

Biden touts stimulus projects in Yellowstone visit

By MATT VOLZ - Associated Press Writer | Posted: Tuesday, July 27, 2010



Janie Osborne Vice President Joe Biden speaks at Yellowstone National Park's Madison Valley on Monday. Biden began a two-day tour highlighting stimulus projects in Yellowstone and Grand Canyon national parks by speaking to about 100 park workers, contractors and their families in Yellowstone. Listening from left are Yellowstone Superintendent Suzanne Lewis, project manager John Jarvis, and Ed Bennett, vice president of Anderson Construction. (Janie Osborne/AP)

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK -- Hundreds of stimulus-funded projects under way in national parks across the U.S. are long-overdue upgrades to the country's neglected "national jewels," Vice President Joe Biden said Monday.

Biden began a two-day tour highlighting Recovery Act projects in Yellowstone and Grand Canyon national parks by speaking to about 100 park workers, contractors and their families in the scenic Madison Valley, where the famous Madison River is formed in the shadow of 7,500-foot National Park Mountain.

He said some \$750 million in stimulus money has gone to about 800 national park projects, which have created jobs in tough times. But, he added, the projects would have been necessary even if the economy was good to protect the parks and reduce man's footprint there.

"For too long our nation's crown jewels have been neglected," Biden said. "Everything we're doing in this park is worthwhile and needed to be done anyway, whether times were good or bad."

So when the Recovery Act was passed in an effort to stabilize the economy, it included hundreds of national park upgrades and repairs that had been delayed or stalled, he said.

"We're beginning to polish once again these national jewels," he said.

As part of his tour with Jon Jarvis, head of the National Park Service, Biden stopped at one of the projects nearby, a \$4.7 million replacement of the 50-year-old Madison Wastewater Treatment Plant, which park workers say has contaminated the environment and degraded the Madison River's water quality.

The new plant will be more than double the capacity of the old and will work more efficiently, Biden said. It is an example of how the projects are supposed to reduce the human impacts so that future generations will also be inspired by the parks, he said.

"It's all about being able to see this beauty without marring this beauty," he said.

There are 14 different stimulus-funded projects worth \$12.4 million under way or completed in Yellowstone, according to park officials. Among them:

- * Installation of a new hydroelectric generation plant near Mammoth Hot Springs, which would reduce annual greenhouse gas emissions and save the park \$80,000 a year in electricity bills.
- * Demolition and replacement of substandard trailers used for National Park Service employee housing.
- * Upgrades to the South Entrance Road and historic South Rim Drive along the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone.
- * Replacing the visitors' boardwalk around the geothermal features of Biscuit Basin.

Dustin Seme, a radio technician for the National Park Service who waited for two hours to hear Biden speak, said work this summer has been booming, keeping contractors from nearby areas like Bozeman, Mont., with jobs.

"When you look at the infrastructure of a lot of the Park Service, it's way outdated, falling down. I think it is very overdue," Seme said.

Biden said he planned to spend the rest of Monday touring Yellowstone with his 16-year-old granddaughter, Naomi. He is to speak from the Grand Canyon's South Rim today.