

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Parks Welcome New Citizens of the United States of America



Welcome to Your America!



Many years ago I became a U.S. citizen by the same process you have just completed. As the director of the National Park Service, I would like to welcome you to this unit of the National Park System, which is part of the network of public lands that belong to you as a citizen of this country. Some national parks focus on natural wonders. Others honor an important event or pay tribute to a group of people. National parks can cover hundreds of square miles, or be less than a city block in size. They can be in wilderness, underwater, on rural farmland, or in an urban environment. The National Park System's nearly 400 sites are truly remarkable.

Why would you visit such places? I'll suggest four reasons.

Parks contain examples of all kinds of nature. You can see animals, trees, plants, rivers, streams, mountains, deserts—almost anything in our natural heritage can be experienced in a national park.

Parks are examples of the diversity of American culture, history, and landscapes. Parks tell amazing, true stories that collectively describe our nation's story. They are "classrooms" and "libraries." By visiting national parks, you can better understand cultural traditions that define us as Americans.

Parks are a legacy. National parks are lands that have been intentionally set aside and preserved because of their important role in our nation's development. They are links to the past—gifts from earlier generations that we will pass on to future generations. And they are real. Rather than reading about them in a book or viewing images of them on television or a computer screen, you can go to national parks yourself and physically experience why these places are special.

Parks belong to all Americans. All citizens share in the privilege of owning national parks and in the responsibility of protecting them. Parks are for our enjoyment. But, we must all do our share to preserve and protect these national treasures. I hope you will.

I encourage you to explore your national parks. Learn more about your new nation's history and culture. See the majestic canyons and rivers. Experience the towering, ancient trees or cool streams overlooked by towering mountains. Stand near a battlefield and sense the history that surrounds you. Feel the solitude of a desert sunset.

Join us in preserving, protecting, and enjoying these important places. National parks unite us all as Americans. From one "American by choice" to another, congratulations!



Director Bomar

Mary A. Bomar
Director,
National Park Service

Your National Park Service: Mission



The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.

History

On August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the act creating the National Park Service, a new federal bureau in the Department of the Interior. The National Park Service promotes and regulates the use of national parks, monuments, and reservations. Our responsibilities are to conserve the scenery, natural and historic objects, and living things in the national parks; to keep these resources in good condition; and to make them available for people to enjoy now and in the future.

The National Park Service still strives to meet these goals, while filling many other roles as well: guardian of our diverse cultural and recreational resources;

world leader in the parks and preservation community; and pioneer in the drive to protect America's open space.

What does this mean for you?

The National Park Service invites you to visit and enjoy *your* 391 national parks. We hope you will learn about the history they memorialize and the living plants and animals and other wonders of nature they preserve.

In addition to enjoying your national parks, you play an important role as a caretaker and protector of these special places so that your family and future generations can also visit and experience them.

In our national parks, every citizen can see America's natural beauty—sometimes just as the first Americans saw it. These special places are for all to enjoy and, together, we can ensure that nature is not harmed in a way that would lessen the experience for us, our children, and future generations.

—Michael Soukup,
Former Chief Scientist



1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240
(202) 208-6843

<http://www.nps.gov>

Public Lands for Everyone



National parks and monuments are part of a large system of public lands that include national forests, national wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, national marine sanctuaries, and state and county parks. These lands were set aside for your use and enjoyment and are to be maintained for you now and in the future. As a U.S. citizen you own these special places, which are administered for you by the National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and many other federal and state agencies.

In general, public lands are open to the public; however, each government agency develops its own rules for how you can use and enjoy them. For example, on public lands you may be permitted to collect firewood, or this activity may be prohibited. Fishing is another popular activity that is regulated on public lands. With a permit it is allowed in many areas, though not all.



Park Ranger William Newman, National Mall, Washington, DC



National Mall, Washington DC

We invite you to find out about the public lands near your home, including the National Park System. Learn what they offer and how you might enjoy them. A visit to the national parks and other public lands will surely deepen your experience as an American citizen.