The National Mall Tidal Basin is threatened by as much as $500 million in deferred maintenance needs. Daily flooding, crumbling infrastructure, and damaged cherry tree roots threaten the integrity of one of America’s most iconic places. In April 2019, the National Trust for Historic Preservation launched the National Mall Tidal Basin National Treasure in partnership with the Trust for the National Mall.

PHOTO BY SAM KITTNER

Deferred Maintenance in Our National Parks

The National Park Service (NPS) preserves a network of 419 parks and sites that protect spectacular historic, cultural, and natural resources while telling the stories of remarkable people and events in our nation’s history. The size and complexity of NPS infrastructure and its mission to preserve our parks’ resources represent a significant challenge. Unfortunately, after more than 100 years of operation and inconsistent funding, the National Park System faces a deferred maintenance backlog estimated at nearly $12 billion. According to FY2018 data, 47% of the backlog is attributed to historic assets.

The Great American Outdoors Act would provide $9.5 billion over five years for deferred maintenance needs, with 70% dedicated to the NPS and remaining funds for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Indian Education. Funding would not be subject to annual appropriations, ensuring certainty of investment in our nation’s public lands.

Great American Outdoors Act (S. 3422)

The Great American Outdoors Act would provide historic new investment in our nation’s parks and public lands. The legislation would establish a National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund to address deferred maintenance needs of select federal agencies and protect historic assets. It would also fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which saves historic, cultural, and natural landscapes for the benefit of all Americans.

Tell your representatives in Congress to support the Great American Outdoors Act today!

For additional information, contact Pam Bowman, Director of Public Lands Policy, PBowman@savingplaces.org, (202) 588-6347.
Land and Water Conservation Fund

Since 1965, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has played a pivotal role in preserving historic places as the principal funding source for adding to our national parks and other public lands. Through the American Battlefield Protection Program, LWCF also helps states, local governments, and their partners preserve historic battlefields.

LWCF helps people experience places that tell diverse American stories.

LWCF has helped ensure permanent stewardship of and public access to:
- Sites of women’s history like the Women’s Rights National Historical Park in New York
- Iconic Civil Rights Era sites like the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park in Georgia
- Civil War battlefields like those at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park in Virginia
- Native American cultural landscapes managed by the Bureau of Land Management like Sears Point at the Great Bend of the Gila in Arizona and Canyons of the Ancients National Monument in Colorado

Background

Each year, $900 million—primarily from offshore oil and gas revenues—is deposited into the Land and Water Conservation Fund in the U.S. Treasury. Congress then appropriates funding from LWCF for federal land acquisition, outdoor recreation grants to states that fund state and local park projects, the American Battlefield Protection Program, and a handful of other programs that provide permanent preservation and conservation benefits across the nation.

Despite its success, less than half of the funding set aside for LWCF has been appropriated by Congress for intended purposes since the program was created in 1965.

The Great American Outdoors Act would correct the shortfall in funding going forward by providing the full $900 million each year for LWCF activities. Congressional appropriators would still have a say in how the $900 million is spent, but the program could no longer be shortchanged.

Thanks to LWCF, visitors to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in West Virginia can more fully experience the rich, multi-layered history of the area. For example, LWCF allowed the park to add Murphy Farm, the one-time site of John Brown’s Fort that drew a pilgrimage from W.E.B. Du Bois and other Niagara Movement leaders during their historic meeting in the early years of the modern civil rights era.

PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

For additional information, contact Janelle DiLuccia, Associate Director of Public Lands Policy, JDiLuccia@savingplaces.org, (202) 588-6140.