

**Testimony of Marcia Argust
The Pew Charitable Trusts**

**Before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks
July 11, 2018**

Legislative Hearing on S. 3172

Chairman Daines, Ranking Member King, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing today on the bipartisan Restore Our Parks Act (S. 3172), legislation to help address the multi-billion-dollar backlog of repairs plaguing our National Park System. The Pew Charitable Trusts strongly endorses S. 3172.

The Restore America's Parks campaign at The Pew Charitable Trusts seeks to conserve the natural and cultural assets within our national parks by pursuing common sense, long-term solutions to this deferred maintenance challenge.

Deferred Maintenance Challenge within the National Park System

The National Park Service (NPS) estimates that repairs at its more than 400 sites across the nation total \$11.6 billion, based on FY2017 data [see Figure 1]. At these diverse sites—national parks, historic sites, national monuments, battlefields, seashores and lakeshores, national recreation areas—the agency is responsible for the care and operation of over 75,000 assets.

These assets include over 18,000 miles of trails, campgrounds, waterfronts, more than 28,000 buildings and historic structures 5,000 miles of paved roads, approximately 1,800 waste water systems, former military installations and battlefields, electrical and water systems, interpretive facilities, and iconic monuments and memorials.

Aside from the Department of Defense, the NPS maintains more assets than any other federal agency. Over half of its 75,000 assets have deferred maintenance, or repairs that have been postponed for more than a year.

Pew has completed a number of case studies that document the breadth of maintenance challenges plaguing our parks, along with a compilation of testimonials from local officials, community leaders, and businesses that depend on well-maintained, safe, and accessible parks to help sustain healthy local economies. The case studies and testimonials can be viewed on our webpage:

<http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/fact-sheets/2017/05/national-park-case-studies>.

The Causes of Deferred Maintenance

Due to aging facilities, strain on resources caused by increased visitation in certain park sites, and decades of inconsistent funding, NPS has been unable to keep pace with necessary maintenance and repairs.

Our National Park System is over 100 years old and many park units are showing their age. Based on FY 2017 NPS data, 64.9% of the \$11.6 billion backlog, or \$7.54 billion, is attributed to assets that are 81 years or older. Over 23.5% of the backlog, or \$2.73 billion, is associated with assets that are 41-60 years

old [see Figure 2]. Infrastructures have a finite lifespan, due to factors such as material longevity, weather, use, and design. In addition to aging infrastructure, the high level of visitation that many park sites have been experiencing in recent years is placing increasing pressures on resources that are often already showing signs of deterioration.

Years of inconsistent, inadequate funding for park facility and operations maintenance needs have compounded the challenges of preserving the integrity of NPS physical and historic assets. From FY2006-FY2015, federal funding for the repair and rehabilitation, cyclic maintenance, and line-item construction portions of the NPS budget declined by 33 percent. We commend Congress for the increased allocations it has provided for NPS' maintenance accounts over the past several years, but consistent funding is still needed to close the recurring maintenance gap and start reducing the large cumulative deficit.

Why We Must Address Deferred Maintenance and Restore Our Parks

Ignoring the national park maintenance backlog, or addressing it piecemeal, is not an option.

- *Preservation.* Our national park units document America's history. If our historic and cultural resources are not maintained and allowed to fall into disrepair, pieces of our nation's history will be lost to future generations.
- *Access.* Without safe and reliable roads and facilities, visitors cannot access and enjoy park resources.
- *Economics.* Parks are proven economic engines and must be maintained to ensure positive visitor experience and thriving local communities. Based on FY2017 records, over 330 million park visits translated to \$18.2 billion in direct spending in gateway communities, generating approximately \$35.8 billion in national economic output and 306,000 jobs.
- *Recreation.* World class recreation opportunities in parks are supported by trails, campgrounds, and water facilities. These amenities need to be safe and updated to ensure a continued high-quality, safe recreation experience.
- *Infrastructure-related jobs.* Fully investing in the park maintenance backlog has the potential to generate over 110,000 additional infrastructure-related jobs, based on a Pew-commissioned analysis: <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/compass-points/2017/12/01/job-creation-potential-if-we-restore-our-parks>.
- *Cost-savings.* Proactively addressing park maintenance provide a cost-savings to taxpayers, as postponement of projects can lead to increased deterioration, and more costly and extensive repairs.

