

**EXAMINING BARRIERS TO ACCESS:
ONGOING VISITOR EXPERIENCE ISSUES AT
AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS**

OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
INVESTIGATIONS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON EXAMINING
BARRIERS TO ACCESS: ONGOING VISITOR
EXPERIENCE ISSUES AT AMERICA'S
NATIONAL PARKS**

**Thursday, July 27, 2023
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:39 p.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Paul Gosar [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Gosar, Rosendale, Collins, Westerman; Stansbury, and Lee.

Also present: Representatives LaMalfa, Stauber, Wittman; and Quigley.

Dr. GOSAR. The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will now come to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

The Subcommittee today is meeting to hear testimony on "Examining Barriers to Access: Ongoing Visitor Experience Issues at America's National Parks."

I ask unanimous consent that all Members testifying today be allowed to sit with the Subcommittee, give their testimony, and participate in the hearing from the dais.

I ask that the gentleman from California, Mr. LaMalfa, be allowed to sit with the Subcommittee and participate in the hearing.

I ask that the gentleman from Minnesota, Mr. Stauber, be allowed to sit with the Subcommittee and participate in the hearing.

I ask that the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Wittman, be allowed to sit with the Subcommittee and participate in the hearing.

And I ask that the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Quigley, be allowed to sit with the Subcommittee and participate in the hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member. I therefore ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee Rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

I will now recognize myself for my introductory comments.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. PAUL GOSAR, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA**

Dr. GOSAR. I thank Deputy Director Reynolds for coming before the Subcommittee. We are gathered here to examine the incredible failure of the National Park Service under the Biden administration in carrying out the agency's core mission of both providing access to public lands and conserving those lands for future generations.

And to be clear, I have a lot of respect for the many dedicated, talented Americans working day in and day out in our parks and welcoming visitors every day. My criticisms today are pointing toward the bureaucrats in DC who have steered the agency in the wrong direction.

Over the last several years, the Park Service has received an historic level of investment from the Federal Government and, I should note, the private sector. For years, I have listened to the Service come before this Committee and my friends on the other side of the aisle as well, who mirror one another, "If you give us more money, we will solve these problems."

If I can get one message across today, it is this. Maybe, just maybe, more money isn't the solution.

My friends, I am here to tell you something. Americans continue to love their national parks, as they should, but the management stinks. The lines are longer. The employees continue to not show up for work in person. Bathrooms are dirty, windows are broken, and trails across the country are closed.

The so-called Inflation Reduction Act set aside \$500 million. Yes, that is half a billion dollars to hire staff for the Park Service. Several years ago, Congress passed the Great American Outdoors Act, a pact made in part with the National Park Service, among other management agencies to pay down then the approximately \$13 billion of deferred maintenance backlog.

Today, instead of a growing and thriving workforce, we continue to receive reports of closed trails like the popular White House Overlook Trail and Canyon de Chelly at the National Monument, the only public trail on the south rim, or alerts on an official website to be aware of the illegal traffic or smuggling, as well as the presence of rabies in the park like Coronado National Monument.

Lake Powell has numerous boat launches closed along with the marinas, and convenience stores closed until further notice, which is effectively permanent at this point. The Service has added recreational water advisories to its website, warning visitors not to ingest any of the water at the lake, ostensibly where the same freshwater that millions of Arizonans drink, although it is obviously not filtered first.

Despite the historic and growing levels of investments in our national parks at every level, from employees to critical infrastructure, heck, even to climate change projects, the situation seems to be getting worse for both the visitor and the critters who live in the parks. The entire park system is suffering from mismanagement and, as usual, the American people end up paying for it.

My home state of Arizona, as of September 2022, had over \$1.2 billion in deferred maintenance and repairs across 22 different

park units. This is unacceptable, and ultimately it damages the overall visitor experience and restricts access to America's national parks.

Reducing the deferred maintenance backlog should be our utmost priority, but the record clearly shows that this is not the case. With the deferred maintenance backlog continuing to grow year after year, and the huge increase in the backlog since the National Park Service received over \$1 billion from the Great American Outdoors Act, the Committee expects to hear a concrete plan from you on how the National Park Service can get back on track.

The National Park System infrastructure is in a state of disrepair, with countless examples across the nation of damaged transportation infrastructure cutting off access to whole areas of the National Park System and impacting recreation opportunities, businesses, and the gateway communities that support the parks and outdoor recreation economy.

In 2022, the National Park System recorded over 311 million recreational visits, a 5 percent increase from the year before, with similar visitation numbers expected for this year. As visitors from around our country and the world continue to flock to our national parks, I find it shocking, quite frankly, that the National Park Service isn't doing everything in its power to support the businesses and gateway communities who support these parks.

In my home state of Arizona, as well as a number of other states, I have been discouraged by the Service's efforts to effectively shut down air tours over our parks. These air tours are very critical for those who do not have the physical ability to hike or bike through some of our nation's natural wonders, and at the same time support local economies.

I still believe that with stronger leadership at the National Park Service and working together with Congress, we can get back to the basics and accomplish a lot for the American people. The National Park Service should work with Congress to develop a more active, efficient management strategy for the National Park System that incorporates the best science and technology available in order to increase access to public lands and recreational opportunities for all Americans and to protect these amazing spaces.

I now recognize the Ranking Member for her opening comments.
Ms. Stansbury.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. MELANIE A. STANSBURY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to welcome our Deputy Director, Mr. Reynolds.

Thank you so much for being here with us today.

And I also want to just take a moment to thank all of our Federal employees and our Park Service employees who are out on the ground serving our great country every day and protecting these iconic and beautiful spaces that are so important to our cultural heritage and our ecological integrity.

This is a wonderful and welcome hearing to be here with the Park Service today, and I want to take a moment to just acknowledge what an incredible moment we are living in, historically, in

terms of the transformation of the Park Service. I actually worked at the Office of Management and Budget during the Obama administration, and was involved in oversight of the Department of the Interior. And it is amazing to see, even during the last several years, the transformation within the Park Service and what a difference that great leadership makes.

It is extraordinary to think that the U.S. Department of the Interior is now under the leadership of our nation's very first Indigenous Cabinet Secretary, and that the National Park Service has at its helm our nation's very first Director in Chuck Sams, III. And we are extraordinarily grateful for his leadership and for all of the things that he is doing to help transform the culture within the Park Service, to help tell a more complete history of our nation's beautiful public lands, and his efforts and all of the efforts of the National Park Service to protect these historic and ecologically important places.

Of course, the National Park Service is working to advance equity, to support underserved communities, to tackle the climate crisis, to conserve our natural resources, and to preserve these public spaces and waters for generations to come. The Park Service is indeed making these spaces more accessible to all people and, as I said, telling a more complete history.

And, in fact, as we know, many of our national parks are actually spaces that are formerly Indigenous lands in which our tribes lived, used, hunted, prayed, and used for ceremonial purposes since time immemorial. The Park Service is partnering with our tribal communities and co-stewardship efforts, helping to return sacred places and access to important resources. The Park Service is working with our communities to increase access for underserved communities and, of course, doing the daily activities that they have always done to make sure that we can access those spaces.

But in addition to that, and I do agree with many of the comments that my colleague made about conditions worsening in our national parks, but I would beg to differ that the primary source of that problem is actually rooted in climate change. It is getting hotter. Our ecosystems are degrading. We have less people working in our parks right now because not only a historic pandemic that decimated the Federal workforce, but Donald Trump, who dismantled and made a concerted effort in dismantling our Federal workforce, and forced and pushed many people out of Federal service. So, while there may be challenges that the Park Service has always faced, they have certainly been exacerbated by climate change, by the pandemic, and by a historically bad President who pushed out many of our Federal workers.

But I do want to take a moment to turn to some of the important work that the Park Service is undertaking currently and, in particular, just to use a few moments at the end here to thank the President and to thank our Deputy Director and all of the staff out there for the announcement this week of the President's creation of the Emmett Till and Mamie Till Mobley National Monument.

For those of you that are not familiar with this story, of course, this week would have been the 82nd birthday of Emmett Louis Till, a young Black man from the South who met an untimely death at 14 years old. His mother's refusal to remain silent after the death

and the brutal murder of her son and the open casket of his death are part of what galvanized the civil rights movement and helped to propel it forward. And this is the work that the National Park Service and our President are doing today to make sure that we tell the complete story of this great nation and its sometimes tragic and complicated past.

I am grateful for the President's brave efforts to recognize Emmett and his mother, the signing of that proclamation, and the continued work by the National Park Service to uplift these stories, to create spaces where all Americans see themselves, see their history, and see their future.

With that, I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentlewoman. I just think there is another way of going about things. I think I look through a different lens. Is there something we could see with volunteers, having a national park volunteer system, where we can actually put people to work? I think there are a lot of ways we should be looking at this, not just one way with more money. So, I thank the gentlewoman.

Now I would like to hear from our witness, Mr. Mike Reynolds, the Deputy Director of Congressional and External Relations, National Park Service.

Your 5 minutes are starting. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL T. REYNOLDS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
FOR CONGRESSIONAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS,
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE
INTERIOR, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. REYNOLDS. Thank you, Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on the visitor experience at national parks.

