

**Ambassador Hartley's Remarks for**  
**the Opening of the Exhibition**  
**"National Parks: Taking Care of Nature"**  
**Tuesday, April 5, 2016, 6:00 p.m.**

The second great love of my life, after my wife Elizabeth, is the great outdoors. Whether in my youth, hiking in the Cascade mountains of Oregon in my youth, or working after university on a fishing boat off the coast of Alaska, or trekking in Nepal, or this past year, hiking Slovenia's Transversala and climbing Mt. Triglav, I've found that many of my life's greatest pleasures have come from being in nature.

That's one reason I was so pleased to be named as the U.S. Ambassador to Slovenia – it is no secret in Washington that your small country possesses immeasurable beauty – but it also means that tonight's exhibition feels deeply personal to me.

The United States is known for many things around the world ...but some have called our national parks "America's best idea." This year is the centennial of the U.S. National Parks System, and that anniversary inspired us to partner with National Geographic Slovenija and Tourism Ljubljana to organize this exhibition.

This exhibition is about a common love and respect between Slovenians and Americans for our countries' landscapes. I have been struck by how many Slovenians I've met who've told me of their experiences in Yellowstone, or Yosemite, or the Grand Canyon.

And of course, my friends and family back in the U.S. can't get me to stop talking about my enthusiasm for Slovenia's mountains. And I'm struck that Slovenians' relationship with nature transcends all differences: young and old, left and right.

I'm pleased to announce that this exhibition is the formal start to a larger series of events we will organize this summer to celebrate our national parks and our shared love of nature.

In 1864, the U.S. Congress donated Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove to California for preservation as a state park. Eight years later, in 1872, Congress reserved the spectacular Yellowstone country in the Wyoming and Montana territories "as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." And thus began my nation's love affair with its parks.

Our 26th President, Theodore Roosevelt, known in the U.S. as our conservationist president, expanded on this fledgling effort, setting aside 230 million acres (nearly 100 million hectares) of public lands and creating the core of the park system which would, in 1916, come under the care of the National Park Service. "We have fallen heirs to the most glorious heritage a people ever received," he said, "and each one must do his part if we wish to show that the nation is worthy of its good fortune."

His words were prescient – and we hear the echo of those words today, as policymakers and political leaders grapple to address the tremendous environmental challenges we face first

and foremost from climate change, and strive to protect our planet.

So I welcome you to join us in exploring the beauty of Slovenia's Triglav National Park and the fifty nine American national parks represented here. We hope the exhibition inspires you to celebrate nature's treasures and think about how we can help protect our natural environment.

Before I conclude I would just like quickly to thank our friends and partners at National Geographic Slovenija, and to congratulate them on their ten year anniversary. And of course, thank you to Deputy Mayor Crnek and the City of Ljubljana, which is a trailblazer in environmental sustainability efforts, particularly this year, as the European Green Capital.

President Roosevelt said, after camping in Yosemite National Park, "It was like lying in a great solemn cathedral, far vaster and more beautiful than any built by the hand of man." I hope you enjoy the exhibition and the cathedrals of nature it so beautifully showcases.

Thank you.