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**NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM ADVISORY BOARD**  
**158<sup>th</sup> Meeting, June 2-3, 2016**  
**National Park Service Alaska Regional Office**  
**Day Two: June 3, 2016**

1 MR. KNOWLES: Okay. With that, let me, if I could ask Sara  
2 Taylor to come forward. At the invitation from the National  
3 Park Service and the board, she agreed to come. Sara is the  
4 executive director of the citizen's advisory commission on  
5 federal areas, and I know that Bert Frost and the NPS locally  
6 here have had some very productive meetings with you, and with  
7 some of your board. And we want you to know one thing that is,  
8 that this board is very aware of the importance of the  
9 relationships between communities and the Park Service. We have  
10 serving on the board, Mayor Judy Burke, from a gateway community  
11 in Colorado, and so this will be a very helpful part of our  
12 experience and recommendations to the director for policies, to  
13 have your input. And we welcome you and thank you for coming.

14 **PUBLIC COMMENT**

15 MS. SARA TAYLOR: Thank you very much. I'm glad I came a  
16 little bit early just to see those. That was very interesting.  
17 I wish I could do something similar. That was really nice. So  
18 thank you for this invitation, and thank the service, Dr. Frost,  
19 for inviting me to come and testify today, and most especially,  
20 thank you all for your service to the lands that mean so much to  
21 me and many others. I was - I am a child of an immigrant  
22 family, also, from Oaxaca, Mexico, and I grew up just north of  
23 Canyon de Chelly, which is probably still one of the most  
24 beautiful places I've ever seen. So thank you for that. Thank  
25 you for your service. So, yeah, my name is Sara Taylor. I'm

1 the executive director of the Citizen's Advisory Commission on  
2 federal areas.

3 This is a commission that was created just by the Alaska  
4 State Legislature, shortly after the passage of the Alaska  
5 National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980. And the idea  
6 behind the commission was to have a group of 12 Alaskans, two  
7 sitting legislators and 10 people also appointed by the governor  
8 and the legislature. And the idea was to monitor the  
9 implementation of the Alaska National Interest Lands  
10 Conservation Act, and many other federal laws, and to advise the  
11 state on implementation issues of concerns to Alaskans. So we  
12 have three meeting per year. We hold - they're all open to the  
13 public. We take a lot of public testimony at these meetings,  
14 and we also have staff year-round to also interface with the  
15 public and take in issues and do research and write comments and  
16 things of that nature. So we try to represent the diversity of  
17 users and uses of the public lands, but we also work on all  
18 federal public lands, so not just National Park Service lands.

19 I'm very grateful for this opportunity. So I just wanted  
20 to talk briefly today about some of our experiences and some of  
21 our concerns, just take this opportunity to kind of talk about  
22 the things that I've seen and some of the things that members of  
23 our commission have seen and witnessed, and some of the Alaskan  
24 stories that I've heard about and been able to experience with  
25 people. Humans were a very thriving, vital part of the

1 landscape in 1980 when 51 million acres of our state became part  
2 of the National Park System, either through expansion or  
3 establishment, under the Alaska National Interest Lands  
4 Conservation Act. I always like to tell people, if the National  
5 Park Service lands in Alaska were a state, it would be the 14<sup>th</sup>  
6 largest state in the US. And while Alaska's national parks host  
7 numerous visitors around the year who marvel, humbly, at our  
8 extraordinary natural resources and abundance of beauty,  
9 Alaskans look at those same parklands as some combination of  
10 home, office, grocery store or source of intimate renewal.

11 They've known these lands, from one year to even 10,000  
12 years. So the National Park System, to me, is meant to kind of  
13 celebrate, cherish, and conserve the American story, both the  
14 natural and the historical. And it does so quite well, which  
15 you all know and actually largely thanks to you. But  
16 unfortunately, the perceived kind of myth of Alaska is the story  
17 that we often hear the most. And it's an idolatry that  
18 increasingly overlooks or tends to obscure some very distinctive  
19 Alaskan histories and traditions and cultures that are  
20 disappearing incrementally and sometimes systematically. And  
21 they're not necessarily being cherished or conserved, and this  
22 is the unique, very unique, Alaska way of life, which Congress  
23 sought to protect when it established or expanded the National  
24 Park System in Alaska, is part of the history of this land.