The National Park Service is honored to care for all parks on behalf of the American people, and to welcome them to experience the wonders of their National Park System. The NPS seeks to provide outstanding experiences for all visitors, while upholding our mandate to conserve each park's resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

Significant investments from the Great American Outdoors Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and recent disaster supplemental appropriations have allowed the NPS to address critical needs in our national parks and enhance the visitor experience. Yet, the NPS faces many of the same challenges and constraints that other government agencies, towns, and businesses face across the country, whether due to natural disasters, public safety, seasonal wildlife protection, or infrastructure improvements, certain areas of national parks may be closed out of necessity. Our goal is to re-establish access as soon as possible and where feasible, or provide alternatives where closures are permanent.

Park resources and facilities can be impacted by natural events such as hurricanes, flooding, drought, wildfires, leaving them inaccessible to visitors. There are also times when areas may be closed to protect wildlife or culturally significant artifacts. Closures

or limited hours of visitor facilities may occur due to staffing shortages, as our existing staff is spread more thinly than in years past.

The NPS is grateful for the \$500 million that Congress provided in the Inflation Reduction Act to hire employees. However, this will not fully or permanently restore lost capacity. As we welcome visitors to their national parks this summer and beyond, we encourage visitors to check our website, [nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov), to make sure the areas that they hope to see are open and accessible.

Visitors expect to find high-quality facilities which enable a safe and memorable experience, yet many of the roads, trails, restrooms, and facilities in national parks are aging and strained by underfunding for the use that they were not designed to support that we get now. We are grateful to Congress for the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act to address deferred maintenance. This much-needed funding infusion has helped us make meaningful progress in improving the condition of high-priority assets.

While projects are underway, temporary closures will typically be required as we work to improve the facilities for visitors. Incidental road trail and facility closures in individual national parks have not resulted in significant reduction in total visitation across the National Park Service. Park facilities and staffing levels are challenged to keep pace with ever-increasing visitation.

The NPS is employing a range of park-specific strategies to provide a welcoming and enjoyable environment while ensuring the protection of nationally significant resources. We have long managed access in backcountry areas by issuing trailhead and overnight permits, and as we test new ideas and planning tools we are conducting robust public and stakeholder engagement before committing to long-term implementation.

Congestion can result in gridlock, visitor conflicts, safety issues, resource damage, and delays in emergency response. Timed entry systems spread visitation throughout the day, reduce lines at entrance stations and parking lots, and avoid impacts on resources. These systems allow visitors to better plan and have more enjoyable experiences, while often having the added benefit of expanding the economic benefits of parks to more local businesses and area attractions.

The NPS wants visitors to have high-quality experiences wherever they go in the National Park System. The NPS is committed to finding innovative solutions, collaborating with communities, and making responsible choices to ensure future generations can enjoy and be inspired by the parks entrusted to our care. We appreciate your ongoing support as we endeavor to achieve these goals.

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, thank you again for this opportunity to appear today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Reynolds follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHAEL T. REYNOLDS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR CONGRESSIONAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on the visitor experience at national parks.

National parks are among the most remarkable places in America for recreation, learning, and inspiration. These special places belong to all Americans. The National Park Service (NPS) is honored to care for all parks on behalf of the American people and to welcome them to experience the wonders of their National Park System. We also welcome international visitors, in keeping with our commitment to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout the world.

Visitor enjoyment is a critical part of the NPS mission. The NPS seeks to provide outstanding experiences for all visitors while upholding our mandate to conserve unimpaired each park's natural and cultural resources for the benefit of present and future generations. Fulfilling our mission and ensuring positive visitor experiences is the work of our 20,000 employees and thousands of volunteers, interns, fellows, and partners who are the heart of our agency. I want to acknowledge their accomplishments and thank them for their dedication.

Significant investments from the Great American Outdoors Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and recent emergency disaster supplemental appropriations have allowed the NPS to address critical needs in our national parks and enhance or recover the visitor experience. Yet, the NPS faces many of the same challenges and constraints that other federal agencies, cities, towns, organizations, and businesses face across the country. We rise to meet these challenges and work daily to sustain these remarkable places that the American people have entrusted to us. Indeed, many countries look to our leadership and to us as the model park system.

Responding to Road, Trail, & Facility Closures

Whether due to natural disasters, significant weather events, public safety, seasonal wildlife protection, or infrastructure improvements, certain areas in national parks may be closed out of necessity. Our goal is to reestablish access as soon as possible where feasible or provide alternatives where closures are long-term or permanent.

In years with heavy snowfall, mountain roads and facilities open later than they might in an average year. Deeper snowpacks provide needed drought relief but also require more time to clear. This past winter and spring, for example, the Tuolumne River basin in Yosemite National Park received 250% more snow than average. Crews and equipment worked exceptionally hard this year to clear Tioga Road while maintaining safety in avalanche hazard areas. The North Rim of Grand Canyon National Park saw over 250 inches of snow this past winter and reopened to visitors in early June with water conservation measures in place while the park repaired a break to the water infrastructure.

Floods impact parks across the country every year. Notably, in Yellowstone National Park last year, record flooding events washed out portions of two major roadways, leaving the park headquarters and the park community of Mammoth Hot Springs isolated. The NPS and its partners worked quickly to ensure the safety of visitors, employees, and community residents, and to restore damaged roads, water and wastewater systems, power lines, and other critical park infrastructure. The park rapidly reopened areas when it was safe to do so and over 90% of the park was reopened just a couple weeks after the flood event. Thanks to the strong partnership with the Federal Highway Administration, the agencies were able to reestablish access for Yellowstone National Park visitors, employees, and gateway communities in under five months. It would not have been possible without the tremendous support from the Congressional delegations, governors, counties, communities, and other partners.

Increased winter snowpack and spring rain have improved conditions slightly at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and Lake Mead National Recreation Area, but declining water levels due to climate change and over 20 years of ongoing drought have reshaped these parks' shorelines. As Lake Powell and Lake Mead continue to recede, extending launch ramps and other infrastructure becomes more difficult and more expensive due to the topography and projected decline in water levels. The NPS recognizes the important role that launch ramps and marinas play in the economies of gateway communities and the numerous businesses that operate in and around both parks. Our commitment to understanding the impacts of climate change on park resources, infrastructure, operations, and visitor experiences is central to ensuring the safe, responsible, and long-term use and enjoyment of all the parks have to offer.

We know one year of heavy snowpack alone will not sustain lake access into the future. To prepare for the possibility of continued rapid water level decline, Lake Mead National Recreation Area is preparing a Sustainable Low Water Access Plan, which is currently open for public comment. The NPS looks forward to the next

phase of public and stakeholder feedback and engagement to develop a responsible and feasible plan to preserve both motorized and primitive recreational boating access to the lake.

Besides heavy snow and ice, flooding, and drought, events that can damage park resources and facilities and leave them inaccessible to visitors include hurricanes, landslides, rockfalls, structural fires, wildfires, and beach erosion. The NPS appreciates the support of Congress in providing recent emergency supplemental appropriations to recover from the consequences of these disasters, but notes that these funds do not support proactive investments in infrastructure hardening or resiliency at a portfolio scale.

The protection of natural and cultural resources is core to the NPS' legislative mandate. There are times when an area may be closed to visitor use to protect wildlife or culturally significant artifacts. In the spring, certain trails or rock-climbing routes may be closed to protect nesting peregrine falcons, such as at Joshua Tree National Park, Zion National Park, and Acadia National Park. At national seashores, certain dunes and beach areas may be closed to protect piping plovers or sea turtles from disturbance during vulnerable nesting periods. These federally threatened and endangered species are an integral part of what makes these places special and national seashores provide critical habitat for their survival.

Closures or limited hours of visitor facilities due to staffing shortages is another access issue the NPS is working to address. Our existing staff is spread more thinly than in years past. Between FY 2011 and FY 2022, the total number of NPS full-time employees decreased by approximately 3,400 or 15%. Capacity requirements of the NPS have increased significantly as Congress has authorized new parks and programs, as well as expansions of existing parks. The NPS is grateful for the \$500 million available through FY 2030 that Congress provided in the Inflation Reduction Act to hire employees in the national park system; however, this will not fully or permanently restore lost capacity.

Other factors also complicate this issue, including how NPS pay, benefits, and work environment compares to that in the local area. The NPS typically tries to hire approximately 7,000 seasonal positions annually to fill critical roles across the National Park System during the heaviest periods of visitation. The NPS is committed to using all available hiring authorities and pursuing strategic workforce planning and recruiting to fill these and other positions. In many parks, housing availability or affordability in the local area challenges their ability to recruit or retain employees. The FY 2024 President's Budget Request for the NPS includes an increase of \$7.0 million, for a total of \$14.9 million, to support improving the condition or quantity of park housing units.

As we continue to welcome visitors to their national parks this summer and beyond, we strongly recommend they "Plan Like a Park Ranger" so that the only surprises are happy ones. A park visit begins with a trip to NPS.gov for ideas about where to go, what to see, and most important, to make sure that the areas visitors hope to see are open and accessible. Information about current conditions and timelines for facilities reopening can be found on each park's website and social media platforms. The NPS provides advance notice, when possible, of anticipated closures. We appreciate visitors' understanding and ask that they be prepared to adapt their plans, slow down on roadways, expect delays, and pack their patience.

Making Progress on Improving Facilities

When Americans visit their parks, they expect to find high-quality facilities which enable a safe and memorable experience. Many of the roads, trails, restrooms, water treatment systems, and visitor and operational facilities in national parks are aging, obsolete, and strained by underfunding and use they were not designed to support. We are grateful to Congress for passage of the Great American Outdoors Act which established the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) to address the Department's deferred maintenance and repair backlog. The NPS is using this investment to accomplish much-needed asset maintenance, repairs, and replacement. Improved facilities will be more resilient, operate more efficiently, and better serve visitors. The NPS has prioritized 130 LRF projects that will improve the condition of roads, buildings, utility systems, and other assets in 176 parks located in 48 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. While projects are underway, temporary closures will typically be required as we work to improve facilities for visitors.

