

# ASLA ADVOCACY DAY

## Talking Points for Congressional Meetings

### Introduction

- Since 1899, ASLA has served as the primary voice of the landscape architecture profession. Today, ASLA members lead the design, planning, and analysis of our natural and built environments in communities across the nation.
- As the economy continues to rebound, communities want policies that will make them more resilient – economically, physically, and socially.
- Landscape architects have the training and experience to plan and design resilient communities, with multimodal transportation choices, community infrastructure projects like parks and recreational facilities, stormwater management projects, and more. Integrated vegetation management plays a critical role in making infrastructure projects more resilient, while also providing other benefits.
- ASLA urges Congress to develop and support legislative policies to rebuild America's infrastructure; protect our natural, cultural, and historic resources; and expose millions of visitors to our iconic national parks.

### Issue: Designing Resilient Streets to Create a Transportation Network for the 21st Century

Key Ask: Urge Congress to **oppose** any legislation or amendments to limit vegetation management in transportation projects.

- Currently, legislation—H.R. 2606, the Roads Not Roses Act—pending in Congress would eliminate funding for green infrastructure in all federal transportation projects. In the past, this legislation has been offered as an amendment to the House fiscal year 2015 Transportation, Housing and Urban Affairs Appropriations bill and during consideration of the House surface transportation bill. Each time, the amendments failed to pass.
- Integrated vegetation management (IVM) projects, also known as green infrastructure, are **NOT** highway beautification projects. Many highways, roads, and streets are purposefully designed using green infrastructure to stabilize the project and prevent erosion. Eliminating vegetation management, a core part of the project design, from these types of

transportation projects could leave them unstable and unsafe for use.

- Today, many communities are plagued by severe flooding events. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), there are about 15,000 severe thunderstorms and flooding events annually in the United States. Integrated vegetation management **helps prevent flooding** by absorbing stormwater instead of sending it into already flooded sewer systems.
- The Flint, Michigan, water catastrophe has exposed how our current water infrastructure is not adequately keeping our water supply safe. Green infrastructure on our highways, roads, and streets helps prevent contaminants from entering our drinking water by capturing it before it runs into our waterways.
- According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, \$106 billion is needed for water infrastructure repairs and upgrades. Replacing some of this gray infrastructure with green infrastructure projects can help reduce the staggering costs.
- Green infrastructure projects on rights-of-way **address invasive species concerns**. In many areas in the West, native plants help prevent wildfires and recharge groundwater in areas with drought concerns.
- Our nation's agricultural sector is being jeopardized by a dramatic decline in bee and other pollinator populations. With 17 million acres of roadsides suitable for pollinator habitats, green infrastructure on our rights-of-way is critical to **supporting a healthy pollinator population**. Sound vegetation management practices on our streets, roads, and highways that support pollinators go a long way in helping protect our nation's food supply.
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics released a report that shows "green jobs" accounted for **3.1 million jobs**, 2.4 percent of total employment in the United States. Investments in green infrastructure projects create and sustain skilled, well-paying, community-based jobs that cannot be outsourced. Green infrastructure projects require a range of professional services from design to supply, installation, and maintenance.
- Vegetation management projects also **help small businesses**. Unlike large highway projects, which are built by large construction firms, green infrastructure projects on highways and other rights-of-way are

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designed and built by small businesses, including landscape architecture firms and small supplier and contracting companies.

- Communities with well-vegetated streets and roads help local **economic development** by attracting commercial development and increasing property values.
- Today's fiscal concerns require that our streets, roads, and highways do more than just one thing. We need our transportation projects to provide multiple benefits, and integrated vegetation management helps achieve this goal. ASLA urges Congress to oppose any legislation or amendments to limit vegetation management in transportation projects.

## Issue: Invest in the Next Century of National Parks

Key Ask: Urge Congress to **authorize** and **fund** the National Park Service Centennial Challenge.

- Landscape architects have a deep connection to the National Park Service (NPS). The profession played a key role in the passage of the National Park Service Organic Act, legislation that established the NPS in 1916.
- This year marks the centennial of the National Park Service and its century of protecting our country's most important historical sites and most incredible landscapes.
- The NPS Centennial offers a historic chance to engage the next generation of park stewards and supporters, and for Congress to invest resources to preserve our natural and cultural treasures for a second century of success.
- In 2006, the Bush administration launched the National Parks Centennial Initiative, which includes the Centennial Challenge, a guaranteed federal fund to be matched with private contributions, dollar for dollar, from the philanthropic community.
- Over the last two years, Congress has provided \$25 million for the Centennial Challenge through annual appropriations, which successfully doubled that investment with private matches from foundations, universities, local governments, businesses, and others in the private sector.

- Investing in our national parks has a proven track record to jump-start economic development—every dollar invested in the NPS yields \$10 in economic activity. Also, NPS supports more than a quarter million private sector jobs, generates nearly \$17 billion in spending by national park visitors in gateway communities, and contributes \$32 billion to the nation's economy.
- Landscape architects have played an essential role in preserving our iconic recreational treasures by leading the design, conservation, and recreation efforts throughout the NPS.
- The Centennial Challenge has bipartisan support in Congress. Representatives Rob Bishop (UT) and Raul Grijalva (AZ) separately introduced the National Park Service Centennial Act. Both pieces of legislation will establish a Centennial Challenge Fund, which will maximize private donations to finance signature construction projects and address the NPS maintenance backlog. The House Natural Resources Committee is working to merge both bills into a bipartisan proposal for consideration by the full House.
- In the Senate, a bipartisan effort led by Senators Rob Portman (OH), Maria Cantwell (WA), and Lisa Murkowski (AK) to introduce NPS Centennial legislation is under way. The forthcoming proposal will include a Centennial Fund to enhance our national parks and their visitor programs for a second century.
- ASLA urges Congress to authorize and fund the NPS Centennial Challenge, which will build on the recent federal investments to national parks, help protect park assets, enhance facilities and services, address the maintenance backlog, and offer a new level of excellence for park visitors throughout the country.

## Conclusion:

- We'd like to invite you to visit a landscape architecture site or project back home to show you how we are making an impact in our communities. Which staff member in your district or state office would be the best person to contact for events?
- Please contact us if you have any questions on the discussed policy areas or if we can serve as a resource on a particular issue. Thank You.