National Parks

Yellowstone National Park

By F. Patrick Holmes and Bryan Hurlbutt

Under Stress

Some eighty-eight years ago, congress authorized the creation of the National Park Service, stating in the preamble of the Organic Act of 1916 that the intent of the newly formed agency would be

> "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." [1]

More than fifty years later, Edward Abbey would declare this mission a "contradictory mandate." After all, the need to "provide for the enjoyment" of the people with access roads and facilities clearly competes with the dissenting need to leave the park resources "unimpaired" for future generations, if the term unimpaired is interpreted in the strictest sense of the word.

What Ed Abbey didn't foresee when he yanked those road survey stakes from the high Utah desert, and what his eventual musings in *Desert Solitaire* failed to conceive, was the ultimate reconciliation of these two seemingly polar mandates of the National Park Service nearly a century after they were originally written.

Today, the real irony sets in when we discuss an estimated $4.6 billion backlog of maintenance needs at our parks - accruing costs from years of use and over-use of the facilities that the service provides and administers for our enjoyment.

Since Abbey's well-known critique of the service, the focal point of the debate for many park enthusiasts has profoundly shifted. Today, conservation groups are not trying to prevent the paving of our parks, but rather, they are trying to maintain park facilities so that repair efforts keep pace with the increasing levels of demand placed on park roads, buildings, and trails by ever increasing visitation levels.

The fury of political discourse over park service management, with charges and counter-charges, has since enveloped the specific issue of the maintenance backlog, hindering the public's ability to understand what is happening to our most cherished natural, cultural, and historical assets: our national parks.

Should we believe politicians and bureaucrats who control budgets and staffing for the national park system? Should we heed the "other voices' " claims of doom and gloom scenarios for the same National Park Service and its individual park units? Indeed, what is the proper role for public information and participation in setting levels of funding and staff for the "crown jewels" of the nation? For citizens of the Rockies, the continued investment in these areas that form our backyard, our memories, and for many of us, our economic lifeblood, is of salient concern.

In an attempt to sort out the highly charged issue of the "maintenance backlog," the State of the Rockies Project filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the National Park Service in the fall of 2004. The requested data provides site-specific information about a broad range of facility assets in our parks, their replacement value, levels of deferred maintenance that remain to be addressed, and the Bush administration's schedule for reducing this backlog over the next five years. This newly released information provides a more comprehensive park-by-park understanding of the financial resources it will take to keep our parks healthy and whole. When this important financial requirement, necessary to "heal" parks and adequately equip them to serve their legal mandate, is combined with other data on staffing, visitation, funding, and proposed rehabilitation and repair projects, a comprehensive picture begins to emerge on the actual status of our national parks.

Political Disputes:

In October 2000, President Bush declared, "I will ensure that the federal government meets its responsibilities by devoting $5 billion to eliminate the backlog in maintenance and improvements at our national parks." [2] Estimates of the magnitude of the reported backlog have ranged from $4.08-$6.8 billion.[3] By September 12, 2004, President Bush said he has "devoted $3.9 billion to maintenance projects, putting the park service on track to eliminate the maintenance backlog." [4] Repeated claims by President Bush, Interior Secretary Gale Norton, and Park Service Director Fran Mainella that the administration is funding the national parks with "more funds per employee, per acre, and per visitor than any time in the history of the National Park Service" have become the focal point of speeches and interviews, and have been trumpeted as the principal success of the Bush administration's environmental record.[5] Lynn Scarlett, assistant secretary for policy, management and budget, remarked, "Our bottom- line message is that at no time have the parks got [sic] the attention they've got in the last four years," a sentiment that has been echoed by Secretary Norton who has said, "Never before have our parks received so much care." [6]

These claims have been met with particularly vocal responses from several special-interest groups, and subsequently, members of Congress.[7] Assertions that "creative accounting" techniques have enabled the administration to stake claims to nearly $4 billion of funding towards the backlog have been led by the nonprofit advocacy group The National Parks Conservation Association, which says the park service has spent only $662 million in new money to reduce a backlog of maintenance needs.[8] The group says the rest of the money is going to routine repairs that are regularly funded in NPS appropriations. An editorial in the *New York Times* provides a similar critique:

