

Committee on Natural Resources

Rob Bishop, Chairman
Hearing Memorandum

March 6, 2018

To: All Natural Resources Committee Members

From: Majority Committee Staff x67736

Hearing: Oversight hearing titled “*Exploring Innovative Solutions to Reduce the Department of the Interior’s Maintenance Backlog.*”

The Committee on Natural Resources will hold an oversight hearing to hear testimony on The Department of the Interior’s maintenance backlog on **March 6, 2018 at 10:00 AM in 1324 Longworth House Office Building**. The hearing will focus on addressing the significant maintenance backlog of the Department of the Interior’s land management agencies.

Policy Overview

- The Department of the Interior’s deferred maintenance backlog currently exceeds \$16 billion dollars. This backlog, among other land management challenges, is negatively impacting visitor access, enjoyment, and safety on public lands.¹
- The National Park Service (NPS) includes 417 units covering more than 84 million acres. The NPS has an estimated deferred maintenance backlog of \$11.607 billion which, between FY2007 and FY2016 grew by \$1.718 billion in nominal dollars and \$0.021 billion in inflation-adjusted dollars.²
- The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) manages more than 560 National Wildlife Refuges and thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas totaling more than 150 million acres. The FWS has an estimated deferred maintenance backlog of \$1.4 billion.^{3 4}
- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages more than 245 million surface acres of federal land. The BLM has an estimated deferred maintenance backlog of \$810 million which represents a 65% increase over the past decade.
- The hearing will analyze DOI's existing deferred maintenance backlog and innovative ways to finance and implement needed improvements with greater efficiency and effectiveness.

¹The Department of the Interior, FY2019 Budget https://edit.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/fy2019_bib_dh005.pdf.

² National Park Service, Planning, Design and Construction Management, NPS Deferred Maintenance Reports <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/defermain.htm>.

³ Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife. "Fish and Wildlife Service - About Us." Official Web page of the U S Fish and Wildlife Service. March 24, 2016. Accessed March 01, 2018. https://www.fws.gov/help/about_us.html.

⁴ "U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service FY2019 Budget in Brief." U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Accessed March 1, 2018. https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/fy2019_bib_bh059.pdf.

Invited Witnesses

Mr. P. Daniel Smith

Deputy Director of the National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, DC

Mr. Steve Guertin

Deputy Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, DC

Mr. Steve Iobst

National Park Conservation Association
National Park Service, *Retired*
Former Chief of Facility Management for Yellowstone National Park
Driggs, ID

Mr. Dan Puskar

Executive Director
Public Lands Alliance
Silver Spring, MD

Mr. Jason Rano

Vice President, Government Relations
National Park Foundation
Washington, DC

Background

The Department of the Interior's (DOI) three major land management agencies, the National Park Service (NPS), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), maintain tens of thousands of diverse assets, including roads, bridges, buildings, and water management structures. As the federal estate expands, existing infrastructure ages, and visitation increases, the DOI land management agencies are increasingly unable to fund necessary repairs. In total, DOI agencies have a combined deferred maintenance backlog of over \$16 billion dollars. Deferred maintenance is defined as "maintenance and repairs that were not performed when they should have been or were scheduled to be and which are put off or delayed for a future period." The DOI deferred maintenance backlog significantly effects visitor access, experience, and safety.

National Park Service

The NPS has the largest and most challenging deferred maintenance backlog within DOI. With more than 84 million acres and 417 units valued for their natural, cultural, and recreational importance, NPS administers units in every State, the District of Columbia, and multiple territories. The infrastructure of NPS is comprised of approximately 75,000 constructed assets, second only to

the Department of Defense in size.⁵ These assets include vitally important and nationally significant historic structures as well as the facilities necessary to provide public access, enjoyment, and safety (e.g. roads, campgrounds, visitor centers, trails, utilities).

