

**STATEMENT OF CHARLES F. SAMS III, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL
RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS, REGARDING “EXAMINING
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT AND THE
GROWING NATIONAL PARK SERVICE MAINTENANCE BACKLOG”.**

April 18, 2023

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior’s (Department) views on implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act Legacy Restoration Fund and deferred maintenance within the National Park System.

The historic enactment of the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) combined a financial commitment to conservation and recreation for future generations with a significant investment in the facilities needed to carry out the Department’s important mission, including the care and maintenance of America’s national treasures. The GAOA combined two major conservation initiatives into one legislative package: the guarantee of permanent full funding for the existing Land and Water Conservation Fund and the establishment of a National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF). This investment provides an unprecedented opportunity to address the Department’s deferred maintenance and repair backlog and restore deteriorating assets.

For FY 2021 through FY 2025, Congress authorized up to \$1.9 billion annually to be deposited in the LRF for projects that reduce deferred maintenance across several land management agencies. The annual deposit is equal to 50 percent of energy development revenues from oil, gas, coal, alternative, or renewable energy on Federal land and water credited, covered, or deposited as miscellaneous receipts under Federal law in the preceding fiscal year. Of the annual funding, 70 percent is allocated to the National Park Service (NPS), 5 percent is allocated to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 5 percent is allocated to the Bureau of Land Management, 5 percent is allocated to the Bureau of Indian Education, and the remaining 15 percent is allocated to the U.S. Forest Service.

With these resources, the NPS is using this opportunity to accomplish much-needed asset maintenance, repairs, and replacement. Improved facilities will be more resilient, operate more efficiently, and better serve visitors.

At the end of FY 2022, an estimated \$22.3 billion of deferred maintenance and repair needs existed on roads, buildings, utility systems, and other structures and facilities across the National Park System. DM&R is defined as the cost of 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. Addressing deferred maintenance and repairs (DM&R) is critical to the continued preservation, accessibility, and enjoyment of national parks. The NPS maintains a complex portfolio of more than 75,000 assets, including historic structures, roads, bridges, trails, campgrounds, and utility systems. Many of these assets require highly skilled, technical

craftsmen with specific, detailed knowledge of historical construction techniques to maintain and restore complex period structures.

The criteria the NPS uses when selecting LRF projects, which it implemented in FY 2021, are similar to the criteria used by other bureaus in the Department and include addressing a significant amount of deferred maintenance, maximizing return on investment, and safeguarding those we serve—our workforce, volunteers, visitors, and partners. Projects that meet the criteria must ensure funds are used to rehabilitate assets to support conservation and recreational opportunities for years to come.

The project selection process is built from the ground up, as parks identify condition deficiencies in their assets and develop projects to address those deficiencies. Projects are then evaluated and approved by the respective regional directors and reviewed by the NPS Bureau Investment Review Board, a committee of senior managers from the National Leadership Council, which provides a servicewide policy perspective for and oversight of NPS major infrastructure investments. One of the Review Board's key considerations is how these assets, once improved by LRF funding, will be maintained in the future. From the Review Board, a list of candidate projects is provided to agency and Departmental leadership for final selection and then included in the President's budget request for Congressional review and concurrence.

To date, the NPS has prioritized 130 projects to address critical deferred maintenance and improve transportation, administrative, and recreation infrastructure across the National Park System. The average project size is \$31.8 million, and it is estimated that the deferred maintenance addressed by these projects will be \$3.8 billion. LRF funding for these projects will improve the condition of roads, buildings, utility systems, and other assets in 176 park units located in 48 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and will address critical life, health, and safety issues, as well as related code compliance and accessibility deficiencies. Funding will also be used to remove dilapidated and unneeded structures that detract from the visitor experience and attract vandalism. Examples of projects underway include:

At Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky, \$6.5 million was awarded to rehabilitate approximately one mile of cave trail inside Mammoth Cave. The project will harden the existing cave trail, replace narrow stairways, and install new benches to improve both the visitor experience and emergency personnel access.

At Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio, \$12.6 million was awarded to assure continued access to recreational experiences in the park. The project will stabilize the riverbank at sites along the Cuyahoga River where erosion threatens the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail and the tracks for the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad.

