



Cary Jenkins/Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

Restoration of the walls of the Maurice Bathhouse is among the park's almost \$20 million in needed repairs.

Hot Springs National Park

Arkansas

Overview

For centuries, American Indian tribes recognized the healing powers of hot springs that flowed from the western slope of a mountain in Arkansas' Ouachita range. By 1832, when President Andrew Jackson designated Hot Springs Reservation as the nation's first federally protected recreation area, a town had sprung up around the springs. Samuel W. Fordyce, a business and railroad magnate, moved to "the American spa," as the town became known, in 1876 after experiencing the thermal waters, said to treat rheumatism and other ailments. He and others constructed large hotels, utility systems, street railway systems, and grand bathhouses, most of which are still open to the public.

Hot Springs did not become a national park until 1921. Visitors can explore the National Historic Landmark District, hike trails and drive scenic roads, and take a dip in an early 20th-century bathhouse. However, this one-of-a-kind park is now threatened by almost \$20 million in deferred maintenance.

Maintenance challenges

Most of the park's maintenance backlog is to preserve buildings, many of which are historic. Together, two of the iconic bathhouses on Central Avenue—the Fordyce and the Buckstaff—require over \$1 million for repairs. Although the National Park Service (NPS) recently replaced the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system in the Fordyce, it needs to upgrade the fire alarm system, install automatic door openers to increase accessibility, and replace the ceramic tile roof. And it aims to install LED bulbs and tuck-point the exterior brick of the Buckstaff Bathhouse. The Friends of Hot Springs National Park is also trying to raise \$500,000 to restore the Roycroft den, lobby, and front porch of the Maurice Bathhouse so the NPS can lease the building to a local investor.

Visitors driving into the mountains encounter roads in disrepair. Fixing them will cost nearly \$6 million. Together, West Mountain Drive and Hot Springs Mountain Drive need over \$1 million to inspect and clean culverts, repair rock walls and asphalt overlays, and replace traffic signs and posts. Trails, camping grounds, and picnic sites also require regular upkeep.

The park protects the western slope of Hot Springs Mountain, where rain and snow soak into the ground, feeding its 47 springs. About 700,000 gallons of hot water flow from the springs into a piping and reservoir system and—before it enters the spa buildings—a water treatment plant. The system and plant together have nearly \$1 million in deferred maintenance.

“ If it were not for the national park, there would not be a city of Hot Springs. The national park is the reason they call us ‘the Spa City.’ For hundreds of years, people have journeyed here for the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical healing of the thermal waters. They are still coming by the thousands, and the No. 1 attraction is not Oaklawn or the Mountain Tower; it is the Hot Springs National Park! We are forever grateful for this historical contribution to our community.”

Mayor Ruth Carney

Recommendations

To address the infrastructure needs at Hot Springs National Park and other NPS sites in Arkansas 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.

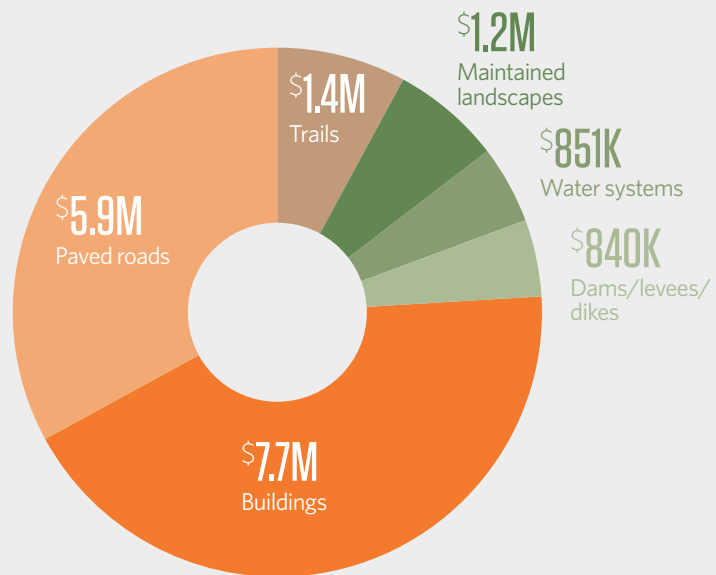
Table 1
Hot Springs National Park Facts
 2016

Visitor spending	\$99 million
Jobs created by visitor spending	1,584
Economic output	\$126.6 million
Labor income	\$41.2 million
Visits	1,544,301
Deferred maintenance (fiscal year 2015)	\$19.6 million

Sources: National Park Service, "Annual Visitation Report by Years: 2006 to 2016," accessed June 14, 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 14, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>; National Park Service, "NPS Deferred Maintenance Reports," accessed June 23, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/defermain.htm>

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Figure 1
Hot Springs 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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