> "With the peak season for park visits almost upon us, this page has begun reviewing the troubled park system, … Mr. Bush, who made such a big deal of the parks during his presidential campaign, has not come close to delivering on his promise to clean up the maintenance backlog. But this has been a bipartisan failure not only by indifferent presidents, but also a long line of irresponsible Congresses…The money we spend on the parks, about $2.4 billion a year, is one-tenth of 1 percent of the total federal budget of $2.4 trillion, not much more than a rounding error. Surely a nation as wealthy as this one can do better. These are our jewels, deserving of far more jealous safekeeping than we are giving them now." [9]

Amid the increasing number of claims that the administration's "rosy" outlook of our national parks lacks credibility, Secretary Norton has responded, questioning the original $4.9 billion estimate developed during the 2000 presidential campaign.[10] In an interview she remarked, "It turns out that wasn't a useful guide. All of that was guesstimate. Nobody went out there and did what a real property manager does, which is to physically assess the facilities and document it." [11]

Current Director of the NPS Fran Mainella

To apply data to a reduction in "guesstimates," the staff of the park service have worked diligently over a number of years to implement a sophisticated accounting system for physical assets, their current replacement value, deferred maintenance, and a systematic five-year strategy for addressing the measured maintenance backlog.

Trends in Visitation, Full-time Employees, Acreage, and Appropriations

Before analyzing data on the maintenance backlog, we must first explore trends in appropriations. This information charts the basic life-blood of park units, annual levels of funding for staffing, operations, and maintenance. To the credit of the Bush administration, when we look specifically at congressionally appropriated funding in constant 1994 dollars, its claim of increased funding holds up. System-wide, the national parks are receiving more funding per visitor, per acre, and per employee than they have before (*See* **Table 1**). Upon further analyzing 1994 through 2005 NPS actual appropriations and projected trends and breaking these statistics down by region, however, this claim is not as meaningful as it seems.

First of all, claims of "ever more" are nothing new. Funding per visitor, per acre, and per employee have been growing above the previous year's levels almost every single year from 1994-2005, and in many instances this growth has been slower over the past few years. Though we applaud the continuation of this trend, it cannot be flaunted as a major accomplishment.

From 1994-2001, average system-wide funding grew by over $18 million annually, but since 2001, such funding has grown less than $6 million annually. Had funding increases remained the same since 2001, total NPS appropriations would be $828 million in 2005, over 6% more than the $778 million total appropriation projected for 2005. The eight-state Rockies Region, formerly accustomed to an increase of $3.8 million in annual appropriations from 1994 to 2001, has only received a $670,000 annual increase since 2001 (*See* **Table 2**).

Furthermore, certain NPS regions are receiving more funds at the expense of other regions – mostly in the West – many of which are not being funded at record levels. The National Capitol NPS Region accounts for the most significant regional share of the increased funding per visitor since 2001, likely as funding directed toward counter-terrorism efforts. For the Rockies parks, appropriations per visit, per acre, and per employee have actually gone down in 2003 from their highs over the previous ten years.

Rehabilitating the Many Glacier Hotel at Glacier National Park

(photos courtesy of Glacier National Park)

