

Centennial Essay Feedback

a selection of comments received in response to recent Centennial Essays

Comments on Dwight T. Pitcaithley’s “On the Brink of Greatness: National Parks and the Next Century” (volume 24, no. 2, summer 2007; on-line at www.georgewright.org/243pitcaithley.pdf):

I am disappointed that it appears that the Park Service is going to do nothing to rethink its mission, readjust its values, reexamine its governance, and review the current one-year funding cycle. Instead, the centennial is devolving into a giant grab bag of projects and programs, presumably to be funded by some kind of partnership between cooperators and as-of-yet unappropriated federal dollars. What a golden opportunity for the NPS to spend the next 9 years trying to reenergize itself for its second century of service to the American people. And, it doesn’t look like the Service will seize the opportunity.

— *Rick Smith*

I wish to commend GWS to starting this Centennial Essay Series and taking the leadership role of creating thoughtful essays on the future of the parks. I think Dwight’s lead-off essay could not have been better chosen to set the tone and the foundation for future essays. The Coalition of National Park Service Retirees has, for several years, formally called for just such an insightful and deep look into the future of our second century of parks. Dwight’s essay was dead on target echoing many of the challenges CNPSR has also identified. If enough thoughtful and respected professionals and organizations can come together around a central thought it is entirely possible to create the synergy for a momentum of change to take place to re-form the landscape of park management for a second century.

— *Rob Arnberger*

Congratulations on drawing attention to the shameful underfunding and overpoliticization of the NPS with this hard-hitting article. It marshals all the facts and figures, the reports, studies and assessments, and draws conclusions that are unassailable. But some issues hardly seem to need debate. A fully-funded Park Service, regularly supplied with enough money to conserve resources, educate visitors, conduct research, and actually maintain structures and roads: should this even be a topic of discussion? Yes, it appears, if we want to see it happen. Taking the agency out of Interior and making it independent is a bold proposal, but makes excellent sense. The article provides persuasive precedents for this and the related idea of appointing the director for a 15-year term. I doubt that we as a

nation are even capable of thinking in 15-year cycles any more, but certainly something must be done to change the revolving door of Park Service leadership. The article properly emphasizes the role of the national parks in our democracy. Visitors to the parks approach them with a unique mixture of reverence, pride, and an openness for learning. So I remember, at any rate, from my days as a seasonal ranger at Mesa Verde in the 1970s. I felt honored in those days to be the person to whom park visitors directed their questions. They never seemed to doubt that the ranger would have the answers. Their faith that the Park Service knew what it was doing, and did it well, was apparent. We must make sure that faith continues, and is justified. Thank you for starting the conversation.

— *Jane Scott*

What a coup! I've been a park employee since 2003 and throughout this time I've learned to take a deep breath each time before reading anything on the Inside NPS web page. In my experience, Inside NPS functions primarily as a one-way rhetorical mouthpiece for the present administration's agenda to privatize our National Parks. What a pleasure to find the essay "On the Brink of Greatness: National Parks and the Next Century" referenced on Inside NPS. Your five "recommendations" reclaim the promise and unique character of the national park system and are diametrically opposed to the generic, amusement-park vision of the current administration. As a person who works for a park interpreting the Constitution, questioning decisions of the executive branch, and freedom of speech, your essay on and vision for the national parks offer the first rays of hope for the parks in a future darkened by an administration mandate to commercialize the parks. Keep up the fantastic work.

— *K. Alden Peterson*

You can read the full text of these and other comments on the NPS Centennial Essay webpage: www.georgewright.org/nps2016.html.