HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To:	House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members
From:	House Committee on Natural Resources Staff: Aniela Butler (Aniela@mail.house.gov) and Hannah Devereaux (Hannah.Devereaux@mail.house.gov); x6-7736
Date:	Thursday, June 11, 2026
Subject:	Legislative Field Hearing on H.R. 9250 (Rep. Westerman), *"Great American Outdoors Act 250"* in Hot Springs National Park

The House Committee on Natural Resources (Committee) will hold a legislative field hearing on H.R. 9250 (Rep. Westerman), the *"Great American Outdoors Act 250"* in Hot Springs National Park. The hearing will take place on **Friday, June 12, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. (CDT), at the Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas.**

Member offices are requested to notify Sophia Varnasidis (Sophia.Varnasidis@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. (EDT) on Thursday, June 11, 2026, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- Ahead of our nation's 250th birthday, the Great American Outdoors Act 250 (GAOA 250) reauthorizes and reforms the America's Legacy Restoration Fund (ALRF) to ensure that "America's Best Idea"—our national parks and public lands—are modernized and maintained for generations to come, without using taxpayer funding.
- GAOA 250 enhances public access, improves infrastructure, and creates new outdoor recreation opportunities, while making significant reforms that prioritize mission-critical deferred maintenance, streamline project delivery, and generate new revenue while keeping parks affordable for American families.
- Hot Springs National Park (HSNP) serves as the perfect backdrop for this hearing, demonstrating how GAOA 250 investments can spur new public-private partnerships, create jobs, and sustain billions of dollars in spending within rural and gateway communities.
- GAOA 250 reauthorizes a signature legislative achievements from President Trump's first term, while supporting new initiatives from his second term, such as codifying foreign visitor fees and securing American energy dominance.

II. WITNESSES

- **The Hon. Kate MacGregor,** Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.
- **Mr. Chris French,** Associate Chief, U.S. Forest Service, Washington, D.C.
- **Mr. Kevin Costner,** Actor/Director, West Hollywood, CA
- **Ms. Katherine Andrews,** Director—Office of Outdoor Recreation, Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism, Little Rock, AR
- **Mr. Cole McCaskill,** Interim President & CEO, The Greater Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce, Hot Springs, AR
- **Mr. Mike Ward,** Executive Council Member, The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, Edwardsville, IL *[Minority Witness]*

III. BACKGROUND

Overview

Vintage postcard featuring the Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs National Park, the location of the field hearing. **Source:** Chamber of Commerce, 1930-1945.

Referred to as "America's Best Idea," our country's national parks and public lands provide affordable outdoor recreation opportunities for American families, support rural and gateway economies, conserve premiere natural and historic resources, and connect hundreds of millions of Americans with the outdoors every year.[1] From Alaska's icy fjords and Wyoming's roaring geysers to California's towering giant sequoias, Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains, and Utah's red rock canyons, our national parks and public lands conserve the best of America's landscapes. Each year, approximately 637 million visitors flock to sites managed by the National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), to create memories that will last for generations.[2] Visitors

[1] "National Parks: America's Best Idea," PBS, https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-national-parks/.
[2] "Visitor Use Data", National Park Service, 2026, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/visitor-use-statistics-dashboard.htm. "National Visitor Use Monitoring Program," U.S. Forest Service, https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/nvum. "Celebrating the power of public lands through tourism and community impact," Bureau of Land Management, https://www.blm.gov/blog/2025-05-05/celebrating-power-public-lands-through-tourism-and-community-impact. "The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Announces National Visitor Survey Results," U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, https://www.fws.gov/press-release/2025-09/the-us-fish-and-wildlife-service-announces-national-visitor-survey-results.

come to hike, bike, rock climb, camp, whitewater raft, canoe, horseback ride, hunt, fish, shoot, and experience the other abudandant, affordable outdoor recreation opportunities that our public lands offer. These visitors also generate approximately $29 billion in economic activity for rural, gateway economies, supporting 340,000 local jobs, $18.8 billion in labor income, and "$56.3 billion in economic output in the national economy."[3]

