



Media Advisory for
September 26, 2009

Contact: Patricia Charles, 301-887-1060 x111
patricia@kelleycampaigns.com

Beauty and cultural history of capital city's monuments to be preserved on National Public Lands Day, largest annual outdoor volunteer event in U.S.

Volunteers to convene Saturday, September 26, at Lincoln Memorial, National Mall's riverfront steps and President's Park, among other locations across D.C. metro area

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On Saturday, September 26, hundreds of volunteers will gather at several sites around the metro region to improve and help renovate some of the area's most treasured public spaces on National Public Lands Day, the largest annual outdoor volunteer activity in the country.

At one project, volunteers will reset Belgium blocks and prune and weed foliage surrounding the "Watergate Steps," once known as the ceremonial gateway to the city's monuments. The steps lead from the Potomac River up to the Lincoln Memorial and the rest of the National Mall.

The Watergate Steps and a barge anchored on the riverside served as an open-air amphitheater for concerts along the Potomac for 30 years, starting during the Great Depression in 1935.

In 1939, the location became known as a "stronghold for racial justice," after Marian Anderson performed there on Easter Sunday, shortly after the Daughters of the American Revolution banned the African-American opera singer's appearance at Constitution Hall.

The location's cultural landmark status led to its being featured in a major Hollywood movie, the 1958 romantic comedy, "Houseboat," starring Cary Grant and Sophia Loren.

To commemorate this history, park rangers will present a public program at noon on the District side of Memorial Bridge, including the past stories of the Watergate Steps and the nearby "Arts of War" statues that flank the bridge. Lunch will be provided for pre-registered volunteers by Toyota Motor Sales, USA, Inc, lead sponsor of National Public Lands Day.

Other activities in the capital on National Public Lands Day include removing invasive plants and weeds, picking up debris and mulching vegetation beds and trees at other locations around the National Mall and other memorial parks. A caravan of dignitaries will leave from the activities on the Mall at 10 a.m. to travel to Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens, on District's northeastern border with Maryland, for further remarks and a tour of the site's rare water lilies and lotus plants.

At President's Park, which encompasses the White House, a visitor center, Lafayette Park and The Ellipse, volunteers will work with rangers to assess the condition of memorials and statues and clean historic structures and sashes.

"Volunteering on National Public Lands Day is a great way to celebrate our freedom and patriotism," said Robb Hampton, Program Director of National Public Lands Day. "And with 25

million visitors coming here every year to enjoy the capital area, these memorials and parks can really use the help.”

The volunteers in the District will join an expected 130,000 participants of National Public Lands Day providing an estimated \$14 million of labor at over 2,100 projects across the country. National Public Lands Day was established in 1994 to carry on the legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a program to revive communities and create opportunities for employment following the Great Depression. The event is a program of the National Environmental Education Foundation.

Other events in the nearby Washington D.C. region include removing lotus plants from the Anacostia River at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, trail maintenance at Kingman and Heritage Islands, and weeding of stilt grass and non-native plants around Rock Creek Nature Center. More information about the Anacostia River activities may be seen in a video at <http://www.publiclandsday.org/involved/index.htm>.

As part of the celebration, free entrance will be granted to all 391 National Parks on Saturday, September 26. There will also be free public screenings of the new Ken Burns documentary film, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, in some parks across the country including one on The Ellipse at 7 p.m. that evening. The film will be publicly released the next day.

Media interested in attending National Public Lands Day events on the National Mall should RSVP to Patricia Charles at (301) 887-1060 x111, and check in at the South Lincoln Guest Services Food Kiosk, located at Daniel French Dr. and Independence Ave. SW. The Watergate Steps projects will be organized at the west entrance to the Lincoln Memorial, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

For more information about National Public Lands Day, and to locate a nearby project in which to participate, please visit www.publiclandsday.org.

###

The National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) provides knowledge to trusted professionals who, with their credibility, amplify messages to national audiences to solve everyday environmental problems. Together, we generate lasting positive change. NEEF partners with professionals in health, education, media, business and public land management to promote daily actions for helping people protect and enjoy the environment. Through our primary programs—Classroom Earth, National Public Lands Day, National Environmental Education Week, Business and Environment, Earth Gauge® and Health & Environment—we offer Americans knowledge to live by. To learn more, call (202) 833-2933 or visit www.neefusa.org.