



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
**NATURAL RESOURCES**  
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

**To:** House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members  
**From:** Federal Lands Subcommittee, Brandon Miller – [Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov](mailto:Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov) x57611  
**Date:** Tuesday, April 18, 2023  
**Subject:** Oversight Hearing on “*Examining the Implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act and the Growing National Park Service Deferred Maintenance Backlog*”

---

The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will hold an oversight hearing on “*Examining the Implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act and the Growing National Park Service Deferred Maintenance Backlog*,” on Tuesday, April 18, at 10:15 a.m. EST in 1324 Longworth House Office Building.

Member offices are requested to notify Sophia Varnasidis ([sophia@mail.house.gov](mailto:sophia@mail.house.gov)) by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, April 17, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

## I. KEY MESSAGES

- Federal land management agencies’ deferred maintenance backlogs have nearly doubled from roughly \$22 billion in 2019 to \$38.6 billion in 2022, despite Congress investing a staggering \$9.5 billion in recent years to address the issue.
- The National Park Service has the highest total of deferred maintenance, with their backlog increasing by nearly \$10 billion *after* Congress passed the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA).
- Committee Democrats refused to hold a hearing on Great American Outdoors Act implementation last Congress. This inaction allowed the Biden administration to squander taxpayer dollars with no accountability, causing funding to be improperly allocated across geographic regions, between large and small parks, and between urban and rural areas.
- With National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) funding set to expire in 2025, Committee Republicans are committed to implementing long-overdue transparency while pursuing innovative solutions to address the maintenance and management challenges affecting our national parks and public lands.

## II. WITNESSES

- **The Honorable Charles F. “Chuck” Sams**, Director, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC

### III. BACKGROUND

#### *Deferred Maintenance at the National Park Service*

The National Park Service (NPS) manages 424 individual units across over 85 million acres.<sup>1</sup> Park units are found in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories.<sup>2</sup> They are managed under a dual mandate that requires the NPS to protect unique resources while providing opportunities for public use and enjoyment.<sup>3</sup> There are many challenges facing NPS, with none more pressing than the deferred maintenance backlog. Unlike routine maintenance, deferred maintenance and repairs are “maintenance and repairs that were not performed when they should have been or were scheduled to be and which are put off or delayed for a future period.”<sup>4</sup> The failure to keep up with maintenance needs presents risks to NPS resources, diminishes visitor enjoyment, and creates safety hazards for the public. This means that parks are often replete with crumbling trails, dilapidated visitor centers and campgrounds, leaking wastewater systems, and closed off access points or recreation sites.

The primary drivers of the maintenance backlog are aging infrastructure, consistently high visitation, and the acquisition of new land or creation of new units for NPS to manage.<sup>5</sup> National parks remain very popular tourist destinations for Americans and international travelers alike and every year, there are more than 300 million visits to NPS sites.<sup>6</sup> This visitation can put a strain on resources and infrastructure, and without regular maintenance and upkeep, can lead to a degradation of infrastructure. Additionally, a significant amount of NPS infrastructure has reached or exceed its lifespan, as many of these assets “were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s or as part of the agency’s Mission 66 infrastructure initiative in the 1950s and 1960s.”<sup>7</sup> Finally, instead of focusing on what the agency already owns, continued land acquisition has stretched already thin resources. During the Trump administration, NPS proposed cutting land acquisition funding to “allow NPS to focus resources on managing existing lands and assets.”<sup>8</sup> In contrast, President Biden’s most recent budget proposed \$104.3 million for new NPS land acquisition.<sup>9</sup>

#### *The Great American Outdoors Act*

As the NPS maintenance backlog continued to steadily rise through the 2010s, reaching \$12.7 billion by the end of fiscal year (FY) 2019, a growing coalition of NPS stakeholders began to push for Congress to provide a solution.<sup>10</sup> The Department of the Interior (DOI) also put forth

---

<sup>1</sup> National Park Service, National Park System, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/national-park-system.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Congressional Research Service, “The Federal Land Management Agencies”, Katie Hoover et al, February 16, 2021, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF10585?source=search>.

<sup>4</sup> Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board, “Deferred Maintenance and Repairs,” April 25, 2012, [http://files.fasab.gov/pdf/origional\\_sffas\\_42.pdf](http://files.fasab.gov/pdf/origional_sffas_42.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Congressional Research Service, “National Park Service Deferred Maintenance: Frequently Asked Questions”, Laura B. Comay, May 13, 2020, [https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R44924?source=search#\\_Toc41640408](https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R44924?source=search#_Toc41640408).

