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## Centennial Initiative News Release



**Release date: Immediate**

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**Date: August 23, 2007**

### **Bridging the Watershed proposal eligible for matching funds**

Washington, DC— Expanding the hands-on Bridging the Watershed (BTW) education program throughout the National Capital Region (NCR) to underserved high school students is one of 201 proposals National Park Service Director Mary Bomar and Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne announced at a press conference in Yosemite National Park today to celebrate the 91<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the NPS.

“The National Park Service has, after a rigorous review, certified these proposals as eligible for centennial challenge matching funds,” Bomar said. “And they are ready to go in Fiscal Year 2008 which begins Oct. 1”

Expanding BTW to underserved youth in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia is one of nearly \$370 million of proposals eligible for centennial challenge matching funds. BTW is a dynamic private/public partnership education program connecting diverse populations of high school students and teachers in the Potomac Watershed with the rich resources of their national parks. BTW is conducted with 14 public schools systems in 10 of the 14 parks of NCR in collaboration with the Alice Ferguson Foundation (AFF). This initiative would expand the reach of this highly successful program to more students and educators ranging from rural areas in Maryland and, Virginia, and West Virginia to inner-city schools in the District of Columbia. More students from diverse groups would use their national parks as learning laboratories for the hands-on study of science and history and become future stewards of their national parks. Looking into the future, by 2016, many BTW alumni will be actively working to protect the parks they have come to love. Total proposal \$800,000.

Director Bomar said, “The centennial challenge is a critical element in the National Park Centennial Initiative put forward by President Bush and unveiled by Secretary Kempthorne one year ago. The full centennial initiative is a potential \$3 billion investment in our national parks, two-thirds of it a public-private partnership of matching money.”

The President’s fiscal year 2008 budget called for an additional \$100 million a year for 10 years to be dedicated to bolster basic park operations, Bomar said. Congress has included the first \$100 million for operations in the fiscal year 2008 budget that awaits final passage.

“The second part of the initiative is the centennial challenge – a funding mechanism to match up to \$100 million a year over 10 years of public money with \$100 million a year for 10 years in private donations,” Bomar said. “Congress has yet to finish legislation necessary to create the public-private centennial challenge.”

Financial commitments to the first round of proposals exceeded the President’s challenge. “We have about \$370 million in proposals with not \$100 million in private commitments but \$216 million committed from park visitors, friends groups and other partners,” Bomar said.

“I’ve testified before Senate and House subcommittees and judging by the warm reception we received, I believe Congress will include centennial challenge money in our next budget. We look forward to working with members from both sides of the aisle to provide the key to the centennial challenge. When that happens we can make decisions on which of these wonderful proposals to begin in the fall.”

Locally, Superintendent Coleman said the Alice Ferguson Foundation has committed matching money for expanding Bridging the Watershed. “We are excited to get this centennial project underway when the new fiscal year begins on October 1<sup>st</sup>.” Tracy Bowen, executive director of the Alice Ferguson Foundation, remarked, “Through the power of this public/private partnership, we will be able to reach many more students and teachers and engage them in learning about their world and their relationship to the Potomac River watershed.”

The list of proposals – at 116 parks in 40 states and the District of Columbia – touches parks nationwide with a centennial effort to inventory every living thing in the national park system.

To be certified, proposals had to be imaginative and innovative, addressed critical Service needs, had a philanthropic partner, required little or no additional recurring operating funds to be sustainable, improved the efficiency of park management, operations and employees and produced measurable results.

Other proposals:

- Lewis and Clark National Historical Park adopting the Class of 2016 with the goal of turning students to stewards.
- Additional student education through Acadia National Park’s “No Child Left Inside” project.
- Strengthening efforts to save Kemp’s Ridley sea turtles – the world’s most endangered sea turtle – with citizens assisting park rangers to observe and relocate nests on Padre Island National Seashore, the turtle’s most important U.S. nesting habitat.
- Restoration of more than 50 miles of important foot trails in Yosemite National Park.
- Climate change research of glaciers at Mount Rainier National Park and
- Utilizing scientists and volunteers to study life along the Appalachian Trail seeing national parks as an environmental barometer.

“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 over 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,” Bomar said, “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.”

“When history is written,” Bomar said, “the Centennial Initiative will be second only to the creation of the national park system itself.”

The full list of centennial challenge-eligible projects and programs is available on-line at the National Park Service centennial web site [www.nps.gov/2016](http://www.nps.gov/2016)

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