1 It's uniquely tied to the land, and it's part of the compelling  
2 and very diverse American story.

3 And Alaska's historical presence on this land can be viewed  
4 with everything from suspicion to contempt, but it's not always  
5 in reverence, in reverence for our historical presence on this  
6 landscape. I'm not exaggerating. This is something commission  
7 has accumulated decades of history and evidence on, and we're  
8 not seeing very much change in the narrative. And I respect  
9 very much that the Park Service has a national and even an  
10 international constituency, and this doesn't really condone  
11 hiding behind or perpetuating the myth of Alaska, in managing or  
12 in planning for or in making decisions about land and resource  
13 management in the state. We love our parklands. Alaskans love  
14 their parklands, and that is a love that comes from familiarity  
15 and from the perspective of being so connected and so tied to  
16 the land. And we have a culture, ourselves, of responsible and  
17 sustainable management of our resources that we love so much.  
18 These are our roots. These are the lands and resources which  
19 our lives depend on, and from which our lives draw meaning.

20 And yet, very often, many Alaskans feel like we're trying  
21 to survive a culture war that pits us as the enemy against kind  
22 of an abstract, ideological ethos about nature and wilderness  
23 that can't rationally include people. But it's very hard to say  
24 this, but we were frequently informed, not always explicitly but  
25 very effectively, that we don't belong here. And that is hard.

1 For every story you read like One Man's Wilderness, about  
2 Richard Proenneke's relationship with the Lake Clark National  
3 Park, you'll read stories like A Land Gone Lonesome, which is  
4 Dan O'Neill's chronicle about how difficult it was to find  
5 accommodation from the Park Service for the people who lived on  
6 the land that was to become Yukon-Charley Rivers Preserve in  
7 1980.

8 I get calls all the time all year from members of the  
9 public, from commercial service providers who are having  
10 problems or issues with the National Park Service, and they ask  
11 me to help them. And it's hard enough, I think, navigating the  
12 federal system. It's very daunting, but when you are a business  
13 trying to earn a living, or you are a resident who needs access  
14 across parklands to your property, or you're just a parent who  
15 wants to pass on traditions or a connection to the land, having  
16 a, I guess challenging or making waves with the agency that  
17 makes all those things possible is very intimidating, and it's  
18 not without risk. And people are very afraid of losing what's  
19 sacred to them. And as an Alaskan and an American, I am afraid  
20 that they're going to lose it, too. Those fears are not  
21 baseless. I have personally witnessed and I've studied and I've  
22 heard about some very, a well-founded basis for many of those  
23 fears. And while I'd like to think that the tide is turning and  
24 I wake up every day and I think it's going to be the day when  
25 everything is different, I would like your help in making sure

1 that that narrative changes, because it's very unwelcoming and  
2 very hard for people to have to deal with, especially when many  
3 of those people have lived on the land long before they were  
4 parks.

5         And I want to be very clear, too. I don't in any way mean  
6 to disparage the vast majority of service employees in Alaska  
7 that truly care deeply and have been amazingly accommodating of  
8 Alaskan concerns. The Park Service has come to our meetings, at  
9 least for the last nine years, which is about all I can  
10 knowledgably speak to. They come to our meetings incredibly  
11 well-prepared and they present projects and plans and  
12 regulations, and they have this - they listen very carefully to  
13 our questions. They answer them very promptly. All of the  
14 follow-ups are very thorough. I have had absolutely  
15 transformative conversations with service employees, from  
16 everything ranging from matters of significant consequence to  
17 matters of little apparent consequence, and I could not be more  
18 appreciative of these experiences. I have seen the genuine  
19 benefit of them.

20         But the commission is not just a forum. We're not - we  
21 don't just present kind of an opportunity for dialogue, because  
22 we are also a resource. We are a resource. We're made up of  
23 legislators and biologists and hunters and miners and guides and  
24 trappers, and we have a wealth of knowledge and perspective.

25 And the presentations and the dialogue are very helpful, very

1 valuable, but they're not always productive. I'm trying to kind  
2 of make this less about presenting to us and more about talking  
3 to us, because Alaskans are innovative problem solvers, and the  
4 commission would like nothing more than to be a conduit and to  
5 promote that ingenuity and to bring that ingenuity to bare. And  
6 the many problems that the Park Service faces, just ask us.  
7 Talk to us and ask how we can help the service fulfill its  
8 mission in Alaska. We'd like nothing more than to do that.

