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Look West: America's parks under attack from all sides

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Look West

PUBLIC LANDS AND ENERGY NEWS
FROM THE CENTER FOR WESTERN PRIORITIES

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A park scientist conducts research at Big Bend National Park in Texas. **NPS Photo**

The National Park Service is by far **the most popular government agency in America**. Its employees and the land it manages are also facing an unprecedented and simultaneous attack from the **White House**, **Elon Musk's**

DOGE operatives, members of Congress, and the Interior department itself.

The New York Times reports that a DOGE employee assembled **a spreadsheet of \$26 million dollars in National Park Service grants** to eliminate, including the popular Scientists in Parks program that places students and early-career scientists at national park units to help protect ecosystems and historic landmarks.

The budget reconciliation package passed by the House Natural Resources Committee early Wednesday morning would **zero out remaining money** that had been set aside in the Inflation Reduction Act to hire park rangers and perform ecosystem restoration in parks and on Bureau of Land Management lands. However, the House budget would provide \$150 million for the Interior department to throw America a 250th birthday party in 2026, and \$40 million for President Trump's planned statue garden of American heroes.

More pressing than 2026 budget concerns, however, is **another round of layoffs** that are expected to hit the Park Service and Interior department as early as next week. **Government Executive reports that NPS will fire around 1,500 employees**, along with 1,000 at the U.S. Geological Survey. The Park Service layoffs are expected to fall heavily on national and regional offices, cultural resources, and science staff.

House land sell-off is even larger than first reported

In Wednesday's Look West, E&E News reported that the House reconciliation bill aimed to sell off at least 11,000 acres of national public land. However, **backers of the measure refuse to give an exact number**, and analysis of the amendment, which was added to the bill in the middle of the night, **suggests it would actually dispose of 500,000 acres or more.**

The sell-off provision will be the first test of the new **bipartisan public lands caucus** in the House, headed up by Rep. Gabe Vasquez of New Mexico and Rep. Ryan Zinke of Montana, President Trump's former Interior secretary. **At a press conference on Wednesday**, Zinke said "I have told leadership before, I have told leadership since, that ... I strongly don't believe [land sales] should be in the reconciliation bill," **but he stopped short of saying that he would vote against the final bill if the land sell-off was included.**

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