

Statement of Denis P. Galvin
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Before the House Committee on Natural Resources, Federal Lands Subcommittee
On Identifying Innovative Infrastructure Ideas for the National Park Service and Forest Service
March 16th, 2017

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify at this important hearing. I am Denis P. Galvin. I worked for the National Park Service for nearly forty years in many different assignments. I served as Deputy Director under three administrations for a total of nine years. In addition, and relevant to this hearing, I was responsible for planning, design and construction in the parks for fourteen years. I am a civil engineer.

I testify today in my capacity as a board member of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) on behalf of our more than 1.2 million members and supporters across the country. Of note is that I am also affiliated with the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, a group of over 1,200 former National Park Service employees who continue to support the parks; that group has submitted testimony for the record.

The National Park Service celebrated its Centennial in 2016. Americans and international visitors participated by visiting in record numbers, with more than 330 million visits last year, an all-time record that reflects a 13% growth in visitation over the last two years. While last year's crowds stressed the capacity of the service to meet the demand, public reaction remained high, topping 90% satisfaction. Similarly, the private businesses that support and accommodate park visitors saw record years. During peak visitor season, these businesses employ more people than the National Park Service. As a result of visitor spending in surrounding communities, many of them rural, national parks support \$32 billion in economic activity nationally and nearly 300,000 jobs. The existence value of our heritage has significant value to Americans: a recent economic study done by Harvard University and the University of Colorado concluded that the American public values the services of the National Park Service at \$92 billion.

History of NPS' Aging Infrastructure: Since our subject today is public lands infrastructure it is worth considering some of the history of the inventory of the National Park Service. There are three periods of note. Early lodges were built by the railroad companies who sought to expand their passenger business by bringing visitors to parks. A second period of major investment happened in the 1930's with the depression-fighting programs of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). National treasures such as Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park owe their origins to this era.

Finally was Mission 66, a ten-year program that President Eisenhower started in 1956 to rehabilitate and renew the parks after WWII, the same year he signed legislation creating the Interstate Highway System. Through Mission 66, a billion dollars was spent in ten years. Most of those projects, including over 120 visitor centers, are still serving the American public. There has been no comprehensive infrastructure effort since the end of that program in 1966. Most park facilities are, thus, over 50 years old. A recent report by the Government Accountability Office

(GAO) showed that indeed the major infrastructure in disrepair was constructed during those three periods. These and other facilities, neglected due chiefly to insufficient funding and staff, are now showing their wear, from basic maintenance needs to entire reconstruction.

Funding to Address Park Maintenance: The chief cause of the growth of the maintenance backlog is insufficient funding to maintain, repair, and in some cases, reconstruct park assets. After the Department of Defense, NPS has the most assets of any federal agency, with 75,000 assets, 41,000 of which struggle with deferred maintenance. Caring for these many resources requires consistent and sufficient funding. Unfortunately, the park service has not been receiving this funding. In FY15, the latest year for which reliable numbers are available, the park service needed \$820 million just to keep the backlog from growing, but received only \$473 million, or 58 cents for every dollar the agency needed just to keep the problem from growing worse.

Non-transportation Needs: The construction program of the National Park Service is the chief account for addressing larger non-transportation projects but is characterized by relatively small and highly decentralized projects. The account is scarcely half of past levels. Even after a \$55 million increase in FY16, park construction is funded at only 40% of levels of fifteen years ago in 2016 dollars. In FY02, the account received \$486 million in 2016 dollars, but in FY16 it was just under \$193 million. The House and Senate FY17 Interior appropriations bills seek to provide \$216 million and \$217 million respectively. This increase would be very helpful for better addressing repairs needs but we fear the large number of environmentally damaging policy riders in the bill could force another continuing resolution that would prevent the proposed increase from becoming law.

