



Coalition To Protect America's National Parks Weekly National Park System Report

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Volume 1

Number 1

Introduction

This is the first edition of a new weekly report on news and developments in the national parks that is being produced by The Coalition To Protect America's National Parks. Member Bill Halainen, who edited the NPS Morning Report, will be preparing the entries; Coalition staff will be producing and disseminating them. The contents will be similar to the original Morning Report.

Although the initial audience consists of members of the Coalition, it's available to any and all via free membership in the Coalition. See the bottom of this issue for more information.

Maureen Finnerty
Chair, Executive Council

Incidents

Chiricahua NM

Man Who Assaulted Park Employee Found Guilty On Multiple Charges

Gil Gaxiola, 33, the man who attacked a Chiricahua park employee four years ago, has been found guilty of attempted first degree murder, armed robbery, three counts of aggravated assault, kidnapping, and motor vehicle theft.

The charges stemmed from an incident in August 2013 in which Gaxiola assaulted the employee, employing a large rock to inflict serious and life-threatening injuries. He then stole the employee's assigned work vehicle. The employee was airlifted to an area trauma center.

Special agents from the Service's Investigative Services Branch worked with detectives from the Cochise County Sheriff's Office on the case, which was prosecuted by the Cochise County Attorney's Office. Other agencies that significantly contributed to the detection, apprehension, and successful prosecution of Gaxiola include the FBI and the Arizona Department of Public Safety Laboratory. A sentencing hearing is expected to take place in April.

Source: Investigative Services Branch. Click on [this link](#) for more.

Grand Teton NP Roof Of Rockefeller Preserve Center Collapses

A heavy snow load appears to have caused the collapse of the front porch roof on the Laurance S. Rockefeller Preserve Center. The collapsed roof was discovered on the morning of March 23rd. The seasonally-used building is closed each winter from late September through late May and was unoccupied at the time of the porch roof collapse. The main building structure and its contents appear to be undamaged.

The collapsed porch roof was discovered by two park maintenance employees conducting a routine wintertime building check. Maintenance crews have been busy this winter clearing large amounts of snow off park buildings. Area measurements show the current snow water equivalent is around 150 percent of median, and recent rain and warm temperatures may have contributed to the weight of the snow on the roof.

The area immediate around the preserve center is closed to the public. Once the snow melts and the area dries, the porch roof will be safely demolished and a comprehensive building inspection conducted before opening the building for summer visitation.

Source: Press Release, Grand Teton NP. Click on [this link](#) for more.

Death Valley NP Fossil Footprints Stolen From Park

Rangers recently discovered that fossil footprints had been removed from the park. Trackways of mammals and birds were formed about three to five million years ago when the animals left footprints in a muddy area. Scientists visiting the area discovered that the fossils were missing during a recent visit and reported the theft to rangers.

Backpackers in the area were photographed and may have witnessed the crime or have information about those responsible. Investigators are offering up to \$1,000 for information leading to the identification, arrest, and conviction of those responsible.

Source: News 3, Las Vegas. Click on [this link](#) for more.

Yellowstone NP Three Sentenced For Myriad Violations In Four Parks, Two BLM Areas

Three defendants from the Canadian group High On Life appeared before a federal magistrate in the park on January 19th to face charges on a number of violations in Yellowstone and in other western national parks and BLM areas. Two other members of the group appeared in court last November.

Charles Gamble, Alexey Lyakh, and Justis Brown pleaded guilty to violations in Yellowstone National Park, Zion National Park, Death Valley National Park, and Mesa Verde National Park; Hamish Cross, Park Heuser pleaded guilty to violations in Yellowstone and Death Valley on November 1st.

Gamble and Lyakh pleaded guilty to charges in Yellowstone that included disorderly conduct by creating a hazardous condition and foot travel in a thermal area. They also pleaded guilty to charges for commercial photography without a permit in Zion; use of a drone in a closed area, riding a bike in wilderness, and commercial photography without a permit in Death Valley; and the use of a drone in a closed area in Mesa Verde.

