



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

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Incidents

Southeast Region

Hurricane Irma Causes Extensive Damage To Parks

Hurricane Irma's long path from the Leeward Islands to the interior Southeast carried it over numerous parks. Reports are still coming in, but some early submissions are now available (below).

The National Park Service's Eastern Incident Management Team has mobilized in Atlanta to begin coordination of recovery operations in the affected South Florida and Caribbean parks. The team's focus is on ensuring the safety of employees at impacted parks, organizing for the work ahead, and bringing in additional staff resources to conduct damage assessments, coordinate debris removal, and provide access to park areas.

An operational branch has been established specifically for the Caribbean parks, and personnel to provide peer support for employees and damage assessments are en route. The IMT's advance team headed to South Florida on Monday afternoon; the remainder of the team will tentatively follow on Wednesday. The NPS is also coordinating closely with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to support the federal response to Irma.

Here's what we currently know, sorted by area:

Caribbean Parks

Preliminary reports have been received from areas in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands:

- *Virgin Islands National Park* – The section of the park on the island of St. John sustained extensive damage, the extent of which is currently being assessed. The NPS is working with federal partners and local organizations to evacuate non-essential NPS employees who have chosen to leave and to continue transporting NPS emergency support personnel and supplies to the park to open and clear roads for emergency services, assess damage, and treat the drinking water supply. Power has been restored to the park visitor center and emergency crews are working to reestablish communication lines. Park facilities without external power or water are operating on generators and have stored supplies and water for staff.
- *Christiansted National Historic Site* and *Salt River Bay National Historical Park* – The two areas suffered less damage than Virgin Islands NP. They have external water and sporadic power and are currently closed.
- *San Juan National Historic Site* – The park sustained minor damage. Castillo San Cristobal is open; Castillo San Felipe is closed until further notice, pending restoration of power.

Florida Parks

All non-essential NPS employees in Dry Tortugas, Everglades, and Biscayne National Parks were released before the storm, and all parks on the Florida peninsula are closed to visitors. The Eastern Incident Management Team will establish operations in South Florida on Wednesday to begin information systems, peer support, damage assessments, and recovery operations.

Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina and Tennessee Parks

Most parks across the five states were partially or wholly closed during the hurricane's passage.

In all cases, see individual park web pages – particularly the section with alerts – for particulars on the exact status of facilities.

Source: [NPS Hurricane and Severe Weather Response webpage](#).

Intermountain and Southeast Regions

NPS Provides Support To Parks, DOI Bureaus Hit By Hurricane Harvey

The National Park Service has been providing assistance to the staffs of a number of national park units in Texas and Louisiana and is continuing to support other Department of the Interior bureaus. The Service is also supporting FEMA on a number of mission assignments in Texas. The current commitment includes rangers and other personnel from 43 NPS areas.

See individual park web pages – particularly the section with alerts – for particulars on the exact status of facilities.

Source: [NPS Hurricane and Severe Weather Response webpage](#).

Buffalo National River

Update On Fatal Shooting Of Camper By Ranger

As was noted in a previous edition, a camper wielding a weapon was shot and killed by a ranger at Spring Creek Campground in the early morning hours of August 20th. The following

update comes from the September 7th edition of the *Springfield News-Leader* (link below report):

A Branson camper wielding a BB gun pistol was shot dead by one of two park rangers who encountered the man at Spring Creek Campground on August 20th.

According to the Park Service, at 1:34 a.m. that day, two National Park Service law enforcement rangers were conducting a routine patrol of the Spring Creek Campground in the Lower District of the Buffalo National River.

In a news release, the Park Service said preliminary results of an investigation found that "as the rangers entered the campground, they were immediately confronted by a white man, later identified as Jonathan Bolger, 34, of Branson, Missouri."

According to the Park Service, the rangers identified themselves as law enforcement officers and illuminated Bolger with flashlights. Bolger was pointing an object directly at the rangers, which they believed was a semi-automatic handgun.

The rangers ordered Bolger to drop the handgun and he refused, according to the Park Service. He continued verbally challenging them and was then shot by one of the rangers.

The rangers provided immediate life-saving efforts to Bolger, the release said, but they were unable to revive him. He was pronounced dead by Regional Medical Center ambulance personnel when they arrived.

