

TESTIMONY OF  
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Before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
December 8, 2015  
On S. 2257, the National Park Service Centennial Act

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of the National Park Foundation. My name is Will Shafroth and I am the President and CEO of the National Park Foundation.

Established by Congress in 1967, the National Park Foundation is the Congressionally chartered philanthropic partner of the National Park Service. NPF raises philanthropic funds that directly aid, support, and enrich America's 409 national parks and their programs. The Foundation plays a critical role in their conservation and preservation and provides equal opportunities for all Americans to experience, enjoy, learn from and support these treasured places. We carry on the legacy that began more than a century ago, when private citizens from all walks of life took action to establish and protect our national parks.

Over the past five years, the National Park Foundation has contributed more than \$90 million to the national park system through grants, programs, goods and services including more than \$17 million in fiscal year 2015.

2016 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Park Service. The Centennial represents a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity for Americans to come together to celebrate the achievements that have been realized as the result of "America's Best Idea." Most importantly, the anniversary presents an opportunity for Americans of all ages, races, genders, ethnicities and political affiliations to unite behind a shared vision for building upon the success of the National Park System during its second century. This is our opportunity to both celebrate the past and look to the future.

The National Park Service (NPS) and National Park Foundation (NPF) are working closely with partners and stakeholders across the country to ensure that the Centennial is more than just a birthday. For example, earlier this year the NPF and the NPS launched the Find Your Park public education and engagement campaign ([FindYourPark.com](http://FindYourPark.com)) to inspire all Americans to connect with, enjoy, and support America's national parks. The purpose of the campaign is to connect Americans to all of the 409 national park units, from iconic Parks such as Denali, Mt. Rainier, Yellowstone, Cuyahoga Valley, Great Smoky Mountains, Rocky Mountain, Grand Teton, and Grand Canyon to the small historic sites in our own backyards like Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument and the New Orleans Jazz National Historic Park. Since we launched this campaign in early April, more than 28,000 Americans have submitted a story of finding their park including several members of Congress, there have been more than 140,000 uses of the Find Your Park hash tag and nearly two million shares, likes and retweets of Find Your Park social media posts. Most importantly, we're seeing increased visitorship to our parks. From April through September there were more than 201 million park visitations and from January through September 2015 there were more than 248 million visits, an increase of 10 million visits over

the same time in 2014. We're on pace to break the record park visitations of 292.8 million, which was set just last year.

Additionally the National Park Foundation is undertaking our largest national fundraising campaign to fund priority projects and programs throughout the national park system. The proposed projects include everything from enhancing the digital experience throughout the National Park System, to trail and facility restoration projects. The Foundation and the Service worked together closely to develop this list that we believe will have great appeal to philanthropic donors.

In addition to celebrating past accomplishments and re-connecting Americans to their parks, the Centennial Anniversary should also be a time to identify shortcomings and develop innovative ways to address them. For example, the Centennial presents an opportunity for us to generate innovative new approaches to addressing challenges associated with securing the needed funding to prepare and sustain the National Parks for another century of service. That's why I'm so pleased to have the opportunity to testify today.

Generating nearly \$30 billion in economic activity and more than a quarter of a million jobs annually, our National Parks provide among the best returns the federal government gets on investments of taxpayer dollars.

However, as is well known the National Parks have a deferred maintenance backlog of approximately \$11.5 billion. I should note that while nearly half of this total represents transportation infrastructure costs, it also doesn't account for the funding needed for day-to-day operations.

While federal appropriations are likely to and should remain the largest funding source for the National Park Service, it is unlikely that current federal budget constraints will be reversed in the near future. Therefore, it is imperative that we utilize the 2016 Centennial to explore new funding models that can be utilized to supplement the taxpayer investments needed to prepare and sustainably fund our parks for another 100 years of service. Why? Because it will connect current visitors to our parks in new state-of-the-art ways and introduce a new generation to the natural beauty and grandeur of our American landscape through our national parks.

This new paradigm must include finding new ways to incentivize foundations, non-profit organizations, individual donors, and corporate partners to make even greater investments in our parks going forward. Activities are already underway that prove the viability of this new, innovative approach of partnering with companies and corporations. For example, NPF has raised more than \$30 million from corporate partners to support the parks, including for the Find Your Park campaign, which is being funded entirely through corporate partners who see the campaign as a way to simultaneously benefit the National Park System and the financial interests of their companies.

Through the launch and implementation of the Find Your Park public engagement campaign and our national fundraising campaign we've learned a few key lessons.

