



March 2009 Newsletter

National Park Hospitality Association

www.parkpartners.org

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NPHA 2009 Annual Meeting Report

The National Park Hospitality Association held its annual meeting March 8-10 in Washington, D.C. at the Madison Hotel with special sessions at the Department of the Interior and on Capitol Hill. Nearly 100 concessioners, allies and National Park Service (NPS) employees participated in discussions with the new Administration and key Members of Congress. Conversation topics included improving awareness of the long history of concessioner support for parks and park visitors and action on reversing a decline in visitation to America's national parks. NPHA's new video, *Partners in Parks - United for America*, was shown and will be distributed to contributing members for use with employees, gateway allies and local park officials. Acting NPS Director Dan Wenk told the group of plans for the \$920 million NPS received under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The Task Force on Rate Approval reported its recommendations to NPS leadership and received a green light for discussions aimed at overcoming park-to-park variations in rate reviews and use of the SERA effort to address "big picture" issues on standards, evaluation and rate approval. NPHA also added two new executive committee members: Steve Tedder as a new Vice Chairman and Terry MacRae in an ex officio role as Chair of the newly created Committee on Increasing Park Visitation.

To read the full report on the NPHA 2009 Annual Meeting, [click here](#).

If you attended the Annual Meeting, please take a moment to complete this [evaluation form](#). Thank you for your efforts to strengthen future NPHA meetings!

Mark your calendars! NPHA 2009 Park Services Forum, October 18-21, Yosemite NP area

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NPHA offers proposals to Second Century Commission

The National Park Hospitality Association is aiding the Second Century Commission in articulating a vision for the second century of America's national parks. A delegation of NPHA leaders met with Commission Co-chair J. Bennett Johnston (former U.S. Senator from Louisiana) during the NPHA Annual Meeting to discuss ways concessioners can continue to assist the National Park Service in improving and sustaining visitor services and experiences in the parks. NPHA outlined two important initiatives that will help achieve these shared goals in partnership with the NPS.

The first proposal is for a reinstatement of national park outreach and promotion efforts. NPHA believes that promotion is at the heart of today's widespread understanding of the value of parks and sees long-term risks from the abandonment of federal park promotion efforts. NPHA suggested action similar to the 1998 Sport Fishing and Boating Safety Act, which mandated a national outreach and communication program to address declining participation in recreational boating and fishing. This program is conducted through the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, with public and private sector involvement. A similar initiative with the goal of boosting awareness of park visitor opportunities could be the tool national parks need to combat the downturn in annual park visitations. The second proposal is to both encourage world-class visitor infrastructure in our parks and to place a priority on using non-appropriated, largely concessioner-furnished funding for needed facilities.

NPHA representatives will be present for the Second Century Commission's gathering on March 19-20 in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, to build further support for these initiatives within the Commission.

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Encouraging signs for travel and recreation

While reasons for concern still exist, we have been delighted by several recent news headlines projecting promising travel and recreation trends for the months ahead. RV dealers, who were hit hard by last summer's skyrocketing gas prices and the subsequent economic downturn and credit crunch, are finally reporting increased sales, some as high as double this same time last year. While buyers are often looking more for used models, they ultimately recognize that RV camping is a less expensive means for quality family travel. White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs reported last week, "The President believes it's important to have a strong tourism industry," and that, "He would encourage people to travel." The U.S. Travel Association applauded the statement, saying, "These comments are extremely positive for the 1 million employees in this industry whose livelihood depends on business meetings and events." The February travelhorizons™ survey of leisure travelers also reported that the U.S. Traveler Sentiment Index™ has recently spiked due to an increase in the perceived "affordability of travel." This trend appears to be a direct result of many travel suppliers' recent efforts to stimulate short-term demand through the aggressive promotion of discounted fares and rates. These promising trends could have positive consequences for travel to national parks this summer.

The related articles can be found below:

- [Local RV dealers say sales are improving](#)
- [President believes strong tourism industry is important](#)
- [Leisure travel intentions trend slightly upward](#)

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DOI Chief of Staff Tom Strickland announced for Assistant Secretary

On February 23 President Obama announced his nomination of Tom Strickland for Interior Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, overseeing policy for the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Mr. Strickland is currently serving as Interior Secretary Ken Salazar's Chief of Staff. In an unusual move, Mr. Strickland plans to concurrently serve as Chief of Staff and Assistant Secretary if he is confirmed. Secretary Salazar commended the President's nomination. "I have known and worked with Tom Strickland for more than twenty years," he said. "From the work we did together to create the Great Outdoors Colorado program to his service as U.S. Attorney, his record and devotion to public service is second to none. As my Chief of Staff, he has helped us hit the ground running at the Department of the Interior so that we can restore the trust of the American people in its government and fulfill President Obama's agenda. In addition to serving as the Chief of Staff for the 67,000 employees of the Department, he would bring to the Assistant Secretary position the type of vision for our parks, wildlife and open spaces that our country needs right now."

