



## CARES Act Funding Snapshot Departmental Offices

### OS expenditures can include:

- Equipment and supplies to disinfect and clean buildings and public areas
- Law enforcement and emergency management operations
- Biosurveillance of wildlife and environmental persistence studies
- Employee overtime and special pay expenses
- Other response, mitigation, or recovery activities

### Top Five Recipients

1. Corporate Lodging Consultants, Inc. (\$250,000)
2. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (\$200,000)
3. Valcorp Enterprises, LLC (\$195,336)
4. San Diego, Allan (\$168,193)
5. 4 Star Technologies, Inc. (\$146,200)

\* The OS recently transferred \$450,000 to the BOR for Field Special Assistant Support. The BOR has not obligated or expended any funds as of the date of this report.

Under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) enacted on March 27, 2020, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) received \$909.7 million to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus pandemic. The Office of the Secretary (OS) received \$158.4 million of the DOI's CARES Act funding and transferred funds to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Office of Inspector General (OIG), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and Office of Wildland Fire (OWF). Figure 1 includes a breakdown of the OS funds appropriated or transferred to these departmental offices.

**Figure 1: Funding Status as of November 30, 2020**

Office	Appropriation or Transfer Amount (\$)	Obligations to Date (\$)	Expenditures to Date (\$)
OS	143,580,000	2,816,896 (2%)	905,870 (0.6%)
FWS	3,585,000	1,343,896 (37.5%)	1,126,168 (31.4%)
	1,206,000	Staffing and Immediate Response	
	2,379,000	Wildland Fire Management Program	
NPS	5,467,000	1,854,108 (33.9%)	1,503,289 (27.5%)
	2,029,000	Staffing and Immediate Response	
	3,438,000	Wildland Fire Management Program	
BLM	4,053,000	1,421,697 (35.1%)	1,068,980 (26.4%)
	830,000	Staffing and Immediate Response	
	3,223,000	Wildland Fire Management Program	
OIG	1,000,000	755,627 (75.6%)	755,627 (75.6%)
OWF	265,000	241,460 (91.1%)	134,078 (50.6%)
BOR*	450,000	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$158,400,000</b>	<b>\$8,433,685 (5.3%)</b>	<b>\$5,494,013 (3.5%)</b>



*"What we have learned over the past six months is that while our scientific understanding of this virus has progressed, so too have the response needs of our bureaus, as well as our State and local partners. As such, rather than imprudently distributing all funds immediately, the Department has taken a deliberate approach to carefully steward CARES Act funds so that we may remain responsive to evolving needs through next September."*

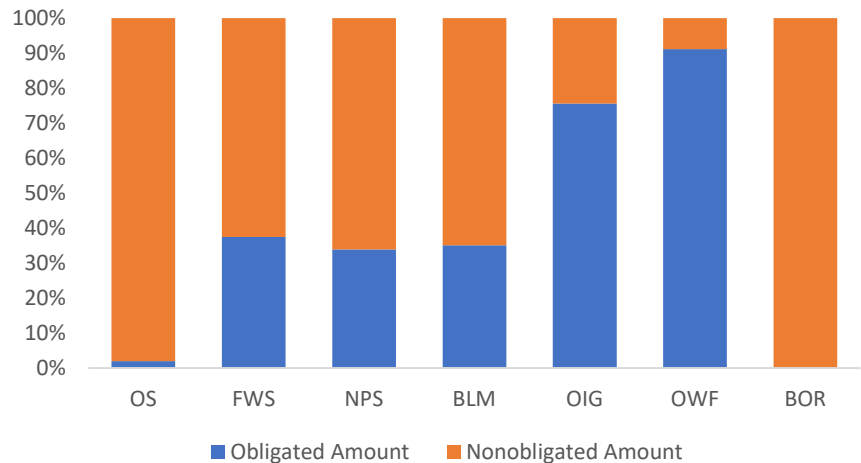
—Acting Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget

According to the NPS, BLM, and FWS:

- Wildland Fire Management Program funding:
  - The NPS does not need additional funding.
  - The BLM has approximately \$2 million in excess funding.
  - The FWS is awaiting guidance on how to allocate the funding.
- The funds the NPS and the BLM received (other than for wildland fire) were for pandemic-response costs the bureaus already incurred.

As of November 30, 2020, 5.3 percent of the funding for departmental offices had been obligated. Figure 2 shows the obligated and nonobligated amounts by office.

