former director of the National Park Service, and is the first person of Native American descent to serve in that position. He has worked in tribal government for over 3 decades, strongly emphasizing the importance of promoting historical background to the parks with special attention to indigenous American perspectives. Additionally, he used the funds generated by the Great American Outdoors Act during his tenure as director to further promote accessibility within parks, dedicating himself to preserving the parks for everyone.

Jennifer Nersesian

Jen Nersesian is the current Regional Director of the National Park Service's National Capital Region, managing 79,000 acres of land in Washington D.C., including Arlington National Cemetery, the Lincoln Memorial, and Frederick Douglass's house. Over her 22 years of service for the NPS, Nersesian has worked to promote the parks to



underserved populations and has dedicated herself to fighting the effects of climate change, such as flooding, with natural solutions.

Steven Sims

Steven Sims is the current superintendent of Independence National Park, and has previously served as the superintendent of multiple other parks across the Northeastern United States, including Gettysburg National Military Park and Valley Forge Historical Park. His leadership traces to his military background as a West Point graduate and it has allowed him to lead parks through renovations, conservation, and more. Having worked for this park's structure as a civil engineer and now its upkeep as superintendent, Sims is dedicated to preserving public spaces as a cornerstone of society.

Herbert Frost

Herbert Frost is the National Park Service's Regional Director for the Midwest, overseeing regions 3, 4, and 5, which encompass the Great Lakes, Missouri Basin, and Mississippi Basin. He used to lead region 11, which covers Alaska's national parks, where he promoted a science-based approach towards park management, hosting the first regional Science Symposium. With this year marking his 31st year working for the NPS, Frost remains dedicated to promoting scientists' voices when discussing park development.

Brian Carlstrom

Brian Carlstrom is the current National Park Service Deputy Regional Director of the Intermountain Region, which spans over 80 parks across 8 states in the Western United States. Previously, he served as Cape Cod National Seashore's Superintendent, with 30 years of additional experience leading up to that position. Carlstrom is currently stationed in Denver, and is dedicated to continuing his tenure as a member of the NPS.

David Szymanski



David Szymanski is the current National Park Service Regional Director for the Pacific West Region, which includes California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, parts of Arizona and Montana, and several U.S. territories. Although he has extensive experience with the NPS, he has also worked for other organizations such as the Peace Corps, where he supported the founding of Madagascar's national parks system. His extensive team and budget have been cut down due to the budget reductions. Despite that, Szymanski maintains that he is dedicated to promoting tribal collaboration and correspondence with Congress to improve the parks.

David Alberg

David Alberg is the National Park Service's current Deputy Regional Director for Alaska, promoted from his position as Head of the Resource Management and Compliance Division at Lake Mead National Recreation Area. Throughout his career, Alberg has worked to find solutions to the issues caused by climate change in addition to educating the public about their relationship with the land that they reside on. In spite of the budget cuts, Alberg vehemently maintains that the parks are essential resources for the public to interact with the natural environment.

Senate Committee on Energy and National Resources

Steve Daines (R-MT)

Senator Steve Daines has served as a Montana Congressman since 2013 when he was elected as one of the state's two representatives in the House, and then as senator in 2015. Daines himself is a self-described outdoorsman, and promotes increased access to public lands, alongside the promotion of Montana's traditional forestry, mining, and energy development sectors. He has worked on bipartisan bills to improve park funding, however, he is typically fiscally conservative and supports overall budget cuts as well as voting against certain environmental bills.



John Barrasso (R-WY)

Senator John Barrasso has served as one of Wyoming's senators since 2007, and has since risen in the ranks to become the Republican whip (the second-highest rank of Republican leadership). Barrasso is a supporter of Americans exploring the outdoors, and has likewise worked on multiple bills to improve safety and communication within parks. Although he errs on the side of fiscal conservatism, he has voiced concerns about the effects of overall budget cuts on park staffing and the economics of poor park maintenance.

