

Arizona Journal of Environmental Law & Policy
April, 2013

Comment
Nicole Riley^{al}

Copyright © 2013 Arizona Journal of Environmental Law & Policy; Nicole Riley

***1061 NATIONAL PARKS ON THE DECLINE?**

I. WHAT IS THE SEQUESTER?

In the last few weeks, many have worried whether Congress would reach a budget agreement by March 1. Unfortunately, President Barack Obama and Congressional leaders came out of a White House meeting in late February without a resolution to the budget gridlock, referred to in Washington as “The Sequester.” The Sequester, put into effect by executive order on March 1, 2013,¹ will drastically affect natural resources and environmental programs across the country.² Under the Budget Control Act of 2011,³ the sequester requires budget cuts of \$1.2 trillion over 10 years, and the first round of cuts will be about \$85.3 billion for the fiscal year ending September 30.⁴ This will prove to be detrimental to our nation’s resources. Frances Beinecke, president of the nonprofit Natural Resources Defense Council (“NRDC”), said recently, “This is not political theater. The budget cuts are real and they are going to hit home. They strike at the core of essential health and environmental programs that many Americans depend.”⁵

II. WHY WILL THE DECLINE OF FUNDING TO NATIONAL PARKS BE DETRIMENTAL TO OUR ENVIRONMENT AND NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM?

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar said, “the sequester threatens to derail all the 398 economic engines that are our national parks.”⁶ Many Americans think of national parks as a place for an enjoyable vacation. Others see them as wonders of our nation. But many often forget the contributions our national parks make to everyday society. Many people depend on the national park system for their livelihoods, and some depend on the system *1062 for their main stream of income. Local businesses that surround national parks also rely on the “national park seasons” to springboard their revenue streams for the whole year. For example, according to a report released by the National Park Service, nationwide visitors of national parks in 2011 generated \$30.1 billion in revenue and supported 252,000 jobs for local communities.⁷ These statistics for 2011 are the result of economic spending generated by about 279 million national park visits, and importantly, more than one-third of that total spending, \$13 billion, went to the communities within 60 miles of a park.⁸

Secretary Salazar, in response to skeptics who have questioned why a five-percent cut would affect these parks so greatly, stated, “because the cuts would take place in the middle of the fiscal year, their impact is effectively doubled.”⁹ He also predicted that Whitefish, Montana, which is adjacent to Glacier National Park, would lose an estimated \$1 million per day in revenue.¹⁰

Not only will the budget cuts impact revenue streams, but they will also have drastic impacts on the length of the visiting seasons and the upkeep of our national parks. For instance, National Park Service Director John Jarvis stated that the spending cuts will mean fewer hours of operation for visitor centers, shorter seasons, and closing some campgrounds, hiking trails, and other recreational areas due to insufficient staff to ensure protection of guests and upkeep of our natural areas.¹¹

Among the parks that will be affected are: Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which will close four campgrounds; Grand Canyon National Park, which will have to shorten visitor hours at the South Rim; Cap Cod National Seashore in Massachusetts, which will have to close its visitor's center and restrict access to many large sections of the Great Beach; and Yosemite and Yellowstone National Parks, which will have to delay road openings for summer by up to four weeks.¹² A spokesman for Governor Matt Mead of Wyoming, Renny MacKay, stated, "Tourism is the No. 2 industry in Wyoming, and Yellowstone is a big part of that."¹³ Gettysburg National Military Park is another park that will be affected.¹⁴ This year is the 150th anniversary of the battle that is thought to be the turning point of the Civil War. Because of the budget cuts, the special education programs for the site will most likely be eliminated.¹⁵

***1063 III. WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE, AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL FACETS OF EVERYDAY LIFE?**

Frances Beinecke, president of NRDC, said in response to the effects sequestering will have on other facets of life, take the air we breathe, the environmental protection agency has said it will have to cut back on air pollution monitoring. as a result, local officials will have a harder time warning senior citizens and asthma sufferers about bad air quality days, and parents and coaches will have a tougher time knowing if it is safe for children to play outside.¹⁶

Furthermore, about 40 percent of the EPA's total budget is redirected to the states through programs such as the clean water and drinking water state revolving funds and grants issued under the Clean Air Act.¹⁷ Wenonah Hauter, executive director of the nonprofit Food & Water Watch, stated that this reduction in available funds will negatively impact local drinking water quality and wastewater management.¹⁸ She also stated that municipal water supplies, which are already underfunded by about \$30 billion per year, will lose millions more.¹⁹ "With the sequestration, the State Revolving Funds, the most common mechanism through which communities receive federal support for their drinking and wastewater systems, will be cut by about six percent, or \$135 million."²⁰ Another potential consequence is that the Energy Department's Office of Renewable Energy and Efficiency will not be able to continue much of its work; Energy Secretary Steven Chu said the sequester would "decelerate the nation's transition into a clean energy economy, and could weaken efforts to become more energy independent and energy secure."²¹ Sequestration will impair many aspects in our world today, and our only hope for a solution will be to find a way to reverse some of these budget cuts going forward.

