

# Parks & Recreation

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## Park Champion

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell talks with NRPA about her vision for the future of parks, recreation and conservation Page 48



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**Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell  
talks with NRPA about her vision for  
the future of parks, recreation and  
conservation**

Interview by Barbara Tulipane, CAE  
Introduction by Danielle Taylor

**I**n January 2013, when former Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced his plans to resign his post after four years, many naturally assumed that President Obama would appoint another elected official to take his place. Instead, he reached beyond the political sphere and nominated Sally Jewell, a business executive and avid outdoorswoman who was serving as president and CEO of Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI) at the time. The Senate confirmed her appointment in April 2013, and since then, she's established a reputation as an unconventional leader with big plans for getting Americans involved in the conservation of their public lands.



U.S. Department of the Interior/Tamia A. Heilemann

Jewell was sworn in as the 51<sup>st</sup> Secretary of the Interior by retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. The two had previously worked together on the National Parks Second Century Commission.

Secretary Jewell's unorthodox background, which includes positions as an oil industry engineer and a commercial bank executive, has raised a few eyebrows, but her work over the past 11 months speaks for itself. Since she took the reins at the Department of the Interior, which oversees 20 percent of the land in the United States, the agency has announced the provision of \$475 million in Hurricane Sandy relief, approved renewable energy projects in Arizona and Nevada that will power almost 375,000 homes, launched an initiative to promote healthy and sustainable food choices at more than 250 food and beverage operations in national parks, outlined a \$1.9 billion land buy-back program for American Indian tribal nations, allocated \$40 million from the Land

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and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for state-identified outdoor recreation projects, auctioned more than 275,000 acres off the Atlantic coast for wind energy development and successfully weathered a federal shutdown, to name a handful of highlights. Secretary Jewell's dual and often conflicting roles of protecting America's public lands and tapping into them to provide for

the nation's energy needs requires a balance often criticized by groups invested in one interest or the other, but she remains unfazed and has received a significant vote of confidence.

"She knows the link between conservation and good jobs," President Obama said at her nomination. "She knows that there's no contradiction between being good stewards of the land and our economic progress; that, in fact, those two things need to go hand in hand."

Here, NRPA's CEO Barbara Tulipane speaks one-on-one with Secretary Jewell to learn her views on the economic significance of outdoor recreation, her opinions on the best ways to utilize LWCF, her plan to build a million-member youth conservation corps and more.

**Barbara Tulipane: Having been the former CEO for REI, you bring a unique perspective to the Department of the Interior. What do you see as the link between outdoor recreation, business and our economy, and how has this shaped your goals for your tenure as Secretary of the Interior?**

**Secretary Sally Jewell:** An important tool that the Outdoor Industry Association developed was an economic report and accompanying website that puts the economic value of outdoor recreation by state at anyone's fingertips. The report estimates that consumers spend \$646 billion on outdoor recreation each year. The spending directly supports 6.1 million jobs in America and generates \$80 million in local, state and federal tax revenues annually. That is a powerful number that helps tell the story of why our public lands are not only important to our health and national identity, but they're also critical to our economy, especially in rural communities.

As I make the case for conservation on Capitol Hill and elsewhere, these numbers are helping shape the discussion in a new way. The message is clear: This isn't just about fishing rods and kayaks. It's about putting people to work in a wide range of jobs — from manufacturing to retail to hotels and restaurants — that all benefit directly and indirectly from outdoor recreation and public lands. Our goals reflect the importance of America's Great Outdoors to our economy and the opportunity to link thoughtful conservation to economic health.

**Tulipane: You have launched an ambitious youth initiative to connect millions of young people with the great outdoors — including setting up what is essentially the Civilian Conservation Corps 2.0. Why is this one of your priorities?**

**Secretary Jewell:** The millennial generation — young people born between 1980 and 1995 — is the largest generation in the history of the United States at 79 million strong. This is a generation that's more disconnected from nature than earlier generations, but more tech-savvy, well-educated and interested in making a difference in their careers and communities. Our youth initiative provides a great opportunity for us to reach out and connect a new generation to the great outdoors, while enhancing our public lands and providing needed job skills and confidence in our nation's future workforce.

The Department of the Interior — just like many federal, state and local organizations — has an aging workforce. About a third of our employees will be eligible to retire within five years; these are great people who have deep knowledge about public land management. We need to ensure their knowledge and passion is

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transferred to the next generation of park rangers, wildlife biologists, scientists and policymakers.

The youth initiative seeks to inspire millions of young people to play, learn, serve and work outdoors. Our goals over the next four years

include establishing partnerships in 50 cities to create opportunities for outdoor recreation; providing educational opportunities to at least 10 million of the nation's K-12 students annually; engaging one million volunteers in support of public lands, effectively tripling the numbers we have now; and providing 100,000 work and training opportunities to young people.

