

**Statement of Dan Puskar**  
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**Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands**  
**Natural Resources Committee**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Concerning "The Role of Partnerships in National Parks"**

September 23, 2010

Mr. Chairman and Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. The National Park Foundation ("Foundation") is proud to be the Congressionally chartered charitable partner of the National Park Service (PL 90-209) and commends this committee for its commitment to prepare our national parks for the challenges and opportunities of the next century and for highlighting the role that partnerships will play in this future.

The Foundation serves as the philanthropic and promotional arm of the national park system, much like friends groups service individual parks or park groups. Through its grant-making programs and public outreach, the Foundation works with National Park Service leadership in Washington, D.C. and in parks across the country to fund conservation and restoration efforts, foster stewardship, engage youth, promote citizenship and preserve history in the places where it happened. The Foundation helps the Park Service to fulfill its mission to connect the American people to their parks in ways that a government agency cannot. Unlike other Congressionally chartered nonprofits established to support land management agencies, the Foundation receives no federal appropriations.

In my testimony, I will highlight how the Foundation collaborates with the National Park Service at all levels to ensure that its grant-making directly addresses park priorities. We embrace an entrepreneurial spirit that allows us to pilot projects and ideas that may provide innovative solutions to the challenges of connecting youth and underserved audiences to our parks. Inevitably, we have experienced successes and failures, and continue to learn how to improve our partnership and our practices.

**PHILANTHROPY IN THE NATIONAL PARKS**

Since Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872, private philanthropy has been at the core of the preservation, protection, and improvement of America's national parks, and will continue to be essential in securing their future.

Private philanthropy helped create individual national parks, as well as the National Park Service itself. The earliest philanthropic acts spanned the country from California to Maine. In 1907, Mr. and Mrs. William Kent donated what became Muir Woods National Monument in California. In June 1916, a group of private donors donated to the federal government the land for Sieur de Monts National Monument in Maine, the very same

land that would one day grow and develop into Acadia National Park. Stephen Mather himself, the first director of the National Park Service, contributed from his personal fortune to support parks and their administration both before and after he led the agency. In addition to land purchases, Mather enlisted several western railroads to join him in contributing \$48,000 to publish the *National Parks Portfolio*, which publicized national parks and helped persuade Congress to create the National Park Service in 1916.

With the help of friends groups and other nonprofit park partners, the Foundation has carried on this legacy of private support of our national parks for over forty years so that they may be preserved and protected for future generations.

### **OUR IMPACT**

Congress established the Foundation in 1967 to encourage private philanthropic support for America's national parks. Over the past five years (FY2005-2009) the Foundation has provided over \$89.3 million in grants and program support and more than \$35.5 million in contributed goods and services to the national park system, a total contribution of \$124.8 million.

The Foundation is authorized to accept and administer "any gifts, devises, or bequests, either absolutely or in trust of real or personal property or any income therefrom or other interest therein for the benefit of or in connection with, the National Park Service, its activities, or its services." This broad mandate has been used to:

- Between FY2005-FY2009, manage an average of \$51.9 million restricted net assets for numerous parks and park initiatives, some of which do not have friends groups.
- Establish the Everglades National Park Freshwater Wetlands Mitigation Trust Fund in 1983 to restore and monitor the 6,600 acres "Hole-In-The Donut" area of the park. The Foundation has received and distributed \$67.4 million since the inception of this massive restoration project.
- Earn interest and increase the impact on restricted contributions until required by the national park system. For example, in February 2010, the Foundation received \$5.5 million for the Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial. This amount represents 10% of the total estimated cost of construction and has been set aside to offset the costs of perpetual maintenance and preservation of the commemorative work once it is completed. It is unlikely to have any disbursement for more than a decade.
- Provide technical assistance and cost-effective financial operations for facilitating philanthropy at national park units without a friends group.

The Foundation also raises funds for specific grant-making and programs to strengthen park resources and visitor experiences. In FY2010, the Foundation awarded grants to 108 parks and National Park Service offices totaling \$2.5 million. This amount does not include \$10.2 million to complete the first phase of construction for the Flight 93

National Memorial, monies that have been leveraged by \$18.5 million from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and \$13 million from federal appropriations.

