

**STATEMENTS OF  
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AND  
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FOREST SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
BEFORE THE  
INTERIOR SUBCOMMITTEE  
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
REGARDING  
THE FUTURE OF RECREATION.GOV  
May 24, 2016**

Chair Lummis and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide information the future of Recreation.gov. We are honored to speak before you today on how this program supports the mission of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service (Forest Service) and other federal agencies in delivering outstanding outdoor recreation services to the American people. We are Joe Meade, Director of Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources, National Forest System and Rick DeLappe, Recreation One Stop Program Manager.

Now, more than ever, federal agencies must connect with urban, suburban, and rural populations and encourage outdoor stewardship and remain relevant in our ever-changing world. We know the benefits of outdoor recreational experiences on physical and mental health. We know the demand for access to outdoor settings and outdoor recreational experiences are increasing at a rapid pace, and we know that federal land and water management agencies, assisted by partners and service providers, host the largest and most diverse array of outdoor recreation opportunities in the world.

Outdoor recreation is an essential part of our American culture. Thousands of rural and urban communities benefit from recreation on federal lands. When Americans play outside during outings or overnight trips, their spending directly supports outdoor-oriented industries such as outfitting and guiding, lodging, and concessions, many of which are small businesses, and many more. In 2012, outdoor recreationists made more than 938 million visits to federal lands and waterways, spending \$51 billion and supporting 880,000 jobs. Many of these jobs are located in rural communities and are associated with numerous outdoor industries and small businesses. For the Forest Service, outdoor recreational experiences are the single largest contribution to the

gross domestic product and local economies, generating over 13 billion dollars in revenue and supporting approximately 205,000 jobs.

The federal lands and waters reservation system, Recreation One Stop, and the interagency website Recreation.gov are critical components of providing these services.

## **Background on Recreation One Stop**

**Recreation One Stop (R1S)** is an interagency partnership among federal agencies to provide reservation services, sharable data, and recreation trip-planning tools for federal lands and waters across the United States. R1S was created as one of the Quicksilver e-government initiatives under the Bush administration in 2002 with the primary goal of reducing redundancy by combining the online reservation services of the Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Park Service.

At that time, the program was focused primarily on providing advanced reservations through the Recreation.gov website for developed campgrounds and tickets for a few locations such as the Washington Monument and Mammoth Cave. R1S also provided a rudimentary data-sharing tool, which allowed third parties access to a single bulk download of all recreation data. The software design, provided by contracted services, was simple and easily supported these activities. Since its inception in 2002, the program has changed and grown significantly.

Today, millions of visitors use Recreation.gov to plan, reserve, and share their federal land recreational experiences in national parks, national forests, national wildlife refuges, and national waterways. In 2015, there were more than 22.3 million sessions, 12 million visitors, and 220 million page views to Recreation.gov, which represents a 31 percent increase in visitation over 2014. Currently, Recreation.gov hosts more than 3,200 individual facilities, with more than 90,000 campsites, 12 ticketed tours or events, and 26 high-demand locations accessed by permit or lottery.

The Recreation.gov contract provides for comprehensive web services, database management, and customer support. R1S program manager works closely with the contractor to deliver the entire suite of services. Recreation.gov hosts a range of sites that allow visitors to reserve a campsite, secure a whitewater rafting permit, schedule a ranger-led cave tour, or reserve their spot on a boat tour. They can use the Build a Trip tool to map a route for their next trip and then see dozens of federal recreation options along the way. If they need help, call center agents offer assistance over the telephone, through live chat, or by e-mail.

Contractor-furnished infrastructure for Recreation.gov also includes:

- a complex security system for protecting personally identifiable information and processing payment card industry-certified financial transactions;
- customer support across six time zones;
- training and business reporting;
- web-based field management tools and internal support for over 500 field locations;
- maintenance of a complex and dynamic data platform;

- on-the-ground implementation support for dozens of new facilities each year; and
- marketing and communications to promote outdoor recreation.

