

Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Tom McClintock, Chairman
Hearing Memo

July 21, 2015

To: Natural Resources Committee Members

From: Terry Camp, Subcommittee Staff, x 6-7736

Subject: Oversight hearing titled, “*New and Innovative Ideas for the Next Century of Our National Parks*”

The Subcommittee will hold an oversight hearing titled, “*New and Innovative Ideas for the Next Century of Our National Parks*,” **on July 23, 2015 at 10:00 AM; 1324 Longworth.**

Policy Overview

- Since the creation of the National Park Service (NPS) in 1916, the National Park System has grown dramatically. NPS is now responsible for the management of all U.S. National Parks, many national monuments, and other conservation and historic properties.
- In total, NPS manages 408 units across the system encompassing more than 84 million acres in every state, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.¹
- As the mission of NPS expanded and the footprint of the National Park System enlarged, NPS became increasingly unable to fund necessary maintenance projects. NPS currently estimates that its deferred maintenance backlog stands at \$11.5 billion (of which \$5.9 billion represents non-transportation assets).²
- Per capita visitation at National Parks has steadily declined in recent decades.³ Visitation by youth ages 15 and under decreased by 50% in the past decade.⁴ The average age of visitors to Denali National Park is 57 and the average age at Yellowstone is 54.⁵

Invited Witnesses

Mr. John L. Nau, III, Vice Chairman
National Park Foundation (2012–2013)
Houston, Texas

¹ National Park Service. "[Frequently Asked Questions \(U.S. National Park Service\)](#)." July 14, 2015. Accessed July 20, 2015.

² National Park Service. "[NPS FY 2014 Deferred Maintenance Reports](#)." July 20, 2015. Accessed July 20, 2015.

³ Watson, Reed. "[If You Find Yourself in a Hole...](#)" PERC Reports 34.1 (2015): 5.

⁴ Bergeron, Ryan, and Sean Redlitz. "[Does National Park Service Have a Youth Problem?](#)" - CNN.com." CNN. March 19, 2015. Accessed July 20, 2015.

⁵ Ibid.

Mr. Jim Fram, President & CEO
Greater Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce
Hot Springs, Arkansas

Mr. Derrick Crandall, Counselor
National Park Hospitality Association
Washington, D.C.

Mr. Craig D. Obey, Senior Vice President, Government Affairs
National Parks Conservation Association
Washington, D.C.

Hearing Focus

This hearing will focus on new and innovative ideas for generating funding for the National Park System, outside of congressional appropriations, including increasing park visitation, enhancing guest services, and promoting recreational opportunities within parks.

Background

Next year marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of NPS. As NPS prepares for the next century of protecting and promoting our National Parks, new and innovative ideas for supplementing congressional appropriation dollars are essential to ensure the long-term sustainability the National Park System.

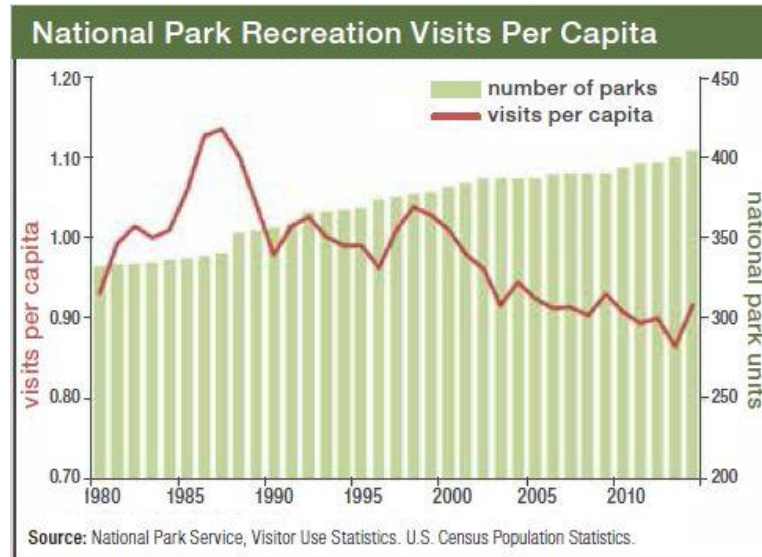
In preparing the parks for the centennial, the agency faces considerable challenges, chief among them being the **\$11.5 billion deferred maintenance backlog**. As NPS gradually took on new responsibilities and Congress voted to add new units to the National Park System, NPS fell behind on necessary projects. These projects include maintaining trails, fixing wastewater systems, and repairing deteriorating roads and bridges. Recent assessments of NPS roads reported that roughly 90% of all roadway pavements in National Parks are in "fair" to "poor" condition. Additionally, NPS assessments report that 28 publicly accessible bridges located within NPS properties are considered "structurally deficient" and are in need of rehabilitation or reconstruction.⁶

In addition to deferred maintenance projects, NPS also faces challenges with decreased visitation, fee collection, and technological upgrades. The chart below shows visitation to National Parks as a share of the overall U.S. population. In 2014, America's National Parks had a record-setting 292.8 million visits, however when measured on a per capita basis, visitation has steadily declined in recent decades.⁷ The decline in visitation has been particularly high among youth. Recent reports indicate that visits to parks by those 15 and younger fell by 50% in the last decade.⁸

⁶ National Park Service. "[NPS Transportation Program Activities - Building The Parkways System](#)." Accessed July 20, 2015.

⁷ Id at 3.

⁸ Id at 4.



(Chart courtesy of Reed Watson/PERC Report Summer 2015, see supra note 3)

In the face of these daunting challenges, NPS has recently taken some positive steps forward. One positive change has been in the area of corporate sponsorship. In January of this year, NPS Director Jonathon Jarvis waived NPS policies against partnering with alcoholic beverage companies so the congressionally chartered National Park Foundation could sign a \$2.5 million agreement with Anheuser-Busch InBev. The deal is designed to raise revenue and promote the NPS’ centennial “Find Your Park” campaign.⁹

Another positive change has been an increased focus on volunteerism and utilization of so-called “Friends Groups.” The National Park Foundation has worked to increase the growth and effectiveness Friends Groups. Friends Groups have helped fund projects involving campground and trail restorations, wildlife research, and facility construction.

A final positive change has come through private philanthropic donations. NPS recently received several generous donations from philanthropist David M. Rubenstein. Mr. Rubenstein funded half of the cost of fixing the earthquake-damaged Washington Monument, donated more than \$12 million to rehabilitate the Arlington House, and recently gave another \$5 million to restore the Iwo Jima Memorial.¹⁰

While the items listed above have been positive for NPS, there is still much work to be done. The witnesses invited to this hearing have proposed many new and innovative ideas to ensure our National Parks are maintained and visited by the next generation of Americans.

⁹ Blevins, Jason. ["National Parks Ink \\$2.5M Marketing Pact with Anheuser-Busch."](#) The Denver Post. May 1, 2015. Accessed July 20, 2015.

¹⁰ National Park Foundation. ["David Rubenstein To Donate \\$5.37 Million To The National Park Foundation To Restore U.S. Marine Corps 'Iwo Jima' Memorial."](#) April 29, 2015. Accessed July 20, 2015.