



## May 2012 Newsletter

National Park Hospitality Association

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### **NPHA's October Meeting Anchors *Grand Thoughts at the Grand Canyon***

The National Park Hospitality Association, in close collaboration with Grand Canyon National Park officials, will invite more than 200 corporate and nonprofit representatives, citizen activists and government officials to join in a novel week of learning, sharing and action on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon this fall. Called ***Grand Thoughts at the Grand Canyon***, the program will build upon the successful January 2012 America's Summit on National Parks and will continue preparations for the 2016 Centennial of the National Park Service. Each of the seven days will feature a theme and will draw leaders in industry and government for keynote presentations, followed by small group discussions.

Daily themes will include: *Telling America and the World About Our Parks*; *Connecting Urban Parks with Remote and Iconic Parks*; *Harnessing Technology in America's Parks*; *Funding America's Parks*; *Building Unity in America Around Parks*; and *Learning in Parks for All Ages*.

NPHA will hold its Board of Directors and membership meetings on October 16 and 17, to kick off the discussions. Some NPHA committees and task forces will meet later in the week – details shortly at [www.parkpartners.org](http://www.parkpartners.org). The gathering will be just weeks before the nation goes to the polls to elect 435 U.S. Representatives, 33 U.S. Senators, a dozen governors and the President of the United States, who will be in office on August 25, 2016, the 100th anniversary of the creation of the National Park Service.

**Grand Thoughts at the Grand Canyon** is made possible by a one-time, one-week extension of the normal operating season of the Grand Canyon Lodge by Grand Canyon National Park Superintendent David Uberuaga. The extension between October 16 and 23 was granted at the request of the National Park Hospitality Association (NPHA) and Forever Resorts, concessions operator on the North Rim. In addition to providing an inspiring venue for discussions, the extension will provide tangible benefits to the National Park Service locally and nationally. Participants will generate additional entrance fee and franchise fee income for both the park and the agency, and the concessioner has volunteered to earmark 30% of all accommodations revenues to a new National Park Centennial Account managed by the National Park Foundation. The account will be used to fund Centennial projects and programs.

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### **NPHA Urges CMAB Use on Priority Issues**

NPHA's Board of Directors discussed efforts of the National Park Concessions Management Advisory Board (CMAB) and agreed to make recommendations to NPS officials about future operations of the board. NPHA suggests that the CMAB be asked to address five key issues:

- 1) **Introduction of incentives for concessioners.** Develop a new evaluation protocol that includes "superior" and/or "outstanding," supplementing the current acceptable/unacceptable ratings now in use. Review and evaluate tangible benefits for concessioners earning higher ratings. Among the possible benefits could be a contract extension, a reduction in franchise fee payments and/or a bonus in evaluation of responses to prospectuses for new contracts.
- 2) **A comprehensive strategy for encouraging private investment in park infrastructure.** In addition to a review of LSI policy, additional strategies such as allowing qualification for achieving Historic Tax Credits, use of revenue bonds and contracts with renewal clauses conditioned on performance to allow use of traditional commercial loans (which traditionally require 20+ years for leases) should be evaluated and recommendations for policy and law changes made where deemed appropriate.
- 3) **Guidelines on appropriate expenditures by concessioners on outreach and promotion.** NPS rarely includes provisions for outreach and promotion in prospectuses. If NPS desires to have concessioners serve as key partners in this area, these activities should be introduced as an item in the contract development process. Also useful would be an evaluation of appropriate use of franchise fees for research and agency promotion programs, both locally and regarding the 20% of franchise fees available for discretionary national uses.
- 4) **Review of the cost effectiveness of NPS versus concessioner project management.** Just as NPS has researched and concluded that there are important economies associated with use of youth conservation corps, it appears very likely that concessioner management of construction projects involving infrastructure used for concessions activities can be done more efficiently, more promptly and with less disruption to park visitors. Such findings should guide

decisions on how to optimize available construction funds, including special accounts established by concessions contracts.

5) **Conduct a review of where additional concessioner services would assist the goals of the National Strategy on Travel and Tourism.** Investigate whether some or all of these additional services could be provided as part of commercial services plans, without revisions to general management plans.

