



## CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

August 26, 2010

### **H.R. 1612** **Public Lands Service Corps Act of 2010**

*As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
on July 21, 2010*

#### **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 \$136 million over the 2011-2015 period. Enacting H.R. 1612 would not affect revenues or direct spending; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply.

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					2011- 2015
	2011	2013	2014	2015	2015	
Estimated Authorization Level	35	35	35	35	35	175
Estimated Outlays	12	22	32	35	35	136

## **BASIS OF ESTIMATE**

For this estimate, CBO assumes that H.R. 1612 will be enacted near the beginning of fiscal year 2011 and that the amounts estimated to be necessary will be appropriated for each year. Estimated outlays are based on historical spending patterns for the Public Lands Corps.

In addition to changing the name of the Public Lands Corps (PLC) to the Public Lands Service Corps (PLSC), H.R. 1612 would:

- Expand the program to include the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA);
- Assist Indian tribes and related youth groups with operation of an Indian Youth Service Corps;
- 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 PLC 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 more than 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 some agencies receive specific appropriations. For example, the Forest Service receives

appropriations for some PLC projects, but the funding (less than \$3 million in 2010) may only be used for hazardous fuels reduction. The NPS also receives funding for PLC projects, but usually that funding is derived from recreation fees that the agency is able to use without appropriation action. In addition, for the first time in 2010, the agency received \$5 million to expand youth activities at parks. Other agencies work with student conservation groups using funds from their annual operating budgets.

### **Public Lands Service Corps Under H.R. 1612**

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

In addition, H.R. 1612 would authorize DOI to provide grants and other assistance to Indian tribes and related youth organizations for a new Indian Youth Service Corps. Finally, the act would require criminal history checks for program applicants aged 18 or older.

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 appropriation 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 legislation.

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 \$35 million annually for this purpose. Such funding would allow agencies that have smaller 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. Finally, this funding would allow DOI to provide grants to Indian tribes and other organizations for youth projects on tribal lands.

The estimated annual cost of \$35 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. Finally, the estimate includes costs to provide criminal background checks on participants as required by the legislation. Some of the

affected agencies already obtain such checks on participants that they hire directly, but most do not for participants hired through local youth groups. Amounts paid to those groups for public lands projects would probably have to increase by the amount needed for the background checks. The cost of preparing those checks is about \$125 a person.

CBO estimates that funding for the PLSC would grow after the first five years as agencies use the enhanced authorities contained in the legislation to recruit participants directly to their 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.

## **PREVIOUS CBO ESTIMATE**

On October 6, 2009, CBO transmitted a cost estimate for H.R. 1612 as ordered reported by the House Committee on Natural Resources on June 10, 2009. The two versions of the legislation are similar, but as reflected in the estimate, implementing the Senate version would cost more because it would require an Indian grant program and security checks on participants for all programs.

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