

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL T. REYNOLDS, ACTING DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, ON MOVING INTO A SECOND CENTURY OF SERVICE: WORKING TO IMPROVE THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT.

June 7, 2017

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hirono, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the National Park Service's (NPS) progress in improving our workplace environment as we begin our second century of service on behalf of the American people.

As the Acting Director of the National Park Service, it is a privilege to represent the nearly 20,000 dedicated men and women who make up the National Park Service workforce. One of the most rewarding parts of my job is reading the letters and emails that I receive from Americans who have visited national parks and want to share the life-changing and inspiring experiences they had during their trips. More often than not, these thoughtful messages single out individual NPS employees who go above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that visitors feel welcome and have the best park experience possible.

In my over 30 years of government service, I have worked at almost every level within this organization – field employee, field supervisor, superintendent, regional director, associate director, deputy director, and now acting director. I have had the good fortune to work with the most dedicated, professional, and enthusiastic workforce imaginable.

During our Centennial last year, the NPS hosted a record 330 million visitors across the country. This was an indicator of both the growing popularity of our national parks and a reminder of the need for an outstanding professional workforce, capable of meeting the challenges of our second century of service.

Unfortunately, last year also saw the emergence of a series of sexual harassment and hostile work environment cases. These cases were a wake-up call that we need to make significant improvements to the NPS workforce environment. The issues we face are serious. They did not develop overnight and will not be solved overnight. We are facing morale issues with a workforce that has been adversely affected by these allegations, even while working hard in a time of rising park visitation. There are some NPS locations where sexual harassment and hostile work environments were allowed to fester, and where employees felt that reporting these conditions would change nothing and invite retaliation.

We have set an ambitious agenda to bring a culture of transparency, respect, and accountability back to our great organization. The entire NPS senior leadership team has joined me in the effort to ensure that all employees have a safe, respectful work environment that allows them to do their best work. And leading that effort, Secretary Zinke has made it clear he demands that all employees work in a climate where any form of harassment or discrimination is not tolerated.

As many of these sexual harassment cases came to light last year, we realized that we could not do this alone. We reached out to other organizations, including the Department of Defense, for assistance. They helped us identify effective actions to address this critical issue.

We are pursuing proactive strategies on multiple fronts. First, we are examining the breadth and depth of the problems. Second, we are encouraging employees to consult with a newly-established Ombuds Office if they encounter workplace problems. Third, we are improving training programs aimed at recognizing and addressing harassment. Fourth, we are seeking input from employee resource groups. Fifth, we are building stronger procedures for reporting, investigating, tracking, and resolving work environment issues. And sixth, we are acting as quickly as possible when new cases are brought to our attention.

Workforce Survey

In order to understand the prevalence of harassment that permeated our organization we developed a Workplace Environment Survey to give us a better sense of employee experiences with sexual harassment and other forms of harassment in the workplace. From January to March 2017, all permanent NPS employees were asked to complete the survey.

We do not yet have the final data as it is being compiled and externally peer reviewed, although we anticipate receiving it by the end of this summer. I assure you that we are committed to transparency and once we receive the final data, we will share it widely with this subcommittee as well as all employees and interested stakeholders. We will use the results to define specific future goals and metrics, identify additional policy responses, further tailor our response strategy to the problems identified in the survey, communicate goals and expectations to employees, and begin to implement data-informed actions.

In addition to this initial survey effort, we will be issuing the survey in July to all 4,700 summer seasonal employees to capture the experiences of this important segment of our team.

Ombuds Office

To respond to employees' immediate needs for support, we established a professional Ombuds Office in November 2016, which provides employees with a confidential, independent resource that allows them to discuss their work environments and get impartial advice. Ombuds programs are well known throughout the public and private sectors. The Ombuds are available to all employees by phone and email. Unfortunately, we were lacking this critical feedback component within the NPS.

