

CHALLENGES IN GATEWAY COMMUNITIES OF NATIONAL PARKS

FIELD HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL PARKS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
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CHALLENGES IN GATEWAY COMMUNITIES OF NATIONAL PARKS

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2018

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES,
Gardiner, Montana.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:05 a.m. in the Multipurpose Room, Gardiner Public School, 510 Stone Street, Gardiner, Montana, Hon. Steve Daines, presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. STEVE DAINES, U.S. SENATOR FROM MONTANA

Senator DAINES [presiding]. The Subcommittee will come to order.

I would first like to thank everyone for joining us here on this absolutely beautiful day in Montana. I want to extend my special appreciation to Randy Russell, the school's Superintendent, who could not be here today. Also to Mike Baer, the Principal, Mike LaPage, the Custodian, as well as Tom Nelson, who I just chatted with, who is the head of Maintenance, all of whom are here today and have helped make today's event possible.

Today is a very special day because we are bringing the official work of the United States Senate right here to Gardiner, Montana. This is a great opportunity for kids of all ages. I know we have a few in the audience. But I am also very aware of the fact, as a father of four children who were raised here in Montana, that it is a special holiday week.

I know in the Daines' household growing up that oftentimes meant going hunting somewhere in Montana, usually antelope hunting this time of year. So I know we have a lot of kids who are out there enjoying being outside, which is actually a good place for young people to be on a day like today.

But this is a great opportunity for kids of all ages because whether you attend school here or if, like one of our witnesses, you grew up here, you get to gain appreciation for how the Federal Government works.

We are here today in this great school, sitting literally minutes away from the only year-round entrance to Yellowstone National Park. Most people in Washington, DC, and other places around the United States dream of visiting Yellowstone maybe once in their lifetime. But that isn't news to this room when you have the luxury of living in this great town, it is such a special place. You also experience the unique challenges that come when everybody else, lit-

erally the entire world, wants to experience this magic place as well.

I have a lot of memories of being right here in Gardiner as a kid. I have memories of taking the Buick station wagon with the wood veneer siding on it, a Griswold kind of station wagon, and asking permission from my dad if, for our senior prom, I could come down to Chico for prom, back in 1979.

But I think of all the countless times that we would load up the car and come down to Yellowstone Park and this very special part of our nation as a kid whose parents moved to Bozeman back in 1964. So this really is home in many ways.

It is such an honor to be here. This is called a hearing. It is meant to hear, that is why it is called a hearing. We will have some great witnesses here that I will introduce in a minute.

We are here to talk about the fact that—the secret about this special place is out. A lot of people are visiting our national parks and, particularly, Yellowstone National Park.

What does that mean? Well, that can be a very good thing. For starters, visitors to Montana spent \$3.2 billion in 2017 and much of that was near our national parks. In fact, we know they spent about \$275 million in Glacier National Park and about \$500 million in Yellowstone and the surrounding areas last year, according to the National Park Service (NPS). So this increase in spending can certainly lead to more jobs, which is good news for our gateway communities.

However, all this increase in spending means one thing—we are seeing more visitors to our parks. Don't get me wrong, I know at times we like to keep our secret hunting and fishing places secret and our secret hiking places secret. You are looking at a Senator who likes to spend a lot of time hiking miles and miles in the backcountry here, not too far from where we are seated.

I love seeing people coming to Montana and I love the fact that they visit our national parks, especially our parks right here in Montana. But I chair the National Parks Subcommittee, so I am very honored with what I consider my home parks, Yellowstone National Park and Glacier National Park, as a Montanan. I also realize with increased visitation comes some strain. Just like we talk about deferred maintenance inside the parks themselves, the increase in visitation can strain resources in gateway communities as well. I know our witnesses today are here to talk more about the specifics, everything from responding to fires, to just the pavement on the streets, the sidewalk in front of the fly shop, the increase in traffic and so forth and just overall wear and tear.

In addition to routine infrastructure needs, it is my understanding that the very school we are sitting in faces a fairly unique funding challenge. We will hear more about that issue from our witnesses, but I would like to commit to working on that issue as we move forward.

I would also like to speak to a related matter. In a business meeting in Washington, DC, just a few weeks ago, we had one of the most productive Energy and Natural Resources meetings in my six years in Washington, DC. We moved a tremendous amount of bills related to conservation, public lands and protecting our na-

tional parks that I had seen in a long time. In fact, we moved over 40 bills, 40. The news media did not pick a lot of that up.

There were some good things going on in Washington, DC, in that Committee that day and some of them are related to Montana issues. One of those addressed was very relevant to why we are here today. We passed the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act that will permanently protect, for generations to come, the local economy that relies on tourism and outdoor recreation here. Secretary Zinke also recently acted to withdraw this same area from mineral entry, immediately protecting the special place for 20 years.

All this shows the special balance Montana has between protecting the environment and supporting local economies. It also shows our commitment to protecting and strengthening our local economy driven by tourism and outdoor recreation, mostly due to neighboring Yellowstone. I remain committed to seeing this legislation pass both chambers of Congress.

As a native Montanan I take great pride in iconic parks like Yellowstone and Glacier, but also in our state's lesser known national treasures such as the Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site just 50 miles north of Yellowstone and other wonderful sites like the Little Bighorn Battlefield.

The National Park Service Centennial was a banner year with record-setting visitation numbers. As we continue to build upon that success, it is vital that we begin to plan for the future. You think about the visionaries that launched this, Teddy Roosevelt and others, that vision they had. We need to make sure that we set forward a process of funding mechanisms and plans that will protect that vision for years to come and not just for the parks themselves but for these critical gateway communities and the challenges they face outside the parks.

Before I introduce the witnesses, I want to thank everyone who came out today. I will also just remind everyone about the format today. I will introduce everyone. Each witness will have five minutes to give their testimony. Following the testimony I will ask questions, during which time each witness will have up to five minutes to respond. Because we are not in Washington, DC, today, thank goodness—

[Laughter.]

—I am not going to be too strict with the timer. But I do want to try to keep it reasonably close to that time limit. Once we finish up the questions I will gavel out the hearing.

There are no questions from the audience in an official hearing. As a reminder, this is an official hearing of the United States Senate and everything said here today will be included in the official record, including my Griswold comment, is that right?

[Someone in the background:] That's right.

Senator DAINES. Okay, now we will get to the witnesses.

Joining us this afternoon is Mr. Cameron Sholly—I know he prefers to go by “Cam”—the Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park. Day 2 on the job, Cam. Welcome.

We have Ms. Pat Baltzley, Board of Trustees Chairman of the Gardiner Public Schools.

We have Ms. Marysue Costello, Director of the West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce.

We have Ms. Deb Purvis, President, the Cooke City Water District, one of my favorite towns in Montana, by the way. It is true. I like Silver Gate, too. Cooke City is great.

And Mr. Rick Sacca, Emergency Manager, Flathead County, Montana.

We have some Glacier Park representation here as well and then we pretty much have Yellowstone National Park surrounded here with these gateway communities witnesses. I want to thank you all, again, for being here with us.

At the end of your testimony, we will begin questions. Your full written testimony will be made part of the official hearing record.

Mr. Sholly, welcome back, I should say. I know you grew up here in the Gardiner area, and we are really glad to have you back. I know that you have only been on the job, I guess, about 48 hours here on the ground. We are glad you are back. When you are ready, please go ahead with your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF CAMERON SHOLLY, SUPERINTENDENT,
YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

Mr. SHOLLY. Thank you for that introduction, and it is fantastic to be here.

As I mentioned outside, I think the last time I was in this building it was about 30 years ago. So it's special to be back with all of you.

Thank you for holding this hearing today on such an important topic. Relationships with gateway communities is one of the most important things that we focus on in the National Park System, the National Park Service.

I know how much you value, Senator, parks and public lands here in Montana and across the country. Thank you for your support. I look forward to working closely with you in this new capacity that I'm in.

I really want to thank the witnesses for being here and giving us, especially me in the beginning of my second day, their insights and perspectives about how we can work best together, the issues that you're facing and how I can work and the team in Yellowstone can work collaboratively with you to address those issues.

As you know, the National Park Service manages iconic resources in destinations that truly represent some of the very best that America has to offer. Our parks attract hundreds of millions of visitors each year and the communities adjacent to our parks are absolutely essential to helping provide our visitors important services, accommodations, food and beverage, gasoline, other amenities, all which help greatly improve and contribute to the visitor experience.

Growing visitation at national parks is reflected in the vitality of these gateway communities, as you mentioned, not just here but across the country. And in 2017 visitors to our national parks in the U.S. spent over \$18 billion in gateway communities. Annually, we estimate that Yellowstone visitors spent almost \$500 million in local communities and support more than 7,000 jobs.

National visitation has gone up by about 50 million just in the last four or five years. Here in Yellowstone, average annual visitation has jumped by about 40 percent from where it was just a decade ago. Near Gardiner, in West Yellowstone, vehicle traffic counts are up by 60 percent in that 10-year period. The entrance near Cooke City and Silver Gate is up 37 percent, and the east entrance through Cody is up by almost 50 percent.

So as you mentioned, Senator, there are positives that come along with increased visitation levels. As you know, those increases have had a wide range of impacts on infrastructure and resources.

The National Park Service has an existing deferred maintenance backlog of \$11.6 billion across our entire system of which nearly \$500 million is right here in Yellowstone. So we need to take aggressive actions to make infrastructure improvements across the system.

As you know, and as you've mentioned, Chairman, Secretary Zinke has made it his highest legislative priority to establish a dedicated fund to address this backlog and we appreciate your co-sponsorship of Senate bill 3172 which would help really launch a multi-billion-dollar effort to rebuild park infrastructure—probably one of the most important things we can do now and one of the biggest challenges that we face moving forward.

Wherever possible, it's important that we work together on actions that help maintain positive economic activity but also that we work together to lessen and mitigate threats to park resources and values and continue to do this while we improve visitor experiences. It's not just for the values and the experiences inside our boundaries, but also outside our boundaries and in and around these special gateway communities.

Along those lines, also, very pleased with Secretary Zinke's recent announcement on the 20-year mineral withdrawal, just here north of Yellowstone. I think it's a highly commendable action. He recognized, along with Secretary Purdue, the importance of preserving the community's larger recreation, tourism and outdoor cultures. I really do think this is a very tangible example of a decision that helps us protect lands outside of the boundary that are closely connected to shared conservation and recreation values, especially in places like this that are in such close proximity to great places like Yellowstone.

Although Gardiner and Mammoth are separated by five miles and a state line, they really do function as one community. Our employees who live in Mammoth rely on services provided in Gardiner and, similarly, residents that live in Gardiner rely on services provided in Mammoth—a medical clinic, preschool, the daycare.

As we succeed together, we also face a lot of the same challenges. Affordable housing continues to be an issue. Like the park, the Gardiner school has substantial infrastructure needs. These challenges can make it difficult for Gardiner businesses, for our concession's operators in the park and for NPS operations to attract and retain employees with families.

The NPS continually strives to improve the public's access to our national treasures; however, if visitation continues to increase, we must also increase our ability to collaborate with one another.

Yellowstone, like other national parks, needs the perspectives of its partners to address both challenges and opportunities before us.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement, and I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you again for holding this hearing.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sholly follows:]

STATEMENT OF CAMERON SHOLLY, SUPERINTENDENT, YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AT AN OVERSIGHT FIELD HEARING TO EXAMINE CHALLENGES IN GATEWAY COMMUNITIES OF NATIONAL PARKS.

OCTOBER 19, 2018

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on the subject of challenges in gateway communities of national parks. The Department of the Interior appreciates the subcommittee's recognition of the importance of the relationship between national parks and its adjacent communities and the issues that they face together. The Department is also grateful for your cosponsorship of S. 3172, the Restore Our Parks Act, which we believe will have a very positive effect not only for parks but also for the communities adjacent to parks.

The National Park Service (NPS) manages a remarkable collection of places that represent some of the very best of America -- iconic destinations that attract hundreds of millions of visitors each year, from across the country and around the globe. The communities adjacent to parks, where visitors find hospitality services and recreational activities beyond those available within the parks, are essential to visitor access and exceptional park experiences. Often, gateway communities offer convenient locations to purchase goods and services and housing for NPS employees. These communities also benefit economically from park visitors who pass through them. The NPS understands the interdependency between parks and gateway communities and highly values its relationships with these communities. We strive to be good neighbors and partners to them. In fact, Secretary Zinke recently announced an historic 20-year mineral withdrawal just north of Yellowstone National Park, recognizing, with Agriculture Secretary Purdue, the importance of preserving Yellowstone and the surrounding community's recreation, tourism, and outdoor culture.