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## Highlighting American-made Items in Park Stores

High unemployment has given new momentum to Congressional interest in encouraging – perhaps even mandating – American-made apparel, souvenirs and other items in stores within national parks, in Smithsonian museums and other federally controlled locations. U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) recently introduced legislation on this topic. NPHA has created a task force on this topic with representation from most major concessioners. And action is underway.

The group will conduct a survey of major concessioners on “American-made” item sales, but decided to develop a second category of items that would not qualify for the FTC criteria of “American-made” but where a large percentage of the value is created domestically. The task force is also exploring opportunities for increasing the percentage of domestically produced items carried in consultation with key manufacturers, vendors and suppliers. Group purchasing to support domestic manufacturing, especially of Centennial-themed items, is one possibility.

Another action by the task force is the development of a guide to sources of “American-made” items. Using a guide created by Delaware North Companies as a starting point, NPHA members will pool information that will then be posted at [www.parkpartners.org](http://www.parkpartners.org) and updated quarterly.

Also, NPHA will utilize a good program used by the Smithsonian Institute: a form on our website will be available to companies offering American-made goods. By filling out the form, information on the offered items will be sent to all concessioners with major retail operations. That form, too, will be at [www.parkpartners.org](http://www.parkpartners.org).

NPHA is now developing a statement on “American-made” items and park retail operations and will be distributing the statement to Congress, the media and other organizations. The statement will embrace highlighting of American-made items but explain the realities of the supply network and the impact of NAFTA and other laws on U.S. manufacturers.

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## **NPS Centennial Legislation**

NPHA staff is meeting with other park partners and Congressional offices to discuss new legislative authorities which can assist national park operations in the “Second Century” of the National Park Service. Concepts ranging from a new National Park Endowment to multi-year budgets are being discussed. Conversations include many issues highlighted in NPHA’s Better Visitor Services Initiative, adopted in March 2011. These issues include authorization for NPS marketing and promotion efforts and expansion of concessioner operations of campgrounds and other facilities.

The likelihood of a significant “parks centennial” bill in the next Congress is high – and could offer real opportunities to the concessions community. To see NPHA’s Better Visitor Services Initiative, click [here](#). To see an outline of issues NPHA staff is discussing as possible components of NPS Centennial legislation, click [here](#).

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## **NPCA, NPHA Launch Joint Effort to Highlight Public Support for Parks**

NPHA has joined the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) on a follow-up effort to January’s Summit on National Parks which will highlight public support for parks during a critical election year. We heard at the Summit that parks are a positive political issue for Republicans and Democrats alike, but that our issues need to be framed differently. Jobs linked to parks and tourism work with some voters. The health message, about the benefits of active time outdoors, works with some voters. Environmental issues-clean air and water, species protection and more-work with some voters. Heritage and family values linked to parks work for some voters. The trick is to help candidates and those who advise candidates know more about how those messages work with the voters they are pursuing.

The stakes are high. In November, voters will select our President for the next four years-the President who will be in office during the National Park Service Centennial year of 2016. We’ll also elect 435 U.S. Representatives, 33 U.S. Senators and a dozen governors. One of the tools which would be most effective in increasing understanding of and interest in parks by candidates for these offices would be relevant survey data which demonstrates broad public interest in park issues-and delivered in tandem with trusted political analysis.

NPCA has funded research of this type in the past and invited NPHA to join in this effort for 2012. NPHA’s executive committee approved the project and invited NPHA members to support the effort through a voluntary assessment. The research will utilize two highly respected firms-Peter D. Hart Research Associates on the “D” side and Whit Ayres’ North Star Opinion Research on the “R” side – and involve a national sample of more than 1,000 likely voters. We’ll keep you posted as the project moves ahead. The poll is planned for early June and the analysis will be done by mid-summer. The political counsel will be shared with the committees drafting the Democratic and

Republican party platforms, as well as with leading political consultants advising candidates in the 2012 races.

