

NEWS



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Government Shutdown Impacts Millions of Park Visitors and Thousands of Non-federal Employees

Collective impact on businesses serving park visitors, their employees and local communities near parks is massive and will have lasting consequences.

Washington, D.C. (October 9, 2013) – More than 700,000 visitors who normally visit 401 national park units across the nation every day in October – from Acadia National Park in Maine to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on the Big Island – are finding locked gates and barricades due to the shutdown of the federal government. Many of these visits involve long-planned travel and events.

The shutdown has special consequences for many communities. In much of the northern portion of the U.S., fall foliage sparks peak visitation. Acadia National Park and Shenandoah National Park are among the units closed, resulting in major adverse consequences for nearby communities. According to the National Park Service (NPS), visitors to America's national parks spend \$76 million per day in and near parks. This spending supports tens of thousands of jobs and generates millions of dollars daily in state and local sales and lodging taxes. And the shutdown also has a significant impact on the National Park Service's budget. Closure of the parks is costing the agency an estimated \$500,000 daily in entrance and recreation fees, fees normally retained at park units to support visitor experiences. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of additional park income paid daily by park concessioners from sales of lodging, food and more – also retained by local park units to fund maintenance of facilities tragically and historically underfunded under general appropriations – are being lost.

“In national parks, concessioners are losing an estimated \$5 million per day and are being forced to lay off thousands of employees,” according to Derrick Crandall, Counselor to the National Park Hospitality Association (NPHA). “They face large new expenses of contacting guests with reservations for the next month to cancel those

(more)

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reservations and of processing refunds. They are dealing with angry guests. This weekend alone, there will be 300-400 weddings long-planned that are either canceled or moved to another, less desirable venue. They are working with businesses that had planned to bring hundreds of busloads of international guests to the parks. They are managing hundreds of young people, whom they need as employees if they are to reopen, but who are either going unpaid or on sharply reduced hours. Plus these young people are being told by NPS to not go for hikes or use the parks in any way.

According to the NPHA, many of the closures are needless and ignore the essential mission of the National Park Service. "The 1916 organic act requires NPS 'to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same.' We don't believe anything in the law leading to the shutdown overrides or supersedes this directive. It merely prohibits expenditures of federal funds to accomplish this goal," said Crandall.

Across the nation, states and communities and concessioners and nonprofit organizations that support parks have proposed plans to provide limited access to national parks, stepping in to take on roles traditionally played by NPS staff. At the Grand Canyon, offers of about \$1 million have already been made by local and state governments and businesses in the area. Coalitions supporting other high-visitation sites like the Statue of Liberty and Alcatraz also have expressed interest in temporary arrangements that would fill in for federal employees. These temporary arrangements might actually create sustainable-partnership models to pursue as the NPS investigates new ways to meet its important mission by better leveraging federal appropriations.

"Sequestration was a dumb action. The shutdown is a dumb action. We'd like to be partners in demonstrating some smart actions," said Crandall. "That would be a great way to prepare for another century of national park operation."

About National Park Hospitality Association

National park concessioners provide lodging, food services, gifts and souvenirs, equipment rentals, transportation and other visitor services in more than 100 national park units across the United States. They have provided this support for more than 100 years. Their combined sales exceed \$1 billion annually. They pay more than \$100 million in franchise fees to the National Park Service every year. Concessioners include small businesses providing guide services as well as large companies operating lodges. They meet the needs of some 100 million park visitors annually and employ 25,000 people.

Editor/Producer Note: Derrick Crandall, Counselor to the National Park Hospitality Association (NPHA), is available for interview to discuss government shutdown impacts on national parks.

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