



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable French Hill
**“The Great American Outdoors Act: Modernizing and Maintaining National Parks to
Celebrate America’s 250th Birthday”**
House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
September 5, 2025

Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources, thank you for inviting me to attend your full committee field hearing in the Grand Teton National Park (GTNP) on reauthorizing the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA). Over the decades, I have spent many days climbing and camping in the Tetons. Those trips are among some of my happiest memories. You have selected one of America’s most iconic and extraordinary places to hold this important hearing.

As a Member from Arkansas, one of the great outdoor recreation states in this country, I am pleased that the Committee is taking the time to focus on the GAOA reauthorization, which expires at the end of September, 2026. As the Committee has highlighted, this reauthorization serves as a prime opportunity to offer reforms to the GAOA, which are needed to ensure that our nation’s national parks are preserved for generations to come.

According to the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable Association, by the end of the 2010s, the National Park Service’s deferred maintenance backlog totaled nearly \$20 billion, potentially impacting visitors’ experiences at the parks.¹ As a result, the GAOA was signed into law in 2020 by President Trump to address the growing deferred maintenance backlog. I was proud to support this critically important measure.

The GAOA created a new fund, the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund (GAOA LRF), which authorized \$1.9 billion annually for five years from fiscal years (FY) 2021 through 2025. The GAOA also installed permanent full funding of \$900 million annually for the Land and Water Conservation Fund that could be used toward completing deferred maintenance.² While multiple agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land

¹ [America's public lands and waters need help of Congress - Outdoor Recreation Roundtable](#)

² [About GAOA | U.S. Department of the Interior](#)

Management (BLM), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), are eligible for this funding, the National Park Service (NPS) receives almost 70 percent of the total GAOA LRF funding.

Over the summer, I visited with National Park Superintendents and sought their views on the critical nature of the GAOA – particularly, for our parks like the Grand Teton National Park that receives millions of visitors. Despite the historical funding GAOA, President Trump, and Congress provided, GAOA LRF funds, and their implementation under the Biden Administration, suffered from serious caveats.

For example, the GAOA LRF prioritized funding for more urban parks, while smaller, often more rural parks received less. Equally, the GAOA LRF was used to fund expensive repairs, such as wastewater systems, which, while important, took away funding from other important recreational projects. Part of this issue stems from the GAOA’s narrow definition of what constitutes an eligible deferred project, something which I encourage the Committee to reevaluate. Ultimately, though, much of the GAOA LRF funding was still focused on administrative costs and compliance rather than actual upgrades and improving the visitor’s experience.

Additionally, while the GAOA LRF has provided funding for some infrastructure and maintenance backlog projects, some of which were in Arkansas and our state is grateful for, the deferred maintenance backlog has still grown. As the Committee examines reauthorization, I ask that it also look at what is considered eligible for funding under the GAOA LRF and include updates to the current system to determine maintenance needs.

As you know, without routine maintenance at parks, the deferred maintenance backlog will continue to grow. Without changes to help with the proper tracking of deferred maintenance at the Department of Interior and within the National Park System, equally, the selection of future GAOA projects becomes difficult, if not impossible to achieve. This concern has been echoed in a 2023 report by the Inspector General’s office, which found that without the ability to “effectively identify and manage... deferred maintenance,” the Department of the Interior would deter any positive movement toward growing backlogs.³

While the GAOA LRF works to repair and restore parks across the country, these issues mentioned above and at today’s hearing will increasingly become important in ensuring its ultimate success and the continued life of national parks as we know them today.

³ [Final Evaluation Report – The National Park Service Faces Challenges in Managing Its Deferred Maintenance, Report No. 2020–CR–066](#)

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
The Honorable Jared Huffman
September 5, 2025
Page 3

Thank you again, Chairman Westerman, for allowing me to submit my statement for the record. I look forward to reviewing this hearing and the good work the Committee will be doing this Congress as the reauthorization of GAOA approaches.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "French Hill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "F".

French Hill
Member of Congress