



NPCA Position on H.R. 1314, the LODGE Act

June 12, 2023

Dear Representative,

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. On behalf of our 1.6 million members and supporters, we write to share our thoughts on H.R. 1314, Lodging Options Developed for Government Employees Act (LODGE Act) ahead of a markup in the House Committee on Natural Resources scheduled for June 13, 2023. While NPCA supports efforts to address the housing shortages in and near the national parks, we are concerned about language that allows the general public to be housed on national park land beyond those that work closely with the park such as concessioners, cooperating association employees and other partners.

The National Park Service (NPS) provides government housing to employees when conditions of employment warrant it or due to a lack of availability. However, national park units throughout the country are struggling to provide adequate and affordable housing for their employees. NPS maintains 5,513 employee housing units in 216 park units. The average age of housing assets is 61 years and the most recent assessment by NPS states that 3,661 (66%) of the housing assets need \$383 million in repair. In addition, several gateway communities' housing prices have skyrocketed in recent years resulting in NPS staff being unable to live in nearby communities and turning down jobs or commuting an hour or more to the park.

NPCA supports creative ideas to address these housing needs for national parks employees and partners. The LODGE Act expands the Secretary of the Interior's authority to enter into partnerships with other federal agencies, states, local governments, tribal governments, housing entities, and other public and private organizations to develop, construct, rehabilitate or manage housing affordable housing for federal employees, their families and the public. The LODGE Act allows the housing to be located both on and off public lands. NPCA supports the extension of the current authority to allow for these partnerships, but we have reservations about allowing the general public to live on national park land. Housing should be set aside for park employees and those that perform duties at the park unit.

In addition to expanding authorities, NPCA is pleased that Congress is increasing federal funding through the Housing Improvement Program, the only funding that is dedicated to addressing housing repairs in parks. That program is funded at \$7.8 million in FY23 which allows NPS to repair approximately 75 housing units per year. However, at that level, it will take 48 years to complete maintenance on all the housing units needing it. Congress must invest much more to address these housing needs. In addition, line-item construction, repair and rehabilitation, and other annual funding sources can also provide funding for housing repairs and new construction.

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However, those funding sources are in demand for repair money to address other assets like visitor centers, roads, and trails. More funding is necessary in those accounts as well.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Please contact Emily Douce at edouce@npca.org if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Christina Hazard
Legislative Director

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