In its grant-making, the Foundation has found in recent years that the best ideas for funding truly come from the parks. Recently established grant-making programs include the following examples:

- Through the *America's Best Idea* grant program, the Foundation has invested almost \$900,000 since 2009 to reach traditionally underserved groups and empower them to create strong, lasting bonds of stewardship.
- The *Impact Grants* program has provided over \$500,000 in two years to help 62 parks that needed a small amount of additional funding to strengthen the efforts of a local partnership or turn an underfunded and innovative idea into a successful project.
- *Active Trails!* grants promote healthy lifestyles and recreation on land and water trails while protecting and enhancing our national parks' trail resources. Volunteers, community groups, corporate partners, students and educators get involved with their national parks through hands-on trail work, citizen science and learning activities.

In each of these grant-making opportunities, the Foundation encourages individual parks to define precisely what the grant will fund and how it will make a difference for the park and the American public. Grantees are encouraged to use this seed money from the Foundation to leverage other monies or contributed services from other partners thus extending their reach and impact.

Regarding the *America's Best Idea* grant program, the Foundation does not specify what constitutes an "underserved group." Instead, parks provide unique answers that fit their gateway communities and stakeholders needs. Consequently, the Foundation is able to fund a diverse array of meaningful projects. For example, in 2009 grants enabled Puebloan youth to spend weeks exploring Bandelier National Monument's backcountry and educating visitors about their cultural connection to this northern New Mexico monument. At Salem Maritime National Historic Site in Massachusetts, Boys and Girls Club members learned about maritime trade during the 18th and 19th centuries aboard the wooden boat *Friendship*. With this grant program, the Foundation and Park Service leadership look for applicants with projects that are simultaneously fundable, scalable and innovative. To date, 68 parks have employed an *America's Best Idea* grant to give life and legs to new ideas at the local level.

In addition to its grant-making, the Foundation manages select national programs of significance. *Electronic Field Trips* ("EFT"), a signature program of the Foundation, give students the opportunity to virtually visit a national park that they might otherwise never get a chance to visit. An EFT consists of an hour-long broadcast from a national park featuring rangers and youth hosts—often from a local school—who focus on

subjects relevant to the park. The broadcast is coupled with a website that offers interactive tools for students and downloadable lesson plans for their teachers.

Since 2004, the Foundation has participated in EFTs to 11 national parks including Great Smoky Mountains, Grand Canyon, Carlsbad Caverns, Hawaii Volcanoes and Grand Teton National Parks. Our next EFT to North Cascades National Park this October will study the effects of climate change in parks. Nearly 6,000 teachers registered for the last spring's EFT to Bryce Canyon National Park reaching 120,000 students in the U.S. and on military bases in six other nations with a potential additional 7.5 million viewers through the subsequent rebroadcast by Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and other educational TV stations.

The Foundation also makes an impact by bringing specialized skills and technologies to assist the National Park Service in sharing its story with the American people. The Foundation coordinates with the National Park Service to promote the entirety of the national park system through joint awareness campaigns. The Foundation provides marketing, communications and branding support for events and programs that recognize the breadth of the system and may be activated in any park. As an example, for National Park Week 2010, the Foundation developed a tool kit of posters, banners, informational brochures, website graphics, social media templates and press releases that could be customized by individual parks to highlight youth engagement under the title "Share A Park, Shape A Life."

Finally, the Foundation is eager to respond to National Park Service needs, even those that cannot be anticipated. In response to the April 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico that jeopardized the wildlife and coastline of 10 national parks, the Foundation and the National Park Service established a permanent *National Parks Disaster Recovery Fund*. In the case of catastrophic wildfires, floods and even manmade disasters, our two organizations now have a ready vehicle to help Americans direct their time, talents and monies to restore national parks marred by tragedy. Where a responsible party is identified, as with the Gulf oil spill, no funds raised will be used to mitigate what is rightfully owed to the National Park Service.