9       Too often, I think many people feel very blindsided or  
10 ignored or sometimes even lied to, and that can be very  
11 difficult and it begs the question of how legitimately  
12 interested the service is in cultivating the diverse knowledge  
13 and experience of Alaskans, and I don't think that's fair. I  
14 don't think that's a fair characterization of how things could  
15 be, and it's my fervent hope that we can build on the  
16 relationships that we have to find harmony and respect. And I  
17 would like to see the Alaskan perspective integrated and infused  
18 into national regulations, national policies, on the things that  
19 we have to deal with at a disproportionate level because of our  
20 actual acreage and the important of the parks that we have here,  
21 the unique circumstances. I would like to see the Alaskan  
22 perspective infused in that.

23       I'd like to see our contribution to the American story  
24 cherished and conserved the way that I see it elsewhere. And  
25 when we present our opposing viewpoints, which we do. We do



1 present many opposing viewpoints, but we always do so with a  
2 calculated concern and a desire to reach consensus to promote  
3 the guarantees and the promises that Alaskans were made in 1980  
4 and before, when our parks were established and expanded. And I  
5 would like this board to help us, please, particularly at the  
6 institutional level, to remind decision makers that we do belong  
7 here, and that we know these lands better than anyone. So thank  
8 you for allowing me to come and share these things with you. We  
9 have many recommendations. I've had great conversations with  
10 the staff here at the Alaska region, about ways to improve  
11 relationships between the Alaskans and the Park Service, and I  
12 would be happy to share those with the board any time.

13 MR. KNOWLES: Sara, thank you very much for your  
14 willingness to come here and share some of the thoughts of you  
15 and your board, on the National Park Service, and our national  
16 parks. And I can assure you that you are speaking to a group  
17 that understands and appreciates the perspective that you've  
18 presented. I would note that the national director of national  
19 parks, John Jarvis who's here, he was a superintendent of  
20 Wrangell-St. Elias for 10 years back in the early '90s and there  
21 were still some pretty raw feelings at that time.

22 MS. TAYLOR: I was about to say.

23 MR. KNOWLES: And so he can tell - you might mention the  
24 story about filling up at the gas station. But anyway, so it is  
25 appreciated and we know that it's an evolving and changing

1 world. The National Park Service does reach out and wants to be  
2 able to take into serious account, not just listen but to take  
3 into account, the feelings of communities and people who think  
4 that they may not be getting the - a straight deal. And I know  
5 that Bert Frost, John Quinley, who I think you've met with both  
6 of them, they're certainly aware of that, too, and want to do  
7 everything they can to engage the stakeholders, and Alaska's - -  
8 stakeholders in this process. John?

9 MR. JARVIS: Sure. Well, thank you, Sara. I think that  
10 was spot on and I really appreciate the honest. A couple of  
11 thoughts, having worked up here and worked in the Wrangells and  
12 headed out there this weekend to the Copper Valley to see old  
13 friends. Alaska's different than the lower 48. Let's just get  
14 that straight. Everybody who has worked here over time begins  
15 to understand that. And it's particularly different, in my  
16 view, in its relationship with the people of Alaska. In the  
17 lower 48, most of your national parks - I mean you have gateway  
18 communities, like Judy represents in Colorado, and then you have  
19 visitors. But when the parks were established in lower 48,  
20 there was not a recognition, with a few exceptions, perhaps,  
21 like Canyon de Chelly, that the indigenous people or the people  
22 of the area had certain rights that were retained and respected  
23 in the establishment process.

24 And those of you in the room that are students of Alaskan  
25 history understand that from statehood to - - to ANILCA and the

1 establishment of these relationships, for subsistence, for  
2 access, for traditional activities, hunting, fishing, all of  
3 those, gathering, a variety of things. These were embraced and  
4 promised, as a part of the establishment of these new units.  
5 And I think it's been, for the Park Service, a bit of a learning  
6 curve to figure out how to not just allow that, but to embrace  
7 it. And that it actually adds value to these places because of  
8 that relationship, rather than looking at it as just an activity  
9 to be managed. And it was certainly an epiphany for me, living  
10 in the Copper Valley and beginning to engage actively with the  
11 community and understand their relationship with these lands,  
12 and I think it is important.

