

TESTIMONY OF
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Discussion Draft: National Parks Centennial Anniversary Legislation

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Tsongas and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today regarding Chairman Bishop's draft National Parks Centennial Anniversary legislation. I have been a member of the National Park Foundation's Board of Directors for more than seven years and I served as Vice-Chairman of the Board, the highest ranking private citizen position, from 2012-2013. Additionally, I am the Chairman Emeritus of the Civil War Trust and I also had the honor of serving as the Chairman of the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation from 2002 to 2009. I believe that my background as a businessman, who has had the opportunity to experience how parks can serve as economic drivers beyond their borders, is what best positions me to assist the Subcommittee as you legislate vital enhancements to the National Park System for another century of service.

Chartered by Congress in 1967, the National Park Foundation is founded on a legacy that began more than a century ago, when private citizens from all walks of life took action to establish and protect our national parks. Today, the National Park Foundation carries on that tradition as the national charitable nonprofit whose sole mission is to directly support the National Park Service.

2016 will mark the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service. The Centennial represents a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity for Americans to come together to celebrate the achievements that have been realized as the result of "America's Best Idea." Most importantly, the anniversary presents an opportunity for Americans of all ages, races, genders, ethnicities and political affiliations to unite behind a shared vision for building upon the success of the National Park System during its second century. This is our opportunity to both celebrate the past and look to the future.

In addition to celebrating past accomplishments and re-connecting Americans to their parks, the Centennial Anniversary presents an opportunity to generate innovative new approaches to improve the visitor experience and create a better funding model to support our Parks. We believe that the draft legislation you are considering today has the potential to serve as the galvanizing mechanism needed to achieve that goal.

That is why I am pleased to appear before you to testify on behalf of the National Park Foundation to offer our strong support for this draft legislation. I will also share recommendations we have for improvements to it.

Centennial Challenge

The Foundation strongly supports the discussion draft's authorization of a Centennial Challenge fund paired with 'dedicated' funding. Enactment of these provisions, which would require a non-federal match, would undoubtedly create a strong incentive for increased philanthropic contributions to park programs and projects leading up to, during and beyond the year of the Centennial Anniversary in 2016.

In addition, the Foundation supports the proposed overdue increase in the purchase price of the "senior citizen lifetime pass" as a way to help pay for this important program. The Foundation and its staff would welcome the opportunity to work with members of the Subcommittee and your staff to identify additional offsets that can be utilized to increase the funding available for the Centennial Challenge.

NPF Endowment

We strongly support the proposed authorization of an endowment housed at the Foundation, which will establish a long-term funding source for important park projects and programs. The endowment will allow the Foundation to raise significantly more private funding for the parks as part of donors' estate planning and gift giving. Endowment growth serves to build a stable long-term source of private resources for Parks.

The Foundation supports the establishment of 'bed fees' as a mechanism to provide funding for the endowment. Currently, at many Parks, guests at hotels located within the boundaries of national parks do not pay the hotel occupancy taxes paid by park visitors staying outside the boundaries. This represents a lost opportunity to capture fees hotel guests are already accustomed to paying for the benefit of the parks. That said, we look forward to working with members of the committee and your staff and other interested parties to include in the legislation some accommodation to address the collection and administration of these fees.

Finally, we would welcome the opportunity to work with members of the Subcommittee and your staff to identify additional offsets that can be utilized to increase the funding available for this important endowment.

Park Foundation Structure

The Foundation strongly supports the draft legislation's inclusion of amendments to the NPF charter that would transition the Secretary of the Interior and the Director of the National Park Service to ex-officio, non-voting members of the National Board of Directors. The Foundation's authorizing legislation names the Secretary of the Interior as the Chair of the NPF Board and the Director of the National Park Service as the Secretary of the NPF Board. As with any cabinet position, the Secretary of the Interior is a job that has turnover due to national elections and other factors. History has shown that a change in administration occasionally leads to a change in NPF leadership. The resulting uncertainty can be avoided by allowing the board to select its own leadership.

The Foundation also supports the discussion draft's authorization of \$25 million to be appropriated each year, over the course of ten years, to the NPF to be utilized to match non-federal contributions for park projects and programs. This would result in a significant increase in the leveraging of private funds to benefit parks and visitors similar to the successful model set forth in the charter of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Education and Interpretation

The Foundation also supports efforts that would diversify, strengthen and enhance interpretive programs in our national parks while also expanding the role of volunteers in these programs. In particular, it is our hope that these provisions will help generate meaningful new ways to engage Americans that historically have low park visitation rates, such as Hispanics, urban dwellers and Millennials. This will require modernizing the technology used to recruit new visitors so that we can reach them through social media and wherever else we need to go to engage them. In addition, we need to work harder to engage urban populations by better highlighting the many wonderful urban parks already in existence.

Conclusion

As the National Parks Centennial Anniversary approaches, it is truly inspiring to see a diverse and bipartisan coalition of lawmakers, non-profit organizations, businesses and individuals uniting behind a shared commitment to seizing the historic opportunity presented by the Centennial Anniversary to develop and execute innovative new approaches that will ensure that our National Parks achieve another century of success.

While federal appropriations should remain the largest funding source for the National Park Service, it is unlikely that current federal budget constraints will be reversed or even alleviated in the near future. Therefore, it is imperative that we utilize the 2016 Centennial to explore new funding models that can be utilized to supplement the taxpayer investments needed to prepare and sustainably fund our parks for another 100 years of service. Without enhancements and improvements we risk a first time visit to a national park becoming a one-time visit instead of a life-long love for these amazing places.

This new paradigm must include finding new ways to incentivize even greater philanthropic and corporate investments in our parks going forward. That said, it is vital that our emerging coalition works together over the next fifteen months to seek the appropriate balance between the need to avoid over-commercialization and the need to enhance and expand attribution for desperately needed corporate investments in our parks.

We must see supporting our parks not as just the role of taxpayers and Congress or just private citizens or foundations. We must see it as working together in concert to support our parks with federal funds, private philanthropy, corporate partnerships, fees and volunteerism.

The Centennial of the National Park Service comes around only once and the focus of millions of Americans will be on our national parks between now and the end of 2016. We have a

tremendous opportunity to capitalize on this momentum and excitement to help prepare the National Park Service for a second century of success. This will require that we place our political and philosophical differences aside to work jointly on behalf of future generations so that they too can experience and realize the many benefits of “America’s Best Idea” as we have.

In closing, the National Park Foundation believes that the Chairman’s discussion draft National Park Service Centennial Act is an outstanding step toward achieving the goals I have outlined today. We look forward to working with the entire committee and the rest of our emerging coalition to continue refining and ultimately enacting this vitally important legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.