



MEDIA RELEASE

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Organizations Call on Federal Agencies to Present America the Beautiful National Park Passes to New Citizens at Swearing-In Ceremonies as a “Welcome to America Gift”

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Motivated by a desire to ensure greater access to nature for underrepresented communities of color, Eastern California environmental nonprofit Friends of the Inyo, together with social and environmental justice nonprofit GreenLatinos, which counts on an extensive partner network throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico, today, during National Parks Week, delivered a sign-on letter to Federal Agencies asking for their consideration in awarding America the Beautiful National Parks & Recreational Lands Passes to new naturalized U.S. citizens at swearing in ceremonies as a “Welcome to America” gift.

The letter, which has been signed by close to 70 organizations, including many serving the Eastern Sierra, also asks agencies to consider the barrier that cashless entry to National Parks and other recreational sites poses for unbanked individuals at a time when more and more federal

recreational lands are requiring that payment of entry, camping reservation and other fees take place only via debit or credit card, or, in some cases, via digital wallet (Google Pay, Apple Pay, etc.).

Addressed to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; the U.S. Department of Interior, which oversees the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management; and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees the U.S. Forest Service, the letter, whose entire text, including the list of signatories, can be viewed at [FriendsoftheInyo.org/Blog](https://www.friendsoftheinyo.org/blog), also encourages agencies to collaborate in hosting more swearing in ceremonies for naturalized citizens in our beautiful public land recreation sites—the best America has to offer.

Several studies cited in the sign-on letter have found that, besides the cashless entry challenge mentioned above, underrepresented communities of color, including immigrant communities, encounter numerous barriers when attempting to access National Parks and other recreational lands including:

- **Distance**, as National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands are often several hours away from urban areas, where people of color are largely concentrated;
- **Cost**, as it can be expensive to recreate in nature;
- **Lack of familiarity** with the National Park System and outdoor recreation activities and opportunities; and
- **Technology**, as more and more National Parks, National Forests and BLM lands are requiring recreationists to make reservations ahead of their planned visit, often using difficult-to-navigate, English-only websites or apps.

“Giving a National Park Pass at swearing in ceremonies to our new fellow citizens as a ‘Welcome to America’ gift would help address a lot of these issues in one feel-good fell swoop,” said Friends of the Inyo’s Communications and Philanthropy Director Louis Medina, the originator of the National Parks Pass initiative, who is himself a naturalized U.S. citizen. “It would make them feel really welcomed by their adoptive homeland and, especially if presented at an outdoor ceremony in one of our beautiful public lands, would instill an even greater sense of patriotism and gratitude among those taking the citizenship oath, and incentivize them to explore our beautiful public landscapes and become more engaged in their long-term conservation and protection.”

To become a naturalized citizen, an immigrant must have resided legally in the U.S. for at least five years (three years if married to a U.S. citizen), paid taxes, followed U.S. laws, kept their immigration status up to date, passed a U.S. history and English language test, and paid up to \$760 in application fees.

Olivia Juarez, Public Land Program Director at GreenLatinos, remarked, “National parks and other federal recreational lands represent some of the most sacred and precious places in America. Every American and their loved ones deserve to know and cherish these places. I can imagine how much more welcomed and encouraged my family would have felt to know our national parks, monuments, and forests if my dad was presented an America the Beautiful Pass when he became

a citizen. A pathway to citizenship should include a pathway to public lands and waters for the hundreds of thousands of immigrants who take the Oath of Allegiance annually.”

GreenLatinos is keeping open a petition indefinitely for individuals to show their support for this initiative. So far, more than 260 individuals have signed this petition, which can be accessed via the Action Alert on the home page of Friends of the Inyo’s website, FriendsoftheInyo.org.

About Friends of the Inyo and GreenLatinos

Founded in 1986, Friends of the Inyo is a regional environmental nonprofit based in Bishop, California. FOI’s coverage area in the state’s Eastern Sierra Nevada region extends throughout Inyo and Mono Counties and the Inyo, Humboldt-Toiyabe and Sierra National Forests. FOI advocates for healthy local ecosystems and species; partners with volunteers and federal land management agencies in stewardship projects to mitigate the impacts of recreation; and works to ensure that previously under- or non-represented voices are invited to the conservation discussion, heard, respected, and valued. FOI’s mission is to protect and care for the land and water of the Eastern Sierra.

GreenLatinos (NOTE: GreenLatinos is ONE WORD) is a national nonprofit of Latino leaders confronting national and local environmental issues in the Latino community. GreenLatinos envisions a healthy and equitable society where communities of color are liberated from disproportionate environmental burdens, free to breathe fresh air, drink pure water, access clean transportation and enjoy our majestic public lands, ocean, and waters.

(Note: See photos and suggested captions attached)

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