The request in the Fiscal Year 2017 (FY17) budget for non-transportation park assets lists 26 projects totaling \$150 million. Four subsequent years (ending in 2021) lay out a similarly sized request for a five-year total of about 125 projects estimated at \$750 million. Support for these projects is critical but still insufficient. In context, there are many large water infrastructure projects that cannot be addressed with this annual level of funding. For example, the potable water pipeline delivering water to the many facilities at the south rim of the Grand Canyon requires such extensive reconstruction that the project must be funded over many years. Among the larger projects requiring attention is the El Portal wastewater system at Yosemite National Park totaling \$45 million.

The \$6 billion non-transportation half of the backlog is also addressed through the operations account. Park operations however are largely occupied by personnel costs to fund the many park staff who provide visitor services and protect and maintain our parks. This account has long been underfunded such that parks lack sufficient funding for both cyclic maintenance that could prevent the backlog from growing and repair and rehabilitation projects that address the many smaller repair projects.

NPS could be aided in addressing the backlog through sustained multi-year investments through the Interior appropriations process. Critical to this effort are relieving the threat of the sequester through budget deals or amendment of the Budget Control Act and a 302(a) appropriations

allocation that can provide more sufficient funds for the Interior subcommittee to make this investment.

Funding Transportation Needs: The backlog for park transportation infrastructure is \$6.2 billion, roughly half of the \$12 billion backlog. Parks roads, bridges and other transportation assets are funded through the Highway Trust Fund via transportation bills. The last bill, the FAST Act, funds these needs at a current annual level that rises gradually from the FY15 level of \$240 million to \$300 million in FY20. This increase will be very helpful, but still insufficient to address the many larger projects that are long overdue for repair.

That bill also established the Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects Program that funds larger transportation “mega-projects.” However, that amount is \$100 million annually, can be used for other public lands needs and is subject to appropriations through the Transportation Housing and Urban Development (THUD) appropriations bill that has many competing needs. To put these amounts in context, the Arlington Memorial Bridge reconstruction alone totals an estimated \$250 million, more than the FY15 FAST Act allocation for all transportation projects across the system.

The parks maintenance backlog could be better addressed through an additional increase for park transportation infrastructure in the next transportation bill, legislative language to increase the mega-projects account in THUD appropriations, and an appropriation to that account at its fully authorized level.

A Dedicated Funding Solution: As outlined above, current funding sources have, to date, been insufficient to adequately address park maintenance such that the backlog has been growing. Both annual appropriations and transportation funding must be increased. Given constraints to both funding sources, however, an innovative solution would be to dedicate robust annual funding to park infrastructure to supplement—but not supplant—appropriated dollars. For example, \$500 million annually dedicated to park infrastructure outside of standard funding sources would over a decade address the \$5 billion worth of the most critical projects across the system, considerably relieving NPS of these most pressing needs. Such an effort would very likely demonstrate bipartisan support for one of America’s most popular assets, create construction jobs, and ensure the long-term investment needed to sustain our natural and cultural heritage and local economies at the same time.

Legislation to dedicate this funding could allow for the park service to select their highest priority projects using their current and complex process that relies on multiple databases to track and rank the many work orders that comprise the backlog. Appropriators should be given the opportunity to review these projects as they do with annual line-item construction projects. Critically, the legislation should be clear that dedicated funds are intended to supplement rather than replace critical appropriated funds. Legislation to dedicate this funding could be wrapped into infrastructure legislation.

We’re grateful that the president and members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have expressed interest in addressing our nation’s aging infrastructure and that Interior Secretary Zinke has indicated that addressing park maintenance is among his highest priorities. We urge

you to work with other members of Congress to support this effort to dedicate robust funding to park needs. Such an effort must be undertaken with attention to the multi-year nature of projects and to the protection of sensitive environmental and cultural resource protection during the process.

Long-term Planning: The National Park Service was appropriated \$750 million with the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Due to the need to obligate the money quickly to recover the economy, a little over \$523 million, or 70% of those funds addressed the deferred maintenance backlog directly. Other projects included capital improvements and improved parks but were lower priority. In contrast, we recommend a multi-year commitment that is more attentive to long-term planning than a stimulus proposal, though such an endeavor would stimulate the economy through significant construction jobs. Many NPS deferred maintenance projects are larger and more challenging than typical maintenance projects and require additional permitting and planning. The smaller and less expensive projects are more easily addressed through annual appropriations.

