United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

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The Honorable Tom Tiffany
Chairman, Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tiffany:

Enclosed are responses prepared by the National Park Service to Questions for the Record submitted to the Department's witness, Charles Sams, Director of the NPS, following his appearance at the April 18, 2023, oversight hearing before your Subcommittee titled *Examining the Implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act and the Growing National Park Service Deferred Maintenance Backlog*. We apologize for the delay in our response.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond to you on these matters.

Sincerely,

Christopher P. Salotti
Legislative Counsel
Office of Congressional and
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Joe Neguse
Ranking Member

Questions for the Record
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act
April 18, 2023

Questions from Chairman Westerman

<u>Question 1</u>: Director Sams testified several times throughout the hearing that it was "Congressional intent" for $200 million provided in the Inflation Reduction Act to be transferred to the Presidio Trust, despite the fact that Congress did not explicitly direct funding to the Presidio in the language of the IRA and the Director testified that he did not have conversations with the Member representing this park about transferring funds to that district.

a. **Please explain how the administration came to the understanding that it was "Congressional intent" for $200 million provided by the IRA to be transferred to the Presidio.**

<u>Response</u>: The Committee on Natural Resources has submitted a formal request for additional information related to this topic by letter dated April 21, 2023. The Department has responded to that request.

b. **What date was this funding transferred to the Presidio?**

<u>Response</u>: The Committee on Natural Resources has submitted a formal request for additional information related to this topic by letter dated April 21, 2023. The Department has responded to that request.

c. **Is it common for NPS and the Department of the Interior to base Congressional intent on draft pieces of legislation rather than the final version of the bill that is passed?**

<u>Response</u>: The Committee on Natural Resources has submitted a formal request for additional information related to this topic by letter dated April 21, 2023. The Department has responded to that request.

d. **Did the National Park Service apply the same standards and methodology for selecting priority deferred maintenance projects with the $200 million provided in the IRA that was used for the Presidio as the agency does with projects that receive funding under the Great American Outdoors Act? Please explain any discrepancies in the process for determining how these funds were allocated.**

<u>Response</u>: The Committee on Natural Resources has submitted a formal request for additional information related to this topic by letter dated April 21, 2023. The Department has responded to that request.

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Question 2: According to the FY 2024 budget documents, deferred maintenance and repairs are calculated using three components: (1) Parametric condition assessments (PCA) for industry standard assets; (2) Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) assessments for paved roads, parking, bridge and tunnel assets; and (3) work orders for concessions-occupied assets and non-industry standard assets.

a. **Can you please explain each of these three components in greater detail, including how they differ from the previous methodology NPS utilized?**

Response: In FY 2022, the NPS began phasing in the new methodology for calculating deferred maintenance and repairs (DM&R). This methodology consists of three components: (1) Parametric condition assessments; (2) Federal Highways Administration assessments; and (3) work orders.

- Parametric Condition Assessments (PCAs) involve rapid visual assessment of major components and systems of facilities. Scores are recorded and converted into a DM&R estimate using parametric modeling based on the current replacement value (CRV) of assets. This is an acceptable method under both the Federal Real Property Profile and Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board guidelines. PCAs were used for industry standard asset categories beginning in FY 2022 (buildings, housing, campgrounds, trails, wastewater systems, water systems, unpaved roadways and parking areas, and those paved roadways, parking areas, bridges, and tunnels which are not assessed by Federal Highway Administration). PCA assessment models were undergoing development during FY 2022 and for FY 2023 the NPS has moved to PCAs for most non-industry standard assets and the remaining non-industry assets will be assessed using PCAs starting in FY 2024.

- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) condition inspection and repair, rehabilitation, and replacement cost data is used to create DM&R estimates for NPS paved roadways, parking, bridges, and tunnels inspected by FHWA. The FHWA performs condition assessments for most paved roads and parking areas, bridges and tunnels in the NPS portfolio. These assessments, and subsequent analysis for pavements and structures (i.e. bridges and tunnels), provide an estimate of the DM costs for these transportation facilities.