On the eve of our country's 250th celebration of independence, however, our national parks and public lands are facing some of their greatest challenges. Federal land management agencies continue to struggle with aging infrastructure, neglected and deteriorating assets, overcrowding, and deferred maintenance backlogs that now exceed $40 billion collectively.[4] Compounding these issues, the Great American Outdoors Act's (GAOA) Legacy Restoration Fund expired in September 2025.[5] Considered one of the landmark achievements of President Trump's first term, GAOA provided $1.9 billion annually for five years to address deferred maintenance at NPS, USFS, USFWS, and BLM sites, as well as at Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools.[6] Over its five-year authorization, GAOA proved to be a major economic engine, particularly for rural, gateway communities. In total, GAOA supported 72,560 jobs, generated $4.95 billion in labor income, created $15.9 billion in economic output, and added $8.02 billion to the national economy.[7] In response to this successful track record, the Trump administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 budget proposes reauthorizing GAOA at $1.9 billion annually for five years.[8] Reauthorizing this legislation—timed with America's 250th anniversary—would stand as President Trump's next great conservation achievement.

Nicknamed the "Natural State", Arkansas is not only a premier destination for tourism and outdoor recreation, but also the perfect backdrop to examine the reauthorization of GAOA. In 1832, 50 years before Yellowstone became the country's first national park, Congress set aside parcels containing the thermal waters in Hot Springs, Arkansas, establishing the first federal reservation of a natural resource.[9] Today, Hot Springs National Park (HSNP) boasts "ancient thermal springs, mountain views, incredible geology, forested hikes, and abundant creeks—all in the middle of town."[10] HSNP is also at the forefront of demonstrating how strategic infrastructure investments and innovative public-private partnerships can revitalize historic federal assets, reduce deferred maintenance, and support local economies—serving as a model for parks across the country.[11]

Public Lands in the State of Arkansas currently have a $525 million deferred maintenance backlog, comprised of $115.6 million for NPS, $132.4 million for USFWS, and $277 million for

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[3] "Visitor Spending Effects - Economic Contributions of National Park Visitor Spending," National Park Service, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm.
[4] "Budget of the U.S. Government," Office of Management and Budget, Fiscal Year 2027, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/budget_fy2027.pdf.
[5] Pub. L. No. 116-152, https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ152/PLAW-116publ152.pdf.
[6] "The Trump Administration's Environmental Accomplishments," Executive Office of the President, January 2021, https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/210114-Final-Accomplishments-Document.pdf.
[7] "Economic Contributions of National Park Infrastructure Investments," National Park Service, April 12, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/great-american-outdoors-act.htm.
[8] *Id.*
[9] "Park Anniversaries," National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/npscelebrates/park-anniversaries.htm.
[10] "Where History and Nature Meet," National Park Service, Hot Springs National Park, https://www.nps.gov/hosp/index.htm.
[11] "Our Partners," National Park Service, 2026, https://www.nps.gov/hosp/getinvolved/partners.htm.

USFS.[12] Through the first iteration of GAOA, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) was able to invest "$52.5 million towards improving over 150 assets across 4 projects" and USFS invested $39.7 million across 11 projects in Arkansas.[13] HSNP recently celebrated the groundbreaking of the Maurice Bathhouse rehabilitation project, made possible through a $31.6 million investment from GAOA.[14] Originally constructed in 1912, the Maurice Bathhouse closed in 1976 and continued to deteriorate for nearly five decades.[15] Through rehabilitation and commercial leasing authorities, the project will transform the final unrestored bathhouse along Bathhouse Row into a modern visitor destination.[16] Similar partnerships within HSNP have already converted historic bathhouses into a boutique hotel, spa, museum, and brewery that uses the park's thermal spring water.[17]

Interior of the Maurice Bathhouse in Hot Springs National Park, which will receive upgrades through GAOA. **Source:** NPS, 2025.

[H.R. 9250 (Rep. Westerman), the *"Great American Outdoors Act 250"*]

Modernizing and Maintaining our National Parks and Public Lands

GAOA 250 supports hundreds of projects, such as the Maurice Bathhouse rehabilitation, across the nation by reauthorizing the Legacy Restoration Fund for an additional 5 years. Specifically, GAOA 250 provides $1.9 billion annually over five years, divided between NPS (70 percent of overall funding), USFS (15 percent), USFWS (5 percent), BLM (5 percent), and BIE schools (5 percent) through the re-named "America's Legacy Restoration Fund" (ALRF). GAOA 250 modernizes our parks, enhances public access, improves visitor experiences, upgrades infrastructure, and creates new outdoor recreation opportunities. The legislation also makes

