



Corporate Sponsorships of America's National Parks

America's national parks are among our greatest treasures, open for everyone to explore and enjoy. They are a commons – a public trust – equally supported and shared by all, with no privileged access based on wealth or social status, and largely free from commercial or interest group capture.

Now that could change. The National Park Service (NPS) is debating whether to revise Director's Order #21 to allow corporate sponsorships and partnerships. The revision could permit corporations to plaster advertising on bricks, walkways, benches, park buses and other park areas.¹ We already have seen examples where NPS has allowed corporate interests to influence park policy. This proposed policy would open the door for greater conflicts of interest.

Corporate influence in our national parks

- **Coca-Cola has donated \$13 million to NPS². In 2011, Coca-Cola persuaded NPS Director Jonathan Jarvis to block a proposed ban on bottled water in Grand Canyon National Park,³ even though the ban would have removed 20% of the park's waste.⁴** After public pressure⁵, Director Jarvis allowed the ban to be implemented on a park-by-park basis. Each park must complete a rigorous cost-benefit analysis and receive approval from a regional director before the ban can be approved.⁶ A less arduous process would better protect the environment from unnecessary plastic and save employee's time.
- **NPS permitted the development of a retreat and conference center on historically protected Fort Baker in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.⁷** NPS approved development plans despite serious concerns from the neighboring city of Sausalito, Calif., that the center could violate the National Environmental Policy Act or the Endangered Species Act.⁸
- **In 2015, Budweiser and NPS launched a joint marketing campaign, allowing Budweiser to profit from the branding of the national parks.** Budweiser was permitted to use the image of the Statue of Liberty on labels and to host a branded concert in a national park, blurring the line between public and private.⁹

Implications of NPS Director's Order #21

- **Under the proposed policy, Director Jonathan Jarvis and NPS Deputy Directors Peggy O'Dell and Denise Ryan will be able to directly solicit contributions from corporations.¹⁰** Corporate donors could be granted undue influence over park policy in exchange for their solicited donations.
- **Park superintendents would face pressure to become involved in soliciting donations.¹¹** This added job requirement would distract from their primary duties to manage and preserve the parks.¹² NPS might be more likely to reward superintendents based on their ability to influence fundraising.¹³
- **Companies could be given naming rights.** Naming rights would apply to educational, research, recreation and youth programs, as well as to endowments and buildings.¹⁴
- **Partnerships with alcohol corporations would be permitted.¹⁵** The U.S. government should not be condoning alcohol consumption when an estimated 88,000 Americans die from alcohol-related causes each year.¹⁶

Visitor experiences would be tainted by the intrusion of commercial interests

- **Visitors come to our national parks to enjoy the unique beauty that nature offers.** Parks should remain a space for people to escape corporate clutter, a haven from a world where everything seems to be for sale.

- **National parks were founded 100 years ago to preserve our country's most beautiful natural landscapes.** Advertising will spoil the pristineness of the parks.

In reference to the beauty of our national parks, conservationist President Teddy Roosevelt said, "Our people should see to it that they are preserved for their children and their children's children forever, with their majestic beauty all unmarred."¹⁷ Corporate sponsorships are antithetical to that vision. This centennial year of the National Park Service is the time to celebrate the breathtaking splendor of our national parks, not abandon the very principle for which NPS was conceived.

Sign our petition today: National parks should not be billboards for corporate advertising.

Sources

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