

Feds need \$11.5 billion to fix public lands

By Jenna McLaughlin, Mother Jones

In 2014, the 300 million visitors to U.S. national parks may have noticed the potholes in the roads, the magnificent vistas obscured by dense brush, dirty visitors' centers in need of basic repairs, trails that were not maintained, and overgrown campgrounds. Why? Blame Congress, which has routinely purchased new federal lands over the last 20 years while neglecting to fund the maintenance of existing national parks. National parks and historic sites need almost \$12 billion in upkeep – or about four times the National Parks Service's annual budget. Meanwhile, congressional Republicans proposed a budget that would slash spending by \$5.5 trillion in 10 years.

So why the backlog? The NPS claims that stingy funding from Congress has forced park employees to make tough decisions about which repairs to perform and which to put off. But Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, and many conservationists place most of the blame on the government, which has bought up new land instead of spending money maintaining the sites it already administers.

“We spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year to acquire additional federal lands, but none of that funding is applied to the maintenance backlog,” she wrote in a 2013 op-ed in the *Hill*.

With an annual budget of \$3 billion, the NPS is responsible for managing and maintaining 75,780 sites across the country – including such tourist destinations as the Grand Canyon, San Francisco's Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Ellis Island, Mt. Rushmore, Yellowstone – and many of the nation's most iconic NPS-administered landmarks are fast falling into

disrepair.

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