The economic strength of gateway communities is dependent on park visitation. In 2017, the 417 units of the National Park System received an estimated 331 million visits. Park visitors spent an estimated \$18.2 billion in local gateway regions and helped generate hundreds of thousands of jobs. Sixty-one of the 385 parks that track visitation set a new record, and that increased visitation is reflected in the vitality of gateway communities across the country, and particularly around the more iconic parks such as Yellowstone National Park.

The increased visitation we have experienced at national parks has caused enormous wear and tear on park facilities. Facing a deferred maintenance backlog of \$11.6 billion across the National Park System, Secretary Zinke has made it his highest legislative priority to establish a dedicated fund that will use \$6.5 billion generated from Federal energy revenue over the next five years to pay for the repair and restoration of our national parks. S. 3172, which was recently approved by the full Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, would establish that fund, launching an intensive rebuilding of park infrastructure, which will better accommodate the growing number of visitors. Improving the visitor experience and access to our parks will likely mean increasing visitation even more than it has increased already, and that will lead to greater impacts on, and opportunities for, gateway communities.

At Yellowstone, visitation was relatively consistent from about 1990 through 2009, averaging just under three million visitors per year. The average for 2015 through 2017 jumped about 40 percent higher than the previous levels. Those 4.1 million visitors in 2017 spent an estimated \$499 million in local communities, which supported more than seven thousand jobs in the area and had a cumulative benefit to the local economy of approximately \$630 million.

Along with the economic growth generated by increases in visitation, we have seen increased impacts. Vehicle counts at entry points signal increased traffic in gateway communities. Among the five entrances to Yellowstone, the vehicle traffic counts have increased at the north and west entrances about 60 percent. That translates to almost 137,000 and 243,000 more vehicles per year, respectively, than during the period of 1990 to 2009. The northeast counts near Cooke City and Silvergate are up 37 percent, and the east entrance counts from Cody are up almost 50 percent.

Gardiner is unique among Yellowstone's five gateway communities in that a large portion of the park's year-round staff lives just up the road in Mammoth. Although Gardiner and Mammoth are separated by five miles and a state line, they essentially function as one community. Park employees buy their groceries at the Gardiner Market, eat and drink in Gardiner establishments, and send their children to the Gardiner School. Gardiner community members who do not work in the park also take advantage of services in Mammoth. The only daycare and pre-school in the community are both located in Mammoth, and are available to both park employees and community members; the children of non-NPS employees typically comprise about a third of the classes each year. The only medical clinic in the immediate area is also located in Mammoth.

The NPS has enjoyed many successes in partnership with the community of Gardiner. In 2016, we celebrated together the NPS Centennial and the completion of the Gardiner Gateway Project. This project was a great example of our communities working together to accomplish mutually beneficial goals such as improving traffic flow and parking options; enhancing vehicular and pedestrian safety; installing sidewalks, new restrooms, signage, and lighting to protect night skies. We collectively restored the area around the historic Roosevelt Arch and created a beautiful shared space for events in Arch Park. The NPS held its national Centennial celebration in Arch Park, with a ceremony that included the governors of both Montana and Wyoming, the NPS Director, and the Secretary of the Interior. Since then, Arch Park has hosted events ranging from naturalization ceremonies to a BBQ fundraiser for the pre-school, demonstrating the value of these types of projects to both the NPS and the local community.

As the park and community succeed together, we also face the same challenges as well. Affordable housing in this community continues to be an issue. The childcare facility in Mammoth has experienced intermittent closures due to staffing shortages, because daycare workers struggle to find affordable local housing. Like the park, the Gardiner School has substantial infrastructure improvement needs. Combined, these challenges can make it difficult for families, especially those with young children and working parents. This impacts Gardiner businesses, park concessions operations, and the NPS as they work to attract and retain employees.

The National Park Service continually strives to increase the public's access to our national treasures. However, as visitation continues to increase, so must our ability to collaborate together. Yellowstone, like other national parks, needs the perspective of its partners in gateway communities to address both the challenges and opportunities before us.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement and I am happy to answer any questions.

Senator DAINES. Thank you, Superintendent Sholly.

Just a comment on that \$11.6 billion maintenance backlog. That was one of those 40 bills that was moved a couple weeks ago. It was such a great moment when we saw two Democratic senators, Mark Warner and Angus King, come together with two Republican senators, Lamar Alexander and Rob Portman on the committee that I chair, the National Parks Subcommittee, to move that bill through.

Fights tend to sell more media and press in DC than getting something done. I can tell you we got something done and did not get a lot of press about it, but that is a great bill and it is not going to add to the deficit. We are going to, hopefully, get this passed here, maybe in the next couple of months in this lame duck session. I am hoping. That is my goal to get this done because as Angus King, who was a Governor of Maine and is now a Senator, said, "deferred maintenance is debt." It really is and we need to deal with it.

So hopefully we will have some better news for you here. A great way to start off your new job here in Yellowstone.

Mr. SHOLLY. Thank you.

Senator DAINES. Alright, Ms. Baltzley.

STATEMENT OF PATRICIA BALTZLEY, CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, GARDINER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Ms. BALTZLEY. Good morning, Senator Daines and others gathered, for this opportunity to share the challenges of gateway communities.

My name is Pat Baltzley, and I am Chair of the School Board of Gardiner Schools. We welcome you to our school in this beautiful location surrounding us. We're lucky to be here.

To begin with, this has been a tough stretch for our school district—arguably one of the most challenging in its history. We face severe budgetary constraints due to a change in financial structures, we face an infrastructure in need of maintenance due to aging, and we face declining enrollment due to a change in our community's housing situation. The impact of these factors has hit us hard as we've been a school district committed to providing the best educational experiences for our students. We are proud of the school district's commitment to excellence and to supporting a quality education for our students.

Gardiner School has consistently been ranked as one of the top schools in the State of Montana. Recently the U.S. News and World Report once again rated Gardiner as the number one school in Montana.

As an educator myself for over 40 years, having grown up in the Northern Virginia school system and having worked in several large school districts in Maryland, including Baltimore County, I've been so impressed with the quality of the teaching staff and the students in this small, unique community.

There are some bright spots on the horizon that include a partnership with the newly created North Yellowstone Education Foundation, a rallying community support system and connections with other partners and support systems, but we are in a budget shortfall and still need help to stabilize.

While the school district understands and acknowledges that the past financial benefit received from the Yellowstone National Park was unique to Gardiner, the change forced drastic changes to our educational programming. In the past, the school received money from the National Park Service for its students who attended school in Gardiner. This allowed the school to buildup a significant cash reserve and to spend liberally on programs, staff and resources. The NPS no longer provides this funding and the State of Wyoming has picked up, with your support if you remember, that responsibility for the students who reside inside the park in Wyoming.

Because another state is now providing money for these students, Montana now deducts that amount from the funding they provide to Gardiner Schools. The money from Wyoming goes into Gardiner School's general fund, reducing local taxpayer funding obligations by nearly 50 percent while maintaining the general fund's maximum budget allowed by the state.

Furthermore, and of great concern, is that Gardiner School's enrollment is falling—169 students are currently enrolled, K–12, as of this fall. When I came on the school board in 2013, there were close to 250. Enrollment during the last three years has been the first time the number of students has been below 200 in decades. Declining enrollment is a result of large-scale trends that face our community, including housing shortages, escalating real estate prices, transition of housing from family residents to vacation rentals and the changing hiring practices of the area's major employers. Fewer students equal less funding.

With our changed financial situation and with declining enrollment, major changes were needed to balance our general fund budget. The school board had to make many tough decisions over this past year to bring the budget in balance. The school district was using 97 percent of its general fund budget for staffing costs compared to 80 to 85 percent for most other schools in Montana. This prompted the school board to investigate options to stabilize the budget and ensure the long-term sustainability of the school. We reduced our staff, the equivalent of 7.5 full-time employees which for a small school district has a huge impact. Most upsetting of all was having to make the changes that affected the lives of our friends, families, students and fellow community members.

As with any aging infrastructure, one part of our building is over 50 years old with a newer section, built after fire in the 1980s, which is 30 years old. There's a need to ensure that our school environment is safe and healthy for our students. With this aging infrastructure and immediate maintenance concerns, the board has made some recent maintenance decisions with large financial impact.

We completed a part of our roofing replacement project utilizing a 1-to-1 matching grant of \$200,000 from the Gardiner Resort Tax that helped us replace a portion of our roof for \$475,000. We still have another 35 percent to replace that is 30 years old. This will be another significant cost.

We have just begun a project to replace and repair our three aging boilers and our infrastructure system for our boilers. This project could cost the Gardiner School District close to \$650,000.

An application has been made to the Gardiner Resort Tax Board for \$250,000 but more financial support is needed.

We need help in stabilizing our financial structure so that we can continue to provide the quality of education that we have been able to provide in the past and that every student deserves. This means a stabilization of impact aid that we receive. If it gets reduced or eliminated entirely, then we would immediately need to reduce our staff further by about three more teachers, close to \$160,000.

The current method for quantifying the number of families that work in or near Yellowstone is inadequate as we have families that work in the park, although their offices are not inside the park boundaries which is a qualification for being factored into our impact aid funds.

Gardiner Public Schools are in a great part dependent on public lands, and we are at the whim of global market forces. In order to maintain our community and school, we need help.

The school district is working with the larger community to determine how as a community we can address the housing needs in a landlocked community surrounded by national and state land. Our school itself has part of its property on national park land. One of our questions is whether there is a possibility for exchange of national or state land to support the building of needed, affordable housing in our community.

The school would like to take advantage of an opportunity through the National Park Restoration Act, U.S. Senate bill 2509 or House bill 5210 or similar legislation for federal assistance in such a way that does not impact funding options for the park itself. We are involving our community in political advocacy through awareness of these bills and have circulated a petition to garner support for our position. We have gathered 840 signatures to this date in support of this bill.

Your support in general to continue commitment to our national educational system, including financial support for aging infrastructures in the United States, as well as your support for our specific needs as a gateway community, is significant and needed.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our challenging situation as we work to educate our students in this unique environment.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Baltzley follows:]

Patricia Baltzley, Chair of the Board of Trustees, Gardiner School District, Gardiner, MT

Opening

Thank you, Senator Daines, for the opportunity to testify today about Gardiner Schools and the challenges we are facing as we move forward.

To begin with, this has been a tough stretch for the school—arguably one of the most challenging in its history. However, there are some bright spots on the horizon that include a partnership with the newly created North Yellowstone Education Foundation, a rallying community support system, and connections with other partners and support systems. We are proud of our school district's commitment to excellence and to supporting a quality education for our students. Gardiner Schools has consistently been ranked as one of the top schools in the State of Montana. Recently, the US News and World Report once again rated Gardiner as the number one school in Montana.

This ranking is achieved by not only the high standards we hold for our students but also from the broad educational experiences we were once able to provide and hope to continue to be able to provide. Our Core Value as stated in our Strategic Plan is to provide world-class education experiences and opportunities for our students while maintaining the uniqueness and values of our small community. We want to hold to this core value as our community changes impact our school challenges.

While the school district understands and acknowledges that the past financial benefit received from Yellowstone National Park was unique to Gardiner, the change forced drastic changes to our educational programming.

Historical Overview of Budget

Approximately four years ago, the school district funding mechanism changed creating circumstances linked to the budget to force the school's hand in making several changes to staffing and programming that none wanted to make. But, given the approximate \$400,000 general fund shortfall, were necessary to consider.

In the past, the school received money from the National Park Service (NPS) for its students who attended school in Gardiner while also receiving money from the state of Montana for those same students. This allowed the school to build up a significant cash reserve and to spend liberally on programs, staff and resources. The NPS no longer provides this funding and the state of Wyoming has picked up that responsibility for the students who reside inside the Park in Wyoming. Because another state is now providing money for these students, Montana now deducts that amount from the funding they provide to Gardiner Schools. The money from Wyoming goes into Gardiner School's general fund reducing local taxpayers funding obligation (mills) by nearly 50% while maintaining the General Fund's maximum budget allowed by the State.

These multiple sources of funding that it had from the state of Montana, directly from the National Park Service and other federal funds allowed the school to be considered "well off" for many years. In recent times, funding for the Mammoth students has been replaced with money from Wyoming ONLY—this means that the money for these students that came from Montana

and the NPS is gone, and if trends continue in the federal budget, some of these other funds may go away as well.

