

JUNE 22, 2006 STATEMENT BY DERRICK CRANDALL, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN RECREATION COALITION, ON THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM ADVISORY BOARD IN CONJUNCTION WITH A HEARING CONDUCTED BY THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, JUNE 22, 2006.

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Members, the American Recreation Coalition (ARC) appreciates the opportunity to appear before this body today to discuss an important issue: the role of the National Park System Advisory Board in assisting the management of one of the nation's truly spectacular legacies – the nearly 400 units of the national park system.

I am Derrick Crandall and I am delighted to represent the members of the American Recreation Coalition (ARC) – more than 100 national organizations, representing virtually every segment of the nation's \$250+ billion outdoor recreation industry, and tens of millions of outdoor recreation enthusiasts. A listing of our members is attached to this testimony. Our organization has played an active role in federal recreation policy since its creation in 1979.

Outdoor recreation is a vital and positive force in our nation today. Nine in ten Americans participate in outdoor recreation today, and a major catalyst for this involvement is the marvelous shared legacy of our Great Outdoors – one in three acres of the surface of the nation managed by federal agencies and hosting well in excess of a billion recreation visits annually. ARC monitors participation in outdoor recreation closely through national surveys. A summary sheet on participation is attached.

The benefits accruing from recreation participation are significant, and the appreciation for these benefits is growing. The economic significance of outdoor recreation is obvious in communities across the nation, and especially those communities proximate to federally-managed lands and waters. From boat dealers to campground operators, from RV manufacturers to ski rental shops, from retailers selling outdoors goods to guides and outfitters, tens of thousands of businesses and millions of Americans are supported by the expenditures on recreation by American families. And increasingly, America's recreational opportunities are a key factor in luring international visitors to enjoy the world's best systems of parks and forests, refuges and other public sites.

Mr. Chairman, I have enjoyed the good fortune to work closely with leaders of the National Park Service and other federal land-management agencies since arriving in this town late in 1972, still an undergraduate and direct from Hanover, New Hampshire. While at school, I was active in campus and regional environmental matters, and was selected to serve the Administrator of the new Environmental Protection Agency as Youth Programs Coordinator. I became involved in a multi-departmental task force addressing a new executive order on management of off-road vehicles, a task force which included an Associate Director of the NPS.

I arrived at the conclusion of service of a respected NPS Director, George Hartzog – whom I subsequently came to know and respect highly. Since then, I have known and worked with nine NPS Directors, including current Director Fran Mainella, for whom I have the highest regard and respect. I have enjoyed my association with this proud and talented organization, but that does not mean that I have always agreed completely with its decisions and actions!

Over the past 30-plus years, I have served as a Presidential appointee on the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors, which helped define new goals for volunteerism, championed recreational corridors including greenways, trails and byways and urged creation of specialized funding programs designed to link those receiving special services with appropriate fees. I also served as a Presidential appointee on the President's Commission on Environmental Quality, and have held numerous appointments by Cabinet members including service as Chairman of the Take Pride in America Advisory Board and as a founding member of the National Forest Foundation – a body that some thought should serve in part as an advisor to the Forest Service, since that agency has no national advisory board. And I have been actively involved in a variety of key NPS processes, from management policy revisions to the Vail Agenda project of the early 1990's to crafting of the National Recreation Fee Demonstration Program in 1996, which allowed the agency to retain all collected fees for the first time.

During this time, I have observed the operations of the NPS Advisory Board with interest. There have been periods in which the board was endothermic – requiring the input of great energy and resources with little apparent result. At other times, the panel has clearly been exothermic, providing valuable information and counsel and even direct support. I've watched as the panel was created using varying appointment qualifications, and observed the ebb and flow of importance played by the board in its relationship with the agency and the department. The board has been actively used by some Directors and seemed irrelevant to others. And the board has seen a rise and fall parallel to overall interest in advisory committees. In the mid-1970's, advisory committees were extremely common for public land agencies – virtually every national forest had one, for example. Then the enactment of the Federal Advisory Committee Act sharply curtailed this means of public involvement.

The general aversion to advisory committees was clearly reflected in the role of the NPS Advisory Board in the late 1980's

and early 1990's. The advisory board played a very limited role in the Vail Agenda project of 1991-1992 – despite the goal of that effort to render advice to the agency for its actions during a second 75 years. I will say that I regard that effort as both ambitious and steeped in talent. And it certainly addressed many of the tough challenges facing the agency, including the efficacy of combining management of a large national park system with technical and financial assistance efforts to state and local governments – vestiges of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. The Vail Agenda also sought consensus on what additions to the system were desirable to create an ever better system. All of these experiences make me eager to comment on recent actions of and missions for the NPS Advisory Board and to offer suggestions for its future.

