



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

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Incidents

Ozark NSR

Areas Of Park Reopen Following Flood

Parts of the park reopened to day use last Saturday following more than a week of hard work cleaning and repairing sites. Park staff and members of Midwest Region's incident management team have been working daily to clean up debris, repair extensive damage to facilities, and prioritize areas that can be reopened.

This effort requires coordination of over 150 people, including NPS employees who have traveled from all over the country to supplement park staff engaged in the cleanup effort.

Though crews have accomplished a great deal of work since the late April flood, visitors are being advised to be prepared for limited services, as full amenities are not available yet in the reopened areas. Visitors should be prepared for rough road conditions at Devils Well, Klepzig Mill and Rocky Falls.

The Jacks Fork and Current Rivers remain temporarily closed while crews work on removing obstructions in the rivers and at access points, many of which are blocked by downed trees and washed out roads.

The following areas reopened on May 13th:

- Alley Mill – Alley Mill parking area, grounds around Alley Mill and Storys Creek School and Alley General Store opened. Alley Mill and restrooms there remain closed. Burr Oak pavilion and picnic area are closed due to damage and debris. All hiking trails are closed due to hazardous conditions.
- Devils Well – Devils Well is open for day use and picnicking. Cave Spring trail is open for hiking and the vault toilet has reopened.
- Rocky Falls – The area is open for day use and picnicking. The vault toilet is open.
- Klepzig Mill – The area is open for day use and picnicking.
- Akers Ranger Station – The public restrooms at the ranger station are open.

Phone and internet service remain out parkwide. For public information and status updates information desks are being staffed at Round Spring Contact Station, Alley Spring General Store, and Park Headquarters in Van Buren.

Source: Press Release, Pamela Barnes, Ozark NSR. [More information.](#)

Yellowstone NP White Wolf Killed In Park

Hikers discovered a mortally wounded female wolf inside the park near Gardiner, Montana, on April 11th. Park staff responded quickly, and, due to the severity of the wolf's injuries, euthanized the animal. The body was then sent to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon, for a necropsy.

Preliminary results from the necropsy of the Canyon Pack alpha female wolf showed that she suffered from a gunshot wound.

Investigators believe that the wolf was shot on the north side of the park near Gardiner, or possibly near the Old Yellowstone Trail, which is located in the park on the northern boundary. The incident likely occurred sometime between April 10th at 1 a.m. and April 11th at 2 p.m.

This wolf was one of three known white wolves in the park. She lived to be 12 years old, twice the age of the average wolf in the park, and had a broad range that extended from Hayden Valley to the Firehole River area to the northern portion of the park. As the alpha female for over nine years with the same alpha male, she had at least 20 pups, 14 of which lived to be yearlings. She was one of the most recognizable wolves in the park and was sought after by visitors.

Due to the serious nature of this incident, a reward of up to \$5,000 is being offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of whoever was responsible for this criminal act.

Anyone with information about this incident is asked to contact the park's Investigative Services Branch. Tips will be kept confidential:

- Calls – The ISB Tip Line, 888-653-0009
- Text – Send to 202-379-4761
- Online – Go to www.nps.gov/isb and click "Submit a Tip"
- Email – Send to nps_isb@nps.gov
- Facebook – Send a message via Facebook @InvestigativeServicesNPS
- Twitter – Send to @SpecialAgentNPS

Source: Press Release, Morgan Warthin, Yellowstone NP. [More information.](#)

Zion NP Cliffed-Out Hiker Rescued

A man was rescued last Tuesday night after hikers heard him yelling for help from a precarious perch on a cliff several hundred feet above the Weeping Rock Trail.

Park dispatch received a report of a person stuck on a cliff on Tuesday afternoon. A man in his early 20s decided to climb off trail at Observation Point; when he found he couldn't get back up to the point, he descended to a point where he became stuck on a ledge.

A team of four skilled climbers responded. Two members of the team traversed the cliff face until they were above the man, then rappelled down, set up an anchor, and rappelled with the man down to the canyon floor.

The man was back on solid ground by 10 p.m.; all the rescuers made it down by 11 p.m.

Source: Julie Applegate, *Saint George News*. [More information](#).

National Fire Situation

National Interagency Fire Center Fire Activity Continues In Southeast

The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) remains at Preparedness Level 1, the lowest of five preparedness levels.

During the week of May 6th, five new large fires were reported. The West Mims Fire in Georgia, which is the nation's largest fire, has burned more than 144,000 acres. Firefighters in Florida continue to work on seven large fires; five of them are more than 85 percent contained. An incident management team is assisting with damage assessment and clearing trees and debris on Forest Service roads, trails, and recreation sites in southern Missouri and southwest Illinois.

As of May 12th, 21,867 fires had been reported nationwide, just a bit under the average year-to-date annual total of 22,273 fires for the period from 2006 to 2016. Those fires had burned 2,071,365 acres, considerably more than the annual year-to-date average of 900,074 acres for the same period.

Source: NIFC. More information.