- DM&R on concessions-managed facilities are calculated using work orders input into the Facility Management Software System; implementation of PCAs on these facilities is expected to be reflected in FY 2025 DM&R reporting.

Previously, Deferred Maintenance was calculated by individually assessing assets and writing work orders for deficiencies against those assets. This prior methodology, while not incorrect, was a time-consuming process, making it difficult to comprehensively assess the entire NPS asset portfolio. The updated DM&R methodology relies primarily on a PCA process, which is a fast, streamlined methodology for determining an asset-level modeled DM&R based on the condition score and the asset's CRV. The new methodology is considerably less burdensome, allowing for more comprehensive and timelier DM&R estimates.

Work orders track direct investments to assets and are part of the total cost of implementing a project. As projects are scoped and defined, the NPS develops more refined estimates for work necessary to correct identified deficiencies. There is no expectation that the cost to remediate an asset's deficiencies will match the DM&R. DM&R is an estimate based on modeled costs, which will be used primarily for reporting required supplementary information in the DOI Annual Financial Report in accordance with Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board standards, and Federal Real Property Profile, and is not meant to be a construction cost estimate. Project costs are based on construction estimates that reflect current construction market conditions and actual work to be completed in conformance with current codes and regulations, which are generally more stringent than when the asset was originally constructed, and include costs for compliance, site specific considerations, and project management.

b. **NASA published an 80-page report in the early 2000's explaining their process for parametric condition assessments, has NPS produced any similar comprehensive report? If not, does NPS have a similar report in the works that will be published soon?**

Response: The NPS has developed multiple internal guidance documents related to PCAs including:

- Condition Assessment Business Practices
- Parametric Condition Assessment Guide
- Parametric Scoring Tool User Guide

The NPS does not have plans to produce and publish a report similar to what NASA released in the early 2000s.

Question 3: According to the NPS's budget justification documents, NPS was previously using a methodology to calculate deferred maintenance and repairs that did not align with industry standards or even other bureaus within the Department. Can you please explain why NPS calculated its deferred maintenance this way for so long, including when it was justifying spending under the Great American Outdoors Act to Congress?

Response: The previous methodology for calculating deferred maintenance and repairs was in alignment with industry standards and Department practices. There are several acceptable methods for calculating deferred maintenance and repairs, which may be utilized across industries and Government agencies based on the size and complexity of the portfolio as well as available staff resources.

Previously, Deferred Maintenance was calculated by individually assessing assets and writing work orders for deficiencies against those assets. This prior methodology, while not incorrect, was a time-consuming process, making it difficult to comprehensively assess the entire NPS asset portfolio.

In contrast, the new methodology is considerably less burdensome, allowing for more comprehensive and timelier DM&R estimates.

Question 4: What is the percentage decrease in total budget authority for the NPS between FY 2023 enacted and the FY 2024 request according to DOI's own budget documents?

Response: When comparing current, regular appropriations that exclude one-time emergency disaster supplemental funding, the FY 2024 NPS request is an increase of 8% over FY 2023. The requested FY 2024 total budget authority, which is inclusive of all fund sources, is 20% lower than FY 2023 enacted levels. This reduction is a direct result of $1,500,000,000 that was provided to the NPS in FY 2023 in one-time emergency disaster supplemental funds provided by the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328).

Question 5: What is the percentage decrease in total budget authority for the NPS between FY 2022 actual and the FY 2024 request according to DOI's own budget documents?

Response: When comparing current, regular appropriations that exclude one-time emergency disaster supplemental funding, the FY 2024 NPS request is an increase of 15% over FY 2022. The requested FY 2024 total budget authority, which is inclusive of all fund sources, is 8% lower than FY 2022 actual funding levels. This reduction is a direct result of $229,472,000 in one-time emergency disaster supplemental funds provided by the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-43), and $700,000,000 in one-time funding provided by the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-169) in FY 2022.

Question 6: Is the administration proposing an increase or a decrease to FY 2024 Line Item Construction Projects compared to FY 2022 actual funding?

