

Protect Every Park and the Staff Who Steward Them: A Call to Congress to Defend America’s National Parks



Table of Contents

A National Legacy Worth Defending.....	2
Understaffed and Under Threat: The Case for Restoring Park Service Workforce.....	4
Protecting America’s Heritage Means Protecting the People Who Steward It	6
Preventing the Defunding and Dismantling of our National Park System.....	9
Strengthening the Foundation: Reinvesting in Park System Leadership	11
America’s Parks, America’s Voice	13
Contact Information	15

A National Legacy Worth Defending

Congress declares these areas, though distinct in character, are united through their inter-related purposes and resources into one national park system as cumulative expressions of a single national heritage; that, individually and collectively, these areas derive increased national dignity and recognition of their superlative environmental quality through their inclusion jointly with each other in one national park system preserved and managed for the benefit and inspiration of all the people of the United States. -- General Authorities Act (1970), [54 USC § 100101](#)

A nation's true prosperity lies in how it protects its natural and cultural heritage — its wildlife, landscapes and the historic places and sites that shaped its path. These values can't be measured on a balance sheet. More than a century ago, Theodore Roosevelt captured this [idea](#): “The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased; and not impaired in value.”

The United States pioneered the idea of protecting special places “for the benefit and enjoyment of the people” with the [creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872](#), signed into law by President Grant. And in 1916, [Congress established](#) the National Park Service (NPS) to carry out this vision, tasked with preserving natural and historic resources “unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

The National Park System has grown to encompass 433 of America's most important natural, historic and recreational sites across all 50 states and U.S. territories from remote Alaskan wilderness and Pacific islands to major cities and coastal shores. These parks, monuments, battlefields, memorials, seashores and more have been established by Congress and nearly every president for over 150 years. Each are vital thread in the fabric of America's story. They are the crown jewels of our public lands, symbols of national pride, open to all and owned by the American people in trust for future generations.

Why National Parks Matters

In 1983, Pulitzer Prize-winning author [Wallace Stegner](#) called national parks “the best idea we ever had.” More than just scenic destinations, America's national parks reflect our shared values and democratic ideals. They are our national classrooms where we can learn about our complete story: moments of national pride and achievement and moments that demand reflection and reckoning. And they preserve ecosystems that support the well-being of communities across the country.

- **Cultural and Historical Legacy:** From Civil War battlefields to sites honoring civil rights struggles, parks preserve the full spectrum of our national identity. These places are where Americans go to learn, reflect and grow. Preserving these places that, as filmmaker [Ken Burns](#) put it, allows us to “get to know ourselves and...relate to previous generations through these magnificent places.”
- **Natural Beauty and Biodiversity:** Parks safeguard irreplaceable landscapes, ecosystems and wildlife from ancient forests and fragile deserts to coral reefs and tundra. They serve as vital [strongholds of biodiversity](#), protecting thousands of plant and animal species and ensuring healthy ecosystems that benefit all Americans.

- **Public Health Benefits:** National parks are good for the soul. Park advocate [Audrey Peterman](#) captured the lasting impact of time spent in national parks, saying the sense of peace she feels there stays with her: *“The level of comfort and peace that I experience in the parks flows like a stream throughout my life... there is a core of me that cannot be disturbed. It keeps me in balance all the time.”*
- **Economic Impact:** Our national parks are cherished places that fuel local tourism economies and support American jobs. America’s National Park System costs a mere 1/15 of one percent of the federal budget, while contributing over [\\$55 billion](#) to the nation’s economy and supporting 415,000+ jobs annually. Every dollar invested in our national parks provide at least a \$15 return on investment.
- **Public Support:** Americans deeply value their national parks, as reflected by the millions of visitors who explore them each year – more than 331 million visits in 2024 alone. Polling consistently shows the National Park Service enjoys the [highest favorability rating](#) of any federal agency, and Americans [overwhelmingly oppose](#) budget or staffing cuts to the Park Service.

