



FIELDREPORT

Midwest Region | Summer 2017

What Does the Repair Backlog Look Like?

It's difficult to imagine what a \$11 billion maintenance backlog looks like, so here is an example from one of the Midwest's most visited parks.



Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in northern Michigan is a 35-mile stretch of beaches, forests and legacy farmland on the shores of Lake Michigan. The park's most outstanding feature is the incredible steep sand dunes and bluffs formed by glaciers that once covered the upper Great Lakes.

But this iconic park needs \$20 million in repairs.

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Restore America's Parks

Last year marked the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service. That's a century of protecting America's most iconic and treasured places, places that represent our country's natural majesty, rich heritage and vibrant history.

As record-breaking crowds flock to the national parks, these special places face an incredible challenge: a \$11 billion repair backlog.

With our partners, NPCA recently launched the Restore America's Parks campaign to bring attention to this enormous backlog and to call on Congress to fund national parks. Repairs needed at national parks range from improving deteriorating roads, bridges and trails to renovating aging and outdated visitor centers. Years of insufficient funding by Congress means that necessary repairs to park infrastructure have gone untended and maintenance issues have grown with time. Just like your own home, the longer a repair is delayed, the harder and more expensive it becomes to fix.

We must make our parks safer and more accessible for visitors now and in the future by taking care of the repair

For every dollar invested by the federal government in the National Park Service, \$10 is returned to local communities.

backlog. And doing so just makes good business sense. For every dollar invested by the federal government in the National Park Service, \$10 is returned to local communities. Overall, national park visitors generated \$35 billion for the U.S. economy in 2016 while supporting hundreds of thousands of private-sector jobs.

Congress created the National Park Service a century ago to protect America's beloved natural, historical, and cultural sites, and to ensure that all Americans can enjoy these treasures. As the Park Service commences its second century, it's time for Congress to renew its commitment to our national parks by providing annual, dedicated funding for park infrastructure repairs. It's the only way we can protect the proud legacy of our national parks for the next hundred years and beyond.

Top: Alley Mill at Ozark National Scenic Riverways. This park has \$48M in maintenance backlog. ©Phil Wahlbrink | Alamy **Left:** South Manitou lighthouse: one of 368 buildings maintained by NPS. ©John McCormick | Shutterstock

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Design by kelleyalbertdesign.com



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How Not to Get Our Budgets Kicked

INVESTMENTS IN GREAT LAKES PAYS OFF

VIEWPOINT



By Cameron Davis

One of the most frequently-asked questions I got on Capitol Hill as President Obama's liaison to Congress on Great Lakes issues was, "How long until we won't have to fund Great Lakes restoration anymore?" Not surprisingly, members and staff alike wanted to know when taxpayers could stop "paying" for Great Lakes restoration and protection.

My answer was always one of the hardest answers I had to give because it wasn't popular: "Protecting the Great Lakes is an investment we'll always have to make. As long as we're trying to fix damage and as long as we want the Great Lakes to support us, we're going to have to support them." It was as if you could see the gulp from the staffer knowing he or she would have to report the answer back up the chain of command.

But it's true. If you want to stay healthy, exercise is your investment—an output of effort to get the same or greater return. Likewise, if you want your home to protect you, you have to invest in it. Let's face it. Unless you love paying for a new roof or exercising outside during our "cool" Midwestern winters, you get where our legislators are coming from.

Top Left: The Davis family vacation at Isle Royale. Submitted photo. **Top Right:** Isle Royale National Park ©Michael Thompson | Dreamstime

Earlier this year, though, the Trump administration zeroed out the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) budget, which for the past several years has invested \$300 million annually in projects around the lakes and at iconic parks like Indiana Dunes, Sleeping Bear Dunes, Isle Royale, and Pictured Rocks National Lakeshores to restore habitat, fight Asian carp, reduce toxic algae ... and the list goes on.

Fortunately, Congress recognized the importance of these investments. Led by the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, co-chaired by NPCA, along with the Great Lakes Commission, and hundreds of organizational, business, state, tribal and municipal voices, Congress restored the GLRI budget through September 30, 2017.