Furthermore, and of great concern, is that Gardiner School's enrollment is falling—169 students are enrolled (K-12) as of this fall. Enrollment during the last three years has been the first time the number of students has been below 200 in decades. Declining enrollment is a result of large-scale trends that face our community, including: housing shortages, escalating real-estate prices, transition of housing from family residences to vacation rentals and the changing hiring practices of the area's major employers. Less students equals less funding.

School Board Actions during 2017-2018 to balance general fund budget

With our changed financial situation and with declining enrollment, major changes were needed to balance our general fund budget. The school board had to make many tough decisions over this past year to bring the budget in balance. The school district was using 97% of its General Fund budget for staffing costs—compared to 80-85% for most other schools in Montana. This prompted the school board to investigate options to stabilize the budget and ensure the long-term sustainability of the school. Most upsetting of all was having to make changes that affected the lives of our friends, families, students and fellow community members. While no decisions are perfect, all involved did their very best job to uphold the school's and the community's central values while making these needed cuts. Changes to the school are the roadmap for near-term functioning of the school and could change in the future as the school's options and opportunities continue to evolve.

The following is a synopsis of the decisions made by the school board last year with regards to balancing our budget:

- A reduction of the equivalent of 7.5 Full Time Employees (FTEs). The details of these actions are listed below.
 1. Elimination of the Industrial Technology teacher position (1.0). *(Though a job announcement was advertised, no applicants applied, and thus, the technology classes and electives have ceased.)*
 2. Reduction of front office staff member (1.0) *(Duties have been absorbed by the remaining front office staff member; transportation responsibilities have now been re-assigned to administration.)*
 3. Elimination of two educational aid positions (2.0),
 4. Reduction of the library aide (1.0)
 5. Elimination of the Business teaching position (1.0)
 6. Reduction of the Foreign Language position to part-time (0.25) *(The 0.75 position was advertised with no applicants;)*
 7. Reduction of Health Enhancement position to part-time (0.75). *(The 0.25 position was advertised with no applicants; the position was re-assigned to two teachers which resulted in a realignment of their current responsibilities affecting the Library Media Specialist's schedule as well as the Technology Coordinator's duties.)*
 8. Reduction of elementary staff position (0.5)
 9. Elimination of extra stipend days for FFA and Technology
 10. Elimination of Activities Director position - *job duties were re-assigned to*

administrators

- The Technology Coordinator position was reduced to 0.665 FTE but brought back up to full time using Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) funds from outside the General Fund. This position is perhaps the only one that touches everyone in the school as it deals with computer and other technology hardware and software, to keep everyone from students, faculty, staff and administration operating as desired
- Family and Consumer Science (FACS) and the World Language positions were both reduced from full-time, 1.0 FTE positions, down to 0.75 FTE positions.
- Core Class teachers (math, science, English and social studies) in the high school will now teach grades 7-12 to cover changes in the elementary/middle school

Aging School Issues: Infrastructure Update

As with any aging infrastructure - one part of our building is over 50 years old with a newer section (built after a fire in the 1980's) at 30 years old - there is a need to ensure that our school environment is safe and healthy for our students. With this aging infrastructure and immediate maintenance concerns, the board has made some recent decisions with large financial impact.

Here is a summary of the school board's major recent infrastructure considerations:

- Roof—thanks to the Gardiner Resort Tax, a 1-to-1 matching grant of \$200,000 helped complete this for \$475,000 project. In this direction, a consultant was hired to handle the advertising, bidding, and hiring process to replace the roof over the foyer and west wing of the building with completion of the project in September 2018.
- Boilers—we have just begun a project to replace and repair our three aging boiler and infrastructure system. Only one is currently operating, our oldest 50-year-old boiler, with one of the other two no longer working at all and the other one in constant repair. They have reached the end of their lifespan. We have hired a consultant to thoroughly inspect our current system and make recommendations as to the process of replacing our system with an updated infrastructure. This will be done in phases to ensure that our school is heated this year with no interruptions. This project could cost the Gardiner School District close to \$650,000. An application has been made to the Gardiner Resort Tax board for \$250,000.

Housing as an Issue

The lack of housing in our community is a challenge for our school district. Our real estate market is so fluid that properties within our school district are bought prior to listing. This means that families do not have the opportunity, or cannot afford, to purchase housing within the Gardiner community. More and more of our families are moving up the valley into the Emigrant area which gives them the choice to either continue in the Gardiner School District or to send their children to the Livingston School District.

The school district is working with the larger community to determine how as a community we can address the housing needs in a landlocked community surrounded by national and state land. Our school itself has part of its property on national park land. One of our questions is whether there is a possibility for exchange of national or state land to support the building of needed affordable housing in our community.

North Yellowstone Education Foundation (NYEF) Update

To support our students and our educational program, a group of community members created the North Yellowstone Education Foundation last year. Their mission is to work with the community to build sustainable support and enhance innovative educational opportunities for students, teachers, and community members in partnership with Gardiner Public Schools. Their vision is to provide sustainable support for Gardiner Public Schools through fundraising, volunteerism, and community collaboration.

They are working to establish partnerships that will allow the school building, the staff, opportunities to continue functioning at an exceptional level, keeping our students and community engaged while sensibly dealing with present and forthcoming budget shortfalls. Tax dollars support state minimums, but don't always support the margin of excellence we've come to expect.

Some of their current initiatives are to:

- Procure grants such as a recent one from Mountain Sky for \$48,000 to support a new classroom grants program and the newly created Community Program Coordinator/Paraprofessional position. This program will build opportunities for students inside and outside the classroom for the next 2 years
- Facilitate volunteer programs such as the Bruin Buddies that matches community members with elementary students to read together.
- Host fundraising activities continue to build financial support for additional educational opportunities.

Political Advocacy:

The school would like to take advantage of an opportunity through *The National Parks Restoration Act* (currently known as US Senate Bill 2509 or House of Representatives Bill 5210), or similar legislation, for federal assistance in such a way that does not impact funding options for the park itself. We are involving our community in political advocacy through awareness of Senate Bill 2509 and have circulated a petition to garner support for our position of support. We have gathered 840 signatures to this date in support of this bill.

Senator DAINES. Thank you very much.
Ms. Costello.

**STATEMENT OF MARYSUE COSTELLO, DIRECTOR, WEST
YELLOWSTONE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

Ms. COSTELLO. Honorable Senator Daines and other guests, I am pleased to be asked to present information to you today about gateway communities, national parks and the impacts faced by each, and full well knowing that each impacts the other.

Gateway communities, such as those represented at this hearing, economically rely on tours and recreation and the environmental health that drives those activities. They are our lifeblood. Many, many things can affect that blood flow. Public policy, weather and natural events nearby and even worldwide can constrict or open the flow. Specifically, today I would like to talk about fires in national parks, dramatic increases in visitation and access.

The item that gains the most notoriety is fires. They are dramatic, photogenic and alarming, and they go on for months. In recent years Yellowstone's gateway communities have gone through several iterations of impactful fires.

Due, I believe, to the recognition that entities cannot work in isolation, there has been a significant shift to transparency and cooperation. Two summers ago, and again this summer, West Yellowstone has been directly affected by fires that encompassed both Forest Service and Park Service lands. Both Gardiner and Cooke City have had their share of challenges by fires too.

Some citizens are of the opinion that all fires should be managed to be suppressed, while others are more accepting that fire is critical to the maintenance of healthy forests and will be a part of the landscape. Regardless of those positions, West Yellowstone has, especially in more recent years, experienced tremendous openness and cooperation from public agencies, and we are grateful. We feel our local representatives are included in the decision-making processes and we value, too, the joint participation in public meetings and information dissemination.

Fires definitely have a price tag across a broad spectrum of resources: public, private sector and individual citizen. Balancing benefit to cost will always be challenging and we, as gateway communities, highly value the assurance that we will be contributors to the discussion and the decisions.

We, in West Yellowstone and many locations throughout the regions, were first affected this summer by smoke beginning in early July. First was the impact from the fires in California and Oregon, then came Canada and on to Idaho before there were fires burning in our more local areas. It would be my estimation that there were very few days between the last two weeks of July and mid-September that smoke, in varying degrees, was not in the air.

More than a century of hard suppression of wildland fires and the unintended and detrimental impact it has had on our forests cannot be overcome quickly. Nevertheless, it is time for further exploration into a more comprehensive plan to allow fires their natural role while not impacting the entire West. We do not say this lightly and fully recognize that any solutions need to be openly discussed and with all parties having seats at the table.

Next, I would like to address the dramatic increase in visitation over the past few years and its impacts. Yellowstone is known worldwide, and for many internationals it is on their must-see list. Traffic jams sometimes miles and hours long, overflowing parking lots and restrooms, challenges with language, disrespect for wildlife and the fragility of the unique geology place grave demands on Yellowstone's resources. They all dramatically affect the Park and bleed out directly and indirectly into the bordering communities.

The way will not be easy. We look to and for solutions that will enhance visitor experience while not adversely offsetting the economies of gateway communities. With over four million visitors, five gateways and four U.S. highways, answers will need to be multifaceted, responding to an army of stakeholders and, in the end, providing maximum security for the incredible unique resource that is Yellowstone.

We appreciate the Park Service's commitment to the research that is already well underway and that will inform and guide visitor management decisions and planning. Additional funding for all our parks and monuments, as they grapple with current increased visitation and that which is expected to come, would be a blessing.

I wish to express appreciation to Senator Portman and to you, Senator Daines, for all the work on championing the Restore Our Parks Act. It will be critical, I believe, to this area and to all national parks. This Act, by addressing the backlog of infrastructure needs, would enable more of the regular park appropriations to find its way into additional staffing, integral to addressing many of the visitor management challenges.

Lastly, at this time I would like to address access to public lands for West Yellowstone. To our east lies Yellowstone National Park and on our other three sides the vast majority of land belongs to the United States Forest Service. We are, truly, an impacted community. Hence our survival depends on access to public lands.

West Yellowstone has long desired year-round access to the Park instead of the current fall and spring closures of our gate. Each closure is approximately six weeks in length and the result is very like a spigot being turned off. Certain seasonal affects, of course, would continue. We are, after all, a seasonal area. However, our community would be able to better develop a more sustainable year-round economy with such a change and visitors would be more easily satisfied.

With Yellowstone on the bucket list of both citizens and international visitors throughout the world, rarely is "time of the year" considered. Yellowstone is the goal. Everyone understands that weather can impact a vacation; however, the planned, extended closures are confusing and many visitors arrive to be greatly disappointed. Access. It's essential.

Thank you again for committing to be here in Gardiner and in Yellowstone and asking to hear from local voices. We appreciate your time and dedication.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Costello follows:]

West Yellowstone, Montana
Testimony before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources'
Subcommittee on National Parks
October 19, 2018

Marysue Costello
Director
West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce

Senator Daines, other Honored members of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources' Subcommittee on National Parks, and other guests, I am pleased to be asked to present information to you today about gateway cities, National Parks and the impacts faced by each and full well knowing that each impacts the others.

Gateway communities such as those represented at this hearing economically rely on tours and recreation. They are our lifeblood. Many, many things can affect the blood flow. Public policy, weather and natural events nearby and even world-wide can constrict or open the flow. Specifically today I would like to address fires in National Parks, dramatic increases in visitation, and access.

The item that gains the most notoriety are fires. They are dramatic, photogenic and alarming! And they can go on for months. In recent years, Yellowstone's gateway communities have gone through several iterations of impactful fires.

Due, I believe, to the recognition that entities cannot work in isolation, there has been a significant shift to transparency and cooperation. Two summers ago, and again this summer, West Yellowstone has been directly affected by fires that encompassed both Forest Service and Park Service lands very near to our community. Both Gardiner and Cooke City have had their share of challenges with fires, too.

Some citizens are of the opinion that all fires should be managed to suppress while others are more accepting that fire is critical to the maintenance of healthy forests and that they will be a part of the landscape. Regardless of those positions, West Yellowstone has, especially in more recent years, experienced tremendous openness and cooperation from public agencies and we are grateful. We feel our local representatives are included in the decision-making processes and we value, too, the joint participation by in public meetings and information dissemination.

Fires definitely have a price tag across a broad spectrum of resources: public, private sector and individual citizen. Balancing benefit to cost will always be challenging and we, as gateway communities, highly value the assurance that we will be contributors to the discussions and decisions.

