



**NATIONAL PARK HOSPITALITY ASSOCIATION**

## NEWS

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### **Innovative Partnerships Can Make National Parks Better, More Relevant**

Washington, D.C. (September 23, 2010) - The National Park Hospitality Association (NPHA) today outlined partnership strategies that would produce a new generation of world-class national park visitor facilities and enlist medical and educational partners to aid park operations and connect 21<sup>st</sup> Century Americans to their parks.

The ideas were presented at a hearing of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on National Resources. Subcommittee Chairman Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ) called the oversight hearing to help the Congress prepare for the 2016 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Park Service, saying, "The National Park Service has a long history of partnering with public and private entities to help acquire land, build visitor centers and other facilities, protect resources, expand scientific research, and reach out to new constituencies. Over the years, parks throughout the system have become increasingly dependent on their public and private partners."

NPHA Counselor Derrick Crandall appeared at the hearing and addressed four key partnership topics: New and Enduring Visitor Infrastructure; New Opportunities in Health and Education; Funding Sustainable Outreach and Promotion Efforts; and Institutionalizing Creativity.

"We urge you to help in the creation of new park facilities in the tradition of the grand, enduring structures, many predating the creation of the National Park Service in 1916, that are synonymous with the National Park System. Unique architecture and quality construction mark structures like the Ahwahnee and El Tovar Hotels, lodges in Glacier and Yellowstone and many more historic structures that help make 21<sup>st</sup> Century park visits lifelong memories," Crandall told the subcommittee. He noted that growth in visitor capacity needed to coincide with growth in the U.S. population. He called on the Congress to create provisions which could help create a new generation of visitor infrastructures that are enduring, architecturally outstanding and embrace top environmental and accessibility standards. He addressed historic facility tax credits, alternative revenue bonds, an infrastructure bank and more.

## **Innovative Partnerships in National Parks Add One**

Crandall next turned to important opportunities for expanding partnerships. “We believe that one of the most exciting opportunities for the national parks in the 21st Century is to connect to the measurable benefits the park system offers in fields such as education and health, and to develop sustainable funding responding to these contributions,” he told the panel. “There is significant and growing evidence that parks are, and can increasingly be, playing a significant role in reducing the nation's healthcare costs. The nation now spends \$2.7 trillion on healthcare. An estimated 70% is for chronic illnesses, which are lifestyle-induced and largely preventable. A top contributor to chronic illness is physical inactivity, resulting in illnesses ranging from diabetes to hypertension and strokes, cancer and depression. A growing army of medical experts is looking at parks and open space as cost-effective and successful intervention strategies.”

A new publication, *Park Prescriptions*, was shared with the subcommittee. Developed for the White House America's Great Outdoors Initiative, the publication offers case studies of collaboration by parks and medical organizations across the nation. “In locations ranging from Albuquerque to Brooklyn, doctors are prescribing parks. In Arkansas, we discovered that cardiologists had personally raised more than \$1 million for construction and maintenance of an urban ‘Medical Mile,’ offering both opportunities for healthy fun and information about ‘minimum daily requirements’ for physical activity. Also in Arkansas, we learned that the University of Arkansas has invested \$90,000 in expanding and upgrading a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers campground because studies show that patients receiving long-term cancer treatment recover better and faster while staying in a park-like setting than in a hospital ward, a hotel or other facility – and at much lower costs,” Crandall said. He also cited efforts of NatureBridge in the education field as deserving of expansion and support, and urged the subcommittee to support efforts like ED OUT, piloted by the Prince William County (VA) Schools.

The NPHA has noted that park promotion efforts began in the earliest days of America's parks and Mr. Crandall linked lower visitation levels to a recent reduction in those efforts. “Park visitation by Americans is lower today than several decades ago – even as our population has grown by 25%,” he said. “While visitation to showcase parks remains stable, many other units of the National Park System offer wonderful experiences but are highly underutilized. In many cases, these less-visited, high-potential parks have limited visitor services, and this is an area we urge the Congress to examine,” added Crandall.

“NPHA believes that the National Park Service and its partners should undertake expanded outreach and marketing efforts – especially directed to urban Americans, Americans of color, new Americans, and other portions of the American public with limited traditions of park visitation. And NPHA offers to play a major role in this area,” Crandall told the subcommittee. NPHA urges the Congress to earmark funding for outreach and promotion, including a portion of concessioner-paid franchise fees not retained in the parks.

(more)

## **Innovative Partnerships in National Parks Add Two**

Finally, NPHA's testimony strongly supported steps to encourage innovation in park partnerships. Crandall noted, "America's park and conservation community has been blessed with visionary leadership for more than 150 years – reflected in the world's first national park, the world's first national forest and national wildlife refuge systems and more. That vision continues. For many of us who had the pleasure to work with the late Brian O'Neill, long-time General Superintendent of Golden Gate National Recreation Area, we saw firsthand one of the leading contemporary visionaries in our field. We are enthusiastic about the interest of the Chairman of this subcommittee in exploring ways to encourage and nurture this visionary spirit within NPS professionals and partners to the agency. While it seems like an oxymoron to attempt to institutionalize untraditional thinking and partnership-based thinking, we believe that it can and should be done."

Crandall said that NPHA members are excited about the future of America's national parks and believe that partnerships can meet the operational and protection challenges facing the National Park System. "The National Park Service alone cannot protect and support our parks. Fortunately, they do not need to take on this important task by themselves. The array of partners today, and the even more powerful array of potential partners in the future, should make the future of America's national parks bright."

***The NPHA represents the nation's national park concessioners, helping park visitors create life-long memories since the 1870's. Today, concessioners serve some 100 million park visitors annually in more than 150 park units. NPHA members have a combined front-line, visitor-contact workforce of nearly 25,000 persons and provide in excess of \$1 billion in goods and services to visitors annually. Annual franchise fee payments to NPS generated from 600 concessions contracts exceed \$70 million. And concessioners do far more than generate franchise fees. Our Guest Contribution programs operate in partnership with local friends organizations and the National Park Foundation. The NPF-associated programs in 13 parks have generated \$1.1 million for deserving park projects since 2006, including more than \$300,000 in the year ending June 30, 2010. Concessioner park promotion efforts exceed \$10 million annually, and are coordinated with marketing and promotion efforts of state and gateway communities. Concessioners are leading efforts to find ways to focus promotion on the entire National Park System and those Americans unaware of the great benefits available through time in our parks. Most importantly, concessioners are committed to meeting America's needs for healthier lifestyles, for better and lifelong educational opportunities, for strong local and regional economies that sustain and protect our parks, and for connecting all Americans to our parks across differences in regions, ages, income and ethnicity.***

For a copy of the testimonies, please [click here](#).

Information on national park concessioners is at [www.parkpartners.org](http://www.parkpartners.org).