

STATEMENT OF CHIP JENKINS, SUPERINTENDENT, GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OVERSIGHT FIELD HEARING TITLED “THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT: MODERNIZING AND MAINTAINING NATIONAL PARKS TO CELEBRATE AMERICA’S 250TH BIRTHDAY.”

September 5, 2025

Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today to speak about the Great American Outdoors Act’s (GAOA) National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (Legacy Restoration Fund). GAOA has been transformative for the National Park Service (NPS) and has supported significant projects right here at Grand Teton National Park, where I have the honor to serve as Superintendent. On behalf of the Department, I want to express our deep appreciation for the investment Congress has made through GAOA and for this opportunity to highlight the lasting impact it has had in Grand Teton.

The reason Grand Teton is a national park is looming over us right now; the iconic landscape, combined with unparalleled wildlife. The park welcomes close to four million visitors annually and this year we are on track to have our second busiest year on record and GAOA has been critical in helping us to support those visitors by enabling us to address maintenance repairs that were long overdue.

With Legacy Restoration Fund support, we have been able to replace the failing wastewater system at Colter Bay, which was originally built in 1969 and serves nearly two million people annually. The replacement provides safe, reliable operations after years of system strain and outages. It also protects the water quality of Jackson Lake. We were able to improve visitor access at the Granite Canyon entrance and trailhead and upgrade equestrian facilities at Poker Flats to better serve riders and outfitters. These are more than just construction projects. For our visitors they are investments that protect visitor safety, preserve resources, and ensure that future generations can enjoy Grand Teton as we do today. In short, these efforts make an incredible difference for the folks who visit Grand Teton every year.

Despite these successes at Grand Teton, our deferred maintenance backlog and infrastructure needs remain significant across the whole of NPS. Our infrastructure is not always adequate for current visitation numbers, let alone for increasing future levels of visitation. GAOA’s Legacy Restoration Fund has allowed us to plan and execute large, complex projects that we could not otherwise complete with our regular base funding. Looking ahead, Colter Bay is well-positioned for any future priority deferred maintenance projects. Colter Bay was originally designed as the pilot for Mission 66, with work starting in 1953 to construct new facilities for growing post-World War II visitation. The infrastructure is suffering from over 75 years of wear and tear and is not meeting our visitors’ needs, nor matching the beauty that is Colter Bay. Central to addressing increasing visitation is our need to effectively distribute people to lesser-used areas of the park.

We need to rejuvenate the infrastructure to support visitor access for the rest of the 21st century. Just as Mission 66 addressed the needs of its time, GAOA is allowing us to renew and modernize those original investments to ensure millions of visitors can experience the iconic wildlife and scenery that is America. GAOA is particularly relevant as we prepare for the America 250 celebrations in 2026, when parks like Grand Teton will be called upon to welcome record numbers of visitors. GAOA helps to ensure that our nation's most iconic landscapes continue to showcase America's natural heritage at a moment of such historic significance.

Grand Teton benefits from extraordinary philanthropic and community partners who share in the stewardship of this park. GAOA provided the certainty that encourages those partners to step forward with confidence, knowing that the federal government is committed to addressing the park's most pressing infrastructure needs and that their contributions will be more effective. When Congress invests in the backbone systems, such as roads, utilities, and core facilities, it creates the foundation that allows partners to focus their resources on the elements that inspire visitors more directly, such as education centers, trail enhancements, and visitor amenities.

In this way, GAOA is not only a federal investment in deferred maintenance but also a catalyst for additional investment by the private sector and local communities. It allows us to match large-scale, essential infrastructure improvements with philanthropic contributions that add significant value and elevate the visitor experience. This model of shared investment strengthens the public-private partnership tradition that has long been part of Grand Teton's story and ensures that every federal dollar stretches further in service to both visitors and resources.

A positive experience visiting Grand Teton has ripple effects as visitors generate close to \$1 billion in revenue for the local economy: sustaining local tourism economies, creating good-paying jobs, protecting clean water, conserving wildlife, and ensuring that millions of visitors each year experience a safe, well-maintained park. GAOA has vastly improved the visitor experience throughout the National Park System.

The President's 2026 Budget proposes to reauthorize President Trump's GAOA Legacy Restoration Fund. The Legacy Restoration Fund is critical to protecting one of America's most iconic landscapes and ensuring that our shared national treasures remain safe, accessible, and inspiring for generations to come. Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to share Grand Teton's story. I look forward to your questions.