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Remarks at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area in Thousand Oaks, California

August 15, 2003

Thank you all for coming. This is a beautiful place to gather. It's a little different from Crawford—[*laughter*]—but the work is just as hard. If it looks like I'm kind of sweaty, it's because I am. [*Laughter*] I've been shoveling dirt to make sure the trails are maintained so people can use them.

Before I talk about our park system, I do want to say that the people of New York City and New York State and the people of the Northeast and Midwest who were affected by last night's blackout were—kept their calm, were decent to their neighbors, really showed the rest of the country and the world the true character of the American people. I want to thank all of them for how they dealt with a very difficult situation and assure them that Federal, State, and local authorities are working hard to get the power up and running to take care of the needs of the people. And at the same time, we'll figure out what went wrong, and we'll address it. We will view this rolling blackout as a wake-up call, a wake-up call for the need to modernize our electricity delivery systems, and we'll respond.

And what we're here to talk about today is how do we make sure our national asset, the National Park System, has got a modern infrastructure system as well, so that the people who own the park, the American people, can use the parks. After all, the parks are owned by the people of this country, and we want the park system to work well, and we want there to be a modern infrastructure. We want the 80 million acres of national park land to be accessible and comfortable to use for the American people, and at the same time, we want to respect nature and honor God's great gift to our country by conserving these beautiful properties all across the country.

The responsibility to maintain our parks has not always been met in America. It's a problem that we will address, and helping me address the problem is the Secretary of the Interior, Gale Norton. You know, I picked somebody from the West to run the Interior Department because I felt like, in her case, she was sensitive to the needs of the people and to the needs of the land. And she's doing a heck of a good job on behalf of the American people. And I appreciate you being here.

And Fran Mainella is with us today. She's the Director of the National Park Service. Hi, Fran. When I tell you what we're going to do about maintaining our parks, really what I'm doing is telling you what she's going to do—[*laughter*]—in collaboration with the good folks who work for the Interior Department, the good folks who wear the hats, the people that are out on the frontline of maintaining our parks and making sure our parks are accessible to the American people, the park rangers, the dedicated employees who are—really make a difference in the people's lives. I want to thank you all for your hard work on behalf of the American people.

I had a chance to spend some quality time with such a person, Woody Smeck; he's the Superintendent of the Santa Monica Mountains. [*Applause*] Woody, it's a good sign when people who work with you cheer for you. [*Laughter*] I can see why. Woody cares a lot about the land. He cares deeply about the people who use the land. Woody has got a tough job. He manages the largest urban park in America, but it's a park that requires collaboration with State officials—and I want to thank the State officials who are here—requires cooperation with the local officials, and it requires collaboration with private property owners in order to make sure the park works the way we want it to work. And

Woody, you're doing a heck of a good job, and I appreciate your service to our country.

We've got some mayors with us today, and I'm honored you all are here. Andy Fox and Greg Hill and James Bozajian are here with us. The local mayors of Thousand Oaks and Redondo Beach and Calabasas, California, are integral players in making sure the park system works. I asked the question, how are the local people—they were responding well to your initiatives that Woody has laid out? And he said, ''Absolutely.'' He said the cooperation is fantastic. So Mayors, I want to thank you for coming, but more importantly, I want to thank you for doing your job in a way that makes your citizens proud.

I'm also am so proud that my friend Elton Gallegly is here with us. He is the congressman from this area. He cares a lot about this park. He cares a lot about the people who live in this congressional district. And Elton and I are going to work hard to make sure the appropriations process reflects our desire, our common desire, to maintain the park system of America. And Elton, thank you for coming.

One of the things that makes the park systems go and really function well is the volunteer effort all around our country, and you've got a fantastic volunteer effort here. I met two such people today. Melvin Caradine, he is a volunteer here. He leads tours. He shares his knowledge with the people who come to visit. And Ralph Waycott, he is the volunteer coordinator for the Rancho Sierra Vista Nursery. I don't know if Ralph was a botanist in college or not—[*laughter*]—but it sure sounded like it. [*Laughter*] He knows a lot about what he's talking about.