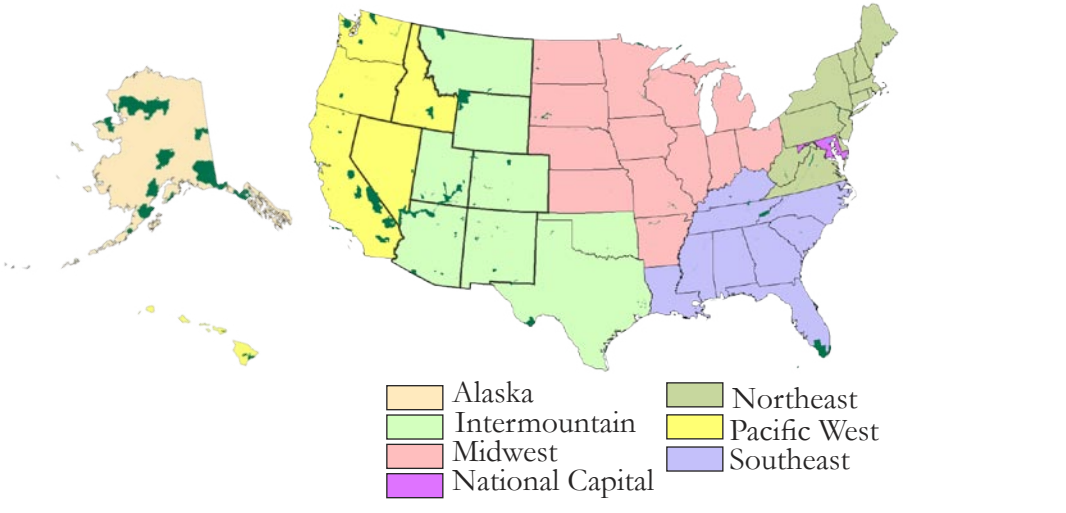
Table 1.
Appropriations Summary for all National Parks in the U.S.

	FY 1994	FY 1995	FY 1996	FY 1997	FY 1998	FY 1999	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	Forecast FY 2004	Forecast FY 2005
Constant $1994 Dollar Appropriations per Visit	$0.24	$0.24	$0.25	$0.25	$0.25	$0.26	$0.26	$0.27	$0.28	$0.30	$0.30	$0.31
Constant $1994 Dollar Appropriations per Acre	$0.77	$0.77	$0.76	$0.79	$0.83	$0.83	$0.85	$0.89	$0.90	$0.90	$0.90	$0.92
Constant $1994 Appropriations/FTE (thousands $)	$43,628	$44,965	$42,651	$45,287	$45,689	$45,844	$45,758	$46,808	$47,438	$47,744	-	-

Table 2.
Appropriations Summary for National Park Regions and the Eight-State Rocky Mountain Region

	FY '05 Appropriations Request ($1994)	FY 'O5 Appropriations per Visitor FY 2005 ($1994)	FY '05 Appropriations per Acre FY 2005 ($1994)	Appropriations per Full-Time Employee FY 2003 ($1994)	Average Annual growth in Funding per Acre FY 1994 - FY 2001	Average Annual Growth in Funding per Acre FY 2001- FY 2005	Average Annual Growth in Funding per Visitor FY 1994-2001	Average Annual Growth in Funding per Visitor FY 2001-2005
All Parks	$777,952,861	$0.31	$0.92	$47,743.58	2.0%	0.8%	1.6%	3.0%
NPS Regions								
Alaska	3.6%	$1.28	$0.05	$88,678.42	4.6%	1.1%	1.2%	-0.2%
Intermountain	20.7%	$0.44	$1.62	$40,593.71	2.9%	1.0%	4.6%	3.9%
Midwest	10.2%	$0.38	$4.54	$46,929.90	5.1%	0.5%	5.2%	0.5%
National Capital	9.9%	$0.29	$98.76	$55,018.71	2.2%	0.7%	-6.1%	8.7%
Northeast	20.7%	$0.33	$10.36	$54,591.24	2.3%	1.0%	1.3%	4.6%
Pacific West	20.2%	$0.30	$1.20	$43,137.12	-3.9%	0.5%	1.6%	2.0%
Southeast	14.7%	$0.17	$2.98	$49,287.77	3.9%	0.7%	2.6%	0.7%
The Rocky Mountains	19.5%	$0.39	$1.36	$40,234.59	1.9%	0.5%	4.5%	3.4%

Figure 1.
National Park Service Regions as Compared to the Rocky Mountain Region



The Maintenance Backlog

The Park Service's new Facility Management Software System (FMSS) has enabled the service to systematically inventory physical facility assets and apply industry standards for preventative maintenance, cyclical maintenance, replacement, and priority of improvement. Cost-effective decisions that utilize an asset priority index are in place at every park unit, enabling park planners to efficiently address current and future maintenance needs. For the first time ever, when the park service considers the decision to build a new visitor center or other facility, they are considering the full costs of operating and maintaining that facility in perpetuity.

