

Statement of Steven F. Iobst  
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Before the House Committee on Natural Resources  
On Exploring Innovative Solutions to Reduce the  
Department of the Interior's Maintenance Backlog  
March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify at this important hearing. I am Steven F. Iobst. I worked for the National Park Service for 43 years in many different assignments. I retired as Deputy Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park in 2016 after several assignments in parks and the Denver Service Center. Relevant to this hearing, I was responsible for planning, design and construction as well as facility maintenance and park operations over those 43 years. I am a civil engineer.

I testify today in my capacity as a member of the Northern Rockies Regional Council of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), an organization that represents more than 1.2 million members and supporters across the country who care deeply about our national parks. I am also affiliated with the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, a group of over 1,200 former National Park Service (NPS) employees who continue to support the parks. That group has testified before this committee as to the urgency of addressing park maintenance needs and I appreciate the opportunity to build on those observations and recommendations. NPCA, the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation are among the many public-interest groups throughout the country dedicated to addressing this issue, and we are grateful for your attention to the need.

Through my testimony I hope to convey the scope of the national park deferred maintenance needs and the urgency of addressing the need through a robust, consistent and dependable funding source. Increasing current funding sources is critical, as are supplemental funding sources including philanthropic giving and appropriate fee revenue. However, what is ultimately needed to address the full scope of the maintenance backlog is dedicated funding. We commend the bipartisan interest in Congress, in particular the sponsors of the National Park Service Legacy Act, for recognizing this need, and now the administration for supporting a dedicated funding approach to public lands infrastructure.

During my time at NPS, we struggled to address park maintenance needs and were constantly falling behind in making repairs. My first career assignment was as a Civil Engineer in design at the Denver Service Center. Design and construction assignments included projects in over 40 parks, including Shenandoah, Yosemite, Acadia, St. Gaudens, Gateway, Fire Island, Virgin Islands, and National Capital Sites. In 1979, I moved to Yellowstone where I began my career in park operations as an engineer in Maintenance and Concessions Management as well as working directly for the Superintendent to guide Planning, Compliance, and Development. Rocky Mountain National Park pulled me away from Yellowstone in late-1988 where I served as Chief of Facility Management which included a special assignment as Acting Chief of Park Facility Management in Washington, D.C. where I worked with a team to develop today's Asset Management Program. In 1997, I returned to the greater Yellowstone area serving as Deputy Superintendent at Grand Teton National Park and Acting Superintendent from November 2000 to February 2002. I returned to Yellowstone in April 2003 to serve as Chief of Facility Management for Yellowstone National Park until August 2011 when I was promoted to Deputy

Superintendent. I am proud to say that I have extensive experience in facilities maintenance, rehabilitation, design, engineering, construction, and contracting. In 43 years I directed or provided indirect oversight of nearly \$1 billion in rehabilitation, new construction, replacement, or historic preservation.

My experience at the park service was one of countless NPS staff who have long struggled with the reality that park assets are aging and have not received the capital investment they require. This is posing serious threats to the ability of parks to meet their mission, preserve our natural and cultural heritage, and bolster the visitor experience on which countless local economies rely.

Currently, Yellowstone National Park, where the bulk of my NPS career was, is estimated to have at least \$497 million in repair needs, as of September 30 2017, according to the NPS online database. This may be a staggering total but one thing that is important for Congress to understand is that overdue repair projects are not only the leaky roofs, degraded trails and pathways, and bathrooms that need repair. These projects certainly add up, but there are also many large projects at Yellowstone and throughout the country that are each dozens and even hundreds of millions of dollars each. At Yellowstone, the largest need is for major road repairs and reconstruction after many years during which there have not been available funds to address the need. NPS highlighted the large scope of the Yellowstone roads need at [https://www.nps.gov/transportation/pdfs/Yellowstone\\_Roads\\_Reconstruction-022016.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/transportation/pdfs/Yellowstone_Roads_Reconstruction-022016.pdf) among numerous other park transportation “megaprojects” outlined at [https://www.nps.gov/transportation/transportation\\_needs\\_beyond\\_core\\_program.html](https://www.nps.gov/transportation/transportation_needs_beyond_core_program.html)

While philanthropy and fee revenue have been critical to Yellowstone and other parks, it is not realistic to expect that such funding sources could cover projects of this magnitude. And of course for needs such as the many large water and wastewater infrastructure projects, there is simply no appeal for philanthropists who expect the government to do its share to care for its assets.

