



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

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Incidents

Glacier National Park Main Building At Sperry Chalet Lost To Wildfire

The main building at Sperry Chalet was lost to the Sprague Fire on the afternoon of Thursday, August 31st. The two-story stone structure included guest rooms and staff housing.

Firefighters had been working at Sperry Chalet since the fire began in August, installing an extensive hose lay, sprinkler, and pump system to protect all of the structures associated with the chalet. Portions of the chalet were also wrapped with fire resistant material.

Firefighters on scene first observed fire activity at the chalet coming from the interior of the building.

The Sprague Fire was under a red flag warning at the time. The high winds, combined with the hot weather, low relative humidity, and extreme terrain pushed the fire to the north and east, causing the fire to more than double in acreage on August 30th to 4,646 acres. The firefighters, supported by four helicopters that flew until last light, made a valiant effort to save the structures, but were unsuccessful in saving the main building at Sperry Chalet. They worked through the night to protect the four remaining structures.

Sperry Chalet, operated by concessioner Belton Chalets, Inc., since 1954, accommodated 40 to 50 visitors per night. The chalet was originally constructed by the Great Northern Railway as part of the system of grand hotels and picturesque chalets in Glacier National Park soon after the park was established in 1910. Construction was completed in 1913. Since then, the chalet has provided backcountry travelers a traditional service by providing hearty meals in a rustic mountain setting.

As more details become known regarding the extent of damage to the main Sperry Chalet building and any fire damage to the secondary structures, the park will begin evaluating the next steps to take concerning future visitor services in the chalet's location.

The Sprague Fire started on August 10th and has been the number one fire suppression priority in the park this summer. In addition to structural protection measures for the Sperry Chalet complex, the fire managers have also put in structural protection measures at the

Mount Brown Lookout. Due to the lookout's location, a watering system or having firefighters remain on site has not been feasible. The lookout has been wrapped with fire resistant material due to its small size to provide some additional fire protection. Over the past month, firefighters have also been creating structure protection plans for and mitigating hazards around buildings in the Lake McDonald area.

For more on the Sprague Fire, go to the fire summary section below.

Source: [News release](#), Glacier NP.

Big Thicket National Preserve Recovery From Impacts Of Hurricane Harvey Underway

Park staff have been working since last week to account for employees, stabilize structures, and survey the conditions of all facilities following the passage of Hurricane Harvey. Widespread and persistent flooding has hampered work in many of the preserve's southern areas, especially in the Beaumont Unit and the Pine Island Bayou Corridor Unit.

On Saturday, September 2nd, park staff were joined by an eleven-person Intermountain Region Incident Management Team, a group of Department of the Interior and National Park Service employees from across the country, who came to Big Thicket to assist in damage assessment and incident response. With their assistance, park staff are working to survey all park trails and day use-areas.

The park's visitor center reopened to the public yesterday, but all access points and day use areas along the Neches River remain closed. Floodwaters have carried in debris, compromised banks, and created unsafe conditions along all creeks, rivers and waterways throughout the region. Due to high flood waters, increased flow, and strong currents, visitors are being discouraged from attempting to paddle or motorboat any park waterway.

For general information about Big Thicket National Preserve, visit the park website (www.nps.gov/bith), Facebook (www.facebook.com/BigThicketNPS), Twitter (www.twitter.com/BigThicketNPS), and Instagram (www.instagram.com/BigThicketNPS).

Source: [News release](#), Big Thicket NP.

National Fire Situation

National Interagency Fire Center NIFC At PL 5; Nearly 80 Major Fires Currently Active

Synopsis

NIFC remains at PL 5, its highest preparedness level.

The 77 large fires currently active throughout the West have so far burned a total of 1.4 million acres. Fires are burning in California (15), Idaho (6), Montana (26), Nevada (2), Oregon (20), Utah (1), Washington (6), and Wyoming (1).

Forty-four incident management teams are currently committed, up from 32 a week ago; nearly 28,000 firefighters and overhead personnel are in the field.

Yosemite National Park

The 4,914-acre Empire Fire is burning a mile east of the Badger Pass ski area and is 55% contained. It's being managed by a Type 3 IMT (Messenger); 45 firefighters and overhead are assigned.

Fire crews are implementing a perimeter control strategy for the northern, western and southern flanks of the fire to protect Bridalveil Campground, Yosemite Ski and Snowboard Area, Yosemite West subdivision, Wawona Road (Highway 41), and Glacier Point Road. The north, west and south flanks of the fire are contained and holding. Areas of new smoke may be seen as the fire cleans up areas of unburned fuel interior. Fire management personnel are implementing this strategy on three sides of the fire to minimize further smoke production in heavy fuels. The east flank is being allowed to move towards the Illilouette basin to continue to enhance forest resiliency in a fire adapted ecosystem

The following trail and area closures are in place until further notice: Glacier Point Road, Bridalveil Campground, Ostrander Trail, Bridalveil Trail, Alder Creek Trail, Mono Meadow Trail, and Turner Meadow Trail.