Hot Springs National Park received \$16.7 million of LRF funding for roof repairs to the Buckstaff Bathhouse and structural and systems upgrades to the Maurice Bathhouse and the former Libbey Memorial Physical Medicine Center. These essential repairs include structural improvements and upgrades to electrical, plumbing,

and fire suppression systems, which will provide employees and visitors with more accessible, safe, and energy-efficient facilities.

Several miles of the Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park will undergo rehabilitation as part of a \$17.1 million LRF project. Work will include replacement of the current multi-span McDonald Creek Bridge with a clear-span bridge. The project also entails curve widening, milling, and repaving of the road segment, along with installing conduit for future fiber lines.

At the North Rim of Grand Canyon National Park, water system improvements are part of a planned \$180.1 million LRF project. The improvements would address frequent failures with extended periods of service outages and would result in a reliable water system to meet supply needs at the North Rim and in the cross-canyon corridor for a projected life span of up to 75 years. Feedback received during the public comment period will be used to refine the project proposal.

Tuolumne Meadows Campground in Yosemite National Park will receive a major overhaul with \$26.1 million in LRF funding. The project will rehabilitate and modernize the park's largest campground, which hosts more than 150,000 campers annually and which was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. The work will enhance the visitor experience, fix structures damaged from heavy snowfall, and repair aging, inefficient infrastructure.

At Lyndon B. Johnson National Historic Site, a \$9.1 million LRF project will address repair work, structural concerns, code deficiencies, and deterioration of historic features in the Texas White House and the surrounding site. The work will ensure the long-term integrity of a critical park resource and allow it to be reopened to the public. The nearby communications building will be repurposed to provide essential restroom facilities and expand visitor amenities.

The much-needed funding infusion from the LRF program has helped us make meaningful progress in improving the condition of high-priority assets, yet there remains an ongoing need for long-term maintenance, modernization, renewal, strategic evaluation of low-priority assets, and operations support. We recognize, even with this significant investment, the NPS has more assets than staff and funding to adequately operate and maintain them.

The impact of appropriations for park facilities is measured in decades; therefore, it is critical that we adopt a sustainable mindset and business model that considers fiscal and staffing limitations for resource allocation to ensure the preservation and accessibility of our cherished national parks. That includes making strategic choices like decommissioning, closing, or removing lower priority structures. This will allow us to allocate funds and staff to protect priority resources while creating meaningful experiences for visitors that will be enjoyed by future generations.

We will continue to seek funding through line item construction, Federal Highways, and other programs, to ensure facilities, including roads, trails, and natural and cultural resources are properly maintained and improved to meet code compliance for safety, sustainability, and accessibility for people with disabilities, and to meet current and future capacity needs.

The President's budget request for the NPS for FY 2024 is \$3.8 billion. This request makes bold investments essential for the NPS's continued mission success in its second century while remaining committed to the daily mission of ensuring that the American public continues to have an enriching experience at each site.

Addressing High Visitation and Enhancing the Visitor Experience

Incidental road, trail, and facility closures in individual national parks have not resulted in a significant reduction in total visitation across the national park system. In FY 2022, the NPS received 312 million recreation visits, up 15 million visits (5%) from FY 2021, which is nearly at pre-pandemic levels. Visitors may experience congestion at popular parks and at attraction hotspots and where entries and exits are limited. Crowding can also be felt at the most popular scenic viewpoints that are within one-quarter mile of a parking lot.

For some parks, providing great experiences has become more challenging due to increases in the number of people visiting, changes to when and how visitors arrive, and evolving visitor needs and expectations, including how visitors want to engage in the parks. Some parks are finding the level of visitor demand to be significantly outpacing their ability to accommodate, resulting in the need to explore new management strategies. Park facilities and staffing levels are challenged to keep pace with this changing visitation, impacting the quality of the visitor experience, health and safety, and resource protection. These visitation changes are also felt outside park boundaries in adjacent lands, waters, and communities.

The NPS is employing a range of park-specific strategies to provide a welcoming and enjoyable environment while ensuring the protection of nationally significant resources. In addition to using pilot projects and flexible planning tools to test ideas,

we are conducting robust public and stakeholder engagement before committing to long-term implementation. Over the next few months, our expanded social science research will also provide us with visitor information at the park and bureau levels for visitor experience planning. The data will also enable the NPS to facilitate strategies to provide for more inclusive, diverse, and equitable visitation.

Some strategies for managing use have been employed for decades. The NPS has long managed access in backcountry areas and wilderness, for example, by issuing trailhead and overnight permits. Permit systems for remote backcountry locations have helped preserve the qualities of solitude and minimize resource impacts.

To address vehicular congestion, the NPS has invested in multimodal transportation options such as shuttles and multi-use paths where biking and walking are encouraged. We also strategically support the use of ride-hailing applications and micromobility options such as scooters, e-bikes, and bike-share where appropriate.

Other managed access strategies, such as reservation and timed entry systems, are now in place or have been piloted at several parks, with each addressing specific park-level issues. Congestion can result in gridlock, visitor conflicts, crowding, safety issues, resource damage, and, of particular concern, delays in emergency response. Managed access strategies are intended to address the amount, type, and timing of access to an area to ensure desired conditions are met for high-quality visitor experiences and resource protection. For example, reservation systems spread visitation throughout the day, reduce queuing at entrance stations and parking lots, and avoid the cascading impacts on resource conditions, operational capacity, and visitor experience. These systems allow visitors to better plan and have more enjoyable experiences, while often having the added benefit of expanding the economic benefits of parks to more local businesses and area attractions that have historically seen less use.

Comprehensive, reliable, and accessible traveler information plays an important role in enhancing recreational access to parks. The NPS is working on several technological advances that will improve the visitor experience in parks through enhanced trip-planning tools. In FY 2023 and FY 2024, the NPS Transportation Planning Program and Federal Highways Administration Innovation and Research Council have funded a \$500,000 research project to develop a recreational travel forecasting tool to be applied across a range of parks to assist visitors in advanced trip planning by informing them of where and when congestion occurs. Pilot tool development will occur at approximately 10 different parks of varying types. Meanwhile, expansion of wireless service coverage along transportation corridors would ensure visitors have increased access to these travel tools.

Recreation.gov provides reservation and trip planning capabilities and features more than 110,000 individual sites and activities across 4,000 recreation areas. The platform offers expanded features to improve the customer experience through visitor mapping and trip planning tools that allow visitors to discover locations and activities new to them, especially when their chosen sites are already reserved. The Recreation.gov mobile app offers visitors the convenience of making and managing reservations on the go.

The NPS mobile app is another helpful tool visitors to national parks can use to assist them in their trip planning. The app ensures visitors have access to the most current information about the parks they visit. It currently offers interactive maps, tours, accessibility information, and more. The app is built to be used even in remote parks, where internet access may be limited by allowing visitors to download information to their phones in advance.

The NPS wants visitors to have a high-quality experience everywhere they go in the National Park System. National parks are working to offer new ways for people to receive timely information to better plan and enjoy their trips. We cannot meet these challenges alone. The NPS is committed to collaborating with local communities, businesses, and nonprofit partners to find solutions that improve the quality and diversity of visitor experiences, address crowding and congestion in a thoughtful way, and maintain the tremendous range of benefits that national parks provide. Given the iconic and finite nature of these highly valued places, along with the complexity of providing inclusive and high-quality visitor opportunities, creativity, active collaboration, and shared responsibility will be essential for ensuring sustainable and effective strategies.

Enjoyment of our parks and park resources by Americans and international visitors is a fundamental purpose of all national parks. We may face many challenges, but the NPS is committed to finding innovative solutions, and making responsible choices to ensure future generations can enjoy and be inspired by the parks entrusted to our care. We appreciate your ongoing support as we endeavor to achieve these goals.

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO MICHAEL REYNOLDS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR CONGRESSIONAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Mr. Reynolds did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Questions Submitted by Representative Westerman

Question 1. An efficient, timely contracting process is important to maintaining the continuity of visitor services and high-quality visitor experiences in our National Parks. We understand that concession contract award decisions and announcements are often taking longer than anticipated, with extended periods between the submission of proposals and selection decisions and announcements.

1a) Please identify and explain any factors that are contributing to the length of concession contract award processes and any delays in those processes, including specifically for time periods after offers have been submitted.

1b) Please provide the Committee information on the duration of contracting processes for concession contracts, including specifically identifying amounts of time between proposal due dates and the selection announcements.

1c) In these processes, how much have the actual time periods between proposal due dates and selection announcements differed from the projected time periods between those milestones?

Questions Submitted by Representative Gosar

Question 1. The National Park Service has an active lease with Oregon Inlet Marinas, LLC (Lessee) in the Bodie Island District of Cape Hatteras National Seashore, the term of which is 20 years, currently set to expire on December 31, 2038. It has come to my attention that the Lessee has an interest in extending the term of the lease, and all parties are currently satisfied with the performance of the Lessee. In addition, the Lessee is interested in providing additional capital improvements to the property, which would be mutually beneficial to both the Lessee and the National Park Service. However, the local superintendent has stated that he does not have the authority to extend the current lease, despite the fact that leases, in a number of cases, have been granted for up to 60 years within the National Park System. Please provide a detailed explanation for any reason the lease may not be currently eligible for an extension, as well as options for working with NPS and the Lessee to find a mutually beneficial path forward.