Bill Cassidy (R-LA)

Senator Bill Cassidy has held a seat in Congress since 2009 when he was elected as a state representative, and became a senator in 2015. Despite his involvement in the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Cassidy is known for promoting a “people before parks” argument—that is to say Americans should be prioritized over the environment—one which he used as justification for voting against the Great American Outdoors Act. Nevertheless, he has promoted Louisiana's state parks on multiple occasions.

Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)

Senator Lisa Murkowski has served in the Senate since 2002 as the first Alaskan senator to have been born in Alaska. Murkowski has long been a supporter of the National Park Service, working on bills such as the Great American Outdoors Act to protect and maintain the American wilderness. She is concerned about the effects of the budget cuts on the Alaskan economy, which relies significantly on tourism generated from the national parks, and has since spoken out against restricting funds for the parks and conservation.

James E. Risch (R-ID)

Senator James E. Risch was first elected to represent Idaho in the Senate in 2008, and has since then served for 16 years beginning in January of 2009, and with



reelections in 2014 and 2020 . He is known for his conservative fiscal approach and strong support of individual state rights as opposed to prioritizing natural resource conservation. Risch supports limited funding for park maintenance and tourism and wants to limit government expenditure without large federal budget increases.

Jim Justice (R-WV)

Senator Jim Justice was elected to the Senate in 2024, previously serving as the Governor of West Virginia and continuing to work as the CEO of a large coal mining corporation. Although he has opposed multiple environmental policies in the interest of West Virginian businesses, Justice is in support of West Virginia's national parks as both a benefit to the public and tourism. In regards to the budget cuts, Justice is traditionally fiscally conservative, supporting rollbacks of federal funding, and dedicating himself to reducing government debt.

Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS)

Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith has served as a Mississippi senator since 2018, previously working as the Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce. Hyde-Smith is typically fiscally conservative, preferring to reduce overall federal spending while increasing spending in some areas such as the defense and projects that would benefit Mississippi. She maintains that the parks are an important part of the country, but also emphasizes the importance of protecting American industry in regards to environmental policies.

Angus King (I-ME)

Senator Angus King was first elected as one of Maine's senators in 2013, notably running as an independent rather than a Republican or Democrat, and is typically considered a moderate. Over the course of his career, he has been known to vote for environmentally sustainable acts, and to support the increase of Americans exploring their nation's wilderness and outdoors. Concerning the national budget cuts, King has



raised major concerns due to the potential impossibility of keeping the national parks open and mass increases in understaffing.

Mazie Hirono (D-HI)

Senator Mazie Hirono has served as one of Hawaii's senators since her election in 2013, previously serving as a House representative. Hirono has historically backed nearly every environmental bill in Congress, and is especially concerned with funding rollbacks due to the federal budget cuts. She has worked to support the parks with safety policies including an early warning system in case of volcanoes, and research into wildfire reduction, and been critical of parks removing historical context from exhibits.

Ronald Wyden (D-OR)

Senator Ronald Wyden has served as Oregon's senator since 1996, working as a representative in the House before that. Over his many years in Congress, Wyden has worked to protect the American outdoors, through sponsoring laws like the Protect the West Act, which provided billions of dollars in funding to protect the U.S. from the impacts of droughts and wildfires, and passing laws to protect wetlands and prevent land sell-offs. Recently, he has become concerned over the effects of the federal budget cuts on the national parks, especially on Crater Lake, the only national park in Oregon.

Maria Cantwell (D-WA)

Senator Maria Cantwell was first elected to be Washington's Senator in 2001, previously serving as one of the state's representatives. Cantwell views the national parks and other public lands as vital tools to combat the effects of climate change, and believes that investing in them is crucial to protecting the environment. As such, she has supported laws like the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which expand funding for public land, and opposes the current reductions on national park funding as both an issue for staff and Washington's tourist economy.



Catherine Cortez-Masto (D-NV)

Senator Catherine Cortez-Masto has served the Senate since 2017, previously working as Nevada's Attorney General. Cortez-Masto personally enjoys hiking and exploring the national parks, and as such continually promotes and votes to pass bills protecting them and the environment in general. Following the federal funding rollbacks, Cortez-Masto has been critical of the current administration's budgeting, claiming that a lack of funds will cause public safety issues due to understaffing as well as economic issues from decreased tourism.

