



Chairman Ken Calvert

*Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

FY 2016 Budget Hearing - National Park Service

March 17, 2015

Opening Statement As Prepared

The Committee will come to order.

Director Jarvis, I'd like to welcome you to today's hearing, along with our good friend, Bruce Sheaffer. This morning's hearing will address the important work of the National Park Service and its budget priorities for fiscal year 2016.

Let me begin by stating the obvious: Everyone loves our national parks.

Last year's visitation numbers tell the story. The National Park Service recently announced that it had 293 million recreational visitors in 2014—the highest annual total in its 100 year history. That's an increase of 19 million visits from the year before. So, more folks are visiting our national parks—many from other countries—and that trend will likely continue as the Service prepares to celebrate its 100th anniversary, or Centennial, in 2016.

As you know, our subcommittee worked very hard on a bipartisan basis to provide funding to the Park Service at the request level in the enacted fiscal year 2015 appropriations bill.

Overall, the proposed funding level in your fiscal year 2016 budget request is \$3 billion, which is \$433 million, or 17 percent, above the fiscal year 2015 enacted level. The largest increase—about \$326 million in discretionary funding—is proposed for the Centennial of the National Park Service. We look forward to hearing about the Service's plans for celebrating its 100th anniversary and receiving more details on the role Park Service partners and the private sector will play in this effort.

As part of the Centennial Initiative, the budget request recognizes the critical need to address deferred maintenance across the Service—which now exceeds \$11 billion. The request proposes sizeable funding increases for deferred maintenance needs in both the Operations account and the Construction account. We look forward to hearing your specific plans for reducing the maintenance backlog in a meaningful way.

Also worth noting is the proposed expansion of the so-called "Centennial Challenge," which leverages Federal dollars with private sector dollars through at least a one-to-one matching of

funds. Congress provided \$10 million for the Centennial Challenge in fiscal year 2015 and the Administration proposes to increase the Federal share to \$50 million in fiscal year 2016.

While your budget request includes funding increases for these and other notable programs and priorities, I need to point out that, again this year, we are operating in a very constrained funding environment. Like proposed budgets for other bureaus and agencies that have testified recently, this request for the National Park Service raises expectations that will be very challenging—if not impossible—to meet.

Again, I remind those attending today's hearing that several years ago the President and Congress agreed upon statutory spending caps through the Budget Control Act. Those caps remain the law of the land—and the Appropriations Committee is bound by them. So, while a 17 percent increase for the Park Service may sound appealing, the fact is it's not a realistic outcome as long as we're bound by these spending caps.

We will do our very best to address the Service's highest priority needs, but any increases above last year's enacted level will likely have to be offset elsewhere in this bill. We welcome any ideas you may have on how to pay for some of the proposed increases within your request.

Before concluding my remarks, I'd like to personally recognize our supporting witness—our friend, Bruce Sheaffer—who is retiring.

For those who don't know him personally, Bruce Sheaffer has been an outstanding public servant for 44 years—all of them with the National Park Service. In 1987, Bruce became the first—and until now—the only Comptroller of the National Park Service. He has appeared as a witness before this subcommittee on many occasions and has provided invaluable counsel to the bipartisan Members and staff of this subcommittee over the years.

Bruce, we have all benefited from your creative problem solving, your knowledge of appropriations law, and your sense of humor. The subcommittee is grateful for your service and we salute you.

Director Jarvis, today's hearing is the beginning of a very important conversation about the Service's funding priorities. We look forward to hearing from you on these and other issues but first, let me yield to our subcommittee's ranking member, Ms. McCollum, for any opening remarks she'd like to share with us this morning.

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