



March 26, 2021

Dear Chairman Merkley, Ranking Member Murkowski, Chairwoman Pingree and Ranking Member Joyce,

We, the members of the National Parks Second Century Action Coalitionⁱ, greatly appreciate the funding increases for the National Park Service (NPS) in recent years. They will be critical in addressing significant staffing shortfalls to improve the visiting experience and enhance resource protection. Unfortunately, the NPS continues to face fiscal challenges, in particular the erosion of park staff and other operational needs. We recognize the many challenges and constraints the subcommittees face and the difficult choices you must make between competing priorities, so appreciate your consideration of our request for sustained increases that are needed in FY22 and beyond to get parks back on track.

For more than a century, our national parks have remained America's favorite places, important pieces of our natural and cultural heritage set aside for future generations to explore and enjoy. In 2019, 328 million park visitors spent an estimated \$21 billion in local gateway communities while visiting NPS sites across the country. These expenditures supported a total of 341 thousand jobs. In addition, America's outdoor recreation economy supports over 5 million American jobs and contributes over \$788 billion in annual economic output. In 2019, there were over 79 million international arrivals to the United States and research indicates that national parks were a huge tourism attraction for those visitors. NPS needs the financial resources to ensure both domestic and international visitors have the experience they deserve.

First, we support increasing the operations account by \$200 million above FY21 to \$2.888 billion. A growing challenge for the superintendents who manage our parks is insufficient staff to address park needs and welcome record numbers of visitors. Between 2011 and 2019, NPS lost 16% of its staff while at the same time struggling to accommodate a 17% increase in visitation. Even with funding increases in recent years, parks continue to be short-staffed for many duties including education, interpretation and other visitor services; science; maintenance; resource protection and management; and more. Record visitation compounds the challenge, with direly needed park staff diverted from interpretation, resource protection and other duties in order to address visitor needs like parking, maintenance and public safety. Park budgets too often must absorb increases for retirement and other benefits, salary increases, inflation and other uncontrollable fixed costs. Operational shortfalls will also be further challenged by the loss of significant fee revenue during the closure of parks during a portion of the pandemic.

In addition, funding should be prioritized for natural resource management. **We support significant increases for natural resource management and funding should be prioritized to those parks that are experiencing impacts due to climate change, such as proliferation of invasive species, loss of native biodiversity, and accumulation of hazardous fuels.**

Preservation of natural resources lies at the core of the NPS mission and a unit's base budget should cover its natural resource management needs. Many units already stretch their base funding to try to cover all priorities, but increased park visitation compounded with the challenges of a changing climate have created significant management challenges in natural parks across the National Park System. The current NPS funding streams are limited in project eligibility, extremely project-based and highly competitive due to a lack of funding. Furthermore, these current funding streams generally do not support the baseline monitoring and research needs that parks require to develop scientifically sound adaptive management strategies.

Coupled with the operation increases, **we support robust investments for deferred maintenance accounts to repair and maintain park infrastructure.** The recently enacted Great American Outdoors Act, which created the Park Legacy Restoration Fund, is an instrumental step toward addressing existing priority repairs within our national parks during the next five years. To ensure that NPS' repair backlog does not continue to grow, it is essential that annual appropriations for cyclic maintenance, repair and rehabilitation, and line-item construction are funded at robust levels. These programs are key to NPS having the ability to undertake the maintenance projects that will keep our national parks accessible and safe.

In addition to supporting robust funding levels for deferred maintenance accounts, more resources are needed for the Housing Improvement Program to directly address employee housing that desperately needs repair. Based on the most publicly available NPS data, maintenance for employee housing totaled more than \$180 million annually in recent years. Compared with the \$2.9 million NPS received in FY20 for its Housing Improvement Program, there is still a tremendous need. **We support \$4 million for the Housing Improvement Program to address this urgent need.**

We support \$20 million for the Centennial Challenge program for projects and programs that improve and modernize our parks. Continued investment is needed for this program that leverages philanthropic dollars (individuals, foundations, businesses, and other non-federal institutions) with at least a one-to-one match of federal dollars. This public-private partnership provides necessary funding for signature projects that improve visitor experiences, address maintenance projects and support educational programs. Recent signature projects include addressing maintenance needs at the historic Hammond-Cranz Farm in Cuyahoga Valley National Park and supporting Native American recreational programming at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. Many more philanthropic opportunities await continued funding.

Finally, we also support the continued reauthorization of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) until a long-term reauthorization can be accomplished. FLREA authorizes NPS to collect and expend recreation fees to benefit the visitor experience by repairing and improving facilities at national parks, offering education materials and services, and providing law enforcement. However, the authority for FLREA continues to be extended year by year and is currently scheduled to sunset again on October 1, 2023. Unless FLREA is

reauthorized a year ahead of the sunset, national parks will not be able to issue the annual pass and stands to lose over \$300 million per year.

It is our sincere hope that people will enjoy our national parks to their fullest following the COVID-19 crisis and help restore the economies of the gateway communities. NPS needs the financial resources to protect resources and ensure the visitors have the experience they deserve in parks and in nearby gateway communities.

Thank you for considering our views,

American Hiking Society
American Society of Landscape Architects
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Atomic Heritage Foundation
The Coalition to Protect Americas National Parks
The Corps Network
Evangelical Environmental Network
Friends of Acadia
International Inbound Travel Association
National Park Hospitality Association
National Park Partners
National Parks Conservation Association
National Tour Association
National Trust for Historic Preservation
Scenic America
Southeast Tourism Society
Student Conservation Association
United States Tour Operators Association

ⁱ The National Parks Second Century Action Coalition is made up of organizations supporting conservation, recreation, outdoor industry, travel and tourism and historic preservation that are dedicated to promoting the protection, restoration, and enjoyment of the National Park System for the long-term benefit it offers our nation.