

Testimony of Jerry L. Rogers, Chair, Cultural Resource & Historic Preservation Committee, National Parks Second Century Commission; Member, Coalition of National Park Service Retirees.

**United States House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources,
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands.**

Hearing, May 25, 2010, *Building on America's Best Idea: the Next Century of the National Park System.*

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Jerry L. Rogers and I am honored to be invited to present testimony today about the National Park Service in its Second Century. Speaking not only as a member of the National Parks Second Century Commission, but also on behalf of the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees, I convey thanks and congratulations of other retirees to the Subcommittee for looking into this topic. It is vital to the future of our nation. We earnestly hope that other committees and members of both the House and the Senate will follow your lead. We also hope this will be the first of a continuing series of hearings, in the 111th Congress and in future Congresses on the National Park Service in its second century; in fact we believe that valuable hearings could be held on subjects revolving around each of the eight committees of the Commission.

The Coalition of National Park Service Retirees is a spontaneously-generated organization of men and women who have devoted their lives and careers to the National Park Service, who know the Service in ways few others know it, who love what the Service does, who share pride in what the Service has been, and who hold a grand vision of what the Service should be and do in the future. Our Coalition began when three retired National Park Superintendents held a press conference in May, 2003 to emphasize concern about budgetary and policy threats to the Service. That event was followed by a letter to then President George W. Bush. As word about the letter went around the nation via the internet, other NPS retirees asked to be allowed to sign, and eventually 20 did so. The internet conversation continued, and this interaction eventually developed into a formal organization chartered as a non-profit corporation in June, 2006. Rapid growth ensued, and without any formal recruitment effort we have now come to number about 800 members. Our membership includes three former Directors or Deputy Directors of the National Park Service, twenty-three former Regional Directors or Deputy Regional Directors, twenty-eight former Associate or Assistant Directors at the national or regional office level, seventy-four former Division Chiefs at the national or regional office level, and over one hundred and seventy-five former Park Superintendents or Assistant Superintendents.

Individuals who became the initial leaders in the Coalition had as early as 2002 advocated a 2016 National Park Service Centennial that would be more than a celebration. Tempting though it is to have a birthday cake, some speeches, and to cut ribbons on a few new park facilities, it was clear to these "voices of experience" that a one-hundredth anniversary was the time for a reflective examination of how far we have come and by what routes, and for a strategic look far as possible into the second

century. The Coalition made its call for such a Commission official when its Executive Council released its “Call to Action” report on September 21, 2004. Retired Alaska Regional Director Rob Arnberger in particular advocated development of a Blue Ribbon Commission of distinguished Americans to undertake this examination, as evidenced by his testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands & Forests in May, 2005. We were, therefore, thrilled when in August of 2008 the National Parks Conservation Association convened the National Parks Second Century Commission. I was profoundly honored when invited to serve as a member of the Commission, and as Chair of the Commission’s Cultural Resource and Historic Preservation Committee. Other Coalition members participated in all five of the Commission’s meetings. We are delighted with the Commission’s report, and we presented the Coalition’s highest honor—the George B. Hartzog Award—for 2009 to the Commission’s Executive Director Loran B. Fraser for his extraordinary leadership in bringing the work to a successful conclusion.

The Commission’s recommendations, we are happy to see, track well with the vision statement the Coalition has had posted on its website since early in 2006. The Coalition envisions a National Park Service in its second century that does the following things.

- Preserves and enables visitors to enjoy the truly special places of our common heritage—the inalienable heritage—of our nation, without confusion about its mission.
- Is deeply involved with the American people in what it means to be American and with the people of the world about what it means to be human.
- Is viewed by the public and government officials not as a “land management agency” but as the steward of the primary ideas and ideals held in trust as the nation’s heritage.
- Educates visitors through deeply personal experiences of profoundly important places.
- Leads, encourages, and assists all others in our country who pursue similar goals; and on behalf of the United States assists all others in the world who pursue similar goals.
- Is free of burdens that impede accomplishment of its mission, and has leadership that is free of inappropriate constraints and conflicting goals.
- Is well-funded, well-staffed, sophisticated, professional, value-driven, motivated, innovative, daring, and excellent, within a context of long-term continuity.
- Provides education, training, and career opportunities that maximize fulfillment of the professional potential of each employee.
- Is driven by a current and constantly-renewed vision, nationally and in each individual park.
- Is managed as a coherent system rather than as independent areas and programs.

