



October / November 2012 Newsletter

National Park Hospitality Association

In this issue:

- [NPHA Assembles Blue-Ribbon Group at Grand Canyon](#)
- [FLREA - One Year Out](#)
- [NPHA Board Meets and Confirms Spring Meeting in DC, Support for Continued Efforts to Unify Park Partners](#)
- [National Park Service Chief of Commercial Services Post Readvertized](#)
- [NPHA, NPS Will Team up to Boost Cell and Internet Access in Parks](#)
- [Recognizing Excellence](#)
- [CONPAC Update - By Julie Gackenbach](#)

NPHA ASSEMBLES BLUE-RIBBON GROUP AT GRAND CANYON

Nearly 150 leaders of America's national park community gathered at the North Rim of the Grand Canyon for a five-day discussion of opportunities and concerns involving national parks. **Grand Thoughts at the Grand Canyon** was organized by the National Park Hospitality Association and included large and small concessioners, top National Park Service (NPS) leaders and the Presidents of both the National Park Foundation (NPF) and the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). The meeting also attracted key leaders from the telecommunications and entertainment industries and national tourism leaders, including state tourism directors. **Grand Thoughts** was held at the Grand Canyon Lodge, a structure built in 1928 that continues today to provide an inspiring perspective on America's natural beauty. The lodge is operated by Forever Resorts, which donated 30% of room revenues to a new Centennial account administered by NPF.

NPCA President Tom Kiernan called for unity among the parks community to achieve a "Bending of the Curve," reversing downward trends in both park funding and visitation. Brent Young, Founder and Creative Director for Studio 78, a top creator of theme park attractions and innovative film concepts globally, touted the use of "Augmented Reality" as a part of park visits, including using geospatial information to share what had occurred at the same spot at which visitors stand during visits today. NPS Director Jon Jarvis delivered a powerful message about the unifying role of national parks and the display of American values reflected in the system's nearly 400 units. Labeling his

presentation “The Field Guide to American Values in the National Parks,” the Director highlighted the broad relevance of parks. He added that, for nearly 100 years, the National Park Service has been pursuing a mission of promoting and protecting parks. He rated the job on the protection side as “good.” In contrast, he put the job on the promotion side as largely unaddressed and key to the success of the agency over its next century.

NPS Associate Director Julia Washburn touted new partnerships in the telling of stories – interpretation and education – both during visits to national park units and “virtually.” New strategies to boost the financial and manpower resources available in national parks were another key topic of discussion. Participants learned about successes in related fields – including the rebuilding of Chicago’s lakeshore through a public/private partnership – and discussed new ideas ranging from a Penny for Parks proposal, which is connected with pending discussions regarding national surface transportation policy, to issues that could be addressed in conjunction with reauthorization of federal recreation fees, necessary by December 2014.

Verizon Wireless and satellite internet providers shared ideas for increasing, managing and utilizing improved cell and internet connectivity in parks – and offered a serendipity. They reminded park interests that they can be powerful allies in reaching the Americans who don’t come to our national parks – because they are existing customers of these firms. After outlining the opportunities associated with better connectivity in parks, NPS Deputy Director Peggy O’Dell challenged concessioners to identify five national parks where new technologies and strategies can be jointly tested by NPS and concessioners as national pilots.

NPS Director Jarvis and NPF President Neil Mulholland touted the 2016 Centennial of the National Park Service as an opportunity to share information about the importance of the national parks across America and the world. They outlined a new initiative underway by the Grey Group, including key research on public awareness of and attitude towards parks and development of themes which can be used by the park family in a coordinated way.

Copies of key presentations and biographic information on more than 30 presenters are available at www.parkpartners.org. Video highlights of **Grand Thoughts** will be added to the website soon. For the schedule and list of participants click [here](#).

[Return to top](#)

FLREA - ONE YEAR OUT

The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) was signed into law in December 2004 – and will sunset in December 2014 without Congressional action. The legislation was based upon the “Fee Demonstration Program” enacted in 1996 and provides for retention of entrance and recreation fees by the National Park Service

(NPS) and four other federal agencies. FLREA now provides substantial funding for the recreation efforts – hundreds of millions of dollars for the NPS alone. Most FLREA-authorized recreation fees are non-controversial – but not all. In fact, FLREA fees for the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have prompted lawsuits and proposed legislation, both seeking to limit application of fee authority.

