



Centennial Initiative News Release

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First National Park Centennial Projects ‘Ready to Go;’ Adding Sparkle to America’s ‘Crown Jewels’

(Yosemite National Park, Calif.) – Build park trails, save sea turtles, “go green” energy, guide students to become stewards and recruit citizens to discover landscapes, history, culture and science – those are just a few of the more than 200 centennial proposals Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne unveiled today to be undertaken in national parks as part of the National Park Centennial Initiative.

“These are America’s proposals to help America’s parks,” Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne said of proposals the National Park Service has certified as eligible for federal matching money under the National Park Centennial Initiative and are ready to go in 2008. “Today we are ready to breathe life into vision and ideas.”

Kempthorne, who made the announcement with National Park Service Director Mary Bomar at Yosemite National Park, said, “These proposals, and the ones to follow over the next 9 years, represent the cornerstones of a new century for the National Park Service and a new era of partnership with the American people.”

The Centennial Initiative, first announced by Kempthorne last August at Yellowstone National Park, is a key component of President Bush’s 2008 proposed budget, which included the largest budget ever proposed for park operations and programs benefiting parks. The Centennial Initiative calls for \$1 billion over 10 years to strengthen basic park operations, and a challenge from President Bush: create a public-private funding vehicle of up to \$2 billion for new projects and programs with the goal of a \$100 million public-private match each year for 10 years.

Director Bomar said private philanthropic commitments exceeded the President’s challenge for the first year. “We have about \$370 million in proposals -- with not \$100 million in private donations, but \$216 million of commitments from park visitors, friends groups and other partners.”

Kempthorne said, “We asked our superintendents to work with local friends groups to suggest these centennial proposals. Working together they impressed us with their innovation and imagination. In short, they wanted to undertake projects that would help parks reach new levels of excellence.”

The list includes proposals at 116 parks in 40 states and the District of Columbia but touches parks nationwide because one of the proposals is an inventory of every living thing in the national park system.

Other proposals include:

- The “Stewardship by Discovery” program at every park across the country, which will tap into citizen scientists, volunteers and students, to catalogue the rich biodiversity parks contain. In many cases, this new program will uncover species never before described... species that live only in our National Parks.
- The “Downloadable Park” at Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee, which will develop state of the art technology bringing the park into the information age and connecting a whole new generation to the wonder of nature.
- Restoration of more than 50 miles of important foot trails in Yosemite National Park.
- Utilize scientists and volunteers to study life along the Appalachian Trail seeing national parks as an environmental barometer.

Bomar said, “Private philanthropy has always been a part of the Service and we continue that with the President’s challenge. The response from park visitors, friends, partners and other groups to match federal money each year means we will ensure national parks remain the jewels in America’s crown.”

“When history is written,” Bomar said, “the Centennial Initiative will be second only to the creation of the National Park System itself.

“There is a huge wave of excitement among National Park Service professionals and our partners,” Bomar said. “We will create park-based centers for Junior Rangers, implement cutting-edge energy projects like fuel cells and geothermal and build multimedia wayside exhibits that ‘talk’ to visitors. This is a victory for national parks and for the more than 270 million park visitors we see each year.”

“Last week, I sent an email to the men and women of the National Park Service to inform them of our announcement. One of the replies I received says it best: ‘This is thrilling! A win/win opportunity like we’ve never seen before. Thanks for the energy and vision for the NPS.’

“That thanks is for the many who worked to transform vision into action: Secretary Kempthorne and our friends in Congress, from both sides of the aisle who introduced legislation to support the Centennial. But most of all, our thanks go to park superintendents, friends groups, partners and an army of supporters.”

Both the United States House of Representatives and United States Senate included park operations increases in a pending National Park Service fiscal year 2008 budget. Kempthorne said Congress is still at work on legislation to authorize private-public funding for the centennial proposals. “We are ready – with Congress providing the final key with a centennial challenge fund - to transform our parks and awaken the spirit of wonder for another century of visitors.”

Bomar on August 2nd testified on several centennial challenge bills before House and Senate subcommittees. She and Kempthorne support administration proposals for the \$100 million challenge fund. Another bill, co-sponsored by Rep. Nick Rahall, D-WV, and Rep. Raul Grijalva, D-AZ, would provide \$100 million a year for 10 years for centennial projects and programs but has no requirement for private matching donations.

Kempthorne said he expects Bomar to call for centennial proposals for fiscal year 2009 and beyond. “This is really just the beginning of efforts to look at our goals and lay the centennial vision over the national park system landscape,” he said. “We’ve unleashed creative thought, and this is a pretty great beginning.”

The full list of centennial challenge-eligible proposals is available on-line at www.nps.gov/2016

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