

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE'S DEFERRED  
MAINTENANCE BACKLOG:  
PERSPECTIVES FROM THE GOVERNMENT  
ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE  
AND THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

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**JOINT OVERSIGHT HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEES ON OVERSIGHT AND  
INVESTIGATIONS  
AND FEDERAL LANDS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON NATIONAL PARK  
SERVICE'S DEFERRED MAINTENANCE  
BACKLOG: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE  
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE  
AND THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

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**Wednesday, January 10, 2024  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Joint Hearing between the Subcommittees on  
Oversight and Investigations  
and Federal Lands  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Washington, DC**

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The Subcommittees met, pursuant to notice, at 10:19 a.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Tom Tiffany [Chairman of the Subcommittee on Federal Lands] presiding.

Present from Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations: Representatives Rosendale, Hunt, Collins, Luna; Stansbury, Case, and Lee.

Present from Subcommittee on Federal Lands: Representatives Tiffany, Lamborn, Fulcher, Stauber; Neguse, Leger Fernández, and Peltola.

Also present: Representatives Bergman and Maloy.

Mr. TIFFANY. The Subcommittees on Federal Lands and Oversight and Investigations will come to order.

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

The Subcommittees are meeting today to hear testimony on the National Park Service's deferred maintenance backlog: perspectives from the Government Accountability Office and the Inspector General.

I ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. Bergman, and the gentlewoman from Utah, Ms. Maloy, be allowed to participate in today's hearing from the dais.

Without objection, so ordered.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairmen and the Ranking Minority Members of the Subcommittees. 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 an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. TOM TIFFANY, A REPRESENTATIVE  
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WISCONSIN**

Mr. TIFFANY. I would like to welcome everyone to the Subcommittee on Federal Lands' first hearing of 2024, and the Committee's first joint Subcommittee hearing of this Congress. I can think of no better way to start out the year than by holding a hearing that highlights the need to rein in out-of-control agency spending, and keep this Administration accountable for the responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

We are holding this hearing today because, as Members of Congress, we have no greater responsibility than ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent appropriately. And as Americans, we all enjoy our national parks and want to ensure that they are left in better condition so our children and grandchildren can experience them as we did.

Four years ago the National Park Service had a total deferred maintenance backlog of nearly \$13 billion. Since then, that backlog has increased by nearly \$10 billion to more than \$22 billion. This increase occurred despite billions of dollars of taxpayer investment to improve and maintain our parks through the Great American Outdoors Act. You heard that correctly, folks. Despite spending billions of dollars to reduce the deferred maintenance backlogs at our national parks, those backlogs increased dramatically. Many Americans, including myself, who expected to see the wide-ranging effects of the Great American Outdoors Act, have been left disappointed.

When we visit our national parks we still see too many closed trails, leaky roofs in visitor centers, potholes in parking lots, and decrepit bathroom facilities. In my district, Apostle Islands National Lakeshore has received some funding through the Great American Outdoors Act this past year. But more than 73 percent of Apostle Islands' backlog remains unaddressed after 4 years of the Great American Outdoors Act.

The Federal Lands Subcommittee has made it a priority this Congress to conduct vigorous oversight of the Great American Outdoors Act to get to the root of this problem so that we can right the ship and start seeing the improvements we all want to see in our national parks, including the Apostle Islands. To that end, we have invited the Honorable Mark Greenblatt from the Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General, and Mr. Cardell Johnson from the Government Accountability Office. Both the Office of Inspector General and Government Accountability Office are independent watchdogs that have recently released reports on the National Park Service's deferred maintenance backlog that contains shocking and disturbing evidence of mismanagement.

According to the Inspector General report, the data that the National Park Service uses to track its deferred maintenance is inaccurate and unreliable. This is hardly surprising, considering the Inspector General also found that the National Park Service inappropriately added a blanket 35 percent markup to its deferred maintenance total without any proper justification. If this was the private sector, and a company inflated its profits by 35 percent without proper documentation, its CEO would go to jail. Yet, in the Federal Government this is being treated as business as usual.

I am also deeply concerned with findings that the National Park Service is not adequately monitoring completed deferred maintenance projects, particularly projects that immediately affect the health, life, and safety of members of the public. There are simply too many instances of the National Park Service failing to address these critical work orders or putting temporary fixes in place that do nothing but let the problem fester for years while the backlog rises.

In total, the Inspector General found evidence that the National Park Service backlog is being over-inflated by just over \$4 billion—that is billion, with a B—through a combination of markups and completed deferred maintenance projects that are still on the books. Although the National Park Service is undergoing the process of updating its methodology for calculating its deferred maintenance, as referenced in the Government Accountability Office report released earlier this week, the Committee has outstanding concerns that this alone will not bring the transparency needed for an issue as important as this one.

I want to thank both Mr. Greenblatt and Mr. Johnson for joining the Subcommittees today and discussing the important findings your organizations have uncovered. I look forward to hearing your testimony.

I will now recognize the Ranking Member, Ms. Stansbury, for her opening statement.

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

Ms. STANSBURY. Wonderful. Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Happy New Year to everyone. It is wonderful to be here and to have this joint hearing.

As we all know, every year hundreds of millions of people visit our national parks seeking refuge, adventure, connection with the outdoors, and for cultural practices. The most recent data show that our national parks received 312 million visitors in 2022, which was up 15 million over the previous year, across hundreds of parks across the United States. And keeping up with these visitor experiences requires a lot of infrastructure. We are talking about thousands of buildings, roads, trails, and hundreds of thousands of employees and volunteers who help to maintain them.

Managing and maintaining our park system is not a simple task, as we will hear here today. Much of the infrastructure for the Park Service was developed between the 1930s and the 1960s, which means, as visitation grows, many of these assets are aging and require maintenance and upkeep. It also means that we have to repair everything from major roads and bridges to moldy buildings to, yes, even toilets.

At the same time, we are taking on new opportunities to invest in sustainability, accessibility, and facing the challenges of climate change. And as we know, this last year was the hottest year on record. Like any agency, National Park Service needs consistent funding to meet the demands of visitation, to ensure safety, and to address these challenges and opportunities. But the Park Service has struggled for decades with underfunding and personnel

shortages, which has led to this long list of what we call deferred maintenance.

I am very proud of this Committee and that it came together today in a bipartisan manner and in 2020 to ultimately pass the Great American Outdoors Act, which we are going to call GAOA today. GAOA provided land management agencies a major funding infusion for maintenance needs and aging infrastructure, including almost \$6.5 billion for the Park Service. And I think it is worth noting that this law was worked on for many years—in fact, many decades—to provide that permanent funding on a bipartisan basis, and was ultimately signed into law by the former President Trump. This sort of achievement is what our constituents sent us here to do, but there is no denying that there are significant challenges, and we cannot continue to address this decades-long issue without increased investment.

Still, 3 years later, the Park Service is making good use of the funding, though I think we will hear today that it is slower than expected. Critical projects that were previously out of reach are underway. For example, nine of the most treacherous miles of the iconic Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park, which is used by visitors from all over the world, is being rehabilitated and a vital bridge is being replaced; sewage treatment systems in the heavily-visited Canyon and Grand Villages in Yellowstone National Park are being repaired and replaced; in my home state of New Mexico, the Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge is having a major revamp, which is very crucial to this huge bird flyway and refuge in our state; and our Speaker of the House Johnson's own neck of the woods in Louisiana, the Cane River Creole National Historic Park is also seeing the replacement of critical infrastructure.

To date, GAOA has leveraged \$1.8 billion in average GDP contributions and supported over 17,000 jobs each year. As more major projects are completed and smaller projects continue to be checked off the list, it sounds like we will see deferred maintenance estimates start to come down in the Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026. But in the meantime, we have our Inspector General and GAO Office here today to share findings that they have prepared investigating how the Park Service is managing deferred maintenance and making use of these resources.

The Inspector General's report found room for improvement for how the Park Service is estimating its deferred maintenance costs, as was referred to by the Chairman, and the GAO looked at how the National Park Service prioritizes its deferred maintenance projects using this funding, and found that the Park Service followed all six leading practices for addressing deferred maintenance, including properly prioritizing projects with health and safety requirements. Both reports found deferred maintenance is still growing and also found room for improvement.

But generally speaking, I applaud the Park Service for the work that they are doing, and I understand that there are other reasons that have slowed the completion of projects, and look forward to hearing the testimony today before the Subcommittee to better understand how we can support this Park Service in making the best use of these resources.

With that, I yield back.



Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Ranking Member Stansbury. I will now recognize the Ranking Minority Member of the Federal Lands Subcommittee, Mr. Neguse, for an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. JOE NEGUSE, A REPRESENTATIVE  
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF COLORADO**

Mr. NEGUSE. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany. Thank you to Ranking Member Stansbury for her leadership. And it is good to see all of my colleagues.

I will say I would be remiss before providing some opening remarks if I didn't recognize my good friend from Colorado on his recent announcement regarding his retirement from this august body. Notwithstanding our disagreements in the past, it has been a real privilege to serve with him over the course of these last several years, and I am grateful to him for his 18 years of service to the state of Colorado, a state that I know he deeply loves and cares for.

So, congratulations to you, Mr. Lamborn.

It is a very important discussion today that we will be having, and I am grateful to the witnesses, of course the office of Inspector General, and to the leadership of the Subcommittees in question for putting this together.

Last April, the Federal Land Subcommittee hosted a similar hearing to review the implementation of GAOA, a significant bipartisan achievement to invest in the maintenance and conservation of our national parks and public lands that we passed in 2020, and I certainly couldn't agree more with my colleague from New Mexico as she articulated the many benefits of GAOA, and the way in which the large-scale investments are supporting the ever-growing popularity of parks and public lands across the nation.

I certainly agree that oversight of this program's implementation is and should be a priority. Last year, in the hearing that we conducted we heard how the National Park Service is utilizing investments from the Legacy Restoration Fund to address a wide range of critical and priority deferred maintenance projects across our cherished national parks. We are seeing the benefits of those projects all over the country: Hot Springs National Park in Arkansas, which I know our Chairman is very familiar with, to Glacier Bay National Park in Alaska, of course, as well, and everywhere in between.

In my home state of Colorado, just for example, there are approximately \$401 million in deferred maintenance at our national parks, but we are excited to see a \$32 million investment from GAOA within Rocky Mountain National Park, which is in my district, to invest in the Moraine Park Campground, the largest campground in the park. This particular project would rehabilitate the campground's water infrastructure, and will also improve accessibility by refurbishing roads, parking infrastructure, and campsite amenities. And it is a prime example, in my view, of how the National Park Service is selecting projects that enhance their core mission, while also increasing visitor safety and sustaining the visitation sites into the future. So, I am certainly grateful with respect to that particular project at Rocky Mount National Park and to the NPS' work more broadly.

It also is just as important to keep perspective. My understanding is that the National Park Service has the second largest number of physical assets of any Federal agency in our government, second only to the Department of Defense. And in comparison, the DOD has a deferred maintenance backlog of approximately \$137 billion, nearly four times the amount of the NPS. Of course, to me, that emphasizes the need for focused and direct investment in routine and annual maintenance so that the Federal land management agencies can continue to protect existing and future parcels of Federal land, hire more staff, and undertake more projects that benefit all Americans.

The increased cost of deferred maintenance being reported by the NPS should also signal the need for sustained and increased funding for the Park Service to address those needs, rather than, I will say regrettably, the \$433 million in budget cuts that have been proposed by my Republican colleagues. I know that the Park Service is actively taking measures to implement a number of responses to the OIG's important report, and I suspect we will hear more about that today.

But, again, I am grateful to the folks at the OIG, folks at NPS for the work that they are doing and, again, to the leadership of this Committee for hosting this important hearing. And I look forward to hearing more about the recommendations and a path forward.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Ranking Member Neguse. I will now recognize the Chairman of the Full Committee, Mr. Westerman, for an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. BRUCE WESTERMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARKANSAS**

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today. I think it is very appropriate that the first hearing of 2024 for the Natural Resources Committee is one that is of great importance not only to my district and Arkansas, but to our nation as a whole.

I believe everybody in this room shares a common goal. We all want to improve our parks and leave them in better condition than how we found them. It is important to me as a conservationist, and it is important to me as somebody who grew up around one of our true crown jewels, as Mr. Neguse mentioned, Hot Springs National Park. But after reading the recently-released reports from the Inspector General and Government Accountability Office, it is clear that we need to face the reality that the Park Service is falling short of this goal, even with the groundbreaking, and I would say landmark, legislation through the Great American Outdoors Act.

I am often referred to as the forester in Congress, but I am also an engineer, and I spent over 20 years doing engineering projects. And in the world of engineering and project management and implementation, there is this model of the three-legged stool and its scope, budget, and schedule. And to have a successful project, you want those three legs of the stool the same length. You want

them in balance. And if one leg of the stool gets out of balance, it affects everything else.

For example, if you don't have the scope defined, it is impossible to produce an accurate budget. If you shorten the schedule, you drive the budget up. And sometimes to make the schedule shorter, you have to shorten the budget or shorten the scope. Or if you lengthen the scope, it makes the schedule longer. So, there is a fine balance, trying to get those three legs of the stool in the right place.

And as I look at the reports, in the simplest terms, it appears that the Park Service is failing to keep the three legs of the stool in balance. It seems clear that the Park Service never really understood the real scope of the problem, despite reassurances to myself and to other lawmakers during the consideration of the Great American Outdoors Act that this legislation would be crucial in reducing the backlog. That is why we have seen dramatic increases in the total backlog from roughly \$12.7 billion when the Great American Outdoors Act was first passed to more than \$22 billion today.

I would say probably the most worrying part of this three-legged stool is the second leg, and that is the budget. I was stunned to find out that the Park Service is inflating its backlog by 35 percent, or roughly \$3.7 billion, with absolutely no justification. Prior to the Great American Outdoors Act passing, I conducted visits to parks and talked to Park Service folks at the highest level, and I was shocked to find out the price tag they were using on some of these projects, which seemed very inflated at the time, and again, this was before the GAOA was even passed several years ago.

There is no question that the cost to the taxpayer for these projects has risen astronomically, and the agency needs to provide more thorough and transparent justifications to the Inspector General, to this Committee, and to the American taxpayer about why that is the case.

And finally, the third leg of the stool, the schedule. As you know, as Chairman of the Committee, I get to tour a lot of parks all over the country, and I have been disappointed in the lack of progress that I have seen in reducing the deferred maintenance backlog. My constituents feel the same, and I know there are projects on the books. But again, as these schedules extend out, the cost continues to go up. I constantly hear feedback about rundown bathrooms, horrible parking lots, and closed trails.

I thought the Inspector General's report highlighting the critical health, life, and safety work orders that were behind schedule was unbelievable. These work orders should be in the agency's top priority, and instead many of these projects that directly affect visitor and public safety are going neglected and unaddressed for years at a time.

Even when the National Park Service does stay on schedule, the agency still fails to properly update the data, resulting in thousands of completed work orders totaling \$364 million that are still on the books as open deferred maintenance projects. For those of you keeping track, that brings us to the end of the three-legged stool, which is not looking very balanced at the moment.

I hope that through this hearing and through the work of the Committee and working with the Park Service, we can get the stool in balance because, again, I believe all of us have the same goal to see our parks in as best shape as they can be, and to see positive results from the Great American Outdoors Act implementation.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Chairman Westerman. We will now move on to our witness panel.

Let me remind the witnesses that under Committee Rules, you must limit your oral statements to 5 minutes, but your entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

To begin your testimony, please press the “on” button on the microphone.

We use timing lights. When you begin, the light will turn green. At the end of 5 minutes, the light will turn red, and I will ask you to please complete your statement.

First, I would like to introduce the Honorable Mark Greenblatt, Inspector General at the Department of the Interior.

Inspector General Greenblatt, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. MARK GREENBLATT, INSPECTOR GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. GREENBLATT. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Neguse, Ranking Member Stansbury, members of the Subcommittees. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

The topic of the hearing today, deferred maintenance in our National Parks System, may sound bureaucratic or mundane, but it is quite the contrary. When critical maintenance on NPS assets such as buildings, trails, campsites—when that is delayed, it can make those assets unsafe or unusable. Deferring maintenance can also significantly increase the costs associated with conducting the necessary repairs, thereby driving up the expense on the American taxpayer.

Managing deferred maintenance has been a long-standing challenge for the NPS. In fact, my office has reported on those concerns as far back as 1999, and we have called deferred maintenance a major management challenge for the Department every year since 2017. GAO has likewise referenced Interior’s deferred maintenance problem on its high risk list since 2003.

