

STATEMENT OF CHARLES F. SAMS III
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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED
AGENCIES OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 18, 2022

Chair Pingree, Ranking Member Joyce, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today at this hearing on the Fiscal Year 2023 President's Budget Request for the National Park Service (NPS, Service).

I am pleased to share with you the President's Fiscal Year 2023 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, as well as my own priorities for the National Park Service. If enacted, this budget will support our ability to protect our resources, our visitors, and our employees well into the future.

2023 Budget Summary

The discretionary budget request for the NPS is \$3.6 billion, an increase of \$345.6 million compared to FY 2022 enacted funding levels. This level supports an estimated 16,412 direct full-time equivalents (FTE). Recreation fee revenue and other mandatory funding sources provide additional funding of \$1.1 billion. The total FY 2023 request for NPS is \$4.8 billion and 20,495 FTE from all funding sources.

The NPS FY 2023 request prioritizes advancing racial equity and support for underserved stories and communities, tackling the climate crisis in the national park system, conserving our natural resources, and using science to inform decisions. The request makes bold investments essential for the Service's continued mission success in its second century while remaining committed to the daily mission of ensuring that the American people continue to have an enriching experience at each and every one of the NPS's 423 sites. The request also invests in our most valuable resource—NPS employees. My top priority as Director is to connect and empower a thriving and diverse workforce, and I believe that funding initiatives such as providing quality employee housing and improving internet bandwidth are in direct support of this goal.

Operation of the National Park System – The FY 2023 budget request for the NPS operations account is \$3.1 billion. This includes \$553.0 million for Resource Stewardship, \$279.8 million for Visitor Services, \$444.2 million for Park Protection, \$959.0 million for Facility Operations and Maintenance, \$636.2 million for Park Support and \$217.6 million for External Administrative Costs. The FY 2023 operations budget includes a \$178.8 million increase to support science, build NPS resiliency to climate change, and increase conservation efforts. The operations account also includes a \$24.3 million increase to advance racial justice and equity for underserved communities, including to support operations at many of our newest parks. Additionally, to invest in the future of our parks, this account provides a combined \$148.3 million to restore capacity throughout the National Park System in visitor services, park protection, facility operations and maintenance, and park support.

Centennial Challenge – This appropriation, requested at \$15.0 million, would provide a Federal match to leverage 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 a 50/50 basis, leveraging a total of at least \$30.0 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 2023 budget request for the National Recreation and Preservation (NR&P) appropriation is \$74.6 million. This appropriation provides technical and financial assistance 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, cultural resources, and wildlife habitat. NPS cultural programs support public participation in preservation of the Nation’s cultural heritage through National Register Programs, and research and training in historic preservation and conservation. The FY 2023 NPS request maintains funding for National Register Programs and supports important grant programs for Chesapeake Gateways and Trails, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation, Japanese American Confinement Sites, American Battlefield Protection Program Assistance, and American Indian and Native Hawaiian Art and Culture. This appropriation also maintains funding for NR&P programs such as Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance. It also supports cooperation with other nations on park and heritage resource management issues, as well as the management of the Heritage Partnership Program, which distributes Federal funding to 53 National Heritage Areas in 43 States.

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 2023 budget request for the HPF is \$151.8 million. This includes an increase of \$7.0 million for grants to Tribal Historic Preservation Offices as part of the budget’s advancement of racial justice and equity for underserved communities. This increase will also support my stated priority for the NPS to respect and strengthen Indigenous connections, enhance our nation-to-nation relationships, and fully uphold our trust and treaty responsibilities. The request also continues several grant programs that support historically underserved communities and advances the cause of racial justice, including: \$5.0 million in competitive grants for large preservation grants within the African American Civil Rights program, \$10.0 million for Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants (which support historic preservation projects that stimulate economic growth in rural areas), and \$10.0 million for grants-in-aid to Historically Black Colleges and Universities to support preservation of historic structures on their campuses.

