



2005 Market Street, Suite 1700 215.575.9050 Phone
Philadelphia, PA 19103-7077 215.575.4939 Fax

901 E Street NW, 10th Floor 202.552.2000 Phone
Washington, DC 20004 202.552.2299 Fax
www.pewtrusts.org

**Statement of Rebecca Knuffke, Officer, Restore America’s Parks, The Pew Charitable Trusts to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
February 6, 2020**

Chairman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of The Pew Charitable Trusts’ Restore America’s Parks initiative.

The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew) applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public, and invigorate civic life. The Restore America’s Parks campaign seeks to conserve the natural and cultural assets of the National Park System by providing common sense, long-term solutions to its multi-billion dollar repair backlog.

Overview of the National Park Service Repair Backlog – Overview

The National Park Service (NPS) is responsible for managing and maintaining more than 400 nationally significant sites in all 50 states and several territories. These park units document the remarkable people, heritage, and the places that comprise the ongoing story of America.

Unfortunately, our 100-plus year old NPS has aging infrastructure that is deteriorating. Compounding this challenge are visitation pressures on park resources—NPS recorded over 318 million visits in 2018—and years of inadequate funding for maintenance needs. The Park Service is not able to keep up with the pace of repairs for assets that include: over 5,000 miles of paved roads; nearly 1,500 bridges; 18,000 miles of trails; more than 28,000 buildings including historic structures and employee housing; over 2,000 sewage systems; and other facilities such as battlefields, campgrounds, interpretive facilities, and monuments and memorials. As a result, the agency must triage repair needs and it has a backlog of deferred maintenance that is estimated at \$11.9 billion (based on FY2018 data).

Drawing down a maintenance backlog that has accrued over decades requires a combined approach—one that includes robust annual appropriations funding, dedicated funding, and policy reforms to leverage technology and increase efficiencies.

Annual Appropriations

Adequate discretionary investment is essential for NPS to keep up with maintenance needs, over three-quarters of which are priority projects. Pew commends the Subcommittee for providing increases for NPS deferred maintenance in recent years. We respectfully urge you to build on this support in FY2021, as there is still a substantial gap between NPS discretionary funding and what it needs to address its priority repair projects.

Specifically, within the Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) and Construction appropriations, Pew urges the Subcommittee to maximize allocations for the Repair and

Rehabilitation, Cyclic Maintenance and Line Item Construction accounts. These accounts provide the bulk of the necessary funding for the Park Service to undertake maintenance that will keep our national parks accessible to the public and safe. Funding for planning and adequate staff capacity are also critical to the execution of repair and maintenance projects. We ask that these accounts be funded as robustly as possible.

Further, we urge an allocation of \$4 million for employee housing to help expedite correcting the dilapidated state of ranger housing. According to NPS, deferred maintenance for employee housing totaled more than \$186 million in fiscal year 2018, yet the agency received only \$2.2 million that year for its Housing Improvement Program.

Another important program, the Centennial Challenge, which matches federal dollars with private donations and directs the monies toward priority deferred maintenance projects and other park programs, has the potential to leverage even more funding. By raising the annual appropriations from \$20 million to \$30 million, federal dollars could encourage more partner and private donations, facilitating the repair of even more park infrastructure.

Dedicated Funding Legislation --Restore Our Parks Act

The Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act (H.R. 1225), sponsored by Reps. Bishop and Kilmer in the House, and the companion Restore Our Parks Act sponsored by Sens. Portman, Warner, Alexander, and King in the Senate (S. 500), would direct over six billion dollars of federal energy development revenue to tackle park repairs over a five-year period. This dedicated source of funding would provide consistent, reliable funding to enable NPS to better plan for complicated, large-scale repair projects. If enacted, this bipartisan, widely-supported legislation—endorsed by over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the House, $\frac{1}{2}$ the Senate, the Administration, and 82% of the public—would provide NPS the resources to help tackle its highest priority repairs. The intent of the legislation is not to supplant annual appropriations, however, which are needed to ensure NPS can do current maintenance work needed to prevent repairs from escalating and becoming more expensive over time.

Conclusion

Fixing our parks has overwhelming support from Congress and the American public. To be successful, NPS needs robust annual appropriations and dedicated funding. We appreciate the discretionary increases in park maintenance accounts over the past several years and encourage the Subcommittee to continue to build on that investment.

Thank you for your consideration of Pew's requests and for your continued support of our national parks.