



BREAKING THE BACKLOG

7 Ideas to Address the National Park
Deferred Maintenance Problem

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SUMMARY

This year, the National Park Service will celebrate its 100-year anniversary. But not all is well in our national parks. The agency will enter its second century with an \$11.9 billion backlog in deferred maintenance projects, an amount five times higher than its average annual appropriations from Congress.

In this *PERC Public Lands Report*, we explore several creative ideas to address the deferred maintenance backlog in our national parks. These proposals are intended to expand the range of options for policymakers and park managers to consider as the nation turns its attention towards national parks in 2016. In particular, these reforms would enable parks to become more self-sufficient and less reliant on Congress for annual appropriations.

1. Stop acquiring more land for the park system and start prioritizing the care and maintenance of existing lands. — *by Shawn Regan and Reed Watson*
2. Dispose of unnecessary federal lands and use revenues to address the backlog. — *by Shawn Regan*
3. Continue to allow park managers to charge recreation fees and retain the revenues for maintenance and other critical projects. — *by Holly Fretwell and Shawn Regan*
4. Allow park managers to set their own fee programs without having to obtain approval from Congress. — *by Holly Fretwell and Shawn Regan*
5. Harness public-private partnerships for infrastructure needs. — *by Leonard Gilroy*
6. Outsource routine park operations to the private sector while maintaining public ownership and oversight. — *by Holly Fretwell*
7. Create a national park franchising system for new additions to the National Park System. — *by Holly Fretwell*

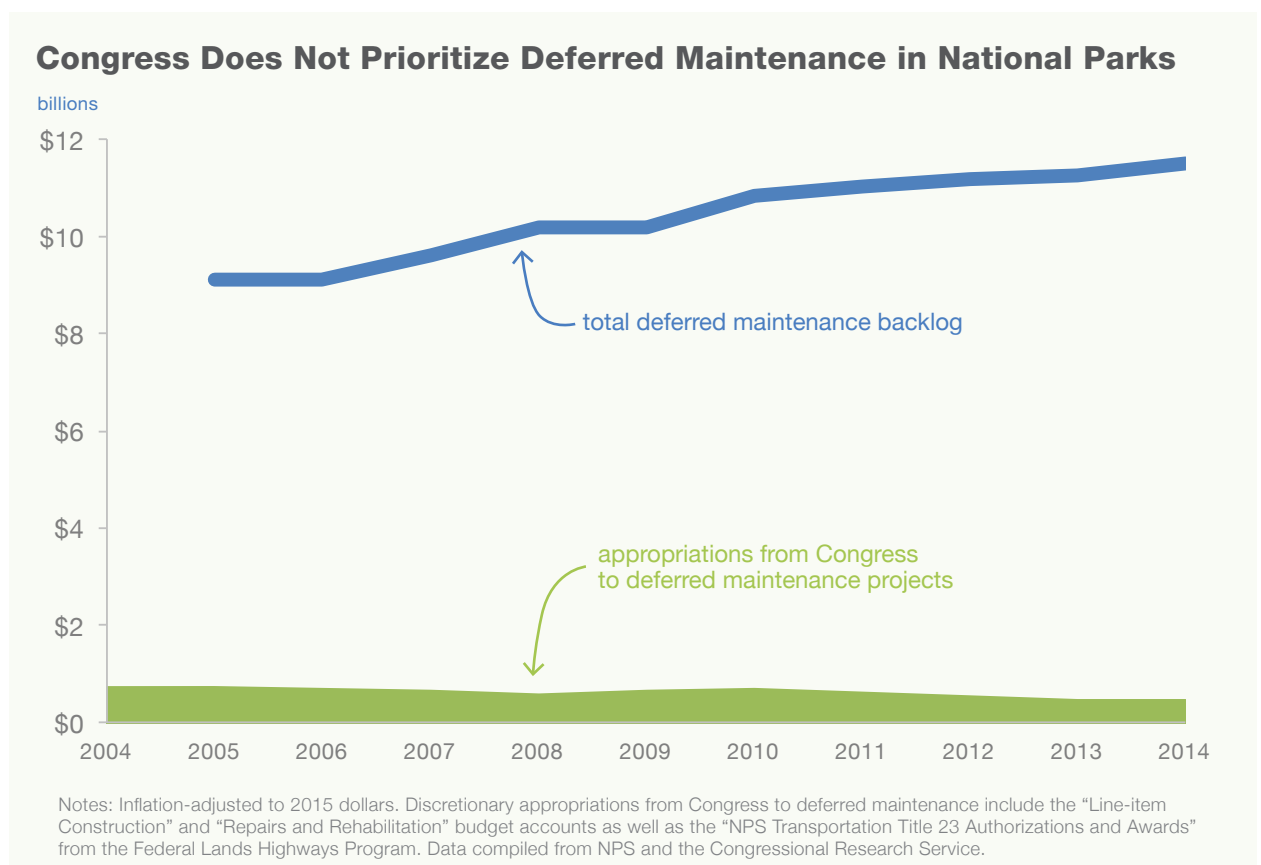
INTRODUCTION

On August 25, 2016, the National Park Service will celebrate its 100-year anniversary. But as the agency enters its second century, our national parks are in trouble. Decades of neglect and misplaced priorities have left a glaring blemish on a system known for its crown jewels. The Park Service will reach its centennial with an \$11.9 billion backlog in deferred maintenance projects, an amount five times higher than the agency's latest budget from Congress.¹

