



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

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Incidents

Southeast Region Parks Still Working To Recover From Hurricanes

Progress continues to be made in reopening areas impacted by this past summer's hurricanes and in restoring visitor services:

Big Cypress National Preserve – Midway Campground was reopened to camping on a first-come-first-served basis on Friday, December 1st. Zone 3 of the Stairsteps Unit has been reopened to recreational use, including hunting. While deer hunting will remain closed in Zone 4 of the Stairsteps Unit, it has reopened to other hunting access and recreational use. Mitchell's Landing and Pinecrest campgrounds will remain closed due to higher than normal ground water levels. Loop Road will remain closed to all non-local and through traffic due to visitor safety and resource protection concerns. Persistent flowing water on the road surface makes through traffic unsafe.

Virgin Islands Parks – Cinnamon Bay beach reopened to the public on Saturday, December 2nd. The concession operations at Cinnamon Bay remain closed, though, with no estimated reopening date. Cinnamon Bay beach is the fourth beach to reopen in the park, joining Hawksnest, Honeymoon, and Trunk Bay beaches. Water sport equipment rental is currently available at Honeymoon Bay and Trunk Bay beaches. Taxi service is available to Trunk and Cinnamon Bay beaches; Honeymoon is accessible by hiking trail.

For continued updates on the status of national park areas in the Caribbean and elsewhere that have been affected by hurricanes and severe weather, visit <http://go.nps.gov/hurricanes>.

Sources: [News release](#), Big Cypress NP; [news release](#), Virgin Island NP

Olympic National Park Storm Causes Damage And Leads To Closures

A storm that hit the park last week, coupled with increased runoff from warm temperatures and melting snow, caused flooding and significant road damage that closed the Olympic Hot Springs Road in Elwha Valley. The road remains closed to vehicle traffic beyond the Madison Falls parking area.

The increased flow, which peaked at over 18,000 cfs, caused a change in the river pattern, sending substantial flow towards the road. This resulted in a breach of the road's low water crossing and additional damage to the road at the parking area near the former Elwha campground.

Over the past two years the park has worked to maintain access into the Elwha Valley through road repairs and a temporary bridge. It has also begun the planning process for the future of the Olympic Hot Springs Road to address long-term, sustainable access. Part of this process includes analyzing various options, such as modifying the current roadway or relocating it to an area outside the floodplain. The planning process will yield alternatives, one of which will be implemented in 2020 and 2021.

The storm also resulted in additional road closures across the park. The Upper Hoh Road was damaged by the Hoh River, resulting in a washout at milepost eight outside the park. Jefferson County public works department will handle repairs there. All park facilities in the Hoh Rain Forest are closed. A landslide on the Staircase Road also resulted in a closure just outside the park boundary at the Bear Gulch Picnic Area.

Source: [News release with photo](#), Olympic NP.

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.

Capitol Hill

New Public Laws

On November 17th, the president signed into law H.R. 3031, to modify the rules relating to withdrawals from the Thrift Saving Plan (TSP) accounts of former federal employees and members of Congress. (P.L. 115-84). Previously, such employees and members could make only one partial withdrawal upon reaching age 59-1/2 while employed or one withdrawal after retirement. The new law permits an unlimited number of such withdrawals. The law also eliminates the automatic annuity as a default option if the plan participant does not make an election to establish an annuity, and the limitation on age-based, in-service withdrawals.

Senate

Nothing to report.

House

On November 28th, the House passed:

- H.R. 2615, to authorize a small land exchange between Gulf Islands National Seashore, MS, and a local Veterans of Foreign Wars Post; and
- H.R. 995, to require, among other provisions, the Department of the Interior to modernize terms used to describe the racial background or place of origin of people in regulations concerning the 1974 development plan for Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC.

On November 29th, the House Natural Resources Committee held a hearing entitled "Modernizing NEPA for the 21st Century." There were no witnesses from the Department of the Interior for this hearing.

On November 29th, the House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy and Environment; and the Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Affairs held a joint hearing entitled "Regulatory Reform Task Forces Check-In: Part III". David Bernhardt, deputy secretary, was the witness for the Department of the Interior.

