

Deputy Director Lindi Harvey
Remarks at Dolomiti Bellunesi National Park
July 10th, 2008

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen, it is an honor to represent the United States National Park Service during this auspicious occasion. It is encouraging to see so many leaders of the world's protected areas here today and I know the outcome of this national conference will be a great success. I wish to extend congratulations to Dolomiti Bellunesi National Park for their 15 years of hard work, dedication and protection of natural areas. I wish you the best in the years to come. The United States National Park Service opens its arms to help as you continue in your honorable journey.

It is truly a privilege to work for the United States National Park Service and I hope the information I share with you today will be helpful and provides for a discussion among our various countries to expand partnerships and relationships.

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On August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed legislation creating the National Park Service establishing a precedent for appreciation of environmental protection and enjoyment of natural areas. This was a momentous occasion as countless members of Congress, environmental leaders, businessmen, and local residents had fought tirelessly to make a unified voice for our national parks.

This legislation brought together the existing 35 national park sites and created an organizational structure and systematic management of the park resources and facilities of these prized locations.

Today our goal is to balance the visitor's desire for recreational experiences with the protection of resources. We faces difficult decisions on allowing certain park uses. We have guidelines as to what is considered an appropriate use in the parks, such as hiking and photography, which leave park resources unimpaired.

However, we are faced with visitor interests such as snowmobiling, personal watercraft use, and the use of off-road vehicles. All of these activities have a place and time for use. The National Park Service's Policy Office is working on establishing guidelines on these activities but often, policy on many activities is made on a case-by-case basis requiring Park Superintendents at a certain park site to make the decision based on their local resource concerns and the level of acceptable use. We may grant permits for some activities in one park, but not allow it at another.

In our first 100 years, we have certainly learned many lessons, some of which I'd like to share with you. For example:

**1. Create policies before they are needed:** We tend to be reactive rather than pro-active in creating policy, waiting until an event or incident requires our attention on how to fix the issue or how to avoid the same mistake from happening again. A substantial number of employees, including park managers, would rather not have extensive policies. They would prefer to simply use their own judgment when making decisions. However, in order for the National Park Service to be at its most effective level, we must have a universal set of policies to orchestrate the magnitude of the business organization and at the same time adhere to the National Park Service mission.

**2. Reach out to the public to gain their insights as well as offer an understanding of our point of view:** With more than 20,000 employees and nearly 400 parks, we have a huge challenge in

communicating our policies to all those who need to understand and apply them in the decisions they make every day. It is vitally important that we engage with the public to better understand their perspective and to share with them the basis for our policies and our decisions. One of our biggest challenges is to articulate why we do the things we do and make decisions as we do. Over the years, the leadership of the National Park Service has conducted listening sessions around the country to engage our employees, citizens and community leaders in such a conversation. We just did this again last year with over 40 such sessions. This provided invaluable information and insights into their individual and collective desires and concerns.

**3. Do not over-build.** Over the years, as the country's population grew and incomes increased, more and more American families as well as international visitors came to the parks to enjoy lengthy vacations. The increase in visitation led the Park Service to build many new visitor centers. The visitors certainly enjoyed the centers and shared their desire for the Park Service to create more so that the majority of the park sites provided such a service.

But, in doing so, the Visitor Centers produced a huge demand on maintenance needs such as repair and rebuild, and required an increase in personnel and government funding to manage these facilities. This created a drain on the National Park Service budget. So while we increased the number of Visitor Centers and increased the need for funds to manage the facility, our government did not give us an increase in our budget and today our dollar is stretched really thin. This has proved to be one of the biggest lessons that we learned along the way. We learned that we must plan for the future and not over build, but instead focus on daily functions of the parks and the programs that enhance visitor experience.

