



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

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Editor's Note

There will be no issue next week due to holiday travel. The next edition will be out on November 29th.

Incidents

Virgin Islands National Park Two Storm-Damaged Beaches Reopen

Honeymoon and Hawksnest beaches officially reopened on Monday, November 13, after recovering from the significant impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in September. Both beaches required a lot of work – cutting trees, clearing access, and removing debris.

At Honeymoon Beach, more than 170 cubic yards of debris were removed; at Hawksnest, another 200 cubic yards. The four commercial buoys used by boats transporting cruise ship passengers have been safety assessed and returned to their correct positions. Public mooring buoys will be assessed as soon as possible.

At the National Park Service portion of Hawksnest Beach, dive teams conducted inspections for underwater debris and removed what they found. At the eastern portion of the beach, there is still debris in the water, so this area will remain closed until removal takes place.

Source: [News release \(with photo\)](#), Virgin Islands NP.

Olympic National Park Hiker Dies After Falling Off Mount Storm King

A 21-year-old Oregon man has died after a fall off Mount Storm King in Washington state.

The man was hiking with a partner in Olympic National Park last Friday when he slipped on a rock while descending a slope with rocky terrain. He fell 20 to 30 feet and tumbled another 100 feet or so upon landing.

The man's hiking partner, who was taking a different route down the mountain, witnessed the fall and reported it to authorities.

A search and rescue team began looking for the fallen hiker on Friday and located his remains on Saturday morning.

Source: [News story](#), Associated Press.

Redwood National and State Parks Trailhead Robbery Report Found To Be False

Rangers have determined that a report from tourists of being robbed at gunpoint near the Lady Bird Johnson trailhead on November 3rd was not true.

Upon notification of the robbery, rangers immediately began investigating the area along Bald Hills Road where the incident allegedly took place and began comparing its time frame with similar incidents reported outside park boundaries. While the victims claimed that multiple shots were fired from an assault-style rifle, no shell casings were found on the ground. In addition, other National Park Service employees in the area at the same time as the alleged robbery heard no shots fired.

Rangers then conducted several witness interviews, including one with the land owner of the first robbery, which took place off Bald Hills Road on private land. The rangers were then able, through a third party, to contact the five tourists. They admitted that they fabricated the park robbery story because they were concerned about being associated with activities at a local marijuana operation.

Rangers are continuing their investigation into the matter and are collaborating with the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office.

Source: [News release](#), Redwood N&SP.

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.

The White House

The president has signed into law P.L. 115-77, to establish the Frederick Douglass Bicentennial Commission to study activities that may be carried out by the federal government to honor Frederick Douglass on the bicentennial anniversary of his birth, including a rededication of the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site. Signed into law on November 2, 2017.

The Senate

On November 8th, the Committee on Indian Affairs held a hearing, among other bills, on S. 1400, to increase penalties for those exporting Native American cultural heritage items and to encourage the voluntary return of tangible cultural heritage to Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations by collectors, dealers, and other individuals and non-Federal organizations that hold such heritage.

The House

On November 6th, the Senate passed H.R. 3031, the TSP Modernization Act, to modify the rules relating to withdrawals from the Thrift Saving Plan (TSP) accounts of former federal employees and members of Congress. Under current law, such employees and members may make only one partial withdrawal upon reaching age 59-1/2 while employed or one withdrawal after retirement. The bill permits an unlimited number of such withdrawals. The bill also eliminates: (1) the automatic annuity as a default option if the plan participant does not make an election to establish an annuity, and (2) the limitation on age-based in-service withdrawals. The bill now goes to the president to be signed into law.

On November 8th, the House Natural Resources Committee approved:

- H.R. 995, to require the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of the Interior to change the terminology used to describe the racial background or place of origin of people in regulations concerning: (1) USDA programs for financing and insuring loans for properties in rural areas, and (2) the 1974 development plan for Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC.
- H.R. 3469, to designate the bridge located in Blount County, Tennessee, on the Foothills Parkway (commonly known as Bridge 2) as the "Dean Stone Bridge."

On November 15th, the House Subcommittee on Federal Lands will hold a hearing on, among other bills:

- H.R. 801, to amend the National Trails System Act to designate the Route 66 National Historic Trail.
- H.R. 2888, to establish the Ste. Genevieve National Historic Site in the State of Missouri,
- H.R. 4266, to clarify the boundary of Acadia National Park.

