

# IMPROVING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE AT NATIONAL PARKS

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## HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE INTERIOR, ENERGY, AND ENVIRONMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

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## IMPROVING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE AT NATIONAL PARKS

Wednesday, April 5, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE INTERIOR, ENERGY AND  
ENVIRONMENT  
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM,  
*Washington, D.C.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:18 p.m., in Room 2247, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Blake Farenthold [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Farenthold, Ross, Palmer, Plaskett, and Raskin.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. The Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy, and the Environment will come to order. Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess at any time.

Good afternoon. Today, the Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy, and Environment will be examining the Concessions Program at the National Park Service, or NPS.

Last year, the country celebrated the 100th anniversary of the NPS. Now that the festivities of that milestone are over, it's time to get back to work improving the Park Service.

The NPS is the custodian of some of our greatest national treasures. To that end, we must make sure that it's performing well and living up to this responsibility.

In July of 2015, shortly before the centennial celebrations, this subcommittee held a hearing that began the Oversight and Government Reform Committee's involvement in these issues. In her opening statement, my predecessor as chair, Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming, quoted Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service. I believe the quotation is worthy of repeating today. He said: "Scenery is a hollow enjoyment to the tourist who sets out in the morning after an indigestible breakfast and a fitful night's sleep on an impossible bed."

This is a particularly astute observation. To be able to enjoy our Nation's stunningly beautiful parks, beaches, monuments, wildlife, and other features, the people need food, lodging, and other appropriate amenities.

To this end, since the first national parks were created in the late 19th century, there has been a history of private companies working on these parks to provide services to visitors. Unfortunately, the amenities at many parks have aged poorly and many have not been maintained properly.

The National Park Service must modernize. It has failed to meet the challenge or the changing demands of its visitors. Millennials and modern families want tech services, like WiFi and internet access. Cell service is not only an amenity, it's an important safety consideration.

When NPS does not keep up, our parks lose visitors to other tourism opportunities, such as privately run theme parks and other attractions. Certainly, we don't need to turn our parks into Disneyland, but we do need to keep up with what 21st century Americans want when vacationing.

I want to see my friends' vacation pictures at our parks on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and I want to know I can get help in the event of an emergency by dialing 911.

By providing up-to-date technology, contemporary food and beverage service, and a choice between rustic, comfortable, and modern places to stay and unique visitor experiences, our parks become more attractive. This is where the role of concessionaires is critical. They help provide these services while providing much-needed funding to the Park Service.

In our last hearing on the subject, we heard of several instances of bureaucratic red tape getting in the way. For instance, one park had a 1,629-page-long bid request outline that cost one concessionaire 2,500 company management hours and more than \$90,000 to fill out. As another example, we heard about parks with campgrounds that sell out, but are only open for part of the year due to bureaucratic requirements.

Fortunately, we have sources of ideas for ways to update the NPS. For instance, in partnering with ski areas, the Forest Service has found a way for people to use the land it leases year round. Furthermore, good ideas have come from various State park systems, such as Kansas' matching of park fees with demand.

I hope to hear more about these ideas and more from our panel today. I very much look forward to hearing suggestions on a way forward from here and hopeful the committee can help update our National Park System.

I would now like to recognize our ranking member, Ms. Plaskett, for her opening statement.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you all for being here this afternoon to talk about such an important part of the American experience, our national parks.

I appreciate the National Park Service's protection and care of our Nation's cherished natural and cultural resources and for the important educational and recreational opportunities they provide for all Americans. The National Park Service plays an important economic and recreational role in my district, the U.S. Virgin Islands. We have national parks on all three of our major islands. Well, technically, St. Croix, Hassel Island, which is off of St. Thomas, and, of course, St. John.

On the island of St. John, the Virgin Islands National Park covers approximately 60 percent of the island and includes the Cinnamon Bay Resort and Campground located inside of the National Park Service, as well as Caneel Bay, one of the most wonderful resorts as well.

Under a new concession agreement reached last fall between the National Park Service and Redwood Company, the campgrounds are currently undergoing extensive renovations that include eliminating bare sites and installing Eco-Tents. The original plan called for 64 Eco-Tents, but after public opposition, that was reduced to 55.

My office has received several complaints regarding the relocation of bare site camping and the high cost and quality of the new Eco-Tents. This is an example of how improvements of park sites can lessen and not improve on the visitor experience at the national parks.

After the Park Service held its centennial celebration in 2017, we must ensure that the very best services are provided for the 280 million visitors that our national parks attract each year, as well as the local employment that it can provide through the vendors and through those individuals who work at those park sites and the relationship they have with the communities that are located adjacent or sometimes even within the parks themselves.

Vendors play a key role in providing visitor services. They offer a wide range of recreational and retail services, while helping to generate more than \$1.2 billion annually in revenue for the Federal Government, as well as the revenues that our local economies are able to receive by visitors and individuals who come to the parks and pass through the areas in which the parks are located. Vendors also employ more than 25,000 workers and drive economic growth in the communities surrounding the parks.

I understand that the public is demanding more recreational and cultural opportunities during their visits to the national parks. I also understand that vendors are ready, willing, and able to provide these additional visitor services, but they've encountered some barriers. We want to understand what these are and how we here in Congress can be supportive of the vendors as well as the parks.

Today, we will examine some of the challenges faced by the National Park Service and vendors in providing the best visitor experiences to our parks. Those challenges include a rigid contracting process, contracts which create negative cash flow for vendors, and the Park Service's failure to meet public demand for more services.

Although the Park Service has made great improvements in its contracting process in recent years, more work can and should be done. We can always work to improve the contracting process with great cooperation between government and industry.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses as we explore possible solutions that can drive progress in these issues.

Thank you.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you.

I will hold the record open for 5 legislative days for any members who would like to submit a written statement.

We will now recognize our panel of witnesses. I am pleased to welcome Mr. Glenn Casamassa. You're associate deputy chief of the National Forest System for the United States Forest Service and the United States Department of Agriculture.

We have Ms. Linda Lanterman, director of the Division of State Parks for the State of Kansas.

Welcome.

Mr. Chris Edmonston, the vice president of government affairs for BoatU.S. And Mr. Rick Cables, the vice president of natural resources and conservation at Vail Resorts.

Welcome to you all.

Pursuant to committee rules, all witnesses will be sworn before they testify. Would you please rise and raise your right hand?

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Thank you. Please be seated.

And you can let the record reflect that all witnesses answered in the affirmative.

In order to allow time for questions and discussions, we'd appreciate it if you'd limit your testimony to 5 minutes. Your entire written statements will be made part of the record. There ought to be a timer in front of you. The green light will be on for the first 4 minutes. The yellow light, much like a traffic light, means speed up—I'm just kidding there—and the red light means your time is up.

So we'll start first with Mr. Casamassa.

## **WITNESS STATEMENTS**

### **STATEMENT OF GLENN CASAMASSA**

Mr. CASAMASSA. Good afternoon, Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Plaskett, and members of the subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today regarding the Forest Service recreation program.

We are proud of the work we accomplish with our private industry partners to provide the best possible breadth of choice and the highest quality outdoor recreation opportunities for the American people. Today, our national forests hosts 149 million visits. Since 2009, estimates of our recreation visitation has been rising by an average of about 1 million visits per year.

Through their direct and ripple spending, recreationists who visit the national forests contribute billions to the U.S. economy and support thousands of jobs, the vast majority of which are in gateway and rural communities. Outdoor recreation supports significant employment opportunities and offers a tremendous economic stimulus for local municipalities.

In addition to the continued popularity of traditional activities, like recreational sport shooting, hunting and fishing, we are seeing growth in ziplining and snowboarding, off-highway vehicle use, rafting trips, or guided backcountry trips.

The combination of public demand and tremendous economic contributions makes outdoor recreation one of the more challenging programs in public land management, pushing the Forest Service to seek innovative approaches in balancing the growing demand for recreation and economic interest for further development with landscape conservation for generations to come.

We administer recreation special uses that enable thousands of private sector professionals to lead a range of activities on national forests and grasslands. For many Americans, these activities represent their first introduction to their national forests and grass-



lands, and the outfitters and guides they use are small businesses, providing jobs and income.

For example, approximately 4 million people visit the Coconino National Forest in Arizona, which surrounds the city of Sedona. Several outfitter and guide permits are issued to locally owned and operated businesses. One specific example of an outstanding working relationship we have with an outfitter is the Pink Jeep Tours. This small business provides about 100 percent of the maintenance to the Broken Arrow Road, one of the most popular 4x4 routes in the area.

The national forests also host more than 120 alpine ski areas. These facilities are privately owned and constructed by our permittee partners, who provide recreation opportunities for proposing and developing sites in response to industry trends and public needs.

We are working with the ski areas to go beyond snow season by enhancing year-round recreation, providing more choices for visitors, and creating additional jobs around resort communities.

This is a win-win situation. More people will be able to find jobs in communities around ski areas, and more Americans will have access to year-round opportunities in these beautiful and convenient settings.

Recognizing the critical role that private enterprise plays in outdoor recreation on our national forests and grasslands, we're also working to expand how we service businesses and the public by improving the permitting process.

Special uses remains one of the primary economic drivers of the agency, in terms of both receipts to the government and national and local economic activity. Modernizing the special use program creates a more predictable business environment and a more efficient workforce.

The Forest Service is working to eliminate redundant process, simplify forms, improve internal and external communication, improve financial accountability through simplification of fees, and streamlining the environmental analysis process for use of a continuing nature. Presently, our line officers have discretion to waive the special use authorization requirements for proposed uses on a case-by-case basis. Forest Service guidance stresses that officers shall allow activities that will have little impact on the land to move forward without undue process.