Over the past few summers (excluding last with the eclipse) we have become aware that August, normally one of the busiest months of the season, has begun to lose ground. This could be due to many factors including school calendars. Nonetheless, a question we are beginning to hear from locals is, "Could it be that visitors are consciously or subconsciously beginning to avoid this month because of concerns about the presence of smoke?" Known for its mountains and stunning vistas—is compromised visibility and potential restriction of activity beginning to cause prospective visitors to rethink plans to visit the West post-July.

We, in West Yellowstone and many locations throughout the region were affected this summer by smoke beginning in early July. First was the impact from fires in California and Oregon, then from Canada and on to Idaho before there were fires burning in the more local areas. It would be my estimation that there were very few days between the last two weeks of July and mid-September that smoke, in varying degrees, was not in the air.

More than a century of hard suppression of wildland fires and the impact it has had on our forests cannot be overcome quickly. Nevertheless, the time for further exploration into a more comprehensive plan has come. We do not say this lightly and fully recognize that any solutions need to be openly discussed with all parties having seats at the table.

Next, I would like to address the dramatic increase in visitation over the past few years and its impacts. Yellowstone is known world-wide and for many internationals it is on their "bucket list." The result?

Traffic jams (sometimes miles and hours long), overflowing parking lots and restrooms, challenges with languages, disrespect for wildlife and an underground plumbing system not subject to man. These all dramatically affect the Park and bleed out directly and indirectly into the bordering communities.

We highly desire to be partners in working through the challenges—in other words, a seat at the table.

The way will not be easy. We look to and for solutions that will enhance visitors experience while not adversely offsetting the economies of gateway communities. With over four million visitors, five gateways and four US highways, answers will need to be multi-faceted responding to an army of stakeholders. And, in the end, maximum security for the incredibly unique natural resource that is Yellowstone.

We appreciate the Park Service's commitment to research that is well under way and that will inform and guide visitor management decisions and planning. Additional funding for all our Parks and Monuments as they grapple with current increased visitation and that which is expected to come, would be a blessing.

I wish to express appreciate to Senator Portman for the introduction of the Restore Our Parks Act and to Senator Daines, too, for all of his work in championing the Act. This Act, by addressing the back-log of infrastructure needs, could enable more of the regular Park appropriation to find its way into additional staffing integral to addressing many of the visitor management challenges of the increased visitation.

Additional gate staffing, wildlife monitors and parking lot supervision would seem to be areas of focus that could enhance the experience for most visitors while researching and developing other additional, long-term solutions.

Lastly, at this time, I would like to address access to public lands. To our east lies Yellowstone National Park and on our other three sides the vast majority of land belongs to the United States Forest Service. We are, truly, an impacted community—rather like a wisdom tooth. Hence our survival depends on access to these public lands.

Recognizing that this hearing is particularly focused on Yellowstone, these remarks are intended with that in mind. Nevertheless, to some degree, they are related to all federal lands.

With reference to Yellowstone's visitation management, access will be an essential element of those discussions.

West Yellowstone has long desired year-around access to the Park instead of the current fall and spring closures of our gate. Each closure is approximately six weeks in length and the result is very like a spigot being turned off. Certainly seasonal affects would continue (after all, we have seasons!), however, our community would be able to better develop a more sustainable year-around economy with such a change. And visitors could more readily be satisfied.

With Yellowstone on the bucket-list of both citizens and international visitor throughout the world, rarely is "time of the year" considered. Yellowstone is the goal! Everyone understands that weather can impact a vacation; however, the planned, extended, closures are confusing and many visitors arrive to be greatly disappointed.

Access. It is essential. And, at this time, I do not believe that I can add anything more on that topic. It would be challenging and exciting to experience. We would like that opportunity.

Thank you again for committing to be here in Gardiner and Yellowstone and asking to hear from local voices. We appreciate your time and dedication to serving.

Senator DAINES. Thank you, Ms. Costello.
Ms. Purvis.

**STATEMENT OF DEB PURVIS, PRESIDENT, COOKE CITY
PARK COUNTY WATER DISTRICT**

Ms. PURVIS. Senator Daines, thank you so much for taking the time to reach out to our gateway communities. I'm really grateful for the opportunity to tell you about the challenges to our tiny little community.

As you know, Cooke City is located—we're isolated. We're between Yellowstone National Park and then there's about ten miles of highway in Montana and on the other side of that is Wyoming. So we're truly an island and that presents unique problems with our highways and plowing and being able to access our roads. We have no cell phone service. Some people really enjoy that. Our visitors do not as much. We also have very limited internet.

Senator DAINES. If you get to the top of Granite Peak, you can get cell service.

[Laughter.]

Ms. PURVIS. Yes, you can hike up to the hill.

[Laughter.]

The little community, Silver Gate and Colter Pass, on either side of Cooke City have very limited internet. We have to operate on satellite internet until you use up all of your limited data—they generously give you 10 gigs of data. When you use that up you're down to dial-up speeds.

But mostly what I want to talk to you about today is our wastewater problem. Cooke City has a really big wastewater problem. As with all of us, tourism is the mainstay to our economy. We're blessed and challenged with the rapid and significant increases in the number of people who visit our area. So just wastewater is not a real popular topic to talk about, but I'm going to give you some idea of what we're facing.

First of all, everybody in Cooke City, business and private residence, has their own onsite septic system. We have no way to manage community wastewater. In 2009, we had 4,000 visitors to our community center. In 2017, we had 23,000. You know about the gate interest we have, and we also recently have had a lot more bus traffic. This summer we had 222 buses carrying 6,660 people and mostly they stopped at the community center to use the bathroom.

The businesses on the south side of Main Street lease space from the National Forest Service for their drain fields. That permit is set to expire in two months, in December of this year, so we're scrambling to work on this.

In 2010, we did build the community center, and they have their own onsite system. They sized that for 600 gallons per day based on best estimates and the DEQ usage table. The reality is that in August of last year, they averaged 990 gallons per day with a peak day of 2,340 gallons. And so, they had taken some steps to address this. We were able to use some of our resort tax money for matching funds for a grant to get a PER, a Preliminary Engineering Report, which is the first step to address this. That initial draft is due

out in March 2019, and we hope to have an election to form a sewer district in May 2019.

We are working with other organizations as well. I traveled to Helena this spring to give testimony at a local government legislative subcommittee hearing. We've also been able to work, not closely, with Park County Commissioners to partner and gain assistance and work toward solving this problem, and they've been wonderful to work with. We've also had just a real light at the end of the tunnel in that the National Forest Service approached us recently and offered, well, they didn't offer to give it to us, I'm sure, but—

[Laughter.]

—offered six parcels of land and asked, you know, how would this work for your community drain field? The engineer and I were just blown over. We didn't quite know what to do with that. So there's a real spirit of cooperation there, and that's been really refreshing.

So, in conclusion, Cooke City is not a city, we're not incorporated. We're not a city or a county. We're very remote. We have no ability to tax that a political subdivision or a government entity does. We're a very important gateway to Yellowstone National Park—220,000, roughly, people go through the Northeast Gate. We need to be able to provide basic sanitation to our citizens and our guests while still safeguarding the natural resources.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Purvis follows:]

Deb Purvis, President
Cooke City Park County Water District

COOKE CITY INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

Statement of the Problem

Cooke City is a tiny community 3 miles outside the northeast entrance to Yellowstone National Park. Tourism is the mainstay of the economy for this area and the number of visitors is increasing at an astounding pace. In 2009, 4000 people visited the Visitor Center in Cooke City. (Cooke City Chamber of Commerce) Last year that number grew to 23,000 visitors! This summer we counted 21,566 people who visited our community center.

According to YNP records, nearly a quarter of a million people entered Yellowstone National Park through the Northeast entrance. Although we have no way to count how many of these visitors stopped in Cooke City, it is easy to imagine that the number was considerably higher than the 21,000 who stopped at the visitor center.

All businesses and homes have individual on site septic systems. Most were installed over twenty years ago; many were installed 30-40 years ago and there are even some homes served by

cesspools. All of the businesses on the south side of Hwy 212, the main street, lease space from the US National Forest Service for their drain fields. These leases are set to expire in just over 2 months on December 31.

In 2010, Cooke City constructed a community center with public restrooms. Buses numbering 222 carrying 6660 passengers traveled through Cooke City this summer. A considerable number of those buses stopped at the Community Center and those passengers used the facilities. This system was sized for 600 gallons per day (GPD) based on best guesses on patronage, the DEQ usage table, and the available space. In the month of August 2017, the Community Center used an average of **990 GPD with a peak day of 2340 GPD**. That septic system is already overwhelmed and failing.

Clearly, this community must address the issue of wastewater management to be a viable gateway community. According to the Census Bureau as reported by the Montana Department of Commerce, the year round population of Cooke City is 35, with a median household income of \$38,500.

(<http://comdev.mt.gov/Resources/Financial/Tar>

getRate2015) Obviously, a community of this size cannot afford to pay for a wastewater treatment system without some significant financial assistance

Efforts to Address the Problem

Cooke City and the surrounding communities of Colter Pass and Silver Gate have a 3% resort tax. Representatives of various community organizations meet annually to decide how to allocate the roughly \$170,000 that is collected. Last year \$20,000 was approved for matching funds for a Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP) grant to fund a preliminary engineering report (PER) to explore alternatives for managing wastewater. An additional grant from the Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) was awarded. The initial draft of the PER is due in March of 2019.

We have also been searching for cooperative ways to address the problem with other public and private agencies. Please see attached letter from our community organizations to Park County Commissioners. Moreover, in an effort to increase awareness and explore possible solutions, our fire chief and I gave testimony at the Local Government Legislative Sub-Committee hearing in

Helena earlier this year. Additionally, recent conversations with representatives from the National Forest Service are very hopeful in terms of securing land necessary for a community drain field.

Conclusion

It is important to bear in mind that Cooke City is not a city or county. We are a remote unincorporated section of Park County without the resources and ability to tax that a political subdivision or governmental entity has. Yet, we find ourselves as an important gateway into Yellowstone. We need to be able to protect the health of our citizens and guests by providing basic sanitation while safeguarding our natural resources.

February 22, 2018

Park County Commissioners
414 E Callender St.
Livingston, MT 59047

Dear Commissioners:

This letter is written on behalf of the Cooke City, Colter Pass and Silver Gate Community Council, the Cooke City Area Chamber of Commerce, the Cooke City Water Board, the Silver Gate Water Board and the Cooke City Silver Gate Emergency Services Board.

Together, our five organizations represent a majority of the businesses and publicly managed facilities in the Cooke City, Colter Pass and Silver Gate area.

As you are well aware, our area of the county is facing serious problems with water and sewer needs. The dramatically increased tourist traffic moving in and out of Yellowstone National Park has literally swamped our tiny community. Our septic systems are dangerously in need of upgrading. Our water system in Cooke City proper is in danger due to faulty design and construction. The Silver Gate water system requires annual capital investment. At the same time, there are limited financial resources to meet these needs. The resort tax does not raise sufficient dollars to address these problems. We struggle each year to merely fund band aids to our mounting infrastructure problems.

As the public bodies in our area charged with managing public funds and facilities we believe we must work together to direct resort tax resources where they are most needed. For example, this year we have agreed that the Cooke City water system is in dire need of funds for emergency repairs and should receive priority. But we know that modernizing existing infrastructure systems in our communities will require a level of investment we cannot afford on our own.

The purpose of this letter is twofold. First, we request that Park County assign some priority to our water and sewer needs by assigning staff or a committee to work with us to search out available funds and other opportunities to solve these problems. In this connection, we wish to accept your offer that we send representatives to Helena on March 15, 2018 when Erica Strickland and Commissioner Berg meet with the Local Government Committee. We will send Deb Purvis, President of the Cooke City Water Board and Troy Wilson, President of the Cooke City Silver Gate Emergency Services Board. Second, we wish to assure the Commissioners that our five organizations have dedicated ourselves to working together on behalf of the community to bring solutions to these important problems.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss with the Commission and staff what we have done so far, what we hope to do and how our organizations and the county can work together to achieve solutions.

Very Truly Yours,

Colter Pass, Cooke City, and Silver Gate Community Council

By Lance Ogden

Colter Pass, Cooke City, Silver Gate Chamber of Commerce

By Lisa Ann Chlinger

Cooke City Water District

By Dee Purnis

Cooke City, Silver Gate Emergency Services

By Travis

Silver Gate Water Board

By Unpublished

Cc:

Yellowstone National Park – Superintendent Dan Wenk
Forest Service – Michael Thom, Gardiner District
Montana Senator - Jon Tester

Senator DAINES. Thank you, Ms. Purvis, I appreciate the testimony.

