



Written statement of

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On behalf of the National Association of Counties

Hearing to Examine Deferred Maintenance Needs and Potential Solutions

Before the  
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

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Washington, D.C.

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Manchin and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for holding today's hearing to examine deferred maintenance needs on our nation's public lands and potential solutions, and for inviting me to testify on behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo) and our nation's 3,069 counties.

My name is Elizabeth Archuleta. I am a fourth-generation resident of Flagstaff, Arizona and I am currently serving my sixth term on the Coconino County, Arizona Board of Supervisors. I have previously served as President of the County Supervisors Association of Arizona and as Chair of the NACo Public Lands Steering Committee, and currently serve as Vice Chair of the Steering Committee. Through my years of experience in local government, I know very well the challenges public lands counties face as we seek to provide our residents and public lands visitors with the first-class experience they deserve.

Coconino County serves as a proud gateway community to some of the most important places in our nation's public lands system, including Grand Canyon National Park, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, the Coconino National Forest, which includes popular destinations like the Sedona Red Rock Ranger District, and the Kaibab National Forest. The county seat is in the city of Flagstaff, which is located about 140 miles north of Phoenix.

Our county is the second largest by area in the lower 48 states, spanning an area of over 11.9 million acres, and has a population of roughly 140,000 residents. Private land makes up approximately 13 percent of our county, making our economy heavily reliant on tourism and recreation to surrounding public lands. Our county government also counts on federal lands payments programs like Payments In-Lieu of Taxes and Secure Rural Schools, and we appreciate all that the members of this Committee have done to support those key programs.

Last year, the Grand Canyon alone hosted 6.3 million visitors who spent \$947 million in communities near the park. Visitor spending supported 12,558 jobs in the county and had a cumulative benefit to the local economy of \$1.2 billion. We understand the need to ensure the public has access to federal public lands—our livelihood as a community depends on it.

Chairman Murkowski, my testimony today offers the local perspective on the challenges county governments face when tourists see a public lands system with limited access to recreational opportunities due to deferred maintenance. I hope Coconino County's story will help drive legislative solutions to bring deferred maintenance back down to sustainable levels within the federal agencies.

#### Economics of Recreation and Impacts Deferred Maintenance

Congress plays a key role in guiding the management of our nation's 640 million acres of federal public lands. Sixty-two percent of counties nationwide have federal land within our boundaries, and federal policies pertaining to these lands have a direct impact on the quality of life and economic wellbeing of our local communities, especially in gateway communities that host millions of visitors to our nation's public lands each year.

More than 330 million people from around the globe visit our public lands annually. Visitors the National Park System alone spent an estimated \$20.2 billion dollars in gateway communities last year, supporting nearly 330,000 jobs and providing over \$40 billion in economic output nationwide. Public lands are a

critical component of the western economy, and westerners want to guarantee every American can explore these treasured landscapes and learn firsthand about our shared conservation heritage.

However, in recent years, the deteriorating state of the infrastructure on federal lands has caused significant alarm in gateway communities. Record numbers of visitors create wear and tear on infrastructure inside and outside of federal lands. In FY 2018, the deferred maintenance backlog was estimated at \$19.4 billion. Most significantly, the National Park Service (NPS) accounted for approximately \$12 billion and the U.S. Forest Service for another \$5.2 billion. These backlogs primarily impact roads, trails, bridges and visitors centers – the main access points for public lands visitors. For the U.S. Forest Service, the access points account for over 60 percent of its deferred maintenance backlog, comparable to the NPS' 57 percent.

This places a significant burden on federal lands agencies to meet the demands of millions of visitors each year, but also presents logistical challenges to local governments. County governments, particularly in rural areas, are often first on the scene when a hiker is injured and must be rescued. When these access points fall into disrepair, it impacts the health and welfare of residents and public lands visitors. It is imperative that Congress act to reduce this burden on our natural resources and people.

#### Deferred Maintenance – Arizona/Coconino County

In the state of Arizona, NPS estimates that there is approximately \$532 million in deferred maintenance, \$330 million of which is in Grand Canyon National Park and another \$32 million at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, both of which are primarily located in Coconino County. Last year, Grand Canyon National Park hosted then-U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke and a group of student volunteers from Coconino Community College who spent a day painting historic cabins.

