



ASSOCIATION OF PARTNERS FOR PUBLIC LANDS

Strengthening Nonprofit Public Land Partnerships

Testimony of Dan Puskar
Executive Director, Association of Partners for Public Lands
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U.S. Senate
Concerning "Funding the National Park System for the Next Century"

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Chairman Wyden, Ranking Member Murkowski and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today alongside my distinguished colleagues. I serve as executive director of the Association of Partners for Public Lands (APPL), which has a history since 1977 of cooperation with the National Park Service (NPS). Through its vital network of partnerships, APPL works for the day when all Americans share the joy and inspiration of our natural world and collective heritage.

APPL represents 85 nonprofit member organizations, 83% of which are cooperating associations, friends groups, foundations and educational institutions that have formal partnerships with the national park system. Our members range in scale from the newly created, all volunteer Friends of De Soto National Memorial to Eastern National, a cooperating association partnering with over 150 national parks. Although we support the full breadth of the NPS, our members are primarily "operational partners" with an on-the-ground presence in 335 of the 401 national park units. Our members staff most visitor centers, provide interpretive materials, offer educational programs and give back through grants and other partnerships. Not only do APPL members save federal funds by providing these services, but in 2011 they provided more than \$134 million in aid to the NPS through major projects, grants, programs and services that respond to the agency's priorities.

Our member organizations epitomize the durability and strength of public-private partnerships. The Yosemite Conservancy, for example, was founded in 1923, and the average length of our public lands partnerships is 48 years. Perhaps this is not surprising as philanthropy and partnership have been essential to the creation and resiliency of many national parks, from the land donation of William and Elizabeth Kent to establish Muir Woods National Monument in 1906 to the recent gift by David Rubenstein to help restore the Washington Monument. Examples of the ongoing contributions of our member organizations and allies to the NPS include:

- Alaska Geographic has donated over \$22 million to the NPS and other federal lands since 1959. Alaska Geographic engages youth in science through programs like the Yellow-Billed Loon Media Project, in which Native youth survey breeding sites alongside NPS biologists and share their results with communities affected by a potential endangered species list change.

- The Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio annually provides financial support for over 1,000 children from low income families to participate in its residential education and summer camp programs. The Conservancy also provides funding and staff support for key outreach programs that bring urban children to experience the park.
- Discover Your Northwest, a cooperating association serving NPS units in three states, partnered with Polaris to provide a brand new electric vehicle for park rangers patrolling the Painted Hills area of John Day Fossil Beds National Monument in Oregon. The actions of this nonprofit partner helped the NPS fulfill its goal to make Painted Hills carbon neutral and energy self sufficient in housing, administration and transportation.
- Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy has provided over \$300 million in support to NPS projects and programs for over 30 years, manages all park visitor centers and directly serves over five million visitors per year. The Conservancy has helped develop a corps of 35,000 annual volunteers providing 500,000 hours of service each year - the largest national park volunteer program in the nation.
- Grand Teton Association is a strong financial supporter of the National Park Service Academy, a program to help recruit and grow future public land employees. Since 2011, this program hosted at Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming has introduced diverse undergraduate and graduate students from across the country to career opportunities in NPS.
- Great Smoky Mountains Association and Friends of the Smokies, both APPL member organizations, collectively provide approximately 8% of their park's annual operating budget to support all aspects of the visitor experience in North Carolina and Tennessee.
- Mount Rushmore Society will fund \$500,000 in grants over the next five years for preservation and maintenance of the iconic South Dakota sculpture. These necessary activities will not be met by current NPS budgets.
- NatureBridge, a non-profit education provider operating in multiple national parks, raises and spends \$12.5 million each year to provide residential environmental science programs to over 30,000 students. These multi-day programs translate to over 100,000 student days of hands-on science learning in national parks.
- Rocky Mountain Nature Association provides approximately \$500,000 annually to the education programs of Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, including opportunities for over 50 interns and student trail crewmembers to work in the park every year.
- Western National Parks Association (WNPA) has provided over \$86 million to support NPS projects and programs for 75 years. WNPA operates in 66 NPS units in 12 Western states, many of which have little budget capacity for programming, let alone staffing. WNPA's presence at sites like Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site and Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial is essential. WNPA staff is often the only personnel encountered by the public, and its aid truly provides the basic interpretation of park resources and meets the needs of visitors.

