

## Editorial Comment

By C. Lee Noyes

One painful lesson of the October shutdown of the Federal Government is that no agency or program is safe from such drastic measures, no matter how productive its activities or how worthy its goals might be.

The National Park Service clearly underscores this observation. No one would dispute the premise that this agency plays a constructive role in preserving, protecting and perpetuating our nation's cultural heritage and natural resources. Few would deny the fact that the nearly 400 units of the National Park System also produce tangible economic benefits by creating employment opportunities and fostering local economic development.

An analysis conducted by Michigan State University for the Park Service concluded that direct spending by park visitors in 2011, for example, totaled \$13 billion. The impact of tourist dollars on the U.S. economy was \$30 billion and the creation of 252,000 jobs nationwide.

“The National Park Service is proud to have been entrusted with the care of America's most treasured places,” Little Bighorn Battlefield Superintendent Denice Swanke noted about this report, “and delighted that the visitors we welcome generate significant contributions to the local, state and national economies.”

By contrast, according to a National Parks Conservation Association estimate, the shutdown cost nearby communities \$30 million a day, denied 750,000 visitors access to parks and sent 21,000 NPS employees home.

Fortunately the permanent interpretive panels were installed at the Little Bighorn Battlefield Indian Memorial installed before the park was temporarily closed to the public on October 1. However, the uncertain budget climate might complicate the return of the Battlefield's collection from Arizona and as well as raise uncertainty about the status of the site's infrastructure plans and projects.

The sad experience of the shutdown simply reflects a far greater problem. Recent funding reductions such as the across the board sequester cuts have clearly hindered the ability of the Park Service to perform its mission effectively, plan for the future and maintain the integrity of our National Parks. Adding insult to injury is the fact that the agency's small appropriation has little impact on Federal spending or on any deficit reductions.

“In the rush to reduce the federal deficit,” the NPCA has warned, “we must not impair the National Park Service's ability to preserve our national identity or undermine the very places that contribute to local economies, foster jobs and protect America's heritage for our children and grandchildren to enjoy.”

Little Bighorn Battlefield and our National Parks deserve far more. They deserve our full devotion and support, regardless of fiscal cost.

*To access and download the Michigan State University report noted above, please visit: [www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/products.cfm#MGM](http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/products.cfm#MGM). Click “Economic Benefits to Local Communities from National Park Visitation, 2011.”*

*Comments may be addressed to [CLeeNoyes@aol.com](mailto:CLeeNoyes@aol.com).*