Response: FY 2022 Actual funding for Line Item Construction Projects was $132.7 million, FY 2023 Enacted was $120.7 million and FY 2024 budget request is $120.7 million.

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<u>Question 7</u>: Director Sams' written testimony states: "The NPS is implementing a multi-year effort to comprehensively review and reform the systems and processes used to manage its assets, including the methodology used to assess facility condition and calculate DM&R."

a. **Has NPS fully implemented its new methodology for tracking deferred maintenance or should Congress expect further revisions to deferred maintenance statistics?**

<u>Response</u>: As of April 2023, the NPS has implemented the new DM&R methodology on over 85% of the portfolio. Concessions occupied assets and Constructed Waterways still rely on work orders and it is anticipated these locations will move to parametric condition assessments for reporting in FY 2025.

Servicewide DM&R values will continue to fluctuate due to changes in portfolio condition, project funding, deterioration, inflationary impacts to both condition and current replacement value, addition of new park units, data quality improvements, and updates to data in the Facility Management Software System.

b. **If NPS is still implementing a review of its deferred maintenance systems and processes, when will this review be complete?**

<u>Response</u>: As of April 2023, the NPS has implemented the new DM&R methodology on over 85% of the portfolio. Concessions occupied assets and Constructed Waterways still rely on work orders and it is anticipated these locations will move to parametric condition assessments for reporting in FY 2025.

c. **If NPS is still updating its methodology, is NPS expecting that the backlog will once again increase as a result of updating its processes for calculating deferred maintenance?**

<u>Response</u>: DM&R numbers may increase due to the change in methodology as parametric condition assessments are fully implemented across the asset portfolio. However, there are other factors that could increase or decrease the DM&R such as changes in portfolio condition, project funding, deterioration, inflationary impacts to both condition and current replacement value, addition of new park units, data quality improvements, and updates to data in the Facility Management Software System. Parametric ratings and guidance will be adjusted as needed and a comprehensive review of Current Replacement Values (CRVs) from a statistical perspective is underway.

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<u>Question 8</u>: What are NPS's projections for what the total deferred maintenance backlog will be at the end of FY 2023? Is the agency projecting it will increase or decrease from the current $22.3 billion?

<u>Response</u>: The NPS does not forecast deferred maintenance and repairs. The deferred maintenance backlog is calculated annually by the methodology noted in response to Question 2.

Question 9: As Director Sams' testimony notes, funding for the programs authorized by the Great American Outdoors Act—including LWCF and the Legacy Restoration Fund—all come from energy revenues, primarily oil and gas revenues. What would happen to the long-term solvency of these conservation programs if we stopped producing oil and gas domestically?

<u>Response</u>: For funding provided to the Legacy Restoration Fund, if full funding is not available in any year, the proposed project activities will be reduced in lowest priority order so that allocations remain within available funds.

<u>Question 10</u>: Some states and parks have been extremely frustrated in the lack of funding they've received under the LRF. What is NPS doing at a national level to provide support to superintendents in parks who have not received a significant investment in funding under the Great American Outdoors Act?

<u>Response</u>: Deferred Maintenance and Repair (DM&R) needs are not distributed evenly throughout the National Park System, and some parks do not have major infrastructure or asset portfolios to manage. As a result, there will be parks that do not receive a significant investment from the Great American Outdoors Act. However, in addition to projects funded by GAOA, the NPS continues to support all parks with facility needs through other fund sources. These include but are not limited to Cyclic Maintenance and Repair and Rehabilitation for facility maintenance and recapitalization; the Federal Lands Transportation Program for maintenance and recapitalization of bridges and paved roads; various construction fund sources for major recapitalization, replacement, and improvement; and disaster supplemental funding to repair or adapt facilities damaged by disasters or impacted by extreme condition. The NPS is attempting to distribute GAOA funding where it is needed most, which frees up funding in these other funding sources to address smaller projects at a wide array of parks.