Questions Submitted by Representative Collins

Question 1. How is the National Parks system currently using public-private partnerships, with both community organizations and private businesses, to address their maintenance backlog?

Question 2. What are the biggest barriers to expanding the use of public-private partnerships for maintenance within the National Park System?

Question 3. What can be done to streamline the approval process for individuals who would like to repair a picnic table or trail shelter for example in one of their local National Parks?

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you very much for your testimony, Mr. Reynolds.

We will now go to our Members for 5 minutes, and the first one out of the gate is Mr. LaMalfa from California.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate being able to sit in on the Committee today.

Director Reynolds, thank you for your time in addressing us here. In my own district, and there might be an example of others around the country, as well, but we have Lassen National Park there, the volcano. And what we find is that the phone lines have been down for quite a while, at least April, perhaps longer. And that is not to be unexpected from the amount of snow we had this year and such, that there would be issues like that. What we have is there is no other phone number listed on the park's website that is working or available, even including the fire and law enforcement, except for 911.

So, the only option available for visitors to inquire is through email, which, you know, the email response is, "We will get back to you ASAP," so we have been getting some dissatisfaction from our constituents on that. How can we improve? Because I can't imagine this is really making a positive experience for our folks there, with just that level of communications. And then take that into what it means for public safety, as well, if you would.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Is that a question, sir?

Mr. LAMALFA. Well, I mean, do you believe that is going to be a positive experience for people to not be able to have really timely communication as we are here in the summer season, and, you know, "Beach Boys all summer long," or almost.

And then what about the public safety concerns for those that you really can't communicate with them in real time?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes. Thank you, sir, for bringing that to our attention. I will personally reach out to the superintendent and find out what the status is of their phone systems.

We pride ourselves on our interpretive rangers, our facilities, our 800-plus visitor centers throughout the System, we try to be open, as I mentioned in my testimony, for a high-quality experience. So, there must be something uniquely happening around Lassen.

To your point, their winter was severe this year, and I know they had trouble opening roads and getting facilities online. We will double check on that, but I wasn't aware that the phone lines were that impacted.

Mr. LAMALFA. I mean, does this underline, though, a public safety concern if there is really no live communications there for them?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Well, the rangers are, as you know, on radio dispatch 24/7, in contact with locals, and I would think they have mitigated those. But yes, we would want to make sure that 911 and any phone system is there.

Mr. LAMALFA. Do you have a system of oversight that should be catching this sort of thing so that there is not a long lag?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, we do. Our regional directors are our accountable folks that have to make sure the superintendents are adhering to these things, and we can double check with those folks and report back to you all.

Mr. LAMALFA. OK, all right. And in the park near Whiskeytown, we had what was known as the Carr Fire back in 2018, 5 years ago. There are three really good hikes that are available in that

area, and two of the most popular trails remain closed still 5 years later.

And the kicker is that neither one of them was in a real severe burn area of that park. There wasn't that big of an effect on those by what the fire did. So, do they evaluate the timeliness of that, and then the superintendent there, do they evaluate the ability of the superintendent to efficiently reopen a park like that?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, there would be an evaluation. This will be something else we can follow up on in terms of status for you. I know that park—well, you know better in your district—was really impacted by the Carr Fire, almost everything, facilities, roads, trails. So, they were replacing facilities over the last couple of years, and the trails may be in somewhat of a priority that we can identify for you when they are going to be completed and/or reopened.

Mr. LAMALFA. I mean, 5 years, though, that is quite a milestone in the amount of time for having two of the main trails still not available.

Whiskeytown, during and after COVID, it did have a record amount of visitation, but they were forced to use only a handful of the trails. So, we have to do better on that time-wise. We know when the trails are left unused for years, not maintained, and they become overgrown, then that just more than quadruples the cost of the work it takes to re-establish them.

We have a lot of volunteers out there that want to help, that want to do this, and be part of it. How can we have more local partnerships and more folks that can be engaged in this, and not find closed doors or closed gates in order to help?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, we are very fortunate to have nearly a half million volunteers throughout the NPS system. So, I can only imagine that that park has those relationships, and are leveraging them. And this would be something else that we could check on.

Mr. LAMALFA. But they are finding frustration in not being allowed to do that timely, again, we are 5 years in.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Well, that would be something that we would be happy to check in on and ask why there is a roadblock to using, we use volunteers a lot, particularly for trail building, particularly for resource help, perhaps replanting trees.

Mr. LAMALFA. Yes, it is a beautiful thing, so we need to take advantage of it. If there is an issue at the local level, we need to know and if it is individuals that are somehow roadblocking it, then we need to change that.

I have to yield back. Thank you, sir.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, I appreciate it.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. The gentlelady from Nevada, Ms. Lee, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, thank you, Ranking Member Stansbury, and it is nice to see you, Mr. Reynolds, thank you for your work.

When the President established Avi Kwa Ame National Monument earlier this year in my district, he directed the Department of the Interior to evaluate opportunities to locate a visitor center or other visitor information facilities. He also specified that the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management

shall manage the monument cooperatively, with NPS retaining primary authority over the portion of the monument within the Lake Mead National Recreation Area.

Could you please update us on the status of the Park Service's work with the BLM to prepare an agreement to share whatever resources are necessary to manage the monument?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, thank you for bringing that up, and we are so proud to be a part of your district now with this new monument.

We started off the first thing with a new cooperative agreement where we invited the tribes to the table. And that process is underway, as you know. We are having planning conversations with BLM about locating facilities, about how we are going to be working together in this kind of partnership approach.

And I don't have the fine details on deadlines, but we can easily make a phone call back to you to make sure you are updated.

Ms. LEE. Yes, that would be great, thank you.

Mr. REYNOLDS. But you haven't missed anything. We are just getting everybody's feet on the ground, but particularly consulting with the tribes because of the very unique nature of this site, as you know, and leveraging Lake Mead and the other existing parks around to help us get things up and running.

Ms. LEE. Absolutely. With respect to the visitor center, other facilities, to what extent is the Park Service involved in the development, and do you have any idea of potential location? Is there any discussion of areas where you are looking at?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I am not aware of that, and I apologize that I wouldn't know exactly. But I do know that most of that area was intended to be managed as wilderness, so there are probably a few places that they have already pre-identified. BLM will have a lot of lead on some of that is my understanding, but we are going to be active participants in the cooperative selection of that and development of it.

Ms. LEE. I would love a follow-up on the status. That would be great.

Mr. REYNOLDS. We will do that.

Ms. LEE. Thank you. Also, I want to talk about the Lake Mead National Recreation Area. Quite like Mr. Gosar's statement with Lake Powell, we have witnessed many closures of boat ramps over the past year.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes.

Ms. LEE. In fact, at this time last year there was only one remaining boat launch open. And now, given the banner snowpacks in the West, things have turned around entirely with all of the boat ramp launches open, at least partially reopened, with the sole exception of Boulder Harbor.

How long does the Park Service anticipate conditions will allow these to remain open, do you have any idea?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Well, this is the hard part, right, with climate change. We are so fortunate this year that the water levels are high. We are engaged in a low-water planning process that your office, I know, has also engaged with us about, as well as your constituents. And we are also awaiting, I believe, a Bureau of Reclamation study or EIS on water management that will help us understand the long-term predictability.

But I will assure you that we are very committed to being there, to providing recreation, to keeping as many of these as we can.

The disaster supplemental has been extremely helpful in getting, as you mentioned, some of the other boat ramps reopened, and that is what we are planning in the future as these studies kind of come together, how we prioritize and how we can design them to basically flow with the water, if you will, up and down the shore.

Ms. LEE. Yes, with Lake Mead being one of the most visited National Recreation Areas in the country, it was quite, let's just say, very disruptive to our economy and our community.

In fact, I am aware that many of your excellent front-line staff members bore the brunt of many people's frustration, and were unfairly burdened with that. So, what are you doing to better manage expectations moving forward, and how can we help with that to protect your front-line workers?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, first of all, thank you to you and your staff's help and support, both funding politically, and just in our communications. But what we can do is keep you at the table, and the leadership in the community, as well.

We really encourage people to be checking those websites, which I know sounds like a simple thing, but we are upgrading our ability to really give much more real-time information. The park leadership is strengthening, and right now we have a very good person there that is leading a team that is very focused on this. So, they will be even more transparent, I guess you can say, about the day-to-day operations, particularly the way things change fast at Lake Mead.

Ms. LEE. Absolutely. Well, thank you, and we look forward to working with you.

And having been through the process of closing, I hope we can work together to prevent that, should the drought continue in that manner in the future. Thank you.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Right. Enjoy this year. Thanks for mentioning the staff.

Dr. GOSAR. We are going to go to the gentleman from Minnesota, and then we are going to take a little short recess. They called votes.

So, Mr. Stauber, you are recognized.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and Ranking Member Stansbury, for holding this hearing, as well as allowing me the opportunity to waive on.

Minnesota's 8th Congressional District is home to some of the most beautiful landscapes you can find in our country. It is home to two very important properties in the National Park System, Voyageurs National Park and the Grand Portage National Monument.

Voyageurs National Park is a crown jewel in our National Park System that showcases our iconic northern Minnesota landscapes. Each year thousands enjoy the outdoor recreation opportunities that exist in every season, and Voyageurs National Park is also unique within the National Park System, as it is largely made up of lakes, streams, and wetlands, rather than land.