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[12] "Arkansas Great American Outdoors Act National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund," U.S. Department of the Interior, April 2026, https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2026-04/arkansas-gaoa-factsheet-2026.pdf. U.S. Forest Service data provided to Committee.
[13] *Id.*
[14] "National Park Service breaks ground on historic Maurice Bathhouse rehabilitation," National Park Service, August 19, 2025, https://www.nps.gov/hosp/learn/news/maurice-gaoa-groundbreaking.htm.
[15] *Id.*
[16] "Maurice Bathhouse," National Park Service, 2026, https://www.nps.gov/hosp/learn/historyculture/maurice-bathhouse.htm.
[17] "National Park Service breaks ground on historic Maurice Bathhouse rehabilitation," National Park Service, 2026, https://www.nps.gov/hosp/learn/news/maurice-gaoa-groundbreaking.htm.

targeted reforms to improve accountability and transparency, expedite project delivery, strengthen fiscal sustainability, and support long-term recreation infrastructure needs.

For additional background on the Great American Outdoors Act, please see the memorandum from the Committee's September 2025 field hearing on *"The Great American Outdoors Act: Modernizing and Maintaining National Parks to Celebrate America's 250th Birthday"*, which can be found here.

Supporting Public-Private Partnerships and Gateway Communities

Building on the successful model utilized in HSNP, GAOA 250 places a renewed emphasis on leveraging public-private partnerships and non-federal investment to improve public lands infrastructure and enhance visitor services. These partnerships have proven to be successful across the country. In Michigan's Hiawatha National Forest, for example, GAOA investments supported partnerships between USFS and non-profit corporation networks to rehabilitate the deteriorating, historic Point Iroquois Lighthouse, restoring this infrastructure and creating workforce development opportunities for at-risk youth pursuing careers in skilled trades.[18] In Mount Rainier National Park, the National Park Foundation is matching GAOA funding to provide $1.5 million in private donations towards rehabilitating more than 185 campsites at the Ohanapecosh Campground.[19] These partnerships all demonstrate how GAOA funding can be used to stretch federal dollars further, make project delivery quicker and more efficient, and create jobs in local communities.

By encouraging public-private partnerships, GAOA 250 recognizes that local communities, non-profit partners, and private organizations can play an essential role in improving recreation infrastructure and expanding workforce opportunities, thereby enabling the quick and efficient implementation of projects. The bill contains several provisions that enhance these partnerships. First, the legislation allows agencies to directly transfer funds to non-profit organizations, with appropriate guardrails to ensure fiscal transparency and accountability. These trusted partners can "contract and deliver high quality work" more efficiently than the federal government, "stretching every public and private dollar."[20] Second, the bill directs the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to more aggressively solicit cash and in-kind donations, pursue matching contributions, and establish partnerships with non-profit organizations. This addresses a shortcoming in the original law, which resulted in agencies not receiving donations because they did "not [communicate] broadly to the general public about donating" despite being authorized to do so.[21] GAOA 250 also directs agencies to dedicate at least five percent of funding allocations to projects seeking private matching contributions, helping stretch taxpayer dollars while increasing community investment in public lands infrastructure. This framework will help non-profit organizations identify priority projects to support while maintaining agency control over which projects are prioritized nationwide. Lastly, GAOA 250 encourages the agencies to partner with private entities on cross-boundary projects that can improve outdoor recreation and public access.

