

REOPEN PARKS TO THE PEOPLE

October 2, 2013

Honorable Harry Reid, Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable John Boehner, Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Messrs. Reid, Boehner and McConnell and Ms. Pelosi:

We are writing to help you understand the significant consequences arising from the federal shutdown and the closure of America's national parks. While we understand the intensity of feelings which prompted an inability of the Congress and the Administration to agree to even short-term funding of federal agencies including the National Park Service, we hope that you understand the real impact on millions of lives in addition to furloughed federal employees.

The National Park Service has announced that some 21,000 of its employees have been furloughed. But the impacts extend well beyond that. There are nearly 300 million visits to national parks each year. Park visitors depend upon some 25,000 concessioner employees and thousands of not-for-profit organization employees for lodging, food, supplies and souvenirs, transportation, education and interpretation. Some 20,000 youth work on federal lands each year through conservation corps, restoring habitat and maintaining trails and more. Gateway communities also serve these visitors - in many cases, concessioner operations are the largest source of tax revenues in these communities. All of this activity - and its economic and social benefits - has been halted by the government shutdown.

An estimated 700,000+ individual park experiences will now be denied every day. And it's not only the American people who will be turned away. Some 10% of all park visits are by international guests - whose spending helps the nation have a favorable balance of trade in tourism. Recent estimates are that one US job is created for every 35 inbound travelers to the USA. And national parks figure importantly in the National Strategy for Travel and Tourism, which has set a national goal of strengthening the U.S. economy by increasing the number of international visitors to 100 million by 2021. Reaching this goal will not be helped by disgruntled visitors here in the US now, denied access to parks, nor by the uncertainty being caused by the widespread publicity about US national parks being gated and closed.

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This shutdown unfairly harms the American people and the businesses helping our economy to grow. It comes on the heels of significant budget reductions that have already limited opportunities for visitors, harmed the tourist economy, and strained park resources. The shutdown needs to be ended swiftly and a lesson learned. Please find a way to resolve issues on budgets and other national issues without imposing unjustified, unnecessary pain on the rest of the nation. We ask your help in making certain that the pain resulting from closures of and budget cuts for our parks and other public lands ends quickly.

Sincerely,

National Park Hospitality Association
National Parks Conservation Association
US Travel Association
National Tour Association
Southeast Tourism Society
Destination Marketing Association International
America Outdoors Association
Association of Partners for Public Lands
American Recreation Coalition

cc: Hon. Barbara Mikulski
Hon. Richard Shelby
Hon. Jack Reed
Hon. Lisa Murkowski
Hon. Ron Wyden
Hon. Mark Udall
Hon. Rob Portman
Hon. Hal Rogers
Hon. Nita Lowey
Hon. Mike Simpson
Hon. Jim Moran
Hon. Doc Hastings
Hon. Peter DeFazio
Hon. Rob Bishop
Hon. Raúl Grijalva