

**Emily Wadhams  
Vice President for Public Policy  
The National Trust for Historic Preservation**

**Testimony  
Before the Committee on Government Reform  
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources  
Chairman Mark Souder**

**The National Parks: Will they survive for future generations?  
April 22, 2005**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to offer the views of the National Trust for Historic Preservation concerning the condition of our National Parks and the need to support the National Park Service's (NPS) vast historic and cultural inventory. For more than 50 years, the National Trust has been helping to protect the nation's heritage as the Congressionally chartered leader of the private historic preservation movement in America. The Trust, a nonprofit organization with more than a quarter million members throughout the country, is directly involved in saving the best of our past for future generations.

While the Trust observes that there are serious issues with support throughout the Service, I will focus today on the historic and cultural properties owned and managed by the NPS and those programs and funds that support historic preservation in communities across the United States. As documentation for the assertions I make today, I will primarily rely upon the data contained in the Service's own "Fiscal Year 2006 Budget Justifications and Performance Information" or from the agency's own official publications and information.

We are concerned not only about funding for the National Parks, but also for the host of other related cultural resource programs managed by the NPS, which are experiencing similar, chronic under funding. In this regard, let me underscore the Trust's support for your bill that would finally establish a dedicated fund to overcome the NPS maintenance backlog and rally citizens around the plight of these national treasures. We thank you for your leadership as we approach the Centennial of the National Park system.

### **Cultural Properties in National Parks**

Arguably, the National Park Service has responsibility for the stewardship of America's most significant historic sites and museum collections. Sixty-two percent of the 388 park units managed by the NPS were designated as historic or cultural in nature by the Congress and every one of the 388 park units contains important prehistoric and historic places or collections.

1. Historic Structures: Several laws and Executive Orders direct federal agencies, including the NPS, to have current and reliable data on their real property. The Service has counted and evaluated their historic structures and reports that 55 percent of the approximately 26, 500 structures are in poor or fair condition. Some examples of sites that have suffered from deferred maintenance include:
  - Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas National Park, off the coast of Florida (built in 1846-66, Fort Jefferson is the largest all-masonry fortification in the Western world);
  - the nationally significant steam schooner "Wapama" built in 1915, now located in San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park;
  - the Walnut Hill Estate at Valley Forge, a part of General George Washington's winter encampment; and

- the “Arts of War” sculptures by Leo Friedlander located at Arlington Memorial Bridge. Flanking the eastern ends of the bridge and the parkway are two pairs of gilded monumental neoclassical equestrian statuary on identical pedestals.
2. Archeological Sites: When it comes to archeological sites, the National Park Service has relatively little data on the number of archeological sites within their purview. And for those archeological sites for which they do have information, less than half are in good condition. In calendar year 2003, approximately 370 incidents of vandalism or looting related to archeological or paleontological sites were reported.
  3. Museum Collections: The NPS’s museum collections rival those of the Smithsonian, in size (105 million objects, specimens, documents, and images), scope, and significance, yet the Service has catalogued only approximately 48 percent of their collections. The collections include a wide variety of objects from personal objects like Abraham Lincoln’s cane – given to Frederick Douglass by Mary Todd Lincoln, and General Robert E. Lee’s mess kit and field desk, to important American art like Thomas Moran’s painting of the Yellowstone Valley, and furniture. The picnic table used by President Johnson when he signed the Education Bill is an example from the more recent past.
  4. Historic Landscapes: Of the historic landscapes identified, nearly 70 percent is in poor or fair condition. One example in that category is the farm, recreation buildings, and landscape at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan. This site represents the history of the area as it grew from farming and lumbering to a tourist destination in the 1920’s and thus to designation as a National Seashore.

In summary, the National Park Service simply does not have the financial resources to collect the most basic data, to repair and maintain our nation’s most important historic structures, archeological sites, historic landscapes, or museum collections in the National Park system. All are irreplaceable elements of our shared American heritage and worthy of public support.

### **Cultural Programs of the National Park Service**

The Trust’s concerns do not end with the story of the conditions in the National Parks. The NPS has also been directed by Congress to manage an array of cultural programs to assist state and local historic preservation efforts. These programs are covered in the “National Recreation and Preservation” and the “Historic Preservation Fund” sections of the budget. While the operating funds support National Park Service employees at the national and regional level, the grant funds go to states, tribes and nationally significant projects and require a 40 percent match.

1. The National Register of Historic Places and NCPTT: The United States is the only country in the world that relies on its citizens to identify and nominate properties of national, state and local significance for recognition by the federal government. The National Register Program, as it is called, assists states, communities and individuals in recognizing their historic places through formal designations and technical assistance.