Estimates at each park of the total replacement value and deferred maintenance cost of seven asset categories have been conducted. These assets are:

-buildings
-campgrounds
-housing
-trails
-unpaved roads
-waste-water systems
-water systems.

Work orders are then incorporated into the Park Rehabilitation and Repair Program provided they meet certain requirements as to their priority. This program provides a five-year look at proposed projects aimed at alleviating the backlog.[12]

Difficulty in stating the total amount of deferred maintenance costs that currently exist within the park system arises from individual park considerations about whether or not to repair or replace assets and the priority in which these replacements or repairs are conducted. Also, estimates of the total deferred maintenance are based solely on the seven asset categories measured, and thus do not include backlog costs for other assets like protection of archaeological sites and natural resource projects. Because of this, the figures provided by NPS's FMSS can be considered conservative estimates of the actual maintenance backlog because, in general:

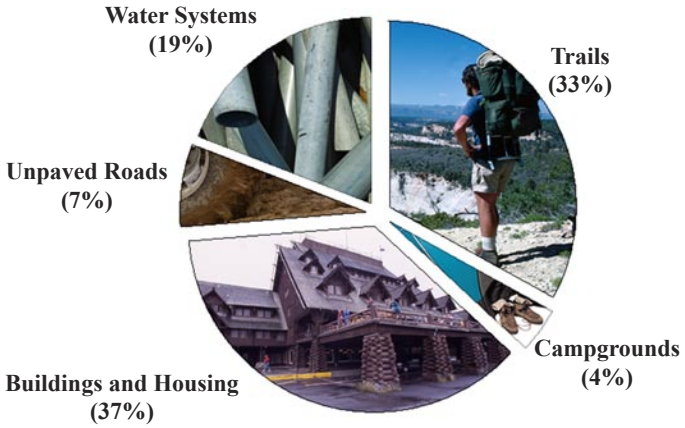
1. replacement costs far exceed repair costs,
2. including more assets in the analysis will increase the known backlog,
3. foregone funding to repair or replace assets causes deferred costs to accrue, and
4. variable operating deficits contribute to increased backlog.

The current amount of known maintenance backlog for all national parks in the U.S., based upon the estimates of the asset categories included in the facilities system, is about $2.14 billion for the units participating in the analysis. Three separate programs are generally used to fund backlogged maintenance needs, the repair and rehabilitation program, line-item constructions approved separately through the congressional budget, and funds from the fee-demonstration program. Additionally, funding from the proposed reauthorized Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century would address paved road maintenance needs, an asset category not included in the current FMSS analysis, and thus ignored for the purpose of our analysis.

Table 3.
Remaining Deferred Maintenance by Category for the Rocky Mountains

Asset Type	Current Replacement Value	Total Deferred Maintenance	Percent of Assets That are Deteriorated (Deferred Maintenance/Current Replacement Value)	Planned Funding from Repair, Rehabilitation and Construction Projects through FY 2009	% of Deferred Maintenance Funded through FY 2009	Remaining DM through FY 2009
Buildings & Housing	$3,381,684,096	$136,451,856	4%	$57,220,218	42%	$79,231,638
Campgrounds	$107,546,373	$16,374,303	15%	$2,039,382	12%	$14,334,921
Trails	$296,246,293	$152,244,315	51%	$11,690,588	8%	$140,553,727
Unpaved Roads	$251,369,355	$29,450,531	12%	$4,647,239	16%	$24,803,293
Water Systems	$1,528,286,189	$79,183,570	5%	$36,062,351	46%	$43,121,219
Total	$5,565,132,306	$413,704,576	7%	$111,659,778	27%	$302,044,798

Figure 1.
Existing Deferred Maintenance by Category for the Rocky Mountains as of October 2004