Alex Padilla (D-CA)

Senator Alex Padilla was first elected to the Senate in 2021 following his tenure as California's Secretary of State. His first term in office has marked a number of environmentalist policies including the expansion and creation of new national monuments and preventing oil drilling in proposed protection areas. Padilla is notably critical of the Trump administration generally, especially because of his handling of the protests in Los Angeles, but is especially concerned about the environmental and economic effects of the budget cuts on the national parks.

Martin Heinrich (D-NM)

Senator Martin Heinrich was first elected to the Senate in 2013, now serving as a ranking member on the committee. Heinrich has consistently pushed for conservation efforts across New Mexico and the United States, co-sponsoring the Great American Outdoors Act, and approving funding for Carlsbad Caverns National Park for infrastructure improvements. Additionally, he has actively fought the push to sell public lands, believing them to be essential resources for all Americans. He disapproves of the current budget cuts for the parks, and like many of his colleagues worries about the economic impacts from decreased tourism, and economic impacts from understaffing.



US Department of the Interior

Doug Burgum

Doug Burgum is the current Secretary of the Interior under President Donald Trump, previously serving as the Governor of North Dakota. Throughout his political career, Burgum has been an avid supporter of fossil fuel extraction citing the mass amounts of profit that could be generated from projects like oil drilling. Additionally, he has attempted to sell public lands to private entities, citing the need for additional housing, a particularly contentious topic within Congress. He has raised controversy with his orders to remove historical parts of park exhibits, and maintains that the parks should remain open and find workarounds within the constraints of budget cuts.

Kate MacGregor

Kate MacGregor is the Deputy Secretary of the Interior, appointed under President Donald Trump alongside Doug Burgum. She has worked to implement laws supporting the parks such as the Great American Outdoors Act, and has a particular affinity for helping Americans living in rural areas. In terms of economics, she is mostly aligned with President Trump's vision for budget reductions and works to find solutions to problems arising from lower funding within the new financial constraints.

Environmental Activists

Phil Francis

Phil Francis is a current member of the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks Executive Council, having previously served in various high-ranking positions across the American Southwest for the National Park Service over the course of 41 years. He is dedicated to serving the National Park Service even after his retirement from the organization, and seeks to promote the parks as an essential resource for every American. He is concerned about how the current issues within the parks will be further exacerbated by the budget cuts and seeks to secure greater funding.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Should all parks receive an equal amount of budget cuts, or should larger, more visited parks be less of a priority for cuts because of surrounding communities' economic reliance on them?
2. Why might a government want to cut the budget for national parks?
3. How can parks make money to help support themselves?
4. What can state legislatures learn from each other about protecting parks?
5. What is a state specific or lesser known problem concerning your delegation that others may not have thought of?
6. Are there any examples of parks that have already been affected by budget cuts? What happened?
7. How can the ecological effects of cutting funding be mitigated?



REFERENCES

For More About...

Recent Budget Cuts:

[Parks Group Troubled by Looming Impacts of Budget Cuts on America's National Parks](#)

[National Parks Face "Extreme" Cuts Under the Proposed 2026 Federal Budget](#)

[National Park Service Targeted for 1,500 Layoffs And Budget Cuts From Trump Administration](#)

[National Park Service cuts threaten parks and science alike- Scienceline](#)

[Former national park superintendents urge Trump administration to close parks in case of shutdown](#)

The Federal Government:

[Land and Water Conservation Fund | U.S. Department of the Interior.](#)

[Great American Outdoors Act | U.S. Department of the Interior.](#)

[U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources](#)

Conservation Efforts:

[The Coalition To Protect America's National Parks](#)

[Landscape & Wildlife Conservation | National Park Foundation](#)
[Park Preservation](#)



[Conservation At Home – Connected Conservation \(U.S. National Park Service\)](#)

National Park Service History:

[What We Do \(U.S. National Park Service\)](#)

[Brief History of the National Parks | Articles and Essays | Mapping the National Parks | Digital Collections | Library of Congress](#)

[History of the national parks](#)