Almost 3,000 organizations across the nation recognize these benefits and support directing more resources to restoring our parks. These groups— counties and cities, local officials, businesses, veterans, the hotel and restaurant industry, conservation groups, unions, the recreation industry, infrastructure groups, state tourism societies—can be viewed here: <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2018/04/18/calls-mount-for-congress-to-fix-our-parks>.

The Restore Our Parks Act

Drawing down the NPS maintenance backlog that has accrued over decades requires multiple approaches. Pew supports a range of solutions including dedicated annual federal funding, continued robust annual appropriations funding, legislative and administrative policy reforms, increased opportunities for public-private partnerships, and leveraging technology to achieve efficiencies and generate revenue. Of all these avenues, dedicated annual funding is core to helping NPS tackle priority repairs and preventing deferred maintenance from escalating.

Pew has been working with sponsors of bills that have been previously introduced to address the national parks maintenance backlog—specifically the National Park Service Legacy Act (H.R. 2584/S.751) and

the National Park Restoration Act (H.R. 5210/S.2509)—to develop one measure that would incorporate the best components of each bill and would draw support from across political lines and the Administration. The Restore Our Parks Act (S. 3172) has accomplished these goals. We applaud Sens. Portman (R-OH), Warner (D-VA), Alexander (R-TN), and King (I-ME) for their collaborative work to craft S. 3172. If enacted, this common-sense legislation presents a feasible path forward in reducing the NPS maintenance backlog by providing a number of benefits, the most significant of which is consistent annual funding for park repairs. The Restore Our Parks legislation would:

- **Provide Reliable Funding for Priority Park Maintenance Needs.** The legislation would facilitate a potential \$6.5 billion drawdown in the NPS maintenance backlog by establishment of *National Park Service Legacy Restoration Fund* in the U.S. Treasury that would direct monies to priority national park deferred maintenance needs. The Fund would be in effect for five years, with an annual revenue cap of \$1.3 billion. Past mineral revenue data from the Department of the Interior indicates that, even during low energy production years, a \$1.3 billion cap is likely to be reached, which would provide the consistent, reliable annual funding NPS needs to tackle its priority maintenance needs.

Under the annual appropriations process, NPS isn't always able to take on planning, design, scope of work, and project implementation costs for more complicated, multi-year maintenance projects. As a result, work is deferred or done incrementally, which can be inefficient and more costly. The Restore Our Parks Act would provide a dependable source of annual funding to help remedy this problem.

For example, Alcatraz Island, part of Golden Gate National Recreation Area in California, is a top tourist draw and boasts one of the most iconic, recognizable landscapes in the nation. The Island has deferred maintenance needs estimated at \$76.9 million, almost \$40 million of which is associated with the Alcatraz prison. Work on the infamous cell house typically starts and stops when NPS receives money from federal appropriations or partners. Sustainable funding would allow the agency to complete planning and design work and execute the project on a comprehensive scale, which would ultimately save money.

Another example of a deferred maintenance project that needs dependable annual funding to get off the ground is right here in Washington, DC. The Tidal Basin seawall that circles the Thomas Jefferson and FDR Memorials, and Washington's famous cherry trees, has \$64 million worth of deferred maintenance. The wall is over 100 years old and is sinking due to settling and erosion. Sections of the historic cherry blossom walkway and the seawall flood twice a day when the tide comes in, causing accessibility issues for visitors and damage to some of the trees and memorials. NPS lacks the funding to initiate a comprehensive process—public scoping, engineering surveys, redesign recommendations—on how to repair this area.

- **Protect Existing Programs Financed by Mineral Revenues.** The Fund would be financed with unobligated annual federal mineral revenues—such as royalties from on-shore and off-shore oil, gas, coal, and other mineral operations, as well as renewables. This concept of using revenues generated from the development of a federal energy resource for the conservation of another resource is not new, as it is the basic idea behind important programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the Historic Preservation Fund.