The deferred maintenance backlog refers to the total cost of all maintenance projects that were not completed on schedule and therefore have been put off or delayed. The effects of the backlog show up throughout the National Park System in the form of dilapidated visitor centers, deteriorating wastewater systems, and crumbling roads, bridges, and trails. Nearly half of all roadways in national parks are rated in "fair" or "poor condition."² Dozens of bridges are considered "structurally deficient" and in need of rehabilitation or reconstruction. And 6,700 miles of trails, more than one-third of all trails in the entire park system, are in "poor" or "seriously deficient" condition.³

In some cases, the deferred maintenance backlog threatens the very resources the National Park Service was created to protect. According to the agency's 2017 budget justification, a leaky wastewater system in Yosemite National Park has caused raw sewage to spill into the park's streams. In Grand Canyon National Park, an 83-year-old water distribution system frequently breaks, leading to water shortages and facility closures. And at Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, a deteriorating visitor center is contaminated by mold and rodent infestations, resulting in unsafe conditions and temporary closures.⁴

FIGURE 1



Congress is unlikely to solve the problem through budgetary appropriations alone. Funding for the deferred maintenance backlog makes up only a small fraction of the National Park Service's annual appropriations from Congress. Over the past decade, Congress appropriated an average of \$521 million each year to projects related to deferred maintenance, or just 4 percent of the agency's total backlog (see Figure 1).⁵ The agency estimates it would have to spend \$700 million per year on deferred maintenance just to keep the backlog steady at \$11.9 billion.⁶ In recent years, however, Congress has devoted less and less funding to deferred maintenance. Discretionary appropriations for the backlog have decreased by 40 percent over the past decade.⁷

The basic problem is one of incentives. The National Park Service relies on appropriations from Congress for the vast majority of its funding.⁸ But Congress would rather create new parks or acquire more land than fund mundane maintenance projects. As one former congressman put it, "It's not very sexy to fix a sewer system or maintain a trail. You don't get headlines for that."⁹ Since 2000, 26 new park units have been added to the National Park System, yet discretionary appropriations from Congress remain essentially flat.

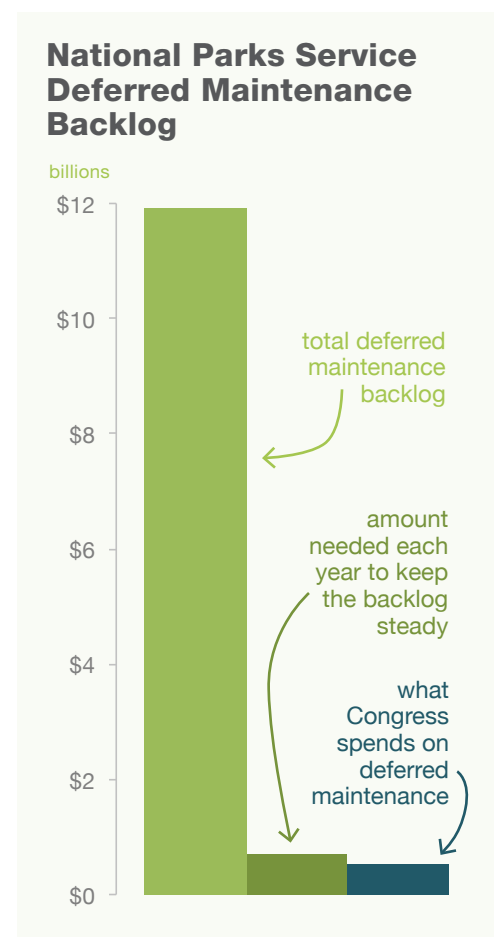
Simply put, relying on congressional appropriations is not a practical solution to fix the backlog problem in national parks. In fact, an over-reliance on Congress is likely to make the problem worse. Thanks to Congress' neglect, the deferred maintenance backlog has increased by more than 25 percent over the last decade. With more parks but little or no additional funding, our national parks are stretched thin. Unless changes are made, the National Park Service estimates the backlog will continue to increase as new parks are created and existing facilities continue to deteriorate.¹⁰

BACKGROUND ON THE BACKLOG

At \$11.9 billion, the National Park Service maintenance backlog has the potential to overwhelm the agency during its second century. When maintenance is not completed on schedule, it accelerates the rates at which facilities deteriorate. This diminishes the value of park assets and increases repair costs, often as much as three to five times more than if the resources were maintained properly.¹¹

In recent years, several attempts have been made to address the backlog. The National Park Service has repeatedly requested additional funding for deferred maintenance projects, but the amounts appropriated by Congress have been small. A special Centennial Challenge fund,

FIGURE 2



established by Congress in 2008 to support park improvements, has received less than \$55 million in appropriations to date.¹² Recent proposals to increase appropriations to the fund have so far been unsuccessful. The proposed National Park Service Centennial Act would separately allocate \$900 million over a three-year period “to correct deficiencies in National Park Service infrastructure and facilities,” but the act has yet to receive widespread support in Congress.¹³

As the National Park Service celebrates its centennial this year, it is clear that the current approach to addressing the backlog is not working. This report explores several creative ideas to address the deferred maintenance backlog in our national parks. The ideas are intended to expand the range of options for policymakers and park managers to consider as the nation turns its attention toward national parks in 2016. Among other things, these reforms would enable parks to become more self-sufficient, and therefore less reliant on Congress for annual appropriations.

None of these ideas alone will solve the backlog problem. But together they offer a range of options to tackle the problem and prepare our national parks to address one of the major challenges of its second century: breaking the backlog.