Current Threats

Despite strong bipartisan support for national parks, the current administration has initiated the most severe cuts in Park Service history, proposing a \$1 billion budget cut and implementing staff reductions that have already eliminated 24% of the agency’s permanent workforce since January 2025. These losses are weakening the NPS’s ability to meet Congress’s mandate to manage parks using [“the highest quality science and information.”](#)

At the same time, [directives from Interior Secretary Burgum](#) have pushed for the erasure of complex historical narratives, prioritizing nostalgia over the truth, and undermining another Congressional mandate that the Park Service provide [“the highest quality interpretation and education.”](#)

Together, these actions weaken Congress’s vision and threaten the integrity, mission and future of the national park system, putting irreplaceable places and public trust at risk.

Call to Action

Decimating America’s Park System could very well be the country’s [worst idea](#). We cannot allow this administration to erase a legacy that belongs to all Americans. It’s up to us—individually and collectively—to speak out and demand that Congress protect these irreplaceable places.

Congress must hear loud and clear: Americans will not stand by while one of the defining pillars of our national identity is undermined. We expect Congress to hold the administration accountable and uphold its responsibility to protect America’s national parks now and for generations to come.

Understaffed and Under Threat: The Case for Restoring Park Service Workforce

The National Park Service (NPS) is experiencing a staffing crisis with the current workforce level at a historic low. Since January 2025, NPS has lost [24% of its permanent workforce](#). And that's on top of a [20% decline since 2010](#). These losses, driven by a hiring freeze, pressured buyouts and retirements, and a pending reduction in force, are devastating the agency's ability to protect park resources, ensure visitor safety and deliver basic services.

Despite [record visitation](#)—331.9 million visits in 2024 alone—and growing demand for access to public lands, the Park Service is being asked to do more with far less. Congress must step in to stop further damage, reverse harmful cuts and restore NPS staffing capacity now, before it's too late.

What's Happening

- **Staff Reductions:** NPS has lost 4,000 staff due to terminations, pressured buyouts, deferred resignations and early retirement buyouts. This has left parks severely understaffed during peak visitation, putting visitor centers, trail maintenance and public safety at risk when help is needed most.
- **Hiring Freeze:** An [ongoing hiring freeze](#) --just extended to October this Monday--has delayed seasonal hiring and severely limited the agency's ability to fill vacant positions, including more than 100 superintendent positions. Of the nearly 8,000 positions pledged by the administration, only about 4,500 seasonal positions have been filled.
- **DOI Consolidation:** Interior Secretary Burgum [ordered](#) the consolidation of key administrative functions—IT, communications, finance, human resources and contracting—into the Office of the Secretary. This move has stripped NPS of essential staff capacity, disrupted park operations and created significant accountability gaps. As the transfer proceeds, NPS is being charged \$2,000 plus 111% of each consolidated employee's salary and benefits, diverting critical resources from an already underfunded agency.
- **Reduction in Force:** These staffing challenges are unfolding under the cloud of a potential reduction in force, adding to the widespread uncertainty across the agency. Thousands more jobs remain at risk due to the administration's short-sighted push to shrink the federal workforce. The Supreme Court just ruled that a reduction in force can proceed.

Why it Matters

- **Safety Threats:** Reduced emergency staff slows response to medical calls, fires and search-and-rescue operations. Prior to January 20th, permanent law enforcement ranger staffing had already decreased 21% from 2010 to 2023, while the number of visitors increased 16% during the same period.
- **Resource Risk:** Fewer staff to monitor and protect natural and cultural resources increases the threat of theft, vandalism and long-term degradation. Park staff are being pulled from their duties monitoring resources and conducting critical research in order to clean bathrooms or cover shifts outside their jobs.

- **Loss of Access:** In national parks across the country, from Yosemite to Assateague, staffing shortages have led to reduced hours at visitor centers, delayed maintenance and fewer educational programs.
- **Economic Impact:** Each year park visitors spend roughly \$26.4 billion in local communities, but staff shortages jeopardize this economic engine. When the visitor experience suffers, so do the communities that rely on park tourism.