Mr. Sacca.

STATEMENT OF RICHARD ANTHONY SACCA II, EMERGENCY MANAGER, OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT, FLATHEAD COUNTY, MONTANA

Mr. SACCA. Good morning, Senator Daines and ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Rick Sacca. I'm here from Flathead County, up in Northwest Montana, where I serve as both the County Emergency Manager and the County Coordinator for Montana State Disaster and Emergency Services. I'm also fortunate to be the Local Emergency Planning Committee, or LEPC, Chairman. And in my part time I'm the Assistant Chief of Bad Rock Fire. So, as you can tell, my perspective is probably going to be an emergency services perspective.

I plan to brief you on some of the many successes that we've seen as a result of the positive relations with our partners at Glacier National Park, I intend to highlight the importance of these relations as it relates to the never-ending cycle of emergency management, and I also hope to show you the value of these relations, the value that these relations build, particularly in terms of the management of emergencies and the processes that we have developed for emergency management. And these incidents go far beyond the response actions that you might think of: sending an ambulance or a police car. These are much more in-depth than processes and this allows us to work together in managing any incident or event or crisis that occurs in or out of the park.

As detailed in my written testimony, the ever-increasing number of visitors to our national parks places an increased burden on the local emergency services and response agencies, particularly in the closest gateway communities. These agencies have grown over the years but at a rate commensurate with the population growth, permanent population growth, not in step with the significant increases in visitors that we are now serving.

In Flathead County, these emergency response agencies in the gateway communities and throughout the county are primarily all volunteer, unpaid, rural fire departments. The lack of growth of these departments can be attributed to the lack of increased property ownership, lack of increased property taxes and the ever-decreasing rates of volunteerism we see nationwide. There is no improvement in that situation visible on the horizon from our view.

The park is also, arguably, not keeping up with the dramatic increase of visitors in terms of their emergency services staff. In essence, none of us have grown sufficiently to accommodate the needs and demands of these increased visitors.

Glacier National Park, Flathead County Office of Emergency Services and all of our emergency response and service agencies recognize this limitation and have chosen to seek better solutions. The idea that we can and do all work together helps us to combine our forces. Our emergency management team, if you would, and the collective pool of resources we have work together.

The relationships we have developed allow us to plan and use these resources in this resource pool to plan for, respond and recover from any incident or emergency we face. The types of incidents that we have developed processes to respond to range from the minor vehicle collision, minor medical emergencies, serious trauma, structural fires, hazmat or hazardous materials leaks, search and rescue, wildland fire and all the way up to large events like mass casualty incidents, the Bakken oil train derailment and possible leak, and avalanches which cut off our interstate highway and major rail lines. All of these negatively affect tourism and the gateway communities.

The ability to plan for and respond to these incidents is rooted on relationships with the park and county agencies that have created effective emergency management processes and a teamwork approach with the park and the community. I don't have a funding solution to the challenges we have.

The commitment that's been demonstrated from the park and the county to protecting these relationships is clearly seen as they are designated as "values of risk." And that's what I'd like to leave you with today is we, the park, Flathead National Forest, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and Flathead County Emergency agencies include these values of risk in our delegations of authority when we sign a delegation of authority letter and commission incident management teams.

Those teams consist of the typical Type 3 Incident Management Teams which we use on a routine basis. Regional Type 2 teams we bring in when there's a larger-scale incident, and the national Type 1 teams as we brought two teams in this past season. The incident management objectives that are outlined in those delegations of authority become incident management objectives for every single person working on that incident: firefighter, police officer, what have you.

The same needs to be done in the daily standard operating procedures of our national parks. The idea that we want to protect these relationships needs to be something that's regular course of business, not something that's a standout that we do only when there's a big fire.

It is my hope that you have seen the tremendous value in these relationships and their results, and we ask you to help craft a more formalized mandate for the parks to follow this model, this successful model, and encourage support and nurture this type of relationship-building and relation maintenance with the external gateway community's emergency services.

None of us can do this alone. We are all in this together, and I'm proud of the important work and successes we have achieved with Glacier National Park.

Thank you for your time and thank you for listening.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sacca follows:]

**Richard Anthony Sacca II, Emergency Manager,
Flathead County Montana, Office of Emergency Management**

Challenges of Gateway Communities of National Parks

Flathead County Montana is considered as the major gateway community to Glacier National Park with an estimated 70 percent of all visitors to the park traveling through our county. This volume of visitors presents unique and substantial challenges to our county emergency services organizations. These include increased traffic, parking shortages, increased ambulance/medical service calls, increased fire department calls, increased number of urgent care and emergency department visits, and increased human-caused wildfires.

The local emergency response agencies of Flathead County are primarily funded through resident property tax levies. Most of the Fire and EMS agencies in Flathead County are all-volunteer or part volunteer/part paid departments. The jurisdictions that border Glacier National Park are all small, rural, all-volunteer departments. The seasonal influx of visitors places a burden upon these agencies, stretching them to the limit of staffing and equipment. These include organizations and challenges include:

- Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
- Law Enforcement
- Wildland Fire Response: The beginning of northwest Montana's wildland fire season coincides with the height of tourism at Glacier
- All-Hazards Incident Management

Successes Found through Partnership with Glacier National Park and Flathead County

Numerous examples of successes of these partnerships exist and including:

- Excellent professional working relationships are maintained between the Park's Chief Ranger, Chief of Ranger Operations, Structural Fire Coordinator, Wildland Fire Management Officer, District Rangers, and Public Information Officer with Flathead County Sheriff, Emergency Manager, Fire Warden/Fire Service Area Manager, Emergency Services Manager, and the Fire Chiefs of the 5 closest mutual aid fire departments. These relationships are supported by the senior elected officials of the county as well as the Park Superintendent and leadership team.
- Participation of the Park in the Interagency Type 3 Incident Management Team. The Park is an equal member of the team along with the US Forest Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, and Flathead County. Joint training is conducted and the team stands ready all summer to respond to all types of hazards, with a focus on wildland fires.
- Joint development of response plans for the 911 system which now allows for pre-determined automatic notification and dispatch of emergency services to and from the Park and the gateway community. This creates expedient emergency responses by the Park to adjacent remote highways, and also brings multiple fire agencies automatically to the park when an emergency occurs.
- Coordinated, regular information sharing with our press partners, local communities, and visitors. Partnerships between the US Forest Service, Glacier National Park, Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks, and Flathead County are evident through the daily Interagency Fire Season Information Fact Sheet. This helps to ensure timely, accurate and consistent messaging to the public.

**Richard Anthony Sacca II, Emergency Manager,
Flathead County Montana, Office of Emergency Management**

- Cooperative relationships with the Park, Flathead County Office of Emergency Services and Flathead Emergency Communications Center improved public emergency notification and warning processes. This gives the Park access to the County-Administered Emergency Alert System to notify the public via cell phone, land-line telephone, television and radio.
- The Park's membership in the Flathead County Fire & EMS Chiefs Association fosters camaraderie and a teamwork approach to joint fire response and EMS services.
- Wildland Fire Response: The beginning of northwest Montana's wildland fire season coincides with the height of tourism at Glacier National, and the highest national preparedness levels (and shortages of firefighting resources nationwide). This strains the local fire departments which are dealing with the increased number of motor vehicle accidents and EMS cases. Due to the preexisting relationships that the Federal, State, and County agencies have, and effective response pre-planning, wildfire firefighting response are still able to be made, despite the strain all departments are faced with. Two recent examples are:
 - 2017 Structural Protection Task Force to protect the Lake McDonald Lodge complex. This team deployed to the Park in 2 hours with 8 emergency apparatus and 21 County responders.
 - 2018 Structural Protection Task Force to protect the Lake McDonald Ranger Cabin Complex and Private In-Holder vacation homes. This team deployed to the Park in 1 hour with 13 emergency apparatus and 25 County responders.
- The Park, partnered with the Office of Emergency Services, Environmental Protection Agency Region VIII Office, and Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad, jointly conducted extensive inland oil spill training, and a functional exercise, to be best prepared in the event of a train derailment resulting in any oil spill affecting the greater Flathead River basin, the headwaters to the Columbia River.
- The Park, partnered with the Office of Emergency Services, Flathead County Sheriff, Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad, Montana Highway Patrol, and the Montana Department of Transportation, conduct coordination meetings and a tabletop exercise each year to plan for the avalanches that could disrupt travel and interstate commerce by blocking US Highway 2 or the BNSF rail line. This ensures a safe and timely joint response when these avalanches occur. This has also led to successful review and approval for emergency avalanche mitigation work.
- The Park participates in the Emergency Communication Users Group which helps to ensure that we have a pre-designed emergency radio communications program and plan in place. This allows true interoperability between the Park and our local, County, State, and Federal partners in response to any emergency.
- Coordination with the Office of Emergency Services, Flathead County Sheriff, Flathead Emergency Communications Center, and the Park allows the Park timely access to any of the County assets that the Park does not independently maintain. These include:
 - County aircraft assets including; Advanced Life-support & Emergency Rescue Team (ALERT) helicopter, Two Bear Air rescue helicopter, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (drones).
 - Search & Rescue assets including; snow rescue, ice rescue, remote rescue, water rescue, underwater rescue & recovery, and two experienced search and rescue organizations.

**Richard Anthony Sacca II, Emergency Manager,
Flathead County Montana, Office of Emergency Management**

- Incident command assets including two mobile command & communication vehicles, portable emergency radio repeater stations, Mass Casualty Incident (MCI) response vehicle, all-hazards incident support vehicle & equipment suite, Emergency Operations Center suite, and the Northwest Montana Type 3 All-Hazards Incident Management Team.
- Law enforcement resources from the Flathead County Sheriff, including a SWAT capability, as well as law enforcement officers from the cities of Kalispell, Columbia Falls and Whitefish.
- Coordination between the Park and the Flathead Emergency Communications Center allow for emergency 911 calls from the park to be answered by the Flathead 911 Center during off-season times at the Park, and in emergency situations.
- Close cooperation with the Office of Emergency Services and the Park help keep the County Senior Elected Officials apprised of our joint emergency preparedness work and response successes. This also ensures direct access to the Montana Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) Division through the County DES Coordinator.
- Partnerships between the Park and the Office of Emergency Services allow for the effective integration of incident management teams, including the regional type 2 teams and the national type 1 teams. Having these relationships in place between the park, the stakeholders and the cooperators allow these teams to seamlessly integrate with the local resources and to address the emergency at hand.

Threats to the Partnership with Glacier National Park and Flathead County and Solutions

Several threats to the partnerships with the Park exist including;

- We are fortunate to have a likeminded approach to emergency preparedness and to cooperative relationships. However, personnel turnover could negatively affect these relationships if new personnel arrived and did not share the same long-term vision of emergency management. Senior leadership of all organizations need to recognize, support and encourage maintaining and expanding these relationships.
- Effectiveness emergency preparedness is based on the Park's participation in a continuous cycle of threat evaluation, plan development, training, exercises and evaluation, and plan revision. Failure to continue to engage in and support this preparedness cycle could erode the effectiveness of current relationships, and ultimately hinder response to future emergencies.
- Continuous increases in the demand for emergency services (fire, EMS, and law enforcement) will continue with the ever-increasing number of visitors to Glacier National Park. These visitors will continue to draw upon the local agencies, including the small, rural departments, and are an additional stressor to these all-volunteer departments. With no increases in funding, staffing, or equipment in the near future, the only element that keeps this level of support is the personal relationships that exist between the park and these agencies. These relationships need to be nurtured and further enhanced whenever and wherever possible.

**Richard Anthony Sacca II, Emergency Manager,
Flathead County Montana, Office of Emergency Management**

Advantages of the Partnership with Glacier National Park and Flathead County

The effective relationships that exist between Glacier National Park and the Flathead County emergency management agencies have created a process that allows for effective emergency management. This process is applicable to all known and unknown hazards that we may encounter. Cultivating and strengthening these relationships bolsters this process and will produce a high return on the investment we are making for future incidents.

The partnership between the Park and the local response agencies transcends the geographic boundaries of the park and beyond the emergency response function. Not only do we meet and work together at emergency incidents, we see each other throughout our normal lives; at the grocery store, at school and sporting events, in all aspects of our community.

The positive benefits of the currently exceptional relationships between the park and local emergency resources are clearly evident. Leaders at Glacier National Park and Flathead County emergency response agencies are proud of these relationships and the effective emergency services they bring to the residents of this gateway community and to all the visitors of the park. The fact that these relationships were formed and maintained are testament to those involved and should be celebrated!

