

Chris Belland - CEO, Historic Tours of America

“[W]e quickly discovered that many more guests wanted to visit the Dry Tortugas than we were allowed to take. The market had spoken – visitors wanted to experience the Dry Tortugas National Park and preferred our boat over other options... After more than 20 months, the NPS finally agreed to the increase... The torturous path of paperwork between the local park and the region and the national office was costly to all parties and was stressful to the relationship between our company and NPS...What did not appear to gain consideration was the 10,000+ potential park visitors that could have experienced Dry Tortugas during this period, or the revenue loss to NPS of \$250,000 or more.”

“While I realize the National Park Service is not a business per se, it is in business and its future is likely to depend more than ever on the marketplace and its ability to be relevant to the leisure industry. With the substantial and ongoing budgetary restraints that the NPS is facing, it seems to me that the NPS can, with little effort, recover a larger portion of the costs of its many excellent programs from those directly benefiting from those programs. Recreation and tourism are a trillion dollar industry, and national parks are widely regarded as a top asset of this industry.”

Alex Klein - Vice President and General Manager, Grand Teton Lodge Company and Flagg Ranch Company

“It is important for the NPS and concessioners to maintain flexibility in the contracts to address services and improvements not anticipated at the beginning of the contract term.”

“A system designed to reward those that do provide excellence in concession operations would benefit both incumbent concessioners as well as the National Park Service. Rather than challenging ourselves to innovate every time a concession contract comes up, it would encourage constant innovation and excellence in the performance of a contract.”

“Knowing that strong performance would have a significant impact on retaining a contract would enhance business value and allow for ongoing investment in facilities and a longer term strategic vision.”

“The current process lacks transparency and doesn’t allow unsuccessful bidders to understand their perceived shortcomings. This lack of transparency also leads to mistrust of the process, whether real or perceived.”

Terry MacRae - Hornblower Cruises; Chairman, NPHA

“National park visitation has been unchanged over 25 years despite a growth in the U.S. population of more than 30%, a surge in international visitors and the addition of dozens of new park units. Visits to national parks in 1987 were 287,244,998 according to NPS.

Visits in 2014 were 292,800,082. But if you deduct visitation to just two of the 60+ recent additions – the World War II Memorial and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial – 2014 visitation drops below the levels of 1987.”

“Stagnant park visitation reflects more leisure choices today ***but is also the result of reduced visitor activity choices*** – potential visitors are choosing other destinations. There are fewer park campsites, fewer lodging rooms, fewer restaurant seats, fewer ranger-led walks, fewer tours and outings. Visitor services eliminated by NPS have not been offset by new outdoor activities and special events.”

“NPS is pursuing an unsustainable strategy of forcing higher payments by concessioners to the agency while simultaneously reducing business opportunities.”

“We can fix the challenges and ready our parks for generations of new visitors. Some changes will require legislative changes – but in many cases, solutions can be achieved by changes in agency operations and by ensuring cooperation and communication needed for shared park protection and visitor services efforts.”

Derrick Crandall - National Park Hospitality Association

“Connecting all Americans to their parks is an important goal with numerous benefits – including improved health, more widespread public appreciation for the environment, visibility for many gateway communities and a better understanding of our nation’s history. To achieve this connection, the National Park Service and its partners – including concessioners – need to undertake new outreach and marketing efforts.”

“The visitor services we provide in national parks are often inhibited by NPS policies which limit visitor experiences and reduce our payments, called franchise fees, to the agency. The buildings we operate, including lodges, are federally owned – even though most were originally built with private capital. They are historic in almost every case, and expensive to maintain and operate. They constitute a significant portion of the backlog of deferred maintenance reported by the National Park Service – in excess of a billion dollars.”

“Sixty percent (60%) of our nation’s downhill skiing activity is provided at largely world-class facilities under agreements between business partners and the Forest Service that extend 40 years or more. All investments are made by the private sector. Similar-length terms for park concessions contracts would produce the needed investment in our lodges and other structures and open the door to another tool: historic investment tax credits.

“We are confident that increases in visitor services, including lengthening operating hours at units like Alcatraz and Statue of Liberty, adding appropriate services and allowing dynamic pricing of services, could increase franchise fees to the NPS by 50% within three years.”