**Figure 2: Percentages of Obligated and Nonobligated Amounts by Office**



## The Office of the Secretary's Spend Plan

The OS requested that the bureaus and offices formulate spend plans for allocating CARES Acts funding, including any requested transfer of funds from the OS. The Office of the Solicitor also reviewed the plans for the purpose of ensuring that the proposed spending aligned with the purposes specified in the CARES Act.

All bureaus and offices are eligible for the funding appropriated to the OS; therefore, additional fund transfers can be expected through September 30, 2021. The OS stated that it has maintained a flexible approach to its decision-making practices to ensure adaptation to the changing landscape during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To prioritize the allocation of the funds, the OS stated that it has relied on the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other sources to provide advice on decisions on whether to provide the requesting bureau or office with CARES Act funds.

Before the CARES Act, the DOI's procurement executive proactively issued guidance to authorize increases in certain thresholds for purchases of supplies and services.



The OWF's mission is to develop a budget, coordinate work, create policy, and pursue technological innovation on behalf of the Wildland Fire Management Program. These efforts cover thousands of employees and 535 million acres of public and tribal lands affecting the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), BLM, NPS, and FWS.

The OWF stated that it is working with interagency partners—including the BIA, BLM, NPS, FWS, and U.S. Forest Service—to continue its firefighting mission during the COVID-19 pandemic by:

- Hiring firefighters
- Protecting firefighters to mitigate the spread of COVID-19
- Preparing for outbreaks during wildfire incidents
- Adapting wildfire response plans
- Continuing work to reduce wildfire risk
- Monitoring new developments

## OS Guidance to Bureaus and Offices

On March 27, 2020, the DOI's Office of Budget issued a memorandum to bureaus and offices that provided initial guidance for apportionments, spend plans, and reporting requirements. The memorandum directed bureaus and offices receiving apportionments under the CARES Act to prepare draft spend plans by March 31, 2020, so the DOI could meet its April 6, 2020 deadline to provide the OMB with its apportionments. The memorandum also directed bureaus and offices to provide spend plans reflecting anticipated costs directly related to the COVID-19 response and recovery that could not be addressed through annual appropriations. The spend plans were to include allocations for the entire appropriation and estimated timeframes for completion through June 30, 2020. DOI officials stated that leadership reviewed and approved all spend plans.

As requirements change, bureaus and offices are required to submit updated spend plans. The DOI stated that it used information already available in the Financial and Business Management System (FBMS) to standardize the process. The DOI's Office of Budget stated that it is working with bureaus and offices to evaluate and align existing data with the spend plan structure. All bureaus that received transferred CARES Act funds informed us that they are complying with weekly reporting requirements.

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The OS plans to use existing reporting mechanisms to minimize the administrative burden on the bureaus and offices. For example, the OS stated that it can mine information from financial and HR systems to track spending and employee leave related to the pandemic.

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## The Office of Wildland Fire

We issued a report on July 31, 2020, outlining the Wildland Fire Management Program's allocation of CARES Act funds ([Report No. 2020-ER-042](#)). The OWF is responsible for the coordination, accountability, and oversight of the Wildland Fire Management Program's budget across the bureaus. Our report documented the \$11.3 million in CARES Act funding and related obligations and expenditures as of June 19, 2020. The OWF received \$265,000 in CARES Act funding from the OS for remote access to dispatch center software and broadband communications for incident management teams (see Figure 4).



The FWS is the oldest Federal conservation agency, dating back to 1871, and the only agency in the Federal Government with the primary responsibility of managing fish and wildlife for the American public.

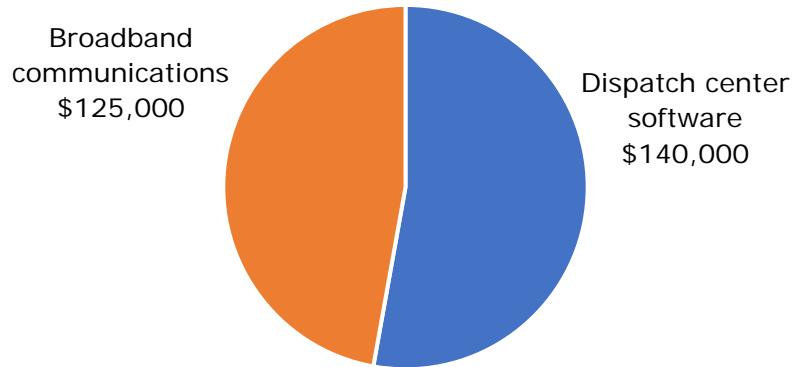
In April, the NPS and the FWS issued safety alerts for counterfeit N95 filtering face respiration masks. The pandemic and a depletion of available PPE caused an increase in such masks.