Rick Sacca

**Flathead County Emergency Manager,
Office of Emergency Services Manager, &
Montana Disaster & Emergency Services Coordinator
Flathead County, Montana
October 17, 2018**

Senator DAINES. Thank you.

Before we get into some questions, I think it would just be worth noting some of the support staff who are here that makes these hearings possible.

I will start with Rebecca—Rebecca Bonner is a Professional Staff Member from the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Raise your hand there, Rebecca. She serves on the Minority Staff with Senator Cantwell, who is the Ranking Member of this Committee from the State of Washington.

And then to my right is Michelle Lane, Professional Staff Member from the Committee who serves on the Majority Staff under Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska.

To my left is Joshua Sizemore. He serves on my legislative staff in Washington, DC. He is a native of Billings. So Billings is home, but we have him temporarily displaced in Washington, DC.

And then Darla Ripchensky, Chief Clerk from the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. So it is great to have you out here as well. Thank you.

So this literally is all the formalities of a U.S. Senate hearing, the way it is recorded and so forth. The beauty of this is we are in Gardiner, Montana.

I am going to start with you, Mr. Sholly. If you could get the microphone back here.

Welcome back to Montana. Welcome back to Yellowstone. Welcome back to your old school here.

The question I have for you, in your mind, how do you see the relationship between the National Park Service and the Gardiner Schools working today and how is that different than when you were a student? Can you remember that far back, Cam?

Mr. SHOLLY. I'm not sure if I was really thinking about the relationship between the park and the school district when I was going to school here. It's a great question though.

From what I understand in my first 24 hours, 36 hours here, the park works very closely with the school district. The school has produced some amazing graduates—I wasn't talking about myself.

[Laughter.]

I was—I know this school is regularly ranked not only number one in Montana, but it's a top-ranking school in the country, too, from a Class C perspective, and that's because of the leadership of the school and the commitment of Gardiner and the importance that Gardiner puts, and Mammoth, on having a great school in a community like this which is absolutely essential. So I think we have a good relationship.

I will tell you that my goal is to continue to ensure that that relationship ascends, that we really work on understanding better what issues you have, in what ways we can help solve some of those issues and, you know, anything that's within our legal authority that we have the ability to help you with, we will. The school itself, from an executive management standpoint, and the park and I can speak for the concessions as well and the businesses even here in Gardiner. Our goal is to attract the best and the brightest into this community, into Mammoth, and the best and the brightest have families and many times they'll make a decision if they think that a school, not just here but in many places around

the country, is not up to their satisfaction for one reason or another. They will choose not to transfer and that can have a big impact on who we bring into these communities and the types of talent that we want and need to attract.

And so, I think we have mutual objectives, mutual goals and a mutual commitment to continue working together to elevate and improve not only the relationships, but the type of things that we work on and the opportunities that we have in the future.

Senator DAINES. It is interesting. The two of you are sitting next to each other. I mean, you think of the important relationship.

I remember when we were building our technology company in Bozeman, trying to sometimes recruit talent to come to Montana. The first question that was asked was, tell me about the schools. And that was, oftentimes, a key decision, like to use a matrix to come to a place like Gardiner, to Bozeman, wherever.

Mr. Sholly, as you are aware, the Centennial set records around the country as it relates to visitation at our parks. Here at Yellowstone we continue to see record visitation numbers and just when we thought we would not see another record, we break that record here in Yellowstone. I know you track those numbers. Could you speak to how the increased visitor levels that we are seeing here impact the park and looking at both in terms of the challenge it presents as well as an opportunity?

Mr. SHOLLY. Well, I really appreciate that question. It's very timely.

I think we've increased visitation by about 50 million people nationally, since 2013 or 2014. We were running on about a 270 to 280 million visits per year for a very long time and with the build-up to the Centennial and other reasons, we've increased substantially in the last four to five years.

That's not a bad thing, I mean, 330 million people enjoying our parks and connected to our parks. As you mentioned, our parks represent the very best of America, and they're bipartisan. And it's incumbent upon us to make those connections, and we've tried to do that very successfully in the past.

There are impacts to that. I would put those in, kind of, two different buckets. One, impacts to resources, operations and staffing at the park level. And then in another bucket, the impacts on, kind of, peripheral impacts on communities and on the visitor experience itself.

On the first bucket, which I think is in my mind, they're all priorities but something I'm going to be very heavily focused on is the corridors within, say, Yellowstone of my peers and around the service we're looking at these same things, where we have high-density, high-use, visitor impacts on fragile resources or see an increased damage to resources because of the visitor use. Those are things that need to be addressed immediately.

And in the short amount of briefings that I've gotten here in my first day in the job, I can tell you already, there's a considerable amount, and especially in the West Yellowstone to Old Faithful corridor, of impacts because of the higher visitation levels, not just on visitor impacts, not just on the communities, but directly on the resources where people are parking their cars, where they're walking on geothermal features.

And so, there are a lot of things that we need to do on that front, working with communities, working to come up with solutions that make sense. That doesn't necessarily mean restricting visitors, but as far as things that we can do to prevent that damage and those impacts, we need to line those out and work to execute them.

Forty percent more visitation in the last 10 years in Yellowstone. And I haven't looked at these numbers in my first day here too much, but when you look at the numbers across the service, you see—when adjusted for inflation, some flat budgets—you see similar or eroding staffing levels. And so, you've got an increase in Yellowstone at 40 percent. You've got similar staffing. That's a stressor on our ability to manage the visitations. That's something that we look at.

And then I heard an anecdotal story yesterday about visitation, or cars backing up at West Yellowstone all the way into town. And so, there's a lot we need to do from the standpoint of how efficient we are, do we have the right entrance framework, whether that be a west or here in Gardiner or anywhere else. And then once visitors are in the park, are they—are we doing what we need to do to manage that traffic flow, to manage that experience and do it in a way where they can enjoy these incredible resources, but we're also protecting them at the same time.

Senator DAINES. Thank you, Cam.

I know we have had some good hearings in Washington looking at how technology might help us as well in terms of trying to smooth out some of the crowding issues we are seeing at times, so I think there will be more to come on that as we think about the future.

Ms. Baltzley, first I want to congratulate you and Gardiner for achieving the ranking as top school in Montana, not only in Montana, but having the national recognition, and I think your own credentialing of your experiences in Virginia and Maryland and seeing what is out here. I know sometimes out here in Montana people think that we are not quite as smart as they are back east.

Ms. BALTZLEY. That's right.

Senator DAINES. But we prove them wrong most of the time, don't we?

Ms. BALTZLEY. We do.

Senator DAINES. Yes.

Ms. BALTZLEY. The staff here is incredible.

Senator DAINES. Yes, exactly.

Your testimony mentioned that enrollment in the school has fallen below 200 students for the first time in decades. As I travel around the state—I get to all 56 counties every two years—the plight of the Class C schools around Montana is very, very troubling. You attribute this to a variety of factors. Would you like to elaborate on what you feel is causing enrollment to decrease? You talked about it a bit in your testimony, but maybe you could elaborate further. And what, if anything, could be done to get enrollment back up in Gardiner in the coming years?

Ms. BALTZLEY. Well some of it, you would assume, would be a natural ebb and flow of trends, as most school districts see, but this is such a dramatic drop that when we take a look at what's happening, we realize that our housing issue is probably at the root

of—it's probably the largest cause of what's our declining enrollment.

Although there are still employees who are working in the park for both either the National Park Service or for Xanterra, some of those employees are coming from Livingston, so they're no longer living in the Gardiner area because either they can't afford the housing that is here or there isn't housing available.

So over the past, I've lived here since 2010 and we've noticed a dramatic shift and I think it was even occurring before that. When houses go up they're often bought at a huge price that may be investment, investors, et cetera, are able to afford and are changed into vacation rentals. They often then are used from May to October and then they may sit empty, some of them sit empty, or we even have in-seasonal employee housing for which the houses also sit empty during our school year.

So we have young families who cannot afford to buy houses here in Gardiner or there's not even rentals available for them, affordable rentals, that they can come and purchase. So consequently they move up the valley, as we say, and they are beyond a point of rocks which is, where 89 crosses Yellowstone, our Gardiner boundary and a lot of our families are moving out to the Emigrant area or north of there. And, consequently, they have a choice: they can either continue to send their students here to Gardiner as out-of-district students, or they can go to Livingston. I think both choices are made. We have about 35, I think, families right now who are, choose to continue to send their students to Gardiner. A lot of the reasons are they're coming from Emigrant and their employment is in the National Park Service. So, consequently, that has a huge impact on our enrollment.

As far as what we can do. There are several community groups that have been working on this housing situation, and we've been working to see whether or not there are places that we might be able to support some development of affordable housing. Well, just like West Yellowstone was talking, we're landlocked. We can't find those places because we have national lands. We've got state forest lands, et cetera. And so, consequently, we're not able to find the property in order to be able to work with some of the agencies to help us with that affordable housing.

Senator DAINES. Yes, interesting.

Ms. Purvis talked about the national forest, talking about maybe some land for you all because you're landlocked as well, right? You are surrounded—just thinking about what we need to do here—

Ms. BALTZLEY. Right.

Senator DAINES. —as we grow and you have a 40 percent increase in visitation—

Ms. BALTZLEY. Right.

Senator DAINES. —over a period of 10 years.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Right.

Senator DAINES. Something has got to give here, it seems like.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Right.

And we look to, you know, maintaining that same quality—

Senator DAINES. Yes.

Ms. BALTZLEY. —of education that we've been able to do, that has given us that ranking of number one, et cetera. And we do

need to be able to figure out a way in order to have our, yeah, our teachers, which is another piece.

Senator DAINES. Right.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Is, you know, you asked about declining enrollment but even when we do have new teachers the first question is, we did a little reconnaissance before we came and we're not going to be able to afford housing here.

Senator DAINES. Yes.

I want to follow up on another question and get into some details about the funding for the Gardiner Schools. You talked about that a bit in your testimony. You mentioned the school used to receive funding directly from the National Park Service for students who attended school in Gardiner. I remember that distinctly.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Yes, thank you very much for helping us.

Senator DAINES. I think I was going through the National Park budgets, and the issue was revealed.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Right.

Senator DAINES. And that line item has now been replaced with a payment from the State of Wyoming. I remember hearing about it when I was in the House, and we were working with the Wyoming delegation to protect prior year payments because that was also an issue regarding the arrears piece.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Correct.

Senator DAINES. That would have been devastating, if I—

Ms. BALTZLEY. \$8 million.

Senator DAINES. Yes, and to assure the school was made whole.

How is this updated arrangement working for you all? I would like to hear more about that.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Well, we've had to adjust and you heard that this past year was very dramatic in our adjustments because we did have, you know, with the confluence of things that have been going on since that money, which was not earmarked in our—did not need to be earmarked in our general fund budget, which then allowed us to use it for some things over and beyond what we, a Class C, might typically have been able to use. When that money was no longer coming to us and the Wyoming payment came in, working with the State of Montana, that money now needed to go directly into our general fund which then offset what Montana was paying for us, paying us.

So now, we only—the only pieces that we have coming in, for the most part, are in our general fund which is spent every year and we are not able to add to our reserves as much as we have been in the past, which then creates an issue of when we have major factors like what I described with our infrastructure maintenance with having to replace an aging roof. It had to be replaced. We have three boilers of which one, the oldest, is the only functioning one. Those kinds of things take down from our reserves. They're not budgeted into our general funds.

So we do receive impact aid. We also receive REAP money which is, I think, they—

Senator DAINES. By the way, Ms. Baltzley, on the impact aid, you mentioned the formula issue—

Ms. BALTZLEY. Yeah.

Senator DAINES. —there, about where the employees actually were working, where the offices were——

Ms. BALTZLEY. Correct.

Senator DAINES. —and all that, then some that did not qualify for impact aid.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Correct. Right.

Senator DAINES. We have staff here who took notes quickly, as I did as well. We want to go back and look at that——

Ms. BALTZLEY. Great.

Senator DAINES. —to see if there is something there that could be changed in just an administrative rule issue. Is that a law issue? We are going to go investigate that, yes——

Ms. BALTZLEY. Well, thank you because that is a challenge.

Senator DAINES. Yes.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Because so many of the people living in the community actually work in the park, but their offices—they could be guides.

Senator DAINES. Right.

Ms. BALTZLEY. They could be independent contractors.