Grading the Parks in the Rockies

Through careful inventory of proposed repair and rehabilitation, as well as line-item construction projects through fiscal year 2009, the State of the Rockies Project grouped proposed funding for each park unit in the Rocky Mountains into five major asset categories: Buildings and Housing, Campgrounds, Trails, Unpaved Roads, and Waste and Water Systems. Proposed projects that did not meet the assets measured were not included in the analysis. For each asset category in each park, the Rockies Project then compared the proposed funding to the level of deferred maintenance. Because it is often more cost effective to replace assets rather than repair them, the proposed funding level often exceeds the level of deferred maintenance for that category. Still, this "extra" funding to completely replace a visitor center, for example, that more than covers the Buildings and Housing deferred maintenance level shown, does not eliminate deficiencies in the other asset categories. As a result, it is not possible to measure yearly the level of deferred maintenance not funded, but it is possible to calculate the remaining level of deferred maintenance not met by appropriations through 2009. This is possible if we assume that funding levels that meet or exceed the level of deferred maintenance in an asset category correct all the deficiencies for that category.

Table 3 depicts the level of remaining maintenance needs, and the percent funded for each category for the Rocky Mountains. Most of the deficiencies in trails, campgrounds, and unpaved roads will likely remain, even after five more years of funding. Less than half of the deferred maintenance is planned to be eliminated in the Rockies by 2009 in the categories of Buildings and Housing, and Water and Waste Water Systems.

Table 4 grades all of the National Parks in the Rockies. Three different scenarios are presented for the likely percent of the maintenance backlog that will remain after 2009. These scenarios are based upon different possible amounts of funding from the fee-demonstration program that is diverted towards maintenance needs, in addition to the repair and rehabilitation and line item construction funds coming from annual appropriations. Under scenario 1, no fee-demonstration revenue is added to each park's funding for deferred maintenance. Under scenario 2, all fee-demo money would go to fixing the maintenance backlog. Under scenario 3, 55%, or the national average of fee demonstration money put toward the maintenance backlog, is included in the funding.

Finally, grades for each park unit in the Rockies have been assigned based upon a composite score of two indicators: 1) the percent of the deferred maintenance remaining after 2009 if the national average of fee-demo funds are devoted to the planned funding of deferred maintenance, and 2) the remaining deferred costs as a percent of the current replacement value of all park assets (scenario 3). The first measure evaluates how much of the park's maintenance backlog will be addressed; the second measure evaluates how substantial the remaining maintenance backlog is for that park. Parks that will likely have all of their maintenance backlog addressed by 2009 tied with the same grade of A- to B-. (Note: For more information on how composite scores and grades are calculated please *see the Methods section*.)

