



Opening Statement
Oversight Hearing on Deferred Maintenance & Potential Solutions on Federal Lands
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
June 18, 2019

Good morning, everyone. The committee will come to order.

We're here to today to examine the deferred maintenance needs of the major public land management agencies—this is a topic that I certainly care about, and that each of you, the folks on this committee have expressed concerned—not just coming into this hearing today, but really over the years.

When we consider deferred maintenance, we most commonly think of the \$12 billion maintenance backlog accrued by the National Park Service. We have considered that here at that committee at great length, and it rightfully continues to attract a great deal of national attention.

But somehow and sometimes overlooked in this conversation are the deferred maintenance needs of the other federal land management agencies, including the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Combined with the Park Service, these four agencies face a deferred maintenance backlog totaling \$19.4 billion – That's worthy of repeating, within these four agencies that govern our public lands, almost \$20 billion in deferred maintenance backlogs. This is an overwhelming amount that covers everything from direct visitor experiences to projects that will perhaps never be noticed by the average family.

Regardless of the agency we are talking about, deferred maintenance needs are very real. For example, families visiting the Grand Canyon National Park should not be greeted by locked bathrooms and campers should not be left without access to shower and laundry facilities, as was the case for 10 days after the sole waterline serving the Canyon burst last month. This is a waterline that has had over 80 separate breaks since 2010. So it's not like we didn't see this one coming.

For us in Alaska, one that hits pretty close to home is in Denali National Park where earlier this summer, we had a service truck that slid off of the gravel-backfilled park road at Polychrome Pass. We've heard a lot about Polychrome Pass here in this Committee. Fortunately, the driver was not injured there, but we're looking at a practical reality with the landslides and the slumping or the slippage that is going to require—if not a significant overhaul-- a complete rerouting of that road at incredible expense.

And while recreation is a major driver of this discussion, deferred maintenance impacts wildlife, conservation and development opportunities as well.

BLM has identified 57 miles of roads in eastern Oregon in need of repair. These roads support timber operations, they provide a way for wildlife managers to access the heart of Chinook salmon spawning areas.

In Colorado, a project to remove and replant trees that had been killed by spruce beetle on 1,100 acres of fire-prone land has stalled indefinitely because of the poor road conditions in the Rio Grande National Forest.

In many cases, roads, bridges, wastewater systems, and other federal assets are intertwined with the needs of local communities. Counties and boroughs have an obligation to ensure the safety of their citizens and the vitality of their local economy. And that means the infrastructure they share with their federal neighbor – including the roads used by first responders – have be well-maintained. Or at least maintained.

As part of our conversation today, we will discuss the need to develop meaningful, creative, and fiscally-sound solutions to ensure the long-term maintenance of our extensive public lands infrastructure.

We will consider the need for federal agencies to prioritize routine maintenance to prevent projects from becoming backlogged in the first place.

And we will also discuss the role of philanthropic donations, public-private partnerships, and intergovernmental agreements that are in place today.

So I'm pleased to be able to welcome our witnesses to the committee to help us advance this important discussion. We have representatives from the Department of Interior and the Forest Service, as well as the recreation industry, a county government, and an advocate for public land stewardship. So it really represents the breadth of stakeholders who are involved in this issue, I know all of you are looking to Congress to say okay, what are we going to do, how are we going to deal with this? So I appreciate you all being here this morning.

I'll turn to my ranking member Senator Manchin and then we will move to the witnesses.

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