Senator DAINES. Yes, we will take that as a follow-up item here, too, to see if there is something we can do there.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Great, thank you.

Senator DAINES. Because I think we are violating the principle and the spirit of what is trying to be done on the algebra there.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Great, thank you.

Senator DAINES. The formula needs to be adjusted, best I can tell, first look.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Thank you.

Senator DAINES. Yes.

Ms. BALTZLEY. So consequently, our funding has changed. And so, we're trying to, and especially the Board of Trustees, being the stewards of the money, is trying to act responsibly and trying to be able to take care of our aging infrastructure, be able to appropriately use our budget without going over, without dipping into reserves more than we need to because those reserves are needed for some of the things that are one-time costs, et cetera.

Consequently, it's been a change in the way that we do business and that has impacted our programs of education. We've eliminated some of our academic programs. More of our students are taking online courses because we don't have the staff in order to have direct programs for those students.

Senator DAINES. Thank you.

I am going to move to Mr. Sacca here for a minute.

You described this close, cooperative relationship with the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, other federal partners. Would you describe your relationship with the Park Service as generally positive? And what, if anything, could be done to improve that relationship with the service and other federal partners for that matter?

Mr. SACCA. I believe that Flathead County and our relationship with Glacier National Park is truly outstanding. It's to be commended that they're so willing to be good partners. We enjoy the same level of partnership with the Park, the Forest Service, DNRC and the County.

It was really started, just a couple of people that knew each other, myself and the Chief Ranger, we work next door to each other. We live next door in the park and when our jobs took us in different directions, he stayed in the park and I went to the county, we maintained that relation and continued to build that.

That was quickly capitalized and actually championed by the superintendent and then our commissioners at the county level. They actually recognized the value in that. That allowed it to flourish and happen beyond just the two guys that knew each other to all of our offices working cooperatively in that spirit of cooperation which now is championed by the superintendent and by the county commissioners. That's the value of what we found.

Senator DAINES. Thank you.

Ms. Purvis, how are the wastewater and the water improvements currently paid for?

Ms. PURVIS. Wastewater is not currently paid for. Our water improvements—we built a new water system in 2011, \$2.2 million, made up of a combination of grants and low interest loans.

People in the community right now pay, we fund that with a system called EDU, which is an estimated daily usage. Each unit is \$32.17. It's, kind of, an arbitrary assignment. Restaurants are assigned 1.5 EDUs. So I have a cafe there. Our water bill is like \$46 a month. The hotels are hit very hard. They pay 1 EDU, plus 0.5 EDU for every room that they have. So some of them are paying \$700 and \$800 a month for water. Residents pay \$32.17. We are looking now at moving to a different rate structure based on usage. Restaurants, unhappily for me, are going to be paying considerably more. Hotels will be paying less, I believe.

Senator DAINES. What alternative funding models do you think need to be explored?

Ms. PURVIS. I'm at a disadvantage here. I'm a psychiatric nurse and a restaurant owner, and I don't even know what the options are.

You know, we have a population based on the recent Census Bureau of 2015. I'm not sure it's entirely accurate, but they had said we had 35 year-round residents with a median household income of \$38,500. So the community cannot afford to do this on their own.

Senator DAINES. Any kind of thoughts, perhaps, on whether it is a user fee where visitors would be able to contribute to that as well, or just thinking out loud here of ideas to try to generate revenue to cover some of these things?

Ms. PURVIS. Sure. And we have our three percent resort tax. That generates about \$170,000 a year in Cooke City.

Senator DAINES. Yes.

Ms. PURVIS. But in January, it's an interesting meeting when people fight for their share of the pie. The local option tax that Park County Commissioners and Erica talked about would be, I think, useful for us, so that just the gateway communities could charge that tax for visitors who come through.

Senator DAINES. I have to believe that somebody who gets to your part of the neighborhood here often, Silver Gate and Cooke City, especially in August. You talk about those peak-use months in August. How does that compare to what you see in January and

February when it turns into more of a snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, backcountry skiing, kind of economy?

Ms. PURVIS. That's a really nice time of recovery for many of our septic systems. The numbers are not nearly as high. I don't have the specific figures for you.

Senator DAINES. Ms. Costello, my question for you is a little more general in terms of the habits of visitors to Yellowstone National Park. Are you able to capture how many tourists stop at local businesses versus those who drive straight through to the Park?

Ms. COSTELLO. Well, when I consider that question I can really start to think of maybe a way of trying to understand that. But I don't believe, I know we do not have a way of capturing that at this point in time because we would not know if a visitor, for instance, stopped at the far side of town and had breakfast before they went through the gate.

So all of those sorts of things would be very difficult for us to really know. We obviously know that West Yellowstone is the most popular gateway to Yellowstone, and I'm sure much of that is because we're closest to California. But also—well, it's true. But the other part of that would be just if, you know, we have a couple of highways, three highways and so, it makes a busy place. And no, we do not know that figure.

Senator DAINES. As you work with the businesses there in the Chamber and so forth that you interact with, do you have any strategies for the businesses? I mean, how do they increase their revenue there to get tourists to stop in West Yellowstone before they enter the park and spend some of their money?

Ms. COSTELLO. We spend a considerable amount. West Yellowstone is one of the funded communities for bed tax in Montana. There's a whole formula, but West Yellowstone is fortunate to have that. And then we also have the West Yellowstone Tourism Business Improvement District. Both of those fund a considerable amount for our small community, a considerable amount of marketing and advertising that we do. And that strategy is reviewed and gone over annually to see which ways, what more we could do.

One of the things that we like and are excited about are the additional activities and attractions that are beginning to appear in our area, because I do believe it helps take some of the pressure off the gate because people will come and do other things as well.

For instance, the Adventure Park with ziplines and the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center are in the process of this early into the next tourism season will be opening their riparian habitat which will have otters and lots of types of fish of the area. And we see that as being a tremendous attraction as well. So the more of those things that we can do.

We also send people on tours all over the area. Of course, always bringing them back to West Yellowstone, I might add. But we send them on loop tours that bring them back but encourage them to visit those things that are wonderful places but additional to Yellowstone—Mesa Falls, the Earthquake Visitor Center, all of those.

Senator DAINES. Thank you.

Mr. Sacca, your testimony mentions that the local emergency response agencies of Flathead County are primarily funded through

resident property tax levies and most first responders in the area are either all volunteer or partial volunteer. I know this can put a strain on your resources in terms of time and people, particularly in the peak fire and the peak tourism season when it all happens, usually at the same time. Could you describe the type of fiscal impacts this has on your local budget and what ideas you might have that could be better appropriated in the future?

Mr. SACCA. Well, sir, when we have the large fire season or large other types of incidents that exceed four hours, the response takes a long time. There's a funding mechanism that's in place. There's agreements between the Forest Service, the county, the park and DNRC and have standardized rates that we can use for that.

But anything that's less than four hours is considered mutual aid, the Good Neighbor Policy, and we just go and do it. And the vast, vast majority of those responses that are related to tourism directly, are those one and two and three hour responses, somebody has a medical emergency, a vehicle accident, a vehicle fire and things of that nature.

There is no funding mechanism that exists right now, that we're aware of, and that puts a huge strain on us because that's the bread and butter of what we do. We have some departments that go out several times a day. For a rural department with just six members, that's a tremendous burden on them and their families.

On some of the larger departments, where we send out 10, 12, 15 calls per day and none of it's being reimbursed, but yet it's all in support of somebody else's jurisdiction, that takes a tremendous financial burden on those.

Then those finances, or financial burdens, some of it is salary. Three of our 20 departments have a full-time pay structure, just 3, where the 17 others are 100 percent volunteer. They're not funded at all.

So there is no money coming in there, but we're still consuming resources. We're still using things to clean up the spill from the vehicle accident and medical supplies and things like that on every single call that we do. We're putting wear and tear on all of our vehicles and ambulances and fire trucks, and we're consuming fuel, another huge expense. None of that is reimbursed.

So for the big incidents, yes, there's clearly a funding mechanism and there's 100 percent reimbursement, and those multi-day events and these strike teams and task forces that we send to respond to fires, 100 percent is being reimbursed. But all of the small ones are the ones that are really doing the damage to us.

Senator DAINES. So it is my understanding the task force is paid for services. I guess the question is going to be, do you think you are receiving fair market value?

Mr. SACCA. Yes, sir, I think we do.

For example, the task force that I led this summer to go in and respond into Glacier National Park based on a phone call, a 911 call from the park, to bring what's called a wildland structure protection task force. It's about 26 people, about 13 vehicles, and we go into the park to help them protect the Lake McDonald Ranger Station. Every single gallon of fuel, every man hour for the employees that went, and the daily usage rate or hourly usage rate for those vehicles, all were part of a formula that's been agreed upon,

an existing agreement through DNRC. The DNRC rates are reviewed and updated every single year, so all of us, all of our partners, feel that that's an accurate and fair rate for reimbursement.

Senator DAINES. Okay, thank you.

Ms. Baltzley, I want to come back to something that you said in your testimony. You mentioned the Gardiner Schools had to reduce, I think, 7.5 FTEs in order to balance the budget.

I have to applaud you, first of all, in balancing a budget. DC hasn't figured that out yet. But in terms of keeping Gardiner's reputation as one of the top schools in the state, I mean, I think about when we were raising our children, that would be a very attractive thing to think about, bringing your kids here to one of the top schools in the state, not to mention the nation. But can you speak to what it means to the students and staff here when you have to reduce 7.5 FTEs out of—what's the total FTE count?

Ms. BALTZLEY. Nineteen teachers and then a staff that includes another 7 or 8, so close to 30.

Senator DAINES. Right.

I mean that is 7.5 and the absolute is one thing, but when you look at it in terms of about a quarter—

Ms. BALTZLEY. Correct.

Senator DAINES. —of your entire staff.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Correct.

Senator DAINES. Having spent a lot of years managing businesses, a 20 to 25 percent kind of reduction in force is huge. Maybe you could talk about what that means to the students and staff here?

Ms. BALTZLEY. It's been—I'm not sure the students have noticed as much because of the staff that we have, a lot of them have stepped up and taken on commitments. For example, even our administration, we reduced the athletic director, so now the principal and the superintendent split the athletic director position, so, things like that. So a lot of the staff have stepped up to the plate and picked up some of those pieces.

The Board of Trustees has been calling this a Phase Two, is what's going to happen this year. Phase One was addressing the budget issues. Phase Two was addressing what we're calling the new normal. And the new normal is we have to take this as an opportunity of taking a look at our programs and saying, what do our students need for their future? So how are we going to rework what we currently have, knowing the staff that we have, and try and figure out a different way of keeping that quality education program.

We also have a new educational foundation, the North Yellowstone Educational Foundation, that has started with their—put together an organization that is a non-profit—that's an organization to help us meet some of the needs that are over and beyond what would be our normal educational needs. For example, they funded a position that is going to help us make those connections with Yellowstone in an educational way because our students benefit from being in this area and having a unique opportunity to explore things that they wouldn't have other places. So they are helping us fund a position in order to coordinate that. They're also working on some other opportunities to be able to support professional develop-

ment for teachers that we can't afford in our general budget. We need to have our teachers have that training.

So we're trying to do other things outside of our general fund that we might be able to do that. We've just set up our committees at our last board meeting that are looking at our academic program. We're looking at the housing situation. We're looking at the future strategic planning as it relates. So this is our year of work toward that. We will involve the staff in order to help us. They're always on our committees. And so, how can we best utilize the resources that we currently have here now?

Senator DAINES. Thank you. Thoughtful answer.

I have a question here I am going to open up to the entire panel, kind of go round robin here, as we wrap up.

We have talked a lot today about some of the challenges we see in our gateway communities, but it also sounds like there are some success stories out there as well. Sometimes it is nice to end on a higher note, too, as we also look at the challenges. I would like to hear from each of you if you have ideas for solutions that could come from either a federal, state, local government, maybe something you have seen already work that we should continue to explore further.

We have spent some time working with the Congressional Research Services as it relates to things like wastewater. Ms. Purvis, for example, like what federal grant programs are out there for small, rural communities that have scale problems but don't have a source of tax revenue, particularly in tourism type towns.

So that is the question, what solutions come to mind, federal, state or local government or private sector? You talked a little bit about some of the foundations, perhaps, that are out there, philanthropic causes to help out in education or some combination thereof to help address the issues we are talking about here today.

I will also let whoever has an idea to start off. It looks like the Superintendent is ready to say something. Cam?