The following websites are available for more information:

[Empire Fire incident information](#)
[Current park conditions](#)

Glacier National Park

The lightning-caused Sprague Fire was reported the evening of August 10th and is burning above Crystal Ford on the Gunsight Pass Trail. A Northern Rockies Type II IMT (Hutton) is managing the fire. It had burned 13,053 acres as of yesterday. A total of 145 firefighters and overhead personnel were committed. The fire is now 35% contained.

An evacuation order is in effect for all residents and visitors from the south end of Lake McDonald to Logan Pass. This includes the Lake McDonald Lodge, concession housing, Kelly Camp Area, and the Avalanche and Sprague Creek Campgrounds. Logan Pass is still accessible from the east side of the park. The duration of the evacuation is unknown at this time.

The following websites are available for more information:

[Sprague Fire incident information](#)
[Road, trail and facility status reports](#)
[Park webcams](#)

Crater Lake National Park

The previously reported Spruce Lake Fire and Blanket Creek Fire are now part of the High Cascades Complex, which consists of 20 fires located within the park, the Rogue River/Siskiyou National Forest, the Umpqua National Forest, and the Fremont/Winema National Forest.

Fires in the complex have burned 28,362 acres to date and are 33% contained. They are being managed by a Type 1 IMT (Knerr); 647 firefighters and overhead are committed.

The Level 1 Evacuation Notification for Mazama Village remains in place. The notification advises residents and visitors to "be ready" for a potential evacuation of Mazama Village, including employee dormitories and trailer sites, in the event that the Blanket Creek Fire approaches these areas. Current or projected threats from the approaching fire indicate that there may be a need to evacuate in the future, but there are no mandatory evacuations at this

time. Rim Village, park headquarters and other areas in the park are not affected by this notification.

The North Entrance Road and West Rim Drive are temporarily closed (as of September 4th) due to their proximity to the Spruce Lake Fire. It's not yet known when they will reopen.

Many trails west of the lake are temporarily closed due to potentially hazardous conditions created by the Spruce Lake and Blanket Creek Fires. These are the Watchman Peak Trail, the West Rim Trail, the Boundary Springs Trail, the Union Peak Trail, the Stuart Falls Trail, the Pumice Flat Trail, the Bert Creek Trail, the Lightning Springs Trail, the Bald Crater Loop, and the Pacific Crest Trail (except for the short segment between Highway 62 and the Dutton Creek Trail). The Annie Creek Canyon Trail is also closed. The trail and its footbridges were damaged by snow last winter.

Smoke from these fires has been causing hazy skies, reduced visibility, and poor air quality on certain days, especially when winds have been blowing from the west.

The following websites are available for more information:

[High Cascades Complex incident information](#)
[Smoke levels and air quality at the park and throughout Oregon](#)

Active Incident Resource Commitments

| Category | August 8th | August 29th | September 5th |
|--------------------|------------|-------------|---------------|
| Area Command Teams | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| NIMO Teams | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Type 1 Teams | 6 | 11 | 14 |
| Type 2 Teams | 16 | 18 | 26 |
| Crews | 377 | 419 | 581 |
| Engines | 849 | 1,027 | 1,924 |
| Helicopters | 119 | 157 | 200 |
| Total FF/Overhead | 16,004 | 19,127 | 27,792 |

Fires/Acreage

| Category | 2017 Total | 2006-2016 Ave | 2017 Variance |
|--------------------|------------|---------------|---------------|
| Year-to-Date Fires | 46,951 | 49,927 | - 2,976 |
| Year-to-Date Acres | 7,650,844 | 5,488,788 | + 2,162,056 |

Sources: [National Interagency Fire Center](#), [InciWeb](#).

News From Around Washington

Reports from Capitol Hill, the White House, the Department of the Interior, the National Park Service and other related agencies and NGO's. Prepared by members Don Hellmann, former assistant director, legislative and congressional affairs for the National Park Service, and Bill Halainen, newsletter editor.

Washington Office

Report Issued On Great Smoky Mountains Fire

On August 31st, Secretary Zinke issued an independent review (link below) of last November's Chimney Tops 2 Fire, which burned 11,410 acres in the park and merged with other area fires, causing 14 deaths and millions of dollars in damage in the Gatlinburg area.

