



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

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Incidents

Joshua Tree National Park Autopsy Offers Little Additional Info On Murder-Suicide

A recently-released autopsy fails to answer the mystery behind a murder-suicide at Joshua Tree last year, but provides some hints about how the young couple's trip unfolded.

The remains of Joseph Orbeso, 21, and Rachel Nguyen, 20, were found last October 15th, nearly three months after they disappeared. Sheriff's detectives believe that Orbeso shot Nguyen, whom he had previously dated, then turned the weapon on himself. Friends and Orbeso family members have said they believe the murder-suicide was a result of desperation, not anger, and that the shooting happened only after the couple became lost in the sprawling park and ran out of food and water.

The autopsy offers nothing to support or contradict that belief, but notes that the couple's remains were found only two miles or so from where they had parked their car, a fact that might suggest confusion.

"Since we don't have any evidence to tell us why the shooting occurred, we are left to speculate," said a spokeswoman for the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. "Knowing that they rationed food, had no water, and were seeking shade certainly sheds light on the apparent dire circumstances."

Source: [Orange County Register](#).

Grand Teton National Park Two Rescued From Park's Backcountry

On Monday, March 19th, rangers worked in concert with Teton County Search and Rescue volunteers to conduct a helicopter-based rescue of an injured skier who was caught in an avalanche in Death Canyon early in the afternoon. Later in the afternoon, rangers completed a ground-based rescue of a snowshoer who became injured while jumping off boulders near Taggart Lake.

The first search and rescue effort began just before 1 p.m. when Teton Interagency Dispatch Center received a report that a skier was caught in an avalanche in an area known as "Son of Apocalypse Couloir" on the south side of Death Canyon.

Four people were skiing the couloir when a natural avalanche of fresh snow began above them. The sliding snow swept past one skier before gaining momentum, picking up snow, and hitting the remaining three. The first two were able to stop themselves, but the last skier, Yuki Tsuji, 37, of

Louisville, Colorado, was knocked down and tumbled a few hundred feet down the lower portion of the couloir and onto the apron of snow at its base.

The three uninjured skiers, two of them emergency medical providers, skied down to Tsuji's location and discovered she had suffered a leg injury and was unable to ski out. Tsuji's partner carried a satellite communicator and was able to send a text message for help. Meanwhile, one of the medical providers skied out to Phelps Lake where he was able to make a broken call to rangers and discuss the patient's condition.

Based on the patient's condition, rangers requested assistance from the Teton County Search and Rescue helicopter and prepared for short-haul evacuation. The helicopter flew one search and rescue volunteer into the patient's location. The volunteer then fitted Tsuji into a screamer suit and flew with her back to Sawmill Ponds Overlook along the Moose-Wilson Road. Tsuji was transferred to a park ambulance and transported to St. John's Medical Center in Jackson, Wyoming. The remaining three individuals skied out on their own.

The second search and rescue effort of the day involved a party of two who snowshoed around Taggart Lake before heading a few hundred feet above the lake. Cody Dumont, 24, of Lexington, Kentucky, suffered leg injuries after jumping off a ten-foot boulder around 3:30 p.m. Cody's partner sent a text message for help to a friend at the Taggart Lake Trailhead, who in turn contacted the Teton Interagency Dispatch Center.

One ranger skied into the area to locate the party and assess the patient's condition. Based on this assessment, four additional rangers skied into the area with a toboggan and medical gear. The rangers skied with Dumont in the sled back to Taggart Lake Trailhead, where Dumont and his partner chose to drive themselves to the hospital.

Source: [Grand Teton National Park](#).

Yellowstone National Park Three Activists Arrested In Attempt To Block Bison Killings

Three activists were arrested a week ago yesterday for attempting to block the slaughter of Yellowstone bison.

