

BUY MORE OR FIX WHAT YOU HAVE?

QUICK STATS

- ✘ **CONFERENCE:** Spending
- ✘ **TEAM:** National Park Service
- **FUMBLE:** Mismanaging current assets and spending millions acquiring more
- **HOW TO RECOVER THE BALL:** Addressing current maintenance backlog with LWCF funds

Perhaps the most popular and often-visited federal entity, National Park Service protects and preserves America's greatest landscapes and proudest historical monuments. Unfortunately for the American public, the stewardship of these sites was placed in the hands of Congress, which has neglected to perform the simple duty of tending U.S. national treasures. Instead Congress decided to focus on expanding the federal footprint by spending hundreds of millions of dollars to acquire additional land each year. Meanwhile the federal government has completely lost the ability to care for the lands it already controls. The result of this congressional fumble is about \$20 billion in deferred maintenance needs accrued on federal lands, including \$11.5 billion in NPS.³⁶⁹

Despite federal ownership of 29 percent of all the land in the U.S., Congress spent \$1.7 billion over the last ten years (including \$178 million in 2015) to acquire additional land through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).³⁷⁰ Unfortunately these purchases do not always come at a cheap price per acre. In the FY 2016 land acquisition priority list, NPS asked to purchase land in Alaska for \$400,000 per acre, four acres in Florida for \$324,000 (\$81,000 per acre), and two acres in Washington for \$790,000 per acre.³⁷¹

At the same time these expensive land purchases push forward, failing 70-year-old

sewer lines in Yosemite National Park caused raw sewage spills nearly a decade after the deficiencies were reported in a 2006 conditional assessment. The State of California has threatened \$5,000 per day in fines if a sewage spill occurs again and \$10,000 per day if it reaches the river. NPS warns that "if another major spill occurs, a shutdown of wastewater flows from Yosemite Valley and Yosemite View Lodge facilities will impact visitation by closing facilities served by the trunk main resulting in impacts for visitors and a major loss of revenue to the concessioners, park partners and the park."³⁷²

Not only is the river in danger, so are some of the most famous trees in America. Deteriorated water pipes first installed in 1932 in the Grove area at Yosemite National Park leak 39,500 gallons of chlorinated water per day. The leaks impact the natural hydrological flow, which damages the health of the 500 mature sequoias that are about 2,000 years old. An expert on sequoias speculated the death of a giant sequoia "may be attributed to the over-abundance of water resulting from the water line leakage."³⁷³

In New Mexico a failing electrical system caused the loss of power for 21 days, threatens emergency access and could create wildfires at Bandelier National Monument. Even right in Congress's front yard, the water conveyance system on the National Mall is a "dilapidated and complex network of water lines" that was

“installed by the War Department of the early 1900s.”³⁷⁴

NPS’s purpose is to preserve and ensure the federal government is a good steward of America’s historical monuments and landscapes for generations to come. However, in conjunction with Congress, NPS failed to adequately manage and finance its entrusted assets. If the federal government continues the practice of funding expansion over preservation, the maintenance backlog will continue to grow and the enjoyment of

America’s most treasured landmarks will be unavailable to future generations.

RECOVERY

Congress must correct its priorities and allow the LWCF to also be used to take care of the deferred maintenance backlog that impacts the access and enjoyment of federal lands and cherished places that the federal government has a duty to protect. American families should not buy cars if they cannot afford gas, and the federal government should not buy more land if it cannot manage the land for the future.

For more information, please visit:

[CRS: Land and Water Conservation Fund: Overview, Funding History, and Issues](#)

[NPS: Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Justifications](#)

[National Parks Traveler: Plans To Restore Mariposa Grove Of Giant Sequoias In Yosemite National Park Open For Comments](#)