

# WSTPC NATIONAL ISSUES BULLETIN

April, 2006

*An e-mail service for members of the Western States Tourism Policy Council by WSTPC Washington, DC, Representative Aubrey King (202.251.6845), who can provide more details on any of the issues reported here. Comments or suggestions are always welcome. New information since the last National Issues Bulletin is in bold.*

## CONTENTS

<i>National Parks Visitation Concerns</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Immigration Reform</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Gateways Bill</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>National Parks Management Policy</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Natural Resources Spending in Senate 2007 Budget Resolution</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Federal Lands in President's 2007 Budget Proposal</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>International Tourism Marketing</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Facilitation of International Travel</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Federal Highway Fiscal Outlook</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Recreation Fees</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Federal Land Sales</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Celebrating the Interstate and New Tourism-Transportation Partnerships</i>	<i>8</i>

### *National Parks Visitation Concerns*

**At an April 6<sup>th</sup> hearing by the House National Parks Subcommittee on Visitation in the National Parks, WSTPC testimony was represented by Mike Cerletti, who told the Subcommittee that recent declines in national park visitation trends should be addressed by at least four strategic steps: (1) The NPS should continue to strive for greater balance between both sides of its dual mission, preserving and protecting the resource while providing public access and enjoyment; (2) The NPS should cooperate more fully with State Tourism Offices in comprehensive, integrated marketing and public relations programs; (3) The NPS should regard its recreation fee program innovatively as a crucial part of its marketing strategy; and (4) The NPS Office of Tourism should have a budget sufficient to accomplish its vital functions. Subcommittee Chairman Steve Pearce (R-NM) wants to increase national park visitation and was so pleased with the hearing and the ideas it generated that he announced that he plans to have a follow-up hearing on the same subject in September.**

### *Immigration Reform*

**The Senate is expected to take up immigration reform soon after it reconvenes following the Easter Recess on April 25<sup>th</sup>. An effort to pass a bipartisan agreement led by Senators Mel Martinez (R-FL) and Chuck Hagel (R-NE) was not brought to**

**the Senate floor for a vote before the recess. The Martinez-Hagel proposal is similar to more lenient legislation sponsored by Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and would allow 450,000 legal immigrants into the U.S. annually (with green cards), with as many as 300,000 going to unskilled workers. A path to citizenship is provided for an estimated eight million undocumented persons who can prove they have been in the country for five years or more before the legislation is enacted. They would be granted a renewable work visa, after paying a \$2,000 penalty and any back taxes, and passing a national security and criminal background check. After five years, they could apply for citizenship, provided they remain employed, demonstrate a knowledge of English and U.S. civics. For undocumented workers in the country two to four years, they would have to report to a U.S. port of entry to be fingerprinted and processed, and, if they pass the preceding requirements for temporary workers, they would be given priority over future immigrants entering as temporary workers. If the Senate is able to pass such immigration reform legislation, it will be very difficult to reconcile it with the Sensenbrenner Bill passed earlier by the House of Representatives.**

The WSTPC in a March 27<sup>th</sup> letter from Chairman Carl Wilgus to the Senate Judiciary Committee and the leadership of the Senate explicitly endorsed and supported the bipartisan policy resolution on immigration reform adopted by the Western Governors' Association. The WGA position includes ten specific points, including support for comprehensive reform; opposition to blanket amnesty for all undocumented persons currently in the U.S.; full funding of personnel, technology and infrastructure for effective border security and enforcement; support for a national temporary guest worker program; and improvements in the facilitation of international visitation to the U.S.

One of the most controversial issues before Congress in years is the question of immigration reform. H.R. 4437, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act, was introduced by House Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) on December 6, 2005, and passed the House of Representatives just ten days later. This bill is strongly opposed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other business interests, including many tourism and hospitality companies, because it would require reverification of all 140 million immigrant workers and would classify millions of undocumented aliens as "aggravated felons" and require that they return to their home countries before becoming eligible for legal worker status in the U.S. The Sensenbrenner bill would also impose harsh new criminal penalties and heavy fines on employers for even paperwork violations documenting new hires.

