



CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

October 6, 2009

H.R. 1612 **Public Lands Service Corps Act of 2009**

As ordered reported by the House Committee on Natural Resources on June 10, 2009

SUMMARY

H.R. 1612 would amend the Public Lands Corps Act of 1993, which governs programs that assist and employ young adults to work on lands managed by the Department of the Interior (DOI), the Forest Service, and other federal agencies. Assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts, CBO estimates that implementing the legislation would cost \$120 million over the 2010-2014 period. Enacting the bill would not affect revenues or direct spending.

H.R. 1612 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA) and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

ESTIMATED COST TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The estimated budgetary impact of H.R. 1612 is shown in the following table. The costs of this legislation fall within budget function 300 (natural resources and environment).

	By Fiscal Year, in Millions of Dollars					2010- 2014
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
Estimated Authorization Level	30	30	30	30	30	150
Estimated Outlays	10	20	30	30	30	120

BASIS OF ESTIMATE

For this estimate, CBO assumes that H.R. 1612 will be enacted near the beginning of fiscal year 2010 and that the amounts estimated to be necessary will be appropriated for each year. Estimated outlays are based on historical spending patterns for similar programs.

In addition to changing the name of the Public Lands Corps (PLC) to the Public Lands Service Corps (PLSC), the bill would:

- Expand the program to include the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA);
- Require DOI to establish a department-level office to coordinate PLSC programs among its various bureaus;
- Emphasize that training for participants should be provided at federal residential centers;
- Authorize federal appropriations to be used for transportation subsidies; and
- Eliminate the program's current authorization ceiling of \$12 million a year.

Public Lands Corps Under Current Law

The Public Lands Corps is a network of young men and women, most of whom are recruited by federal land management agencies through nonprofit organizations such as the Student Conservation Association and over 100 local conservation service corps.

Several agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service (NPS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), use members of the corps and students from other programs to build trails, perform maintenance, and carry out other projects in exchange for benefits such as training, living allowances, and medical care.

Existing corps programs vary by agency and funding source. Currently, only the Forest Service receives specific appropriations for some PLC projects, but the funding (less than \$3 million in 2009) may only be used for hazardous fuels reduction. The NPS also receives funding for PLC projects, but that funding is derived from recreation fees that the agency is able to use without appropriations action. (The President's 2010 budget for the NPS requested \$5 million of appropriated funds to expand youth activities at parks.) Other agencies work with student conservation groups using funds from their annual operating budgets.

Public Lands Service Corps (PLSC)

H.R. 1612 would significantly expand PLC programs and change the corps' name to the Public Lands Service Corps. Under the bill, participants could receive classroom education, more job training, transportation subsidies, housing during their time in the program, and hiring preferences upon completion of their tenure. The bill also would expand the types of activities in which PLSC members could participate.

The effect of H.R. 1612 on discretionary spending is uncertain, largely because total costs would depend on how the Administration chooses to implement the legislation and on how much funding the Congress would provide in appropriations acts. Based on information provided by the affected agencies, CBO expects that all of those agencies, including the newly added NOAA, would take advantage of the authorities provided by the bill.

For this estimate, CBO assumes that the land management agencies and NOAA would, over the next five years, implement H.R. 1612 by expanding their use of federal-nonprofit partnerships. We expect that the affected agencies would need a total of about \$30 million annually for this purpose. Such funding would allow agencies that have smaller PLSC programs (including the USFWS and BLM) to expand their programs, primarily by working with nonprofit corps in areas such as wildlife refuges and national monuments. The funding would also enable the Forest Service to expand the scope of its corps programs to encompass more activities such as trail construction and facility maintenance. This level of funding also would allow the NPS to expand its existing program—the largest of any of the agencies—using discretionary funding as requested in the 2010 President's budget. The estimated annual cost of \$30 million also includes funds to operate an office at DOI to coordinate the department's activities and to provide participants with extra training, allowances, and transportation subsidies.

CBO estimates that funding for the PLSC would grow after 2014 as the Administration uses the enhanced authorities contained in the bill to recruit participants directly to agency programs. CBO estimates that implementing the expanded program would require a significant increase in funding after 2015.

This estimate is based on information provided by the NPS, the Forest Service, BLM, and nonprofit organizations that operate local conservation corps.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND PRIVATE-SECTOR IMPACT

H.R. 1612 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in UMRA and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

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