



National Park Service

The park's \$170 million in deferred maintenance includes repairs to the Alan Bible Visitor Center.

Lake Mead National Recreation Area

Arizona and Nevada

Overview

Just minutes from the Las Vegas city limits lies the third-largest area operated by the National Park Service outside Alaska. Lake Mead National Recreation Area spans 1.5 million acres—twice the size of Rhode Island. The lake and smaller Lake Mohave to the south attract boaters, swimmers, and fishermen, while the surrounding desert draws hikers, wildlife photographers, and roadside sightseers. Remarkably, three of America's four desert ecosystems—the Mojave, Great Basin, and Sonoran deserts—are found here. At first glance, the landscape seems barren. But on closer inspection, visitors will find a wide variety of plants and animals, some of which are not found anywhere else.

The lake is named for Elwood Mead, commissioner of the Interior Department's Bureau of Reclamation during the 1920s and 1930s. He drafted the original plan to dam the Colorado River where it bends south near Boulder City, Nevada, to provide flood control, crop irrigation, and power generation. Today, we know the structure as Hoover Dam. The lake it created, when it's full, is the largest reservoir in the United States. Unfortunately, many access points to Lake Mead and Lake Mohave need infrastructure repairs, and the park has a deferred maintenance list that exceeds \$170 million.

Maintenance challenges

The more than 7 million people who visit Lake Mead National Recreation Area each year generate substantial income for surrounding communities but also leave an impact. The National Park Service (NPS) says repair needs run the gamut from bathrooms to mountain trails. But the biggest expense is to maintain roads that lead to the lakes. More than \$6 million is needed to repair the road to Willow Beach, a popular trout fishing spot below Hoover Dam. A nearly equal amount is needed to repair access roads leading to Katherine Landing at the southern tip, where visitors can hike, camp, and launch a boat. Boulder Beach also is a popular spot for launching boats, but its marina, boat ramps, moorings, and docks need more than \$6 million to fix.

The NPS says it also needs to repair or replace radio towers and repeaters along Lake Mead's 759 miles of shoreline that park rangers use for communications to ensure visitor safety and monitor flood protection devices. To do so would cost \$5 million.

Almost \$6 million is needed for building rehabilitation and repairs, including to the Alan Bible Visitor Center, which is just outside the park, near Boulder City. Developed as part of the NPS Mission 66 program during the agency's 50th anniversary in 1966, it has since been updated to bring it up to code, improve accessibility for the disabled, and add solar panels and other green designs that will qualify for a coveted LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) silver rating. However, it still needs almost \$700,000 in deferred maintenance.



Lake Mead is an important economic driver for North Las Vegas. We need to make sure that the park receives adequate federal funding to provide recreational opportunities for our residents and visitors alike."

John Jay Lee (D), mayor of North Las Vegas, Nevada

Recommendations

To address the deferred maintenance at Lake Mead and other NPS sites in Arizona, Nevada, and across the country, Congress should:

- Ensure that infrastructure initiatives include provisions to address park maintenance.
- Provide dedicated annual federal funding for national park repairs.
- Enact innovative policy reforms to ensure that deferred maintenance does not escalate.
- Provide more highway funding for NPS maintenance needs.
- Create more opportunities for public-private collaboration and donations to help restore park infrastructure.

Table 1
 Lake Mead National Recreation Area Facts
 2016

Visitor spending	\$312.7 million
Jobs created by visitor spending	4,200
Economic output	\$369 million
Labor income	\$141.4 million
Visits	7,175,891
Deferred maintenance (fiscal year 2015)	\$172.8 million

Sources: National Park Service, "Annual Visitation Report by Years: 2006 to 2016," accessed July 13, 2017, [https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/National%20Reports/Annual%20Visitation%20By%20Park%20\(1979%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)](https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/National%20Reports/Annual%20Visitation%20By%20Park%20(1979%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year)); National Park Service, "Visitor Spending Effects," accessed July 13, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>; National Park Service, "NPS Deferred Maintenance Reports," accessed Aug. 19, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/defermain.htm>

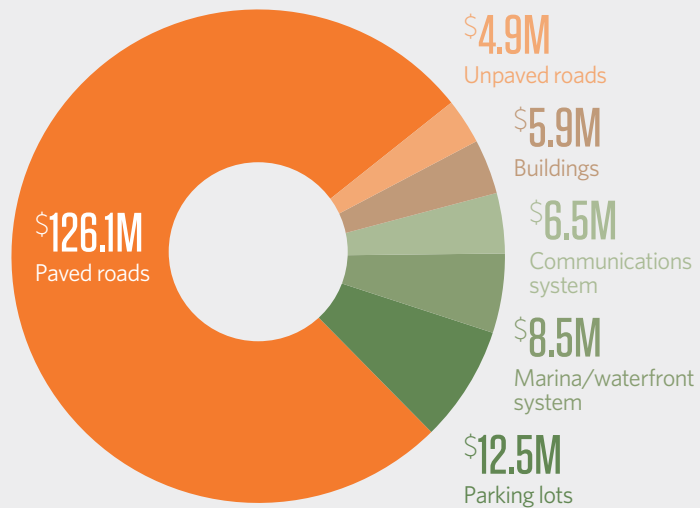
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Figure 1
 Lake Mead National Recreation Area Needs Millions of Dollars for Infrastructure Repairs
 Key deferred maintenance

Note: This chart depicts the largest maintenance categories.

Source: Pew analysis of National Park Service data

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The Pew Charitable Trusts works alongside the National Parks Conservation Association, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and other national and local groups to ensure that our national park resources are maintained and protected for future generations to enjoy.

This case study was updated on July 31, 2017, to reflect newly released 2016 data and to correct references to calendar and fiscal year.

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