

PEW

Testimony of Marcia Argust The Pew Charitable Trusts

**before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands
March 20, 2018**

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 5210 and H.R. 2584

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to discuss dedicated federal funding as a means to help address the multi-billion dollar maintenance needs within our National Park System. I also want to thank Chairman Bishop and Rep. Grijalva for their attention to the deferred maintenance backlog. I request that my full written statement and accompanying documents be submitted for the record.

The Restore America's Parks campaign at The Pew Charitable Trusts seeks to conserve the natural and cultural assets of the National Park System by providing common sense, long-term solutions to the deferred maintenance challenge facing the National Park Service (NPS).

The Deferred Maintenance Challenge within the National Park System

At present, NPS estimates that repairs at its more than 400 sites total \$11.6 billion based on FY2017 data [see Figure 1]. At these diverse sites—national parks, historic sites, national monuments, battlefields, seashores and lakeshores, national recreation areas—the agency is responsible for the care and operation of over 75,000 assets.

These assets include over 12,000 miles of roads (over 5,000 of which are paved), nearly 1,500 bridges and 60 tunnels, 18,000 miles of trails, more than 28,000 buildings and historic structures, approximately 1,800 waste water systems, former military installations, parking lots, waterfronts, campgrounds, electrical and water systems, interpretive facilities, and iconic monuments and memorials.

Aside from the Department of Defense, NPS maintains more assets than any other federal agency. Over half of its 75,000 assets have deferred maintenance. “Highest” and “high” priority assets account for \$8.8 billion (or 75%) of the \$11.6 billion backlog [see Figure 2]. Highest priority assets are considered critical to the operations and mission of a park site while high priority assets are considered very important.

Pew has completed a number of case studies that document the breadth of maintenance challenges plaguing our parks, along with a compilation of testimonials from local officials, community leaders, and businesses that depend on well-maintained, safe, and accessible parks to help sustain healthy local economies. The case studies and testimonials can be viewed on our webpage: <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/fact-sheets/2017/05/national-park-case-studies>.

Of specific note, Utah is known world-wide for its national parks units. They attracted over 14 million visits in 2016, which translated to \$1 billion in direct spending in local communities, \$1.5 billion in state economic

output and over 17,000 jobs. Yet our national parks in Utah have maintenance needs totaling \$266 million. Zion National Park, one of the most visited sites, needs \$65 million worth of repairs, primarily for roads that provide access to park resources. The Floor of the Valley Road that runs through Zion Canyon, the park's most popular destination, is now accessed only by shuttle or tour buses nine months of the year. It was originally built to withstand the weight of cars, but its heavy use by larger vehicles caused almost \$3 million in damage. Millions more are needed to fix roads to Zion's campgrounds and visitor centers, and their accompanying parking lots, bridges, and tunnels.

In California, national park units drew nearly 42 million recreation visits in 2016, leading to \$2 billion in direct spending in gateway communities, \$2.9 billion in state economic output, and more than 28,000 jobs. Despite the proven economic benefits that parks provide to the state of California, they have a maintenance backlog estimated at \$1.8 billion. Yosemite National Park alone has \$582 million in repairs, over \$200 million of which is attributed to roads. But once visitors get out of their cars, they find walking, hiking, and biking trails are often in disrepair as well, including the historic Yosemite Bike Path. Yosemite's famed Mariposa Grove has been impacted by a 1930s water line system that was leaking chlorinated water into the grove at a rate of 39,500 gallons per day, affecting the growth and longevity of the mature sequoias. The area will reopen this summer, after being closed for several years to replace the waterline system and other restoration efforts done in partnership with the Yosemite Conservancy. Aging historic properties within the park have problems too, including the Ansel Adams Gallery, and account for over \$100 million repair needs.

The Causes of Deferred Maintenance

Due to aging facilities, strain on resources caused by increased visitation in certain park sites, and unreliable funding, NPS has been unable to keep pace with necessary infrastructure repairs.

- **Aging infrastructure:** Our National Park System is over 100 years old and many park units are showing their age. According to a December 2016 Government Accounting Office (GAO) report, most of the NPS maintenance backlog is attributed to older park sites, stating specifically that "about \$10.5 billion in deferred maintenance was for park units established more than 40 years ago." Most infrastructures have a finite lifespan, due to factors such as material longevity, weather, use, and design.

Mirroring the infrastructure problems of both urban and rural areas across the country, transportation needs comprise more than half of the NPS maintenance backlog and represent some of the most costly infrastructure projects, including roads, tunnels, and bridges.

