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**National Parks, Philanthropy, Volunteerism  
Testimony to the National Parks Subcommittee  
of the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee**

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Mr. Chairman and honorable committee members, thank you for the invitation to testify today about the roles of philanthropy and volunteerism in our national parks. I'm Greg Moore, Executive Director of the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, a nonprofit membership organization that works to preserve the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, to enhance the experiences of park visitors, and to engage community members in conserving the parks for the future. The Parks Conservancy was established in 1981, and since then it has provided the National Park Service with nearly \$80 million in support for park projects and programs.

The Parks Conservancy is one of over 100 nonprofit organizations nationally, working as cooperating associations and friends groups, to support the mission of the National Park Service. These organizations, along with the National Park Foundation, engage community members and the private sector in philanthropy and volunteerism and help protect, enhance and interpret park resources. Many have been active for decades. Recently, the Yosemite Association celebrated its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the Rocky Mountain Nature Association has been serving this national park since 1931.

In total, these organizations provide over \$100 million annually in philanthropic aid to the National Park Service and strive to make lasting positive impacts on park resources and on the park visitor experience. Today, I will address four key questions:

- What motivates philanthropy and volunteerism in our national parks?
- How do federal funding and the work of the National Park Service enhance philanthropy and volunteerism?
- What specifically, do the American people consider the federal responsibility to our national parks?
- What can the future bring in terms of philanthropy and volunteerism?

## **What motivates philanthropy and volunteerism in our national parks?**

The American ethic of charity and volunteerism has made a remarkable impact on our national parks. In addition to more than \$100 million in annual philanthropic support, last year 140,000 volunteers donated 5 million hours to the national parks at a value of \$85.9 million<sup>1</sup>. What motivates this level of commitment?

Few things inspire Americans like the immense natural and physical beauty and the historical poignancy of national parks. We understand that national parks require not only the care and investment of the National Park Service, but our direct support and involvement as well. Americans entrust the National Park Service to lead the protection and stewardship of these cherished places and, in effect, to be the ultimate caretaker of our nation's heritage. We expect and respond to this leadership. Throughout the National Park system, whether at Golden Gate, Yosemite, the USS Arizona Memorial, Yellowstone, or Rocky Mountain National Park, philanthropic projects have been inspired by visionary Park Service leadership, implemented by effective and eloquent nonprofit partners, and funded by generous donors.

Organizations like the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy open direct and active channels through which Americans can contribute their time and charitable gifts to augment the critical work of the National Park Service. In the San Francisco Bay Area, community members share a very strong connection to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and recently contributed \$34 million for the restoration of Crissy Field, a former army airfield in the Presidio on the shore of San Francisco Bay. A lead gift of \$18 million by the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, followed by a major public campaign of the Parks Conservancy, rallied the community behind this project. Over 2,000 gifts and 3,200 volunteers transformed this national park site. Today, these donors and volunteers retain their commitment and generosity to our parks.

To make projects like Crissy Field meaningful to the community that supports them requires not only executing these park transformations, but an ongoing commitment to preserve over time what has been transformed and restored together. Federal operating funds can be leveraged with volunteer support in this long-term stewardship. As one example, each year close to 16,000 people donate over 350,000 hours of volunteer time to preserve park habitat, lead interpretive tours and support education programs for children throughout the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. This type of support is motivated throughout the National Park system by welcoming volunteers as part of the "park team," giving them fulfilling work and expressing active appreciation.

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<sup>1</sup> National Park Service, Volunteers-In-Parks

## **How do federal funding and the work of the National Park Service enhance philanthropy and volunteerism?**

Effective partnerships depend deeply on the National Park Service tradition, commitment, professionalism, knowledge, and active staff presence in our parks. These capacities are essential to philanthropy working in a dynamic and effective way. There are federal responsibilities, resources, and talents that philanthropy would never want to replace, and realistically, philanthropy does not have the capacity to serve as a substitute. In fact, philanthropy depends upon these National Park Service attributes and resources to serve as its foundation for its positive impact in the parks.