At Acadia National Park in Maine, a \$33 million contract was awarded for demolition of outdated structures and construction of new maintenance and wastewater treatment facilities at park headquarters. This project will support park and partnership staff with enhanced facilities to better serve visitors and protect park resources.

At Yosemite National Park in California, \$31.6 million was awarded to rehabilitate and correct safety issues at the historic Ahwahnee Hotel. Work includes seismic upgrades and other safety improvements, renovation of the kitchen, and replacement of critical systems.

At Minute Man National Historical Park in Massachusetts, \$27.4 million was awarded to preserve and repair witness structures, landscapes, and trails. The Battle Road Trail and Groton Road provide the primary recreational and interpretive infrastructure for park visitors.

The creation of the LRF enabled the NPS to launch the Maintenance Action Team (MAT) Program in FY 2021 to address projects at small and medium-sized parks. A mobile unit composed of trade specialists skilled in historic restoration and preservation work, MATs perform smaller, but critical, maintenance repair projects on historic structures across the NPS, including forts, buildings, masonry walls and fencing. In addition to completing essential work, the MAT program will proactively engage public land corps, youth conservation corps, veterans' groups, and under-represented communities. With LRF funding for the MATs, including for projects proposed in the FY 2024 Budget, NPS will dedicate \$59.1 million to address over 200 deferred maintenance activities in 96 park units.

An example of a recent MAT project that impacted a smaller NPS unit is the completion of deferred maintenance work at the Harry S Truman National Historic Site in Missouri at the Truman Farm Home. Harry Truman lived and worked on the family farm from 1906 to 1917. LRF funding provided for preserving the character of the Farm Home by repairing and replacing porch decking, exterior siding and trim, porch wainscoting and by replacing damaged porch screens.

While the LRF is the newest and largest source of deferred maintenance funding, the NPS balances its priorities across multiple discretionary, mandatory, and supplemental appropriations to ensure funding is distributed to meet the most critical needs across parks as conditions and funds availability changes. For example, prioritizing large-scale deferred maintenance projects for LRF funding created space in the NPS's discretionary Line Item Construction plan to accelerate work on other projects such as improvements to the visitor center and headquarters of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park in Georgia.

In addition to the work described above to formulate and execute the LRF program of projects, we have also continued efforts to report the condition of assets more consistently and accurately, to ensure that progress, supported by LRF and other resources, is appropriately documented. The NPS is implementing a multi-year effort to comprehensively review and reform the systems and processes used to manage its assets, including the methodology used to assess facility condition and calculate DM&R.

This 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. This approach provides a more comprehensive, consistent, and timely understanding of facility conditions and estimate of maintenance, recapitalization, and repair needs for the NPS portfolio.

In response to recommendations from the Department's Office of Inspector General (OIG), the Department compiled its work into a Strategic Plan documenting the overarching strategy for maximizing the impact of funding. The Strategic Plan, which is available on the Department's GAOA webpage, describes the Department's strategic goals, objectives, performance measures, risk management strategy, and organizational roles and responsibilities specific to the Department's implementation of the GAOA LRF program.

From the start, the NPS and the Department have worked to develop, implement, and refine strategic planning and best management practices for the LRF and for deferred maintenance. Efforts include, but are not limited to: publishing LRF project plans, data, and other supporting information on public-facing websites as well as hosting public and industry meetings; hosting bipartisan briefings regarding the GAOA LRF program for Congressional staff; implementing improved processes to collect and record deferred maintenance and repair needs; and standardizing definitions across bureaus.

The investments provided by GAOA LRF have made an enormous economic impact. In total, FY 2021 – FY 2024, NPS LRF expenditures are estimated to support a total of 48,870 job-years, \$3.32 billion in labor income, \$10.3 billion in economic output, and contribute \$4.7 billion to the US GDP.

Enactment of the GAOA marked a new era for America's outdoors with unprecedented funding, improved recreation opportunities, and broader engagement. We look forward to working together to ensure our country's national parks and public lands remain safe, enjoyable, and accessible to everyone.

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.