



Testimony of

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RE: H.R. 1612, the Public Lands Service Corps Act

Before the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands

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Good afternoon. My name is Sally Jewell, and I am pleased to be invited to testify as a trustee of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) to discuss H.R. 1612, the Public Lands Service Corps Act of 2009. For the information of the subcommittee, in addition to my position as a member of the NPCA Board of Trustees, I am President and CEO of outdoor retailer Recreational Equipment, Inc., so our National Park System and public lands have a great deal of significance to me personally and professionally. As you know, the nonprofit National Parks Conservation Association has served as the leading citizen voice on behalf of our national parks since 1919. It is a privilege to be here today on behalf of NPCA's 340,000 members to express our strong support for H.R. 1612, the Public Lands Service Corps Act of 2009.

I want to begin by first thanking Chairman Grijalva and Chairman Rahall for introducing this important legislation. HR 1612 seeks to benefit our national parks and other public lands by unleashing the spirit and energy of committed Americans who, working with their government and non-profit organizations, can help our nation capitalize on the potential for our national parks to produce significant civic benefits, stimulate local economies, educate Americans about our shared heritage, and protect our national treasures for the use and enjoyment of our children and grandchildren. The Act builds upon the Public Land Corps Act of 1993 by facilitating valuable new service-learning opportunities, enhancing mechanisms to help restore the nation's natural, cultural, archaeological, recreational, and scenic resources, providing for the training of a new generation of public land managers and enthusiasts, and by promoting the value of community and national service. HR 1612 complements the GIVE Act and Serve America Act, which passed the House and Senate and is on its way to the President, which includes a Clean Energy Corps that will work in partnership with the Public Lands Service Corps.

NPCA has been calling for the creation of a new National Parks Service Corps in order to foster additional national and community service in our national parks and help ready the national parks for another century of service to our nation and the world. H.R. 1612 responds to and expands this vision to include all Interior and National Forest-managed lands, and areas under the jurisdiction of the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration. The legislation also rounds out the expansion of national and community service under the GIVE and Serve America

Acts with a robust commitment to service that would help the National Park Service to address the needs of our national treasures and would foster stronger connections between national parks, visitors, and our national community.

Enhanced Service Opportunities Help Address Critical Economic Needs

These are challenging times for our National Park System and our country. This subcommittee is well aware that an annual operating shortfall, estimated at \$750 million, and a maintenance backlog of approximately \$9 billion, continue to undermine the ability of national park managers to protect the natural and cultural resources in their charge. We have begun to make some progress in the last couple years, but there remains much more to do. Furthermore, as our troubled economy staggers, unemployment rates are continuing to rise.

In February, nationwide unemployment reached 8.1%, with youth unemployment at 21%. Unemployment rates for African-American youth hovered around 39%, with rates for Hispanic and Latino youth at about 25%--both up 7 points from February 2008. Unemployment rates for college graduates are increasing significantly, as they are with Americans over age 55. National service cannot cure these problems. However, the tight job market, coupled with the president's call for people to serve, is already creating tremendous demand for meaningful service opportunities, and HR 1612 can provide such opportunities in a manner that helps address continuing, significant needs on our public lands. Such levels of unemployment remind us of the days of the Great Depression, when Franklin Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps to marry two destabilized resources – young men out of work and school and diminished natural resources on our public lands and in agriculture.

In tough economic times, our nation has mobilized millions of people to conserve and protect its most vital resources, producing lasting benefits for society and providing individuals with opportunities and new skills. The Public Lands Service Corps can do this and more, by employing people from the most vulnerable sectors of our economy in jobs that would enhance their future employability, invigorating them with an enhanced sense of civic pride, and supporting President Obama's call for people to serve.

