

LETTERS

New parks are necessity

By Jym St. Pierre

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A recent editorial, "In 'Parks,' the triumph of idealism," (Oct 7) correctly pointed out that "Ken Burns is right. National parks are one of America's best ideas." It also said that the parks have often been underfunded, which makes arguing for new parks, such as the proposed Maine Woods National Park and Preserve, difficult.

This raises a couple of important points.

First, the national parks funding backlog is being addressed. The blue-ribbon National Parks Second Century Commission, in a recent report, "Advancing the National Park Idea," called for guaranteeing the ongoing vitality of the national parks by increasing the National Park Service budget by at least \$700 million during the next seven years. In response, the president's budget for the next fiscal year already includes an additional \$100 million more than inflation. Continuing this pace would eliminate the operations shortfall by the centennial of the National Park Service in 2016.

Second, we cannot afford not to create new national parks. Tight funding is an old argument against creating new parks that has proven wrong. Adding parks does not have to mean reduced funding for existing parks. On the contrary, new parks create even more constituencies who support funding for the entire national park system. The nation's national parks are economic engines. They generate \$13.3 billion of local private sector economic activity and support 267,000 private sector jobs nationwide. The annual appropriation of \$7 million to Acadia National Park generates more than 3,000 jobs and \$145 million in expenditures for local economies in Maine. Investing in the national parks is not a cost in the expense ledger. Rather, it is an investment that leverages enormous economic prosperity.

The National Parks Second Century Commission recommends that we "extend the benefits of the national park idea in society by creating new national parks." A Maine Woods National Park would provide many public values, including preservation of treasured landscapes, protection of wildlife, conservation of ecological values, and opportunities for public recreation. It could also help generate many millions of dollars in annual economic activity and support thousands of jobs in the northern rim counties.

Maine has a chance to create one of the grandest national parks on the planet. As the Ken Burns' series emphasized, our national parks are still America's best idea.

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