**4. Environmental Impact:** While we are looking at the issue of funding and maintenance needs, we must also be concerned about what environmental impacts we create by building Visitor Centers as well as hotels and lodges inside our parks. An example is the lesson we learned at one of our California park units, Sequoia National Park, where we have just finished removing a massive village of hotels, cabins and visitor facilities from a grove of Giant Sequoia trees. While the village was a visitor favorite, its location greatly impacted the growth and reproduction of the Giant Sequoias. Today, there is a massive rehabilitation project in the area to restore the health of the trees. Visitor centers and hotels today are now more commonly built outside of the national park. By making this change, we also make possible economic opportunities for the gateway communities to provide hotel accommodations, restaurants and gift shops for visitors to the park.

**5. Carrying Capacity:** Another lesson we are involved in learning about is how to provide transportation of visitors inside the parks. We have not yet discovered the answer, or the secret to carrying capacity, but one must consider how many visitors are too many for the park to handle. Some of the questions we are asking ourselves include: *"Do we have a plan for how the park will handle a large number of visitors at one time?"* And, *"Do we need to consider developing techniques for reducing the number of visitors, if necessary?"* We may not know all the solutions to carrying capacity, but we can take steps to minimize the impact of over-visitation. At Zion National Park in Utah, at Acadia National Park in Maine, and at other park sites, there are now innovative transportation systems that reduced the impact of auto traffic and allow visitors to have a better experience. For example, at Muir Woods in Northern California (one of the homes of the coastal Redwood trees), a shuttle bus allows the visitors to park their individual cars at a designated spot and allow the shuttle bus to provide the transportation to the park site.

**6. Moving with the Times:** With an increase in visitation to our parks, there is a need for more personnel to provide educational and interpretive services. But, without the necessary funding to add new Rangers, we are looking for new techniques to fulfill this need and in recognizing our changing audience.

For example, Alcatraz Island in Northern California makes available an audio tour for their visitors. Every visitor to “The Rock” receives an audio device and headphones which provides a pre-recorded tour that visitors can stop and start at their leisure throughout the former prison facility. Added to the recording are the voices and stories of former inmates and prison guards as well as sounds of the prison doors slamming that help create an authentic experience of what it must have been like if you were incarcerated or worked at Alcatraz. The audio tour is now available in ten languages, including Italian and Mandarin Chinese.



## 1916-2016: The NPS Centennial Challenge

As we learned more and more from the many situations we faced over the years, we created rules and regulations to prevent resource damage and to prevent injuries to our visitors. But this too is another lesson well-learned. In the process of changing the focus from the visitor to the resources, the culture of the national parks changed. The length of visitor stays declined, down from the whole summer to maybe a week and now social science surveys tell us that the average visitor remains in the park only four (4) hours!

Our challenge over the next 10 years will be how to re-establish ties with the public so that our parks stay as strong, as vibrant and as great an experience as when they were first created. Many people flock to Yellowstone National Park to see the “Old Faithful” geyser, Sequoia National Park for the magnificent trees, Yosemite National Park to see “Half Dome” rock, or Crater Lake because each is well-known and a tourist draw. Our challenge now is to create a cohesive sense of the National Park Service, not just to draw people to the known resources, but also to those that may get less attention. It is a never-ending process.

To meet this challenge we are supported and inspired by our upcoming 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary on August 25, 2016. The National Park Service Centennial Initiative was announced by President Bush on the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Park Service as a means of re-engaging the visitor, improving our visitor programs and improving the way our parks are run to attract new audiences from diverse backgrounds.

This initiative is bolstered by five overarching goals:

- (1) lead America in preserving and restoring treasured resources;
- (2) demonstrate environmental leadership to the nation;
- (3) offer superior recreational experiences where visitors explore and enjoy nature and the great outdoors, culture and history;
- (4) foster exceptional learning opportunities connecting people to parks, especially children and seniors;
- (5) achieve management and partnership excellence to match the magnificence of the treasures entrusted to its care.

The five centennial goals are a framework for evaluating progress, but also for establishing new ideas, new visions and new concepts to move the National Park Service into the second Century of existence. Our goal is to determine how to move forward as a system. The National Park Service Centennial Initiative is an excellent tool for garnering attention on our parks, and we must be able to capitalize on it.

