

Concessioners Centennial Council

May 18, 2007

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are delighted to express our support for the National Park Service Centennial Initiative and to underscore our commitment to working in partnership with your department to make our national parks a valued and valuable part of the life of every American.

Caring for national parks and visitors to park units has involved a partnership between federal officials and companies providing accommodations, food, transportation and other goods and services even before the creation of the National Park Service in 1916 – and that partnership continues today. Operating under some 600 agreements, concessioners serve 280 million customers annually. Our sales in parks total \$900 million annually, and we have some 25,000 employees – who are often primary points of contact for park visitors, delivering information about hikes and wildlife viewing at food counters and stores.

Concessioners contribute significantly to the resources available to serve visitors and care for our parks. Our annual franchise fee payments to the federal government are nearly \$50 million – but that is far from the total support we provide. We invest in and maintain federal buildings and other facilities, meeting the health, safety and fire codes required of this infrastructure. As companies, we have embraced business practices that reflect a commitment to protecting the environment, reducing waste, recycling and reducing energy demand. Our employees are frequent volunteers in the parks, and we regularly contribute materials, services and equipment to meet park needs. Because we share a commitment to the mission of the National Park Service, we regularly take on roles well beyond the requirements of our agreements with the National Park Service. Attached are some examples of the efforts by concessioners to be full partners for the parks.

As we focus on the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service in 2016, we are proud to commit to three important steps.

First, ***park concessioners pledge to continue and to expand our efforts to support local park needs and initiatives.*** Many of our companies are involved in employee volunteer efforts, guest donation programs and support for local park fund-raising groups. We are gathering information on the total impact of these efforts and will work with the National Park Service to ***actively assist all concessioners to understand how to engage in these efforts,*** in full compliance with Directors Order 21 and other requirements.

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Second, the organizations signing this letter are pleased to announce plans to ***work cooperatively to develop and implement a new, major effort to generate a sustainable source of funding for projects under the Centennial Challenge program.*** A key part of the effort will be to ***use our contacts with visitors to park units to inform them about the Challenge*** and the upcoming 100th anniversary of the National Park Service. We also plan to ***offer at all participating concessioners one or more special items celebrating the Centennial*** where 50% or more of the selling price will be earmarked for Centennial projects. Over the course of the next decade, we expect that our effort will generate millions of dollars to fund projects identified by individual parks and national projects defined by the National Park Service that will succeed in engaging the American public with their parks. We expect to have the details of our effort developed by June and to have the effort underway in pilot fashion by this summer, with full implementation at the start of 2008. We will meet with the National Park Service to discuss our plans and to develop the required national agreement and invite you to join us in announcing the new effort at an appropriate location and date this summer.

Third, we will ***invite gateway communities and state tourism offices to join with us to develop better understanding of park visitor opportunities and support for local park projects and programs.*** We are already holding discussions with key representatives of these organizations and have proposed a major planning session for this fall.

We believe that this effort will contribute in a substantial way to the Centennial Initiative and will play a key part in inviting the American public to visit and enjoy their parks and assuring that their visits will yield wonderful, memorable experiences replete with physical, mental and spiritual benefits.

Sincerely,

Joe Fassler, President
National Park Hospitality Association

Bruce Fears, President
ARAMARK Harrison Lodging

Kevin Kelly, President
Delaware North Companies Parks and Resorts

Rex Maughan, Chairman
Forever Resorts

Gerard Gabrys, President
Guest Services, Inc.

Andrew Todd, President and CEO
Xanterra Parks and Resorts

cc: Mary Bomar, Director, National Park Service

Attachment