

**STATEMENT OF CHARLES F. SAMS III
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED
AGENCIES OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today at this hearing on the Fiscal Year 2024 President's Budget Request for the National Park Service (NPS, Service).

I am pleased to share with you the President's Budget Request for the NPS, which directly supports the vision and objectives laid out by President Biden and Secretary Haaland for the Department of the Interior, as well as my own priorities for the National Park Service. If enacted, this budget will support our ability to protect our resources, our visitors, and our employees well into the future.

FY 2024 Budget Summary

The FY 2024 discretionary budget request for the NPS is \$3.8 billion, an increase of \$289.2 million compared to FY 2023 enacted funding levels. This level supports an estimated 15,601 full-time equivalents (FTE). Recreation fee revenue, funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and other mandatory funding sources provide additional funding of \$1.2 billion. The total FY 2024 request for NPS is \$5.0 billion and 20,759 FTE.

The NPS FY 2024 request prioritizes conserving our natural and cultural resources and protecting them from climate-related threats, advancing racial equity and supporting underserved communities, and making investments in park operations. The request makes bold investments essential for the Service's continued mission success in its second century while remaining committed to the daily mission of ensuring that the American people continue to have an enriching experience at each and every one of the NPS's 424 sites. The request also invests in our most valuable resource—NPS employees. My top priority as Director is to connect and empower a thriving and diverse workforce, and I believe that funding initiatives such as providing quality employee housing and increasing parks' capacity to address growing responsibilities directly support this goal.

Operation of the National Park System – The FY 2024 budget request for the NPS operations account is \$3.2 billion. This includes \$509.6 million for Resource Stewardship, \$300.3 million for Visitor Services, \$457.7 million for Park Protection, \$983.0 million for Facility Operations and Maintenance, \$697.3 million for Park Support, and \$241.8 million for External Administrative Costs. The FY 2024 operations budget includes an \$86.8 million increase to support science, build NPS resiliency to climate change, and increase conservation efforts. The operations account also includes an \$18.8 million increased investment to advance racial justice and equity for underserved communities, including \$3 million to support recent or potential new

parks that preserve important places and tell the stories of those who have been historically underrepresented. Additionally, to invest in the future of our parks, this account supports \$17.3 million to build park capacity throughout the National Park System in visitor services, park protection, facility operations and maintenance, and park support, and \$8.2 million for new and critical responsibilities in NPS operations.

Centennial Challenge – This appropriation, requested at \$15.0 million, leverages partner donations for signature projects and programs at national parks. The Centennial Challenge program is instrumental in garnering and fostering strong partnerships. All Federal funds must be matched on at least a 1 to 1 basis, creating a program total of at least \$30.0 million. These projects focus on repairing and modernizing NPS infrastructure, expanding recreational opportunities and access to the public, and developing new and improved educational and interpretive programs for visitors.

National Recreation and Preservation – The FY 2024 budget request for the National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) appropriation is \$95.2 million. This appropriation provides technical and financial assistance to preserve natural and cultural resources from the local level to the international. Natural resource programs funded in this account support collaborative and community-driven efforts and outcome-focused investments to preserve and enhance rural landscapes, urban parks and rivers, important ecosystems, and wildlife habitat. NPS cultural programs funded in this account support partnerships in preserving the Nation’s cultural heritage through National Register Programs, research and training in historic preservation and conservation, and a number of grant programs. NR&P also supports cooperation with other nations on park and heritage resource management issues, as well as the management of the Heritage Partnership Program, which distributes Federal funding to 60 National Heritage Areas in 44 States and one territory.

The FY 2024 NPS request includes an increase of \$3.0 million for the recently established African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program and an increase of \$1.0 million to support the NPS’s growing workload of grants administration. The FY 2023 appropriation provided new funding under the Japanese American Confinement Sites Grants program to provide grants for projects to educate the public on the historical importance of Japanese American confinement during World War II. The NPS is working to establish the competitive criteria and other specifications for these two new grants authorized in the FY 2023 Omnibus.

The request maintains funding for all other NR&P-funded programs except one-time funding received in FY 2023 for community project funding items. This appropriation includes the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance and National Register Programs. It also supports important grant programs for Chesapeake Gateways and Trails, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation, Japanese American Confinement Sites, American Battlefield Protection Program Assistance, and American Indian and Native Hawaiian Art and Culture.

Historic Preservation Fund – The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) supports Historic Preservation Offices in States, territories, and Tribal lands to preserve historically and culturally significant sites and provides competitive grants to other entities. The authority to deposit receipts of up to \$150 million annually to the HPF expires at the end of FY 2023. The FY 2024

budget request proposes to extend that authority for an additional year and to appropriate \$177.9 million for FY 2024. As part of the budget's advancement of racial justice and equity for underserved communities, the request includes an increase of \$2.5 million in dedicated funding for Tribal Heritage Grants to support Federally recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Villages and Corporations, and Native Hawaiian Organizations in preserving and protecting their cultural heritage.

The request maintains support for all other programs funded from the Historic Preservation Fund except one-time funding received in FY 2023 for community project funding items. This includes grants to State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices to help meet preservation responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act to protect and preserve historic resources based on local needs and priorities. This appropriation also supports a number of competitive grant programs that support preservation of historic structures on the campuses of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), historic preservation projects that stimulate economic growth in rural areas, preservation of historic sites that tell the stories of the struggles for civil rights and equal rights in America, diversification of the listings in the National Register of Historic Places, restoration and preservation of sites that commemorate the founding of the Nation, and preservation of nationally significant sites and collections.

