
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Monique Limón, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

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Author:	Wallis		
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Consultant:	Genevieve Wong		

Subject: National parks: federal funding

SUMMARY

This resolution would urge the President and Congress to immediately restore full and consistent funding and staffing for the National Park Service and makes findings regarding the iconic nature of the state’s national parks, the popularity of these parks, and the impact of reducing the National Park Service workforce on the local economy, National Park Service employees, and park visitors.

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

National Parks. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the National Park System Organic Act (Organic Act) which established National Park Service (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.”

The mission of NPS is “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

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 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, National Seashores) than any other state, and includes some of the nation’s most iconic national parks: Channel Islands, Death Valley, Joshua Tree, Lassen Volcanic, Pinnacles, Redwood, Sequoia and Kings Canyon, 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 October 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 Department of the Interior, the U.S. Supreme Court blocked the ruling.

Despite this uncertainty, the Secretary of the Interior, Doug Burgum, ordered on April 3, 2025, that “to ensure visitor access and satisfaction, any closures or reductions to operating hours, seasons, or any visitor services (including trails and campgrounds), in whole or in part, must be reviewed by the NPS Director and the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks prior to any reduction action by the individual park units.” 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 July 3, 2025, the House of Representatives approved H.R. 1, which includes a rescission of \$267 million of previously committed funding to support conservation and resilience in parks and on federal lands and to hire NPS employees.

That same day, President Trump signed an Executive Order increasing fees for foreign tourists visiting national parks.

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).

PROPOSED LAW

This resolution would:

- 1) Resolve that the Legislature urges the President of the United States and Congress of the United States to immediately restore full and consistent funding and staffing for the National Park Service, including the restoration of positions to protect and enhance the nation's irreplaceable natural and cultural heritage;
- 2) Resolve that the Legislature supports the rehiring of park rangers and staff, enhancement of visitor services, and the continued preservation and protection of California's and the nation's treasured landscapes; and
- 3) Resolve that the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of the resolution to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, the Majority Leader of the United States Senate, each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States, and to the author for appropriate distribution.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT

According to the author, "Assembly Joint Resolution 9 calls for the urgent restoration of full and consistent funding for the National Park Service 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, AJR 9 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."

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

None received

COMMENTS

The cuts are deep. Cuts to federal funding impact much more than the ability of NPS to maintain parks. Not only can the inability to adequately maintain and protect parks have permanent impacts on the preservation of parks for future generations, but it also affects the local economies and can create safety issues for visitors. If popular parks such as Joshua Tree or Yosemite are not able to be adequately maintained, or have enough staff to provide an enjoyable experience, people will be less inclined to visit. This can have a ripple effect on the surrounding communities that rely on those visitors for business. Further, ensuring adequate staffing ensures the safety of visitors. For example, in Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Parks, especially during the hotter months, visitors may suffer from heat-related illnesses while visiting. But with less staff available to protect visitors, the risk of an incident occurring increases.

Related federal 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. S.949 has been referred to the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

Related state legislation

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'tsán 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

SUPPORT

None Received

OPPOSITION

None Received