As you know, in 2020, Congress passed the Great American Outdoors Act, authorizing \$1.3 billion per fiscal year from 2021 to 2025 to reduce deferred maintenance in national parks.

Because of the influx of funding from GAOA, my office performed an evaluation to determine how the National Park Service identifies and manages deferred maintenance. Our review covered Fiscal Years 2016 through 2021, during which the deferred maintenance estimate increased by more than \$12 billion. While NPS has stated that it is currently in the process of updating its process for identifying and estimating deferred maintenance, at the time of our evaluation NPS primarily calculated deferred maintenance by totaling the estimated costs from all open deferred maintenance work orders at the end of each fiscal year.

We found, however, that the work order data being used for the basis of this calculation were inaccurate and unreliable. On the one hand, NPS understated deferred maintenance estimates because it had not categorized work orders that were years old as deferred maintenance. During our review, we found 214,000 open work orders that were 3 years or older, totaling \$2.6 billion by NPS' calculation. On the other hand, NPS overstated deferred maintenance estimates because it did not consistently close deferred maintenance work orders once the work had been completed. We found more than 3,600 open deferred maintenance work orders that remained open after the work was completed, totaling up to \$364 million by NPS' estimates.

Between the \$2.6 billion in understatements and the \$364 million in overstatements, we identified roughly \$3 billion in work orders that appear to be classified inaccurately. This means that a significant percentage of NPS' deferred maintenance estimate at the time was unreliable and inaccurate.

Worse, these data quality weaknesses were compounded by the NPS' application of a blanket 35 percent markup on all open deferred maintenance work orders in Fiscal Year 2021. We have multiple concerns with this markup. For example, NPS could not provide us with an adequate justification demonstrating why 35 percent as a markup was valid, or why it was appropriate to apply that percentage across the entire portfolio of deferred maintenance projects. When you have a significantly inaccurate estimate bolstered by a 35 percent across-the-board markup, one could argue that the prior estimates were akin to a house of cards built upon a house of cards.

As I mentioned earlier, NPS told us that they had begun implementing a new asset condition assessment process in Fiscal Year 2022 to estimate deferred maintenance. NPS officials told us that this new process would allow it to produce modeled deferred maintenance estimates based on asset condition and current replacement value. That is, once the new process is fully implemented, it is our understanding that NPS will no longer base its estimates on work orders, although the work orders will still be used for tracking the actual completion of the deferred maintenance process.

We acknowledge NPS' efforts to make improvements, but it is important to note that these changes appear designed to improve NPS' estimating of the amount of deferred maintenance. Once fully implemented, however, NPS will still be at risk of not effectively managing its deferred maintenance if it does not implement internal controls to ensure that the work orders are closed and conditions assessments are updated as deferred maintenance projects are completed.

I can't comment on the new process, as we have not yet reviewed it, so I don't know whether the process will be effective in estimating its deferred maintenance. What I do know is that our review establishes that the process NPS used for managing deferred maintenance in years in the past appears to have been unreliable and inaccurate. And if past is prologue, NPS must ensure the accuracy and reliability of its data, and we all must remain vigilant about overseeing these deferred maintenance

processes to protect the American taxpayer and our national treasures in the NPS system.

Thank you, and I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Greenblatt follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. MARK LEE GREENBLATT, INSPECTOR GENERAL,  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Chairman Tiffany, Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Neguse, Ranking Member Stansbury, and Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss the National Park Service's (NPS') deferred maintenance and in particular, our office's September 2023 evaluation report, *The National Park Service Faces Challenges in Managing Its Deferred Maintenance*. As you know, inspectors general have a direct reporting relationship to Congress. My office and I take this obligation seriously, and we appreciate your continued support for our independent and objective oversight.

According to the information that we received, when prioritizing its financial resources each year, the NPS assesses the condition of its infrastructure and calculates how much it would cost to address needed repairs. As of September 2021, the NPS reported that it had accumulated more than \$23 billion in deferred maintenance—which the NPS considers as maintenance that has not been completed on schedule and is delayed for a future period. We evaluated how the NPS identified and managed deferred maintenance; specifically, we reviewed how NPS identified and managed deferred maintenance at 15 of its 397 parks for FY 2020.<sup>1</sup> We considered the time period of FY 2016 through FY 2021.

In short, we found that, during the period of our evaluation, the NPS was unable to effectively identify and manage its deferred maintenance, in large part due to inaccurate and unreliable data. Furthermore, the NPS applied a blanket 35-percent markup to its FY 2021 deferred maintenance, which resulted in a \$3.7 billion increase to the estimated costs of the NPS' deferred maintenance in just one year. We found, however, that there was insufficient documentation demonstrating that the amount of the markup was reasonable. We also found that the NPS' broad application of the markup may lead to inaccurate estimates depending on whether work is completed by staff or contractors. In addition to data challenges, we found delayed response times for addressing critical Health, Life, and Safety (HLS) work orders. We made eight recommendations to address these issues.

### Background

The NPS' mission is "to conserve the natural and cultural resources of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations." The NPS manages approximately 400 park units—commonly referred to as "parks"—that include more than 75,000 assets. For deferred maintenance purposes, the NPS defines an asset as real or personal property that it tracks and manages as a distinct and identifiable entity. Assets may be physical structures or groupings of structures, land features, or other tangible property with a specific service or function. Examples include buildings, roads, bridges, campgrounds, marinas, and sewage treatment plants.

### NPS Deferred Maintenance

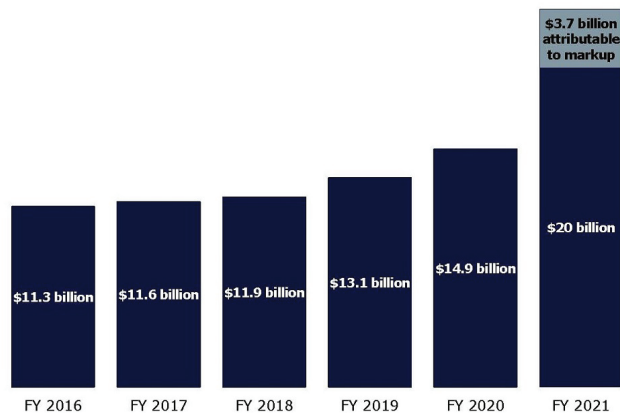
The NPS relies on discretionary appropriations, allocations from the U.S. Department of Transportation, park entrance and concession fees, donations, and other funding sources to repair and maintain its more than 75,000 assets. Maintenance refers to day-to-day repair activities and planned work required to preserve facilities in such a condition that they may be used for their designated purpose over an intended service life. Under the NPS' policies and procedures, deferred maintenance is considered a subset of the NPS' asset maintenance. As noted previously, the NPS defines deferred maintenance as "[m]aintenance that was not performed when it should have been or was scheduled to be and which, therefore, is put off or delayed." Delayed or deferred maintenance can affect visitor experiences at parks due to building or bridge closures, trail limitations, and facility disrepair. In addition, deferring maintenance may result in significantly higher maintenance and operating costs or, in some cases, premature asset replacement.

<sup>1</sup>A full list of the parks we reviewed is included as an appendix to this testimony.

To address this problem and its effect on NPS resources, Congress enacted the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA).<sup>2</sup> GAOA was signed into law on August 4, 2020, and it authorized up to \$1.9 billion per fiscal year from 2021 to 2025 to reduce deferred maintenance on public lands and at Indian schools through the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF).<sup>3</sup> The LRF is intended to ensure the safety of staff and the increasing number of visitors to the U.S. Department of the Interior's (DOI's) public lands by providing dedicated funding to address the growing amount of deferred maintenance. Under GAOA, the NPS will receive up to \$1.3 billion per fiscal year for 5 years (FY 2021 through FY 2025) to reduce or eliminate its deferred maintenance. In addition, the Inflation Reduction Act<sup>4</sup> authorizes up to \$200 million to the NPS for priority deferred maintenance projects through FY 2026.

At the time of our review, the NPS calculated and reported its deferred maintenance using the total of the estimated costs from open deferred maintenance work orders at the end of each fiscal year. As of FY 2021, the NPS estimated deferred maintenance of \$23.7 billion. Although its number of assets has not increased, the estimated cost of the NPS' deferred maintenance has risen more than \$12 billion from FY 2016 through FY 2021 (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Reported NPS Deferred Maintenance Increase FYs 2016–2021**



The NPS reported that contributing factors to the increasing deferred maintenance included aging infrastructure, heavy visitor use, and insufficient funding to keep pace with repair needs. The NPS also reported that the FY 2021 increase was due, in part, to a change in how it estimated deferred maintenance costs. Specifically, the NPS added a blanket 35 percent markup to its estimated deferred maintenance. In FY 2021, the NPS calculated approximately \$20 billion in deferred maintenance, which was an increase of approximately \$5.2 billion in deferred maintenance. The addition of the 35-percent markup to the \$20 billion increased the NPS' FY 2021 deferred maintenance by another \$3.7 billion, resulting in an \$8.8 billion increase over FY 2020.

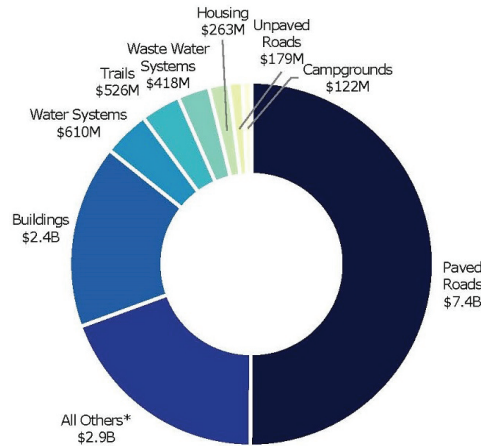
<sup>2</sup>Pub. L. No. 116-152.

<sup>3</sup>In March 2022, we published an inspection of the Department of the Interior's implementation of GAOA, *The U.S. Department of the Interior Needs a Strategy To Coordinate Implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act*. We determined that the Department did not develop a strategy to maximize the GAOA's impact and that the Department did not develop best management practices for deferred maintenance projects. We made two recommendations to the Department intended to help the Department fulfill GAOA's intent to reduce deferred maintenance. We consider both recommendations closed.

<sup>4</sup>Pub. L. No. 117-169.

The NPS uses asset categories to track and report its 75,000 assets. Figure 2 shows these asset categories for the NPS' FY 2020 deferred maintenance estimates.

**Figure 2: FY 2020 Deferred Maintenance by Asset Category**



\* The "All Others" asset category includes a wide variety of assets, including waysides and picnic areas, radio systems, fuel systems, marinas and boat ramps, dams, and amphitheatres.

### NPS Asset Management Roles and Responsibilities

The NPS has three levels of responsibility for facility management regarding deferred maintenance: Park Facility Management, Regional Facility Management, and the Washington Support Office. In addition, the NPS GAOA Program Office provides GAOA-specific support.

The Park Facility Management staff have the greatest responsibility for addressing deferred maintenance. At the time of our evaluation, the park staff used the NPS' Facility Management Software System (FMSS) to ensure asset condition assessments were completed; they also created maintenance repair work orders, assigned work order status, and added cost estimates. The NPS used the FMSS to identify, manage, and track all park maintenance repairs, including deferred maintenance. Park staff used the Cost Estimating Software System to generate cost estimates, which they could either export to the FMSS or enter directly in a work order.<sup>5</sup>

Park staff were also responsible for determining when a maintenance or repair work order became deferred maintenance as well as for classifying and documenting work orders with HLS maintenance issues in the FMSS. For example, if park staff determined that a building was unsafe, it was their responsibility to create a new work order to quickly mitigate the HLS concern.

We were told that park staff may complete the maintenance identified in work orders depending on park staff availability, expertise, or direct park funding. Otherwise, during the annual budgeting process, park staff prioritized work orders that could be completed in-house or bundled work orders (which can include those classified as deferred maintenance) into projects that needed contractor technical expertise or additional funding resources. The bundled work orders were sent to the NPS Regional Facility Management staff for prioritization and funding authorization.

<sup>5</sup> Work orders are the source documents for maintenance repairs for all park assets such as trails, visitor centers, and campgrounds, as well as water systems and roads. The NPS uses 10 categories for its facility maintenance work orders, including deferred maintenance. Separately, the NPS also uses the Health, Life, and Safety (HLS) classification, which is identified in the NPS' *Business Practices: Risk Assessment Codes*, to identify issues that need immediate attention—for example, an unsafe building.



When the maintenance or repair has been completed, the park staff are responsible for updating and closing each work order in the FMSS.

Regional Facility Management staff determine funding eligibility and prioritize project submissions for all parks within the respective region. The Washington Support Office prioritizes and reviews projects across the NPS and allocates funding to each region; it also provides guidance and oversight for all NPS facility maintenance. Finally, the NPS GAOA Program Office provides additional program management oversight and guidance for current and future projects funded through the LRF. This office was established in FY 2021 and works with the Washington Support Office to prioritize and then submit projects for LRF funding. The DOI's GAOA Program Management Office then approves the LRF funding for these projects.

Once a project is approved and funded, the work is either completed by park personnel or through a contract. At that point, the NPS should close the project and work order.

## Results of Evaluation

### The NPS' Deferred Maintenance Data Was Inaccurate and Unreliable

We found that the NPS did not have the quality information necessary to make informed decisions and that, instead, its deferred maintenance data were inaccurate and unreliable.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, the NPS did not consistently identify, enter, and classify deferred maintenance work orders or verify their accuracy—which in some cases understated and in others overstated its deferred maintenance estimates.

#### *The NPS Did Not Consistently Identify, Enter, and Classify Deferred Maintenance Work Orders*

We found inconsistencies in how the NPS identified its deferred maintenance needs, entered its deferred maintenance work orders, and classified existing work orders as deferred maintenance in the FMSS. Some work orders that were years old were not categorized as deferred maintenance, thereby underestimating the amount of needed deferred maintenance. At the 15 parks we reviewed, we identified approximately 26,000 open work orders with estimated costs of \$371 million that were 3 years or older but that had not been classified as deferred maintenance. These work orders included necessary repairs for NPS employee housing assets, such as repairing broken smoke alarms, rehabilitating kitchens, replacing heaters and roofs, repairing leaks, and providing exit signs.

When we expanded our analysis across all NPS parks, we identified a total of approximately 214,000 work orders that were 3 years or older that were not classified as deferred maintenance—this amounted to a total of \$2.6 billion that was not included in the NPS' deferred maintenance calculations.

We found that park personnel had varying practices relating to when to identify and enter deferred maintenance work orders or classify existing work orders as deferred maintenance. For example, some would classify existing work orders as deferred maintenance based on the life cycle of the assets or if the work orders were delayed. Others would classify existing work orders as deferred maintenance after the work order had been open for one year.

These varying practices mean that the NPS has not fully defined, and so cannot accurately account for, the parks' deferred maintenance needs. The NPS' policies and procedures do not provide guidance on when park personnel should identify, enter, and classify work orders as deferred maintenance in the FMSS. Inconsistently identifying, entering, and classifying deferred maintenance work orders and failing to verify their status in the FMSS leads to inaccurate deferred maintenance estimates, which results in an incomplete picture of the NPS' deferred maintenance needs. Without reliable data, the NPS cannot make informed decisions to manage its deferred maintenance.

#### *The NPS Did Not Consistently Verify the Accuracy and Completeness of FMSS Data*

The NPS also did not consistently verify the accuracy and completeness of FMSS data regarding deferred maintenance work orders (e.g., work order status, cost estimates, and duplicate work orders) due to inconsistent monitoring at all levels. We found that the NPS did not consistently close deferred maintenance work orders in the FMSS after the work was completed even though changing the work order

<sup>6</sup>The U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO's) internal control standards state that management must have quality information to make informed decisions to evaluate its performance in achieving its objectives. GAO characterizes quality information as information that is current, complete, and accurate.

status to closed is the final step in the work order process. For the 15 parks we reviewed, we identified 580 open deferred maintenance work orders that included a “finished date” entered in the FMSS, suggesting that the work had been completed and that these work orders should have been closed. Because the work order status was not updated to “closed,” the estimated cost for deferred maintenance in the work orders was included in the NPS total deferred maintenance estimate. These work orders, if closed in the system, would lower the NPS’ deferred maintenance estimate by approximately \$86 million.