Deputy Director Reynolds, first off, thanks for your support and service to our National Park Systems throughout your career. I

appreciate that. I want to ask you something. To whom do our national parks belong to?

Mr. REYNOLDS. The people, right?

Mr. STAUBER. Do you believe our national parks and the National Park System policies that govern these parks should serve the best interests of the American people?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Of course.

Mr. STAUBER. Do you believe the policies that govern our national parks should enable or limit access for Americans?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Well, I think the policies need to follow the law for what the park was set up to do, and to meet the mission of the Organic Act, which is to provide for future generations for enjoyment, right? We have the word "enjoyment" in the Organic Act.

Mr. STAUBER. I can't read between the lines. Do you believe the policies that govern our national parks should enable or limit access for Americans?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I think that we should be able to have parks open and as accessible as possible.

Mr. STAUBER. I agree.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Within the law.

Mr. STAUBER. I agree. I have, unfortunately, heard time and time again from my constituents that the National Park Service's policies in Voyageurs National Park, along with other parks around this country, limit their use and enjoyment of these incredible resources. The policies in place hinder our way of life in northern Minnesota, and limit our ability to recreate responsibly in the lands and waters at Voyageurs.

This April, the National Park Service proposed a frozen lake surface access and use plan for Voyageurs National Park, which does not have the best interest of my constituents, and it impedes their access to this sacred public space that they have enjoyed for decades. I have heard from many constituents who are angry, upset, and frustrated about the plan as written, and I stand with the constituents.

The proposed plan, as written, would block how my constituents have responsibly recreated in the park for many, many years, limiting access to the park via snowmobiles, tracked ATVs, or small SUVs outfitted with tracks.

As you just stated, the National Park Service policy should enable and expand access, not limit it. I fear that this proposed plan is simply an attempt by this Administration to keep our public lands off limits. I have a couple of questions.

The public comment period on the frozen use plan at Voyageurs National Park closed on June 3. When does the National Park Service plan to finalize its plan?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I will follow up with a date because I actually don't know that, just to be honest with you. But I do know that if it was just June 3, it is a few months for the staff and the contractor, whatever. So, we will make sure that Voyagers is telling everybody what their status is.

Mr. STAUBER. Fair enough. Thank you.

Mr. REYNOLDS. But I think you haven't missed anything yet.

Mr. STAUBER. I appreciate that. Will a final plan go into effect before this upcoming winter?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I will also confirm that. But I would guess that you are cutting it pretty close, and we would need more time than that. But we will talk to the park and—

Mr. STAUBER. Can you commit that the Park Service plan will not limit access to my constituents?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I don't know those particulars. I do know that there are safety concerns that the park was concerned about, you know, the weight of certain vehicles, or where the vehicles could go. But I don't think that there was a particular stance taken on prevention.

Mr. STAUBER. OK. With the last 30 seconds, I respectfully request that you provide a full response back to this Committee in writing, as you just alluded to, and I appreciate that.

Our northern Minnesota economy is largely based on outdoor tourism, and the recreational multi-use of our public lands and waters at Voyageurs National Park has been an economic driver for our communities for decades. I will continue to do all that I can to ensure it remains that way, and access is available for the folks.

I look forward to receiving your full and complete response to these questions, and I implore you to respect the desires of the constituents that I serve, and ensure the finalized frozen use plan at Voyageurs National Park does not limit our access to recreate within the park, and it supports our way of life.

I yield back, thank you.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Thank you for bringing it up.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman, the Ranking Member from Illinois, Mr. Quigley, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. QUIGLEY. This morning I wasn't on the Committee, and I am now the acting Ranking Member. What a country.

[Laughter.]

Mr. QUIGLEY. Director, thank you for your service. Let me ask you a few quick questions. Volunteers are great. They do an amazing job. But there are limits of what they can do, correct, working in the parks?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes.

Mr. QUIGLEY. And they have to be managed, as well, with hired personnel, correct?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, for safety reasons.

Mr. QUIGLEY. So, let's talk just for a minute about the problems with retaining and obtaining personnel. I have been to the national park tours that I led in the last 8 years. One of the things that I would talk to you a lot about is housing, right? And given the proposed cuts that we are talking about in appropriation bills, this can only exacerbate the problem.

Can you tell us a little bit about why the housing crunch among workers is an issue, and how serious a problem it is?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, Congressman, thanks for bringing that up. I really appreciate it. It is probably one of the No. 1 worries and concerns coming to us from park employees and our superintendents.

Part of it is what is happening in the nation, there are general housing shortages everywhere, probably in some of your communities, as well, or affordability issues if they are on the market. And that is what we are experiencing. Many of our parks are in

beautiful places that people want to live in, so the housing shortage and/or affordability is what is impacting us.

We have about \$7 million geared toward housing with some requests, I think, to bump that up to \$14 million in the coming years to try to really invest in developing either housing or some agreements with private-sector for housing. That is something else we are interested in: leasing. We are trying to reinvest in our housing allotment or convert buildings to housing as we can. Or, as I mentioned, I am thinking of a couple of parks that are working on something with the local community.

Mr. QUIGLEY. But it is an issue for retaining and obtaining new personnel to do all the things we are talking about, including access to the parks.

Mr. REYNOLDS. That is right.

Mr. QUIGLEY. I was in Denali on one of these climate tours recently, and there is no access to half the park because of a landslide taking out the only road there. I appreciate and respect that we are very concerned about access to our national parks, but the problem up there is the permafrost is melting, the land is moving much, much faster than it was. We are talking 15.5 inches a day. No road can withstand that. This is all because of the aspects and reactions to climate change.

So, if you can, reference what other issues involving climate change affect access, safety, and the cost of running the national parks.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, it is getting more complicated. We are seeing increased fires, which we have all experienced the smoke from our neighbors to the north this year in Canada. We are seeing sea level rise or we are seeing storms that are strange, right? There are heavier rains than we have seen in certain locations, or windstorms and damage. So, yes, costs are definitely impacted.

The disaster supplementals, as you showed in the chart, are going up each year as we deal with either drought in the West, or an overabundance of water in the East, or a storm impact. And what you are describing at Pretty Rocks is a geologic phenomena that we are struggling with.

Mr. QUIGLEY. And a \$100 million bridge to get to half the park.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, very, very expensive, but as you say, it is a huge park, and there is only one way in and one way out, as they say.

Mr. QUIGLEY. Sure. And access generally, not talking about one particular park, you mentioned reasons why there might be limited access to areas of our national parks. Safety is certainly one of them. I would imagine that areas that are being restored, or particularly sensitive and fragile, for lack of a better word, are protected and limited access, at the very least, to give them a break and a chance to restore themselves. And because, as you said, it is not just the weight of some vehicles, it is the destructive capabilities of those vehicles in areas that are particularly fragile.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, thank you. And we pride ourselves on working as hard as we can, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, to maintain the use and aspect and enjoyment of parks. But we also equally are supposed to be preserving them, and conserving them for future generations. So, sometimes management decisions are

made. That is often why certain permits in the backcountry might limit how many people per day we allow in a certain area, because they have measured it through science with trampling or loss of vegetation, things like that.

And some of those things adjust, but superintendents, as a general rule, try to not block off entire portions of parks.

Mr. QUIGLEY. And issues with access to the parks, just how much of that do you think is related to shortages in personnel?

Mr. REYNOLDS. We are managing with what we have, but we are down about 15 percent in the last numbers I saw from a few years ago. Since 2011, I think, we are down about 15 percent.

Mr. QUIGLEY. What I am hearing is that there are not people who can man the front gate in some cases.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, as with many American companies and/or government agencies, we don't have as many applicants for certain jobs. There is a lot of competition. We have a recruitment team now that the Park Service didn't used to have that is working really hard to find really smart, capable, diverse people to get back out there.

Mr. QUIGLEY. Thank you, sir.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Thank you.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Reynolds, would you be able to stay for a little while?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Sure.

Dr. GOSAR. We are going to take a quick recess. There are 105 votes left, so I will be back.

Mr. REYNOLDS. See you soon.

[Recess.]

Dr. GOSAR. The Subcommittee will resume. The gentlelady from New Mexico is recognized for her 5 minutes.

Ms. STANSBURY. All right. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think it is worth noting for the public, since we are back here, that the reason we had to go recess is actually because the Majority could not succeed in passing an appropriations bill, so they just brought a CRA to the floor to try to wipe out two endangered species, including bats and the lesser prairie chicken. So, it is unfortunate that this is the state of our nation and affairs, but here we are, on the last day of voting before recess.

Mr. Reynolds, we do so appreciate you being here today. I would like to ask a few questions about climate change, about the current challenges that the Park Service is facing generally, about tribal co-management, and about how you are using the Inflation Reduction Act funds.

But I wonder, sort of big picture, could you talk to us a little bit about what do you see as some of the biggest challenges right now that the Park Service is facing, and how can we here in Congress help address that?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Thank you for that question.

I mentioned housing, which is in a broader category of one of our No. 1 priorities. The director's No. 1 priority is a thriving workforce. So, I think any suggestions that you either hear from constituents or our employees that come to you, we would be all ears. We are trying to empower, diversify, provide housing, as we discussed earlier, before the break, and try to deal with workloads,

which have been something that comes back in our employee viewpoint surveys.

The other thing that we are very focused on is climate and the impacts, but also being able to maintain good visitor experiences as the environments are changing, right? So, it factors into our GAOA investments. And it is a question, if you will, in design review, as is accessibility and things like that.