### **Gateways Bill**

**The WSTPC continues to meet with key Senators and top staff of the Senate Forests Subcommittee and Forests Subcommittee to urge positive consideration of the Gateways Bill.**

The Gateway Communities Cooperation Act (H.R. 585) is now before the Senate after passing the House of Representatives on December 6, 2005. Gateway communities serve as

gateways for millions of visitors to the national parks, forests and other Federal lands. This legislation was inspired by two WSTPC Gateway Conferences in 1999 and 2002 and its passage has been a high WSTPC priority because it promises to improve relationships between gateways and the Federal land agencies.

Under the bill, communities would be certified as “gateways” by either local Federal land managers or by state tourism offices and the Federal agencies would be required to involve gateways as early as possible in the preparation of their critical multi-year plans and assist those communities to participate in the planning process in a meaningful manner.

### **National Parks Management Policy**

On February 17, 2006, WSTPC Chairman Carl Wilgus submitted formal comments to the National Park Service regarding the NPS Draft Management Policies. The comments commended the NPS on revisiting its 2001 Management Policies but made several recommendations “intended to improve the final NPSMP to make the NPS more sensitive and more responsive to the needs and demands of this very special industry/business of tourism.” The comments recommended that the final NPSMP: (1) Recognize the positive potential of the travel and tourism industry; (2) Recognize a potential, invaluable role for State Tourism Offices; (3) Recognize the role of the NPS Tourism Office; and (4) Recognize the Importance of Gateway Communities.

### **Natural Resources Spending in Senate 2007 Budget Resolution**

**Just before the Easter recess, House Republicans failed to reach agreement on a fiscal year 2007 Congressional budget (H.Con Res 376) because of deep divisions between moderate and conservative Republicans. Another attempt is expected the week of April 24<sup>th</sup>.**

The Senate 2007 budget resolution for fiscal year 2007 (S. Con Res 83) as passed by the Senate on March 16<sup>th</sup> sharply reduces natural resources spending (the budgets of all the Federal land agencies except the Army Corps of Engineers) by 16 percent. Although this cut appears staggering, it must be noted that the 2006 budget was bloated by emergency and other supplemental spending in its FY 2006 comparable totals. Nonetheless, at a minimum, natural resources spending would be cut at least one point in absolute terms from 2006 to 2007.

**The House budget apparently would cut natural resources as severely as the Senate budget resolution.**

**Although budget resolutions are essentially advisory only and sets a total discretionary domestic Federal spending cap, leaving it up to the respective appropriations subcommittees to establish spending amounts for agencies and**

**programs, it is believed that this year, because of election year pressures elsewhere on the overall Federal budget, the outlook is grim for Federal land agency budgets.**

**Federal Lands in President's 2007 Budget Proposal**

President Bush's proposed budget for the 2007 fiscal year is a mixed bag for the Federal land agencies, with sharp reductions projected for the Forest Service in recreation related programs while the National Park Service fares moderately well, with the NPS Operations and Operations Maintenance actually given respectable increases. The State side of the Land Water Conservation Fund is zero funded. Following is a brief summary overview showing the amounts called for in the President's budget for 2007, with the amount appropriated by Congress for 2006 in parentheses:

*NPS Operations* \$1.74 million (\$1.72 million)

*NPS Operations Maintenance* \$601.8 million (\$593.1 million)

*NPS Construction* \$229.3 million (\$313.9 million)

*NPS Recreation and Preservation* \$33.3 million (\$54.2 million) (Reduction resulted mainly from transfer of heritage areas program with \$13.9 million to the Historic Preservation Fund and elimination of earmarks.)

*National Heritage Area Grants* \$7.3 million (\$13.9 million)

*Federal Side of Land Water Conservation Fund* \$91 million (\$125 million)

*State Side of LWCF* \$-0- (\$30 million)

*National Wildlife Refuge Operations* \$381.7 million (\$382.5 million)

*BLM Recreation* \$63.8 million (\$65.8 million)

*Corps of Engineers Operations and Maintenance* \$2.258 billion (\$1.989 billion) (increase mainly due to Hurricane Katrina recovery expenses)

*Corps of Engineers Construction* \$1.555 billion (\$2.372 billion) (because of use of special Congressional appropriation for Katrina recovery)

*Forest Service Recreation and Wilderness* \$250.88 million (\$265.2 million)

*Forest Service Trails* (includes OHV implementation) \$60.341 million (\$74.882 million)

*Forest Service Roads* \$182.787 million (\$222.181 million)

Two caveats must be borne in mind: First, Congress usually increases the President's budget requests for the Federal lands. Last year, for example, the final appropriation for Forest Recreation and Wilderness was \$8.1 million more than the President had requested. President Bush's budget cuts have already stimulated much opposition in the media and on Capitol Hill, although most of that has been directed at the cuts in Medicare, Medicaid and other "entitlement" programs. On the other hand, it should be noted that because personnel costs will increase about three and a half percent in 07, the real decreases in program funds are greater than the preceding figures suggest.

