



5.2 U.S. FEDERAL BUDGETING PROCESS

The Federal Budget process begins the first Monday in February of each year and should conclude by October 1st, the start of the Federal Fiscal Year.

Step 1: The Executive Budget

Purpose: The President is responsible for submitting a detailed budget request to Congress in February. Estimated levels of spending, revenue, and borrowing are broken down for the coming fiscal year, serving as a template for congressional action.

Process: Assembling the budget is a long administrative process involving each individual agency and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). OMB and the agencies develop priorities and list funding levels needed to maintain or improve individual programs.

Getting Involved: Contact agencies as they are formulating budget request for the upcoming year. This process starts long before February so make sure to start communication early. Promote your priorities including individual programs and overall strategies to each agency and the OMB personnel working with priority agencies.

Step 2: The Concurrent Budget Resolution

Purpose: Congress is responsible for developing the concurrent budget resolution which governs the rest of the budget process by setting limits on total levels of revenue and spending. The resolution is where Congress expresses its economic goals for the upcoming fiscal year and for the next four years.

Process: The Budget Committees of the House and Senate use the President's budget request, testimony from agencies, and forecasts from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to set a total level of budget authority called the 302(a) allocation level. When the House and Senate have developed their respective resolutions, a conference committee must reconcile the differences. The resolution should be passed by both houses by April 15.

Getting Involved: Contact Congressmen on the Budget Committee or on the conference committee to show your support for a resolution that supports natural resource funding.

Step 3: Setting Spending Allocations

Purpose: Congress must agree on spending allocations, or limits to how much money can be spent on discretionary programs during the coming fiscal year and the next four years. The allocations ensure that congress is holding to the budget resolution. Discretionary funding refers specifically to money provided each year through the appropriations process.*

Process: The House and Senate Appropriations committees divide up the money specified in the concurrent budget resolution into separate appropriations bills. The subcommittees that produce each appropriations bill must use this allocation as a total dollar ceiling for all of the agencies and programs in their jurisdiction. These are called 302(b) allocations.

Getting Involved: Contact Congressmen on the Appropriations committee. Encourage higher allocations for the appropriations bills that deal with natural resources. The two main natural resources bills are the ones that fund the Interior Department and Agriculture Department (see step 4).

Step 4: Developing Appropriations Bills

Purpose: Appropriations bills set the amount of money specific departments, agencies, and programs receive for a given fiscal year.

Process: Each Appropriations subcommittee is responsible for a set of departments, agencies, and programs and writes one bill each year that divides up their 302(b) allocation into line items for each program. Each bill is drafted, marked up, and voted on by the subcommittee in separate hearings. The full Appropriations committee then holds a hearing to approve and amend the subcommittee bill. There are 12 Appropriations subcommittees and 12 subsequent bills per chamber. The Subcommittees and related bills are:

1. Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and related agencies
2. Commerce, Justice, Science, and related agencies
3. Defense
4. Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies
5. Financial Services and General Government
6. Homeland Security
7. Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
8. Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
9. Legislative Branch
10. Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies
11. State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
12. Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies

The Appropriations Committees that address natural resources are:

House

- [Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies](#)
- [Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies](#)

Senate

- [Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies](#)
- [Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies](#)

Getting Involved: Contact Appropriations subcommittee (Agriculture and Interior) and full committee members as they hold hearings and markups on the bills. Make sure to identify and support specific aspects of the bills as well as general funding levels that line up with your priorities. Find other organizations that have similar funding priorities and work together to send coalition letters that represent diverse groups and individuals.

Step 5: Passing the Appropriations Bills

Purpose: Each appropriations bill must be approved by both chambers.

Process: After Senate and House Appropriations committees approve each of the twelve appropriations bills in their respective chambers, the full Senate and House vote to approve them. Once each bill passes each chamber, conference committees made up of both chambers must reconcile the differences and develop a bill that both chambers can then vote to approve. Congress is required to have given final approval to all 12 spending bills by October 1 (the start of the new Fiscal Year), although this deadline is rarely met.

Getting Involved: Contact Congressmen in the conference committee. Support versions of each provision in a given appropriations bill (House or Senate) that most closely aligns with natural resource priorities.

Step 6: Presidential Approval of Appropriations Bills

Purpose: As an executive check on the legislative branch, the President can decide to veto or approve the appropriations bills.

Process: The President has ten days in which to decide:

- a) To sign an appropriations bill, thereby making it law;
- b) To veto the bill, thereby sending it back to Congress and requiring much of the process to begin again with respect to the programs covered by that bill; or
- c) To allow the bill to become law without his signature after 10 days, thereby making it law but doing so without his express approval.

Step 7: The Bill Becomes Law

If the process goes as planned, all 12 spending bills have been signed by the President and become Public Law by October 1st, the start of the new Fiscal Year. Since 2011, the October 1st deadline has not been met and Congress has had to pass a Continuing Resolution (CR) to fund the government. A CR, for the most part, allows programs to continue with the same amount of funding as the year before while Congress works to approve new appropriations bills. If a CR cannot be passed and the 12 Appropriations bills are not approved, then the Federal government is shutdown.

* Programs that use discretionary funds are funded each year through the Appropriations process. When the program is enacted by law, a funding level, or Authorization, is set by the law. Authorizations are the maximum amount of money that is legally allowed to be spent by the program. Every year, these discretionary programs are appropriated money through Appropriations bills; the amount of money appropriated can vary each year. Mandatory programs, are not funded through annual appropriations bills; spending for mandatory programs is dictated by the laws that created the programs (e.g. Social Security), and cannot be altered by the annual budgeting process described here.