Creation of the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) also enabled the NPS to launch the Maintenance Action Team (MAT) Program in FY 2021 to address projects at small and medium-sized parks. These teams are led by experienced trades professionals who train and complement Wage Grade Professional crews to perform critical maintenance and repair services. The NPS' Historic Preservation Training Center and the Northeast Region's Historic Architecture, Conservation, and Engineering group have been executing MAT projects with mobile teams of trades specialists that have been established at host parks and sites throughout the country. The NPS will dedicate $59.1 million through FY24 to address over 200 deferred maintenance activities in 96 park units with LRF funding for the MATs. Development of all future MAT projects will continue to target parks in unfunded locations whenever possible.

Question 11: There have been concerns for years that the NPS's method of accounting for deferred maintenance incentivizes parks to inflate their backlogs to receive more funding. How is the NPS's new methodology addressing this issue to ensure backlogs aren't artificially inflated by local park units?

Response: NPS parks, regions, and headquarters work to implement data quality improvement tools and targeted data review to flag and correct anomalous or potentially inflated deferred maintenance needs. The next step in these efforts will be focusing on parks that have unconventional assets and/or a large maintenance backlog. Parametric ratings and guidance will be adjusted as needed and a comprehensive review of Current Replacement Values (CRVs) from a statistical perspective is underway. The CRV study will identify values that may be statistical outliers. Parks will review the outliers and make any necessary adjustments.

Question 12: Despite the success of Maintenance Action Teams in addressing deferred maintenance at smaller parks, the administration is only proposing a $5 million increase for this program in FY 2024. Why isn't the National Park Service investing more money in Maintenance Action Teams to ensure that deferred maintenance isn't building up at smaller park units?

Response: Focusing primarily on facility deficiencies at small and medium sized park units, the Maintenance Action Teams (MATs) complete projects with the support of Service and Conservation Corps, veterans, youth, volunteers, and other partners, sharing knowledge through project execution and on-the-job training opportunities. The NPS intends to gradually build a network of experienced field-based teams that maximize the ability to reach small and medium parks, develop communities of practice, and partner with non-profit Youth and Service Corps organizations to address deferred maintenance and repair needs throughout the NPS.

Recruitment efforts during the past year provided the MAT program with opportunities to increase wage-grade workforce capacity to support additional high priority deferred maintenance projects at small and medium units, though some hiring challenges remain. The NPS will continue to recruit and mentor diverse skilled trades workers to fill MAT positions to address the current and projected workload and become the next generation of National Park stewards.

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Question 13: In NPS's FY 2024 budget documents the agency attributes the $10 billion increase in the deferred maintenance backlog in large part due to methodology changes that went into effect in FY 2022. However, the largest increase in the backlog happened the year prior, in FY 2021. Between FY 2021 and FY 2022, the years in which the methodology supposedly switched over, the backlog only increased by $500 million. Can NPS please explain this discrepancy?

Response: In FY 2021, the NPS added a project markup of 35% to all projects, consistent with the markup included by the Federal Highway Administration on our transportation projects, our major rehabilitation and capital improvement projects, and reflective of the approach of other DOI bureaus. Subsequently, in 2022, DOI released DOI-AAAP-0183, *DOI Policy on Standardizing Cost Estimating Allowances for Reporting of Construction Costs in the Asset Management Program*, which standardized the methodology used in calculating cost estimates. Actual expenditures may differ but planning for these mark-ups better reflects actual project cost and provides for better scoping and planning of project fund sources.

NPS reported DM&R using parametrics on industry standard assets, a subset of total assets, for the first time in the first quarter of FY 2022. FY 2023 DM&R reporting also includes parametric modeling on some non-industry standard assets.

Question 14: When GAOA passed in 2020, NPS's maintenance backlog was roughly $12.7 billion. GAOA funding is set to expire in September 2025. By that time, NPS will have received over $6.5 billion towards reducing its deferred maintenance backlog. At this point, is NPS projecting that the backlog will be higher or lower once GAOA expires compared to where it was when GAOA first passed in 2020 (i.e. higher or lower than $12.7 billion)?

