



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

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Incidents

Indiana Dunes NL

Three Park Areas Closed Due To Toxic Spill

A spill at the U.S. Steel plant in Portage last week leaked a toxic chemical into Burns Waterway, a Lake Michigan tributary, forcing the closure of beaches in and around the park.

Low levels of the chemical hexavalent chromium, which is a carcinogen, were found in Lake Michigan near the mouth of Burns Waterway. It's so far unclear whether, or how far, the chemical traveled down the shoreline, but EPA and other officials took 100 samples along the waterway east and west of its entry point to the lake. Results were expected last Thursday.

A pipe failure at the steel plant led to the contaminated water being released to the wrong wastewater treatment plant at U.S. Steel Midwest and being discharged into Burns Waterway.

The park closed public access to West Beach and the Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk on April 11th and added the beach at Cowles Bog on April 12th.

Sources: Chicago Post-Tribune ([click here](#) for more), Indiana Dunes NL public affairs ([click here](#) for more). Both sites include maps of the closed areas.

Grand Teton NP

Snowboarder Rescued After Avalanche In Granite Canyon

On April 9th, rangers joined members of the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort ski patrol in the rescue of a 26-year-old man who'd been caught in a soft slab avalanche in Granite Canyon.

Alex Thompson was snowboarding in the park's backcountry with three companions when the avalanche occurred. Thompson was traversing the top of Air Force Couloir when the slab broke above him. The sliding snow carried him approximately 1,000 feet downhill until he came to a rest atop the snow. He suffered injuries during the fall from collisions with rocks.

One of Thompson's companions called Jackson Hole Mountain Resort ski patrol. Three ski patrollers skied down to Thompson's location with a rescue toboggan and medical gear. They

assessed his condition and prepared him for ski-toboggan transport to the bottom of Granite Canyon and eventual aerial rescue.

Meanwhile, two Grand Teton rangers met the Teton County Search and Rescue helicopter and flew to Thompson's location. The helicopter landed near Thompson's location and the rangers brought him aboard. Thompson was flown out to a temporary staging area along the Chapel of the Transfiguration road just as deteriorating weather conditions began making visibility difficult. He was transferred to a park ambulance and transported to St. John's Medical Center in Jackson.

Thompson's group was aware of the avalanche hazard for the day, which was listed as moderate by the Bridger-Teton Avalanche Center. They were adequately equipped for winter backcountry travel, wore helmets, and carried avalanche beacons, shovels, and probes.

Source: Public Affairs Office. Click on [this link](#) for more.

Olympic NP Search In Progress For Missing Man

A search is underway for 22-year-old Jacob Gray, who was reported missing last week. Hikers found his bike and camping gear on the Sol Duc Hot Springs Road near the Sol Duc River.

Rangers and crews from Olympic Mountain Rescue have been searching a two- to four-square-mile area around where Gray's gear was found.

Crews couldn't do a thorough search of the area early on because of the river's conditions. The river is currently running high, cold and fast.

Gray's uncle has said that the family doesn't typically worry about Gray when he's in the outdoors because of his experience. He is known to go camping alone in foul weather and in the mountains.

Source: Peninsula Daily News. Click on [this link](#) for more.

Big Cypress NP Cowbell Fire Continues To Burn In Park

As of this past Sunday, the Cowbell Fire, which started in the park on March 30th, had burned just short of 18,000 acres and was 50% contained. A total of 294 firefighters and overhead personnel, seven helicopters, two air tankers, and 24 fire engines were committed. A Type 2 incident management team (Steve Parrish, IC) is managing the fire.

Primary fuels consist of grass, southern rough and timber litter. Current heavy loading of fuel conditions are favorable for very active fire behavior within the grass and shrub fuels. The current drought conditions have led both live and dead fuel moistures to reach levels of concern. All fuels are expected to burn readily, including those that appear green.

For full details, including maps and photos, go to the link below.

Source: InciWeb Incident Information System. Click on [this link](#) for more.

Natural and Cultural Resources

Antietam NB Burnside Bridge Reopens Following Major Repairs

On Friday, April 21st, the park will hold a ceremony to rededicate the historic Burnside Bridge. The bridge recently reopened after undergoing 15 months of major repairs. These repairs included rebuilding the bases of the two bridge piers, selectively dismantling and relaying the stone parapet walls, adding new wood coping, and resurfacing the bridge. Prior to dismantling, every stone was painstakingly mapped, recorded and re-laid as close as possible to its original location.

Built in 1836, the bridge and became famous as a focal point during the Battle of Antietam, fought on September 17, 1862. For over three hours, Confederate soldiers defended the bridge against a series of attacks by the Union Ninth Corps, commanded by General Ambrose Burnside. Burnside's men eventually drove the Southerners back and captured this critical crossing over Antietam Creek.

The contract to repair Burnside Bridge was managed by the National Park Service Historic Preservation Training Center, based in Frederick, Maryland.

