

Centennial Initiative News Release



Release date: Immediate

Contact: Chris Paolino (202) 208-6416
David Barna (202) 208-6843

Date: May 31, 2007

Kempthorne Presents to the President A Vision for the Future of Our National Parks

WASHINGTON – “Inspired by the passions of thousands of citizens and mindful that boldness matches our history, today I bring you our vision to ensure that the American love affair with national parks endures,” wrote Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne in a report delivered today to President George Bush.

Kempthorne, and National Park Service Director Mary Bomar, unveiled report details during a rooftop press conference at the Interior Department. In the report, “The Future of America’s National Parks,” Kempthorne wrote, “Parks teach and inspire. Parks are America the beautiful...the cultural...the historical.” He explained the 100th anniversary should be a time to celebrate accomplishments achieved through goals with boldness and vision. The National Park Service will:

- lead America in preserving and restoring treasured resources;
- demonstrate environmental leadership;
- offer superior recreational experiences;
- foster exceptional learning opportunities that connect people to parks; and
- be managed with excellence.

Performance goals will guide our achievement. By 2016, the National Park Service plans to:

- improve priority facilities to acceptable condition;
- restore native habitats by controlling invasive species, and reintroducing key plant and animal species;
- improve natural resources in parks as measured by scientific vital signs monitoring;
- reduce environmental impacts of park operations;
- double the amount of volunteer hours;
- enroll two million new Junior Rangers;
- encourage greater partnership and philanthropy; and
- reshape the workforce to meet the needs of America.

Bomar said, “The men and women of the National Park Service will transform these goals into reality. We will be accountable to the American people for our actions and develop benchmarks to measure our success. We will report back to the citizens to tell them how we are doing.”

Kempthorne said the core of the report was written following a nationwide series of "listening sessions" that drew about 4,500 people. "We received recommendations and ideas from thousands of Americans, including park visitors, current and retired National Park Service employees, experts and advocates, and the President and the First Lady Laura Bush who is a regular national park visitor and the honorary chairperson of the National Park Foundation."

The goals, national strategies and the selected centennial projects and programs will be supported by centennial plans for each of the 391 national parks. Bomar said, "Superintendents are working with park friends, advocacy groups, and community leaders to prepare the vision and outline specific actions for their own parks. They will also identify and outline the specific projects and programs to be proposed for public/private funding between now and 2016."

While the report includes some potential on-the-ground actions and examples, they are just that, examples. The report is not meant to be a listing of the specific projects.

Some of the actions are summarized by the Secretary in the report: "The 21st-century National Park Service will be energized to preserve parks and welcome visitors. Stewardship and science will guide decisions. An inventory of all wildlife in parks will be completed, a vital baseline to monitor change and adjust management. Strategic acquisitions will protect landscapes. Parks will be known as America's best classrooms. We will work carefully to add new parks to tell America's stories. Facilities will be in better condition. Hallowed battlefields will be preserved. Majestic species that symbolize this nation, such as bison and bald eagles, will thrive in their native habitats. A new era of private-public partnerships will bring greater excellence to parks. More volunteers will add value to park experiences. The latest information technology will captivate young people with the national park story. Children will reconnect to the outdoors and lead healthier lives. A new generation of conservationists will convey parks unimpaired to the next generation."

Bomar will work with the employees of the National Park Service and with park advocacy groups to recommend criteria for prioritizing and selecting centennial projects. "All projects must meet the highest standards of accountability and transparency."

On August 25th, 2007, on the 91st anniversary of the National Park Service, Kempthorne will report on each park's centennial strategy as well as projects and programs that should be funded in 2008. "This will set the tradition that the Secretary of the Interior will report annually on progress achieved and future actions to be taken," Kempthorne said.

As proposed in the President's Fiscal Year 2008 budget, the Centennial Initiative is a potential \$3 billion infusion for the national park system. The President has already proposed \$1 billion over 10 years, above existing budgets, be spent on park operations. He also called for Americans to donate \$1 billion over 10 years to the National Park Service to be matched by up to \$1 billion from a special centennial account.

