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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: FY2021 Appropriations

Introduction

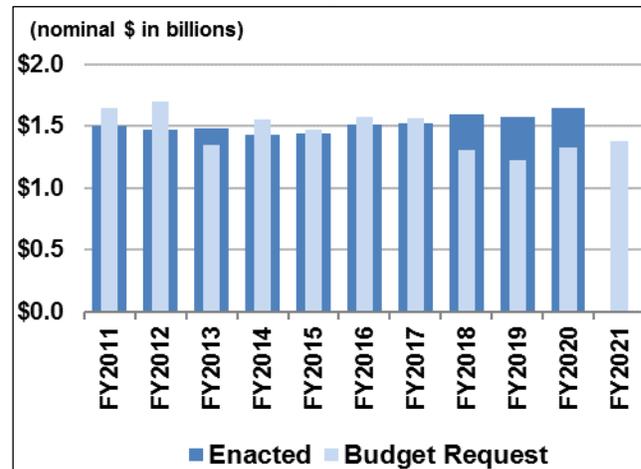
Congress generally funds the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS, an agency within the Department of the Interior [DOI]) in annual appropriations laws for the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. Discretionary appropriations for FWS fund many of the essential functions related to the agency’s mission, namely the conservation, protection, and enhancement of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats. Discretionary funding covers activities such as resource management and conservation, construction projects, land acquisition, and payments and grants to states and other parties. FWS also receives mandatory appropriations, most of which are used to provide funding to states. The Administration’s FY2021 request estimates \$1.468 billion in mandatory appropriations for FWS in FY2021. This In Focus looks at the agency’s discretionary appropriations.

Issues for Congress include the level of discretionary funding for FWS, its distribution across agency programs, and the Administration’s proposals to provide no funding for selected activities. Congress also may consider the creation of the Public Lands Infrastructure Fund as proposed in the Administration’s FY2021 request.

FWS Discretionary Appropriations

From FY2011 through FY2020, FWS received \$1.518 billion annually, on average, in discretionary funding (Figure 1). Enacted levels exceeded requests in four years, and requested levels were higher than enacted in six years.

Figure 1. FWS Discretionary Funding: Enacted and Administration Requests, FY2011-FY2020, and FY2021 Administration Request



Sources: CRS, with data from FWS budget justifications and enacted appropriations during these fiscal years.

For FY2020, P.L. 116-94 provided \$1.644 billion in discretionary appropriations across nine accounts for FWS (Table 1). For FY2021, the Administration requested \$1.379 billion in discretionary appropriations across seven accounts, which was \$264.9 million (16.1%) less than the FY2020 enacted level.

Table 1. FWS Appropriations by Account, FY2020 Enacted and FY2021 Administration Request

Account	FY2020 Enacted		FY2021 Request	
	Nominal \$ in Millions	% of Total	Nominal \$ in Millions	% of Total
Resource Management	\$1,364.3	83.0%	\$1,281.2	92.9%
Construction	29.7	1.8%	13.3	1.0%
Land Acquisition	67.1 ^a	4.1%	10.9 ^a	0.8%
Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund	35.7 ^a	2.2%	-8.0 ^a	-0.6%
National Wildlife Refuge Fund	13.2	0.8%	0.0	0.0%
North American Wetlands Conservation Fund	46.0	2.8%	40.0	2.9%
Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund	4.9	0.3%	3.9	0.3%
Multinational Species Conservation Fund	15.0	0.9%	6.0	0.4%
State and Tribal Wildlife Grants	67.6	4.1%	31.3	2.3%
Total	1,643.5	100%	1,378.6	100%

Sources: CRS, with data from explanatory statement accompanying H.R. 1865 (P.L. 116-94) and FWS FY2021 budget justification.

a. This figure includes a rescission/cancellation of unobligated balances.

Resource Management Account

The Resource Management (RM) account comprises the majority of the FWS discretionary budget (\$1.364 billion [83.0%] of the \$1.644 billion enacted in FY2020; **Table 1**). For FY2021, the Administration requested \$1.281 billion, \$83.1 million (6.1%) less than the FY2020-enacted level. In FY2020, the RM account provided funding for eight activities (**Table 2**). The FY2021 request did not include funding for two activities funded in FY2020—Cooperative Landscape Conservation and Science Support (**Table 2**).

