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Before the Subcommittee on National Parks  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate

To consider the National Park Service report *A Call To Action*

September 21, 2011

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. The National Park Foundation (“Foundation”) commends this Subcommittee for its commitment to help prepare the National Park Service (“NPS”) for the challenges and opportunities of the next century and for highlighting the role that partnerships and philanthropy will play in this future.

Established by Congress in 1967 (PL 90-209), the Foundation serves as the philanthropic and promotional arm of the NPS. Through its grant-making programs and public outreach, the Foundation works with NPS leaders in Washington, D.C. and in parks across the country to fund conservation and sustainability efforts, engage diverse communities, promote health and recreation in the great outdoors and educate our citizens about our shared history in the places where it happened.

In the previous five years (FY2006-2010) the Foundation has provided \$95 million in grants and program support and more than \$28 million in contributed goods and services to the NPS, a total contribution of over \$123 million. Unlike other Congressionally chartered nonprofits established to support land management agencies, the Foundation receives no federal appropriations. The Foundation is governed by a citizen Board of Directors appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. Additionally, the Secretary and the NPS Director serve *ex officio* as Chairman and Secretary of the Board, respectively. The Secretary of the Interior and the NPS Director have always been invaluable resources to the Board as it charts a course for our organization.

This year, the Foundation initiated a strategic planning process with the goal to increase alignment between our organization and the NPS. The process has helped the Foundation’s Board and staff to refine our mission of enriching America’s national parks and programs through private support, safeguarding our heritage and inspiring generations of national park enthusiasts. The Foundation’s strategic planning process and the development of the NPS *A Call To Action* report had significant overlap and both organizations benefited from the simultaneous and parallel conversations about how best to adapt our long standing organizations to this new moment in our nation’s history.

The Foundation was pleased to provide thoughts and ideas to the NPS in its development of *A Call To Action*, and I am energized by the opportunities it presents to expand public-private partnerships to protect and preserve our national parks. In my testimony, I will highlight how the Foundation will assist the NPS in finding creative and innovative ways to meet the goals outlined in *A Call To Action*, including its call for an endowment for the national parks, and the role of park philanthropy in the next century.

**PHILANTHROPY AND THE NATIONAL PARKS**

Since Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872, private philanthropy has been at the core of the preservation, protection, and improvement of America’s national parks, and will continue to be essential in securing their future.

Private philanthropy helped create individual national parks, as well as the National Park Service itself. The earliest philanthropic acts spanned the country from California to Maine. In 1907, William and Elizabeth Thatcher Kent donated land that later became Muir Woods National Monument in California. In June 1916, a group of private citizens donated to the federal government the land for Sieur de Monts National Monument in Maine, the very same land that would one day grow and develop into Acadia National Park. Stephen Mather himself, the first director of the NPS, contributed from his personal fortune to support parks and their administration both before and after he led the agency. In addition to land purchases, Mather enlisted several western railroads to join him in contributing \$48,000 to publish the *National Parks Portfolio*, which promoted national parks and helped persuade Congress to create the NPS in 1916.

These examples from, what are today, the icons of our national park system necessitate the recognition of park philanthropy as a vital element of the second century for parks. Annually, the National Park Foundation and Friends Groups leverage the federal government's necessary investment in national parks to grant over \$100 million in private support to the parks. With the help of these nonprofit park partners, the Foundation will build on this rich tradition and help achieve the goals of *A Call To Action* with public and private interests working in tandem.

#### **IMPLEMENTING A CALL TO ACTION**

*A Call To Action* envisions a National Park Service that works closely with park partners to improve the services they provide within our parks, but also to strengthen local economies, create jobs and support conservation in American communities. Park partners like the Foundation are asked to work hand in hand with NPS employees to advance a shared vision toward the NPS centennial in 2016.

The Foundation looks forward to working with the NPS to help convene national park Friends Groups, cooperating associations and other nonprofit park partners in preserving, interpreting and restoring natural, historic and cultural resources in the NPS and local communities. It will work to enable park partners, educational institutions and youth to use national parks as places of learning and thereby deepen our knowledge and understanding of the natural world, science, art, history and other academic disciplines. The Foundation will seek to collaborate with non-NPS land managers and park partners to conserve urban, rural and landscape-scale resources that connect these neighboring lands to parks.