According to the preliminary investigation, Bolger was armed with a Umarex XCP air pistol, which resembles a two-toned semi-automatic handgun and does not have an orange tip to identify it as an air pistol [see the news article below for a photo of the air pistol].

Both rangers involved in the incident were placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of the investigation, as is the normal protocol of the NPS. Also in accordance with NPS procedures, once the investigation is complete, the case will be presented to the U.S. Attorney's Office and Searcy County prosecutor for review.

Source: [Springfield News-Leader](#).

Lake Mead National Recreation Area Man Drowns While Attempting To Secure Houseboat In Storm

Just after 7:30 p.m. on the evening of September 2nd, rangers received a marine radio distress call reporting a drowning on Lake Mohave.

Khoeun Sum, 48, of Long Beach, California, was helping secure a neighboring houseboat that broke away from the shore when he got tangled in spike lines and was pulled under the water as the houseboat began drifting.

Resuscitation efforts were unsuccessful. Sum was not wearing a life jacket; the Clark County coroner's office ruled his death an accident.

A severe thunderstorm warning was in effect at the time of the drowning. Wind speeds were clocked in between 40 and 50 mph during the storm, according to the National Weather Service.

Source: [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#).

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore Unexpectedly Intense Storm Grounds Boats On Islands

Six- to eight-foot waves and high winds on Lake Superior late on Sunday, September 3rd, and into Monday, September 4th, left several boats beached, grounded and even partially sunk in the outer Apostle Islands, where storm conditions persisted into the next day and thwarted salvage efforts.

Several boats were anchored on the eastern sides of the islands' outer rim of Sand, Rocky and Outer Islands on Sunday when the prevailing westerly breeze suddenly gave way to strong winds as a line of storms moved through the area. Chris Smith, chief ranger of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, said the intense storms were sudden and unexpected.

Boats dragged anchor as winds blew the private vessels onto beaches and rocks and into thickets of trees overhanging the waters of Lake Superior. Winds were reportedly up to 35 mph within the island chain and up to twice as fast out on the lake.

The park and Coast Guard responded to the ensuing calamity, which involved eight boats with 17 people aboard. Rangers traveled by boat from one site to another, assessing and stabilizing then moving on to the next scene. Their objective was to prevent further damage and help those who needed it. Some people were holed up below deck on their boats; others camped on shore as their boats were caught in the storm.

Seven kayakers were also stranded, pinned down for some time on an island, and two others who were overdue ultimately were accounted for as safe.

Source: [Duluth News Tribune](#).

Lake Mead National Recreation Area Woman Dies Of Hyperthermia In Park

A woman's death has been ruled an accident more than a month after her body was found in the desert in a remote part of the park. The coroner's office determined that Lorann King, 59, died of environmental heat stress.

The Metropolitan Police Department responded to calls from the National Park Service on July 23rd regarding a body that was "in the middle of nowhere." The body was found in the desert near Devil's Cove Road within the park.

King was found inside a vehicle that was parked on the remote road. A helicopter tour operator saw it there over a period of several days and reported it. It wasn't clear how long King was in the car before she was found.

Source: [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#).

National Fire Situation

National Interagency Fire Center More Than 60 Large Fires Currently Burning In West

Synopsis

NIFC remains at PL 5, its highest preparedness level.

Five new large fires were reported on Monday. Firefighters continue to make progress toward containment goals on wildfires.

The 64 large fires currently active throughout the West have together burned more than 1.6 million acres. Fires are burning in California (8), Colorado (3), Idaho (4), Montana (25), Nevada (1), Oregon (17), Utah (1), Washington (7), and Wyoming (2). Forty-one incident management teams are currently committed; nearly 23,000 firefighters and overhead personnel are in the field.

Two hundred and forty-five soldiers from the 23rd Brigade Engineer Battalion and 1-23 Infantry Battalion based out of Fort Lewis, Washington, have been deployed in support of the Umpqua North Complex.