American Public Supports Service in Our National Parks, Public Lands

The American people are ready for this kind of commitment. Americans strongly support our national parks, and want to engage in their protection. In fact, an extensive poll by Peter D. Hart Research Associates and McLaughlin & Associates, which NPCA commissioned in 2008, found that more than four in five voters believe that it is important for the federal government to protect and support national parks and national historic places. That poll also found significant concern about the failure of funding of our national parks to keep up with what's needed, the shortage of needed staff at parks and historic sites, and the need to be sure parks could serve school groups. Finally, it showed that more than 1 out of every 3 Americans are motivated to roll up their sleeves and get involved—a tremendous finding for a poll of this type, and one that shows the continuing affection of our society for our national treasures.

NPCA has called for the addition of at least 10,000 new, full-time equivalent service positions to be devoted to work in our national parks within the next few years, through an

expansion of the Public Land Service Corps and through a cooperative agreement between the Department of the Interior and the Corporation for National and Community Service. H.R. 1612 broadens this vision to also include other public lands, and we support that breadth so as to provide a broader geographic distribution of service opportunities and to help address needs and opportunities on all public lands—as long as it maintains the commitment to our national heritage.

Service in Public Lands Improves Individual Lives, Communities, National Heritage

NPCA believes that service legislation relating to our national parks should focus on five basic principles: (1) addressing resource protection and fiscal needs in the parks; (2) enhancing multi-generational service opportunities; (3) building strong community partnerships; (4) developing the next generation of diverse National Park Service leaders; and (5) a strong emphasis on cultural, historic, and civic impacts. H.R. 1612 takes important steps in this direction, and we have several modest suggestions to make it even stronger.

With the addition of significantly more service employment opportunities in national parks, along with supervisory capacity for the National Park Service, we can make genuine headway on a variety of maintenance and conservation-related projects. For example, service and volunteerism are ideally suited to projects designed to eradicate many invasive species, replant native vegetation, and control erosion. The human power brought to bear under the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, when CCC participants planted over 3 billion trees and built over 97,000 miles of roads in national parks and on public lands throughout the nation, provides a compelling example. Service Corps members can rehabilitate campgrounds and deteriorating structures throughout the National Park System, renovate and help maintain historic sites, and help conduct natural and cultural resource management, science and research projects. In addition, the Act provides an important focus on marine resources and climate change.

By expanding the potential duration of service corps participation to two years, H.R. 1612 enhances the ability of the National Park Service to manage and capitalize on the opportunities service presents through fostering non-episodic volunteering to the greatest extent possible. The GIVE Act and its Senate counterpart, the Serve America Act, are designed to with the goal of fostering long-term, consistent service work, and H.R. 1612 can accomplish the same. That means fostering service work that lasts more than a couple days. The longer individuals serve, the more highly trained they may become. This means greater impact on parks and communities, both over the short- and long-term. In addition, service corps participants can and should leverage and help manage additional volunteerism. To the extent such individuals can be trained to coordinate additional volunteers, the service corps will facilitate even more community engagement capacity than stipended corps members, alone, will provide.

Many community organizations, including those testifying today, have excellent track records running programs that provide supervised opportunities for many weeks or months. Their capacity and infrastructure are also scalable, allowing them to ramp up the number of participants in the service corps without the need for costly new bureaucracy. In addition, some also run residential operations, and could do so at some facilities rehabilitated in the national parks for this purpose.

It is hard to overemphasize the effect service can have on the lives of those who undertake it, not to mention the people and resources who directly benefit from it. The youth of today are in danger of becoming the most disconnected generation from nature in our history as a nation. They are not benefiting from the magic of national parks and other natural areas that comes from experiencing them first-hand. There are many reasons for this: over-scheduling of activities, economics, the decline in the time families have to travel, lack of outside play, and more. But when young people are given an opportunity to work in a park, they develop a very deep sense of ownership and connection to that place, to other national parks, and to the natural world, as well as experience many other benefits.

A few years ago, Washington State's former governor and senator, Dan Evans, told me how he always looks for "his tree" when he drives along I-90 in the Mountains to Sound Greenway. He planted that tree as a boy scout at 10 years old and the tree is now 73 years old. To me, that is a powerful example of the strong connectedness we feel when we work on behalf a special place. There are countless other stories of those who have undertaken some form of service work, from the bonds participants in the Civilian Conservation Corps forged with our national parks and forests, to the volunteers who already give of themselves to make our national parks what they ought to be.