Therefore, significant infrastructure investments must:

1. Prioritize critical projects—those that will, for example, preserve a significant resource, improve visitor safety or result in significant cost savings in the future;
2. Allow multi-year proposals and provide funding for planning and project development. Lack of sufficient funding over the years has resulted in minimal long-range planning and permitting. Plans and other documentation associated with projects often become outdated and are not developed unless construction funding is guaranteed. Any national park infrastructure revitalization program will need to provide funding for planning and permitting so that the projects of greatest need can be addressed, and not simply the ones that are “shovel-ready.” This is especially true for the “mega” projects, such as the renovation of the Arlington Memorial Bridge, the planning and permitting of which alone will require millions of dollars. These projects are particularly important for inclusion because annual funding streams are vastly insufficient to cover these projects, even over the course of several years.
3. Require mandatory funding for contracting and project management specialists. The contracting and project management required for large-scale or specialized infrastructure projects is often beyond the capacity of park staff. Individuals with the skill and experience in large-scale construction contracting and management will need to assist parks to ensure that federal dollars are efficiently spent. Further, legislating enhanced opportunities and preference for local contractors while ensuring competitive bidding would build local buy-in for parks; this will likely result in broader support for the park as a whole from gateway communities.

Attention to Environmental and Historic Resource Needs: When planning for and undertaking infrastructure projects, we urge the importance of ensuring the protection, integrity and historically sensitive restoration of natural and cultural resources. Any construction projects must follow legal requirements such as the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and

the National Historic Preservation Act (including Section 106 requiring Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties).

It is also important that careful restoration of historic properties adhere to administrative guidelines, including but not limited to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the treatment of historic properties, Director's Order 28 on cultural resource management, and Director's Order 80 on real property asset management, as well as related guidelines and relevant handbooks.

We caution the committee not to consider these standards to be inconveniences that challenge maintenance efficiencies, as undermining environmental or historic resource protections would only threaten the integrity of the world-class resources for which these areas were designated for protection and special recognition. Americans support protection of our cultural and natural heritage, and these bedrock laws and policies do not get in the way of projects. Rather, they ensure that they are done with sensitivity.

Additional concepts to support maintenance needs that augment--but do not supplant--appropriated and transportation funding:

In addition to the innovative concept of dedicated funding for parks, there are other opportunities for supporting park maintenance, many of which have their own set of limitations and challenges, and some that have realistic potential to leverage additional fees. In March of 2013 NPCA partnered with the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) and the National Park Hospitality Association to investigate 16 concepts that could leverage non-appropriated funding for the park service. These concepts, written by numerous experts and not necessarily reflecting the positions of NPCA or the organizations with which the writers were affiliated, have been provided for the record. They are attempts to leverage a constructive dialog about additional ways to address parks' needs. We explore a few of those and other concepts below.

Philanthropy: As we seek to convey in this testimony, funding park maintenance is and always will be foremost a federal responsibility. While philanthropy and other concepts are helpful and have potential, they are no substitute for the level of support that, according to numerous polls we can provide upon request, is required and expected of the federal government.

Over the last thirty years the NPS has partnered with public and private partners to accomplish some major projects. Some include the Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island, Independence, and Gettysburg. Currently a major rehabilitation at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, the Arch (over \$300 million), is being accomplished with such a partnership.

As we discuss innovative ideas to address national park infrastructure, philanthropy is one idea that is often raised as having great potential. Indeed, philanthropy has played an important role in supporting national parks since the system's inception. Donations both small and large, both monetary and in-kind, support programs and projects throughout the system. Many of them help parks repair, rebuild and construct infrastructure. The 2016 Centennial was an important year as the National Park Foundation and others leveraged substantial support.