Mr. Chairman, during my time as a National Park Service Senior Executive the United States Government closed down, twice briefly and twice for longer periods, due to the

lack of appropriations for its operation. During each of those times, network television news asked four questions:

- will the country be defended,
- will the mail be delivered,
- will the Social Security checks be on time, and
- will the National Parks be open?

These four questions are powerful evidence of what the National Parks and the vastly larger array of places preserved by others under National Park Service programs actually mean to Americans. They are national icons almost equal to the flag itself. They have evolved from units of a respected national system into the combined expression of our most valuable and inalienable national heritage. They are the unchanging measure of a rapidly changing world, repositories of information against which human progress or its opposite can be gauged, touchstones of who we are as a people and even as members of the human species, the best hope for preserving the cultural record that defines American civilization and the global biological diversity upon which life itself depends.

Those four questions show, appropriately, I think, that the National Parks have become fundamental elements of our national identification—they are the hard and tangible manifestation of the experiences, beliefs, and values that bond almost 300 million people of various national and cultural origins into a single viable and coherent nation. Without them we might never have become, and certainly could not long remain, the “Americans” that we understand ourselves to be. The National Parks, in a very real way, *are* America. And we Americans are not the only ones who see them as such—they are as valuable to the world as they are to us here at home.

Mr. Chairman, the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees strongly supports all of the recommendations of the National Parks Second Century Commission. Using what I have just said as background, however, I wish to focus on only a few of the most fundamental points made by the Commission.

First, although the problems faced by the Service today must be addressed, and although the centennial provides an ideal target date for doing so, we urge the Subcommittee to keep constantly in mind what the nation and the world need after—long after—2016. Let’s hold fast to the long-term perspective and not allow urgent problems to drive out vision.

Second, the America that the National Parks represent is changing rapidly. Demographic changes, but also changes in the ways people learn, communicate, use their time, assemble their enterprises, and conduct commerce create constant change in the very definition of America. The parks and the National Park Service must keep pace with that change or lose that iconic status. As just one example of what keeping pace means, the National Park Service must more frequently review and modify its criteria and the thematic categories within which it determines national significance—the benchmarks by which places are judged to be appropriate for addition to the system or designation as National Historic and Natural Landmarks.

Third, parks are a special type of national university. One thing we know far more about now than was known in 1916 is that different cultures and different individuals learn in different ways. Whether one is devoted to books and classrooms or to any of the new educational methods that daily amaze us, we must not overlook the fact that visits to National Parks provide almost 300 million individual non-traditional educational opportunities each year. It seems obvious that we must make the most of these opportunities, but the experience of recent decades makes it clear that the educational mission of the parks and the Service needs to be established in law with absolute clarity. Education, in this case, includes but is greater than, park interpretation. Parks are and must always be vigorous centers of education, but it is not enough to wait for the world to come to the parks in order to learn. Education must be taken by the Service to the world.

Fourth, the parks are threatened by myriad forces from outside their boundaries and they cannot be defended against these threats by actions taken only inside park boundaries. Not even the largest natural park can contain within itself everything its ecosystems require. No historic park can contain more than a select part of the historic places that embody the larger and more complete story. These outside threats will not be overcome by exertion of authority over people and practices outside the boundaries. They may be overcome, however, through the kind of leadership by the Service that encourages and enables others to carry out their own natural and cultural stewardship activities that are helpful to the parks.