The work of the Foundation and its new strategic vision align with many *A Call To Action* goals including:

- *Provide multiple ways for children to learn about the national parks and what they reveal about nature, the nation's history, and issues central to our civic life.*

The Foundation and NPS are looking to leverage the NPS Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program with the Foundation's Park Stewards, a grant program that gives high school teachers and students the opportunity to build a deeper connection and sense of stewardship for their national parks through personal engagement and service learning projects. To date, over 4,000 students have directly benefited from the Park Stewards program; an estimated 7,000 have indirectly benefited; and more than 100,000 national park visitors have also benefited from materials and activities produced by the Park Stewards students.

- *Expand opportunities for students to directly experience national parks, where natural and historic settings inspire powerful learning. To achieve this we will provide transportation support for 100,000 students each year to visit national parks.*

Early next year, the Foundation will offer a grant program aimed at helping parks provide transportation for youth in their local area to engage with park programs, educational efforts and service opportunities.

- *Foster civic dialogue about the stories of the civil rights movement found within the parks.*

The African American Experience Fund of the National Park Foundation is working with NPS Interpretation and Education to plan numerous special events between 2012 and 2015 to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of major national civil rights events including the 1963 March on Washington, enactment of the Civil Rights Act, enactment of the Voting Rights and other key events that are memorialized in our parks.

- *Lead the way in protecting natural darkness as a precious resource and create a model for dark sky protection.*

Since 2005, the Foundation's Best Lighting Practices grant program has worked to reduce light pollution in several national parks and we are working with corporate partners like Musco Lighting to expand that commitment.

- *Create a new basis for NPS resource management to inform policy, planning, and management decisions and establish the NPS as a leader in addressing the impacts of climate change on protected areas around the world.*

The Foundation has committed to fund the re-examination of the Leopold Report to help the NPS enhance its national resource science and stewardship in the next century.

Each of these goals presents the private sector with an opportunity to provide financial, technical, scientific and educational support and expertise to help the NPS meet and exceed its expectations.

## **A SECOND CENTURY ENDOWMENT**

America's national parks are owned by all its citizens. As the history of park philanthropy suggests, these citizens have supported their parks through their tax dollars and their charitable contributions. In *A Call To Action*, NPS has highlighted one important mechanism for inviting Americans to continue that support: an endowment. The action item states:

- *Engage the power of philanthropy to provide legacy support for the NPS both nationwide and at the individual park level. To do so we will develop a \$1 billion National Park Service second century endowment campaign working in partnership with the National Park Foundation and national park Friends Groups.*

This goal presents an opportunity for the Foundation to work collaboratively with the NPS and Friends Groups to assess the feasibility of a substantial endowment campaign. It also provides a challenge to think beyond the traditional definition of an endowment and instead consider the potential for an

umbrella for a range of restricted and unrestricted funds, capital campaigns and fundraising initiatives. The NPS and the Foundation are now beginning the conversations, planning and due diligence necessary to launch such an effort. Our organizations will explore how to create a movement in support of national and local parks endowments that would complement, rather than compete against, one another.

The Foundation supports the NPS goal of creating for future generations a long lasting source of support to ensure that our parks are protected. An endowment, or constellation of national and local endowments, ensures continuity in programming during periods of financial uncertainty and changing times. As a supplemental financial support to normal appropriations, an endowment would provide the national parks with a perpetual funding stream that would allow park leadership to thoroughly plan and implement multi-year programs.

A second century endowment is a legacy for the current generation and a benefit for future generations. Those who lead the Foundation, Friends Groups and the NPS realize that the actions they take today in establishing an endowment will be a long-term strategy to position the parks for future success. An endowment will provide donors with a maximum return on their investment. In a sense, their gifts to our national parks live on in perpetuity, contributing to the purpose for which they were intended.