The agencies that use R1S reservation services through Recreation.gov are the Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, and the National Archives and Records Administration. Collectively, the 5-year average annual return for these agencies in recreation fees collected through Recreation.gov is \$90.5 million, as shown in the table below. These fees are used to provide visitor services and improve the visitor experience at recreation sites.

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Reservation Fees Returned to Agencies Annually (5-year average, in \$)</b>
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	67,444
National Park Service	17,567,369
Bureau of Land Management	331,992
Bureau of Reclamation	496,590
Forest Service	33,582,946
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	38,451,628*

\*The fees collected by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are returned to the General Treasury, not the agency.

### **Recreation.gov and the Recreation Information Database (RIDB)**

Recreation.gov is a trip planning and reservation service portal. Information about specific facilities and activities that can be reserved in advance, including information about the site such as driveway length, electric hookup information, and other amenities such as fire pits and picnic tables, is collected directly on the website and input into the reservation database by the contractor. .

In contrast, RIDB was created in the late 1990s as a stand-alone database capable of sharing data with anyone who wanted access to federal recreation data for any purpose. RIDB does not contain any personally identifiable information. The information in RIDB is populated both manually and through the use of automated web services by the participating agencies. RIDB contains over 120,000 recreation area records for 12 different government agencies. Each agency assigns data stewards to ensure its data are updated and correct. The type of data available in RIDB includes facility type, detailed descriptions, mapping coordinates, address, and, depending on the type of site, details such as maximum occupancy, event details, and permit type. We also require strict security measures to ensure the data are protected and maintain their integrity.

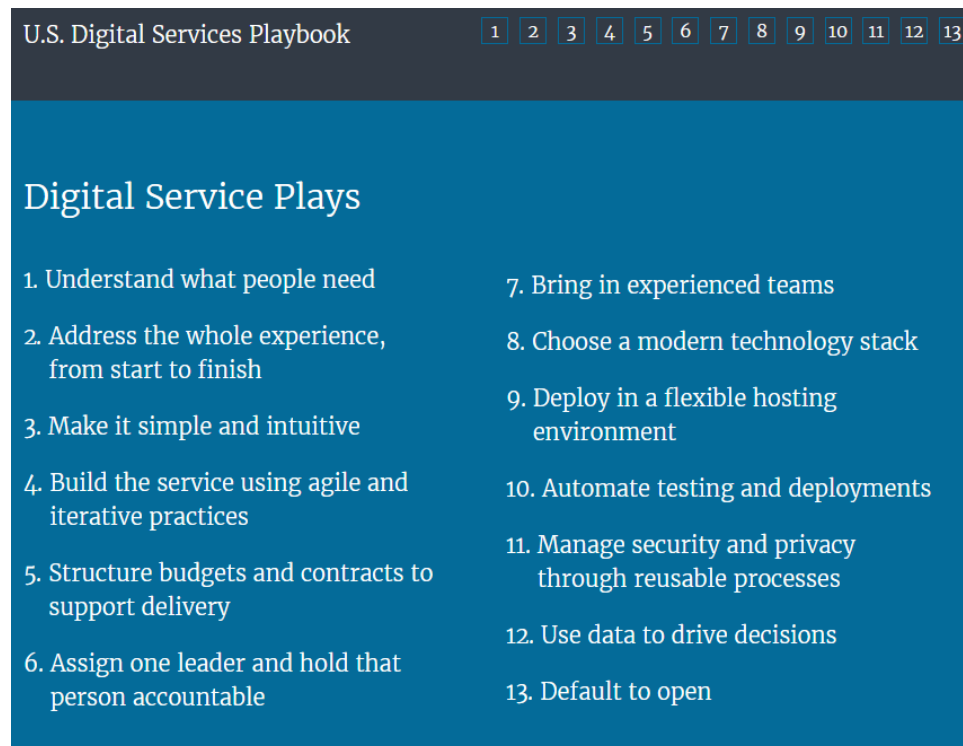
With award of a 10-year contract to Reserve America (now ACTIVE Network) in 2006, oversight of both programs, Recreation.gov and RIDB, was consolidated under the R1S Program. To provide more comprehensive recreation information to those making reservations, the information from RIDB was also included in Recreation.gov.