Addressing these issues is important – and can't be done well at Congressional hearings. And important policy issues are unlikely to be addressed by the dedicated agency representatives who meet regularly to oversee the operations of FLREA. NPHA will help to create forums for conversation and for developing consensus among major recreation interests on fee policies and programs. Among the topics which should be discussed are these arising at the Grand Thoughts at the Grand Canyon meeting:

- Should the senior pass be revised? Should its cost move to \$80 for a lifetime pass? Should the age for eligibility be raised, and if so, to what age? Should discounts on campsites for seniors be changed from 50% to 25%?
- Should we provide a new free, or reduced-cost America the Beautiful Pass for those below the poverty level?
- Should the National Park Service be allowed to benefit from a premium, multiple-year Centennial Park Pass?
- Should we collect and retain addresses of America the Beautiful Pass purchasers and pursue renewals via email and direct mail?
- Should national park entrance fees be revised to end subsidies for multiple-day stays?
- Should the USA, like Canada, provide all youth of a certain age with a free park pass to encourage park visits?
- Should we encourage earning passes to recreation sites with entrance fees through volunteer work at non-fee units to address the rich park/poor park dichotomy resulting from 80% fee retention at collection sites?
- Should FLREA's successor require inclusion of search-and-rescue insurance in backcountry permit costs, with discounts for training and locator beacon use?
- Should FLREA's successor require more efficient and convenient collection of fees through E-ZPass and PayPal technologies?
- Should Purple Heart recipients be automatically eligible to receive free access to federal recreation sites? Currently, they must submit proof of a permanent disability.

[Return to top](#)

NPHA BOARD MEETS AND CONFIRMS SPRING 2013 MEETING IN DC, SUPPORT FOR CONTINUED EFFORTS TO UNIFY PARK PARTNERS

The National Park Hospitality Association Board of Directors met in conjunction with Grand Thoughts and confirmed plans to hold the organization's annual meeting in Washington, D.C., in the spring of 2013. The board further created a task force to address Leasehold Surrender Interest and other visitor facility investment options over the next 90 days. And the board also authorized an overture to other park partner groups to continue joint meetings through Summits and sessions like Grand Thoughts.

The board and NPHA members also had an extended and open discussion with NPS Deputy Director Peggy O'Dell and Associate Director Lena McDowall covering a range of issues including incentives for excellence, the NPS food standard and joint efforts to encourage healthy lifestyles, the future of the Concessions Management Advisory Board and filling the Chief of Commercial Services post.

Discussion about restructuring of NPHA, terms of officers and representation of concessioners of all sizes was deferred until a later meeting.

[Return to top](#)

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CHIEF OF COMMERCIAL SERVICES POST READVERTIZED

The Chief of Commercial Services position with the National Park Service, now held by Jo Pendry, is once again posted on <https://www.usajobs.gov>. The job announcement number is WO-DCKN-13-761225-DE. Applications will be accepted through November 23. Here is a link to the announcement:

<https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/328419500>

NPS Associate Director Lena McDowall has invited our active assistance in finding top-notch candidates for the position, writing, "Filling this position is my highest priority." She offered this overview of the position:

National Park Service Seeks Chief, Commercial Services Program

The National Park Service (NPS) is looking for an innovative individual with strong leadership and business skills and a proven track record in the hospitality management and/or recreation services field to serve as Chief of the Commercial Services Program. The Chief of Commercial Services will oversee the delivery of a \$1.1 billion dollar commercial services program that returns close to \$77 million each year to the NPS in the form of franchise and permit fees. The Chief provides leadership and program management for approximately 600 concession contracts, 4,000 commercial use authorizations and several hundred leases. Services provided through this program include lodging facilities, restaurants and snack bars, marinas, souvenir and gift shops, grocery and general merchandise outlets, campgrounds, boat rentals, tour boats and buses, horse operations, outfitter and guide services, and numerous other visitor services. The position oversees a staff of 30 with responsibility for policy formulation, oversight and review of concessioner finances, oversight of operations and contract development and

management of an asset (facility) management program for the buildings assigned to the concessioner and leases. The Chief also provides guidance and support to seven regional concession program managers throughout the United States.

This is a high-level management position within the NPS. The selected person will work directly with NPS senior leaders and Department of Interior officials, and will interact with Congress on strategic actions for the program. The position is based in Washington, DC. Starting salary is between \$105,211 and \$136,771. Additional compensation may include a recruitment bonus of up to 25% of starting salary, student loan repayment of up to \$30,000 and reimbursement of relocation expenses.

The ideal candidate will have experience developing and overseeing commercial hospitality and recreation service operations or contracts such as concession contracts, hotel management contracts, and/or leases; developing and maintaining relationships with third party management companies; overseeing financial analysis and capital investment planning activities for commercial hospitality and/or recreation service contracts or operations; and managing a professional staff engaged in hospitality and recreation service operations or contract oversight. The ability to negotiate with owners of large hospitality management companies and interact with senior leaders is imperative. This is a fast-paced environment that requires strong management, multitasking, organizational, and leadership skills.

