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Box 65: **Commentary from the GWS office and our members**

A Second Century Of Stewardship: Mission 2016

This year the National Park Service (NPS) will mark its eighty-fifth anniversary as the nation's premier preservation agency. As we continue our stewardship of natural and cultural wonders on behalf of the people of the United States, we need to pause occasionally and determine if we are true to our mission. In these past nine decades the mission of this agency has grown and evolved into areas never envisioned by the founders. The American people now expect much more from the stewards of parks and historic sites than could ever have been imagined in the nineteenth century.

Having now left the twentieth century behind, many of the future dilemmas and mandates the NPS will face in the century ahead are still difficult for us to foresee. However, others are clearly evident and will require resolution before the new challenges can be faced. The aim of this paper is to challenge the employees of NPS, our partners, and the public to set a course for moving the agency forward in planning, preparation, and scientific knowledge for preservation in perpetuity. The purpose of the goals that follow is to provide a coherent context for NPS to present issues and solutions to the American people and their representatives in a manner that will allow for successful disposition of those issues. This agenda will focus the talent and energy of NPS professionals on the tasks most urgently requiring completion to prepare for the impending "Second Century of

Stewardship." My fervent hope is that all concerned individuals and groups will suggest additional goals to be considered and implemented by the agency.

In order to meet the ever-more-difficult feat of providing visitation opportunities while preserving resources in an unimpaired state, we must first complete the tasks begun in the twentieth century. We must establish a far-reaching strategy for managing wildlife, wilderness, and historic structures and districts. We must integrate every programmatic mandate into the consciousness of every unit manager. Whether it is the River and Trails program or the National Register, every superintendent must feel a sense of ownership of these outreach activities. We must provide our workforce with the tools and the knowledge to meet visitors, partners, and antagonists on an equal footing.

The agency needs to focus for the next fifteen years on preparing for those tasks and completing the agenda of this rapidly closing first century of NPS existence. The following broad objectives could provide a cohesive context for the NPS family of employees, partners, and friends to cooperate over the next two decades while building a consensus with the public and their elected officials. We must finally answer definitively the question “What are national parks?” if we are to proceed boldly and successfully into the realm of twenty-first century challenges. We must solve the dilemmas that have plagued our past if we are to face the as-yet unimagined land management conundrums of the future.

The next NPS director should declare that it is our intention to mark the first century of preservation stewardship in America, not by self-congratulatory recognition of past achievements, but by building the workforce, the tools, and the constituency in this nation to surpass those achievements in our “Second Century of Stewardship.”

Mission 2016 Goals for the National Park Service

1. Assist the president and Congress in disposing of the twentieth-century wilderness proposals, dating back to 1970. The agency cannot continue to manage large portions of the land within its purview without final direction from Congress. Many

of these areas have already been held in temporary status for thirty years.

2. Prepare a programmatic and systematic policy implementation for wildlife issues in all NPS units. The various populations are extremely distinct, but the problems and solutions are limited in number and in type. This issue requires a stronger centralized role.
3. Develop a critical review process for determining the appropriateness of inclusion of new sites within the National Park System. The process must be as objective as possible and be approved by Congress and the president, allowing decisions to be determined without political interference. An independent board composed of experts would apply the criteria submitted by the agency. These individuals should be drawn from diverse backgrounds and locations to ensure that the voice of the people is heard.
4. Establish a method of supplying scientific research for natural and cultural issues and applying objective academic peer review in a manner that is not impaired by the necessities of other management priorities. The NPS has experimented with numerous ways to investigate scientific dilemmas, but has yet to find one that is accepted by a majority of the academic and scientific community.

5. Integrate all of the legal mandates of the agency into the daily operational activities of every park, regional office, and the Washington office. The complex mission of NPS, as established by the Organic Act, has been enhanced and further complicated by the subsequent passage of numerous important laws, all of which need to be recognized and understood in an operational context by every employee.
6. Develop the strategic planning aspects of the agency to project future roles for NPS and to embrace areas of preservation that the public foresees as critical elements of the NPS role in the future. We have not, as an agency, always accurately judged the best interests of the public. We have been led into historic preservation, wilderness management, and partnership activities by some visionary leaders within NPS and by many members of the public outside the government. These important elements of today's NPS often were initiated against our will, but today we all see the value of them.
7. Create a workforce that represents a true picture of the American population. Diversity will include the full spectrum of racial, ethnic, and religious groups that make up the American population, but will also mean more. A diverse work force for NPS in the next century will include individuals with urban, suburban, and rural backgrounds. We will need academics and tradespeople, historians and biologists, not just by grade and series but by vocation and avocation. We need to have members of the NPS family who understand the psyche of visitors from metropolitan areas and foreign nations as well as from rural American areas. We have begun to make excellent progress in this area, but much remains to be done before the "face of America" greets us in every NPS unit.
8. Ensure that the NPS workforce has the basic necessities, amenities, and tools so that their private lives enhance their workplace effectiveness. Isolated parks need to have appropriate housing. Parks with local communities need to ensure that their employees are part of the local housing market and community life. People need to have their basic needs met in order to function efficiently in the workplace. We can no longer expect employees to function like a military force occupying some foreign land. While it is a valid goal to limit our housing liabilities, it is more important to supply the basic living needs to our staff in remote locations.
9. Maintain, as a basic element of the NPS mission, a sufficient level of technology to accomplish that mission. Technology will be at the core of our ability to pro-