One of NPS’s most notable challenges is its considerable deferred maintenance backlog which was estimated at \$11.607 billion for FY2017.⁶ This is 69% of DOI’s total deferred maintenance backlog of \$16 billion.^{7 8}

Several factors have contributed to the maintenance backlog, including the creation of new units, expansion of existing units, aging facilities, natural disasters, appropriations shortfalls, and strain on resources from increased visitation. The NPS is experiencing a significant uptick in visitation with 331 million recreation visits in 2017 alone.⁹ Despite agency efforts to address deferred maintenance through improved asset management, the backlog continued to grow over the past decade. From FY2006 through FY2015, NPS spent roughly \$10.5 billion on maintenance projects, and yet the backlog continued to increase.¹⁰

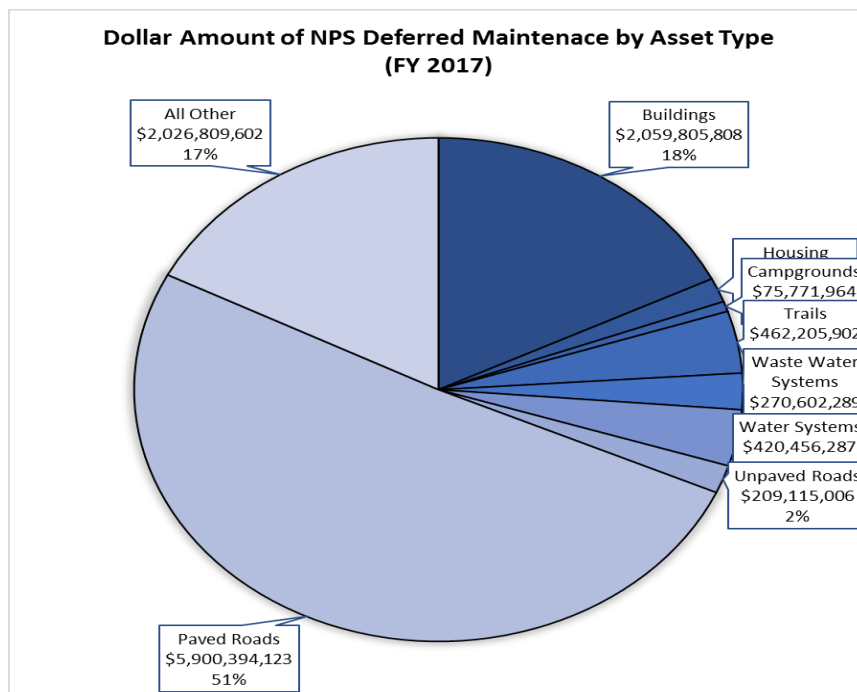


Figure 1: NPS. “National Park Service Asset Inventory Summary”

⁵ NPS. “NPS Deferred Maintenance Reports”. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/defermain.htm>.

⁶ NPS. “National Park Service Asset Inventory Summary” Data as of September 30, 2017. https://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/upload/FY17-Asset-Inventory-Summary-AIS-Servicewide_Report_508-3.pdf.

⁷ DOI Press Release. “President’s \$11.7 Billion Proposed FY2019 Budget for Interior”. February 12, 2018. <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/presidents-117-billion-proposed-fy-2019-budget-interior-includes-legislation>.

⁸ NPS. “National Park Service Asset Inventory Summary” Data as of September 30, 2017. https://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/upload/FY17-Asset-Inventory-Summary-AIS-Servicewide_Report_508-3.pdf.

⁹ NPS. “Annual Visitation Highlights” <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/annual-visitation-highlights.htm>.

¹⁰ Government Accountability Office. “National Park Service: Process Exists for Prioritizing Asset Maintenance Decisions, but Evaluation Could Improve Efforts.” GAO-17-136. Dec 13, 2016. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/690/681581.pdf>.