<sup>6</sup> National Park Service, “Annual Visitation Highlights”, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/annual-visitation-highlights.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> National Park Service, Budget Justifications and Performance Information, Fiscal Year 2021, <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/fy2021-budget-justification-nps.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> National Park Service, Budget Justifications and Performance Information, Fiscal Year 2024, <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/fy2024-nps-greenbook.pdf-508.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, “It’s Time for Congress to Address the Maintenance Backlog on America’s Public Lands and Waterways”, [https://recreationroundtable.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ORR\\_DeferredMaintenance\\_OneSheet\\_03.pdf](https://recreationroundtable.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ORR_DeferredMaintenance_OneSheet_03.pdf).

legislative proposals to create a dedicated fund to “significantly improve the Nation’s most visible and visited public facilities that support a multibillion-dollar outdoor recreation economy.”<sup>11</sup> Both before and after GAOA’s passage, administrations of both parties argued increased funding was vital to decrease the deferred maintenance backlog. NPS testimony on previous iterations of the bill promised that the “funding will help substantially reduce the NPS \$11.6 billion deferred maintenance backlog.”<sup>12</sup> The Obama administration also testified that at least \$700 million was necessary annually to keep the backlog from growing.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, a similar coalition was advocating for the reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which initially expired in 2015 and was permanently re-authorized in March of 2019.<sup>14</sup> In order to address these maintenance backlog concerns, Congress passed the Great American Outdoors Act and President Trump signed it into law in August 2020.<sup>15</sup>

GAOA established a new, mandatory fund known as the “National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund” (LRF) to address the deferred maintenance needs of NPS, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the U.S. Forest Service (FS), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE).<sup>16</sup> The LRF is funded through 50 percent of the unobligated or “miscellaneous” revenues deposited into the U.S. Treasury from all forms of energy development (oil, gas, coal, and alternative or renewable energy), up to \$1.9 billion a year for five years (\$9.5 billion total).<sup>17</sup> Of the amounts deposited in the LRF each year, NPS receives a 70 percent share (\$1.33 billion), FS receives 15 percent (\$285 million), and the FWS, BLM, and BIE each receive 5 percent (\$95 million). The agencies must use the funding for “priority deferred maintenance projects” and at least 65 percent of each agency’s funds must be used for “non-transportation projects.”<sup>18</sup> No funding may be used for land acquisition; to supplant discretionary funding for facility operations, maintenance, and construction needs; or to provide bonuses to federal government employees. Under GAOA, the President submits a list of priority deferred maintenance projects to Congress with annual budget justifications.<sup>19</sup> The law allows for annual appropriations bills to make alternate allocations under the LRF; if no alternate allocation is enacted by Congress, the President’s list is fully funded.

Section 3 of GAOA also permanently re-authorized the LWCF and made \$900 million in spending annually from the Fund mandatory.<sup>20</sup> Congress created LWCF in 1964 to “preserve, develop, and ensure access to outdoor recreation resources.”<sup>21</sup> Prior to GAOA, LWCF was

---

<sup>11</sup> DOI, “Fiscal Year 2019 The Interior Budget in Brief,” February 2018, [https://republicans-naturalresources.house.gov/UploadedFiles/DOI\\_FY2019\\_Budget\\_in\\_Brief.pdf](https://republicans-naturalresources.house.gov/UploadedFiles/DOI_FY2019_Budget_in_Brief.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Lena McDowall, Testimony before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, concerning S.312, The Restore our Parks Act, July 11, 2018, <https://www.doi.gov/ocl/s-3172>.

<sup>13</sup> The Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University, “Addressing the Maintenance Backlog on Federal Lands,” March 2020, <https://www.thecgo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/addressing-the-maintenance-backlog-on-federal-public-lands.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> “John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act,” P.L. 116-9.

<sup>15</sup> PUBLIC LAW 116-152—AUG. 4, 2020, <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ152/PLAW-116publ152.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Congressional Research Service, “The Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152)” Carol Hardy Vincent, Laura B. Comay, Bill Heniff Jr., December 15, 2022, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF11636?source=searchId>.