1. Stop acquiring more land for the park system and start prioritizing the care and maintenance of existing lands.

— *by Shawn Regan and Reed Watson*

Conservation funding for public lands is primarily dedicated to land acquisition. But with an \$11.9 billion deferred maintenance backlog in national parks, the federal government lacks the resources needed to adequately maintain and care for the lands it already owns.

By focusing on land acquisition, limited conservation dollars are spent at the expense of properly maintaining existing lands. Moreover, adding more public lands can exacerbate the problem because the federal government incurs even more liabilities, often with little or no means of maintaining the additional lands.

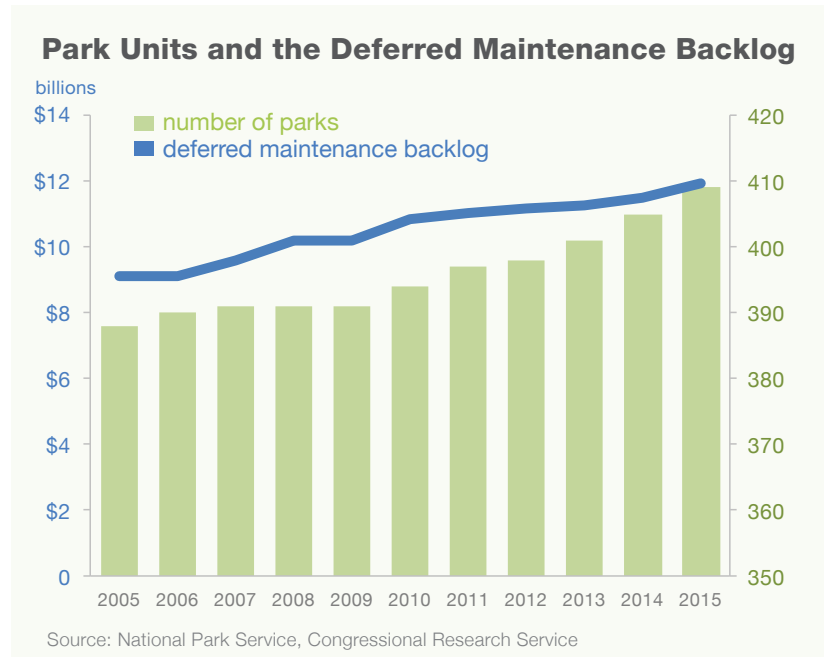
The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is the federal government's primary source of funding for public land acquisitions. The LWCF devotes up to \$900 million

each year from offshore oil and gas royalties for federal, state, and local recreation projects. More than \$10 billion in LWCF funding has been spent to acquire federal lands since the program was created in 1964, of which the National Park Service has received \$4.5 billion.¹⁴ Between 2011 and 2014, nearly \$100 million was spent to add more than 100,000 acres to the National Park System through the LWCF.¹⁵

Under its latest authorization, the federal portion of LWCF funding can only be used for land acquisition by federal land agencies, primarily for acquiring inholdings surrounded by existing public lands. The funds generally cannot be used for the care and maintenance of current federal lands. In other words, the LWCF provides funding to acquire more land, but it does not provide any means of addressing current problems such as the maintenance backlog in national parks.

By reforming the Land and Water Conservation Fund to address these needs, policymakers should reorient the fund to prioritize land conservation on existing public lands, including deferred maintenance. In particular, Congress should amend the LWCF to ensure that the funds are used to conserve and maintain the lands the federal government already owns before they can be used to

FIGURE 3

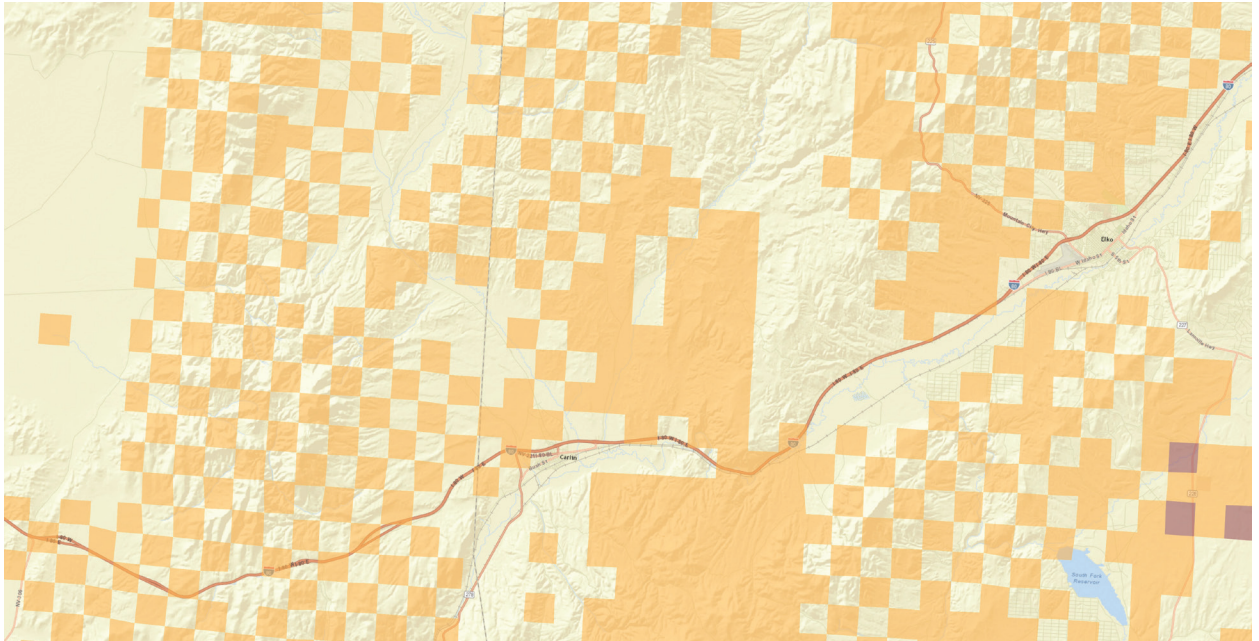


acquire more lands. The LWCF expired in 2015 and recently received a temporary three-year extension. Its potential reauthorization presents an opportunity for Congress to reform the program to create an additional funding source for critical maintenance projects on existing public lands, including national parks.