When we expanded our analysis across all NPS parks, we identified a total of 3,667 open deferred maintenance work orders with a “finished date” entered in the FMSS. These work orders, if closed in the system, would lower the NPS’ deferred maintenance cost estimate by up to \$364 million.

The NPS does not have a monitoring mechanism to ensure the accuracy and completeness of its FMSS data. Failing to monitor the FMSS data consistently across the NPS results in inaccurate and incomplete deferred maintenance reporting, and it also means that inconsistencies from different park practices are built into the system. Without reliable data, the NPS cannot make informed decisions on how to manage its deferred maintenance, improve program effectiveness and accountability, and potentially enhance decision making.

*The NPS’ Data Quality Weaknesses Are Amplified by Its Application of a Blanket Markup*

We found that the NPS added \$3.7 billion to its initial deferred maintenance estimate in FY 2021 without a methodology to support this approach. It did so based on the year-end deferred maintenance balance that included each asset’s deferred maintenance cost estimates for each asset, which were the basis for the NPS’ deferred maintenance estimate calculation. The initial FY 2021 deferred maintenance calculation included in the balance was \$20 billion; however, the NPS then added a blanket 35-percent markup, which increased the FY 2021 deferred maintenance estimate to \$23.7 billion.<sup>7</sup>

According to an October 5, 2021, internal NPS memorandum, *Changes to National Park Service Deferred Maintenance Reporting for Fiscal Year 2021*, the NPS started adding 35 percent to deferred maintenance cost estimates for all assets reported to both the Federal Real Property Profile and the Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board (FASAB).

We identified two major concerns with the assumptions used in NPS’ approach, which call into question the validity of applying a 35-percent project execution cost to all deferred maintenance work orders. First, the NPS could not provide supporting documentation demonstrating the validity of the 35-percent project execution add-on for all NPS deferred maintenance work orders. We note that the percentage conforms with what the Federal Highway Administration uses for public road and bridge projects. Although this may be appropriate for some NPS deferred maintenance projects, adding such a significant amount to the overall balance without a methodology can lead to inaccurate cost estimates.

Second, the NPS applied this markup to all deferred maintenance included in the FY 2021 FMSS data with the assumption that all work would be completed by contractors. We learned, however, that NPS staff at multiple parks complete some work orders instead of contractors.

The NPS added this blanket 35-percent markup to all work orders instead of individually revising its deferred maintenance work order cost estimates to accurately reflect the work that would be completed by contractors or NPS staff. This occurred because the NPS does not have processes or procedures in place to identify work orders that will be completed by NPS staff or contractors. Further, the NPS’ Park Facility Management Division told us that it could not determine if work had been or would be completed by NPS staff using the information available in the FMSS.

As a result, the NPS did not accurately estimate the cost of its deferred maintenance. This issue is further complicated by the data reliability issues discussed above—that is, the blanket markup is being layered on top of information that is already unreliable. This markup accordingly contributes to an inaccurate deferred maintenance figure, which may affect internal and external stakeholders alike. Without addressing both the underlying data inaccuracies and the appropriateness of the blanket markup, the NPS cannot make informed decisions to manage its deferred maintenance.

<sup>7</sup> The increase from \$20 billion to \$23.7 billion was the result of a 35-percent markup applied to all work orders except transportation deferred maintenance work orders (paved and unpaved road asset categories, including bridges). The Federal Highway Administration already included a 35-percent project execution cost markup in those work order estimates.

### **The NPS Did Not Consistently Monitor, Complete, and Close Open Critical Health, Life, and Safety Work Orders**

The NPS identifies five classifications<sup>8</sup> for HLS work orders and establishes timelines for their completion. Specifically, it defines “critical” HLS work orders as those that pose “immediate danger to life, health, property, or infrastructure.” According to the NPS guidance, work orders with this classification require immediate action to correct the issue or, if full remediation is not possible, implementation of an interim control measure to reduce the risk to an acceptable level until full remediation can be completed. For example, if an HLS work order identifies that a trail bridge used primarily for hiking and camping needs to be replaced, an interim control measure would be to close the bridge and temporarily relocate the trail until the NPS could replace the bridge.

For the 15 parks we reviewed, we identified timeliness concerns for 29 open critical HLS work orders. Although all 29 open critical work orders had interim control measures in place, we found two were duplicate and 12 had been open for more than 5 years.

For example, five open work orders designated as “critical” were related to mold in buildings. In these instances, NPS staff officially closed the buildings in 2014 as an interim control measure rather than immediately fix the issue, even though the staff designated the work orders as emergency maintenance. While an interim control measure mitigated the immediate risk, it did not address the original hazard. In addition, in these cases, the NPS was not able to use multiple buildings for their intended purpose—including visitor lodging, a coffee shop, a camp store, and a restaurant—for more than 5 years. Both the coffee shop and lodging were initially closed in 2010 when the NPS could not find concessionaires to run the properties. During the initial closures, the buildings began to deteriorate. When the NPS inspected the buildings in January 2014, it found mold. At that time, the NPS wrote an interim control measure work order to officially close the buildings; however, this resulted in larger deferred maintenance issues because the work order to remediate the mold was not immediately addressed. The coffee shop recently reopened after a long-term effort to raise nearly \$1 million with nonprofit and community funding support, which included more than \$250,000 for mold remediation.

We also noted that, even when NPS staff implemented an interim control measure instead of correcting the issue, staff may not have implemented those measures within the required response times. For example, the FMSS showed that nine of the 29 open work orders had interim control measures that were not listed as completed for more than 5 months.

The NPS told us that all 29 critical HLS work order delays occurred because it does not have sufficient guidance for monitoring or verifying the ongoing status of HLS work orders. The applicable NPS guidance includes a requirement to “Review and Update Assessment of Hazards Periodically.” The guidance, however, does not define how often staff should conduct reviews beyond “periodically.”

Without clear guidance on interim control measure timeliness and HLS work order closure expectations, as well as policies establishing processes to ensure compliance by monitoring those time frames, the NPS cannot ensure that it will timely complete HLS work orders or interim control measures to ensure the safety of both the public and NPS employees.

#### **Office of Inspector General Recommendations and NPS Response**

We made eight recommendations to help the NPS increase its effectiveness in identifying and managing its deferred maintenance. We recommend that the NPS:

1. Develop and implement policies and procedures that define the circumstances and time frame in which to enter work orders into its maintenance software system (e.g., the Facility Management Software System).
2. Update current policies and procedures to clarify when to classify existing work orders as deferred maintenance in its maintenance software system (e.g., the Facility Management Software System).
3. Identify and update deferred maintenance data in its maintenance software system (e.g., the Facility Management Software System) to ensure all data are accurate and complete.
4. Develop and implement a monitoring mechanism for deferred maintenance data in its maintenance software system (e.g., the Facility Management

<sup>8</sup>The five classifications and their required response times are (1) critical—immediate, (2) serious—15 days, (3) moderate—12 months, (4) minor—2 years, and (5) negligible—5 years.

Software System) to routinely verify that deferred maintenance data are accurate and complete. This monitoring mechanism should define the roles and responsibilities for each facility management level.

5. Develop and implement policies and procedures that provide guidance for appropriately estimating the cost of maintenance projects.
6. Include accurate estimates for all existing and future work orders based on the guidance developed under Recommendation 5.
7. Verify that existing Health, Life, and Safety work orders address the original hazard, are completed, and are closed.
8. Develop and implement an oversight mechanism that monitors Health, Life, and Safety work orders to verify the original hazards are addressed and completed within the required time frames.

Based on the NPS's response and our analysis of that response, six recommendations are resolved, and two recommendations are unresolved. In particular, Recommendation 5 and Recommendation 6 are considered unresolved. Although the NPS stated that it concurred with these recommendations, we did not agree that the NPS' description of the actions it intended to take would address the concerns to which these recommendations were directed.

More generally, with respect to the issues set forth in our report, the NPS stated that it began implementing a new methodology for estimating deferred maintenance using "parametric condition assessments," a methodology based on visual assessments of conditions. The NPS stated that the new methodology removes the need to enter work orders for the purpose of *estimating* deferred maintenance because, once the new methodology is fully implemented, work orders will be created within the FMSS only when a project is *funded*. Based on the information we have received to date, it does not appear that this new methodology, on its own, addresses the ongoing risk that the assessments may not be updated as deferred maintenance work is completed. Therefore, we believe that the NPS still faces risks in managing overdue maintenance and repairs if it does not develop and implement a process to ensure that data within the FMSS are accurate and complete. It is our belief that, even after implementation of the revised estimation approach, the NPS will need to address a number of potential concerns relating to its deferred maintenance projects.

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<sup>9</sup>We judgmentally selected these parks based on their total number of assets, arriving at 5 of its 249 parks with 1 to 99 assets, 5 of its 111 parks with 100 to 499 assets, and 5 of its 37 parks with 500 or more assets. We also ensured that each of the NPS' seven regions was represented by at least one park.

**Appendix: FY 2020 NPS Parks Reviewed<sup>9</sup>**

<b>Park</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Deferred Maintenance (\$)</b>	<b>Total Assets</b>
President's Park (White House)	National Capital	62,244,044	94
Herbert Hoover National Historic Site	Midwest	4,445,417	96
Presidio of San Francisco	Pacific West	32,997,744	98
White Sands National Monument	Intermountain	6,358,112	98
San Juan National Historic Site	Southeast	315,649,911	99
Wrangell St Elias National Park	Alaska	18,655,577	392
New River Gorge National Park and Preserve	Northeast	16,296,689	485
Mammoth Cave National Park	Southeast	93,414,607	490
Mesa Verde National Park	Intermountain	117,726,547	492
Voyageurs National Park	Midwest	15,861,315	492
Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park	National Capital	163,602,569	1,246
Appalachian National Scenic Trail	Northeast	28,826,979	1,556
Blue Ridge Parkway	Southeast	681,423,081	1,846
Yosemite National Park	Pacific West	637,373,863	2,121
Yellowstone National Park	Intermountain	1,221,356,125	2,823

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QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO MARK GREENBLATT, INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

**Questions Submitted by Representative Grijalva**

*Question 1. Based on the OIG's findings in its September 2023 report on the National Park Service's (NPS) deferred maintenance management, please explain the primary reasons that NPS deferred maintenance costs have increased since Fiscal Year 2021.*

Answer. The Office of Inspector General (OIG) has not independently evaluated the root causes of deferred maintenance. In our September 2023 report, we found that the National Park Service (NPS) was unable to effectively identify and manage its deferred maintenance due to inaccurate and unreliable data. Even though its identified number of assets remained relatively constant, the NPS' deferred maintenance cost estimate has continuously increased from \$11.3 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 to \$20 billion in FY 2021. Our review determined that the NPS did not consistently identify, enter, and classify deferred maintenance work orders or verify their accuracy—which in some cases understated and in others overstated its deferred maintenance estimates.

For example, during our review of San Juan National Historic Site, we found that, between FYs 2015 and 2016, the NPS canceled all deferred maintenance work orders at the park that were more than 10 years old. As a result, the park's deferred maintenance decreased from \$330 million in FY 2015 to \$18 million in FY 2016. This led to underestimated reporting of the park's deferred maintenance cost estimates for several fiscal years. As the park reentered the work orders with updated cost estimates, its deferred maintenance costs appeared to significantly increase through FY 2020.

Overall, the NPS has cited multiple factors that contributed to this increase, including aging infrastructure, heavy visitor use, growing construction costs, insufficient funding to keep pace with repair needs, change in how deferred maintenance costs are estimated, and the application of a blanket 35-percent markup. We found that there was not sufficient documentation demonstrating whether the amount of the markup was reasonable.

*Question 2. The OIG's 2023 report notes that NPS is in the process of implementing a new assessment method that is expected to address many of the OIG's recommendations. Does the OIG have any reason to think this new methodology will be less accurate than the methods that were in place when the OIG started its audit?*

Answer. Given that the OIG has not evaluated the new methodology being implemented by the NPS, we do not have a basis to opine on its accuracy.

*Question 3. Will the 35 percent markup result in an overestimate or an underestimate of the size of NPS's deferred maintenance?*

Answer. We could not determine with certainty whether the blanket 35-percent markup overstated or understated NPS' deferred maintenance overall. As we note in the report itself, the markup may overstate deferred maintenance in instances where the work will be performed by park service staff. For example, during our review, we learned that NPS staff at multiple parks complete some work orders instead of contractors. For example, the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve had its NPS staff replace roofs for 13 buildings at an approximate cost of \$265,000 during FY 2020. Had the NPS applied the 35-percent markup to these work orders, the cost—and consequently, the deferred maintenance—would have been overestimated by approximately \$93,000.

Conversely, the markup could potentially understate project management costs for certain contracted work. While the NPS acknowledged that this 35 percent markup likely overstates deferred maintenance in some cases and underestimates it in others, it stated that 35 percent is a good representation across the deferred maintenance portfolio because it is an overall average estimate of markup. However, NPS was unable to provide the OIG an analysis demonstrating that the overstated and understated estimates would average to 35 percent or that 35 percent was a reasonable amount to mark up the portfolio. Although adding a markup may be appropriate for some NPS deferred maintenance projects, adding such a significant amount to the overall balance without an appropriate methodology can lead to inaccurate cost estimates.

*Question 4. Considering the substantial deferred maintenance list at NPS, the multi-year process for completing critical maintenance projects, and the ongoing funding shortfall for routine maintenance, is it reasonable to assume that deferred maintenance will continue to grow in the immediate future, regardless of any accounting changes implemented by NPS or additional funding from the Great American Outdoors Act?*

Answer. OIG's work did not examine this issue and so we cannot opine on the reasonableness of this assumption. However, we note that the NPS may be able to provide information on this topic.

*Question 5. The Republican-passed Interior Appropriations bill includes a decrease of \$433 million or 12.5 percent to the National Park Service and a 52 percent cut to the construction account. Would a cut like this worsen or improve the Park Service's deferred maintenance? Would repeated cuts in successive years worsen or improve the Park Service's deferred maintenance?*

Answer. The OIG has not conducted an independent analysis of the NPS' budget request or funding needs and therefore we do not have a basis to address this question.

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Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Inspector General Greenblatt. I would like to now introduce Mr. Cardell Johnson, Director of Natural Resources and Environment for the Government Accountability Office.

Mr. Johnson, you have 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF CARDELL JOHNSON, DIRECTOR, NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT, GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you. Chairmen Tiffany and Gosar, Ranking Members Stansbury and Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important topic.

GAO's recent oversight work identified six challenges that Federal land management agencies and the Bureau of Indian Education face in reducing the maintenance backlog.

Properly maintaining assets such as campgrounds, trails, schools, and drinking water infrastructure on our public lands is vital for public recreation, our economy, and the preservation of important historical and cultural resources.

My statement today will focus on data management challenges, because changes in how the agencies manage their data contributed to the sharp increase that we saw in deferred maintenance over the last 4 years. And then I will also highlight the positive impact that the Legacy Restoration Fund is having on addressing data management and other challenges.

So, the first step to reducing maintenance backlog is to have good data. This includes a consistent and transparent approach for determining total deferred maintenance. It also includes instituting robust quality controls to ensure that data is accurate and complete. Prior to Congress establishing the Legacy Restoration Fund in 2020, the agencies did not collect complete information. They cited a limited funding as the primary reason for why they didn't dedicate enough resources to this task.

And until August 2023, Interior agencies used different definitions of "deferred maintenance."

Furthermore, the Department of the Interior in particular lacked robust quality controls and information systems used to manage assets. As a result, deferred maintenance was under-reported by \$821 million at one agency. Interior first discovered this inaccuracy while responding to our data requests. The Department then took immediate action to strengthen quality controls.

So, the bottom line that I am getting to here is that incomplete data, inconsistent approaches, and the lack of robust quality controls resulted in inaccurate reporting, and ultimately affected decisions of which deferred maintenance projects to fund. Correcting these practices contributed to the sharp increase in deferred maintenance that we see today.

Despite the increase in the maintenance backlog, the Legacy Restoration Fund is having a positive impact. Our analysis describes a few ways in which the fund is helping agencies address long-standing challenges. First, the fund has fostered a cultural change toward maintaining better data on deferred maintenance because there is additional funding available.

Second, guaranteed funding for 5 years has allowed agencies to better plan to reduce challenges such as uncertainty and inflation.

And then lastly, the fund has given agencies the ability to maintain, train, and expand internal maintenance teams, and this has resulted in some agencies being able to tackle smaller projects more quickly and at a lower cost to the taxpayers.