Bomar said it will take "an army of supporters" to help reach the centennial goals. "From national organizations like the National Park Foundation, to more than 160 park friends groups and 66 park cooperating associations to 140,000 volunteers, we will rely on them to augment the efforts of the 20,000 men and women of the National Park Service."

Bomar said, "This is not only a report to the President but a pledge to the American people, who are shareholders in the greatest system of parks and special places in the world ... a pledge that the men and women of the National Park Service will continue to preserve these wonderful places for generations yet to come."

-NPS-

“The Future of America’s National Parks”
Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne’s Centennial Initiative Report to the President
May 31, 2007

“Dear Mr. President,
Inspired by the passions of thousands of citizens and mindful that boldness matches our history,
today I bring you our vision to ensure that the American love affair with national parks endures.”
– Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne

Last August, President Bush charged Secretary Kempthorne with reporting, by May 31, 2007, on specific performance goals to be achieved so our parks enjoy “another century of conservation, preservation, and enjoyment”.

The Future of America’s National Parks builds upon President Bush’s National Park Centennial Initiative in the FY 2008 budget to enhance park operations and to increase significantly the experiences available to park visitors with the addition of 3,000 new seasonal rangers. The report outlines 5 overarching goals to guide the National Park Service as it prepares for its centennial anniversary in 2016. Each goal is accompanied by broad objectives, supported by specific performance goals, and potential actions and examples.

The report reflects the voices of the American public, heard in listening sessions across the country earlier this year at more than 40 different locations, with over 6,000 comments received.

• **The five overarching goals and associated performance goals:**

- *Stewardship. The National Park Service leads America and the world in preserving and restoring treasured resources.*
 - Rehabilitate historic buildings; Restore native habitats; Improve high priority assets to acceptable condition; Improve the natural resources in parks; Complete all cultural resource inventories.
- *Environmental Leadership. The National Park Service demonstrates environmental leadership to the nation.*
 - Establish programs to showcase exemplary environmental practices; Increased use of alternative energy and fuels; Reduce the environmental impact of parks on air and water quality; Ensure every new park facility receives at least a silver rating equivalent under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards.
- *Recreational Experience. National parks are superior recreational destinations where visitors have fun, explore nature and history, find inspiration, and improve health and wellness.*
 - Increase annual volunteer hours by 100%; Increase visitation at lesser known parks by 25%; Rehabilitate over 2,000 miles of trails; Increase the number of visitors that attend ranger-facilitated programs.
- *Education. The National Park Service fosters exceptional learning opportunities that connect people to parks.*
 - Increase visitor satisfaction, understanding and appreciation; Enroll an additional 2 million children in the junior ranger program; Increase the number of web hits through advanced, interactive features.
- *Professional Excellence. The National Park Service demonstrates management excellence worthy of the treasures entrusted to our care.*
 - Meet 100% of diversity recruitment goals; Attain the highest employee satisfaction rate of all federal agencies; Establish a structured professional development curriculum; Improve communications and marketing capacity to increase public awareness; Reduce the number of employee lost-time and serious visitor injuries by 20%.

• **Potential Actions and Examples:**

- *National Mall and Memorial Parks:* Demonstrate the very best in urban park design, maintenance and visitor services.
- *Richmond National Battlefield Park and the Glorieta Battlefield at Pecos National Historical Park:* Protect battlefields from encroachment by acquiring high-priority lands.
- *Pearl Harbor visitor center at the USS Arizona Memorial:* Demonstrate the highest standards of energy efficient design in completion of new facilities to serve visitors and enhance understanding of the war in the Pacific.
- *Urban parks:* Use urban parks as portals to encourage children and their families to discover all national parks, based on successful models at Gateway National Recreation Area and Golden Gate National Recreation Area.
- *The Internet:* Work with educators to develop online curricula that teachers can use in classrooms and field trips to parks.
- *Education and outreach:* Establish 10 learning centers at parks near major population centers to serve students and their communities.
- *Professional Development:* Provide comprehensive, mission-oriented training within an employee’s first two years of service.

For more information, go to www.nps.gov/2016.