The report outlines the origins and growth of the fire within the boundaries of the park. It identifies a number of factors that contributed to the growth of the fire over the course of six days before the fire moved beyond the park boundaries to merge with other fires and become the Sevier County fires. The report also provides a summary of findings and recommendations regarding the park's fire management planning and response capabilities.

"While visiting the Great Smoky Mountains National Park last week, I met with park staff, local officials, and members of the Gatlinburg community that were impacted by this devastating fire," said Secretary Zinke. "Based on those meetings and my review of the report, I am satisfied that it accurately describes the unusual and unexpected conditions that resulted in the largest fire in the park's history and a series of other fires around the park, which caused so much devastation to the community of Gatlinburg."

This report will be combined with other reports and investigations to ensure that every action can be taken to prevent similar fires in the future. Among next steps, the National Park Service is working to:

- Upgrade Great Smoky Mountain National Park's radio communications system to ensure interoperable communication between the park's emergency responders and local cooperators, with capacity to accommodate multiple simultaneous incidents. This is a \$2.5 million initiative through a public-private partnership with the Friends of the Smokies and the National Park Service.
- Issue seven neighboring fire departments portable radios and personal protective equipment this fall with funding through the Department of the Interior Rural Fire Readiness program.
- Implement the goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, which prioritizes healthy and resilient landscapes, fire adapted communities, and safe and effective response. This includes efforts to actively manage vegetation and fuels effectively, removing dead and dying trees.
- Assemble a Management Action Team of fire and leadership experts to take immediate action at the local, regional and national levels based on the findings and recommendations from the report.
- Participate in a review of the broader Sevier County fires with local, state and other federal officials.

"We see this report on the Chimney Tops 2 Fire as the first steps of a journey that will help us institutionalize the lessons learned from the tragic Sevier County fires," said National Park Service Fire and Aviation Division Chief Bill Kaage. "The review report is only the beginning of a longer process."

Kaage delegated the review of the Chimney Tops 2 fire to an independent team of seven interagency fire experts this past February. The team was charged with identifying the facts leading up to and during the fire within the boundaries of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, as well as making recommendations on planning, operational, or managerial issues which can be addressed locally, regionally, and/or nationally to reduce the chances of a similar incident in the future.

Between February and April, the review team conducted research and interviews of personnel and leadership involved with the fire. They used materials and information gathered during the fire cause investigation, their own interviews of involved NPS staff and cooperators, and fire weather data and other information to create a narrative of the event from the time it ignited on November 23rd through the time when it left the park on November 28th.

[Click on this link](#) for a PDF copy of the full report.

Source: [News release](#), Department of the Interior.

National Parks Conservation Association Administration Kills DO-100 On Resource Stewardship

NPCA has spoken out against the administration's recent decision to rescind Director's Order 100: Resource Stewardship for the 21st Century.

Adopted by Director Jarvis in 2016, Director's Order 100 represents the culmination of years of planning going back to the George W. Bush Administration for managing parks in the face of current and emerging challenges in the Service's second century.

In particular, the order singles out climate change, biodiversity loss, invasive species, land use changes, and pollution as challenges that require comprehensive, science-based management responses to ensure the parks' irreplaceable natural and cultural treasures are preserved "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations," as required under the 1916 law that established the National Park Service.

The Trump Administration rescinded Director's Order 100 on August 16th. By taking this action, the administration is returning the Park Service to a narrower and outdated resource management strategy that had been judged inadequate by the independent Science Committee of the National Park System Advisory Board in 2012.

Key actions mandated by Director's Order 100 and how they protect park resources include:

- Better coordination with agencies like the Bureau of Land Management. This helps ensure that oil, gas and other forms of development near park borders do not harm parks, their wildlife or their resources.
- Increasing preemptive measures to protect wildlife habitat and other resources. This helps protect parks from the impacts of climate change as well as human activity like overfishing.
- Basing resource stewardship decisions on science, law, and long-term public interest. This helps guide park managers to ensure that activities, such as the use of flying drones within parks, does not compromise protection of park resources and the preservation of a high-quality experience for visitors.

You can read the text of DO-100 at [this website](#) and NPCA's earlier comments on DO-100 at [this website](#).

Source: [News release](#), National Parks Conservation Association.

Park People, Friends and Allies

International Ranger Federation Past Vice President Wayne Lotter Murdered

Wayne Lotter, 51, past vice president of the International Ranger Federation and a leading wildlife conservationist who pioneered new techniques to catch elephant poachers and ivory smugglers, was shot and killed in Tanzania on Wednesday, August 30th. The following report on his death is taken from the *Washington Post* (link below):

Wayne Lotter, a 51-year-old South African, was in a taxi in Dar es Salaam when it was stopped by another vehicle. Two men opened the car door and one shot him.