In conclusion, continued attention on the data management challenges outlined here today will position agencies to communicate their resource needs and better guide strategic decision-making. Also, as agencies continue to tackle the maintenance backlog, they may need support from Congress.

Should Congress consider reauthorizing the Legacy Restoration Fund, there may be opportunities to enhance the fund's effectiveness at addressing ongoing challenges to reducing deferred maintenance. Doing so may go a long way to ensure that our iconic national parks and wilderness areas are available for the public to enjoy for generations to come, and that schools maintained by the Bureau of Indian Education are in good condition to meet the students' needs.

This concludes my statement, and I am happy to take questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Johnson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CARDELL D. JOHNSON, DIRECTOR, NATURAL RESOURCES  
AND ENVIRONMENT, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Chairmen Gosar and Tiffany, Ranking Members Neguse and Stansbury, and Members of the Subcommittees:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work on deferred maintenance and the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF). The federal government manages public lands and other assets such as buildings and roads that require billions of dollars to maintain and operate annually. The land management agencies—Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and National Park Service (NPS)—and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) carry out this work.<sup>1</sup> These agencies have reported tens of billions of dollars in deferred maintenance—maintenance and repairs to assets that were not performed when they should have been, or were scheduled and then delayed.

As we and others have reported, deferred maintenance can have negative consequences, including limiting the agencies' ability to carry out their missions and reducing assets' value and life span.<sup>2</sup> Properly maintaining our public lands and their supporting infrastructure helps ensure that recreational areas are available for the public to enjoy. In 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act established, among other things, the LRF to provide additional funding to address deferred maintenance during fiscal years 2021 through 2025.<sup>3</sup>

Our January 2024 report and my statement today describe (1) how the amounts and compositions of deferred maintenance at each of the five agencies changed from fiscal year 2019 through 2022; (2) how these agencies selected projects for LRF funding and the extent to which the selection approaches followed leading practices for managing deferred maintenance; and (3) challenges the agencies reported facing in reducing deferred maintenance and how the LRF program design helps to address some challenges.<sup>4</sup>

For our January 2024 report, we analyzed agency data on deferred maintenance per year and per agency for fiscal years 2019 through 2022, the most recent year available at the time of our report.<sup>5</sup> We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of describing general trends in the agencies' recorded deferred maintenance. We also reviewed agency documentation and interviewed agency officials about how their agencies prioritized LRF projects. We compared

<sup>1</sup>The Department of the Interior oversees three of the four land management agencies that receive funding from the LRF—BLM, FWS, and NPS—as well as BIE. The U.S. Department of Agriculture oversees the Forest Service, the remaining land management agency.

<sup>2</sup>GAO, *Federal Real Property: Agencies Attribute Substantial Increases in Reported Deferred Maintenance to Multiple Factors*, GAO-23-106124 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 28, 2022).

<sup>3</sup>Pub. L. No. 116-152, §2(a), 134 Stat. 682, 682-685 (2020) (codified at 54 U.S.C. §§200401-200402).

<sup>4</sup>GAO, *Deferred Maintenance: Agencies Generally Followed Leading Practices in Selections but Faced Challenges*, GAO-24-106495 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 8, 2024).

<sup>5</sup>Departments report department-wide deferred maintenance through their annual financial reports. However, we used data from agency asset management databases in our January 2024 report and this statement because these data allowed us to report on individual agencies' deferred maintenance.



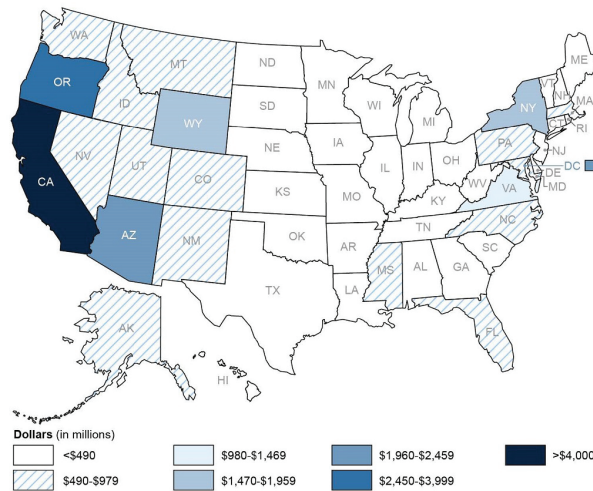
information about agency efforts with six leading practices derived from research by the National Research Council, which we identified in January 2014.<sup>6</sup> These practices are recognized as effective strategies for managing deferred maintenance. Our January 2024 report provides a more detailed description of our methodology. Our work was performed in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

**Reported Deferred Maintenance Increased for the Agencies, in Part Due to Changes in Approaches for Estimation**

Reported deferred maintenance increased for all five agencies from fiscal year 2019 through 2022, according to our analysis of agency data.<sup>7</sup> NPS and BLM had the largest increases, while BIE, Forest Service, and FWS experienced smaller increases.

Different types of assets accounted for the bulk of each agency’s deferred maintenance in fiscal year 2022. Roads and other transportation assets accounted for most deferred maintenance for BLM and Forest Service. Schools accounted for most deferred maintenance for BIE; recreational and visitor experience assets for NPS; and water infrastructure and utilities for FWS. The most deferred maintenance was in California, Oregon, and Arizona in fiscal year 2022, according to our analysis (see fig. 1).

**Figure 1: Total Reported Deferred Maintenance for All Five Agencies, by State, Fiscal Year 2022**



Sources: GAO analysis of Department of the Interior and Forest Service data; Map Resources (map). | GAO-24-107234  
 Note: We totaled deferred maintenance reported by the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Indian Education. Forest Service does not record precise location information for deferred maintenance on roads or trails. We included data on Forest Service roads approximated by multiplying a national average deferred maintenance per mile by the number of miles of road in each state.

Agency officials at NPS and BLM attributed some of their increases to changes in data management.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> GAO, *Federal Real Property: Improved Transparency Could Help Efforts to Manage Agencies’ Maintenance and Repair Backlogs*, GAO-14-188 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 23, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> This is consistent with government-wide increases in deferred maintenance over the past 5 years. GAO-23-106124.

<sup>8</sup> BIE’s, FWS’s, and Forest Service’s deferred maintenance did not increase significantly over this same period. Forest Service officials said they are in the process of changing the way the agency calculates deferred maintenance for roads by increasing the miles of road sampled and moving toward looking at 3 years of data. However, Forest Service officials stated these changes did not play a role in changes to the agency’s deferred maintenance.

- **NPS.** NPS changed its approach to determining total deferred maintenance in fiscal year 2022. Specifically, it began using a modeling method for non-transportation assets.<sup>9</sup> This change allowed NPS to more consistently develop and track deferred maintenance data for these assets in its data system, according to NPS officials. Additionally, in fiscal year 2021, NPS added a 35 percent markup to deferred maintenance estimates for non-transportation assets to account for project execution costs, such as design, construction management, and compliance. NPS's previous assessment methodology only considered construction costs.
- **BLM.** Starting in 2018, BLM began implementing a modeling methodology for assessing deferred maintenance on roads. Under its previous method, BLM did not have the resources to perform all the required assessments and corresponding data entry, and many assessments were not completed. Therefore, condition data were inaccurate, according to BLM officials.

Agency officials also said deferred maintenance increased in part because inflation drove up costs to address deferred maintenance. From October 2019 through September 2023, the construction material price index increased 42 percent, according to our analysis of Federal Reserve data.

Additionally, agency officials said increases were due in part to agency staff putting in more effort to log all deferred maintenance because of the increased funding available from the LRF. The officials told us that when funding was limited, there was not an emphasis on logging complete data on all deferred maintenance needs because so much of it would not be funded. As a result, they did not dedicate many resources to inputting data. The LRF's creation led the agencies to reevaluate their asset management approach and fostered a cultural change toward maintaining better data on deferred maintenance, according to agency officials.

Interior and some of its agencies recently took some action to address issues with how the agencies managed their deferred maintenance data. In particular, Interior had incomplete and inaccurate data on deferred maintenance for BIE and FWS for fiscal years 2019 and 2020. However, the agencies have implemented additional quality control measures, such as hiring a new employee to ensure they have adequate oversight and quality control over future reporting and implementing quarterly review of the data to prevent future errors.

Additionally, Interior agencies previously used different interpretations for the definition of deferred maintenance. Interior established a comprehensive policy in August 2023 that standardized a definition for deferred maintenance for its agencies to use. This policy will help ensure Interior has more complete and accurate information on deferred maintenance to guide its resource allocation decisions, according to our analysis of the policy.

#### **Agencies' Processes to Select Deferred Maintenance Projects for LRF Funding Generally Followed Leading Practices**

All five agencies generally considered similar factors in their processes for selecting LRF projects.<sup>10</sup> For example:

- **Amount of deferred maintenance addressed.** All five agencies' processes for selecting LRF projects included considering projects that addressed the most deferred maintenance possible, according to agency documentation and interviews with agency officials. The four land management agencies set quantifiable objectives related to the amount of deferred maintenance that a project addressed. For example, Forest Service aimed to reduce deferred maintenance by 75 cents for every LRF dollar spent, and BLM by at least one dollar for every LRF dollar spent.<sup>11</sup>
- **Cost and scope of project.** All five agencies' processes to select projects considered prioritizing projects with high costs and large scopes. Such large projects were generally too costly to fund using annual appropriations. For

<sup>9</sup>Deferred maintenance estimates for the agency's transportation assets are based on assessments and modeling conducted by the Federal Highway Administration, according to NPS officials.

<sup>10</sup>Interior's agencies prioritized some of these factors based on a department-wide plan that established high-level goals and objectives for the LRF investment strategy. For more information see U.S. Department of the Interior, *Great American Outdoors Act National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund Strategic Plan* (Oct. 21, 2022).

<sup>11</sup>Some projects may address a lower amount of deferred maintenance than the actual cost of the project. For example, deferred maintenance estimates may not include some project development costs such as those related to environmental approvals, planning requirements, or design costs. See our January 2024 report for more information. GAO-24-106495.

example, BIE had a project in 2021 to consolidate education programs housed in multiple buildings into a single facility at a high school in the Navajo Nation. The project cost estimate was approximately \$70.9 million, which would have amounted to most of the agency's annual non-LRF funding of \$95.3 million for facility improvement and repair in fiscal year 2021.<sup>12</sup> Projects that have large scopes may be more cost-effective because they may reduce overhead costs, such as contract administration. These large projects can also create longer term improvements by thoroughly addressing maintenance issues rather than performing minimal work that will then need additional maintenance soon thereafter, according to agency officials.

Agencies also considered relevance to core mission, visitation to site, and speed of implementation. See our January 2024 report for further discussion of these factors.<sup>13</sup>

Our review of the agencies' processes for selecting LRF projects also found that they generally followed all six of the selected leading practices for managing deferred maintenance.<sup>14</sup> For example:

- **Identify the primary methods to be used for delivering maintenance and repair activities.** The agencies generally have multiple methods available to address their deferred maintenance activities while implementing LRF projects. These methods were identified in agency documentation and included using outside contractors, partnerships, flexible contract vehicles, and internal maintenance staff to conduct maintenance activities.
- **Identify the types of risks posed by lack of timely investment.** Agencies' processes to select LRF projects identified risks of not addressing deferred maintenance in a timely manner. For example, they selected LRF projects that addressed identified risks such as threats to health and safety, which are prioritized as part of the agencies' core missions. For example, as part of its weighted evaluation process for project selection BLM considered whether a project would address safety issues.
- **Identify types of facilities or specific buildings (i.e., assets) that are mission critical and mission supportive.** Agencies' processes to select LRF projects included identifying assets that are mission critical and generally prioritizing projects that address deferred maintenance for these assets. For example, according to Forest Service documentation, the agency's process assesses, selects, and approves potential decommissioning projects based on standardized factors, including how critical the asset is to the agency's mission.

#### **Agencies Reported Facing Several Challenges to Reducing Deferred Maintenance, and the LRF Program Design Helps to Address Certain Challenges**

Officials from the five agencies reported facing several challenges to reducing deferred maintenance. For example, agencies face challenges related to construction supply chain issues and inflation, according to officials at all five agencies. Recently, due to COVID-19, a shortage of materials necessary for construction has contributed to project delays and higher-than-expected construction bids. Remote project locations, extreme weather conditions, and limited contractor capacity and competition have also made it difficult to address deferred maintenance needs, according to agency officials.

In addition to general challenges related to reducing deferred maintenance, agencies also face challenges specifically related to the LRF. According to officials at the four land management agencies, the short-term nature of the LRF can create challenges with hiring. The LRF is designed as a 5-year program through 2025; however, construction projects to address deferred maintenance may take longer. Therefore, agencies could face difficult decisions on whether to hire (1) an employee

<sup>12</sup>BIE's fiscal year 2021 education construction appropriation was approximately \$264.3 million. The explanatory statement accompanying the appropriations act directed approximately \$95.3 million of that appropriation for facility improvement and repair. Pub. L. No. 116-260, 134 Stat. 1182, 1493 (2020); 166 Cong. Rec. H8311, H8536 (Dec. 21, 2020).

<sup>13</sup>GAO-24-106495.

<sup>14</sup>In January 2014, we identified leading practices, derived from the National Research Council, for effective strategies for managing deferred maintenance. For more information on our methodology for developing these leading practices, see GAO, *Federal Real Property: Improved Transparency Could Help Efforts to Manage Agencies' Maintenance and Repair Backlogs*, GAO-14-188 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 23, 2014). Our January 2024 report contains more information on the leading practices and how agency actions followed those practices.

to serve a 5-year term that might end during the project, or (2) a permanent employee they might not be able to justify in their budgets after the LRF funding ends.

However, some aspects of the LRF program design have helped with challenges related to project uncertainty and inflation. For example:

- Agency officials told us having the LRF funding specified for 5 years allows them to know in advance that they will have steady funding, compared with having less predictable surges of annual funding. As a result, agencies can plan better for the coming years, according to agency officials.
- The LRF funding does not expire or need to be spent in a particular time frame. This assists agencies because projects generally take place over a long time frame.
- The agencies' ability to use the LRF funds to maintain, train, and expand internal maintenance teams have helped NPS and FWS tackle smaller projects more quickly and at a lower cost than through contracted work, according to agency documents.

Another benefit of the LRF's program design is the inclusion of contingency funds. Since fiscal year 2022, the explanatory statements accompanying the five agencies' annual appropriations acts have included an amount for contingency funds for each agency.<sup>15</sup> The agencies can use these contingency funds for any project funded by the LRF that experienced a funding deficiency due to unforeseen cost overruns if certain requirements are met.<sup>16</sup> These contingency funds allow agencies more flexibility to deal with inflation and other challenges and address deferred maintenance, according to agency officials.

In closing, while facing some challenges in managing deferred maintenance, the five agencies have generally followed leading practices for doing so. In addition, the LRF has resulted in benefits. For example, the additional funding from the LRF has helped foster a cultural change toward maintaining better data on deferred maintenance. Continued attention to these issues will position agencies to more effectively communicate resource needs. It will also help provide Congress and the public with a clear picture of the anticipated costs to address deferred maintenance in the future and support critical government functions.

Further, the LRF funding has allowed the agencies to tackle projects too large to address using annual appropriations. NPS and FWS used the funding for internal maintenance teams to tackle small projects more quickly and at a lower cost than through contracted work. The LRF's 5-year term can create challenges with hiring employees to assist in construction projects that might take longer than 5 years. However, the LRF funds do not expire, which can help with these long projects. Contingency funds have also helped agencies adjust quickly to unforeseen cost overruns and deal with challenges, such as inflation.

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This testimony was submitted as an official GAO Report, titled "DEFERRED MAINTENANCE—Agencies' Project Selection and Challenges." The original document can be found at:

<https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24107234.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> See Pub. L. No. 117-103, div. G, tit. IV, § 431(c), 136 Stat. 49, 417-18; 168 Cong. Rec. H2477, H2538 (Mar. 9, 2022); Pub. L. No. 117-328, div. G, tit. IV, § 431(c), 136 Stat. 4459, 4828-29 (2022); 168 Cong. Rec. S8553, S8716-S8717 (Dec. 20, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> For example, the contingency funds may only be used if there is a risk to project completion resulting from unforeseen cost overruns. In addition, the contingency funds can only be used for costs of adjustments and changes within the original scope of effort for projects funded by the LRF. Pub. L. No. 117-103, div. G, tit. IV, § 431(c)(1), (2), 136 Stat. 49, 417-18; Pub. L. No. 117-328, div. G, tit. IV, § 431(c)(1), (2), 136 Stat. 4459, 4828-29 (2022).

