

# POST-DISPATCH WASHINGTON BUREAU

## Park Service surprised by Arch plan

By **Philip Dine**

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08/31/2007

WASHINGTON — A veteran official with the National Park Service in St. Louis said Thursday that his agency was taken aback by the proposal from Mayor Francis Slay and former Sen. John Danforth to obtain part of the Gateway Arch grounds for a project to revamp the city's waterfront.

"We've been involved with a number of community planners over the past two years on the riverfront master plan, so it's surprising that one of the partners in the planning efforts has jumped out in front of everyone and come to this conclusion without consulting us," said Frank Mares, deputy superintendent of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial.

Mares said it was difficult to understand how the process had suddenly "jumped to needing the Arch grounds. ... We have been very active members of the riverfront master plan steering committee, and we have not met in a good number of months."

Peter Sortino, president of the Danforth Foundation, said there was little choice but to seek the use of part of the park grounds.

"Once we reached that conclusion, we informed the National Park Service at what we felt was the appropriate time," he said.

In Washington, Jude McCartin, a spokeswoman for Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., chairman of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, said that requests to change the use of public lands were "definitely not uncommon."

"So long as there's general support for it, these bills do get done," McCartin said. She said agreement by the National Park Service would also be important.

Mares said there was a distinction between lands belonging to the National Park Service and those belonging to other agencies.

It's a "very rare thing for parks to give up land," Mares said.