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Details on NPHA's Limited Benefit Medical Plan

The National Park Hospitality Association, in partnership with Dynastar Benefits Group, an expert in voluntary employee benefits, has developed a limited benefit medical plan (LBMP) especially for NPHA members to offer to their employees. LBMPs can be a cost-efficient solution for businesses wishing to offer basic health insurance coverage to help to attract and retain employees and boost employee satisfaction.

These plans are offered to employees on a voluntary basis. Member companies decide whether or not to contribute to the plans and then deduct the premiums through payroll deduction. Dynastar works closely with participating companies to make offering the program simple by providing all enrollment materials and assigning a dedicated account manager who provides ongoing assistance with payroll administration.

An LBMP is a group-sponsored employee health plan that provides capped medical and prescription drug benefits to employees. Although the plans are not designed to replace major medical insurance, LBMPs include meaningful benefits for basic medical services such as doctor office visits, diagnostics, x-ray and lab testing, wellness checkups and screenings, outpatient medical services, emergency room care and inpatient benefits.

NPHA's indemnity-based plan reimburses a fixed dollar amount for covered medical services to help meet basic health insurance needs. The benefits that are guaranteed are issued with no pre-existing conditions exclusions, meaning that if the plan is purchased, an employee can receive medical and prescription benefits on the first day of eligibility. With premiums starting at approximately \$10 per week for employee-only coverage, it is something to consider while evaluating your current employee benefit plan.

For more information, contact Scott Airmont of Dynastar Benefits Group at 719-684-6933 or by email at sa@dynastarbenefits.com and visit the NPHA Benefits website at www.parkpartnersinsurance.com. In addition, an association casualty and liability insurance program soon will be available to NPHA members, with a special "job loss" protection option for guest reservations.

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NPHA Membership Directory draft available for your review

Notice to all National Park Hospitality Association members: a new draft NPHA Directory is now available for your review on www.parkpartners.org. Please visit the "Members Only" section and enter your password – nphaonly – to view the draft. For corrections or to add another contact, notify Mindy Meade at mmeade@funoutdoors.com **as soon as possible**. Thank you!

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Federal Parks and Recreation Newsletter: New NPS tourism policy looks to new revenue sources

Without fanfare the National Park Service (NPS) late last year produced a new tourism policy that not only is designed to attract more visitors to the parks, but also to improve the quality of visits. Indeed, one of the six building blocks of the policy – improving visitor experiences – states, "Build an expectation that visiting parks opens doors to a wide spectrum of life-enriching experiences which lead to repeat visits, referrals, volunteerism and philanthropy." The policy anticipates several strategies to pay the freight, beginning with an appropriations base for overhead costs. "We would look for appropriations for costs that can't be assigned elsewhere to what will be one of the smallest Washington offices," said Dean Reeder, NPS National Tourism Chief. Beyond that base the policy considers two new strategies to pay for specific marketing projects – a share of entrance fees and revenues brought in by the projects. The entrance fees would come from the 20 percent of existing revenues that are distributed from the Washington office. (The other 80 percent of fee revenues is reserved for the collecting park.) Further down the line, Mr. Reeder said, NPS hopes to obtain the approval of Congress to finance marketing projects from revenues produced by the projects themselves, kind of a pay-as-you-go system. "We aren't able to say how that would work at this point," stated Mr. Reeder. "It will take considerable analysis and a presentation to Congress. That's way down the road."

To read the rest of this story, learn about progress of key legislation and more, go to your member-benefit copy of the *Federal Parks & Recreation Newsletter* on the NPHA website and use your password: nphaonly [\[Click here\]](#).

Federal Parks & Recreation Newsletter – a free service for NPHA members – provides biweekly, up-to-date information on park and outdoor recreation policy developments.

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News

- [NPS Concessions: News on prospectuses](#)
- [Obama celebrates Interior Department's 160th Anniversary](#)
- [National Park Week: April 18-26, 2009](#)

For more information or to send questions/comments, please email: mmeade@funoutdoors.com

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