Mr. SHOLLY. Well, I really appreciate that question. I think that you can look at this gateway arch project right out here that was completed here recently, which really helped improve traffic flows, pedestrian safety. It accomplished a lot of objectives and I think it was a terrific partnership with the community of Gardiner.

The leveraging of private dollars, as you know, working with Senator Blunt, we just completed the largest public-private partnership in the Gateway Arch in St. Louis where we really leveraged, effectively, philanthropic dollars with some federal dollars and local tax dollars in order to achieve something incredible.

I think for us there are areas in which we can work with federal dollars, legally, and have positive impacts on our gateway communities by the things that we do within the boundary. There are many things we can share—responsibilities for that have joint benefits both in the communities and within the park.

Our Yellowstone Forever group has done a tremendous job in Yellowstone raising private dollars for an incredible amount of projects within the park, but also things that support efforts outside of the park.

So I think it's really about, do we have an inventory, do we recognize where some of those opportunities exist and then how do we

best leverage our resources, either appropriated dollars, community dollars, philanthropic dollars, to get the results that we need and make sure those dollars are invested in the right places.

Senator DAINES. Thank you.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Kind of tagging in on that collaboration piece, I think that's an extremely important piece for the entities that do work in these gateway communities to be able to work together.

Specifically, we really need support for our housing solution. And since we're—land is our constraint, that's probably a place where the national and state agencies might be able to support just, you know, possibly some of the things that were done with the Cooke City issue. We might also be able to tag into that opportunity because we don't have anyplace to build housing. There's no land available.

The general support for education, you know, not reducing the general educational budget, especially as it relates to the aging infrastructures. I know that Gardiner is not the only school district, having worked in a lot of school districts and even our neighboring school districts, that is an issue. So if there's anything from a national perspective that could be done from an aging infrastructure of our school buildings, I think that's an important aspect.

Senator DAINES. Ms. Baltzley, it seems like we keep circling around this housing issue.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Yeah.

Senator DAINES. It seems just critical right now.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Right.

Senator DAINES. And as you talked about strategic planning—

Ms. BALTZLEY. Correct.

Senator DAINES. —that you are starting to do here with your board. Is there, and this is maybe outside the realm of your responsibility, you probably have a view on it or know about it, just the community of Gardiner, per se. Are they looking at long-term master plans here on housing and where this all goes?

Ms. BALTZLEY. We have been.

I joined the community in 2012 and there was already—there was an organization that was out there called the Greater Gardiner Community Council and it was an opportunity for, because we're unincorporated there is no—where do you go for grants? Who is going to get grants on behalf of the community? How are we going to make decisions?

That's still a question. There's a current community group that is just starting some work that's called Gardiner, A Successful Community. It's looking at addressing the big issues that face us as a gateway community where we do rely on our tourism businesses to be a dynamic, economic community but that comes at a price.

And how do we remain a dynamic community so that we're not just a tourism community that then shuts its doors when the season is over and, I mean, you probably noticed if you are staying here, a lot of our restaurants are now closing and it's a little bit different.

We've been working with some of our area groups, the HRDC out of Bozeman, et cetera, have been part of that organization where they actually, over the past several years, have been working on,

can we get some developers in here in order to be able to help us support affordable housing? We get them in here, there's no land. So it circles back to that land issue all the while.

So, yes, this community is extremely dedicated to trying to make sure that Gardiner remains that dynamic community of people that really want to live here and want to be able to maintain the excellence in all things, not only our schools, but in everything else. There are organizations that are out there, and this will probably be a big year of some decisions.

There was a recent article in the Livingston Enterprise that a survey was done before the gateway project and housing was a big issue. Then they were able to come back, I think it was the University of Montana that also did the survey, came back this past summer, did another survey. Same exact things and that was five years ago and more intense about the housing issues and how do we solve that.

Senator DAINES. Well, having grown up in Bozeman since 1964 and growing up in the construction business there, Mom and Dad were in the home building business, I watched that, certainly, what Bozeman did when it was 13,000 people when I was going to kindergarten there at Longfellow.

It is something I know Cam will be looking at as well. I mean, the partnership here between Gardiner and Yellowstone National Park around thinking about this landlocked situation which might require some Congressional action to work with everyone here to probably have some, I am sure who owns the deeds around the town here probably might involve our neck of the woods here in Washington, DC, to see what we can do here to try to figure something out here too.

Ms. BALTZLEY. Thank you.

Senator DAINES. Thank you.

Ms. COSTELLO. Well, I was thinking that about a couple of things. One is going back to the idea of being landlocked and I, because I don't remember exactly how this occurred initially, but West Yellowstone was recently able to purchase 80 acres from the Forest Service directly. But that was included in some legislation that allowed for that.

Is that a possibility for other areas that are exactly in exactly the same situation because that might, indeed, be a solution?

Senator DAINES. You are living on islands here, if you think about the ownership, right? We have to figure something out.

Ms. COSTELLO. Right.

Senator DAINES. Because this is, I mean, just projecting this out 10, 20, 30, 40 years—at some point, I mean, the crisis is here now. It is only going to get worse.

Ms. COSTELLO. Right.

Senator DAINES. We are going to start thinking about that longer-term, perhaps.

Yes?

Ms. COSTELLO. And West Yellowstone is in the process, has received a grant to do some study that will help, hopefully, with the park entrance, the whole situation as well. So that's one thing that West Yellowstone is doing.

We're also, of course, where is the topic of housing not? Nowhere. It's everywhere.

And so, I don't know, I was just reflecting on the fact that when Superintendent Wink was here he changed the conversation from numbers of snowmobiles in the wintertime to sound. It changed the whole viewpoint, sound, sound events.

Maybe we're all locked into just looking at it one way and we need a voice that will change that conversation so that we do see another solution. Isn't there a line over here? Open your mind before your mouth. So I think we're going to have to have really, really open minds about a solution to this because from the projects in big cities to wherever you are, it's been tough.

Ms. PURVIS. Well, I'd just like to echo what you're saying about collaboration and partnerships and opening our minds. We've been very fortunate to find an ombudsman in DEQ who has been actually helping us look for solutions rather than just tell us, "no, you can't do that," "no, you can't do that" and "no, you can't do that."

I think that would be incredibly helpful. We're addressing, well, we're not addressing, but we're suffering from the housing issue as well and attracting employees because we have no place to put them. And it's easy in Cooke City, as we're so isolated, to feel isolated as well, as we're trying to address these problems.

It would be really wonderful to be able to bring these resources together and work with a problem-solving mindset as opposed to the regulations and what we can't do.

Senator DAINES. Great, thank you.

Mr. SACCA. I know it sounds, kind of, just common sense, but one of the things that we can do is really work on just maintaining those close and cooperative relationships. I know that it sounds hokey, but realistically if we have good, quality relations that we're cooperating and we're communicating on all issues, not just when the bad day occurs and we have an emergency or when we have crises that we need to address. A good relation is going to help facilitate finding and implementing the solutions that we need. Bad relations could easily derail any type of improvement that we want to do. So what do we need to do? And how can we do that?

Setting the tone at the top, whether that's the Director of the Forest Service or the Director of the NPS setting the tone, saying that quality relations are values at risk that need to be nurtured and maintained. That trickles down to the Forest Service, the state DNRC. We see the success of that in Flathead County with our agency heads of those two agencies, DNRC and the Forest Service, and the Superintendent of the National Park.

Seeing this as a value at risk and understanding that it needs to be maintained and nurtured, that leadership, if they would continue to champion and protect those relationships with all of the emergency services, but also all the stakeholders and all the co-operators, that's what we need. And we need to set the tone at the top.

Senator DAINES. Well, that is a good way to close on the last word, I think. I appreciate that.

We are going to conclude, and I especially want to thank the witnesses for your time here today, for your testimony today, for your

thoughtful comments. I found it very, very enlightening. I appreciate it very much.

This hearing record will be open for two weeks.

This hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:35 p.m. the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDIX MATERIAL SUBMITTED

Testimony of Bill Berg for the
Subcommittee on National Parks Field Hearing to
Examine Challenges in Gateway Communities of National Parks
Gardiner, Montana - October 19th, 2018

I am Bill Berg, long-time resident of Gardiner, Montana and retired business owner. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony for this important hearing. I've spent decades serving my community and working to support Yellowstone and the larger National Park System, including my role as a regional council member for the National Parks Conservation Association and founder of CoolWorks.com. I have had the good fortune to work in the interior of Yellowstone as a Winterkeeper for 9 seasons, for concessions operations in the park for longer, and as an NPS backcountry ranger in Yellowstone and Alaska. I currently serve as a County Commissioner for Park County. To be clear, these comments are from me, not the Park County Commission.

As past President of the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce as well as the Greater Gardiner Community Council, I can attest to how Yellowstone drives the economy of Gardiner and Park County. I can also attest to the infrastructure challenges that growing levels of visitation bring us just outside of Yellowstone's boundaries. From 46 years of working in and adjacent to Yellowstone I have firsthand experience of the deferred maintenance impacts.

I am grateful for the committee's effort to examine challenges in gateway communities. The problems created from the disrepair of park facilities spill over to gateway communities as we all work together to provide for our visitors. I arrived at a time when Mission 66 infrastructure was shiny and new. Some of those facilities have come and gone. Many are still in service along with infrastructure that is much older. Many of us wonder when things might break down to the point of permanent damage, closure of facilities, or risks to visitor and staff safety.

As Superintendent Sholly will attest, infrastructure at Yellowstone has been deteriorating for some time, posing challenges to the long-term protection of park resources and the visitor experience that is so essential to the economy of Park County and communities throughout the nation that rely on our parks for their livelihood. The growth of Yellowstone's backlog to \$516 million at the end of the last fiscal year is an unacceptable situation, which is why we commend bipartisan members of Congress for working together to seek passage of the Restore Our Parks Act. The bill, which dedicates \$6.5 billion to the park service's deferred maintenance backlog, would go a long way in addressing parks' highest priority projects. At Yellowstone, they are chiefly roads, but also bridges and water and wastewater systems. Parks cannot be functional without a robust and committed deferred maintenance investment. We urge passage of this important bill in the remainder of this Congress.

The second coast-to-coast highway in the United States was the Yellowstone Trail, "from Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound", first imagined in 1912. The objective was to create a route to Livingston so travelers could take that turn to the south through Paradise Valley and Gardiner into Yellowstone. That conduit has been working for more than a century but it delivers visitors to a park road system that needs a lot of work. Members of this committee and in Congress

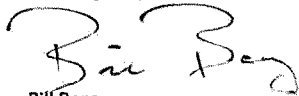
generally can support the funding of our national parks by supporting a highway bill that includes another increase to address park transportation infrastructure and promote wildlife-vehicle collision mitigation solutions and funding. Congress could also ensure that the fully authorized \$100 million annually is committed for public lands transportation infrastructure through the appropriated Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects Program. Finally, Congress should increase annual appropriations for the National Park Service through the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

Annual funding for the park service should not just better fund deferred maintenance. The National Park Service, and Yellowstone specifically, suffers from underfunded park operations, leading to understaffing throughout the park system, among other challenges. As the spouse of a Yellowstone Ranger, now retired, these challenges were a part of daily life for more than 30 years. Between 2011 and 2017, park service staffing dropped by 11% as visitation increased by 19%. This is an unacceptable situation for both the stewardship of our parks, overwhelmed park staff, and for the many visitors so important to our community. Wildlife monitoring, visitor programs, and day-to-day maintenance are not receiving the support they deserve. I urge Congress to better address this need.

Park Service funding is not the only challenge facing national park gateway communities. The protection of Yellowstone, its wildlife and waters, and the larger ecosystem is critically important to our community. In 2014, visitors to Park County brought \$196 million in revenue. Those visitors fuel our largest economic sector. We at the gateways help to meet the community needs of park staff, with housing, schools, and more. We also play a key role in delivering the visitor experience. We must conserve the landscapes, waters, and wildlife that help our economy thrive. One important mechanism for protecting our gateway community is the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act, which recently moved through mark up in both the House and the Senate. This bill, which just this week received the endorsement of the Outdoor Industry Association and is supported by more than 400 members of the Yellowstone Gateway Business Coalition, builds upon the protection put in place by Secretary Zinke, by securing permanent protection from new gold mines in the gateway to Yellowstone. I urge Congress to capitalize on this momentum and pass this bill by the end of the year to provide economic certainty to Yellowstone gateway communities.

Thank you again for holding this hearing, for monitoring the needs of our national parks and their gateway communities, and for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

Best Regards,



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