

August 25, 2006

MEMORANDUM FROM SECRETARY DIRK KEMPTHORNE

TO: FRAN MAINELLA, DIRECTOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

SUBJECT: IMPLEMENTING PRESIDENT BUSH'S DIRECTIVES ON
THE FUTURE OF AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS

President Bush used the celebration of the National Park Service's 90th Anniversary to express the vision that America should prepare national parks for another "century of conservation, preservation, and enjoyment."

The President directed that we establish performance goals to achieve this objective. He also directed that we identify signature projects and programs that are consistent with these goals. These programs and projects should continue the National Park Service legacy of leveraging philanthropic, partnership and government investments for the benefit of national parks and their visitors.

With these directives, President Bush again affirms his commitment to national parks.

I know that you and the National Park Service join me in the heartfelt desire to achieve the President's vision. To accomplish the President's directives, I am today launching the National Park Centennial Challenge during the anniversary celebration at Yellowstone National Park.

As you know, there is historical precedent for the noble work we begin today. In 1956, when the National Park Service celebrated its 40th anniversary, there was a decade long effort to prepare national parks for their 50th anniversary. This project was called Mission 66.

It is fitting that we launch this Centennial Challenge at Yellowstone, at Canyon Village and at the Village's renovated Canyon Visitor Education Center. Yellowstone was America's first national park. Canyon Village was created by Mission 66. The visitor center was a Mission 66 project. After 50 years of service, it required renovation. This renovation embodies the President's effort to improve national parks as well as the National Park Service's legacy of leveraging private and public funds to benefit national parks and their visitors. This renovation is one of 6,000 improvement projects completed or underway in the past five years. This project was funded with visitor entrance fees, private gifts and targeted government investments.

Several actions should be immediately taken to begin fulfilling the President's vision. Therefore, I direct you to do the following:

- Provide the President's Message about the National Park Service's 90th Anniversary to every National Park Superintendent who, in turn, should provide it to today's park visitors. The President's message captures the spirit and passion of those who work at and visit national parks. I call your attention to the President's statement that "I encourage Americans to celebrate this anniversary, especially those one million visitors who on just this one day will be in national parks. I call on the National Park Service and every American to continue the work, cooperation and partnership necessary for our national parks to endure for the next 100 years and beyond."
- Recommend candidates for my consideration to lead the Centennial Challenge effort. The person I will select must have:
 - Passion for national parks;
 - Experience in managing complex projects that combine public and private funding sources;
 - Ability to work cooperatively with citizens and organizations having diverse views; and
 - Proven leadership and communications ability. This person will report directly to the Director of the National Park Service. This person will meet regularly with me to review progress achieved in fulfilling the President's directives.
- Please ask the National Park Service Leadership Council, the National Park System Advisory Board and the National Park Foundation to propose options for fulfilling the President's directive to "invite and receive suggestions from those who desire to preserve the scenic, cultural, historical, geological and recreational values of our national parks." With this advice, and with the help of the Centennial Challenge Director, we will establish an inclusive process for writing creative, thoughtful goals and selecting signature projects. I expect the process of choosing signature projects will be highly competitive. Only projects that can inspire America's imagination should be selected.

This is a time for all of us to think creatively about how to accomplish the President's objective. I look forward to working with National Park Service employees, citizens, interested organizations and benefactors in preparing national parks for the next century.