Mount Rainier National Park Norse Peak Fire Closures

On September 5th, Mount Rainier closed the northeast portion of the park due to the unpredictable behavior of the Norse Peak Fire, which is burning outside its east boundary. The Sunrise Road was closed between the junction with SR 410 near White River and Sunrise. The portions of SR 410 to Cayuse Pass and SR 123 within the park remained open.

Backcountry closures included all of the trails and cross country zones on the east side of the park from Frozen Lake to Panhandle Gap and all of the trails with trailheads along SR 410 and SR 123 north of Stevens Canyon Entrance.

The park also issued a Level 2 advisory for the White River Campground. Campers have been encouraged to leave the campground and advised that they should be packed and ready to go in the event of a mandatory evacuation. Level 2 means BE READY. This level indicates there is significant danger in the area and people who choose to remain should be prepared to leave at a moment's notice.

Other road closures due to the Norse Peak fire included SR 410 east between Cayuse Pass and the Bumping River Road and Crystal Mountain Boulevard. A detour for SR 410 traffic was available via SR 123 and US 12 over White Pass. Updates on the fire can be found at [this link](#).

Source: [News release with area closure map](#), Mount Rainier NP.

Yosemite National Park Empire Fire Status

The Empire Fire, located a mile east of the Badger Pass ski area, has burned 5,887 acres 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.

Fire activity increased on Sunday due to a strategic burning operation near Glacier Point Road between Ostrander Trailhead and Mono Meadow Trailhead. This activity continued on Monday in order to tie the northern flank of the fire to Glacier Point Road. Glacier Point Road remains closed until further notice due to fire operations.

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
- Turner Meadow Trail

The following websites are available for more information:

[Empire Fire incident information](#)

[Current park conditions](#)

Glacier National Park Sprague Fire

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 (Diane Hutton) is managing the fire. It had burned 14,432 acres as of yesterday. A total of 152 firefighters and overhead personnel were committed. The fire is now 47% 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.

Planned IMT actions include:

- Assessing and checking fire spread on the Lake McDonald side of Mt. Brown and Snyder Ridge.
- Maintaining structure protection in the Lake McDonald Lodge area.
- Continuing structure protection and fuels mitigation at the north end of Lake McDonald Road for the Lake McDonald Ranger Station and Wheeler historic cabins.
- Maintaining structure protection at Avalanche Creek Campground and boardwalk.
- Utilizing air resources from Mt. Brown Lookout south to Snyder Ridge and north toward Avalanche Campground as needed.
- Continuing mop up and patrol in the Sperry Chalet complex area.
- Planning for fuels mitigation work around Apgar and park headquarters.
- Continuing structure assessments for the Apgar area and for NPS structures along the Middle Fork of the Flathead River.

The following websites are available for more information:

[Sprague Fire incident information](#)

[Road, trail and facility status reports](#)

[Park webcams](#)

Crater Lake National Park High Cascades Complex

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 72,309 acres to date and are 28% contained. The High Cascades Complex is now being managed in two zones – the West Zone is NW Team 7 (Knerr) and the East Zone is managed by SW Team 3 (Sinclair).

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

The North Entrance Road and West Rim Drive are temporarily closed 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.

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 29th	September 5th	September 12th
Area Command Teams	1	2	4
NIMO Teams	2	2	4
Type 1 Teams	11	14	13
Type 2 Teams	18	26	20
Crews	419	581	474
Engines	1,027	1,924	1,271
Helicopters	157	200	187
Total FF/Overhead	19,127	27,792	22,974

Fires/Acreage

Category	2017 Total	2006-2016 Ave	2017 Variance
Year-to-Date Fires	48,082	51,221	- 3,139
Year-to-Date Acres	8,159,989	5,598,207	+ 2,561,782

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.

New Public Laws

P.L. 115-51, to authorize the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation to establish the National Global War on Terrorism Memorial in the District of Columbia to commemorate and honor the members of the Armed Forces who served on active duty in support of the Global War on Terrorism. The bill was signed into law on August 18th.

United States Senate

On August 2nd, the Senate passed S. Res. 199, designating June 2017 as "Great Outdoors Month" (yes, this did happen after the fact).

On August 2nd, the nomination of Ryan Douglas Nelson, of Idaho, to be solicitor of the Department of the Interior was submitted to the Senate.