Two people locked themselves inside the squeeze chute at the park's Stephens Creek corrals early Tuesday morning. The chute is where bison are readied for slaughter. Other protesters were also there, holding signs signaling their opposition to the annual cull of Yellowstone bison. The two were arrested for entering the area around the corrals, which is closed to the public. No damage was done to the facility. A third person has also been arrested, also for entering a closed area.

The three activists are connected to a group called Wild Buffalo Defense. On its Facebook page, the group calls itself a "collective of indigenous and non-native organizers dedicated to seeing wild buffalo roam free on the plains."

The group has identified the three people who were arrested as Cody Cyson, Thomas Brown and Hannah Ponder. Initial court appearances are scheduled for Wednesday.

In a phone interview, Adam Luke, a spokesman for Wild Buffalo Defense, declined to say how many people are involved in the group or how long it had been active. He described it as an "autonomous grassroots group" and said they wanted to intervene in the annual slaughter of bison "directly and nonviolently."

The park works with other federal, tribal and state government agencies to reduce its bison population each year. A management plan calls for a population of about 3,000. Last August, Yellowstone biologists estimated the population at about 4,800 animals. The reduction comes through slaughter and hunting. Last year, more than 1,200 bison were culled. This past winter, managers agreed to try to remove between 600 and 900 bison.

Rangers previously arrested two other protestors who'd chained themselves to cement-filled barrels in an effort to prevent trucks from taking bison to slaughterhouses. The two were members of Wild Buffalo Defense. In a post on the group's Facebook page, they're identified as Wolf and Coyote.

Source: [Bozeman Daily Chronicle, March 6th](#); [Bozeman Daily Chronicle, March 16th](#)

National Fire Situation

National Interagency Fire Center Fire Activity Continues In South

Synopsis

NIFC is at Preparedness Level 1 (PL 1), the lowest of five levels.

Forty-eight new large fires were reported last week, mostly in the Southern Area. Firefighters contained another 51 large fires.

National Park Service Fires

Anhinga Fire, Big Cypress National Preserve – The fire has burned 3,119 acres and is 95% contained. The fire is smoldering and displaying little activity.

Active Incident Resource Commitments

Category	March 21st	March 28th	April 4th
Area Command Teams	0	0	--
NIMO Teams	0	0	--
Type 1 Teams	0	0	--
Type 2 Teams	0	0	--
Crews	14	7	--
Engines	250	259	--
Helicopters	9	12	--
Total FF/Overhead	1,017	1,012	--

Fires/Acreage

Category	2018 Total	2007-2017 Ave	2018 Variance
Year-to-Date Fires	9,649	10,045	- 396
Year-to-Date Acres	393,814	409,593	- 15,779

Sources:

[National Interagency Fire Center webpage](#); [NICC Incident Management Situation Report](#).

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.

Capitol Hill Weekly Legislative Roundup

New Public Laws

Nothing to report.

Senate

On March 19th, the nomination of Aimee Kathryn Jorjani of Wisconsin to be chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation was transmitted to the Senate.

On March 22nd, the Senate passed:

- H.R. 4851, to establish the Kennedy–King National Commemorative Site in the State of Indiana, at the site in Indianapolis where Senator Robert F. Kennedy informed the crowd of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As amended by the Senate, the bill strikes the section requiring the National Park Service to do a special resource study of the site to determine if it should be a unit of the national park system. See March 19th action of the House, below, for a further explanation of the provisions of the bill.
- S. Res. 448, designating March 2018 as "National Women's History Month".
- H.R. 1625, as amended by the House, to provide Consolidated Appropriations for FY 2018. This bill provides appropriations for the remainder of FY 2018 for all federal agencies whose appropriations bills had not yet been passed by Congress, including the National Park Service. The bill passed by a vote of 65 yeas to 32 nays. See the March 22nd action of the House, below, for a further explanation of the provisions of the bill.

