
Centennial Initiative News Release



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Rock Creek Park Centennial proposals eligible for matching funds

Washington, DC – Construction of the Wisconsin Avenue Plaza in the Georgetown Waterfront Park, which is managed by Rock Creek Park, in Washington, D.C., 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 91st 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”

The construction of the Wisconsin Avenue Plaza in the Georgetown Waterfront Park is one of nearly \$370 million of proposals eligible for centennial challenge matching funds. When completed the 2.5-acre Wisconsin Avenue Plaza will provide a superior recreational destination and will be the lively centerpiece of the Georgetown Waterfront Park, with its signature elements including an interactive fountain, pergola and river stairs with seating for 350 at the finish line of the Potomac River regattas. This stretch of the Potomac River has been the historic venue for rowing for over a century and thousands of high school, college and masters rowers congregate here in spring and fall for the regattas. The Wisconsin Avenue Plaza is the culmination of the reclamation of nine acres of formerly industrialized Potomac Waterfront and the project will create a world-class urban waterfront park, worthy of joining the parks of the Nation’s Capital. It will be the largest new park created in the District of Columbia since 1976 and will form the vital link in a 225-mile national park green space from Mount Vernon, Virginia to Cumberland, Maryland. Total proposal cost: \$9,000,000.

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.”

The planning, design and construction of the Wisconsin Avenue Plaza is the result of collaborative community involvement and has its enthusiastic support. Ready, willing and able partners, the National Park Foundation and the Friends of Georgetown Waterfront Park have already raised more than 25% of the goal of \$4.5 million in private donations. The Friends of Georgetown Waterfront Park is committed to securing the remaining funds from private donors and the District of Columbia. The new fiscal year begins Oct. 1 and we are excited to get this centennial project underway. Bob vom Eigen, President of Friends of Georgetown Waterfront Park reacted “We are delighted to receive this wonderful news! The certification of the Wisconsin Avenue Plaza as a project eligible for centennial matching funds could not have come at a better time as we move into the fall fundraising season. This provides the boost we need in our efforts with private donors and the District of Columbia to reach our fundraising goal so that construction now underway on the Georgetown Waterfront Park can continue uninterrupted to the Wisconsin Avenue Plaza next spring.”

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

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