The other I would say this way. The love and use of our parks, I am trying to come up with a term that is not "overcrowding," but we have this very strange dilemma in that many parks are exceeding, as I am sure you are aware, record-breaking visitation, places like Zion National Park, and yet there are 426 units in the National Park System now, some of which are under-utilized. So, we are also very focused on how to steer the American people to, as you said earlier, the full American story, which is represented in the System.

So, I think dealing with how to have a quality visitor experience and take care of the resource in these very heavily-visited places, how to get folks to really understand their parks is another one.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you. Yes, and certainly I know in New Mexico we struggle with that challenge. There is a double-edged sword in that having that Federal recognition and protection of these beautiful and important places brings greater attention and protection, but also brings, as you stated, over-love of some of those spaces, and we are certainly struggling with that in some of ours.

In terms of the challenges that climate change poses specifically for parks, obviously, this summer the Southwest has been covered in a heat dome. We are having historic fires in Canada that have brought smoke descended down across all of the United States and, of course, the historic drought and climate and water challenges that Representative Lee talked about across all of the West.

As the Park Service is thinking about modeling, looking at the science, and then your mandate, what do you see are the biggest challenges and opportunities to really address these challenges going forward?

And what will you need to manage our parks in a time of a changed climate?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, thank you for that. It, of course, varies depending on the environment we are talking about. But if I can think of some high-priority areas, we will need to make sure we are held accountable, if you will, to design as we invest in things that will be resilient.

So, we were talking to Representative Lee about her district's issues, and Representative Gosar's issues at the Lakes. When we put in a new boat ramp, obviously, really think ahead with our planning and our science teams and work with our partners in our communities about what does a resilient dock system look like to maintain access when it goes up and down? Because some of our science folks are telling us it is not necessarily a linear progression with climate change. You might have one year that is just heavy snow, you might have another year of heavy drought. So, I think that is something that we are looking at.

And then, on a resource side of things, we have a lot of conversations with our science teams about whether and how we deal with

different species, right, that might be falling out of their range, and how to deal with investing in the right landscape treatments for fire.

So, those things come to mind as huge challenges right now.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you. And I know we mentioned it just a moment ago, but the Inflation Reduction Act, of course, was the largest investment in climate change accompanying the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the significant downpayment that we have made in our national parks, alongside, of course, the LWCF funding that we made permanent a few years ago is really crucial to the future and climate resilience of these special places.

So, we appreciate your stewardship.

With that, I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you. I just warn the gentlelady to be careful what she asks for. When you start throwing first rocks, they always come back to bite you. So, just be careful.

The gentleman from Montana is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Representative Stansbury, also, for holding this hearing.

The National Park Service across this country has faced severe overcrowding and visitor experience issues due to the lack of staff and inadequate management of our parks since the COVID-19 pandemic first took off in 2020. As the recreational visits begin to climb back up to pre-COVID numbers, these issues are becoming more and more glaring.

The current infrastructure in the parks cannot handle this renewed influx of people, and we need proper management techniques applied by the parks to make sure that no one's visitor experience is hampered by the overcrowding. There is more to the numbers of visitors going to the park. It is about the experience. And I think that you probably recognize that.

However, at the same time, my office has received many reports, even from fellow members of the congressional body, of issues they have had trying to book and register for their national park visits, especially at Glacier National Park in my home state. While timed entry is vital to allow my constituents and tourists to enjoy their time at the parks, the process should serve as something other than a roadblock or a deterrent from anyone coming or booking a trip.

I asked the National Park Service and the Deputy Director, who is here today, to come up with a comprehensive plan that can effectively deal with these overcrowding problems, while at the same time providing an easy, streamlined process that people of all ages and walks of life can understand and use.

This current overcrowding not only has harmful effects on the visitor experience, but also on the wildlife that calls these parks home. We have heard reports from Yellowstone where there are bear sightings in parking lots and other parts. We have seen wastewater systems collapse due to the over-use, sending sewage into the rivers and streams where the fish reside. These issues are all result of overcrowding, and we must solve this issue while maintaining open and accessible parks for all who are interested.

I know this is no easy task, but with the help of these agencies' highly-qualified civil engineers, a practical and reasonable solution may be found. I look forward to hearing the testimony of the Deputy Director today, and hope that we can find some bipartisan solutions to these issues plaguing our parks today.

Mr. Reynolds, are there any civil engineers currently working or employed by the Department focusing on lowering the congestion across the Park System?

Mr. REYNOLDS. We do have a collection of civil engineers. They tend to work on our sewer treatment facilities, or our drainage, and things like that. I don't actually know if there is a civil engineer working on the overcrowding side, but there are transportation planner/engineers, there are specialists in visitor use management, and then there are contractors that we bring in to do that. So, we are looking at those.

And I know you know the Glacier situation very well, but we have a lot of expertise, both in-house and out-of-house, beginning to help us with those planning efforts.

Mr. ROSENDALE. I work very closely with Superintendent Sholly down in Yellowstone. He is doing an incredible job down there, and we were able to get the park opened back up on the north side, the north entrance, in record time after the floods last year.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes.

Mr. ROSENDALE. What I also know is that going down into the park, two things. No. 1, wastewater systems are really, really being strained down there. And then No. 2, housing for the staffing is an incredible challenge.

I know housing around the country is always a big issue, and the cost of it, and they are building some housing units on the park, and nice units, so that they actually can attract and retain the employees that they need.

But I am really concerned with those wastewater projects and potable water projects. Having a development background myself, I know that they take a lot of time, and it is very expensive. So, do you have civil engineers looking specifically at that?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, absolutely, and I want to thank you very much for the support through the Great American Outdoors Act. It has been the big boost that we needed to take on those treatment plants.

Superintendent Sholly and his team have put forward a lot of top priorities. There are at least three that I can think of off the top of my head that have to do with their wastewater treatment plants: Mammoth, Old Faithful, those areas. And as you would know as a developer, sir, these are things no one wants to deal with, but they are some of the most expensive and some of the most important resource preservation things you can do, especially with overcrowding. So, they are a top priority. They are in the funding stream, and they are in development now.

Mr. ROSENDALE. And then it has also been my experience that, if you can start putting some even minor amenities in different locations around the park, then you are able to draw some of the visitors to these other areas instead of having them all concentrated in the typical areas that they have been accustomed to going to.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, that is true. We have this phenomena of social media helping to amplify certain places and people show up. I am just going to say counter that. It is not that, but we need to add to that, right, to let people understand the other gems that they can visit.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I see my time is expired.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. I am going to recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Just last year in June, Secretary Haaland issued Order No. 3407, directing the Department of the Interior agencies to phase out the procurement, sale, and distribution of single-use plastics by 2032. What is the current status of the National Park Service's efforts in developing this plan?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. It is in various stages. We have started it where we can. Our concessionaires, I must throw them a compliment, the private sector is stepping up, discussing things with our business services folks about how best to change their products to be non-plastic oriented, recyclable, compostable, things like that.

So, I don't know if I have an exact percentage for you, but we could follow up and give you that.

Dr. GOSAR. That would be great.

Mr. REYNOLDS. But we are in that early planning and implementation phases.

Dr. GOSAR. How much money did the National Park Service spend toward the effort through Fiscal Year 2022?

And what is the highest projected spending for Fiscal Year 2023?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Is that in our overall budget, do you mean?

Dr. GOSAR. How much in this plastics recycling?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Oh, that. I will have to follow up on an answer for that.

Dr. GOSAR. Did you have an estimate for the total cost of this transition near the 10-year implementation period?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I am not aware that we have one, but I am sure we do somewhere, and I can get it to you.

Dr. GOSAR. It would be nice to see if we had a policy to see where we were heading, nice to know where we are going.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes.

Dr. GOSAR. As you know, the state of Arizona has 22 national parks, Mr. Reynolds, with an average of over 10 million visitors per year coming to our parks. The economic impact is over \$1 billion per year. One of the things that visitors enjoy in the parks, and particularly those who are either short on time or who have physical disabilities at being able to see the parks, and this is our air tours.

Air tours are a great way to see the parks, especially for those who have mobility issues. Recently I have been hearing from the air tour operators on issues about the Park Service. Specifically, the Service has not been listening to the advice of the National Parks Overflight Advisory Group. I am particularly concerned about the upcoming discussions related to the air tour management plan, and efforts to shut down air tours completely in some national parks.

Mr. Reynolds, yes or no, can I get a commitment from you to work with the Committee on this effort?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, we are working with many parks on the air tour management plans, as you have indicated. We will continue to work closely with you or whoever can step up through the public process.

Dr. GOSAR. Can I get a yes or no on a commitment for the Park Service to seek the counsel of the National Parks Oversight Advisory Board, particularly as it relates to the economic impact to these gateway communities?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, we will talk to any of the oversight folks, along with the FAA, who is our prime partner in this.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you very much.

The Grand Canyon currently has \$829 million in deferred maintenance and repairs, which has become a great challenge for the staff who run the park, and impacts overall visitor experience. For the second-most visited park in America, with an outrageous \$829 million in deferred maintenance outstanding, do you agree that it should be a priority for the Park Service to resolve some of the issues at Grand Canyon Park ASAP?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, we are working very hard. As I mentioned earlier, along with sewage treatment plants, the Grand Canyon's problem, as you know well, sir, is the water supply itself. So, we have obligated a project, thanks to GAOA and rec fee money, to get that water system fixed, \$180 million.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, that is one of the things I really wanted to hit was the water supply on that issue.

I want to come back to the overflight aspect. How receptive would you be to that board in regards to their plans?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I am not super familiar with the board and its makeup, but we would listen, and are trying to be as transparent as we can in the planning efforts. So, I can't see why we wouldn't want to work with them.

