

National Park System Advisory Board



Citizen advisors chartered by Congress to help the National Park Service care for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Douglas P. Wheeler
Washington, DC
CHAIRMAN

March 14, 2005

John Francis
Washington, DC

Honorable Fran P. Mainella
Director, National Park Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

William F. Baker
New York, New York

Dear Ms. Mainella:

Marie Greene
Kotzebue, Alaska

The National Park System Advisory Board applauds the vision and renewed dedication of the National Park Service to civic engagement. As your Director's Order 75A; *Civic Engagement and Public Involvement*, says, civic engagement is "a continuous, dynamic conversation with the public on many levels that reinforces its commitment to the preservation of heritage resources and strengthens understanding of the full meaning, contemporary relevance and future of these resources." The Board expresses its strong support of your goals and offers its conviction that interpretive and educational programming is a fundamental part of this work. There is high national purpose associated with civic engagement. It is to nurture citizenship by expanding civic awareness and responsibility.

Jerry Hruby
Brecksville, Ohio

Michael Kammen
Ithaca, New York

In 2002, President George W. Bush announced a series of Administration initiatives "to restore civic and historical understanding throughout American Society." Citing reports of declining knowledge of American history, the President spoke about the fundamental importance of civic understanding. He said: "Our Founders believed the study of history and citizenship should be at the core of every American's education. . . . Ignorance of American history and civics weakens our sense of citizenship. . . . To be an American is not just a matter of blood or birth; we are bound by ideals, and our children must know those ideals. They should know about the nearly impossible victory of the Revolutionary War, and the debates of the Constitutional Convention. They should know the meaning of the Declaration of Independence, and how Abraham Lincoln applied its principles to . . . fight slavery. Our children should know why Martin Luther King, Jr., was in a Birmingham city jail, and why he wrote a magnificent letter from that place." As you know, these great stories are told in national parks and historic sites specifically established for those purposes.

Jay Farmer
Reno, Nevada

Daniel Ritchie
Denver, Colorado

Larry E. Rivers
Tallahassee, Florida

William C. Walters
Nashville, Indiana

The national park system has been likened to an American history textbook, with chapters on almost every significant event and movement that shaped the nation's growth. Jamestown, George Washington's birthplace, Independence Hall, Minute Man National Historical Park, Valley Forge, Gettysburg, Lincoln's Home, Little Bighorn Battlefield, Edison's laboratory, Guam's War in the Pacific National Historical Park, the Selma to Montgomery Trail, Little Rock Central High School—these parks and many others stimulate regard for the people, ideas and great happenings that define America. They encourage us to think critically about the course of our democracy, from the magnificent beginning in Philadelphia in 1776, through the construction of the Constitution of 1787 and the crucible of the Civil War, to our

LaJuana S. Wilcher
Alvaton, Kentucky

George Willeford III
Austin, Texas

present condition at the outset of the twenty-first century. They stimulate understanding of who we are, where we have been and how we as a society might approach the future. They celebrate our democratic traditions.

Implicit in the successful transmission of this story is the message that all of us, today, must do our part to preserve and promote these values by being well-informed and engaged citizens. When Frederick Law Olmsted was Chair of the Yosemite Commission in 1865, he predicted that national parks would come to represent a "faith in the refinement of the republic." It is the Board's vision that national parks can become even more effective as places to learn about and to participate in an enduring process of democratic refinement.

The National Park System Advisory Board recommends that the National Park Service expand its commitment to civic engagement, augment what is already in place, and build new partnerships and opportunities to utilize the national parks for this high purpose. So richly endowed by the places, resources and memories entrusted to its stewardship, the National Park Service is uniquely positioned to make more relevant the park experience and add value to the democratic vitality of the United States.

Sincerely,

THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM ADVISORY BOARD



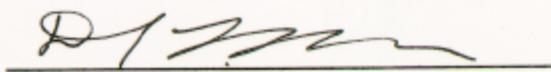
 Douglas P. Wheeler, *Chairman*



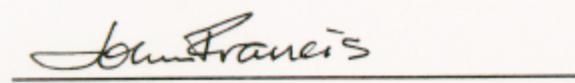
 Jay Parmer, *Member*



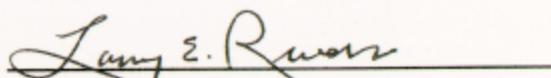
 William F. Baker, *Member*



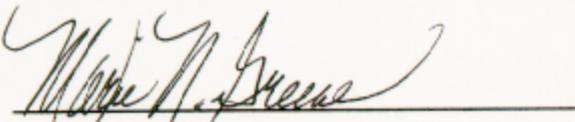
 Daniel L. Ritchie, *Member*



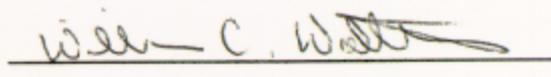
 John Francis, *Member*



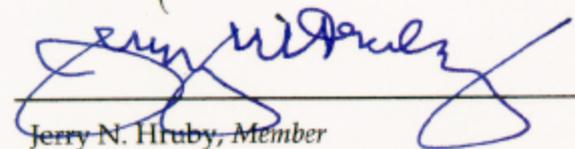
 Larry E. Rivers, *Member*



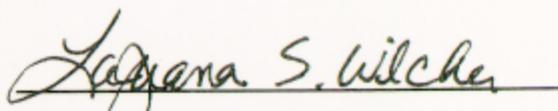
 Marie Greene, *Member*



 William C. Walters, *Member*



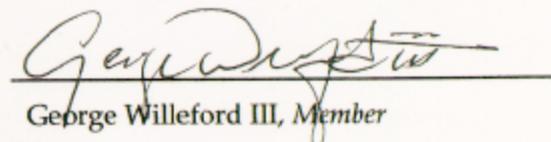
 Jerry N. Hruby, *Member*



 LaJuana S. Wilcher, *Member*



 Michael Kammen, *Member*



 George Willeford III, *Member*