tect the visitors and park resources in the coming years. Communications and computer technology will support every operational activity, from search and rescue to resource management.

10. Continue to provide technical assistance. The NPS is a force for leadership in park management around the world. Many of the areas of expertise within the agency, however, should also be developed for use by other sectors of the government and the public. For example, cultural centers that specialize in archeology, museum services, and cultural landscapes should be developed to assist other agencies and non-profit groups, and, in some cases, provide services for a fee. These centers, already in existence, should be nurtured and encouraged in their mission.
11. Provide specific and career-long developmental opportunities for employees. Career ladders must be established that allow individuals to find personal fulfillment from disciplines and management positions. Flexible competencies should be established that encourage employees, but also allow for individual initiative and career development within the civil service system.
12. Promote the heritage assets of the people of the United States in a manner that allows for increasing visitation without compromising the quality of a national park

visit. The agency agenda for the future needs to be transparently non-partisan. It should be made as easy for a political representative to support parks as it is for their constituents to do so. An agency whose mandate is to protect in perpetuity should have broad plans for decades ahead that are not influenced by topical political activity. This goal may seem naïve, but it is in fact critical. The public supports parks regardless of political affiliation, and it is our burden to develop a way for the NPS's goals to become pervasive throughout the political system.

13. Develop transportation alternatives to allow for maximum visitation without degrading the resources. In some ways, railroads created the parks and automobiles peopled them. In the future, public transportation and reservation systems will keep them open to the largest number of visitors. Areas which allow special uses, such as the operation of off-road vehicles, should develop sustainable management systems for those high-impact recreational activities and limit them to the extent required for resource preservation.
14. Find a way to ameliorate the impacts of commercial consumptive uses and develop sustainable management practices for those uses. Some examples of consumptive uses that cause conflicts with preservation of re-

sources include grazing, mining, oil and gas development, and commercial fishing. NPS also must acquire, to the greatest extent practicable, all non-federal lands and interests within NPS units.

15. Participate in the larger land-use planning exercises that are taking place all over the country. We must work closely with other land managers and the public to find ways for state, federal, and private lands to manage visitation and recreation, and to sustain the larger ecosystems and wildlife corridors.
16. Maintain purity of purpose in the protection of parks. While we anticipate continued evolution of our mandates and the kind of sites we may manage in the future, the original mandate of preservation in perpetuity must be ingrained in every employee at every level. New directions the agency may take must grow from its core values and mission—not be incompatible and alien to them.
17. Continue and increase the relevance of the national parks to the population of the United States.

This is the single most important goal for the management of NPS. The changing demographics of the nation and the varied cultural backgrounds of the people will demand a constant education effort. NPS must reach out to the inner cities, the suburbs, and the rural areas, and especially to new immigrant populations, through traditional outreach activities, the educational system, and telecommunications. The values that are the foundation of preservation efforts must continue to be taught to all of the people, if those values are to continue to be relevant.

If we celebrate our hundredth anniversary by preparing for a second century of stewardship, we will have demonstrated that we are indeed worthy of the trust that the likes of John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, and Bob Marshall placed in us. More importantly, we will also have earned the trust and gratitude of future generations for our ability to think of their needs and to place those needs first. This great legacy we care for is ours to hold and to enhance, but never to diminish.

John Donahue is superintendent of Big Cypress National Preserve in Florida, and was formerly vice president of the GWS. Reminder: this column is open to all GWS members. We welcome lively, provocative, informed opinion on anything in the world of parks and protected areas. The submission guidelines are the same as for other GEORGE WRIGHT FORUM articles—please refer to the inside back cover of any issue. The views in “Box 65” are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position of The George Wright Society.