

WHERE DO THE

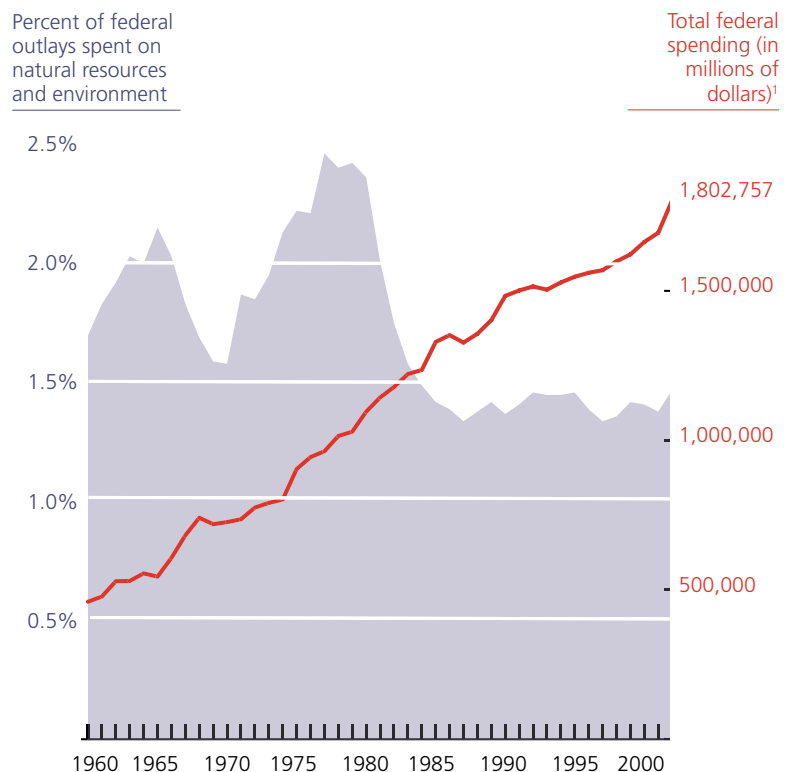
U.S. Spending on the Environment and Natural Resources

By Neil Sampson

Federal spending on programs designed to enhance natural resources and the environment have fared poorly in the last 40 years. Yet, total federal spending has increased almost 4-fold, from somewhere in the \$500 billion per year range to nearly \$1.8 trillion. So where has all the money gone? Virtually all of the spending increase has gone to non-discretionary payments, to such things as interest on the national debt, social security, and medicare. Whereas in 1962 more than two thirds of the annual budget was in the discretionary category, by 2002 lawmakers had discretionary control of only around one third of the annual expenditures. The overall proportion of the discretionary budget spent on the environment has actually increased. But the crux of the matter is that we are competing for a piece of a smaller and smaller pie.

Sources: Sampson, R.N. 1998. Federal investment in natural resources and the environment. *Conservation Voices* (1)5:19-21. **Note:** All data is from federal budget documents produced by the Office of Management and Budget.

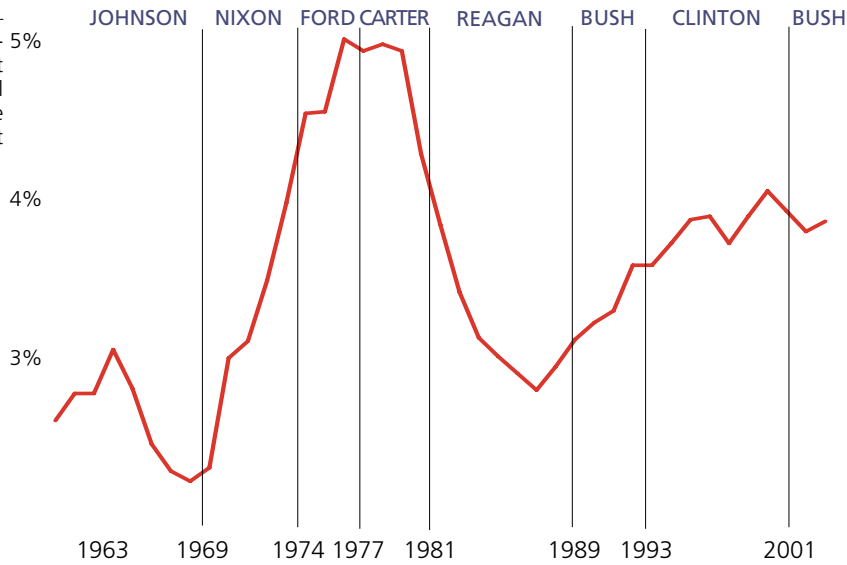
The U.S. once allocated about 2.5 cents out of every federal dollar to natural resources and the environment. Today, the proportion is about 1.5 cents per dollar — despite the 4-fold increase in total federal spending.



¹Values calculated in terms of 1996 dollar levels

DOLLARS GO?

Percent of discretionary budget spent on natural resources and the environment



Trends in the proportion of the discretionary budget spent on natural resources and the environment.

Changing priorities in the discretionary budget (defense is off this scale at 72% in 1962 & 48% in 2002).

The discretionary budget has shrunk by almost half.

	1962	2002
Discretionary	70%	37%
Non-discretionary	30%	63%

