

June 2017

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Recommended Citation

Morath, Sarah J. (2017) "An Introduction to the National Park Service Symposium," *Akron Law Review*: Vol. 50 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/akronlawreview/vol50/iss1/1>

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SYMPOSIUM

*Sarah J. Morath**

“Keep it for your children, your children’s children, and for all who come after you.”

Theodore Roosevelt, *Grand Canyon Speech*

It is quite fitting that the University of Akron School of Law would produce a symposium celebrating the National Park Service Centennial. The city of Akron, Ohio, is the southern gateway into the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, a park that runs northward along the Cuyahoga River towards Cleveland. Those who visit this park are often “surprised” to find varied topography with waterfalls, gorges, ledges, and diverse wildlife, including, beavers, blue herons, and bald eagles.¹ The Cuyahoga Valley National Park is one of 59 national parks maintained by the National Park Service.

In 1916, the National Park Service was created through enactment of the National Organic Act for the purpose of “promot[ing] and regulat[ing] the use of the National Park System.”² Specifically, the National Park Service “conserve[s] the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and . . . provide[s] for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”³ Today, the National Park Service manages over 410 units including parks, historical sites, battlefields, and lakeshores, from 13.2 million acres to 0.02 acres that welcome over 307

*Sarah Morath is a Clinical Associate Professor of Lawyering Skills and Strategies at the University of Houston Law Center.

1. Daniel Borzynski, Alamy, *Pictures: Cuyahoga Valley National Park*, NAT’L GEOGRAPHIC, http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/national-parks/cuyahoga-valley-national-park/#/brandywine-falls-cuyahoga-np_92542_600x450.jpg (last visited Dec. 1, 2016).

2. 54 U.S.C.A. § 100101(a) (West 2014).

3. *Id.*

million visitors.⁴

This symposium features four different perspectives on the National Park Service Centennial, and includes the voice of Donald J. Hellman, an attorney who has spent much of his career working for the National Park Service in Washington, D.C., Jamison E. Colburn, an environmental law and policy scholar at Penn State Law School and former EPA attorney, Julie Joly Lurman, a natural resources law and public lands expert, and Liz Putnam, a youth and conservation advocate.

Hellman begins by tracing the 100 year history of the national park service, from before its creation under the National Organic Act to present day, pointing out key moments in the NPS's expansion such as the inclusion of national historic sites in the 1930s and wilderness areas in 1960s and the *Urban Agenda* initiative, which began in 2015. Colburn's essay describes the NPS's experience dealing with disruptions, like motorized vehicles, and considers the NPS approach using NEPA to address the greatest disruption of the next century, climate change. Lurman's essay discusses national parks in Alaska and the dual responsibility and conflicts that arise on land governed by both the Organic Act and Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. Putnam concludes by highlighting the importance of the Student Conservation Association, an organization that has placed high school student volunteers in national parks for over 60 years. These articles describe an organization that has evolved and grown, but continues to face challenges.

One such challenge is maintaining the relevance of the National Parks in the twenty-first century. To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service, the Obama Administration, non-profits like the National Park Foundation, and businesses like REI and Subaru partnered in the #findyourpark campaign and the Every Kind in a Park initiative, as part of an effort to connect people across the United States with a national park. The few years leading up to the centennial will also be remembered for efforts to better reflect this nation's history and diversity. Some highlights include the designation of the Stonewall National Monument in New York City, commemorating the history of the LGBT community,⁵ the Seawall-Belmont House and Museum in Washington D.C. to highlight

4. NAT'L PARK SERV., NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM (Aug. 24, 2016), <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/upload/Site-Designations-08-24-16.pdf> (As of August 2016, there were 413 units under National Park Service control).

5. Scott Horsley, *Obama Names LGBT Landmark As National Monument*, NPR (June 24, 2016), <http://www.npr.org/2016/06/24/483385747/obama-names-lgbt-landmark-as-national-monument>.

women's equality,⁶ Pullman Park in Chicago to commemorate African American and labor history,⁷ and Ceazar Chavez Monument to memorialize the farm worker movement.⁸ Obama's tenure has also included monument designations to preserve open space and natural landmarks typically associated with National Parks like the designation of Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.⁹

As the National Park Service has evolved, so have the lands under its protection. It is hard to say what the National Park Service and the land it maintains will look like in 2116, and whether efforts to maintain their relevance will succeed. Rather than assuming the worst, we should take advantage of the ecological and historical treasures that have been protected so far. National parks today reflect a country with a remarkable history and remarkable landscapes.

6. Becky Little, *New U.S. National Monument Is First To Honor Women's Equality*, NAT'L GEOGRAPHIC (April 11, 2016), <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/04/160411-national-womans-party-house-museum-park-service-monument>.

7. Juliet Eilperin, *Obama to make Chicago's Pullman Park a national monument*, WASH. POST (Feb. 10, 2015), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2015/02/10/obama-to-make-chicagos-pullman-park-a-national-monument>.

8. Julie Cart, *Cesar Chavez National Historic Park is in the works*, L.A. TIMES (Oct. 24, 2013), <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/oct/24/local/la-me-1025-chavez-park-20131024>.

9. Richard Pérez-Peña, *Obama Designates National Monument in Maine, to Dismay of Some*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 24, 2016), <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/25/us/obama-maine-katahdin-woods-and-waters.html>.