Construction – The FY 2023 budget request includes \$279.3 million to fund construction projects, equipment replacement, management, planning, operations, and special projects. This includes \$134.7 million for line-item construction, a \$16.7 million increase to transition the NPS fleet to zero emission vehicles, and a \$7.0 million increase for projects that address damage from emergencies, critical system failures, and extreme environmental conditions, such as the impact of the Colorado River drought.

2023 Budget Priorities

Natural Resources Conservation Initiative – The FY 2023 NPS budget request proposes an increase of \$224.6 million compared to the FY 2022 enacted appropriation in targeted, Servicewide investments to protect the Nation’s treasured natural resources from 21st century threats. The NPS Organic Act includes in our mission the stewardship of natural resources, and this responsibility is woven throughout park operations, programs, budget activities and appropriations. For natural resource conservation, the FY 2023 budget seeks to bolster existing, successful efforts to protect wildlife and landscapes, fund climate

change science and resiliency, and increase resources supporting climate and natural resource decision making.

Additional funding for a Conservation initiative directly supports two of my top priorities for the Service: investing in the future of parks and confronting the climate crisis using science and traditional ecological knowledge in stewarding our resources. This initiative also supports several Administration priorities laid out in Executive Order 14008—Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad—including, (1) conserve 30 percent of the Nation’s lands and waters by 2030 (the “America the Beautiful” Initiative), (2) establish a Civilian Climate Corps, and (3) support climate resilience and adaptation. Fundamental to this effort is a \$57.0 million increase to operational budgets to improve the capacity of parks and other field offices to engage in a wide range of natural resource management activities. The request also includes a \$29.6 million increase to engage in high-priority natural resource projects such as wildlife migration corridors, wildland fire fuels management, climate resilience, and responding to natural resource threats.

E.O. 14008 also directs agencies to work closely with Federal and non-Federal partners on tackling the climate crisis. The FY 2023 budget request includes amounts to support several partnership programs. In FY 2023, the NPS plans to complement existing youth partnership programs by directing an additional \$31.0 million to implement the Civilian Climate Corps (CCC). This initiative will prioritize work in partnership with Tribes, States, and local governments to advance locally designed projects that improve climate-driven economic opportunities at parks in urban and rural communities. For example, the CCC will create opportunities and strengthen special hiring authorities, such as the Indian Youth Service Corps, to advance the conservation and protection of indigenous natural and cultural resources through maintenance, research, resilience, and mitigation. Programming will align indigenous traditional cultural values with projects that provide sustainable and long-term benefits for the program participants and residents of the impacted lands.

The NPS also requests an additional \$22.5 million to increase support of conservation partnership efforts through Research Learning Centers and Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units. The work of the NPS Inventory and Monitoring Program, for which the budget requests an increase of \$16.0 million, provides vital resource data to park managers and research partners. Finally, the budget includes a \$2.0 million increase to establish a permanent NPS Incident Management Team that will plan for and respond to emergencies including natural disasters, which have increased in severity and frequency due to the effects of climate change.

To improve NPS climate adaptation and resilience efforts, the budget includes increases totaling \$45.8 million for the Construction account. This includes a \$10.0 million increase for abandoned mineral lands projects—supporting the President’s commitment to create jobs in some of the hardest hit communities in the Nation—while mitigating hazards, improving water quality, and restoring natural resources to their original condition. It also includes a \$7.0 million increase for unscheduled projects that address damage from emergencies, critical system failures, and extreme environmental conditions as a result of increased threats from climate change. The proposal includes an additional \$12.1 million for management planning related to climate change, including climate vulnerability assessments and compliance pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act.

Also, as part of the conservation initiative, and in support of the President’s goal of transitioning to a fully Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Federal fleet, the NPS budget includes an increase of \$16.7 million to acquire ZEVs and to deploy vehicle charging and refueling infrastructure. The Department of the Interior is coordinating all of these efforts to meet or exceed the ZEV-related goals set forth in the comprehensive plan developed pursuant to E.O. 14008, Section 205(a). This investment will be complemented by Department of Energy funding to provide technical assistance to agencies through the Federal Energy Management Program as the NPS builds and grows its ZEV infrastructure. This investment serves as a

down payment to support a multiyear, whole-of-government transformation to convert the Federal motor vehicle fleet to ZEVs and thereby reduce carbon emissions.