First, the Foundation and the National Park Service are developing an enhanced understanding of the types of projects and programs that are most and least attractive to private donors and corporate partners. The ability to categorize these projects is helpful to informing which projects should be pursued for contributions and corporate sponsorships and which should be pursued as part of the federal budget and appropriations processes. For example, building or restoring necessary infrastructure

such as roads, restrooms and maintenance facilities are better suited to being completed with federal appropriations. Conversely, adding cellular service and mobile phone applications to enhance the experience of park visitors tend to be the types of projects that generate non-federal partner interest in making donations or sponsorship investments.

Importantly we are also learning that matching federal investments provide private donors and corporate partners the added layer of certainty they need to make a contribution or corporate investment in a national park program or project.

With all of this in mind I'd like to focus on three sections of S. 2257.

#### Centennial Challenge

The Foundation strongly supports the Centennial Challenge fund paired with 'dedicated' funding. At the end of 2014, Congress appropriated \$10 million for this fund, which, in just five months, NPS and partners were able to match with an additional \$16 million to fund 106 projects.

Enactment of this provision, which would require a non-federal match, would undoubtedly create a strong incentive for increased philanthropic contributions to park programs and projects leading up to, during and beyond the Centennial.

#### NPF Endowment

We also strongly support the proposed authorization of an endowment housed at the Foundation, which will establish a long-term funding source for important park projects and programs. The endowment will allow the Foundation to raise significantly more private funding for the parks as part of donors' estate planning and gift giving. Endowment growth serves to build a stable long-term source of private resources for Parks.

#### Funding

We are cognizant of the budgetary restrictions facing this committee to fund these vital programs. However, for both the Centennial Challenge and the endowment to be effective the government must invest in them. With increased lead time and long-term funding, NPF, local friends groups and other partners will be able to leverage the government's Centennial Challenge investment for even greater impact.

A federal investment is key to making the endowment viable to potential donors who want to know their donations are not the sole source of funding. Additionally, seeding the endowment will help it grow as the Foundation solicits philanthropic dollars.

That's why the Foundation supports utilizing the long overdue increase in the price of the "senior citizen pass", which the National Park Service estimates will raise \$35 million annually, and the "overnight fees", which NPS estimates will raise \$12.7 million annually, in Section 6 of S. 2257 to fund these important programs.

NPF believes these "overnight fees", which consumers are used to paying when staying in lodging around the country are used most effectively to leverage significant philanthropic dollars for the long-term health of our national parks. We would also support some percentage of the fees going to concessionaires to alleviate the burden of collecting the fees.

Additionally, we would welcome the opportunity to continue to work with the Committee to identify additional funding sources for the Centennial Challenge and the endowment to strengthen both programs.

#### Park Foundation Structure

Finally, the Foundation strongly supports the legislation's inclusion of amendments to the NPF charter that would transition the Secretary of the Interior and the Director of the National Park Service to ex-officio, non-voting members of the National Board of Directors. The Foundation's authorizing legislation names the Secretary of the Interior as the Chair of the NPF Board and the Director of the National Park Service as the Secretary of the NPF Board. As with any cabinet position, the Secretary of the Interior is a job that has turnover due to national elections and other factors. History has shown that a change in administration occasionally leads to a change in NPF leadership. The resulting uncertainty can be avoided by allowing the board to select its own leadership.

The Foundation also supports the legislation's authorization of \$25 million to be appropriated each year, over the course of ten years, to the NPF for park projects and programs. This would result in a significant increase in the leveraging of private funds to benefit parks and visitors similar to the successful model set forth in the charter of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

#### Conclusion

As we approach the National Parks Centennial year, it is inspiring to see a diverse and bipartisan coalition of lawmakers, non-profit organizations, businesses and individuals uniting behind a shared commitment to seizing the historic opportunity presented by the Centennial Anniversary to develop and execute innovative new approaches that will ensure that our National Parks achieve another century of success.

It is imperative that we utilize the 2016 Centennial to explore new funding models that can be utilized to supplement the taxpayer investments needed to prepare and sustainably fund our parks for another 100 years of service. Without enhancements and improvements we risk a first time visit to a national park becoming a one-time visit instead of a life-long love for these amazing places.

This new paradigm must include finding new ways to incentivize even greater philanthropic and corporate investments in our parks going forward. We must see supporting our parks not as just the role of taxpayers and Congress or just private citizens or foundations. We must see it as working together in concert to support our parks with federal funds, private philanthropy, corporate partnerships, fees and volunteerism.

The Centennial of the National Park Service comes around only once and the focus of millions of Americans are already on our national parks and will be there through the end of 2016. We have a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on this momentum and excitement to help prepare the National Park Service for a second century of success. This will require that we place our political and philosophical differences aside to work jointly on behalf of future generations so that they too can experience and realize the many benefits of "America's Best Idea" as we have.

We look forward to working with the entire committee and the rest of our emerging coalition to continue refining and ultimately enacting this vitally important legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.