



## December 2013 Newsletter

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### **NPHA ANNUAL MEETING IN D.C., MARCH 16-19, 2014**

NPHA's Annual Meeting will be held March 16-19, 2014 in Washington, D.C. at the Hamilton Crowne Plaza Hotel and nearby D.C. locations. The meeting's theme – Centennial on the Horizon – Preparing to Welcome More Park Visitors – will help us focus on ways to make the 2016 Centennial successful in attracting new park visitors and serving them well. Topics for discussion will include: the encouragement and measurement of – and rewards for – concessioner excellence; enhanced 21<sup>st</sup> Century visitor services; the Centennial Campaign; enhancement of cell and WiFi access; an economic activity dashboard; and influencing the NPS park planning process. The NPS Concessions Management Advisory Board plans to meet in the Washington, D.C., area in conjunction with our meeting. Room reservations must be made by February 18<sup>th</sup> and the deadline for "Early Bird" registration – a \$50 discount – is March 7<sup>th</sup>. More information is available [here](#).

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## **NPS/PARK CONCESSIONER LEADERS IN NORTHEAST REGION SHARE IDEAS, RECOMMIT TO JOINT EFFORTS**

Top national park concessions industry executives active in the Northeast Region spent an afternoon with the NPS Northeast Region leadership team on December 9<sup>th</sup>. The discussions of the 20+ participants were frank, far-reaching and encouraging to both sides. The session was the third of its type in this region and one of many held in six of the seven NPS regions over the past four years. Concessioners in the meeting represented companies generating at least 30% of all NPS franchise fee payments.

NPS Regional Director Dennis Reidenbach expressed empathy for the impacts of Hurricane Sandy, sequestration and the October shutdown on concessioners in the Northeast and other park partners. He welcomed the chance to discuss lessons to be learned from these episodes and expressed pride in his regional team and its commitment to adaptation and innovation.

The discussions that followed covered a number of key topics, including: mitigation of the continuing impacts of the October shutdown; steps to improve communication and clarify policies before any future similar occurrence; practical responses to potential cuts in NPS funding; pilot/demonstration projects for new visitor services; inclusion of concessioner-provided visitor services in park planning efforts; consideration of “satellite” concessioner operations; enhanced, appropriate connectivity for park visitors; concessioner involvement in prospectus development; and development of support for the Centennial among Congressional and Administration officials.

The meeting concluded with an expression of thanks by both sides and with special recognition of the contributions to encouraging more NPS/concessioner dialogue by Dennis Reidenbach, who will end his NPS career in early January 2014. “This was the kind of exchange of information and ideas that leaves me excited about working together,” said NPHA Counselor Derrick Crandall. “The regional NPS team showed genuine interest in our ideas and real interest in working with us to overcome past difficulties.”

Click [here](#) to read the full report.

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## **CMAB RECOGNITION AND INCENTIVES WORKING GROUP URGES YOUR INPUT**

The CMAB Recognition and Incentives Working Group held a two-hour conference call on December 19<sup>th</sup> and plans to have an action plan ready for presentation to the CMAB and NPS in March. The working group has some 17 concessioner representatives and has reached some preliminary agreements.

First, concessioners would earn ratings far different than unsatisfactory/satisfactory. Concessioners meeting all of the contract requirements would be rated as “Excellent,”

and those who demonstrate a commitment to real partnership with NPS and others can earn an "Outstanding" rating that would also earn rewards – likely a contract extension. But other ideas are being discussed, too – like appeals of deficiencies and measurement of visitor satisfaction, reduced evaluation burden and an expedited process for testing out new visitor services. The working group is led by CMAB Chair Jim Eyster and staffed by NPS's Kurt Rausch. Your comments and additional suggestions are invited!

To see the most recent summary of working group ideas and views, click [here](#).