David B. Woodside, President, Acadia Corporation

“[The] future is not a promising one for small, single-park operators . . . Absent any significant changes in concessions contracting, I would consider investing the time and resources necessary to compete to be a highly speculative investment. Absent congressional action, national park concessions are destined to be left to companies large enough to have personnel dedicated to proposal development and centralized management offering a homogenous, mediocre service lacking the distinctiveness befitting America’s unique national parks.

“It is critical to require a high standard of service and quality for park concessioners, but the heritage aspect of local concession management should play a significant role in the concession contract decision as well. A single-park concession with . . . a long history of service in support of a unique tradition cannot be valued entirely by balance sheets.

“Wherever possible, national park visitors deserve goods and services unique to the distinctive character of each individual park. I call upon Congress and the National Park Service to develop a system that respects the role that locally owned and operated concessions can play in enhancing visitor services in our national parks.”

Forever Resorts

“This need to be responsive to today’s visitors creates a challenge for many of the park units that struggle with dated facilities and infrastructure. . . Park managers struggle with limited financial resources to tackle both the maintenance backlog and these needed visitor enhancements . . . Concessioners can be part of the solution to this need for funding.

“Forever Resorts would like to provide a few examples in some of the parks we operate where, working with the local park, we can focus on some initiatives in a few areas that would have a positive impact by creating ‘win, win, win’ scenarios for the park visitors, the NPS, and the concessioner. These examples include: extending the operating season in parks where there is demonstrated demand; improving cell phone and Wi-Fi coverage in concession areas; taking over NPS campground operations and making needed improvements to same; and assisting in providing new and expanded services.”

John King, Regional Vice President, Forever Resorts

“In looking toward the future, we hope that the National Park Service will become even more receptive to increasing visitor service where it is needed, and where it makes sense, in a timely manner while at the same time, always protecting the National Parks’ natural and cultural resources. Prospectuses and contracts could be improved by giving concessioners a credit of some sort or other innovative rewards for making capital investments . . . Longer contracts would also allow concessioners to make larger capital investments that could be recovered by the end of the concession contract. And, finally, rewarding excellent concessioners in some way for being outstanding partners with the National Park Service and for providing outstanding visitor services . . . would help to solidify longevity and stability for good concessioners.”

Gettysburg Tours, Inc. and TRF Concession Specialists of Florida, Inc.

“[I]f local NPS staff thinks the park and visitors are better served by adding a service, the NPS needs to provide direction to authorize the service promptly during the term of the contract. NPS needs to learn to adapt quickly to changes in demand for services if they wish to stay relevant to today’s consumer.

“Prospectus development for contracts needs to be simplified. . . [C]oncessioners who perform above and beyond the terms of their contract should be given some points for their efforts in the evaluation process . . . The evaluation and award process needs to become more transparent, so that all participants understand the evaluation process and how awards are determined.”

Pamela Koeberer Pitts, Secretary, The California Parks Company

“No other agency that we work with micro-manages us to the level of the National Park Service . . . The price-approval process within the NPS is cumbersome and slow. . . Small operators are forced to spend disproportionate dollars to respond to prospectuses that are better suited to bigger companies doing business in many national parks. . . The NPS has lost sight in recent RFPs of the capital demands put upon the concessioner compared to the length of contracts.”

Tim Rout, CEO, Dyno Ventures, LLC

“My team . . . developed, implemented and operated all Wi-Fi and Internet-TV concessions on military bases . . . That innovative global project was made possible through partnerships with non-appropriated fund instrumentalities (NAFIs), such as Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS) and the Army Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES). The project was entirely funded with over \$90 million from private investors, and required zero U.S. government funding.

“Each land management agency should establish a non-appropriated fund instrumentality (NAFI). NAFI organizations are entirely self-funded, and are tasked with partnering with commercial vendors of products and services on public lands . . . Establishment of NAFIs . . . would greatly enhance the quality and quantity of services available to visitors to public lands and, therefore, visitation. Furthermore, it would produce significant new non-appropriated funding for other public land maintenance operations.

“We continue to believe that public land management, and more diverse visitation, can best be enhanced through the provision of market-based, for-fee services. The American population increasingly expects both basic and premium hospitality amenities while on vacation, even on public land. It is critical that specialized, self-funded NAFIs oversee the quality provisioning of those services.”