

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 21, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum,

We write today to express our deep concern over alarming directives issued to eliminate roughly one thousand full-time employees, rescind hundreds of offers for full-time positions, and delay thousands of offers for seasonal positions at the National Park Service (NPS). These roles are critical to protecting America's treasured natural assets, maintaining public safety, and promoting exceptional standards expected at national parks across Virginia and the nation.

We urge you to reverse these directives and prevent additional cuts to existing staffing going forward given the critical role that the vast majority of NPS staff play in ensuring public safety. If these directives are not reversed, we fear it will significantly undermine the Park Service's ability to protect both visitors and park resources, particularly as we approach peak visitation season.

The National Park Service's dedicated workforce plays a vital role in ensuring the smooth operation of our nation's parks and the safety of the millions of visitors who explore them each year. NPS staff are also responsible for protecting the priceless natural, historic, and cultural resources that belong to the American people. The recent staffing directives will make it significantly more difficult for NPS to carry out their mission. NPS staff positions affected by these directives include frontline park rangers responsible for ensuring visitor safety and protecting park assets, maintenance staff tasked with addressing the deferred maintenance backlog and reducing the risk of wildland fires, and support staff responsible for raising revenue for NPS through fee collections.

Despite the critical role the vast majority of NPS employees play in ensuring public safety, it appears that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) acted unilaterally to dismiss probationary employees and rescind offers at NPS with no input from park superintendents as to their responsibilities or function within individual parks. Park superintendents have been left with little guidance to figure out how and whether it is possible to continue to safely operate their units with the reduced staffing levels.

It has been reported that the only exemptions offered were for positions that respond to public safety incidents, including law enforcement rangers, public safety dispatchers, and wildland firefighters. However, public safety response is just part of the work that goes into protecting the public. Countless other positions from rangers to natural resource specialists to wastewater specialists to maintenance mechanics that are not covered under the exemptions have wide-ranging responsibilities for preventing public safety incidents in the first place. Eliminating these positions put our parks at greater risk of damage and make them less safe for visitors. We are particularly concerned about reports that NPS rescinded offers for positions directly responsible for fire safety at Shenandoah National Park – coinciding with the start of wildfire season.

While it is encouraging that NPS recently walked back its decision to rescind offers for nearly 5,000 seasonal positions, park superintendents have received no guidance as to the next steps they can take to move forward

with seasonal hiring. The late winter and early spring months are critical for ramping up seasonal staff in preparation for the summer visitation surge. Without clear guidance for superintendents on seasonal hiring, the continued delay in hiring could jeopardize the ability of these parks to safely accommodate millions of visitors this summer.

In addition to risking public safety, these staffing directives directly undermine the progress Congress has made in recent years to invest in repairing and restoring our national parks. For over one hundred years, NPS has been charged with safeguarding millions of acres of America's irreplaceable natural, historic, and cultural resources. However, persistent underfunding of NPS resulted in the Service's inability to properly staff park units and the growth of a multi-billion-dollar backlog of deferred maintenance projects. In recognition of the worsening situation at our national parks, bipartisan majorities in Congress passed and President Trump signed into law the *Great American Outdoors Act of 2020 (GAOA)*, one of the largest ever investments in conservation and public lands in our nation's history. The GAOA gave NPS the resources it needed to dedicate billions of dollars for addressing deferred maintenance across the country, including over \$470 million for projects in Virginia. As a result of these staffing directives, units will be forced to reallocate remaining staff to support regular operations at the expense of staff hours dedicated to reducing the deferred maintenance backlog.

These actions could not come at a worse time for Virginia's parks. Virginia is home to 22 national park units that collectively see over 22 million visitors annually, with visits peaking in the summer months annually. These parks—including Shenandoah National Park, the Blue Ridge Parkway, Colonial National Historical Park, George Washington Memorial Parkway, and Manassas National Battlefield Park—contribute significantly to Virginia's economy, generating \$1.5 billion for local gateway communities each year. Significant disruptions to NPS staffing during the critical months prior to peak season threaten to harm the tourism economy associated with Virginia's national parks that supports hundreds of small businesses and thousands of jobs.

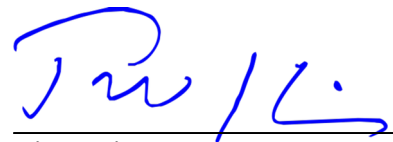
We urge you to swiftly reverse these directives and communicate clear guidance to park superintendents to ensure that NPS units in Virginia and across the country can move forward with hiring both seasonal and permanent positions that are critical to ensuring the safety of millions of park-goers.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



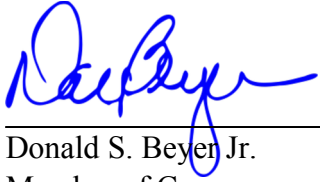
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



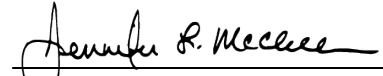
Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



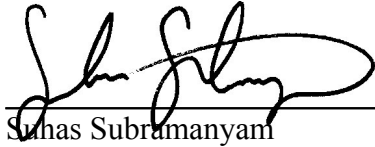
Gerald E. Connolly
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