Nearly 170,000 people volunteer to work for the Park Service each year. The hours these individuals render and the contributions they make are of an invaluable service to our national parks, and yield tremendous pride and connectedness to our parks and to our country. Yet, when parks lack sufficient funding, they often find themselves without the staff to recruit, train, and manage volunteers. Leveraging additional volunteer support and engagement is exactly the kind of utility that Public Lands Service Corps members, once trained, could bring to the National Park Service, the Forest Service, and NOAA. It is also fundamentally important that adequate funding and support personnel be provided to ensure that component of the Service Act succeeds.

One way to augment this capacity, and an opportunity for enhancing H.R. 1612, relates to so-called "experienced Americans." H.R. 1612 attempts to get at this through a new mentorship authorization, which we strongly support. Encouraging older Americans like Volunteers in Parks, military retirees and veterans to help train service corps members and lead crews will tap the know-how of many thousands of able individuals who have much to contribute. Yet, we see additional opportunity to encourage service work by experienced Americans.

AARP recently commissioned a report, entitled *More to Give*, which details the tremendous untapped potential of older Americans for service. An extensive survey of 44-79 year olds, whom the survey dubbed "experienced Americans", found that "55 percent believe they will leave the world in worse condition than they inherited it, while only 20 percent believe they are leaving the world in better condition." It also found that those most engaged in volunteer work feel more optimistic about the future. The survey also found that financial wherewithal can be an important barrier to older Americans serving as volunteers.

As is the case with youth, stipends can enable older Americans to serve. In addition, according to the survey, "more than half of all Experienced Americans (51 percent), including 55 percent of Baby Boomers, said that education awards they can earn and give to a child in

exchange for significant levels of volunteer service would have a big or moderate impact on their participation in volunteer activities.” Such incentives were particularly appealing to Hispanics and African-Americans.

As a consequence, the GIVE and Serve America Acts authorized a transferable education award for older Americans who participate in 1-year “Encore Fellowships” to carry out projects in areas of national need. Fellowships go to individuals 55 and older who engage in full- or part-time service in the nonprofit sector or government, and are designed to capitalize on the additional skills set and experience that participants have to offer. NPCA believes that the Public Lands Service Corps Act should encourage greater participation among older Americans, including eligibility for Encore Fellowships or some other means of making transferable education awards available to them, which they can use themselves or transfer to a grandchild. The existing law already provides for AmeriCorps education awards in approved Public Land Corps positions. The addition of an Encore-like provision would ensure that the Public Lands Service Corps tracks the opportunities that are being made available in other national volunteer programs. Importantly, the *More to Give* survey showed “volunteer senior ranger” to be among the most popular volunteer activities for Experienced Americans. When asked what kind of service they would like to do, millions of Experienced Americans chose serving in our national parks.

The Public Lands Service Corps Act clearly contemplates valuable service learning opportunities—an emphasis NPCA strongly supports. Nonetheless, we would also like to see this role further emphasized. Providing for greater participation of experienced Americans, together with the creative deployment of younger participants, creates additional opportunity to enhance service learning capacity and opportunities in national parks. For example, the service corps should be expected to foster the greater use of service-learning projects linked to classroom learning in history, biology and civics. While the authorization contemplates a preference for service learning activities, it should be made clear that such efforts are a central purpose of the service corps, in addition to its important resource protection and restoration mandates. In addition, the law can provide for greater use of service corps participants in serving the public. While NPCA agrees that individuals without sufficient training should not be providing interpretation that should be provided by experts, it is important to provide a reasonable measure of flexibility in appropriate circumstances.