Also, the Forest Service has implemented an agreement with GSA's 18F for development of an ePermitting System. We will soon offer a more convenient way for the public to apply for special use authorizations via an online application process.

A national Campground and Day-Use Concession Review was conducted in early fiscal year 2017. The goal of the review was to enhance public-private ventures and agency business practices that promote true partnerships and identify shortfalls in agency policy and procedures.

The Forest Service remains committed to serving the American public through commonsense cooperation with businesses, who drive the enormous diversity of recreation opportunities on American national forests.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.  
[Prepared statement of Mr. Casamassa follows:]

**TESTIMONY of GLENN CASAMASSA**  
**ASSOCIATE DEPUTY CHIEF, NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM**  
**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
**FOREST SERVICE**  
**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT & GOVERNMENT REFORM**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE INTERIOR, ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT**  
**on IMPROVING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE AT NATIONAL PARKS**  
**APRIL 5, 2017**

Good Morning, Chairman Farenthold and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to speak with you this morning regarding the tremendous public contributions of the Forest Service's recreation program. We are proud of the work we accomplish with our private-industry partners to provide the best possible breadth of choice and high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities for the American people.

**Recreation Benefits for the American Taxpayer**

The Forest Service provides a huge number of diverse recreation opportunities for the American public. Through their direct and ripple spending, recreationists who visit the National Forest Lands contribute billions to the US economy and support thousands of jobs—the vast majority of which are in gateway and rural communities. Outdoor recreation supports significant employment opportunities and offers a tremendous economic stimulus for local municipalities.

National forests also receive significant repeat visitors. More than 15 percent of total visits result from people who visit their public lands more than 50 times a year. In a recent survey, we found 7 out of 10 Americans agree that protecting our history and natural beauty through public lands like national forests is one of the things our agency does best.

“Gateway” communities provide access to public lands and visitor services to the many millions of Americans who come for outdoor recreation each year. The distinguishing feature of these towns is their proximity to public lands. The vitality of their social and economic structure often depends on management decisions on and for these public lands.

**A Brief History of Recreation on the National Forest System**

Visitors historically engage in recreation activities such as hiking, camping, picnicking, skiing, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, wildlife watching, visiting cultural sites and visitor centers, or just viewing the scenery and driving for pleasure. The kind of recreation the public wants today is far more diverse than in the early 1900s. In addition to the continued popularity of traditional activities like shooting, hunting and fishing, we are seeing growth in ziplining and snowboards,

ATVs and snowmobiles, rafting trips or guided backcountry trips, with gourmet meals and llamas carrying everything but your daypack.

Today our national forests host some 149 million visits, according to the 2015 National Visitor Use Monitoring Survey. Since 2009, estimates of recreation visitation have been rising by an average of about 1 million visits a year. The combination of public demand and tremendous economic contributions makes outdoor recreation one of the most pressing issues in public land management, pushing the Forest Service to seek innovative approaches in balancing the growing demand for recreation with ecosystem protection and economic pressures for further development. As the most intensive development of public lands for recreational use, ski resorts have long embodied this balance.

The National Park Service (NPS), within the Department of the Interior, and the Forest Service, within the Department of Agriculture, have different purposes and are governed by different laws, regulations, and policies, including new concessions authorities authorized in the recently passed NPS Centennial Act, related to visitor services, preservation and conservation.

#### **Working with Partners and Permittees**

The Forest Service is deeply committed to connecting all Americans to the outdoors; we value the important role played by guides and outfitters, ski areas, schools, non-profit organizations, and others as partners in linking people to recreational opportunities on national forests. Outdoor recreation supports health and wellbeing. It also attracts people to visit, live and work in gateway and rural communities, and supports the economic vitality of those communities.

We administer recreation special use permits that enable thousands of private-sector professionals to lead a range of activities on Forest Service lands, from whitewater rafting, horseback riding, and big game hunting, to youth education trips in the Wilderness, and even scenic jeep tours. For many Americans, these activities represent their first introduction to their national forests, and the outfitters and guides they use are small businesses providing jobs and income.

For example, approximately 4 million people visit the Coconino National Forest in Arizona, which surrounds the City of Sedona. Several outfitter and guide permits are issued to locally owned and operated businesses providing the public with opportunities for jeep tours, hiking guides, hot air balloon rides, four-wheeler rentals, and fishing. One specific example of an outstanding working relationship there is with *Pink Jeep Tours*. This small business provides 100 percent of the maintenance to the Broken Arrow Road, one of the most popular 4x4 routes in the area.

Meanwhile, various partnerships with permittees at the Land between the Lakes National Recreation Area have also enhanced local economies through issuance of recreation special use permits. These include unique events such as popular drag boat races, an annual rodeo averaging

1,000 visitors, and a trail that is perfect for a variety of mountain bike and running races, some with upwards of 700 participants. These partnerships between the Forest Service and its permittees contribute to the sustainable management of Land between the Lakes National Recreation Area.

The national forests also host more than 120 alpine ski areas. These facilities are privately owned and constructed by our permittee partners who provide recreation opportunities by proposing and developing sites in response to industry trends and public needs.

#### *Four Seasons for Recreation*

The Forest Service is working with ski resorts to go beyond snow seasons by enhancing year-round recreation, providing more choices for visitors and creating additional jobs around resort communities.

In 2014, the Forest Service published new recreation directives spurred by the Ski Area Recreational Opportunity Enhancement Act of 2011, which amended the National Forest Ski Area Permit Act of 1986 to specifically allow “natural resource-based, four-season activities” – which can include such opportunities as zip lines, mountain bike terrain parks and trails, disc golf courses and rope courses. These new guidelines affect 120 ski areas on nearly 180,000 acres of public land administered by the Forest Service.

Broadening options for outdoor activities in areas that already have parking, lodging, and restaurants will likely increase public excitement for visiting national forests. This is a win-win situation – more people will be able to find jobs in communities around ski areas, and more Americans will have access to year-round fun in these beautiful and convenient settings.

Two Vail Resorts ski areas, Vail Mountain in Colorado and Heavenly Mountain Resort in California, are among the first to offer four-season action, unveiling a variety of programs and activities to connect people to summer outdoor experiences. In addition to environmental interpretation, the resorts offer tree-canopy tours, aerial adventure courses, alpine coasters, 4x4 tours and zip lines.

#### **Our Challenges**

Over 110 years ago, President Theodore Roosevelt established the U.S. Forest Service to manage America’s national forests, now including national grasslands and encompassing 193 million acres, for the benefit of all Americans. Today, more Americans benefit from recreation use than any time in our history, and we’re working to expand how we serve businesses and the public by improving the permitting process.

The Forest Service is working to eliminate redundant processes, simplify forms, improve external and internal communication, improve financial management through the simplification

of fees, and increase permitting efficiency through the simplification of the environmental analysis process for uses of a continuing or routine nature.

Responding to the expectations of the businesses we work with and the public we serve, the Forest Service has implemented an agreement with the contemporary digital services group at General Services Administration's 18F for development of an ePermit System. We will soon offer a more convenient way for the public to apply for special use authorizations via an on-line application process.

The Forest Service continues to collaborate with other agencies to explore interagency functionality for the ePermit System. The Forest Service is also working to improve and enhance the Special Uses Data System, the Forest Service database which tracks and maintains all special use permit information, nationwide.

Line officers have discretion to waive the special use authorization requirement for proposed uses on a case-by-case basis. Proposed uses in some situations may have little or no impact on National Forest System lands, resources, or programs. In considering whether a nominal effects determination is appropriate, Forest Service guidance stresses that officers should allow activities that will have little impact on the land to move forward without undue process.

A national Campground and Day-Use Concession Review was conducted in early Fiscal Year 2017, a first of its kind from conception of the concession program back in the 1980's. The goal of the review is to enhance public-private ventures and agency business practices that promote true partnerships, and identify shortfalls in agency policies and procedures.

Special uses remains the primary economic driver of the agency in terms of both receipts to the government and national/local economic activity. Modernizing the special uses program will create a more predictable business environment and a more efficient workforce. Modernization accomplishes this by improving our core business tools, reducing environmental analysis, and promoting partnerships to maintain and operate trails and facilities.

The Forest Service has also established special "strike teams" to take on the challenge of bringing thousands of expired special use permits up to date. In Fiscal Year 2016, these teams successfully addressed and resolved 3,449 expired special use authorizations, resulting in a 31 percent decrease in the number of expired authorizations.

#### **Conclusion**

Managing for sustainable recreation on the national forests means providing opportunities for small businesses, such as restaurants, motels, and other tourism-related enterprises in gateway communities. It means sustaining current businesses and jobs and helping new ones get started.

It helps connect people to nature, and it encourages outdoor activities that promote physical and mental health. It helps Americans understand their natural and cultural environments, and it helps engage them in the stewardship of the natural world. It brings the next generation into the fold, giving them opportunities to contribute to their public lands and develop lifelong land ethics.

We know the benefits of outdoor recreational experiences on physical and mental health. We know the demand for access to outdoor settings and outdoor recreational experiences are increasing at a rapid pace, and we know that federal land and water management agencies, assisted by partners and service providers, host a wide and diverse array of outdoor recreation opportunities. Outdoor recreation is an essential part of American culture.

Thousands of rural and urban communities benefit from recreation on federal lands. When Americans play outside during outings or overnight trips, their spending directly supports outdoor-oriented industries such as outfitting and guiding, lodging, and concessions, many of which are small businesses.