- **Rising visitation pressures:** In addition to aging infrastructure, the high level of visitors that many park sites have been experiencing in recent years is placing increasing pressures on resources that are often already showing signs of deterioration.
- **Unreliable funding:** Years of underfunding compound the challenges of preserving the physical integrity of NPS assets. From FY2006-FY2015, federal funding for the repair and rehabilitation, cyclic maintenance, and line-item construction portions of the NPS budget declined by 33 percent.

The agency is typically \$250 - \$320 million short of the \$800 million it estimates it needs each year to maintain transportation and non-transportation assets at existing conditions. We greatly appreciate the increased allocations Congress has provided for NPS maintenance accounts over the past several years, but more consistent, reliable funding is needed to close this recurring maintenance gap and start reducing the large cumulative deficit.

Why We Need To Address Deferred Maintenance

Accompanying this statement is a list of almost 3,000 organizations across the nation that support directing more resources to fixing our parks. These groups—counties and cities, local officials, businesses, veterans,

the hotel and restaurant industry, conservation groups, unions, the recreation industry, infrastructure groups, state tourism societies—recognize the importance of investing in park maintenance for the following reasons:

- Restoring our parks preserves and documents our nation’s history for future generations.
- Parks are economic engines for rural and urban communities. Based on FY2016 records, 330 million park visits translated to \$18 billion in direct spending to local communities and regions, generating nearly \$35 billion in national economic output and 318,000 jobs. A Pew study commissioned last year found that fully addressing the national park backlog has the potential to create and support more than 110,000 additional infrastructure-related jobs nationwide: <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/compass-points/2017/12/01/job-creation-potential-if-we-restore-our-parks>.
- Safe and accessible roads, trails and facilities are needed so visitors can access and enjoy park resources.
- Investing in park maintenance provides a cost-savings, as postponement of projects can lead to more costly and extensive repairs.

Dedicated Funding Legislation

Drawing down and preventing the escalation of a multi-billion maintenance backlog that has accrued over decades requires multiple approaches. Pew’s Restore America’s Parks campaign is pursuing a range of solutions including dedicated annual federal funding, continued robust annual appropriations funding, legislative and administrative policy reforms, increased opportunities for public-private partnerships, and leveraging technology to achieve efficiencies as well as help generate revenue.

Of all of these avenues, dedicated annual funding is core to ensuring that the NPS can keep pace with priority repairs and keep deferred maintenance from escalating. When Congress established the Park Service over 100 years ago, it mandated the agency “...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” Congress has a responsibility to ensure that NPS has adequate resources to fulfill the mission it gave the agency.

Several bipartisan bills have been introduced this Congress to tackle the deferred maintenance challenge within our parks, specifically the National Park Service Legacy Act (H.R. 2584/S.751) and the National Park Restoration Act (H.R. 5210/S.2509). We applaud the sponsors and co-sponsors of all of these measures for their commitment to our national parks and for responding to the diverse voices across the nation calling on Congress to fix our parks.

There are a number of similarities between the Legacy Act and the Restoration Act. Each would establish a fund in the U.S. General Treasury to direct dedicated federal funding each year to park maintenance needs. Both measures prohibit funds from being used for land acquisition and would discourage funds from replacing discretionary funding for NPS facility maintenance needs. The revenue stream for the Legacy Act and the Restoration Act would be royalties from energy development on federal lands and waters that are paid into the General Treasury (it should be noted that the Restoration Act would also use revenues from renewables). Using revenues from energy development for mitigation purposes is not a new concept. The onshore and offshore mineral revenue system is an existing system set up decades ago under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 and the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act of 1953. Both proposals contain language to ensure that monies going into the maintenance funds would not come from royalties payments that are obligated for other purposes under law (such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Historic Preservation Fund, and state funds). Additionally, the bills share a number of the same co-sponsors.

Pew endorses the National Park Service Legacy Act, introduced by Senators Warner (D-VA) and Portman (R-OH) and Representatives Hurd (R-TX), Reichert (R-WA), Kilmer (D-WA), and Hanabusa (D-HI),

without reservation. In addition to the provisions outlined above, the legislation would provide that 80 percent of the fund be used for repairs to non-transportation assets (such as historic structures, visitor facilities, trails, water utility systems, and assets that impact disability access, health and safety, and recreation) and 20 percent be used to restore transportation-related infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and tunnels. This breakdown is intended to ensure parity for non-transportation assets, as NPS receives some dedicated funding from the Highway Trust Fund to address transportation needs (though the annual amount is far from adequate). The Legacy Act would direct monies from the fund to ramp up over 30 years: \$50,000,000 for the first three years, \$150,000,000 for the next three years, and \$250,000,000 for the following three years, and \$500,000,000 for each successive year. This consistent, reliable annual funding is critical and would allow for more planning and integration of projects, cost-effectiveness, and the ability to tackle complicated, larger-scale maintenance issues. The measure also contains a provision to encourage public-private collaboration by incentivizing projects that have a cost-share component.