Response: A combination of factors contribute to the growth of the repair backlog. When preventive, recurring, and related maintenance programs are insufficient to keep pace with maintenance needs, the backlog grows. Available funding does not fully cover maintenance and repair costs, and as assets age they become more expensive to repair and maintain in acceptable condition. The NPS portfolio also continues to grow with the addition of new units, adding new operation and maintenance needs and deferred maintenance and repair liabilities. Growth in the cost of construction and materials increases the DM&R backlog while also reducing LRF's purchasing power, resulting in funding fewer projects at higher costs. To date, GAOA LRF is making significant impact on addressing the DM&R associated with critical assets located in 80 park units with an additional 96 units receiving funding for smaller MAT projects, but GAOA alone cannot resolve the NPS portfolio backlog.

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Question 15: What is the average length of time it takes to complete a NEPA analysis for a deferred maintenance project?

Response: The National Environmental Policy Act, as required by law, is part of the planning and decision-making process that focuses on objective and science-informed impacts to the quality of the human environment. The length of time to complete the NEPA analysis varies by the NEPA pathway; Categorical Exclusion, Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. Most deferred maintenance projects fall into the Categorical Exclusion pathway and can be completed in alignment with the project planning phase of design which tends to be less than a year.

Question 16: What is the average cost for complying with NEPA for a deferred maintenance project?

Response: The costs of pre-construction compliance required for LRF projects are tracked but not by individual compliance activities. The NPS programs approximately 5% of net construction costs for all pre-construction compliance related activities. Natural resource compliance consists of National Environmental Policy Act and other laws, as applicable, such as Endangered Species Act, Wilderness Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Paleontological Resources Preservation Act, Clean Water Act, Coastal Zone Management Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation & Management Act. Cultural resource compliance consists of National Historic Preservation Act, Archeological Resources Protection Act, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

Question 17: What effect is inflation having on completing deferred maintenance projects on budget and on time?

Response: Similar to our other construction fund sources, the NPS has established processes to estimate cost escalation and evaluate bid packages. Projects also have some contingency funds set aside, allowing flexibility if bids exceed internal estimates. In times of market volatility, the bureaus will hold additional contingency in a separate line to provide a further buffer for uncertainty and varying local market conditions. In the rare case that bids far exceed available funding, bureaus assess if scope or cost changes are necessary, and will address those through approved change or reprogramming processes.

Question 18: What effect are supply chain issues having on completing deferred maintenance projects on budget and on time?

Response: Due to the nature of the construction process, projects must be prepared to address multiple risks that frequently increase costs. These include unforeseen/unanticipated site conditions that require adjustments to construction methods and timelines, adjustments to project scheduling due to unexpected environmental events, and unpredictable fluctuations in prices for supplies and materials—particularly in the today's volatile construction market.

Contingency funding reinforces bureaus' ability to complete projects on time, minimizing closures of the buildings, amenities, and roads improved by the projects, and ensuring they are reopened for visitor enjoyment or unit/station operations in a timely fashion. Projects also have some contingency funds set aside, allowing flexibility if bids exceed internal estimates. In times of market volatility, the bureaus will hold additional contingency in a separate line to further buffer against uncertainty. In the rare case that bids far exceed available funding, bureaus assess if scope or budget changes are necessary, and will address those through approved change or reprogramming processes.

Question 19: To what extent do wildfires contribute to deferred maintenance issues at NPS?

Response: Wildfires and natural disasters can damage facilities and infrastructure; such damage is evaluated as part of the recurring Parametric Condition Assessment process, and considered as part of the overall deficiencies of an asset. When facilities and infrastructure are completely destroyed by wildfires or natural disasters, the NPS cancels or otherwise retires the tracked maintenance needs of the destroyed asset.

Wildfires may indirectly contribute to deferred maintenance and repair totals by interrupting park operations, which prevents the NPS from conducting regular maintenance activities when they are needed or scheduled.

Question 20: To what extent does NPS consider potential additions to the deferred maintenance backlog when conducting special resource studies?