A vital role of APPL is to represent the interests of our members in working with federal agencies and Congress to ensure that all nonprofit park partners are provided the greatest opportunities to help expand visitor services, educate and inspire the next generation, create jobs and engage all people in public lands stewardship. My comments today represent the experiences of APPL and its member organizations, and I hope will reflect the insights of the National Park Friends Alliance and the contributions of key educational field institutes across the nation.

A Strong Federal Funding Commitment Invigorates Partnerships

While recognizing the fiscal challenges facing our nation, APPL and its member organizations believe that funding for the operations of the national parks, the protection of their resources and the safety of their visitors are the responsibilities of the federal government. Public-private partnership, however, should be a core strategy to address the need for additive funding that provides a margin of excellence in parks. Recognizing the complementary roles of public and private leadership is particularly important at this time when NPS seeks to reach broader and more diverse audiences with more scarce federal funds.

In the presence of a strong federal funding commitment to the NPS, APPL member organizations are ready, willing and able to mobilize their donors, retail customers, volunteers, educational resources, gateway communities and business partners to help the NPS achieve its important mission to preserve and protect America's national parks for the enjoyment of future generations.

INCREASING NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM FUNDING AND SERVICES THROUGH NONPROFIT PARTNERS

APPL trusts that our already vibrant and rewarding relationships with the NPS will add greater resources and save more federal funds if our partnerships were fully embraced and facilitated by law, policy and procedure. With the goal of unleashing the nonprofit sector to enhance parks and achieve more results with tax dollars, I offer a few perspectives and recommendations:

Expand Public-Nonprofit Partnership Authorities

NPS Director Jarvis and his leadership team have been tremendous advocates for park partners, although the tools provided to them have not kept up with the NPS and its growing desire to engage meaningfully in partnerships. Additional or clarifying legislation will help the NPS to simplify and streamline its partnership policies and practices, and to meet the goals that Director Jarvis has articulated.

- *Encouraging Long Lasting Partnerships*

The NPS currently does not have legislation specifically endorsing the value and necessity of partnerships as a central tenet of fulfilling its mission. This gap in authorities can often lead to the NPS, as well as other federal agencies, relying on familiar regulatory or transactional frameworks like contracting and procurement law to practice the art of partnerships. Partnerships, like most good relationships, work best when founded on trust and communication, and are open to the creative risk inherent in entrepreneurial activity and private sector ingenuity.

New authorities that recognize the centrality of partnership in the NPS and provide the agency with the ability to enter into agreements noncompetitively with nonprofit partners would give greater clarity to all parties and strengthen the ability of our member organizations to engage the American people to support the parks.

- *Strengthening the Leverage of Public-Private Funding*
The tools provided to the NPS for maximizing the efficiencies of public and private dollars are limited. Cooperative agreement authority, one of the few instruments available, was not conceived as a framework for longstanding partnerships and has presented problematic complications as parks and partners work to achieve shared goals. In the past, APPL members have been told by the Department of the Interior that general federal law preempts the full use of some specific NPS agreement authorities.

Another core partnership tool, the Challenge Cost-Share Agreement Authority, has been recognized by this Committee as a valuable tool to stimulate private investment and confront looming obstacles, most recently in its advancement of S. 783, the Helium Stewardship Act of 2013. The Congressional Budget Office reports that S.783 would provide \$50 million in federal dollars, matched with an additional \$50 million in private funding, to the NPS for maintenance and infrastructure projects within national parks. APPL congratulates the Committee on shepherding this initiative.

These authorities would be strengthened by identifying the unique role that nonprofit partners have in the history and mission of the NPS and recognizing the variety and value of public purposes inherent in preserving our parks and welcoming all generations of Americans to experience them. Modest changes to these agreement authorities would help ensure that the energy and expertise of nonprofit partners, especially those operating in an increasingly competitive philanthropic arena, will be maximized.

Improve and Streamline Partnership Policies, Agreements and Approvals

In *A Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement*, the NPS has expressed its desire to work with partners to help strategically focus its many efforts and align its existing resources on powerful actions that advance the NPS mission. APPL applauds Director Jarvis for his commitment to revise the NPS policy on donations and fundraising, known as Director's Order 21, in order to meet the dynamic landscape of 21st century philanthropy. Additionally, APPL is encouraged by the agency's intention to create a workable Reference Manual for Director's Order 32, which governs NPS activities with cooperating associations, and for Director's Order 6, which applies to educational programs.