Pew offers support of the National Park Restoration Act, introduced by Representatives Simpson (R-ID) and Schrader (D-OR) and Senators Alexander (R-TN), King (I-ME), Heinrich (D-NM), Daines (R-MT), Gardner (R-CO), Tillis (R-NC), Moore Capitol (R-WV), Manchin (D-WV), with improvements. We would like to work with the bill sponsors to implement the following improvements:

- Modification of the funding mechanism to reflect a specific annual dollar amount, ensuring a consistent, reliable source of park maintenance funding. A successful dedicated funding measure must provide certain and robust annual funding to effectively address long overdue park repairs. As currently written, the Restoration Fund would take in 50 percent of energy development revenues over a baseline figure projected for each of 10 years. Reliance on a percentage figure means that the annual intake will vary from year to year.
- Addition of language to ensure funding parity between transportation and non-transportation assets.

While not on the hearing docket today, Pew also endorses the Land and National Park Deferred Maintenance Act (H.R. 2863) authored by Rep. Simpson. The legislation seeks to provide dedicated annual funding for maintenance needs within public land agencies and to provide dedicated funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund over a seven year period.

Conclusion

Deferred maintenance within our National Park System is a critical issue that needs to be addressed. It will require a bipartisan approach and collaboration. The bipartisan bills that have been introduced this Congress, the Administration's recognition of the need to resolve the maintenance backlog, and this hearing are signs that we're headed in the right direction. Pew is committed to working with the sponsors of all of the deferred maintenance measures to incorporate the best provisions of each into a final proposal that can be enacted and will provide a significant reduction to the national parks backlog.

Thank you for your consideration of these views and for the Subcommittee's interest in addressing the maintenance backlog plaguing our national parks.

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Figure 1.