Case Examples

- At **Assateague Island National Seashore**, all 13 lifeguard positions are vacant, including the chief lifeguard and six guards each on the Maryland and Virginia sides.
- Every building at **Yosemite National Park's** Pioneer History Center was forced to close after several artifacts were stolen, a consequence of dangerously low staffing.
- An [estimated 60 staffers](#) from the **National Park Service's regional offices in Alaska**, who provide vital oversight and expertise for Alaska's 54 million acres of national parkland, are gone.
- **Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park** is unable to fill 24 of the park's 74 positions. All custodial staff have been terminated, so other, higher graded maintenance employees are being directed away from their regular duties to perform custodial functions.
- **The National Parks of Boston**, which are hosting thousands of visitors for America 250 celebrations, have over 50 vacancies for full-time employees.

Call to Action

The loss of NPS staff is not improving government efficiency. It's endangering visitors, degrading treasured resources and dismantling over a century of conservation success. Congress must act now to stop the erosion of America's national parks and restore the staffing and support these places need:

1. **End the hiring freeze**, support legislation to prevent future freezes, and require all vacant positions to be filled within four months.
2. **Oppose any NPS-wide reduction in force** and require a legal review of its validity.
3. **Mandate transparency** by requiring NPS to report workforce levels by park, region and program, alongside impacts from recent administrative actions.
4. **Reverse DOI staff consolidation**, returning affected employees and funding to NPS pending a full, transparent review shared with relevant Congressional committees.

Protecting America's Heritage Means Protecting the People Who Steward It

National and regional offices form the operational backbone of the NPS and provide [essential support](#) in all aspects of park management, including natural and cultural resources, visitor services, business operations, external affairs and planning. Smaller parks especially rely on regional staff and programs to meet legal requirements and ensure public safety. Losing this support undermines the [Park Service's core mission](#) to protect resources "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

It will also violate the [1998 National Parks Omnibus Management Act](#) (PL 105-391) that directed the Secretary "to assure that management of units of the National Park System is enhanced by the availability and utilization of a broad program of the highest quality science and information." Severely weakening the NPS science program at all levels would be a clear violation of this law.

What's Happening

- **Staff Reductions:** NPS has lost 4,000 staff due to terminations, pressured buyouts, deferred resignations and early retirement buyouts. Their loss represents not just a staffing shortage, but also the loss of decades of institutional knowledge and specialized experience.
- **Reduction in Force:** A looming reduction in force threatens to eliminate or significantly weaken NPS' regional and national programs that keep our Park System up and running.
- **Scientific Monitoring Paused:** A now lifted stop-work order has left lasting uncertainty over NPS' air quality program. Ongoing cuts threaten the effectiveness of our nation's top rural air monitoring system, essential to protecting park visitors, staff, wildlife and ecosystems.
- **Contracting Delays:** The Department of the Interior has added new contract review layers, canceling or delaying projects, even approved ones. With many senior experts pushed out at both the national and regional levels, key programs are now severely weakened.

John Donahue, retired superintendent of Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, put it simply: "A park superintendent can't understand roads, buildings, endangered species, natural resources, damage assessment and a thousand other things without some assistance. That's where a regional office comes in handy." In emergencies, he added, "Who else is going to organize firefighters from 30 different parks to go out West and help with a fire?"

Why it Matters

- **Public Health & Safety Risks:** The NPS air quality network – [widely regarded](#) as the world's best for rural monitoring – is vital for [protecting visitor health and guiding emergency decisions](#), like Yosemite's closure during the Ferguson Fire due to hazardous smoke levels. It also ensures prescribed burns meet Clean Air Act standards. Without these capabilities, fire management would become less safe and less effective.
- **Project Delays & Cost Overruns:** As demand for visitor services grows and [NPS' maintenance backlog](#) rises, efficient project management is more critical than ever. The NPS has streamlined its design and construction work by relying on private-sector expertise overseen by the national-level Denver Service Center and its 7 regional offices. Through this model the Denver Service Center has successfully overseen billions of dollars in park maintenance and construction,

completing hundreds of Great American Outdoors Act projects on time and on budget. But losing this expertise risks costly delays, cancellations and quality issues, even when [funding is available](#).