A second century endowment, and the other forms of private philanthropy that help support the NPS, will only be successful when donors have faith that their government is doing everything it can to ensure these special places will remain preserved and protected for future generations.

A second century endowment has the opportunity to benefit from the substantial transfer of trillions of dollars of wealth from baby boomers to their children, causes and charities. Our national parks have demonstrated for generations that they are worthy of philanthropy, and they have used this private support collaboratively with their partners to become centers of education, science, history, recreation and conservation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The state of our parks at the Centennial Celebration in 2016 will say a lot about our priorities as a nation. Through *A Call To Action*, the NPS has pledged its own commitment to transform itself to meet the needs of the American people in its next century. As its Congressionally established partner, the Foundation is ready to help the NPS achieve its goals.

Opportunities for partnership and philanthropy must be central to the future of our national parks. The Foundation is confident this can be accomplished in a manner that empowers local partners to be successful and helps national programs extend the benefits of philanthropy to all parks. Partnership and philanthropy are critical to create new opportunities for more of the public to relate to their parks and to generate the creativity and innovation the NPS recognizes in *A Call To Action* that it will need.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your ongoing support of America's national parks and for allowing me the opportunity to report on the important role philanthropy plays in supporting the noble mission of the NPS.

## **ABOUT THE NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION**

The National Park Foundation, in partnership with the National Park Service, enriches America's national parks and programs through private support, safeguarding our heritage and inspiring generations of national park enthusiasts. In the previous five years (FY2006-2010) the Foundation has provided \$95 million in grants and program support and more than \$28 million in contributed goods and services to the NPS, a total contribution of over \$123 million.

Established by Congress in 1967 (PL 90-209), the Foundation is authorized to accept and administer "any gifts, devises, or bequests, either absolutely or in trust of real or personal property or any income therefrom or other interest therein for the benefit of or in connection with, the National Park Service, its activities, or its services." This broad mandate has been used to:

- From FY2006-FY2010, manage an annual average of \$51 million restricted net assets for numerous national parks and park initiatives, some of which do not have friends groups.
- Establish the Everglades National Park Freshwater Wetlands Mitigation Trust Fund in 1983 to restore and monitor the 6,600 acres "Hole-In-The Donut" area of the park. The Foundation has received and distributed over \$67 million since the inception of this massive restoration project.
- Earn interest and increase the impact on restricted contributions until required by the national park system. For example, in February 2010, the Foundation received \$5.5 million for the Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial, the newest unit of the National Park System. This amount represents 10% of the total estimated cost of construction and has been set aside to offset the costs of perpetual maintenance and preservation of the commemorative work once it is completed. It is unlikely to have any disbursement for more than a decade.
- Provide technical assistance and cost-effective financial operations for facilitating philanthropy at national park units without a Friends Group.
- Raise funds for specific grant-making and programs to strengthen park resources and visitor experiences. In FY2011, the Foundation awarded grants to 108 parks and National Park Service offices totaling \$2.5 million.

The Foundation, in a contemporary initiative, is leading the capital campaign to build the Flight 93 National Memorial, the only national park dedicated to commemorating and interpreting the events of September 11, 2001. To date the Foundation has raised \$20 million and is actively raising the remaining \$10 million in private philanthropic support. The campaign is a public private partnership that has also received \$18.5 million from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and \$13 million from federal appropriations.

In 1998, Congress directed the Foundation to design a program to foster fundraising at the individual national park unit level (PL 105-391). The Foundation recognizes that bolstering sustainable Friends Groups is the key to successfully answering this charge from Congress. When Friends Groups have the capacity to promote and publicize their parks, serve as liaisons between parks and communities, increase local tourism and raise funds to support individual park projects, the benefits are multi-dimensional and extend well beyond park boundaries.

In 2010, the Foundation launched an in-depth technical assistance program to help emerging and transitioning Friends Groups become more effective and sustainable. The program helps the Foundation achieve its goal to steadily increase the number of sustainable national park Friends Groups across the nation, broadening the landscape and growing the appetite for park philanthropy.