

Committee on Natural Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands

Oversight hearing on "Building on America's Best Idea: The
Next Century of the National Park System."

May 25, 2010, 10:00 a.m. Room 1324 , Longworth House Office
building

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Invited to Testify in my personal capacity

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Committee members
for the privilege to testify before you.

I am not a specialist in the National Park system or in
Conservation, but over the past thirty years I have worked
closely with the Park Service' in its international
outreach; first, as the State Department Officer
responsible for preparing US delegations to meetings of the
UNESCO world Heritage Committee and, since retirement, on
behalf of the United Nations Foundation on shared
priorities such as biodiversity protection. But this
morning I speak for myself, alone and On the basis of this
experience

The Park Service's International Office has for many
years done the heavy lifting in preparing and leading our
government's participation in the World Heritage
Convention, which over the years has identified and
inscribed on the World Heritage List 877 sites worldwide
deemed to be of outstanding universal value. States
Parties to the Convention take it seriously because of
the political and economic value they perceive as coming
from having sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, The
Convention is taken seriously also by the international
conservation community because of the growing awareness
that many World Heritage sites are not adequately managed
and that there needs to be a concerted international effort
to conserve and protect them. A measure of the importance
given the Committee by States Parties and conservationists
is that the annual 21- member committee meeting usually
draws 800- to 900 delegates even, in recent years, to such

distant locations such as Cairns, Australia, Durban, South Africa and Christchurch New Zealand.

Permit me to observe that while there is usually background noise of scores of whispered conversations during meeting of this size, a hush falls, when the U.S. takes the floor and most particularly when delegates become aware that a representative of the National Park Service at the microphone. Why? Because Everyone knows that the speaker will speak knowledgeably and credibly about the recognition, conservation, and preservation of these sites of outstanding universal value and how local communities can on the one hand help in their conservation and, on the other, benefit from the economic dividends they have the potential to provide. The Park Service, under both Republican and democratic administrations, gives credibility to the U.S. Delegation at these meetings. To such a degree, in fact, that after representing the U.S. at successive Committee meetings in Marrakesh and Cairns, Australia without Park Service representation, I recommended to the Department of State that it was better for the U.S, not to attend such meeting than to attend without the professional expertise of the Park Service.

There are likely many reasons for the international respect for the Park Service and through it for the United States. But in large measure, it appears to me to be a return on the sound investments over the years in international programs such as the National Park Service-Peace Corps partnership launched in 1961 that grew into the largest volunteer conservation program in the world with several thousand volunteers working in wildlife and forestry preservation. Beyond its primary goal of conservation, this partnership also enhanced staff quality at both the NPS and Peace corps as well as contributing to the United States government's international heritage protection diplomacy.

The International Seminar on the Administration of National Parks and Equivalent reserves had comparable success and continues to bring long-term benefits to the United States. The program, run, at the time in partnership with the Park Service Office of International Affairs, the Universities of Michigan, Miami and Arizona, Parks Canada and sometimes Mexico, had at one time trained the majority of National Park Executives, system directors

and key managers worldwide. These programs created a worldwide conservation community, put the US and the National Park Service on the map as the key conservation player internationally and, very importantly, served to introduce hundreds of innovative ideas and concepts to the National Park Service management. It is noteworthy that the current Acting Director of the world Heritage Center, Inshore Rao, is a Seminar graduate. This is one reason the United States has significant influence at the Center. Regrettably, funding for the international seminar eroded and, like the National Park Service-Peace Corps Agreement, it was discontinued. But t Fortunately, some good things continue to happen! As part of a commitment on the part of the United States to help strengthen the conservation of World Heritage sites around the World, the National Park Service recently initiated the "U.S. World Heritage Fellows" program. It offers training opportunities to qualified candidates who wish to learn from the U.S. experience in managing and protecting World Heritage sites. The Fellows work alongside National Park Service professionals in a variety of areas including resource management, concessions, education, planning and law enforcement. Travel expenses are paid by the Park Services International office while individual parks provide housing and, in many cases, a modest living stipend.

In 2012, the World Heritage Convention, which is a projection on the international scale of the National Parks concept, will celebrate its 40th anniversary. The convention was an American invention and the United States, under then President Nixon, was the first country to ratify it.

With the forces that shape our future becoming increasingly global in scope, I respectfully suggest to the Committee that it is time to provide the National Park Service with the means to renew and expand its international outreach. In particular to renew its partnership with the Peace Corps and to relaunch the International Seminar on the Administration of National Parks. I recommend also that it consider support for emerging new programs such as "Global Parks" which, working with the Park Service, mobilizes retired conservation specialists for service abroad. These are the kinds of international initiatives that we do very well and, as the record shows, they are investments that bring a high

return. There are other opportunities, many at low cost, such as providing administrative funds to incorporate the widely respected "World Heritage in Young Hands" program into schools and youth groups. If funds were available, the National Park Service's International office could also provide valuable training to African site managers through the African World Heritage Fund, a newly created body to help sub-Saharan African nations to conserve their World Heritage sites and to identify and submit others for inscription. China, India, the Netherlands and Norway currently provide most of the external funding for this fund. It is a serious and well-managed program that has requested and badly needs U.S. expertise. In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, it is my firm conviction, based on thirty years experience of working side by side with the National Park Service that to the degree the international outreach of the National Park Service can be strengthened and expanded, to that degree the US national interest and the global good will be served.