

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 8, 2022

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair
Subcommittee on Interior & Environment
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior & Environment
Senate Appropriations Committee

Dear Chairman Leahy, Chair Merkley, Vice Chairman Shelby, and Ranking Member Murkowski,

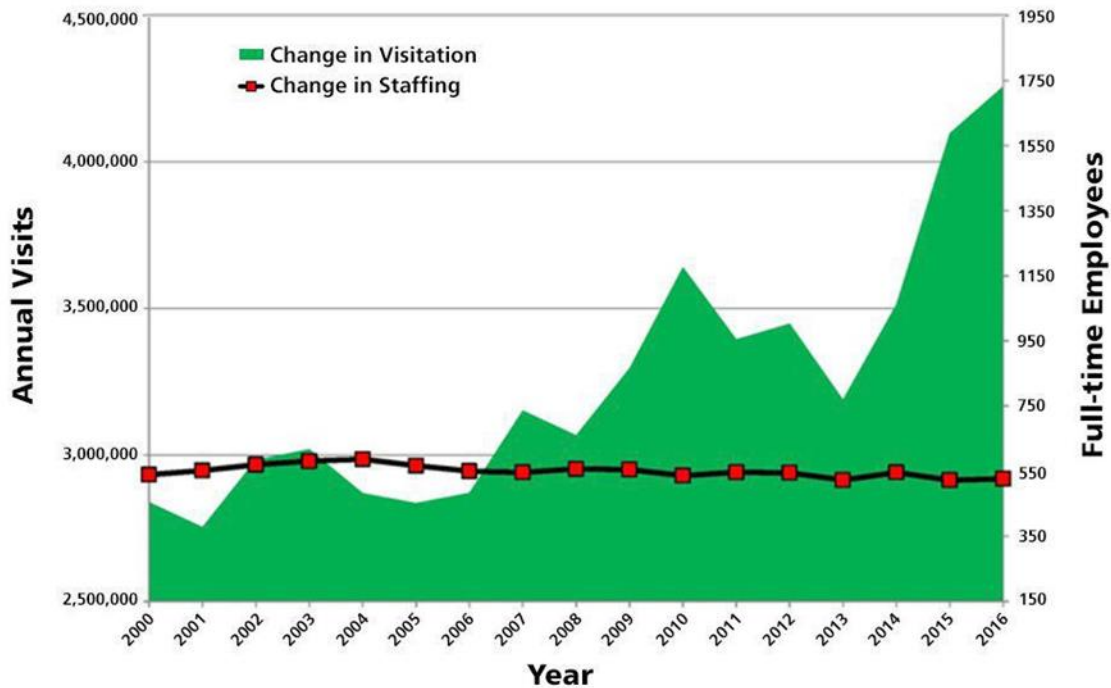
As you continue to work on the Interior and Environment appropriations bill for fiscal year (FY) 2022, we write to thank you for including funding for an additional 1,000 full-time equivalent (FTEs) positions at the National Park Service (NPS). We also encourage you to continue working towards the ultimate goal of a staffing level of 23,000 FTEs at the NPS.

As more Americans are seeking opportunities offered by our public lands and our national parks, visitation at NPS units have skyrocketed over the last year—many of the nation’s most popular parks consistently set attendance records through 2021, and while we are still waiting on the final visitation numbers for the year, we are confident that this year will be another one for the record books. While these record numbers can be beneficial to gateway communities, we need to be mindful that visitation and staffing levels at the NPS have not kept pace with each other.

Since FY2011, staffing at the park service has steadily declined, from 22,051 FTEs in FY2011 to 18,567 FTEs in FY2020.¹ During this time period, NPS visitation has increased from 278.9 million visits in 2011 to 327.5 million visits in 2019 (2020 visitations were down dramatically,

¹ Laura B. Comay, National Park Service Appropriations: Ten-Year Trends. Table 5: NPS Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff, FY2011-FY2020)
https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R42757?source=search&guid=235b9bbf15484c2da29d07495b7081cd&index=0#_Toc58596608

likely due to COVID-19).² Included below is a chart demonstrating this trend at Yellowstone from 2000 to 2016, showing the dramatic increase of visitation and the stagnant staffing levels at one of the America’s most recognizable parks.³ Our NPS staff, like all federal employees, have been faced with difficult challenges during the pandemic and being understaffed is an additional burden Congress can help address with additional funding.



As members of the Senate Subcommittee on National Parks, we hope to continue shining a light on the importance and value our national parks bring to our country—and the roles they play for the gateway communities that are supported by the visitors that come to see these treasures. NPS staff are some of the most mission-driven employees in the federal government, and we should be ensuring that they have the support they need to continue serving the public and protecting our national treasures. Achievements like the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act will help to address some of the infrastructure needs at national parks, but if we don’t have the appropriate staff to carry out these projects—and to fulfill the daily needs at parks—that milestone will not be as impactful as it could be.

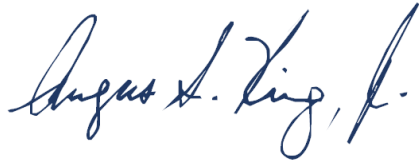
Thank you again for your work to increase funding to add additional FTEs within the NPS—we are optimistic that together we can continue to increase staffing at our parks and make sure these

² NPS Visitation Numbers, Recreation Visits by Year. <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/visitation-numbers.htm>

³ Kurt Repanshek, Yellowstone Visitors Say Park Too Crowded and Congested, Not Enough Rangers, <https://www.nationalparkstraveler.org/2017/08/yellowstone-visitors-say-park-too-crowded-and-congested-not-enough-rangers> (August 11, 2017).

sites are fully staffed to handle the increased visitation we will surely continue to see in the years ahead.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Angus S. King, Jr. in blue ink.

ANGUS S. KING, JR.
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Steve Daines in blue ink.

STEVE DAINES
United States Senator