Dr. GOSAR. I think that they have felt like they have come up with some rather interesting solutions, and yet have not been heard. So, I thought it would be very interesting to see how you could work with them, to see how this works. I mean, a lot of these people only go over the airspace. They are from somewhere else, they are from Ms. Lee's district, they may have their outfit over at McCarran Airport, and they fly over there, and they keep their trash all the way to when they come back to McCarran. So, I think it would be a great thing.

I am running short of time. Do you want a quick second round?

Mr. ROSENDALE. I could ask a couple of questions.

Dr. GOSAR. You are recognized for 5 minutes, Mr. Rosendale.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Mr. Reynolds, what type of feedback are you receiving, and how are you collecting it in regards to the staggered attendance through Glacier Park and some of the other parks?

Mr. REYNOLDS. As you know, sir, we have started the pilot programs, and I think Glacier needs to move in next to more formal planning, which would involve some public involvement.

They have gotten positive comments about the overall experience they have. As you mentioned in your earlier remarks, there have

been some frustrations about ordering, but the park has responded to those. I will give you a quick example.

They have been watching the feedback to the point where they changed on the fly how the tickets were allocated. And they also have changed the hours so that you can come into Glacier if you perhaps are on a road trip, and you didn't realize you needed a reservation, or you don't have online access, you can come in before 7 or after 3, which, actually, are some pretty decent times, especially if you are just trying to go to the Sun Road. So, they are trying very much to work with people on it.

And, again, it is not about prevention. It is trying to make these experiences work and to try to give people, I guess, more certainty that they would also then spend time in the community.

Mr. ROSENDALE. It is about the experience, exactly. But what I am trying to get at is how are you collecting the information from the visitors.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Right. We are doing online input, we are taking any comments that are dropped off at a visitor facility. We have open comment periods, much like you would see in a planning or NEPA process.

Mr. ROSENDALE. And do you have anyone who is taking this data and organizing it, and establishing some kind of matrix that says we have a problem with the hours, we have a problem with the amount of time that we are allowed to spend, we have a problem with the advance notice that is required? Is somebody evaluating that, and actually creating a matrix?

Mr. REYNOLDS. The short answer is yes, absolutely. And we will be able to share that with the public.

Mr. ROSENDALE. OK, because that is the only way we are going to be able to measure results and find out what the traveler's experiences are like.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Agreed.

Mr. ROSENDALE. What other methods are being used to manage, or stagger attendance times or days around the nation?

I am familiar with Glacier, but are other park systems using different types of staggering?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, there is a whole series of different strategies.

Arches National Park in Utah has something similar about timed entry, whereas before they were just shutting the gate down once the parking lots and the roads were completely packed. So, that has been well received, actually, by the Moab community, as well, because people know they are going in at a certain time, so they are spending money in the restaurants, they are hanging out doing other activities in town.

And I mentioned earlier the social media and Web space. We have a program called Plan Like a Park Ranger, where we try to encourage people to know a list of things that they can do outside the park, in the community, as well as other parks in the zone, which you are rich of in Montana, right?

Mr. ROSENDALE. Yes, we are.

Mr. REYNOLDS. There are different places to go.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I see my time is expired. I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. The Chair of the Full Committee, Mr. Westerman, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Gosar, and thank you to Deputy Director Reynolds for being here today.

National parks are obviously very important to all of us. I happen to live in Hot Springs National Park, which is a source of pride in Arkansas. It was the first land ever set aside as in reserve by the Federal Government.

And I will commend the Park Service employees there for their work to keep the park healthy, and actually do some active forest management on the park just to keep the threat of catastrophic fire down, and to do controlled burns, and to really be good stewards of the park, as well as the Buffalo National River, which is in my district, which was the nation's first Wild and Scenic River. And I know all Members probably in Congress can talk about parks in their state, or their favorite places to visit.

But I know in the Wildland Fire Strategic Plan for 2020 through 2024, you state the goal of using active management techniques to protect National Park Service structures and to reduce the risk of communities and assets. Could you provide an update to the Committee on progress made regarding the deployment of active forest management techniques since the issuance of the Wildland Fire Strategic Plan?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, I think I can offer a couple of things.

We have been able to up the acres that we treat and that can be, as you know, sir, different kinds of activities. You can clear brush, have active forest management, controlled burns, those kinds of things. So, we have gone from a little over 200,000 acres this year, up from about 170,000. We have gone up to about 268, I think.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Good. How about your workforce? How much has it increased under the plan?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I will follow up and get you a note on that. We have been doing better. There has been support for wildland firefighter pay. There have been those kinds of issues. I haven't heard of any major problems with staffing this year yet.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Let's talk a little bit about maintenance budget, and maintenance backlog. For years, I have heard the Park Service come before the Committee and say, "If we only had more money, we could fix all these problems with the outdated buildings and trails in the parks. If we had more money, we could hire more employees." But over the last few years, Congress has made historic investments in the Park System, yet it seems that these problems, if they are improving, they are not improving very quickly.

And kind of to add insult to injury, the Park Service requested an increase of 8 percent in discretionary funding for Fiscal Year 2024.

Can you explain why last year the Park Service reported a dramatic increase in the deferred maintenance backlog, and what concrete plans does the Service have to reduce the backlog, other than just continuing to ask Congress for more money?

Mr. REYNOLDS. We very, very much appreciate the investments that have been made between all of the various funding sources, and they are putting them to very good use as quickly as we can.

There is at least \$1.2 billion obligated right now, a couple of years into the GAOA work. And the plan is very much on a public-facing website. We can give you that link, or constituents that link. And we have plans up through at least Fiscal Year 2024 that I am aware of, park priorities and investments that we are going to use this money.

The deferred maintenance number is very difficult to explain and understand sometimes. There were some very large changes in how that number was measured as part of the big increase. But we are hoping to eliminate about \$3.6 billion in deferred maintenance, hopefully, in the next 2 years. These projects take anywhere from 1 to 5 years to complete, and we won't change the DM number until that project is fully completed.

So, I realize that patience is thin, but we are really working fast, and I think we could make a really good case if you would welcome us to come up and brief the Committee at some point about what these plans look like, if we haven't already done so with your staff.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Yes, I would like to get more information on that, as well.

In the so-called Inflation Reduction Act, there was a half-billion dollars given to the Park Service specifically for hiring additional employees. How many employees have you hired to date?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I know that some parks actually have started the hiring process. We created a hiring team. I can confirm that number. I don't have it handy with me, but I can just go to HR and get you that number. I think that it has started, and it is underway. And the parks are putting proposals in through their regional offices, and we are approving those as quickly as we can.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Do you know how much of the \$500 million you have left?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I don't, but we can let you know that.

Mr. WESTERMAN. And I do appreciate the Park Service's efforts to work with us on our bipartisan bill on the giant sequoias in Sequoia National Park. Hopefully, we will get that bill on the President's desk sooner than later.

And Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Thank you.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman, and I recognize myself real quick for 5 minutes.

Mr. Reynolds, you have only been in your position as head of the Congressional and External Affairs for a little over a year now. You have had every job in the Service, from a ranger to a regional director to acting director at one point. I read you are actually a third-generation National Park Service employee. Tell me, what do you think personally the Service could do, from your vantage point, to be more efficient and to reduce wasteful spending?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I am glad that you are asking a question about the Park Service growing and changing and being a better agency. It is something that we talk about and strive for. And I think, if you have spent time with some of our folks, I know there are different views of government these days, but the people that I have

known for 38 years, there are always a couple, but most of them, of the 20,000, 19,998 of them are some of the most dedicated people possible.

I think one of the things we can do is very much help the employee's life, be invested in and to be appreciated. This is true of any business that you are running. But I think for a long time we have asked our folks to do some sacrifices because they loved the work so much. So, I think that having a very healthy, diverse, invested, skilled staff and supported and empowered by good leaders, by an appreciation from Congress is something that we keep striving to do.

I also think that that will then get to any kind of waste and fraud issues if you have well-trained, good people running your system. So, we are really investing in that.

I also think that listening to the American people and involving them, and continuing to be approached about how these parks fit their lives is something else that we can do that helps to be less wasteful, right? Because we are fitting the bill about what the people want.

Dr. GOSAR. Would something like the bison issue on the Grand Canyon, as you probably know, there were no historical bison in that area, and these aren't really bison, they are buffaloes. Some creative programs that you work with the state of Arizona to allow the culling of that herd, where they could pay money to an agency like the Arizona Game and Fish so they could actually take a tag, are those some of the programs you would be looking for?

Mr. REYNOLDS. We welcome partnerships where it makes sense, and where we can legally support something like that.

And I recall those dilemmas. I recall the superintendent getting engaged with the state, and it seemed to get a lot better after they all came together.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, I think there is room for improvement, and I think that this is just the start of a dialogue. I thank you very much for your answers.

I am going to see if the Vice Chair wouldn't mind taking the Chair. I am going to see if I can catch a flight.

I yield back to the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Collins.

Mr. COLLINS [presiding]. The Chair will recognize Mr. LaMalfa for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Resuming where we were a little while ago, talking about utilizing volunteers and keeping the trails open, we get a fair amount of questions up in my area about the status of the trails when they fall into neglect and you get behind, next thing you know, you get a memo that says we can't recapture the trail, it will be too expensive, which is a de facto closure of the trail. And a lot of people feel like it is done fairly deliberately because there seems to be more and more exclusion from Forest Service lands for hiking, hunting, even off-road vehicles and such.