As data demands increased, the RIDB data-sharing tools needed to be updated. In response, R1S upgraded its data-sharing capability to the industry standard and launched a Representational State Transfer application programming interface (RESTful API) in March 2015, providing the latest recreation data through machine-readable formats. To date, RIDB has received over 1.4 million API requests since that technology was made available.

## Lessons Learned and Future Plans

The efforts — both successes and challenges — to build and implement R1S have provided valuable lessons that shape the way forward. What began as an online camping reservation tool has grown into a valued modern and comprehensive travel planning and recreation reservation service. Recreation.gov now provides services for a variety of recreational activities, all of which require different business rules and software solutions. The current platform was designed in the late 1990s as a campground reservation service. Over the years, it has adapted to accommodate new facility types and expanded as demand has increased. As we look to a new era of services, we recognize the need to continually innovate as technology evolves and to be nimble enough to meet public expectations for online services.

R1S has adopted the principles of the U.S. Digital Service’s Playbook to keep pace with technology and to meet visitor expectations and needs. R1S consulted with U.S. Digital Services representatives in developing the R1S Request for Proposals, which helped R1S stay true to tenets described in the Playbook. As stated by the U.S. Digital Services: “We created a playbook of 13 key ‘plays’ drawn from successful practices from the private sector and government that, if followed together, will help government build effective digital services.”



Rather than prescribing solutions that are likely to change over time, we have required outcomes — which generally remain the same throughout the life of a contract — to provide the public with an easy-to-use and enjoyable experience. We let the vendor choose the appropriate technology to succeed. As technology changes and public expectations evolve, so does the solution.

End-user feedback from all types of stakeholders will drive design, navigation, and system functionality. Agile development processes will allow the government to work side-by-side with those writing the code so that solutions can be tested and deployed continuously and large-scale failures can be avoided. Our default position will be to ensure recreation data are as open and available as possible for many different types of uses and can fuel innovation and entrepreneurship.

The R1S reservation service contract was awarded with a Contract Line Item Number (CLIN) commission/payment structure, where the contractor earns a payment based on each reservation transaction. The payment schedule varies based on what is reserved and which sales channel is used. Industry standards establish variation in pricing based on customer convenience. For example, call center CLINs are typically more expensive than web-based CLINs.

The Forest Service financial management office sets aside funds collected for each reservation to pay a monthly invoice for the Contract Line Item CLINs.

Several agencies have built the cost of the reservation contract CLIN into their nightly fees for camping and ticket prices. The Forest Service and BLM cover these costs by charging a non-refundable reservation fee separate from the actual site fee.

Our experience over the past 10 years has reinforced the importance of listening to our customers and continually innovating and updating. At the heart of the new system is an absolute priority on the user experience. Every design element, every aspect of functionality, all of the navigational features, the various workflows, are designed to create a simple, intuitive experience. One of the keys to creating a user-centric experience is to include users in the design and development of the solution. From the family planner to the campground manager to the leader of a land management agency, we will rely on these user perspectives to create a system that works well at every level.

On day one of the new contract, we will embark on an agile development process. Private sector best practices focus on continuous improvement, flexibility, user input and quality product delivery. This approach will produce an infrastructure that can more easily adapt to emerging technology and a service platform that meets the needs of visitors today and in the future.

