National Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis plans to stick around for the rest of President Obama's term, but his deputy director will retire at the end of the month.

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility announced the retirement of Deputy Director Peggy O'Dell and several NPS moves in a press release, citing what it described as minutes from the July 11 call of the NPS National Leadership Council. NPS confirmed the news.

A small band of lawmakers have questioned whether Jarvis should continue to lead the agency, pointing to his decision to write an unauthorized book for a concessionaire (Greenwire, June 23). But the document released by PEER says that the Interior Department has "asked him to stay and given him their full support."

As a political appointee, Jarvis will retire when Obama leaves office in January. Until then, he will focus on the agency's workforce, developing a more "inclusive, welcoming, respectful" culture, according to the document. The Equal Employment Opportunity office will now report directly to Jarvis, it said.

NPS has been grappling in recent years with unhappy employees who appear frustrated with their workload, pay, resources and leadership (Greenwire, May 31). Jarvis has also focused on increasing diversity at the agency, where more than 80 percent of employees are white.

NPS spokesman Jeff Olson could not confirm whether the document was notes from a National Leadership Council meeting. But he acknowledged that the information was accurate.

PEER, which has frequently clashed with NPS, criticized Interior for supporting Jarvis. In a press release, the group pointed to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell's recent comments that reports of sexual harassment within NPS may be indicators of a more systematic problem within the ranks (E&ENews PM, July 12).

"By virtually every measure, Jon Jarvis has been the worst Director of the National Park Service in memory," PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch said in a statement. "If he has failed to inspire any positive change in more than six years why would one expect him to be able to do so in less than six months?"

PEER also characterized O'Dell's retirement as "abrupt." But in an email, Olson said O'Dell will retire after a 37-year career "that has included service at all levels of the National Park Service leadership."
"In considering succession planning, Deputy Director O'Dell wanted to ensure that the person following her in this critical leadership position would have time to get established and engaged to support the transition to a new Administration in 2017," he said.

Olson emphasized the importance of succession planning at an agency that has 2,800 employees who are currently eligible to retire. Another 2,800 will become eligible in the next five years.

The document released by PEER also notes that Michael Reynolds, the current associate director of workforce and inclusion, is expected to replace O'Dell as deputy director for operations on Aug. 1. Reynolds will also serve as acting director "during the transition between administrations," according to the document.

Lena McDowall, the agency's chief financial officer, will become the deputy director for administration, adding workforce and information resources to her responsibilities.

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