The National Park Service (NPS) currently has a nearly $12 billion deferred maintenance backlog that has built up due to years of inadequate funding to fix maintenance needs. It will only get worse unless Congress can agree on a way to provide funding to address these needs. However, contrary to the picture that Secretary Zinke has painted, funding to address this massive maintenance backlog does not have to come at the expense of conservation funding. Meaning that Congress can—and should—allocate funds for both the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and the NPS maintenance backlog.

**National Park Service Maintenance Backlog**

In 2017, the deferred maintenance backlog in national parks was valued at $12 billion. This is due to years of under-funding for standard maintenance of roads, buildings, and trails. However, several investigations have found that a large portion of this maintenance backlog is not due to standard national park maintenance and should instead be paid for by concessionaires—private businesses with permits who operate inside national parks. In fact, one analysis found that $389 million in deferred maintenance costs should be paid for by these private interests. In addition, a Center for American Progress report found that only 30 percent of the $12 billion was categorized as 'critical systems deferred maintenance' by the NPS. Taking into account concessionaires costs and the other non-critical maintenance costs, the $12 billion figure that has been repeatedly cited is closer to $8 billion.

There have been several proposals for funding the NPS maintenance backlog, but they have all fallen short; particularly with a seven percent reduction in parks funding from the Trump Administration. Accompanying this funding cut are proposals such as the National Park Restoration Act and the peak season entrance fee hike to seventeen of America's most popular national parks. After a public comment period, an incredible 98 percent of Americans opposed the entrance fee increase, and thus the Department of Interior (DOI) killed the proposal. The National Park Restoration Act was introduced in March 2018 and would funnel royalties from energy development on public lands into a fund to be used for the maintenance backlogs. This has been criticized as a way to encourage oil and gas development on public lands to enhance President Trump's 'energy dominance' agenda especially due to the inconsistent funding mechanism currently written into the bill.
The substantial need for funding to address the NPS maintenance backlog must be addressed in a meaningful, consistent manner. However, this does not need to be done in lieu of providing funding for other public land needs through funding from the LWCF. The demand on and for public lands is increasing, especially in mountain and gateway communities. Without proper management and maintenance of these public lands, resources will be strained, and the nearby communities will feel the impacts from degraded forests, streams, and roads.

By providing full and permanent authorization for the LWCF, Congress can ensure that America’s public lands are maintained and expanded for the current and future enjoyment of all Americans. Since the LWCF does not rely on taxpayer dollars, this fund does not impact Congressional and Agency ability to provide funding to address the NPS maintenance backlog. Our national parks are a global attraction and are seeing more visitors each year. National parks and other public lands surrounding mountain communities will continue to feel the impacts unless adequate funding is made available. Public lands are important for outdoor recreation, conservation, ecosystem preservation and management, as well as sustainable timber and grazing. With inadequate funding, these lands will continue to be degraded impacting all Americans whether that is from lack of access, unacceptable infrastructure, or reduced water and air quality. Thus, Congress and the Trump Administration must provide funding for both the LWCF and the NPS maintenance backlog.