Source: News Release, Antietam NB. Click on this link for [more information](#) and a photo of the restored bridge.

Yosemite NP Website Established To Help Protect Black Bears

On April 3rd, the park and Yosemite Conservancy launched [KeepBearsWild.org](#), a new website to protect the park's iconic black bears. The website features the Service's first online bear tracker, information on ways for the public to help save bears, and eye-opening photography and videos not before available to the public.

Yosemite Conservancy grants of more than \$1.2 million since 1998 have funded a variety of bear-management tools, including the creation of this site. Conservancy support has also gone to improving monitoring and tracking technologies, purchasing and installing thousands of bear-proof food lockers, and funding research and educational programs. As a result of such programs, there has been a major reduction in annual bear-related incidents in the park, from 1,584 in 1998 to fewer than 100 in 2016.

Since 2014, Yosemite's bear biologists have benefitted from previously unprecedented access to real-time spatial data of bears captured in the park and fitted with GPS collars. This high-resolution data, which identifies the bear's location, has allowed park managers to better understand responses of bears to seasonal changes in the distribution of natural foods, as well as the lure of human food. Yosemite's bear team has utilized this information to better strategize and manage park bears in near real-time and keep bears out of developed areas.

The movement patterns being observed over the past three years have inspired park managers to take this information one step further. For the first time, delayed tracking of some bears will be shared with the public on the [KeepBearsWild.org](#) "Bear Tracker." With the ultimate goal of keeping bears wild in Yosemite, managers are taking great care that sensitive data, such as den locations and exact coordinates, are not shared in real-time. To this end, delay intervals will not be made available to the public. In fall and winter months, delayed tracks will be removed to ensure the safety of these animals during hibernation.

Source: Yosemite NP Public Affairs. Click on [this link](#) for more.

Denali NP Climate Change Impacts: Repeat Photo Project Reveals Dramatic Changes

Repeat photo pairs of locations within the park are providing dramatic visual evidence of recent changes in vegetation, water bodies, and glaciers, among other elements of the landscape.

The magnitude of observed changes in many of these photo pairs suggests that a significant alteration of the parks ecosystems is occurring in some areas, likely caused by a warming climate and related processes. Some of the primary types of change documented include:

- expansion of spruce into formerly treeless areas,
- invasion of open wetland areas by woody vegetation,
- widespread colonization of formerly open floodplains and terraces by vegetation,
- shrinking ponds, and
- receding glaciers and related features.

In many cases, these changes appear directional; that is, they represent a qualitative shift in the landscape mosaic, not simply a shift in vegetation due to succession or cyclical fluctuations in pond level or glacial extent.

The Denali Repeat Photography project has helped to gather and make available to the public this valuable visual evidence of these important and far-reaching changes that have the potential to significantly affect park resources over the long term.

To see some of the photos, go to the link below.

Source: Denali NP Briefing Statement. Click on [this link](#) for more.

Agency Management

Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary For Fish, Wildlife And Parks Selected

Aurelia Skipwith has been selected as the new Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks – the assistant secretary who oversees the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Skipwith will assist in the development and implementation of the Administration's policy objectives on matters relating to public lands and wildlife. She brings with her years of national and international experience in both the public and private sectors and nonprofits.

Skipwith is a graduate of Howard University and earned a J.D. from the University of Kentucky. She is a licensed member of the Kentucky Bar.

Source: DOI Public Affairs. [More information](#).

The White House OPM Issues Guidance On Plan To Reorganize Agencies

On March 13th, the president signed an [executive order](#) mandating the development of a comprehensive plan for reorganizing the government's executive branch, an action with far-reaching implications for the NPS and other agencies.

On April 12th, the director of OMB issued guidance to agencies and departments on implementation of this executive order. Here are some of the highlights of the 14-page document, which can be found at [this link](#).

The memorandum requires all agencies to:

- Begin taking immediate actions to achieve near-term workforce reductions and cost savings, including planning for funding levels in the president's FY 2018 budget blueprint;
- Develop a plan to maximize employee performance by June 30th; and
- Submit an agency reform plan to OMB in September as part of the agency's FY 2019 budget submission to OMB that includes long-term workforce reductions. An initial, high-level draft of the agency reform plan is due to OMB by June 30th.

The memorandum also outlines the steps that OMB will take to formulate a comprehensive government-wide reform plan for publication in the president's FY 2019 budget, including both legislative proposals and administrative actions. This plan will rely on three primary sources of input – agency reform plans, OMB-coordinated crosscutting proposals, and public input.

According to the memorandum, the objectives of this reform plan are to:

- Create a lean, accountable, more efficient government that works for the American people;
- Focus the federal government on effectively and efficiently delivering those programs that are the highest needs to citizens and where there is a unique federal role rather than assuming current programs are optimally designed or even needed;
- Align the federal workforce to meet the needs of today and the future rather than the requirements of the past; and
- Strengthen agencies by removing barriers that hinder front-line employees from delivering results.