On August 3rd, the Senate passed H.R. 873, to authorize the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation to establish the National Global War on Terrorism Memorial in the District of Columbia to commemorate and honor the members of the Armed Forces who served on active duty in support of the Global War on Terrorism.

On August 3rd, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing to examine federal and nonfederal collaboration, including through the use of technology, to reduce wildland fire risk to communities and enhance firefighting safety and effectiveness. Bryan Rice, Director, Office of Wildland Fire, was the witness for the Department of the Interior.

On August 3rd, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources approved the nominations of Susan Combs, of Texas to be Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget and Douglas W. Domenech, of Virginia to be Assistant Secretary for Insular Affairs, at the Department of the Interior,

On September 7th, the Senate amended and passed H.R. 601, which among other provisions, includes continuing appropriations for the Department of the Interior and other federal agencies through December 8th.

On September 7th, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a hearing on the nomination of Ryan Douglas Nelson, of Idaho, to be Solicitor of the Department of the Interior.

United States House of Representatives

On September 8th, the House approved the Senate amendments to H.R. 601, which, among other provisions, includes continuing appropriations for the Department of the Interior and other federal agencies through December 8th. The bill is now cleared for the president's signature.

On September 7th and 8th, the House debated H.R. 3354, the FY 2018 Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, which includes funding for the National Park Service. This bill was used as the vehicle for the House to pass the remaining eight appropriations bills for various federal agencies that had not already passed the House this year. A summary of the provisions of the act that affect the National Park Service is available in the [July 19th edition of this newsletter](#).

During the House floor debate on H.R. 3354, the following changes, among others, were made to the bill:

- Designates \$300,000 from the Operation of the National Park System for the New England National Scenic Trail;
- Increases by \$2 million the Operation of the National Park System account (unclear for what the amounts would be designated);
- Increases by \$2 million historic preservation grants for Historically Black Colleges and Universities that would be offset by a \$2 million reduction in the Office of the Secretary;
- Restores appropriations for the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) to the FY2017 enacted level by shifting \$5.5 million from the Department of the Interior, Departmental Operations, Office of the Secretary account;
- Prohibits the use of funds by the National Park Service in contravention of section 320101 of title 54, United States Code which provides that it is a national policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings, and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States, especially as it relates to National Heritage Areas (NHAs) (unclear what the effect of this amendment is);
- Prohibits any funds in the bill from being used towards the National Park Services' proposed Dog Management Rule in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area;
- Increases the National Park Service's Facility Maintenance and Operations account by \$9.692 million to help address longstanding deferred park maintenance needs;
- Prohibits the federal government from entering into an agreement to establish a heritage partnership program in nine counties in southeast Colorado;
- Prohibits funds to be used to implement a rule by the National Park Service regarding wildlife management practices on National Preserves in Alaska (the amendment was agreed to by a recorded vote of 215 ayes to 196 noes).

After the adoption of the changes above, the House postponed further proceedings on the bill.

Park People, Friends and Allies

National Park Service

Passing Of Retired Interpretive Ranger Bob Carnes

Robert Graham "Bob" Carnes, 75, of Williamsburg, Virginia, died on August 28th after a brief, intense battle with cancer.

Bob is survived by his wife, Dorothy; sisters, Kristine Christianson and Kathryn (Ted) Droppa; along with numerous nieces and nephews whom he cherished. He also leaves his beloved dog, Miguel.

Bob served in the U.S. Army for three years after high school. Following graduation from the University of Maryland, he became a National Park Service ranger in interpretation at Prince William Forest Park, Glen Echo Park, and Clara Barton National Historical Site, a position he held until his retirement in 2005.

A memorial service will take place at 2 p.m. Thursday, September 28th, at Williamsburg United Methodist Church, 500 Jamestown Road, Williamsburg. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Williamsburg United Methodist Church or Heritage Humane Society of Williamsburg. Online condolences may be offered at www.nelsenwilliamsburg.com.

Source: [Williamsburg-Yorktown Daily](#).

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.

Thanks to members Dennis Burnett and Dick Martin and NPS friend Gordon Miller for sending along articles for this compilation.