**Further indication of the difficulties facing Federal land agency budgets is a recent memo sent by the National Park Service Headquarters to all national park units directing them to prepare budgets that could be at only eighty percent of current funding.**

### **International Tourism Marketing**

**The Travel Industry Association has launched an ambitious effort to develop industry support for a campaign to establish a \$200 - \$300 million international tourism marketing campaign to restore the U.S. share of the global tourism market. This was a key theme advanced by TIA Chairman Jay Rasulo and President Roger Dow at the World Travel and Tourism Council Summit Meeting in Washington, D.C. on April 11-12, 2006.**

President Bush's budget contains no funding for the U.S. Travel and Tourism Promotion Advisory Board because "No funding is requested for this program as travel promotion activities can be handled through a variety of non-federal sources."

This, however, will not affect the ongoing activities of the Commerce Department and the Advisory Board, which is fully funded through the end of 2007, by previous Congressional appropriations. The \$6 million tourism marketing campaign in the U.K., created by the Advisory Board in 2003, has been joined this year by a similar campaign for Japan, with funds directly appropriated as a line item by Congress.

### **Facilitation of International Travel**

**On April 18, 2006, the Bush Administration announced it still planned to require passports from all foreigners entering the U.S. under the deadlines required by the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). Although a cheaper identification document, called a PASS card, may be allowed for U.S. citizens, it would not be available to Canadians or other frequent border crossers.**

In a March 16<sup>th</sup> joint letter, Travel Business Roundtable Chairman Jonathan Tisch and TIA President Roger Dow complained to Secretary of State Rice and Secretary of

Homeland Security Chertoff that the Federal government was making little substantive progress in implementing its pledge to develop by the end of 2006 a land border identification card that will satisfy the requirements of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. The TBR-TIA letter requested a plan of action showing how the government intended to meet several specific implementation goals, including how the departments would work with the travel and tourism industry to ensure that the WHTI 2006 deadline would not disrupt cross-border land, sea and air travel.

On January 17, 2006, the State Department Secretary Rice and Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff announced a new “Joint Vision” to “improve border security while still welcoming visitors to the United States.” The program includes several elements especially applicable to travel and tourism, including development of “model airports,” along the lines of pilot projects at Houston and Dulles, which will have customized video messages and improved screening and assistance for foreign travelers; expanded use of digital videoconferencing for visa applications; formation of a travel industry advisory board; increased use of digitalized e-passports; development of a secure, less expensive passport card for U.S. land borders by late 2006; creation of a global enrollment network to consolidate travel document application information obtained by either DHS or State; refinement and improvement of the US-VISIT entry-exit system; and improved screening of international travelers through the Terrorist Screening Center and the Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center.

The travel and tourism industry, particularly TIA and the Travel Business Roundtable, hailed these new initiatives as promising. Two key tests will be how well they can be implemented to overcome concerns over the identification requirements of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative and the October 26, 2006 deadline for biometric passports from visa waiver countries.

### **Federal Highway Fiscal Outlook**

**At an April 3<sup>rd</sup> hearing by the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, the U.S Treasury Department, the Congressional Budget Office and the General Accountability Office all said that their long-term analyses conclude that programs authorized by the 2005 SAFETEA-LU highway bill will eat up more gas tax revenue than will be available by either the end of fiscal year 2009 (Treasury) or the end of 2010 (CBO). The implications for tourism and recreation are ominous – the less gasoline tax money Congress has to work with, the smaller the allocations to such programs as transportation enhancements, scenic byways, recreational trails and Federal land roads.**

As a result of Hurricane Katrina reconstruction costs, Congress imposed nearly a \$4 billion cut in the 2005 SAFETEA-LU Federal highway program for fiscal year 2006. Three separate rescission bills were passed at the end of 2005 that total between \$3.6 billion and \$4 billion. One was an across-the-board one percent rescission for all Federal programs, which meant just over \$400 million for the \$40.7 billion highway program. A

second rescission of \$1.143 billion applies to “formula” programs, including transportation enhancements and recreational trails, but not to nonformula programs such as scenic byways, Federal land roads and earmarked projects. A third rescission of \$2 billion also applies to formula programs but not to nonformula programs. These reductions are not otherwise specified but are left up to the states to determine. This may mean that programs like transportation enhancements, which have never been popular with many state departments of transportation may be exposed to substantial reductions without strong political support.

