

Senate appropriators passed the Interior bill through full committee on a party line vote yesterday after much back-and-forth over funding levels and riders. The bill will move to the floor of the Senate at an unspecified later date.

The FY2016 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill provides a total of \$31.06 billion, including \$30.01 billion in discretionary funding and \$1.05 billion in emergency firefighting funds.

Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) took a hit compared to last year's enacted funding level, the committee appropriators funding it at \$292 million which is \$14 million less than FY2015. Considering that the senate majority switched in the last election, however, it still reflects that there is much support for this program that is vital to completing so many trails. It also continues the trend, regardless of who is the majority party, of the Senate recommending much higher investment in LWCF than the House.

In LWCF action, Sen. Tester (D-MT) introduced an amendment that would have increased funding to \$380 million if Congress addressed the sequester budget caps, but the amendment was defeated. However, an amendment offered by Sen. Collins (R-ME) increased the originally proposed funding level by \$14 million with offsets from other areas of the bill.

While the bill currently funds LWCF at \$292 million, more of those funds are directed to the Forest Legacy Program (\$60 million) and Stateside grants (\$55 million) and less money towards federal land acquisitions.

Highly contentious policy riders were included and fought by all the Democrats while the Republicans were unanimous in backing all but one of them. Referred to as "poison pill" riders by the Dems, they included riders that would affect climate change, clean water, hydraulic fracturing on BLM lands, and the sage grouse issue, among other things.

In other Senate Interior appropriations bill news, the bill funds **wildfire suppression** at 100% of the 10 year average as well as providing access to additional funds if the costs of suppression exceed that level of funding. While AHS still strongly advocates for passage of the **Wildfire Disaster Funding Act**([H.R. 167](#) & [S. 235](#)), this is a big win as it will help the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service to stop borrowing from other programs (such as trails maintenance and construction) to address the increasing costs of wildfires in recent years.

American Hiking Society has been actively advocating on these issues as have many of our Alliance members and other trails organizations. I thank all of our Alliance members, individual members, and others who have responded to calls to action and contacted your senators when requested. While we would of course like to see (and will continue to work to effect) increased LWCF funding, just getting to this level is a small victory and would not have happened without the support of so many people and organizations.

But our work is nowhere near complete. The Senate and House have far to go to actually finalize their budgets and agree on a final budget. This process, as most of you are aware, can stretch out clear into the next fiscal year that they are funding. In the interim, there will be many chances for advocates to speak up and help ensure that land management agencies have the resources required to protect the trails and lands that are so important to us and to the American people.