To deal with these problems and many others, the Commission's Cultural Resource and Historic Preservation Committee envisioned *"a century of the environment beginning August 25, 2016 in which history, nature, culture, beauty, and recreation are parts of sustainable community life and development everywhere and in which the National Park Service preserves and interprets selected outstanding places and provides leadership to all others engaged in similar work."*

Fortunately, in the Cultural Resource and Historic Preservation programs the Service has abundant experience that should be useful in shaping a second century. In this experience, I believe, will be found at least some keys to National Park Service success decades into the future.

Beginning as far back as 1933, but especially after enactment of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and its various amendments, the Service has engaged others, mostly private property owners, in voluntary preservation of more than 2,400 places designated as National Historic Landmarks and almost 600 places designated as National Natural Landmarks. These nationally significant entities are equal in significance to the National Parks themselves. At other degrees of significance, 80,000 places have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In many instances the National Register's locally significant places fill out the cultural counterpart of the ecosystem concept—preserving the details of the story that may not be encompassed within the National Park unit or the National Historic Landmark. Other means the

Service has used with outstanding success include the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Programs, and the development of community-driven interactions known as National Heritage Areas.

More important, and not often spoken about, is the way these broadly-based, grass-roots driven programs gauge the national mood and tap into a national creative energy with regard to the whole mission of the National Park Service. Think for a moment of their inclusiveness. They encompass virtually all property-managing Federal agencies. Their backbone is a network of State Historic Preservation Officers appointed by the Governors of 59 States and similar jurisdictions, each of whom runs a program shaped to deal with the realities of their own jurisdictions. Almost 90 American Indian Tribes have Tribal Heritage Preservation Officers who run programs shaped by each tribe to fit its own heritage. More than 1700 Certified Local Governments are parts of this network—each designed by and to suit its locality. The private sector is fully engaged, not just the great organizations like the National Trust for Historic Preservation, The Archaeological Conservancy, the National Parks Conservation Association, and thousands of smaller non-profits, but an unlimited number of businesspeople and private property owners who wish to exercise responsible stewardship over their pieces of the national heritage and who often profit by doing so. All of these are energetically engaged in carrying out the National Park Service mission—devoting their time, treasure, and creative imagination to preserving the national heritage. The National Register of Historic Places is at the heart of this outpouring of grass-roots energy.

Mr. Chairman, when the National Park Service undertakes the above-recommended review and update of thematic structures that guide growth of the National Park System, it should begin by analyzing the contents and the growth trends of the National Register and of the state, local, tribal, and agency data bases that are the source of Register nominations. Like the solid benchmark a surveyor uses to provide a known starting point for a survey, the contents of the National Register and related data bases should tell us much about what we as a nation believe to be our heritage and want to have preserved. The recent growth trends should, like a compass, tell us the direction in which we are moving whether or not that direction is yet apparent to everyone. More than this will be needed, of course, but this is the place to begin.

One of the greatest concerns addressed by the Commission is the need to protect natural systems inside National Park System units by engaging managers of public lands and owners of private lands outside parks into some sort of positive cooperative interaction with the parks. There may be a great many ways in which this might be done, and a great many incentives provided to encourage cooperation. When the National Park Service undertakes to develop these ways it must first consider the ways in which its Cultural Resource and Historic Preservation programs; National Heritage Areas; Rivers, Trails, Conservation Assistance, and other community outreach programs have successfully engaged so many others in accomplishing the National Park Service mission. One recommendation particularly relevant to this Subcommittee's jurisdiction is to enact a law patterned somewhat after the National Historic Preservation Act that would direct the National Park Service to provide

leadership in preserving nature and other resources central to survival of the parks. Such leadership should not involve command or control, but rather it involves creating circumstances in which others can succeed in doing what needs to be done. By appealing to the better nature of Americans, and by encouraging, enabling, and assisting them to preserve the natural and scenic places they want to preserve, the National Park Service can effectively carry out this part of its mission beyond park boundaries.