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO CARDELL JOHNSON, DIRECTOR, NATURAL  
RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT, GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

**Questions Submitted by Representative Grijalva**

*Question 1. Based on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) findings in its January 2024 report, please explain the primary reasons that the National Parks Service's (NPS) deferred maintenance costs have increased since Fiscal Year 2021.*

Answer. Agency officials at the National Park Service (NPS) attributed some of the increases in deferred maintenance to changes in data management. Specifically, NPS changed its approach to determining total deferred maintenance in fiscal year 2022. Previously, NPS conducted comprehensive in-person assessments of its assets. In 2022, the agency began using a modeling method for non-transportation assets, where staff conduct rapid visual assessments of assets to model deferred maintenance. This change allowed NPS to more consistently develop and track deferred maintenance data for these assets in its data system, according to NPS officials. Additionally, in fiscal year 2021, NPS added a 35 percent markup to deferred maintenance estimates for non-transportation assets to account for project execution costs (such as design, construction management, compliance, and project management). NPS's previous assessment methodology only considered construction costs.

NPS officials also said deferred maintenance increased in part because inflation drove up costs to address deferred maintenance. From October 2019 through September 2023, the construction material price index increased 42 percent, according to our analysis of Federal Reserve data. Additionally, NPS officials said increases were due in part to agency staff putting in more effort to log all deferred maintenance because of the increased funding available from the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF). Agency officials told us that when funding was limited, there was not an emphasis on logging complete data on all deferred maintenance needs because so much of it would not be funded. As a result, they did not dedicate many resources to inputting data. The LRF's creation led the agencies to reevaluate their asset management approach and fostered a cultural change toward maintaining better data on deferred maintenance, according to agency officials.

*Question 2. GAO's January 2024 report notes that NPS recently applied a 35 percent markup to deferred maintenance projects to account for additional project execution costs (e.g., design, construction management, compliance, and project management), partly explaining the increased valuation for deferred maintenance. Is there precedent for similar changes in accounting methodology within other federal agencies that resulted in substantial changes in estimated deferred maintenance and repair costs?*

Answer. We have previously reported that similar changes in methodology for other agencies resulted in substantial changes in estimated deferred maintenance. For example, State Department officials said their deferred maintenance estimates increased from \$96 million in fiscal year 2019 to \$3 billion in fiscal year 2020 as a result of adopting a new methodology for determining its deferred maintenance.<sup>1</sup> The State Department introduced parametric modeling to supplement data collected through its annual condition assessments. This model estimates the extent building systems have deteriorated over time and the estimated costs for replacement, if needed, based on the ages and expected useful life of individual systems.

As another example, Department of Energy officials have said that the main cause of an increase of about 35 percent in its estimated deferred maintenance from fiscal year 2018 through fiscal year 2019 was a National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) initiative designed to improve the quality of its data on its assets.<sup>2</sup> NNSA began using a new software application and updated information to calculate deferred maintenance for its buildings. Officials said this new method led to about a \$2 billion increase over previous calculations.

<sup>1</sup>GAO, *Overseas Real Property: Prioritizing Key Assets and Developing a Plan Could Help State Manage Its Estimated \$3 Billion Maintenance Backlog*, GAO-21-497 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 15, 2021).

<sup>2</sup>GAO, *Federal Real Property: Agencies Attribute Substantial Increases in Reported Deferred Maintenance to Multiple Factors*, GAO-23-106124 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 28, 2022).

*Question 3. Has the Government Accountability Office encountered any evidence to suggest that the National Park Service has been negligent or has failed to follow leading practices in its management of deferred maintenance?*

Answer. Our January 2024 report evaluated NPS's processes for selecting deferred maintenance projects for LRF funding and found that they generally followed all six of the selected leading practices for managing deferred maintenance.<sup>3</sup> This review focused on processes for selecting LRF projects in particular and excluded three leading practices for managing deferred maintenance more generally.

Other recent GAO work on government-wide deferred maintenance examined two of those leading practices which were excluded from our January 2024 report, specifically that agencies (1) structure budgets to separately identify funding to address maintenance and repair and deferred maintenance backlogs and (2) employ models for predicting outcome of investments, analyzing trade-offs, and optimizing among competing investments.<sup>4</sup> That report found that Department of the Interior budget documents identified funding for maintenance but did not identify funding for addressing deferred maintenance backlogs separately or plans that include time frames for addressing backlogs. In addition, the report found that Interior officials were unaware of the agency using models to predict the outcomes of its investments.

In response to our findings, the officials observed that it may be difficult to quantify in advance how much deferred maintenance costs from prior estimates would be addressed by the amount of funding they request; and the amount of funding spent on a project would not necessarily correlate to the amount of deferred maintenance addressed. In addition, Interior officials said that, while they recognized the value of such models, Interior agencies did not need complex models to understand that funding levels are insufficient and would lead to increased deferred maintenance. Further, they said that trade-offs between projects are analyzed during project prioritization at the local, regional, and headquarters levels.

*Question 4. The Republican-passed Interior Appropriations bill includes a decrease of \$433 million or 12.5 percent to the National Park Service and a 52 percent cut to the construction account. Would a cut like this worsen or improve the Park Service's deferred maintenance? Would repeated cuts in successive years worsen or improve the Park Service's deferred maintenance?*

Answer. When available funding does not cover the cost of all needed annual and preventative maintenance, maintenance and repairs are not performed when they should be and must be delayed. This can result in an increase in deferred maintenance.

*Question 5. How does the availability of confirmed, guaranteed funding for planning and executing maintenance projects as opposed to relying on the fluctuations of the annual appropriations process benefit an agency's ability to manage deferred maintenance?*

Answer. Officials told us having the LRF funding specified for 5 years allows them to know in advance that they will have steady funding, compared with having less predictable surges of annual funding. As a result, agencies can plan better for the coming years, according to agency officials.

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Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you very much, Mr. Johnson. We are now going to recognize Members for 5 minutes for questions, and I am going to open the questioning up today.

Mr. Greenblatt, you described it as a house of cards on a house of cards. Could you give us a little more in-depth explanation of why you say that?

Mr. GREENBLATT. Sure. This was based on the old model using work orders, and then you have the 35 percent markup tacked on top of the work orders. Our concern is that our review established that the work order data was inaccurate and unreliable. So, that is one house of cards. And then, when you add on the 35 percent

<sup>3</sup> GAO, *Deferred Maintenance: Agencies Generally Followed Leading Practices in Selections but Faced Challenges*, GAO-24-106495 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 8, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> GAO, *Federal Real Property: Agencies Should Provide More Information About Increases in Deferred Maintenance and Repair*, GAO-24-105485 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 16, 2023).

on top of that, we are concerned that that is another house of cards built on top of that. It is an unstable foundation, and then they are adding an across-the-board markup on top of that.

I will note that they have asserted to us that they are moving away from that over the last couple of years. The final implementation of moving away from that process is underway now and should be done, according to the NPS, this fiscal year. But the estimates that have been used for years, the estimates that were driving GAOA, appear to have been, as I said, a house of cards built upon a house of cards.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Greenblatt, where did this 35 percent markup come from? Have you been able to ascertain that in your investigation?

Mr. GREENBLATT. According to the NPS, this is based on the Federal Highway Administration, they apparently apply a 35 percent markup on theirs.

Now what it is, according to NPS, is that before they would look at just the actual costs of, say, construction for a particular project. And now they are adding on additional costs, those sort of peripheral costs or ancillary costs such as compliance, such as project management, other items which may be legitimate, and now they said they weren't including them in the past. In 2021, they elected to include those in. And to do so, they effectuated this 35 percent markup, which comes from the Federal Highway Administration.

We have a number of concerns about that. It is not necessarily that there shouldn't be additional costs incorporated. That may be completely valid. Our concern was on a couple of different ways looking at this. One was, is the 35 percent number in and of itself appropriate?

Two, does it apply across the board? There may be different types of projects that warrant different types of markups, either none or, perhaps even arguably, more than 35 percent, depending on the project.

The third thing is these are all based on the assumption that these jobs will be done by contractors, and there is some subset, an appreciable subset of deferred maintenance projects that will be done in house, and therefore wouldn't warrant that markup.

So, those are the nature of our concerns about the markup, and that is why we questioned that over the course of our review.

Mr. TIFFANY. Did you ever get an answer or a rationalization of why 35 percent? Have you gotten a good answer?

Mr. GREENBLATT. We don't believe it was adequately justified. What I understand is that they have referred to the FHFA amount, and DOI adjusted a policy to include the incorporation of some of these costs. We don't feel like the justification that NPS used for the 35 percent number across the board was adequate, frankly. It wasn't sophisticated enough and wasn't nuanced enough to give a fair representation.

Mr. TIFFANY. Should this Committee have full confidence in the National Park Service going forward dealing with this issue?

Mr. GREENBLATT. That is a call for you all to make. We are looking at the numbers that they were putting forward.

I would say it is incumbent on the Park Service to get the numbers right. And for us, meaning me in my office, GAO, and the

Members in this room right here right now, to exercise oversight because, as you are looking at the GAOA reauthorization in the next year or so, this is going to be critical to understand the magnitude of the issues at play.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Johnson, it seems to be much different conclusions between the Inspector General and GAO. Why is there such a discrepancy?

Mr. JOHNSON. Well, there isn't a discrepancy. I think a lot of what we found in our work, very similar findings. We point out the 35 percent markup in our report, as well. We have also identified the same data management challenges as the IG report.

In regards to the 35 percent markup, we agree with our accountability colleagues here that it needs to be transparent, that they need to justify and document that. We do also believe that trying to estimate project execution costs is a best practice, but it is also a best practice to make sure that you are transparent, and that it is justified and documented.

Mr. TIFFANY. In your opinion, should this Committee have full confidence that the National Park Service is going to turn around this really big problem?

Mr. JOHNSON. The National Park Service has been given a lot of resources over the years to address this particular issue, and I think the work that we have done here—it is looking like that they are following a lot of the leading practices, but they have to remain consistent and diligent with what they are doing.

It is one thing to fold the leading practices into your policies, but you actually have to apply them every day.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you for your answers. Next, I would like to recognize the gentleman from Hawaii, Mr. Case, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CASE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think we can all agree on this Committee, or at least most of us, with the vast majority of Americans that our goal here is to strengthen and improve our national parks throughout our country. I have two of the best national parks—along with everybody else—Hawaii Volcanoes National Park and Haleakala. So, if the intent of this hearing is to do that, I commend our Majority colleagues for holding it.

But I am having trouble trying to sort through to determine what the real issue is that we are trying to solve here, so that is the nature of my questions. And I would make a couple of observations up front.

I think the first observation is that the reason we are talking about deferred maintenance is because we deferred it to start with, and that is a result of chronic underfunding of the National Park Service over a long, long period of time, through multiple administrations, in Congresses of simply not keeping up with maintenance to start with, No. 1.

No. 2, that is a function of the appropriations decisions that this body makes in terms of maintaining our national parks, and I would note that we have a choice to make even this year where, and I speak as a member, together with Ms. Lee here, of the Appropriations Committee, serving on this particular committee, where we have seen in the Department of the Interior budget put forward by my Majority colleagues from Fiscal Year 2023 to Fiscal Year 2024, 2024 being their budget, a reduction of about 13 percent



in the National Park Service overall, and a 52 percent proposed cut in the National Park Service construction budget.

So, we can talk here about deferred maintenance, but we are only repeating the problem by our appropriations decisions. So, to me, that is the big picture here, is how much money are we putting in to maintaining the parks to start with, and how much money are we putting in every year to getting after the deferred maintenance.

Now, I think we also almost all agree that the Great American Outdoors Act was a great development, despite the fact that some members of this Committee voted against it. And we are trying to make that work. So, let's focus in on the exact issue that we are talking about here.

I think we are all trying to get after the deferred maintenance. We are trying to determine whether the National Park Service can do it better. I think we are having some disagreement over the extent to which it is doing a good job from that perspective. I welcome the oversight there. But let me ask you this direct question.

Why is the estimate of deferred maintenance, which we are focusing on in this hearing—we are saying basically the National Park Service did or didn't or is or isn't utilizing the right techniques to estimate deferred maintenance, but that is only really relevant, isn't it, if you are trying to get to a prioritization of your deferred maintenance projects and an overall budget? You still have to bid it out.

You talked about how many of these jobs are done in the private sector. I mean, they are bid at some point. I hope they are bid competitively. And then you also talked about how the projects are, in fact, in some cases, done internally. But in that case there is an end game cost. I mean, in other words, the cost is not the estimate. Or is it?

So, the question is, why is it so relevant that we are focusing in particular, and I have no problem in making sure that we have good estimates. I am just trying to figure out whether we are solving the actual problem here, which is deferred maintenance.

Mr. GREENBLATT. Yes, I would agree that the core issue should be on the work being done. The estimates are important for decision-making, though. Critical, as I said, as you are going into the GAOA reauthorization, that getting those numbers right, or at least a reasonable approximation of those numbers, is important. But yes, we also focused on the use of the work orders, whether they have implemented the internal controls in order to drive that system to where it is an effective way to identify and manage the necessary work.

Mr. CASE. OK, so we are in agreement that cost, at the end of the day, is relevant. Have we studied whether cost is actually matching estimates?

Are they actually, at the end of the day, getting the estimates right in terms of the actual cost?

Mr. GREENBLATT. Well, that is the problem. They are shifting to this new process.

Under the old process, we have significant concerns that no, the process was not identifying the costs right. The systems that were

being used under the work order mentality was deeply flawed, and that is what I think we found. Now, whether the new system cures that or not, it really depends on their internal controls and whether they are maintaining the system to account for whatever work is being done.

Mr. CASE. OK. And then I think, finally, as my time runs out, a question which is more rhetorical at this point is, OK, well, then are these issues that we are dealing with, are they fixable administratively, or do they take a statutory fix, which is all about your GAOA reauthorization process?

So, I will just leave it there. I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I would now like to recognize the gentleman from Colorado, Mr. Lamborn, for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here. Thank you to the Chairmen for holding this important hearing. Thank you to the Ranking Members for their bipartisan support of this important issue.

The testimony touches on several issues highlighting the effect on concessionaires who bring in \$1.5 billion in revenue for the National Park Service annually. At the end of 2023, the final rule updating 36 CFR part 51, the commercial visitor services concession contracts, was issued. And while this is a great improvement towards the issue of the minimum franchise fee, I still have concerns about transparency within NPS.

Mr. Greenblatt, first of all, just a detail. Which location was vacant for years starting in 2010 that you mentioned in your testimony?

Mr. GREENBLATT. Which position was vacant?

Mr. LAMBORN. Which location?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I am blanking on the name of it right now, but it was a restaurant and lodge. Thank you. It was Blue Ridge Parkway. It had a significant structure that was vacant because of mold.

Mr. LAMBORN. OK, very good. And do you have any numbers on what revenue is lost from that facility? Or if not, you could get that back to us.

Mr. GREENBLATT. Sure, we can get back to you. I don't know that. I think that is probably an NPS question, but we can see whether there is any data on that.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you. And did either of you, your organizations or agencies, identify whether any of the current deferred backlog applies to concessionaire contractual maintenance requirements?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I don't know the answer to that off the top of my head, but we can get back to you on that.

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes, we would also need to get back to you on that.

Mr. LAMBORN. OK. If you could, that would be great.

Have either of you seen any evidence of using concessionaires to improve quality-of-life additions to visitor areas?

In some cases, NPS' deferred maintenance backlog in visitor services facilities like campgrounds and visitor centers could impact adjacent concessionaire operations directly or indirectly. With that in mind, has there been any consideration of partnering

with the concession industry to help accelerate curing these aspects of the NPS deferred maintenance backlog?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I am not aware of any. That again would probably be an NPS question in terms of whether they have explored that path. I don't know of that sitting here right now.

Mr. LAMBORN. But it sounds like something they should look at.

Mr. GREENBLATT. I think they could explore all sorts of different options, but that is something that, like the issue in the Blue Ridge Parkway where there was a restaurant and a lodge that were not active for a decade, presumably there could have been concessionaires that had an interest there. But that is something, again, that would be an NPS question.

Mr. LAMBORN. Would you have anything to add to that?

Mr. JOHNSON. No, thank you.

Mr. LAMBORN. OK, thanks.

As Vice Chair of the Natural Resources Committee, I have heard many of the issues about NPS employee housing and the rundown nature of the infrastructure. Has the OIG or the GAO addressed or reviewed further utilizing public-private partnerships to provide support in some of the most important infrastructure to the parks?

