Press Release

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Park "Benefits" Sharing Plan a Money-Loser
Secret Royalty Deals Force Parks to Eat High Administrative Costs

Washington, DC — A pending scheme for profit-sharing with those who extract and make money from organisms taken from the national parks has crippling problems, according to a critique issued today by the Edmonds Institute, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), Alliance for Wild Rockies, International Center for Technology Assessment (ICTA), and Wilderness Watch. The "Benefits-Sharing" plan will cost the National Park Service (NPS) more money than it raises, prove utterly impractical to operate, and compromise both resource protection and ethical principles.

Under the plan, awaiting final approval from NPS Director Jon Jarvis, any of the nearly 400 national parks could enter into a "benefits-sharing agreement" with a "research collaborator" for monetary or in-kind compensation for any profits derived from park resources. In order to maximize revenue, the agency and its "preferred alternative B2" - hereafter referred to as B2 - allows those with whom NPS makes B2-like deals to keep royalty and/or other financial terms shielded from public or Congressional review.

Noting that NPS has other and better ways of gaining benefits for the parks, the objecting groups argue that the B2 plan, which has been in the works since 2001, has big drawbacks for national parks and the taxpayers, including –

- Meager financial returns more than offset by high administrative and technical assistance costs, all of which would come out of the Park Service's budget;

- Corporate revenues earmarked for the park that was home to the original resource and superintendents facing uncomfortable choices between protecting resources from exploitation and maximizing their particular park's income; and

- Public backlash and loss of NPS reputation over allowing the financial nitty-gritty of "benefits sharing" to be kept from public and Congressional view.

"This is a full employment plan for consultants on the taxpayer's dime," stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch. "Rather than supporting research or conservation programs, national parks will lose net revenue under this plan for a least a decade - and might never turn a profit."

Much of the interest in the "benefits sharing" plan revolves around "bioprospecting" – particularly research derived from microorganisms drawn from unique park settings, such as geysers. At Yellowstone National Park, a bioprospecting benefit-sharing agreement resulted in considerable consultant and administrative costs ($359,000 over two years, according to records obtained by PEER under the Freedom of Information Act). The cost of that deal exceeded the "mid-range" estimate for system-wide revenue that NPS projects from all such agreements after five years under its "preferred" B2 plan.

"At the start of all this, we wondered whether NPS plans were legal," said Beth Burrows, head of the Edmonds Institute, lead plaintiff in the suit that forced public examination of the original Yellowstone bioprospecting arrangement. "Now we wonder, whether they are wise or even smart. . .No one loves a business park."

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For more details, see attached copy of a letter to the Mr. Jon Jarvis, Director of the NPS.

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