Read more:

- “Federal Land Acquisition and its Impacts on Communities and the Environment,” by Shawn Regan. Testimony before the Subcommittee on Federal Lands. U.S. House of Representatives. (April 15, 2015).
- “The Reauthorization and Potential Reforms to the Land and Water Conservation Fund,” by Reed Watson. Testimony before the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. U.S. Senate. (April 22, 2015).

2. Dispose of unnecessary federal lands and use revenues to address the backlog. — *by Shawn Regan*



Scattered federal landownership in Nevada, where the federal government has disposed of thousands of acres since 2000.

The federal government owns roughly 640 million acres of land in the United States. In total, nearly half of the western United States is under federal ownership, including 62 percent of Idaho, 65 percent of Utah, and nearly 85 percent of Nevada.¹⁶

Not all of this land needs to be under federal ownership. In fact, some agencies have identified some federal lands as suitable for disposal through the federal land-use planning process. There is little or no disagreement on this simple fact: Under certain conditions, the public interest is better served by allowing the federal government to sell unneeded lands and use the revenues to provide better protections for other public lands.

The Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA) allows the Bureau of Land Management to sell certain federal lands identified for disposal and retain the proceeds in a special account that can be used by the federal government to purchase other higher-priority lands. The revenues are used to purchase inholdings within existing federal lands, including national parks. Since 2000, the BLM has disposed of nearly 30,000 acres of federal land under FLTFA authority.¹⁷

To be clear, FLTFA is not selling off our crown jewels. The lands identified for disposal primarily consist of scattered, isolated tracts that are difficult to manage, or lands that were acquired for a specific purpose but are no longer needed. Many of the lands sold through FLTFA serve important public objectives, such as community expansion and economic development, which are not possible under federal ownership. Some of the lands are in the urban interface and of high value. For example,

under FLTFA, the BLM has disposed of small parcels of public land in the suburban Las Vegas and Phoenix areas in return for millions of dollars in revenue.

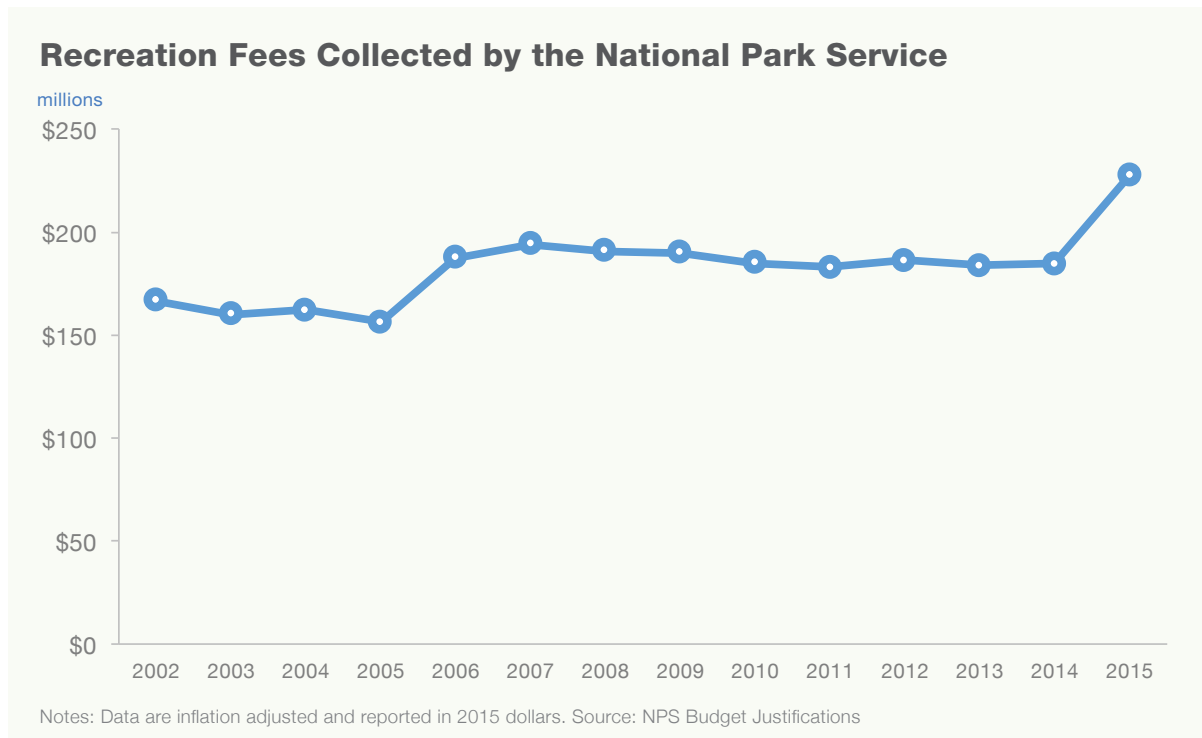
Although FLTFA expired in 2011, support for its reauthorization is widespread. Several bipartisan proposals have recently been put forth to renew the act, with the support of environmental and advocacy groups such as the Conservation Fund, the Nature Conservancy, and Center for Western Priorities. President Obama has also proposed to permanently reauthorize FLTFA to generate new funding for federal land conservation.¹⁸

To address the national park backlog challenge, Congress should permanently reauthorize FLTFA and continue to allow the disposal of unneeded federal lands. However, the act should be reformed to enable the proceeds from land sales to go toward addressing critical maintenance projects on existing federal lands, rather than land acquisition. Under its previous authorization, FLTFA funds could only be used to acquire inholdings for other federal agencies. But with the backlog challenge, FLTFA funds should go to addressing those critical needs as well.

