



Mojave's \$131.8 million maintenance backlog includes repairs to historic buildings such as the Kelso Depot.

# Mojave National Preserve

California

## Overview

Two hours from the hustle and bustle of Las Vegas and 100 miles from the nearest lodging lies California's Mojave National Preserve. The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* dubbed this vast desert in San Bernardino County the "perfect escape for those seeking serenity." The preserve spans 1.6 million acres, making it the third-largest National Park Service (NPS) unit in the contiguous United States.

Mojave is ecologically and geologically diverse, with towering sand dunes, dun-colored mesas, and volcanic formations providing habitat for its abundant plants and wildlife. In addition to the densest forest of Joshua trees in the world, visitors can see bighorn sheep, bobcats, golden eagles, and breathtaking displays of seasonal wildflowers.

The preserve also has a rich cultural heritage. Lands first inhabited by the Chemehuevi and Mojave tribes attracted gold miners in the late 19th century and were later crossed by several railroad lines. Visitors can learn more about this history through exhibits at the visitor center and by exploring archaeological sites, abandoned mines, and preserved homesteads and other buildings. The ghost town of Kelso, which once served as a Union Pacific Railroad depot and mining outpost, is one of the park's most popular destinations. Unfortunately, Mojave faces over \$131 million in deferred maintenance.

## Maintenance challenges

Nearly all of Mojave's needed repairs are for its road network. Severe deterioration of some sections of pavement has prompted the NPS to warn visitors of dangerous potholes. It has determined that nearly 155 miles of paved roads must be completely reconstructed to ensure safe driving conditions.

The NPS completed \$7.7 million worth of road maintenance in February 2016, but several large projects remain. For example, Kelbaker Road—a 56-mile stretch that connects many of the park's most popular destinations, including Cinder Cones National Natural Landmark and Kelso Dunes—needs \$53 million for reconstruction and resurfacing.

In addition to roadways, NPS maintains 137 buildings in Mojave that collectively require \$2.7 million to repair. The crown jewel is the Kelso Depot, a mission-style train station that opened in 1924 and served as a stop on the Union Pacific Railroad route that connected California and Utah. Despite a major restoration in 2005, the station—which serves as the park's main visitor center—still needs \$24,000 in maintenance. Restoring all of the historic structures and visitor amenities in the ghost town of Kelso will cost \$900,000.

Other maintenance needs in Mojave include trails (\$22,000), archaeological sites (\$181,000), water systems (\$375,000), and Zzyzx, the site of a health spa in the 1940s (\$3.3 million).

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“ The Mojave National Preserve provides the perfect environment for learning to respect and preserve the treasure that is the Mojave Desert. It has played a part in my lifelong love of the Mojave and this planet that we call home. Maintaining our parks ensures that others can also experience these natural wonders in the years to come.”

**Deborah Benson**, executive director, Maturango Museum of Indian Wells Valley

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## Recommendations

To address the deferred maintenance needs at Mojave and other NPS sites in California 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  
**Mojave National Preserve Facts**  
 2016

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| <b>Visitor spending</b>                        | \$34.2 million  |
| <b>Jobs created by visitor spending</b>        | 490             |
| <b>Economic output</b>                         | \$43.5 million  |
| <b>Labor income</b>                            | \$16.8 million  |
| <b>Visits</b>                                  | 585,634         |
| <b>Deferred maintenance (fiscal year 2015)</b> | \$131.8 million |

Sources: National Park Service, "National Park Service Visitor Use Statistics," accessed June 12, 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 June 12, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>; National Park Service, "NPS Deferred Maintenance Reports," accessed June 12, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/defermain.htm>

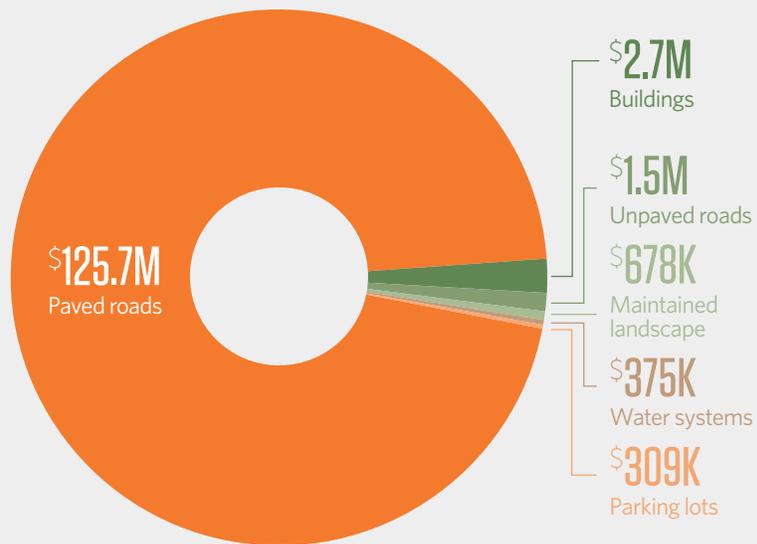
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Figure 1  
**Mojave National Preserve Needs Millions for Infrastructure Repairs**  
 Key deferred maintenance

Note: This chart depicts the largest maintenance categories by dollar value.

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.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Richard N. Velotta, "Mojave National Preserve Perfect Escape for Those Seeking Serenity," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, Oct. 29, 2016, <http://www.reviewjournal.com/life/travel/mojave-national-preserve-perfect-escape-those-seeking-serenity>.
- 2 National Park Service, "Alerts and Conditions," accessed Dec. 16, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/moja/playourvisit/conditions.htm>.
- 3 National Park Service, "Mojave National Preserve Deferred Maintenance Backlog Identified: Part of \$11.49 Billion Backlog at the National Park Service," accessed Dec. 16, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/moja/learn/news/mojave-national-preserve-deferred-maintenance-backlog-identified.htm>.
- 4 National Park Service, "Mojave National Preserve Announces New Round of Road Work to Begin in Spring 2016," accessed Dec. 16, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/moja/learn/news/mojave-national-preserve-announces-new-round-of-road-work-to-begin-in-spring-2016.htm>.

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