

**STATEMENT OF CHARLES F. SAMS III, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL
RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS REGARDING A HEARING
TO EXAMINE THE PRESIDENT’S BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE NATIONAL PARK
SERVICE FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025.**

May 15, 2024

Chair Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today at this oversight hearing on the Fiscal Year 2025 President's Budget Request for the National Park Service (NPS).

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

FY 2025 Budget Summary

The FY 2025 discretionary budget request for the NPS is \$3.6 billion, an increase of \$251.3 million compared to FY 2024 enacted funding levels, supporting an estimated 14,571 full-time equivalents (FTE). Recreation fee revenue, funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and other mandatory funding sources provide additional funding of \$1.24 billion. The total FY 2025 request from all fund sources for NPS is \$4.81 billion and 19,912 FTE.

The request prioritizes conserving our natural and cultural resources, advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities. The request balances investments in key priorities with necessary funding for day-to-day operation of the 429 park units, 25 trails, and 66 wild and scenic rivers, ensuring the American public continues to have enriching experiences on park lands.

The request also invests in our most valuable resource—NPS employees. My top priority as Director continues to be to connect and empower a thriving and diverse workforce, and I believe that funding initiatives such as providing quality employee housing and increasing parks’ capacity to address growing responsibilities directly support this goal. To that end, the budget supports an increase of \$151.9 million across all accounts for FY 2025 fixed costs like the 2.0 percent employee pay increase, and maintaining baseline capacity to reflect increased FY 2024 fixed cost requirements. Without full funding for these costs, the NPS will continue to absorb these must-pay costs by cutting funding for program work or staffing.

Operation of the National Park System – The FY 2025 budget request for the NPS operations account is \$3.1 billion, an increase of \$201.9 million above the FY 2024 enacted level, including an increase of \$44.0 million for FY 2025 fixed costs. This includes \$431.0 million for Resource

Stewardship, \$299.5 million for Visitor Services, \$456.6 million for Park Protection, \$974.0 million for Facility Operations and Maintenance, \$709.7 million for Park Support, and \$219.5 million for External Administrative Costs.

Additionally, in support of our NPS employees and staffing capacity, the operations budget provides an additional \$28.0 million for increasing general staffing capacity, supporting new and critical responsibilities at park sites, and increases to wage grade and locality pay areas. This funding will increase operating capacity at parks and offices with new and critical needs, allow NPS to collaborate with the public and Tribal governments, broaden programming and maintenance activities, expand our law enforcement presence, and improve park safety and security.

Also, to help prevent the growth of deferred maintenance, the account proposes \$193.2 million for cyclic maintenance, a \$5.0 million increase over FY 2024. This funding supports projects that address routine maintenance and recapitalization needs, and contributes to the NPS' approach towards lifecycle investments that sustain assets in the long-term.

Centennial Challenge – This appropriation, requested at \$13.0 million, leverages partner donations for signature projects and programs at national parks. The Centennial Challenge program is instrumental in garnering and fostering strong partnerships. All Federal funds must be matched on at least a 1 to 1 basis, creating a program total of at least \$26.0 million. These projects focus on repairing and modernizing NPS infrastructure, expanding recreational opportunities and access to the public, and developing new and improved educational and interpretive programs for visitors.

National Recreation and Preservation – The FY 2025 budget request for the National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) appropriation is \$84.4 million. This appropriation is dedicated to supporting local community efforts to preserve natural and cultural resources from the local level to the international. Natural resource programs funded in this account support collaborative and community-driven efforts and outcome-focused investments to preserve and enhance rural landscapes, urban parks and rivers, important ecosystems, and wildlife habitat. NPS cultural programs funded in this account support public participation in preserving the Nation's cultural heritage through National Register Programs, research and training in historic preservation and conservation, and a number of grant programs. The FY 2025 request includes an increase of \$3.0 million to fund the recently established African American Burial Grounds Preservation Grant Program and invests additional funding in staffing for grants administration to ensure proper management of a growing workload of grants funded through this appropriation and the Historic Preservation Fund.

The request also maintains funding for NR&P programs such as Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance, National Register programs, Chesapeake Gateways and Trails, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation, Japanese American Confinement Sites, American Battlefield Protection Program Assistance, American Indian and Native Hawaiian Art and Culture, and the 9/11 Memorial Act. NR&P also supports the management of the Heritage Partnership Program, which distributes Federal funding to 60 National Heritage Areas in 36 States and one territory as well as international cooperation on park and heritage resource management. While NPS

recognized the important role of National Heritage Areas as important local conservation leaders, the FY 2025 request finds savings of \$11.2 million to the Heritage Partnership Program along with other budget savings to preserve funding for core operations and Administration priorities.

Historic Preservation Fund – The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) supports Historic Preservation Offices in States, territories, and Tribal lands to preserve historically and culturally significant sites and provides competitive grants to other entities. The FY 2025 budget request for this appropriation is \$151.4 million. As part of the budget’s advancement of racial justice and equity for underserved communities, the request includes \$2.5 million in new, dedicated funding for Tribal Heritage Grants to support Federally recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Villages and Corporations, and Native Hawaiian Organizations to preserve and protect their cultural heritage.

The President’s budget includes \$62.2 million for grants to State Historic Preservation Offices and \$23.0 million to Tribal Historic Preservation Offices to help meet preservation responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act to protect and preserve historic resources, based on local needs and priorities. This appropriation also includes \$11.0 million for grants-in-aid to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to support preservation of historic structures on HBCU campuses, \$12.5 million for Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants to support subgrant programs for historic preservation projects that stimulate economic growth in rural areas, \$30.3 million for competitive grants to preserve historic sites that tell the stories of the struggles for civil rights and equal rights in America, and \$10.0 million for Save America’s Treasures grants to support preservation of nationally significant sites and collections.

