
June 18, 2019

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
U.S. Senate
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Joe Manchin
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
U.S. Senate
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

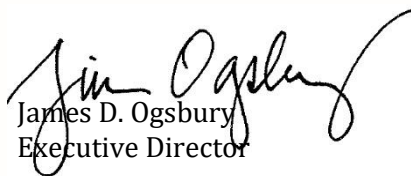
Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Manchin:

Western Governors appreciate the Committee's examination of the National Park Service's deferred maintenance backlog in its hearing on June 18. The National Parks help conserve natural, historical and cultural resources and support the economic health of gateway communities across the West. Not adequately addressing the maintenance needs at National Parks is already having negative effects on important infrastructure needs at our nation's parks, including road and bridge safety, and water and sanitation facilities.

To inform the Committee's consideration of this subject, I request that the Committee include Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution [2019-07, National Parks and the West](#), in the permanent record of the hearing. The resolution was just adopted at last week's annual meeting of Western Governors in Vail, Colorado.

I hope that the Governors' perspectives are helpful as you consider strategies to address this important challenge. Thank you for your leadership on this matter.

Respectfully,



James D. Ogsbury
Executive Director

Attachment



Policy Resolution 2019-07

National Parks and the West

A. **BACKGROUND**

1. The National Park Service (NPS) was created on August 25, 1916. The NPS Organic Act (Pub. L. 64-235) states that the fundamental purpose of the NPS “is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objectives and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”
2. The NPS system includes Historical Parks or Sites, National Monuments, National Parks, Battlefields or Military Parks, Preserves, Recreation Areas, Seashores, Parkways, Lakeshores, and Reserves. The NPS also helps administer affiliated sites, the National Register of Historic Places, National Heritage Areas, National Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Historic Landmarks, and National Trails.
3. NPS system units preserve scenic, historic, cultural, recreational and natural (i.e., wildlife, water, vegetation, etc.) values for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of millions of visitors.
4. Across the United States, the NPS system covers more than 85 million acres and comprises 419 units.
5. In 2017, the NPS system received over 331 million visitors who supported more than 306,000 mostly local jobs and contributed about \$36 billion to the U.S. economy, including an estimated \$18.2 billion in local gateway regions. NPS system units function as the backbone of many rural economies throughout the West.
6. The West has a unique history and special role in the establishment of our Nation’s system of NPS units.
 - a. The Nation’s first thirteen recognized National Parks are all located in the West and many other “crown jewels” of the NPS system are found in western states.
 - b. Western states and U.S. territories in the Pacific are home to over 200 NPS system units, with over 110 million visitors annually contributing more than \$9.4 billion to the states’ economies through visits to unique and iconic treasures found in our mountains, deserts, and coastlines.
 - c. National Parks help to safeguard natural and cultural heritage throughout the West, including 222 National Natural Landmarks, 618 National Historic Landmarks, over 62,000 archaeological sites, and 13 World Heritage Sites, and supporting over 400 threatened and endangered plant and animal species throughout the United States.

7. NPS system units are an important aspect of all-lands management efforts that seek to conserve landscapes across federal, state, and private ownership boundaries. Management decisions made within NPS boundaries can have effects on regional economic development and tourism, wildlife habitat and connectivity, cultural resource preservation, and other areas of interest to states.
8. The NPS system currently has a \$12 billion backlog in deferred maintenance projects for roads, bridges, visitor centers, historic buildings, trails, campgrounds, and other critical infrastructure needs. Aging facilities, growing visitation, and limited resources have all contributed to this backlog of deferred maintenance. Not adequately addressing these maintenance needs will have negative effects on visitor experience and economic activity in gateway communities.
9. The extended shutdowns of the federal government in 2013 and 2018-2019 caused millions of dollars of lost revenue for gateway communities, which are mostly rural and whose economies are highly reliant on tourism. These shutdowns also caused significant harm directly to the NPS system through staff furloughs, diminished revenue, lost recreational and educational opportunities, and damage to natural resources. During these shutdowns, some states entered into agreements with the U.S. Department of the Interior to keep certain National Parks open and lost millions of dollars that were never recouped.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Western Governors understand that not every state or territory approaches public land management in the same way. However, Western Governors recognize the role of our system of National Parks, in economic development, development of social values, positive health benefits, and recreational opportunities, which benefit our citizens, the region, nation, and world.
2. Western Governors support efforts to protect iconic NPS features, venues and landmarks so as to ensure and maintain their economic, cultural and historic values.
3. Consultation and coordination between NPS regional leadership, park unit managers, and Governors' offices can lead to improved cross-boundary management of ecological, economic, and cultural resources.
4. Western Governors encourage the NPS to partner with State Parks to improve outcomes and efficiencies related to resource protection, cost-sharing, staff training, educational programming, and other shared goals.
5. Western Governors recommend the federal government dedicate significantly more funds than currently appropriated for the maintenance of National Parks.
6. Western Governors support legislative efforts to improve the maintenance of National Parks, including measures that would direct revenues from energy development on federal lands and waters to address the deferred maintenance backlog at the NPS.
7. Western Governors believe maintenance of National Parks is first and foremost a federal responsibility. However, Western Governors support the federal government collaborating

with the National Park Foundation to obtain private and nonprofit sector support to enhance the offerings of the NPS and assist with the maintenance of National Parks.

8. Western Governors recommend the federal government take all necessary action to avoid lapses in funding and the associated harmful impacts to federal lands, particularly NPS units within the states and major tourist attractions in the West.
9. In the event of a lapse in funding, Western Governors recommend the federal government work collaboratively with states and follow through on any commitments it makes to those that undertake extraordinary measures to support their National Parks.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with Congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a bi-annual basis. Please consult westgov.org/resolutions for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.