



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

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### **Incidents**

#### **Natchez Trace Parkway Man Sentenced To 40 Years In Jail For Parkway Murder**

An interagency investigation led by an NPS special agent has culminated in a lengthy prison sentence for a man who fatally shot a woman on the parkway in 2014.

Christopher E. Lemon, 37, pleaded guilty to second degree murder in September and was recently sentenced in federal court to 480 months in federal prison followed by five years of supervised release.

On July 3, 2014, Lemon was riding on the parkway with a co-worker. He'd stolen a firearm from their employer's store before getting into the vehicle with the victim. While inside the vehicle, Lemon shot the woman five times in the chest and leg, leaving her in the backseat of her vehicle. Her body was later found by a ranger.

A federal grand jury indicted Lemon in September 2016, charging him with murder in the second degree as well as being a felon in possession of a firearm, possession of a stolen firearm, theft of a firearm, and use of a firearm in relation to a crime of violence. At the sentencing hearing, Lemon was also ordered to pay \$7,269 in restitution to the Office of Attorney General's Crime Victim Compensation Fund.

The National Park Service thanks the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Leake County Sheriff's Department for their assistance in the investigation. The case was prosecuted by the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Mississippi.

Source: [News release](#), Natchez Trace Parkway.

#### **Big Cypress National Preserve Hikers Lost In Park Rescued By Helicopter**

Two lost hikers were rescued from Big Cypress National Preserve on the Friday before last.

The Collier County Sheriff's Office received a 911 call about the hikers around 8:30 a.m. and dispatched a helicopter to try and find them. Big Cypress rangers and Miami-Dade Fire Rescue also helped with the search.

According to the Sheriff's Office, the men got lost after trying for several days to navigate a waterlogged section of the Florida Trail, a 1,100-mile National Scenic Trail that starts in the Everglades and ends off Pensacola Beach.

In a 911 call, one of the hikers told a dispatcher that he and a friend were supposed to be out on the trail for three days but had been there for seven days. The man told the dispatcher the water was "abnormally high" and at some points reached their waists. He added that there were alligators and water moccasins everywhere.

Although the two men were out of food and water, neither was injured.

Source: [News release \(including video of rescue\)](#), *Naples Daily News*.

## **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***

Nothing to report.

#### ***Senate***

On December 7th, the Senate passed H.J. Res. 123, making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2018, by a vote of 81 yeas to 14 nays. The bill extends funding for federal agencies, including the Department of the Interior, through December 22nd. The bill now goes to the president to be signed into law.

#### ***House***

On December 7th, the House passed H.J. Res. 123, making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2018, by a vote of 235 yeas to 193 nays. The bill extends funding for federal agencies, including the Department of the Interior, through December 22nd.

On December 7th, the House passed 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.

On December 7th, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing entitled "Transforming the Department of the Interior for the 21st Century", which focused on the proposed reorganization of the department. Denis P. Galvin, advisor to the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks and former deputy director of the National Park Service, testified at the hearing, among other public witnesses; [his testimony can be read at this link](#). There was no witness from the department.

On December 7th, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal lands held a hearing, among other bills, on:

- H.R. 805, to allow for the conveyance of two properties, and the relinquishment of their reversionary interest, currently owned by the Union Pacific Railroad, to the City of Tulare, CA, which uses the properties for youth recreational opportunities.
- H.R. 1349, to amend the Wilderness Act to ensure that the use of non-motorized bicycles, motorized wheelchairs, non-motorized wheelchairs, strollers, wheelbarrows, survey wheels, measuring wheels, and game carts are not prohibited in Wilderness Areas.
- H.R. 3961, to authorize of a study of the Kissimmee River, FL, and its tributaries as a potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

There was no witness from the Department of the Interior at this hearing.

On December 12th and 13th, the House Natural Resources Committee will mark up, among other bills, the following:

- H.R. 1349, to amend the Wilderness Act to ensure that the use of non-motorized bicycles, motorized wheelchairs, non-motorized wheelchairs, strollers, wheelbarrows, survey wheels, measuring wheels, and game carts are not prohibited in Wilderness Areas.
- H.R. 1350, to modify the boundary of Voyageurs National Park, MN, by transferring administrative jurisdiction over several small tracts of land managed by BLM to the National Park Service, and to authorize a land exchange between the state and NPS for other small parcels on the edges of the park.
- H.R. 2888, to establish the Ste. Genevieve National Historic Site, MO.
- H.R. 3400, to streamline the process for the sale of federal land recreation passes, and encourage greater access to outdoor recreation.
- H.R. 4266, to clarify the boundary of Acadia National Park.

