NATURAL WONDERS

Program Helps Small Parks Grow

(NAPSA)—Millions of people visit the 385 American national parks every year. To help enrich the park experience for visitors, many of the parks provide services and features geared towards keeping people safe, educated and connected to the parks.

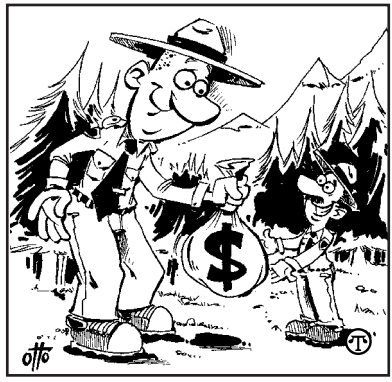
Destinations such as Yellowstone, Yosemite and Grand Canyon National Park cover costs of such programs through the entrance fees they collect. Many small parks, however, often collect little or no money at their gates, but still have high operating costs.

To help parks operate more efficiently, 137 national park sites participate in an experimental initiative called the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. The program lets parks use 80 percent of the revenue they collect for internal projects.

The remaining 20 percent helps support small parks that do not collect fees and funds park-wide programs such as Public Land Corps. In addition, the money is used for priority projects that involve restoration of landscapes, buildings and park infrastructure.

Fort Clatsop National Memorial, for example, is a small park that participates in the program. The site's main feature is a 46-year-old wooden replica fort of the Lewis and Clark Expedition's 1805-1806 winter encampment. Money raised by other parks and sent to Fort Clatsop have helped replace a leaky roof and repair water damage inside the fort. In addition, the park increased visitor services and information.

Similarly, Aztec Ruins National Monument receives funds through the Fee Demonstration Program. The park preserves and interprets an extensive Ancestral Pueblo collection, to which many Native American tribes maintain ties.



A number of smaller national parks use fees to spruce up services for the public.

Aztec Ruins used program monies to replace an outdated orientation film to include perspectives from modern tribes and archeologists.

The National Park Service says the program has been successful because 80 percent of the revenue stays in the park where it was collected. The result is often improvements that help parks provide better services.

Such was the case at Sitka National Historical Park, a small national park in Alaska that's participated in the project since its beginnings. "The program has been crucial for Sitka. Funds from the program let us replace a 20 year-old orientation video for park visitors. It's helped to improve their overall experience," says Mitzi Frank, chief of interpretation at Sitka NHP.

Today, the park uses program money to maintain and run its popular Russian Bishop's House. "We now offer visitors access seven days a week, eight hours a day, May through September," says Frank. "We wouldn't be able to provide this service without the Fee Demo program."

For more information, visit www.nps.gov.