Each was sentenced to serve seven days in jail and to pay more than \$2,000 in fines, plus restitution, community service payments, and fees. They'll be on probation for five years and banned from public lands. As a condition of their probation, they will remove all photographs and videos taken of public lands where they were charged with violations from their social media sites.

Brown pleaded guilty to charges in Yellowstone that included disorderly conduct by creating a hazardous condition and foot travel in a thermal area. He agreed to pay over \$3,500 in fines, restitution, community service payments, and fees. He too will be on probation for five years and will be banned from public lands.

On May 16, 2016, a concerned citizen contacted rangers in Yellowstone after seeing four individuals walking on Grand Prismatic Spring. During the course of the investigation, rangers identified the four involved in the violations in Yellowstone National Park and arrest warrants were issued. Through the use of social media and tips from the public, additional investigations were conducted about the group's activities on other federal lands.

The High On Life group was also issued violation notices by rangers at Zion, Death Valley, Yellowstone and Mesa Verde and at two BLM areas – Corona Arch and Bonneville Salt Flats.

Source: Morgan Warthin, Yellowstone NP. Click on [this link](#) for more.

Natural and Cultural Resources

Assateague Island NS

Climate Change Impacts: Rising Sea Levels, Stronger Storms Affecting Landscape

Assateague Island, which encompasses 37 miles along the coasts of Maryland and Virginia, is part of a chain of barrier islands stretching from Maine to Texas. Its landscape is constantly changing as natural coastal processes, storms, and sea-level rise continue to shape and move the island. Climate change will speed up the normal rate of change, and members of the park staff are working to prepare for its effects.

Scientists project that by 2040 the island will experience increases in temperature and extreme weather, a sea level rise of 3.5 to 9 inches, and altered precipitation patterns. These changes will magnify the normal coastal processes that shape the island. For example, rising sea levels will increase the rate of overwash – the washing of water and deposition of sand toward the island interior – that allows barrier islands to migrate or rollover westward. Intensifying storms and rising sea levels will create new breaches and inlets.

The park is taking several approaches to mitigating these ongoing impacts.

When natural areas are healthier, they are more resilient and can better withstand the stresses placed on them by climate change. Improving the ecological health of the island and its surrounding waters are therefore more important now than ever. Staff are focusing their efforts in three main areas:

- **Adapt:** As storms intensify and sea level rises, new park structures – such as light-weight changing rooms, passive-solar vault toilets, and a solar-powered shower at Tom's Cove, Virginia – have been designed so that they can be moved. Parking areas are made of crushed clam shells that reduce storm runoff and are more sustainable than asphalt.

- Restore: In the salt marsh, man-made ditches built in the 1930s are being filled in to reduce erosion. In addition, stands of phragmites, an invasive grass that displaces native species, are being moved to promote resiliency.
- Protect: Wire enclosures are placed around federally threatened species such as piping plover and sea beach amaranth. These enclosures protect species from predation and other disturbances.

Source: Assateague Island NS Briefing Statement. Click on [this link](#) for more.

Agency Management

Department of the Interior President Calls For 12% Decrease In DOI Funding

The President's 2018 Budget requests \$11.6 billion for DOI, a \$1.5 billion or 12 percent decrease from the 2017 annualized CR level.

The White House budget document highlights a dozen key points in DOI's budget, including an increase in funding for "environmentally responsible development of energy on public lands and offshore waters," elimination of "unnecessary, lower priority, or duplicative programs," and "streamlines operations while providing the necessary resources for DOI to continue to protect and conserve America's public lands."

Here are three points that directly affect the National Park Service, with the associated claims for their benefits:

- The budget "reduces funding for lower priority activities, such as new major acquisitions of Federal land." It "reduces land acquisition funding by more than \$120 million from the 2017 annualized CR level and would instead focus available discretionary funds on investing in, and maintaining, existing national parks, refuges and public lands."
- The budget "ensures that the National Park Service assets are preserved for future generations by increasing investment in deferred maintenance projects. It "reduces funds for other DOI construction and major maintenance programs, which can rely on existing resources for 2018."
- The document "budgets responsibly for wildland fire suppression expenses. It will "directly provide the full 10-year rolling average of suppression expenditures."