Table 4.
Grading the National Parks in the Rockies

Park	Current Replacement Value (CRV) of Inventoried Physical Assets $	Measured Deferred Maintenance $	Deferred Maintenance Remaining in 2009 after…							Grade for Maintenance Addressed
			Planned Projects and Line Item Construction (scenario 1)		Planned Projects, Line Item Construction, and 100% of Projected Fee Demo Revenues (scenario 2)		Planned Projects, Line Item Construction, and 55% (or the National Average Going Toward Deferred Maintenance) of Projected Fee Demo Revenues (scenario 3)			
			$	%	$	%	$	%	% of Asset CRV	
Sand Creek Massacre NHS	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	A
Rainbow Bridge NM	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	A
Gila Cliff Dwellings NM	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	A
Minidoka Internment Camp NM	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	A
Yucca House NM	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	A
El Malpais NM	8,861,763	289,184	289,184	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Lake Mead NRA	124,666,652	29,605,872	7,321,677	25%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Yellowstone NP	1,055,446,611	16,394,488	6,838,196	42%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Grand Canyon NP	704,681,314	34,941,302	32,635,954	93%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
City of Rocks NRes	2,358,736	147,329	147,329	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Petrified Forest NP	48,337,539	5,377,613	1,272,602	24%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Chaco Culture NHP	15,337,865	348,765	1,607	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Chiricahua NM (includes Fort Bowie)	2,134,585,654	7,076,319	815,705	12%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Casa Grande Ruins NM (includes Hohokam Pima)	9,097,353	285,624	285,624	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Big Hole NB	6,416,241	375,645	190,883	51%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Devils Tower NM	7,088,872	2,087,046	1,242,571	60%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Tonto NM	5,001,071	71,255	71,255	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Montezuma Castle NM (includes Tuzigoot)	9,824,547	1,060,080	1,060,080	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Nez Perce NHP	8,416,794	40,375	31,875	79%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS	24,026,800	207,635	27,835	13%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Little Bighorn Bttfld NM	9,777,547	327,429	327,429	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Tumacacori NM	4,609,394	73,206	24,501	33%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Navajo NM	8,566,453	373,061	348,061	93%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Timpanogos Cave NM	7,817,081	464,094	439,454	95%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Aztec Ruins NM	3,365,346	212,896	4,698	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Pipe Spring NM	13,256,608	193,260	193,260	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0%	A- to B-
Capulin Volcano NM	7,213,630	626,708	235,696	38%	0	0%	6,090	1%	0%	C+
Bandelier NM	25,222,109	2,407,557	1,826,320	76%	0	0%	191,180	8%	1%	C+
Fort Laramie NHS	15,742,502	1,487,580	344,796	23%	70,106	5%	193,716	13%	1%	C+
Flagstaff Area National Parks	24,259,748	8,972,668	2,751,906	31%	0	0%	1,046,796	12%	4%	C+
Glacier NP	198,378,496	27,648,791	9,527,540	34%	329,125	1%	4,468,412	16%	2%	C+
Zion NP	78,173,378	5,899,414	5,483,697	93%	0	0%	1,155,444	20%	1%	C+
Hovenweep NM	4,334,971	224,546	90,882	40%	16,686	7%	50,074	22%	1%	C+
Salinas Pueblo Missions NM	3,132,936	544,095	544,095	100%	0	0%	172,154	32%	6%	C

"Popularity draining park's resources: RMNP study cites funding constraints"
Denver Post 8/8/2002