The Centennial Challenge program is an innovative program that leverages private dollars with a matching federal investment for projects throughout the park system that enhance the visiting experience. These include projects that provide for maintenance, for example of historic buildings including the Old State House in Boston, and trails such as the historic retaining wall and trail at Grand Teton National Park. The program was started during the last Bush Administration with bipartisan support in Congress, and then after a hiatus of a few years, was restored in the appropriations process in FY15. Over FY15 and FY16, \$25 million in federal dollars leveraged \$49 million in private donations--a two-to-one match, though the program only requires a one-to-one match.

We were grateful, thanks to the commitment of the bill's sponsor, Chairman Bishop, that the Centennial Challenge program received dedicated funding at the end of the last Congress in the National Park Service Centennial Act. The bill dedicated annual funding for the program through a portion of an increase in the senior pass, formerly priced at \$10 for life. The bill also established a national parks endowment seeded with a modest investment in a corpus. This will be very helpful to parks in the long-term but will take quite a number of years to grow and could not provide a complete solution to parks' funding woes. The centennial challenge program could be further supported with a larger dedicated funding source that augments its current funding stream.

However, partnerships and philanthropy have their limitations and are not alone sufficient to address needs without a more robust federal funding stream. Philanthropists do not want to undertake projects they feel are the responsibility of the federal government, and there is no philanthropic appeal to projects such as wastewater treatment plants. Furthermore, these partnerships must be undertaken with sensitivity to the numerous ethical issues that must be navigated. The recent revisions to Director's Order 21 governing NPS policies on partnerships and philanthropy provide numerous improvements for enhancing partnerships--but they also raise sensitive issues. Among them are the threat of pressuring park staff to become *de facto* fundraisers at the expense of their fundamental duties under the NPS Organic Act to protect resources and serve visitors. The order also raises sensitivities surrounding the recognition of donors and the importance of ensuring that parks remain an experience free of commercialization.

Federal Lands Recreation Act (FLREA) Reauthorization: NPCA has been grateful that since expiration of FLREA in December of 2014, Congress has provided annual extensions such that the program continues to allow the park service to retain now roughly \$200 million annually in recreational fees it collects. Given the need for long-term FLREA reauthorization, NPCA was pleased that this committee considered a discussion draft of a bill that would provide that long-term support. We were therefore grateful for the opportunity to testify in the hearing on that bill in October 2014.

In our testimony for that hearing, we commended the committee for taking up the legislation and considering many concepts we support, including technological improvements, adjusting the annual America the Beautiful pass every three years for inflation, long-term reauthorization, and the concept of transparency in fee collection. We also provided numerous recommendations

including a list of concepts agreed upon by groups within the Second Century Action Coalition, which includes diverse historic preservation, recreation, travel, conservation and other groups that care deeply about funding national parks and representing the many Americans who hold that view.

However, we also had several significant concerns with the FLREA proposal. Chiefly, we did not support the concept of requiring congressional approval of fee increases given the many competing priorities and limited time for Congress to address such an increase in a timely manner. We proposed an alternative—and simple—approach to raising fees: adjust them automatically for inflation every three years, such that the buying power for the consumer remains consistent but NPS is able to collect amounts that do not suffer from the changing value of the dollar.

We also opposed the bill's proposal to change the requirement that the minority of fee-collecting parks in the system contribute 20% of their proceeds to a competitive fund that allows non fee-collecting parks to compete for needed projects. If this requirement is to be changed, NPCA has found that moving towards more of a 70-30 split would be far more helpful than to a 90-10 split, as was proposed in the discussion draft.

Through longer-term FLREA legislation, there are a variety of ways that fee revenue might be enhanced, from fees charged for group tours to differential charges for international visitors or during peak seasons, and pilot programs to investigate the potential for new technologies such as automated entrance gates and automatic online annual pass renewal.

As discussed later in this testimony, changes to fee collection have their limits and can be problematic.