House

On March 19th, the House passed the following:

- H.R. 4851, to establish the Kennedy–King National Commemorative Site in the State of Indiana, at the site in Indianapolis where Senator Robert F. Kennedy informed the crowd of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As amended by the House Natural Resources Committee, the bill designates the local park site as a national commemorative site with language stating the site would not be unit of the national park system despite the desire of the sponsor of the bill, Rep. Andre Carson, who introduced it to designate the site as a national historic site. Under the revised bill, the site would be part of the African-American Civil Rights Network, and the National Park Service could enter into cooperative agreements with private entities to do interpretive and educational programs. The National Park Service would also be asked to do a special resource study of the site to determine if it should be a unit of the national park system. There is one other National Commemorative Site, which was designated by Congress in Charleston, Arkansas, in 1998. The Charleston Public School complex is the site of the first previously segregated public school system in the South to integrate its school system after the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.
- H.R. 835, to update the map of, and modify the maximum acreage available for inclusion in, the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. The bill allows for the expansion of the monument by 300 acres by donation from a local land trust. The lands are on the west side of the monument and would allow better access for hazardous fuels mitigation projects as well as the protection of important wildlife habitat.

On March 20th, the Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing on H.R. 5210, to establish the National Park Restoration Fund, and H.R. 2584, the "National Park Service Legacy Act of 2017", both dealing with providing funds to the National Park Service to address the maintenance backlog. P. Daniel Smith, deputy director, National Park Service, was the witness for the department.

On March 22nd, the House again passed H.R. 4851, as amended by the Senate, to establish the Kennedy–King National Commemorative Site in the State of Indiana, at the site in Indianapolis where Senator Robert F. Kennedy informed the crowd of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As

amended by the Senate, the bill strikes the section requiring The National Park Service to do a special resource study of the site to determine if it should be a unit of the national park system. See March 19 action of the House, above, for a further explanation of the provisions of the bill. The bill now goes to the president to be signed into law.

On March 22nd, the House passed H.R. 1625, to provide Consolidated Appropriations for FY 2018. This bill provides appropriations for the remainder of FY 2018 for all federal agencies whose appropriations bills had not yet been passed by Congress, including the National Park Service. The bill passed by a vote of 256 yeas to 167 nays. H.R. 1625 provides \$3.2 billion for NPS, which is \$270 million over the current FY 2017 levels/Continuing Resolution (CR) levels and \$648 million over the president's request. This includes providing NPS with fixed costs, which is a significant win for the NPS. The breakdown of the \$3.2 billion is as follows:

- Operation of the National Park System is funded at \$2.4 billion with additional money beyond the president's request for cyclic maintenance and repair/rehab. Includes \$23 million for Centennial Challenge grants, with NPS being encouraged to give \$3 million to the National Park Foundation so they can leverage additional matching funds for backlog projects.
- National Recreation and Preservation Programs are funded at \$63.6 million, \$1 million more than FY 2017/CR levels. This includes \$20 million for heritage areas, which the administration wanted to zero out. Also includes funding for Chesapeake Bay Gateways program, NAGPRA grants, and Japanese-American internment site grants, all of which the administration wanted to cut or zero out.
- Historic Preservation Programs are funded at \$96.9 million, a boost of \$18 million over FY 2017/CR levels and \$44.8 over the president's request. This includes \$13 million for competitive grants for Civil Rights sites, \$5 million for historically black colleges and universities, \$13 million for Save America's Treasures grants, \$5 million for competitive grants for revitalizing historic properties of national, state, and local significance in rural villages and downtown areas.
- Construction is funded at \$359.7 million, which is a boost of \$150 million over the FY 2017/CR levels, and \$133 million more than the president's request. The focus of the increased money will be on addressing the deferred maintenance backlog.
- Land acquisition is funded at \$180 million, which is an increase of \$14 million over the FY 2017/CR levels, and \$120 million more than the president's request. \$124 million would go for the state grant program, \$10 million for the American Revolution, War of 1812, and Civil War battlefield grant program, with the rest for federal land acquisition.