In my career I do not recall a time when funding matched need, with “need” being defined as the amount of funding required to perform routine repairs and preventive maintenance as well as cyclic maintenance to keep all assets in good condition. What I experienced first-hand each year was that the chief cause of the growth of the maintenance backlog was insufficient funding to maintain, repair, and in some cases, reconstruct park assets. Caring for an inventory of assets second only to the Department of Defense requires consistent and sufficient funding. Unfortunately, the park service has not been receiving this funding. My analysis at Yellowstone, utilizing the Park Asset Management Planning Tool, was that we consistently ran a routine maintenance program as I just described with 40% of the funding required to just keep deferred maintenance from growing.

Parks throughout the system face a diversity of maintenance needs, from roads and buildings to trails, water systems, docks, parking lots and more. Examples include:

- **Roads:** Kolob Canyon Road, a popular five-mile scenic drive at **Zion National Park**, needs \$15 million in repairs—an amount that is nearly equal to the entire value of the road itself;
- **Trails:** Also at **Zion**, among millions of dollars in trail needs are the Overlook Point Trail, the famed Angel’s Landing Trail and the West Rim Trail. Walking, hiking, and biking trails at **Yosemite** are in disrepair or closed. More than \$17 million in deferred maintenance affects these systems, including the Yosemite Bike Path, the Stubblefield Canyon Trail, and the Clark Point Spur Trail.

- **Historic buildings:** At **San Antonio Missions National Historical Park**, nearly \$400,000 is needed to repair the office and sacristy of the Franciscan father-president, who oversaw development of these historically important missions. A compound where Native Americans lived, and the walls that encircle it, also requires restoration at a cost of \$600,000.
- **Campsites:** At **Voyageurs National Park**, campsites have more than \$1 million worth of deferred maintenance. This includes restoring and improving tent sites, maintaining fire rings, and repairing and installing new bear-proof food storage lockers.
- **Water Systems:** At **Rocky Mountain National Park**, the primary water system at the park's headquarters, where the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center is located, has 50- to 70-year-old pipes that need to be replaced. The cost estimate for this work is nearly \$5 million.
- **Historic landscapes** at **Gettysburg National Military Park** comprise by far the largest investment need to restore the park to its original appearance, including addressing invasive plants.

These and other needs are highlighted by the Pew Charitable Trusts on its website at <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/fact-sheets/2017/05/national-park-case-studies>. Included with my testimony are several of these case studies we ask to be submitted for the record.

Park infrastructure needs are not only facilities that promote and enhance the visiting experience. The maintenance problem includes projects that help protect natural resources, such as channel markers in the Everglades that prevent boaters from harming sensitive seagrasses. It also includes many historic structures of national significance. From the inspiring civil rights movement history shared at Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park's historic buildings to the several hundred Native American cultural sites and cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde National Park, these world-renowned places tell the diverse stories of our nation. Unfortunately, according to FY 2016 data, historic assets represent 45% of the maintenance backlog and without dedicated funding to address these needs, conditions will continue to deteriorate and risk permanent loss of these resources.

There are several ways these diverse repair needs can be addressed. I've briefly noted the importance and limitations of philanthropy, and my colleagues on the panel offer great insight into this issue. Notably, matching philanthropic funds with federal dollars is critical. A successful program in this regard has been the Centennial Challenge, which now thanks to the support of this committee, enjoys a dedicated funding source through senior pass revenue. Importantly, this program should continue to receive appropriated funding, as there is tremendous philanthropic interest in this program, beyond what can be matched through the senior pass alone. We urge the administration to propose appropriations for this important program in future budgets.

Fee revenue, too, is critical, but can only be increased so much without becoming prohibitive. Even the recently proposed fee hike for the peak visiting season at 17 parks throughout the system would only address less than 1% of the NPS backlog, and that proposed fee hike is one we and others oppose because we fear it is too much and threatens to price Americans out of their parks. Fees play an important role, particularly in parks such as Yellowstone, but are not a realistic or appropriate source to provide the level of funding needed to address the bulk of park maintenance needs.