A Penny for Parks: Another idea the BPC white papers explore is to increase the gasoline tax and dedicate a portion of that increased revenue to park transportation infrastructure. There is no debate that American infrastructure has long been neglected, and again, we are pleased to see decision-makers explore the need for infrastructure legislation. A challenge for such an effort will of course be identifying an offset to pay for the investment. Park transportation infrastructure, as outlined above, relies on funding in the transportation bill; those funds are drawn from the Highway Trust Fund. This fund relies on the gas tax, which has not been increased for inflation since 1993. NPCA supports an increase in the gas tax, which could help address park transportation infrastructure with a small portion of the increase dedicated to parks while meeting infrastructure needs throughout the country.

Volunteerism: Park volunteer programs help inspire Americans, train the next generation of park stewards, and address many projects, some of which provide for basic maintenance and repair needs. The in-kind value to NPS is enormous: last year, 440,000 volunteers donated 7.9 million hours to the NPS. Standard valuation of volunteer labor is estimated at \$24 per hour. These programs rely on permanent park staff to recruit and coordinate these volunteers. Many parks and regional offices lack sufficient staff to take advantage of these opportunities. We urge this committee to investigate opportunities to increase the number of volunteer coordinators in NPS and engage with nonprofits dedicated to volunteerism and public service.

Efficiencies: In 1998, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommended improvements for NPS to track and address its maintenance backlog. This led to years of improvements involving NPS establishing a complex system of tracking and ranking projects using multiple databases and considering such factors as visitor and staff use, the replacement value of park assets, and the importance of ranking numerous competing work orders to address critical needs such as roof replacement. Under Director Jarvis, NPS examined and implemented efficiencies that encouraged cost savings, such as consolidation of IT services, limits to travel budgets with a focus on using technologies to communicate remotely, and energy efficiencies. We were pleased to see NPS pursue these requirements and urge them to continue identifying such opportunities.

In response to a request by Senators Murkowski and Enzi to investigate several questions related to the maintenance backlog and park funding, the GAO released a study in December of 2016 that concluded that a process exists for prioritizing NPS asset maintenance decisions, but that additional evaluation could improve efforts. GAO recommended “that the Park Service evaluate [its recently implemented] Capital Investment Strategy and results to assess whether it has achieved its intended outcomes.” The report found that NPS “uses tools that are consistent with asset management guidance from [OMB] and the National Academies Federal Facilities Council.”

The GAO determined NPS found “that its highest-priority assets should be considered first for funding to keep them in good condition, and park unit staff use the agency’s Capital Investment Strategy to rank and prioritize projects for funding.” However, it also recognized concern among some park staff that “the focus on high-priority assets may result in continued deterioration of less-critical assets, thereby increasing deferred maintenance,” which we find to bolster our observation that the chief cause of the backlog is that repair funds are simply insufficient. The GAO also acknowledged that NPS doesn’t have a plan or timeframe for evaluating whether or not the Capital Investment Strategy has been successful, and whether or not it might be too early after implementation to determine the strategy’s effectiveness, given that FY15 was the first year that involved ranking projects using the updated strategy.

We concur with the report’s recommendation that NPS evaluate over time the success of its updated strategy and look forward to seeing the results of that evaluation over time. However, we also found the report supported our observations that funding for the backlog is insufficient, and that NPS has instituted a thorough system for prioritizing and otherwise tracking projects and project needs. We therefore question if there are many additional efficiencies that have not already been implemented but remain supportive of further identification and implementation of efficiencies that enhance NPS maintenance but don’t undermine resource protection efforts.

Historic Leasing: Another concept we support is increasing the use of historic leasing for properties identified as historically significant within the park system. While not a complete solution to the deferred maintenance backlog, the House Appropriations Committee noted that “leasing of historic park buildings has proven to be an effective public-private partnership that has brought private investment to the repair and maintenance of historic park resources.” Historic leases lighten the load on the National Park Services for maintaining historic buildings.

Additionally, entering into long-term leases of 60 years provides an incentive for a lessee to utilize the historic tax credit and invest in restoration, preservation, and maintenance of an historic property.