The bill also:

- Authorizes the establishment of the Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park in Missouri, upon acquisition of sufficient lands to make a manageable unit.
- Extends the authorization of appropriations for the Tennessee, Augusta Canal, and South Carolina National Heritage Areas for a year.
- Adjusts the cap placed on wildland firefighting funding that would help agencies from having to borrow funds to fight fires and would provide a more dependable source of funding in the future.
- Designates the wilderness within Lake Clark National Park and Preserve as the Jay S. Hammond Wilderness.
- Authorizes a boundary adjustment of an additional 100 acres to be added to Morristown National Historical Park, New Jersey.
- Authorizes the Second Indian Head Division Association, Inc. to place additional commemorative elements or engravings on the existing Second Division Memorial in Washington, D.C., to further honor the members of the Second Infantry Division. The provision is a duplicate of one enacted as part of the Defense Authorization Act for FY 2018, which was signed into law by the president on December 12, 2017, as Public Law 115-91.
- Provides an additional \$45 million for the construction of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial in Washington, D.C.
- Provides \$1 million for the Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission.

- Provides \$7 million for the World War I Centennial Commission.
- Extends the authorization for the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Program for two years.

Source: Don Hellmann, former assistant director, legislative and congressional affairs for the National Park Service.

Park People, Friends and Allies

Fire Island National Seashore Superintendent Chris Soller To Retire At Month's End

Superintendent Karl "Chris" Soller will retire on March 31st.

During his 41 years of service, Soller worked to foster collaboration and nurture partnerships which can support the long-term stewardship of national parks.

As superintendent at Fire Island, Soller completed a new general management plan, deer management plan, breach management plan, and visitor experience plan. He has been a consistent voice in the planning and execution of the Corps of Engineers' Fire Island to Montauk Point and Fire Island to Moriches Inlet beach reformulation studies. In addition, he led staff and partners through Hurricane Sandy and the challenging, five-year recovery.

Soller's federal career began in 1977 as a VISTA volunteer; he started with the NPS in 1978 as an outdoor recreation planner in Washington, D.C. From 1977 to 2008, he continued to serve in a variety of positions, working between headquarters in Washington, D.C. and field positions in national parks in New York, including Gateway National Recreation Area. His first tour at Fire Island was from 1983 to 1988, when he worked as a management assistant, responsible for park planning, land use issues, and community relations. He returned in 2008 as superintendent and has served in the position longer than any superintendent before him.

A native of Youngstown, Ohio, Soller earned his BA in American studies from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and his MA in urban and environmental planning from the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia. He and his partner of 25 years, Jack Curry, split their time between New York and Arlington, Virginia.

In his retirement, Soller plans to initially spend time with family and pursue his many personal interests. He hopes to continue to be engaged in landscape management and preservation through education and advocacy.

Source: [Fire Island National Seashore](#).

Capitol Reef National Park Sue Fritzke Selected As Park's New Superintendent

Susan "Sue" Fritzke, deputy superintendent for four NPS sites in the San Francisco Bay Area, has been named superintendent of Capitol Reef National Park.

Fritzke, who served a detail in 2016-17 as acting superintendent of nearby Bryce Canyon NP, assumes her new post on April 15th.

Fritzke, a 33-year veteran of the Park Service, has been the number two manager since November 2011 for four Northern California parks, all in the East Bay – Eugene O'Neill and John Muir National Historic Sites, Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial, and Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Historical Park. She also served as acting superintendent of these parks for four months in 2015.

A natural resources professional by training and experience, Fritzke began her NPS career in 1985 as an interpretive ranger at Yosemite National Park. She also served at Mount Rainier National Park

before moving into biological science, prescribed fire, and vegetation ecology posts for the next 11 years at Yosemite and then Redwood National and State Parks.