We know that in recent years, NPS has explored avenues for greater efficiencies and cost savings such as improvements in energy efficiency. We know that technology improvements are among the avenues NPS can continue to explore to identify savings that can help with maintenance costs. However, these

and other supplemental funding sources cannot cover the scope of the backlog problem. They cannot alone be relied on to address park needs; a serious federal investment is needed.

Appropriations for day-to-day, cyclic maintenance and larger repair projects for non-transportation assets have long been insufficient. Appropriations should be increased to better meet these needs. We commend the appropriations committees for increasing funding for the NPS, including for its maintenance needs, over the last three fiscal years, with a particularly helpful boost in FY16. We urge Congress to build on these investments.

On this subject, I must note that the administration's FY18 and FY19 budget proposals for appropriated funding are unhelpful and in many ways, damaging. We urge the administration to do better in future budgets, and for upcoming FY19 budget hearings in this committee to address national park funding needs including but not limited to the deferred maintenance challenge.

At this moment, members of this committee are positioned to advocate for improved funding for NPS in both FY18, given the recent budget deal, and FY19. NPS transportation assets that comprise half of the backlog should also receive increased funding through appropriations for the Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects Program in the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development appropriations subcommittee, as well as in the next transportation bill. We're grateful the last transportation bill, the FAST Act, increased funding for park transportation infrastructure, but funds remain vastly insufficient.

We are dismayed that in the current budget climate, and for the foreseeable future, the constraints on these funding sources, including through the Budget Control Act, will make difficult securing the robust level of funding that is needed to address the national park repair backlog, despite the commendable bipartisan support Congress has shown -- and must continue showing -- for park funding through current transportation and non-transportation revenue sources.

Thus a dedicated, robust funding source to address the large scope of the backlog is needed. In this regard, we commend Senators Warner and Portman and Representatives Hurd, Kilmer, Reichert and Hanabusa for introducing the National Park Service Legacy Act (S. 751/HR 2584), as well as the many bipartisan members of Congress who have thus far agreed to co-sponsor this important bill. The bill would dedicate more than \$11 billion to the parks backlog over 30 years through receipts from onshore and offshore energy development not otherwise dedicated to other purposes.

We also commend Congressman Simpson for his commitment to the public lands backlog, as well as to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), through the LAND Act. The concept of addressing both the parks backlog and LWCF needs is one NPCA wholeheartedly supports. In this regard, we also commend Senators Murkowski and Cantwell for their commitment to both of these important needs in the energy bill currently before Congress.

In this context, we feel it is important for the administration to not only express support for and provide its own recommendations for addressing park infrastructure, but to work with both parties in Congress to arrive at legislation that dedicates reliable revenue to the backlog problem through a dedicated funding source. In this regard, the administration's recent proposal is very helpful.

We do have a number of questions about, and look forward to greater clarity of, the administration's proposed Public Lands Infrastructure Fund, which deposits "half of additional receipts generated by

expanded Federal energy development” to address the backlog on Department of the Interior (DOI) lands, as well as for Bureau of Indian Education schools.

We must note that any fund to address maintenance should be sure to not rely on any energy initiatives that threaten the health of our public lands and waters, our parks and the ecosystems on which they rely. NPCA urges Congress to recognize that explicitly linking infrastructure funding to environmentally threatening and damaging energy production proposals would not only threaten the integrity of our land, air, water and wildlife but also compromise the bipartisan support that’s needed to pass a bill to address public lands maintenance.

Critically, the revenue source cannot just be a dedicated fund; it must also be a reliable and dependable one. Legislation that dedicates funding to the deferred maintenance problem should include several components:

**Reliable Funding:** Any funding source for national park repairs must have certainty. If a funding source relies on projected revenue as the administration’s proposal appears to, then those projections must be sound such that there is a high level of confidence that there will be sufficient funds to address parks’ billions of dollars in repair needs. As this committee knows well, passing legislation is very difficult, so it is important that legislation will actually address the problem with realistic and reliable funds.

**Certainty of Funding Stream:** Any funding source must be dependable. As I experienced during my time at the park service, construction projects rely on multi-year funding that is known and dependable at the outset, which in part helps NPS to stage projects and work with contractors who need funding certainty.

