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May 16, 2012 (FMS 1211)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**US AGENCIES JOIN FORCES WITH FIRST LADY AND DR. BIDEN TO HONOR AND SUPPORT
MILITARY FAMILIES**

*Department of the Interior-led effort will provide a Military Pass for Free Access to National Parks and Other
Public Lands*

(YORKTOWN, Va., May 15, 2012) – As part of the Joining Forces initiative to support our nation’s service members and their families, several U.S. government agencies will announce an annual pass to active duty service members and their dependents, granting free access to more than 2,000 national parks, wildlife refuges, national forests, and other public lands around the nation in the coming years.

“First Lady Michelle Obama and I started the Joining Forces initiative last year as a way to honor, recognize and support our veterans and military families,” said Dr. Jill Biden. “This effort is a wonderful way to give something back, giving our military men and women and their families a chance to reconnect with their loved ones, experience the beauty of this country, and simply have a little fun.”

Beginning on Armed Forces Day on May 19, active duty service men and women – Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and activated National Guard and Reserves – can obtain the new military version of the America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreation Lands Annual Pass. The pass will be accepted at National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Army Corps sites that charge entrance or standard amenity fees.

The initiative was announced today during a ceremony at Colonial National Historical Park in Yorktown, Virginia where Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, Director of the National Park Service Jonathan B. Jarvis and Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) Jo-Ellen Darcy distributed the first passes to one member from each of the military’s five branches.

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*South Carolina’s National Forests
Celebrating 75 Years of Restoring Forests, Protecting Water and Reducing Catastrophic Wildfires.*

2-2-2-2-2 US Agencies Join Forces to Honor and Support Military Families

“Our nation owes a debt of gratitude to our service men and -women who make great sacrifices and put their lives on the lines to protect our country and preserve our freedom,” Secretary Salazar said. “In recognition of their contributions and service, we are putting out a welcome mat for these brave men and women and their families at America’s most beautiful and storied sites.”

"Our country's iconic memorials, open spaces, and majestic landscapes provide inspiration for those serving in the military, especially those far from home," said Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, whose agency oversees national forests. "In appreciation for their service, we want to encourage these men and women and their families to visit and enjoy America's wondrous lands and waterways."

"Our soldiers, sailors and airmen give so much to this country. The federal family is honored to thank them for their service by offering them an opportunity to visit the natural resources that they defend," said Assistant Secretary Darcy. "The Corps is proud to be participating in the program by accepting the America the Beautiful Military Pass at Corps recreation facilities."

Military members and their dependents can pick up a pass at any national park or wildlife refuge that charges an entrance fee or other selected sites. Members must show a current, valid military identification card to obtain their pass. The pass is also available to dependents of active duty personnel. A list of participating sites is available [here](#).

Today’s announcement complements the [Joining Forces Initiative](#) launched by the First Lady and Dr. Biden, a national initiative to mobilize all sectors of society to give service members and families the opportunities and support they have earned. In just its first year, Joining Forces has rallied American businesses to hire tens of thousands of veterans and military spouses, schools have improved educational opportunities for military children, and the medical community has vowed better care for military families.

Where there are entrance fees, the pass covers the owner and accompanying passengers in a single, private, non-commercial vehicle at recreation sites that charge per vehicle. At sites where per-person entrance fees are charged, it covers the pass owner and three accompanying adults age 16 and older. There is no entry fee for children 15 and under.

While the pass is not available to veterans and retirees, many of these individuals are eligible for other discounted passes, such as the Senior Pass, granting lifetime access to U.S. citizens over 62 for \$10, and the Access Pass granting free lifetime access for permanently disabled U.S. citizens.

For more information on the pass, please visit: <http://store.usgs.gov/pass/index.html>.

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