

Remarks from the Chair, Education Committee, National Park System Advisory Board

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THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM IS MORE THAN THE PLACES AND OBJECTS central to the heritage of the United States. The national park system embodies intangible meanings—beauty, health, wonder, freedom, democracy, and struggle—that are central to our collective identity. The survival of the national park system in the 21st century depends on how it interacts with society and how much society values it. The Interpretation and Education Program is the primary means by which the National Park Service engages diverse publics with their national parks, provides access to meanings, establishes relevance, and connects people and communities to national heritage.

It is critical that the NPS Interpretation and Education Program be strong, vital, flexible, and effective. To that end, it is exciting that the NPS is in the midst of an interpretation and education renaissance—a commitment to build on existing success, and to learn, grow, and respond to our changing society. The National Park System Advisory Board Education Committee is honored to be a catalyst for this renaissance and is pleased to see the director and the National Leadership Council forming a strong partnership with regional, park level, and field leaders within interpretation and education.

This National Park Service Interpretation and Education Evaluation Summit was a historic step toward creating a culture of evaluation within NPS, which is one of the central pillars of the renaissance. It was clear to me that summit participants found the experience of this day and a half of dialogue to be fulfilling and thought-provoking. The contributions of our panelists and outside experts provided fresh and useful insights, and the responsive discussion from NPS staff and partners demonstrated the depth, creativity, and commitment that we bring to this challenge and opportunity.

The National Park Service must work to find the resources that will help to create this culture of inquiry and on-going learning. This is not something that can be accomplished overnight. This will be a long journey, but ultimately the effort will be fulfilling, worthwhile, and enjoyable. Creating a culture of evaluation will be a key piece of taking the NPS from “good” to “great.”