13 In talking to Bert, the regional director, a little bit, is  
14 that one area that I would suggest that you guys focus on is  
15 ensure that there are employees in Washington that have Alaska  
16 experience. That, as we go through a transition, there are few  
17 of us in Washington right now that have worked and lived in  
18 Alaska, but not very many, and we're all getting kind of old.  
19 And I think that having that depth of understanding of the  
20 relationship with the communities, the people's access and  
21 utilization, are a part of this establishment and in some ways,  
22 perhaps, the models for our Alaskan national parks are not in  
23 the lower 48, but in other parts of the world where the  
24 indigenous people had long, thousands of years of relationship  
25 with these lands and has been embraced in the National Park

1 models. And I've always felt that there was, perhaps, better  
2 models for the way we manage in relationship with the people in  
3 other parts of more the international park communities than  
4 there is in the lower 48 here.

5 And I think we are on, still on the learning curve, but I  
6 would suggest that one, you, in your interaction with the  
7 federal family up here, is to say, how many people in Washington  
8 have had any Alaskan experience? And as the retirements occur  
9 and a new secretary gets a start in the next administration,  
10 that ensure that you have good representation back in  
11 Washington, as well. Because you can interact directly with  
12 Bert here, but you need to make sure people back in DC also  
13 understand the complexities of Alaska.

14 MS. TAYLOR: I can't tell you how refreshing it is to hear  
15 that. I have some very embarrassing stories for your colleagues  
16 that come up here and what they tell me, but I won't share them.  
17 I promise. I'm going to say an unnamed federal official  
18 commented on how beautifully green it was outside of Fairbanks  
19 and said it must be from all the rain. Thank you. If you want  
20 to put me in charge of hiring people in DC, I'm on board. Yeah.

21 MR. KNOWLES: When I requested that the board come to  
22 Alaska, that was part of the understanding that I hope would  
23 come with it, and I can tell you it's been so well-received by  
24 the board to listen to Alaskans and to get a feel for how that  
25 it is different, but it can also be a model for the interaction

1 in other parks in other states. On how to engage the public in  
2 a much more active and positive way. And as you may know, as  
3 you note that there's a long way to go in actually realizing  
4 that. But I can assure you from the National Park Service, with  
5 its current director and personnel, have strongly expressed that  
6 direction and genuinely, I believe, are working to try and make  
7 that happen.

8 MS. TAYLOR: Thank you.

9 MR. KNOWLES: Any other comments or questions?

10 MS. COLWELL: Sara, I haven't met you before but you  
11 certainly are very articulate. Your comments are very  
12 thoughtful, and I'm impressed. I think partnership, an active  
13 partnership to reach consensus action would be very, very  
14 helpful. So I thank you for your presentation, as a member of  
15 the advisory board.

16 MS. TAYLOR: Thank you.

17 MS. LONG: I would express appreciation, as well. Those  
18 are very heartfelt, important thoughts. And it strikes me. I  
19 think we've been quite attentive and good to all discussing a  
20 universe in which we are trying to, and the Park Service is  
21 trying to reach new audiences, establish richer partnerships and  
22 so forth, but it strikes me that maybe in terms of the Alaskan  
23 perspective, we've not been as mindful of that, as you would  
24 help us to become. So thank you.

1 MR. KNOWLES: I've irritated them all quite a bit with  
2 Alaska advertising and everything, and I'm glad to have fellow  
3 Alaskans.

4 MS. TAYLOR: Governor Knowles was governor when I came into  
5 Alaska, actually. Yeah, it was - yeah, this is a place that I  
6 still don't even understand and I don't know if I ever will.  
7 But thankfully, I have a lot of Alaskans who help me and I  
8 commend that approach to all of you also. Alaskans can be a  
9 fascinating bunch, but man, I have the best job. I have the  
10 best job.

11 MR. KNOWLES: Thank you very much and please, you're  
12 invited if you care to. I don't know if you have other business  
13 to take care of, but you're certainly invited to be here for the  
14 rest of our meeting. Thank you. Jerryne, did you want to make  
15 some comments?

16 MS. JERRYNE COLE: Sure, sure. Guess it's on now. Right,  
17 thanks. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you all today,  
18 except for you, Linda. I think I've had a chance to meet  
19 everybody between last evening and this morning, and thank you  
20 Tony for getting this group to Alaska. This is altogether  
21 impressive, and there are many of us here in this state that  
22 really, we acknowledge the role that you all play. It's an  
23 extremely important role. It's wonderful to have you here, as  
24 well, John, to come back to some of your roots. And it is a  
25 great privilege to be able to share with you not only what Sara