Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to share the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s perspectives on two pieces of legislation (H.R. 5210 and H.R. 2584) that address the National Park Service’s maintenance backlog. My name is Tom Cassidy and I am the Vice President of Government Relations and Policy.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a privately-funded charitable, educational and nonprofit organization chartered by Congress in 1949 in order to “facilitate public participation in historic preservation” and to further the purposes of federal historic preservation laws.¹ The intent of Congress was for the National Trust “to mobilize and coordinate public interest, participation and resources in the preservation and interpretation of sites and buildings.”² With headquarters in Washington, D.C., nine field offices, 27 historic sites, more than one million members and supporters and a national network of partners in states, territories, and the District of Columbia, the National Trust works to save America’s historic places and advocates for historic preservation as a fundamental value in programs and policies at all levels of government.

We appreciate the Committee scheduling this hearing to discuss two legislative proposals to address the National Park Service’s maintenance backlog and thereby preserve the ability for Americans and visitors to enjoy and experience iconic historic resources and natural wonders on federal lands. This testimony supplements our testimony previously submitted testimony to the Natural Resources Committee on March 6, 2018.

The Need

The National Park System is one of our nation’s best ideas – a network of 417 parks and sites that protect spectacular historic, cultural, and natural resources and tell the stories of remarkable people and events in our country’s history. The National Park Service (NPS) is responsible for maintaining a system comprised of more than 84 million acres across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and many U.S. territories.

The National Park System tells an incredible story at sites as diverse as Gettysburg National Military Park, the Statue of Liberty, Shenandoah National Park, the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park, and Native American cultural sites like those at Chaco Culture National Historical Park and Mesa Verde National Park. National parks, and the historic and cultural sites they protect, are some of our nation’s most popular attractions and were visited by

¹ 54 U.S.C. §§ 312102(a), 320101.
over 330 million people last year. In 2015 alone, these millions of visits generated visitor spending of an estimated $16.9 billion in nearby communities – spending that supported 295,300 jobs and provided a $32 billion boost to the national economy.

The size and complexity of the NPS infrastructure and the importance of preserving our parks’ invaluable resources represent a significant challenge. Unfortunately, after 100 years of operation and inconsistent public funding, the National Park System faces a deferred maintenance backlog estimated at $11.6 billion, and according to FY 2016 data, 47% of the backlog is attributed to historic assets.

Deferred maintenance in our national parks puts historic and cultural sites at risk of permanent damage or loss, and in the absence of funding, the condition of these assets will continue to deteriorate and become more expensive to repair and preserve in the future. Some of the National Park Service’s most significant historic sites are at risk of falling into disrepair. For example, the Statue of Liberty National Monument in New York Harbor, which includes Ellis Island – an iconic symbol of American freedom and immigration – has repair needs of over $160 million.

**Legislative Solution**

The NPS maintenance backlog of $11.6 billion demonstrates that additional investments and new strategies are necessary if NPS is to meet their stewardship responsibilities. We are encouraged by the many statements of support by Secretary Zinke, members of this committee, and others for reducing the maintenance backlog and prioritizing this issue as part of policy proposals to make investments in our nation’s infrastructure.

The National Trust has worked closely with many stakeholders—including The Pew Charitable Trusts and National Parks Conservation Association—on a legislative solution that would provide dedicated funding to address the maintenance backlog. We strongly support the bipartisan efforts to introduce the National Park Service Legacy Act (H.R. 2584, S. 751) by Representatives Hurd, Kilmer, Reichert, and Hanabusa and Senators Warner and Portman and thank them and the 80 cosponsors of these bills for their leadership and support.

We appreciate the many other legislative and policy proposals to address the maintenance backlog—including the National Park Restoration Act (H.R. 5210, S. 2509)—which demonstrate a recognition this is a pressing issue that must be addressed. We believe the National Park Service Legacy Act proposal and its strong, bicameral support can serve as a starting point for what we hope will be immediate action and a bipartisan, legislative compromise to tackle the maintenance backlog.

As this subcommittee considers legislation to address these needs, we offer the following recommendations for elements that would successfully address these challenges:

**Reliable and Dedicated Funding**

A reliable, dedicated federal funding source distinct from annual appropriations is necessary to address the maintenance backlog, along with providing sufficient staffing capacity to ensure that we preserve historic sites, maintain buildings and infrastructure in safe condition, and keep our parks open and accessible. The Legacy Act (H.R. 2584) provides such dedicated funding through receipts from onshore and offshore energy development that are not otherwise allocated to other purposes. This legislation would...
guarantee contributions towards reducing the maintenance backlog over the next 30 years, starting at $50 million in 2018 with incremental increases over time through 2047.

While the National Park Restoration Act would also direct funding to the maintenance backlog through receipts from onshore and offshore energy development, annual allocations would be limited to fifty percent of the revenue above estimated annual projections, which makes a solution to the backlog and protection of irreplaceable NPS assets dependent on oil prices and production. It is also unclear whether the projected increases in energy prices will result in real revenue. We believe any legislative solution should include reliable and dedicated funding and provide certainty for park units about the availability of funds for high priority projects.

Priorities for Maintenance Projects

The National Trust strongly supports a provision in the Legacy Act that provides funding parity between non-transportation and transportation-related maintenance needs, which ensures that funds are available for the preservation of historic structures and cultural artifacts. Many of the large projects included in the NPS backlog are transportation-related and will require significant investments.

For example, several of the road systems at Yellowstone National Park have an estimated maintenance cost of at least $850 million. With limited annual allocations to a dedicated fund for the maintenance backlog and additional funding for transportation projects available through the Highway Trust Fund, a provision to ensure funding parity will ensure that the maintenance needs of historic and cultural assets are also addressed.

Additional Provisions

The National Trust strongly supports provisions in the Legacy Act that promote public-private partnerships that leverage private funding for maintenance projects and discretion for congressional appropriators to evaluate priority projects.

We also believe that congressional appropriations providing sustained and robust funding levels for Repair and Rehabilitation, Cyclic Maintenance, and Line-Item Construction are needed to alleviate the maintenance backlog and ensure adequate preservation and protection of resources in our parks. After years of level funding or modest increases for both Repair and Rehabilitation and Cyclic Maintenance, we were pleased to see increases for FY16 enacted of $35 million for both accounts, followed by an additional increase of $39 million for FY17. Unfortunately, the President’s budget request proposes substantial decreases for these two key accounts that address the deferred maintenance backlog, with Repair and Rehabilitation seeing a $25 million decrease and Cyclic Maintenance a $13.6 million decrease. As Congress considers FY19 funding levels, we believe that additional investments in these key accounts will contribute to the successful preservation of historic sites and other resources in the National Park System.

The nation faces a challenging fiscal environment, and the National Trust recognizes there is a need for fiscal restraint and cost-effective federal investments. However, we do not believe that preservation and conservation programs should suffer from disproportionate funding reductions, or that a successful solution to address the maintenance backlog can omit significant and reliable financial investments.

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Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to present the National Trust's perspectives on these issues, and we look forward to working with the committee, Administration, and other key stakeholders as you consider policy proposals to address the deferred maintenance backlog. We hope that these critical investments continue to sustain our nation’s rich heritage of cultural and historic resources that generate lasting economic vitality for communities throughout the nation.