[Return to top](#)

NPHA, NPS WILL TEAM UP TO BOOST CELL AND INTERNET ACCESS IN PARKS

Grand Thoughts at the Grand Canyon participants had excellent Verizon Wireless cell and WiFi internet access – a unique experience on the North Rim, where cell service is normally restricted to sporadic “spill-over” service from the South Rim and limited WiFi provided by Forever Resorts at the campground store. The augmented service was nearly invisible and drew many positive comments – including an NPHA board member who told the assembled group that the good service actually enabled him to extend his time at the meeting. And that is significant, because Chip Campsen is an important elected official in South Carolina in addition to roles as an active businessman and dad. The service improvements were provided by two small satellite dishes linking to ViaSat and generating enough service for nearly 200 simultaneous users throughout the several acres occupied by the lodge and cabins and by a Verizon Wireless COLT (cell on light truck) unit, which was able to pick up and amplify signals from across the Grand Canyon and was parked hidden from view.

Also interesting was the widespread use of the cell service and internet by other park visitors unconnected with the meeting!

During discussions, NPHA noted that it had requested a new Director’s Order supporting cell and internet access, replacing a provision that now addresses the visual impact of cell and internet facilities. NPS Deputy Director Peggy O’Dell made clear that she and the Director agreed that better cell and internet access was valuable to visitor safety and enjoyment and invited NPHA to nominate five parks as pilots for access improvements. NPHA accepted the offer.

NPHA and its members described plans to pursue a system which, like many airports, provides free internet access for checking and sending emails but which charges for more robust internet usage. The “landing pages” for the free access would provide visibility for NPS and cooperating association information – including safety messages – as well as information about concessioner services in the park. In addition, NPHA plans to offer the NPS a “hot zone” around entrance stations, which could reduce the need for handing out printed materials and even facilitate fee collection through electronic devices.

[Return to top](#)

RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE

The National Park Hospitality Association has urged the National Park Service (NPS) for years to revise its ratings of concessioners to reflect outstanding efforts in visitor services and facility and environmental management. NPS leadership agreed to investigate this recommendation and sought the counsel of the Concessions Management Advisory Board (CMAB). The topic was a major focus of the CMAB meeting at Shenandoah National Park on September 18.

In open discussions, NPHA members, CMAB members and NPS staff appeared in agreement regarding the concept of recognizing excellence and discussed ways to implement a meaningful program. NPHA urged that the recognition go beyond some type of award and provide tangible rewards, offering suggestions ranging from contract extensions to reductions in franchise fees to “bonus points” in future contract competitions to more flexibility in pricing and use of special funds. NPHA is preparing comments to the CMAB and NPS Associate Director Lena McDowall on these and other options. If you have examples of reward programs used within the hospitality and related industries which might be employed by NPS to recognize excellence by concessioners, share suggestions with Derrick Crandall at dcrandall@funoutdoors.com.

[Return to top](#)

CONPAC UPDATE – By Julie Gackenbach

As the 2012 election enters its final days and the nation is focused on the Presidential race, we take a look at the Congressional elections. The House of Representatives is expected to remain under Republican control. All 435 seats are up for election with 192 rated as strongly Republican, and 157 strongly Democratic. Of the 86 competitive seats, 19 are likely GOP and another 14 lean Republican, 14 are likely Democratic seats and 12 lean Democratic. Only 27 seats are considered pure toss-ups. Election watchers predict Democrats will retain control of the Senate, although Republicans are expected to see gains of 2-4 seats. Thirty-three seats in the Senate are up for election this cycle and the Senate has a far higher proportion of toss-up races. Ten races are considered pure toss-ups two weeks out while five seats are rated as strong

Republican, one likely Republican, five lean Democratic, four likely Democratic and eight strong Democratic.

CONPAC had a successful 2012, including hosting an event for Sen. Mark Udall (D-CO), Chair of the Senate Subcommittee on National Parks. NPHA representatives participated in events for U.S. Reps. Tom Petri (R-WI), Chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation; Mike Simpson (R-ID), Chair of the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee; Sam Farr (D-CA), Co-Chair of the Congressional Travel and Tourism Caucus; and candidate Derek Kilmer. Kilmer is the Democratic candidate running to fill the seat of retiring Rep. Norm Dicks, long-time NPHA friend, representing the Olympia region of Washington. NPHA/CONPAC representatives also participated in the Democratic and Republican conventions and a meeting of the Democratic Platform Steering Committee. Stay turned in the new year for exciting new plans for CONPAC.

[Return to top](#)