

**STATEMENT OF JONATHAN B. JARVIS, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE NATURAL  
RESOURCES COMMITTEE CONCERNING BUILDING ON AMERICA'S BEST IDEA:  
THE NEXT CENTURY OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM.**

**May 25, 2010**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the approaching second century of the national park system.

Nearly 100 years ago—on August 25, 1916—President Woodrow Wilson signed into law the National Park Service Organic Act. The Organic Act brought to fruition years of hard work by such visionary men as President Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir, Frederick Law Olmsted, Stephen Mather and others who realized that our national parks—the best idea America ever had—needed a fundamental statement of purpose, and a body of dedicated professionals to care for them.

Since that time, the national park system has grown from 36 parks, monuments, and reservations to 392 units in 49 states. The National Park Service today has a workforce of roughly 22,000 employees. Last year, we had 285 million visits, with a visitor satisfaction rate of 96 percent. As we prepare to enter our second century, it is highly appropriate to take a step back, to reflect, and to consider where the Service should be headed in the next hundred years, and the steps we should be taking now to get us there.

When I was sworn in as director of the National Park Service, I told our employees that with their help, we could build a more adaptive and innovative organization that could better respond to the challenges we would face in our second century. I reiterated that my core responsibilities were the stewardship and care of our national parks, service to our visitors, and attention to our community programs found throughout the country. I also mentioned the four areas I wished to address first: providing our employees the resources they need to help them do their jobs and to succeed, assuring the continued relevancy of our parks by connecting the American people to them, rededicating ourselves to the stewardship of our natural and cultural resources, and using education to help people to understand and appreciate the complexities of the natural world and of the historic events that have shaped it and our lives.

National Parks Second Century Commission Report

The areas I identified as priorities, while focused on immediate needs, dovetail with the recommendations of the National Parks Second Century Commission—a very distinguished group of business leaders, conservationists, public servants, scholars, and statesmen, led by former Senators Howard Baker and J. Bennett Johnston. This panel was convened by the National Parks Conservation Association in 2008-2009 to give serious consideration to what the National Park Service needs to do in its next century. There is much in the commission's report,

*Advancing the National Park Idea*, that is helpful. In very broad outline, the commission's four recommendations are to:

- Create a 21st-century national park idea, one that will meet the needs of the time.
- Strengthen stewardship of our Nation's resources, and broaden citizen service to the agency's mission.
- Build a 21st-century National Park Service, one that is effective, responsive, and accountable.
- Ensure permanent and sustainable funding for the work of the National Park Service.

Each of the four general recommendations has a number of specifics associated with it. I would like to take this opportunity to address a few of the specific recommendations.

## **21st-Century National Park Idea**

### A National Park Service Plan

One of the specific recommendations for creating a 21st-century national park idea is for Congress to require the National Park Service to develop a National Park System Plan. The plan would strategically identify natural and historic themes of the United States that are non-existent or underrepresented within the system from which additions to the system would be identified. It would also identify those places where the Service can best play the role of partner, assisting and advancing the efforts of others. Such a plan would provide a strategic approach to building a cohesive, connected, and relevant system. It would entail restoring the requirement of the plan that was in law from 1980 to 1996. The strategic vision the plan would provide is perhaps more necessary now than ever. There are several proposals pending in Congress to authorize the NPS to study areas as possible additions to the national park system, or as new national heritage areas, wild and scenic rivers, or national trails. A National Park System Plan would help guide Congress and the National Park Service in determining which areas would help fill the gaps in the system and which would be more appropriately managed by others.

### Heightening Awareness of the National Park System

In addition to filling any gaps in the system, we should also consider steps to heighten awareness of existing units, and of the system as a whole. People do not have a problem identifying Yosemite National Park or Yellowstone National Park as parts of the national park system. But many people would be surprised to learn that the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, and Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway are also parts of the system. One of the recommendations of the Second Century Commission that we believe has merit is to substantially reduce the more than two dozen different park titles currently used for units of the national park system. We feel strongly that a nomenclature with fewer titles would make the public more aware of the national park system as a whole.

### Engaging Diverse Audiences

Another of the commission's specific recommendations is that the National Park Service invite all Americans to build a personal connection with the parks, and place a high priority on

engaging diverse audiences. The National Park Service wholeheartedly agrees. Our parks tell our story, the story of the American people. The National Park Service has begun to tell more of that story in recent years, parts that have been neglected or under-emphasized. Newer sites like Manzanar National Historic Site and Minidoka National Historic Site tell of the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, and Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site and Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site tell of the long struggle for African-American civil rights. Similarly, our civil war parks now seek to explain the causes of that terrible conflict, instead of focusing just on the battles that were fought. As such, our parks are forging connections with segments of our rich and varied populace whose stories have not always been heard.

It is vitally important that our parks continue engaging all Americans, particularly given the changing demographics of our country. America is much larger and more diverse today than it was in 1916. In 1916, our population was roughly 100 million; today it is 309 million. In 2003, for the first time, there were more Hispanic-Americans than African-Americans. Hispanic-Americans currently make up nearly 16% of the population and will make up about 25% of the population in 2050. And nearly one out of four Americans under the age of 18 has at least one immigrant parent. This goes directly to one of my four priorities, namely, keeping the national parks relevant.

