

TESTIMONY OF  
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U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
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On “Encouraging the Next Generation to Visit National Parks”

Chairman Daines, Ranking Member Hirono, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing on Encouraging the Next Generation to Visit National Parks and inviting me to testify. My name is Will Shafroth and I am the President & CEO of the National Park Foundation, the Congressionally-chartered philanthropic partner of the National Park Service.

Chartered by Congress in 1967, the National Park Foundation was founded on a legacy that began more than a century ago, when private citizens from all walks of life acted to establish and protect our national parks. Today, the National Park Foundation carries on that tradition as the only national charitable nonprofit whose sole mission is to directly support the National Park Service.

As you know, 2016 was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Park Service. The National Park Service and National Park Foundation worked together hand in hand to take advantage of this ‘once in a lifetime’ opportunity to bring Americans of all ages, races, genders, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and political affiliations together to celebrate the Centennial and look forward to the second century of our national parks.

Part of that effort is the Find Your Park / Encuentra Tu Parque public education and engagement campaign ([FindYourPark.com](http://FindYourPark.com) / [Encuentra Tu Parque.com](http://Encuentra Tu Parque.com)), which was designed to inspire all Americans to connect with, enjoy, and support America’s national parks. We focused specifically on the millennial generation who have shown less interest in national parks than other generations.

In its first two and a half years, Find Your Park is showing success – both in connecting all Americans to our parks and in beginning to engage the next generation of park users and supporters. The steady increase in visitation to our parks the past 3 years – to a record 331 million in 2016 – is indication that our collective efforts are working.

NPF’s work with NPS over the last several years has also focused on capitalizing on philanthropic enthusiasm for our parks as part of our Centennial Campaign for America’s National Parks. Launched in February 2016 with an initial goal of \$350 million, the campaign has raised \$429 million to date towards a goal of \$500 million.

## **Find Your Park/Encuentra Tu Parque**

In April 2015, NPF and NPS kicked off the Find Your Park/Encuentra Tu Parque public education and engagement campaign. Fully funded by corporate partners, the campaign utilized those partnerships, earned and donated media, NPS and celebrity storytellers, members of Congress, social media, and other technology to engage Americans with their parks and spread the knowledge that there are 417 parks located in every state and territory in the United States, from iconic parks such as Acadia, Glacier, Yellowstone, Rocky Mountain, Great Smoky Mountains, Cuyahoga Valley, Denali, and Mt. Rainier, to the smaller historic and cultural sites in our own communities. The goal of Find Your Park was to increase visitation to our national parks with a special focus on millennials and diverse audiences. As America becomes younger and more diverse, we must engage the next generation to visit, love, and support our parks for these special places to survive and thrive for another century.

The campaign has been a resounding success not only measured by the record visitation to our parks but by the 15 billion views of Find Your Park social media content, including 885,000 uses of the Find Your Park hashtag and 76,300 Find Your Park stories submitted by the public, including members of Congress. These personal stories showcase the inspiration for and importance of an individual finding their park and have helped spread the movement's message around the country and the world. NPS and NPF social media followers increased by 1.8 million people across both organizations' national accounts. These channels in and of themselves can help attract visitors – the best of them share stunning pictures as well as important information about visiting parks and upcoming events like meetups and tours.

Importantly, one in three millennials – our target audience – reported being familiar with the Find Your Park campaign and 83% said they are somewhat or very likely to visit a national park.

We also have corporate partners – including premier partners American Express, Budweiser, Subaru, REI Co-op, Humana, Disney; as well as and national partners Coca-Cola and Coleman – that were willing to fund and participate in the campaign through various activations to engage and connect people around our parks. The campaign also worked with partners like the out-of-home advertising industry that donated billboard, bus stop, and other spaces for Find Your Park and Encuentra Tu Parque content.

## **Parks 101**

The success of Find Your Park and the broader increase in visitation has been both a success and a challenge to the National Park Service. The increase in visitors has affected the most well-known parks – Yosemite, Yellowstone, Glacier, Grand Canyon, Rocky Mountain, and Acadia to name a few – and has led to traffic congestion and greater demand on already strained infrastructure. As more than one park superintendent has said: Find Your Park, but find someone else's park because mine is very overcrowded.