Mr. GREENBLATT. No, I know that that is a significant part. Going back to that Blue Ridge Parkway, one of the reasons why that situation was fixed was they ultimately went to private donations to get that situation remedied. So, I think that could be a robust avenue for some improvement there. But we have not looked at that, as far as I know.

Mr. LAMBORN. OK. And Mr. Greenblatt, would the minimum franchise fee have been a burden to solidifying contracts in certain places?

Mr. GREENBLATT. We haven't looked at that, but I can look into our records to see whether we have explored that issue in the past. That is not coming to mind, whether we have done any review on that in particular.

Mr. LAMBORN. OK. With all those various things that you didn't have at your fingertips but could find, please provide that to the Committee and we would appreciate that.

Mr. GREENBLATT. Absolutely. Will do.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you so much.

Mr. TIFFANY. Will the gentleman yield the balance of his time to me? Thank you very much.

Mr. Greenblatt, you have seen recently in the news the National Park Service wanted to remove the William Penn statue from Welcome Park in the heart of Philadelphia. That received a lot of blowback.

In your opinion, if the National Park Service spent more time focusing on deferred maintenance rather than being the woke police, do you think it might help them in actually reducing that \$22 billion backlog?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I appreciate the question. I am not really well situated to answer that question, but I appreciate the nature of that question.

Mr. TIFFANY. It is amazing what the priorities are of this Administration. I yield and recognize the gentlelady from New Mexico, the Ranking Member, Ms. Stansbury.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Greenblatt, for being here today. We really appreciate you being here.

I have to admit, like some of the other members on this Committee have stated this morning, I was pretty shocked when I initially heard some of the numbers and what we were seeing with the change in the baseline around the deferred maintenance. And I think, like Mr. Case, we are all still struggling a little bit to kind of understand what is going on and why this re-baselining happened. But I do think it is important to revisit the timeline a little bit, because I think it will help to answer a lot of questions.

So, Mr. Chairman, if you will indulge me, I think it is important for us to recognize that the GAOA passed in August 2020, and as we all remember, 2020 was the height of the pandemic, right? So, we were all working from home, the national parks were seeing an overwhelming number of visitors, and there was very little work happening on construction projects. The Federal Government and Department of the Interior had an all-time vacancy high at the time, and it was the end of the Trump administration. And my understanding is that after GAOA passed, the Trump administration under Secretary Bernhardt convened a task force to look at how to address this big chunk of money that was now being reallocated from the LWCF fund to deferred maintenance.

And it is important to recognize that these weren't sort of new dollar appropriations. These are dollars that come into the Federal Government from oil and gas and minerals revenues. And for 50 years, we have been trying to get that funding reallocated to the original purposes for what LWCF was originally authorized. So, this was sort of the final realization of that, but it happened at the height of the pandemic.

So, my understanding is that Secretary Bernhardt convened a task force, and one of the first things that they identified was actually this problem with the baseline data and how they were estimating costs. So, it was actually Secretary Bernhardt who set into motion the process of re-evaluating the actual financial baseline of how this deferred maintenance was actually being calculated.

In addition to that, it was Secretary Bernhardt who put into motion a process for prioritizing projects. And it is our understanding that that administration wanted to prioritize major projects first.

Now, everyone on this Committee understands that major projects like roads and huge construction projects require a lot of planning. We have an engineer right here on the Committee, and that takes a long time to actually put together the plans. You have to get permits. And at the height of the pandemic, we were having shortages of construction materials, as well.

So, we are talking about a 3-year timeline between when this bill passed—3½ years to us sitting here today. And what we do know from the GAO report, as well as the OIG report, is that there are projects underway, major projects that originally were put on that list in 2020 and a lot of minor projects. But what we are seeing in these reports is a complete re-baselining of how those costs are estimated. And I think that all of us are a little concerned about the sort of across-the-board estimation of those costs.

And Mr. Johnson, I have to say when you shared your anecdote about the data that you requested, I was a little shocked, but not surprised because I am a former OMB employee, and one of my jobs at OMB in the Interior branch was to collect data, just like what you were speaking to today. And when I worked at OMB between 2011 and 2015, the Department of the Interior was struggling with baseline data on deferred maintenance. And I am glad you brought up BIE, because it is one of the biggest challenges, as well. And it, of course, affects all of our tribal communities.

So, I think it is important that we understand there has been a re-baselining of the costs. We had labor shortages, we had agencies that were barely operational because of a pandemic, we had planning horizons, we had major projects, we had a change in administration, and we just had the ramp-up of getting projects done and then ticked off the list. So, there is a lot going on National Park Service right now. And I think it is important that we do give proper due to the fact that they are doing their best, even if the internal controls need some fixing.

I know I am running out of time quickly, but Mr. Chairman, if you will indulge me, I would like to ask both of the witnesses.

You both mentioned that in the reauthorization we could bake things into a reauthorization statute that would fix some of these problems. I am wondering if you could each share very quickly what your thoughts are on that.

Mr. GREENBLATT. Well, I think in the effort to reauthorize, we could bake in some additional oversight mechanisms, some additional internal control mechanisms in terms of how some of these estimates are implemented.

And then also the execution side, I mean, to your point about getting away from the estimates and looking at the actual work being done, the internal controls, I would think, are a significant part. Now, whether that is statutory or whether that is a mechanism of oversight by the folks in this room, you know, us as well as the committees at play, that might be a valid path, as well.

I am not going to comment on whether it should be statutory versus sort of on the ground. But, I think there are a wide array of mechanisms that we can pursue, and we are happy to engage with all of you as we move forward and as you all contemplate the reauthorization of GAOA.

Ms. STANSBURY. Mr. Chairman, would you allow Mr. Johnson to respond?

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes.

Ms. STANSBURY. Mr. Johnson?

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you.

In addition to the internal controls, I would agree more oversight would be very helpful. But in our work there are a couple things that we saw that might make the LRF a little bit more effective. So, a couple of things that we highlight here today would be the contingency fund so agencies are able to set aside a contingency fund in case the projects go over a little bit.

And what we are seeing with that is that some agencies like BIE, for example, they have a very small amount of deferred maintenance. So, the contingency fund is set at 10 percent. They could be doing a lot of projects that are about \$100,000 or so. So, the process

that they go through to sort of request those contingency funds and proceed, they would be asking to move \$10,000. And that is a little bit of a delay of time, so it might be helpful to maybe adjust the different thresholds for the different agencies based on the amount of deferred maintenance.

And then the last thing that I would highlight is consider separating LRF allocations from the budget process. Now, that does not mean no oversight. Oversight is what has really helped, I think, move the ball forward on some of these issues. But what we are seeing is that, in many of the parks or areas in the country, they are dealing with extreme weather issues, and there is very limited time to be able to do some of the work. So, if there is a delay, that could also set that project back by a couple of years. So, there might be an opportunity to do that.

And I would be happy to work with your office or any of you to get you additional insights that we have from our work.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. TIFFANY. The Ranking Member yields. I would like to recognize Mr. Stauber for 5 minutes.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

And to the Ranking Member, you mentioned Secretary Bernhardt. I just want to give you my opinion. I think he was one of the best Secretaries of the Interior in this country's history.

To our witnesses, thanks for coming. And Mr. Johnson, I do like the idea of contingencies being able to make those on-the-spot decisions, rather than going through the bureaucracy to finish a project if it is \$10,000, et cetera. But I do want to say, is the mission of the Park Service, is it to increase and expand access for responsible recreation?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I think that is part of the mission, certainly.

Mr. STAUBER. In your priorities throughout the park system, was that kept in mind?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I assume so, everything I have seen—

Mr. STAUBER. I know that Mr. Case talks about his great national parks in California, and I have no doubt about that. I want to talk about my Voyageurs National Park.

Go ahead, if you want to respond.

Mr. CASE. I am just going to correct. Mine are in Hawaii, not California.

Mr. STAUBER. Oh, that is right, OK, correction.

[Laughter.]

Mr. STAUBER. Mine are in northern Minnesota. My only national park is Voyageurs National Park, and it gets a lot of use, and the priority list that has been put out, when you talk to some of the local officials and the users, that doesn't sit well with them. And I will just give you a couple examples. Some of the winter trails, because of the blowdowns, et cetera, they can't use them. And the park has wanted to resurface roads that have several years of lifetime in them.

I would just encourage you to listen to the users of those parks that use them frequently, and I think that is important. But I also want you to be independent thinkers and make good decisions.

Conditional use permits, they are expanding in price. The conditional use permits, the folks that use them in Voyageurs National Park, when they have asked the Park Service why they have increased, the Park Service says the additional monies go to administration. Briefly tell me where does that money go, that additional \$20 on a conditional use, administration of what?

Mr. GREENBLATT. That would be a question for the National Park Service. I am not familiar with—

Mr. STAUBER. OK. Mr. Johnson, do you want to respond?

Mr. JOHNSON. Generally, I would say that as agencies administer programs, there are always some administrative costs that are involved in the administration. Whether you are sort of doing the oversight of the actual project or sort of design, there could be things related to compliance. So, some agencies may do a small set-aside to account for those sorts of things.

Mr. STAUBER. Yes. I think that for both of our witnesses, I think that the mission of the Park Service, I just respectfully ask that you keep the mission in mind to increase and expand access to the American people, not restrict it.

In the Great American Outdoors Act, the Land Legacy Restoration Fund, there is \$1.33 billion to the National Park Service for a 5-year period of deferred maintenance, is that correct?

Mr. JOHNSON. Correct.

Mr. GREENBLATT. Yes, sir.

Mr. STAUBER. Where does that money come from?

Mr. GREENBLATT. Fifty percent of that comes from oil and gas, as Ms. Stansbury just talked about a moment ago, oil and gas revenues that are directed specifically for—

Mr. STAUBER. So, 50 percent come from oil and gas. What happens if this Administration gets their way and shuts down oil and gas? How are we going to recoup that money? Where is it going to come from?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I don't know the answer to that question.

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Johnson?

Mr. JOHNSON. If the source of the revenue comes from the oil and gas, then it would be up to appropriations to determine where else the money—

Mr. STAUBER. It has to come from somewhere else. There is already a funding stream for it, right?

Mr. JOHNSON. Right.

Mr. STAUBER. And if the Biden administration gets their way, funding is going to go away.

And I think that the most important part of that is we know that our national parks, they are crown jewels in our respective states. The public wants to use our national parks, and they want them to be kept up, kept open, and as my colleague on the other side of the aisle said, there have been deferred maintenance backlogs, we should have been doing this a long time ago, right? But here we are now, and we have the opportunity to start. And you have a good opportunity, monies invested to do just that because these national parks are used—and we saw it in COVID, as was already mentioned. They are beautiful, and I implore you to do your best to keep them that way, and keep the mission in mind to increase access for Americans to these parks.

And I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I would now like to recognize Ms. Lee for 5 minutes for questioning.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the representative of the state that has the most Federal land outside of Alaska, one of the proudest votes I took was for the Great American Outdoors Act, including the establishment of the LRF to address a priority deferred maintenance at many of the land management agencies. And my own district is home to Lake Mead, the first National Recreation Area to be designated as such by Congress in 1964.

I am going to turn some of my questions more to the human aspect of managing deferred maintenance. Before I do that, I just want to ask you, Mr. Greenblatt, is it fair to say that Lake Mead is one of the many NPS sites with infrastructure and resources that date back more than half a century?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I think that is fair.

Ms. LEE. And is it also fair to say that the proposed Federal actions to assets 50 years or older, ranging from demolition to rehabilitation, often require significant expertise, funding, and time to complete, given both the historic and the environmental review processes involved?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I am not an expert on those specific issues, but I have no reason to disagree with that.

Ms. LEE. So, as essential as it is, the LRF funding alone is not a cure-all for the deferred maintenance issue. The level of expertise and staff resources needed to successfully tackle these issues also requires a commitment from Congress to adequately fund the National Park Service and other Federal agencies year to year.

And the reason I am making this point is today's hearing comes at a time when House Republicans are seeking to slash the National Park Service budget by more than \$400 million, resulting in what the National Parks Conservation Association estimates would result in the loss of more than 1,000 National Park Service staff members.

Mr. Greenblatt and Mr. Johnson, every year the non-partisan Partnership for Public Service releases its annual rankings of the best places to work in the Federal Government based on employee responses. Do either of you happen to know how the NPS came out in these rankings?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I don't actually, off the top of my head.

Mr. JOHNSON. No.

Ms. LEE. Well, sadly, in the lowest 15th percentile, ranking 371 out of 432 agencies. The Partnership's CEO further emphasized that the National Park Service's overall score has consistently been low throughout the last decade. And why? Because employees have had to operate with really diminished resources for a very long time.

I mean, we talk about even their facilities where they sleep and eat and all the deferred maintenance with that. They feel like their hands are tied behind their back and they don't have the resources they need.

So, in spite of these challenges, the professionals at the Park Service are actively putting LRF funding into work at Lake Mead, including more than \$5 million to ensure continued access to safe



drinking water for visitors, and a little over \$4 million to demolish abandoned and hazardous structures within the park.

If the Majority's concern about deferred maintenance in our national parks is genuine, I would urge them here, just as I have on the Appropriations Committee, to join us and join House Democrats in making sure that the National Park Service actually has the resources and the congressional support it needs to succeed and implement these types of programs.

And with that, I yield.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlelady yields. Now I would like to recognize Mr. Collins from Georgia for 5 minutes.

Mr. COLLINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I too am trying to figure out what the problem is. And a lot of times it is not always more resources. A lot of times it is the management, and I think that is where we are at today. We are seeing numbers that we don't understand. I am a business person. They don't look like they make sense. You can throw all the money you want to at anything. But unless you have the right management, and you trust that management, and you trust those numbers, then you really don't have anything.

I had questions I wanted to start with, but since I have gotten here I have other questions. So, what I wanted to ask right off the bat, Mr. Greenblatt, is expansion considered deferred maintenance?

An example was like what Mr. Neguse was talking about, they were increasing the campground. Would that be part of deferred maintenance, or is that a new project?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I am not 100 percent sure the answer to that question. We can get back to you on that. I don't think it is, but we will give you a more certain answer.

Mr. COLLINS. OK, yes, I would love to know what the exact definition would be.

The 214,000 work orders that are 3 years or older, why is that? Waiting on studies, or they just weren't important, or did you get an answer?

Mr. GREENBLATT. That was a conservative estimate by us. You could easily draw the line at, say, 2 years or 1 year. Some parks classified deferred maintenance at 1 year; we went with a conservative estimate at 3 years. So, it could actually be much more than the 200,000 work orders that we found if you drew the line at 2 years or even 1 year.

And what we heard was that there were no policies in place in terms of how to classify the deferred maintenance, and some folks wouldn't even classify them at all if they weren't funded already. So, it was just an unreliable data set. There was no consistency across the NPS. That is what we found with respect to the work order process.

Mr. COLLINS. So, if you look at cost versus estimate, and they are estimating going up 35 percent across the board, did you go back, or is there a way to go back and look at, when a project or a deferred maintenance is actually done, that the cost was in line with whatever national average is on other cost and other agencies to do the same work?

Mr. GREENBLATT. We are doing work right now looking at contracts and overruns, and looking at how they are being managed

right now. That is in the process, so that could be months down the road. But we are doing a job on that specific issue right now to look at those types of issues. That is a sweet spot for us in terms of doing our oversight—

Mr. COLLINS. Do you have an idea when you will finish that?

Mr. GREENBLATT. It is months away. It is early-ish in the process, so it is several months away. They are just ramping up with a lot of these jobs, but I will get back to you with a—

Mr. COLLINS. Yes, I think that is very important in the whole scope of this.

And Mr. Johnson, when you were talking about climate and disasters and stuff like that happening, don't we allocate money for disasters to help fix these parks over and above deferred maintenance? That wouldn't even be deferred maintenance, would it?

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes. There are events that happen where we have flooding or a wildfire occur or some other disaster and sometimes they do receive money in conjunction with other pots—

Mr. COLLINS. Yes, I thought that we went in and put in additional funds over and above.

All right, now I am going to get to my questions that I had written down yesterday.

Mr. Greenblatt, we have seen numerous examples. You have been in here before. We have talked about things like passwords and how you all hacked 90 percent of the Department of the Interior's computers in less than 15 minutes because they don't update things. Outdated technology is leading to inefficiency, and it is also costing us money, the taxpayers.