Advancing Racial Justice and Equity for Underserved Communities – The Biden Administration, through Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities, 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. My NPS priorities also include a focus on equity, with a goal to advance equity, inclusion, and access as we carry out the NPS mission.

The FY 2023 NPS budget proposes \$36.3 million in increased, targeted investments Servicewide to advance racial justice and equity for underserved communities. This increase is spread across three appropriations, with \$5.0 million of this increase requested within the Construction appropriation to assess and address transportation barriers to parks from underserved communities. Within the operating account, the NPS requests an increase of \$24.3 million to fund new and critical responsibilities at parks preserving the stories of underrepresented communities and for interpretive projects that tell these stories. This funding will support many of our newest units' operating needs, such as the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument. The requested increase in the Operation of the National Park System account (ONPS) will also support NPS's commitment to respect and strengthen Indigenous connections, enhance our nation-to-nation relationships, and fully uphold our trust and treaty responsibilities—another of my top priorities for the Service. We have requested an additional \$5.7 million to support additional Tribal liaisons in parks and regional offices, as well as Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) specialists, archeologists specializing in Tribal artifacts, and Tribal compliance and coordination specialists. Finally, within the Historic Preservation Fund, the NPS requests an increase of \$7.0 million in grant funding to Tribal Historic Preservation Offices.

Restoring Operational Capacity in the National Park System – Collectively, the NPS has lost more than 15 percent of its ONPS-funded capacity since FY 2010. Over the same period, 33 units have been added to the national park system, and visitation has grown by more than 40 million, or 15 percent. Despite a decrease in visitation due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the NPS has already seen visitation levels rebound in many parks and anticipates further increases in demand in the future. To meet this demonstrated and anticipated demand, the FY 2023 budget includes \$148.3 million across initiatives to support more than 1,100 additional FTE to strengthen critical functions. This includes funding for more than 900 FTE to build park capacity across all major types of work, support U.S. Park Police operations, and address critical operating responsibilities. Funding would also provide for more than 150 FTE to help tell stories of under-represented communities, particularly within newly added lands, facilities, visitor centers, interpretive offerings, and for work with Tribal partners. These increases directly support the priorities of the Administration, the Secretary, and my own priorities with efforts to rebuild core functions and capacities, empower a thriving and diverse NPS workforce, and create an NPS experience that meets evolving expectations from the public, and increasing visitation.

Additional Priorities – The 2023 President's Budget contains several additional increases that support key NPS priorities, in particular my goal to greatly improve, streamline, and modernize NPS management and business practices, and ensure accountability to ourselves, our partners, and the American people. Split across the Operation of the National Parks System and the Construction appropriations, the NPS has requested a \$6.9 million increase to improve internet bandwidth and connectivity throughout the park system, increasing connectivity for employees to improve their work efficiency. And within ONPS, a \$1.8 million increase for continued work on the NPS mobile app; as well as an \$8.0 million increase for central IT support costs. Also within ONPS, the NPS has requested increases for law enforcement training, employee mental health and wellness, a new environmental coordinator in support of the

President's Justice40 initiative, and funding to support the Advisory Committee on the Reconciliation in Place Names.

In order to recruit and retain quality employees to remote areas with few rental or purchase options, the NPS must be able to provide quality and affordable housing to its permanent and seasonal workforce. In support of that need, the NPS has requested an increase of \$6.9 million to support leasing, constructing, and modernizing park employee housing.

Conclusion

The President's FY 2023 budget proposal supports President Biden's commitment to address climate change, tackle longstanding inequities in many of our communities, and to restore parks' abilities to protect our shared cultural and natural heritage. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for your continued support of the NPS.