Supporting recreation requires us to restore and maintain healthy resilient forests. To sustain the recreation economy, we need to have the healthy landscapes that provide the recreational experiences that the public expects and demands. Our work to restore and maintain healthy forests and grasslands is an essential part of our recreation program.

The Forest Service remains committed to serving the American public through common-sense cooperation with the businesses who drive the enormous diversity of recreation opportunities on America's national forests.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Your timing is phenomenal. I assume you practiced that. Thank you.

Ms. Lanterman, you are up for 5 minutes.

#### STATEMENT OF LINDA LANTERMAN

Ms. LANTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Plaskett, and members of the subcommittee. I am here representing the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, the Division of State Parks. We manage 26 State parks, with an annual budget of \$12 million.

I am also the vice president of the National Association of State Park Directors. It's an organization dedicated to helping State park systems effectively manage and administer their State park systems.

I am here, though, today to discuss Kansas State parks, as well as the national State park landscape and how State park systems work to improve outdoor recreational opportunities for their constituents and conserve natural resources, through partnerships, innovations, and reducing barriers.

Nationwide, there are over 10,000 State park areas. They are comprised of over 18 million acres, and we receive more than 790 million visits annually.

Those State parklands may be owned outright by States or consist of lands leased from Federal agencies. As a result, Federal partnerships are crucial to the success of State park systems, as well as to the success of Federal agencies which make their lands available for public use.

Of special importance to State park systems are Federal programs, such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the National Recreational Trails Grant, and the AmeriCorps program. State parks around the country collectively serve the public with more than 37,000 miles of trails, over 241,000 campsites, over 9,400 cabins and cottages, and 161 lodges. Operating expenditures account for \$2.5 billion, with less than half of those expenditures coming from the general funds of the States. Nineteen thousand full-time and 29,000 part-time or seasonal staffs work tirelessly to provide topnotch memorable visitor experiences.

Nationally, it's been estimated there may be as much as \$95 billion in unfunded capital improvements and maintenance needed just to sustain the State park systems. In Kansas, our capital improvement and maintenance needs are over \$25 million.

The Kansas State Parks Division and the Department do not receive any State general funds. Instead, our State parks are funded primarily from revenues we receive from our State park vehicle permits, camping permits, and cabin rentals. In addition, we also receive a portion of the Department's allocation of the Economic Development Incentive Fund, which is funded by proceeds from the Kansas Lottery.

However, there are many State park systems that benefit from dedicated funding sources. The Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Recreational Trails Grant program, and the AmeriCorps program have always been an important and efficient matching fund for Kansas State parks. We rely heavily on our partnerships



with our friends groups, our volunteers, and other park supporters that provide financial, labor, and advocacy support.

With the support of Governor Brownback, we have implemented several measures to meet challenges of operating a primarily fee-based parks program. For example, we aggressively market our State park systems within Kansas, nationally and internationally. We hold staff positions open at times to save staffing costs. We've been successful in matching permit fees with demand.

Additionally, we have special events to attract and encourage our customers' ongoing loyalty. Some of those events include outdoor music concerts, live bands, guided nature hikes, Halloween events, Black Friday with the hashtag #OPTOUTSIDE, the Governor's Campouts and, of course, our First Day Hike.

To be competitive in today's leisure market, it's important that we address the changing needs and expectations of our customers. Some of the land use policies of the Federal agencies need to be modernized so our parks can compete for our Nation's young family free time.

Among the immediate changes we recommend concerning our Federal landlord partners are more flexible lease agreements, more streamlined processing of concessionaire contracts, an ability for our Department to retain all net proceeds arising from hosting of special events designed to attract our customers.

Some of the Corps properties, we have both State park and Corps parks. Efficiencies could be improved if these two levels of government were not duplicating their services, such as camping.

Kansas State parks and those in other States attract a diverse clientele who enjoy traveling in their home State and visiting parks in other States. Staying at a State park is truly a form of recreation that's important on a national level.

From my testimony today, I hope you really see the important role Federal partnerships are and how the Federal funding in our State parks and how important the partnership with State parks are nationally to an efficient public land strategy.

I too will accept any questions. Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Ms. Lanterman follows:]

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**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF LINDA LANTERMAN  
DIRECTOR OF STATE PARKS  
KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE, PARKS AND TOURISM  
BEFORE  
THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT**

APRIL 5, 2017

**Linda Lanterman  
Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism  
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Pratt, KS 67124-8174**

Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Plaskett and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today. I am Linda Lanterman, the Director of Kansas State Parks of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. I have worked for the Department for 25 years and have been the Kansas State Parks Director since 2010. We manage 26 state parks with an annual budget of \$12 million. I am also Vice-President of the National Association of State Park Directors (NASPD), an organization dedicated to helping state park systems effectively manage and administer their state park systems. I also serve on the National Transportation Research Board (TRB) which helps address access needs on National Parks and public lands. Additionally, I serve on the board of the National Association of State Outdoor Recreation Liaison Officers (NASORLO) who provide a liaison to the Department of Interior for administration of matching funds for outdoor recreation.

I am here to discuss the Kansas State Parks program, as well as the national state parks landscape, and how state park systems work to improve outdoor recreational opportunities for their constituents and conserve natural resources through partnerships, innovation and reducing barriers.

Nationwide, there are 10,314 state park areas comprising over 18 million acres serving more than 791 million visitors annually. Those state park lands may be owned outright by the states or consist of lands leased from federal agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation. As a result, federal partnerships are crucial to the success of state park systems, as well as to the success of the federal agencies which make their lands available for public use. Of special importance to state park systems are federal programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Recreational Trails grants and AmeriCorps Program.

State parks around the country collectively serve the public with more than 37,000 miles of trails; 241,255 campsites; 9,457 cabins and cottages along with 161 lodges in 29 states. Operating expenditures total \$2.5 billion, with less than 50 percent of those expenditures coming from the general funds of the states. 19,008 full-time state park staff and an additional 29,069 part-time and seasonal staff work tirelessly to provide top-notch, memorable visitor experiences. As recently reported in the American Society of Civil Engineers 2017 Report Card, seven in 10 Americans use state and local parks for a source of their recreation on a regular basis. Nationally, it has been estimated that there may be as much as \$95 billion in unfunded capital improvements and maintenance needed just to sustain state park systems.

In Kansas, our capital improvements and maintenance needs total more than \$25 million. The Kansas State Parks Division and the Department do not receive any state general funds. Instead, our state parks are funded primarily by revenues from state park vehicle permits, camping permits and cabin rentals. In addition, we also receive a portion of the Department's allocation from the Economic Development Incentive Fund (EDIF) which is funded by proceeds from the Kansas State Lottery. Many states however, benefit from dedicated funding including a percentage of sales tax like in Missouri that passed overwhelmingly last year.

Land and Water Conservation Funds, the Recreational Trails grant program and AmeriCorps have always been important and efficient funding match for Kansas State Parks. We also rely heavily on partnerships with friend's groups, volunteers and other park supporters to provide financial, labor and advocacy support.

With the support of Governor Sam Brownback, Kansas has implemented several measures to meet the challenges of operating a primarily fee-based state park program. For example, we aggressively market our state parks within Kansas as well as nationally and internationally, we hold staff positions open for a certain time to reduce staffing costs, we have been successful with matching permit fees with demand. Additionally we have added special events to attract visitors and encourage their ongoing loyalty. Some of the events include outdoor music concerts, live bands, guided nature hikes, Halloween events, Black Friday #OPTOUTSIDE marketing, Governor's Campouts, and First Day Hikes.

We can learn from our state parks. Examples include: Coming together in unity for First Day Hikes every January 1. Learn to Camp programs that teach families how to camp. Capital Campouts and Governor Campouts are geared to those children that have not camped or may be underserved in our industry. States like Kansas, Michigan, Idaho, and Washington have increased revenues by offering year-round park passports available at their Departments of Motor Vehicles. South Carolina and others have moved to allow pricing to meet market demands in what we call dynamic pricing. It allows pricing to be flexible in response to demand based on occupancy, weather conditions, or events. Dynamic pricing is a strategy that might be appealing to the National Parks.

To be competitive in today's leisure market, it is important that we address the changing needs and expectations of our customers. Some of the land use policies of the federal agencies need to be modernized so our parks can compete for the nation's young family's leisure time. Among the immediate changes we recommend concerning our federal landlord partners are more flexible lease agreements, more streamlined processing of concessionaire contracts and the ability for our department to retain all net proceeds arising from the hosting of special events designed to attract visitors. On some

USACE properties we have both state parks and USACE parks. Efficiency could be improved if these two levels of government parks were not duplicating services.

Kansas State Parks and those in other states attract a diverse clientele who enjoy traveling in their home state and visiting parks in other states. Staying at a state park is truly a form of recreation that is important on a national level.

From my brief testimony, I hope you will see the important role federal partnerships and funding has in our state parks system and how important the partnership with State Parks are nationally to an efficient public lands strategy.

I will be happy to address any questions you may have.

Linda Lanterman

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you.  
Mr. Edmonston, you are up for 5.

#### STATEMENT OF CHRIS EDMONSTON

Mr. EDMONSTON. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Plaskett, and members of the committee, I am pleased to be here representing the 550,000 members of the Boat Owners Association of the United States, BoatU.S. We appreciate the chance to share how access, public-private partnerships, and technology can improve the visitor experience in national parks and other public lands.

