



**THE COALITION OF CONCERNED  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
RETIREES**

c/o J. W. "Bill" Wade  
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Tucson, AZ 85750

June 14, 2004

Mr. Charles H. Taylor, Chairman, Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies  
Mr. Norman D. Dicks, Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies  
Mr. George P Radanovich, Chairman, Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands  
Mrs. Donna M. Christensen, Ranking Democrat Member, Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands  
The U. S. House of Representatives  
Washington D. C. 20515

Gentlemen and Gentlewoman;

On behalf of the Coalition of Concerned National Park Service Retirees, I want you to know that the Coalition, now consisting of more than 255 former career professionals, many of whom were senior leaders and managers of the National Park Service, appreciates your interest in, and attention to, the operational needs of the national park system. We want to apprise you of several recent developments involving National Park Service Director Fran Mainella and others.

**Superintendents asked to lobby Congress**

We are attaching a copy of a fax sent to selected superintendents from Director Mainella's offices, with reference to the Highway Re-Authorization Bill (SAFETEA), urging those superintendents to "call your Congressman and have he or she urge a House Transportation Conferee for your state to strip the section, marked on the attachment, from the bill." When Coalition members were active employees, we were told that lobbying the Congress about an introduced Bill by Executive Department career employees was a violation of law and policy. Indeed, the Chief of the Park Police, Teresa Chambers, was removed from her position after having been accused of doing precisely what this Assistant Director instructed the superintendents to do. Isn't it strange that Director Mainella encourages superintendents to lobby on behalf of specific legislation yet urges them not to tell the truth to the public about the reductions in visitor

services and cuts in NPS personnel occurring this summer in parks across the nation? Even though the Assistant Director's memorandum was subsequently revoked, the implications are clear. If an NPS employee lobbies for something that the Director and the Administration support, he/she is practicing good management. If it is something of which the Director does not support, that same employee is guilty of lobbying and potentially subject to reprisals. Is it any wonder that many senior active employees tell Coalition members that employee morale in the NPS is the lowest that they have ever seen it?

### **A continuing pattern of pressure on career professionals by Director Mainella**

At a press conference in Washington, DC on May 27th, the Coalition of Concerned NPS Retirees released a report<sup>1</sup> detailing differences between the Director's budget "happy talk" and the realities facing park staffs. Following the release of the report, senior officials in the NPS Washington Office have told Coalition members that Director Mainella was "explosively angry about the latest cycle of stories about reduced services and hours. She was ranting about (park) superintendents making a liar of her and demanding that regional directors make sure that not one hour of operation be cut at any facility." If this account is accurate, the Coalition observes that the Director has only herself to blame.

Additional evidence has come to our attention that soon after our report was released there were attempts on the part of the Director to determine who our "sources" were. Park managers and other employees in the NPS are already reluctant to be forthcoming and honest with the public and the media because of concern about retribution for doing so. (The actions taken against US Park Police Chief Teresa Chambers have created a deep chill over the NPS relative to employees speaking out about conditions existing in the parks.)

### **A continuing pattern of misleading the public about conditions in parks**

At the Appropriations Subcommittee's March 25th hearing that featured testimony from Director Fran Mainella, every member in attendance that day voiced his/her concern and commitment to meeting the needs of our parks.

Since then, as you may know, Director Mainella, often in company of Secretary Norton, has been touring the United States saying that the National Park Service has "more funds per acre, per employee, and per visitor than at any time in the history of the agency." She said in front of the Appropriations Subcommittee that "Our parks will be open, which they will be; resources are protected, which they will be; and outstanding visitor services will be provided, which they will be."

*In fact, there is less money reaching the parks:* While the Congress may have appropriated more money to the National Park Service than ever before, certainly little of this largesse is trickling down to the parks. The Coalition has discovered that, using the

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<sup>1</sup> This report may be viewed on the Web at: [www.protectamericaslands.org/news\\_releases.asp?nrid=119](http://www.protectamericaslands.org/news_releases.asp?nrid=119).

NPS's own budget figures for allocations to parks, fully 85% of the areas included in the system that have individual budgets have smaller budgets in 2004 than they did in 2003. Moreover, after unfunded mandates (such as the un-appropriated portion of the civilian pay raise) and other increasingly expensive fixed costs are applied to those parks that were fortunate enough to receive an increase in their base allocations, those increases for many were effectively wiped out, increasing to well above 85% those parks that have less money this year than last.