Consider the Yellowstone Road Program, something I have extensive experience with and without question the best inter-agency partnership (with the Federal Highway Administration) I have ever experienced. It is a program of projects identified well into the future. Scoping, permitting, compliance and surveying often start five years before construction; design, leading to contract documents usually takes two to three years. Once construction begins, the project has been in the queue for three to five years. Yellowstone’s Road Program has been successful for thirty years due to multiple six-year programs of projects with a reliable, and predictable, funding stream.

We fear that without a specific, known amount each year, the uncertainty of the funding available would challenge NPS’ capacity to engage in the procurement and contracting that is needed for successful repair and reconstruction projects. The backlog includes many projects such as water systems that require at least tens of millions of dollars for each project; these projects need multi-year funding. Legislation to address the repair backlog must be designed in such a way as to provide a dependable revenue stream in this regard.

In addition to consistent and robust dedicated annual funding, legislation to address deferred maintenance should consider:

- funding parity between transportation and non-transportation deferred maintenance needs;
- a public-private partnership component to leverage non-federal funds for projects that can attract philanthropic interest, while still dedicating robust funding to the many projects that cannot receive philanthropic support;

- giving appropriators discretion with the list of priority projects while still ensuring a dedicated funding stream.

Addressing park maintenance is critical in part because our national parks resonate so deeply with the American public, frequenting our parks like never before. The National Park Service celebrated its Centennial in 2016. Americans and international visitors participated by visiting in record numbers, with more than 330 million visits last year, an all-time record. While the data released last week indicate on-average essentially flat 2017 visitation compared to 2016, visitation clearly remains high. Notably, in some parks to the extent that it is further challenging the ability of park superintendents to meet needs with insufficient staffing and other resources.

While last year's crowds stressed the capacity of the service to meet the demand, public reaction remained high, topping 90% satisfaction. Similarly, the private businesses that support and accommodate park visitors saw record years. During peak visitor season, these businesses employ more people than the National Park Service. As a result of visitor spending in surrounding communities, many of them rural, national parks support \$32 billion in economic activity nationally and nearly 300,000 jobs. The existence value of our heritage has significant value to Americans: a recent economic study done by Harvard University and the University of Colorado concluded that the American public values the services of the National Park Service at \$92 billion.

Addressing the maintenance backlog also creates jobs. A recent study, *Restoring Parks, Creating Jobs: How Infrastructure Restoration in the National Park System Can Create or Support Jobs*, commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trusts and conducted by the independent firm Cadmus Group, found that more than 110,000 jobs could be created or supported if funds were invested to resolve the NPS maintenance backlog.

On the subject of infrastructure, we must also note before concluding this testimony our deep concern with many provisions in the administration's *Legislative Outline for Rebuilding Infrastructure in America*. The proposal seeks to undermine fundamental environmental laws, dispose of the NPS-managed George Washington Memorial Parkway, allow for expedited construction of pipelines through national parks, and otherwise threaten the cultural and natural resources central to the preservation of our national parks and their ecosystems. As the administration and Congress work together to address infrastructure, we urge these concepts be left out of any legislative package. Such provisions would not only threaten public lands and the broader environment, but would also compromise needed bipartisanship to move such a package to the president's desk.

In conclusion, NPCA and our many partners concerned with the park funding crisis are grateful that the administration and members of Congress on both sides of the aisle are now prioritizing public lands infrastructure. We also commend the administration for now supporting the concept of a dedicated funding stream for public lands maintenance needs. Legislation addressing the maintenance backlog must have a realistic and dependable funding stream. And such legislation should not rely on undermining the integrity of our land, air, water and wildlife protections.

We urge the administration and members of this committee to work with the bipartisan champions of the National Park Service Legacy Act, appropriators, party leadership and other members of Congress to support a dedicated, robust funding stream for national park repair needs.

I am encouraged by the paradigm shift that could lead to a transformational change in funding deferred maintenance projects on National Park Service lands. I ask that you consider that national parks are national, regional, and local economic engines; that national parks are precious to America as pristine watersheds and carbon sinks; that park sites represent America's natural and cultural heritage; and that they are our national identity and irreplaceable.

Our national parks reflect who we are as Americans. From Yellowstone to the Everglades and the Statue of Liberty to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Site, these places are our heritage. If we don't care for them and restore them, it reflects poorly on us as a people. We have an opportunity before us to do right for our parks and the Americans who own and have a deep connection with them.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for the committee's consideration of our views.