National Park Service Deferred Maintenance by Asset Category

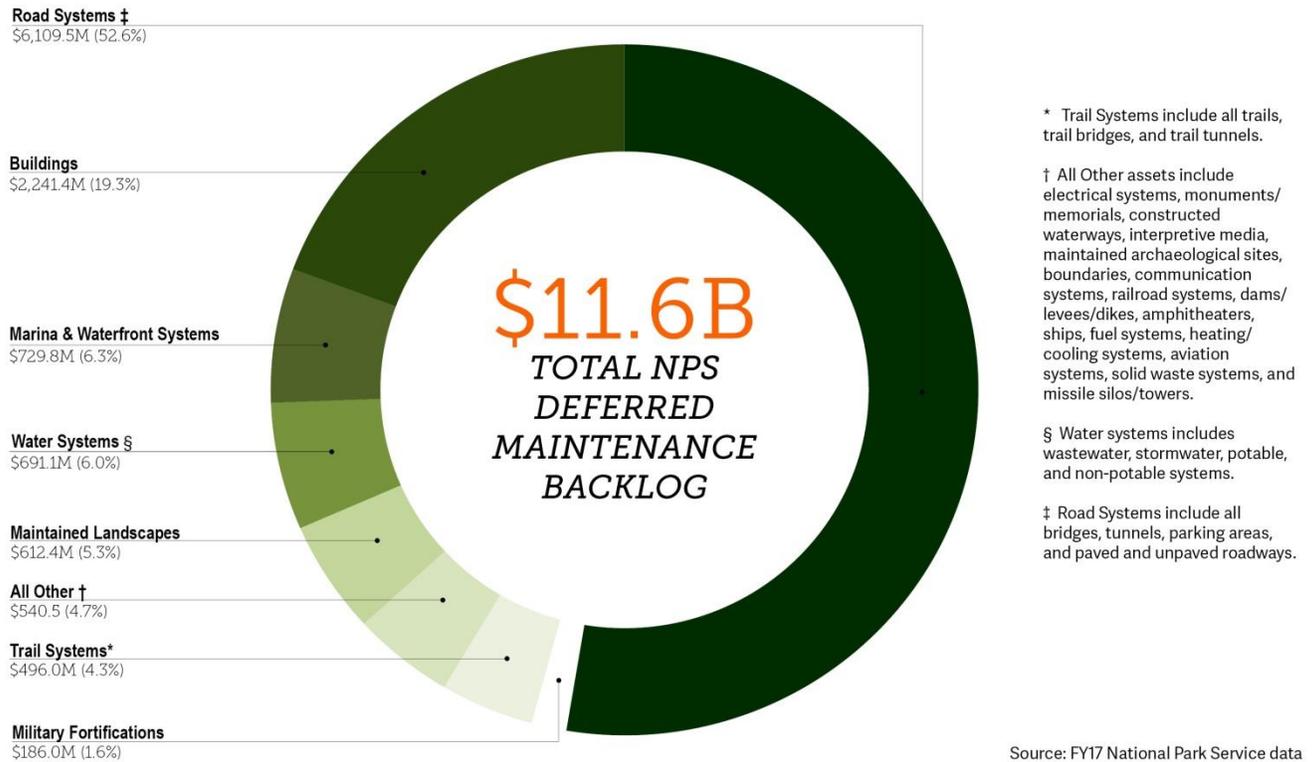
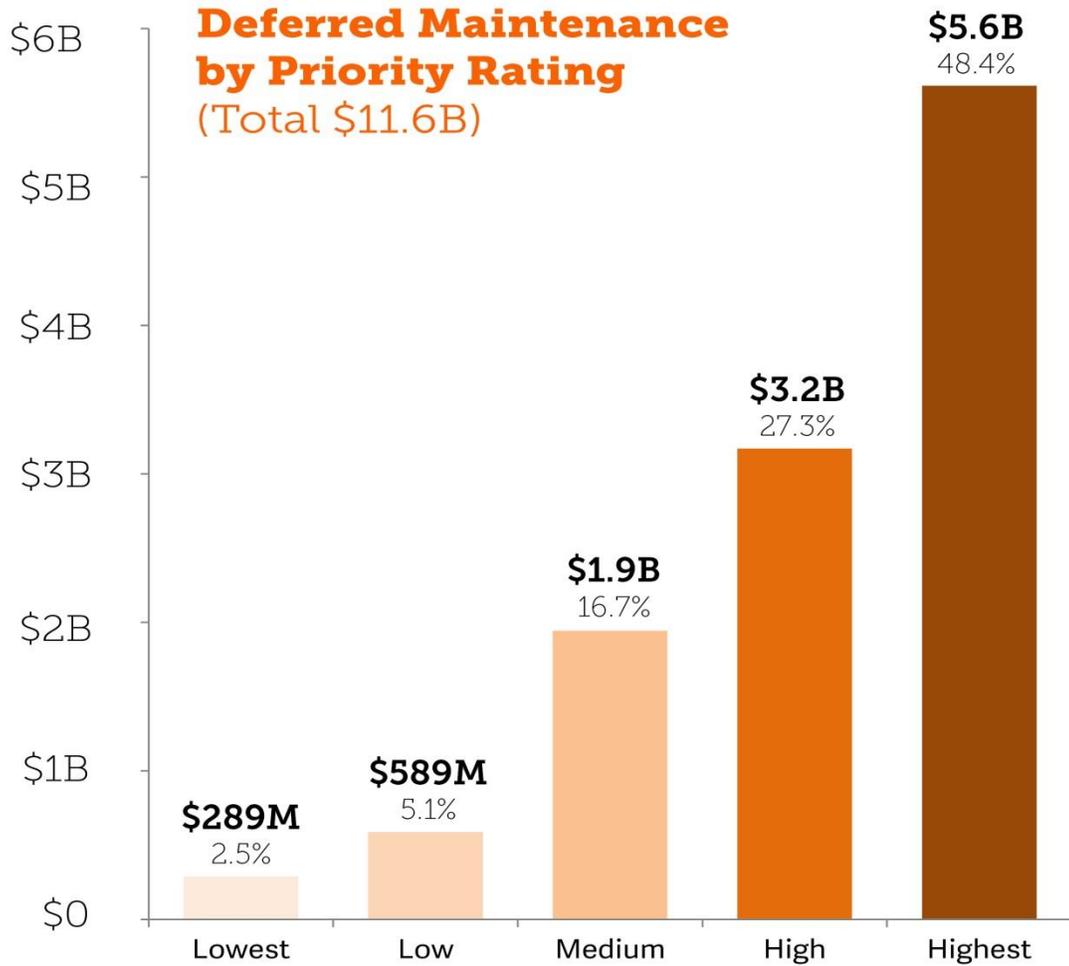


Figure 2.



Source: FY17 National Park Service data