### **Interaction with Third-Party Sites**

In today's online world, there are many sources that provide information about recreation destinations and activities. Data-sharing allows real-time data from one site to display on many other relevant sites. Through the use of API, we are able to share data with different providers so

that the public can interact with federal recreation information from a variety of interfaces. We will seek opportunities to provide sharing services that expand the reach of our recreation programs and encourage more people to get outdoors. Entrepreneurs will have access to data that allow them to create new tools to reach users in a dynamic, mobile-friendly environment.

## **Concessions**

There are 71 concessionaires operating 1,107 campgrounds with reservable inventory in Recreation.gov. In 2015, \$26.3 million was distributed to these concessionaires for the customer services they provide.

Federal concessionaires have access to a full range of data associated with the campgrounds they operate and the guests who make reservations for these campgrounds. This information is included in daily arrival reports identifying reservation holder information. This information is not shared outside of the program or with other concessionaires and is releasable to the extent allowed by law.

Providing the public with a full menu of travel planning choices is a primary goal. We recognize that everyone does not want to camp and that finding lodging information is critical to planning a trip. We also recognize that there are many activities on federal lands that would not be possible for an average visitor without the services of authorized outfitters and guides. We will be incorporating these services into the design and navigation planning so that visitors will be able to find all kinds of federally managed and concession-supported activities and facilities in the future.

## **Data Security**

Protecting the privacy of our visitor's information is one of our top priorities. The R1S contractor must comply with all requirements of the Federal Information Security Management Act, the Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program (FedRAMP), Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) 199, and the Federal Information System Controls Audit Manual, as applicable, throughout the contract term. Because the system is owned by the contractor, authorization to operate from the federal government is also required under FIPS 199. Because the data system is cloud-based, the system and hosting environment must comply with all FedRAMP Moderate Requirements. All credit card processing must comply with the highest level of payment card industry data security standards.

In addition, the contractor and all subcontractors must report any breach or potential breach of data and information, including network or asset breaches and loss of control, compromise, unauthorized disclosure, unauthorized acquisition, and unauthorized access of data, to the Contracting Officer and the Contracting Officer's Representative within 30 minutes of becoming aware of the breach or potential breach, regardless of the time or day of the week.

## **Conclusion**

The Forest Service is focusing on strengthening connections with the public through outdoor recreational experiences. The agency has initiated a national effort to modernize its recreation concession program, enhance community service and volunteer programs, increase the diversity of visitors to the National Forest System, and implement technological innovations to provide even better public service. R1S is a key initiative for all federal land and water management agencies to provide the latest information and inspiration to a new generation of visitors wherever they are, whether they are on their smart phones and tablets, in their home, or on the road.

We would like to thank this subcommittee for its support of R1S, which is critical to the missions of the Forest Service and other federal land and water management agencies in providing outdoor recreational experiences to the American public. We would be happy to answer any questions you have at the appropriate time.

**Joe L. Meade**  
*Director of Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources*  
National Forest System

Joe Meade has a deep passion for recreation that started on the Deschutes National Forest as an interpreter at the Lava Lands Visitor Center, now a National Monument. Today, Joe's 38-year natural resource career spans five Forest Service Regions, the Washington Office, four Forests, and two Ranger Districts. Joe was the Forest Supervisor on the Chugach National Forest for seven years; Regional Director of Recreation, Heritage & Wilderness Resources in the Southwest Region (R3) for 5 years; and Recreation Developed Sites Program Leader for 7 years in the Washington Office.

2013 to Current: National Director, Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources,  
USDA Forest Service

2010 to 2013: National Partnership Director, USDA Forest Service

2003 to 2010: Forest Supervisor, Chugach National Forest, Alaska



**Rick DeLappe**  
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Mr. DeLappe has worked with the Recreation One-Stop program for more than a dozen years. He provides leadership and direction for a virtual team of federal employees and contractors who are dispersed throughout the country. Mr. DeLappe has worked for the National Park Service in many different parts of the country as a park ranger, and other capacities, in places like Maui, Colorado, Yellowstone, Zion and New Orleans.