Knowledge in digital format is extremely fragile and its future is quite precarious. The preservation of digital knowledge is an immediate and ongoing concern that requires policymakers, authors, researchers, technologists, publishers, legal scholars, archivists, librarians, administrators to collaborate on solving the enormous challenges in sustaining the cultural and scholarly record for future generations. The fragility lies in many factors: copyright restrictions and general “fuzziness” of copyright in the digital environment; hyperchange and frequent requirements of software migration; lack of storage space for massive digital data; withdrawal of information by governments and publishers; enclosure of scientific information in anticommons scenarios, etc. Digital preservation requires a mind-boggling number of variables: from human coordination and expertise, ongoing monitoring and attention; to electrical and broadband capacity, robust budgets, ever-expanding computer hardware and software. And then, there is the legal mind field of IPRs.

This paper examines the complexity of digital preservation in the context of intergenerational equity. It discusses the erosion of knowledge as a public good and argues the purchase of adapting a commons-based approach to build new infrastructures that can address the economic, legal, technological, and institutional challenges of digital preservation.