APPL is eager to assist Director Jarvis and his leadership team in revisiting these policies, and the agreements which tier from them, to focus and align the best elements of the public and private sector and unleash their combined potential.

SUSTAINABLE SUPPLEMENTARY FUNDING FOR AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS

Earlier this year, the National Parks Conservation Association, an APPL member organization, and the National Park Hospitality Association developed a series of white papers to outline 16 strategies that could be employed to increase non-appropriated funding for the national parks. Several of these papers identify programs and opportunities central to the viability and strength of nonprofit partnership and funding.

Enhancing Park Experiences Through Fees

APPL supports the reauthorization of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) and the continuation of its current authorization wherein the NPS retains the recreational and associated fees it collects.

National park visitors intuitively expect that their fee dollars will support the places they experienced and enjoyed. APPL members are committed to creating great visitor experiences and are concerned that the loss of support for NPS interpretation, maintenance and protection funds will significantly decrease the agency's ability to provide basic services. Additionally, several APPL member organizations and allies leverage these fees to create exemplary resources for park visitors including.

- Like many cooperating associations, the Mesa Verde Museum Association and the NPS combine nonprofit aid with FLREA funds to print and distribute the park visitor guide which includes recreational, educational and safety information, which is annually distributed to over 400,000 Mesa Verde National Park visitors in Colorado.
- The Schoodic Education and Research Center Institute and the NPS completed a \$2.7 million renovation of the historic Rockefeller Hall in Acadia National Park earlier this month. The Center supports research for Acadia that is linked directly to STEM education opportunities for youth and to lifelong learning for all in the sciences and arts. The project cost was shared equally by philanthropic contributions and FLREA fees.

APPL urges the Committee to reauthorize this valuable authority not only for the NPS, but for all federal land management agencies. We also believe this program would be strengthened with the inclusion of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recreation areas. APPL encourages this Committee's collaboration with the appropriate committee of jurisdiction to help invest these fees in the visitor's enjoyment of all public lands.

Park Legacy Partnership Fund

APPL strongly supports the establishment of a long term public-private philanthropic opportunity wherein federal dollars are matched one-to-one by private dollars. This model has several similarities to the National Park Service Centennial Challenge which was activated for one year in 2008 and provided over \$50 million to critical NPS projects. The combination of \$24.6 million in federal funds matched by nearly \$27 million in philanthropic contributions resulted in many projects including:

- The Friends of Big Bend leveraged a \$100,000 Centennial Challenge grant to make something that its remote park, which encompasses 13% of the U.S. southern border, had never had in 75 years: a visitor center film to enhance public safety and encourage stewardship. Raising \$177,000 in private funds, the Friends not only created the film but upgraded the audiovisual assets of the park auditorium necessary to view it.
- Lewis and Clark National Park Association leveraged a \$30,000 Centennial Challenge grant to complete a formal education plan for the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park in Oregon and Washington State. The plan expanded what had been a curriculum focused on 4th graders to a portfolio of place-based activities for school groups from 4th to 12th grades.
- The Zion Natural History Association and the NPS created an initiative to significantly enhance youth education and outreach in the park by matching a \$54,000 Centennial Challenge grant with \$54,000 in private funds. This modest initiative increased the number of children attending programs by nearly 300% in the first year, and today tens of thousands of young people have been connected to the unique natural and cultural resources of Zion National Park as a result.

The value of a long term federal matching program would dwarf the success of the one-year Centennial Challenge effort. Nonprofit partners who can share the guarantee of a future federal match with their donors and constituents will be better positioned to attract greater philanthropy and aid – especially smaller organizations that may not have high cash reserves or friends groups that lack sizeable philanthropic bases in their gateway communities.

Commemorative Coins

Legislation has been introduced in Congress to create a series of commemorative coins that will celebrate the National Park Service Centennial in 2016. Sale of the coins includes surcharges that provide up to \$12.25 million in funds that may be matched by the National Park Foundation, an APPL member. This is an opportunity for the Congress to help deliver \$24.5 million “for projects and programs that help preserve and protect resources under the stewardship of the National Park Service and promote public enjoyment and appreciation of those resources” without adding to the deficit or finding offsets. (In the interest of full transparency, I authored this white paper when I was a member of the National Park Foundation staff.)