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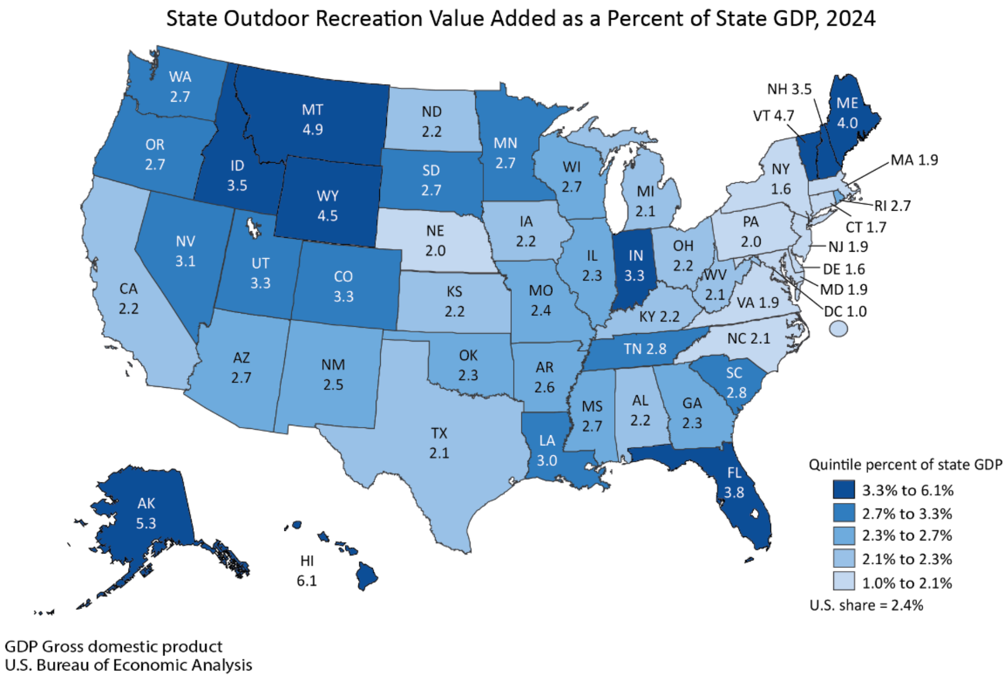
[18] "Great American Outdoors Act," U.S. Forest Service, 2026, https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/gaoa.
[19] Information provided by the National Park Foundation.
[20] Testimony of Leslie Mattson, Grand Teton National Park Foundation, https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II00/20250905/118553/HHRG-119-II00-Wstate-MattsonL-20250905.pdf.
[21] Letter from the U.S. Department of the Interior to Senators Daines and King, August 15, 2024, on file with the Committee.

Outdoor Recreation and Sportsmen's Access Pilot Program



State outdoor recreation value added as a percent of state GDP for 2024, the most recent year for which data are available. **Source:** Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2026.

The outdoor recreation economy generates $1.3 trillion in economic output annually, accounting for 2.4 percent of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) and supporting 5.2 million jobs across the country.[22] Well-maintained, modernized outdoor recreation infrastructure at well-trafficked sites in our national parks and public lands is crucial for expanding outdoor recreation opportunities. However, the highest priority investments in certain sites may not necessarily be classified under the strict definition of "deferred maintenance," which constitutes "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."[23] For example, the Dragon Bravo Fire in 2025 wiped out virtually all recreation infrastructure on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, requiring repairs to campgrounds, trails, overnight lodging, and roads.[24] Since 2010, more than one-fourth of overnight campsites in the Ouachita National Forest in Arkansas have been decommissioned, limiting public access and stymying recreation visits.[25] In Michigan, NPS officials removed a popular overlook platform due to "loss of structural integrity," which "was an imminent safety concern."[26] In each of these instances, despite being identified by local communities as highest-priority investment needs, these projects would not meet the definition of "deferred maintenance" because the relevant assets had been removed, destroyed, or decommissioned.

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[22] Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, "Outdoor Recreation Economic Data," https://recreationroundtable.org/resources/national-recreation-data/.
[23] Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board, "Deferred Maintenance and Repairs," April 25, 2012, http://files.fasab.gov/pdffiles/original_sffas_42.pdf.
[24] "Status of the North Rim," National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/grca/northrimstatus.htm.
[25] Campsite data on the Ouachita National Forest January 1, 2010, compared to 2023, data provided by the Forest Service on March 17, 2023, and on file with the Committee.
[26] "Famous Lake Michigan overlook platform at Sleeping Bear Dunes removed," WYXZ Detroit, May 28, 2025, https://www.wxyz.com/news/famous-lake-michigan-overlook-platform-at-sleeping-bear-dunes-removed.

Similarly, across the country, much visitor-facing infrastructure—such as trails, bathrooms, and campgrounds—requires modernization but does not meet the administrative definition of deferred maintenance. For example, at the Committee's field hearing in Grand Teton National Park, Members visited two trails—one that had been eligible for deferred maintenance funding and one that had not. Despite making accessibility improvements for people with disabilities at one of the most highly visited recreation sites in the park, the Taggart Lake Trail improvements did not meet the traditional definition of deferred maintenance.[27] Moreover, many campgrounds do not have deferred maintenance needs but instead require modern amenities, such as RV hookups, broadband connections, restroom facilities, and other upgraded utilities.[28] By prioritizing investments in visitor-facing infrastructure, agencies can also optimize funding by leveraging private donations and generating new funding sources through standard amenity recreation fees. These examples highlight how maintaining public lands for the next 250 years requires more than simply repairing roads and buildings—it requires flexible investments that can simultaneously modernize visitor infrastructure and improve recreation access.