<sup>17</sup> Note: There is no such thing as unobligated energy receipts. Energy revenues deposited into the Treasury before the passage of GAOA were used to pay other obligations of the U.S. government. Therefore, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) “scored” the bill as increasing the deficit by \$9.54 billion (<https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2020-07/HR1957directspending.pdf>).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Land and Water Conservation Fund: Frequently Asked Questions” Carol Hardy Vincent, November 23, 2022, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF12256?source=search>.

subject to appropriations and generally received less than \$900 million per year.<sup>22</sup> Every year since GAOA’s enactment, LWCF is credited with \$900 million, primarily from offshore oil and gas revenue.<sup>23</sup> Under LWCF, at least 40 percent of funds may be used for federal land acquisition and 40 percent of funds may be used to provide financial assistance to states (the law is silent on the remaining 20 percent).<sup>24</sup> GAOA only made funds starting in FY 2020 mandatory, the “unobligated balances” of \$21.6 million that had been “credited” to LWCF were not affected.<sup>25</sup>

*Deferred Maintenance Backlogs Nearly Double After GAOA Passage*

Since GAOA’s passage, the LRF has not only failed to reduce deferred maintenance backlogs, the backlogs at each of the five land management agencies have *increased*. Disconcertingly, the total backlog for all agencies increased by \$16.6 billion over a 3-year period, an increase of more than 75 percent. While all five impacted agencies are at fault, the NPS’s backlog increase is by far the most egregious. At the end of FY 2019, the last full fiscal year before GAOA’s enactment, NPS reported a maintenance backlog of \$12.7 billion.<sup>26</sup> Four years later, in FY 2022 (the most recent year for which data is available), the NPS maintenance backlog rose to \$22.3 billion, reflecting an astounding \$9.6 billion increase from the pre-GAOA passage reported number.<sup>27</sup> This increase reflects two full years of GAOA funding to NPS, totaling \$2.66 billion. A full breakdown of backlog increases since GAOA’s passage is as follows<sup>28</sup>:

Agency	FY 2019	FY 2022	Percent Increase
NPS	\$12.7 billion	\$22.3 billion	+75.6%
BLM	\$1.08 billion	\$4.7 billion	+335.2%
Indian Affairs (includes BIE)	\$1.7 billion	\$1.9 billion	+11.8%
FWS	\$1.3 billion	\$2.0 billion	+54.6%
FS	\$5.2 billion	\$7.7 billion	+48.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$21.98 billion</b>	<b>\$38.57 billion</b>	<b>+75.5%</b>

In response to the obvious questions raised about such a colossal increase in their deferred maintenance backlog, NPS provided the following response explaining a recent change in the methodology the agency uses to calculate deferred maintenance that began in FY 2022:

“Through 2018, and unlike other bureaus within the Department of the Interior, the National Park Service only calculated the cost of construction in its deferred maintenance

<sup>22</sup> Congressional Research Service, “The Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152)” Carol Hardy Vincent, Laura B. Comay, Bill Heniff Jr., December 15, 2022, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF11636?source=searchId>.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> 54 U.S. Code § 200304(b).

<sup>25</sup> Similar to the explanation provided in footnote 14, there are no unobligated balances in the “coffers” of LWCF. That funding has already been expended through annual discretionary and mandatory funding programs. Any attempts to access that funding would constitute new, mandatory spending and would score under CBO budget rules.

<sup>26</sup> DOI Deferred Maintenance and Repairs by Asset Class As Reported in the Agency Financial Report, FY 2019 and FY 2020, [https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/doi\\_fy2019\\_and\\_fy2020\\_deferred\\_maintenance\\_backlog\\_as\\_reported\\_in\\_the\\_afr.pdf](https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/doi_fy2019_and_fy2020_deferred_maintenance_backlog_as_reported_in_the_afr.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> DOI Deferred Maintenance and Repairs by Asset Class As Reported in the Agency Financial Report, FY 2020 and FY 2021, [https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/doi\\_fy2021\\_deferred\\_maintenance\\_backlog\\_as\\_reported\\_in\\_the\\_afr\\_and\\_comparison\\_to\\_fy2020.pdf](https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/doi_fy2021_deferred_maintenance_backlog_as_reported_in_the_afr_and_comparison_to_fy2020.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Information compiled by the House Natural Resources Committee based on data provided by CRS.

figures and did not include the full scope of construction-related costs like design and construction management. National Park Service DM&R [deferred maintenance and repair] estimates now reflects this fuller and truer cost. The improved assessment process aligns with contemporary industry standards and the cost elements included in the figure are more consistent with other government DM&R calculations. Together, this provides a more comprehensive understanding of facility conditions.”<sup>29</sup>