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## **RENT-A-TENT**

A number of concessioners and The Coleman Company are working hard to give park visitors an option for staying in national park campgrounds – and we are receiving strong encouragement from NPS staff in Washington and at the park level. The concept involves increasing the convenience of camping in national parks by offering a "package" of rental equipment at campsites. The "package" is designed to attract visitors who: (1) do not own camping equipment but have an interest in a camping experience, especially at the low cost of camping; (2) those who own equipment but who will be reaching the national parks in a way that makes bringing their own equipment challenging (for example, by air travel); (3) those who want to spend time in a national park but are unable to reserve lodging because rooms are unavailable; and (4) those who like the convenience of driving up to a campsite and unloading just needed personal items, but who are also likely to rely on other park visitor facilities like food service and want to avoid the uncertainties of weather and timing associated with use of their own equipment.

The Rent-a-Tent program would address the significant decline in overnight campground stays within national parks over the past two decades (tent camper nights are down some 1.2 million, while RV camper nights are down some 1.6 million). The program would be offered by existing national park concessioners as a pilot effort designed to assess whether the program warrants inclusion in future concessions contracts or as a CUA. Coleman will make available suitable tents, air mattresses, electric lanterns and more. Concessioners will have personnel trained in providing tent set-up and removal, cleaning and repairs and more. A meeting in the Las Vegas area in early 2014 is planned to test out the equipment and pick the pilot sites. To be involved in the discussions, ask to join in at [dcrandall@funoutdoors.com](mailto:dcrandall@funoutdoors.com).

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## CENTENNIAL UPDATE

The Grey Centennial Campaign, designed to build awareness of national parks, connect new generations to our parks, and increase support for parks, will soon be unveiled. Research was shared at the NPHA fall meeting and ideas on logos and licensing have been shared with the Centennial Advisory Committee. Discussions about logo use are planned for a January session of the Committee's Executive Group, and the creatives for the campaign will be presented to the full Committee in mid-February. The campaign is designed to attract the interest of Millennials – and especially urban, diverse Millennials – while also maintaining the enthusiasm of current park visitors.

The NPS is also reviewing hundreds of proposed Centennial Projects and Programs, including a number submitted by NPHA and its members. About a dozen of these ideas are likely to be designated “signature” projects and gain active NPS and NPF support – but NPS plans to encourage a far larger number of projects. NPHA is urging selection of a number of programs including:

**Group Tour Industry Certifies Guides/Tours:** *Working with NPHA, the National Tour Association proposes a tour certification program for both domestic and international groups visiting national parks. The National Tour Association believes that groups should receive substantial information both about the national park system and specific parks visited, using both specially prepared video content shown on the tour bus during approach and a specially trained guide on the bus, able to answer questions and deliver relevant and timely information. Each day, hundreds of tour buses enter national parks and for some, debarkation at the park visitor center begins the education and interpretation process. A much better process can be developed, reducing demand on visitor center staff and delivering additional information that addresses the NPS Centennial and topics such as global warming and the NPS role. Key to this process is creation of a certification program, where tour companies would utilize both existing and available tools as well as new resources developed through the combined efforts of the National Tour Association, NPHA and NPS. Companies that implement the program would be permitted – indeed encouraged – to note that they have received certification as a NPS Centennial Interpretive Partner.*

**NPS Centennial Fellowships:** *NPS Centennial Fellowships are proposed for young adults (with a special emphasis on engaging underserved and diverse youth) to learn about and contribute to the efforts of several organizations operating in a single national park. The Fellow would spend time with the National Park Service, a concessioner, and a nonprofit organization operating in the park, ideally on a single program, such as visitor interpretation and education or communications. Fellows would rotate among the organizations – much as medical students rotate through various hospital departments. This rotation would have the dual benefit of building awareness of alternative ways to*

*contribute to the success of America's national parks' full operation and of helping to integrate the efforts of key park partners. Fellows would utilize the power of social media as they provide blogs and photos and document experiences, outcomes while promoting the NPS Centennial, parks, programs and participants. Funding for each Fellowship could be derived from the Guest Donation Programs in major parks. Goals for the program would be to have at least 100 Fellows annually by 2015 and to continue the program for at least 20 years. Fellows would be offered \$1,000 per month, coverage under the Student Conservation Association healthcare and related benefits program, accommodations and transportation assistance.*