Fritzke next served as supervisory resources manager at Yosemite (1998-2003) before moving to the Bay Area to be branch chief for vegetation management at Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Muir Woods National Monument and Fort Point National Historical Park (2003-2011).

Since 2015, she has been a participant in the NPS Superintendents' Leadership Roundtable. She earned her bachelor's degree in environmental studies and physical geography from UC-Santa Barbara and her master's in physical geography and plant ecology from Oregon State University in Corvallis. A master gardener, Fritzke also taught a course in park horticulture at West Valley Community College in Saratoga, California.

Source: [Capitol Reef National Park](#).

Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area Mike Tranel Takes Over At Bighorn Canyon

Mike Tranel, a 33-year NPS veteran, has been named superintendent of Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area and group superintendent of the eastern Montana-Wyoming Group of parks.

Tranel, who grew up on Wyoming and Montana ranches not far from Bighorn Canyon, will directly oversee the two-state recreation area and supervise the superintendents of three historically significant NPS units in the region – Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in Montana and Devils Tower National Monument and Fort Laramie National Historic Site in Wyoming.

Tranel has served for the past seven years as superintendent of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in Skagway, Alaska. He will transfer to Bighorn Canyon in late May.

Tranel has worked for NPS parks in Alaska for the past 25 years. He recently served as acting associate director in the Alaska Regional Office. He served previously as acting superintendent at Jewel Cave National Monument in South Dakota and Cape Lookout National Seashore in North Carolina. He also has worked in Denali National Park & Preserve, Timpanogos Cave National Monument in Utah, Gulf Islands National Seashore and Ocmulgee National Monument in Georgia, where he started in the NPS in 1985 as a park interpreter.

During his time at Klondike, Mike has led the park through several changes, such as completely new museum exhibits, new welcome signs in Skagway, a “cribs” exhibit of historic buildings, a grand opening of the Jeff Smiths Parlor Museum, and installing a locally-designed stamper sculpture next to the historic Itjen House. Planning for the Dyea Area was finalized in 2014 with improvements such as a new trail system in the historic town site being completed last fall.

Tranel grew up one of ten siblings near Big Horn, Wyoming, and Ashland and Broadview, Montana. His first visit to a national park was a second-grade class trip to Little Bighorn.

Tranel attended St. Labre School in Ashland, graduated from Billings Central High School, and earned bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Notre Dame and the University of Iowa, respectively.

He will move to Wyoming and Montana with his wife, Mary Tidlow, and their daughters Abigail and Olivia. Tidlow also works for the National Park Service as an architect in the NPS Park Facilities Management Division. Tranel's daughter Kelsey, who grew up in Denali, lives and works with her husband in Anchorage, Alaska.

Source: [Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park](#).

Coalition News and Activities

News and actions taken by CPANP and its members on behalf of the National Park Service and National Park System.

CPANP Membership Hits New High – On March 21st, Coalition membership hit a new benchmark high. We now have 1,500 active members. Source: Amy Gilbert.

Member Bill Halainen And Morning Report Featured In NPCA Magazine – The spring edition of *National Parks*, NPCA's quarterly magazine, has an article entitled "Reporting For Duty" which is about the 30-year run of the NPS Morning Report, its popularity among readers, and its abrupt termination in 2015. CPANP member and Morning Report editor Bill Halainen offers his perspectives on the publication, as does member Butch Farabee. The closing paragraphs are about this newsletter and tell readers how they can join CPANP. Source: [National Parks Magazine](#).

Other Reports and Releases

A brief summary of other recent news stories, web postings and agency press releases pertaining to the department, the National Park Service in general, public lands and the environment – particularly the impacts of climate change on park ecosystems, flora and fauna.