On November 30th, the House passed:

- H.R. 4182, to modify the probationary period from one year to two years for certain positions within the competitive service and the Senior Executive Service.

On November 30th, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies held an oversight hearing on the Department of the Interior. David Bernhardt, deputy secretary, was the witness for the Department of the Interior.

On November 30th, the House Natural Resources Committee approved, among other bills:

- H.R. 3607, to authorize the secretary of the interior to establish fees for medical services provided in units of the National Park System; and
- H.R. 4600, to authorize Pacific Historic Parks, a cooperating association of the National Park Service, to establish a commemorative display to honor members of the United States Armed Forces and Allies who served in the Pacific Theater during World War II, at a suitable location at the Pearl Harbor site of the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument, HI.

Park People, Friends and Allies

Branch Of Fire And Aviation Management Brian Johnson Selected As NPS Chief Of Structural Fire

Effective December 10th, Brian Johnson will become the new chief of structural fire for the Division of Fire and Aviation Management in Boise. He succeeds Hal Spencer, who retired earlier this year.

Johnson has served as the prevention program manager for structural fire since December 2008. Prior to coming to the National Park Service office at NIFC, he served as fire chief for the Marine Corps Bases Japan Fire Department. He also previously worked as a fire inspector and emergency services coordinator at Golden Gate National Recreation Area in California.

Raised in Orange County, California, Johnson began his career as a firefighter within days of graduation from high school and has served in every position from firefighter to fire chief and fire inspector to fire marshal. Brian and his wife, Barbara, have two adult sons, one of whom manages a dining facility in Yellowstone National Park.

Source: [News release](#), NPS Division of Fire Management and Aviation.

Buffalo National River Superintendent Kevin Cheri Is Retiring

Kevin Cheri, the park's superintendent for the last decade, is retiring.

Kevin's NPS career began in 1974, when he began working as a seasonal ranger for Carlsbad Caverns National Park through Xavier University's Cooperative Education Program. He worked there for four seasons.

In 1978, Kevin was hired as a permanent protection ranger at Buffalo Point, becoming the first African American employee at Buffalo National River. After completing a two-year intake training program, Kevin was hired as a supervisory park ranger at Canyonlands National Park in 1980. During much of the eight years he was there, Kevin was the only African American ranger in the entire Rocky Mountain Region.

Kevin became the superintendent of Fort Davis National Historic Site in 1988 and the deputy superintendent of Big Bend National Park and Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River in 1992. In 1996, he returned to his hometown of New Orleans to serve as the deputy superintendent at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, where he stayed until he became the superintendent of Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area in 2000. In 2007, he returned to Buffalo National River.

With Kevin's leadership, the park has found new opportunities to welcome visitors, leading to greater river stewardship and economic development. Kevin has established safer and more accessible roads and trails, supported the expansion of park outreach programs, and facilitated the development of two environmental education centers in cooperation with Arkansas State University, the University of Central Arkansas, and North Arkansas College. He worked with members of the surrounding communities to establish the Buffalo National River Partners, a friends group dedicated to supporting the mission of the park.

Since his first permanent appointment, Kevin has successfully increased diversity in every park he has served. He is passionate about mentoring employees of all backgrounds to support a strong workforce into the future. He serves on the Parks and Conservation Advisory Council at Texas A&M University and also works with the Harrison Community Task Force on Race Relations.

Source: [News release](#), Buffalo NR.

Other News And Notes

National Park System

The NPS 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.

- **Climate Change National Park Proposed** – A business magazine called *Fast Company*, which focuses on technology, business and design, has an article on a “modest proposal” being advanced by the Regional Plan Association to turn northern New Jersey into Climate Change National Park. Excerpt: “[What] it would denote – according to a new plan that’s as much a piece of political art as it is a policy proposal – is a stretch of land valuable as both an educational site, and as an important part of climate resiliency. The Meadowlands would be a national park ‘that changes and grows with climate change...’” The article includes some conceptual drawings of the park. [Full story](#).
- **National Mall Prescribes Birth Control For Rats** – *E&E News*, a publication that focuses on news for energy and environmental professionals, reports that the National Mall is going to try to reduce its rat population by trying birth control: “Under a pilot

project set to begin in the coming weeks, a contraceptive bait called ContraPest will be fed to rats around the food kiosk at the Thomas Jefferson Memorial. The plan is the brainchild of Arizona-based SenesTech Inc., which says it makes more sense to target the reproductive capabilities of rats to try to eliminate them in the long run instead of relying on toxic poisons to kill them immediately. Calling it ‘a new paradigm in rodent control,’ the company says its formula can work on both sexes of rats, inducing egg loss in females and impairing sperm development in males.” [Full story](#).

