



American Recreation Coalition

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

NEWS

Contact: Derrick Crandall, 202-682-9530

Partnership Announces Initiative to Connect New Americans to Public Lands



Washington, D.C. (July 10, 2008) The White House Office of USA Freedom Corps, Department of Homeland Security's Task Force on New Americans, National Park Service and American Recreation Coalition announced the creation of a public-private partnership to connect new citizens to America's public lands. The initiative – named ***This Land Is Your Land*** – will coordinate public and private efforts to engage new Americans in volunteerism on public lands. The initiative also created the New Americans Outreach Task Force, which aims to draw newly naturalized citizens to National Parks and other public lands.

This Land Is Your Land was unveiled on July 7, 2008 at a special naturalization ceremony in Ellis Island's Great Hall where 20 new citizens from 15 countries took the Oath of Allegiance within sight of the Statue of Liberty. Cokie Roberts, broadcast journalist and member of the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation, led the event and encouraged the new Americans to vote and to volunteer on public lands. She specifically challenged them to volunteer 100 hours to earn the President's Volunteer Service Award during their first year of citizenship. Alison Young, Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of USA Freedom Corps (USAFC), asked the new citizens to answer the President's 2002 national Call to Service that created USAFC. "It is our hope that through this new partnership, USA Freedom Corps can create an eagerness among new Americans to engage in volunteer opportunities in the great outdoors and to enjoy the grandeur of our National Parks," said Young.

Upon naturalization, new citizens are granted the rights and responsibilities associated with the shared ownership of America's public lands, which cover one-third of the United States. Keynote speaker Mary Bomar, Director of the National Park Service and the first naturalized American to hold that position, spoke passionately of her own Oath of Allegiance ceremony and of how National Parks connect all Americans through shared ownership and responsibility. "There are special places that unite us all as Americans," said Bomar. "National Parks are those special places, and by visiting them, I hope you'll be as inspired as I was."

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U.S. Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne announced July 4 that all new citizens naturalized between now and National Public Lands Day on September 27 will receive free entrance to a National Park during the weekend of September 27-28, 2008. At the naturalization ceremony, Sam Solomon, President and CEO of The Coleman Company, announced that Coleman will offer these same new citizens a 25% discount on outdoor equipment purchases at www.coleman.com until December 31, 2008. Solomon encouraged the new citizens to cherish the American legacies of conservation and volunteerism. "Our public lands cannot be safeguarded by great agencies like the National Park Service alone," he said. "They need to be safeguarded for future generations by all of us through responsible use, personal contributions of time, and other resources. We hope you will embrace this part of the American character in your lives and in your families' lives."

The Statue of Liberty National Monument, one of 391 National Park sites, was a fitting venue for the announcement of ***This Land Is Your Land***. Park Superintendent Cynthia Garrett addressed the new citizens, stating, "The National Park Service uses the power of this special place to engage people in dialogue about the immigration story and the cultural richness of the United States, about immigration policy and the contributions of immigrants to our society. What an ideal place for the ceremony to mark your transition from immigrant to American citizen!" After the ceremony, the newly naturalized citizens and their guests took a tour of the Statue of Liberty and were treated to lunch courtesy of ARAMARK and Evelyn Hill, Inc.

The New Americans Outreach Task Force met after the ceremony to set an action agenda for the partnership's next steps. The Task Force will work to make the successful launch of ***This Land Is Your Land*** part of a larger, sustainable effort to welcome naturalized citizens to their new public lands. One of the Task Force's many exciting goals is to have a Coleman camping-equipment package at 10 National Parks available for new Americans to borrow. The Task Force also plans to have information about public lands and National Parks become part of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services naturalization materials and to have more National Park sites host naturalization ceremonies.

"Enjoying our beautiful public lands is a real privilege and caring for them is a great honor," said American Recreation Coalition President Derrick Crandall. "We are excited by this wonderful new opportunity to introduce the majesty of America's Great Outdoors to her newest citizens."

To learn more about ***This Land Is Your Land*** or to find one of more than four million volunteer opportunities near you, visit www.volunteer.gov.