3. Continue to allow park managers to charge recreation fees and retain the revenues for maintenance and other critical projects.

— *by Holly Fretwell and Shawn Regan*

FIGURE 4



No one understands the maintenance challenges in national parks better than park managers themselves. Congress should continue to allow parks to charge recreation fees and retain the revenues onsite to reinvest in park infrastructure and enhance recreation services, as directed by local park managers.

National parks have charged recreation fees, such as entrance fees, since the creation of the National Park Service in 1916.¹⁹ For most of the agency's first century, however, the majority of these fees were deposited into the U.S. Treasury. Each year, the National Park Service relied on Congress to appropriate funds back to the agency. These appropriations were often spent on politically determined projects rather than on the repairs and renovations necessary to adequately maintain parks.

That began to change in 1996 when Congress passed legislation enabling the National Park Service to keep a portion of the fees collected in national parks. Today, the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) authorizes the agency to retain all park fees within the National Park Service. Under FLREA, at least 80 percent of the fees remain in the individual parks where they were collected, while the remaining amount is used agency-wide at the discretion of the National Park Service.²⁰

Fee revenues are important because they allow parks to address critical needs without relying entirely on Congress for appropriations. Local park managers, not Congress, decide how fee revenues

should be spent. While Congress still provides the vast majority of national park funding (more than 90 percent in 2014), fee revenues provide park managers with a small but reliable source of funding for deferred maintenance projects (Figure 4). In 2014, the National Park Service funded nearly 1,545 projects through FLREA, about half of which addressed deferred maintenance and improved facilities. In total, the agency has collected more than \$2.75 billion through its recreation fee program.²¹

Congress should continue to enable park managers to retain recreation fees by permanently reauthorizing FLREA, which is set to expire in 2017.²² Those who visit and enjoy national parks have a direct responsibility to care for and fund our parks. While entrance fees alone will not solve the deferred maintenance backlog, they are a step in the right direction by reducing parks' reliance on Congress and ensuring additional revenues are available for critical unfunded maintenance projects.

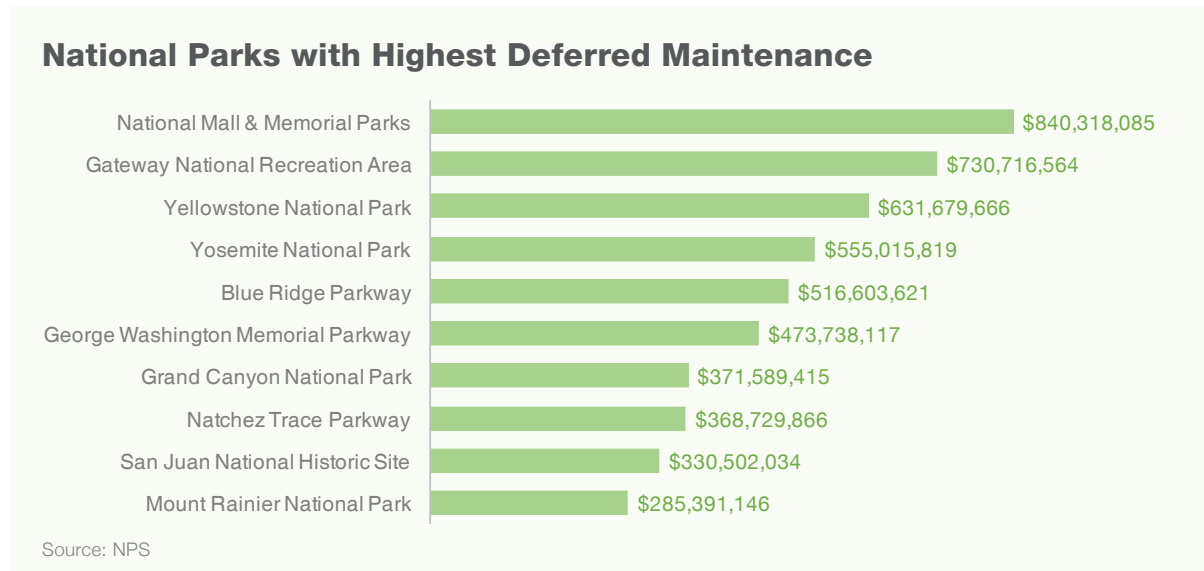
Read more:

- “Recreation Fees—Four Philosophical Questions” by J. Bishop Grewell. *PERC Policy Series*. No. 31 (2004). Available at perc.org.
- “Paying to Play: The Fee Demonstration Program” by Holly L. Fretwell. *PERC Policy Series*. No. 17 (1999). Available at perc.org.

4. Allow park managers to set their own fee programs without having to obtain approval from Congress.

— *by Holly Fretwell and Shawn Regan*

FIGURE 5



Charging and retaining recreation fees is important, but the National Park Service should also have the authority to raise fees or establish new fee-based services as needed, without having to obtain additional approval from Congress.