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.

- **Confirmation Of DOI Nominees On Hold** – *The Hill*, a publication that covers Congress, reported on November 8th that Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) has put [a hold](#) on four pending nominees for DOI positions (not including the NPS director) over the Trump administration's plans to potentially shrink multiple national monuments. Durbin disclosed his hold in a letter to the Interior Department after Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke sent a public letter complaining about the confirmation process. [Full story](#).
- **Interior Decorator** – The *Huffington Post* is reporting that Secretary Zinke is looking into redesigning the Department of the Interior flag and making it bigger (so that it'd be the same size as the U.S. flag). It's not yet clear what design he has in mind. The article also goes into Zinke's redecoration of his office with numerous stuffed game animals. [Full story](#).
- **Drain Lake Powell?** – On October 27th, *Scientific American* posted a story headlined "Should Iconic Lake Powell Be Drained?" The subhead enlarged on the headline: "Such a proposal may become reality as climate change increasingly stresses Colorado River water resources." The idea is that Lake Mead would be the main impoundment on the Colorado and that Lake Powell would become a "dead pool" – that is, a reservoir

with insufficient water to generate hydropower. “Between the drought years of 2000-2005, Lake Powell lost 13 million acre-feet of water and dropped almost 100 feet, about one-fifth of its maximum depth. A repeat dry spell could decimate what remains.” [Full story](#).

- **Ginseng Poaching On The Increase** – *Blue Ridge Outdoors* reports on an uptick in ginseng poaching in Great Smoky Mountains NP – and undoubtedly in other parks and forests in the Smokies. Demand in China for the wild ginseng found in the southern Appalachians continues to increase, with the root fetching from \$300 to \$900 per pound. The article includes a video on the subject. [Full story](#).
- **Wolf Reintroduction Considered At Isle Royale** – The wolf population on Isle Royale has dropped from 50 to two over the last few decades due to climate change and the disappearance of winter ice bridges from the mainland. As a result, the moose population is skyrocketing and the forest is being severely impacted. According to Fox 9, a local news station, the NPS is accordingly looking at the possibility of reintroducing wolves. [Full story](#).
- **Member’s Book Published** – Member Jim Brady has just published a book entitled *Yosemite Mafia: The Turbulent 1970s*. You can obtain a copy by contacting him at bradydurango@gmail.com

Systemwide Park Operations Update

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

- **Yellowstone National Park** – The park has permitted the National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON) to build an ecological research and monitoring site on Blacktail Deer Plateau in the northern section of the park. With at least 81 field sites across the U.S., NEON measures the causes and effects of environmental change. The site in Yellowstone will produce long-term monitoring data about the impacts of climate change, invasive species, and landscape changes. [Click on this link](#) for the PEPC environmental assessment. Source: [News release](#), Yellowstone NP.
- **Channel Islands National Park** – Last week seabird biologists discovered brown boobies actively nesting on Santa Barbara Island. This first record of brown boobies nesting in the park signifies a significant northward expansion of their breeding range. During a survey on November 3rd, biologists observed four nests and 102 individual birds on Sutil Island off the southwest end of Santa Barbara Island, the smallest island in the park. Source: [News release](#), Channel Islands NP.
- **Minute Man National Historical Park** – Contractors will begin an extensive rehabilitation of Battle Road Trail, which runs the length of the park, on November 15th. Sections of the trail at Hartwell Tavern will be closed. There will be a pedestrian trail detour, which is narrow and impassable to bicycles or strollers and is not suitable for running or jogging. The project concludes on December 31st; additional work will be undertaken at the North Bridge on April 23rd. Source: [News release](#), Minute Man NHP.

Acknowledgements

Thanks this week to members Don Hellman, Dennis Burnett, and Cathy Halainen for sending along either tips or articles for this edition.

A Closing Observation

"One may lack words to express the impact of beauty, but no one who has felt it remains untouched. It is renewal, enlargement, intensification. The parks preserve it permanently as the inheritance of the American citizen."

[Historian Bernard DeVoto](#)

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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 member Steve Pittleman.

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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