

OPENING STATEMENT
Sen. Steve Daines
Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Parks
September 27, 2017

The Subcommittee will come to order.

This is the third hearing of the National Parks Subcommittee this Congress – a continuation of the important work of oversight of the National Park Service. In collaboration with Ranking Member Hirono, this afternoon’s hearing will examine a collection of topics and ideas to attract younger generations to our national parks, and how the increasing role of technology supports not only the visitor experience, but park operations too. Technology is becoming entwined with every aspect of our life, in our jobs, our home life and even our outdoor recreation. In fact, I am holding my second High Tech Summit in Missoula, 100 miles south of Glacier Park, to highlight and examine the growing role of tech in our lives.

As we have learned, the NPS Centennial was a banner year with record setting visitation numbers. What the numbers don’t show is that the majority of visitors to national parks – aging Baby Boomers - do not reflect the make up of the American population.

The younger generations, our kids and grandkids, will eventually assume the leadership and responsibility for our government, our corporations, our businesses, and our national parks. That’s why it’s so important for us not only to engage youth and young adults, but to instill a sense of ownership and excitement in these national treasures.

The lives of younger generations are much more steeped in technology than older adults. This poses a challenge, but an opportunity too. One of the things we will explore today is how to knit together technology with the park experience.

Less exciting, but equally important, is the role of technology in park operations and how the Park Service plans to keep pace with best business practices and customer service.

Something young and old alike are experiencing – especially after the successful Centennial campaign - is overcrowding in some parks, while other park sites remain fairly undiscovered. I take great pride in iconic parks like Yellowstone and Glacier, in my home state, but also in Montana’s lesser known national treasures such as the Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site, just 50 miles north of

Yellowstone and other wonderful sites such as the Little Big Horn Battlefield. Much work remains to be done by the Park Service and the National Park Foundation to better inform the public and foster visitation, especially for those living nearby, of lesser known - but no less interesting - sites under the Park Service's stewardship.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how the National Park Service can catch the imagination and passion of our youth and future stewards, to improve the visitor experience in its second century.

I will now turn to our ranking member, Senator Hirono, for her remarks.

###