Reflecting on the visitor experience in national parks provides an opportunity to consider how important access to the water really is. Boaters need facilities to launch and retrieve, dock, moor, and anchor their boats. Providing such access is vital to keeping boating available to the American public.

The thoughtful oversight of this committee and Congress should focus the National Park Service and other Federal agencies on providing such access to our public lands and waters. In our experience, how well a particular national park unit or other Federal entity provides access is highly variable. In some cases, they welcome boats, which might be the only way to reach some of the more remote areas. Other park units do not always welcome all boats and often make management decisions that diminish public access.

The controversies at Key Biscayne National Park surrounding fishing closures, adequate moorings, bans on certain types of boats, and expansive nonmotorized zones is of grave concern to us. In our view, a shift in management philosophy to one that welcomes all users, not just the young and fit, is long overdue.

Our current system of waterway access provides a good example of the wide range of partnerships that can benefit all of us. For example, many boating access programs are funded by the Sportfish Restoration Boating Trust Fund. This user pay-everyone benefits fund is supported primarily through taxes on boaters and anglers. The system is widely supported by the boating and angling communities. Boaters are not looking for a free ride and are quite willing to pay reasonable fees, provided they can count on the facilities being available and well-managed.

We recognize there is a reconsideration of Federal budget priorities currently underway. We respectfully suggest that investment in facilities that provide access to public lands and waters should remain a priority for this Congress.

Each year, over 80 million Americans go boating, with a large portion doing so on federally managed waters. We ask the help of this Congress to be sure that recreational boaters, as well as other outdoor recreation participants, aren't ignored as tough budget decisions are made.

During another time of budget crunches several decades ago, the Coast Guard shifted its mission focus and ended its longtime policy of aiding recreational boaters stranded on public waters. While they do continue to come to the aid of those in life-threatening conditions, other situations, such as a malfunctioning engine or running out of fuel, are no longer a time where the Coast Guard will provide assistance.

In response to this policy change, BoatU.S. created a nationwide towing dispatch service, which today has more than 600 towboats across the country and is available at a very reasonable cost. The program is effective, it's popular, and it allows the Coast Guard to focus on emergency missions. In fact, there is a large industry of on-water service providers which works closely with State and Federal agencies to ensure that recreational boaters receive prompt and professional assistance on the water, assistance which over the past few decades has saved the Coast Guard untold millions of dollars.

Another area where we see opportunity for Federal agencies to provide better service involves the application of new technology. Information on boating and other outdoor opportunities are often difficult to discover on many government or individual park websites.

Such resources should be welcoming to visitors and provide ways to discover all the activities available. This requires a new outlook on the part of Federal managers, one with a view to enhance the visitor experience as part of their core mission.

We also see technology as a way to enhance access while protecting resources. Providing greater connectivity will open up management options, such as allowing faster updates to resource information, better reporting of available activities, such as fishing or camping, and the purchase of passes and permits needed for recreating. BoatU.S. supports the appropriate use of technology to improve visitor experiences on all public lands and waters.

In closing, recreational boaters and anglers have an abiding interest in the protection of our waterways, as do other recreational users of public lands. We wish to see these special places protected. We also need to be able to reach these special places in many different ways. Providing appropriate access is crucial to the long-term political and financial support for national parks and other public lands.

We appreciate the opportunity to bring the voice of boaters before the subcommittee. Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Edmonston follows:]



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**Statement of Chris Edmonston**

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Before the

**Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy, and Environment of the  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**

**United States House of Representatives**

**- Regarding Visitor Experience at National Parks-**

April 5, 2017

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here today representing the over 550,000 dues paying members of the Boat Owners Association of the United States, BoatU.S., all of whom are avid recreational boaters. Our members enjoy this family friendly activity on all types of water around the country, including many national parks, while using a wide range of boats types. For many, boating is the quintessential expression of the freedoms we enjoy in this Nation. We appreciate the chance to share how public-private partnerships and technology can improve the visitor experience in National Parks and other public lands

Reflecting on the visitor experience in National Parks provides an opportunity to consider how important access to the water is to boaters. To state the obvious, without adequate waterway access there is virtually no opportunity to go boating. Boaters need facilities to launch & retrieve, dock, moor and anchor their boats. Providing such access is vital to keeping boating available to the American public. The thoughtful oversight of this Committee and Congress should focus the National Park Service and other federal agencies on providing such access to our public lands and waters.

In our experience, how well a particular National Park unit or other federal entity provides access is highly variable. In some case they welcome boaters and often it is the only way to reach remote areas. In 2012 we happened to feature some of the great national park opportunities for boaters in our Trailing Magazine (see attached.) One interesting note to this article is the discussion of the South Padre Island National Island Seashore. At this park, the boat ramp lacked adequate capacity on busy weekends, highlighting the fact that demand for water access exists.

Other NPS units do not always seem to welcome boats and often make management decisions that diminish public access. The controversies at Key Biscayne National Park surrounding fishing access, the provision of adequate moorings, bans on certain types of boats and expansive non-motorized zones is of grave concern to boaters. In our view, a shift in management philosophy to one that welcomes all users, not just the young and fit, is long over-due.

Our current system of waterway access provides a good example of the wide range of partnerships that can come together so the public can enjoy our public lands and waters. For example, many boating access programs are funded by the **Sportfish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund**. This user pay-everyone benefits fund is supported by taxes on boaters and anglers. The fund is used to match state, local and private investment for ramp construction, larger vessel docks and other facilities that give access to the water. This very successful program was most recently reauthorized as part of the FAST Act in 2015, and runs through 2020. This system is widely supported by the boating and angling community. Boaters are not looking for a free ride, and are quite willing to pay reasonable fees provided they can count on the facilities being available and well managed.



Today, we recognize there is a reconsideration of federal budget priorities currently being taken up by the Administration and Congress. We respectfully suggest that investment in facilities that provide access to public lands and waters should remain a priority. As noted, access to the nation's waterways is very important to tens of millions of recreational boaters. Each year over 80 million Americans go boating, with a large portion doing so on federally managed waters. Millions more highly value campgrounds, trails and other facilities on public lands. We ask the help of this Congress to be sure that recreational boaters – including a very large number of boaters in Texas and the U.S. Virgin Islands – and other outdoor recreation participants aren't ignored as tough budget decisions are made.

As funding priorities are debated, we offer for consideration an instance when a new model of public/private partnership was created to meet a need. During another time of budget crunches, the Coast Guard shifted its mission focus and ended its long-time policy of aiding recreational boaters stranded on public waters. While they continue to come to the aid of those in life-threatening conditions, other situations such as a malfunctioning engine, or running out of fuel, is no longer a time where the USCG will provide assistance.

In response to this policy change, BoatU.S. created a nationwide towing dispatch service which today has more than 600 towboats available across the country– and is covered by a very reasonable annual cost, even for offshore needs. The program is effective and works well, is popular and allows the USCG to focus on emergency missions. In fact, there is a large industry of on-water service providers, as well as an industry trade association, the Conference of Professional Operators for Response Towing--also known as C-PORT. C-PORT sets the industry standards for professionalism and training, ethics, vessels and equipment. C-PORT and its members such as BoatU.S., work closely with state and federal agencies to ensure that recreational boaters receive prompt and professional assistance on the water, assistance which over the past few decades has saved the Coast Guard untold millions of dollars.

Another area where we see opportunity for federal agencies to provide better services involves the application of new technology. Information on boating and other outdoor opportunities are often difficult to discover on many government websites such as Recreation.gov and individual park web sites. Such resources should be welcoming to visitors and provide ready ways to discover all the activities available. This requires a new outlook on the part of federal managers, one with a view to enhancing the visitor experience as part of their core mission.

We also see technology as way to enhance access while protecting resources. With multiple permits and licenses often required to access public lands and waters, providing electronic, mobile-friendly methods to obtain them is essential to improving access. Providing greater connectivity will also open up management options such as allowing faster updates to charts and maps, and better reporting of available activities such as

fishing or camping. BoatU.S. supports the appropriate use of technology to improve visitor experiences on all public lands and waters.

In closing, Recreational boaters and anglers have an abiding interest in the protection of our waterways as do other recreational users of public lands. We are on the water, in the water and eat fish from the water, and wish to see these special places protected. We also need to be able to reach these locations in many different ways. Providing appropriate access is crucial to the long term political and financial support for national parks and other public lands. We appreciate the opportunity to bring the voice of boaters before the Subcommittee.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you, Mr. Edmonston.  
Mr. Cables, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

#### STATEMENT OF RICK CABLES

Mr. CABLES. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Plaskett, and members of the committee, thank you for the invitation today.

Vail Resorts operates 13 premier resorts worldwide. We have resorts in Canada, in British Columbia, and Australia. The others are all in the United States. We have some of the most iconic and beautiful landscapes that we operate on in the Nation, and we've learned a thing or two about managing people and providing a guest experience that I want to share today.

Six of our largest resorts are on the national forest, and we have a 40-year permit with the United States Forest Service that lays out exactly how we can operate. It's a classic example of a public-private partnership, where the Federal Government provides the land and our business provides the business acumen, the capital, and the operational capability to deliver wonderful experiences for the American public and our guests. We provide a fee to the Treasury for leasing the land, which is substantial.

It wasn't long ago that ski areas were just thought of as for the winter recreation. You do it on snow. And so for the bulk of the winter, that's when ski areas operated. In the summer, they didn't. In the fall, they didn't. The private land ski areas started changing that by offering summertime activities on the ski resorts and including things like hiking trails, mountain biking trails and mountain coasters, ziplines, and those sorts of activities.