New and more comprehensive approaches appropriate to a new century of work will require new and more comprehensive concepts of budgeting and appropriations. We are all familiar with shortfalls in funding to operate the parks, and ways must be found to fill the gaps. This, however, puts the spotlight on one of the major ways in which new thinking must also result in new priorities. Leadership of the present grass-roots network in Cultural Resources and Historic Preservation depends in part on appropriations from the Historic Preservation Fund, which the Commission recommends be at the full \$150 million per annum level. Leadership of the proposed grass-roots network dealing with natural and other resources vital to success of the parks themselves will require not only the recommended “full funding” of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, but specifically will require support for some version of what has been called the “state side” of that fund. The parks must be funded properly in order to be operated properly, but if the parks cannot be saved from inside the parks it makes no sense to go on year after year failing to support budget items important to our outside partners such as Save America’s Treasures—as the administration’s FY 2011 budget embarrassingly fails to do.

Mr. Chairman, we applaud—as an immediate measure and as a long-term strategic necessity—Director Jarvis’s approach to decision-making, based upon

- impeccable fidelity to law, policy, and the mission of the Service,
- use of the best available sound scientific and other scholarly information, and
- acting in the best interests of the broad national public.

No matter how spare the budget, how pressing the competing national priorities, nor how difficult the political circumstances, to cut any of these short is to enter a downward spiral.

Mr. Chairman, at least one fundamental element of the National Park Service—its ability to manage its own cultural resources and to create environments in which its Federal, state, tribal, local, and private sector partners can succeed in managing theirs—requires virtually “emergency room” level of attention. This whole set of cultural resource and historic preservation programs over the past decade has suffered serious damage, as reflected in more than 25% reductions in staffing and budget and by debilitating and unproductive changes in the organizational structure. Even though the Service shows new energy under Director Jarvis’s leadership, and the Department of the Interior is launching exciting initiatives for Outdoor America, these programs still languish with no leader or spokesperson at the Senior Executive level. The absence of well-informed advocacy at high levels is obvious and embarrassing. A permanent Associate Director for Cultural Resources is urgently needed now! And when that appointment has been

completed it must be seen as a mere beginning. A funding and professionalization initiative—perhaps a “Cultural Resource Challenge” counterpart to the outstanding Natural Resource Challenge of recent years—must become one of the highest and most immediate priorities of the Service if any of the grand vision for the future mentioned before is to be possible.

Over decades, the National Park Service has from time to time confronted, but subsequently has walked away from, the fact that it can be no better than the women and men who treasure and cultivate the vision and who do the work to carry it out. The need to value, respect, and particularly to continually train and educate the workforce, has received diminishing priority in recent years. This must be reversed—through formal education and training and through using methods that make work itself a continuous learning experience. We have done this in the historic preservation programs in the past and the Service can do it in virtually its entire operation.

In the long journey the National Park Service has traveled in its first 94 years, and as it finds its path into a second century, one more thing cannot be overlooked. This grand mission is at once grassroots, and local, and state, and national, and global. Just as the mission cannot be accomplished only within the boundaries of the parks, neither can it be accomplished only within the boundaries of the United States. Natural ecosystems, tribal homelands, cultural and historical traditions, migratory species, moving air and water, immigrants, and park visitors all in obvious way overlap our boundaries with Mexico and Canada. Interactions with those nations need to be vastly accelerated, but the global role of the Service is yet greater. No part of the world now is truly isolated from any other part of the world, and if we want the rest of the world to behave in ways that will support what we need to accomplish here, the United States through its National Park Service must be active on a global scale. Not many years ago the United States, the first nation to have a national park, was often called upon to teach other nations about the concept. We can, and must, still do that; but nowadays we see the many ways in which the United States learns as much as it teaches. We see this, and we can gain the benefit of it, through international activities of the National Park Service. As the Subcommittee explores its own vision of a second century of the National Park Service, we urge a perspective that ranges from grassroots to global. No lesser approach can succeed.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. If I can answer questions or provide additional information I will be very happy to do so.