In some cases, the National Park Service is unable to modify its own fee structures. For example, the interagency senior pass—available to U.S. citizens age 62 or older—can be purchased for a one-time fee of only \$10. The pass provides lifetime access to all national parks and other public lands. Several recent proposals have called on Congress to increase the price of the pass to raise much-needed revenue—something the National Park Service cannot do on its own.²³ In 2015, the agency sold more than 600,000 senior passes at this low rate, forgoing millions of dollars of potential revenue.²⁴

Even where the National Park Service does have the authority to adjust its fees, the process is often so onerous that it deters park managers from attempting to do so. In recent years, several parks attempted to update their fee structures, but the agency's fee-change process was deemed too time consuming and burdensome.²⁵ As a result, today less than one-third of all national park units collect entrance fees.

The National Park Service's rigid fee structure represents a missed opportunity to generate additional revenues to address the maintenance problem. A 2015 review of national park recreation fees by the U.S. Interior Department's Office of Inspector General found that small changes to park fee structures could yield tens of millions of dollars in additional fee revenues.²⁶ Because certain recreation fee changes require legislative intervention, it hampers the agency's flexibility to make business decisions that would accommodate changing economic conditions and visitor demands.

To address these issues, Congress should not only reauthorize FLREA, it should also ensure that park managers have the flexibility to implement and adjust their own recreation fees as needed. This includes the ability to charge higher fees that enable parks to better address critical maintenance needs.

Small changes to park fees are not likely to have a significant effect on visitors. Studies in Yellowstone and Yosemite suggest that entrance fees make up only a small fraction of visitors' overall trip expenditures—just 1.2 to 1.5 percent, according to some estimates—with the vast majority of expenses going towards food, lodging, and travel.²⁷ Updating fee programs and expanding them across more units could generate much-needed revenue for park maintenance.

There is some indication that the National Park Service is moving in this direction. In 2014, the agency lifted a self-imposed moratorium on fee increases in an effort to generate more funding. In response, more than 100 parks are increasing fees. The agency also took steps to streamline the fee-change process for individual park units and is considering updating its fee structure for commercial tour buses.²⁸ However, uncertainty regarding the expiration of FLREA has hampered the agency's flexibility to manage its recreation fee program and caused the agency to delay or cancel efforts to update some interagency pass fees.

Read more:

- “Recreation Fees—Four Philosophical Questions” by J. Bishop Grewell. *PERC Policy Series*. No. 31 (2004). Available at perc.org.
- “Back to the Future to Save Our Parks” by Donald Leal and Holly Fretwell. *PERC Policy Series*. No. 17 (1997). Available at perc.org.

5. Harness public-private partnerships for infrastructure needs.

— *by Leonard Gilroy*



Road maintenance required near the Firehole River in Yellowstone National Park.

Roads and other transportation infrastructure make up half of the deferred maintenance backlog in national parks.²⁹ With the agency's centennial fast approaching, the National Park Service should consider creative partnerships with the private sector to address these challenges and ensure park infrastructure is sustainable in the agency's second century, not marred by chronic deterioration.

The National Park Service can look to states and local governments for inspiration on how to deal with their infrastructure challenges. Over the past several decades, state and local governments have turned to public-private partnerships to tap into private-sector capital and expertise. This allows them to stretch limited tax dollars further, often by outsourcing maintenance activities to the private sector to lower costs.

A recent example of this approach comes from Pennsylvania's Rapid Bridge Replacement Project, a partnership to reconstruct 558 structurally deficient bridges statewide in one fell swoop.³⁰ A private consortium is financing the \$899 million project and is managing the design, construction, and maintenance of the bridges under one comprehensive contract. The consortium will maintain each bridge for 25 years after completion and will be repaid by the state through an annual payment over that same time period to keep costs manageable for taxpayers.

The state estimates that bundling the work will cut costs by 20 percent relative to a more traditional approach. The contract model incentivizes proper maintenance, transfers major financial and long-term operational risks to the private partner, and ensures that the work is done now.

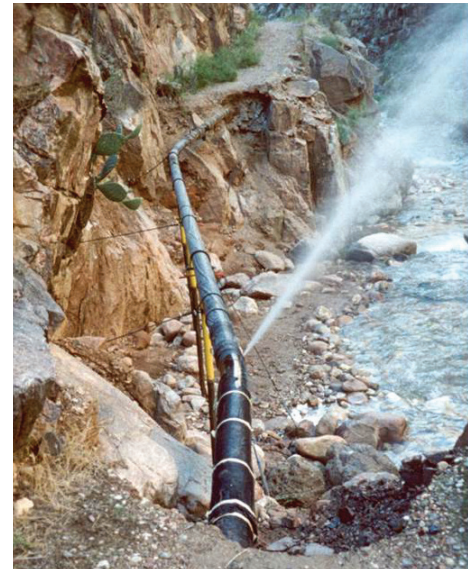
The National Park Service should consider the potential of using similar models to address its transportation backlog across one or more parks. At the same time, the National Park Service’s authorizing legislation and policies should be modernized to give the agency maximum flexibility in crafting innovative partnerships. Though the agency can already make use of some types of infrastructure public-private partnerships, a 2013 report notes that “federal statutes and NPS policies place limitations on these types of partnerships.”³¹ In addition, the National Park Service should explore public-private partnerships to address related infrastructure challenges such as water and wastewater system projects, which together make up \$693 million in deferred maintenance.³²

Public-private partnerships can provide a powerful means of stretching parks’ limited funds further. The National Park Service could begin assessing the potential for infrastructure partnerships in a low-cost, low-risk way by issuing an open-ended request for information, seeking big-picture concepts from the private sector on how to tackle the maintenance backlog. The Park Service can use the feedback to refine its thinking and develop more concrete proposals.