- **Loss of Expertise:** Though not based inside the parks, regional office staff play a vital role in protecting park resources, infrastructure and the visitor experience. They ensure roads, trails and facilities are safe, uphold the quality of interpretive and educational programs, and provide the scientific expertise needed to monitor and restore natural and cultural resources. Without this support, national parks would lack the infrastructure needed to operate safely and effectively.
- **Compliance Violations:** NPS scientific and support programs are essential to conserving park resources “unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations,” as mandated by the [Organic Act](#), as well as ensuring park management is supported by the highest quality science and information as mandated by the [1998 National Parks Omnibus Management Act](#). Gutting these programs jeopardizes NPS’s ability to comply with foundational laws.

Case Examples

- **Air Quality:** Due to the Clean Air Act requirements and air quality monitoring led primarily by NPS and its contractors, [visibility has improved](#) and haze reduced at 103 of 106 federal public land monitoring sites, including national parks. Yet, [97% of U.S. parks still face significant harm](#) from air pollution. Without experts and equipment, efforts to protect public health and viewsheds will erode.
- **Wildlife Management:** Even large parks like Yellowstone depend on regional staff, including veterinarians and wildlife disease specialists, to assist with bison health and population management. These experts negotiate with Tribes and states to manage bison that cross park boundaries, helping maintain genetically pure herds and support restoration efforts.
- **Historic Discoveries:** In 2023, NPS regional archeologists working at Minuteman National Historical Park discovered five 18th-century musket balls—the actual “Shot(s) Heard Round the World.” Their expertise ensured these priceless artifacts from America’s founding were preserved from destruction during trail construction.
- **Climate change:** Coastal parks like [Colonial National Historical Park](#) face threats from sea level rise, flooding and storms, endangering historic and archaeological resources vital to our nation’s history. The expertise and labs at NPS’ regional archaeological centers have been critical in artifact recovery and restoration.
- **Concession Revenue:** Many national parks rely on concession revenues from services like lodging and tours to fund operations. Regional and national staff manage contracts and ensure fair returns, generating over \$180 million annually for the NPS.

Recently retired National Capital Regional Director Kym Hall emphasized that regional offices act as a force multiplier, especially for small and mid-sized parks. “The regional leadership framework provides efficient oversight of multiple parks, rapid communication on critical issues, and enhances collaboration between parks to ensure consistency on the ground.”

Call to Action

Congress must direct the Department of the Interior to fully reinstate essential NPS science, cultural, and operational staff at the regional and national levels to ensure parks have the expertise and support they need to function safely and effectively. Congress must also ensure that funds appropriated for NPS' science, preservation and support programs are spent as directed as required by law.

Additionally, Congress must require that any major structural changes to NPS staffing or programs receive prior Congressional approval, ensuring transparency and accountability. And Congress must include appropriations language prohibiting the downsizing or elimination of regional support offices, which provide essential services that enable parks to operate safely, legally and effectively.

Preventing the Defunding and Dismantling of our National Park System

America's national parks represent more than a century of bipartisan commitment to preserving our nation's most significant natural, historical and cultural treasures. National parks are a symbol of America's heritage and global leadership in conservation. But these places have come under attack in recent months. The largest proposed budget cut in NPS history, combined with massive staff reductions and plans to transfer national park units to states and private interests, threatens the future of these places and everything they were created to protect.

Across the country, millions visit national parks, monuments, seashores, battlefields and historic sites to connect with stories that define America, from the Revolution and Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement and the Wright Brothers' first flight. These aren't just regional stories; they are shared American stories. For generations, we've believed certain places are so special they must be preserved forever, and for all to experience. Any move to strip these unique natural and historic sites from the National Park Service is a betrayal to the American people.