First, there can be no doubt that its recent and current members are talented men and women, including the distinguished Chairman who sits with me on this panel. Also clear is the fact that the advisory board has done some good work in recent years. Under the previous Administration, the advisory board undertook an initiative which resulted in an important and thoughtful report entitled Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century. And I have only accolades for the actions of the Director and Chairman in the recent creation and nurturing of a Committee on Health and Recreation, on which I had the pleasure of serving, and which defined actionable steps for the agency now implemented by the Director.

Before addressing my recommendations for the NPS Advisory Board, let me be clear that we feel a properly constituted and guided board can and should play a significant role in aiding one of the truly great American inventions – our national park system. But it is important that its role respect other valuable structures available to serve the park system. It is not a fundraising body – that role should be left to the National Park Foundation and local friends groups. And it is not a vehicle for addressing tactical and operational issues – that is the role of the Director and the National Leadership Council (NLC).

The NPS Advisory Board's role can and should be strategic and visionary, helping the Director and the Secretary understand demographic, technological and political changes, evaluating options and identifying external forces that can and will shape America's parks. And it should be a force in consolidating and coalescing the variety of organizations vitally interested in these special places.

There is an acute need to take on such a task today, in 2006. The NPS is a proud organization doing its job well. Yet it is also an organization buffeted by winds of change and passion, challenged by short-term issues and largely unguided by any shared vision among Members of Congress, Administration leaders and key interest groups. We also seem to be at a time when the role of advisory boards has attained a new cachet – witness the embrace of recreation resource advisory committees (RecRACs) for BLM and the Forest Service in new federal fee legislation.

Yet the true value of the NPS Advisory Board will only occur if its efforts include liaison with key constituents, and only if its recommendations are part of a multi-year strategic plan combined with action by the Congress to create a multi-year funding commitment – a program resembling, perhaps, the six-year cycle followed by the Congress to guide the nation's surface transportation program.

As the Congress considers the future of the National Park System Advisory Board, we offer the following recommendations:

- 1) we strongly recommend reauthorization of the board;
- 2) we further recommend continuation of the board at or about its current size, subject to the addition of two ex officio seats. These would be the Chairs of the House and Senate subcommittees exercising primary jurisdiction over the national park system (or their designees). My experience on the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors, with four Congressional members, was extremely positive. While participation by the principals was limited, the involvement added value to discussions and interest in addressing the Commission's report;
- 3) we recommend a change in the terms of the advisory board members to five years. We suggest that the board members normally be limited to a single term except that the Chairman and up to two Vice Chairman may be selected from existing members and appointed to a second five-year term;
- 4) we support a broadening of the qualifications of the board members, including a diminished emphasis on individual scientific achievement. While scientific background is valuable to the national park system, such knowledge is available from internal as well as external sources to assist the agency and the board and the primary mission of the board is broad, strategic counsel to the Secretary and Director. Appointments to the board should be premised on a willingness to serve on behalf of the public, combining the contribution of personal insights and knowledge with an eagerness to solicit and apply the ideas and insights offered by others. The board needs a significant number of members who are skilled in and committed to inviting the counsel of others to be considered in advisory board deliberations. My service on commissions and advisory boards has increased my appreciation for the need for collegiality and for a commitment to striving for consensus – working diligently to devise the right solutions to challenges;

5) the board needs a clear mission and role. We recommend that the board be charged with undertaking an environmental scan every five years and then developing a report to the Secretary, the Director and the Congress on the key issues facing the agency over the next five years – challenges and opportunities alike. This scan should place an emphasis on demographic, technological and societal changes, should include opportunities for presentations by key stakeholders and should involve efforts to gain consensus on the highest priorities for action;

6) in addition, we recommend that the board conduct more focused inquiries into identified opportunities and challenges through the use of committees comprised of board members, other outside experts and appropriate NPS staff and submit these reports to the Secretary and the Director. A model for this action would be the Committee on Health and Recreation, which was chaired by a member of the board and included in its membership officials of other departments (notably HHS), NPS officials and key outside experts. Among the topics for examination might be long-term staffing and skill needs of the agency, the relationship of parks to such issues as health, education, crime, environmental protection, tourism and regional economies, and integration of NPS units into larger public assets, including heritage corridors, byways and more;

7) in lieu of current geographic representation, we recommend that the Director identify intended appointees with a proven interest in park issues, distinguished leadership records in public service, business and academia and reflecting diversity in geographic, age and gender, and racial characteristics. The intended appointees should be identified to the Chairs and Ranking Members of the House and Senate subcommittees exercising primary jurisdiction over the national park system. The Director shall consider the views of the Members but shall retain authority to appoint individuals to the board; and

8) the Director should appoint individuals to open and unexpired terms. Such appointments should continue the overall quality and diversity of board membership.

Thank you for your interest and your actions to assist America's national parks and America's Great Outdoors.