This federal designation provides eligibility for federal grants and tax credits and it is a key component in the formal review process for federal agency projects. The public interest in this program is overwhelming. In 2004 alone, there were 145 million hits on the National Register web site representing 4.2 million individual users. In addition, in 2004, the public requested copies of 80,000 pages of documentation held by the National Register. This is about the same number of pages as published by the “Federal Register” every year.

Another related program, The National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT) supports research, training and skills development in preservation and conservation. In 2003, Congress enacted \$17,467,000 for these programs. In 2006, the Administration’s budget request for these activities was \$15,309,000. That is over a \$2 million dollar cut in real dollars from just three years ago and it does not factor in inflation.

2. The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF): The National Park Service manages several grant-in-aid programs that directly assist states, Indian tribes, institutions and significant historic properties. The HPF provides funds to the states, Indian tribes, Historically Black Colleges and Universities. A separate category within the fund, “Save America’s Treasures,” assists nationally significant buildings and collections.
3. HPF Grants to the States: When the Congress established the federal Historic Preservation programs in 1966, it established, in law, a federal-state-local partnership that shares responsibility for identification and protection of historic places. The federal government shares the responsibility, and the cost, with the states, and localities. As a result, substantially fewer federal employees and federal resources are required, and the states and local governments have a significant role in the program. The NPS estimates that the states and localities will nominate 1,400 historic properties to the National Register of Historic Places and that the states will directly assist federal agencies with their responsibilities to evaluate 10,000 federal projects such as highways, urban redevelopment and hydro-electric for their possible impact on historic properties. Were it not for the assistance of the State Historic Preservation Officers, much needed federal projects would be indefinitely delayed, and much more expensive to complete.
4. HPF Grants to the Tribes: Grants-in-aid to Tribes support tribes’ participation in the National Historic Preservation Act. As tribes are recognized as meeting the criteria to assume Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) duties, they become eligible for equally distributed grants to support on-going activities. A smaller amount of money is reserved to assist tribes that have no THPO and have a need for a specific project. There are presently 59 tribes that must share a portion of the \$3,205,000 proposed in 2006 for this grant category (an average of \$54,322 per certified tribe if no other grants were awarded). For comparison, in 2003, 43 tribes shared \$2,981,000 (an average of \$69,325 per certified tribe using the same measure.) As the number of certified tribes grows, there will be less and less money to support their important work if the present trend continues.

5. HPF Grants to Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Grants-in-Aid to Historically Black Colleges and Universities support the rehabilitation and restoration of significant historic buildings on the campuses of the colleges and universities. The 2006 budget proposes to eliminate the \$3,451,000 available in 2005 for this work.
6. HPF Save America's Treasures Grants: Save America's Treasures (SAT) is a program in which the National Trust has a significant role. The federal grants require an equal share of private money and are made to nationally significant threatened historic buildings or collections. Thanks to the broad bi-partisan Congressional support for SAT over the past seven years, \$218 Million has been awarded in federal challenge grants to 726 nationally significant preservation projects in every state, Puerto Rico and the Midway Islands. The Trust has been instrumental in raising over \$55 million in preservation dollars for 100 federal grantees and other significant preservation projects, often leading the way with private funds subsequently applied to meet a federal challenge grant. In FY2004, over \$156 million was requested for the \$32.6 million available in SAT. The need is five times the available funds in that account alone. In 2004, the Congress appropriated \$32,592 million dollars for SAT. In 2006, the NPS budget proposes that \$14,583 be appropriated – half the amount appropriated in previous years.

In 2004, the Congress appropriated \$73,582,000 for significant and effective grant-in aid programs described above. In 2006, the budget proposal for the same programs is \$53,705,000. A 27 percent reduction in the amount of money available to preserve the history of the United States as reflected in its monuments and neighborhoods is not the right thing to do.

Mr. Chairman, in 2016, a decade from now, the National Park Service will be 100 years old. In setting aside places of history and natural beauty, Congress expressed, in a very tangible way, its belief in the nation's future. It appointed the National Park Service as the steward of those 388 parks and entrusted their care to its men and women. Seeing that the desire to preserve significant places was not limited to National Park Service sites, Congress asked the states, tribes and individual citizens to help. These groups have rallied to meet this mandate. Yet the National Parks and the National Park Service's cultural programs have remained under funded for the task. As we approach the centennial of the National Park Service, Congress and the Administration have the opportunity to remedy the situation by appropriating the funds necessary to maintain our cultural and natural heritage for America's public and America's posterity.