



## May 2013 Newsletter

National Park Hospitality Association

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### **MEDIA FOCUS ON NATIONAL PARKS TURNS POSITIVE**

Media stories this spring focused on sequestration and other budget problems, and highlighted late openings and plans to reduce staffing in national parks. This week, though, the media attention has been very positive. USA Today has a special national parks publication out on newsstands and [online](#) which includes an article by Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan. And the Today show this week planned to showcase special travel destinations across the country, including a live broadcast on Tuesday, May 21, from Yellowstone. Although the tornado in Oklahoma changed the Today show plans at the very last minute, we feel certain that all of the show's planning is likely to result in coverage soon. NPHA members were actively involved in both efforts.

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### **NPCA TRANSITION UNDERWAY**

Tom Kiernan officially departs NPCA this week for his new role as President of the American Wind Power Association, also based in Washington, D.C. He led NPCA for 15 years and played a central role in creating the partnership with NPHA and NPF which sponsored the America's Summit on National Parks in January 2012, the joint NPCA/NPHA research effort on Americans' attitudes toward national parks in June 2012 and the March 2013 joint NPHA/NPCA effort with the Bipartisan Policy Center to

highlight opportunities for Sustainable Supplementary Funding for America's National Parks – showcasing 16 initiatives including expanded visitor services provided by concessioners. Tom has demonstrated a true commitment to cooperation and coordination of efforts as we approach the centennial of the National Park Service. His vision and energies will be missed.

Tom will be succeeded on an interim basis by Theresa Pierno, now Acting President and previously NPCA's Executive Vice President. Biographic information on Theresa can be found [here](#). A search for a permanent President is underway. Theresa will be meeting with NPHA and NPF staff leadership later this month to keep cooperation among the key park partners strong.

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## **NPHA BOARD AND MEMBERS WILL MEET IN WASHINGTON, D.C. IN OCTOBER 2013**

NPHA leaders decided in March at the annual meeting to return to Washington for the fall meeting in light of the many important park issues being discussed by Congress and the Administration. The inspirational North Rim setting and the marvelous support of Forever Resorts and Grand Canyon National Park for our October 2012 meeting, Grand Thoughts at the Grand Canyon, will be missed but 2013-2014 is shaping up to be a time for action on the ideas produced by the 2012 session.

Our 2013 fall meeting will also utilize the capabilities of ARAMARK, which operates the Georgetown University Hotel and Conference Center, where our Fall 2013 meeting will be headquartered. The meeting will open on Sunday, October 27, and continue through Tuesday evening, October 29. We anticipate opportunities to meet with new leadership at the U.S. Department of the Interior, with key Members of Congress and with NPS leaders. The NPS Concessions Management Advisory Board plans to meet on October 30. Additional information will be sent out in late June – but block your calendars now.

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## **CMAB CREATES THREE WORKING GROUPS**

In meetings with NPS Director Jon Jarvis, NPHA called upon the NPS leadership to improve the agency's use of the talent of the Concessions Management Advisory Board (CMAB) or discontinue the board and apply resources to other priorities. NPHA leaders outlined a number of issues where CMAB could contribute to a stronger concessions program. In response, NPS leadership has now charged the CMAB with considering three important issues through Working Groups comprised of advisory board members, NPS staff and consultants and concessioners. The three Working Groups will address:

- 1) simplified processes for small concessioners
- 2) concessioner recognition and incentives

### 3) innovative commercial visitor services

Although initial members of each Working Group have been named, additional volunteers can apply for one or more of the groups by expressing interest via email to: [commercial\\_services@nps.gov](mailto:commercial_services@nps.gov). More information on the leadership, scope and time lines for each Working Group is available [here](#). Plans call for the Working Groups to work actively between now and the fall of 2013, with recommendations going to NPS leadership by early 2014.

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## **NPS TRANSITIONS**

The NPS Commercial Services Office will have a new national Chief beginning in early June. Ben Erichsen will start his new assignment on Monday, June 3. He has 30+ years of experience in the hospitality industry in both the private and public sectors. His background covers sales, marketing, advertising and operations. He spent 10 years as Chief Marketing Officer for Marine Corps Community Services Okinawa, a hospitality and community services organization responsible for seven military bases. He also served as Corporate Director of Marketing for Hornblower Cruises and Events, General Manager of the dinner cruise ships Spirit of Washington and Spirit of Mount Vernon, and as a vice president for an investment banking firm specializing in private placement syndication of hotel and resort investments.

There have been a number of other key transitions in the Commercial Services Office. Trystan Stern has taken over as the Commercial Services Program Manager, Pacific West Region. He succeeds Anne Altman, who is now Special Assistant to the Associate Director of the National Park Service for Business Services. Jill Morgan is the new Chief of Commercial Services, Alaska Region, replacing Kevin Apgar, who retired in December 2012.

Within top NPS leadership, there is a vacancy at the Deputy Director level following the departure of Mickey Fearn. His successor has not been named. Peggy O'Dell remains as the Deputy Director for Operations. To follow new appointments, retirements and more, visit <http://home.nps.gov/applications/digest/people.cfm>.