- **Yellowstone National Park** – Stories show up periodically in the media about the possibility that the Yellowstone “super volcano” will erupt soon, usually after one of the region’s periodic earthquake swarms, but Fox News has taken a new angle on the story in an August 28th web posting – it talks about a NASA project to determine how to cool down the magma that lies 10 km beneath the surface in order to prevent a catastrophic eruption. [Full story](#).
- **Alaskan Parks** – The Humane Society posted a story on its web page on September 5th entitled “Alaska Lawmaker Plots Yet Another Assault On Wolves, Grizzlies On Federal Lands.” According to the article, Congressman Don Young “plans to offer an amendment [to a spending bill] that would override federal wildlife management professionals on the ground in Alaska and open up 20 million acres of national preserves to ruthless trophy hunting and killing practices.” [Full story](#).
- **National Monuments** – The *Washington Post* reported back on August 24th that Secretary Zinke has recommended that three of the national monuments under review be modified. The secretary recommended reducing the size of Utah’s Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments, as well as Oregon’s Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. This move, says the *Post*, is “expected to reshape federal land and water protections and certain to trigger major legal fights.” [Full story](#).
- **National Park System** – In August of last year, *The Guardian*, a well-known English newspaper, published an article in its series on the centennial of the National Park Service entitled “‘I Was Born To Do This:’ National Park Rangers On Their Triumphs And Tragedies.” It includes a number of stories from five NPS rangers on the wide variety of ranger duties. [Full story](#).
- **National Parks** – *Atlas Obscura*, a publication that calls itself “the definitive guide to the world’s wondrous and curious places,” has published an interesting piece on its web page entitled “The Early Master Plans for National Parks Are Almost as Beautiful as the Parks Themselves.” The article talks about park master plans from the 20s and 30s and how beautiful they often were – it’s illustrated with covers and internal art from maybe a dozen plans. [Full story](#).
- **Olympic National Park** – This edition of *High Country News* has an article on the Elwha restoration project entitled “After Its Dams Came Down, A River Is Reborn.” It talks about the river’s successful restoration and the lessons being learned from the project, including the fact that it came back, unexpectedly, as a “chaotic and wild river.” “[The] return of this unpredictable river offers a lesson for others looking to down dams that have passed their prime. In this wildness is resilience.” [Full story](#).

Systemwide Notes On Park Operations and Maintenance

Short reports regarding the National Park System's 400 plus parks and its central, regional and training offices:

- **National Mall and Memorial Parks** – A contract has been awarded for the modernization of the Washington Monument elevator, which had been subject to frequent breakdowns, and the construction of a permanent screening facility for visitors entering the landmark. The monument, closed since August 2016, is set to reopen in the spring of 2019. [Full story](#).
- **Flight 93 National Memorial** – On September 11th, the park broke ground (and sound) on a visual and audible reminder of the courageous actions of the 40 passengers and crew of United Flight 93. This feature marks the final phase of major construction of the memorial's original design and will be named the Tower of Voices. It will stand 93 feet tall and contain 40 wind chimes that will serve as an enduring memory of the voices of the passengers and crew. Construction of the tower will begin in late September with anticipated completion and a dedication ceremony in September 2018. [Full story](#).
- **Kings Mountain National Military Park** – The comment period for the park's draft GMP and EIS is now open and will close on October 31st. Both are available on the PEPC Planning, Environment & Public Comment [website](#). [Full story](#).

Systemwide Upcoming Events

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

- **September 12** – The House Committee on Natural Resources will hold a hearing on the SHARE Act in Longworth 1334 at 10 a.m. The purpose of the proposed Sportsmen's Heritage and Recreational Enhancement Act, or SHARE Act, ([HR 3668](#)) is "to provide for the preservation of sportsmen's heritage and enhance recreation opportunities on Federal land." [More information](#).
- **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

"We have a big stake in what you see around you here at Yellowstone. It's a part of what I call our common ground. And we should not do anything – anything – to weaken our ability to protect the quality of our land, our water, our food, the diversity of our wildlife and the sanctity of our natural treasures. We can balance the budget without doing any of that, and that's the commitment all of us ought to make today on this anniversary of the National Park Service."

President William Clinton, speaking at a Founders Day event in Yellowstone, August 26, 1995

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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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