Natural and Cultural Resources

Grand Canyon NP Public Comment Sought On Bison Herd Reduction

The park is seeking public review and comment on a bison herd reduction environmental assessment that evaluates management actions pertaining to bison on the North Rim. The EA was prepared in collaboration with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Inter-Tribal Buffalo Council.

Bison on the park's North Rim are descended from animals brought to northern Arizona in 1906. In the 1990s, the bison herd, which the Arizona Game and Fish Department has managed in the House Rock Wildlife Area on the Kaibab National Forest since 1929, began venturing into the North Rim unit of the park. Most of the bison herd now spends a majority of its time inside the park.

Biologists estimate that since the early 1990s the herd has grown from approximately 100 bison to between 400 to 600 bison. Estimates also show that this herd could grow to nearly 800 bison within the next three years and as large as 1,200 to 1,500 animals within ten years if further management actions are not taken.

Given the current bison distribution, abundance, and density and the expected growth of this herd, the NPS is concerned about increased impacts on park resources, such as water, vegetation, soils, and archaeological sites; and on values such as visitor experience and wilderness character.

The purpose of the actions evaluated in this EA are to quickly reduce bison population density in collaboration with other agencies with jurisdiction for bison management on the Kaibab Plateau and to protect Grand Canyon National Park resources and values from the impacts of a steadily growing bison population.

Through the preferred alternative, the NPS, working together with cooperating agencies and partners, would reduce the bison herd to fewer than 200 animals using lethal culling with skilled volunteers and non-lethal capture and removal. Considering the size of the current bison population, the proposed herd reduction could be achievable over a period of three to five years and is consistent with recommendations for a herd size that would reduce or prevent impacts on park resources.

The NPS seeks the public comments during the 30-day comment period, which concludes on June 7th. The EA is available on the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca_bison.

Source: Press Release, Emily Davis, Grand Canyon NP. [More information](#).

Agency Management

Nothing this issue.

Park People, Friends and Allies

Washington Office

Mike Schell Selected To Head NPS Structural Fire Program

Michael “Mike” Schell has been selected as the Service’s new operations program manager for the NPS structural fire program, replacing Mark Gorman, who retired in 2016.

Schell will lead and provide oversight of the Servicewide structural fire protection and suppression operations program. He will be stationed at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho. Mike has been the deputy fire chief for Yellowstone’s structural fire department for the past five-and-a-half years.

Schell began his firefighter career in June, 1990, when he enlisted in the Air Force. After graduating from the Department of Defense Fire Academy in September, 1990, the Air Force assigned him to Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, where he performed structural, airport and wildland firefighter duties under the Strategic Air and Space Commands.

While deployed in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, he accelerated through certifications as a structural and airport firefighter, performing the duties as a firefighter, dispatcher and fire apparatus driver/operator. Mike also graduated from the Vandenberg Hotshot Academy and joined Crew 2, the only military hotshot crew in the United States. It was at Vandenberg that Mike met his future wife, Tami.

In 1994, Mike continued his firefighting career as a driver/operator and later as a crew chief assigned to Elmendorf AFB in Alaska. Mike also volunteered in his off-duty time with Central Mat-Su Fire Department in Wasilla.

Three years later, Mike became lead rescue crew chief in San Angelo, Texas, at Goodfellow AFB. He also performed station captain and assistant chief of operations duties. In 2002, the base fire department transitioned from military to civilian and he became a DoD instructor for the Louis F. Garland Fire Academy, located just across the base from his previous position.

As a fire instructor, Schell taught airport firefighter and the military wartime firefighting blocks of instruction to over 19,000 students annually. Earning degrees in teaching and fire science, he became an instructor supervisor, leading cadre teams and up to 60 instructors. He surpassed over 3,000 hours of teaching and 1,000 hours of volunteer teaching in the local community and obtained DoD master instructor certification.

In 2006, Mike and Tami were reassigned to Altus AFB in Oklahoma, where Mike became the assistant chief of operations. He led a department of 76 firefighters in structural, airport, and wildland duties and then moved into the deputy fire chief position vacated by the previous civilian deputy. During this time, the civil engineer commander selected Mike to lead the Emergency Management (EM) Flight. Assuming the duties as the emergency management flight chief and superintendent, he brought the EM Flight to a new level of performance and emergency response. Eleven months later, he was ordered to report to Misawa Air Base in Japan.

In Misawa, Mike assumed the deputy fire chief/chief of operations duties. Working closely with Japanese Air Self-Defense Forces, local community governments, and prefecture fire departments, he brought interagency relations to a commendable status noted by all affected agencies. In September 2011, after his last deployment to the Middle East in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and New Hope and a delay due to the need to assist with recovery from the 9.0 Fukushima earthquake and tsunamis in Japan, Mike retired from the military and returned to the United States. One month later, Mike and Tami moved to Yellowstone National Park, where he became deputy fire chief.