Problematic Funding Concepts that NPCA Does Not Support:

Numerous concepts have been presented that raise concern for NPCA. Among them:

Fee collection: Some fee concepts that have been presented are problematic. Further increasing fees by amounts that would make a substantial difference in addressing the backlog would not be realistic or fair to the very concept of national parks. Visitors already invest in parks through their tax dollars, so fees must be increased very carefully and must be limited so that parks remain affordable to American families, some of which are of lesser means and are seeking inspirational and more affordable alternatives to private-sector amenities that cost many times that of entering or camping in a park.

NPS recently raised fees, mostly in a manner that approximated an inflation adjustment. Though visitors understand and appreciate that fee dollars are needed, because it had been so long since NPS last increased fees, some members of the public balked at those increases. As discussed in the FLREA hearing in this committee, most parks simply cannot collect fees for varied reasons including prohibition of fees in parks' establishing legislation or the inefficiencies associated with multiple park entrances and/or lower visitation that makes the cost of fee collection impractical or unprofitable.

The concept of larger fee-collecting parks raising their fees to become self-sustainable would require raising fees by such amounts that those parks would become prohibitively expensive for some families. National parks are not amusement parks or professional sports arenas; in contrast, they are public assets owned by all Americans and a federal responsibility, a concept enshrined in the legislation establishing the park system and supported by the vast majority of the American public, as supported by polling.

Using Land Acquisition Funds to Pay for Maintenance: NPCA and many other public-interest groups strongly oppose this concept. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has been successful for more than fifty years in protecting national parks and other public lands. The program protects these lands from incompatible development and ensures management efficiencies by allowing public land management agencies including the National Park Service to purchase private lands from willing sellers. One recent LWCF success was protecting a valuable land parcel in Grand Teton National Park. The NPS' purchase from the State of Wyoming provided revenues for the state that helped fund its schools while ensuring protection of this iconic landscape, its wildlife and recreational access.

NPCA does not view supporting LWCF and addressing deferred maintenance as a choice between the two. Instead, we maintain that our national parks should be preserved, maintained and managed for the enjoyment of the many Americans who collectively own them. Recreational access, protection of wildlife and other natural resources, and the protection of our cultural heritage all benefit from the protection of our federal lands and the maintenance of the resources within them.

The suggestion that LWCF should not be funded until maintenance is better addressed, or that funding for land acquisition should be used to pay for maintenance until such time that the maintenance challenge is relieved, is simply a false choice. We therefore urge Congress to commit dedicated and robust funding for both the maintenance backlog *and* LWCF.

Franchising Park Duties to Private Companies: Central to this concept is the idea that franchising park duties to the private sector would allow for cost savings. The reality is that because private-sector contractors operate with an intent to secure a reasonable profit margin, NPS would have to pay higher costs to contract their services if these services are to remain affordable to American families. We therefore urge considerable caution in pursuing this concept.

Prohibiting Designation of New Units Until the Backlog is Better Addressed: NPCA forcefully opposes this concept and finds it to be significantly misguided. As the aforementioned December 2016 GAO report found, the vast majority of the maintenance backlog is in parks that were established long ago, particularly during the three periods outlined at the beginning of this testimony. Newly established park units are generally small in size and budget, are community-driven—in part because they foster tourism revenue and often come with private contributions—and do not have extensive maintenance needs.

Franchising Out Operation of New NPS Units: Any park unit that is technically within the National Park System but operated and interpreted by a private entity simply would not meet the concept of a national park unit as envisioned by the 1916 Organic Act. Neither would it meet the expectations of an American public that collectively owns parks and supports the National Park Service as a federal responsibility. Americans deeply appreciate the guidance and interpretation of park rangers. Furthermore, as with all parks, new units must be affordable, and any private company that would seek to operate a park unit would need to charge inappropriate entrance fees to make a profit.

Disposing of unnecessary federal lands to pay for the backlog: NPCA is generally comfortable with the disposal of select parcels of federal land if those parcels are truly lacking in recreational, natural and/or cultural resource values and are a burden for land managers, but only if it is through a public process that ensures such a determination is made carefully and those revenues are used for conservation. We therefore support use of those revenues for public land management agencies, but through an existing program that has enjoyed bipartisan support, the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA). This program has used a land-for-land strategy to commit those rather limited revenues from carefully disposed properties toward land acquisition projects across the agencies that ensure protection of these resources.