APPL encourages Senators to co-sponsor S.1158, National Park Service 100th Anniversary Commemorative Coin Act, as several members of the Committee have previously done, and thus add resources to and improve public awareness of the NPS Centennial in 2016.

THE FUTURE OF PARK PARTNERSHIPS

All APPL member organizations are honored to be official partners of America’s most treasured landscapes. Our national parks have traditionally been supported by both the public and private sectors, and APPL hopes that these perspectives and recommendations open opportunities to expand our partnerships to greater effect and impact.

In summary, APPL strongly encourages the Committee to:

- Encourage the increase of national park system funding and services through partnerships. This may be accomplished by adopting partnership authorities to help the NPS to simplify and streamline its policies and practices and spur ever greater nonprofit contributions and aid.
- Renew the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act in a manner that will meet park visitor expectations and improve their experience and enjoyment of these treasured places.
- Strongly consider new proposals, including the Park Legacy Partnership Fund and a commemorative coin series, which provide the leverage nonprofits need to further extend scarce federal dollars.

I enthusiastically offer our services to the Committee in developing new partnership authorities and in continuing to serve as a voice for nonprofit park partners. Thank you for your strong interest in helping to galvanize nonprofit partnerships with the NPS and thereby expand the funding of national parks in the next century.

Dan Puskar
Executive Director
Association of Partners for Public Lands
DPuskar@appl.org
www.appl.org

APPL MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Alaska Geographic
Arizona Natural History Association
Badlands Natural History Association
Big Bend Natural History Association
Black Hills Parks and Forests Association
Bryce Canyon Natural History Association
Cabrillo National Monument Foundation
Canyonlands Natural History Association
Capitol Reef Natural History Association
Carlsbad Caverns Guadalupe Mountains Association
Carver Birthplace Association
Central Coast State Parks Association
Colorado National Monument Association
Cradle of Forestry in America Interpretive Association
Crater Lake Natural History Association
Craters of the Moon Natural History Association
Death Valley Natural History Association
Devils Tower Natural History Association
Discover Your Northwest
Dixie / Arizona Strip Interpretive Association
Eastern National
Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association
Everglades Association
Fort Laramie Historical Association
Friends of Acadia
Friends of Big Bend National Park
Friends of Black Rock High Rock, Inc.
Friends of DeSoto National Memorial
Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Friends of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park / Hawai'i Volcanoes Institute
Friends of Independence National Historical Park
Friends of Minute Man National Park
Friends of Pompeys Pillar
Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Inc.
Glacier National Park Conservancy
Glen Canyon Natural History Association
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
Grand Canyon Association
Grand Teton Association
Great Smoky Mountains Association
Harpers Ferry Historical Association
Hawai'i Pacific Parks Association
Intermountain Natural History Association
Isle Royale & Keweenaw Parks Association
Jefferson National Parks Association
Joshua Tree National Park Association
Kennesaw Mountain Historical Association
Lassen Association
Lewis & Clark National Park Association
Manzanar History Association
Mesa Verde Museum Association
Mount Rushmore Society
Mount St. Helens Institute
National Association for Interpretation
National First Ladies' Library
National Park Foundation*
National Parks Conservation Association
Nevada Outdoor School
Ocmulgee National Monument Association
Our Lands & Waters Foundation
Pacific Historic Parks
Petrified Forest Museum Association
Point Reyes National Seashore Association
Portland Parks Foundation
Public Lands Institute, University of Nevada-Las Vegas
Public Lands Interpretive Association
Red Rock Canyon Interpretive Association / Southern Nevada Conservancy
Redwood Parks Association
Rocky Mountain Nature Association
Rosie the Riveter Trust
San Juan Mountains Association
Santa Monica Mountains Fund
Sawtooth Interpretive and Historical Association
Sequoia Natural History Association
Shenandoah National Park Association
Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods
Student Conservation Association
Tahoe Heritage Foundation
The Encampment Store
Theodore Roosevelt Nature and History Association
Western Maryland Interpretive Association, Inc.
Western National Parks Association
Yellowstone Association
Yosemite Conservancy
Zion Natural History Association