And so about a decade ago, we approached our partner, the United States Forest Service, with the idea: Can we do that on our public land resorts? Can we actually open it up for four seasons? The response was: Yes, and it's probably better if you get some enabling legislation that helps do that.

So we approached Congress, and in 2011 the Ski Area Recreation Opportunity Enhancement Act was passed unanimously in both Houses. And I think that's a testament that it just made common sense that you would use this land for four seasons. We have the infrastructure in place, parking lots, restaurants. They were sitting idle half of the year. It helps us round out the resort communities' economies, because we provide jobs all year round now, and for our own employees. So the benefits, both from a guest experience and from an economic benefit, are significant.

Our company proposed the first projects under the new law in 2014, after the regulations were promulgated. We started at Vail in Colorado and Heavenly at Lake Tahoe. We proposed ziplines, coasters, canopy tours, mountain biking trails, and a whole host of fun things to do. Our concept is learn through play. So we want people to learn a little bit about the natural environment and also have fun on these mountains.

The results are spectacular. If any of you ever want to come out and enjoy a zipline at 11,000 feet, you should do it. The public loves it. The economic benefits are coming. Our guests are up in the summer versus what we had before, clearly. And we've got a partnership with the Nature Conservancy to take a percentage of our revenue and put it into conservation projects.

We've worked with the Forest Service because we want uniformed rangers on the mountain. The public loves it when they're on the mountain and there's a ranger there that can talk to them about the environment, the wildlife, the forest, water, whatever questions they may have. So we're really excited about that. It's working.

The challenges we have are with funding and the way the Forest Service budget's fire suppression has eaten into the other programs, like recreation. So the Forest Service is having a hard time keeping up with us.

We have a proposal to solve that. If we could get legislation that allows us to keep the fees we pay local, then we can help fund the Forest Service and they can be a better partner and a healthier partner. Senators Gardner and Wyden on the Senate side are proposing this legislation and working with us on it, and we'd like to work with Members of Congress here.

And also, obviously, there's process streamlining that would help. We think there's ways to streamline some of the National Environmental Policy Act analysis associated with really common projects that we do.

So, again, I'll close by saying, if you can imagine a family, maybe a single parent from Denver, that gets up to Vail that's really never spent time in the mountain, getting on a chair lift in the fall with the Aspen turning, getting up on the mountain and doing a mountain bike trip or riding a mountain coaster, and just hooking those people on the outdoors and recreation, that's what we're trying to do, have fun and get people out and do it in a way that we haven't done in the past.

So our partners with the Forest Service have been fabulous to work with. I can't say enough about that relationship.

Thank you, and look forward to your questions.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Cables follows:]

**Statement of Rick D. Cables**  
**Vice-President, Natural Resources and Conservation, Vail Resorts, Inc.**  
**Before the Subcommittee on Interior, Energy, and Environment**  
**House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**  
**Improving the Visitor Experience at National Parks**  
**April 5, 2017**

Chairman Farenthold, Ranking member Plaskett and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide you with written testimony. On behalf of Vail Resorts, Inc. (Vail Resorts) I am pleased you have asked us to offer our experiences with regard to improving the visitor experience on public lands through both innovation and our partnership with the U.S. Forest Service. This critical partnership has successfully resulted in expanded recreation opportunities, increased infrastructure investment, job creation and enhanced rural mountain economies.

Vail Resorts is the premier mountain resort company in the world. Our product is the great outdoors and our mission is simple: Experience of a Lifetime. Our Company was founded in the late-1950s in Vail, Colorado by a pair of visionary skiers – Pete Seibert, a 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division veteran, and Earl Eaton, a local rancher – whose lifelong dreams were to build a ski resort like no other. Today, Vail Resorts is best known for our portfolio of 13 mountain resorts including the largest resort in North America – Whistler-Blackcomb in British Columbia, Vail, Breckenridge, Keystone and Beaver Creek in Colorado, Park City in Utah, Heavenly, Northstar and Kirkwood in the Lake Tahoe area of California and Nevada, Afton Alps in Minnesota, Mt. Brighton in Michigan, Wilmot Mountain in Wisconsin, and Perisher in Australia. We also recently announced that we entered into an agreement to acquire Stowe Mountain Resort in Vermont.

Four of our mountain resorts are among the top five most visited resorts in the United States. Our strategy is to continuously reinvest in all of our resorts to maintain a premier guest experience and our leadership position, with both capital investments on our mountains and in our resort communities. I submit that adopting policies that enable this approach is also the way forward for natural resources agencies like the U.S. Forest Service.

**The United States Forest Service – Our partner in recreation**

Six of our largest mountains, Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, and Keystone in Colorado, and Heavenly and Kirkwood in the Lake Tahoe region, are located largely on national forest system lands (NFS). We, like over 100 other resorts nationally, work in partnership with the Forest Service to deliver quality outdoor recreation experiences. In our public-private partnership, the public provides the NFS lands and we provide the capital, business acumen and operational capability to deliver a product that benefits millions of our guests every year. We also deliver a significant return to the taxpayer through fees paid for the use of the land. In fact, our partnership connects more people with the great outdoors and public wildlands than any other single activity on public lands.

Without this partnership, many of the premier ski resorts in the U.S. would not exist. Historically ski resorts operated almost exclusively in the winter, but that is changing to year-round, full service, unique and thrilling opportunities to engage the public on their public lands.

**More Recreation, More Investment, More Jobs and More efficient use of public land**

About a decade ago our Company began a dialog with the Forest Service on how we might work together to develop four-season, recreation opportunities on our permitted lands. The idea was simple; rather than have much of our existing infrastructure sit idle during the non-ski season we believed we could expand recreation opportunities by adding new activities, facilities and programs. We could do this on our permit areas – land already allocated for recreation use, land that was already developed, and land that was known for iconic and spectacular landscapes. We had already developed parking lots, ski lifts, utilities, restrooms and restaurants that we could use in all four seasons. We could also expand employment to year-round for both our own employees and for the recreation-dependent communities where we operate. It is a classic win-win-win.

We approached our Forest Service partners and were told that enabling legislation would be the best way to ensure the agency had the necessary authority. Vail Resorts, in partnership with the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA), led the effort that culminated in the Ski Area Recreation Opportunity Enhancement Act (SAROE). This bill passed both houses in 2011 unanimously, a testament to how much public support there was for the idea. In 2014, the implementing regulations were adopted and Vail Resorts immediately proposed the very first projects under the new law – starting with that very same mountain in Vail that started our Company.

We have proposed projects at three of our largest mountain resorts – Vail, Breckenridge and Heavenly. New infrastructure included mountain coasters (the very first to be constructed on national forest lands), zip lines, canopy tours, climbing walls, ropes courses, mountain biking and hiking trails. The Forest Service analyzed the proposals and rendered three separate affirmative decisions following the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In another testament to the common sense nature of the idea and thorough project analysis, not a single public objection was filed in protest of the three projects.

We launched our expanded recreation offerings at both Heavenly and Vail last summer – inviting USDA and U.S. Forest Service dignitaries, State officials and legislative leaders to celebratory events. We operated all last summer. This coming summer we will add Breckenridge to our summer line up. Vail Resorts expects to invest a total of over \$80 million, company-wide, in our four season, what we are calling Epic Discovery “learning through play” program under SAROE.

It is still early in the development of our four season recreation program but we are seeing multiple benefits. As we had hoped, our guest visitation is increasing, we are providing more year-long employment, and our communities are benefitting from a more stable year-round economy. We have entered into a partnership with The Nature Conservancy to capture some of the new revenue and reinvest it in conservation projects. We have worked with the Forest Service to encourage them to add uniformed Rangers at our resorts to provide conservation education programs. Best of all – our guests and the public are reconnecting with public wildlands and having a lot of fun in the outdoors as a result of these innovations.

### **Lessons learned and challenges ahead**

*Sustaining a healthy business partner.* Our most significant challenge with the new four season recreation program has been the inability of the Forest Service to keep pace with our efforts. The response from our Company, and many in the ski industry, to this new opportunity has been very strong. In fact, on the White River National Forest where both Vail and Breckenridge are located, the demand for summer projects has created a new, very significant workload. This additional work, coupled with our very active winter projects and the agency's reduced budgets, have created an acute bottleneck and backlog of projects waiting for review and processing. We do our part, as the ski industry "pays its way" on the analysis work undertaken by the U.S. Forest Service when we propose projects. However, under current Forest Service use of the discretionary budget and the continued erosion of non-fire funds, we are not overly optimistic that there will be improved timelines or additional personal for the effort.

We believe this issue can be addressed through a combination of funding and process streamlining which I will address in just a bit. Let's look first at the data related to the loss of funding for non-fire programs in the U.S. Forest Service. It tells quite a story. Current recreation program staffing levels are at 40 percent of what they were in the year 2000, primarily due to a change in how the Congress is funding wildfire suppression by requiring the Forest Service to use non-fire program funds. Catastrophic wildfires are not treated as other emergencies such as tornados or hurricanes – where the disaster is funded through a designated emergency fund. Instead, these wildfire emergencies are funded from programs such as recreation, timber, and livestock grazing, year after year. This wildfire funding formula is destabilizing to our industry and to rural communities whose economies depend on the jobs and investments we provide. Congress has been working on a "fix" to the fire suppression funding formula and we have been an active member of a coalition of business leaders and others to make the needed changes. Treating wildfire emergencies differently than other natural disasters is unfair and unsustainable, and directly impacts our industry, other programs and industries, and the American people by denying them access to recreational opportunities.

