



The park's \$13 million in deferred maintenance includes reburying infrastructure like this exposed pipe at Pueblo Bonito.

# Chaco Culture National Historical Park

New Mexico

## Overview

Visitors to Chaco Culture National Historical Park traverse a rocky, 20-mile roadway to reach its entrance and are rewarded with ancient, dun-colored ruins that blend into a quiet canyon. This setting was a thriving trade and political center for thousands of Chacoan people from A.D. 850-1250.

A road loop inside the canyon provides access to the stone and timber remains of Great Houses and other structures, including the 600-room Pueblo Bonito, Hungo Pavi, and Chetro Ketl. Visitors can step through these

ancient remains, once multistory structures with sophisticated storage systems. Constructing the houses, University of Arizona researchers have concluded, required wood from over 240,000 trees that was transported from mountains about 65 miles away.<sup>1</sup> On nearby trails, visitors also can view petroglyphs and detailed rock. All told, the park has about 4,000 prehistoric and historic archaeological sites that represent more than 10,000 years of human history, earning it a UNESCO World Heritage site listing. Unfortunately, despite its cultural and historical significance, the park has almost \$14 million in deferred maintenance.

## Maintenance challenges

Traveling from the park to the archaeological ruins at the base of the cliffs requires a ride on cracked roads that need \$4.8 million to resurface. And four hiking trails that offer views of the surrounding mesas are washed out or blocked by overgrowth in sections, requiring \$519,000 to repair. Owing to the park's remote location and dry conditions, supplying water is a challenge. Upgrading the wastewater and water systems, to provide potable water at the popular Gallo Campground, for example, will cost more than \$1 million.

The architectural wonders of the Chaco Great Houses are accessible by foot, but hundreds of years of erosion and differential settlement of the soil have exposed infrastructure. Repairing the site's grounds will require \$4 million. And buildings throughout the park are long overdue for upgrades. Problems with the visitor center's heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning systems often prevent ancient artifacts from being displayed. The center needs \$1 million to repair it.

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“ Most Americans have little understanding of the incredible history of our land before the arrival of Europeans. Chaco Culture NHP is an international treasure, sacred to the memory of Native Americans and an irreplaceable tool for educators. Yet during the past few decades, the condition of trails, facilities, artifacts, and the staffing needed to maintain them have been systematically degraded and reduced.”

Steve Speth, president, Friends of Chaco

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## Recommendations

To address the infrastructure needs at Chaco Culture and other National Park Service (NPS) sites in New Mexico and across the country, Congress should:

- Ensure that infrastructure initiatives include provisions to address park maintenance.
- Provide dedicated annual federal funding for national park repairs.
- Enact innovative policy reforms to ensure that deferred maintenance does not escalate.
- Provide more highway funding for NPS maintenance needs.
- Create more opportunities for public-private collaboration and donations to help restore park infrastructure.

Table 1

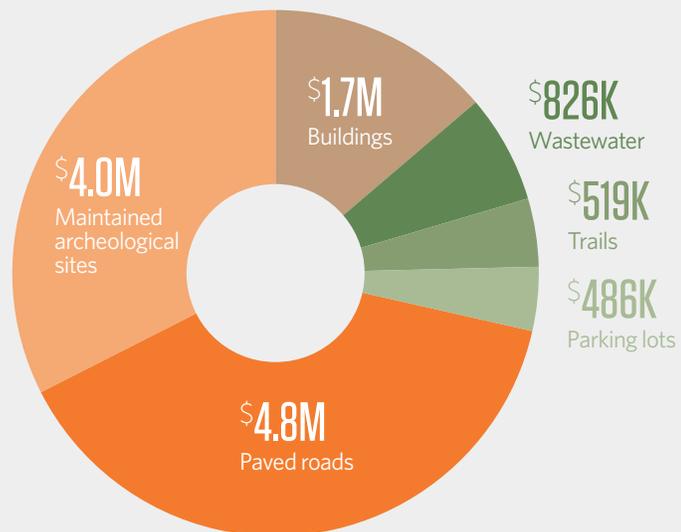
## Chaco Culture National Historical Park Facts 2016

<b>Visitor spending</b>	\$3 million
<b>Jobs created by visitor spending</b>	46
<b>Economic output</b>	\$3.6 million
<b>Labor income</b>	\$1.2 million
<b>Visits</b>	54,083
<b>Deferred maintenance (fiscal year 2015)</b>	\$13.7 million

Sources: National Park Service, "Annual Visitation Report by Years: 2006 to 2016," accessed June 13, 2017, [https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/National%20Reports/Annual%20Visitation%20By%20Park%20\(1979%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)](https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/National%20Reports/Annual%20Visitation%20By%20Park%20(1979%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year)); National Park Service, "Visitor Spending Effects," accessed June 13, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>; National Park Service, "NPS Deferred Maintenance Reports," accessed June 13, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/defermain.htm>

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Figure 1  
Chaco Culture  
National  
Historical Park  
Needs Millions  
for Infrastructure  
Repairs  
Key deferred  
maintenance



Note: This chart depicts the largest maintenance categories by dollar value.

Source: Pew analysis of National Park Service data

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The Pew Charitable Trusts works alongside the National Parks Conservation Association, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and other national and local groups to ensure that our national park resources are maintained and protected for future generations to enjoy.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Mari N. Jensen, "Unexpected Wood Source for Chaco Canyon Great Houses," news release, University of Arizona, Dec. 7, 2015, <https://uanews.arizona.edu/story/unexpected-wood-source-chaco-canyon-great-houses>.

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