The legislation recognizes the importance of these and other programs and includes provisions to ensure they are not adversely impacted. Language specifically stipulates that the *National Park Service Legacy Restoration Fund* would receive 50% of revenues “that are not otherwise credited, covered, or deposited under Federal law.” Further, language states that the Fund shall not affect revenues that “are due to the United States, special, funds, trust funds, or States from mineral and energy development on Federal land and water; or have been otherwise appropriated under Federal

law, including the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006, the Mineral Leasing Act, and chapter 13 2003 of title 54, United States .”

- **Ensure that monies from the *National Park Service Legacy Restoration Fund* flow to priority maintenance projects, in line with NPS’ asset prioritization system.** We support NPS’ current approach to prioritizing assets, which enables the agency to focus limited funds on maintenance projects that are deemed mission critical. Under its current asset management system, NPS generates facility management scores based on four mission criteria—resource preservation, visitor experience, health and safety issues, and financial sustainability—to help prioritize repairs.

Provisions in the Restore Our Parks Act would help ensure that funds are used to address priority projects. NPS assets are placed into categories deemed “highest”, “high”, “medium”, “low”, “lowest”. Highest priority assets account for \$5.6 billion (or more than 48%) of the \$11.6 billion backlog [see Figure 3], and are considered critical to the operations and mission of a park site. High priority assets are considered very important to operations and mission and account for \$3.3 billion, or more than 27%, of the backlog.

- **Provide for the Restoration of Non-Transportation and Transportation Assets.** Sixty-five percent (65%) of Fund revenues would go toward the repair of non-transportation resources, such as historic structures, visitor facilities, trails, water utility systems, and assets that impact disability access, health and safety, access and recreation. Thirty-five percent (35%) of revenues would be used to restore transportation-related assets such as roads, bridges, and tunnels. When combined with funding NPS receives through the Highway Trust Fund, this ratio would provide approximate parity between resources directed toward transportation and non-transportation maintenance needs.
- Allow for revenue that is collected within the Fund to be expended indefinitely.
- Permit the Secretary of Treasury, at the request of the Secretary of the Interior, to invest revenue in the Fund into a public debt security; income from the investment would be returned to the Fund.
- Prohibit allocated funds from being used for land acquisition and prohibit funds from replacing discretionary funding for NPS facility operations and maintenance needs.
- Encourage public-private donations toward deferred maintenance projects.

Conclusion

Supporting the bipartisan Restore Our Parks Act is a wise investment for a National Park System that has overwhelming support from the American public, that generates hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars for the economy each year, that provides access to world class recreation opportunities, and that preserves our nation’s history. We appreciate the leadership and vision of Sens. Portman, Warner, Alexander, and King in protecting our national parks and we appreciate the serious consideration this Subcommittee and Congress to giving to the issue of restoring our parks. Pew is committed to working with all Members of Congress and the Administration to move this legislation forward. Thank you.

Contact:

*Marcia Argust, Director, Restore America’s Parks campaign
The Pew Charitable Trusts
margust@pewtrusts.org*

Figure 1.

