

Statement of
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Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior
Before the
House Natural Resources Committee
at a Field Hearing on the
“Great American Outdoors Act 250”
June 12, 2026

Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing on the reauthorization of the Great American Outdoors Act’s Legacy Restoration Fund and for your leadership on this important effort.

As we celebrate the Nation’s 250th anniversary, reauthorizing the Legacy Restoration Fund provides an opportunity to renew a generational investment in the treasured places millions of Americans go every year to experience and enjoy America’s great outdoors, enriching their lives and fueling a booming outdoor recreation economy. The Legacy Restoration Fund, signed into law by President Trump in 2020, has enabled the Department to address overdue maintenance and repair of the roads, bridges, trails, water systems, visitor centers, student dorms, campgrounds, bathrooms and other structures that make up the \$440 billion infrastructure asset portfolio managed by the Department. After decades of increased visitation and use across tens of thousands of aging facilities, the deferred maintenance backlog has reached more than \$30 billion at national parks, national wildlife refuges, public lands and Bureau of Indian Education-funded schools. As described in the President’s FY2027 budget proposal, the Administration strongly supports reauthorization of the LRF.

The impact of the LRF is visible across the country, including here at Hot Springs National Park. One of the most significant LRF investments in Arkansas is the rehabilitation of several historic bathhouses on Bathhouse Row. The Maurice Bathhouse, built in 1912 and closed in 1974, is the last to be rehabilitated. Its large size and high restoration costs have previously hindered leasing, but through the LRF, the park is now addressing key system upgrades, making it more appealing to leaseholders and lowering future maintenance costs.

The work being done at Hot Springs not only restores historic architecture—it strengthens the economic vitality of the surrounding community by protecting assets central to the park’s identity and visitor experience. Hot Springs’ downtown, its tourism economy, and small businesses depend on these facilities being operable and in good condition.

LRF investments are making similar impacts in every state across our nation, allowing the public to safely recreate on, enjoy, and learn from our public spaces. For example, at the Apostle Islands

National Lakeshore in the great state of Wisconsin, construction started this summer at multiple locations including the rehabilitation of the Little Sand Bay and Devils Island Marinas. These repairs will improve access, stabilize the waterfront marinas, increase future storm resiliency, and enable Devils Island to remain open to the public.

The LRF is also restoring more than 1,000 outdoor recreation-focused assets such as trails, boat ramps, hunting blinds, and wildlife viewing platforms that directly enhance the visitor experience and increase public access. And the LRF has restored many nationally significant assets such as the First Bank of the United States at Independence National Historical Park, the Dorchester Monument at Boston National Historical Park, and the enhanced battlefield interpretive experience at Saratoga National Historical Park, ensuring the stories and places central to our Nation's culture and founding can be experienced and understood by current and future generations.

As the Committee considers reauthorization of the LRF, the Department recommends ensuring funding is directed to projects that address the deferred maintenance backlog in line with the original law's intent and targeted reforms that build upon our track record of success and strengthen its effectiveness. These reforms should ensure at-risk, mission-critical deferred maintenance projects are prioritized before they become costlier repairs. Such reforms should also provide that the dollars we invest in these critical projects are not tied up in bureaucratic red tape and result in shovels in the ground to deliver projects in your states and across the country more quickly. We must also be able to appropriately leverage non-federal funding to do more with taxpayer dollars and maximize the return on their investment. Finally, the Department believes identifying additional revenue streams to fund reauthorization will protect taxpayer dollars consistent with the President's priorities and that spending in the final legislation should be fully offset.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and look forward to continuing to work with you to reauthorize the Legacy Restoration Fund. Reauthorizing this law supports the Administration's commitment to addressing long overdue maintenance and repair needs at our national parks and public lands and ensuring visitors, volunteers, and employees can safely access and enjoy these extraordinary places for years to come.

I will be glad to answer any questions you or members of the Committee may have.