Table 2. FWS Resource Management Appropriations by Activity, FY2020 Enacted and FY2021 Request
(nominal \$ in millions)

Activity	FY2020 Enacted	FY2021 Request
Ecological Services	\$266.0	\$244.1
Habitat Conservation	70.3	70.2
National Wildlife Refuge System	502.4	525.3
Conservation and Enforcement	148.3	145.4
Fish and Aquatic Conservation	205.5	156.1
Cooperative Landscape Conservation	12.5	0.0
Science Support	17.3	0.0
General Operation	142.0	140.1
Total	1,364.3	1,281.2

Sources: CRS, with data from explanatory statement accompanying H.R. 1865 (P.L. 116-94) and FWS FY2021 budget justification.

Other FWS Accounts

The remaining discretionary funding for FWS is divided among eight other appropriations accounts (**Table 1**). Funding levels in the Administration’s FY2021 request are lower than the enacted levels for six accounts, and the Administration proposed no funding for two accounts.

In FY2020, the Construction account received \$29.7 million in discretionary funding. Construction account appropriations support engineering design and construction throughout FWS facilities and infrastructure through three activities: Line Item Construction Projects, Bridge and Dam Safety Programs, and Nationwide Engineering Services. For FY2021, the Administration requested \$13.3 million (a decrease of \$16.4 million, or 55.3%; **Table 1**).

Funding for the Land Acquisition account is used to acquire land for recreation and conservation purposes. The Land Acquisition account received \$67.1 million in FY2020, which included a \$3.6 million cancellation of unobligated balances. The Administration’s FY2021 request is \$10.9 million, which includes a \$2.0 million cancellation of unobligated balances. The requested amount would be a decrease of \$56.2 million, or 83.7% (**Table 1**). The FY2021 request did not include funding for four land acquisition activities that received funding in FY2020 (**Table 3**).

The other six accounts fund conservation activities, financial and technical assistance programs, and a tax losses

offset program for county, state, tribal, and international partners and other stakeholders (**Table 1**).

Accounts and Activities with No Requested Funding in FY2021

For FY2021, the Administration did not request funding for two of FWS’s nine discretionary appropriations accounts—the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (CESCF) and the National Wildlife Refuge Fund (NWRP)—in order “to support higher priorities.” The request also proposed a cancellation of \$8.0 million in CESCF unobligated balances. Further, the Administration requested no funding for seven activities that received funding in FY2020 across three other accounts (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Activities with No Requested Funding in FY2021 Request with FY2020 Enacted Funding Level
(nominal \$ in millions)

Activity (Account in Parentheses)	FY2020 Enacted	FY2021 Request
Cooperative Landscape Conservation (RM)	\$12.5	\$0.0
Science Support (RM)	17.3	0.0
Land Protection Planning (LA)	0.5	0.0
Exchanges (LA)	1.5	0.0
Highlands Conservation Act (LA)	10.0	0.0
Land Acquisition Projects (LA)	31.3	0.0
Tribal Wildlife Grants (STWG)	5.2	0.0

Sources: CRS, with data from explanatory statement accompanying H.R. 1865 (P.L. 116-94) and FWS FY2021 budget justification.

Notes: RM = Resource Management; LA = Land Acquisition; STWG = State and Tribal Wildlife Grants.

Legislative Proposal

The Administration included one legislative proposal in the FY2021 FWS request. The proposal would create the Public Lands Infrastructure Fund to address the over \$18 billion in deferred maintenance needs of the DOI and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The budget request states, “the Fund will be supported by the deposit of 50 percent of all federal energy development revenue that would otherwise be credited or deposited as miscellaneous receipts to the Treasury over the 2021-2025 period, subject to an annual limit of \$1.3 billion.” The fund would support infrastructure improvements on certain federal lands, including wildlife refuges. This is a DOI-wide initiative, and similar language is included in the FY2021 DOI *Budget in Brief* and other DOI agency requests. In the 116th Congress, legislation has been introduced with a similar objective (H.R. 1225, S. 500, and S. 3422). However, some details differ between the Administration’s proposal and the introduced bills.

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