



American Recreation Coalition

Dedicated to the protection and enhancement of everyone's right to health and happiness through recreation.

NEWS

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NPS CENTENNIAL TO INCLUDE YOUTH OUTREACH, BACKLOG REDUCTION

Washington, D.C. (Feb. 3, 2015) – President Barack Obama used his FY2016 budget request to outline plans to keep parks relevant to an increasingly urban and diverse nation and to invite all Americans to help support their parks. His requests include \$20 million annually to transport over a million urban youth to national parks and public lands, with dedicated youth coordinators to welcome them and their families, and a significant increase in the National Park Service (NPS) Centennial Challenge program, which leverages federal spending at least 1:1 with contributions and partner funding and helps reduce the large NPS deferred-maintenance backlog.

The budget requests were explained in briefings by White House officials, including Counselor to the President John Podesta, and Interior officials led by Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and including NPS Director Jon Jarvis. Congressional hearings on the President's FY2016 budget requests, for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2015, will begin shortly.

Administration sources indicate that the youth-outreach efforts will be detailed over the next several weeks and seek to begin an ongoing, meaningful experience in a park or other public lands setting for millions of youth starting in the fall of 2015. Federal, state and local park and recreation agencies and other organizations are expected to coordinate hosting the visits, designed to be both fun and educational. A program of the National Park Foundation has previously supported student trips to parks through grants under its *Ticket to Ride* program. Recreation community research has repeatedly shown that exposure of kids to the outdoors is critically important to later-life participation in outdoors activities.

The recreation community has also expressed great concern over a backlog in deferred maintenance of NPS visitor infrastructure now estimated to total nearly \$12 billion. The President's proposal outlines a strategy to end the non-transportation component of that backlog within 10 years, partly through increased appropriations and partly by inviting support from individuals, organizations and corporations.

"The nation's recreation community applauds the President's action," said Derrick Crandall, President of the American Recreation Coalition (ARC) and an active member of the National Park Service Centennial Advisory Committee. "We have stressed for two decades that there has been a decline in outdoor activity by America's kids. We noted declines in kids' bike sales

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and overall park visits, a surge in obesity among youth and dramatic increases in hours spent by kids staring at screens. We helped build partnerships to lure kids outdoors – offering ideas to parents and schools and youth organizations and park agencies. We have united groups around action through Great Outdoors Month™, including efforts by governors of both political parties. The President’s proposal will supplement and energize programs like these.”

The program is expected to put a special emphasis on the nation’s Title I schools, schools with concentrations of low-income students. These same students often have limited exposure to America’s shared legacy of parks, forests, refuges and other public lands and waters.

According to Crandall, there will be strong support for the youth-outreach and backlog-reduction efforts from the recreation and tourism communities. “There are communities that already have similar youth-oriented programs in place, including use of overnight environmental education centers, and national park concessioners assist with food and transportation. In addition, the current backlog threatens the quality and quantity of park visitor experiences, even as the agency seeks to invite all Americans to visit and benefit from their parks. This proposal is an important step forward.”

Outreach to youth is expected to be a primary focus of the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR) for 2015-16 and will be a focus of Partners Outdoors 2015, to be held in Washington, D.C., on June 2-4, which ARC coordinates.

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About the American Recreation Coalition:

American Recreation Coalition – is a nonprofit, Washington-based federation founded in 1979. The association provides a unified voice for recreation interests to ensure their full and active participation in government policy-making on issues such as public land management. ARC membership consists of more than 100 organizations, including national and regional associations and corporations that represent a major share of the \$650 billion a year recreation/leisure industry and enthusiast groups representing millions of recreationists. Since its inception, ARC has sought to catalyze public-private partnerships to enhance and protect outdoor recreation opportunities and resources. ARC conducts research, organizes national conferences, and disseminates information through a variety of means, including its website www.funoutdoors.com. ARC plays a leading role in several key coalitions and organizations, including the Coalition for Recreational Trails, Scenic Byways Coalition and Coalition for Recreation in the National Forests. ARC also supports and promotes the WOW – Wonderful Outdoor World outreach to urban children and was instrumental in the re-launch of Take Pride in America. ARC was also instrumental in launching National Get Outdoors Day, a national effort dedicated to helping children enjoy healthy, active outdoor lives.