Dear Chair Murkowski, Chair Calvert, and Ranking Members Udall and McCollum:

As nonprofit organizations, businesses, and historians who support historic preservation, we urge you to work with us to protect our national parks well into the future and, in particular, to support guaranteed funding for repair needs.

This year marks the 100th birthday of the National Park Service (NPS), which oversees 412 natural and cultural areas in all 50 states and most U.S. territories. The National Park System tells the story of remarkable people and events in our nation’s rich history at sites as diverse as Gettysburg National Military Park, Independence Hall, the Statue of Liberty, the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, and Native American cultural sites like Mesa Verde National Park.

NPS faces a growing challenge in adequately maintaining its sites to ensure that visitors can experience the parks’ natural beauty and learn about our nation’s history. After decades of underfunding, NPS has an infrastructure repair backlog estimated at $12 billion (FY 2015), of which over $3 billion is attributed to historic, non-transportation related structures and sites. 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.

Historic and cultural sites in the National Park System are testaments to our citizens’ valor, our hardships, our victories, and our American traditions. Deferred maintenance in our national parks puts historic sites at risk of permanent damage or loss. In an April 2016 survey about the National Park System conducted by Public Opinion Strategies/The Pew Charitable Trusts, 44 percent of respondents ranked preservation of historic and cultural sites and monuments as their top priority for repair in the national parks, higher than any other category of infrastructure repair need.
A reliable, dedicated federal funding source to address the deferred maintenance backlog ensures that we preserve historic buildings, sites, and necessary infrastructure in safe condition, and that parks remain open and accessible so that the public can continue to learn from and experience the stories that tell our nation’s history. Our National Park System celebrates our historic and natural treasures, and we have a responsibility to ensure our parks are maintained and preserved so future generations can continue to enjoy and learn from them.

Sincerely,