"Nurture at odds with nature in Rocky Mt. National Park"
Denver Post 2/23/2003

2002

2003

"Parks face budget cuts, repair crisis"
The Gazette 5/25/2003



Park	Current Replacement Value (CRV) of Inventoried Physical Assets $	Measured Deferred Maintenance $	Deferred Maintenance Remaining in 2009 after…						Grade for Maintenance Addressed
			Planned Projects and Line Item Construction (scenario 1)		Planned Projects, Line Item Construction, and 100% of Projected Fee Demo Revenues (scenario 2)		Planned Projects, Line Item Construction, and 55% (or the National Average Going Toward Deferred Maintenance) of Projected Fee Demo Revenues (scenario 3)		
			$	%	$	%	$	%	% of Asset CRV
Pecos NHP	11,987,225	575,930	366,280	64%	107,820	19%	224,127	39%	2%	C
Hubbell Trading Post NHS	13,960,684	278,049	278,049	100%	16,939	6%	134,438	48%	1%	C
Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP	9,013,289	1,071,734	1,071,734	100%	18,494	2%	492,452	46%	5%	C
Great Sand Dunes NP&Pres	13,427,555	4,170,337	2,715,871	65%	942,106	23%	1,740,300	42%	13%	C
Canyonlands NP	30,538,281	1,250,660	733,886	59%	0	0%	744,014	59%	2%	C-
Craters of the Moon NM	11,321,759	3,599,969	3,242,345	90%	570,639	16%	1,772,906	49%	16%	C-
Rocky Mountain NP	131,231,941	35,738,928	30,807,733	86%	9,962,788	28%	19,343,013	54%	15%	C-
Grand Teton NP	155,077,975	54,214,723	43,050,620	79%	16,742,535	31%	28,581,173	53%	18%	C-
Bighorn Canyon NRA	23,760,529	4,903,605	3,216,313	66%	2,729,883	56%	2,948,776	60%	12%	C-
Colorado NM	20,811,698	4,299,967	3,074,487	72%	2,295,327	53%	2,645,949	62%	13%	D+
Bryce Canyon NP	48,560,996	10,099,364	7,796,190	77%	5,288,859	52%	6,417,158	64%	13%	D+
Curecanti NRA	27,822,086	3,795,165	3,174,991	84%	2,365,855	62%	2,729,966	72%	10%	D+
Arches NP	12,955,561	2,713,102	2,067,902	76%	1,615,116	60%	1,818,870	67%	14%	D+
Fort Union NM	6,458,641	618,744	618,744	100%	348,429	56%	470,070	76%	7%	D+
Natural Bridges NM	8,028,765	409,356	340,982	83%	369,626	90%	356,736	87%	4%	D
Canyon de Chelly NM	12,829,295	631,701	631,701	100%	490,251	78%	553,903	88%	4%	D
Coronado NMem	10,403,368	1,248,591	1,176,591	94%	916,956	73%	1,033,791	83%	10%	D
Organ Pipe Cactus NM	26,324,200	6,280,808	5,913,219	94%	3,933,113	63%	4,824,160	77%	18%	D
Dinosaur NM	41,696,903	22,219,776	14,519,512	65%	13,891,872	63%	14,174,310	64%	34%	D
Great Basin NP	30,501,506	6,625,425	6,453,067	97%	4,776,877	72%	5,531,162	83%	18%	D-
Carlsbad Caverns NP	22,039,079	6,846,860	6,846,860	100%	4,130,925	60%	5,353,095	78%	24%	D-
Bent's Old Fort NHS	21,537,313	2,335,786	2,335,786	100%	2,153,266	92%	2,235,400	96%	10%	D-
Capitol Reef NP	19,401,649	4,275,580	4,174,219	98%	3,374,253	79%	3,734,238	87%	19%	D-
Cedar Breaks NM	4,293,714	990,728	990,728	100%	778,498	79%	874,001	88%	20%	D-
Florissant Fossil Beds NM	3,000,716	1,023,514	989,018	97%	721,463	70%	841,862	82%	28%	F
Mesa Verde NP	111,341,099	30,624,525	29,039,623	95%	25,475,688	83%	27,079,458	88%	24%	F
Golden Spike NHS	9,610,255	2,449,885	2,334,124	95%	2,132,698	87%	2,223,340	91%	23%	F
El Morro NM	5,344,598	2,125,075	1,991,096	94%	1,743,520	82%	1,854,929	87%	35%	F
Hagerman Fossil Beds NM	1,717,690	513,137	513,137	100%	487,622	95%	499,103	97%	29%	F
Petroglyph NM	2,677,530	1,128,382	1,128,382	100%	1,030,687	91%	1,074,649	95%	40%	F
JD Rockefeller, Jr., Mem Pkwy	6,939,068	2,641,104	2,641,104	100%	2,641,104	100%	2,641,104	100%	38%	F
Fossil Butte NM	5,996,131	3,069,323	3,069,323	100%	2,901,748	95%	2,977,156	97%	50%	F
Saguaro NP	21,919,194	56,468,701	55,904,537	99%	53,277,647	94%	54,459,747	96%	248%	F

"Parks deserve attention, funds"
Denver Post 2/20/2005

"Bush fulfilling pledge to fix national parks, report says: Critics say bad air, poor protection are real legacy"
The Gazette 7/3/2003

"Utah park official releases memo urging 'spin' on cuts"
Salt Lake Tribune 3/18/2004 *

"National park chiefs ordered to stay rosy"
Denver Post 5/24/2004

"Park Service police chief fired for talking about funding with press"
High Country News 8/19/2004

2004

"Reports cite budget cuts, reduced services in national parks"
USA Today 3/17/2004 *

"Rescuing the National Parks"
New York Times 5/16/2004

2005

"Administration falls far short of national park needs, report says"
Rocky Mountain News 11/10/2004

Note: many headlines come from the news service Headwaters News, for more information visit www.headwaters.org.