On December 14th, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands will hold a hearing on H.R. 4558, to codify the president's recent proclamation reducing the boundary for the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument. Among other provisions, the bill would establish within the reduced national monument boundary, an Escalante Canyons National Park and Preserve, of undetermined size since the map is unavailable; a 212,000-acre Grand Staircase National Monument; a 551,000-acre Kaiparowits National Monument; and a 243,000-acre Escalante Canyons National Monument. A management council would be established to develop a comprehensive management plan for the park, preserve, and national monuments, with seven total members. One member would be from the Department of the Interior, five members would be from the local counties in UT, and the remaining member would be appointed by the president. In the park and preserve, the council is required to allow hunting, fishing, and trapping, and grazing is required to be allowed in perpetuity. The only thing NPS is authorized to manage is grazing. There are no requirements that the park and preserve be managed in accordance with the Organic Act. It is unclear if NPS or BLM is responsible in any way for management of the named national monuments.

### **Park People, Friends and Allies**

#### **Alaska Region**

#### **Darry "Lynn" Ellis Receives Aviation Legend Award**

On October 27th, the Alaska Air Carriers Association (AACCA) recognized and bestowed the esteemed title of Alaska Aviation Legend to National Park Service pilot Darryl "Lynn" Ellis.

A lifelong Alaskan, Ellis grew up in the remote community of Nabesna, located in the Wrangell Mountains northeast of Glennallen, where aviation was a way of life for his family. In the early days of Alaska's statehood, his father was a commercial big game guide and Ellis learned his piloting technique from the backseat of his father's Piper Super Cub. Along the way, he also learned the maintenance skills needed to keep the aircraft flying.

Later, when others were leaving Alaska, Lynn started a commercial aviation business at the Gulkana Airport, where he delivered mail, passengers, freight, hunters, and birdwatchers. Missions with more urgency included search and rescue operations for those in Glennallen and the surrounding communities. Lynn amassed over 14,000 flight hours flying the region.

In 2011, several years after selling his personal aviation business, Lynn put his immense aviation knowledge and talents to work becoming a pilot for the National Park Service in his beloved Wrangell Mountains. As an FAA certified flight instructor and a Department of the Interior instructor pilot, Lynn is passing his expertise and knowledge on to the next generation of NPS and DOI aviators. He is a highly respected member of the Alaska aviation community as well as in the DOI aviation program.

Source: [News release](#), NPS Aviation Program.

### **Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area Kirsten Talken-Spaulding Named Acting Superintendent**

Kirsten Talken-Spaulding has been named acting superintendent of Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. She will take the helm later this month and will be working out of the superintendent's office at park headquarters beginning in early January.

She will be in the park until early spring unless a new permanent superintendent is named before then. John Donahue recently retired as superintendent after 14 years in the park.

Talken-Spaulding comes to the park with a wealth of experience and leadership skills. She is currently the superintendent at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park in Virginia. Prior to that, she served as the first superintendent of Fort Monroe National Historic Site, also in Virginia, where she led startup operations for a brand new national park unit.

She began her NPS career in 1988 at Shenandoah National Park and held positions at Mojave National Preserve in California, NPS headquarters and the National Mall and Memorial Parks in Washington, D.C., Haleakala National Park in Hawaii, and several parks in National Capital Region, including Prince William Forest Park and National Capital Parks-East.

As a Bevinetto Congressional Fellow in Washington, D.C., from 2010 to 2011, Talken-Spaulding served as a staff member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and as special assistant to the NPS director. She also worked with the NPS Legislative and Congressional Affairs office. The Bevinetto Congressional Fellowship is a highly competitive and intensive two-year training and development program for NPS employees.

Source: [News story \(with photo\)](#), *Pike County Courier*.