In their FY 2024 budget justification, NPS further stated that needs will be calculated using three components: 1) Parametric condition assessments (PCA) for industry standard assets; 2) Federal Highways Administration assessments for infrastructure such as paved roads, parking lots, bridges and tunnels; and 3) work orders for concessions-occupied assets and non-industry standard assets.<sup>30</sup> With this adjustment, NPS now estimates its deferred maintenance backlog at the end of FY 2022 is \$22.3 billion, broken down by the following categories<sup>31</sup>:

Asset Category	Asset Count	Deferred Maintenance & Repairs
Buildings	25,163	\$6.8 billion
Housing	3,661	\$383 million
Campgrounds	1,657	\$288 million
Trails	6,244	\$677 million
Wastewater Systems	1,767	\$804 million
Water Systems	1,578	\$1.1 billion
Paved Roads	11,961	\$5.4 billion
Unpaved Roads	5,664	\$883 million
All Others*	17,737	\$6.0 billion
<b>Total</b>	<b>75,432</b>	<b>\$22.3 billion</b>

While a methodology change could explain a portion of the increase in backlog, it does not explain the full extent of the backlog increase. As demonstrated by the chart below, the NPS backlog increased from \$14.37 billion the year GAOA passed to \$21.8 billion in FY 2021, the year before the new methodology was put into place. Between FY 2021 and FY 2022, the backlog only increased by \$500 million. NPS has cited a variety of other factors contributing to the rising backlog, including inflation and supply chain issues. Of course, the Biden administration’s own reckless spending and burdensome regulatory agenda has exacerbated both of these issues. In reality, a significant portion of this increase is due to mismanagement on the part of NPS. These concerns have been confirmed by the DOI Office of Inspector General (OIG), which released a report last year that found DOI lacked a strategy to maximize the impact of GAOA and failed to implement best management practices for deferred maintenance projects.<sup>32</sup> The absence of cohesive plans and best management practices places NPS and the entirety of DOI at risk of failing to adequately resolve its backlog of deferred maintenance

<sup>29</sup> National Park Service, “Infrastructure”, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/faqs.htm>.

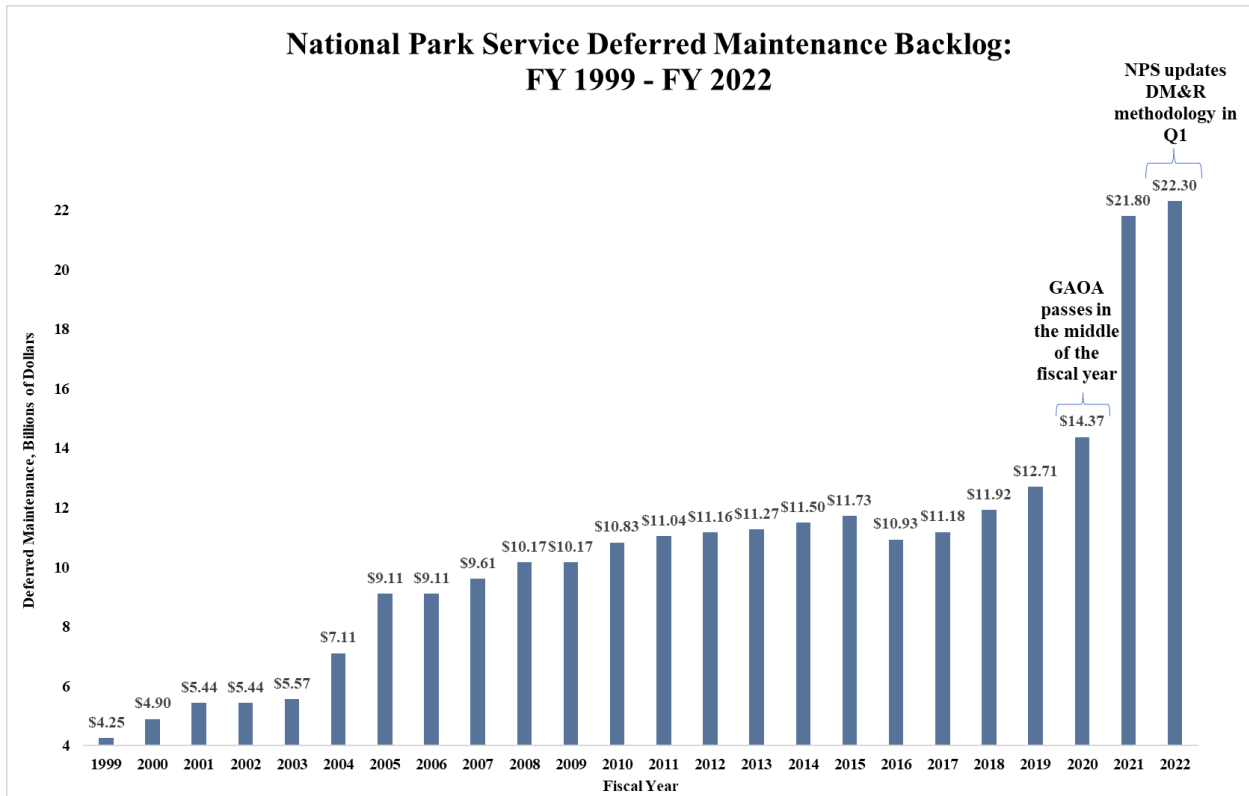
<sup>30</sup> National Park Service, FY 2024 Budget Justification, SpecEx-1, <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/fy2024-nps-greenbook.pdf-508.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* “All others’ captures non-industry standard assets including utility systems, dams, constructed waterways, marinas, aviation systems, railroads, ships, monuments, fortifications, towers, interpretive media and amphitheatres. Note that the work order methodology is still being used to calculate DM&R for these assets as the NPS continues to improve the data quality for this subset of the portfolio.”