He and Melvin really represent the best of the country, when you think about it—people who are willing to take time out of their lives and to, in this case, make the park system work and make our fellow citizens feel comfortable and knowledgeable when they come to the parks. I'm told there's a couple hundred volunteers who come here on a regular basis to help make sure this park works, and I want to thank you. And I urge others that if you're interested in serving your community, interested in serving your country, volunteer at a park. Make it work better. Help restore it. Help the hard-working employees and dedicated folks that are in charge of our parks; help make their job easier. And so for those of you who are here who volunteer, thanks a lot for what you do.

What's interesting about this place is, there are over 33 million visitors who come here. That's a lot. [*Laughter*] There are a lot of people who use this park, and that's good. That's the way it should be. And I can see why they come. It's a beautiful spot. Fantastic trails—it's a good opportunity for people to care of their physiques—[*laughter*]—by taking off in the hills and a getting yourself a good walk on a daily basis. But 33 million people use this.

The truth of the matter is, God designed this park's beauty, but men and women make sure it remains beautiful. And that's an important part about conservation: It's man's ability to make sure that God's beauty is maintained and preserved and that when people use it, they use it in a respectful way. The park rangers and the landowners and the local businesses have made it so that people from all over the world can come here and use this place. Because of wise stewardship, this park has flourished. This is good for all of us, to understand what works.

You see, Gale mentioned we've got 388 national park areas. Now, this includes historic sites and battlefields and recreation areas and monuments and shores. But all of them are a point of pride for the local communities surrounding the particular site, and they need to be a point of pride for our country as well. And after all, our park system is the crown jewel of America's recreation system.

In the past, though, the sites have really, in some cases, been ignored. And that's the reality, and that's the truth. For many years, our Federal Government did not even have the basic information it needed to set priorities about what should be repaired or not repaired, because we had a haphazard system of dealing with the people's asset. We just kind of—as we say down there, catch as catch can, without a national strategy to maintain this incredibly important asset.

And so I've set out to do something about it. And the first thing we've got to do is, we've got to get a commitment from the appropriators in Congress to spend enough money

to maintain our parks. And so I'm calling on Congress to spend $5 billion over the next 5 years. I made that call 2 years ago. I've said, ''If you're interested in helping us maintain the park system, put some money out there so that we can actually do the job.'' And Congress responded for the last 2 years by appropriating $1.8 billion to meet the needs to make sure our parks are modernized and maintained and get the needed repairs to make the parks accessible to the people. In this year's budget, this year's request, I put in $1.1 billion and then plan on asking 2.2 total for '05 and '06, so that we spend $5 billion on maintenance projects and repair projects in the park system all across the country.

And I expect Congress to respond. We've got a national asset that in some cases needs needed repairs, and now is the time to get after it on behalf of the American people. This is a problem, and now let's address the problem. And I think they'll respond.

In the first 2 years in my administration, under Gale and Fran's leadership, we've undertaken 900 park maintenance projects, and that's a good start. We're making progress. We'll do another 500 this year and 400 next year. Slowly but surely, we're beginning to deal with the backlog of much needed maintenance.

And these are projects that—I'll talk about some of them we're doing here, under Woody's supervision, but for example, there's repairs to a visitors center at Cape Cod National Seashore. I mean, when visitors show up for the Cape Cod National Seashore and its beauty, we want there to be a visitors center that's worth going into. We want the toilets to flush. [*Laughter*] We want the potholes to be taken out of the parking lot. Whatever the problem is, we need to address it so that the people, when it comes to using their own park, are able to do so in a comfortable way.

We've got a new wastewater system being developed at Yellowstone National Park, and that's important. We've got a new lighting and electrical systems on the U.S. *Arizona* Memorial at Pearl Harbor. At the Redwood National Park, we're removing abandoned roads to protect the park and to improve the watershed. There are just practical things that need to be done on a park-by-park basis in order to do our job on behalf of the American people.

In order to have a strategy, we felt it was important to develop a national system to take a national inventory so you can set priorities. If the information is scattered and haphazard, you'll have a haphazard and scattered response to a problem. And so I tasked Gale and Fran with the idea of setting up a national database that will track maintenance needs on a asset-by-asset basis. And so the Interior Department and the parks department have tasked the park superintendents to conduct an inventory of buildings and trails and monument roads and assets and let us know the condition on a park-by-park basis. And the data will be centralized in Washington. So far, 384 out of the 388 park superintendents have responded. We're chasing down the other four—[*laughter*]—to make sure we get inventories.