Response: Analysis of the feasibility criterion during a special resource study provides an initial opportunity to understand the magnitude of costs required for acquiring park lands and establishing park operations and is where the NPS's deferred maintenance backlog is considered. Studies identify an estimate of the costs required to acquire, maintain, and operate a site for the long-term future to inform this analysis. However, the full costs to acquire and sustain a site as a unit of the National Park System may not be known because they would be affected by the level of visitation, requirements for resource preservation, and the desired level of facility development, which would be determined though a future long-term unit management planning effort after the park unit is established.

Studies explain that projects which would be both technically possible and desirable to accomplish for the new park may not be feasible in light of budgetary constraints. Studies also note that designation of a new unit of national park system does not automatically guarantee that funding or staffing to administer that new unit would be appropriated by Congress. Any newly designated national park unit would have to compete with the more than 400 existing park units for limited funding and resources within a fiscally constrained environment.

While the study's estimated costs of acquisition, development, and operations associated with the resources evaluated may be minimal or modest in comparison to other units of the national park system and/or the system as a whole, any new expenditures would need to be carefully weighed in the context of the agency's existing deferred maintenance backlog and other fiscal constraints and in terms of potential future visitation.

Finally, a study identifies management alternatives that describe what the National Park Service considers to be the most effective and efficient approach to protecting significant resources and providing for public enjoyment. This information is provided to inform Congress of the options available and the communities, stakeholders, and potential partners that are critical for engagement should they choose to act on this study's findings and designate these sites as a National Park System unit. If, after the study's transmittal to Congress, legislation for the establishment of a new unit or units is drafted, that can draw from the study's information, findings, and management alternatives.

Question 21: What is NPS doing to reduce the backlog of special resource studies?

Response: Beginning in FY 2022, the NPS began piloting improvements to its special resource study process to prepare new studies faster and to undertake more studies at one time. Under the revised process, studies will be completed in about 18 months after preliminary requirements (funds allocation, initiation and scoping, and final project agreement). This timing may be longer for more complex studies.

Efficiencies employed include using more virtual meetings, consolidating site visits, strategic use of subject-matter experts, and concurrent document reviews. To ensure studies remain on schedule, each study utilizes leadership team check-point meetings to provide consistent direction for key decisions and findings. This new process will be reviewed and updated as the pilot special resource studies progress, and those improvements will be applied to the special resource studies that begin in FY 2024 or later. Opportunities to streamline study processes for National Heritage Area feasibility studies, National Historic/Scenic Trail feasibility studies, and Wild and Scenic River studies will be undertaken on a case-by-case basis.

So far in FY 2023, six studies have been transmitted to Congress. Ten studies are in the final review process, and twelve studies are currently in development. For the 16 new studies authorized or requested since the beginning of FY23, NPS is planning to start each one between now and the end of 2024.

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<u>Question 22</u>: Last year, the Bureau of Land Management permanently damaged dinosaur tracks at Utah's Mill Canyon Dinosaur Tracksite during the replacement of a boardwalk. Internal documents uncovered during a FOIA request and published by E&E News showed that agency officials tried to cover up the fact that this was done using GAOA funding, stating: "Will you please encourage the District and Moab office to refrain from talking about the funding source if at all possible. So far this has not been publicized as a GAOA disaster, and we would prefer to keep it that way."

a. **To the agency's knowledge, has GAOA funding used in any NPS project resulted in any resource damage and destruction, similar to the BLM's incident in Utah?**

<u>Response</u>: We are not aware of any similar incidents. NPS LRF projects consider potential resource impacts during the planning and compliance phases, and LRF projects are not proposed to Congress if they could have unacceptable impacts to resources. We expect all projects to comply with rules, regulations, policies, and laws related to protected resources. Construction projects are not guaranteed to be incident-free and on-site accidents may damage resources. In those cases, the NPS would pursue remedies.

b. **In light of E&E News' investigation into this coverup, did the NPS implement any new protocols to ensure that if GAOA money did fund a project that resulted in resource damage or destruction, that this would not be concealed from the public?**

<u>Response</u>: The NPS has controls in place to review and monitor projects throughout the planning, design, and construction phases. NPS projects complete natural and cultural resource compliance in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies. NPS park units typically lead pre-construction compliance efforts, as well as providing natural and cultural resource specialists to monitor testing and construction activities that could potentially impact park resources.

