

# Congress grapples with National Park Service maintenance costs

By Michael  
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The backlog at Yosemite National Park ranges from upgrading the El Portal sewer lines and replacing the Crane Flat Campground's septic leach field, to rehabilitating the famed [Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoia trees](#).

BRIAN VAN DER BRUG — TNS

WASHINGTON — Yosemite National Park needs a lot of work, [National Park Service Director Jonathan B. Jarvis](#) warned lawmakers Tuesday.

What's needed is not glamorous, and not unique to one park. The deferred maintenance backlog at all national parks is now pegged at \$11.5 billion, a burden looming even as the National Park Service solicits corporate and congressional support for its 2016 centennial celebration.

"No one is going to give money to fix the wastewater plant at Yosemite," Jarvis told a House subcommittee. "That's a federal responsibility."

How to meet it is a question that can divide Democrats and Republicans.

The Obama administration's \$3 billion budget proposal for the park service includes hundreds of millions of dollars for deferred maintenance projects.

The specific Yosemite backlog, [spelled out in park service documents](#), is an often gritty wish list that ranges from upgrading the El Portal sewer lines and replacing the Crane Flat Campground's septic leach field, to rehabilitating the famed [Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoia trees](#).

At Sequoia National Park to the south, the maintenance backlog includes replacing the Lodgepole Campground's

water treatment facility, while Lassen Volcanic National Park to the north could use a new headquarters utility system.

For these projects and others like them, the administration's budget proposal seeks a new Second Century Infrastructure Investment campaign of \$300 million annually for three years, in addition to other increases for deferred maintenance work.

"I recognize this is a significant ask in today's budget climate," Jarvis acknowledged. "The maintenance backlogs are overwhelming."

Pressed by Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif., chairman of the [House Subcommittee on Federal Lands](#), to make what he called a "Sophie's choice," Jarvis allowed that funding the deferred maintenance projects would take priority over the administration's simultaneous request to buy more park land.

The concession all-but foreshadowed how the Republican-controlled Congress is likely to rewrite the [administration's budget proposal](#) in the Fiscal 2016 appropriations process now getting underway: the money may be less, and the priorities are sure to differ.

"Shouldn't we be taking care of the property we already have instead of acquiring additional property?" McClintock asked.

Echoing the point, Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R-Calif., whose sprawling Sacramento Valley district includes the 106,372-acre Lassen park, voiced his own "grave concerns" about the park service's request for funds to buy more land.

The park service has proposed buying land for parks in Colorado and Hawaii, among other states, while the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management has proposed buying land for the likes of the Carrizo Plains National Monument in California's San Luis Obispo County.

Tellingly, a memo prepared by the Republican staff of the federal lands committee characterized the park service's budget proposal as "runaway federal spending."

The National Park Service budget hearing Tuesday morning was the subcommittee's first since McClintock took over the chairmanship earlier this year, and it gave the conservative lawmaker and his GOP colleagues an opportunity to put their own priorities on the table.

McClintock, whose district includes Yosemite, pushed for public access and recreational use, citing bicycling, horseback riding and ice skating as examples.

"At Yosemite, there is a continuing effort to try to reduce or remove those activities," McClintock said, adding that this would "send a wrong message to the public."

Last year, following extensive public debate, the National Park Service released a [revised Merced River management plan](#) to restore some of Yosemite Valley's natural habitat while still retaining popular recreation activities.

In further preparation for the park service's 100th anniversary celebration next year, the administration is asking for \$40 million for a "Centennial Challenge" designed to match corporate and private contributions.

Next week, starting March 25, [a three-day conference](#) at the University of California, Berkeley, will also bring together park service officials, scholars and advocates for an early anniversary celebration.

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