Before purchasing N95 masks, procurement officials were to verify the manufacturers of the masks are approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Some vendors falsely claimed to meet the approval standards and included images of testing and certification numbers that did not match the product data.

The FWS also published a frequently asked questions notice on N95 masks and other face coverings to provide employees with information on COVID-19 precautions.

The OWF worked with the Office of Budget, the Office of the Chief Information Officer, and other program leaders to determine its IT priorities.

**Figure 4. The OWF's Plan for Spending the \$265,000**



The OWF has provided links to guidance for firefighters on its website including safety guidelines for wildland fire operations; recommendations for firefighter screening, testing, and social distancing; and regional guidance and best practices for wildland fire response during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The OWF stated that it is following guidance from the National Wildfire Coordinating Group on efficient clearance and remote onboarding of new and returning employees.

The OWF will be reporting its COVID-19 and CARES Act transactions to the Office of Budget on a weekly basis.

### **The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

The FWS received \$3,585,000 in CARES Act funding from the OS. The FWS determined its funding priorities by consulting with its programs and regions, the COVID-19 incident management team, and the FWS safety office.

The FWS anticipates spending the funding on personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning; physical security at the National Conservation Training Center; overtime, premium, and hazard pay; and the FWS Wildland Fire Management Program facilities and crew quarters. Figure 3 shows the funding amounts for these areas.



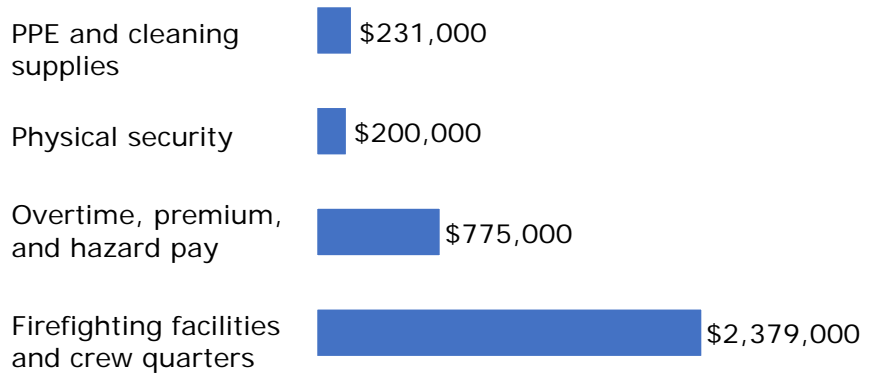
The NPS has had responsibility for national parks since 1916. It relies on the help of volunteers and partners and receives more than 318 million visitors each year.

The NPS created a website to update the public about its COVID-19 response plan. The website includes:

- News releases
- Digital resources
- Program operation information
- Employee protection resources
- Ideas for responsible recreation

Visitors can also take “virtual tours” of national parks. The tours are available on various social media sites and include photographs, webcams, live programs, children’s activities, games and challenges, and a calendar of events.

**Figure 3: Funding Amounts in the FWS’ Spend Plan**



As part of its request, the FWS agreed to demonstrate to the Department that all costs are defensible and to build strong internal controls and develop routine reporting. Additionally, the FWS stated that it would develop communications strategies, especially for internal communications to employees affected by the pandemic. Currently, the FWS is awaiting further guidance from the OWF on how to allocate its Wildland Fire Management Program funding.

The FWS kept its refuges open while State and other Federal agency lands were closed. During the pandemic, the FWS saw an increase in visitors to and interest in its public lands.

In its funding request to the OS, the FWS stated that it would establish an executive oversight team to monitor the status of projects, review obligation trends, and ensure that all funding requirements have been met. The FWS is reporting its obligations and providing supporting documentation to the OS on a weekly basis.

### **The National Park Service**

The NPS received \$5,467,000 in CARES Act funding from the OS. The funding included \$3,438,000 for Wildland Fire Management, but those funds had not yet been obligated as of October 29, 2020. The OWF originally requested the funds, which were approved for wildland fire employee housing and firefighting facilities to comply with local and State social distancing mandates. Ultimately, the NPS did not need the OWF funds in fiscal year 2020. When asked what it planned to do with the unneeded funds, the NPS stated that it is discussing this with the DOI but did not have a final plan as of October 29, 2020.



