

BCHA Update on Government Shutdown

As you've heard by now, the federal government shut down after Congress failed to reach a deal over how to extend funding before its October 1st deadline. This is not a new topic for many BCHA volunteers. The last time this happened was seven years ago.

The shutdown could be short-lived, yet includes ceasing or severely reducing all federal services except those deemed "essential" during the shutdown. Federal employees have been instructed either to stop working (furloughed) or to continue working without pay until a federal budget or continuing resolution is passed by Congress and signed by the President. During the shutdown, there have also been threats of mass layoffs.

How will the government shutdown affect public access and our volunteer work on public lands? The short answer is: There are few specifics at this point. Based on past experience, generally public lands are open, however offices will be closed, and staff likely will not be available. Local BCHA chapter leaders are in the best position to know specifics for your locations. State managed lands, offices and facilities are not included in this shutdown.

Most of the agencies have issued contingency plans for a government shutdown. We provide links to those plans, below, and a brief summary of key statements from those plans as they might affect BCHA volunteer projects and access to trails and campgrounds. Hopefully, all this will blow over soon.

National Park Service

Their [contingency plan's](#) section on Visitor Services includes the following:

- Park roads, lookouts, trails, and open-air memorials will generally remain accessible to visitors.
- Parks with accessible areas that collect fees under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) will...provide basic visitor services in a manner that maintains restrooms and sanitation, trash collection, road maintenance, campground operations, law enforcement and emergency operations, and staffing entrance gates as necessary to provide critical safety information.
- ...As a general rule, if a facility or area is locked or secured during non-business hours (buildings, gated parking lots, etc.) it should be locked or secured for the duration of the shutdown.

US Forest Service

The US Department of Agriculture's [contingency plan](#) does not include specifics about the public use of Forest Service trails, campgrounds or the ongoing use of volunteers other than the generic statement that "Public access to recreation sites would be reduced." Those decisions will be made locally, by the Forest Supervisor or District Ranger (local line officers).

During the December 2018 government shutdown, the USFS issued a [contingency plan](#) that included the following instructions:

- Forest Service Operated Campgrounds and Other Developed Recreation Sites that Require Forest Service Maintenance: They will remain open, as determined necessary by the local line

officer, utilizing FLREA funding. This includes keeping recreation sites in safe operating condition, restroom facilities serviced, and identifying or repairing unsafe facility conditions (i.e., campgrounds, boat launches, and picnic areas).

- Volunteers: All volunteer activities should be discontinued during the shutdown. Volunteers who are housed in Forest Service housing will be allowed to remain there but will not do any project work or be otherwise compensated. See note on campground hosts below.

Note: A source that reviewed the shutdown and furlough plan stated that employees exempt from furlough include managers of pack and saddle stock among "Business functions necessary to support continuing work" in order "to ensure the health and safety of the public and other (federal) property."

Bureau of Land Management

The BLM's current [contingency plan](#) includes the following:

- Visitor Management: BLM will evaluate and keep open as many public lands and public facilities as possible. Additionally, BLM will continue operations at visitor sites where fees are collected...BLM land will remain accessible to the public and efforts will be made to post signs, as appropriate, to indicate where services are or are not available.
- Volunteers: Volunteer activities will be discontinued during the shutdown and the normal protections and liability coverages will be suspended, except as determined on a site-specific basis. Volunteers must follow the same restrictions as BLM employees.
- Campgrounds and Other Recreation Sites: Campgrounds, boat ramps, and other recreation sites will be open, however, at some facilities the full range of services may not be available including restrooms and water systems. In cases where funds are not available to maintain such services, signs will be posted but visitors may remain at these sites at their own risk.

Note: One press report dated 10/1/25 stated that BLM staff managing wild horse and burro holding facilities have been directed to continue their work.

Conclusion

We've been here before. The uncertainty is aggravating and having a deeply divided Congress by no means promotes BCHA's mission and our use and enjoyment of public lands. Fortunately, the current budgetary situation will be temporary.

BCHA encourages you to make your feelings known to your members of Congress. Here is a [link](#) containing information about how to contact your representative and senators. Let them know what you think about their failure to consistently and timely act upon this important element of government operations.

Background on the Federal Appropriations Process

Note: The following is an AI-generated summary.

The federal appropriations process begins with the President's annual budget request, submitted to Congress in February. This initiates a collaborative process involving Congress, the White House's Office

of Management and Budget (OMB), and federal agencies to determine discretionary spending for the upcoming fiscal year.

Stages of the process

1. **Budget formulation:** Agencies first send their requests to the OMB, which compiles and refines them into the President's official budget proposal.
2. **Budget resolution:** The House and Senate Budget Committees create their own non-binding budget resolutions, which set overall spending limits and are eventually reconciled between the two chambers.
3. **Appropriations bills:** Twelve subcommittees within the House and Senate Appropriations Committees draft specific funding bills. These are debated, amended, and passed by each chamber before being reconciled into a final version.
4. **Presidential approval:** The President must sign the appropriations bills for them to become law and authorize federal spending.

Alternatives and consequences

If the process is not completed by the October 1 deadline, two things can happen:

- **Continuing Resolution (CR):** To avoid a shutdown, Congress can pass a temporary spending bill, called a continuing resolution, to continue funding for agencies.
- **Government Shutdown:** If a CR is not passed, funding lapses for affected agencies, and they must stop all non-essential operations. To expedite the process, Congress often combines multiple spending bills into larger "minibus" or "omnibus" packages.