



The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chair, Energy and Natural Resources
Committee
U.S. Senate
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member, Energy and Natural
Resources Committee
U.S. Senate
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

December 8, 2015

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee:

Next year, Americans will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service. We, the National Parks Second Century Action Coalition and other partners, write in strong support of efforts underway to prepare our national parks for a second century of service for current and future generations.

The National Parks Second Century Action Coalition is comprised of organizations supporting conservation, recreation, outdoor industry, travel and tourism, and historic preservation that are dedicated to promoting the protection, restoration, and operation of the National Park System to benefit the health and well-being of current and future generations.

We applaud Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell for holding a hearing on S. 2257, The National Park Service Centennial Act, which demonstrates congressional interest in providing a significant commemoration of—and support for—the National Park Service Centennial. The bill up for discussion today provides needed funding for programs and maintenance through the Centennial Challenge Fund as well as a path toward improved long-term fiscal health with the establishment of an endowment.

With an expected influx of visitors expected during and following the Centennial year, it would be a shame if families arrived to decaying facilities and too few rangers to greet them due to the current fiscal challenges facing national parks. On the eve of the National Park Service Centennial, our national parks are facing billions of dollars' worth of overdue repairs. Additionally, there has been more than a 7%, or \$178 million reduction in the account to operate national parks and more than a 12%, or \$370 million reduction in the total budget for the National Park Service over the last five years in today's dollars. The Centennial bill could provide important support for helping relieve these significant funding shortfalls, particularly if the committee is able to identify robust revenue sources.

We are particularly supportive of the provisions in S. 2257 that address some of the national parks' financial needs by formally establishing the Centennial Challenge Fund, an endowment, and the Second Century Infrastructure Fund to directly address the growing deferred maintenance backlog. We hope the committee will continue to investigate additional revenue sources to robustly invest in the Centennial Challenge Fund and explore additional funding mechanisms for the National Park Service. We appreciate the work already underway by Senators Murkowski and Cantwell to establish a fund to help address the deferred maintenance backlog directly.

The Centennial Challenge is an innovative program that encourages private individuals, foundations, businesses and others to donate funds to help restore and improve our national parks by providing a federal match for the donations. Previous annual investments have supported valuable projects throughout the country. We are pleased this bill establishes this program over three years, which would allow partners additional time and certainty to raise the matching funds. The endowment, meanwhile, would provide long term financial support for the national parks by investing monetary gifts and other contributions to be used in the future for projects and activities that support the national parks. Additionally, the Second Century Infrastructure Fund would provide a critically needed mandatory investment to directly address the most critical non-transportation-related projects.

We support many of the other provisions in the bill, particularly those provisions that recognize the importance of national parks as places of learning by enhancing interpretation and education programs, and by providing additional opportunities for volunteers in our nation's treasures. We also support the provisions that will help connect a new, diverse generation to the great outdoors and allow the National Park Service to recruit and hire more young and diverse Americans.

While we collectively agree on many of the provisions in S. 2257, the National Park Visitor Services Management Program provision creates ambiguity in the law and needs further discussion to determine the merits of inclusion. We hope to work with the Committee to strengthen partnerships with all park partners and supportive organizations.

Passage of a bipartisan centennial bill with robust dedicated funding, coupled with additional investments for national park roads in the transportation bill and operation and construction funding in the FY16 omnibus appropriations bill and future appropriations bills, can ensure our parks are better prepared to serve another hundred years and beyond. In regards to transportation funding, we are deeply grateful for the additional revenue that has received support in the FAST Act.

Again, we thank you, Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell, as well as your committee staff for offering a forum to discuss strategies to keep America's national parks relevant and cherished and for offering specific steps to achieve these goals. We urge other members of the committee to support the effort and work with the House to swiftly move a final Centennial Bill towards passage.

Thank you for considering our views. We look forward to working with you to ensure final passage of a bipartisan National Park Service Centennial Bill.

Sincerely,

American Forests
American Recreation Coalition
American Society of Landscape Architects
Association of Partners for Public Lands
Chicago Neighborhood Initiatives
Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park
The Corps Network
Destination Marketing Association International
East Bay Regional Park District
Friends of Acadia
Friends of the Mississippi River
Greater Roseland Chamber of Commerce
Historic Pullman Foundation
Mississippi River Fund
National Parks Conservation Association
National Park Hospitality Association
National Tour Association
NatureBridge
Pullman Arts
Recreational Equipment, Inc.
Save the Dunes
Southeast Tourism Society
St. Croix River Association
Student Conservation Association
United States Tour Operators Association
US Travel Association
Western National Parks Association
The Wilderness Society
Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts