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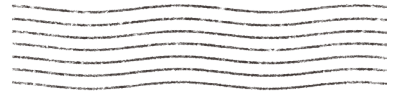
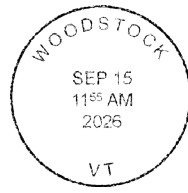
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LETTER FROM WOODSTOCK



Refoundation Resolve

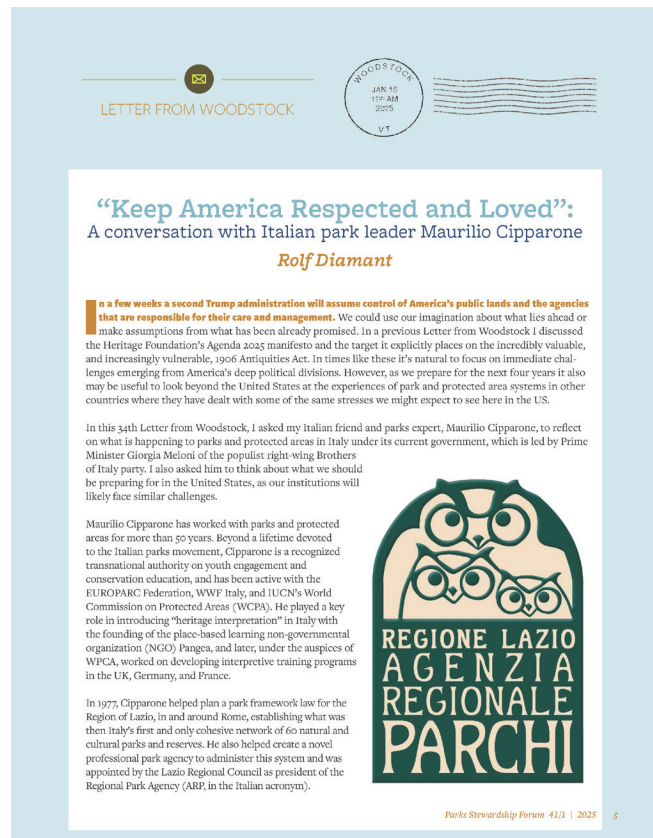
ROLF DIAMANT

The earliest mention of the word “Refoundation” in *Parks Stewardship Forum* can be traced back to my January 2025 interview with Italian park advocate Maurilio Cipparone in a Letter from Woodstock entitled “Keep America Respected and Loved.”

This issue of the *Forum* appeared just as the second Trump administration was taking power.¹ Most of Cipparone’s interview dealt with the neglect and politicization of Italy’s once-ascendant system of national parks and protected areas. However, he was also clearly worried that the US national parks were entering “uncharted territory” with the destructive empowerment of Elon Musk and his DOGE agents.

Cipparone ended the interview by offering a few prescient observations on the future of parks and protected areas on both sides of the Atlantic. Referencing his own government’s promises to revitalize Italian parks damaged by years of political manipulation and neglect, Cipparone said, “I want to be optimistic.... However, I am also realistic. If nothing comes from this, looking down the road, no doubt the whole system of protected areas in Italy will need a refoundation. *I sincerely hope this will not be necessary in the United States*” [emphasis added]. The Letter concluded with me saying that “no public institution, even our long-established US national park system, can survive intact without strong public support—and the will to continually resist efforts aimed at the system’s diminution and dissolution.”

An accelerating campaign of “diminution and dissolution” of public lands and waters was launched by the second Trump administration almost immediately. My follow-up Letter from Woodstock, in the May 2025 issue of *Parks Stewardship Forum*, was simply titled “Refoundation.”² In that Letter I chronicled the hollowing out and deconstruction of key government functions that traditionally safeguarded the stewardship of the public estate, calling these actions “the most far-reaching acts of civic vandalism in the nation’s history.” Recognizing that “even if the worst excesses are prevented” I predicted that “the human debris field already left in the administration’s wake may take a very long time to set right.” I then broadly defined the contours of a refoundation:



LETTER FROM WOODSTOCK

Humanities in Exile

ROLF DIAMANT

When I was superintendent of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, I was invited to a Boston event, where I received, on behalf of the park, an award from the Green Building Council (GBC). We had recently completed our education-oriented Forest Center, built with third-party (Forest Stewardship Council) certified wood from the park's historic managed forest. Our new building had been given GBC's highest LEED rating, "Platinum," and we were quite proud of and honored by this recognition. At some point during the evening, one of the GBC organizers confessed to me that his organization was somewhat ambivalent about holding such award ceremonies. What was most important about the certification ranking system, from GBC's perspective, he explained, was not just the recognition of the highest achievers—those in the vanguard of change. Rather, GBC defined success, in relation to its mission, by the extent to which the organization was able to encourage gradual improvement in green construction across the board, particularly with those builders who often lagged far behind the curve. GBC's primary objective was incentivizing incremental positive changes in the building practices of those who were not part of a vanguard of early adopters, but who were encouraged nevertheless to do better. I came away from the evening with a nice plaque for the park, but more importantly, I gained a new appreciation for GBC's strategy to reach its desired outcomes—its "theory of change."

I recall this conversation, as I sit down to write this thirty-seventh Letter from Woodstock, reflecting on the turbulent life of one of the most ambitious partnership programs in the history of the US National Park System, the National

Ballot Blocked Episode 1: Service, Sacrifice, and Citizenship



An African American soldier in Union Army uniform stands with his family for a photograph. When war broke out, African American men served in the United States Colored Troops (USCT) during the Civil War.

To learn more about this wartime service, we interviewed Dr. Holly A. Petersen, Jr. in this forthcoming book, *The Freedom's Call*, a volume co-edited with the University of Georgia Press. Dr. Petersen's scholarship is focused on the African American living in Pennsylvania between about 1850 and 1880. It examines the toll that enslavement in the Union Army took on soldiers and their families. His work also highlights the ways that Black women claimed civil and political rights, despite being denied access to the ballot.

Ballot Blocked Episode 1: Service, Sacrifice, and Citizenship

0:00 / 22:47



Ballot Blocked Podcast

"Ballot Blocked" Mellon Humanities Fellowship Program podcast

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To "refund" something means to lay its foundations anew—not simply restore the status quo. The extent of the damage being done, and the rapidity with which it has been accomplished, have exposed critical vulnerabilities.

Such vulnerabilities can only be fixed by a thoroughgoing reconsideration of the laws and funding mechanisms that govern our public lands and waters, followed by (and the metaphor is especially apt) concrete actions—a process that we in the George Wright Society are now referring to as "Refoundation" with a capital "R."

It was soon apparent that Refoundation meant more than statutory or budget reforms. In my January 2026 Letter from Woodstock, "Humanities in Exile," addressing the beleaguered National Park Service (NPS) Mellon Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, I revisited Refoundation in the context of incorporating humanities knowledge and expertise into the stewardship of public lands and waters.³ Centering humanities scholarship in this stewardship mission, I proposed, "is a refoundation undertaking of the highest importance."

There are moral and ethical dimensions to Refoundation as well. The May 2026 Letter from Woodstock, "Stress

LETTER FROM WOODSTOCK

STRESS TEST

How the National Park Service Responded to a Directive to Erase History and Silence Science

Rolf Diamant

In the spring of 2025, Department of Interior (DOI) Secretary Doug Burgum issued Secretarial Order (SO) 3431, "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History." This Orwellian-titled directive gave all DOI land management bureaus, including the National Park Service (NPS), 90 days to "conduct a review of all public monuments, memorials, statues, markers, or similar properties on lands within its jurisdiction to identify whether any such properties contain images, descriptions, depictions, messages, narratives or other information (content) that inappropriately disparages Americans past or living (including persons living in colonial times), or, with respect to content describing natural features, that emphasizes matters unrelated to the beauty, abundance, or grandeur of said natural feature."

One might think with all the professional editors at DOI, the secretary might have gotten help with this maladroitness and painfully longwinded edict, but perhaps most of them had already been fired. In any case, Burgum's SO 3431 repeated almost word for word Executive Order (EO) 14553 (aimed at both NPS and the Smithsonian Institution) issued by President Trump several months earlier.

Implementation of the SO in the National Park System has been met with a chorus of public protest, congressional criticism, and several lawsuits. Much has been written and said about how the SO flouts up-to-date scholarship and science, existing statutes, established administrative procedures, and long-standing relationships and agreements with partners and communities. Less commented upon—but perhaps, ultimately, the most consequential impact—

2027: Emergence from a slide deck that was sent to the field instructing all parks to report "inappropriate content" as defined by EO 14553 and SO 3431. 2028: The administration ordered every park to post signs with a QR code encouraging visitors to send in examples. The signs were widely denied and the effort largely halted.

5.b. Review for Inappropriate Content

- All public-facing content for "images, descriptions, depictions, messages, narratives or other information (content) that:
 - inappropriately disparages Americans past or living (including persons living in colonial times), or
 - with respect to content describing natural features, that emphasizes matters unrelated to the beauty, abundance, or grandeur of said natural feature."
- Response Deadline: July 15, 2025



Wilcox Creek National Battlefield

belongs to the American people, and the National Park Service wants your feedback. Please let us know if you have identified (1) any areas that need repair; (2) any services that need improvement; or (3) any signs or other information that are negative about either past or living Americans or that fail to emphasize the beauty, grandeur, and abundance of landscapes and other natural features.

To make a submission, please visit go.nps.gov/ep14253 or scan QR code.



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Test," looked at how a public work force, in this case NPS, behaves when subjected to relentless political pressure.⁴ In that Letter I specifically assessed the response of agency leadership in carrying out executive orders aimed at erasing history and suppressing science in the national parks. Suggesting something akin to a post-administration truth and reconciliation process, the Letter concluded that an honest reckoning and self-assessment, closely bound up in any Refoundation, would help employees and allies of public land agencies be better prepared—legally, ethically, and psychologically—should they again have to navigate trials of a similar magnitude.

It has become self-evident to many people that a considered rethinking and rebuilding of our national conservation framework has emerged as a complex but necessary task. We have seen new organizations arise, such as Ground Shift (<https://www.groundshift.us/>) and Next Interior (<https://www.nextinterior.org/home>), with this purpose specifically in mind. The essays on Refoundation in this special issue of *Parks Stewardship Forum* aim to advance and enlarge this essential conversation.

Rolf Diamant

ENDNOTES

1. “‘Keep America Respected and Loved’: A Conversation with Italian Park Leader Maurilio Cipparone,” Letter From Woodstock, *Parks Stewardship Forum*, Volume 41, Issue 1 (2025); <https://doi.org/10.5070/P5.41996>.
2. “Refoundation,” Letter from Woodstock, *Parks Stewardship Forum*, Volume 41, Issue 2 (2025); <https://doi.org/10.5070/P5.47428>.
3. “Humanities in Exile,” Letter from Woodstock, *Parks Stewardship Forum*, Volume 42, Issue 1 (2026); <https://doi.org/10.5070/P5.62072>.
4. “Stress Test: How the National Park Service Responded to a Directive to Erase History and Silence Science,” Letter from Woodstock, *Parks Stewardship Forum*, Volume 42, Issue 2 (2026); <https://doi.org/10.5070/P5.65805>.

The views expressed in Parks Stewardship Forum editorial columns are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the University of California, Berkeley or the George Wright Society.