So, can you disabuse that assumption that folks contact me about?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes. The good news about the break, sir, is I was able to look something up with the staff. There are about 75

percent of the trails open, so a quarter of the trails, I guess, at Whiskeytown are still struggling, probably from post—

Mr. LAMALFA. Are you talking Whiskeytown there?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, sorry.

Mr. LAMALFA. OK, yes, all right.

Mr. REYNOLDS. But there should be no on-purpose actions, if you will, to keep something closed. And there should be an accountability about why something is closed. Is it a resource problem? Is it the fire damage? Is it a lack of funding or safety?

So, we will be happy to follow up with you all and with that park to find out what might be happening. But there shouldn't be actions to keep something closed just to keep it closed without justification.

Mr. LAMALFA. I would hope not. Again, we have a volunteer force that is just raring to go on that. I know that personally about Whiskeytown. So, if we can reach that 100 percent open milestone, that will be really great.

Let me continue here on the issue with concessionaires. So, parks often are in very remote areas, there are a limited amount of concessionaires that are either allowed to have the contract or that take them. So, pretty much you are looking at monopolies in a lot of these cases here in the park's lands.

So, people, they are reporting that what they are finding out is that, in order to visit these public lands, it is about as costly as, approaching even Disneyland they might say. Now, maybe that is a bit of an exaggeration, but it is getting very costly for folks because of what the concessionaires seem to be able to get away with, and which really kind of comes down to kind of an elitist way of doing business.

And it pushes people to actually go to the Forest Service and BLM lands, instead of the national parks, which is what they are set aside for, is that purpose, especially. What is the quality control that we are looking at for concessionaires on how they are performing, on what they offer?

And then is the pricing commensurate with normal people, not like baseball game \$12 beers, and stuff like that?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Right. We have concessions management specialists. If the park is large enough, there is usually a concessions division that does the accountability. There are inspections. And in order for their contract to be either renewed or continued, these things have to happen.

And we can make those reports available, if there is a particular problem area that you are hearing about, to talk to you about what the concessions team is doing.

And yes, prices have gone way up, and there is a constant conversation with concessionaires with pricing approvals. But the Park Service does have an opportunity to ask them about pricing and to regulate that.

Mr. LAMALFA. OK. Because it hits hard. We heard for a long time how it is low income. Well, these days, with inflation, middle-income people are starting to feel like low-income folks. And these things hit really hard, the price of everything, the fuel to get there, the meals you might get on a restaurant along the way, everything

is so much higher. So, we need to find how we can keep the concessionaires being competitive with what people's perception is.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes.

Mr. LAMALFA. When we are looking also at a massive influx of international visitors to our parks, they hit Yosemite very hard, and they are welcome and such, but have you considered a raised entry pass price for international visitors to help carry that additional burden, something a little more in line with that load in order to have American citizens be able to have a better shot?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I don't believe we have any consideration of that at this point.

Mr. LAMALFA. OK. Maybe that is something you should take back, and we can talk with you about that, too, if you would.

There is a push for pay increases of 5 percent for Park Service employees. Do you think that is actually enough, or such that it will make more employees want to be there? We are dealing with that with Forest Service, as well.

Mr. REYNOLDS. I think some pay gap resolution, as I mentioned earlier, would be very helpful where we can, and of course—

Mr. LAMALFA. OK. Maybe we should look toward housing being more affordable. That might be incentive.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes.

Mr. LAMALFA. All right, I am being told no, the gentleman from Georgia. I yield back.

[Laughter.]

Mr. COLLINS. Mr. Rosendale, 5 minutes.

Mr. ROSENDALE. I won't need 5.

Mr. Reynolds, I have one last question for you. When we start talking about the experience at the park, it is also very critical that you feel safe in that environment.

And Montana just experienced yet another death of a camper from a grizzly bear attack. The population of grizzlies in Montana right now far exceed 2,000 between the Yellowstone population and the greater northern continental divide population. What additional steps are you taking to protect visitors as the grizzly bear populations grow, and the endangered species protections have rendered many of them completely fearless of humans, and very habituated, causing danger to the campers?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, I was very sorry to hear about that tragedy, and we continue, with our bear management folks, with our rangers, to try to help people understand how to be bear safe in these environments, and we work with the partners up in that area, of course, in Montana.

As you know well, it is a whole combination of landowners, right? The Forest Service, the Park Service.

So, we are working hard to basically keep an education program going with the visiting public, but also to manage these bears if they do become habituated or they are in town and in communities and that kind of thing, removals or whatever actions need to be taken.

Mr. ROSENDALE. What kind of actions are you taking with the visitors? What kind of additional education are you sharing with them?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, as far as I know, we still have, for instance, in the evening, in the campground, you might have a roving ranger or a volunteer a lot of times that comes around, and we will talk to people about the hygiene of their camp, perhaps, or how they are going to store their food that night.

The more we can personally touch people, rather than just hand them a pamphlet at the entrance gate, the better.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. COLLINS. The Chair recognizes Ms. Stansbury for 5 minutes.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am just going to make a brief remark.

I do want to thank you, Deputy Director, for being here today. I had hoped to take a moment before the Chairman had to leave for his flight to address a comment that he made directed at me about a comment that I made.

And one thing I do appreciate is the bipartisanship of my colleagues who are here, my friendship with all of you, our professionalism. And we really are a model for the American people. The behavior that we engage in here on this dais has impacts and implications for people out there, especially young people who watch us. So, I just wanted to raise that, and that I appreciate you all.

I appreciate the comments about bipartisanship, but I do not appreciate the comments that were made by the former Chairman that were a bit threatening. So, with that, Mr. Chairman, I do yield back and thank you again.

Mr. COLLINS. All right. The Chair will now recognize myself for maybe 5 minutes.

Mr. Reynolds, these questions are really not coming from me, they are coming from my chief of staff, who is a big hiker. So, he enjoys the outdoors, and he makes it a point whenever we are not here, he is usually somewhere in the woods, hiking. And he was actually my GC on my campaign, so we had talked about this a little bit during the campaign. So, I know a little bit about what he is talking about, just enough to probably mess up the question how he would want to ask it.

But could you please speak, and you may have addressed this earlier, can you please speak about the use of public-private partnerships to address the maintenance backlog facing the National Park System?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Well, sure. As you know, Mr. Chair, a lot of our projects, our maintenance backlog, will be contractors. And that is probably not what you are asking. But I just wanted to point out that it is the private sector that basically implements our construction, building, and the on-the-ground projects, supervised by us.

In public-private partnerships we have a philanthropic, the National Park Foundation. We also have hundreds of other friends, organizations helping most parks nowadays, especially bigger parks. And we welcome and are trying to be as innovative as we can, working with those boards and those donors to match money. So, the Centennial Match process is really helpful with that, where we can put up 50 percent of the money that they would raise. Apparently, that is really great for fundraising, for donors.

So, we work a lot with our philanthropic organizations. They can do a lot of things, sometimes, quicker and faster for us, for the American people. And then we can, as part of a donation, perhaps they can purchase a piece of land for us and donate it over. So, we do utilize the public-private partnerships a ton.

We also have the ability through general agreements to work with somebody, perhaps to share housing, as I mentioned earlier.

Mr. COLLINS. How do you use the philanthropic partners with Great American Outdoors Act projects?

Mr. REYNOLDS. We are just in the planning stages of a lot of them. So, we haven't gone all the way, but we ask them a lot of times to help us add onto a project.

I often joke about it as gunmetal gray if you have ever seen U.S. Government desks, right? We use the basic investment money to fix that sewer treatment plant that we were talking to Congressman Rosendale about, and then the philanthropic organization adds something that might be a really nice addition for the visitor experience, and they can fundraise for it, and sometimes build it with us, or donate something to us that adds to the experience that we wouldn't be able to build with public funding.

Mr. COLLINS. Right. I know my wife and I, we have had a home in Gatlinburg for years, until recently, and she has been a Friend of the Smokies forever.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Great organization.

Mr. COLLINS. Yes, they always have different projects or things going on.

What can be done to streamline the approval process for individuals who would like to, say, repair a picnic table or trail shelter, for example, in one of the local national parks they live around?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Well, we want to try to empower each park unit to deal with a project of that kind of scale. So, what I would recommend is the organizations that want to do something like that, go ask for an appointment with the superintendent, and talk to them directly about what they are trying to do, and then they can work with us. We want to welcome, as I said to Mr. LaMalfa, as much help as we can, and as much as we can manage.

Mr. COLLINS. Right. And I think that is pretty much what he was getting at when we were talking earlier, my chief, I think he was out hiking and there was a shelter and picnic table, and there was a local Boy Scout group that actually had wanted to repair it, but they couldn't get permission to do it.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Interesting.

Mr. COLLINS. And it was rather confusing when people were willing to donate supplies and labor.

Mr. REYNOLDS. I am happy to look into that particular subject if it is still burning. But I would guess that somehow the right connections haven't been made because the parks would probably welcome that kind of help.

You asked me how we use the philanthropic organizations. We can insert them into that process right away with perhaps the Eagle Scout or something, and they can help host it, or help facilitate it.

Mr. COLLINS. Right, OK. Well, those are all the questions I have. I don't think we have anybody else lined up, do we?

OK, I want to thank Mr. Reynolds for his valuable testimony and the Members for their questions.

The members of the Committee may have some additional questions for the witness, and we will ask you to respond to those in writing. Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Committee must submit questions to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, August 1. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for these responses.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:16 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