National Park Service Deferred Maintenance by Asset Category

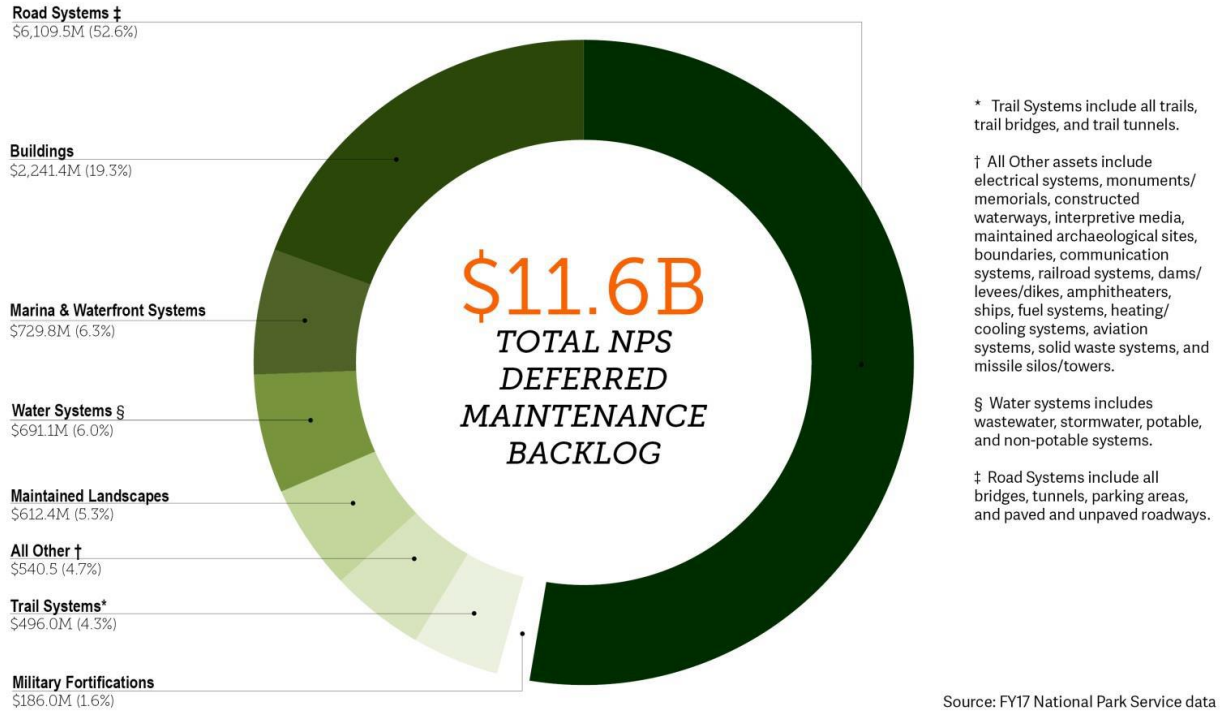
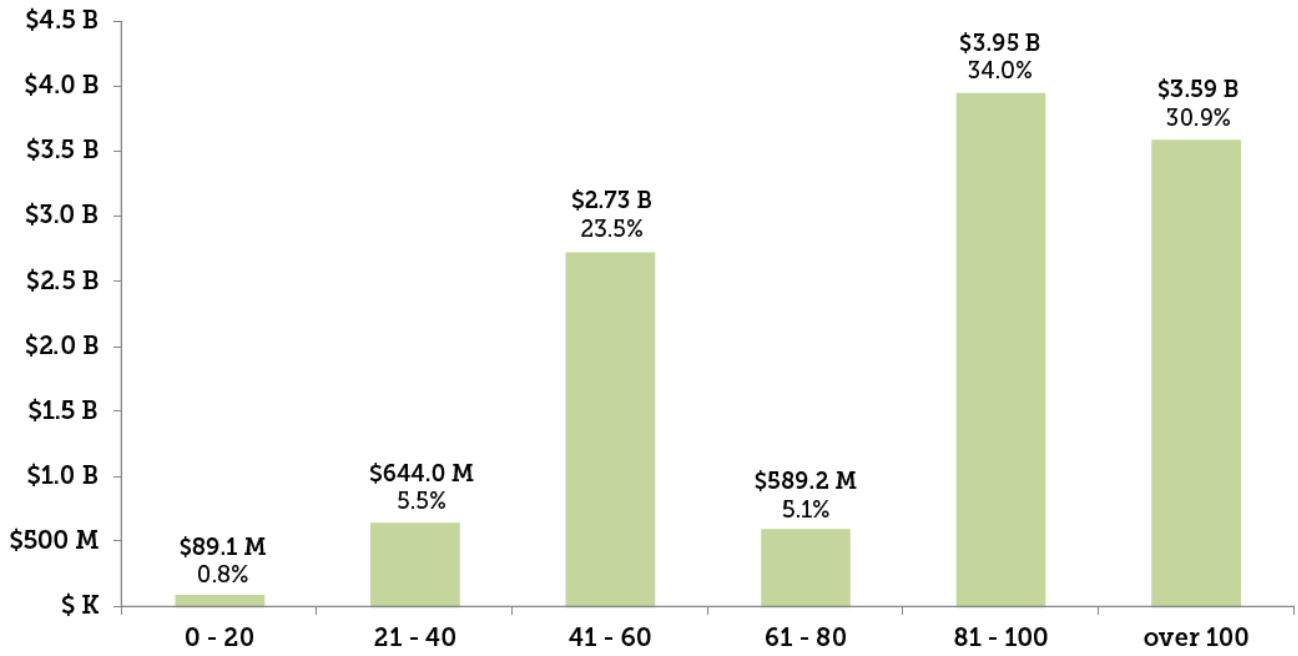


Figure 2.