To spread out the increase in visitors, the Foundation has recently launched the next iteration of the Find Your Park campaign – Parks 101 – to coincide with the 101<sup>st</sup> birthday of the National Park Service. This series is designed to highlight some of the lesser-known parks in the system as well as stories and experiences. So far in 2017 we've enlisted *Hamilton: An American Musical* star Jordan Fisher to feature both Channel Islands National Park and Hamilton Grange National Memorial, which along with the hit Broadway show has helped inspire visitation to this memorial; Navy veteran and Paralympian Brad Snyder's exploration of Maryland's Monocacy National Battlefield earned coverage in *The Washington Post*; Olympian Dominique Dawes' visit to monuments around DC was featured on WTOP Radio; TV stars Rutina Wesley and Dawn Lyen-Gardner highlighted New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park and Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; and country music star Dierks Bentley's love for incredible places like Crater Lake National Park was featured in *People* magazine.

By highlighting some of our less visited national parks, Parks 101 is designed to spread visitation throughout the system while also showcasing parks that are closer to population areas, and having the added benefit of inspiring younger and more diverse visitors to our national parks.

### **Centennial Campaign for America's National Parks**

In addition to working to increase and diversify park visitation through Find Your Park, we've sought to capitalize on increased philanthropic enthusiasm for our parks by raising money to support key programs and projects throughout the system.

In February 2016 we launched the most ambitious fundraising campaign in our history – the Centennial Campaign for America's National Parks – with a goal of \$350 million. I'm proud to share that to date we've raised \$429 million for our parks towards a new goal of \$500 million. The campaign is scheduled to last through the end of 2018.

This money has been spent with an eye toward improving the visitor experience through the rehabilitation and repair of trails and facilities, protecting and restoring wildlife habitat, connecting 4<sup>th</sup> graders and their families to parks, and supporting the work of youth and veterans corps to enhance our parks.

### **Infrastructure**

The Foundation has found that donors are enthusiastic about projects in National Parks that rehabilitate, repair, and build trails as well as restoring historic buildings and Memorials – like the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument.

A few projects include:

- \$150,000 to restore the helical staircase and replicate and install the original light fixtures at the historic Many Glacier Hotel; and
- nearly \$80,000 to support the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conservation Corps working on reconstruction of the iconic and highly trafficked Hidden Lake Trail at Logan Pass in **Glacier National Park**
- \$174,050 for 60 young people to rehabilitate and reconstruct the Bierstadt Lake Trail in **Rocky Mountain National Park**
- \$64,000 to rehabilitate, stabilize, and preserve the important Palmer House; and
- \$160,000 in partnership with Friends of the Great Smokies, to rehabilitate the Chimney Tops Trail in **Great Smoky Mountains National Park**
- \$2,000,000 to support youth conservation corps at **Mount Rainier National Park** and **Olympic National Park** for the next ten years
- \$18.5 million for the rehabilitation and restoration of and expanded public space at **The Lincoln Memorial**
- \$12.35 million for the full restoration of **Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial**
- \$5.3 million to renovate and rehabilitate the **Marine Corps War Memorial (Iwo Jima)**
- \$3 million to renovate the elevator at the **Washington Monument**

### Every Kid in a Park

Engaging the next generation to visit our parks is a long-term effort and benefits from reaching young people at an early age to spark lifelong connections. Many of today's park visitors have memories of riding in the back of a station wagon during a family trip to national parks. It's vital that we make efforts to forge the same connections with current and future generations today.

Transportation is one of the greatest barriers facing young people accessing our parks. That's why the Foundation has focused significant funding on transportation grants including in our support for the Every Kid in a Park (EKIP) program. In support of the EKIP program, NPF has provided \$5.5 million in grants to provide transportation for more than 500,000 4<sup>th</sup> graders from Title I and other underserved schools around the country to access national parks and other public lands. Importantly, based on surveys of our grantees, many of the children are visiting national parks and public lands for the first time.

We've also allocated resources to focus cities – Baltimore, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Miami, St. Louis, St. Paul, and Seattle – which allows parks to collaborate and leverage capacity with their surrounding communities to get more 4<sup>th</sup> graders into parks and onto public lands.

This program has proven very popular as evidenced by members of Congress participating in field trips at parks and the bipartisan legislation introduced in both the

Senate and House to codify the program – by Subcommittee members Senators Alexander and Heinrich here in the Senate.