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Inspector General, 2021-CR-031, The U.S. Department of the Interior Needs a Strategy to Coordinate Implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act”, March 23, 2022, <https://www.oversight.gov/sites/default/files/oig-reports/DOI/FinalInspectionGAOATaskForcePublic.pdf>.



projects.<sup>33</sup> The OIG’s concerns highlight the need for greater transparency and oversight in DOI’s decision-making process, its selection of LRF projects, and the Department’s monitoring of project progress.



**Source:** House Natural Resources Committee, 2023. Information compiled from data from the Congressional Research Service and National Park Service.

### GAOA Implementation Concerns

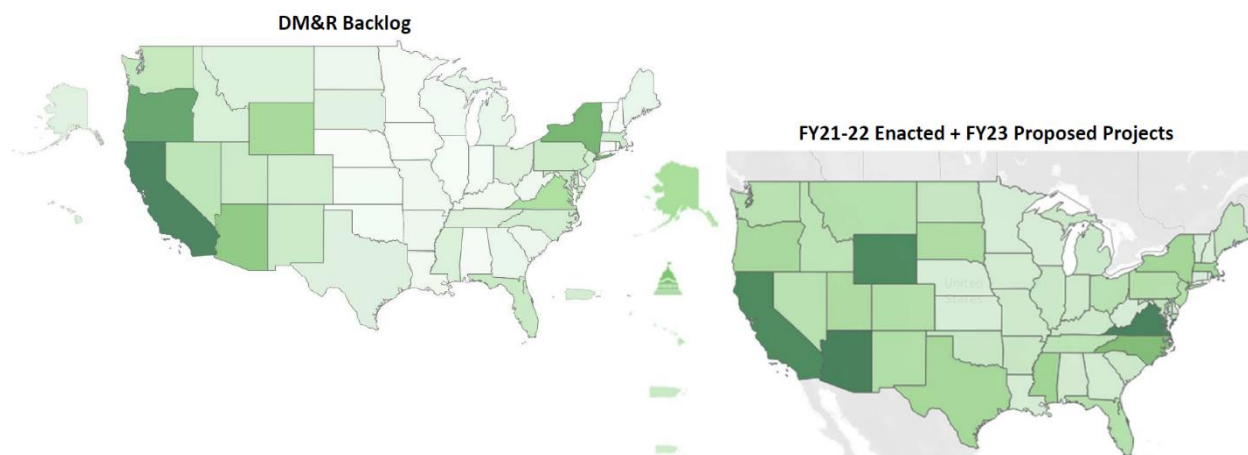
In addition to the concerns about soaring maintenance backlogs, there are further concerns that NPS is failing to ensure the appropriate disbursement of GAOA funds geographically, across large and small parks, and between urban and rural areas. This is particularly alarming as three of the five years of GAOA funding have already been disbursed (FY 2021-FY 2023; \$3.99 billion total) and the President’s Budget just proposed a project funding list for FY 2024.<sup>34</sup> This means that next year, in February 2024,<sup>35</sup> the President will submit the final list of projects eligible for LRF funding under the current authorization. This increases the urgency of conducting proper oversight to ensure the remaining funds are prioritized properly and are being used in a way that will effectively foster better opportunities to enjoy our parks for visitors.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> For further information, please see the data sets for FY 2021 (<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/project-data-sheets-for-the-national-park-service-22.pdf>), the project list for FY 2022 (<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/fy2022-bib-d0001.pdf>) and FY 2023 (<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/fy2023-bib-apx-c-508.pdf>), and the proposed project list for FY 2024 (<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/fy2024-bib-apx-d-national-parks-and-public-land-lrf-from-2024-bib-508.pdf>).