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## **Regional NPS/NPHA Meetings Continue**

Concessioners active in the Midwest will gather May 30 for a half-day session with NPS Regional Director Mike Reynolds. Topics of discussion will include regional efforts to achieve the goals of **A Call to Action**, NPHA initiatives involving outreach and promotion, and a brainstorming session on innovative ways to meet visitor facility needs during a period of extreme tightness in appropriated funds for construction and maintenance.

Meetings with regional directors and their teams in San Francisco, Denver and Alaska are planned for the summer of 2012.

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## **National Strategy on Travel and Tourism**

The Obama Administration released its new National Travel and Tourism Strategy on May 10, outlining an ambitious pledge to promote domestic and international travel opportunities throughout the United States. Developed by a White House task force chaired by Commerce Secretary John Bryson and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, the Strategy was described by the Administration as “a blueprint for expanding travel to and within the U.S., laying out concrete steps to be taken in five key areas. It sets out a goal of increasing American jobs by attracting and welcoming 100 million international visitors annually by the end of 2021, more than a 50 percent increase over the number expected this year. These international visitors would spend an estimated \$250 billion per year, creating jobs and spurring economic growth in communities across the country.”

Parks figure prominently in the Strategy – in fact, the cover features the Grand Canyon. There is new guidance and authority for the National Park Service and other federal land managing agencies to put an emphasis on visitor services and promotion. However, the Strategy does not direct any new federal resources into these efforts. To read the full 33-page report, download it [here](#).

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## **NPHA Tells NPS that LSI Guide Need Rethinking**

The NPS issued a draft guide to Leasehold Surrender Interest (LSI) in March, inviting public comments. After discussions by the NPHA board, NPHA Chairman Joe Fassler submitted comments on the guide. The comments noted that NPHA members have

been disappointed and concerned by delays and inconsistencies encountered in getting recognition of LSI, and that the impact has been significant on the quality of visitor services offered in parks, exacerbating the well-documented large and growing backlog of deferred maintenance and have contributed to a reduction in overall visitor experience in America's national parks over two decades. He reported that NPHA members feel the draft Guide fails to adequately protect and encourage needed investment by concessioners.

NPHA's comments focused on the broader issue of how the LSI tool can and should fit into a broader strategy of meeting legitimate visitor experience needs through combined agency and partner investments and operations. NPHA also noted that the agency needs in the visitor experience arena have been highlighted and underscored by the new National Travel and Tourism Strategy, yet the draft Guide fails to even recognize the importance of LSI to this important new policy direction.

NPHA urged in its comments that national parks serve as models of excellence in environmental operations, in compliance with health and safety standards, in universal access and in visitor services. Current NPS policies and operations hamper these goals, including LSI treatment, NPHA said.

NPHA urged NPS to respond to changed financial realities in a holistic and creative way, respecting core values and mission but fully utilizing new tools, and using old tools in new ways. The agency can and should assemble and coordinate a full suite of tools available to serve visitor needs, including but not limited to LSI. Other tools might include expanded use of longer concessions contracts, more efficient use of specialized maintenance and capital investment accounts created under concessions contracts, priorities in use of park unit-retained franchise fees and priorities in the use of entrance fees and other user fees.

NPHA concluded with this: *"We believe that the Guide as published in draft form adds little and introduces new uncertainty to agency efforts to execute a financial strategy. We are particularly surprised by the statement, 'The proposed LSI Guide is not intended to describe all LSI requirements or circumstances. The proposed LSI Guide does not adopt requirements or policy for the National Park Service or National Park Service concessioners.'*

*"NPHA calls upon NPS to (1) withdraw this proposal and (2) develop a new strategic plan which addresses LSI and other important financial tools which are needed to develop and maintain a quality visitor services infrastructure, especially in light of the new National Tourism and Travel Strategy."*

To read the full submission, click [here](#).

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**Important Dues Notice Reminder**

2012 NPHA dues have been submitted by a large majority of members – and are now past due. If you have not submitted your dues, please do so now. A link to the dues forms is [here](#). Questions? Contact Derrick Crandall [dcrandall@funoutdoors.com](mailto:dcrandall@funoutdoors.com).

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