

# Opinion: Cutting National Park funding is a bad idea

By Mary G. Martin

After spending 38 years working for our federal government and national parks, including two years as superintendent of Lassen Volcanic National Park, 11 as superintendent of Mojave National Preserve, and time spent in Yosemite National Park and Alaska's exquisite parks, I am no stranger to the power and beauty of our most special places.

That's why it disturbs me in the most personal way to know our National Park Service is facing across-the-board cuts that, if implemented, will compromise that great experience visitors have come to expect. Such cuts would eliminate park ranger positions, close visitor centers and campgrounds, and even close entire parks.

Children are my passion. Seeing a child discover the smallest element of a park and exclaim wonder is heartwarming. My grandchildren cherish their national parks and national park experience. Every child should have an opportunity for similar experiences. The National Park Service is instrumental in adding that dimension to a child's growth and, with partners, reach out to children who otherwise might not have had nature experiences. Your national parks already operate on a "shoestring" budget, and cuts would have a devastating impact on programs such as the growing youth program in most parks.

At one-fourteenth of 1 percent of the federal budget, cutting National Park Service budgets will not solve our deficit problems, but has the power to severely harm local economies, in particular small businesses, that depend on healthy parks and strong park attendance.

Investing in our national parks is the best idea that our

country can make. In California alone, visitors spent over \$1.3 billion in economies surrounding national parks in 2010, and national parks created nearly 17,000 jobs. Locally, visitors to Whiskeytown National Recreation Area contributed over \$32 million to local economies and businesses in 2010, and my alma mater, Lassen Volcanic National Park, generated more than \$16 million. On a larger scale, the National Park Service reports that every dollar invested in park operations generates about \$10, and every two Park Service jobs yields one outside the park service.

Our nation's treasures are entrusted to the National Park Service for preservation. The Statue of Liberty, the Washington monuments, Mt. Rushmore, the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, the USS Arizona and most iconic monuments and memorials that define our nation are a part of the National Park System. Upkeep and maintenance on these treasures currently poses a challenge to meet unique needs with limited budgets.

America's national parks already suffer from an annual operations shortfall of \$500 million to \$600 million. Parks are falling into disrepair and are more vulnerable than ever to inappropriate development within park boundaries. Another deep cut of 8 to 10 percent across the National Park Service will mean even fewer rangers, less maintenance and almost certainly park closures. Given the negative consequences this could have for visitors and local businesses nationwide, Congress needs to find a more balanced solution to our deficit problem.

As the National Park Service looks to its centennial in 2016, I call upon Congress and the administration to ensure that our national parks are protected and funded for the continued enjoyment of our generation, and our children and grandchildren to come. Funding our national parks will help protect the positive visitor experience that I helped create while working with our National Park Service, and will protect the continued successful tourism economy in Redding,

throughout northern California, and beyond. Our national parks are a legacy worth preserving and fully supporting them is without question the right thing to do.

*Mary G. Martin is the retired superintendent of Lassen Volcanic National Park and a board member of the Lassen Park Foundation and the Mill Creek Conservancy. This first appeared in the Redding Record Searchlight.*