<sup>35</sup> The Biden administration has been chronically late in submitting their budget proposal, so it will likely be later in the year.

One of the primary concerns about LRF funding is that it has not been distributed in a geographically diverse way. For example, the State of Utah, which boasts five highly visited national parks, received only \$83.7 million for two projects. Of Utah’s “Big 5” National Parks, only one has received funding (\$11.3 million for Zion National Park in FY 2022).<sup>36</sup> Rural states like Idaho, which has \$53 million in deferred maintenance across 7 park units, have only had one project funded through the three years of the LRF.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, the District of Columbia received almost as much funding (\$124.2 million) just last year alone and the administration is proposing spending another \$50.4 million in the District this year.<sup>38</sup> In fact, the single largest project paid for by the LRF thus far has been the \$207.8 million reconstruction of 7.6 miles of the George Washington Memorial Parkway just outside of Washington, D.C.<sup>39</sup> This project, which represents nearly ten percent of the total amount of maintenance backlog funding spent so far by NPS, has very little to do with outdoor recreation and much more with repairing a road into Washington, D.C. that sees 70,000 commuters every single day.<sup>40</sup>



A Heat Map showing the differentiation between deferred maintenance backlogs by state versus where funding has been allocated. **Source:** NPS, 2022.

In a similar vein, the Biden administration has prioritized funding projects for park units in urban areas over crown jewels of the National Park System in rural areas. For instance, last year, the congressional district represented by former Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) received \$165.9 million for projects in two park units.<sup>41</sup> At the time, this funding could have addressed the entire deferred maintenance backlogs of eleven states encompassing 35 park units, with nearly \$2 million in excess available funds left over.<sup>42</sup> In total, this one congressional district received

<sup>36</sup> The President’s FY 2024 Budget also proposes \$15.3 million for Bryce Canyon National Park, which has not been awarded yet.  
<sup>37</sup> NPS, “Idaho Parks Infrastructure Fact Sheet,” [https://www.nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/upload/ID-State-Fact-Sheet\\_122022\\_508.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/upload/ID-State-Fact-Sheet_122022_508.pdf).  
<sup>38</sup> NPS, “National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund,” <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/legacy-restoration-fund.htm>.  
<sup>39</sup> *Id.*  
<sup>40</sup> WTOP News, “Ground broken to rehabilitate GW Parkway; work will impact commutes”, Neal Augenstein, July 18, 2022, <https://wtop.com/local/2022/07/ground-broken-to-rehabilitate-gw-parkway-work-will-impact-commutes/>.  
<sup>41</sup> Compare U.S. DEP’T OF THE INTERIOR, GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT (GAOA) – NAT’L PARKS AND PUBLIC LAND LEGACY RESTORATION FUND, *Nat’l Park Service – FY 23 Project List*, (March 28, 2022) at 5-6 (Congressional district CA-12 is proposed to receive \$165,866,000) available at [https://doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/doi-fy23-gaoa-dm-project-list-rev1-508\\_0.pdf](https://doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/doi-fy23-gaoa-dm-project-list-rev1-508_0.pdf) with U.S. DEP’T OF THE INTERIOR, NAT’L PARK SERVICE, *Infrastructure – Identifying & Reporting Deferred Maintenance, Reports by State*, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/identifying-reporting-deferred-maintenance.htm#states> (last visited July 5, 2022) (The deferred maintenance backlogs of Connecticut, Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Vermont, Rhode Island, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and New Hampshire encompass 35 park units for a total backlog of \$164,000,000).  
<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

approximately 12.5 percent of NPS’s overall funds for deferred maintenance last year.<sup>43</sup> Two of the projects funded in her district are the 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> most expensive projects paid for by the Fund.<sup>44</sup> Last year’s project list also provided funding in major metropolitan areas that covered only six park units, which could have otherwise addressed all the deferred maintenance backlogs of Alaska, Iowa, Idaho, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and South Dakota combined, totaling 46 park units.<sup>45</sup>