In that vein, during your investigation, you mentioned that you found that the NPS inconsistently entered deferred maintenance work orders into its tracking system. What was the cause of this inconsistency, and was it due to outdated technology such as them running on Windows 7?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I don't know if it is a technological issue as opposed to a consistency in terms of policy across the board.

As I mentioned before, there were some folks that were not entering deferred maintenance at all until it got funded. There were some folks that said, well, if it is a year old, then we are going to classify it as deferred maintenance. There were some folks that used different standards across the board, so that is why we were saying that this is unreliable.

I mean, if you have 400-some-odd park units and they are all using different processes, different definitions, then your data set is going to be problematic.

Mr. COLLINS. Right. Mr. Chairman, in what I have seen and what I have been looking at, and from the testimony that we continue to hear, to me it just seems like a lack of concern or a laziness within a department of the Federal Government.

And with that, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I would like to recognize the gentlewoman from New Mexico, Ms. Leger Fernández for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you, and thank you very much to our witnesses. Thank you for the work that you do in both working on trying to make our park systems available in a way that our

public can enjoy them, and for actually holding them accountable to the GAO. We appreciate both of those aspects of your testimony.

And in New Mexico, as you all know, we have a lot of national parks. We have a lot of amazingly beautiful places and historic places of cultural significance. Many of these parks were built back in the 1930s. We have Civilian Conservation Corps construction. And when something is 100 years old, the maintenance is even harder when you are trying to also preserve the historic nature of it.

And I am concerned about the idea that we have these oversight hearings and we beat up on the agencies at the same time that we are starving the agencies of resources. Right now, there is a proposed \$450 million cut to the Park Service. People carry out the services, people do the work. And when you cut the funding and the resources for people, you can't really get that work done.

Mr. Greenblatt, how would such a severe cut to the Park Service affect the ability to address deferred maintenance backlog if there actually were a \$450 million cut, which we are fighting against, I can tell you.

Mr. GREENBLATT. Well, there is no question that the National Park Service has stated repeatedly quite publicly that insufficient funding, in their view, has caused the deferred maintenance backlog, along with other issues as well, like heavy visitor use. There is no question that the National Park Service has stated that for years. We have not done an independent review on that particular item, so I can't opine on the direct correlation there.

What I would say was that under the Inflation Reduction Act, there were additional funds spent for National Park Service, \$500 million spent for the National Park Service. We in the Inspector General's office, we are beginning work right now. It is going to be a while before we are coming public, but we will keep you posted, we are doing a review of their workforce planning and the implementation of those funds, as well.

So, we are playing in that space, but that is foreshadowing something that could be a bit down the road. But we are trying to look at those very issues that you are raising.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Well, like I said, I really do appreciate the accountability role that the GAO plays in each of the agencies and the role that you play there. As you know, I find it very important. I am very appreciative of the work you are doing in New Mexico on other matters.

But I have also been hearing from my constituents about what it means when the maintenance is not done. I have ranchers in the Valles Caldera area in New Mexico, for example, who keep talking about the fact that those fences aren't mended. And when those fences aren't mended, what you are doing is you are creating conflict between people who are concerned about the environment, who are concerned about wildlife, and people who are concerned about ranches. Deferred maintenance is also an area in which if we do not fix it, we create conflict where there should not be conflict between different community members.

So, I wanted to ask you, Mr. Johnson, how does the National Park Service prioritize projects so that we can look at where would it be good, should we prioritize a project where, if we don't get it

done, like fixing the fences at Valles Calderas, we have both a negative impact on wildlife, but also a negative impact on a way of life, and should that be a priority of looking at ways in which we prioritize projects to reduce conflict within a community?

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes, thank you for the question. We know from our work that the Park Service really considers five factors when they are trying to look at projects to fund for the deferred maintenance. They are looking at things that are relevant to their mission. They are looking at the scope, they are looking at if they are quick implementation, or even things like, is it the site visitation?

So, what we know is that all of those things play a role into the decision-making, but it is something that we would also say that prioritization isn't a one-time thing. You don't just sort of go through the exercise or do it once. You have to constantly reassess and think about all the different types of priorities and risks out there, and that might get you different decisions along the way depending on what the overall priorities would be.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Well, thank you. And I think that we need to really be careful that we are not, by deferring this maintenance, then expecting and passing the cost on down to ranchers, for example, and that we need to be careful that kicking the can down the road is really not acceptable because of its impact on private individuals like ranchers.

And with that, I yield back. Did you want to add to that, Mr. Greenblatt? I ran out of time, however.

Mr. GREENBLATT. Just to your point, in our example in the testimony, the deferred maintenance shut down buildings, and private donations had to come along to then fund the remediation of the mold and get those buildings up and running again. So, I think that is analogous to what you were just mentioning.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Greenblatt, and I yield back.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the few extra minutes.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlelady yields, and I will now recognize Mr. Bergman from Michigan for 5 minutes.

Mr. BERGMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It has been a few years since I have been in this committee hearing room. It feels great to be back, because we are talking about things natural, OK? And we are talking about resources, in this case, how we spend money to preserve the natural resources that God has granted us with.

I represent half the state of Michigan. To be specific, Sleeping Bear Dunes, Isle Royale, Pictured Rocks National Seashore, Keweenaw. Roughly, of those four on the list here, we have about \$156 million in deferred maintenance issues.

Now, numbers are one thing here in DC, but when you are that small business operator in and around those areas of those national parks and national seashores, you are the person who is running the guided tours. In some cases, you are the one doing the Pictured Rock cruises, all the different things. And if we take the \$156 million in deferred maintenance and we multiply it by an average—this is fact at least in our neck of the woods—that tourist

dollar that comes up there turns seven times. We are talking about \$1 billion-plus in economic opportunity for the local businesses.

So, if we have facilities closed or unusable at these national parks, the people aren't going to come, the economic opportunity is not there for those small business owners. It is not big business up there. This is small mom-and-pop kind of things.

And I guess we hear, regardless of whether you are Democrat or Republican, if you are here elected in the House, if you are not looking at oversight of the expenditure of taxpayers' dollars, then you are not doing your job. Really, it is not party-specific because we are counting on you to take the money that we give to the agencies and hold them accountable for results. And I don't want to talk too long here because I have a couple of questions.

But one example in our district, do any of you all work with the Army Corps of Engineers at all?

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes.

Mr. BERGMAN. When we did the Soo Locks project upgrade a few years ago, the Army Corps admitted they made a mistake in estimating how much it would cost. They were only off by a billion and a half dollars. What happens when that happens? When we are talking about being held accountable, it goes both ways.

What I would like to hear from you, Mr. Johnson, is the Government Accountability Office, in this case, exactly what entities are being held accountable for what we are talking about here today?

When you go to work and your staff goes to work on a daily basis, they have their list of, in my case, and by the way, the Army Corps is doing a great job of catching up, but they didn't kick the ball through the goalposts on the first try, OK?

So, any of you want to give me an example of, in this particular case, who you are looking at specifically from an accountability standpoint?

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes, absolutely. I lead our oversight of issues related to Federal lands and water resources. So, I have oversight responsibility for the Federal land management agencies, National Park Service, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, et cetera.

I think that the work that we do on a daily basis in response to requests and mandates that we get from Congress is about holding the agencies accountable. And one of the things that I have been very encouraged by, just as we have done this work, as the IG has done this work over many decades, is being there as the agencies are trying to make decisions, are struggling with how to move forward. It is because of the work that we have done that I think has really helped them to sort of think about issues that they didn't think about before.

For example, I pointed out that \$821 million in my opening statement. That was some deferred maintenance that was under-reported, and—

Mr. BERGMAN. I hate to cut you off, because I know you are deeply involved in it.

And the only thing I would ask both of you, if you embody the following phrase, "a sense of urgency," we need to have that sense of urgency go all the way down so we here on this side of the river can look at how we are spending money wisely in support of our

natural resources to do better for our citizens and those small businesses.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I would like to recognize the gentleman from Idaho, Mr. Fulcher, for 5 minutes.

Mr. FULCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to the panel for being here, thank you for that.

I frequently say, and I will say it again here today, please excuse us when we come and go. Sometimes we have dueling committees. I mean, there are two going on at the same time. So, if this is a repeat, forgive me, that is why.

But we are here, of course, talking about National Park Service backlogs, and that is a huge issue for us and our state in Idaho, the jump from, I think it was \$12.7 billion in Fiscal Year 2019 to \$22.3 billion for 2022.

One of the things that has driven a lot of those concerns is the concern of a wildfire in our state. We have tremendous wildfire problems. A lot of unmanaged Federal land is subject to that, so that is always a factor for us.

A question for Mr. Johnson. I know fees are briefly mentioned in the GAO report, but there was at least a component that I didn't fully understand about that, and that is having to do with recreational fees. In Fiscal Year 2021, recreational fees from the Federal Lands Recreational Enhancement Act collected about \$463 million. Over the last 10 years, the Interior bureaus and offices have used about \$80 million, or at least that is my understanding. Is that accurate? And if so, where is the difference between the \$463 million and the \$80 million?

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes, what we know is that some agencies collect recreation fees, and they are allowed to use some of these fees to address deferred maintenance.

I think the sort of difference that you may be seeing there is that these agencies, such as the National Park Service, have a lot of different activities that they do. So, some of those fees are applied to deferred maintenance, and the other fees might be applied to other activities that they do.

I am happy, if you would like us to take a look at—

Mr. FULCHER. Are those fees, in your view, are they appropriately set? Should we be considering increasing those fees, decreasing those fees?

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes, that would sort of be a policy decision. We have not taken a look at those fees in quite some time. We would be happy to do that. But that is one option that we know that has been talked about by various stakeholder groups is increasing recreation fees. But that comes with advantages and disadvantages.

Mr. FULCHER. OK, thank you. I am going to shift to Mr. Greenblatt.

The Department of the Interior is one of the Federal agencies responsible for wildfire management, as well. And, again, I just have to underscore that is a huge concern for us. The largest fires in Idaho in 2023 occurred, of course, on Federal U.S. Forest Service land.

Would you take just a very brief second here and speak to the Forest Service backlog, and then some of the challenges, and I can be more specific, but some of the challenges you have in doing a better, more thorough job with the backlog?

Mr. GREENBLATT. The Forest Service isn't under our jurisdiction. That is under Ag. But in terms of Interior, we do have wildland fires, and we are doing work on that right now.

Mr. FULCHER. And I am aware of that.

Mr. GREENBLATT. And we have a report in the draft phase right now that will be coming out with respect to their preparedness in terms of their firefighting vehicles and maintenance. That is in process, and hopefully will be out in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. FULCHER. Hit some high points on the struggles. I hear about manpower, and I hear about hiring issues, housing issues. Just talk to me about the high points there and some of the struggles.

Mr. GREENBLATT. Yes, certainly staffing. I remember we mentioned Secretary Bernhardt earlier. He mentioned staffing concerns back when he was Secretary, this is when I first started in 2019, that that was a significant issue.

And hiring the seasonal employees, getting them on board quickly is difficult and has been a problem for Interior in the past, and that has certainly been an issue. We are identifying some concerns with respect to vehicle maintenance so that folks can go out when there is a fire, and I think funding is pretty much what they would assert is an issue for wildland fire services and the various components that deal with wildlife fires.

Mr. FULCHER. I might just mention, because we are out of time here, that we do have a very capable State Department of Lands. And in our state, we are one of very few with more than 50 percent of our land mass Federal. So, I just want to, while I have you here and I have your ear, I want to just plug in there partner with them to the extent that you can. It will help both of you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I would like to recognize the gentlelady from Utah.

Ms. Maloy, you have 5 minutes.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for letting me join your Committee today.

I represent Utah's 2nd Congressional District, and for that reason I have a big interest in the backlog. The Department of the Interior manages the majority of the land in my district. We have three really large national parks, including Zion National Park, which is one of the most visited. And I may be new to Congress, but I am not new to this issue. I have spent a lot of time working on issues with Zion National Park, and any time we talk to a park or any Interior agency, what we hear is, "We are underfunded, we are understaffed, we don't have the resources."

My local elected officials—state, county, city—want to be good partners with the parks. And I am hearing from them that they have offered resources. They are saying, "We will help with parking, we will help with transportation. We want to offset some of these burdens on the park," and the park hasn't been very interested in responding, but they keep talking about the maintenance

backlog and how far behind they are. And the local officials get the feeling that the backlog is the excuse they use to try to limit the number of people who are coming into the park. There is just an ethic within Park Service that the parks are being loved to death, and they should have fewer people in them.

And I have spent a lot of years trying to find ways to help the parks have the resources they need, and this is startling to me to hear today that they don't actually even have a good handle on what their backlog needs are. So, there is a question in this, I am not just going to monologue.

But first of all, Mr. Greenblatt, when can we expect more accurate numbers?

Mr. GREENBLATT. Well, according to the National Park Service, they have implemented this process starting in Fiscal Year 2022. It should be fully implemented this year. This is, again, according to the Park Service.

I will note, though, that as of today, the estimate on the Department's website for deferred maintenance, my understanding is that something in the order of magnitude of a third of that estimate for the National Park Service is still under the old work order model which we found to be unreliable and inaccurate. So, my concern is that even with the shift to the new process, if it is still relying on those old numbers or those old work orders, that is where we are having problems.

The other piece is, as they are moving to the new system, it will only be as accurate as their internal controls and as accurate as their processes. For example, in the new system, if they don't close out work orders that are completed, it is going to show up as something that is still deferred maintenance. So, they have to be on top of it. Otherwise, it is bad data in, bad data out.

Ms. MALOY. Yes, thank you. I find that really concerning. That is something that my office will be following up on.

Mr. Johnson, what are you doing in your accountability role to make sure that these agencies that control so much of the resources in the West, and particularly in my district, are being good partners?

If they don't have accurate numbers of what the backlog is, I am concerned that it is going to be really difficult to partner with somebody who doesn't even have a handle on what their needs are.

Mr. JOHNSON. Well, I think one of the roles that we serve here is we try to highlight through our work the appropriate sort of internal controls that they should be taking, particularly for the data issue that is so important here to get a handle on it.

But then also, making them aware, through our work, of leading practices. I know a lot of what our report focused on was the Legacy Restoration Fund itself and sort of looking at are they following leading practices for selecting the projects and getting that money out? Because if agencies can focus on those key controls and those leading practices, they have a better chance. But they still have to be consistent as they do it on a day-to-day basis.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you. I am going to have my staff follow up with yours on that, as well, because this is a really important issue in my district and for my constituents.

With that, I yield back.



Mr. TIFFANY. Will the gentlelady yield the balance of her time?

Ms. MALOY. Yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. She brings up a very good issue, the gentlelady from Utah. Have either of you done an analysis of using other agencies, in particular state and local agencies, to help with this problem that the National Park Service has?

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes, we did not do any in-depth analysis on that, but we do know that the Park Service is starting to consider partnerships in this particular area. But that is about the extent that our work covered there.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Greenblatt?

Mr. GREENBLATT. We have not done any work on that, but I am interested in working with you and your teams to see whether there is a viable path where we can add value in that regard. So, I am happy to have a follow-up engagement with you all.

Mr. TIFFANY. I think a good place to start is to talk to Ms. Maloy from Utah, because it sounds like she has some of the information.

I yield and turn to the Chairman, Mr. Westerman.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany. And, again, thank you to the witnesses today for your insight on something that is very important, as we have already outlined.

I was listening to the questions. Mr. Case made a good point about the cost is the cost. Whatever it costs to do these projects, that is the cost. And what is the importance of a good estimate versus what it actually costs? And I think it is extremely important that we have good estimates, as policymakers, and it is extremely important that the Park Service have good estimates as planners and implementers of policy.

Looking back to the time when the Great American Outdoors Act was passed, as a policymaker we were told that there was \$12.7 billion in maintenance backlog. So, GAOA had \$1.9 billion per year, with 70 percent of that, or \$1.33 billion, going to the Park Service. And over the previous 4 years that should have been \$5.32 billion of that \$12.7 billion that was erased. But here we find ourselves today. And then, if you put the 5th year in, you would be at \$6.7 billion of the \$12.7 billion. We find ourselves here today with a number saying we have a \$22 billion backlog, which could potentially be more by the time GAOA reauthorization comes up.

So, instead of thinking we are more than halfway through and on pace to maybe another 5-year reauthorization to wipe out the maintenance backlog, we find that we are actually in worse shape than we thought we were when we approved GAOA to begin with.