Hunting, angling, target shooting, and wildlife-related recreation activities are not only part of America's heritage, but they are also critical to supporting the outdoor recreation economy. Hunting, shooting, and trapping make up the third-largest share of economic activity among conventional outdoor recreation activities, generating $16.5 billion annually.[29] Spending from sportsmen and women also sustain approximately 1.3 million jobs and generate roughly $80 billion in wages and income nationwide.[30] Reliable, affordable access to federal lands and waters is crucial for the approximately 32 million Americans who engage in target shooting annually and the 101.6 million Americans (or roughly 40 percent of the population over the age of 16) who engage in some type of hunting, fishing, or wildlife-related activity.[31] These recreationists depend on well-maintained shooting ranges, boat launches, wildlife viewing platforms, wildlife habitat, and public access infrastructure at hunting and fishing sites.[32] Yet, in many areas, aging infrastructure and deteriorating habitat conditions continue to hinder public access.

To tackle these broader infrastructure and access challenges, GAOA 250 creates a new outdoor recreation and sportsmen's access pilot program to improve hunting and fishing access, enhance wildlife habitat, modernize recreation infrastructure, and expand opportunities for public use. Under this program, NPS, USFS, USFWS, and BLM are authorized to allocate not more than 15 percent of funds made available to their agencies to address either outdoor recreation infrastructure improvements or sportsmen's access projects, including improved habitat

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[27] "Committee Holds Field Hearing in Grand Teton National Park on the Great American Outdoors Act," House Committee on Natural Resources, September 8, 2025, https://naturalresources.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=418356.

[28] "Recommendations to the Make America Beautiful Again Commission," Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, https://recreationroundtable.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/ORR-Recommendations-to-the-Make-America-Beautiful-Again-Commission_February-2026.pdf.

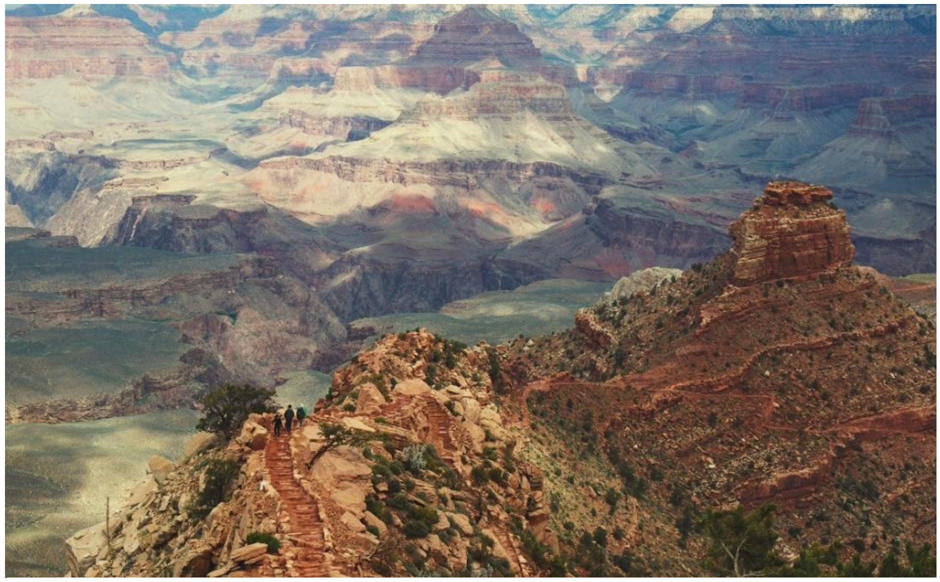
[29] "Outdoor Recreation Economic Statistics, U.S. and States, 2024," Bureau of Economic Analysis, March 5, 2026, https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2026-03/ores0326.pdf.

[30] "New Report: Economic Impact of Hunting and Shooting in America," Sportsman's Alliance, October 16, 2024, https://sportsmensalliance.org/news/new-report-economic-impact-of-hunting-and-shooting-in-america/.

