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At the threshold of the 21st Century, the Forest Service enters our second century of service as the world's largest provider of outdoor recreation. The legacy of a national forest and grassland system has proven to be more than even Roosevelt and Pinchot could have imagined, and they would certainly be gratified at how deeply these lands are rooted in our culture. How fitting that recreation is one of the four pillars of our resource agenda, since recreation is the primary means by which Americans meet the Forest Service. And what a daunting challenge for the Forest Service as we seek to exceed their expectations!

It is in this context that we are developing a Recreation Strategy to guide the Forest Service. We conducted 14 recreation "summits" throughout America in the last couple months to give people a forum to share their ideas on how we ought to focus our considerable resources and energy to meet their needs. We will be putting the final touches on this strategy in the next few weeks.

Chief Dombeck will be showcasing Forest Service recreation opportunities through a series of field visits in the next few months. In addition, Denny Bschor (Director of Recreation, Wilderness, and Heritage Resources) and I are visiting the Intermountain, Eastern, and Southern Regions this summer to focus agency attention on recreation. Denny and I just returned from our first visit to the Intermountain Region and I'm writing (as I will after each trip) to share some of the insights we gained, as well as to stimulate our thinking about the challenges that lie ahead.

Denny and I had a fruitful trip to Las Vegas, NV and Provo, Ogden, and Salt Lake City, UT. Our thanks to the various people--both Forest Service and others--for hosting us. Their enthusiasm, dedication, and pride were remarkable and, I'm happy to add, consistent with my experience wherever I go.

Among the vast array of things witnessed, the following are symbolic and indicative of what the future holds, in my view. We visited the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area northwest of Las Vegas, a remarkable forest island in the desert. Coupled with BLM, NPS, and FWS lands, Las Vegas is ringed by federal lands. Legislation allows the periodic auction of BLM lands adjacent to Las Vegas, the fastest growing metro area in America. Proceeds are expected to exceed \$500 million over a 15-20 year period, and these revenues are to be plowed back into several categories of federal land improvements in Nevada. The approach is innovative, opportunistic, and well suited to the unique circumstances there. The solution was collaborative, with full support from both the community and Congress.

Federal agencies are also helping create "Outside Las Vegas," a not-for-profit foundation



intended to strengthen conservation education and recreation services. Consider the potential of such an organization operating in a community with business investments of billions per year! Not for profit organizations are common, but we have yet to invest the necessary energy to build this potential in many of our large metro areas with nearby national forest lands. When we do this effectively, both we and the public stand to gain enormously.

We then traveled to the Uinta National Forest. We viewed a recreation fee demonstration project in American Fork Canyon. The concept of “fee for use” on federal lands has been getting a lot of attention and is being tested at nearly 100 Forest Service sites. It is a vital issue with critical implications for the future of the recreating public. Uinta NF officials worked with state and local officials and interested citizens, and with NPS staff at Timpanogas Cave to create a highly effective demonstration project. They now generate nearly \$500,000 annually in revenue, and they have an open, public process to determine investment strategies, quickly converting revenues into visible, priority recreation projects. Put simply, we have built credibility and support. People see a direct connection between their recreation pursuits and our meaningful response to serve them.

Strawberry Reservoir, a world-renowned fishery, was next. Here, Uinta NF officials are exploring the right mix of privately operated recreation facilities and services on federal lands. Strawberry has a complex mix of marina, campgrounds, visitor center, power, sewer, water, paved roads, and much more. Managing this effectively takes wisdom, time, and know-how. There are still places where the Forest Service can “do it all,” but I see this type of partnership as exactly what is meant by government learning how to “steer more and row less.” It is our future. Recreationists are entitled to the very best services possible, and often the private sector is the best provider.

Denny and I saw much more, but these were the highlights. We are all seeking answers to very basic questions—What is our niche? What are people seeking from us, and from the lands we manage? How are we doing; how can we improve? We do know this—national forests and grasslands are wildly popular, and becoming more so with each passing decade. New uses and activities are emerging, too.

I believe there is no greater challenge before us than to be not only the world’s largest provider of recreation, but also the best! We must grow and change. Whether we do or don’t will make all the difference in the world, both to the resources we manage and the people we serve. Trips like this fill me with optimism, for I see evidence that we are up to the challenge. The commitment, enthusiasm, determination, and ingenuity of our employees are the greatest resources we have. I look forward to seeing more of our recreation agenda in action in the weeks ahead.

/S/James R. Furnish

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