

STATEMENT OF FRAN MAINELLA, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, CONCERNING THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE 2006 DRAFT MANAGEMENT POLICIES.

JULY 25, 2006

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your subcommittee to discuss the revisions to the National Park Service (NPS) Management Policies. This is the fourth Congressional hearing held on these revisions, and we are pleased to report that significant progress has been made since our last hearing. We believe that the revised draft policies are a significant improvement and will provide useful guidance to our park managers.

Since the last hearing before this subcommittee on February 15, 2006, we received nearly 50,000 comments on the proposed policy revisions. The public comment period ran for 127 days, and the draft was reviewed by interested individuals and groups, NPS employees, the Department, and other federal and state agencies

The number and content of the comments reflected a strong public interest in our national parks and how they are managed. The comments repeatedly stressed the vitality and relevancy of the Organic Act and that the Act must be honored in the management of our National Parks. We heard very clearly that our mission to protect parks was of paramount importance. We received many good suggestions from the public, NPS employees, and others that helped clarify various portions of the document. In response to this interest, the current management policies state in section 1.4.3 that, "Congress, recognizing that the enjoyment by future generations of the national parks can be ensured only if the superb quality of park resources and values is left unimpaired, has provided that when there is a conflict between conserving resources and values and providing for enjoyment of them, conservation is to be predominant.... The fundamental purpose of all parks also includes providing for the "enjoyment of park resources and values by the people of the United States. The "enjoyment" that is contemplated by the statute is broad; it is the enjoyment of all the people of the United States, and so includes enjoyment both by people who visit parks and those who appreciate them from afar."

As Director, I am very pleased with this document. We expect the document to be utilized contextually as a whole. By this I mean that it is a very comprehensive document and those who look to it for guidance should be careful not to take excerpts out of context. We believe that the revised draft is an improvement in content, tone, and clarity over the 2001 policy document and the earlier 2005 draft. We would like to emphasize that revisions were considered only if they met basic principles that were adopted by our career employees. We believe that these principles are so fundamental that they should guide any future management policy changes and are part of the management policies themselves. The policies must ---

- Comply with current laws, regulations, and Executive Orders,
- Prevent impairment of park resources and values,
- Assure that conservation will be predominant when there is a conflict between protection of resources and their use,
- Maintain NPS responsibility for making decisions and for exercising key authorities,
- Emphasize consultation and cooperation with local, state, Tribal, and federal entities,
- Support pursuit of the best contemporary business practices and sustainability,
- Encourage consistency across the system – "one" National Park System,
- Reflect NPS goals and a commitment to cooperative conservation and civic engagement,
- Employ a tone that leaves no room for misunderstanding the NPS's commitment to the public's appropriate use and enjoyment, including education and interpretation, of park resources, while preventing unacceptable impacts,
- Pass onto future generations natural, cultural, and physical resources that meet desired conditions better than they do today, along with improved opportunities for enjoyment.

We want to assure you that the process of comment evaluation was thorough. Comments were consolidated by career policy specialists and a private firm that was retained to assist with the large volume of comments. We then assembled a group of NPS employees that included park superintendents, managers, and program specialists. This knowledgeable team reviewed, discussed, and revised the draft based on those comments. The revised draft was then further reviewed by the NPS National Leadership Council (NLC). Following that approval, a special committee of the National Park System Advisory Board met with key NPS staff to discuss the revised policies. On the recommendation of the special committee, the revised draft policies were endorsed by the full Advisory Board on June 9, 2006.

The Director released the revised draft policies to all NPS employees for final comment on June 19, 2006. We also have placed a courtesy copy on our web site for viewing by the public. We believe it was very important for our employees to have had a final opportunity to make sure that this document is as accurate and useful as possible. The review period ended on July 10, 2006; an analysis of the comments is in progress. Any changes based on the comments will be made to the revised draft at the purview of the NLC at their upcoming meeting August 8 and 9. Final approval will be based on NLC's input.

I would like to illustrate several key areas where the revised draft provides greater emphasis and clarity than the 2001 policy document.

We unequivocally confirm to the American people that the fundamental purpose and mission of the NPS as stated in the 1916 Organic Act is to "... promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations... by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments, and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." Since passage of the Act, the NPS has established itself as a world leader in park management. We believe that these revised draft policies inspire and guide managers to follow that tradition.

The revised draft policies are committed to civic engagement and cooperative conservation at all levels of park management. This revised draft emphasizes to our managers that decisions based on sound public input are better for parks and more supportive of surrounding communities.

The management of parks is recognized as a serious business enterprise that must be continually improved by professional management. This ensures that the American taxpayer is well-served by managers using the best business practices. These revised draft policies make a strong commitment to workforce and business practices improvement.

The revised draft policies provide additional guidance on the important relationships between parks and tribal governments. The revised draft is respectful of tribal sovereignty and more explicitly expresses our commitment to a positive government-to-government relationship between parks and tribes.

The revised draft policies further recognize the importance of clean air and water as well as soundscapes and lightscapes. These resources help make each park unique and special in today's more crowded world. The revised draft policies allow for managers to review the variety of possible park resources and values, account for each park's specific legislation, and encourage working with neighbors and other land management agencies.

The revised draft policies recognize that we must not allow uses or threats to park resources to even approach the level of impairment. The park manager will use professional judgment, including good science, to determine when a proposed or existing use may be leading to impairment and manage to a level far below that critical point. This level of impact, referred to as "unacceptable" impact, is clarified in the revised draft.

The revised draft policies have strengthened our commitment to appropriate use in parks. Managers have new guidance on determining what an appropriate or inappropriate use in a park is. These revised draft policies also acknowledge that what may be appropriate in one park may not be in another park.

The revised draft policies ensure that the American people will continue to enjoy their national parks. Visitor enjoyment of resources protected by the NPS is what makes our mission so compelling. It is part of what makes parks inherently relevant to the American people and the world.

I will mention two specific examples that emphasize how management policies address visitor enjoyment. The first is from section 1.4.3 where it states that, "The fundamental purpose of all parks also includes providing for the enjoyment of park resources and values by the people of the United States. The enjoyment that is contemplated by the statute is broad; it is the enjoyment of all the people of the United States, and so includes enjoyment both by people who visit parks and by those who appreciate them from afar."

The second is from section 8.2 where the policies say that, "Enjoyment of park resources and values by the people of the United States is part of the fundamental purpose of all parks. NPS is committed to providing appropriate, high quality opportunities for visitors to enjoy the parks, and will maintain within the parks an atmosphere that is open, inviting, and accessible to every segment of American society."

The revised draft policies also recognize in a more emphatic way how much National Parks and the National Park experience means to Americans. The role of the park ranger as educator and protector is emphasized. The document demonstrates our commitment to the relevancy of National Parks and to the inspiration that they provide for our citizens, both today and in the future.

In closing, I would like leave you with two quotations from distinguished Americans who cared deeply about our special places. The first is from President Theodore Roosevelt in 1912:

"The establishment of the National Park Service is justified by considerations of good administration, of the value of natural beauty as a National asset, and of the effectiveness of outdoor life and recreation in the production of good citizenship."

The other quotation is from the author Wallace Stegner. In 1983, he wrote:

"National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best...."

We believe that the revised Management Policies will help the National Park Service to shine in its role as a leader of resource stewardship, as a leader in providing opportunities for visitor enjoyment, and as a model for other nations in how to protect special places unimpaired for the future.