

## RECREATION COMMUNITY CONCERNS REGARDING JUNE 2006 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE MANAGEMENT POLICIES DRAFT

Outdoor recreation enriches the lives of virtually every American. Whether on urban trails or in distant Wilderness, whether alone or in the company of family and friends, recreational experiences provide mental, physical and spiritual benefits. Units of the national park system provide some 270 million of these experiences annually, fulfilling the visions of Americans who pioneered the conservation movement globally, establishing the first national park system.

The 1916 Organic Act of the National Park Service established a clear mission for the agency – ***“to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”*** This single mission was altered in the 2001 Management Policies to place conservation as a higher purpose than enjoyment by the public. This replaced the existing doctrine, the 1988 NPS Management Policies, and reflected the views of an Administration that publicly alleged that the American public was loving its parks to death – despite a decrease in visitations (during a period of growth in the national park units) from 287 million visits to 310 units in 1987 to just 270 million visits to 390 units last year.

The NPS Management Policies June 2006 draft further hampers consensus about the management of national park units by altering the meaning of “impairment,” introducing direction to return natural soundscapes and reverse biological or physical processes altered by man. It is essential to remember that those who first established the test of impairment – the agency’s first leaders – subsequently oversaw the construction of road systems, hotels and other infrastructure that is essential to serving the needs of those who visit our parks today, and that this development was done with the support and agreement of the Members of Congress who authored the Organic Act.

One of the important positive attributes of the June draft is clear direction to National Park Service decision makers to embrace civic engagement to support better, and better understood, policies and plans. We are disappointed that the development of the draft Management Policies is not an example of this principle in operation. Sadly, the draft document has left important constituencies divided and in disagreement, despite significant potential for consensus. This division will hamper park unit decision making and should be addressed by agency leadership.

Finally, we believe it is time for all of us who celebrate the legacy of our national parks to work together to ensure that the park system remains relevant to most Americans – a natural outgrowth of a return to the intent of the Organic Act. Today, a declining percentage of Americans visit and benefit from our parks – and delivering these benefits to urban Americans, youth and Americans of color should be of special concern to all of us.

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