Construction – The FY 2025 budget request includes \$237.2 million to fund construction projects, equipment replacement, management, planning, operations, and special projects. This includes \$124.7 million for line-item construction, which includes an increase of \$46.1 million for major construction projects, in order to modernize and renew some NPS priority assets. This account also includes a \$9.0 million increase to improve and expand NPS housing, a \$3.9 million increase for Climate Vulnerability Studies, a \$3.2 million increase for construction project planning, and a \$1.0 million increase to help establish charging infrastructure that supports the Federal Zero Emission Vehicle fleet.

FY 2025 Budget Priorities

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

The FY 2025 NPS budget includes an increase of \$15.1 million in targeted investments to support advancement of racial justice and equity for underserved communities. This increase is spread across multiple appropriations. The request proposes \$3.1 million and 22 FTE in the Biden-Harris Administration’s Increasing Representation on Our Public Lands initiative, which supports operations at new or expanded park sites like Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley

National Historic Site, Brown v. Board of Education National Historical Park's Summerton South Carolina unit, New Philadelphia National Historic Site, Blackwell School National Historic Site, and Amache National Historic Site. This effort also includes \$3.0 million to implement the recently established African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program, \$250,000 for the newly established Japanese American World War II History Network, and \$500,000 to address the growing workload of grants management.

The NPS's commitment to respect and strengthen connections with Indigenous communities, enhance our nation-to-nation relationships, and fully uphold our trust and treaty responsibilities—another top priority for the Service—is reflected in our request for an additional \$3.0 million to support expanded Tribal co-stewardship of park resources, \$1.5 million to implement the Native American Tourism Improving Visitor Experience Act (NATIVE Act) to support tourism that benefits Tribes, \$1.0 million to support the management of subsistence uses of NPS lands in Alaska, \$250,000 for a new Native American Graves Protection Act (NAGPRA) national program coordinator, and \$2.5 million to provide dedicated funding for competitive grants to Tribes, Alaska Native Villages and Corporations, and Native Hawaiian Organizations for the preservation and protection of their cultural heritage.

Ensuring Operational Capacity in the National Park System – The NPS has lost almost 15 percent of its operations staff capacity since FY 2010. Over the same period, over 35 new units and additional authorized sites have been added to the system, existing units have seen responsibilities grow, and visitation has increased by tens of millions. To meet this demonstrated and anticipated additional demand, the FY 2025 budget proposes \$180.0 million and 944 FTE spread across multiple appropriations in support of several priorities. These increases provide vital support to parks and programs to advance priorities and fulfill important responsibilities.

The budget requests \$151.9 million to support basic operational capacity needs associated with increases in fixed costs. \$46.1 million of this request will support the proposed 2025 fixed costs increase including the employee pay raise, while \$105.8 million will support baseline capacity due to absorption of FY 2024 fixed cost requirements. An additional \$11.2 million and 69 FTE will support new and critical responsibilities at park units and central offices, such as addressing significant physical security issues at Mount Rushmore National Memorial and providing increased resource and visitor protection at Stonewall National Monument. The FY 2025 budget proposes \$6.8 million in Wage Grade and Locality Adjustments to support required increases in personnel expenses and \$10.0 million for staff capacity restoration.

Employee Housing – To address this very critical need, the FY 2025 budget proposal invests more than \$100 million in housing for NPS employees across multiple fund sources, including a \$9.0 million proposed increase in the Construction account that would directly support new construction or rehabilitation of existing housing facilities. Housing for employees in and near national parks is increasingly scarce and expensive, reflecting a trend impacting communities across the country; this has led to long commutes and has made it difficult for NPS to recruit and retain employees. This funding increase will support compliance, design, and construction of housing units that will replace obsolete and deteriorated housing or add housing capacity at multiple parks, including at Rocky Mountain National Park, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, and Mammoth Cave National Park.

Additional Priorities – The 2025 President’s Budget contains additional increases that support key NPS priorities. To mitigate the impacts of climate change, this includes an increase of \$2.5 million to invest in conservation and climate-based projects that will include management and control of non-native invasive species, restoration of damaged ecosystems, or mitigation of threats to at-risk resources. And, to further strengthen the Department’s ability to meet its conservation mission in the face of a changing climate, the NPS budget includes \$250,000 as part of a total \$1.0 million increase Department-wide to establish experts in NPS and other DOI bureaus to implement a nature-based solutions policy. To assess the impacts of a changing climate on parks, the budget requests an additional \$3.9 million to conduct climate vulnerability studies. The budget also includes \$4.0 million for Zero Emission Vehicle equipment and infrastructure deployment, which is used to increase electrical supply and access for electric vehicle supply equipment, and coordinates installation to ensure the Department can maximize the use of these charging stations.

The NPS request also includes a \$15.4 million investment in Central Information Technology (IT) needs. This funding will invest in IT modernization, the IT workforce, and critical IT infrastructure needs in order to meet growing cybersecurity requirements. Additional funding will preclude these costs from being billed to park and program budgets, which would further erode their operational capacity.

Additionally, the request includes \$1.0 million in new funding to implement recommendations of the DOI Law Enforcement Task Force to proactively support the mental health, wellness, and resiliency of all DOI law enforcement officers from recruitment to retirement. This funding would also provide additional psychological testing, required for all newly hired law enforcement officers. The request also contains a one-time investment of \$4.2 million for activities associated with the 2025 Presidential Inauguration.

Conclusion

The President’s FY 2025 budget proposal supports President Biden’s commitment to respecting and strengthening our connections with underserved communities, mitigating the impacts of climate change, and restoring parks’ abilities to protect our shared cultural and natural heritage.

Chairman Tiffany, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for the Subcommittee’s continued support of the NPS. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.