**Free Photos from Parks for Christmas Cards and More:** *Under this proposal, concessioners would cooperate with key university fine arts programs to arrange for youth with photographic skills to be at iconic park locations during peak-season periods of 2014, 2015 and 2016 to take high-quality photographs of the visitors by family or group. We will suggest the photos be shared via social media, including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and used as photographs sent to family and friends with holiday messages. Using the photographs will undoubtedly deliver a message to each sender's network of friends and relatives about the great fun had during the visit. This system will be appreciated because: the trained student photographers will be skilled at selecting backdrops, lighting and more; the full group/family will be in the picture; the image will be better than most consumers could create. This program is based upon very good response to free family photos offered by concessioners in conjunction with fee-free days in parks. Concessioners will also offer high-resolution versions of the free picture and additional shots at a price approved through the normal concession rate approval process – generating a new stream of franchise fees.*

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## **NPS RELEASES DRAFT PLAN TO KEEP BISCAYNE NATIONAL PARK OPEN TO BOATING AND FISHING**

The National Park Service (NPS) has released a [Supplemental Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement](#) for Biscayne National Park in Florida. The supplemental plan was developed in response to the comments received when the initial draft plan was released in August 2011. The park, located south-southeast of Miami, includes 173,000 acres, mostly water, and is one of the largest marine parks in the national park system, attracting 500,000+ visitors each year. Its last General Management Plan was completed in 1983.

NPS published a preferred alternative plan in August 2011 which would have established a 10,000 acre marine reserve zone where fishing would be completely prohibited to promote a healthier coral reef ecosystem. The proposal also proposed “significant non-combustion engine zones,” further restricting boating access.

Altogether, the angler and boating interests contended that up to 20% of boating and fishing access in the park would have been lost. The State of Florida opposed the 2011 preferred alternative, contending that the designation of a marine reserve zone could only be considered after less restrictive management procedures had been implemented and evaluated.

NPS has now released a new preferred alternative developed in consultation with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The proposed marine reserve zone has been replaced with what the agency calls “a new concept” – a 14,585 acre special recreation zone. Recreational fishing, with specific restrictions like no spearfishing, would be permitted year-round in the zone with a special permit. The State of Florida would be an active partner in the implementation of this alternative, including permitting, research and monitoring. A second alternative would have the same special recreation zone but would prohibit fishing from June through September. In both alternatives, the next 10 years would be considered an adaptive management period during which management procedures would be evaluated by a multi-agency team and adjusted as needed to meet the goals of the original proposal. According to the NPS, implementation of either of the new alternatives “within the framework of an adaptive management strategy represents a new opportunity to manage these special marine areas that are important to a diverse set of user groups.”

Thom Dammrich, President of the National Marine Manufacturers Association, supports the NPS preferred alternative. “NMMA is optimistic that this plan properly balances the need for resource conservation and robust boating and angling access,” he said. Mike Nussman, President and CEO of the American Sportfishing Association, added, “The recreational fishing industry is pleased that all the agencies involved in the Biscayne National Park debate were able to come together and identify productive management solutions that still allow for public access while addressing resource concerns.”

Comments on the draft supplemental plan must be submitted by February 20, 2014. They can be mailed to: Biscayne National Park GMP, National Park Service, M. Elmer (DSC-P), P.O. Box 25287, Denver, CO 80225-0287. Comments can also be submitted online [here](#).

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## **WINTER PARKS GUIDE PUBLISHED**

National Parks Traveler has just published its *Essential Parks Guide, Winter 2013-2014*. This 26-page publication is filled with beautiful pictures of the national parks in winter, ideas for winter activities – cold and warm weather alike – in specific parks, and interesting articles on topics like capturing the parks in paintings and photographs. A review copy of the print version, which is available for sale for \$7.50, can be accessed via the National Park Traveler website [here](#).