What's Happening

- **Funding Cuts:** The President's FY26 budget proposal includes a \$900 million cut to NPS operations, which would be the largest cut in Park Service's 109-year history. Cuts of this magnitude could [shutter at least 350 national parks sites](#) across the country – more than 75% of our Park System – that protect our nation's irreplaceable history and culture and inspire and educate millions of people every year.
- **Transferring Units:** The [President's FY26 budget](#) also proposes transferring national park sites, including many historic sites, to individual states' control. However, Congress designated nearly all of these sites over the past century, and the administration cannot unilaterally hand them over.
- **Attacks on National Monuments:** In February 2025, Interior Secretary Burgum [called for a review](#) of all monuments, mirroring efforts from the Trump administration's first term. The Justice Department has since released an [opinion](#) claiming the president has the authority to rescind or abolish national monuments—reversing 77 years of established precedent. While the Trump administration has openly sought to roll back protections for monuments, a [2017 legal analysis](#) concluded that the president has no power to unilaterally abolish a national monument under the 1906 Antiquities Act.

Why it Matters

- **Economic Impact:** America's National Park System contributes over [\\$55 billion](#) to the nation's economy and supports more than 415,000 jobs annually. Attempting to unravel and dismantle our national parks would be devastating for local economies that rely on tourist dollars.
- **Public Support:** Americans deeply value their national parks, as reflected by the millions who explore them each year – more than 331 million visits in 2024 alone. Polling consistently shows that Americans [overwhelmingly oppose](#) budget or staffing cuts to parks.

- **Less Access:** Shifting park management to less-resourced entities could mean higher fees, reduced access, and fewer educational and preservation services. Most states and local agencies simply don't have the funding or staff to match the Park Service's standards.
- **Resource Risk:** Without NPS protections, sacred Indigenous sites, battlefields and historic landmarks could be sold, developed or altered, leading to the permanent loss of America's most meaningful places.
- **Unmatched Expertise:** The National Park Service includes our country's greatest storytellers. Park Service staff protect our history at battlefields, historic homes and museums and bring unmatched skills in conservation, education and emergency response. Their mission-driven work protects parks in ways no other agency can.

Case Examples

- **Designating a new national park unit is a rigorous, often years-long process that requires careful study and community input.** Recently designated sites like Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley National Monument, Amache National Historical Site, and Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park were designated after Special Resource Studies confirmed their national significance. These studies are in-depth and time-intensive, involving public engagement, local collaboration, and thorough research.
- **Each of the more than 430 parks in the National Park System is dedicated to interpreting and preserving American history.** Without continued federal protection, we risk losing places like the Roosevelt National Historic Site, where President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill planned strategy during WWII; Ford's Theatre, where President Lincoln was assassinated; and Appomattox Courthouse, where the Civil War effectively ended. Turning these sites over to states could lead to reduced protections, underfunding or even commercial development and threaten to erase irreplaceable pieces of America's story.

Call to Action

Congress must take decisive action to safeguard the future of America's National Park System. It must affirm its sole authority over park designations, transfers and funding decisions, as well as ensure the public has a voice in any proposed changes to park management.

Lawmakers should reject harmful personnel policies that have drained national park staffing capacity and immediately restore resources needed to protect and operate these treasured places. As Congress considers the FY26 budget and the administration's proposals for federal agencies, it is critical to prevent short-sighted decisions that threaten to deauthorize, transfer or defund the National Park System.

Strengthening the Foundation: Reinvesting in Park System Leadership

Retaining strong federal leadership and standards in the National Park Service (NPS) is critical to safeguarding the integrity, safety and educational value of our national parks. But recent efforts to drastically reduce NPS staffing and propose privatizing operations threaten to shift the agency's mission from public stewardship to profit, undermining both resource protection and visitor experience. Together, these two actions erode the foundational federal leadership and accountability that protect park resources, support visitors, and ensure the National Park Service's mission endures for future generations. Privatization has never been and will never be the answer for a thriving National Park System.