In the Grand Canyon, the most pressing need is the replacement of the Transcanyon Water Pipeline, the water delivery line from the North Rim to the South Rim. This aluminum pipeline was constructed in 1965 and was expected to last for about 40 years, and it serves as the lone source of potable water for NPS personnel, local businesses, visitors and wildland firefighters in the area. The pipeline breaks down multiple times per year primarily due to rock falls, leading to costly repairs, water rationing and even trail closures on some occasions.

While NPS has a plan and funding to replace the pipeline, it is long past its prime and has taken far too long to secure the resources necessary to ensure a stable water supply to the park. This project alone will cost somewhere between \$80 to \$100 million, and take approximately 3.5 years to complete. It is vital that this water supply remains secure so that we can continue to grow our tourism economy.

Additionally, federal public lands in Arizona face a significant backlog of road and trail repairs. Nearly 50 percent of the deferred maintenance backlog within the state is due to poorly maintained roads and trails. Lack of access to trails or roads limits the ability of campers, hikers and other outdoor recreational enthusiasts to enjoy our public lands. Bicyclists will not use unmanaged infrastructure that can harm expensive equipment. Poor road and trail conditions also inhibit the ability of first responders to access the scene of an emergency, prevent or suppress a wildfire and better manage the National Forest System.

## How county governments can assist in reducing deferred maintenance

County governments stand ready to assist in addressing deferred maintenance on public lands. Knowing that our economic life depends on the ability of tourists to access our parks and public lands, Coconino County has a long history of partnering with federal agencies to ensure our respective goals are met.

Coconino County has shown it will share the burden with the federal government to ensure public access to federal lands. For almost 100 years, our county has maintained Lake Mary Road, a 48-mile U.S. Forest Service road that serves 2,100 vehicles per day – 70 percent of which are for recreational purposes. Trucks and other heavy equipment also frequent Lake Mary Road due to the expansion of forest and watershed health projects in the area. Massive amounts of traffic and winter weather conditions in Northern Arizona also constantly wear down the road, forcing the county to conduct significant maintenance year-round.

Coconino County recently worked with the U.S. Department of Transportation to secure \$8.95 million from the Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFL) to pulverize, grade and repave 17 miles of Lake Mary Road. This successful relationship between our county and the federal government has led to further investments in Lake Mary Road through CFL Federal Lands Access Partnership (FLAP) grants, with the third phase of the repair project scheduled to be finished later this year. Coconino County invested \$5 million in the project after voters approved a sales tax increase earmarked for road maintenance funds in 2014.

The county is also looking to partner with federal agencies to improve Stoneman Lake Road, a gravel road connecting Lake Mary Road to Interstate 17, and Perkinsville Road, which serves as a major traffic route for our county's forest thinning and watershed health initiatives. Coconino County's example shows what can be accomplished when all levels of government work together to meet the needs of residents and visitors alike.

Through our Resource Advisory Committee (RAC), Coconino County has jointly participated with our federal partners in projects to improve trails and roads on Mount Elden, which has stunning views of the landscape surrounding the City of Flagstaff and serves as a natural point of pride for the residents of our county. Other RAC projects include fuels thinning to improve landscape health and reduce the threat of wildfire, snowpack studies and restoration work within the Coconino National Forest.

Counties across the nation want to reiterate our support for the adjustments Congress made to RAC requirements under last year's Farm Bill, which will make it easier for smaller population areas to form a RAC and conduct restoration work in national forests. Additionally, we are excited that Congress expanded Good Neighbor Authority to county and tribal governments, so that we can have greater opportunities to work with federal partners on forest health and access issues, including road construction. We look forward to using these new authorities and working through existing programs and partnerships to build a even stronger relationships between local governments and federal agencies in the coming years and further reduce the deferred maintenance backlog on our nation's public lands.

## Conclusion

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Manchin, thank you for the opportunity to share Coconino County's story with the Committee. Our federal public lands serve as a living testament to our commitment to conservation and recreation. We must ensure that future generations can see and appreciate our rich history in these places, and to learn more about the people and lands that have shaped us as a nation. Counties urge Congress to enact legislation to tackle the deferred maintenance backlog so that we continue to lead the world in providing an outdoor experience to our citizens and visitors.