For example, we've granted:

- \$390,000 to support **Cuyahoga Valley National Park's** work to connect all 4<sup>th</sup> graders in Cleveland Public Schools and parts of Akron Public Schools.
- \$60,000 to connect Alaska youth to their national parks and public lands including **Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, Tongass National Forest and Kobuk Valley National Park**, among others.
- \$64,380 to connect Hawaiian youth with **Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail, Kaloko-Honokohau National Historical Park, and WWII Valor in the Pacific National Monument**.
- \$10,000 to **Keweenaw National Historical Park** to transport 700 fourth graders from 22 rural schools in Upper Michigan to the park's Calumet Unit in 2018 for its Copper TRACES program.
- \$10,840 to **Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore** to connect 1,100 fourth graders from three school districts in the Upper Peninsula to the park and surrounding public lands. Students will enjoy hands-on activities aligned to Michigan State Academic Standards.
- \$10,000 to **River Raisin National Battlefield Park** to connect 4,500 Wayne County fourth graders to the park for immersive living history stations exploring the War of 1812. The park will also work with Youth Connection of Detroit to offer summer kayaking experiences for underserved inner-city youth.
- \$10,000 to **Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore** to connect 1,000 Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District fourth graders to the park for its Winter Snowshoe Experience program.
- \$9,000 to **Chaco Culture National Historical Park** which connected 100 Pueblo youth to the site for an overnight camping trip during the 2015-2016 school year.
- \$2,850 to **Petroglyph National Monument** to connect 60 Isleta Elementary School students to the park as well as to El Malpais National Monument and Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

This is the type of program that can engage the next generation of visitors and spark a lifelong love of our parks.

#### Standing Up New Parks & Protecting Inholdings

Along with providing funding to existing parks, we have helped stand up some of the new parks established in the last few years. The National Park Service has an important role to play in telling the story – good and bad – of America. In the past several years we've raised money to support:

- \$8 million for **Pullman National Monument**
- \$1 million for **Stonewall National Monument**

- \$1 million for **Belmont-Paul Women’s Equality National Monument**

We’ve also worked to protect valuable inholdings. For example, in 2016 we worked with the Grand Teton National Park Foundation to raise \$23 million, matched with \$23 million from NPS’s allocation from LWCF, to protect the 640-acre Antelope Flats parcel with Grand Teton National Park. This parcel was under threat of development, which would have ruined not only the pristineness of the park but also altered wildlife migration routes. That \$46 million raised for this project went directly to Wyoming state schools.

### **Centennial Legislation**

Last year Congress, thanks to the work and leadership of several on this subcommittee including Senator Portman, Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell, passed the National Park Service Centennial Act.

There were several key provisions of this legislation that will help connect the next generation to our parks including increasing the amount of money that can be spent on the Volunteers in Parks program and giving preferential hiring to volunteers and veterans.

Additionally, the legislation dedicates funding to an endowment that NPF will manage, the very successful \$1:\$1 Centennial Challenge matching program, and for the first time, authorizes NPF to receive annual appropriations.

This money will be spent on key projects and programs throughout the National Park System that are designed to improve the visitor experience like trail rehabilitation and restoration, and to initiate and grow programs that connect people to parks.

### **Looking Ahead**

Our work on engaging the next generation and inspiring all Americans to visit our parks did not begin with the 2016 National Park Service Centennial and did not end in the wake of this milestone. NPF’s efforts continue on all of our existing projects and programs like Every Kid in a Park, raising and granting out philanthropic dollars for key projects and programs, and Find Your Park/Encuentra Tu Parque/Parks 101.

But given all that we’ve accomplished in our partnership with NPS and our commitment to ensuring the next generation not only visits but loves our parks, we’re currently planning new projects and programs to ensure that happens.

This means working even closer with partners including Friends Groups, concessionaires, volunteer organizations, service corps, and others to accomplish our common goals to improve and enhance infrastructure. It also includes exploring connectivity and technology in parks to enhance the visitor experience through innovation, including reservation systems, fee collection, and education and interpretation platforms.

Despite our best efforts, not everyone will be able to visit parks. Fortunately, technology and the multitalented staff throughout the park system have the ability to bring the amazing stories of our national parks to all Americans and especially our youth.

We must provide more opportunities for volunteers including veterans to invest their time, passion, and expertise across the National Park System. Such opportunities spark connections to our parks and transform one-time volunteers into lifelong national park supporters while also tackling key deferred maintenance projects.

## **Conclusion**

The National Park Foundation understands the importance of engaging with and ensuring that the next generation of visitors experience the wonder of our national parks. Our work in partnership with the National Park Service to achieve this goal has already begun and has yielded dividends. We look forward to continuing this work and remain committed to seeing it through.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.