<u>Question 23</u>: The Committee has heard concerns that there appears to be a discrepancy between the prioritization of investments under the LRF. How is it that some projects appear to be fast-tracked for action and results while others are seeing no progress despite being in a planning process for many years? With only 2 years of funds remaining under the GAOA, how is NPS preparing to address these deferred maintenance needs for these kinds of projects?

<u>Response</u>: The NPS received a total of $3.9 billion for deferred maintenance in the first three years of the Legacy Restoration Fund. As of the beginning of this year, the NPS had obligated more than $1.4 billion, and has allocated funding for 101 projects and Maintenance Action Team programs. 74 projects are under construction, and we expect to see more construction starting in spring and summer 2023.

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<u>Question 24</u>: There is a recognized housing shortage associated with the National Park System.

a. What is the NPS doing to address backlogged building and housing infrastructure repairs?

<u>Response</u>: The NPS has taken steps to improve the condition of the housing inventory. The FY 2023 Housing Improvement Program budget of $7.9 million targets replacement or rehabilitation of existing employee housing in poor or obsolete condition. The FY 2024 budget requests an additional $7.0 million for this priority, for a total funding level of $14.9 million. The obsolete housing initiative, implemented in FY 2018 invested approximately $95 million from multiple fund sources to address 43 projects that replaced or rehabilitated more than 175 housing units in poor or obsolete condition. Some of these projects are ongoing. Across all funding streams, the NPS intends to spend more than $100 million in FY 2024 to improve the condition of or increase the quantity of units.

b. With housing for NPS gateway communities remaining a pinch point for both NPS and tourism operators in meeting their full capacity, does the NPS have any plans to address housing shortages?

<u>Response</u>: In the FY 2023 enacted budget, Congress provided $2 million in the NPS operations account to support leasing of seasonal housing in local communities. The FY 2024 budget request continues that funding level, and requests $7.0 million in additional funding for the Housing Improvement Program to support rehabilitation of existing structures and adding housing capacity in areas that have documented shortages and where local market data shows limited availability of affordable housing for purchase or rent. Across all funding streams, the NPS intends to spend more than $100 million in FY 2024 to improve the condition of or increase the quantity of units.

<u>Question 25</u>: The Committee has heard concerns from several local communities about delays in deferred maintenance at various NPS sites. Can you please provide an update on the following projects:

a. Elevator repairs at Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota.

<u>Response</u>: Planning and design is currently underway and construction funding has been formulated. This project is programmed to be funded by Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act fees.

b. **Visitor center repairs at Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota.**

Response: The Park is currently scoping the project to understand the full extent of the costs.

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Questions from Ranking Member Grijalva

Question 1: The Great American Outdoors Act permanently authorized annual mandatory funding of $900 for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which included a requirement to prioritize federal land acquisition. What is the benefit of federal land acquisition?

Response: Federal land acquisition supports the NPS mission by contributing to the protection of natural and cultural resources in perpetuity for the enjoyment and use by visitors.

Question 2: How does land acquisition create management efficiencies and reduce ongoing operating costs?

Response: Management efficiencies can be realized through such things as, more efficient law enforcement and monitoring, decreased need for multiple lines of fencing in an area, better mowing practices, revegetation efforts, water run-off management, and broad invasive species mitigation.

Question 3: The Great American Outdoor Act also established the National Parks and Public Land Restoration Fund to address priority deferred maintenance at the National Park Service and other federal land management agencies. Does federal land acquisition contribute to deferred maintenance at the National Park Service?

Response: Acquiring unimproved land does not contribute to the deferred maintenance backlog. When NPS acquires lands containing existing infrastructure, the NPS's practice is to plan for the additional costs associated with undertaking the maintenance obligations associated with the infrastructure. The NPS also considers removal of unneeded improvements when acquiring land.

Question 4: At the hearing, it was suggested that the National Park Service's FY24 budget proposal cuts the agency's budget by approximately 20 percent compared to FY2023 levels? Is that an accurate depiction of the administration's budget proposal?