NPS Maintenance Backlog Estimates, FY 2007-2016

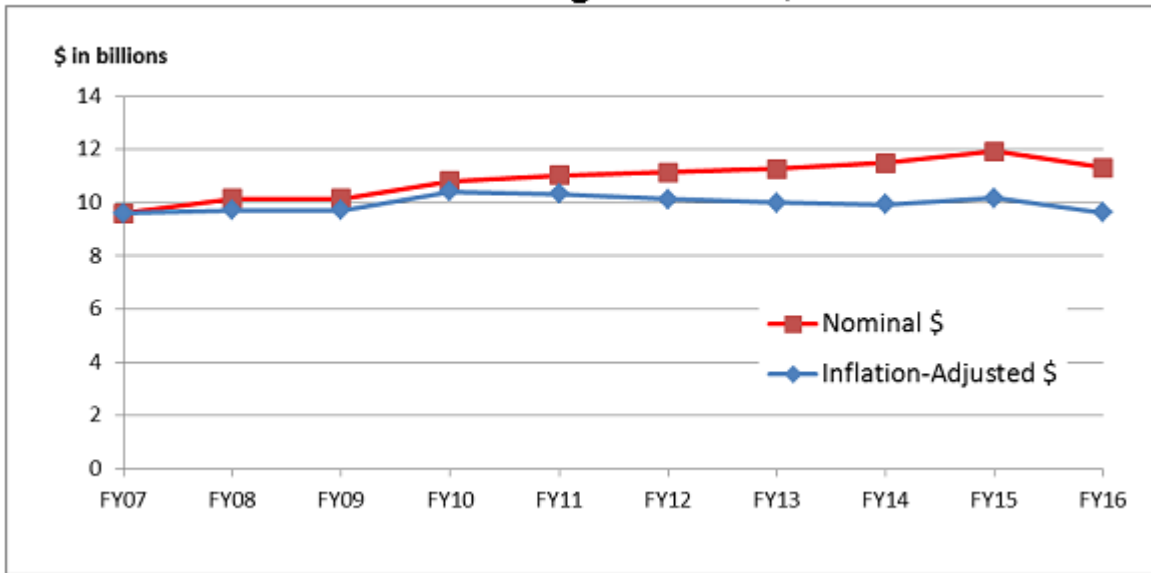


Figure 2: Congressional Research Service



Campground - Joshua Tree National Park



Pipeline – Grand Canyon National Park

Furthermore, Antiquities Act proclamations and legislation have transferred ownership of new assets to NPS, compounding the limited capacity to care for existing facilities. Since 1999, 8,000 buildings and 2,000 miles of roads have been added to NPS infrastructure portfolio (a 50% and 25% increase respectively).¹¹ The number of park units that NPS manages has grown from 390 in 2006 to 417 today.

Beginning in FY2015, NPS began funding projects based on the agency's Capital Investment Strategy, which prioritizes projects that are critical to the operations and missions of NPS units or experience high visitor use. While this system focuses funding on the highest-priority assets, this constrained focus may potentially result in the continued deterioration of less-critical assets, thereby increasing deferred maintenance costs overall. A GAO study regarding the Capital Investment Strategy published in December 2016, noted: "*The Park Service does not have a plan or*

¹¹ Office of the Inspector General, DOI. Audit Report: "Deferred Maintenance, National Park Service". Report 99-I-959. September 1999. And NPS. "NPS Deferred Maintenance Reports".
"<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/defermain.htm>"

*time frame for evaluating whether the Capital Investment Strategy has been successful.*¹² Oversight and evaluation of the Capital Investment Strategy by NPS and Congress is necessary to ensure the strategy is fulfilling its goals with greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Funding to address NPS deferred maintenance comes from discretionary appropriations, recreation fees, and other sources.¹³ Two appropriations subaccounts (Construction and Operation of the National Park System) partially address deferred maintenance. Allocations from the Department of Transportation's Highway Trust Fund are used for NPS road repair and improvements. The recently created Centennial Challenge Fund, established through the National Park Service Centennial Act (Public Law 114-289) provides another avenue of funding and specifies deferred maintenance as a priority.¹⁴

In addition to congressional appropriations for deferred maintenance, the NPS is taking a variety of other actions to finance deferred maintenance projects including: using philanthropic donations, working with volunteers, engaging friends groups, expanding private concessions operations, partnering with states to apply for transportation grants, and leasing properties.

Fish and Wildlife Service

The FWS manages more than 560 National Wildlife Refuges and thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas totaling more than 150 million acres. The FWS estimates that its deferred maintenance backlog stands at \$1.4 billion.¹⁵

The FWS faces a number of unique maintenance challenges. One challenge comes from damage caused by natural disasters, such as floods, drought, or hurricanes. An additional maintenance challenge results from the atypical assets within the National Refuge System. The FWS road system is not a well-defined system of paved highways but is instead a collection of mostly native surfaced roadways often located in environmentally sensitive areas. Determining the best way to maintain such roads is difficult both in terms of design and reliable forecasting of long-term maintenance costs. Furthermore, it is difficult for the FWS to maintain infrastructure on the many island refuges in remote areas of the Pacific Ocean, such as Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge.