A few other changes in how the National Park Service is conducting business are having profound effects, especially here in the Rocky Mountains. Here's a brief look at these changes.

National Security

It's no secret that a large portion of the park-base funding increases that have occurred during this administration have gone to counter-terrorism efforts. Most of these funds have gone to places like the National Capitol region parks in Washington D.C. and to places like Independence Hall and the Statue of Liberty, national assets we often forget about here in the Rockies. Still, other funds are coming into the Rockies region, most notably to border parks like Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument along the Mexican border and Glacier National Park along the Canadian border for increased border patrol and protection.

While we all agree that protecting our national heritage from terrorist attacks is an important action deserving adequate funding, we ought to think carefully about whether this funding should come from within the Park Service where it inevitably competes dollar for dollar with other park needs, like maintenance, resource protection, and visitor services. Consider that Clinton-era park base increases for environmental monitoring, restoration, and preservation have dropped from about 33% of all increased funds to roughly 4% of park-base increases in recent years, while counter-terrorism park-base increases topped out at 44% percent of all park-based increases during FY 2003. (*Source: NPS Budget Justifications*)

Cultural Resources

As mentioned earlier, the Park Service's current estimate of deferred maintenance levels does not take into account cultural resources. Unlike the physical facilities like waste-water systems that have industry standards for determining their current replacement value and lifecycle, cultural resources have no clearly defined means for estimating the costs to fix or replace them. Ask any archaeologist the value of an intact and treasured one-of-a-kind glimpse into early American settlement, and their response will be simply: priceless. Likewise, each site has a compelling urgency for preservation and restoration that hardly compares to a leaky visitor center roof.

The Park Service has picked the "low-hanging fruit" in attempting to quantify and fix physical facility deferred maintenance. The Service is currently exploring ways to marry information about inventoried archaeological resources into a cost-effective rehabilitation plan, but in the mean time, cultural resources may be left waiting in the wing.

Consider these findings:

- In FY 2004 the cultural resources cyclical maintenance program was eliminated and joined with the facilities cyclical program, leaving cultural resource preservation largely in the hands of facilities personnel rather than with trained preservationists. $10.4 million earmarked for cultural resource cyclical maintenance can now be diverted to other priority maintenance needs.
- The goal to increase the number of archaeological sites inventoried by 22% since FY 1999 was not met, largely because sites had been destroyed during that time period. (*Source: NPS Budget Justifications*)

Conclusions

In reality, the State of the Rockies Project finds the outlook for our national parks neither particularly rosy nor hopelessly bleak. The initial efforts to adequately manage the deferred maintenance problems have made significant headway in enabling the park service to better understand and respond to ongoing impairment of their human-built assets. However, only 27% of the maintenance backlog here in the Rockies will be alleviated through FY 2009. The government, in our view, can and must provide more funding just to solve the current measured maintenance problems. Further, the NPS should better plan for, and congress should more adequately fund the parks in advance of increasing visitation levels. This will help prevent such large maintenance costs from accruing in the future. Moreover, this should be done nationwide, without preference to certain regions and without funding anti-terrorism by diverting funds from other essential park needs. There are other challenges and changes that the new efforts have made evident. An important and necessary immediate step to improving the health of our National Parks is to begin inventorying and assessing cultural resource assets so that they may adequately compete for funding with physical assets.

Canyonlands National Park: Culture and Counter-terrorism

Canyonlands National Park (Maintenance Backlog grade: C-), renowned for its archaeological resources, has never conducted a full inventory to identify all of them. Three out of every five historic structures are said to be failing,[13] and the park's measured maintenance backlog is estimated at over $1.5 million, with only 59% likely being funded in the next five years. Still, the Park Service has proposed a $61,500 project for fiscal year 2006 under the heading of "Repair Headquarters Security/Gate System - Anti-Terrorism."[14] Look out remote Southern Utah – you could be the site of the next terrorist attack!