When President Bush and Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne announced the Centennial Initiative in 2006, they vowed federal money would be set aside for the parks to use to improve facilities, education venues, the visitor experience and employee training and morale. As part of this, we have the Centennial Challenge that collects money from partners who support an individual park and provide at least 50% of funds for a particular project or program. These partners consist of community groups, individual donors, corporate sponsors, and park supporters. All of these projects and programs will reflect at least one of our centennial goals of stewardship, environmental leadership, recreational experience, education, and professional excellence.

For 2009 and beyond, we are working with our members of Congress to pass the Centennial Challenge Fund Act which would appropriate this additional funding until 2016 and hopefully beyond. This is a work in progress and it has required the support and help of many, many individuals.



## Working with Local Communities

In building an involved citizenry who care about the national parks into this century and the future, we need to continually find ways to immerse our public in the national park experience. It's not enough to talk about the parks, or show pictures of them – we need to draw the public to our parks with the new projects and programs.

Nearly every national park in our system has at least one community that exists close to the park boundary. Because parks do not exist in a vacuum, issues that come about in the park can also affect the surrounding community and visa versa. National parks around the country are working with local communities to stimulate stewardship ethics and assist in the commitment for sustainability. It has become obvious that it is no longer enough to strive for friendly coexistence, but that all parties must work pro-actively on their mutual interests and to develop cooperative strategies that contribute to some measure of sustainability and long-term conservation.

The National Park Service is forever indebted for the ideas shared in a 2002 workshop convened by the Italian Nature Conservation Service, the Lazio regional parks and the National Park Service to discuss how parks and communities work together as well as another workshop convened in the Czech Republic in 2006 to discuss the marketing and promotion of local heritage products.

Our staff at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park in Vermont and at our Conservation Studies Institute have taken the lead in surveying and inventorying more than two dozen case studies where our park units are working closely with local communities. Our Stewardship Atlas, is a direct result of the inspiration from our Italian colleagues and the efforts of our staff to chronicle these public-private park-local community partnerships.

Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio was inspired by the European approach to maintaining agriculture and working cultural landscapes in national parks and created the Countryside Initiative in the late 1990s. The Countryside Initiative strives to sustain the agricultural heritage of the valley and preserve the remaining agricultural land and buildings by rehabilitating and revitalizing more than 20 of the old farms that operated in the valley from the mid 1800s to the mid 1900s. This partnership between a local non-profit group, local valley farmers and the national park has advanced privately supported, economically viable and environmentally friendly approaches to agriculture in the national park setting. A key step forward has been the opening of seasonal farmers markets which provide an outlet for high quality food and crafts produced by the Initiative.

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## Kids in Parks

Another area where we are constantly learning great lessons is in understanding America's changing demographics and lifestyles. Children are spending less and less time outside. The joy of being outside has been replaced with spending time indoors in front of the TV or video game. Children are less likely today to be willing to venture outside and explore on their own. Exploring and playing in the outdoors like climbing trees, building forts, splashing in puddles and streams allow children to build their natural curiosity, use their imagination and encourages them to discover more about their world. The National Park Service has taken action over the past few years to re-engage children with the outdoors through programs and projects, events and tools. The goal is to attract children to the wonders of the outdoors and away from the TV screen. While this is an uphill battle, the concern is if we do not take action about the current situation we may witness a fall in support for our national parks and green areas.

For starters, we surveyed all of our national park units and asked them to describe programs at their park that help kids learn and enjoy nature, our culture, and our history better. The results were amazing – hundreds and hundreds of programs have been submitted. The programs will be shared with parks around the country to give them ideas on how to expand and improve education and kid-friendly programs. We will also provide some of this information to the public through our website so that visitors can consider planning their next trip to park in order to enjoy the program or activity planned. This is the first time in our history that we have created a database of such valuable information that can be sorted by location, date and program content.

One of the programs that is offered throughout the park service is our Junior Ranger Program.