For the FWS, roads, bridges, and trails do not make up the largest portion of their deferred maintenance as it does for the other agencies. The FWS has four asset categories with roughly comparable portions including 28% for other structures, 27% for buildings, 24% for roads, bridges, and trails and 21% for irrigation, dams, and other water structures. As of FY16, the FWS manages 39,697 assets, including 6,540 buildings, 13,928 transportation-related assets (roads, bridges, and trails), 8,677 water management structures, and 10,552 other assets.

¹² Government Accountability Office. National Park Service: Process Exists for Prioritizing Asset Maintenance Decisions, but Evaluation Could Improve Efforts. GAO-17-136. Dec 13, 2016. ["http://www.gao.gov/assets/690/681581.pdf"](http://www.gao.gov/assets/690/681581.pdf)

¹³ Comay, Laura. "National Park Service: FY2017 Appropriations and Recent Trends." Congressional Research Service.

¹⁴ P.L. 114-289, §101

¹⁵ "2019 Fish and Wildlife Service Budget in Brief." Accessed March 2, 2018. https://edit.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/fy2019_bib_bh059.pdf.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Act (P.L. 106-408), called for the FWS to develop a long-term plan to address the highest priority operations, maintenance, and construction needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the law required the FWS to submit an annual report assessing the maintenance backlog. The FWS heavily prioritizes projects to ensure the safety of FWS employees and visitors all while supporting and promoting access. Prioritizing and planning for long-term costs has helped the FWS decrease their maintenance backlog by more than 50 percent, although more work still needs to be done. According to the FWS, the FY 2019 requested funding levels will allow the FWS to complete over 120 of the highest priority deferred maintenance projects.¹⁶

Bureau of Land Management

The BLM manages 245 million acres. As of FY2016, the BLM managed 45,458 assets, including 4,312 buildings, 18,910 roads and 22,236 structures. As of FY2016, the BLM estimate its deferred maintenance backlog stood at \$810 million.¹⁷ Putting that in context, in FY2016 the BLM had the smallest backlog of the land management agencies but it accounted for almost three quarters of the entire agency's budget appropriations for that year. Over the last ten years, the BLM has seen its backlog increase by 65%.

The BLM's deferred maintenance backlog is primarily comprised of roads, bridges, and trails accounting for 76% of FY2016's deferred maintenance. In addition, two other categories of assets had relatively comparable portions, specifically 10% for buildings and 9% for other structures. The remaining 5% was for irrigation, dams, and other water structures. As of FY2016, the BLM manages 45,458 assets, including 4,312 buildings, 18,910 roads and 22,236 structures. With the BLM managing such a significant number of assets, it is vitally important for the BLM to actively manage all assets under their control. With the swelling federal estate, the BLM must prioritize their most vital assets for maintenance all while remaining cognizant of their responsibility to manage for multiple use across regions and landscapes.

Public Lands Infrastructure Fund

The President's DOI budget proposal for FY2019 calls upon Congress to establish a Public Lands Infrastructure Fund to help address and make long overdue repairs and improvements to federal lands. The DOI proposal will increase revenues from federal energy leases and 50 percent of the additional revenue — not otherwise allocated under existing law— will be used to address DOI's infrastructure needs. The Fund will be capped at \$18 billion in total possible expenditures, and is designed to promote significant improvements to the country's most noticeable and frequently visited facilities.¹⁸

¹⁷ Vincent, Carol Hardy . "Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY2007-FY2016." April 25, 2017. Accessed March 2, 2018. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43997.pdf>.

¹⁸ The Department of the Interior, FY2019 Interior Budget in Brief <https://www.doi.gov/budget/appropriations/2019/highlights>

Department of Interior FY2019 Budget Proposal for Deferred Maintenance

The DOI's FY2019 budget proposal includes over \$1.3 billion for deferred maintenance and construction, with \$256.5 million specifically designated for NPS.¹⁹

¹⁹ The Department of the Interior, FY2019 Interior Budget in Brief, Departmental Overview
https://edit.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/fy2019_bib_dh005.pdf