

Trump was awful for the environment. But he wanted to be even worse. If Trump had had his way, only shreds of key environmental agencies would now be left. Although Trump has certainly succeeded in weakening them, the cores of the agencies remain intact. Without them, Biden’s task would be much harder.

Trump’s budgets unvaryingly called for eviscerating or even zeroing-out environment-related agencies. In 2017, with his first budget proposal, everyone panicked at the prospect. But even when the GOP completely controlled Congress, his budget proposals were miserable failures.

Take EPA. Trump’s 2017 budget proposal called for cutting EPA’s budget by 31%, reducing the budget to \$5.7 billion and cutting 3200 jobs. Even Scott Pruitt thought that was too much. Yet, year after year, Trump has renewed the same budget-cutting efforts. Here’s what [came out](#) of Congress:

Fiscal Year Enacted Budget Workforce

FY 2019	\$8,849,488,000	14,172
FY 2018	\$8,824,488,000	14,172
FY 2017	\$8,058,488,000	15,408
FY 2016	\$8,139,887,000	14,779

What you can see is that EPA’s budget went up by \$710 million, and it lost only 600 jobs from FY 2016. There was a temporary bump up in FY 2017 which went away in FY 2018, but except for that, the situation has been quite stable. (This isn’t to say the current numbers are good — EPA really needs to grow to do its job properly).

Last year’s budget was even a bigger loss for the Administration. The President proposed an EPA budget of \$6 billion, a 32% cut from the FY2019 appropriation. But Congress instead [appropriated](#) \$9 billion — the biggest EPA budget ever. The biggest defeat was on regional programs targeting areas like the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay. Trump wanted cuts of about 95%; instead, Congress provided an 11% increase. Undaunted, this year Trump is again calling for a 27% cut at EPA. With luck, this will result in another backlash from Congress and a further increase in EPA’s budget for 2021.

Another example is ARPA-E, the research office at the Department of Energy that funds

cutting-edge new technologies. Trump has tried to eliminate ARPA-E completely time and again. This has gotten nowhere with Congress. In FY 2018, the program got \$353 billion from Congress, which went up to \$366 billion in 2019, and the FY 2020 budget went up 16% to \$424 million. This year Trump is once more trying to axe the program, and will undoubtedly once more fail. The ARPA-E story is especially dramatic, but Trump sought heavy cuts in all renewable energy and environmental science programs, and failed to get them.

In November 2016, just after Trump's election, I wrote a threat assessment of risks to environmental law. I said then that "[a]s in the Bush Administration, budget cuts are probably the greatest single threat." There's no doubting Trump's implacable desire to wipe out environmental protection. But on this front, at least, he was a total failure. That leaves Joe Biden with a solid foundation for his environmental actions.