- The motto of our Junior Ranger program, “**Explore. Learn. Protect: Be a Junior Ranger**” captures the process of stewardship-building from awareness and learning to care *about* the parks and their stories, to learning to care *for* them, and is an excellent template for engaging youth in both historical parks and natural areas.
- Italian, German, and Japanese park colleagues have shown us how to expand the appeal of reaching the youth demographic, through their adoption and expansion of the National Park Service Junior Ranger program.
- In May 2006, three members of the National Park Service Interpretation and Education Division were invited by EUROPARC Germany to travel to Germany and share the National

Park Service Junior Ranger program model and program development toolkit with park rangers from around the world. The result was an exchange of best practices and a developing relationship between the U.S. and German Junior Ranger programs.



## Climate Change

In my remaining time with you this morning, I would like to address the global issue of climate change and the impact it has on our natural resources. At the National Park Service, we feel it is our obligation as one of the highest profile agencies to set an example. As environmental awareness and the troubling status of our world's natural areas is continuously an issue, we are working on numerous projects and partnerships that will set the example for environmental sustainability and practices.

Two new and important programs are the Climate Friendly Parks and Energy SmartPARKS! which aim to reduce our carbon footprint, introduce new technologies and revise our management techniques to provide for more eco-friendly park operations. I realize we are not alone in this effort and we have certainly followed the lead of other countries in our efforts, but we are confident that our efforts will make a difference at the local level if not the national or international level.

The Climate Friendly Parks Program, a collaboration of the National Park Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, provides national parks with management tools and resources regarding this issue. The program aims to provide national parks with comprehensive support to address climate change both within park boundaries and the surrounding community.

The program has a three-pronged approach:

- First, to measure park-based greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions;
- Second, to develop sustainable strategies to mitigate these emissions and adapt to climate change impacts; and
- Third, to educate the public about these efforts.

We will soon be signing a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Department of Energy to launch Energy SmartPARKS! which is geared at reducing energy usage and implementing sustainable building practices with park facilities.

The goals of the Energy SmartPARKS! Program include:

- First, to enable the National Park Service to showcase sustainable energy best practices and fulfilling the National Park Service mission of environmental stewardship;
- Second, to harness combined federal government and private sector support, sparking a green energy revolution in America; and
- And, third, to establish an Energy SmartPARKS! Fund to ensure that the National Park Service continues to lead, innovate and inspire a green energy future for the next century.

Some of the proposed projects awaiting funding under the Energy SmartPARKS! Program are:

- Repair or replacement of five primary photovoltaic (PV) panels, battery charging systems, and electrical components at Isle Royale National Park in Michigan, which provide power to operate the solar powered water systems, chlorine pumps, lighting in employee quarters, and ranger station radios.

- Utilize a year's worth of wind speed and directional data taken from a wind meteorological tower installed near Cape Cod National Seashore in Massachusetts to inform a feasibility study for wind power production at the site.



As you can see, there are many great things happening in the National Park Service, and much of what we do is based on partnerships.

We have the oldest system of national parks in the world and we are honored when asked to provide advice, but we are also quite fortunate to have the opportunity to learn much from partners and parks in other nations.

One of our most iconic symbols of the National Park Service, the ranger-naturalist, is based on the alpine guides of Switzerland. We have learned much from South Africa about how to manage large mammals and one of our newest projects—the all-taxa biological inventory—was adopted from Costa Rica... It is a complete inventory of all species of plants and animals in an area, and it provides valuable information to scientists and to natural resource managers in our parks.

Of all the US federal land management agencies, the National Park Service was the first to establish an international program and is the only agency which explicitly calls for international cooperation in our mission statement... We are the lead technical agency for the U.S. for the UNESCO World Heritage Program, and we maintain bilateral agreements with a dozen foreign counterparts.

Over the decades, we have provided technical assistance in park management, historic preservation and other topics to almost every country on the planet. Working with partners abroad is essential to the good stewardship of our own parks. We recognize that our sites are connected to the rest of the world through both natural and cultural links, including shared migratory species, invasive species, climate change, and historic and thematic links.

I am excited to listen to the remarks by the other participants in this meeting and hope to learn about other new and innovative approaches you have for meeting the challenges we all face in parks management.

We are all in this together, and we look forward to working with you to improve our parks and our planet. Thank you for your kind attention this morning and for your warm hospitality. It is an honor to be here with you at this conference.

Ciao!