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National Parks to Seek Out, Recognize Corporate Funding Under New Plan

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The National Park Service (NPS) is proposing a relaxation on rules governing corporate partnerships in a move that could see parks increasingly commercialized and dependent on the whims of private donors.

Some park superintendents will be asked to help raise up to \$5 million in individual gifts, according to the [NPS proposal](#).

In return, the service will allow the use of park names and imagery in corporate advertising campaigns. NPS will also allow the display of corporate logos in park infrastructure through "donor recognition."

NPS leaders said the liberalization is needed to fund \$11 billion in maintenance projects, with Congressional appropriations unreliable. From 2013-2015, the park service received on average about \$2.5 billion annually from Congress.

Jeff Reinbold, NPS associate director for civic engagement, told [The Washington Post](#) that the policy "gives us new opportunities and new tools."

The NPS has been criticized for its new take on philanthropy by some conservationists.

"We are concerned that influence peddling will soon become a major recreational activity in our national parks," said Jeff Ruch, the executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER).

The non-profit advocacy group said [Monday](#) that the rule change represented "a quiet but far-reaching move."

"This proposal fundamentally shifts from that traditional role to one where NPS is seeking private gifts to support its base budget, lowering its reliance on appropriated funds and increasing dependence on corporate money," PEER said.

The group noted how park policy, in the past, has been influenced by corporate interests. In 2011, NPS Director Jon Jarvis [nearly reversed](#) a ban on plastic water bottles at the Grand Canyon, [after talks](#) with Coca-Cola -- a major donor to the National Park Foundation.

"Having Jon Jarvis as the arbiter of propriety in fundraising is like putting a kleptomaniac in charge of mall security," Ruch remarked.

In [February](#), Jarvis was stripped of his authority to deal with the service's ethics office, and ordered to have monthly ethics training sessions. He was found by Department of Interior officials to have intentionally sidestepped rules when publishing a book on the National Parks.

"I consider it a good lesson learned and will ask for guidance if and when similar situations arise in the future," Jarvis [said](#) at the time.

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