

Federal Parks & Recreation

Bulletin #1: January 12, 2015

Dear Subscriber:

This bulletin from Federal Parks & Recreation newsletter reports on the following:

*** Bipartisan set of senators drafting NPS Centennial bill**

NOTE: This bulletin is a supplement to your regular edition of Federal Parks & Recreation. It is NOT your regular issue. The next issue will be published January 16.
The Editors

NPS Centennial legislation is in the works in the Senate

Sen. John Portman (R-Ohio), who promises to be a key player in park and rec policy in this Congress, is preparing legislation to support the 2016 Centennial of the National Park Service, his office confirmed Friday.

On background the Portman office said Senate Energy Committee Chair Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and ranking committee Democrat Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) are helping Portman, who is expected to chair the Senate subcommittee on National Parks this year.

Of importance the senators are assessing the advisability of using the legislation to establish an endowment to allow philanthropists and others to contribute to upgrading the National Park System.

FPR has also learned that Portman and company may introduce a "marker" bill as early as this week to effectively announce their intentions. The marker bill may contain little if any substance but will identify the goals of Portman, Murkowski and Cantwell.

Meanwhile, it is understood that President Obama may include a shout-out to the NPS Centennial in his State of the Union address January 20. That address may include

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some specific recommendations for new steps the administration can take internally to generate interest in the Centennial.

We note that the early Congressional interest in Centennial legislation is coming from the Senate Energy Committee and not from the counterpart House Natural Resources Committee. While the Republican leaders of that latter panel have generally supported the national parks, they have also been loath to support Obama administration initiatives.

And in its fiscal 2015 budget request the Obama administration took the lead on a Centennial program. It asked Congress for hundreds of millions of dollars for the Centennial. Ergo the House committee leaders, particularly chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah), would likely resist the renewal of such a major administration recommendation.

But if the Republican Senate gins up a major initiative under Portman's lead that is a whole other kettle of political fish.

Congress last month did approve modest boosts for the Centennial in a fiscal year 2015 appropriations law (PL 113-235 of December 16) and in an omnibus public lands bill (PL 113-291 of December 19.)

The appropriators approved \$25 million for NPS operations and \$10 million for matching endowment grants. That's new money.

The House-Senate appropriations bill conferees said the \$25 million is to be used "to strengthen visitor services, public safety, and infrastructure programs in anticipation of increased visitation leading up to the Centennial of the National Park Service in 2016."

Separately in the public lands omnibus Congress authorized the Treasury Department to mint \$5 gold coins, \$1 silver coins and half-dollar coins during calendar year 2016 for the Centennial.

The provision would also assess a significant surcharge on each minting - \$35 for each dollar coin, \$10 for each silver coin and \$5 for each half-dollar coin. By our math if all coins were sold, the program would bring in \$13,625,000.

In its fiscal 2015 budget request the administration recommended more than \$600 million in new spending for the NPS Centennial over three years.

Specifically, the administration proposed \$40 million in increased appropriations for the Park Service, and Congress covered most of that.

Under the administration plan the appropriations increase would be followed by legislation that would generate up to \$400 million per year from a new Congressional Centennial initiative. Finally, in the third prong NPS could compete for some of \$200 million per year in government-wide Opportunity, Growth and Security Initiative money. That part didn't fly in Congress.

Some of the impetus for the attention to the Centennial is coming from a coalition of Park Service support groups led by the National Park Foundation, the National Parks Conservation Association and the National Park Hospitality Association.

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