



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849C Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20240

DEC J 4 2005

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Honorable Steve Pearce
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Parks
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20015

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In light of your Committee's hearing on Wednesday, December 14th on "The Organic Act and Its Implementation," I am writing to reaffirm, as stated in the testimony of Deputy Director Steve Martin, the support of the National Park Service (NPS) and the Administration for the Organic Act of 1916.

Our national parks are the soul of America. We want to make sure they are preserved for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

The Organic Act is one of this nation's most important laws dealing with the protection of our natural and cultural heritage. The Organic Act directs the NPS to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for their enjoyment in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. This mandate provides a strong sense of purpose and direction to those who manage the parks and to those who love and visit them.

The NPS is proud to carry out the mission entrusted to us by the U.S. Congress through the Organic Act. I am personally and professionally committed to this mission. This mission cannot, and should not, change.

Under the guidance of the Organic Act, the National Park System has remained dynamic through the creation of different types of park areas established for specific purposes. For nearly the past century, the Organic Act has stood the test of time - it has transcended many Congresses, Presidents, environmental challenges, population changes, and, yes, many NPS Directors. I am confident that it can continue to be dynamic for the next century and beyond.

To contribute to the physical and mental well-being of our citizens and international visitors, the NPS provides for enjoyment opportunities that are consistent with the Organic Act, employing new technologies and other creative means to ensure that these recreational activities occur safely, with a light environmental footprint and with minimal conflicts with other visitors.

In 2004, the NPS hosted more than 277 million visitors in our parks, and, based on surveys conducted over the past few years, nearly 96 percent of them enjoyed their visits. No one can enjoy our parks if they are impaired.

It is a legitimate exercise to periodically evaluate, update and revise all policies and guidelines the NPS uses to protect, preserve and provide for the enjoyment of our National Parks. Having said that, it does not mean that we need to change the fundamental laws and purposes the National Park Service was created to provide for the American people. In fact, the need for National Parks and for protecting and preserving them "unimpaired for future generations" is even more important today than it was in 1916, and if we do our jobs right, will be even more important to the generations of visitors that will follow us.

From time to time, the NPS has revised its overall management guidance consistent with the Service's fundamental mission under the Act, and all applicable laws and regulations. As you know, we are currently doing that as we have released a draft proposal to revise the Management Policies.

The draft, now available for public and employee review, provides clear guidance and tools for park managers, and encourages consistency across the National Park System while celebrating the unique aspects of individual park units. It specifically recognizes such new challenges facing the NPS as border and homeland security, fiscal restraints, sustainability of programs, and urban encroachment, and recognizes the importance of parks to local communities.

The document also reaffirms our stewardship goal. As Deputy Director Martin testified, "When a conflict arises between conserving park resources and values and providing for their enjoyment, the process for determining what are appropriate uses and the mandate that unacceptable impacts not be allowed ensures that protection of park resources is maintained... There is no change in the fundamental policies underlying the Organic Act, but an improved way to ensure that its objectives are, in fact, achieved. Thus, conservation is predominant."

The National Park Service has always been about protecting, preserving and enjoying the best natural and cultural resources our nation has to offer. These are places that are part of our common American heritage. As Americans, we owe responsible stewardship to ourselves - and our children.

The employees of the NPS are among the most dedicated and committed of any organization. The Organic Act continues to be the foundation for all of our management actions, and the work the employees do every day in the field. I look forward to working with you to ensure that this is not altered.

I appreciate you hearing our input during the hearing, and look forward to continued dialogue on the many important issues before your committee. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fran P. Mainella". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "F".

Fran P. Mainella
Director