

Find stories in park service's centennial celebration

BY DANIELLE TAYLOR

The National Park Service's 100th anniversary this year is the biggest event in a century for America's public lands, and although the actual date won't roll around until Aug. 25, the park service has planned a yearlong celebration to mark this milestone.

With 410 sites and more than 305 million visitors in 2015, there are countless ways to cover the park service and the lands it manages. Add in a centennial anniversary as a news hook and you could stay busy the rest of the year.

To begin, note that the objective of the anniversary celebration goes beyond just commemorating a landmark date.

"The official goal for the Centennial campaign is to 'connect with and create the next generation of park visitors, supporters and advocates,'" said Beth Stern, public affairs specialist for the National Park Service's Centennial office. "The next generation is the key thing — we're expanding on that concept to reach new audiences. We're looking at people from all backgrounds and asking how we connect with everyone. We want the parks to reflect everyone's story, to make everyone feel welcome and so they know they have a place."

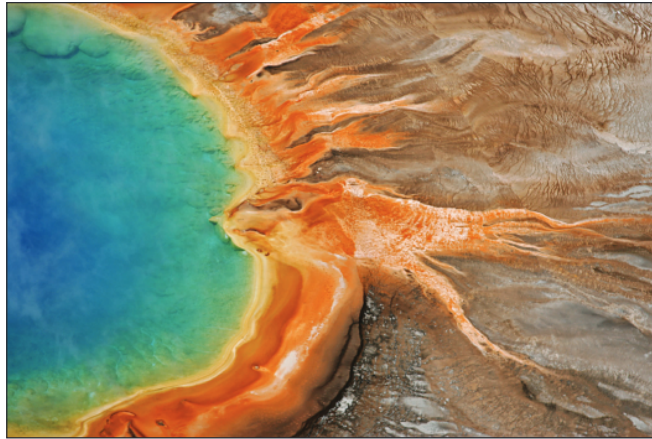
To help make that happen, the agency and the National Park Foundation, the official nonprofit partner of the National Park Service, developed "Find Your Park," a public awareness campaign that encourages Americans from all walks of life to engage with their public lands in ways that are most meaningful to them. It's important to remember "park" can mean many things, Stern said. While for some it means nature and recreation, for others it may mean places with cultural significance, historical importance or connections with their heritage.

An important part of the Centennial campaign is encouraging that broad range of uses so the parks remain relevant and supportive of American ideals now and into the future.

You can find stories in the different and more unique ways people connect to the parks. If you are looking for sources, the park service has been encouraging the hashtags #FindYourPark and #EncuentraTuParque for social media. Searching these could lead you to passionate park explorers, and using these hashtags is a great way to promote your stories.

When thinking of coverage, it's easy to immediately think of the big, well-known parks, like Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon. But don't forget about the smaller and lesser-known sites. These are places your readers and editors might not have explored or even heard about. They offer great untapped story fodder.

You can also use the park Centennial to cover public lands on a broader scale.



Grand Prismatic Spring is one of many attractions in Yellowstone National Park. This year the park service celebrates its 100th birthday and stories abound. Photo courtesy Jim Peaco and the National Park Service.

"Another big goal and message of this Centennial campaign is that we're encouraging people to explore all public lands, even beyond the National Park Service," Stern said. "There are lots of community-based programs that cultivate and encourage stewardship of all landscapes. A number of state park systems have joined the Find Your Park campaign, and the Centennial has been a great opportunity to increase awareness of all parks, not just those under the NPS umbrella."

If you haven't already, it's a good idea for outdoor media to develop relationships with the park managers and staff in your

area. The parks' public information officers can be vitally useful resources, and they can add you to email lists so you'll be on top of planned events and new developments at the parks as soon as they're announced. Also, many parks partner with friends groups that contribute with fundraising campaigns and volunteer efforts, and these can be excellent information sources as well. In addition, the National Park Foundation can also be a great source for information on programs that support the parks.

The parks wouldn't be able to do the work they do without the contributions of corporate partners and philanthropic donors. There's a newsmaker session at the OWAA conference this year that will cover the continuing problem of deferred maintenance on public lands, and federal dollars alone won't make up the deficit. There are stories in the collaborations of sponsors and the projects they help fund.

There's a lot to talk about in this Centennial year, and as you do so, go beyond the surface and consider the road that led to here as well as the future prospects for the parks. Weigh the future significance of current events affecting the public lands in your area, and be mindful of challenges and threats facing these valuable resources that provide opportunities for all Americans.

Most of all, encourage your readers, viewers and listeners to bring their kids to the parks. These are their public lands. By exposing kids to nature, history and the other opportunities offered by our parks, we can naturally engage and inspire the next generation of stewards and outdoor enthusiasts. ■



Danielle Taylor, founder of Adventure Editorial, is a freelance writer focusing on outdoor recreation, conservation, public lands and travel. In celebration of the National Park Service's Centennial, she's currently on a long-term road trip to visit all 59 national parks and as many other park service sites and public lands as possible, and she's actively looking for freelance writing, editing and partnership opportunities. To contact Taylor, or keep up with her journeys and work, follow her on Twitter @adventureedit and Facebook @adventureeditorial, and visit www.adventureeditorial.com.