



May 18, 2016

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell:

We, the members of the National Parks Second Century Action Coalition¹, write to express our support for further consideration of S.119, Wounded Veterans Recreation Act of 2015, by the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. The National Parks Second Century Action Coalition supports S.119 which allows free access to disabled veterans to our national parks and other federal lands.

In addition to physical injuries, veterans often deal with mental health issues resulting from military service. Our public lands can provide a place of respite for our military transitioning back to civilian life from participating in outdoor recreation activities to contributing in volunteer opportunities. By providing free access to our national parks and other federal lands to our nation's disabled veterans, the federal government is giving back in a small way to these individuals and their families who have made huge sacrifices for our country.

The America the Beautiful - National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass is currently made available at no charge to, and for the lifetime of, any U.S. citizen or person domiciled in the United States who has been medically determined to be permanently disabled. S.119 amends the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act to require the pass also be made available at no charge to, and for the lifetime of, any veteran with a service-connected disability. While the National Park Service broadly interprets those that have been medically determined to be permanently disabled, the additional authority to provide the pass to any veteran with a service-connected disability provides certainty for our injured veterans. The coalition supports expansion of the pass at no charge for our disabled veterans beyond the statutory definition of being permanently disabled.

Given the importance of the entrance and recreation fees to augment visitor opportunities in our national park and other federal lands, we appreciate efforts to ensure there is no impact to the revenue currently being generated by entrance and recreation fees. However, the provision in Section 805(b) requiring the federal agencies to adjust entrance fees of other visitors to accommodate the potential revenue loss with the implementation of this new pass is of concern. If S.119 is enacted with this provision, it would likely require the Secretary to increase the entrance fees on all other users, including low-income families. The National Park Service increased fees in a majority of the fee-collecting parks just last year. In the end, we believe the overall fee revenue loss will be minimal. We encourage the Committee to work with relevant agencies to address this provision or remove it completely.

We further encourage the Committee to work with the Appropriations Committee to enhance operation and construction accounts to provide the necessary accommodations for visitors with disabilities to our federal lands.

We sincerely hope the Committee moves this legislation forward to ensure more of our veterans have free access year round to our national parks and other federal lands.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Big Bend Conservancy
Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
The Corps Network
National Tour Association
Public Lands Alliance
Southeast Tourism Society
Trust for the George Washington Memorial Parkway
National Parks Conservation Association
Western National Parks Association

ⁱ The National Parks Second Century Action Coalition is made up of organizations supporting conservation, recreation, outdoor industry, travel and tourism and historic preservation that are dedicated to promoting the protection, restoration, and enjoyment of the National Park System for the long-term benefit it offers our nation.