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## **DIRECTOR'S ORDER 21 REWRITE EXPECTED**

Changes in the fiscal realities of the National Park Service – and growing strength in its partner organizations, including concessioners and local friends groups – have prompted the agency to begin a review of Director's Order 21, last revised in 2006. The document applies to donations and fund-raising and includes comprehensive guidance for partnering with friends organizations and other nonprofit groups. The agency has been told by NPF, by local friends organizations and by NPHA that the current guidance

is having a chilling effect on partnerships and cooperation. In recent months, DO 21 has been identified as a deterrent to accepting offers of concessioner assistance during Superstorm Sandy recovery efforts as well as implementation of the guest donation program in ways which would help to create strong links between park visitors and individual parks. NPF has encountered significant unhappiness from corporations desiring to assist parks but encountering far less acknowledgment than typical when supporting other public programs and organizations. NPHA hopes to bring about changes to DO 21 which will increase opportunities for challenge programs like those initiated by former Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne and to facilitate cooperative efforts involving construction and on-going operations where public and private funds are combined – and where non-federal leadership of the project can achieve significant cost savings.

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## **BRIDGEBUILDER SESSION WHITE PAPERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT**

NPHA played the leadership role in recruiting and managing authors of 16 white papers which were included in the core document for the March 2013 Bipartisan Policy Center Bridgebuilder session on Sustainable Supplementary Funds for America's National Parks. The papers can be reviewed and downloaded [here](#). Many of the white papers are being edited and improved, using ideas and examples provided by park community leaders. Here is how the white papers are already making a difference:

- 1) At a hearing of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies, substantial interaction occurred between Chairman Mike Simpson (R-ID) and NPS Director Jon Jarvis. The Director praised the assembly of ideas and told the Chairman that the ideas were under review. The Chairman made clear that NPS needed to consider revenues beyond general appropriations, and the Director acknowledged that reality at the hearing and at subsequent public sessions where he expressed a need for a new financial model for the agency that removes it at least somewhat from the challenges of annual appropriations.
- 2) The white papers were a topic of discussion when the NPS National Leadership Council convened in Washington in mid-May, with presentations by NPS Comptroller Bruce Sheaffer. Although no firm positions were taken, the stimulation of new thinking is already being seen at the local level.
- 3) A proposed “action step” derived from the March white paper on fees has been submitted by a broad mix of park supporters for incorporation in the 2013 update of the **A Call to Action** document, urging new efforts to employ technology and partners in fee collections to reduce costs and increase visitor convenience, questioning the seven-day basis of the fees now imposed by most units, promoting “dynamic pricing” of entrance fees and fees for services such as campgrounds, and urging consideration of rewarding volunteers at non-fee units with free entrance passes to fee units as a way to address the “rich park/poor park” challenge.
- 4) The leadership of the Senate Subcommittee on National Parks has requested briefings by NPS on the white papers in advance of an anticipated hearing on future park funding early this summer.

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## NPS HEALTHY FOOD STANDARD

NPS is awaiting a green light from the Administration on its Healthy Food standard, which was approved by the agency in March but put on hold. An event is being considered for June 5 in Washington, during Great Outdoors Month and involving demonstrations by several concessioners of the healthy food choices now available in many park locations. Little change is anticipated from the draft standard developed in 2012 [here](#).

### 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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### ***News from the NPS Commercial Services Team:***

## NPS CLARIFIES POLICY CONCERNING SURCHARGES ON CREDIT CARD TRANSACTIONS

In a memorandum issued April 9, 2013, NPS Commercial Services clarified that, in accordance with current NPS rate administration policies and procedures, concessioners are not permitted to impose surcharges on credit card transactions.

Historically, bank and credit card contracts have prohibited merchants from imposing a surcharge when a customer uses a credit card; however, a Federal judge recently approved a preliminary settlement in an antitrust class action suit brought by retailers against Visa, MasterCard, and other large financial institutions. A condition of the settlement eliminates this ban on surcharges as of January 27, 2013. Retailers may now charge customers for the actual cost of processing credit card transactions (typically 1.5% to 3% of the transaction amount). This fee is a surcharge added to the price of the good or service. The elimination of the ban on surcharges is part of a preliminary settlement. A final ruling is expected later in 2013.

Concessioners are not permitted to impose such surcharges on credit card transactions. Current concession contracts already consider expenses like credit card

processing costs during the prospectus development process. These expenses are already accounted for when setting franchise fees and when calculating authorized rates. Although surcharges are not permitted, concessioners may offer discounts to customers who pay with cash, check, or debit card.

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## **COMMERCIAL SERVICES GREENLINE GOES BLOG**

Commercial Services has been publishing the GreenLine Newsletter since 2000. The primary purposes of the GreenLine Newsletter are to publicize program goals and objectives, provide information on environmental compliance and best management practices, and highlight outstanding concessioner environmental programs.

After 12 years of hard copy publication, the GreenLine is now electronic. To keep communications current, the Commercial Services program has moved from a semi-annual publication to a GreenLine Blog. This will help deliver information on important topics more quickly as it comes up. The blog will continue to: highlight concession best management activities; provide information on compliance, management systems, and sustainability; and answer park and concessioner questions that arise. The first blog entry was posted on Earth Day, and highlighted some of the concessioner-planned Earth Day events. Check out the blog site at [http://www.concessions.nps.gov/tools\\_greenline.htm](http://www.concessions.nps.gov/tools_greenline.htm). If you have any suggested blog stories, please send them to [Kat\\_Berry@nps.gov](mailto:Kat_Berry@nps.gov).

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