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Foreword

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FOREWORD

Wallace Stegner, one of our greatest writers, wrote that “something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed.” He called the West “the geography of hope.” He was right, and not just for our landscapes, but for our history and for our people. The National Park Service plays a pivotal role in preserving these natural and historic treasures and in protecting our heritage.

We have come a long way from the days of Teddy Roosevelt, when House Speaker Joe Cannon famously said, “Not one cent for scenery!” That seems ridiculous to us now. It probably was ridiculous to a lot of folks even then. When my dad was Secretary of the Interior for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, he always said that we hold land in trust. He had one main goal: a revival of respect for the environment. He used to say that “back then, you could fit the conservation movement into a broom closet—and still have room for the brooms.” These historic perceptions reflect the uphill battle and vision necessary to go against the current.

What the National Park Service began one hundred years ago has evolved over time. Change is rarely easy, and progress is often slow. The first Wilderness bill was introduced by Hubert Humphrey in 1956. It was very controversial. New Mexico’s Senator Clinton Anderson kept pushing year after year, and it took eight years—and over sixty revisions—before President Johnson could finally sign the Wilderness Act into law. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act took four years to make its way through Congress to President Johnson’s desk.

But Democrats and Republicans worked together. They understood that our common heritage, our national treasures, and the health and safety of American families should not have a party label. They knew Speaker Cannon was wrong. It wasn’t just about scenery. It was a way of looking at the world that has changed the world.

The National Park Service helped begin that change, and continues to move us forward today. It is a great legacy and also a great responsibility. We have an obligation to make sure that our parks stay strong. For example, I was recently present at Valles Caldera for the transferring of its management to the National Park Service. We need to do all we can to protect special places like Valles Caldera. That is why tools like the Land and Water Conservation Fund are so important to the National Park Service. The Land and Water Conservation Fund has helped acquire new open spaces and has protected existing ones for half a century. It provides critical support—without using taxpayer dollars—and yet Congress inexplicably allowed it to expire on September 30, 2015. I strongly supported its re-authorization and was pleased that it passed Congress in December of 2015. It should be permanently re-authorized, and fully funded.

We also face great challenges in taking care of our parks. Canyonlands National Park, for example, has a \$40 million backlog in deferred maintenance. This is just one piece of an estimated national parks maintenance backlog of \$11.5 billion. We are seeing the results of this neglect at our national parks, neglect that has gone on for too long and that happens too often. This is unacceptable. Consequently, I am doing all I can as the ranking member of the Appropriations subcommittee on Interior and the Environment to change it.

More than 290 million people from all over the world visited our national parks just last year. People want to visit, work, and live near these iconic places because they strengthen our communities, grow our economy, and create jobs.

The centennial of the National Park Service is an occasion to look back in gratitude—for the great efforts of those who came before us—but also to look forward with renewed commitment and determination. It is an occasion to ponder not just what we have been given, but what we will give back.

We owe that to future generations. What will they celebrate a century from now? What will we leave them? I hope we leave them a safer planet, where the threat of climate change has been met, where a clean energy economy is thriving, and where our natural resources and historic treasures are protected.

The answer to these questions will depend on all of us, including a new generation. To the readers of the Natural Resources Journal and the students at the University of New Mexico School of Law, as a proud graduate of this distinguished institution, let me just say: soon it will be your turn. You have a great legacy, and a great challenge. The West is still “the geography of hope,” and I have no doubt that, working together, we will keep that hope strong and flourishing.

-Senator Tom Udall