Moreover, we have learned that when doling out the extra money that Regions got from the travel reductions that Director Mainella promised the Appropriations Subcommittee, the criteria for allocating money to parks was solely, simply, and clearly that "parks adjust their operations in areas that would not affect the services they provide to visitors."

### **Professional priorities are being replaced by political judgments**

This is evidence that the Director is substituting her political judgments for the professional judgments and priorities of her professional park superintendents and regional directors. By mandating that superintendents take no actions that would violate the promises that she made to the Appropriations Subcommittee when she was under intense questioning from members, and obligations made by her and the Department of the Interior to the tourism industry, she is choosing to protect herself rather than allowing superintendents to apply their budgets to those priorities they professionally determine are most important for the missions of their respective parks. Director Mainella has constantly ignored the advice of the senior career leadership of the agency. She does not listen to career professionals and chooses to follow exclusively the advice of the political appointees in the Department. This is not the way to engender loyalty among National Park Service career employees, long considered to be among the finest in Federal service, and it is not the way to meet the mission of the national park system.

We are deeply concerned that while attempting to artificially preserve visitor services, resources protection and visitor safety are being compromised. And we are deeply concerned that these actions are not in the best interests of carrying out the legislated mission of the National Park Service.

### **Wasteful spending contributing to deficits in the parks**

Where are the appropriated dollars going if not to parks? The Coalition offers the following examples of why money never gets to the parks,

*Costly duplication of effort:* On June 2, 2004, the National Park Service announced that it would undertake yet another analysis of the impacts of the use of snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park. Such a study would include an additional public comment period. The two previous studies, the first conducted during the Clinton presidency, the second during the Bush term, had the same results. Both showed that snowmobile use disturbed park wildlife, shattered the natural quiet of the park, and posed health hazards to both park visitors and park employees. Both analyses featured public comment

periods. In both cases, the public overwhelmingly supported a phase out of snowmobiles and the adoption of an alternative winter travel strategy that featured the use of snow coaches. These analyses are not inexpensive and we can expect that this restudy will cost an additional 2 million dollars. The Coalition wonders if Director Mainella and her counterparts in the Department will continue to study this issue until they find a researcher who will confirm their pre-existing bias toward the snowmobile industry and the use of snowmobiles in the world's first national park. It certainly looks that way.

*Insistence on further "outsourcing" studies:* These studies are designed to determine if the private sector can do the work in parks more efficiently and at lower cost than the National Park Service employees who currently perform the tasks can. Since these studies require significant study and analysis and since few National Park Service employees know how to do the studies, costly consulting firms have been contracted to do the studies. It is estimated that the studies alone cost \$3,000 per position analyzed. The Park Service is committed to study approximately 1500 positions for outsourcing. That represents another \$4,500,000 of budget outlays that do nothing to promote quality visitor services or resources protection within parks. Even though the Director has been repeatedly warned that outsourcing would adversely affect the ability of the Park Service to accomplish its mission, she continues to push this initiative, a favorite of the President and her bosses at Interior.

*Continuing travel in support of the President's agenda:* While some travel in the NPS Headquarters and Regional Offices might have been reduced, it does not appear that these reductions have influenced Director Mainella to cut her own travel. She continues to be on the road almost constantly touting the "accomplishments" of President Bush and spreading the message about how visitors can expect an "outstanding experience" in the parks. Moreover, there is evidence that much of Secretary Norton's recent travel to parks has been charged back to the National Park Service, reducing even more additional dollars that could be provided to the parks. These blatant political campaign visits to parks are not so fondly referred to by hard working field personnel as "Fran's Hop and Stops" contributing to the low morale of the agency and contradicting her own recent commandment to the field to reduce travel. And no one will ever know how much money is being spent courting the tourism industry and promoting commercialization in the parks—under the guise of "partnerships."

### **Beyond the current situation.**

In the professional judgment of Coalition members, President Bush, Secretary Norton and Director Mainella have created a calamity for the national park system—one of a scale not experienced in decades, if ever, in the history of the National Park Service. It is highly unlikely, given the fiscal crisis faced by this country, that there will be sufficient appropriations available over the next 5 – 10 years to reverse the decline in facilities and resources—especially irreplaceable historic resources—in the national park system.