- **Point Reyes Makes 'Crappiest Places in America' List** – The Center for Biological Diversity posted this item in late November: “The livestock-polluted waters of Point Reyes National Seashore rank in the top 10 percent of U.S. locations most contaminated by feces indicated by *E. coli* bacteria, according to a new report published on the investigative journalism website *The Revelator*. The report also discloses that Point Reyes National Seashore has been one of the 10 most feces-contaminated locations monitored in California since 2012 and that the state’s highest reported *E. coli* level was on a Point Reyes cattle ranch.” A number of private ranching enterprises currently graze beef and dairy cattle on 24 lease units that make up more than 18,000 acres of the park’s 71,000 acres. [Full story](#).

Department of the Interior Interior In The News

These days, DOI is generating almost as much news as the National Park Service, with much of it concerning the Service either directly or indirectly. This section will capture those stories.

- **Two National Monuments To Be Reduced Drastically In Size** – The *New York Times* has posted a front page story – one among many such in the media – on the administration’s decision to “sharply reduced the size of two national monuments in Utah...by some two million acres, the largest rollback of federal land protection in the nation’s history.” Bears Ears National Monument is to be reduced in acreage by 85 percent and Grand Staircase-Escalante will be cut to about half its current size. Says the *Times*: “The decision to reduce Bears Ears is expected to set off a legal battle that could alter the course of American land conservation, putting dozens of other monuments at risk and possibly opening millions of preserved public acres to oil and gas extraction, mining, logging and other commercial activities.” [Full story](#).
- **But National Monuments In Zinke’s State Fare Otherwise** – An article with the following headline appeared in the November 27th *Huffington Post*: “Zinke Aims To Shave National Monuments — Except In His Home State.” The lead paragraphs provide an overview: “Montana won’t lose any acres or protections for its current national monuments, and the state may also get a brand-new 200-square-mile national monument. That could happen even as the ink dries on Zinke’s recommendation to open millions of acres of public land in other states to oil and gas interests. Zinke recommended the massive Badger-Two Medicine area in northwest Montana be designated as a national monument over the summer. The designation would protect the federal lands from any oil and gas development.” The article adds that Montanans are “scratching their heads” about such an apparent contradiction in treatment of national monuments, and that some speculate that maybe it’s because Zinke has plans to run for governor of Montana once his Washington tour is done. [Full story](#).
- **Whistleblower Sues Department** – The *Huffington Post* has also reported on DOI scientist Joel Clement’s suit against DOI seeking release of information on the recent shuffling of senior staff: “A scientist-turned-whistleblower who resigned from the Interior Department in October citing agency chief Ryan Zinke’s ‘poor leadership’ and

'résumé of failure' is suing to obtain information concerning his own reassignment and that of several of his former colleagues. Joel Clement told HuffPost he has been 'completely stonewalled' in his attempts to get documents via Freedom of Information Act requests and was left with no choice but to file suit against the department." [Full story](#).