It is clear that the Service needs a three-part strategy to ensure relevancy in our changing society. First, we should look to the inclusion of new areas or use existing areas to tell the missing pieces of our American story. Second, we should take positive steps to ensure that the interpretive and educational programs offered at our parks are relevant, insightful, and of the highest quality, so that we not only attract diverse audiences, but ensure that the parks provide meaningful experiences to all Americans. Third, we should hire NPS employees who reflect the demographics of this country.

### Creating a National Heritage Area System

As we look to the future on how to develop strategies to preserve our natural areas and cultural history, we recognize that protecting critical resources does not necessarily mean ownership by the Federal Government. Consistent with the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative, we will continue to support locally driven efforts to protect large landscapes. For NPS, this means preserving the collective stories of our Nation by means of national heritage areas. Currently, there are 49 such areas, across 32 states, yet there is no clearly defined program. The Second Century Commission recommends the enactment of program legislation creating a system of national heritage areas, and establishing a process for studying and designating them in a uniform manner. The National Park Service agrees with this recommendation, and believes that it would strengthen the ability of the Service to provide assistance to local efforts where appropriate.

### Making Education Central

The commission's report repeatedly emphasizes the centrality of education to the National Park Service's mission. We agree completely, and education is one of my four priorities. There can

be no doubt that education is a primary responsibility of the National Park Service. Parks truly are classrooms that help people understand and appreciate the complexities of the natural world and of the historic events that have shaped our lives. Service learning opportunities must be enhanced. There are many partners in the educational community who welcome the National Park Service, and we will continue to reach out to them. To elevate this function, I have created an Associate Director for Education and Interpretation.

## **Strengthening Stewardship**

### Make Full Use of Community Assistance Programs

Under the broad heading of strengthening stewardship, the commission also recommends that the National Park Service make full use of its extensive portfolio of community assistance programs. Congress gave the National Park Service these responsibilities in a series of legislative enactments dating back to the early 1960s. Again, the Service is in complete agreement with the commission. We will continue to assist communities in conserving rivers, preserving open space, and developing trails and greenways through the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. We will continue to work in partnership with State and local governments in the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities through the Land and Water Conservation Fund State Assistance Program. We will continue to staff and provide technical support for both the National Historic Landmark and National Natural Landmark programs. Through the National Register of Historic Places, the Service will help coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources. In partnership with the State Historic Preservation Offices, we will continue to administer the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program in conjunction with the Internal Revenue Service, to encourage private sector rehabilitation of historic buildings and thus spur community revitalization. Working with our State and local partners through these external programs, we can continue to bolster stewardship of our natural and cultural resources, another of my four priorities.

## **Building a 21st-century National Park Service**

### Reauthorize the National Park System Advisory Board

The commission calls on Congress to reauthorize the National Park System Advisory Board. This body of citizen advisors was first established in the 1935 Historic Sites, Buildings and Antiquities Act. Among other duties, the board makes recommendations regarding designation of both National Historic and National Natural Landmarks, and as to the national historic significance of proposed national historic trails. In recent years, Congress has extended the life of the board in one-year increments only. This unduly complicates the appointment of members, and impedes the work of the board. A longer extension of the board would help with its continuity and work with the leadership of the National Park Service. It would also assure action on pending landmark and trail proposals.

### Support Leadership Development

The commission calls for “substantial new efforts to support leadership development.” We agree that the National Park Service must create a workplace that continues to attract the brightest and best, one that values and learns from its employees. Consistently in OPM’s annual surveys of Federal employees, a large majority of our National Park Service workforce says that it likes the work it does, feels that the work is important, and derives a sense of personal accomplishment from such work. But, as with any organization, continued improvements must and will be made, and I have placed workforce at the top of my four priorities. Some recent positive steps the Service has taken include:

- Creating a new superintendents’ academy, one that allows superintendents to tailor the 18-month program to meet their individual developmental needs.
- Completing a year-long, comprehensive review of training and development, and implementing its recommendations across the Service.
- Establishing an institutionalized effort with partnering universities to enhance our leadership development opportunities.
- Improving our applicant pool by implementing OPM’s on-line USAStaffing system, making the application process easier and allowing the Service to fill vacancies more quickly.

The National Park Service is committed to becoming a model employer for the 21st-century.

#### Create a Center for Innovation

The commission recommends that the Service “establish a Center for Innovation to gather and share lessons learned quickly throughout the organization.” I am pleased to be able to report that the National Park Service is already working to accomplish this. We have begun discussing how we might set up a clearinghouse for new ideas, best practices, and systematic ways to address organizational challenges. It is our hope that such a center would enable creative thinking at all levels of the National Park Service.

#### International Partnerships

Finally, the Second Century Commission report states that “the need for international engagement by the Park Service has never been more urgent.” The National Park Service encourages, facilitates, and coordinates interactions with foreign counterparts to share expertise. This helps to ensure that National Park Service resources are protected from global threats including invasive species and loss of habitat.

The National Park Service has learned invaluable lessons on managing resources in our parks from other countries. To take an example from the Service’s earliest years, the concept of a “ranger naturalist” dates back to the 1910s, when a few Americans visited Switzerland and were impressed with the example of alpine guides bringing schoolchildren into the mountains to teach them about local flora and fauna. More recently, National Park Service employees have learned about invasive species management in South Africa, the preservation of adobe buildings in Mexico, and island restoration efforts in New Zealand. The National Park Service will continue to be called upon to work with foreign governments, other Federal agencies, other public entities, educational institutions, and private nonprofit organizations to promote the development,

management, and protection of national parks, natural and cultural resource heritage sites, and other protected areas around the world.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you and the other members of the subcommittee may have.