

## MARSTEL-DAY DEVELOPS IMPACT INVESTING FRAMEWORK FOR NATIONAL PARKS INFRASTRUCTURE

*Climate change and habitat loss take heavy toll on federal landscapes; environmental consultancy sees ample opportunities to attract impact oriented investors.*

*Marstel-Day is an environmental consultancy established in 2002 to provide expertise to public and private sector organizations in the interrelated areas of climate, habitat, open space, water, resilient infrastructure/public-private partnerships and investment strategies, energy, land use and other natural resource conservation issues. Since our inception 16 years ago, we've grown our force from one person to over 100, comprised of a mix of full time and part time staff, staff associates, consultants and more. And, to our original office in the Alexandria, VA area we've added a principal office in Fredericksburg, VA and a west coast office in Oceanside, CA.*

*Rebecca R. Rubin is Marstel-Day's founder, President and CEO. She also serves as Chairman of the Board for the National Wildlife Refuge Association, which protects 850+ million acres of America's wildlife heritage. She was named by President Obama as a White House Champion of Change for Community Resilience and previously served (2014-2018) on the Commonwealth of Virginia's State Air Pollution Control Board by appointment of the Governor.*

### **EBJ: What key milestones has Marstel-Day reached over the past two years?**

Rubin: We were an early and vocal contributor to the necessity of preserving large landscapes, particularly in the federal space, given the twin threats of climate change and habitat devastation. Seeing some of the programs that we helped pioneer – such as DoD's encroachment partnering program, which has helped both to preserve habitat and sustain the mission – really come to fruition has been very meaningful to us.

And, while we are probably best recognized for our work in the federal space, our staff also strives to have an impact at a more local and regional level. So, it was gratifying for us to help the Sonoran Institute develop a Resilient Cities Toolkit providing a step by step framework for addressing climate related impacts such as increased wildfire, drought, excessive heat, urban heat islands, and other extreme weather events. It's available as a free download at <https://sonoraninstitute.org/resource/resilient-communities-starter-kit/>.

### **EBJ: What are the main problems parks face when it comes to funding?**

Rubin: NPS manages the largest federal facilities and infrastructure inventory outside of the Department of Defense, but its facilities management challenges are different from typical military installations or civilian federal agencies that operate concentrated facilities and manage large public works support programs. Most park units have very small facilities staffs, and large road networks and utility systems can often extend many miles across difficult terrain. The largest funding challenges that the National Park Service (NPS) faces are: to reduce its \$11.6 billion backlog in deferred maintenance projects; provide adequate operations and maintenance funds to prevent this backlog from growing; and ensure that future park facilities and infrastructure funding is adequate to accommodate the increasing numbers of visitors to the National Park System.

### **EBJ: Traditionally, how are our parks funded?**

Rubin: As with other federal agencies, most NPS funding is provided through annual congressional appropriations. The NPS budget consists of annual operations, maintenance, and support costs and the current year funding component of the Five Year Maintenance and Capital Improvements Plan, which covers construction and major maintenance projects at national park units. However, specific statutes authorize NPS to collect visitors' fees and to use them for facilities projects that directly enhance visitors' park experiences, such as trails and interpretation centers. NPS also obtains project funding from the National Park Foundation (NPF), a Congressionally-chartered non-profit organization that is authorized to receive tax-deductible charitable donations from private parties to support the National Park Service. NPF works closely with NPS leadership to identify shared priorities and provides funding in the form of grants and program support in these areas.

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### **EBJ: Tell us about the transformational impact investing framework you have created for National Park infrastructure.**

Rubin: In a nutshell, National Parks already attract a good deal of philanthropy. What's different here is exploring the potential to add a suite of impact-oriented investing to the mix and to apply that mix across a potentially wide range of applications – housing, roads, utilities and other

backlogged infrastructure. There is no shortage of opportunities: NPS holdings include approximately 84.4 million acres of land; four million acres of water; 43,000 miles of shoreline; and 21,000 buildings. This could attract a varied mix of entities: Corporations and their foundations; public and private pension funds; commercial funds; special funds that support mission investing; family funds; community foundations; and private individuals are all eligible. And while there is no cookie cutter formula for a rate of return, in general, impact-oriented investors are willing to accept a below-market rate of return in exchange for social or environmental impact. Public-private partnerships may also be a key ingredient in bringing investment potential forward.

**EBJ: How is climate change affecting national parks?**

Rubin: Climate change is taking a heavy toll across all federal landscapes – not just National Parks. Iconic parks such as Glacier Bay National Park (where the Muir Glacier has retreated about 31 miles), Yellowstone (where a bark beetle infestation has wiped out more than one million acres of white-bark pine trees) and Joshua Tree (where the trees require cool winters and freezing temperatures to set seeds) tend to grab headlines, but across the federal landscape as a whole, sea level rise, wildland fire, warming temperatures (to name just a few key effects) are forcing species migrations and contrib-

uting to the danger of species extinction, as well as forcing more conflicts to occur at the human-wildlife interface.

**EBJ: What other unique or outstanding projects are being performed by Marstel-Day today?**

Rubin: We've been delighted to support the non-profit Connecticut Fund for the Environment/Save The Sound in its quest to preserve ecologically rich Plum Island, NY – currently home to a federal animal disease research center – and its waters, which include rocky shorelines and sandy beaches, wetlands and grasslands, upland shrub and forest; a significant seal haul-out and over 200 species of birds including two federally endangered species; and historic Fort Terry and the Plum Island Lighthouse. We've been helping CFE/Save the Sound develop initial conservation scenarios, pathways, and proposed outcomes with the goals of permanent conservation, habitat protection, and integrated compatible reuse of the island's existing infrastructure, and we recently helped conduct a stakeholder session to define scenarios and ideas for the island's reuse.

We also partnered with Virginia Community Food Connections (VCFC) and dozens of food security partners to understand and map the scope of hunger in the George Washington region of Virginia, where 11.2% of the population lacks access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food.

The result is the George Washington Region Food Security Story Map <https://bit.ly/2M89ZDB>, an interactive multi-media website created by Marstel-Day in support of efforts by VCFC and many partners to promote food security in the region. □

**Marstel-Day Creates Transformational Impact Investment Framework and Financing Options for National Park Infrastructure**

Marstel-Day is working collaboratively with the National Park Foundation (NPF) and National Park Service (NPS) to identify projects that demonstrate park infrastructure priorities, leverage public-private partnerships, attract outside investment, enhance long-term operational efficiency and create cost savings for NPS. National Park holdings include approximately 84.4 million acres of land; four million acres of water; 43,000 miles of shoreline; and 21,000 buildings. Robust park infrastructure is a mission-critical requirement for meeting increasing visitor demand and enhancing the quality of the visitor experience in NPS's next century of park management and stewardship, yet the NPS faces over an \$11 billion backlog in deferred maintenance. In 2018, this project explored infrastructure financing opportunities including both built and natural infrastructure and concluded with a policy and legal framework, as well as three NPS demonstration cases marrying high-impact projects with potential alternative financing models.

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