



Assateague Coastal Trust

Coastal storms wash over roads and parking lots at Old Ferry Landing and elsewhere in the park, damaging buildings and roadways.

Assateague Island National Seashore

Maryland and Virginia

Overview

Visitors to Assateague Island National Seashore see firsthand the balance between preservation and recreation. The island's sandy beaches, salt marshes, and coastal bays provide important habitat for its popular wild horses, white-tailed deer, and waterfowl, as well as blue crabs, Atlantic menhaden, and summer flounder. Conservation of these species is carefully balanced with access to horseback riding, hunting, hiking, fishing, and camping.

Unfortunately, Assateague has a backlog of millions of dollars in infrastructure repairs that is detracting from visitors' experiences and harming the local ecosystem.

Maintenance challenges

Assateague Island is a barrier island whose landscape is continually reshaped by ocean currents and storms. Severe storms, such as Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and winter storm Jonas in 2016, have washed out roads, inundated parking lots, and destroyed boardwalks. In addition to the weather pressures, the more than 2.2 million visitors each year have caused roads to deteriorate and parking facilities to overflow. As of October 2015, road repairs—including resurfacing Bayside Drive—represented the biggest slice of deferred maintenance, at over \$9 million. Another \$5.5 million is needed to fix parking lots on the oceanfront and around visitor centers.

Once visitors leave their cars, other needed repairs become apparent. Visitor centers and visitor contact stations, campgrounds, entrance booths, and bike trails all require maintenance. The Barrier Island Visitor Center needs over a quarter of a million dollars in repairs, and the seashore administration building needs \$744,000 worth of fixes. Entrance booths, campground offices, and restroom/shower houses at North and South Ocean Beach require close to \$100,000 in restoration. Additional work is needed at a wastewater treatment center, a generator building, a maintenance shop, district ranger stations, and boat sheds, totaling almost half a million dollars. Deferred maintenance costs for buildings and structures throughout the park are \$3.3 million.

But Assateague Island's largest maintenance needs involve its roads, parking lots, and trails. This barrier island has ocean on two sides, making it extremely vulnerable to coastal storms that frequently flood parts of it, causing erosion and sand deposition. Road repairs, especially to Oceanside and Bayside drives, amount to \$9.1 million. Upkeep for parking lots, including those at North and South Ocean Beach, Bayside Picnic and Parking Area, and Old Ferry Landing, will cost \$5.5 million. And repairing biking and walking trails requires almost \$1 million.



The increasing number of people who visit Assateague every year is testimony to its economic significance. In fact, I can't think of a local Ocean City tourism-related business that doesn't use Assateague in its advertising. But badly needed maintenance repairs, left unfunded, could hurt visitation to the seashore and affect local businesses."

Dave Wilson, principal, Conservation Community Consulting

Recommendations

To address the deferred maintenance needs at Assateague and other National Park Service (NPS) sites in Maryland, Virginia, 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.

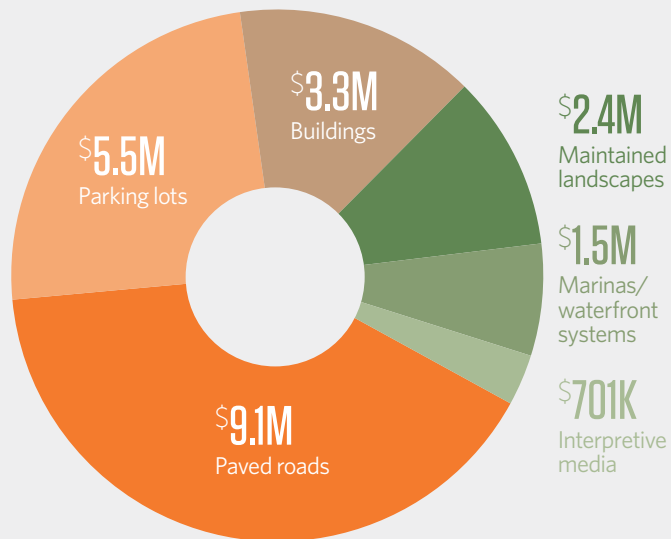
Table 1
Assateague Island National Seashore Facts
 2016

Visitor spending	\$98.3 million
Jobs created by visitor spending	1,332
Economic output	\$112.2 million
Labor income	\$38.8 million
Visits	2,267,822
Deferred maintenance (fiscal year 2015)	\$24.5 million

Sources: National Park Service, "Visitor Spending Effects," accessed Oct. 6, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>;
 National Park Service, "NPS Deferred Maintenance Reports," accessed Oct. 6, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/defermain.htm>

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Figure 1
Assateague Island National Seashore 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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For further information, please visit:
pewtrusts.org/nationalparks

Contact: Monique O'Grady, communications officer
Email: mogrady@pewtrusts.org

Contact: Marcia Argust, director
Email: margust@pewtrusts.org

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