



Zion National Park's \$70 million in deferred maintenance includes repairing a section of the Emerald Pools Trail.

Zion National Park

Utah

Overview

Zion National Park's scenic splendor draws over 4 million people each year, making it one of America's most visited national parks. Spanning 229 square miles in Utah near the Arizona border, the park is known for its high plateaus, narrow slot canyons, striking rock towers and mesas, and breathtaking ridgelines. It also protects hundreds of petroglyphs etched onto sandstone, evidence of the Ancestral Puebloan and Parowan Fremont peoples who lived here from about 300 B.C. to A.D. 1300.

Unfortunately, Zion's popularity has led to the degradation of key infrastructure such as roads, and it now has a \$70 million repair backlog.

Maintenance challenges

Ninety percent of the park is wilderness, which concentrates the vast majority of visitors in front-country destinations that can be easily accessed by road, via shuttle bus or car. The park's largest maintenance need by far is \$46 million for roads, and its superintendent considers most of these repairs a high priority. For example, the Kolob Canyon Road, a popular 5-mile drive that takes visitors through soaring red cliffs, needs nearly \$15 million to repave—nearly the value of the road itself.

The Floor of the Valley Road that runs through Zion Canyon, the park's most popular destination, is now accessed only by shuttle or tour buses nine months of the year. It was originally built to withstand the weight of cars, but its heavy use by larger vehicles has caused almost \$3 million in damage. Millions more are needed to fix roads to Zion's campgrounds and visitor centers, and their accompanying parking lots, bridges, and tunnels.

Visitors seeking more active experiences in the park flock to the trails that switch back and forth up sheer rock cliffs and meander along valleys and the scenic Virgin River. Repairing all of them will cost \$2.6 million. Those most in need of rehabilitation are Canyon Overlook Trail, the famed Angels Landing Trail that affords extraordinary views of the valley, and the West Rim Trail. An entire section of the park's most popular trail, Emerald Pools, has been closed for several years after a flash flood washed away sections of it. Almost \$250,000 is needed to repair this pathway.

“ Zion National Park is the gem of southern Utah...Without this funding, the long-term sustainability of these park resources will deteriorate to the point that maintenance will be even more difficult and costly. As a national park volunteer, I see visitors weekly who are saddened by their inability to enjoy these resources due to the closure of park areas. As an elected official, I am embarrassed to inform visitors that funding is lacking due to low budgets.”

Lisa Zumpft, Springdale Town Council member and Zion National Park volunteer

Recommendations

To address the deferred maintenance needs at Zion and other National Park Service (NPS) sites in Utah 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
 Zion National Park Facts
 2016

Visitor spending	\$244.5 million
Jobs created by visitor spending	3,382
Economic output	\$333.2 million
Labor income	\$126.2 million
Visits	4,295,127
Deferred maintenance (fiscal year 2015)	\$70.1 million

Sources: National Park Service, "Annual Visitation Report by Years: 2006 to 2016," accessed June 16, 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 16, 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>.

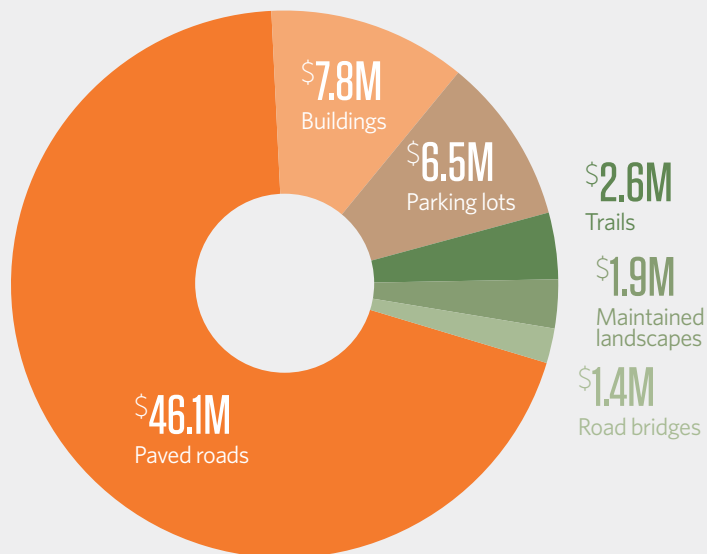
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Figure 1
 Zion National
 Park Needs
 Millions for
 Infrastructure
 Repairs
 Key deferred
 maintenance

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

Source: Pew analysis of National Park Service data

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