#### **PROMOTING LOCAL PARK PHILANTHROPY**

In 1998 Congress directed the Foundation to design a program to foster fundraising at the individual national park unit level (PL 105-391). In the intervening years, several models have been adopted to make the most of local community enthusiasm and expertise and the Foundation's own institutional experience.

The Foundation recognizes that bolstering sustainable friends groups is the key to successfully answering this charge from Congress. When friends groups have the capacity to promote and publicize their parks, serve as liaisons between parks and communities, and raise funds to support individual park projects, the benefits are multi-dimensional and extend well beyond park boundaries. Successful friends groups provide

the National Park Service with better resources to fulfill its mission of preserving parks for future generations. Communities reap the economic development benefits of public-private partnership and a vibrant tourism draw. Perhaps most importantly from the Foundation's perspective, citizens are afforded proactive, tangible and varied ways to connect with the lands and resources they own in common trust as Americans.

There is tremendous potential to expand the activities and reach of friends groups today. In a survey of friends groups by the Foundation in April 2010, 41% reported operating budgets of less than \$50,000 and 50% reported having fewer than one paid staff member. More than half of those polled stated that advanced training in fundraising and board development would significantly benefit their organizations. These results reflect impressive passion for our parks and a desire for greater guidance.

This year the Foundation is launching an in-depth pilot program to assist friends groups and help them become more effective and sustainable. This in-depth model has a proven track record, particularly within the land trust community, of creating more robust and efficient organizations that are better able to meet their missions. The potential also exists to help a national park form a friends group if there is sufficient community interest.

The pilot program will conduct on-site engagements with friends groups in each of the seven National Park Service regions for approximately twelve months per organization. The engagements begin with an organizational assessment that will consider such areas as organizational policies and procedures; strategic and program planning and evaluation; fundraising and resource development; and community relations and networking. In addition to fulfilling the promise of our Congressional charter, the Foundation's goal is to steadily increase the number of sustainable friends groups across the nation, broadening the landscape and growing the appetite for park philanthropy.

This pilot program builds on previous efforts whereby the Foundation successfully created new sustainable friends groups for Biscayne, Crater Lake, Dry Tortugas, Everglades, Glacier, Grand Teton, Mount Rainier, North Cascades, Olympic and Shenandoah National Parks, as well as Gateway National Recreation Area, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, and the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial.

### **SETTING PRIORITIES**

The Foundation is honored to help continue the rich tradition in which the parks were established and have been sustained—public and private interests working in tandem. The Foundation's activities benefit from our close collaboration and deep, positive relationships with all levels of the National Park Service – from the park rangers in the field to the Director himself.

As noted in our charter, the Secretary of the Interior serves as the *ex officio* Chairman of the Foundation's Board of Directors and the Director of the National Park Service serves as its Secretary. In cooperation with their fellow citizen board members, these officials direct the activities of the Foundation staff and help set its mission, budgets, grant-making areas and fundraising goals. The Secretary of the Interior and the National Park Service Director have always been invaluable resources to the board as it charts a course for our organization.

In 1998, the National Park Service and the Foundation jointly established a Superintendents Council, a platform for open dialogue between the Foundation and the National Park Service field. The Council provides a forum to receive critical feedback and advice on its current and future projects from park managers connected to the lands, resources and visitors. The Council is composed of two superintendents from each of the seven National Park Service regions who are nominated by their regional directors to exemplify the rich diversity of talent and training found in the national park system. These park managers constructively evaluate and critique the Foundation's fundraising, marketing and grant-making programs. This routine engagement helps ensure that the Foundation's projects support park-level interests and have the likelihood of on-the-ground success.

Additionally, the Foundation's offices are located in the National Park Service headquarters building in Washington, D.C. permitting daily contact between operations and program managers and Foundation staff. The primary liaisons between our organizations – the Chief of the National Park Service Office of Partnerships and Philanthropic Stewardship and the Foundation's Director of Partnerships and Government Relations – meet weekly to discuss new opportunities, manage ongoing activities and evaluate projects. This collaborative approach extends to staff-to-staff communications between Foundation and National Park Service staff in parks, regional offices and Washington, D.C.