From our 433 national parks to thousands of state parks and local trails, Americans depend on public lands for health, happiness and connection to nature. Outdoor recreation now fuels over \$1.2 trillion in annual economic activity and continues to grow. In fact, [reports show](#) surging demand and bipartisan support for preserving, expanding and investing in these spaces. And meeting that demand requires expanding the dedicated federal workforce and leadership and increasing funding and resources, not gutting the agency from the inside out.

What's Happening

- **Reduced Staffing:** Since January, NPS has [lost 24% of its permanent staff](#), including key positions in business services that are essential to the day-to-day operations of the National Park System. Cuts to business services staff undermine the essential business functions that support park infrastructure, resource protection and visitor services.
- **Compensation Reductions:** Proposals to cut various federal employee compensation components would worsen existing recruitment and retention challenges. Even with current benefits, NPS salaries, especially in urban areas, already lag significantly behind comparable roles in local governments or the private sector.
- **Politicizing Positions:** A proposed policy shift would subject senior NPS positions to political loyalty requirements. By reclassifying park employees to [Schedule F status](#) to remove job protections, it's possible to fire anyone regardless of performance or tenure. The result is a devastating loss of experience, expertise and institutional knowledge.
- **Budget Cuts:** The administration's FY26 budget proposal includes a \$900 million cut to NPS operations, which would be the largest cut in Park Service's 109-year history. Cuts of this magnitude could [shutter at least 350 national parks sites](#) across the country – more than 75% of our Park System – that protect our nation's irreplaceable history and culture and inspire and educate millions of people every year.

Why it Matters

- **Privatization risks long-term resource degradation and impacts to visitor services.** Unlike private entities, the NPS is not driven by profit which allows the agency to make decisions grounded in the best interests of the parks and the American public. While commercial partners help enhance visitor services, it's the NPS's impartial leadership, strong standards, professional

oversight and expertise that ensure parks run efficiently, transparently and in a way that supports the NPS mission to protect park resources and provide high-quality visitor experiences.

- **Public safety could suffer from fewer law enforcement rangers and privatized security.** With fewer law enforcement rangers on-site, response times for injuries or emergencies will increase, putting visitors at greater risk. Reduced funding also means fewer interpretive and law enforcement rangers to provide safety information and enforce precautions, leading to more accidents and harm to sensitive park areas.
- **Private contracts may cost more over time and deliver lower quality services.** Outsourcing functions often costs more over time. Contractors must turn a profit, which can drive up prices and reduce service quality, safety and resource protection. A 1980s federal review found that contracting rarely saved money compared to in-house staff, reinforcing the value of keeping skilled NPS employees on the job.
- **Reduced government oversight would make it harder to maintain accurate and transparent records of how public funds are spent.** Federal leadership ensures that spending decisions remain accountable to taxpayers and aligned with legal mandates. Privatization and staffing cuts weaken these safeguards, undermining trust in how national parks are managed and funded.

Case Examples

The NPS offers abundant business opportunities that support its core mission, deliver high-quality visitor services and benefit local economies. While NPS staff manage essential government functions and resource protection, business partners enhance the visitor experience without compromising federal oversight or stewardship.

- NPS manages over 500 concession contracts generating \$1.6 billion in revenue and returning ~\$180 million annually to national parks.
- Currently, the NPS executes thousands of Commercial Use Authorizations, allowing smaller businesses to provide visitor services with NPS oversight, such as river outfitters, guided jeep tours, bicycle tours, hiker shuttles, and many more. Portions of the profit may be returned to the NPS.
- Historic property leases shift maintenance costs to tenants while supporting visitor services, including cafes in Colonial National Historical Park, event rentals at Gateway National Recreation Area, and spas and breweries in Hot Springs National Park.

Call to Action

To protect the future of our national parks, Congress must reaffirm and strengthen the NPS' leadership. This means prohibiting the privatization of core functions, ending the hiring freeze, and restoring the staffing and institutional expertise needed to fulfill the agency's mission. Congress must uphold the NPS' legal responsibilities and increase the agency's operations, starting with the restoration of FY25 hiring.