- **New Outdoor Advisory Panel Reviewed** – MyMagicValley.com, a component of Idaho's *Twin Falls Times-News*, ran an article in November on the "mixed reviews" that have been expressed regarding the secretary's new outdoor advisory panel: "Representatives of outdoor recreation and conservation groups see both potential and peril in a new advisory committee being created by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke." Those interviewed mostly express cautious support, but concerns are expressed about the panel being "overpopulated with people who represent recreational vehicles and motorized recreation." [Full story](#).
- **IG Reports On Secretary's Travel Practices** – If you missed it, the deputy DOI IG reported in mid-November on her investigation into Secretary Zinke's "improper travel practices." She said that Zinke had failed to keep complete records (and in some cases, kept none at all) of his travel since taking office. But the investigation was stymied by "absent or incomplete documentation for several pertinent trips." According to a *Washington Post* article, "Interior lawyers and ethics officials also have not shown evidence to investigators that they have been able to 'distinguish between personal, political and official travel' or cost-analysis documents to justify his choice of military or charter flights..." [Full story](#).
- **DOI Trophy Hunting Action Trumped By President** – The Fish and Wildlife Service moved to end a 2014 government ban on big-game trophy hunting in Zimbabwe and Zambia in mid-November, reported the *Washington Post*, "saying it would help the conservation of the species," as "under U.S. law the remains of African elephants, which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, can only be imported if federal officials have determined that hunting them benefits the species more broadly." "But the Fish and Wildlife decision almost immediately was met with a fierce backlash and outcry from animal rights activists and environmentalists," reported the *Post*, "as well as prominent conservatives and a key House committee chairman." Result: The president reversed the decision. [Full story](#).

Systemwide Park Operations Update

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

- **Channel Islands National Park** – A fossil of an extinct species of sea cow has been discovered on Santa Rosa Island, a new find for the Channel Islands and conceivably one of the oldest of its kind on the west coast of North America with an estimated age between 20 and 25 million years ago. Scientists think that the fossilized remains of a skull and partially articulated rib cage may represent a new species of sea cow, an ancient relative of dugongs known as sirenians. The park has posted photos on its [Facebook page](#). Source: [News release](#), Channel Islands NP.
- **Lake Mead National Recreation Area** – Urban Park Concessionaires, doing business as Lake Mohave Recreation Company, has been picked to operate commercial services and facilities under a new 15-year concession contract at Katherine Landing on Lake Mohave. Urban Park Concessionaires, based out of Red Bluff, California, has 37 years

of experience in the marina and hospitality industry. They will provide a variety of services to the public at Katherine Landing and will also update the restaurant and retail facilities, increase water conservation and reduce electricity and fuel consumption. Source: [News release](#), Lake Mead NRA.

- **Arches National Park** – The NPS has extended the public comment period for the plan to help alleviate traffic and parking congestion in the park. The new deadline for comments is December 18th. The traffic congestion management plan addresses vehicle traffic and parking congestion problems that affect visitor access, visitor enjoyment, and resource conditions. The plan and environmental assessment are available for public review and comment on the [PEPC website](#). Source: [News release](#), Arches NP.
- **Yosemite National Park** – The park will be adding two Proterra Catalyst buses to its fleet. With more than five million visitors each year, Yosemite has seen its free shuttle service log 436,000 miles annually, with 3.8 million boardings. In 2001, the park began replacing its diesel bus fleet with diesel-electric hybrid vehicles. Yosemite is now taking the next step toward a state-of-the-art clean transportation system with the adoption of Proterra zero-emission, battery-electric buses. The new Catalyst buses are expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 887,000 pounds annually and save approximately \$150,500 on maintenance and operating costs. They will begin service in late 2018 and will operate year-round, transporting up to 1,480 visitors per day through the park's Yosemite Valley. Source: [Press release](#), PR Newswire.

Acknowledgements

Thanks this week to members Joan Anzelmo, Cathy Halainen and Dennis Burnett for sending along articles or tips on news stories.

A Closing Observation

In the interest of equal time, we offer a pair of observations about national monuments this week:

“When you turn the management [of national monuments] over to the tree-huggers, the bird and bunny lovers and the rock lickers, you turn your heritage over.” Mike Noel, a Republican state representative in Utah.

“At Patagonia, we are outraged to see President Trump attempt to eliminate federal protection of two million acres of land that belongs to all Americans. On behalf of our staff, customers, and the 2.8 million people who voiced their desire to protect these treasures forever, we’re using every tool at our disposal to stop this illegal action.” Cory Bayers, Patagonia’s vice president of marketing.

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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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salaries (GS, wage grade, seasonal, temporary, or SES) employees of the National Park Service can join the Coalition. For more information, click on [this link](#).

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