Although public-private partnerships cannot solve every problem, they can play an important role in improving infrastructure and reducing the backlog in our national parks. Given the National Park Service’s current state of disrepair—and the prospect that the next century could be one of decline if nothing changes—all solutions should be on the table.

Read more:

- “Breaking the Backlog: Can Public-Private Partnerships Tackle the Park Maintenance Backlog?” by Leonard Gilroy. *PERC Reports*. Vol. 34, No. 1 (2015). Available at perc.org.



Water sprays from a break in an exposed section of a pipeline in the Grand Canyon. Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.

6. Outsource routine park operations to the private sector while maintaining public ownership and oversight. — *by Holly Fretwell*

FIGURE 6

Public-Private Partnership Model for Park Management

■ National Parks Role ■ Private Role



* Capital investment is a shared role between the park agency and the private company. Capital maintenance responsibilities depend on contract length.

Unlike national park campgrounds, many U.S. Forest Service campgrounds are run in partnership with a private lessee. In national parks, concessions are limited to various commercial activities, such as lodges, park retail stores, and restaurants. To address the maintenance backlog, the National Park Service should explore more opportunities to outsource routine park operations to the private sector through public-private partnerships.

Public-private partnerships are performance-based contracts designed by public land agencies to outsource certain management responsibilities. Ownership remains in the hands of the public agency, but the area or facility is managed and maintained by a private entrepreneur. The agency defines the rules, parameters for visitor fees, management goals, and maintenance expectations. The lessee collects visitor fees, maintains the area and facilities, and pays a portion of the receipts back to the agency. As part of the contract, capital improvements are often the responsibility of the private lessee as well.

Under such an approach, private managers have the right incentives to provide good stewardship. Private managers are accountable to visitors to ensure a high-quality experience and a good reputation. Importantly, there is no subsidy for operations. Private managers are dependent upon the revenues earned to cover its costs, and they are also held accountable by their contract with the public land agency.

The Forest Service has used public-private partnerships to manage and maintain recreation sites for over 30 years. Today, more than 1,000 Forest Service campgrounds are leased to private

operators.³³ The private lessees manage the area, maintain the resources, and often invest in infrastructure improvements—all while paying the agency a portion of its revenues to do it. This is a win-win deal that enables the agency to focus its budget allocations elsewhere while providing a quality recreation experience.

Private managers can turn a profit while charging fees that are comparable to, or even less than, those charged by public land agencies elsewhere.³⁴ This is possible because of the increased efficiencies and flexibility of private-sector management. Private managers are better able to hire the right employees for the right jobs—such as picking up garbage, cleaning facilities, and lawn maintenance—whereas federal agencies have more rigid and costly hiring rules that make routine operational tasks more expensive than is necessary.

Recreation Resource Management is one of the nation's largest lessees of public parks and recreation areas. The company demonstrates the benefits that can be realized through private-sector management. RRM leases dozens of Forest Service campgrounds. They pay all operating expenses from the fees that they collect; they pay a portion of their revenues to the Forest Service; and they earn a profit while doing so. In this way, campground management expenses are removed from the Forest Service's balance sheet. The agency only pays for contract oversight. The net revenues earned by the Forest Service from campground leases are often put back into capital maintenance, preventing further increases in deferred maintenance.

Given the growing deferred maintenance backlog in our national parks, Congress and the National Park Service should encourage more public-private partnerships in national parks that would allow the agency to outsource its routine maintenance and operations to the private sector while maintaining public ownership and oversight.

Read more:

- “Funding Parks: Political Versus Private Choices” by Holly Fretwell. *PERC Case Study*. (August 2011). Available at perc.org.
- “A Tale of Two Parks” by Warren Meyer. *PERC Case Study*. (September 2013). Available at perc.org.

7. Create a national park franchising system for new additions to the National Park System. — *by Holly Fretwell*



Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Kansas is jointly managed by the Nature Conservancy and the National Park Service.

Despite an enormous deferred maintenance backlog, the National Park Service continues to grow. In 2014, seven national parks were added to the system and nine parks were expanded—the largest expansion in nearly three decades.³⁵ And some groups are proposing to add even more parks, including a 70,000-acre national park in Maine.³⁶

Typically, new parks come with little or no additional funding, yet they add new maintenance obligations for the agency. This stretches park budgets even thinner and adds to the existing challenges of the agency's \$11.9 billion deferred maintenance backlog.

As the National Park Service moves into its second century, it's time to think outside the box. Instead of simply creating new parks, Congress should establish a national park franchising system in which new parks would be owned and managed by private entities under standards and parameters established by the National Park Service. If proposed parks warrant national park status, they could be granted the national park title but remain owned and operated under private management.

Under such a franchising system, Congress would provide park proponents with a new way to establish national parks without requiring full federal management or funding. Operating as a franchisee, the private party—a nonprofit organization, business, or group of individuals—would maintain ownership and manage the national park unit. The National Park Service would provide a license for these entities to operate under the national park “brand” and monitor the private managers to ensure parks are managed in accordance with the agency's mission.

Like any franchise, national park franchises would be managed under certain strict parameters. Park franchises would need to adhere to the National Park Service's mission and regulations. For example, parks would need to remain open to the public and be managed in such a manner as to protect their historic, cultural, and environmental values while providing for the enjoyment of the public.

