

May 21, 2007**EDITORIAL**

A Lifeline for the Parks

We have had our quarrels with Dirk Kempthorne, the interior secretary, on policy questions involving endangered species as well as other issues. But when it comes to the national parks, he has brought good ideas and real follow-through to an administration that has been long on promises to the parks and annoyingly short on results.

For starters, Mr. Kempthorne helped kill a proposed rewrite in the National Park Service's management policies that favored commercial and inappropriate recreational activities at the expense of the parks' historical mission of preserving natural landscapes for future generations.

He has also persuaded the White House to add real money to the Park Service budget. Annual deficits and steadily building deferred maintenance have taken a toll on everything from park roads and trails to visitors' centers, while robbing the Park Service's valuable scientific and educational programs of the support they need.

The administration's request for this year is \$208 million more than last year, and ranks among the largest dollar increases proposed in the agency's 90-year history. The House Appropriations subcommittee that covers Interior should approve the request, and if the Democrats want to enlarge on it, so much the better.

One program in particular that could use help is the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the government's main open-space acquisition program. Theoretically authorized at \$900 million a year, the program has shrunk to practically nothing despite President Bush's campaign pledge in 2000 to give it top priority.

Mr. Kempthorne has also drawn up an ambitious National Parks Centennial Challenge, which is designed to raise \$2 billion in private money and matching public funds in time for the Park Service's centennial in 2016. The parks, of course, have always welcomed the contributions of concerned citizens, and private-public partnerships can do much good. But none of this should be seen as a substitute for the steady infusion of federal funds to a system that is a national treasure and a national responsibility.

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