### **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.

- **NPS, NPF Initiative Will Focus On Lesser-Visited Parks** – The *Washington Post* has reported on “Parks 101,” a new effort by the Service and the National Park Foundation aimed at shifting visitation from the more popular parks to others that are not so well known: “The overarching message: With visits up by 50 million between 2014 and 2016, people should stop bunching up in the majors and start spreading out to the minors.” Parks 101 is an online series in which each lesser-known site will be paired with a well-known personality in order to draw attention to it – Dominique Dawes, Dierks Bentley and Jordan Fisher among them. [Full story](#).
- **Utah County Looks To Tap Lake Powell** – The *Los Angeles Times* has a story that highlights the growing issue of water usage and availability in the Southwest – a Utah county is attempting to build a pipeline that would draw 77 million gallons a day out of Lake Powell in Glen Canyon NRA. Washington County, which is located around St. George and has tripled in population since 1990, plans to spend millions to build the 140-mile-long pipeline. Others who rely on water from the Colorado River – the 30 million downstream users in Arizona, Nevada and California – see this as a “water grab.” A fight is pending. [Full story](#).
- **Grand Canyon Bison Reduction Plan Taking Heat** – A blog published by the president of The Humane Society carries a vehement denunciation of the plan to reduce bison in the park. An excerpt provides a sense of the tone of his comments: “Shooting animals accustomed to a non-threatening human presence — the park attracts nearly six million visitors a year — is a betrayal. The charges against the bison are trumped-up and best characterized as fake ecological news. And the millions of visitors to Grand Canyon National Park...will be left scratching their heads that the federal agency charged with protecting these animals has turned into their persecutor.” [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.

- **Secretary Advances Proposal For Road Through Wilderness** – CNN is reporting on a plan being advanced by Secretary Zinke that would “for the first time” allow a new road through a federally protected wilderness area. The area in question is within Izembek National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska: “Critics of the road, however, say it would be disastrous, not just for the Izembek refuge but in setting a precedent for construction in wilderness areas nationwide.” [Full story](#).
- **Return Of The [Robber Barons](#)** – An article in *High Country News* compares the current administration with that of President Taft, whose notorious Interior secretary, Albert Fall, sought to give away public lands to oil barons and even do away with the department itself. Says the author: “Ryan Zinke, the current Interior secretary, likes to compare himself to Roosevelt. Yet he far more closely resembles Fall. Fall’s easy-access creed is reflected in Zinke’s systematic evisceration of environmental protections, a crusade clearly laid out in the Interior Department’s recently leaked four-year strategic plan, and in its ‘review’ of department actions that allegedly ‘burden domestic energy.’ The former, from which all mentions of the ‘climate’ have been stricken, provides a

blueprint for private exploitation of public lands, while the latter provides an extensive list of the energy-specific rules now on the chopping block.” [Full story](#).

## **Systemwide Park Operations Update**

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

- **Devil’s Tower National Monument** – The park announced last week that it is planning a number of upgrades that will improve accessibility and visitor experience. The most significant will be a new accessible approach to the 1.3-mile-long Tower Trail, which winds around the base of the tower. The trail is the most popular hiking path in the park, which attracts around 500,000 visitors every year. Other improvements include new interpretive exhibits along the Tower Trail, an interpretive plaza and accessible walkways to the trailhead and visitor center. A climber registration office will also be developed and installed. In addition, new accessible exhibits will be added to the visitor center, along with more parking spaces and a new bus drop off area. Source: [News story](#), *Rapid City Journal*.
- **Cuyahoga Valley National Park** – Two sections of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail will be closed from now until next June while the park replaces four pedestrian bridges along the trail. Closure locations include the sections between Boston Store Visitor Center and the Interstate 271 Bridge and between Deep Lock Quarry and Hunt House. There will be access both north and south of the Lock 29 Trailhead to the closure locations. There will not be access to Boston Store Visitor Center from Lock 29 Trailhead during the closure. Source: [News release](#), Cuyahoga Valley NP.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks this week to member Dennis Burnett for passing along a number of articles.

## **A Closing Observation**

"There may be people who feel no need for nature. They are fortunate, perhaps. But for those of us who feel otherwise, who feel something is missing unless we can hike across land disturbed only by our footsteps or see creatures roaming freely as they have always done, we are sure there should be wilderness. Species other than man have rights, too. Having finished all the requisites of our proud, materialistic civilization, our neon lit society, does nature, which is the basis for our existence, have the right to live on? Do we have enough reverence for life to concede to wilderness this right?"

Author and conservationist [Terry Tempest Williams](#)

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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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