

2018 BEACON AWARD WINNERS APPLY TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE RECREATION IN AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS

Washington, D.C. (June 8, 2018) - Five federal initiatives have won Beacon Awards in 2018 from the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) for outstanding successes in harnessing the power of technology to improve public recreation experiences and federal recreation program management. Winners were selected from efforts of multiple federal agencies. The Beacon Awards were created in 2005 to encourage federal agencies' experimentation with and use of new technologies and alternative communications channels to enhance the experiences of visitors to the nation's public lands. Nominations are made by the federal agencies and are judged against the award's criteria, which are:

- 1) Innovative use of technology for visitor services or recreation management;
- 2) Use of partnerships with for-profit and nonprofit organizations;
- 3) Efforts to share news of creative solutions within the agency; and
- 4) Community support for the work of this initiative.

The recipients of ORR's 2018 Beacon Awards were honored on Wednesday, May 30th, at a presentation at the U.S. Department of the Interior. The ceremony was moderated by Phil Ingrassia, ORR Treasurer and President of the RV Dealers Association; and Jim Kurth, Deputy Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Presentation of the 2018 Beacon Awards was livestreamed, and can be found [here](#). Photos are available upon request.

This year's recipients are:

***Peter Bonsall and Matt Robinson - National Park Service:
National Trails System GIS Network***

The National Trails System GIS Network was formed in 2011 and includes representatives from agencies that administer national trails, trail associations, and educational institutions. The network identifies and shares best practices to effectively and creatively portray the National System for recreation management as well as to inform the public. The network focuses on the GIS data available for 30 National Scenic and Historic Trails. Initial GIS data was inconsistent and for some trails, nonexistent. The approaching 50th anniversary of the National Trails System helped inspire action, along with growing demand for "one-stop-shopping" for national trail information. In February 2017, the network agreed to produce an interactive map of the National Trail System, using technology that would allow federal, state, and partner staff to post GIS data in a single location and simple format. NPS staffers Matt Robinson and Peter Bonsall coordinated the effort, providing GIS services to trails without in-house capability and created a new openness to sharing information. The map is now live and available, located on the Partnership for the National Trails System website. The map will continue to evolve. The next layer to be added is a story map portraying the significant events of each National Scenic and Historic Trail.

(more)

**2018 Beacon Awards
Add One**

***Gabe DeAlessio - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Midwest Regional Office:
Innovative Sign Inventory App***

Signs are critical communications resources for visitors to refuges and other public sites. Signs support wayfinding, safety, regulatory and interpretive information to people "24/7." Missing and deteriorated signs hamper these missions. Signs require significant time and money to develop, fabricate, install and maintain. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Midwest Regional Office understood that an online sign inventory would help refuge managers, maintenance workers, rangers and others know sign age, conditions and other significant information – even identify missing signs. A good inventory would also assist in forecasting timely replacement and updating. Previous sign inventories were very manpower intensive and inflexible, requiring physical compilations of photos, maps, recordings of dimensions, materials, and posted information. Gabriel DeAlessio led a team of visitor services staff and managers to develop a mobile app that can record nearly all these functions (you still need a tape measure!) at a cost of two minutes per sign. Using the app on a mobile device and attributes from drop-down menus, a GPS-tagged photo of the sign is taken and uploaded to the local station. The sign can be reviewed at the station, region, or national levels. Signs which don't get photographed during a site review can be investigated to correct loss, removal or relocation issues.

***Danielle Brigida - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Digital Strategy Manager***

Danielle Brigida leads social media strategy at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, delivering creative, engaging campaigns for more than a decade. She has pioneered agency use of social media platforms including Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to connect with news media influencers, wildlife recreationists, and nature novices, sharing the wonders of wildlife and the importance of conservation. She has tripled the agency's overall audience and aided and expanded use of social media by other agency communicators. The Service's social media across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram now serve more than 735,000 followers. She is leading efforts to improve customer service and leading the agency's migration to the Drupal Content Management System. She has helped the agency use digital storytelling tools, such as Medium.com and blogging. She champions communications through use of humor, the unusual and the spectacular. Danielle not only creates, but collaborates with her team and others to create thought-provoking content that unites people with diverse values, inspires the uninitiated to fall in love with wildlife and outdoor recreation, and promotes improved wildlife conservation by inspiring individual changes in behavior.

***U.S. Forest Service:
USFS Mobile App***

In 18 months, the "National Forest and Grasslands Explorer" Mobile App has become a well-loved and much-used tool by visitors. The app has been downloaded to Apple and Android devices by tens of thousands of visitors. The app is a "ranger in your pocket" offering tours, photos and videos on natural resources, history, and key information like trail maps, operating hours, how to get permits and passes and real-time notifications about trail closures, fire emergencies, and current events. The Cleveland National Forest used the app to announce trail closures for high heat as well as during fire emergencies. These actions probably saved tens of thousands of taxpayer dollars, and likely lives. Currently, 53 of 114 National Forest and Grassland units participate: 27 are now operating, with 26 more in development. Downloaded maps are GPS-enabled and will show the visitor's location even when off-line, which is great for orienting and safety. The app is synced with the Recreation Information Database (RIDB), and updates are automatic. The app also meets the federal government's accessibility standards. **YourPassNow** is being integrated into the app, with two pilot sites up and links planned to www.Recreation.gov. This will make pass compliance easy and will likely save thousands of hours for visitors and agency staff.

(more)

**2018 Beacon Awards
Add Two**

***NIC, Inc. and the National Park Service:
Senior Pass Fulfillment***

The National Park Service (NPS) and NIC, a leading provider of digital government services, embarked on a pilot effort to sell daily and annual passes online in 2016. These efforts have proven popular and have expanded far beyond Acadia National Park and other initial sites. The cooperative efforts were helpful when demand for the National Parks & Federal Recreational Lands Lifetime Senior Pass surged after the Congress raised the fee from \$10 to \$80 under the NPS Centennial Act, effective in August 2017. Media and organizations reaching millions of Americans helped boost demand, overwhelming traditional sales channels. Federal fee collection sites ran out of senior passes, and the online site operated by the federal government quickly reached a backlog of many months. NPS invited NIC assistance in late June. In weeks, NIC created and made fully operational a system able to take large numbers of senior pass orders online, confirm buyer eligibility (only U.S. citizens and permanent residents aged 62 or older), produce the physical passes and fulfill the purchases. NIC sold and delivered 651,342 senior passes in 2017 – compared to total senior pass sales of 33,000 in 2016 through all channels. NPS/NIC efforts continue to expand. Visitors to a growing number of parks can buy entrance passes from **YourPassNow.com** at no additional cost. Passes are emailed for immediate use, can be stored on smart devices or printed for future use.

Please visit www.RecreationRoundtable.org for more information on the coalition's activities and membership.

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