

P.A.R.K.S.: Addressing deferred maintenance for the future

- **P—Preservation**
Our national history must be preserved and protected.
- **A—Access**
Roads, bridges, trails, and historical buildings need repairs to ensure that visitors can access and experience the parks.
- **R—Revenue**
Deferred maintenance detracts from visitors' experiences, jeopardizing the billions in revenue that national park sites provide for adjacent communities and states.
- **K—Kids**
Our park sites must be well cared for so that our youth can enjoy and learn from them.
- **S—Safety**
Aging infrastructure and building code issues need to be addressed so that visitors have a safe experience.

The Pew Charitable Trusts works with the National Park 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.

Endnotes

- 1 National Park Service, "NPS Deferred Maintenance Reports," accessed Aug. 19, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/defermain.htm>.
- 2 National Park Service, "National Park Service Certifies 2015 Visitation at 307 Million: Reports Annual Top 10 Lists and Other Highlights," news release, accessed Aug. 19, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/news/release.htm?id=1784>.
- 3 National Park Service, "Visitor Spending Effects," accessed Aug. 19, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>.
- 4 National Park Service, "National Park Visitor Spending Contributes \$32 Billion to Economy: Every public dollar invested in National Park Service returns \$10," news release, accessed Aug. 19, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/news/release.htm?id=1821>.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 National Park Service, "National Park Service Certifies."

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The Pew Charitable Trusts is driven by the power of knowledge to solve today's most challenging problems. Pew applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public, and invigorate civic life.



National Parks Require Restoration

A look at the infrastructure needs of the nation's treasured sites

Overview

The National Park System protects more than 400 natural, historic, cultural, and recreational sites in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and several U.S. territories.

In 2016, as the National Park Service (NPS) celebrates its 100th anniversary, many of these cherished places are showing signs of age: crumbling roads and bridges; neglected historic buildings; eroding trails; and deteriorating electrical, water, and sewage systems. Decades of congressional underfunding, combined with the inherent challenges of maintaining aging infrastructure and diverse properties, has led to an estimated \$12 billion backlog of deferred maintenance projects, and the price tag for addressing high-priority assets is nearly \$2.4 billion.¹

The NPS needs reliable resources to satisfy its congressional mandate to protect and conserve these scenic, natural, and historic places in perpetuity. Parks with poorly maintained infrastructure or closed facilities can detract from visitors' experiences—and from spending in the gateway communities, many of which depend on park-related revenue. In 2015, NPS sites recorded 307 million visits,² and park guests spent almost \$17 billion in nearby cities and towns. That spending supported 295,300 jobs and contributed \$32 billion in economic activity nationwide.³

The NPS needs guaranteed annual funding to address its maintenance needs so that future generations can enjoy and learn from our national treasures.

An Overview of Deferred Maintenance Issues in the National Park System



What

The National Park Service, and some of the infrastructure it oversees, is 100 years old. It requires reliable annual federal funding to protect the parks for future generations. Rangers need to restore historic sites; preserve visitor access via well-maintained roads, trails, and bridges; and ensure that buildings and electrical, sewer, and water systems are up to date and safe.



Problem

The NPS lacks adequate funding to make needed repairs, which it estimates will cost \$12 billion. The 2015 deferred maintenance list includes eroding trails, broken restrooms, crumbling roads and bridges, neglected historic buildings, breached water mains, and leaking sewer pipes. Failing to make critical repairs could harm historic and natural resources, and visitors' experiences.



Where

The 400-plus national parks are home to natural wonders such as the Grand Canyon and Great Smoky Mountains; historic places such as Gettysburg National Military Park and the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail; urban sites such as the Golden Gate and Boston Harbor Islands national recreation areas; and cultural sites such as Mesa Verde National Park.



Why

The NPS' challenges include years of congressional underfunding that make it difficult to maintain and protect its 75,000 assets, such as buildings, cultural sites, and roads; increased wear and tear—in 2015, park sites received more than 307 million visits;⁶ and aging infrastructure that has exceeded its life span.



Benefits

The national parks provide recreation, environmental, health, and educational benefits and serve as economic drivers for local communities. For every dollar invested in the NPS, \$10 is returned to cities and towns.⁴ Park visitors spent an estimated \$16.9 billion in gateway communities in 2015, supporting 295,300 jobs and \$32 billion in economic activity nationwide.⁵



Solutions

Congress needs to ensure that the NPS has the necessary resources to protect our national treasures in perpetuity. A successful plan should include dedicated federal funding, innovative policy reforms, allocation of more Highway Trust Fund dollars to park infrastructure, and expanded opportunities for public-private partnerships.

