

Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Tom McClintock, Chairman
Hearing Memorandum

November 30, 2015

To: All Subcommittee on Federal Lands Members

From: Majority Committee Staff, Terry Camp, x6-7736
Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Hearing: Legislative Hearing on H.R.____ (Rep. Rob Bishop, R-UT), a discussion draft entitled the “*National Park Service Centennial Act*,” December 2, 2015 at 10:00 AM, in room 1324 Longworth

H.R.____ (Rep. Rob Bishop, R-UT) a discussion draft entitled “*National Park Service Centennial Act*”

Summary

H.R.____ (Rep. Rob Bishop, R-UT), a discussion draft entitled the “*National Park Centennial Act*,” provides the National Park Service (NPS) with new funding and management authority to prepare the NPS for the commemoration of its centennial in 2016 and for a second century of promoting and protecting our National Parks. The bill creates a Centennial Challenge fund to finance signature projects through matching private donations, expands the NPS volunteer program, and modifies eligibility for a fund that hires young workers. Additionally, the bill establishes a Second Century Endowment Fund housed at the National Park Foundation and makes changes to the Foundation Board.

Invited Witnesses

Mr. Jonathan Jarvis, Director
National Park Service
Washington, D.C.

Mr. David MacDonald, President
Friends of Acadia
Bar Harbor, Maine

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

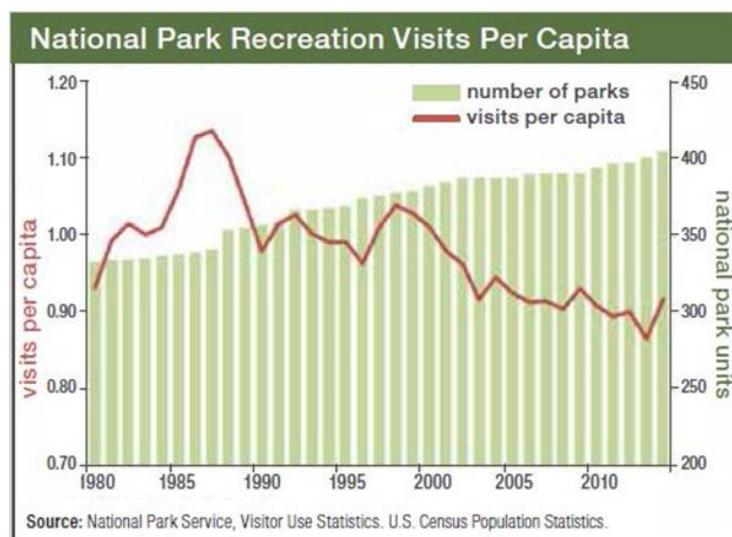
Background

August 25, 2016 marks the 100th anniversary of the signing of the National Park Service Organic Act. This Act created NPS, a new federal bureau within the Department of the Interior responsible for promoting and protecting 35 national parks and monuments. The National Park

System has grown significantly since 1916 and now comprises 409 units covering more than **84 million acres** in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, Saipan, and the Virgin Islands.¹

In preparing the parks for the Centennial, the agency faces a number of challenges, chief among them being the NPS's \$11.5 billion deferred maintenance backlog.² As the 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.

In addition to deferred maintenance projects, the NPS also faces challenges with fee collection, technological upgrades, management of concessions contracts for visitor services, and decreasing visitation. In 2014, America's National Parks had a record-setting 292.8 million visits, however when measured on a per capita basis, visitation declined in recent decades.³ 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% over the last decade.⁴



(Chart courtesy of Reed Watson/PERC Report Summer 2015)

In the face of these significant challenges, the "*National Park Service Centennial Act*," sponsored by Chairman Rob Bishop, helps the NPS prepare for its nation-wide celebration in 2016, and it better equips the NPS for the next century of promoting and protecting our parks. Provisions in the bill help the NPS reduce its deferred maintenance backlog by creating new sources of revenue to pay for needed improvements. Other provisions will help the NPS expand its Volunteers in Parks and Public Lands Corps programs as well as make needed changes to the National Park Foundation Board of Directors.

¹ National Park Service. ["History \(U.S. National Park Service\)." November 24, 2015.](#) Accessed November 24, 2015.

² National Park Service. ["NPS FY 2014 Deferred Maintenance Reports." November 24, 2015.](#) Accessed November 24, 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 November 24, 2015.

Major Provisions

National Park Centennial Challenge Fund

- Creates a Centennial Challenge Fund to be used to fund signature projects on a 1:1 federal to private match. Last year's omnibus continuing resolution for appropriations included \$10 million for the NPS Centennial Challenge program. The appropriated money leveraged \$16 million in private donations that funded 106 projects.⁵ The Act builds on this success by providing the fund with revenue from an increase in the price of the senior lifetime parks pass, which is currently only \$10.⁶
- The bill increases the senior lifetime pass to \$80 to match the price of the annual National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass.

National Park Foundation Endowment

- Establishes a Second Century Endowment at the National Park Foundation that will grow over time through gifts and bequests, as well as from revenue generated by a small new fee on overnight hotel stays within units of the National Park System (camping is not included).

Volunteers-in-Parks Program

- Removes an arbitrary restriction on appropriations that can be used on Volunteers-in-Parks to accommodate the funding needed to support this growing program.

Public Lands Corps

- Raises the age limit for participation in the Public Lands Corps from 25 to 30, and changes the non-competitive hiring status for former Public Land Corps members from 120 days after the member's service is completed to a period of up to two years.

Intellectual Property

- Permits the Secretary of the Interior to enter into agreements for the creation of reproductions of National Park Service museum objects. These agreements can include fees or royalties, which can be retained and used by the park or repository where the museum object is held.

National Park Foundation

- Makes the Secretary of the Interior and the NPS Director ex-officio members of the National Park Foundation Board, ensuring leadership continuity.

⁵ Olson, Jeffrey. "[NPS Announces Centennial Challenge Projects Cost Share Partnerships Grow \\$10 Million Appropriation to \\$26 Million.](#)" National Parks Service. November 24, 2015. Accessed November 24, 2015.

⁶ National Park Service. "[America the Beautiful \(U.S. National Park Service\).](#)" November 12, 2015. Accessed November 24, 2015.

- Authorizes appropriations to the National Park Foundation, not to exceed \$25 million, to match on a 1:1 basis contributions made to the Foundation.

Cost

Unknown at this time.

Administration Position

Unknown at this time, however, many of the provisions in this bill were requested by the Administration.