

TESTIMONY OF
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Committee on Natural Resources
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On New and Innovative Ideas for the Next Century of Our National Parks

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Tsongas, and Members of the Committee, my name is John Nau and I am from the great state of Texas. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of the National Park Foundation. I have been a member of the Foundation's Board of Directors for more than seven years and I served as Vice-Chairman of the Board 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.

Finally, I also have a day job as the President and CEO of the nation's largest distributor of Anheuser Busch products. I believe that my background as a businessman, who has had the opportunity to work on behalf of national parks and historic preservation, and experience how parks can serve as economic drivers beyond their borders, is what best positions me to assist the Committee as you work to identify ways to help prepare the National Park System for another century of service. The Foundation's Board and staff have diverse backgrounds and skills and are similarly qualified and ready to assist the Committee.

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 only 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.

The National Park Service (NPS) and National Park Foundation (NPF) are working closely with partners and stakeholders across the country to ensure that the Centennial is more than just a birthday. For example, the NPF and the NPS recently launched the Find Your Park public education and engagement campaign (FindYourPark.com) to inspire all

Americans to connect with, enjoy, and support America's national parks. The purpose of the campaign is to connect Americans to all of the 408 national park units, from iconic Parks such as Acadia, Glacier, Yellowstone, Gettysburg and Yosemite to the small historic sites in our own backyards. Since we launched the campaign in early April, more than 9,300 Americans have submitted a story of finding their park including several members of Congress, there have been more than 75,000 uses of the Find Your Park hash tag and in May, according to NPS, there were 30.9 million park visits – an increase of 5% over May 2014.

In addition to celebrating past accomplishments and re-connecting Americans to their parks, the Centennial Anniversary should also be a time to identify shortcomings and develop innovative ways to address them. For example, the Centennial presents an opportunity for us to generate innovative new approaches to addressing challenges associated with securing the needed funding to prepare and sustain the National Parks for another century of service.

Generating approximately \$30.1 billion in economic activity and more than a quarter of a million jobs annually, our National Parks provide among the best returns the federal government gets on investments of taxpayer dollars. While impressive, there is room for NPS to optimize this return on investment by partnering with and learning from its private sector partners.

As of September 30, 2014 the National Parks had a deferred maintenance backlog of approximately \$11.49 billion. I should note that while nearly half of this total represents transportation infrastructure costs, it also doesn't account for the funding needed for day-to-day operations.

While federal appropriations are likely to and should remain the largest funding source for the National Park Service (\$2.567 billion in FY 2015), 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. Why? Because it will connect current visitors to our parks in new state-of-the-art ways and to introduce a new generation to the natural beauty and grandeur of our American landscape through our national parks.

This new paradigm must include finding new ways to incentivize foundations, non-profit organizations, individual donors, and corporate partners to make even greater investments in our parks going forward. Activities are already underway that prove the viability of this new, innovative approach of partnering with companies and corporations. For example, the Find Your Park campaign is being funded entirely through corporate partners who see the campaign as a way to simultaneously benefit the National Park System and the financial interests of their companies.

In addition, the NPF is currently engaged in a \$250 million national fundraising campaign to support a diverse suite of park programs and projects. The proposed projects include everything from enhancing the digital experience throughout the National Park System, to trail and facility restoration projects. The Foundation and the Service worked together closely to develop this list that we believe will have great appeal to philanthropic donors.

Three key lessons are already emerging from these efforts:

First, the Foundation and the National Park Service are developing an enhanced understanding of the types of projects and programs that are most and least attractive to private donors and corporate partners. The ability to categorize these projects is helpful to informing which projects should be pursued for contributions and corporate sponsorships and which should be pursued as part of the federal budget and appropriations processes. For example, building or restoring necessary infrastructure such as restrooms and maintenance facilities tend to be projects better suited to being completed with federal appropriations. Conversely, adding cellular service and mobile phone applications to enhance the experience of park visitors tend to be the types of projects that generate non-federal partner interest in making donations or sponsorship investments.

Second, we have learned that the marketing budgets of our corporate partners contain exponentially more potential funding for parks programs and projects than their philanthropic budgets. As a result, the Foundation has been working closely with NPS to modernize the rules governing corporate donor recognition in the parks to better incentivize ‘marketable’ investments in projects in a manner that avoids over-commercializing our parks.

No one wants to see and no one is advocating for giant neon signs on Mount Rushmore or billboards surrounding Old Faithful. That said, as a businessman, I know that corporate leaders and their boards have a fiduciary duty to make investments that serve the best interests of their shareholders. It is vital that the NPS, NPF and Congress work together over the next eighteen 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. NPS, NPF and our corporate partners worked hard and we believe that we’ve found that balance in the Find Your Park campaign by recognizing our premier corporate partners in park signage and on findyourpark.com as you can see in Appendix A.

Third, we are also learning that, in many cases, matching federal investments provide private donors and corporate partners the added layer of certainty they need to make a contribution or corporate investment in a national park program or project. Therefore, in addition to categorizing programs and projects as being best suited for federal or non-federal funding, it is also important that we secure sustainable sources of non-federal funding that can be utilized to leverage federal investments. To that end, the NPF has proposed National Park Centennial Anniversary legislation that would authorize the establishment of an endowment within the Foundation.

This is also why it's important for legislation to include an authorization for mandatory funding for the Centennial Challenge. At the end of last year, Congress appropriated \$10 million for this fund, which NPS and partners were able to turn into \$26 million to fund 106 projects across the system.

Park visitorship has increased significantly in recent years including a record high of more than 292 million visits last year. We expect those numbers to keep rising due to efforts such as the Find Your Park campaign that promote national parks for the Centennial and a surge in visitors attributable to retiring baby boomers having additional time to travel. That is the good news. Our challenge will be finding ways to sustain this growth beyond these opportunities.

Achieving this goal will in large part be determined by our ability to find ways to meaningfully 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. This effort will also require an increased focus on the many cultural resources in our parks and an enhanced commitment to promote these resources while also providing interpretive information about them to optimize the visitor experience of those that we recruit. In addition, we need to work harder to engage urban populations by better highlighting the many wonderful urban parks already in existence. Without these 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.

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 of support for our parks between 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.