IV. WHAT WOULD BE A POSSIBLE RESOLUTION TO THESE CUTBACKS?

John Garder, of the nonprofit parks advocacy group the National Parks Conservation Association, put these budget cuts into prospective. He stated, "in the scope of a year of federal spending, these cuts would be permanently damaging and save 15 minutes of spending."²² A response to generate revenue could lie in our production of oil. Domestic oil production is at record levels right now, despite President Obama's pushback *1064 to increasing its production.²³ According to Energy Department data, during the week of February 15, the United States produced 7.118 million barrels of crude oil per day.²⁴ This is good news for our economy, and if President Obama would allow for more crude extraction on federal lands, output of oil would shatter previous numbers, not just merely surpass them.²⁵ Jack Gerard, president and CEO of the American Petroleum Institute, stated, "on federal land, the area where the president has control, production in the Gulf of Mexico is down 30%. Lease sales in Rocky Mountains on federal lands are down 70%."²⁶ If President Obama would support extracting crude oil, this could be a way to offset the money that is not going to be available to the national parks as a result of the Sequester.

Footnotes

^{a1} Nicole Riley is a 2L Associate Editor for the *Arizona Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*. Born and raised in Arizona, Nicole has always cared about the water and other environmental issues that our great state faces. Nicole did her undergraduate studies in business finance, and thus she is particularly interested in how environmental issues impact our economy. Next year Nicole will be serving as the Marketing Manager for the journal and she looks forward to continuing its successful tradition.

1 Sequestration Order for Fiscal Year 2013 Pursuant to Section 251A of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act, 78 Fed. Reg. 14633 (Mar. 6, 2013).

2 *Sequester Cuts Hit Clean Air, Water, Energy, National Parks*, KTMR.COM (Mar. 2, 2013, 12:01 PM), http://www.kmtr.com/news/environmental/story/Sequester-Cuts-Hit-Clean-Air-Water-Energy/kL0g_Jmk8UWXnJ0VltiZ1A.csp.

3 Sequestration Order for Fiscal Year 2013 Pursuant to Section 251A of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act, *supra* note 1.

4 *Id.*

5 *Id.*

6 *Id.*

7 *Id.*

8 *Id.*

9 Leslie MacMillan, *An Addendum on National Park Cuts*, N.Y. TIMES GREEN BLOG (Feb. 25, 2013, 5:13 PM), <http://green.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/25/an-addendum-on-national-park-cuts/>.

10 MacMillan, *An Addendum on National Park Cuts*, *supra* note 7.

11 *Sequester Cuts Hit Clean Air, Water, Energy, National Parks*, *supra* note 1.

12 Leslie MacMillan, *National Parks on a Precipice*, N.Y. TIMES GREEN BLOG (Feb. 22, 2013, 10:02 AM), <http://green.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/22/national-parks-on-a-precipice/#more-155899>.

13 MacMillan, *National Parks on a Precipice*, *supra* note 9.

14 MacMillan, *An Addendum on National Park Cuts*, *supra* note 7.

15 *Id.*

16 *Sequester Cuts Hit Clean Air, Water, Energy, National Parks*, *supra* note 2.

17 *Id.*

18 *Id.*

19 *Id.*

20 *Id.*

21 *Id.*

22 *Sequestration: Memo Details Potential Cuts to National Parks*, TIME (Feb. 23, 2013),
<http://swampland.time.com/2013/02/23/sequestration-memo-details-potential-cuts-to-nationalparks/#ixzz2MhiZOgDb>.

23 *Domestic Oil Production at Record Level Despite Obama*, INVESTORS.COM (Feb. 28, 2013, 7:01 PM),
<http://news.investors.com/ibd-editorials/022813-646276-obama-shuts-federal-land-oil-notprivate.htm>.

24 *Id.*

25 *Id.*

26 *Id.*