[31] "New 5-Year Report Shows 101.6 Million Americans Participated in Hunting, Fishing & Wildlife Activities," U.S. Department of the Interior, September 7, 2017, https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/new-5-year-report-shows-1016-million-americans-participated-hunting-fishing-wildlife.

[32] Cindy Sandoval, "Report Offers a Snapshot of Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation of Hunters and Anglers in the U.S.," U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, September 27, 2024, https://www.fws.gov/story/2024-09/report-offers-snapshot-hunters-and-anglers-us.

management.[33] This provides agencies the flexibility to address critical projects across the country that may not meet the technical definition of "deferred maintenance," but clearly meet the spirit of this definition. Additionally, by establishing a ceiling, instead of a floor, on this program and applying a broad definition of outdoor recreation, the program still allows for investments in deferred maintenance but ensures that the agencies are prioritizing visitor-facing projects. Furthermore, this program is a force multiplier for creating new, long-term revenue streams for deferred maintenance. To accelerate project delivery and improve coordination, the legislation encourages agencies to use existing partnership authorities, such as Good Neighbor Agreements, Stewardship Contracts, and agreements with tribes, to carry out sportsmen's projects that address habitat deterioration. GAOA 250 keeps revenues generated from these projects available at the local unit level for future deferred maintenance investments, establishing long-term reinvestment opportunities.



Hikers on the South Kaibab Trail in Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona.
Source: Ricoh Imaging Company, 2018.

Improving Oversight, Transparency, and Accountability in Project Selection, Distribution, and Submission

One of GAOA 250's central goals is to ensure that federal dollars are directed toward projects that directly promote public access, enhance visitor experiences, or improve outdoor recreation opportunities. Congressional oversight of the original GAOA identified concerns that funds were not appropriately distributed across large and small parks and between urban and rural areas.[34] To rectify this, GAOA 250 creates new, transparent criteria for project selection that remove these shortcomings. The criteria, which must be published publicly, also target deferred maintenance on the most mission-critical assets (i.e., those that most directly and significantly affect access, recreation, and visitor experiences). Further, GAOA 250 modifies the distribution of funding towards transportation and non-transportation projects to ensure that large transportation projects in urban areas do not crowd out funding for smaller projects in rural areas.

[33] NPS: outdoor recreation projects; USFS and BLM: outdoor recreation or sportsmen's access projects; USFWS: sportsmen's access projects.
[34] Further information can be found here: https://www.congress.gov/index.php/event/118th-congress/house-event/115637.

Under the original law, each agency was required to allocate 65 percent of funds to non-transportation projects.[35] GAOA 250 increases those requirements such that 70 percent of NPS funds and 80 percent of USFWS funds are spent on non-transportation projects.[36] However, GAOA 250 also recognizes the need to provide USFS with greater flexibility to spend not less than 55 percent of funds on non-transportation projects. USFS manages an estimated 371,000 miles of roads across the country, a network 28 times larger than NPS's road system.[37] Allowing greater investment in USFS roads not only addresses the primary driver of their deferred maintenance backlog but also improves public access, forest management, fire suppression and response, and outdoor recreation.

GAOA 250 also establishes stronger good governance limitations on funding to support fiscal accountability. The bill extends the original law's prohibition on acquiring land to also include acquiring any interest in land.[38] Moreover, GAOA 250 adds a new prohibition on decommissioning roads. Since 1991, USFS has decommissioned an average of 2,000 miles of road per year.[39] Congressional oversight has revealed that the agency often decommissions roads rather than addressing maintenance needs, simply cutting off public access.[40] By preventing this rapid decommissioning, GAOA 250 removes perverse incentives for agencies to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog by restricting public access. Lastly, GAOA 250 establishes new limits on administrative expenses and project planning to ensure that the maximum amount of funding is devoted to implementing projects on the ground.

In addition to these new requirements, GAOA 250 maintains existing prohibitions on providing employees bonuses or supplanting discretionary funding.

