



Clockwise from left: © National Park Service; NPCA; Yosemite National Institutes

## 2016: The Centennial of the National Parks

Our system of national parks and historic landmarks has been called the best idea America ever had. It is the most tangible, uniquely American expression of our national character and values. From the geysers at Yellowstone to the history of Independence Hall, from the waters of Everglades to the San Antonio missions, from the Statue of Liberty to the home of playwright Eugene O'Neill, our national parks encompass some of the nation's highest peaks, deepest gorges, our most enduring icons of democracy, and our diverse American stories.

Our national parks speak to what we value as a nation and believe as a people. They attract nearly 300 million visitors a year from around the world. They generate jobs in tough economic times; are classrooms for teaching children and adults about American history and culture; are barometers of environmental health; and are treasures for our children and grandchildren. Yet as honored as parks are, they have not realized their potential as resources for national understanding, economic and environmental renewal, and personal inspiration. As the National Park System approaches its Centennial in 2016, we can unleash the full educational, economic, environmental and civic potential of

America's National Parks.

### National Parks as Showcases

For the national parks to reach their full potential as showcases of American history, culture, and natural wonders, they must be provided with the tools and support necessary to reach that goal. The basic responsibility for this task falls to the federal government.

### Fully Funded

The national parks must have the financial means to restore, interpret, manage and enhance the natural and cultural resources of the park system. The Park Service is currently facing a budget shortfall of more than \$750 million annually. This means fewer rangers in the parks, suspended educational programming, and less resource protection. The ongoing budget shortfall has led to an ever increasing maintenance backlog of \$8 billion, leaving trails overgrown, exhibits outdated, and buildings deteriorating. The Land and Water Conservation Fund also needs to be fully funded, enabling the Park Service to acquire from willing sellers privately owned land within park boundaries. Currently, over 4.3 million acres remain outside of Park Service stewardship and



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many of these acres are vulnerable to incompatible development. Just less than half of those acres have been identified by the Park Service as priority acquisitions for an estimated cost of \$1.9 billion. Acquiring these lands is vital to providing consistent and effective management at our national parks.

### *Fully Protected*

National parks are barometers for our natural environment – for the quality of our air and water, for the numbers of our wildlife, and for the effects that climate change itself is having on our planet. Degraded plant and animal populations, disappearing habitats, damage to cultural structures, and severely restricted visibility for some of America's most iconic views are just a few of the dimensions of the impact of degraded air quality. Bison leaving Yellowstone National Park and wolves roaming their natural habitat in Colorado are being shot as they exit the protective boundaries of national park lands. Parks are not islands. Decisions made on environmental issues around the country impact the plants, wildlife, water, and atmosphere of our national parks. National park managers have led the world in how best to protect natural and culture resources. They need to receive the tools and training to deal with increasing threats. As the national parks approach their centennial, it is vital that their continued health is protected, both from within and outside of park boundaries.

### **National Parks as Partners**

Studies show for every dollar invested in our National Parks, the economy sees at least a four-dollar return in increased economic activity. Parks provide jobs, both within their boundaries and in surrounding communities. They also provide volunteer opportunities. The

American people have repeatedly shown their commitment to working in partnership with their government to support our national parks. Just last year, a \$100 million matching challenge from the U.S. Government, produced \$215 million in commitments from private and philanthropic partners. These partnerships can greatly enhance visitor experiences in the parks and give the American public a greater stake in our national parks' continued success.

### **National Parks as Classrooms**

National parks are classrooms in American history, science and more. They are exciting laboratories that can re-awaken in young people a passion for learning. We must do more to get our young people outdoors to learn about their natural world and our nation's hallowed history. From Golden Gate National Recreation Area to Gettysburg National Military Park, the Park Service provides on-site, curriculum-based education programs for several million school children every year. This represents only a fraction of the potential for using our national parks to educate America's youth. Our national parks need the resources to reach their full potential as America's premier classrooms.

*The National Park Service will celebrate its centennial in 2016. We have an obligation to our children and grandchildren that our national parks are restored for their second century. This anniversary presents our nation with both a challenge and an opportunity to fulfill the promise we made 100 years ago when the National Park Service was created.*

*To learn more about how you can help, visit our website at [www.npca.org](http://www.npca.org) or call 800.NAT.PARK.*



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