

## ‘Boo!’ to the Cost of the Capital’s Costumes

Looking for the great Halloween costume but don’t want to spend a lot of money?

If so, then this is the wrong list for you.

Federal agencies have paid a frightening *\$250,000 of taxpayer money* to construct their own custom-made costumes<sup>i</sup> of characters most people would not know or recognize. At least one reportedly scares children while others are difficult to move in or obstruct eyesight, which violates the [government’s own Halloween safety recommendations](#).

The mission of the masquerading mascots, some of which are profiled below, is to promote government policies, programs, and even parks:



**Costumed Mascot:** The Green Reaper

**Agency/Program:** Department of Energy  
National Security Technologies Energy Program

**Additional Notes:** Modeled after the Grim Reaper but holding a flower instead of a scythe, the Green Reaper visits elementary school children to encourage energy conservation.<sup>ii</sup> The costume includes a built-in fan, which ironically requires the use of energy.



**Costumed Mascot:** Sammy Soil  
**Agency/Program:** U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service



**Costumed Mascots:** Thermie and BAC  
**Agency/Program:** U.S. Department of the Agriculture  
Food Safety and Inspections Service



**Costumed Mascots:** Milkshake the Cow  
**Agency/Program:** U.S. Department of the Agriculture  
Agricultural Marketing Service





**Costumed Mascot:** Power Panther  
**Agency/Program:** U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Food and Nutrition Service



**Costumed Mascot:** Brite the Light Bulb  
**Agency/Program:** Department of Defense  
U.S. Navy Installation Command's Shore Energy program  
**Additional Notes:** The giant, florescent-yellow character with bright-blue pants promotes energy conservation.<sup>iii</sup>



**Costumed Mascot:** Franklin the Fair Housing Fox  
**Agency/Program:** Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity  
**Additional Notes:** A HUD official explained, “our hope is that this mascot will lead to greater housing opportunities for all.”<sup>iv</sup>



**Costumed Mascot:** *Major Muskrat*

**Agency/Program:** Department of Interior  
National Park Service  
*River Raisin National Battlefield Park*

**Additional Notes:** Major Muskrat was created to increase awareness of the existence of the River Raisin National Battlefield Park in Michigan, which was established in 2010. The park commemorates the site of the greatest American defeat during the War of 1812. “No one wanted to talk about it,” admits an interpretative ranger at the park. When questioned by officials at larger parks why River Raisin merits its own mascot, the ranger replies, “We’re so small, that’s why we need a mascot!”<sup>v</sup>

“The life-sized character is played by a person inside the costume that cannot talk and has limited vision,” according to the National Park Service. “The Major is accompanied by two to three other people who are in uniform or costume. One person acts as the Major’s handler and is responsible for ensuring the Major does not fall, is not pulled over by children, is aware of what is going on around him, is positioned well for photos, and can safely move from one point to another.”<sup>vi</sup>





**Costumed Mascot:** G. Lupe Ringtail  
**Agency/Program:** Department of Interior  
National Park Service

**Additional Notes:** Guadalupe Mountains and Carlsbad Caverns National Park  
Lupe is a ringtail, which is a raccoon-like mammal found throughout the desert southwest. Some park “visitors want to pull Lupe’s inflatable tail, and the occasional baby will cry at the sight of the six-foot mascot.”<sup>vii</sup>



**Costumed Mascot:** Sunny Saguaro  
**Agency/Program:** Department of Interior  
National Park Service  
Saguaro National Park

**Additional Notes:** Sunny attends parades and festivals, but the Park’s community engagement coordinator notes, the costume’s “range of walking is very limited.”<sup>viii</sup>



**Mascot:** Riley the Roadrunner  
**Agency/Program:** Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
Manhattan Project National Historical Park  
**Additional Notes:** Because it gets hot inside the costume, Riley is fitted with a built-in fan and an ice vest can also be worn underneath.<sup>ix</sup>



**Costumed Mascot:** Puddles the Blue Goose  
**Agency/Program:** Department of Interior  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



**Costumed Mascot:** Rex the Ready Lion  
**Agency/Program:** Department of Homeland Security  
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)





**Costumed Mascots:** Eli and Layla the Mighty Minters  
**Agency/Program:** U.S. Department of Treasury  
U.S. Mint



**Costumed Mascots:** Owlie Skywarn and Sanctuary Sam  
**Agency/Program:** U.S. Department of Commerce  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

<sup>i</sup> Various agencies have spent a total of \$250,853 on contracts with Costume Specialists, Inc. since Fiscal Year 2018, including costs for costume maintenance, USAspending.gov, accessed October 2, 2019; <https://www.usaspending.gov/#/recipient/48b31733-f33b-4e4b-5d76-9689e51d1c0e-C>.



Spending Explorer

## Keyword Search

Search Summary | Total Prime Award Amount: \$250,853 Prime Award Transaction Count: 39

<sup>ii</sup> Emma Best, “Don’t fear the Green Reaper: The story of the Department of Energy’s dubious mascot,” Muckrock, January 23, 2019; <https://www.muckrock.com/news/archives/2019/jan/23/etid-green-reaper/>.

<sup>iii</sup> Brite Facebook page, [https://www.facebook.com/pg/navybrite/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/navybrite/about/?ref=page_internal), accessed October 2018.

<sup>iv</sup> “HUD’S OFFICE OF FAIR HOUSING AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY INTRODUCES, ‘FRANKLIN, THE FAIR HOUSING FOX,’” U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development press release, April 10, 2007; <https://archives.hud.gov/news/2007/pr07-040.cfm>.

<sup>v</sup> Nicolas Brulliard, “The Rise of the National Park Mascots,” National Parks Conservation Association, February 28, 2018; <https://www.npca.org/articles/1758-the-rise-of-the-national-park-mascots>.

<sup>vi</sup> “River Raisin National Battlefield Park Long-Range Interpretive Plan,” U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, July 2015; <http://npshistory.com/publications/rira/lrip-2015.pdf>.

<sup>vii</sup> Nicolas Brulliard, “The Rise of the National Park Mascots,” National Parks Conservation Association, February 28, 2018; <https://www.npca.org/articles/1758-the-rise-of-the-national-park-mascots>.

<sup>viii</sup> Nicolas Brulliard, “The Rise of the National Park Mascots,” National Parks Conservation Association, February 28, 2018; <https://www.npca.org/articles/1758-the-rise-of-the-national-park-mascots>.

<sup>ix</sup> Nicolas Brulliard, “The Rise of the National Park Mascots,” National Parks Conservation Association, February 28, 2018; <https://www.npca.org/articles/1758-the-rise-of-the-national-park-mascots>.