



Written Testimony

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On behalf of Shenandoah National Park Trust

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All in for America250: Public-Private Partnerships Supporting America's Semiquincentennial on our Public Lands.

Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee—thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Emily Chiles, and I am here on behalf of the Shenandoah National Park Trust, the official nonprofit philanthropic partner of Shenandoah National Park.

Since our founding in 2007, the Shenandoah National Park Trust has provided more than \$8 million in philanthropic support to Shenandoah National Park. That support helps protect natural resources, improve visitor access and safety, strengthen education and interpretation, and preserve the Park's cultural and historic assets. Like nonprofit park partners across the country, we don't exist to replace federal funding—we exist to be a force multiplier ensuring that public investment can have a greater impact.

Last year alone, more than 1,600 donors contributed over \$2 million in support to Shenandoah. Of that total, the Trust awarded more than \$1.4 million directly to Park projects and programs, translating generosity into tangible outcomes for visitors and surrounding communities that rely on Shenandoah for their livelihood.

Shenandoah National Park, like many public lands, continues to experience increasing visitation—drawing millions of visitors each year. As our country approaches the 250th anniversary of its founding, that demand is expected to grow even further.

This year is also a meaningful moment for Shenandoah, as the Park prepares not only to celebrate America 250, it also is celebrating its 90th anniversary. These milestones offer an opportunity to not just to celebrate, but to help people better understand this place—its history, its purpose, and the responsibility that comes with caring for it.

However, as we mark this year of celebration, we are realistic about the conditions facing the National Park Service. Staffing constraints create real operational limits affecting what Park teams can take on, particularly during this expected period of increased visitation. While nonprofit partners cannot—and should not—replace the exceptional National Park Service team who steward Shenandoah every day, we can help support the Park in practical, targeted ways.

During this milestone year, the Trust is actively supporting public engagement. We are developing and hosting online programs that share the rich and complex history of Shenandoah, reaching people who may not be able to visit in person. Working alongside the Park, we are also contributing Trust staff time and volunteers to support a wide range of in-person Park events happening throughout the year.



Across this work, we are focused on creating experiences that help people connect with Shenandoah and understand how its unique history fits into the broader story of our country.

While this year includes important moments of celebration, our work goes deeper. With the Trust's support Shenandoah National park will complete restoration of one of the few remaining cabins that pre-dates the Parks creation at Skyland, once operated by Addie Pollock—an extraordinary woman for her time—and her husband. Protecting this structure preserves an irreplaceable piece of the Park's history and helps visitors better understand the early era of automobile tourism, mountain retreat culture and how the Park evolved.

At the same time, our work is focused on the next 100 years and beyond. We are ensuring that annually more than 15,000 young people experience Shenandoah as a living classroom and a pathway into conservation and land-management careers, building skills, connection, and a lasting sense of stewardship.

We are investing in the health of Shenandoah's forests, supporting efforts to address invasive species, stream restoration and overall strengthen ecological resilience—work that protects wildlife habitat, drinking water for the local communities, and the visitor experience.

Additionally, we are working with Park leadership on a vision for accessibility that reflects how people experience parks today and, in the future, including the thoughtful development of multiple accessible trail opportunities. Expanded access allows families, older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities to experience Shenandoah safely and meaningfully, while improving usability for all visitors.

For us at the Trust, this work reflects remittance in its truest sense—not charity, but responsibility. We have inherited something of immense public value, and our job is to care for it and pass it forward whole.

But that responsibility is shared. Programs like the Great American Outdoors Act have shown what is possible when there is sustained commitment to caring for public lands - with more than \$50M invested in Shenandoah deferred maintenance backlog, that translates into real on the ground impact for Shenandoah. Yet the remaining deferred maintenance is estimated at approximately \$191M. Support for reauthorization of this investment—along with the ability for parks to fully staff and implement the work Congress has authorized—is essential to protecting these places and the legacy they represent.

Shenandoah National Park Trust is honored to stand alongside the National Park Service and Congress in this work. We look forward to continuing to partner in ways that protect our parks, support the people who steward them, ensuring these places endure for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to America's public lands.