In comparison to these seemingly obscure urban parks, there are iconic parks that have not seen the same level of investment. For example, Grand Canyon National Park (\$829 million maintenance backlog), Rocky Mountain National Park (\$99 million maintenance backlog), and Zion National Park (\$52 million maintenance backlog) are among the best and most visited parks in the nation, yet each unit has only had one project funded thus far.<sup>46</sup> Rocky Mountain National Park, Zion National Park, and Grand Teton National Park were among many of the crown jewels noticeably absent from both last year’s project list and this year’s project list.<sup>47</sup> These parks, however, each still face significant maintenance backlogs.<sup>48</sup>

While it is important for the crown jewels of the system to be properly funded, it is equally important that small parks and units receive funding as well. One of the few successes of GAOA has been the implementation of Maintenance Action Teams (MATs). NPS created MATs to address deferred maintenance projects at small and medium sized parks.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, last year’s project list only dedicated 1.5 percent of funding (\$20 million) to MATs while this year’s proposed list includes only a marginal increase of \$5 million.<sup>50</sup> While this is a slight improvement from FY 2021 and FY 2022, which failed to support MATs at all, it is still woefully insufficient to address the needs of smaller parks with deferred maintenance backlogs impacting visitor experiences.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> U.S. DEP’T OF THE INTERIOR, GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT (GAOA) – NAT’L PARKS AND PUBLIC LAND LEGACY RESTORATION FUND, *Nat’l Park Service – FY 23 Project List*, (March 28, 2022) available at [https://doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/doi-fy23-gaoa-dm-project-list-rev1-508\\_0.pdf](https://doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/doi-fy23-gaoa-dm-project-list-rev1-508_0.pdf) (last visited July 5, 2022).

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

<sup>45</sup> Compare U.S. DEP’T OF THE INTERIOR, GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT (GAOA) – NAT’L PARKS AND PUBLIC LAND LEGACY RESTORATION FUND, *Nat’l Park Service – FY 23 Project List*, (March 28, 2022) at 5-7 (The cities of San Francisco, CA, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, PA, New York City, NY, and Boston, MA received \$391,099,000) available at [https://doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/doi-fy23-gaoa-dm-project-list-rev1-508\\_0.pdf](https://doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/doi-fy23-gaoa-dm-project-list-rev1-508_0.pdf) with U.S. DEP’T OF THE INTERIOR, NAT’L PARK SERVICE, *Infrastructure – Identifying & Reporting Deferred Maintenance, Reports by State*, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/identifying-reporting-deferred-maintenance.htm#states> (last visited July 5, 2022) (The deferred maintenance backlogs of Alaska, Iowa, Idaho, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and South Dakota encompass 46 park units for a total backlog of \$388,000,000).

<sup>46</sup> U.S. News, “Best U.S. National Parks,” <https://travel.usnews.com/rankings/best-national-parks-in-the-usa/>. More Than Just Parks, “10 Most Visited US National Parks (Updated and Complete List) 2022, March 2, 2023, <https://morethanjustparks.com/most-visited-national-parks/>”. U.S. Department of the Interior. National Park Service PARK SERVICE, “Infrastructure – Identifying & Reporting Deferred Maintenance, Reports by State”, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/identifying-reporting-deferred-maintenance.htm#states>. U.S. Department of the Interior, “GAOA Project Data”, <https://www.doi.gov/gaoa-project-data> (Grand Canyon, \$40.5 million project, Rocky Mountain, \$32 million project, and Zion, \$11 million project).

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

<sup>48</sup> U.S. DEP’T OF THE INTERIOR, NAT’L PARK SERVICE, *Infrastructure – Identifying & Reporting Deferred Maintenance, Reports by State*, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/identifying-reporting-deferred-maintenance.htm#states> (last visited June 17, 2022).

<sup>49</sup> See U.S. DEP’T OF THE INTERIOR, GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT (GAOA) – NAT’L PARKS AND PUBLIC LAND LEGACY RESTORATION FUND, *National Park Service – FY 23 Project List*, (Mar. 28, 2022) at 5 available at [https://doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/doi-fy23-gaoa-dm-project-list-rev1-508\\_0.pdf](https://doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/doi-fy23-gaoa-dm-project-list-rev1-508_0.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> See NAT’L PARK SERVICE, INFRASTRUCTURE, *Nat’l Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund*, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/legacy-restoration-fund.htm> (last visited Apr. 20, 2022) (The Land Legacy Restoration Fund Fiscal Years 2021 and 22 Project Summary Table shows no funding for the Maintenance Action Team program in 2022).