Construction – The FY 2024 budget request includes \$286.6 million to fund construction projects, equipment replacement, management, planning, operations, and special projects. This includes \$128.7 million for line-item construction, \$15.9 million for zero-emission fleet modernization deployment and related infrastructure, \$18.3 million for DOI Field Communications Modernization, and \$14.9 million to improve and expand NPS housing, a \$7.0 million increase from the FY 2023 enacted budget. The budget includes increases of \$7.0 million to address transportation barriers from underserved communities to national parks, \$2.0 million to mitigate abandoned mineral lands, \$7.0 million for emergencies and unscheduled projects, and \$4.1 million for climate vulnerability studies.

FY 2024 Budget Priorities

Conservation Initiative – The NPS Organic Act includes the stewardship of natural resources in our mission. This responsibility is woven throughout park operations, programs, budget activities and appropriations. The FY 2024 budget is an important step by the Biden-Harris Administration to address the critical challenges of our time by increasing scientific capacity and improving strategic thinking and resource planning to leave lands and waters preserved for future generations to use and enjoy. The NPS is a vital component of the governmentwide approach to addressing the impacts of climate change. Therefore, the FY 2024 budget includes multiple and varied investments to better understand and address resource challenges on park lands.

The NPS proposes \$110.7 million in Servicewide investments to protect the Nation's treasured natural and cultural resources from 21st-century threats. With these targeted increases, the budget seeks to build on existing, successful NPS and partnership programs and strengthen functions that support science-informed resource management. The proposal includes \$86.8 million in operational funding to enhance frontline natural resource stewardship capacity, expand youth corps programs that support conservation, and expand partnerships for interdisciplinary

resources and stewardship. It also includes \$23.8 million in the Construction account specifically for conservation efforts. This provides funding to move the NPS toward a zero-emission vehicle fleet, to help parks recover from natural disasters, which are increasing in frequency and intensity due to climate change, mitigate abandoned mineral lands, and to conduct climate vulnerability assessments.

Advancing Racial Justice and Equity for Underserved Communities – The Biden-Harris Administration directs Federal agencies to operate in an environment that advances equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. Current NPS priorities also include a focus on advancing equity, inclusion, and access as we carry out the NPS mission.

The FY 2024 NPS budget proposes \$32.3 million in targeted investments Servicewide to advance racial justice and equity for underserved communities. This increase is spread across multiple appropriations. \$7.0 million of this increase is requested within the Construction appropriation to assess and address transportation barriers to parks from underserved communities. Within the operating account, the NPS requests an increase of \$3.0 million to fund new and critical responsibilities at recent and potential new parks preserving the stories of underrepresented communities. It will allow NPS to hire staff and cover operating expenses at recently added units including the New Philadelphia National Historic Site, Blackwell School National Historic Site, and the Summerton Site at Brown v. Board of Education National Historical Park and provide start-up funds for potential new parks upon being designated a unit of the national park system. Setting funds aside specifically for potential new parks demonstrates the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to supporting our public lands. The NPS also requests \$250,000 of initial funding to stand up the Japanese American World War II History Network, which was authorized in the FY 2023 Omnibus.

The NPS's commitment to respect and strengthen Indigenous connections, enhance our nation-to-nation relationships, and fully uphold our trust and treaty responsibilities - another top priority for the Service - is reflected in our request for an additional \$7.1 million to support expanded Tribal co-stewardship of park resources, \$2.5 million to support tourism that benefits Tribes, and \$1.0 million to support the management of subsistence uses of NPS lands in Alaska. Also in ONPS, we have requested \$5.0 million to support parks working with the disability community to improve physical and programmatic accessibility. In the National Recreation and Preservation appropriation, we have requested \$3.0 million to implement the recently established African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program, as well as \$1.0 million to address the growing workload of grants management. Finally, within the Historic Preservation Fund, the NPS requests an increase of \$2.5 million to provide dedicated funding for competitive grants to Tribes, Alaska Native Villages and Corporations, and Native Hawaiian Organizations for the preservation and protection of their cultural heritage.

Restoring Operational Capacity in the National Park System – The NPS has lost almost 19 percent of its operations staff capacity since FY 2011. Over the same period, over 30 new units and additional authorized sites have been added to the system, existing units have seen responsibilities grow, and visitation has increased by more than 30 million. To meet this demonstrated and anticipated demand, the FY 2024 budget proposes \$25.4 million and 177 FTE

to add capacity for current operations and to address new, critical, and additional responsibilities at parks and central offices. Within the ONPS appropriation, the budget requests \$17.3 million and 125 FTE to support basic operational capacity needs at all parks, rivers, and trails. \$10.1 million of this request will go specifically to park base increases to increase park capacity, and \$7.2 million will support the U.S. Park Police and NPS Special Agents. An additional \$8.2 million will support new and critical responsibilities at park units and central offices, such as funding facility operation and maintenance personnel to care for the Denali Park Road and establishing a law enforcement ranger program at Fort Smith National Historic Site

Additional Priorities – The 2024 President’s Budget contains several additional increases, totaling \$27.9 million and 21 FTE, that support key NPS priorities, in particular our goal to improve, streamline, and modernize NPS management and business practices, and ensure accountability to ourselves, our partners, and the American people. The NPS requests \$3.0 million to continue to improve our digital tools for visitor services, \$1.55 million to support efforts to improve workflow management and expand Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access within NPS contracting and Financial Assistance functions, and \$2 million for America’s Semiquincentennial Commemoration (America 250). Finally, to recruit and retain quality employees in remote areas with few rental or purchase options, the NPS must be able to provide quality and affordable housing to its permanent and seasonal workforce. To support that need, the NPS has requested an increase of \$7.0 million to support constructing, improving, and modernizing park employee housing.

Conclusion

The President’s FY 2024 budget proposal supports President Biden’s commitment to address the impacts of climate change, respecting and strengthening our connections with underserved communities, and restoring parks’ abilities to protect our shared cultural and natural heritage. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for your continued support of the NPS.