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## **SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK WILL BE PILOT PROJECT FOR CONCESSIONER, NPS, NTHP AND CONSERVATION CORPS**

Shenandoah National Park Superintendent Jim Northup is leading an effort to accomplish major historic renovation to a CCC-era stable in the park in a way that offers many serendipities, including lower cost. The effort combines a new National Trust for Historic Preservation database of skilled craftsmen, a 10-12 person crew from the Citizens Conservation Corps of West Virginia, Delaware North Companies, and NPS. The project is estimated at 6-8 weeks and involves replacement of beams and much of the interior of the stable, reconstruction of the corral, and electrical system upgrades. The 18-25 year old Corps youths will live in employee housing before the season begins and will learn – and be supervised by – skilled restoration craftsmen. In addition to the job-training the Corps members will receive, the project is expected to stretch available DNC Repair and Maintenance Fund dollars greatly, and reduce the park's backlog of deferred maintenance. The superintendent and partners see many more projects in Shenandoah – and across the nation – once the concept is proven.

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## **LEGISLATION INTRODUCED TO INCREASE FEDERAL GAS TAX BY 15 CENTS**

U.S. Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) introduced legislation on December 3<sup>rd</sup> to increase the federal gasoline tax by 15 cents from 18.4 cents to 33.4 cents per gallon. The bill, [H.R. 3636](#), also known as the “Update, Promote, and Develop America’s Transportation Essentials (UPDATE) Act of 2013,” would phase in the increase over the next three years.

The federal gas tax provides funding to the Highway Trust Fund, which underwrites the nation’s surface transportation program, providing billions of dollars annually for construction of roads and other infrastructure. In addition, portions of the Fund are used to support other programs linked to the underlying “user-pay” philosophy of the program, including the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, which receives funding attributable to recreational boating, and the Recreational Trails Program, supported with funding generated from the gas tax paid for nonhighway recreational uses of motorfuel.

The federal gas tax has not been increased since 1993, which has reduced its buying power by nearly 40% over the same period, based upon CPI adjustments. The result has been a shortfall in funding available from the Highway Trust Fund, which, in recent years, has necessitated the diversion of some \$10 billion annually from general funds to the surface transportation program. The shortfall has also been exacerbated as cars have become more fuel efficient, requiring less gas to be purchased – and less gas tax to be paid – to travel the same distance.

NPHA has become very concerned about the deteriorating condition of roads that provide access to national parks and other federal lands covering nearly one-third of the nation and hosting well over one billion recreation visits annually. Deferred maintenance, failing bridges and unsafe roadways total billions in needed investment to allow access to campgrounds, trailheads, lakes and other recreation sites. NPHA has urged consideration of earmarking a “Penny for Parks,” or “Penny for the Great Outdoors,” for use on federal lands. The concept is simple. Earmarking a portion of any increase in the federal gas tax would generate some \$1.5 billion annually that could be invested in efforts that support transportation systems on federal lands vital to quality recreational experiences. Unlike virtually all other public roads in America, roads on America's public lands receive no funding from the state taxes levied on gasoline.

“Penny for Parks” would most likely succeed as part of a broader effort to fund the nation’s surface transportation program. Such a broader effort has support from a wide variety of interests, including AAA, the AFL-CIO, the construction and trucking industry, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

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**TIPS ON HOW TO STAY INFORMED:**

**Read the *Federal Parks and Recreation newsletter***, provided as a member service, at <http://parkpartners.org/Federal-Parks-and-Recreation-Newsletter.html> (password is “nphaonly”).

**For information on upcoming prospectuses and other actions of the NPS Commercial Services Office**, check regularly at <http://concessions.nps.gov/>.

**To reach an NPS employee**, use the NPS locator at <http://www.nps.gov/directory/>.

**For reports on park unit visitation**, current year and historic, as well as information on overnight stays, go to <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/>.

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***For more information or to send questions/comments, please email***

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