Mike is an International Fire Service Accreditation Congress/ProBoard-certified firefighter II, fire officer IV, inspector III, instructor III, hazmat technician, hazmat incident commander, airport firefighter and driver/operator – pumper/aerial/aircraft rescue and firefighting (ARFF)/mobile water supply (MWS). Additional certifications and experience include technical rescue, swift water rescue, search and rescue/urban rescue, confined space rescue, and ice rescue operations.

Mike's wife, Tami, has worked as a 911 emergency dispatcher for the DoD and NPS. Mike has already begun his new duties in the Branch of Structural Fire. He, Tami, and their six cats will be relocating to Idaho soon.

Source: Press Release, Tina Boehle, NPS/NIFC. [More information.](#)

Other News And Notes

Systemwide National Park Service In The News

A selection of additional recent news stories pertaining either directly or indirectly to the operation of the National Park Service:

- **Systemwide** – The *Sonoran News* published an article on May 8th entitled “Park Ranger Force Continues Shriveling As Visitation Swells.” Here’s the lead paragraph: “The number of rangers protecting our national parks and their visitors is steadily shrinking even as new parks are added and the number of park visitors balloons to new records, according to figures posted today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.” [Full story.](#)

- **Grand Canyon NP** – The *Arizona Republic*, part of the USA Today Network, ran a story on May 12th on a creationist suing the federal government after allegedly being denied a Grand Canyon research permit on the basis of his religion: “Andrew Snelling claims that National Park Service, tasked with evaluating the scientific merit of research proposals in parks, along with the Department of Interior and several employees for the agencies violated his constitutional rights when they denied his request to collect rock samples from the Grand Canyon.” [Full story](#).
- **National Monuments** – The Honolulu *Civic Beat*, “the only news outlet in Hawaii dedicated to public affairs reporting,” posted an interesting update on the national monuments review in its May 16th edition (the paper has a particular interest in the review because it includes nearby Papahānaumokuākea Marine NM). “The official public comment period began Friday, and more than 15,000 comments about the proposal flooded into the federal government within the first four days,” reports author Kirstin Downey. “Letters are running more than 100 to 1 against making any changes in use or boundaries of the 29 sites, all of which had previously been declared historically or environmentally significant.” [Full story](#).
- **Systemwide** – A story entitled “Zinke Rides In” appears in the current edition of the *National Review*, one of the nation’s leading conservative magazines. The subtitle gives a sense of the focus of the piece: “But will the new interior secretary take on the federal-lands bureaucracy?” It includes biographical information on Secretary Zinke. [Full story](#). [Submitted by member Dennis Burnett]

Systemwide Upcoming Events

Upcoming events and activities of potential interest to members of the Coalition:

- **May 20** – Memorial ceremony for past Yellowstone superintendent Bob Barbee at Old Faithful. For details, click on [this link](#).
- **May 26** – Due date for comments in DOI review of Bears Ears National Monument. Click on [this link](#) for more information.
- **July 10** – Due date for comments in DOI review of all national monuments but Bears Ears NM. Click on [this link](#) for more information.
- **August 4** – The Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s Maine 2017 Conference will be held in Waterville, Maine, on the week of August 4th. For more information, click on [this link](#) to the conference website.
- **August 3-4** – Along with the above, an Art and Land Conservation Symposium will be held on August 3rd and 4th at Colby College in Waterville, Maine. For more information, click on [this link](#).
- **October 18-22** – Ranger Rendezvous 40, Association of National Park Rangers, YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colorado. [Click here](#) for more information.

Systemwide Weekly Park Status Update

Here’s a listing of newly-announced extended area and facility closures and reopenings from across the Service:

- **Olympic NP** – Flood damage repair work on Mora Road began on May 16th and will continue for up to six weeks. There will be no access to Rialto Beach until the completion of the road work, with the exception of Memorial Day weekend. This includes backcountry trips through the North Coast Wilderness beginning and ending at Rialto Beach.

- **Grand Canyon NP** – Repairs to the damaged water pipeline serving the North Rim were completed ahead of schedule, allowing lodging for those with prior reservations, campgrounds, and other services to open on May 15th as normally scheduled.
- **Apostle Islands NL** – The temporary trail closures that were in place on Oak, Michigan, Stockton and Manitou Islands have been lifted. Straight line winds during storms last July caused large areas of blowdown. The trail closures were necessary to ensure visitor safety.

Source: NPS.gov News Release website.

A Closing Observation

"The abiding purpose of a national park is to bring man and his environment into closer harmony. The ultimate hope that a delicate balance between preservation and use can be maintained will depend upon the ability of the Park Service to promote, and the willingness of the visitor to accept, perception as the highest form of park use. Every visitor reacts to the beauty of the natural scene or the stirring drama of the historical past, if only passively. Salvation for the parks lies in the hope that the park visitor can be actively stimulated, by the immediacy of his surroundings and the substance of the interpretive programs, to perceive and treasure the natural and historical processes through which the land and all living things have achieved their form and by which they maintain their dependent existence."

[William C. Everhart](#), *The National Park Service*, 1972

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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. Tips on and links to park-related stories are appreciated; please send to Bill at BHalainen@gmail.com.

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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