Administration

Former DOI Leaders Oppose Planned Departmental Reorganization – The Associated Press reports that eleven former DOI officials have come together to oppose the planned departmental reorganization, which Secretary Zinke has said would streamline bureaucracy and lead to better decisions made closer to the field. The officials dispute that claim, saying that "the agency already has a well-established system for decentralized decision-making." Scott Florence, who retired after 38 years with the Bureau of Land Management, said that "'ninety percent-plus of the decisions that get made get made at the local level.'" The eleven included former managers from BLM, the NPS, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Their opinions on Zinke's proposal ranged from skepticism to strong opposition, and all said they knew of no former Interior Department employees who supported it. "'It's not a matter of changing the organization,'" said BLM's Mike Ferguson. "It's a matter of allowing the employees in the organization to do the jobs that they were hired to do." Source: [Associated Press/Federal Times](#).

Still More Former DOI Leaders Speak Out In Opposition To Reorganization – Add three more officials to those noted above – specifically, Rebecca Watson, who served as assistant secretary for land and minerals management in the George W. Bush administration, Lynn Scarlett, who served as deputy secretary in the Bush administration, and John Leshy, who served as DOI's top lawyer during the Clinton administration. All opposed the plan, though Leshy found a silver lining. A few of their comments follow:

- Watson: "'It's sort of like rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. It's a huge time suck to do that, and as a political appointee, you have a very limited window to get things done.'"
- Scarlett: She criticized Zinke for his assertions that Interior has too much management in Washington and not enough focus on its offices near public lands, particularly in the West. "The fact of the matter is, there's quite a lot of distribution," Scarlett said, calling Zinke's descriptions of the agency's personnel "quite misleading." She noted that among the department's 70,000 employees, only about 10 percent are located in the Washington area, while 90 percent are "in the field."
- Leshy: "'I hope Zinke pursues this to the end, because I think this will be a tremendous distraction, and a tremendous time sink. It will cost an incredible amount of political chips, it will involve making enemies all over the Congress.'"

The trio spoke at an annual symposium held at the University of Utah's Wallace Stegner Center for Land, Resources and the Environment. Source: [E&E News](#).

New Public Meetings To Be Held On National Monuments – DOI has scheduled public meetings this week in Blanding, Bluff, Kanab and Escalante, Utah, to gather public feedback on how "redrawn"

monuments are to be managed – specifically, Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante NMs. Monument supporters say that BLM should hold up the planning process until the courts resolve lawsuits seeking the monuments’ restoration, and also argue that the comment period timeframe is way too limited. “Millions of Americans have already voiced their concerns about exploiting national monuments, yet this administration fails to recognize science, economic impacts, cultural history or the law when it comes to managing lands already named national monuments,” said Nada Culver, senior counsel for The Wilderness Society. “There is nothing ‘public,’ or legal, about the meetings they plan to hold.” Source: [Salt Lake Tribune](#).

Zinke Updates – Here’s the latest on Secretary Zinke, who continues to garner more press coverage than anyone in the administration other than the president:

- *Zinke and His Departmental Domain* – Dana Millbank, a regular opinion writer for the *Washington Post*, has a column in a recent edition of the paper entitled “All Hail Ryan Zinke, Our Imperial Viceroy.” Along with serious objections to bad decisions Zinke has made, Millbank writes that Zinke treats DOI as if it was his “plaything,” adding that his “fine tastes befit a colonial ruler” – use of private planes and helicopters, ordering special doors fashioned for his DOI suite, having a special secretarial flag hoisted over Main Interior when he’s in town, and commissioning a commemorative coin with his name on it. [Washington Post](#).
- *Zinke and The Miffed Montanans* – It’s not just the Eastern liberal elites who have problems with the secretary and his actions – it’s also his Montana neighbors. On March 20th, an editorial in the *Billings Gazette* offered this perspective on Zinke’s strange comment to Rep Hanabusa at a recent hearing (see last week’s edition): “Beyond being wildly insensitive and bizarrely inappropriate, Zinke's erratic behavior on Thursday at the hearing was just another in a growing number of incidents which demonstrate his values are too much Washington, D.C., and not enough Montana.” The column lists some of the things Zinke has done that are not in accord with beliefs most Montana residents hold. The editorialist then concludes: “Even though Zinke is a Montanan, he's not representing our values.” [Billings Gazette](#)
- *Zinke and The Fiscal Fallacy* – PolitiFact, a website that prides itself on non-partisan accuracy in political reporting, has taken the secretary to task for claiming that the president’s proposal to establish a fund for park and refuge maintenance would be the biggest such fund ever. “This is the largest investment in our public lands infrastructure in our nation's history,” said Zinke. “Let me repeat that, this is the largest investment in our public lands infrastructure in the history of this country.” PolitiFact found that claim dubious at best, partly due to uncertainty about how much of the \$18 billion that will allegedly be in the fund will actually be generated, but mostly because the overall investment in the parks made by the CCC in the 30s, adjusted for inflation, comes to about \$53 billion. Source: [PolitiFact](#).

