

TESTIMONY OF  
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“To Examine Deferred Maintenance and Operational Needs of the National Park Service”

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing “to Examine Deferred Maintenance and Operational Needs of the National Park Service” and inviting me to testify. My name is Will Shafroth and I am the President & CEO at 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. As we celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary throughout this year, 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 all Americans together to celebrate the Centennial and look forward to the second century of our national parks.

Thanks in part to these efforts 2016 saw a record level of visitation to our parks with 331 million visits. And that level of visitation continued last year. NPS recently released visitation numbers for 2017, which showed a similar number of visits to our 417 national parks. In fact, according to NPS, there were only 88,000 fewer visits to our parks in 2017 from the record setting number we saw in 2016.

That visitation has risen and maintained these levels is a testament to the love and importance of our national parks for Americans and people from around the world. Our national parks tell the story of America – including important and difficult stories in our history.

However, increased and sustained visitation to our national parks increases the already high strain on the facilities, roads, bridges, trails as well as hurting the visitor experience by creating traffic jams and not having enough staff to effectively interact with visitors.

Secretary Zinke and many members of this Committee have made tackling the nearly \$11.6 billion deferred maintenance backlog (as of September 30, 2017) a priority.

The focus of my testimony today is the role of philanthropy in tackling the maintenance backlog – basically what can philanthropy do and what is best done with federal dollars.

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

As many of you are aware, one of the National Park Foundation's priorities over the several years has been to capitalize on the 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 now exceeded our updated goal of \$500 million, and done so ten months early.

This money has been spent in close consultation with the National Park Service 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.

### Deferred Maintenance

The need to restore and modernize our national parks is a top priority. As we see increased visitation we see increased strain on our parks – the facilities, the trails, the roads, the bridges, and the staff – all of which can have a negative impact on the visitor experience.

The National Park Foundation's Find Your Park/Encuentra Tu Parque campaign continues to target the millennial generation as the next generation of park visitors, many of whom may be first time or infrequent visitors. Imagine being a first time visitor to a park and encountering closed bathrooms, washed out trails, and impassable roads. Needless to say that may impact whether you return to the park. And that doesn't just impact the park. It also plays a role in the financial health of the hundreds of gateway communities that rely on park visitors for their survival.

In 2016 the 331 million visits to our national parks resulted in \$18.4 billion in spending and supported 318,000 jobs.

### **Philanthropic Role in Deferred Maintenance**

As the conversation has increased around how to tackle the deferred maintenance backlog there has been more discussion about what role philanthropy can play in helping to do so. Philanthropy can play a role but it is limited to specific areas and often provides the margin of excellence. Philanthropy is not a panacea for deferred maintenance.

Through our fundraising campaign, 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:

- \$189,885 to date to support restoration and preservation of **Grand Canyon National Park's** historic Train Depot. This ongoing project will address accessibility to the Depot for people with disabilities and support structural repairs to the Depot's foundation.
- \$174,355 to rehabilitate and reconstruct two and half miles of **Rocky Mountain National Park's** Bierstadt Lake Trail. This project was completed by 60 youth, including members of the Rocky Mountain Conservancy Conservation Corps, other youth corps, and park volunteers.
- \$26,000 for a 2015 Centennial Challenge project at **Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument**. NPF's support was matched with \$26,000 in federal funds to help the park establish an interdisciplinary Youth Conservation Corps crew. The crew consisted of nine underserved youth from Colorado Springs who developed skills in trail maintenance, trail design and safety features, and protecting and monitoring paleontological sites.
- \$150,000 to restore the helical staircase and replicate and install the original light fixtures at **Glacier National Park's** historic Many Glacier Hotel. In partnership with Glacier National Park Conservancy, NPF's funds helped restore the lobby to its historical significance.
- Over \$110,000 to support work on highly trafficked trails at **Glacier National Park**, including funding for a 21st Century Conservation Corps to reconstruct the park's iconic Hidden Lake Trail at Logan Pass in 2016.
- Over \$400,000 to support Conservation Corps at **Olympic National Park** since 2016. NPF's support has allowed the Olympic Conservation Corps to tackle deferred maintenance projects within the park's varied landscapes, including vegetation and debris removal, re-grading of trail tread, foot bridge maintenance, and drainage system repairs. Youth engaged in this work gain valuable job skills, an appreciation and life-long love of national parks, and knowledge of natural resource stewardship.
- \$324,495 to support youth Conservation Corps at **Mount Rainier National Park** since 2016. Corps members helped complete deferred maintenance projects on Mount Rainier's Wonderland Trail and protected sub-alpine meadow vegetation along trails in the park's Sunrise area.
- \$350,320 to reroute and repair sections of **Zion National Park's** Middle and Lower Emerald Pools Trail. Matched with \$346,337 in Centennial Challenge program funds, NPF's support will allow the park to repair washed out trails and retaining walls, and reroute one mile of the trail to more stable rock layers. The resulting trails will allow visitors a loop hike in Zion Canyon and will better disperse the Emerald Pools' 600,000 annual visitors.
- \$160,000 to rehabilitate **Great Smoky Mountain's** Chimney Tops Trail, which stretches two miles from its trailhead off Newfound Gap Road. Climbing 1,600 feet in elevation, the Chimney Tops Trail is one of the park's most popular hikes, averaging some 80,000 hikers a year. This project was completed in partnership with Friends of the Great Smokies.

- \$121,250 to support a five-year grant for **Yellowstone National Park's** Youth Conservation Corps in partnership with Groundwork USA. In August 2017, participants created 60 feet of buck and rail fence, built and installed 20 bumper guards, revitalized four campsites, maintained six miles of trail, revegetated 50 yards of steep mountain, and installed and maintained 47 bear proof boxes.
- \$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**

What we haven't found in our fundraising is donors who are willing to support roads, bridges, sewer systems, water pipes, or other hard infrastructure. This type of maintenance is viewed by donors as inherently governmental responsibilities that should be funded by Congress.

Donors understand that our parks need their support but also understand that our parks belong to all of us and that the government has a responsibility to fund them. Donors prefer to provide that margin of excellence that NPS can't provide because of lack of funds or because it will take too long.

Another important note on the role of philanthropy's limitations is the overall dollars raised. NPF is very proud of our Centennial Campaign for America's National Parks, which has raised more than \$500 million in about four and a half years. In contrast, the Fiscal Year 2018 Omnibus Appropriations spending bill passed by Congress provides \$3.2 billion for the National Park Service. Even if donors were willing to fund hard infrastructure, the dollars aren't there to cover the needs.

## **Conclusion**

The National Park Foundation is committed to continuing to work with Congress, our partners at the National Park Service, and friends groups to raise philanthropic funds to support key projects and programs throughout the park system including those that help with the deferred maintenance backlog.

It's important to note though that while NPF and local friends groups around the country have raised hundreds of millions of dollars for projects and programs and while philanthropic enthusiasm for our parks has never been higher, philanthropy is not a panacea for deferred maintenance.

There are a lot of tools that must be utilized to begin the process of improving the visitor experience for everyone. We look forward to working with this committee to do so.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.