We simply oppose funneling these revenues towards maintenance needs instead of land protection needs. This committee has made numerous statements in support of FLTFA, and we recommend that Congress identify an avenue towards reauthorization of this important program while also supporting robust maintenance funding.

Conclusion: I would like to return to our chief concerns: budgeting for the NPS, the threat of additional funding cuts in the current climate, and the need for a robust, dedicated funding mechanism to address park infrastructure needs.

The Potential for FY18 Cuts: As we point to the underfunding of parks and its key role in the growth of the park maintenance backlog, we are deeply concerned about the current environment for park staffing and funding.

We're alarmed at the potential for an FY18 president's budget that could propose deep cuts to the park service--among many other agencies. Details are lacking because this testimony is written for submission before the release of the president's budget blueprint. However, depending on how the proposed cuts are distributed, it's very possible that we could see deep challenges to the operation of parks.

In considering the magnitude of the cuts under discussion as this testimony is distributed we urge this committee and all members of Congress to recall the damaging impact of the FY13 sequester and its 5% cut to national park operations. The impacts of that cut included nearly 200 fewer park staff, closed facilities and roads, reduced hours at visitor centers, and other impacts that affected visitors and challenged resource protection.

We were therefore pleased to see numerous members of Congress from both sides of the aisle, including but not limited to appropriators, push back on the idea of deep cuts in FY18.

We urge Congress to avoid this kind of indiscriminate budgeting and replace sequestration cuts to avoid further injury to the National Park Service and the programs and agencies that support parks' well-being. We urge Congress to use its power of the purse to reject indiscriminate budget cuts and instead provide functional, logical and strategic budgeting for nondefense discretionary spending that includes better funding for our national parks.

To be clear, it is not just the NPS accounts that are important to parks and their visitors. Parks are often situated within vast landscapes and are therefore impacted by what goes on outside their borders. Agencies including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) play critical roles in helping protect the air and water that flows in and through our parks. Half our national parks have water that doesn't meet water quality standards, while park air quality would be threatened by cuts. Cutting the EPA's budget only adds to the challenges within the National Park System.

Hiring Freeze: We submit this testimony at a time when we are alarmed by the threat of the presidential memorandum instituting a hiring freeze. This short-sighted and indiscriminate memorandum also included instructions to reduce the federal workforce by attrition. In the case

of the National Park Service, the impact of a freeze or additional staff reduction could be deeply damaging, and even devastating to numerous parks. Parks are already understaffed, with more than 1,700 vacant positions. Given increases in visitation and recent reductions in park staffing that challenge the ability of parks to perform maintenance and otherwise meet their mission, what is actually needed is additional staff—not less.

In FY15, the National Park Service had more than ten percent fewer staff than five years' prior. Positions important for parks' mission are vacant across the spectrum of park services, including interpretation and education, maintenance and resource protection. Many of these staff are needed for maintenance: for example at Yellowstone, where half of the most critical 16 vacant positions out of 40 total vacancies are maintenance positions.

The maintenance backlog could only get worse for lack of the many varied experts needed to pursue repair and reconstruction projects.

The Trump Administration must provide an exemption from the hiring freeze for the National Park Service and related agencies so that park staff can ensure needed maintenance while protecting park resources, local economies and the visiting experience.

Conclusion: Again, we are grateful for the opportunity to testify at this hearing and ask the committee to consider our recommendations on addressing parks' many maintenance challenges.

We ask you to address the many funding challenges that have worsened the maintenance backlog, as well as the current threat of FY18 funding cuts and a hiring freeze.

Furthermore, we urge the committee to support dedicated revenue for national parks' maintenance, preservation and restoration needs. Finally, we ask you to oppose any proposals to address maintenance needs through mechanisms that undermine the protection of park resources.