Finally, there are concerns that not enough of this funding is actually going to reduce<sup>52</sup> deferred maintenance. As of the beginning of 2023, 110 NPS projects or project categories totaling \$2.9 billion have been funded.<sup>53</sup> However, \$3.99 billion total have been provided in the past three FYs for NPS deferred maintenance. This means roughly \$1.09 billion, or nearly an entire year's worth of funding, has gone to project overhead and administrative costs. As an illustrative example, for the most recently announced FY 2024 project list, the administration is proposing spending \$145 million on FY 2025+ project planning and compliance; \$19.95 million on program administration (indirect costs); \$35 million on project management; and \$121.945 million for a contingency fund.<sup>54</sup> In total, this amounts to nearly 25 percent of funding that will not actually go towards any deferred maintenance project. In FY 2022, the administration proposed spending \$175.6 million on program planning, compliance, and administration, which would be enough to address 92 percent of the deferred maintenance backlog in the State of Montana.<sup>55</sup> Despite these egregiously high overhead costs, NPS has never recommended any streamlining to reduce the time or cost associated with any environmental reviews impacting deferred maintenance.

### *House Natural Resources Committee Republicans' Response*

During the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, Committee Republicans continued to push for more transparency and oversight to focus on implementation and ensure funds are being maximized. Committee Republicans sent letters to Secretary Haaland and Secretary Vilsack last year on May 17 and July 15 respectively, requesting documents including a full accounting of funds, methodology for selecting deferred maintenance projects, details on how the Departments monitor the progress and budgets of projects, and an explanation for the increase in NPS deferred maintenance estimates.<sup>56</sup> Though some information was provided, the limited response reflected the need to provide real oversight of LRF spending. This hearing provides an important step in that direction.

In addition to vigorous oversight, Committee Republicans have also pushed for innovative solutions to reduce deferred maintenance while limiting the use of taxpayer money. For example, last Congress, Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR) sponsored the "National Park Foundation Reauthorization Act of 2022," which increased funding for the National Park Foundation (NPF) to \$15 million annually for seven years.<sup>57</sup> NPF matches these funds at least 1:1, meaning that this will have at least a \$30 million impact on reducing deferred maintenance annually. Similarly, both the LODGE Act and the PACTS Act would allow NPS to enter into private partnerships or cooperative agreements, respectively, to address an array of issues affecting the parks including

---

<sup>52</sup> Technically no funding has actually reduced deferred maintenance at this point, as discussed above.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, "GAOA Project Data", <https://www.doi.gov/gaoa-project-data>. Note: project categories refers to projects not delineated in NPS data, i.e. Maintenance Action Teams.

<sup>54</sup> DOI, "National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund," FY 2024 Project List, <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/fy2024-bib-apx-d-national-parks-and-public-land-lrf-from-2024-bib-508.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> NPS, "NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LAND LEGACY RESTORATION FUND FISCAL YEAR 2022 PROJECT LIST," <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/fy2022-bib-d0001.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Letters to Secretaries Haaland and Vilsack, accessible via the House Natural Resources Committee website:

([https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2022-07-15\\_westerman\\_moore\\_fulcher\\_bentz\\_obernolte\\_stauber\\_to\\_haaland\\_doi\\_vilsack\\_usda\\_re\\_follow\\_up\\_on\\_legacy\\_restoration\\_fund\\_allocations.pdf](https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2022-07-15_westerman_moore_fulcher_bentz_obernolte_stauber_to_haaland_doi_vilsack_usda_re_follow_up_on_legacy_restoration_fund_allocations.pdf)) and ([https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2022-05-17\\_westerman\\_et\\_al\\_to\\_haaland\\_doi\\_vilsack\\_usda\\_re\\_allocation\\_of\\_legacy\\_restoration\\_funds.pdf](https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2022-05-17_westerman_et_al_to_haaland_doi_vilsack_usda_re_allocation_of_legacy_restoration_funds.pdf)).

<sup>57</sup> P.L. 117-328; included as Section 646 of Division DD.

deferred maintenance at employee housing.<sup>58</sup> Republicans will continue pursuing these solutions and conducting oversight to hold the Biden administration accountable and ensure that our national parks are receiving the maintenance they need to ensure future generations can enjoy them for years to come.

---

<sup>58</sup> PACTS Act: H.R. 6442 (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/6442?s=4&r=3>) in the 117th Congress. LODGE Act: H.R. 1314 (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/1314?s=6&r=2>).