Response: No. This nominal reduction seen in numerical budget documents is for total budget authority, which includes all fund sources. In FY 2023, Congress provided $1,500,000,000 in one-time disaster supplemental funding under the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328). This funding is specifically for disaster recovery projects and does not support ongoing core park operations. When comparing current, regular appropriations that exclude one-time disaster supplemental funding, the FY 2024 request is an increase of 8% over FY 2023.

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Question 5: House Republicans are considering funding levels that could decrease the National Park Service budget by approximately 22 percent. How would across the board cuts of that level impact the operation of national parks?

Response: A 22 percent funding cut to discretionary regular appropriations would have real and damaging impacts. The NPS is heavily reliant on staff for many of our core operations and services; such a reduction may require a hiring freeze, deep cuts to seasonal employees in our parks, and furloughs to permanent employees. This could lead to significant impacts to park operations, such as closing or reduced hours of visitor centers, reduced trash collection and facility cleaning, fewer and infrequent ranger-led programs, and delays in emergency response time. It would also reduce the number of wildland firefighters across all DOI bureaus and the ability to address fuels management treatments, which could be particularly damaging during the upcoming fire season.

Question 6: Would decreasing the Operation of the National Park Service and Construction accounts to FY2022 levels impact efforts to address deferred maintenance?

Response: The proposal to decrease funding to the FY 2022 level would have real and damaging impacts. Reductions would be particularly difficult for the NPS because the bureau relies on staff for so many of its services. Such a reduction could require a hiring freeze, deep cuts to seasonal employees, and furloughs for permanent employees\.

There would also be a significant impact to park operations, potential closures of visitor centers, reduced trash collection and facility cleaning, reductions in ranger-led programs, reduced wildland firefighting capacity, and delays in plowing operations and emergency response times.

Regular maintenance and repairs that are not performed on schedule and put off or delayed for a future period are tracked as Deferred Maintenance and Repair (DM&R) needs. Preventing DM&R needs from accruing requires regular staff and operations; with staff and operational cuts, maintenance activities will be deferred.

Whenever possible, the NPS focuses available resources on park operations. In some scenarios, to lessen operational impacts, the NPS may consider reductions to its maintenance project fund sources, like Cyclic Maintenance, Repair and Rehabilitation, or Line Item Construction. Cuts to these programs could delay up to 400 projects per year.

Questions for the Record
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act
April 18, 2023

Question from Rep. Kamlager-Dove

Question 1: Director Sams, I know that national parks need our help and are struggling with funding challenges, which is why I signed on to support their operational funding in this year's appropriations bill (dear colleague attached). It seems they have multiple overlapping budget challenges, from insufficient staffing to funding challenges associated with climate change and a huge backlog of deferred maintenance projects. It appears that the repairs backlog in California is nearly four billion dollars, a staggering amount. Can you please speak to how understaffing at parks, climate change and other challenges can exacerbate the maintenance challenges you're facing and why the Great American Outdoors Act is an important lifeline?

Response: Understaffing, climate change, natural disasters, and increasing visitation all contribute to asset deterioration, and each can exacerbate the maintenance challenges that the NPS already faces. When parks are understaffed, they cannot perform maintenance activities on time. Climate change can amplify storms and droughts, impacting park operations and interrupting planned maintenance schedules. Natural disasters can damage or destroy facilities and temporarily reduce or close park operations, changing park maintenance priorities. High visitation also causes assets to deteriorate more quickly.

The GAOA National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) investments help the NPS tackle some of its biggest and highest priority maintenance challenges—challenges that the bureau would have difficulty addressing with other fund sources. Shifting these large projects to the LRF also frees up resources in other fund sources for smaller projects. However, significant investments to rehabilitate, restore, or reconstruct damaged or failing facilities is only worthwhile if the asset can be maintained for its entire lifecycle. For that reason, the LRF targets large and high-priority projects that also have a solid business case for the investment. In several instances, the NPS has leveraged LRF funding to demolish or dispose of unnecessary facilities, further reducing the long-term maintenance burden.