There is a solution. We have a forward-thinking, very innovative idea for helping the Forest Service become a healthier business partner. Congress could enact legislation to direct that the fees we pay for use of the national forests lands be kept within the local area instead of being directed to the National Treasury in Washington D.C. A percent of our ski fees could be retained by the local national forest to address the very real impacts associated with the concentrated recreation use on, and adjacent to, our permit areas. Keeping this money local would enable the agency to keep up with our proposals for investments and make the processing of these requests more timely and efficient. It also would enhance the U.S. Forest Service's ability to leverage more private investment to capitalize on future opportunities. Senator Wyden and Senator Gardner are providing leadership on ski fee retention in the Senate. We look forward to working with members of Congress to advance the idea of keeping fees local and addressing our issues locally.

*Process streamlining.* Combining increased capacity for the agency via fee retention and reducing unnecessary process encourages investments in our resorts which translates to an improved guest experience. One example of process excess is the level of analysis and review necessary to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) while approving a relatively routine project such as replacing a chairlift. For example, when we propose to use the same lift alignment and are simply increasing a 2 passenger to a 4 passenger ski lift, we do not see the benefit of extensive analysis and documentation. Ski lift replacements with minimal and known environmental effects could have their own category under NEPA and be excluded from

onerous documentation requirements. Alternatively, programmatic agreements with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) could allow us to proceed under simple letters documenting our activities as opposed to repetitive, costly, and unnecessary environmental analysis. As we develop summer activities under SAROE, similar categories could be defined under NEPA to potentially exclude excessive analysis and documentation for replacing a zip line for example. These simple changes would save millions of dollars nationally and hours of work by public and private entities.

**Thank you and I'll be glad to answer any questions.**

Vail Resorts is thrilled to be on the leading edge of expanding year-round recreation activities and opportunities at ski resorts located on our national forests. We appreciate the support of Congress in creating the authorities so our partner, the U.S. Forest Service, could embrace the concept. The U.S. Forest Service, from Washington D.C. to the field, has been working with our Company to create an experience of a lifetime for the public and our guests for decades, and now via Epic Discovery. We are using our permit areas more effectively, building new infrastructure, providing jobs and strengthening rural economies. The year-round recreational idea is really working. It may be the best outdoor opportunity of the past two decades to reconnect the public with public wildlands, build support for public lands, and address the U. S. Forest Service's need for a strong public connection to the great outdoors. Anticipating the additional workload for agency personnel – and ensuring resources to keep the economic and public recreation benefits flowing – are key. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and I look forward to any questions.



Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you very much.

And we'll start with Mr. Ross for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. ROSS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I'm particularly grateful to our witnesses today who've testified. I feel like I've been to most of the locations that you all have discussed today.

To give you an example, I grew up traveling to national parks with my grandfather in a 1960 Airstream, which I have now restored and own. We went to the '62 World's Fair staying at national parks—that shows you how old I am—'64 World's Fair, '67 World's Fair. But what we did is we stayed at the national parks because they were not only convenient, but they had full facilities and the commercial market didn't.

And today, the RV industry is growing phenomenally. In fact, I own three RVs, one of which is an antique, one of which I let my boys use, and one of which my wife and I use when we travel around the country. By the time my boys were 12, they had been to all continental 48 States and predominantly staying in national parks throughout this country.

And what we've seen, though, unfortunately, is that the national park campgrounds have declined from nearly 4.5 million overnights in the 1980s to less than 2 million overnight stays in 2013. There's an opportunity being missed there, not only by the national parks but by the citizens of the United States because they don't have a chance to enjoy those phenomenal resources, those natural resources that are out there.

So my questions are, first of all, Ms. Lanterman, I love what you guys are doing with public-private partnerships and I think that you've hit on something there, but it's the capital requirements that are necessary. And if Kansas is like Florida and like any other State, those resources, those dollar resources are so limited. Are there opportunities for bond issues to be funded by revenues from concessionaires or things of that nature? Is Kansas looking into creative ways to finance these capital improvements?

Ms. LANTERMAN. We actually do. That's a great question. We look at bond issues. And we've also looked at our foundation for support on putting in our cabin program. Actually, our foundation helped do that. And then our Governor, through the Economic Development Fund, paid those off.

And so now we are reaping the benefits of those revenues. And today, as I sit here, we are still looking at a bond issue for another development in one of our bigger parks.

So you have to look at all sources. You can't look at the State anymore just to fund.

Mr. ROSS. You can't. And, in fact, these RVs today have become so—I mean, really, you know, they're your home once you take the wheels off. But they're large and the facilities in our national parks just can't accommodate them, so we have to put in the infrastructure necessary to allow this.

And then I guess my question is, Mr. Cables, you've talked about the four seasons in Vail and how you've been able to make use of a resource. What other ways can we utilize our national parks and creative financial resources to bring them up to speed so that they can accommodate today's recreational vehicles?

Mr. CABLES. Thank you, Congressman Ross.

All I will say is that we found a way with our partner, our Federal partner, the United States Forest Service, to look at creative ways to expand recreational opportunities, and where there's a will, there's a way.

The Forest Service came to us when we started working on these opportunities, and we proposed some things that they didn't believe were natural resource-based or went a little bit over the line, and we talked it through and worked it through and came up with an agreement on the things that really did make sense that we thought our guests would love and that the Forest Service—

Mr. ROSS. And it's been a good relationship.

Mr. CABLES. Yes. It's the relationship, it's the quality of the land managers that we deal with locally, that we've been able to work this through. So I think that's really the secret.

Mr. ROSS. And, Mr. Casamassa, if I might, how has your relationship been with the National Park Service, I mean, in terms of wanting to be able to expand the infrastructure in these national parks?

Mr. CASAMASSA. I think at times, in my experience, working with park superintendents around different parts of the country, we've looked at ways to provide opportunities for one thing on the park, like, for example, a large parking lot. And then, in addition to that, we would then do something as it relates to camping on the National Forest System.

So it was providing a full suite of amenities. I think we have the opportunity to expand that, to find a full suite of opportunities for people, but it doesn't necessarily have to be on one land administration or another. It could be done together.

Mr. ROSS. And just to bring in an aside here since I've got limited time here, working with the RV industry, working with the Outdoor Recreation Industry Roundtable, is that something that you're taking the initiative to do? I think that would be very fundamental to getting it done in a very all-encompassing way.

Mr. CASAMASSA. I think right now to ensure that we can make our facilities contemporary and connect people to their public lands is paramount.

Mr. ROSS. I agree.

Mr. CASAMASSA. And that any way that we can to set up roundtable discussions to understand fully what the needs are and try—

Mr. ROSS. And with the industry.

Mr. CASAMASSA. With industry. And try to marry up the public lands with those kinds of needs is something that we'd be certainly interested in.

Mr. ROSS. Thank you.

And I see my time is expired. I yield back.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you very much, Mr. Ross.

Ms. Plaskett, I'll recognize you for 5 minutes.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you very much.

The National Park Service is entering its second century, and I want to explore ways that the agency can better utilize the vendors that operate with them.

Mr. Edmonston and Mr. Cables, I understand from your testimony here today that the path to improving visitor experiences in our national parks starts with an effective public-private partnership. Would you say that that is correct?

Mr. EDMONSTON. Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

One of the things I noticed, and I happened to look at the Park Service websites for your Virgin Islands, and I noticed several things related to vendors.

First off, there is a 35-page guide to becoming a vendor in the Park Service, and I noticed that it hadn't been updated since 2001. When I read it, it seemed more of a way for the Park Service to limit liability for the parks rather than a way to encourage entrepreneurs to come into the park system.

I also looked at ways people could utilize parks, their visit to the parks, like, let's say, they wanted to get married and they wanted a nice scenic overlook or a pavilion to get married in. The only way to do that would be to print out a form, mail it in with a non-refundable deposit, and hope that the date and the facility you wanted were available. There was no way to look to see online even what facilities were available for renting. So if you didn't have local knowledge, you couldn't do it.

There are many ways, simple ways, better use of technology, that could help visitor experience and also could make it easier for vendors to come in and use the parks.

Ms. PLASKETT. So just to go forward with that before I get to Mr. Cables, when you talked about, you know, in your testimony you talked about technology, and prior to the passage of the Centennial Act, the business community had raised several concerns with it. And within that, I know that there was some discussion about technology. You talked about the manual that is probably a PDF—

Mr. EDMONSTON. Yes.

Ms. PLASKETT. —that is not interactive, not easy to utilize. What are some of the other new technology that we might—we know what's wrong, but what could the parks be using that would facilitate—

Mr. EDMONSTON. Oh, goodness, I will defer to Mr. Cables on that since he uses that on a daily basis in his business.

Mr. CABLES. Thank you, Ranking Member Plaskett.

First, real quick on the public-private partnership. Yeah, that has to start, be where it starts. The government, at least in my experience in the government, isn't the best at entrepreneurial, some entrepreneurial thinking, marketing, some of those kind of things. I think the private sector does that better. The private sector is an expert on the land management, the forest and wildlife and water science and the considerations associated with that. So if we're both playing to our strengths in a partnership, then it can really work, and I think that's been our experience.

I would say on the technology, again, my expertise is more in natural resources, but we do have a program that we initiated a couple years ago called EpicMix where there's an app and people can track their vertical fee in a given day, and you can actually find out which lift lines are shorter than others. And it gives young people particularly but a lot of people the opportunity to use their

phones and to use it in a way that's kind of fun and figure out where to meet and to do things along those lines.

So we find that tying that kind of technology in with an outdoor experience can actually work and not diminish the outdoor experience, but actually enhance it.