The fight is already ramping back up for the FY18 budget, which begins October 1. But the key to supporting Congress as it maintains healthy funding levels for healthy lakes and people is to keep Great Lakes protection a bipartisan priority and to communicate results from GLRI investments in cities, towns and districts around the region.

If we can keep doing that, we won't get our budgets kicked.

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Cam Davis is vice president at GEI Consultants in Chicago. From 2008 until 2016 he was President Obama's Great Lakes liaison to Congress at the EPA.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

What do you like about this newsletter? What other topics or features would you like to see? Please contact us with your feedback at midwest@npca.org.



A Park of Compromise

By Colin Deverell

On a cool April afternoon, park rangers at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore worked quickly to close three of the park's eight beaches after a dangerous amount of toxic chemicals spilled into a nearby Lake Michigan tributary. This alarming news has been a rally cry for protecting a park that is squeezed in among the smokestacks.

When you walk the wooded trails, make your way through the beautiful dune and swale landscape, or watch the thousands of migratory birds each fall and spring, you forget that this park sits in the middle of a highly industrialized setting. The recent spill of hexavalent chromium—the same substance as in the Erin Brockovich story—

from U.S. Steel's facility near the park has brought renewed focus to the fact that Indiana Dunes was created in the mid-1960s as a park of compromise between those who wanted to preserve the fragile ecology of the lakefront and those who wanted to expand industry and create a large port on Lake Michigan.

Protecting this park is a constant challenge that NPCA and our many partners take on every day. All of the park's industrial neighbors produce waste that is permitted, regulated and monitored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, an agency currently threatened with severe budget cuts. And with the current administration's goal of easing regulations rather than strengthening them to protect our national

parcs, park partners fear there will be few consequences after this recent incident.

The National Park Service performs water testing each week to ensure the safety of the beaches. Given the recent spill, they are increasing the range of elements tested.

Working with our partners, including the Sierra Club and Save the Dunes, NPCA is looking at all options to keep companies accountable for past spills and to prevent these incidents from happening in the future. This incident must provide a call to action for better protection of Indiana Dunes and its fragile ecosystem. Strong activism helped establish the park more than 50 years ago and that same advocacy is what's needed now to keep it protected for the future.

Above: Smokestacks in the distance remind visitors to Indiana Dunes that industry is always nearby. ©Bernadette22541 | Dreamstime

Below: A Barred Owl in Olympic National Park ©Jan Zoetekouw | Dreamstime



Head to the National Parks with NPCA!

NPCA sponsors more than 100 trips to the parks each year. These journeys range from Alaska to Acadia and feature small groups and customized programs. Here are just a few of the trips to our national parks this year.

Northern Michigan's National Lakeshores • September 10-14

Yellowstone and Grand Teton • September 17-22

Hiking Olympic National Park • September 24-29

Visit nps.org/trips for a complete list.

What Does the Repair Backlog Look Like?

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When the park was established in 1970, the Park Service became the owner of an old lighthouse and a former Coast Guard station. Today, it is responsible for maintaining 368 buildings, which account for nearly 40 percent of its repair backlog. The park needs another \$2 million to maintain campgrounds, picnic areas and the landscape itself.

Restoring the dune trails would cost nearly \$600,000, and repairing the dock so that visitors can safely get to North and South Manitou Islands is estimated at \$350,000. Safety updates to roads, scenic drives and access points to the park's inland lakes round out the deferred maintenance at this iconic park.*

*The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2017 fact sheet

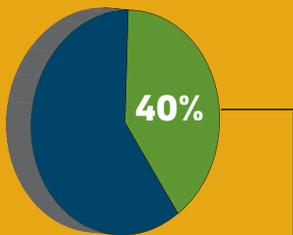
TAKE ACTION!



The answer to the \$11 billion repair backlog and the key to restoring America's parks rests in large part with you! You can help our national parks by contacting your representatives in Congress, submitting letters to the editor, or posting on social media to bring attention to this issue and urge Congress to better fund our national parks.

