

Speaking Up for the National Parks

In order for local communities and state tourism offices to fully capitalize on the opportunities presented by the Centennial and beyond, policies and programs must be put in place now to allow for partnering and collaboration, as well as the long-term health and growth of the National Park System.



- Over the course of 100 years, the National Park System has grown and aged, but federal funding has not kept pace. National parks recently received significant funding increases in the 2016 Omnibus Appropriations Bill and the renewed highway bill. These investments are solid steps forward but more must be done to ensure the long-term health of our national parks. Centennial legislation is currently being considered by Congress to leverage private investments to directly address maintenance needs and engage youth, veterans, and volunteers in our national parks.
- The Centennial bill is not designed to replace annual appropriations but a holistic funding model to leverage fees, philanthropic dollars, and other sources to ensure that the parks, historic sites, and recreation areas are preserved for future generations and have state-of-the-art visitor-friendly programs.
- The legislation would also permanently establish the Centennial Challenge, which is a proven program started by the George W. Bush Administration to leverage dedicated federal monies with private dollars to address maintenance needs and engage youth in our national parks.
- In 2015, Congress reestablished the Centennial Challenge with a one-year federal investment of \$10 million that leveraged \$16 million in donations to fund over 100 projects throughout the country in just five months. Congress increased the federal investment to \$15 million in 2016 and park partners more than doubled the federal investment with a match of nearly \$33 million.
- Senator Brian Schatz of Hawaii is currently drafting “The Explore America Act,” which will authorize the provision of technical assistance under the Preserve America Program to direct the Secretary of the Interior to enter into partnerships with communities adjacent to units of the National Park System to leverage local cultural and heritage tourism assets.
- Senator Schatz is currently seeking original sponsors of the legislation and wants to ensure bipartisan and geographical support for this effort.



*“Celebrating the Special Places
of the Southeast”*

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