And yet, the Secretary and the Director continue to push for increased visitation while de-emphasizing resources protection. They continue to advocate for increased access and

often inappropriate recreational pursuits in parks—in our judgment often in contravention of the legislated mission and widely approved policies of the National Park Service. They continue to ignore professional and scientific judgment and the public preferences in decision-making relative to parks. In some cases, such as giving away Federal water rights on the Gunnison River in Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, decisions are made without required public notice and involvement.

It is not inconceivable, in our judgment, that the actions by Secretary Norton and Director Mainella are part of a well-planned scheme to gradually change the mission of the NPS to allow for greater use and access at the expense of resources protection and to increase commercialization and privatization in park operations. We don't believe these outcomes were intended by the legislators who passed the NPS Organic Act in 1916 nor those who passed the important amendments to that Act, including the Redwood Act in 1978 which states, in part:

“...(the) authorization of activities shall be construed and the protection, management, (and) administration...shall be conducted in light of the high public value and integrity of the National Park System and shall not be exercised in derogation of the values and purposes for which these various areas have been established, except as may have been or shall be directly and specifically provided by Congress.” (16 USC 1a-1)

Furthermore, the House committee report described the Redwood amendment as a “declaration by Congress” that the promotion and regulation of the national park system is to be consistent with the Organic Act. The Senate committee report stated that under the Redwood amendment, “The Secretary has **an absolute duty**, which is not to be compromised, to fulfill the mandate of the 1916 Act **to take whatever actions and seek whatever relief as will safeguard the units of the national park system** [emphasis added].”

We believe that Secretary Norton and Director Mainella are ignoring that “absolute duty” expected by the Congress.

Furthermore, several senior NPS Officials have expressed to us, and we agree, that the Secretary and Director have placed the very integrity of the National Park Service at risk; and through deliberate deception have created an unfortunate perception by many—inside and outside the Service—that the National Park Service is hiding the facts, rather than being honest about them.

We believe that the Congress must intervene to reverse the trend of decline of the national park system. We do not advocate throwing more money at the problem but insist that the Congress hold the leadership of the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service accountable for what your predecessors intended in managing the System.

We urge you to:

1. Insist that the Director and the Secretary start telling the American people the truth about the parks of our system. Americans understand we live in difficult times and that there is intense competition for federal budget dollars. It makes no sense to say otherwise.
2. Bring Director Mainella in front of the Appropriations Subcommittee again and ask her to tell the Congress the truth about her stewardship of the parks of our nation's national park system. Don't accept the fact that reducing a bit of travel will erase the budget shortfalls in the parks. Ask her to detail where the rest of the appropriated funds are employed.
3. Hold oversight hearings on the Administration's management of the national park system. Investigate the evidence of dysfunctional leadership in her immediate office. Investigate the evidence of how career professional senior leaders in the NPS are marginalized or disenfranchised, or how they leave or prematurely retire from frustration. Faced with the facts, the Coalition believes that many Representatives would be very uncomfortable with Director Mainella's leadership and stewardship.

Members of the Coalition, with combined experience in the NPS of over 7,500 years are unwilling to stand by and see the national park system, to which each of us devoted our professional careers, sink into mediocrity or worse. We do not believe that the American public, given an accurate portrayal of what is happening to the natural and cultural treasures comprising the system would tolerate what is happening. Worse perhaps, would be the disrespect to previous generations of Americans, each of whom through your predecessors, set aside those areas they believed deserved the highest degree of reverence and highest level of protection, to now allow them to irretrievably deteriorate. And worst of all, would be the arrogance and selfishness of not preserving these heritage areas for those yet to be born, as intended by those wise lawmakers who developed the legislative mission of the National Park Service.

Sincerely,



J. W. "Bill" Wade  
Coordinator

cc: Senator Lieberman  
Senator Dorgan  
Senator Reid  
Senator Bingaman  
Senator Thomas  
Senator McCain  
Senator Alexander  
Congressman Souder

Congressman Baird  
Congressman Udall, Tom  
Congressman Udall, Mark  
Congressman Rahall  
Congressman Grijalva  
Secretary of the Interior Gail Norton  
National Park Service Director Fran Mainella