

**STATEMENT OF JONATHAN B. JARVIS, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE A JOINT OVERSIGHT HEARING OF
THE HOUSE COMMITTEES ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND OVERSIGHT AND
GOVERNMENT REFORM**

October 16, 2013

Chairman Hastings, Chairman Issa, and Members of the Committees, I appear before you today to discuss the National Park Service's operations during the lapse in appropriations.

On October 1, 2013, the National Park Service, along with all other bureaus and offices of the Department of the Interior, began to implement a shutdown of our activities due to a lapse in appropriations. Under the closure determination and notice I issued that day, the National Park Service closed and secured national park facilities and grounds and suspended all activities.

Due to the lapse in appropriations, and consistent with the requirements of the Antideficiency Act, the National Park Service was forced to close all 401 national parks across the country and furlough more than 20,000 National Park Service employees. Approximately 3,000 employees were exempted from the furlough to respond to threats to the safety of human life and the protection of property. Absent appropriations, the National Park Service will continue to implement the contingency plan that was approved by the Department and made public on September 27, 2013, in advance of the lapse in appropriations that began on October 1, 2013.

The closure of national parks due to the lapse in appropriations has had real and far-reaching impacts across the country: on families whose long-time plans were foiled; on businesses and gateway communities who rely on national parks as economic engines; and on our employees who are furloughed or who have to deliver difficult news to visitors and perform functions that are antithetical to why any of us joined the National Park Service.

The National Park System welcomes more than 282 million people per year and more than 700,000 people per day in October. The national parks are supported and loved by the American public not only because they are beautiful and historic, but because they are well managed, protected, interpreted and maintained by a professional workforce, a workforce that is now largely on furlough.

National parks are also incredible economic drivers with visitor spending generating an estimated \$32 million per day impact in communities near national parks and contributing \$76 million each day to the national economy.

As the funding lapse has dragged on, and in response to the economic impacts that the park closures are having on many communities and local businesses, Secretary Jewell announced on October 10 that Interior would consider agreements with Governors who indicate an interest and ability to fully fund National Park Service personnel to re-open national parks in their states. This is a practical and temporary solution that will lessen the pain for some businesses and communities - a band-aid until Congress passes an appropriations bill.

Turning away visitors is not in our DNA, and we all look forward to re-opening *all* 401 national parks so they may fulfill the purposes for which they were intended – to be enjoyed and loved by the American people.

The closure determination required the notification of members of the public who were visiting parks to vacate the park immediately. Members of the public who were staying at overnight campground or lodging facilities were given 48 hours to leave. Concessioners were required to suspend their operations in overnight accommodations in this same timeframe, while suspending day-use concessions operations immediately. Holders of commercial use authorizations who were on multi-day backcountry trips that could not safely be terminated could continue the trips and then were required to vacate the park within 12 hours after the trip's end.

This closure did not apply to through roads in parks that provided primary access between points located outside of the parks, such as Rock Creek Parkway. It also did not affect First Amendment activities at the National Mall and Memorial Parks and at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia due to regulations and court cases specific to these areas. Because the National Mall and Independence National Historical Park are traditional and long-standing venues for hundreds of First Amendment activities each year, we anticipated that there was the potential for First Amendment activities during the shutdown and we retained enough NPS staff to permit these activities to continue there without risk to life and property.

During the closure, the National Park Service has maintained law enforcement staff including services provided by the U.S. Park Police and Rangers for emergency and disaster assistance. We also have maintained our firefighting programs along with our border and coastal protection and surveillance activities as these are essential for the protection of life and property. Projects that were funded from non-lapsing appropriations also have been continued.

There has been a great deal of attention paid to the implementation of the shutdown with respect to the monuments and memorials under the care of the NPS on the National Mall. From Valley Forge to Gettysburg to the USS Arizona to the memorials on the National Mall, the National Park Service has been entrusted with the care of places to honor those who have fought and died for our nation. We are proud of the special relationship that we share with America's veterans as we protect and preserve these memorials that commemorate their sacrifices – now and for future generations.

On a normal day, there are 300 National Mall and Memorial Park employees on duty. The rangers are on site to provide eyes and ears for the U.S. Park Police and ensure the safekeeping of our national treasures, enhance visitor experience by sharing the history of the war, keep the grounds and restrooms clean, maintain the landscape and fountains, and oversee special events that happen almost daily.

All but a dozen of the National Mall and Memorial Parks employees have been furloughed. Even though the U.S. Park Police commissioned officers have been exempted from the furlough, given the limited staff resources during the shutdown, prudent and practical steps were taken to secure life and property at these national icons where security has become increasingly complex in a post-9/11 world.

We know that visits of America's World War II veterans to the memorial are pilgrimages that many of them will only make once. Throughout the shutdown, we have worked diligently to try and ensure that no Honor Flight group, veteran, or their family has been turned away from visiting the veterans' memorials. Likewise, those also engaging in First Amendment activities are welcome to visit the war memorials.

Congress has charged the National Park Service with the preservation and protection of the park's natural, historic, and cultural resources for the benefit of future generations. This requirement in law exists whether the national parks are open or when a shutdown occurs. With few employees available to perform these duties, we are endeavoring to fulfill our mission as best we can. We look forward to the end of the federal government's shutdown in the near future so that we can reopen all of our national parks for the education, inspiration, and enjoyment of the American public.

I would be glad to respond to any questions you may have.