

From: Elaine Sevy/WASO/NPS
To:
Date: Tuesday, April 11, 2006
Subject: Bullets/facts on operations

Bruce Sheaffer and Lisa Harrison have reviewed the following talking points/facts on park operations, and their comments are reflected in this final version. These points were developed with assistance from the NPS Budget Office, regional public affairs specialists and several park public information officers. Thanks to all who contributed comments and suggestions.
Elaine

Talking Points on Park Operations April 7, 2006

(Park spokespeople should be honest and forthright in providing specifics about the number of employees, deferred maintenance projects, visitor programs, etc. as compared to previous years, but also provide anecdotal information on creative strategies for addressing challenges. There's two sides to the story and the public should know NPS employees are innovative and creative in taking care of resources entrusted to us while providing excellent visitor experiences.)

These are challenging times. The National Park Service, like most agencies, is tightening its belt as our nation rebuilds from Katrina, continues the war on terrorism and strives to reduce the deficit.

The mission of the National Park Service has not changed, but how we accomplish that mission is changing.

The NPS will do its part to keep costs down while still fulfilling our stewardship responsibilities for preserving natural and cultural resources, and maintaining high visitor and citizen satisfaction and support. All citizens, whether they visit a park or not, have ownership in these special places.

Many of the processes we're undertaking right now to improve efficiency will ensure funds be spent in support of a park's purpose, that a park's request for funding will be based on accurate data, and that there will be adequate funds and staff to preserve and protect the natural and cultural resources for which parks are responsible. (Processes include the Corps Operations Analysis Tool, Park Scorecard, Programs assessment Rating Tool {PART}, Preliminary Planning and Competitive Reviews, Partnerships - see background below for more explanation.)

Examples of innovative strategies underway include:

--Pacific West Region's efforts to become more efficient and responsive to visitors and taxpayers include developing interagency "shared" dispatch service for handling emergencies, improving

facilities with solar panels to move parks away from the electrical grid and a bill for electricity, working with volunteers to staff visitor centers and programs while changing some hours of operation.

--Alaska Region: Denali National Park is looking at possibly increasing climbing fees for Mount McKinley and other peaks in the Alaska Range to address the increasing costs of managing the park's mountaineering program.

--Intermountain Region: Canyonlands and Rocky Mountain National Parks have implemented operational efficiency efforts that have freed up \$200,000 to be used for higher priority spending needs. About one-quarter of the region's 89 parks have undergone operational efficiency reviews, resulting in substantial savings at each.

A proposed increase of \$23 million in the FY 2007 budget request (the FY07 funding request for Operation of the NPS is \$1.7 billion) will help. Pay absorptions, across-the-board cuts, and unforeseen circumstances - such as hurricanes and fires - may continue to impact park budgets and visitation.

Our satisfaction rating is over 96 percent nationally, and has remained high for several years. That's a clear indicator that budgets have not reduced visitor enjoyment. It's not the quantity of visitor programs but the quality that counts--it's the satisfaction level that makes us successful.

A recent survey (Harris Poll, December 2005) named the Park Service as the most-supported federal agency by our citizens, even higher than Social Security and health care! That means we're doing something right!

While there is a decrease to funding for line item construction in the FY 2007 request, the funds targeted to address the maintenance backlog total \$933 million - the same as the five-year average for this effort. We've poured billions into our parks, but just as in your own home, there's always something needing to be fixed. The number of buildings, roads and other infrastructure resources are mind-boggling. Many of these structures are historic, requiring specialized rehabilitation. We're undergoing a time-consuming process - through condition assessments of all park facilities and assets - which is enabling us for the first time to gain a handle on the situation and a clear sense of need that is credible and supportable.

The NPS has a host of management initiatives (see background below) to help keep pace with the economic realities of the 21st century. We have proven we can be effective in serving our visitors-- now we must be more efficient as well!

Public support and volunteerism has been a long American tradition -- it continues to help support our national parks move ahead regardless of spending levels.

Background Information:

The Core Operations Analysis Tool - NPS is enhancing resource protection and visitor services by rigorously examining park base

budgets. This process will ensure that all funds are spent in direct support of a park's purpose and in an efficient manner. Core operations is designed to assist park managers in making fully informed decisions on staffing and funding alternatives based on realistic funding projections that tie to core mission goals.

The NPS Park Scorecard - the park scorecard was created in 2004 to serve as an indicator of park financial, operational, and managerial health relative to other park units. This tool is being used to improve priority setting and allocation of limited funds.

Partnerships - a new senior level office of partnerships has been created to help parks establish partnerships to protect cultural and natural resources -- with friends groups, cooperating associations, corporations, local communities (which benefit economically from their support to parks), the tourism industry, and so on. This partnership office also is overseeing a process for how partnership projects, particularly those where philanthropy is a component of funding, are managed, monitored and approved. The NPS continues to build on the success of the Volunteers-in-Parks. Currently, 140,000 Volunteers in Parks (VIPs) donate more than 5 million hours. This equals 2,403 personnel equivalents valued at \$85.9 million.

Program Assessment Rating Tool -- to improve budget and performance accountability, the NPS continues to expand the use of the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) in accordance with OMB (Office of Management and Budget) guidelines. Reviews were conducted during the FY 07 budget formulation cycle to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of four NPS program areas - Visitor Services, Concessions Management, and Technical Assistance and Financial Assistance for external programs. NPS has completed ten PART reviews since FY 2002.

Preliminary planning and competitive review -- making our functions more efficient to save money, which in turn can be reinvested in other critical needs.