



Great Smoky Mountains NATIONAL PARK

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the third most visited park in the nation, straddling the borders of the states of Tennessee and North Carolina, crossing the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and protecting a wonderland of natural resources.

The 522,427-acre park is home to black bears, white-tailed deer, woodchucks and salamanders; old-growth forests and spring wildflowers; and log cabins and gristmills. Visitors explore the once-prosperous Cataloochee Valley, surrounded by 6,000-foot rugged peaks; and Cades Cove, a broad, lush valley where Cherokee Indians once hunted. At Clingmans Dome in Tennessee, which rises to 6,643 feet, visitors to the observation tower enjoy spectacular 360-degree views of the Smokies and beyond—a hundred miles on a clear day. Through entrances in Gatlinburg or Townsend, Tennessee, and Cherokee, North Carolina, families, friends and solo travelers arrive in the Smokies and often stay for days—hiking, cycling, camping, picnicking, birding, or simply breathing in the crisp mountain air.

THE CHALLENGE: roads on a “run to failure” course at America’s most visited park

Many of the park’s nearly 13 million visitors come specifically for scenic driving and expect a pleasurable driving experience, which means a smooth and safe riding surface. Yet, some of the park’s roadways show extreme wear and tear along the edges and driving surfaces. Potholes, unstable shoulders and poor roadway drainage contribute to uneven surfaces and unsafe driving conditions for visitors and employees. The condition of some roads, bridges, parking areas and pullouts has deteriorated and is not currently safe and suitable for motorists, including those from local communities.



BY THE NUMBERS:



\$11.3 million
estimated investment from
the GAOA for repair projects



522,427
acres of park land



8,700 feet
maximum elevation



89 year-old
campground
comfort station



128 campgrounds
at the park

PHOTOS: Cover: ©Andrew S | Shutterstock
Back: ©NPS



These roads are heavily used for access to some of the park's most visited spots. Heintooga Ridge and Balsam Mountain Campground roads, for instance, were built in the 1930s and provide access to a picnic area, trout fishing, backcountry campsites, and hiking and horse trails. Lakeview Drive East offers views of Fontana Lake and provides access to three trailheads; it was last resurfaced in 1979, and cracks, potholes and eroding shoulders make it hazardous for driving. The asphalt on the deck of Noland Creek Bridge, placed in the 1980s, has deteriorated to an unsafe condition. Not implementing this work leaves these transportation assets on a "run to failure" course that will ultimately result in more expensive project investments in the future.

THE PROJECT

Through a \$25.4 million investment, the Great American Outdoors Act will rehabilitate park roads and road structures that are facing severe deterioration. The project includes roadway patching, crack sealing and the application of a thin lift asphalt pavement preservation overlay on both the Balsam Mountain Campground Road and the Heintooga Ridge Road. It also includes the complete reconstruction of the 6.5-mile-long Lakeview Drive, replacement of all guardrail, constructing of ADA accessible parking spaces, replacement of signs, drainage repair and other work.

The Noland Creek Bridge will have its deck replaced and its bearings cleaned and painted. Work will also repair erosion at abutments, replace expansion joints and repoint stone masonry wingwalls. A portion of Newfound Gap Road will also be rehabilitated, including repairing and rehabilitating guard walls, removing and resetting stone curb and replacing and repairing drainage structures. Drainage will be improved by stabilizing and reestablishing roadside turf ditches and by overlaying and reconstructing asphalt and stone paved ditches. Additional work includes stabilizing and reseeding road shoulders, installing pavement markings and replacing road signs.

THE IMPACT

With annual visitation one of the highest in the system, Great Smoky Mountains host many visitors who are navigating unfamiliar territory. Well-marked, safe, stable and smooth roads, shoulders and bridges make it easier to access popular destinations, reduce accidents and prevent damage to roadside vegetation. While the projects address significant backlogged maintenance, they also substantially reduce corrective maintenance by eliminating potholes, cracks and dips from settling pavement. Completing the work now will stop further degradation of the infrastructure and reduce the need for more expensive road rehabilitation

Completing the work now will stop further degradation of the infrastructure and reduce the need for more expensive road rehabilitation and bridge rehabilitation or replacement in the future.

and bridge rehabilitation or replacement in the future. The facilities and systems addressed should not require major rehabilitation or replacement for the next 25-40 years.



The Great American Outdoors Act is successfully repairing infrastructure at hundreds of parks across the country. However, with a \$22 billion backlog, much more is needed. We urge Congress to extend the Legacy Restoration Fund for an additional five years.

Preserving Our Past.



NPCA.ORG

Protecting Our Future.