This approach has several potential advantages over the current system of adding new parks. Rather than spending resources to lobby for new national parks, interested parties could invest in creating a business plan that is in line with the National Park Service's franchise requirements. Some franchise parks could also be required to be financially self-sufficient, ensuring that additional parks do not drain limited agency funds. Franchisees would also be responsible for maintaining park infrastructure, preventing further increases in the agency's deferred maintenance backlog.

To a limited degree, this sort of approach is already happening. Some national parks include non-federal lands within park boundaries that are owned by state or local governments and private landowners.³⁷ Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Kansas, for example, is jointly managed by the Nature Conservancy and the National Park Service.³⁸ The preserve is nearly 11,000 acres, the vast majority of which is owned by the Nature Conservancy. The National Park Service owns just 30 acres—or 0.3 percent—of the preserve's land. A franchise would simply go a step further by allowing the park to be owned and managed by the private entity.

The American Prairie Reserve in Montana is also demonstrating how this could be done. APR, a nonprofit conservation group, is creating a 3.5 million-acre wildlife reserve on the prairies of northeastern Montana.³⁹ When completed, it will be the largest wildlife reserve in the contiguous United States. Although there is no official national park label in this case, the reserve showcases how private managers can provide public access and enhance wildlife habitat on a large expanse of land. APR uses private funds, raised from donations, to purchase land and lease the rights to adjacent public lands to establish a landscape-scale conservation area. The group has already connected 305,000 acres of public and private land and reintroduced more than 600 bison. The reserve allows free public access to its impressive wildlife reserve, and with no federal dollars needed.

Allowing private landowners to leverage the national park brand can help protect areas of national significance without increasing the financial responsibilities of the National Park Service or expanding federal landholdings. A franchise model is a low-cost way for the National Park Service to advance its mission without expanding its budget, landholdings, or maintenance liabilities.

Read more:

- “The NPS Franchise: A Better Way to Protect Our Heritage” by Holly Fretwell. *The George Wright Forum: The National Park Service Centennial Essay Series*. Vol. 32. No. 2 (September 2015).

CONCLUSION

As the National Park Service prepares to celebrate its centennial, our parks face big challenges. At \$11.9 billion, the deferred maintenance backlog is a major burden on an agency that is already stretched thin. It is clear that congressional appropriations alone will not solve the problem. Creative solutions are needed.

The ideas explored in this report suggest that we need to do more than celebrate the national park centennial. We should find ways to improve park management and address the critical maintenance needs that exist throughout the National Park System. That means finding ways to make national parks more financially self-sufficient and harnessing the forces of private enterprise to sustain and fund our parks into the future.

This report offers several ideas that would do just that. Although none of these ideas alone will solve the deferred maintenance problem, together they would significantly reduce the agency's reliance on Congress, improve park management and operations, and help prepare the National Park Service for the challenges of its second century.

NOTES

1. National Park Service. “NPS FY 2015 Deferred Maintenance Reports.” <http://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/defermain.htm>.
2. National Park Service. “Critical Maintenance Backlog.” http://www.nps.gov/transportation/maintenance_backlog.html.
3. National Park Service. “Restoring National Park Trails.” http://www.nps.gov/transportation/activities_trails.html.
4. National Park Service. Budget Justifications and Performance Information. Fiscal Year 2017. <http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/upload/FY17-NPS-Greenbook-for-website.pdf>.
5. Discretionary appropriations from Congress to the deferred maintenance backlog include the “Line-item Construction” and “Repairs and Rehabilitation” budget accounts, as well as the “NPS Transportation Title 23 Authorizations and Awards” from the Federal Lands Highways Program, as compiled from NPS and Congressional Research Service data.
6. Statement of Jonathan B. Jarvis, Director, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, for an Oversight Hearing to Consider Supplemental Funding Options to Support the National Park Service’s Efforts to Address Deferred Maintenance and Operational Needs. (July 25, 2013).
7. Data compiled from the National Park Service, see note 5 for more information.
8. Annual appropriations from Congress comprised 88 percent of total funding on average for the National Park Service between fiscal years 2005 and 2014. See “National Park Service: Revenues from Fees and Donations Increased, but Some Enhancements Are Needed to Continue This Trend.” Government Accountability Office.GAO-16-166. (December 2015).
9. “National Parks, Strained by Record Crowds, Face a Crisis” by Michael Janofsky. *New York Times*. (July 25, 1999).
10. National Park Service. “Deferred Maintenance Backlog.” Park Facility Management Division. (September 24, 2014). <http://www.nps.gov/transportation/pdfs/DeferredMaintenancePaper.pdf>.
11. Ibid. See also “Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY2005-FY2014 Estimates” by Carol Hardy Vincent. Congressional Research Service. R43997. (April 21, 2015).
12. The Centennial Challenge is a matching-grant program that requires an equal or greater match from private or non-profit partners to support projects like construction and education. See “National Park Service: FY2016 Appropriations and Recent Trends” by Laura B. Comay. Congressional Research Service. R42757. (July 22, 2015). Congress approved an additional \$15 million in Centennial Challenge funding in FY2016.
13. 114th Congress. National Park Service Centennial Act. <http://www.nps.gov/subjects/centennial/nps-centennial-act.htm>.
14. “Land and Water Conservation Fund: Overview, Funding History, and Issues” by Carol Hardy Vincent. RL33531. (June 17, 2015).
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Holly Fretwell is a research fellow at PERC and adjunct faculty of economics at Montana State University.

Leonard Gilroy is the director of government reform at the Reason Foundation.

Shawn Regan is a research fellow at PERC and a former ranger for the National Park Service.

Reed Watson is the executive director at PERC.