So, yes, we have some really talented people in our company that focus on technology and how it makes the guest experience better.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. Thank you.

I think what I'm really trying to understand is, if we want to have these relationships and we want to work together, I don't want us to just be beating up on the park, but really offering them some constructive support, because we know that they have their budgetary constraints. They are a government agency. And so it's not their orientation to think this way.

And how do we in Congress facilitate a way that you as vendors and you as entrepreneurs and being in this recreation and resort business can facilitate more people coming to the park. Because, listen, in the Virgin Islands, on St. John, we want to maintain the park. And we realize how important it is to our local economy, because when you get to St. John, you've got to come over on the ferry. That's a ferry fee for us. You're going to eat in a local restaurant. You're going to do other things. And that supports our economy. So how do we make that experience such that people are going to keep coming back?

So if you all have any other thoughts, I'd just leave it up to—I see you, Ms. Lanterman, shaking your head. If you have any other thoughts or, otherwise, I'll yield back after that.

Ms. LANTERMAN. What I would say is we are government, those of us that are in government, and we can change. And there are companies out there that can help us change, with iPhone apps and with a reservation system. And we are moving towards that.

And sometimes it's a little bit slower, but I've found the best way for you learning those changes is when you go out and use it yourself. And so when we travel and when I travel on my own, I use those systems and I come back and I think: Oh, my gosh, we've got to do this.

And so that's how you learn. And it's a process, but I believe it can be done.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you.

And I want to follow up on a little bit of the testimony in my 5 minutes here.

Mr. Casamassa, you talked about getting special use permits and the like. Can you give me an example of what some of the special uses that people use in the forest or parks?

Mr. CASAMASSA. Sure. There's, say, recreational events. In some respects we have, say, a bike race that crosses over five different national forests in an entire State over a week's period of time. Lots of activity associated with an event of that scale. And that's one of the kinds of permits that we issue for those type of recreational events.

We have outfitter and guide permits for whitewater rafting, hunting, fishing, mountain bike tours, OHVs, and the like. So there's a full suite of things that we look at when it comes to pro-

viding recreational opportunities to meet the demands and needs of people.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. So how do you balance the mission of preserving the wilderness with making it available to the public? This has got to be one of the biggest challenges. I've sensed in some—Park Service more so than Forest Service—but this is a great national park but for the damn tourists. I mean, how do you reconcile that?

Mr. CASAMASSA. And that's a very delicate balance. And one of the ways that—I think about looking at opportunities, a full suite of opportunities. And maybe people only understand or are provided the information about one place that provides that opportunity. If you would then provide them a full suite of, well, are you looking for a hike? Are you looking for a lake? Are you looking for that kind of setting? You know, this is a very crowded place here, maybe we can direct you to another location.

So I think it is a lot about information. It's a lot about balancing the maintenance and enhancement of that landscape for generations to come with the use.

And I think there's an interest from the Forest Service about understanding a bit more about the carrying capacity, and perhaps we should be thinking through this and maybe looking at letting the users provide that carrying capacity for an area if we feel like that the area could be maintained, that there isn't any damage to the environment around it.

So it's just about looking at it maybe in a different way that expands, I think, our opportunities.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Ms. Lanterman, you work in the State parks, and I've found that States are a little bit more responsive to the public than we are here in Washington, D.C. Did you want to kind of weigh in on that balance as well?

Ms. LANTERMAN. You know, we have to be. We are in the business of making sure that our customers have a place to go and that it's maintained. And we do our best, truly, to make sure that we have the loyalty of our constituent groups. And, frankly, they'll tell us if we do not.

And so, along with what my colleague here said, it's an education process. We have to educate our users. You don't love and protect what you don't know about. And so that's what our process is, is try to educate our users when they come in so that we can keep it for the preservation for years to come.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Mr. Cables, you look like you wanted to weigh in as well.

Mr. CABLES. Yes. I would say there are other mechanisms to do that. For example, for operating our ski mountains in the summer on national forests, we've zoned the mountain. So at the top of, like, the gondola, in an area that's already developed, there's hard infrastructure, the environment's been altered, that's where we'll put certain things like climbing walls, ropes courses, and some of the heavier infrastructure. And then as you get further from that location, you'll get into what we call zones two, three, four, and five, where there may just be the only appropriate use is a hiking trail.

So it's a spectrum of concentrated recreation, which some people like. They don't want to get too far off, away from sight of a building. But yet others may want to do a mountain bike trip or a hiking trip and get really back away from everything. And there's a master development plan that we have to submit to the Forest Service that actually creates a zoning, and that's how we deal with that.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Great.

I've got some more questions, but I've only got about 10 seconds left. So I'll save them to the second round of questioning and let Mr. Raskin go for 5 minutes.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you for your courtesy, Mr. Chairman.

Let's see. Mr. Casamassa, I was interested in something that you said just a moment ago where you were saying that people might have a cluster of different interests. They might want to do a hike. They might want to do camping near a Civil War battlefield. Is it possible on your website for me to put in all of my different requests and then for you to send me back what your advice is for where I might go?

Mr. CASAMASSA. Well, I think there are opportunities to do that. We continue to enhance. Rec.gov, I think, is a multi-agency website that provides, I think, a relatively large suite of opportunities for people to be informed, to maybe do some trip planning, to get some kind of reservations. Certainly that is unto itself a good start. Tailoring some of the more I'd say specific trips is something that we continue to work on.

One thing that I'd like to add to that is that we recognize that providing information and education in more of a digital platform, really, what I call it is I think it adds capacity without adding any people.

Mr. RASKIN. Got you. Let me just follow up with you for 1 second. I think you're the right person to direct this to, but others can comment if they need to.

To what extent are you dealing with the effects of climate change and severe weather events, and to what extent is that having an effect on the visitor experience in national parks, in terms of floods, forest fires, hurricanes, severe events?

Mr. CASAMASSA. And a good question. I think one of the things that I've experienced prior to coming to the headquarters here in our Nation's Capital is I've had to manage lands that had a significant number of forest fires, catastrophic events, that really impacted the landscape as a whole.

In addition to that, I've seen some pretty significant flooding across a wide landscape that actually really wiped out all the roads and access, bridges, and some of our developed sites.

Mr. RASKIN. Where is that?

Mr. CASAMASSA. In Colorado. And so that, you know, I've seen some significant weather events that we've had to adjust our thinking around how best to site areas and be able to adjust and mitigate to the best of our ability some weather events.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you.

I'm interested also in the question of accessibility. One of the things I've always loved about the national parks is, at least the ones I go to, people just go and they're not even paying. There

might be some, I think, where people pay, but it's kept at a modest level. And I was moved by what Mr. Cables said about doing public-private partnerships that allow for different things to go on.

But to what extent is that done with an eye towards accessibility for the whole population that would otherwise be able to come and hike there? Does it suddenly become off limits to large numbers of people because it's so expensive? Just curious what you might have to say about that.

Mr. CABLES. Thank you for the question.

The resorts that operate on National Forest System lands, they're public lands. So uses can occur on those lands as long as they don't materially interfere with our permitted use. So, for example, people come up all the time in the summer and hike that don't pay a fee, don't get a ticket, don't engage in our own facilities or activities.

Mr. RASKIN. You're not displacing them.

Mr. CABLES. No, no, we're not, no.

Mr. RASKIN. But how much does it cost to do your kinds of things?

Mr. CABLES. Again, we've got one summer under our belt and we've got a suite of products for summer. The high end to do everything is like \$80- to \$90-dollar range.

Mr. RASKIN. For the day?

Mr. CABLES. Yes, for a day. And then we have a package, I think we call it the Little Explorer, which is around \$50 for kids. And you can also do things a la carte, where you don't get the whole package, but you can go to a specific ride or do something along those lines separately. And we're still experimenting. Like I said, we've got one season under our belt.

Mr. RASKIN. That's great. Okay.

And my final question is about education. Is there some formal effort underway to make connections with schools in local areas with the national parks?

Mr. CASAMASSA. I would say that we, "we" the Forest Service, we invest heavily in student conservation service, resource assistant programs, and programs that connect youth to the outdoors. There are several applications that we use for children to be able to explore specific locations.

So I think what we're trying to do is invest in youth to grow the next, I'd say, generation of conservationists in the country.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you very much.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you very much.

And I guess I'm back up for my second round of questions rather quickly.

So I want to talk, Mr. Cables, a little bit about something that I've heard from various national parks and some forest concessionaires, and that's end of contract time.

You've entered into I'm assuming a relatively long-term contract with the amount of capital investments that you have put in. But as you near the end of that term, say you've had a—I'm picking a number out of the air—say you've had a 30- or 40-year lease, in the last 5 to 7 years there's not a lot of incentive for you to put

a lot of money in maintenance and upgrades because most likely your whole deal will go out for bids again.

Is there any middle ground or way that we can structure this to where we don't end up having a huge capital expenditure, putting in nice facilities up front, with no incentives other than contractual requirements to upgrade or improve the facilities?

Twenty or 30 years down the road, we're not going to think of the amenities that people are going to want and are going to be necessary to keep your facility competitive, and you have no real financial incentive to do those upgrades as you're in the waning years of your contract.

Mr. CABLES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would say that it sounds like you're describing an assumption or a set of assumptions based on the park's concession program versus ours. We have a 40-year term special use permit, which is a huge factor because it allows us to invest and amortize that investment over a long period of time, A.

B, we own the facilities, so they're our facilities, and the equipment, the lifts, whatever, they're our facilities.

