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The National Park Service at 100

[Donald J. Hellmann](#)

Abstract

In its first century, the National Park Service was transformed from an agency that managed a small number of western parks to one responsible for over 400 sites across the country. The management of these park sites has changed as well, with many new parks structured as a partnership effort between the National Park Service and surrounding cities and towns, as well as non-profit organizations and friends groups. The Park Service has had its work extended by Congress to reach beyond park boundaries in order to help states and local governments with resource preservation and the development of recreational opportunities in neighborhoods where people live and work. The Park Service has also been given a leadership role in providing technical assistance to other countries in creating national parks and preserving their natural and cultural resources.

As the National Park Service enters its second century, it faces many of the same challenges as other federal agencies. The two primary challenges facing the National Park Service as it moves forward are ensuring sufficient funding for the national park system from Congress and other revenue sources and keeping the national parks relevant to succeeding generations of Americans.

National parks remain popular with the American public for the way they connect us to the land and the story of our country. Perhaps former National Park Service Director George Hartzog stated it best when he said:

"The national park idea has been nurtured by each succeeding generation of Americans. Today, across our land, the National Park System represents America at its best. Each park contributes to a deeper understanding of the history of the United States and our way of life; of the natural processes which have given form to our land, and to the enrichment of the environment in which we live."

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Late June, late afternoon. I speed the rental westward on CA-120, past where Jeffrey pines loom, then brake at Mono Lake. The sun falls to the Sierra Crest's far side. Wind gusts through the sagebrush. I think of a woman, of the summit I'll soon climb. I tell myself, You're in nature. Months pass. I learn Lt. Tredwell Moore entered Mono Basin in 1852. He'd chased Ahwahnechee Chief Tenaya from Yosemite—"discovered" by whites the year before, "during a military campaign to subdue the peoples of the central Sierra Nevada," writes Mark David Spence. Tenaya eluded his pursuers. But David Carle and