In 1946, Congress merged the General Land Office and the U.S. Grazing Service to establish the BLM. The BLM manages 1 of every 10 acres of land in the United States and approximately 30 percent of the Nation's minerals.

The BLM created a COVID-19 response website to notify visitors of updates to the bureau's many offices and districts. The website also provides information on how to visit public lands responsibly and safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

States with a BLM presence have their own websites for updating visitors. The websites include alerts and news releases; refer visitors to local, State, and CDC guidance; and provide recommendations on how to prepare for accessing BLM lands with limited visitor services. Some recommendations include:

- Bringing sanitation supplies
- Taking out trash
- Reducing cash transactions by paying fees through the recreation.gov website

Though the NPS did not specifically make such a request, the OS transferred \$1,759,000 to the NPS for PPE and cleaning supplies obligations incurred prior to May 1, 2020. Most of the expenditures were moved from the original NPS accounts to CARES Act accounts, and the transfer of the remaining expenditures was to be completed by July 29, 2020. The NPS is not authorized to use the funds received for costs incurred after May 1, 2020.

On its website, the NPS states that it is issuing PPE to employees performing critical functions such as visitor and resource protection, emergency management services, and facility maintenance. It also states that Park staff are following CDC guidance by cleaning and maintaining facilities to safeguard employee and public health and safety.

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The NPS is tracking confirmed employee cases of COVID-19 and has stated that it will notify the public if an employee presented an exposure risk to visitors, based on CDC guidance.

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The NPS requires that parks and regions review their costs to ensure they are appropriate to charge to the CARES Act. The NPS has informed us that it provides weekly reports to the DOI's Office of Budget on COVID-19-related costs paid for with the supplemental funding and regular annual appropriations.

### **The Bureau of Land Management**

The BLM received \$4,053,000 in CARES Act funding from the OS. The funding included \$3,223,000 for Wildland Fire Management Program requirements for expanded facilities. This includes costs associated with barracks staff tasked with cleaning and enforcing barracks quarantine; this staff also assists the residents and administrative office staff who provide cleaning services after hours and contracting officers and budget staff who execute virus-related contracts after hours. The BLM has expended approximately \$1,000,000 of the funds and anticipates that it will not need most of the remaining funds for expanded facilities.

The funds the OS transferred for PPE, cleaning supplies, and labor were based on actual obligations and were a reimbursement for expenses already incurred. The BLM stated that it has expended \$650,000 for PPE and cleaning supplies but was only able to use \$104,000 of CARES Act funding.

## Timeline<sup>s</sup>

**March 20** – The DOI increases procurement thresholds temporarily with the nationwide emergency declaration.

**March 27** – The Office of Budget provides initial guidance on submitting apportionments, operating plans, and reporting associated with the CARES Act.

**March 31** – The Office of Budget gives guidance to DOI bureaus and offices for executing emergency supplemental funding provided in the CARES Act. The BLM requests CARES Act funds from the DOI.

**April 3** – The DOI provides bureau budget officers with information on soliciting CARES Act funding requests through its external communications site and asks them to submit operating and management plans.

**April 6 & 8** – The FWS, NPS, and BLM request CARES Act funds from the DOI.

**April 27** – The DOI informs the FWS, NPS, and BLM that it approved funding for the Wildland Fire Management Program.

**May 19** – The DOI informs the NPS that it approved funding for PPE and cleaning supplies. The DOI informs the BLM that it approved funding for wildland fire and nonfire expenses.

**July 8** – The OWF requests CARES Act funds from the DOI.

**July 29** – The DOI informs the OWF that it approved the CARES Act funding.

**August 7** – The DOI Deputy Secretary provides guidance on bureau and office accountability for CARES Act charge card spending.

<sup>s</sup>All dates in 2020

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Per the COVID-19 updates on the BLM's regional websites, visitors may continue to use BLM-managed public lands in a safe and responsible manner. The BLM recommends visiting areas close to home, avoiding popular or crowded locations where social distancing may be difficult, and limiting group activities to members of one household.

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On June 5, 2020, the BLM's budget office provided guidance to BLM staff on the appropriate uses of the CARES Act funding. The BLM reports weekly to the DOI's Office of Budget on COVID-19-related costs paid for with the supplemental funding and regular annual appropriations.