NPCA also believes that the bill’s well-intended restrictions on how service corps participants can engage in interpretation-related activities go a bit too far. We agree that interpretive programs should be conducted by trained professionals, and we support the bill’s reference to properly supervised corps members providing orientation and information services, and playing other appropriate interpretive roles. Something that is not apparent from the language of the bill, however, is the degree to which service corps members would be authorized to reach out to schools and afterschool and youth-serving community-based organizations, provided they are properly supervised. Clearly, there is no substitute for trained Park Service personnel. However, the service corps can do more to augment that capacity. Some older members of the corps may very well have training that could be capitalized upon, rather than artificially restricted. In addition, by expanding the breadth of participation for older Americans in this area, H.R. 1612 could further enhance capacity and service. In addition, we suggest that

the bill be amended to encourage the use of appropriately trained service corps members for multilingual services to visitors and outreach to diverse communities.

Among the most important elements of the Public Lands Service Corps for the National Park Service is its placement and training provisions. First, as the organization that worked to initiate business planning within the national parks in the late 1990s, we are very pleased to see the consulting intern provision, which placement of graduate students to continue that program, which is now run through a partnership between the National Park Service and the Student Conservation Association. Well-trained consulting interns can provide useful assistance in areas beyond business planning as well, given the increasing demand for highly technical work in a variety of fields within the National Park Service.

Second, the Park Service needs to replace retiring personnel with a high diversity of individuals, in order for the parks to adequately serve an increasingly diverse national community. The Act provides an important means to diversify the ranks of the National Park Service by recruiting and training individuals from a variety of backgrounds. The Act requires the National Park Service and other federal agencies to augment the training corps participants receive from nonprofit partners with appropriate training in resource stewardship, health & safety, ethics for public service, teamwork and leadership, and interpersonal communications. Corps members would also receive instruction about the agency's core values, history, and standards for natural and cultural resource preservation. NPCA wholeheartedly supports these training provisions, as well as providing noncompetitive hiring status for up to two years after completion of service for qualified candidates. We do suggest, however, that the bill be clarified to ensure the contemplated training requirement, in fact, augments rather than replaces the other high quality training participants receive.

Finally, we are pleased that H.R. 1612 increases the prominence of service work related to historic and cultural resources. NPCA strongly believes that national service in our national parks should be sufficiently broad to encompass the tremendous civic, historical, and scientific resources and learning opportunities that our national parks have to offer. H.R. 1612 makes it clear that projects related to history and culture should have a prominent role in service corps efforts, including historical and cultural research, museum curatorial work, oral history projects and other cultural and historic preservation activities. In light of the significant backlog of archival work in the National Park System, we also suggest adding "archival work" to the list of referenced activities. In addition, we suggest that the bill be modified to refer to the "heritage" mission of the National Park Service, in addition to the "public lands" mission.

Mr. Chairman, the end of my written testimony includes several specific recommendations related to the issues I have raised, for the benefit of the committee. NPCA again wishes to thank you for introducing this important legislation, and to offer our assistance as the bill moves through the legislative process. Thank you once again for the opportunity to testify today.

Specific Recommendations

- **Purpose Section:** Add references to "heritage agencies" in (5) and (6)
- **Purpose Section:** add "and other" after "conservation" in (5)

- **Purpose Section:** Expand (6) to read, “help promote public understanding and appreciation of the *individual* missions and work of the *respective* land management agencies, *through training opportunities, service-learning, community outreach, and other appropriate means*
- **Residential Conservation Centers:** Clarify the ability to partner with nonprofit service organizations to run the centers, and provide for placement on and outside public lands where appropriate
- **Training:** Clarify that training established by the Secretary supplements training provided by private sector partners
- **Interpretation:** Authorize corps participants to conduct appropriately supervised outreach to schools and afterschool and youth-serving community-based organizations
- **Interpretation:** add multilingual services to list of authorized activities
- **Mentors:** Expand participation of older Americans beyond what is contemplated in the mentorship section, either by changing overall age eligibility for the corps or through greater leveraging of Volunteers in Parks or Senior Corps. Authorize “Encore Fellowships” with transferrable education awards for participants 55 and older.
- **Cultural Resources:** Add archival work to list of authorized activities