



CONSERVATION IMPACTS OF THE FISCAL CLIFF

In the coming weeks, Congress and the President will be faced with a most-difficult choice: Will they allow massive budget cuts to programs that Americans count on—including those that defend clean air and water, safeguard public lands and wildlife, and protect human health—or will they work to find a path forward to raise revenue and stave off these harmful cuts?

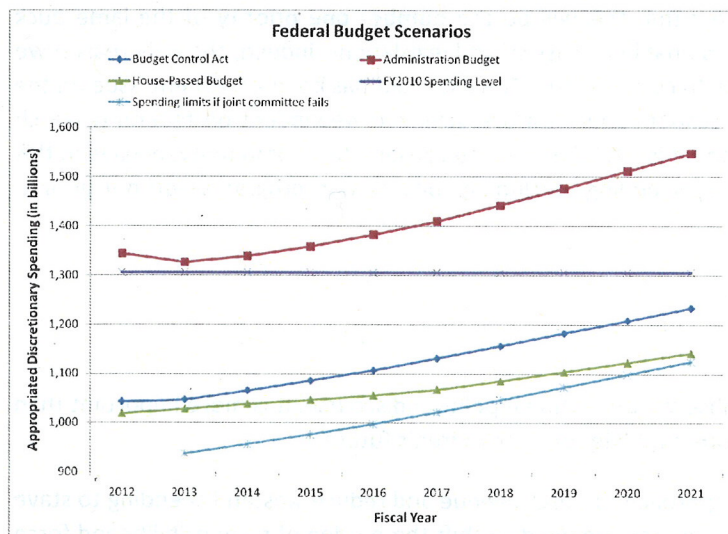
How did we get here?

In the summer of 2011, to avoid the federal government defaulting on its loans, the President and Congress reached a deal: Congress agreed to increase the **debt ceiling** in return for a guarantee that the federal deficit would be reduced. To get there, a bipartisan super-committee was formed to hammer out a deficit reduction deal, and in case they failed to reach an agreement, a failsafe was added: if Congress failed to enact a bill reducing the deficit by January 15, 2012, a series of automatic spending cuts—called “**sequestration**”—would begin in 2013.

Congress did fail to reach an agreement and enact a deficit reduction bill, and now these devastating cuts loom on the horizon. Unless Congress acts before January 2nd, mandatory spending cuts will slash **\$109 billion** from the next year's budget and \$1.2 trillion over the following nine years. This, combined with the expiration of the Bush tax cuts on December 31st, is called the “**fiscal cliff**.” Unless this draconian scenario is averted, **key conservation programs** and the wildlife and ecosystems they protect will face a crushing impact.

What does this mean for conservation?

If sequestration goes into effect, it will mean immediate and significant cuts to all non-defense discretionary spending—a category that includes virtually all conservation programs—over the next 10 years. The budget process over the past year has already cut conservation programs disproportionately: in the fiscal year 2012 budget published by the administration, key conservation programs were cut by **more than 30%**, while overall non-defense discretionary spending was cut by just 7%. However, these recent cuts will seem trivial in comparison to cuts under sequestration; in this scenario, federal spending in fiscal year 2020 will be **almost \$200 billion less** than in the past fiscal year.



This graph compares projected spending levels between the budget passed by the House last summer, the Administration's budget, and the spending limits set by the Budget Control Act. The light blue line at the bottom shows the discretionary spending level under sequestration.

These cuts will have a dramatic impact on conservation programs cherished by **America's hunters and anglers** as well as all those who enjoy access to our rich natural resources. At stake are the decades of progress our country has made to preserve the health and safety of our water, air, land, and environment and to create the clean energy jobs vital to the future of our economy

One difficult aspect of sequestration is that federal departments and agencies have no discretion about where to make the cuts: non-defense discretionary spending is subject to a cut of 8.2% *at the program level*. This means that, say, the US Fish and Wildlife Service can't decide to keep the Multinational Species Conservation Fund intact and cut the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund by 16.4%; *every program* must be cut by 8.2%. Millions of dollars that protect clean air and water, wildlife conservation, alternative energy investments, and environmental remediation programs will be slashed indiscriminately, yet tax breaks for fossil fuels aren't affected.

Sequestration will impact over 100 environment-related programs, setting back conservation efforts across the country and having a negative impact on our nation's economy: in 2011 alone, 90 million Americans (38% of the U.S. population age 16 and older) spent **\$145 billion**—1% of GDP!—on wildlife-related recreation. Below are just a few examples of the many impacted programs:

- The State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program, which **provides crucial funding** for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered, will be cut by about **\$5 million**, leaving only \$56 million to protect wildlife in all 50 states.
- The Land and Water Conservation Fund, which has provided funding for countless National Parks, wildlife refuges, and other public lands, will be cut by about **\$20 million**, almost certainly delaying or halting **crucial conservation projects**.
- The Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental Programs and Management funding, which supports a variety of environmental protection and restoration programs—including critical **Clean Water Act** and **Clean Air Act** protection programs—will be cut by **\$220 million**, undermining fundamental federal regulation and putting our access to clean air and water at risk.
- The Department of Energy's Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Program, which makes investments in **clean energy** essential to our nation's environment and economy, will be cut by **\$148 million**.
- The Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration Funds—which are used to support **wildlife and fisheries conservation**—will be cut by **\$34 million and \$31 million** respectively, endangering countless species and restricting the activities of the 37 million hunters and anglers who contributed \$90 billion to our economy in the past year alone. These come from a trust fund paid into by sportsmen for sportsmen via an excise tax on fishing, hunting, and boating equipment; that even funds **already reserved for conservation** are subject to deep cuts demonstrates the fundamental unfairness of sequestration.

What happens next?

In the third presidential debate, President Obama said that sequestration “will not happen,” and many members of Congress have expressed that they too would like to prevent these cuts. It is clear that this will be the **number one priority** of the lame duck Congress, yet past experience has shown that Congress frequently is unable to pass critical legislation—indeed, the only reason we are facing these cuts is because of Congress's demonstrated inability to compromise. The fiscal cliff has been a frequent issue on the campaign trail, and groups as diverse as the defense community, school administrators, scientists dependent on federal research grants, and America's mayors have spoken out against sequestration. It is vital that we, the conservation community, engage in this conversation to ensure that these cuts to non-defense discretionary spending—including conservation programs—do not go into effect.

What can we do?

At a time when climate change and conservation are increasingly absent from national political discourse, it is more important than ever to fight for the crucial conservation programs we rely on to protect wildlife for our children's future.

ACT NOW— Congress must act immediately to employ a balanced approach to raise revenue and reduce wasteful spending to stave off these devastating cuts. Instead of cutting critical conservation programs, we need to shift the burden of responsibility and force polluters to pay their share. Contact your Senators and Representatives today to let them know that sequestration will have a huge impact on the conservation programs you care about, and urge them to *break the revenue dam* to save the programs Americans count on.

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