In the meantime, two 2-year study commissions were authorized by SAFETEA-LU: one on financing options for the future Federal highway program and another for policy options. No money has been authorized or appropriated for either commission, however, so the first task after appointment of the commission members will be to secure funding. Once that happens, these commissions will receive considerable attention as possibly setting the agenda for the 2009 reauthorization legislation.

In the meantime, because of concern over the future of the national scenic byways program, the American Recreation Coalition is organizing support for its continuation and expansion in the 2009 reauthorization.

### **Recreation Fees**

**The Recreation Advisory Council (RAC) structure mandated by the 2004 Recreation Enhancement Act (REA) for the Forest Service and the BLM is expected to be announced in the next few weeks. It is expected that the RAC structure will generally provide single state RACs (as the WSTPC has long urged) and that existing BLM RACs will be utilized in several cases, although there will be a number of variations, with a few states having more than a single RAC and some areas, especially in the East, having multi-state RACs. The WSTPC was successful in getting the REA to mandate that State Tourism Offices be represented on State RACs.**

Congress is expected to intensify its oversight of the Federal land agencies implementation of the Federal Recreation Enhancements Act in 2006. The Senate Public Lands and Forests Subcommittee and the Subcommittee on National Parks are expected to hold one or more hearings on the program.

On February 6, 2006, the WSTPC submitted comments regarding the Statement of Proposed Work to implement the America the Beautiful Pass, urging that state tourism offices be explicitly involved in the development of this pass, now expected to be issued for the first time in late 2006 or early 2007.

### **Federal Land Sales**

Multiple possibilities have arisen for new legislation authorizing the sale of national forest and BLM lands. One is the possibility that House Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Chairman Jim Gibbons (R-NV) may revive his 2005 effort to allow sale of public lands with a history of mineral deposits. Another is President Bush's proposal to sell hundreds of thousands of acres of national forest service properties to fund a reauthorized, increased Craig-Wyden Program that provides Federal payments to rural schools to offset a decline in PILT payments. In addition, the Administration has proposed selling \$180 million worth of land managed by the Bureau of Land Management, with 70 percent of the resulting revenue going to the U.S. Treasury.

Both proposals have generated bipartisan opposition in Congress and unvarnished opposition from environmental organizations.

The Senate 2007 Budget Resolution (S. Con Res 83) does not renounce the Administration proposals to sell Forest Service and BLM properties and thereby leaves open the possibility of Congressional approval, although the Senate Energy and Resources Committee reported to the Budget Committee that a majority of the Energy Committee would not support such legislation and Committee Democrats were united in their opposition.

### **Celebrating the Interstate and New Tourism-Transportation Partnerships**

In 2006, the interstate highway system will be fifty years old. This 47,000-mile network is arguably the most significant public investment in the history of the nation, if not the world, and it has never cost the Federal treasury a dime since it has been entirely financed through the Federal motor fuel tax. Certainly the tourism industry in America today has been dramatically shaped and boosted by the interstate system.

The WSTPC and the National Tourism and Recreation Coalition for Surface Transportation are joining with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) to plan an appropriate national celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the interstate system in 2006. One project being considered would be a reenactment of the 1919 military convoy across America led by then Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower, which left a lasting impression on the young colonel of the need for a modern national highway system that eventually resulted in President Eisenhower signing into law the 1956 legislation creating what became known as the Dwight Eisenhower National Defense Highway System. The travel and tourism industry and transportation interests are being urged to work together on this celebration in every state.

At the same time, the WSTPC is working with the Transportation Research Board, AASHTO and other tourism and transportation organizations to develop a substantive strategy to promote better relationships between tourism offices and state transportation departments in every state and to broaden support for future Federal highway policies.