What we do now to engage the millennial generation in service on public lands is not only good for the economy and good for young people who gain valuable job skills, but it's also laying the foundation to care for the special places that help define us as a country.

**Tulipane: In a time of constrained federal resources, is it possible to meet these goals?**



U.S. Department of the Interior/Jose Calabero

During a January visit to the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area in Florida, Secretary Jewell highlighted her department's commitment to landscape-level conservation.

**Secretary Jewell:** There's no doubt that in order to achieve this margin of excellence, we need to prioritize our budgets, build off successful programs, and work in partnership with schools, nonprofit organizations and communities to leverage existing resources.

Additionally, we are working with corporations and philanthropists to raise an additional \$20 million to support these youth work and training opportunities through nonprofit youth conservation corps, in partnership with Department of Interior bureaus like the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and others. I'm also calling on businesses to come out and do volunteer work themselves, with their employees and their customers. And I'm asking them to give a

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hiring preference to the young people who have spent time working so hard on our public lands.

From my experience in the private sector, I know that there are many organizations and individuals who want to see our lands protected and the next generation engaged. We will work together to make these goals a reality.

**Tulipane: Next year is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and you have repeatedly expressed strong support for that program. As we approach the reauthorization, what changes do you believe should be made to the program to ensure that all Americans have access to parks, recreation resources, and conserved lands and waters?**

**Secretary Jewell:** We have much to celebrate on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of LWCF. The programs and projects funded through this landmark law have delivered significant economic, environmental and health benefits to every county across the U.S. But we can and should do much more in the program's next 50 years.

The Administration strongly supports full, permanent funding for LWCF, which would finally realize the original intent of the program to invest a meaningful portion of the nation's mineral resource revenues into permanent conservation of lands and waters that are important to communities across the country. Since the program was created nearly 50 years ago, royalties have been paid into the fund far in excess of \$900 million per year (the level at which the program was authorized), but appropriations out of the fund for land and water conservation projects have been a fraction of that. As a result, Americans have not been receiving anywhere near the full benefit they have been promised from the fund.

If Congress passes full funding, we will see more grants to cities and states to support recreation, more close-to-home parks and trails that will reach communities underserved by public lands, easier access to our iconic public lands and more safe places for our children to get outside and play. It will facilitate



U.S. Department of the Interior/Andrew Pernick

Passionate in her defense of wildlife protection and other conservation efforts, Secretary Jewell is also cognizant of her department's role in providing for the energy needs of the United States — a tricky balance to maintain.

easements for access to hunting and fishing across private lands that are fully supported by landowners, and it will enable farmers and ranchers to keep working lands in their families, while supporting conservation objectives. Full funding would ensure that the nation gets the full return we are owed in exchange for allowing companies access to our offshore oil and gas reserves.

**Tulipane: NRPA launched PRORA-GIS, an online database and management tool that uses operational data to allow for the comparison of basic performance measures and GIS data to allow for spatial analysis of parks and facilities. Why is data such as this important?**

**Secretary Jewell:** First, I want to applaud NRPA for your work to establish this online tool that creates the opportunity for users to compare resources and understand trends affecting park and recreation departments.

This is exactly the kind of work that we are doing at Interior to elevate the nation's understanding of our resources on a landscape level. As the managing partner for the National Geospatial Platform, Interior can leverage GIS tools to turn vast amounts of data regarding our landscapes and resources into usable and understandable information for the American people.

By overlaying such critical inputs as habitat characteristics, risk vulnerabilities, mineral resources, energy potential, conservation priorities, cultural resources, water resources and property ownership, we can create reliable, transparent and science-based information that facilitates sound planning and management.

Landscape-level approaches to management hold the promise of a broader-based and more consistent consideration of both development

U.S. Department of the Interior



Prior to attending a roundtable discussion with leading scientists on climate change in the Pacific Northwest, Secretary Jewell trekked out into the backcountry of Mount Rainier National Park to see the effects of climate change firsthand. The park has experienced receding glaciers and other indicators of climate change in recent years, which impacts visitor access and recreational opportunities as well as ecological health.

and conservation, and supporting this work is one of my top priorities as Secretary.

**Few opportunities afford an individual the ability to make as big a difference to so many people as public service does.**

**Tulipane: What piece of advice would you give young professionals and leaders about how to combine their professional careers with public service?**

**Secretary Jewell:** Seize the opportunity to serve others. Volunteer service on our nation's public lands or in your local park is an excellent way to get started and get involved in your community. Once you've helped build a trail or cleaned up a riverbank, you'll never experience that place in the same way again. For those who may aspire to a career in public service, I applaud your decision. Few opportunities afford an individual the ability to make as big a difference to so many people as public service does. After a long and rewarding career in the private sector, I am grateful for the opportunity President Obama has given me to serve in his cabinet.

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