

National parks trying to appeal to millennials

By Andrew Demillo, AP

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. – The National Park Service needs to broaden its appeal to millennials as it celebrates its 100th birthday this year, the director of the agency said last week as he touted civil rights sites that aren't traditionally viewed as parks to a younger audience.

Park Service Director Jon Jarvis spoke during a visit to the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, marking the formerly all-white institution that was desegregated by nine black students in 1957.

Part of the plan to attract more 18- to 35-year-olds to national parks, Jarvis said, includes a Find Your Park website and social media campaign that the service and the National Park Foundation launched last year to promote the parks and encourage people to share their experiences.

“We set a goal for our centennial, which is to create and connect with the next generation of park visitors, supporters and advocates,” Jarvis told the Associated Press in an interview at the Central High site. He says he's tasked every park to “think about what they do on a day-to-day basis, in their existing operations and what more they could do that will achieve that goal. What are they doing to connect with the next generation?”

Jarvis said the effort includes highlighting civil rights sites such as Central High School. He also plans a visit this month to the Colonel Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers Monument in Ohio, which commemorates one of the first African-Americans to graduate from West Point and the first black to achieve the rank of colonel in the U.S. Army. After that, he plans to

visit the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park.

“We put a lot of emphasis on them because we think they are key to being relevant to a much more diverse generation that we have out there,” Jarvis said. “Clearly we already know statistically that the visitation to the national parks does not represent the diversity of the nation and we want to change that dynamic.”

Jarvis compared the effort to reach a younger audience to the National Park Service’s 10-year Mission 66 program launched in 1956 to expand and improve its facilities.

“It’s a modern invitation to that generation to find their park, find that space, find that place, find that story that resonates with them,” he said.