In just four months, the Ombuds received more than 1,000 comments, defined as complaints, concerns, or recommendations, from hundreds of NPS employees. The Ombuds team advises employees about the options available to them to report harassment or other complaints, including resources in the NPS Office of Equal Employment, Office of Employee Relations, and the Department of the Interior Office of Inspector General. They also provide general updates to NPS senior leadership about the questions and concerns they heard, without sharing any specific employees' identifying information. We will continue to support this office as an ongoing part of the NPS workforce improvement effort.

Employee Training

Effective training is a cornerstone to any successful organization. We have identified serious shortfalls in training consistency across the NPS. We now require mandatory online sexual harassment training for all employees – something that had not been required in the past. The training provides a clear overview of how to identify sexual harassment and actions employees subjected to sexual harassment can take. There is a separate training course for supervisors to help them better understand their responsibilities when an employee reports sexual harassment.

Last year, we also required a specific 8-hour training course for all executives to address sexual harassment. We are also incorporating anti-harassment training into all of our major NPS training curricula, including our new employee orientation, first-line supervisors' training, and our superintendents' academy.

The NPS is requiring all supervisors to take Civil Treatment for Leaders training. This training will allow supervisors to learn how to create a welcoming environment where employees feel respected and encouraged to speak up and help supervisors understand their responsibilities as it relates to harassment. All 4,000 supervisors were notified in April 2017 that they must complete this training by the end of 2018. This is the amount of time that is required to arrange and schedule this in-person training across the Service.

Employee Resource Groups

In order to more effectively incorporate feedback from employees, we have endorsed and supported a range of Employee Resource Groups, including a Women's Employee Resource Group, launched in April. These groups are made up of employees from all levels and locations across the organization. They advise and collaborate with NPS leadership to identify and implement best practices. They also provide opportunities for career counseling, mentoring, and peer support.

Clear, Safe Procedures for Acting on Incidents

A primary key to addressing harassment is accountability. We need to have strong procedures in place that result in consistent reporting, investigations, tracking, and resolutions to work environment issues.

We determined that we have very unclear reporting and investigative procedures. In some cases, contradictory policies and procedures make it difficult for us to achieve consistent results in combating harassment issues. A team is conducting a thorough review of our policies and procedures and will recommend updates to: 1) ensure employees have clear and safe reporting avenues when harassment occurs, without retaliation; 2) ensure investigations are effective; and 3) ensure disciplinary actions are applied consistently across the organization in substantiated harassment cases. This is another area where we're not working alone. We will be working closely with offices of the Secretary of the Interior, the Office of Inspector General and the Solicitors Office, to ensure we achieve these goals.

Working with the NPS Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion Program, we will collaborate with and engage employees in two-way communications to ensure information related to sexual harassment is easily available to all employees on multiple platforms, in formats that are easy to understand and use.

By ensuring that procedures and processes are clearly understood and applied consistently across the organization, all employees will know *how to report* incidents of sexual harassment and all supervisors will *understand how to respond accordingly and consistently*. As we develop and finalize new policies, processes, and procedures, we will share them with you. We look at this as work in progress, but believe these actions will make our structure clearer, more consistent, and improve accountability throughout the organization.

Additional Workforce Improvement Efforts

Outside of the realm of harassment, we are seeking to work on initiatives that will more effectively onboard new employees, more efficiently use recruitment and retention tools, and make better use of our training dollars. I would be happy to provide you more details about these initiatives.

I believe that the steps we are taking will help us not only address the problems our organization has with harassment, but they will also improve our workplace in more fundamental ways. We need our front line supervisors and other park and program leaders to really listen and understand what is happening in their parks and workplaces, and we need to give them tools to respond to sexual harassment, bullying, and other forms of harassment. These tools will support our supervisors and enable them to hear and understand what is happening with their employees and to address issues in a more expedient manner. Finally, we will continue to hold employees accountable for these actions.

We need to restore trust and demonstrate to our employees that they are a critical and valued resource and that NPS leadership will protect them with the same passion with which we protect the parks and resources in our care. This will allow us to continue to attract and retain the best and brightest employees who can care for America's national parks and the hundreds of millions of visitors in the second century.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for inviting me to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.