And thirdly, at the end of the term of that permit, we're able to get a reissued permit, without competition, as long as we're managing and meeting the requirements of the permit. So we don't go through a competitive bidding process.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Does anybody want to address that issue?

Do you face that in Kansas?

Ms. LANTERMAN. We actually do. And what we've done is we've enacted a list of what our concessionaires do. Are they in compliance? Have they always been in compliance? And then we allow them to renew.

Our problem is, though, if we are on Corps or Bureau property, we cannot extend it beyond our lease. And that is if we have only a 25-year lease with them, we can't extend it longer than that.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Okay, great.

All right, so you talked about some of the funding issues and such. Is there ever a point where we can be closer to self-sustaining? I mean, a lot of this, especially on the Federal level, is financed through appropriations. Obviously a ski resort has a much better chance of being self-sufficient than some wilderness park somewhere. How close to self-sufficient can we get?

Ms. LANTERMAN. Well, I guess what I would say is the challenges we have is we have to—or at least we feel like we need to make sure our customers, all customers can come, so all clientele. Can they afford it? Can that single mom come? And we try to make our fees that way.

Additionally, you have that weather issue. Most State park systems receive most of their revenue May through September. And so if you have weather issues in there, then you have a challenge of your finances and your cash flow coming in. And so I always believe that may be something that plays a part in this.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Anybody else want to weigh in there?

Mr. EDMONSTON. Yes, sir, I would like to. I mentioned in my testimony the Sportfish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, and that is a system that collects fees based on the sales of boats, motors, fishing equipment. It collects some revenues from the gasoline tax.



And it really goes a long way towards paying for a lot of the infrastructure that boaters and people who recreate on water use. It pays for fish stocking in most of the rivers and lakes around the country. It is a great partnership.

And I would say that there is an appetite for more access, better access, better services. And if vendors were allowed to come in and provide those, maybe not at every park, maybe not at every piece of Federal land, but you would see an increase in revenue and you would be able to better manage your properties.

And getting back to the leases, we have seen on particularly Corps of Engineers facilities, issues with marina managers losing their lease. We saw that up in New York after Hurricane Isabel, I believe, a few years ago, where a marina was taken out by the storm, and they were not allowed to rebuild, and we had to really have an act of Congress to get them to get their lease back. So that is an ongoing issue, yes.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. All right. Thank you very much.

Ms. Plaskett, do you have some more questions?

Ms. PLASKETT. Yes, I did want to ask just a question to Mr. Casamassa, just along the lines of discussion about the growing public demand for outdoor recreation, discussing some of the best practices and initiatives you have identified in your testimony towards improving the visitor experience.

How many partnerships are there between the Forest Service and small businesses utilizing recreational special use permits, if you are aware?

Mr. CASAMASSA. Today, I want to say close to 25,000 permits, recreational permits. I think that that is the number that we have for recreational opportunities. But it is in the thousands, and it is partnerships that we have for a full suite of activities.

Ms. PLASKETT. And how long does it take to apply and then receive the permit on average or typically?

Mr. CASAMASSA. It depends on, I would say, what the proposal would be and how significant it would be, what the scope and scale of it. I would say for individual rec events it should not take but several weeks to get from a proposal into the actual issuance of a permit on something that is that relatively routine and minor, some of the activities now that we are saying that you don't really need a permit. Other activities that have some infrastructure considerations and some longer terms for the permit will take longer than that.

Ms. PLASKETT. What is the longest that you have seen permits take?

Mr. CASAMASSA. That is a good question. From my own personal experience, I'd say over a year.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. And how much do the permits cost?

Mr. CASAMASSA. It depends on what actually is being authorized.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. And then could you tell us a little bit about the rollout of ePermit system?

Mr. CASAMASSA. Sure. One of the things that we've done, just to back up a bit, is that we have what we called a recreational diagnostic. It was both a public- and a private-facing assessment of how well we were doing.

We had five different things that came out of our diagnostic, and one of them was is that we wanted to connect youth to—we thought it would be advantageous to connect youth to the outdoors. We wanted to celebrate our iconic places. We wanted to ensure that there was appropriate access, both roads and trails. We wanted to increase our reach when it came to the digital strategy as another one. And we wanted to streamline our special use permitting process because we recognized that that was a bottleneck.

And so in conjunction with the streamlining, we recognized that some of the activities could be done online. So we are making considerable investments right now not only in the back of the house with our data systems that connect to the front of the house, which would be our ePermitting issue. And we are looking at—right now we have a platform that we are working with AT&F on that could be—it could be used for a wide array of permits. Right now our launches are around rec special uses in specific areas, as well as Christmas tree permits.

And so those are the things we are starting, but, again, that's one of the—for me, I am advocating that we invest in the technology to add capacity without increasing the number of people that we have.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. I really appreciate the work that you all are doing, and I am particularly grateful that you talk about the youth program and working with young people. I think that that is really important. On the island of St. Croix we have had a really outstanding summer youth program with the National Park Service, which has been really instrumental in a lot of kids, high school students and others, really getting comfortable and having a great community awareness for the Park Service that is there in their communities.

Personally, one of my sons ended up going to this program in the summer, being really involved in the restoration that was happening with our fort, went on to college to get his degree in architecture, and is in the outdoors doing this kind of work. So it has really been important to us.

And I am also grateful to the regional director of the National Park Service who has committed to the Virgin Islands to reinvigorate the program on the Island of St. John, where that relationship is even more important because the proximity that the park and the community and the young people really be closely involved.

So thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to ask these questions.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you.

And they've just called votes, which means we've got about 5 minutes before we need to walk over to make it. So I just have one quick question for you guys. And if you all had some advice to give to the Park Service and/or concessionaires about what we need to do, what would it would be? And we will just go down the line with Mr. Casamassa.

Mr. CASAMASSA. I would say, and I think that the—I don't know everything that the Park Service is doing, but I know that they are on a trajectory to look at or assess their concession program, and I think that that is something that we did. There are some good findings out of that. And to me, I would like to think that we would

continue on with looking at ways to lever public-private partnerships through that assessment.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Great.

Ms. Lanterman.

Ms. LANTERMAN. And I would suggest that the National Park Service, as they have in the past, just continue to work with America's State parks to help solve some of these issues too that we face too with them.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Great.

Mr. Edmonston.

Mr. EDMONSTON. I would say it is maybe a slight change of focus in having the focus placed on how to enhance the visitor experience and how to work better with industry and other outside partners.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Make it better for those doggone tourists.

Mr. Cables.

Mr. CABLES. Talk and listen to your constituencies and have an open mind.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. All right. Well, listen, I want to thank our witness panel for being here. I think we got some great input. We do have votes coming up, so we will wrap this up if you guys are good with that.

And I will ask unanimous consent that all members have 5 legislative days to submit questions for the record. And without objection, that's so ordered.

Did you have anything else, Mr. Raskin?

All right. Well, then, with no further business, without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:23 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]



## **APPENDIX**

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MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

Chairman Blake Farenthold Opening Statement

Good afternoon. Today the Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy, and Environment will be examining the Concessions Program at the National Park Service, or NPS. Last year, the country celebrated the 100th anniversary of the NPS. Now that the festivities of that milestone are over, it is time to get back to work improving the Park Service system. The NPS is the custodian of some of our greatest natural treasures. To that end, we must make sure that it is performing well and living up to this responsibility. In July of 2015, shortly before the centennial celebrations, this subcommittee held a hearing that began the Oversight and Government Reform Committee's involvement in these issues. In her opening statement, my predecessor as chair, Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming, quoted Stephen Mather, the first Director of the National Park Service. I believe that quotation is worthy of repeating today. He said, "Scenery is a hollow enjoyment to the tourist who sets out in the morning after an indigestible breakfast and a fitful night's sleep on an impossible bed." This is a particularly astute observation. To be able to enjoy our nation's stunningly beautiful parks, beaches, monuments, wildlife, and other features, the people need food, lodging, and other appropriate amenities. To this end, since the first national parks were created in the late nineteenth-century, there has been a history of private companies working on these parks to provide services to visitors. Unfortunately, the amenities at many parks have aged poorly and many have not been maintained properly. The National Park Service must modernize. It has failed to meet the changing demands of its visitors. Millennials and modern families want tech services such as Wi-Fi and internet access. Cell service is not only an amenity, it's an import safety consideration. When NPS does not keep up, our parks lose visitors to other tourism opportunities, such as privately run theme parks and other attractions. Certainly we don't need to turn our parks into a Disneyland, but we need to keep up with what 21st century Americans want when vacationing. I want to see my friends' vacation pictures at our parks on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I want to know I can get help in the event of an emergency by dialing 911. By providing up-to-date technology, contemporary food and beverage services, and a choice between rustic and comfortable and modern places to stay, and unique visitor experiences, our parks become more attractive. This is where the role of concessioners is critical. They help provide these services while providing needed funding to the Park Services. In our last hearing on this subject, we heard of several instances of bureaucratic red tape getting in the way. For instance, one park had a 1,629 page-long bid request outline that cost one concessionaire 2,500 company-management hours and more than \$90,000 to fill out. As another example, we heard about parks with campgrounds that sell out, but are only open for part of the year, due to bureaucratic requirements. Fortunately, we have sources of ideas for ways to update the NPS. For instance, in partnering with ski areas, the Forest Service has found ways for people to use the lands it leases year-round. Furthermore, good ideas have come from various state park systems, such as Kansas' matching of park fees with demand. I hope to hear about these ideas, and more, from our panel today. I very much look forward to hearing suggestions on a way forward from here and hopeful the committee can help update our national park system.