America's Parks, America's Voice

Civic engagement and public participation are foundational to the National Park Service's mission and essential to the transparent, responsible stewardship of America's natural and cultural heritage. The NPS' [long-standing commitment](#) to collaboration with stakeholders reflects a fundamental belief: preserving our most treasured places requires active, inclusive partnerships with the public. But recent administrative actions are eroding this principle. By weakening environmental reviews, limiting public and Tribal input, and fast-tracking industrial projects near park boundaries, the administration is undermining decades of legal safeguards and public trust. We've seen firsthand that without proper safeguards, mining and energy development [near national parks](#) leads to significant harm to park resources and surrounding landscapes.

For more than 50 years, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) has protected America's public lands and national parks. This crucial law gives people a voice in how their public lands are used, ensuring that impacts to our air, water and wildlife are properly considered before development projects move forward. The American public overwhelmingly supports protecting these treasured places, and the good news is, we don't have to choose between energy progress and park preservation. With responsible planning and oversight, we can meet our energy needs while ensuring national parks remain protected for generations to come.

What's Happening

The administration is fast-tracking its energy dominance agenda through executive orders that prioritize rapid development at the expense of environmental protection and public input. These actions weaken safeguards, reduce transparency and threaten public lands, including national parks.

- **National Energy Emergency:** The administration is advancing its [energy dominance agenda](#) by invoking a [National Energy Emergency](#) through a presidential Executive Order. These measures explicitly acknowledge they meet only the "minimum requirements" of applicable law. Additionally, a related Executive Order accelerates mineral production on federal lands.
- **NEPA Rollbacks:** The administration [issued an Interim Final Rule](#) rolling back government-wide NEPA regulations, with a final rule expected soon, which has since prompted the Department of the Interior to [revise and weaken](#) their own environmental review procedures.
- **Expediting Reviews:** The Department of the Interior has imposed [dramatically expedited review](#) timelines for reviewing energy and critical mineral projects on federal lands. Under this directive, Environmental Assessments must be completed in just 14 days, and Environmental Impact Statements in only 28 days, with a mere 10 days for public comment. Compliance with historic preservation laws, including consultation with Tribal communities on culturally significant sites, may be cut to as little as 7 days.
- **Expanding Development:** The recently passed "Big Beautiful Bill" Act [mandates expanded leasing and drilling](#) on public lands, including areas near iconic parks like Arches, putting natural and historic resources, air and water quality, and visitor experience at serious risk.

- **Funding Cuts:** The [administration's FY26 budget proposal](#) would eliminate the Heritage Partnership Program and slash funding for the Historic Preservation Fund by 93%, effectively defunding support for state and tribal historic preservation offices across the country.

Why it Matters

Critical minerals [shouldn't come at the expensive of our national parks](#) and surrounding landscapes. With more than 200 million acres of public land already open to oil and gas leasing, and only 12 million acres actively producing, there is no demand driving the expanded access.

- More than 1,300 mine claims exist within the boundaries of units managed by the National Park Service.
- Nationwide, more than 490,000 mining claims are currently held on federal public lands – a 27% increase since 2019. Over 120,000 of claims are located within just 30 miles of a national park or national monument.
- Twelve park units have active non-federal oil and gas operations, and 30 others hold non-federal mineral rights.

Fast-tracked reviews and weakened environmental safeguards put both parks and the public's voice at risk. Bedrock laws that guarantee transparency, public input and science-based decision-making are vital to protecting the natural and cultural resources that [Americans value deeply](#). Our national parks are treasured for their wild, unspoiled character. Development near them must be done responsibly to preserve these values for future generations.

Call to Action

Congress must protect the public's voice in decisions that shape the future of our national parks. Lawmakers should reject any efforts—legislative or administrative—to shorten public comment periods or weaken environmental and cultural resource review processes under NEPA and National Historic Preservation Act. Appropriations bills must include clear protections that block federal funding for these harmful rollbacks.

Congress must also ensure strong oversight of major proposals impacting national park landscapes and fully fund state and tribal historic preservation offices in FY26 funding. These offices are key partners in safeguarding our cultural heritage and upholding transparent, accountable decision-making.

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