My first question to you is, what is the real number, or how do we get to the real number as we consider reauthorization of GAOA?

Mr. GREENBLATT. Well, according to the agency, the PCA, their new process will be fully implemented this fiscal year, and hopefully that will define a more accurate number. We have not done work on the PCA process in terms of verifying the accuracy. Like I said, it is not fully implemented, so that would be something that we would wait for full implementation before starting our review. That could be a fruitful endeavor after they implement it fully, but hopefully that will get to a better spot at the end of this fiscal year. But that is a question for NPS to ask. But that is my understanding of the lay of the land right now.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Johnson, do you all have methods to come up with a real number to assign a level of accuracy to the number that the Park Service eventually gives us?

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes, so that would be something that we would need to work with the Park Service on. And I think the Park Service would really need to sort of drill down and make sure that they are having that accurate data so that they can get that number.

I think what we could do in a subsequent review, if Congress was interested, we might be able to look a little bit more at sort of that decision-making process, and factors that go into that, and that might help us look at the reliability of some of the estimates.

But I think what my accountability colleague pointed out, if the beginning point is those work orders, and they have to have that data correct, if there is no attention to detail in terms of updating those work orders to be accurate, then everything is going to sort of be off from there.

Mr. WESTERMAN. All right, I am going to have to cut you off.

Going back to when we were doing GAOA, and I mentioned in my opening statement that I spent a lot of time traveling around to the parks, talking to Park Service employees, and I specifically remember being out in Yellowstone with the former Superintendent, and actually the Director of the Park Service at the time, when we were doing a tour. And I was asking questions, what does it cost to fix this road? And it was \$1 million per mile, which was a lot of sticker shock to me because we weren't talking about building a new road from scratch, we were talking about adding a shoulder to the existing road, which at the time, that seemed like a very high number.

What does it cost to fix this housing? When you go through the math and it is like \$800 per square foot, which again, was sticker shock. So, I thought, well, the Park Service is way over-estimating what their costs are, which I think the real problem was they had no grasp of the scope of what they were actually embarking on.

But on those high costs, it was explained to me that Yellowstone's remote area you only have certain times you can do construction, the labor is costly, plus you are dealing with Park Service property, where you have all the extra levels of permitting. You have, like on the explanation for the \$800 per square foot where these are historical structures and there is a shake roof on this building that nobody makes anymore, so you are going to go have that custom made. I actually talked to some contractors after that, and they said they couldn't imagine how you could spend \$800 a square foot to build something new, much less renovate something, unless you are literally doing gold plating on some of this stuff.

So, in your analysis, have you looked at the unit cost that the Park Service is using, and are there opportunities to lower those costs going forward by maybe easing up on some of these historical preservation guidelines that they have to do, and taking a more realistic look at NEPA permitting to widen the roads in Yellowstone and other places?

Mr. GREENBLATT. Like I mentioned before, we are working on a contract job, looking at some of the costs and the overruns and why

is that happening, that sort of thing, how often is it happening and why is it happening?

We are not looking at the specific issues that you raised in terms of whether they should look at removing historical requirements or NEPA regulations. We are not looking at it quite through that lens, but I am happy to pay attention to those things as we are going about that process and see if there is something where we can add value in that.

I did go to Yellowstone, and I saw many of the same things I think that you are talking about where their costs are very high because their window to operate is very narrow. They have to bring people in for seasonal workers to do a certain amount of work in a certain amount of time. And I heard some of those very same things, and I understand those concerns. But we haven't looked at whether the estimating has baked in some costs that are beyond that. But we are looking at the contract.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I had visited with Secretary Bernhardt about this then. You know, if you have a short window of construction, labor is expensive. Then we were talking about maybe using mass timber to do modular construction, where you had everything kind of pre-built. You truck it in and you erect it quickly. And I think Secretary Bernhardt actually had some Secretarial Order to do some of this, and it was going to be neat by using local timber species to the area. But I think that got tanked under the new Administration.

But should they be looking at things more creative on how to lower construction costs and shorten that schedule?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I think they did do the modular work in Yellowstone for a bunch of that housing. I know we went and saw some of that as it was being implemented there. So, I think Cam Sholly, the superintendent out there, was looking at different ways to fix the housing problem, the very housing problems that you are talking about. I think they did use modular. I don't think it was using the local timber, but it was trucking in fully formed structures for their employee housing, because that was a significant problem for them.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Right. And I know I am way over time, but one last question. I waited until the end, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. TIFFANY. I won't cut you off.

Mr. WESTERMAN. We are talking about 70 percent of GAOA funding for the Park Service, 5 percent went to BLM, 5 percent to U.S. Fish and Wildlife, 5 percent to BIE, and I know, Mr. Johnson, you talked about BIE. I don't know if either one of you have looked at the Forest Service, but is this a problem specific to the Park Service, or are these other agencies that far off in their estimates, as well?

Mr. GREENBLATT. We are currently conducting a review of BIE's management of the deferred maintenance issues there for BIE. That is in process. We have a draft to the agency right now, and we are working on that, getting their comments back. And we will, obviously, be sharing that with you all.

One thing that we are seeing, our understanding is now, and this is pending comments from BIE itself, is that how they characterize deferred maintenance can be very different inside the Department.

So, one component can define it this way, another component can define it that way, and a third can do it a completely different way. So, when you aggregate all these numbers together, like right now on the website it says there is \$30.8 billion with respect to deferred maintenance in the Department. But if each one is characterizing them completely different, it is apples and oranges.

So, that is one of the things that we think we are seeing with respect to BIE on the one hand and NPS on the other. Again, that job is still in process, but that is our initial understanding as it stands right now.

Mr. WESTERMAN. How about Fish and Wildlife and BLM?

Mr. GREENBLATT. We haven't done those. Those are relatively small with respect to the orders of magnitude at issue, so I don't know the answer to that, sitting here right now. But my understanding is that the definitions are not consistent.

And was that part of your work? I think I heard that from your office.

Mr. JOHNSON. That is correct, yes.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I know I have some Fish and Wildlife facilities in my district that are in need of deferred maintenance work, but to my knowledge there has not been any deferred maintenance projects carried out on the Fish and Wildlife.

And then the Forest Service, I realize that is not Interior, but we set aside 15 percent of GAOA funding to go to the Forest Service, and I have seen very little work on Forest Service property, as well.

I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. TIFFANY. The Chairman yields. I really am glad that you brought up mass timber. Hopefully, some day in the future here, hopefully in the near future, we are going to be able to get more mass timber structures that are built here in the United States of America. Just in a variety of ways, aesthetically, I think in terms of carbon footprint, things like that, they are probably a good thing. So, I am really glad you bring that up.

To the witnesses, thank you for your testimony, and I want to thank the Members for your questions.

Members of the Subcommittees may have some additional questions for our witnesses today, and we will ask that you respond to these in writing. Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Subcommittees must submit questions to the Oversight and Investigation Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, January 16, 2024. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for these responses.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittees stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:06 p.m., the Joint Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

## **Submission for the Record by Rep. Gosar**

### **Statement for the Record**

**John Garder**  
**Senior Director of Budget and Appropriations**  
**National Parks Conservation Association**

Chairmen Tiffany and Gosar, Ranking Members Neguse and Stansbury, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am John Garder, Senior Director for Budget and Appropriations for the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). Founded in 1919, NPCA is the leading national, independent voice for protecting and enhancing America's National Park System for present and future generations. We appreciate the opportunity to submit for the hearing record our views and observations on the National Park Service's (NPS) implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) and recent reports examining this topic.

We were fortunate to work with Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to pursue passage of GAOA, which was an historic achievement. Since former President Donald Trump signed it into law in August 2020, the NPS other agencies have made significant progress responsibly investing energy receipts in hundreds of critically needed repair projects across the country, including in many congressional districts represented by members of these subcommittees. These investments are allowing NPS and other agencies to make significant progress with their deferred maintenance backlogs—progress that would not be taking place were it not for GAOA.

The law's success is already visible in numerous parks and other public lands and will increasingly be noticeable to visitors in the ensuing months and years as projects move from planning, design and procurement to construction and completion. As these projects are completed, we will see a significant amount of deferred maintenance taken off the books.

The record of success in national parks throughout the country is impressive. Between FY21 and FY23, GAOA's National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) has allowed NPS to program nearly \$5 billion to improve more than 2,200 assets including water and electric systems, roads and campgrounds—some with critical life and safety issues. NPCA analyzed the list of LRF projects and found that over 200 congressional districts, nearly all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and multiple U.S. territories are benefiting from projects.

These projects are enhancing visitors' safety and experiences and the ability of staff to perform needed duties to meet NPS' mission to protect resources and serve visitors. These successes have come despite several challenges including those outlined in the recently released Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, *Agencies Generally Followed Leading Practices in Selections but Faced Challenges*—in particular the rising cost of labor and materials, supply constraints and severe weather, all of which spread the LRF's dollars more thinly.

It is notable that in concluding its congressionally mandated study, the GAO had no recommendations for NPS to improve its work to prioritize and process projects. Equally significantly, neither the GAO nor the Department of the Interior's (DOI) Inspector General (IG) report found any waste, fraud, abuse or other problems with the projects and the many phases of execution required to bring them from infancy to completion. Instead, as the GAO affirms, we are seeing a solid record of success repairing our parks and other public lands, directing long-overdue dollars to reconstruction and repairs with remarkably little overhead—an average of less than 3% across projects within DOI.

Projects at or near completion improving the visitor experience include at Grand Teton National Park, where roads have been repaved, a bridge has been reconstructed, and parking areas and the southern entrance station have been improved. Additionally at Grand Teton, NPS has been replacing the Colter Bay wastewater main lift station and replacing the roof and addressing safety needs at its headquarters. At other parks, projects at or near completion include the rehabilitation of roads at Great Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah National Parks, which together accommodate millions of visitors annually who drive on these roads and invest in local economies along the way.

Our national parks have gone more than fifty years without the robust investment that is needed to maintain more than 75,000 assets, a collection second only

to the Department of Defense in its magnitude. NPS desperately needed the LRF investment because it has gone for so long without a robust investment in its aging and degraded infrastructure while at the same time, it has been struggling with a significant operational shortfall.

Appropriated operations increases over the decade have been insufficient to provide for NPS' significant fixed costs that include staff cost of living adjustments, benefits and insurance, leading to an erosion of staffing levels. Understaffing and other operational shortfalls have been exacerbated by visitation increases that spread staff even thinner as they tackle multiple collateral duties. Between 2012 and 2022, NPS lost 13% of its staff while accommodating a 10% increase in visitation. Between this operational shortfall and insufficient annual investments in line-item construction and park transportation infrastructure, NPS has been unable to keep up with the growth of the deferred maintenance and repairs backlog. Notably, the FY24 House Interior and Environment appropriations bill would significantly worsen this problem and should be rejected. NPS estimates that "more than one billion dollars is needed annually for preventative and recurring maintenance and component renewal activities just to keep the portfolio of assets at a steady state."

There are numerous repair and reconstruction projects that would have waited indefinitely to be addressed were it not for the LRF. For example, the maintenance facility at Acadia National Park that was built in 1963 was declared structurally unsound over a decade ago and it was not until GAOA that the park was able to repair it. This project was critically needed to ensure the functional operation of this park that accommodates nearly four million visitors annually who collectively spend nearly a half billion dollars, supporting almost 7,000 jobs in gateway communities.

The GAO's recent report outlines agency successes despite several challenges. Firstly, it shows that NPS and the other LRF-funded agencies have been responsibly following standard procedures for estimating deferred maintenance and repairs and have been using strategic and responsible criteria in estimating and addressing this maintenance. It also demonstrates that the LRF funding infusion provided additional motivation to agencies to refine their methods and establish more consistent criteria for estimating deferred maintenance. It observes that all five agencies funded by the LRF have been following leading practices recognized as effective strategies for addressing deferred maintenance, according to the six relevant criteria the GAO examined.

Furthermore, the GAO report shows that the infusion of LRF funding allowed NPS and other agencies to address repair projects that could not have been funded with other funding sources such as appropriations. Clearly, the infusion of LRF funding and associated efforts by the agencies to more accurately, reliably and transparently estimate their backlogs has given lawmakers and the public a more complete understanding of the breadth of the federal public lands deferred maintenance backlog. The report found that all five agencies established clear objectives, performance goals, baselines for outcomes, and performance measures. This included maximizing return on LRF investments and minimizing overhead costs. Another major finding was that all the agencies sought to take as much deferred maintenance off the books as they could and considered factors including public safety, the importance of the asset to the agency's mission, the level of visitation (especially in the first year of funding), the cost and scope of the project, and the speed with which they could implement the project.

The GAO report reflects NPS' improved methodology for estimating its backlog, a need that was recognized and mandated only months after GAOA's passage in November 2020. At that juncture, former DOI Secretary David Bernhardt pointed to the flaws in NPS' former system of estimating the backlog based on work orders and that NPS would need to initiate "a comprehensive review and reform of the systems and processes used to manage its properties, including a streamlined condition-assessment methodology that better conforms to generally accepted practices." In April 2023, NPS Director Chuck Sams wrote the IG to explain that NPS was still in the process of updating its methodology for calculating deferred maintenance, yet the IG performed its review rather than waiting until NPS made additional progress with revising its system for calculating deferred maintenance and prioritizing projects. It is notable that the more recent GAO report did not find issues with NPS' methodology; on the contrary and as outlined above, the agency found NPS' work to be in line with industry standards. NPS has clearly made its transition to updated methodology successfully.

In our testimony to the Federal Lands subcommittee in April 2023 in advance of its NPS deferred maintenance hearing, we made several observations that are summarized much more briefly below. For greater detail on these observations, we encourage members of the committee to review that testimony.

NPS has not received a robust investment in over fifty years in its assets despite their considerable age, increased visitation creating more wear and tear, and understaffing and underfunding that have undermined maintenance capacity. The bipartisan creation of the LRF has been successfully applied across the country in dozens of congressional districts that are urban and rural, with projects both large and small. The larger level of funding than has historically been provided has been able to fund large projects such as roads, bridges, and water systems. Meanwhile, Maintenance Action Teams (MATs) have performed hundreds of smaller projects throughout the country, many to preserve historic resources. Among the many resources that DOI has been posting is a map of completed MATs projects.

Over the last three years, NPS has engaged in a transparent process that has involved numerous online databases, fact sheets, state by state fact sheets and other information relevant to LRF execution. They have engaged in multiple briefings for stakeholders and to congressional committees including the House Natural Resources Committee. The LRF has also further enhanced NPS' economic benefits nationally and in communities throughout the country. According to NPS' most recent Visitor Spending Effects report, "in 2022, 312 million park visitors spent an estimated \$23.9 billion in local gateway regions while visiting National Park Service lands across the country. These expenditures supported a total of 378 thousand jobs, \$17.5 billion in labor income, \$29 billion in value added, and \$50.3 billion in economic output in the national economy." The LRF has additional benefits. By NPS' last estimate, thousands of jobs are being created with more than \$6 billion in benefits to the national economy. Those benefits will continue, showing that the LRF is not only restoring our historic and cultural heritage and ensuring the quality of the visiting experience, but also creating and supporting jobs throughout our nation.

Below is a sample of National Park Service news and promotion of projects, from social media to press releases to television news:

- Cuyahoga tow path
- Lincoln Birthplace restoration
- Craters of the Moon, Hagerman Fossil Beds and Minidoka facilities repaired
- Mammoth Cave's Echo River Spring Trail
- Grand Teton roads and trailhead
- Carver National Monument restoration work

**In conclusion:**

National parks are getting repaired, and millions of visitors will benefit. The LRF is proving successful in states and congressional districts throughout the country in areas both urban and rural, with a mix of smaller, medium-size and larger projects that would have been difficult to fund with non-LRF appropriated and other funding sources. NPS and other agencies have evolved their methods to use transparent, responsible procedures and methods that follow standard business practices. While the DOI IG report did not reflect these methods, the more recent GAO report demonstrated the responsible and effective use of these funds despite challenges including the eroding power of construction dollars. There has been no indication of shortcomings in project execution. To the contrary, the effective use of these funds to repair and reconstruct facilities demonstrates the power of this bipartisan achievement.

Because agency backlog lists show significant continuing needs, NPCA again calls on this committee and the Congress at large to introduce and pass legislation extending the LRF's funding at current levels for an additional five years. We remain available to answer questions or provide additional information supporting this call to action. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Please see our website at [npca.org](http://npca.org) to learn more about the successful Great American Outdoors Act projects, including LRF success stories.