NPS DEFERRED MAINTENANCE

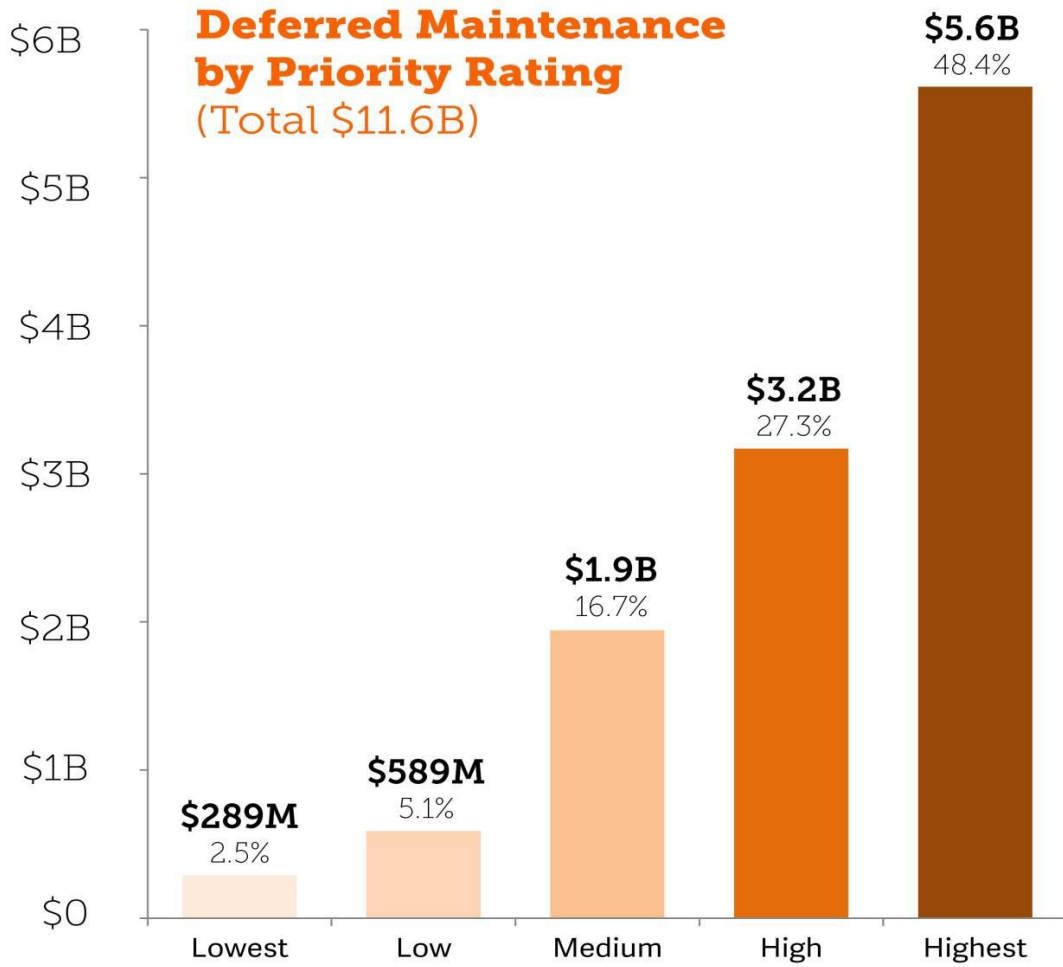
By Age of Park Unit in 2017



* Not included: Approximately \$24.2 million or 0.2% of NPS deferred maintenance is needed for regional offices and training centers.

Sources: FY17 National Park Service deferred maintenance data; "Important Anniversaries and Dates of Designation for National Park Service Units", National Park Service, Office of Communications, updated 12/28/15.

Figure 3.



Source: FY17 National Park Service data