Lotter had for years received threats against his life, according to his organization, the PAMS Foundation, which he founded in 2009. He worked closely with the Tanzanian government during a period in which poaching surged. From 2009 to 2014, the elephant population in Tanzania collapsed from 109,051 to 43,330, according to government data.

Lotter's killing is being investigated by Tanzanian authorities. It remains unclear whether his death is related to his anti-poaching work. Reuters reported that his laptop was stolen in the attack.

"Through his work with PAMS he helped train thousands of village game scouts in every corner of the country. His groundbreaking work in developing an intelligence-based approach to anti-poaching helped successfully reverse the rampant rates of poaching facing Tanzania," the organization posted on its Facebook page.

Lotter helped fund Tanzania's National and Transnational Serious Crimes Investigation Unit, which successfully pursued a number of high-profile ivory traffickers. In 2015, the unit arrested Yang Feng Glan, the so-called [Queen of Ivory](#), who is [accused](#) of smuggling more than 700 elephant tusks out of Africa.

PAMS, which stands for Protected Area Management System, works with local communities to curb poaching and has also helped support the Tanzanian government to prosecute and extradite alleged smugglers. It has promoted so-called intelligence-led policing to use modern surveillance techniques to pursue wildlife traffickers.

Lotter helped extradite another alleged smuggling kingpin, Gakou Fodie, from Uganda to Tanzania. Lotter has said that Fodie was involved in the shipment of six tons of pangolin scales. The rare mammal is considered the world's most hunted animal.

But some of Lotter's most important, and most emotional, work was related to elephants.

"It is hard to describe the exact feeling, but my stomach still knots every time I see an elephant carcass. I have seen hundreds over the last three years," Lotter wrote in 2014 for ITV News.

Click on these links for more information:

[Tribute by Dr. Jane Goodall](#)
[Information on the PAMS Foundation](#)
[Contributing to the Wayne Lotter fund](#)

Note that the latter also includes several photos of Wayne and links to several other media stories about his murder.

Source: [News story](#), *Washington Post*.

Other News And Notes

Systemwide

National Park Service In The News

A selection of additional recent NPS news releases and public news stories pertaining either directly or indirectly to the operation of the National Park Service.

- **Systemwide** – *High Country News* posted an article to its website on September 4th entitled “Slow Progress On Park Service Harassment,” but subtitled “The agency begins to deliver on promises to confront sexual harassment.” Although it focuses on corrective actions underway at Yellowstone, it also deals with actions being taken to reduce sexual harassment throughout NPS. [Full story](#).
- **Yosemite National Park** – The *New York Times*’ Sunday Review section carried a feature on September 2nd that’s partly about the Ahwahnee Hotel being renamed the Majestic Yosemite Hotel but mostly about the violence done to native residents of Yosemite over the years and the need to change a number of names in the park that “falsify and celebrate the slaughter and land theft upon which our national parks were built.” [Full story](#).
- **Mount Rainier National Park** – On August 25th, the park dedicated a new memorial that honors four people who lost their lives in the line of duty. Rangers Margaret Anderson, Nick Hall and Sean Ryan and SCA Phil Otis were remembered for giving their lives “while in the act of saving or rescuing others.” [Full story](#).
- **Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area** – Park researchers have added two new mountain lion kittens to a long-running study of the species in and around the Santa Monica Mountains. The two were found by biologists in early August. Since 1996, the NPS has been studying carnivores in and around the Santa Monica Mountains to determine how they survive in an increasingly fragmented and urbanized environment. During the course of the study, biologists have studied more than 340 bobcats, 145 coyotes, and 60 mountain lions. [Full story](#).

Systemwide Upcoming Events

Upcoming events and activities of potential interest to members of the Coalition, including relevant House and Senate hearings:

- **September 27** – The Senate Subcommittee on National Parks will hold an oversight hearing entitled “Encouraging the Next Generation to Visit National Parks.” It will be held in Room 366 of the Dirksen Building at 2 p.m. [More information](#).
- **October 18-22** – Ranger Rendezvous 40, Association of National Park Rangers, YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colorado. [More information](#).

A Closing Observation

"[A] national park is not merely scenery. A national park embodies something that cannot be found everywhere - it embodies history, a way of life, primitive experience, early environment. It has the elements capable of providing that lifting of the spirit for which modern civilization is willing to pay so much. A national park is specifically dedicated to these intangible and imponderable qualities."

Conservationist [Olaus J. Murie](#), 1889-1963

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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 staffer Susannah Albert-Chandhok.

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 grade, 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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