Recently, the Foundation helped convene National Park Service and friends group leaders to discuss agreement templates that codify their partnerships and define fundraising activities. The Foundation has provided private legal counsel for these discussions, encouraging solutions that remove limitations to effective and sustainable National Park Service – friends group partnerships. Like the National Park Service, the Foundation applauds investments in templates and training that will streamline the process of establishing and growing these partnerships.

#### **THE CHARITABLE COMMUNITY FOR PARKS**

The National Park Foundation has benefited from the generosity of many individuals, foundations and corporations.

The Foundation has seen the greatest growth in its individual giving program in the past five years. In our 2010 fiscal year, the Foundation received donations from over 52,000

individuals. A robust website and a new online parks community have expanded our ability to attract donors in addition to an active direct mail program. In 2006, the Foundation established a major gift program to energize and retain individual donors who want to help connect the American people to their national parks. The Foundation benefits from the significant outreach of its Board of Directors, composed of leading philanthropists, business leaders and nonprofit directors.

Throughout its history, the Foundation has also worked with many significant corporate and foundation partners. Their support has enabled the National Park Service to enhance and expand important programs in such areas as education, preservation, community engagement, health and wellness, habitat restoration and volunteerism.

As noted in the 2009 GAO report commissioned by the Subcommittee for National Parks, Forests and Public lands and titled *Donations and Related Partnerships Benefit Parks, but Management Refinements Could Better Target Risks and Enhance Accountability*, the Foundation employs several models for corporate partnerships. The Foundation continues to pursue long-term relationships with existing and new corporations in a way that provides greater cash resources and minimizes Park Service risk.

With the support of the National Park Service, the Foundation is currently phasing out one specific model for corporate partnership. Launched in 2000, the “Proud Partners of America’s National Parks” program permitted corporations to commit certain donations, primarily in-kind services, by entering into a tri-party agreement with the Foundation and the Park Service. In return, the corporations were designated as Proud Partners, permitted to affiliate themselves with the National Park Service and the Foundation in promotional materials and granted national marketing exclusivity. To ensure marketing exclusivity, the National Park Service agreed to abstain from entering into any other nationwide advertising agreements with companies that sell the same product or service as the Proud Partner.

Although this program has reaped significant benefits for the parks, its marketing exclusivity requirements prohibited the Foundation from soliciting new corporate donors for significant periods of time. Where the Foundation and National Park Service had five Proud Partners in 2006, only one, Coca-Cola, is active today. The Foundation and the National Park Service have learned that a robust fundraising program that connects the parks and corporate partners is possible under a different model.

A new model of successful corporate partnership is one with Macy’s, Inc. From 2008 to 2010, the *Turn Over A New Leaf* campaign was designed to support, educate and inspire sustainability and eco-friendly practices in everyday life, as well as raise substantial support for the Foundation and its programs. Macy’s has raised over \$6.4 million in unrestricted funds for the Foundation in three years. The partnership was formalized in a two-party agreement with the Foundation that provided for limited marketing

exclusivity (i.e. 4-6 months) with the Foundation but not the Park Service, and leveraged a substantial corporate marketing budget to generate national awareness.

Partnerships like Macy's benefit the National Park Service and the Foundation through both the funds they provide and information in advertisements, which promotes public engagement with national parks. This model minimizes the appearance of commercialization within national parks by having corporations affiliate with the Foundation rather than directly with the National Park Service.

## **CONCLUSION**

The state of our parks at the Centennial Celebration in 2016 will say a lot about our priorities as a nation. Opportunities for philanthropy must be central to the future of our national parks. The Foundation is confident this can be accomplished in a manner that allows our local partners to be successful and helps programs at the national level extend the benefits of philanthropy to all parks. Philanthropy is critical to create new opportunities for more of the public to relate to their parks and to generate the creativity and innovation the National Park Service will need in the coming century.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your ongoing support of national parks and for allowing me the opportunity to report on the important role philanthropy plays in supporting the noble mission of the National Park Service and in connecting all Americans to these very special places.