And then when you get an assessment of what is needed, we can set priorities. And when you set priorities, it is more likely that the $5 billion will be spent wisely on behalf of the American people to maintain their park system.

In the Santa Monica Mountains, Woody was telling me that—first of all, he was one of the first to apply to the system, first to input into the system. He determined that the buildings were in good shape but the trails were eroded and needed work. He sent out a priority list to Washington, DC. I think we've sent back $2.4 million of trail maintenance money, if I'm not mistaken, which has improved a lot of the trails for the people who use the trails.

And as importantly, you've made it possible for people to see the beauty of the land, to access the beauty without destroying the land. The more modern the trail system, the more repaired our trail system is, the less likely it is that people will trample the beauty—that they'll stay on the trails, and so you'll be able to have people take wonderful hikes or bike rides throughout this beautiful countryside without the fear of damaging the countryside.

Woody accessed the system; he put out a plan; and the Government responded. And we expect other park superintendents to do

so. And when Congress appropriates the money, which I'm confident they will, particularly after this moment—[*laughter*]—that we'll better spend the money on behalf of the people.

As Woody said, for the first time, we now have a system that moves us from reactive to proactive, and that's how we're able to track real improvements. And that's what we're going to be with America's park system: We're going to be proactive and doing what's right on behalf of the American people.

I mentioned the volunteers that make these parks work—and particularly, this park work. And I ran into some folks from Woodrow Wilson East High School in Los Angeles. Stan is with us. Stan is a teacher. Thank you, Stan, for being a teacher. Rosa Gomez and Susan Lam and Denise Sanchez are with us as well. Thank you all for coming. I see other students from Woodrow Wilson, as well, or Wilson—the Wilson Mules, I take it. [*Laughter*] But we were repairing the trails together. By the way, the three ladies I just mentioned are high school grads. They're going to college. A couple of them are the first time anybody in their family has ever gone to college, which is fabulous.

But I want to thank them for coming out and working hard on the trails. It's a—it's got to be a fantastic educational experience to get out in this beautiful part of our country and put something back into the system. After all, that's really what makes America great, when people realize that patriotism means serving something greater than yourself, serving the country you love, doing your part to make sure that the community in which you live is as good as it can possibly be, loving a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself. Whether it be maintaining park roads or helping somebody who hurts, helping somebody who's addicted, we can all make a difference in changing our country.

And that's what the Harmans are doing. I ran into Terry and Holly Harman. Terry and Holly challenged me to a 6-mile run. [*Laughter*] I took one look at them; I said, "No thanks." [*Laughter*] But the Harmans are here. They love to use the park. They ride their bikes; they run. They've enjoyed this park for a lot of years, and part of their enjoyment is to make it a better place for other people. I want to tell you what Terry said. He said volunteering here has helped him feel ownership for the park. You're kind of protective. You realize, in his words, "This is my park too."

Well, it is your park. It's the park of every person who lives in America, and we've got to remember that. We're stewards of the people land. We have an obligation to leave this park a better place than when we found it. And there's no doubt in my mind, thanks to the hard work of the park employees, to the volunteers who come, thanks to a Congress that recognizes that we need to maintain this incredibly important asset for our country, we'll do our job.

Thanks for coming. May God continue to bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:17 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Stan Katase, teacher, Woodrow Wilson High School. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Luncheon in Irvine, California

August 15, 2003

Thank you very much. Thanks for the warm welcome. Thanks for the friendship. It's great to be back in the great State of California, and it's wonderful to see so many friends from Orange County. I'm honored you all are here. I appreciate the strong financial support you've given.

I want to thank those who have worked so hard to make this a major success. Really what we're doing is, we're laying the foundation for next year's campaign, putting the process in place and the foundation in place for what's going to be a great victory in November of '04.

And I need to count on you, particularly when it comes to energizing the vote, to making sure the grassroots gets our message. I want you to remind your Republican friends, your Democrat friends, your independent friends that this administration is one that is serving all the people of the United States of America.

I'm getting ready—[*laughter*]—and I'm loosening up. [*Laughter*] But the political