[Source: Office of Management and the Budget]

Park People, Friends and Allies

Yellowstone NP

Memorial Ceremony Set For Bob Barbee

Former Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Bob Barbee passed away last October at his home in Bozeman, Montana. He was 80 years old. A memorial ceremony for Bob will be held at 2 p.m. on May 20th in the Old Faithful Rec Hall. For details, click on [this link](#).

The following passage was excerpted from his obituary; for the full text, click on [this link](#):

“Bob's cumulative achievements within the agency and in particular in Yellowstone are too numerous to recount. However, he will always be remembered for his handling of the epic 1988 Yellowstone fires and how he persevered through the intensity of that long summer. He faced hordes of people, thousands of news media, and an endless stream of politicians all wanting to dictate how he should be managing the fires.

“With the hindsight of some 28 years now, it is clear Bob's leadership in managing the extreme fire situation in 1988 ultimately shaped the future of federal wildland fire management policy. Today many of the methods used in Yellowstone in 1988 are now mainstream tactics in managing large wildland fires for resource benefit, economics, and most importantly for human safety.

“Anyone fortunate enough to know Bob also knows his extraordinary partner and spouse Carol. Together they shared their lives in some of our nation's most iconic landscapes, raised

three daughters and are the proud grandparents of seven grandkids. They have entertained presidents and kings as well as seasonal park employees who had no place to sleep for a night or two between jobs. Their hospitality is legend and many a national decision was made around their kitchen table or campfire with some of the nation's highest official.”

Source: Joan Anzelmo. Click on [this link](#) for more information.

Other News And Notes

Systemwide National Park Service In The News

A selection of recent news stories pertaining either directly or indirectly to the operation of the National Park Service:

- **High Country News** – The current issue of the magazine has an article by Tay Wiles entitled “[A Transfer Movement Moves To Rescind Monuments And Weaken The Antiquities Act](#)” which provides a comprehensive overview of current efforts by Western states to rescind national monuments created by President Obama, modify or rescind a president’s authority to create them, and/or transfer monument lands to the states.
- **Treehugger.com** – A website feature entitled “[Artist’s Brilliant National Park Posters Advertise A Grim Future](#)” showcases ‘before and after’ posters by artist Hannah Rothstein that depict the parks in 2050 if climate change continues. Each work is based on one of the classic WPA posters of the parks from the 1930s – on one side is a WPA poster, on the other is her depiction of how the parks may look in the not too distant future.
- **Washington Post** – The April 13th edition of the newspaper carries a story by Darryl Fears about a sexual harassment investigation at Yellowstone. The headline reads “[Investigation Finds ‘Credible Evidence’ Of Sexual Harassment At Yellowstone.](#)” Here’s the lead paragraph: “The Interior Department on Thursday ordered additional harassment prevention training for managers and supervisors after an internal report found that men in a maintenance unit at Yellowstone National Park ‘created a work environment that included unwelcome and inappropriate comments and actions toward women.’”

Systemwide Weekly Park Status Update

Here’s a listing of extended area and facility closures and reopenings from across the Service. This will be a regular feature of this report. Each entry contains a link for more information – some detailed, some not:

- **Indiana Dunes NL** – As noted in the incident report above, Cowles Bog Beach, West Beach and the Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk sites are closed due to a chemical spill and will remain closed until further notice. [More information.](#)
- **Zion NP** – Lower Emerald Pool Trail reopened to visitors on April 5th. The trail was closed in early January due to a landslide. [More information.](#)
- **Grand Canyon NP** – The Colorado River Trail between Pipe Creek and Silver Bridge has reopened to foot traffic, but remains closed to stock use. Hikers can access Phantom Ranch via the Bright Angel Trail and the South Kaibab Trail. The trail was closed due to a rockslide. [More information.](#)
- **Yosemite NP** – Big Oak Flat Road remains closed between Crane Flat and Foresta due to storm damage. There is no access via Highway 120 to Yosemite Valley from Buck

Meadows, Groveland, or Sonora. From Groveland, visitors should take Highway 49 to Mariposa, then Highway 140 to Yosemite Valley. [More information](#).

- **Big Cypress NP** – A number of areas remain closed due to the Cowbell Fire (see the incident report above). They include Pink Jeep, Bear Island and Gator Head Campgrounds; the road leading into the sanctuary, except to residents; all trails between State Road 29, L-28 Canal and north of I-75, including that section of the Florida Trail; all public lands west of the L-28 Canal, north of Alligator Alley and east of State Road 29.

Source: WASO Public Affairs website.

A Closing Observation

"I have always thought of our Service as an institution, more than any other bureau, engaged in a field essentially of morality - the aim of man to rise above himself, and to choose the option of quality rather than material superfluity."

[Freeman Tilden](#) in a letter to [Director George B. Hartzog, Jr.](#), ca. 1971

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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."

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