Americans do not see their philanthropic support as a substitute for the role of the National Park Service. Donors and volunteers are keenly aware of the Park Service role and follow its lead in addressing park needs and enhancements. But increasingly donors are also making their contributions contingent on the assurance that park budgets will be there to preserve and care for the positive park improvements resulting from their donations. In fact, removing or diminishing federal funds when donor dollars are available would be a fundamental disincentive to giving and a serious, perhaps lethal blow to the future of national park philanthropy.

A proactive and sustaining approach involves a deep partnership of the Park Service, donors and nonprofit support groups. Organizations like the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy work very closely with the National Park Service to understand its priorities and to chart our strategic course in unison. The Conservancy also helps the Park Service understand which of its priorities are likely to have donor appeal, and we work together to ensure that donor-supported projects and programs are operationally and financially sustainable.

## **What do donors and volunteers consider the federal responsibility to our national parks?**

Speaking at a recent conference on partnerships for public lands, David Rockefeller Jr., philanthropist and former vice chair of the National Park Foundation, stressed the important distinction between federal and philanthropic roles in our national parks. Our mission, he said, is “not to build roads or employee housing units, nor to build or maintain infrastructure, but to create strong connections between visitor and place.” He called this distinction the “Bright Line” between federal responsibility and private opportunity.

The healthiest public-private partnerships result from a shared vision and an appropriate balance of investment. Donors want to be actively engaged in creating the vision for our national parks, while respecting key federal responsibilities. What is seen as the federal responsibility? Donors

tend to see this clearly. The philanthropic sector expects a fundamental foundation for donors to build upon – a foundation comprised of adequate “park base” operational support, basic park infrastructure, visitor safety, essential resource management, key amenities, upkeep of National Park facilities, expertise in interpretation, and Park Service staff in direct contact with visitors.

Current realities pose some challenges to this view. Many park operational budgets are stretched thin and even essential park infrastructure improvements need to be phased in over many years. Basic services can be heavily strained. But these are not functions that can or should be funded through nonprofit support groups and philanthropy. In the words of my colleague, Ken Olson, who leads the very successful Friends of Acadia, “friends groups are here to provide the margin of excellence, not the margin of survival.” This margin of excellence comes through the over \$100 million in annual giving and over 140,000 volunteers across our National Park system. It rests upon an essential foundation: the Park Service annual budget of over \$2 billion and an NPS workforce of over 20,000 permanent and seasonal employees.

### **What will the future bring in terms of philanthropy and volunteerism?**

Philanthropy and volunteerism are, and will continue to be, essential forces in achieving the mission of the National Park Service. These forces will grow in scale and impact if Americans are asked to share in the vision for our national parks, given respect for their views and involvement, provided with clear and expeditious ways to contribute, and treated with sincere appreciation as they donate time and resources.

National Park Service policy and legislative authorities should embrace and enhance philanthropy and volunteerism – and facilitate their flourishing on behalf of our parks. Federal funding and policy could significantly motivate philanthropy to our parks through greater use and flexibility with challenge grants, more efficient methods to combine federal and philanthropic dollars toward a desired outcome, quicker systems to review and approve philanthropic campaigns and gifts, more openness to donor recognition, and a general culture of gratitude and respect to those generous enough to give to our parks..

Our continued momentum will be the greatest when leveraged from a firm foundation of federal funding and national park professionalism. This foundation can be strengthened by recognizing philanthropic partners (the National Park Foundation, friends groups, and cooperating associations) as strategic and valued allies in the vision for our national parks and working with them in an open, facilitating and collaborative manner. Upon that foundation, generous Americans and the philanthropic sector can and will achieve the margin of excellence – a margin so essential to our national parks, which preserve the best of our country’s natural, scenic and cultural heritage.