The first five years of GAOA implementation also revealed shortcomings, including unreliable data, inconsistent definitions, and weak internal controls.[41] Congressional oversight also identified inconsistencies in how agencies defined, tracked, and reported deferred maintenance, making it difficult to accurately measure progress or compare backlog estimates between agencies and units.[42] As a result, NPS's deferred maintenance backlog increased by $10.3 billion over five years, rising from $12.7 billion in FY 2019 to $22.98 billion in FY 2024.[43] GAOA 250 remedies these shortcomings by codifying a unified, standardized methodology for calculating deferred maintenance across agencies—requiring accurate, timely, and transparent updates to maintenance data. The legislation also directs the agencies to produce a publicly accessible geospatial database that tracks project costs, timelines, permitting statuses, and deferred maintenance reductions achieved. In addition, DOI and USFS must submit annual reports to Congress detailing project implementation, progress in reducing backlog, preventive

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[35] Pub. L. No. 116-152.
[36] BLM is maintained at 65 percent. BIE has no transportation funding limitation.
[37] "Travel Management," U.S. Forest Service, https://www.fs.usda.gov/science-technology/travel-management.
[38] An example of acquiring interests in land, without gaining ownership of such land, would be conservation easements.
[39] "Forest roads and American infrastructure," Healthy Forests Health Communities, March 1, 2019, https://healthyforests.org/2019/03/forest-roads-and-american-infrastructure/.
[40] For more information, please see here: https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/hearing_memo_--_sub_on_fl_ov_field_hrg_in_wi_05.13.24.pdf.
[41] For more information, please see here: https://www.congress.gov/118/meeting/house/116691/documents/HHRG-118-II15-20240110-SD002.pdf.
[42] *Id.*
[43] *Id.*

maintenance efforts, staffing levels, and unobligated balances, while the U.S. Government Accountability Office is directed to conduct recurring reviews of implementation and effectiveness.

Streamlining Permitting, Accelerating Project Delivery, and Disposing of Assets on the Deferred Maintenance Backlog

Lengthy environmental reviews, permitting delays, and procurement bottlenecks all slow the timely implementation and completion of projects across the country.[44] Delays in project delivery not only postpone visitor improvements but also increase costs due to inflation, rising construction expenses, and continued asset deterioration.[45] In response, GAOA 250 streamlines every aspect of project design, planning, and approval processes. These reforms align with broader Trump administration efforts to modernize federal permitting processes and provide "clear, practical guidance to staff, while preserving flexibility to meet operational and project needs."[46] First, the bill directs the establishment of a unified categorical exclusion (CE) under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).[47] This change will consolidate and codify existing maintenance CEs, reducing fragmentation and duplication, while providing clear statutory direction to streamline environmental reviews. Second, GAOA 250 expedites the contracting process by requiring construction contracts to be awarded within 180 days following final project design approval, increasing the micro-purchase threshold for projects to $25,000, raising the cap on architect and engineer fees from 6% to 8%, and codifying emergency acquisition flexibilities. Together, these reforms will help agencies deliver projects more efficiently, reduce cost escalation caused by delays, and ensure that taxpayers see timely results from infrastructure investments.

GAOA 250 also reduces the deferred maintenance backlog by creating a new authority for the disposal of constructed assets that contribute to the deferred maintenance backlog but no longer serve a public need or advance the mission of a federal land management agency. NPS alone manages "more than 70,000 assets that are worth nearly $200 billion."[48] "Zeroing out" the deferred maintenance backlog of these assets is not the goal of GAOA 250. Instead, the legislation recognizes that the transfer or disposal of certain assets is a more fiscally responsible approach to reducing both cyclical and deferred maintenance needs.

Offsets

GAOA 250 provides new, comprehensive, and sustainable revenue streams for our national parks and public lands through energy revenues, donations, and new fees for foreign visitors. This would improve long-term fiscal sustainability while keeping national parks and public lands affordable for American families and supporting American energy dominance. In addition to

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[44] Cardell Johnson, "Deferred Maintenance: Agencies' Project Selection and Challenges," U.S. Government Accountability Office, January 10, 2024, https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24107234.pdf.
[45] *Id.*
[46] "Trump Administration Delivers Historic NEPA Reform, Unleashing Resources on America's Public Lands," U.S. Department of the Interior, February 23, 2026, https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/trump-administration-delivers-historic-nepa-reform-unleashing-resources-americas.
[47] 42 U.S.C. 4332.
[48] "A Path Forward for America's Best Idea," Property and Environment Research Center, https://perc.org/2024/11/13/a-path-forward-for-americas-best-idea/.

these proposals, there are future options to consider to generate even more revenue, such as allowing DOI to license trademarked intellectual property, such as the NPS arrowhead symbol. The ALRF is capped at $1.9 billion per year for five years ($9.5 billion total). Under GAOA 250, any revenue collected beyond this amount in any year is transferred to the General Fund of the U.S. Treasury for debt reduction purposes.

The ALRF is partially funded with 50 percent of the unobligated or "miscellaneous" revenues deposited into the U.S. Treasury from all forms of onshore energy development, including oil, gas, coal, and alternative or renewable energy. In FY 2024, American energy production on federal lands generated $8.2 billion in revenue.[49] On July 4, 2025, President Trump signed the Working Families Tax Cut Act (WFTC) into law, which the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects will generate an additional $12.4 billion in onshore energy revenues over baseline expectations during the next decade.[50] Thus, the WFTC alone generated enough revenue to cover GAOA 250, plus an additional year and a half of ALRF funding. Complementing these measures, President Trump has also signed into law six Congressional Review Act resolutions overturning restrictive resource management plans (RMPs) that had locked up roughly 22 million acres of land and 35 million acres of mineral resources in Wyoming, Alaska, North Dakota, and Montana.[51] According to the CBO, these RMP reversals, combined with the WFTC, would generate an additional $280 million in federal revenue.[52]

An illustrative example of how foreign visitor fees can help meet the current maintenance needs of our national parks. **Source:** PERC, 2025.

In addition, GAOA 250 codifies President Trump's recent Executive Order 14314 by establishing a new $250 annual pass for foreign visitors and a $100 entrance fee surcharge for any foreign visitor without an annual pass.[53] In November 2025, Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum announced a pilot version of this proposal, targeted at the 11 most-visited national parks, beginning in 2026.[54] Prior to this, the U.S. was one of the few countries in the world that did not

[49] "Revenue Data," Office of Natural Resources Revenue, https://revenuedata.doi.gov/explore/?dataType=Revenue&location=NF%2CNA&mapLevel=State&offshoreRegions=false&period=Fiscal+Year&year=2024.
[50] "Estimated Budgetary Effects of Public Law 119-21, to Provide for Reconciliation Pursuant to Title II of H. Con. Res. 14, Relative to CBO's January 2025 Baseline," Congressional Budget Office, July 21, 2025, https://www.cbo.gov/publication/61570.
[51] Pub. L. No. 119-47, 119-48, 119-49, 119-50, 119-51, and 119-52.
[52] Internal estimate provided to the Committee.
[53] "Executive Order on "Making America Beautiful Again by Improving our National Parks," The Executive Office of the President, July 3, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/07/making-america-beautiful-again-by-improving-our-national-parks/.
[54] "Department of the Interior Announces Modernized, More Affordable National Park Access," U.S. Department of the Interior, November 25, 2025, https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/department-interior-announces-modernized-more-affordable-national-park-access.

differentiate between domestic and foreign visitors in its park fee structure.[55] Approximately one-third of international visitors to the U.S. visit a national park during their trip.[56] These visitors, on average, spend $4,484 traveling to the U.S., making a higher national park entrance fee one of the least expensive parts of their overseas vacation.[57] Research has found that a modest surcharge on international visitors could generate hundreds of millions of dollars in annual revenue and decrease visitation by less than 1%.[58] Codification of these passes would not affect any American families, nor would it alter existing free and discounted passes for military servicemembers, veterans, Gold Star Families, and individuals with disabilities.

IV. MAJOR PROVISIONS & SECTION-BY-SECTION

H.R. 9250 (Rep. Westerman), the "*Great American Outdoors Act 250*"

V. COST

A formal cost estimate from CBO is not yet available.

VI. ADMINISTRATION POSITION

The Trump administration's position is unknown at this time.

VII. EFFECT ON CURRENT LAW

H.R. 9250 (Rep. Westerman), the "*Great American Outdoors Act 250*"

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[55] Tate Watkins, "How Overseas Visitors Can Help Steward Our National Parks," Property and Environment Research Center, December 21, 2023, https://www.perc.org/2023/12/21/how-international-visitors-can-help-steward-our-national-parks/.
[56] "Overseas Visitors Love Our Parks. Now Our Parks Love Overseas Visitors," Property and Environment Research Center, December 8, 2025, https://www.perc.org/2025/12/08/overseas-visitors-love-our-parks-now-our-parks-love-overseas-visitors/.
[57] *Id.*
[58] *Id.*