Tell your members of Congress to co-sponsor HR 2584 and S. 751, the National Park Service Legacy Act, which will significantly reduce the repair backlog. Here's how: npca.org/backlog

SLEEPING BEAR BACKLOG BY THE NUMBERS



NPS maintains 368 buildings (40% of its repair backlog at Sleeping Bear)

\$2 Million

to maintain campgrounds, picnic areas and landscape

\$600,000

to restore dune trails

\$350,000

to repair public dock

Unlocking a New Experience on the Mississippi

By Christine Goepfert

Two years ago when the Upper St. Anthony Falls lock closed to boat traffic, a new opportunity arose for visitors to the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area to reimagine their park. Just as NPCA was a leader in the campaign to close the lock, keeping invasive Asian carp from moving farther upstream, NPCA now leads efforts to envision the future for this historic landing point on the Mississippi in downtown Minneapolis.

The Upper Lock, owned and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is ideally situated at about the mid-point of the 72-mile stretch of river within the national park. It currently houses a very small and spartan visitor center that overlooks the only falls on the entire Mississippi River. And though the lock is a centerpiece of the Minneapolis riverfront, it is fenced, uninviting, and cut off from the many riverfront trails and area attractions.

NPCA convened more than 100 people over the last year to help think through creating a world-class visitor center right on the Mississippi River to take advantage of the



natural and historic resources at this park. Through this "Transforming the Lock" visioning process, we sketched out a future for the park that includes ways to better connect the lock to downtown Minneapolis, incorporate storytelling to bring the site's history to life and ensure the National Park Service plays the primary role in providing these unique experiences to visitors now and in the future.

We envision a future where visitors can feel the spray from the falls while learning about how engineers raised and lowered water levels to allow barges to migrate up and down the mighty river. NPCA will release the final vision later this summer, and we look forward to working with our many partners in Minneapolis to make this unique visitor experience a reality.

Above: Students from River's Edge Academy visit the lock. ©Eric Miller

A SOUND INVESTMENT

Great Lakes Restoration in the Parks

Since 2008, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) has pumped more than \$2 billion into the region to ensure beaches, harbors and drinking water supplies are safe from toxins and to restore coastal areas and waters for people

and wildlife. More than 150,000 acres of wetlands, including much land in the eight national parks of the Great Lakes, have been restored and protected.

At Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, the Park Service together with teams of volunteers have been restoring the Great Marsh. These vast wetlands that once extended the full length of the Indiana shoreline have been fragmented by development, which interrupts the flow of water and allows invasive species to crowd out native plants. The result of

this change in landscape is more flooding of roads, backyards and basements in nearby homes. As the marsh is restored, however, native plants and migratory birds are returning. This project and many others in Great Lakes national parks are possible only because of GLRI funding.

For this important program to continue, Congress must insist on adequate funding levels in federal budgets. Ensure that your member of Congress supports restoring our Great Lakes national parks.



THE GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE HAS:

Restored **150,000 acres** of wetlands, an area larger than the City of Chicago

Removed more than **700 million gallons** of waste from waterways

Cleared **3,800 miles** of river for fish and wildlife



Above: Volunteers have planted tens of thousands of native plants at Indiana Dunes Great Marsh. ©NPCA



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Unplugging for Advocacy

By Christine Goepfert

As a national park advocate, it's easy for me to bring passion to my work because I grew up going to parks like the Badlands and Mt. Rushmore. So when I needed to advocate for Isle Royale National Park, a place I'd never been, I strapped on my boots and prepared to experience for myself what this park was all about.

You can't just jump in your car and go to Isle Royale. It's an island in Lake Superior after all, so going there requires lots of planning, including securing passage on either a ferry or a seaplane. It's a place that makes you really think about what you truly need to survive.

Largely designated wilderness, this park is best experienced while hiking with a backpack full of only the necessities. This way you spend your days hoping to see a moose, occasionally seeing other humans and enjoying the quiet that comes with not having technology rule your everyday. You soon find the questions you ask yourself are not what deadlines you have or how many emails to read, but where to stop for the

I returned home with many new miles on my boots and a new passion to protect the wildlife of my now favorite national park.

night and what to boil for dinner.

My quest to connect closer to my work found me traveling a great distance from my home base. But after returning with many new miles on my boots, I'd developed a great passion to protect the wildlife of my now favorite national park.



Above: Chris at Windigo Visitor Center ©Darielle Dannen