



Charles (Chuck) Sams
c/o Office of the Director
National Park Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

November 15, 2021

Dear Mr. Sams:

I am writing you on behalf of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) both to congratulate you on the support you have received during the process of your confirmation to serve as Director of the National Park Service (NPS) and to convey an important report that we do not believe that you have seen.

Back in 2017, the Department of Interior released a shocking survey in which 35 percent of the more than 28,000 employees surveyed said they experienced harassment or discrimination within the prior 12 months. This DOI survey was undertaken following a number of NPS employee disclosures of reported sexual and other harassment at parks such as the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and Yellowstone.

In response, the NPS commissioned an outreach campaign called “NPS Voices.” All NPS employees were invited to participate in what top officials called “a cornerstone in our efforts to change the culture that has allowed harassment to persist.”

During four months ending in April 2018, a human relations contractor conducted more than 53 in-person sessions and 27 web sessions, altogether involving more than 1,200 employees, approximately 8% of the entire NPS permanent workforce.

The resulting report was completed later that year summarizing this sizeable employee input but was never distributed. PEER has obtained and [posted this report on our website](#). We invite you to read this report as we think you will find it of value as you prepare to take the reins of this agency.

Among the key findings on the NPS Voices 2018 effort are:

- “The pervasiveness of disrespectful and abusive behavior should sound as much alarm as the high rates of harassment that prompted the tour.”
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- “Participants express a strong, consistent sentiment that Human Resources does not function effectively or constructively at every stage of the employment life cycle and that its systems are unresponsive, understaffed, and out of touch with the field.”
- A total lack of accountability for misconduct is rife, especially among superintendents and other senior officials who are “transferred or even promoted rather than given realistic and appropriate consequences.”

As you testified at your confirmation hearing:

“The one thing I've always learned in leadership is it's the people that are most important. And therefore helping to improve the morale, listening to the staff, the long-term staff, and figuring out exactly what needs to be done to support them out in the field in order to be the good interpreters they are, to be able to take care of the parks in an appropriate way.”

This NPS Voices report will allow you to get a head start on listening to your staff.

Unfortunately, by burying this report, the NPS has not only turned a deaf ear to a cry for help from its own workforce but may have made a bad situation worse. One particularly notable report finding was that employee cynicism will be aggravated if this attempt at engagement comes to naught:

“Perhaps the strongest message that emerged from the Voices Tour was that participants need to see a response to what they have shared...If parks do not see tangible action coming from the findings of the Tour, we are concerned that the Tour will have raised and then dashed the hopes of those in need of help and change.”

The challenge of raising those dashed hopes will fall to you. It is not too late to answer the alarm sounded in the NPS Voices 2018 report. However, changing the dynamics pervasive within the NPS will take more than words; it will require removing senior leaders who perpetuate this toxic culture. Moreover, we understand that many of the senior leaders who shelved the NPS Voices effort are still in positions of responsibility.

We appreciate the magnitude of the challenge you face in leading NPS through these early years of its second century. We hope this letter and the NPS Voices report will be of some assistance in that regard.

PEER stands ready to assist you as you go forward, so please do not hesitate to call upon us.

Sincerely,



Tim Whitehouse
Executive Director