The 50-plus page budget document, entitled "America First: A Budget Blueprint To Make America Great Again," can be found at [this link](#) .

Source: DOI Press Release. Click on [this link](#) for more.

Park People, Friends and Allies

Washington Office

Passing Of Richard Powell

Career NPS ranger and retired chief of the WASO Division of Risk Management Richard “Dick” Powell passed away on February 18th. He worked for the Service for more than 47 years. A celebration of his life was held on April 8th in Falls Church, Virginia. Contributions may be made to Richard’s favorite charity, Doctors Without Borders.

A recently-published obituary offered homage to Powell:

“Richard was a true National Park Service icon. His service to the NPS spanned over 47 years, commencing at Yosemite National Park on July 1, 1965 as a seasonal law enforcement ranger, culminating with his retirement as the chief, WASO Office of Risk Management in September 2012. If he had not become seriously ill, the once avid cyclist, marathoner, and all around wellness enthusiast would likely still be working for the only organization he ever truly knew and loved.

“Richard became a part of American folklore during his tenure at Death Valley National Park in late 1969 when his investigation into arson of NPS property led him to the Barker Ranch, where he first encountered members of the Charles Manson gang. Unaware at the time of the horrific murders committed by the gang, Richard admittedly expressed how lucky he was to walk away from the ranch unscathed...twice. In October 1969, Richard and other law enforcement officers converged on the ranch arresting Manson and other gang members on suspicion of auto theft.

“Richard was a pioneer in the second part of his career. He worked tirelessly to ‘professionalize’ employee safety and health and was the creator of the Public Risk Management program, which brought focus to visitor injuries and deaths. The Incident Management Analysis and Reporting System, IMARS, used by the entire Department of the Interior law enforcement community, was also Richard’s brain child.

“Richard is survived by his sister Joanne, his daughters Lenox and Brandy, his beloved wife Farin, and her two sons Jimmy and Bobby. He was laid to rest on Tuesday, February 21st, at the National Memorial Park Cemetery in Falls Church, Virginia. A celebration of his life is being planned and will occur in April.”

Sources: Newspaper obituary, flyer announcing celebration.

Other News And Notes

Rockfall Study – Last March’s issue of *Nature Geoscience* contains a paper on daily temperature changes triggering rockfalls in Yosemite Valley. Here’s a summary that appeared in *Earth Magazine*: “Researchers measuring how temperature changes affect the propagation of cracks in cliffs in Yosemite Valley in California determined that rockfalls, which are often triggered by wet or cold conditions, can also be triggered simply by normal daily temperature swings. The finding helps explain seemingly spontaneous rockfalls that occur on hot, dry summer days. Such thermally induced rockfalls could become a factor in hazard assessments.”

Source: *Nature Geoscience* . Click on [this link](#) for more.

A Closing Observation

"Ever since I have been old enough to be cynical I have been visiting national parks, and they are a cure for cynicism...They were cooked in the same alembic as other land laws...but they came out as something different. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst. Without them, millions of American lives, including mine, would have been poorer. The world would have been poorer."

Author [Wallace Stegner](#)

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The *Weekly National Park System Report* is a publication of The Coalition To Protect America's National Parks. It is prepared by Coalition member Bill Halainen, former editor of the *NPS Morning Report*, and produced and disseminated by Coalition staff. Tips on and links to park-related stories are appreciated; please send to Bill at BHalainen@gmail.com.

The Coalition is a non-profit organization of past and current NPS employees and their allies that "studies, educates, speaks, and acts for the preservation and protection of the National Park System and mission-related programs of the National Park Service."

To receive a copy of this free publication, join the coalition. Any current, retired or former salaried (GS, Wage System, seasonal, temporary, or SES) employee of the National Park Service can join the Coalition. For more information, click on [this link](#).

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