National Park System

Report Released On Air Pollution In National Parks – “Polluted Parks,” a new NPCA report, grades the pollution-related damage in the 48 national parks, which are required by the Clean Air Act to have the highest possible air quality. All of them are plagued by significant air pollution. The twelve with the worst problems, listed in descending order, are Sequoia, Kings Canyon, Everglades, Joshua Tree, Carlsbad Caverns, Acadia, Yosemite, Guadalupe Mountains, Big Bend, Mammoth Cave, Great Smoky Mountains, and Saguaro. The article includes a link to the full 30-page PDF report. Source: [NPCA](#).

Thunderbear: Still Alive And Well – Those of you who’ve been around the NPS for a few decades remember editions of *Thunderbear*, “the oldest alternative newsletter in the federal government,” regularly showing up in your mailbox or breakroom. The author was (and is) P.J. Ryan, a career NPS employee; the contents included “light-hearted...behind the scenes” stories on the NPS and “commentary on wildlife and park management of the national parks and forests as well as on history and travel, both domestic and foreign.” Thunderbear was a 2,000-pound, ten-foot-tall, beer-drinking flying bear” whose job was “to protect the protectors of the environment: park rangers, forest rangers, scientists, managers, and others engaged in defending public lands against rapacious developers, special interest groups and their politician friends.” Some of you may not know that it’s still around,

as P.J. continued it on the web after suspending mailed editions. It's available [at this link](#); the page currently includes his five most recent editions, numbers 301 to 305. Source: [Thunderbear](#).

Sundry Actions and Updates – Here, in brief, are additional reports on parks, culled either from park press releases or from newspapers:

- *Lake Mead NRA* – Despite worsening conditions in the mountains that feed the Colorado River, forecasters still expect the Lake Mead reservoir to contain just enough water by the end of the year to avoid a first-ever federal shortage declaration. A month ago, the Colorado River Basin was on track for its seventh-driest winter in more than half a century. Now forecasters say this winter will likely go down as the sixth-driest on record for the river system. Last year's above-average snowmelt will likely keep its surface about two feet above the trigger line for a federal shortage, despite projections from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation that call for the lake to drop by about 11 feet between now and December 31st. Source: [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#).
- *Yellowstone NP* – Abstract submissions and registration are now open for the 14th Biennial Scientific Conference on the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The deadline for abstracts is April 30th. Registration will remain open until the conference fills. This year's conference theme, "Tracking the Human Footprint," focuses on the human experience and the role scientific research and communication will play in shaping future management of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Hosted by Yellowstone Forever, the conference takes place between September 11th and September 14th in Big Sky, Montana. To learn more, register, or submit an abstract, visit [the conference website](#). Conference staff may be reached at e-mail them (a link is provided in the news release) or call 307-344-2260. Source: [Yellowstone National Park](#).
- *Gateway Arch NP* – The travel section on CNBC's webpage has a feature entitled "A Look Inside St. Louis Gateway Arch's \$380 Million Makeover." The article provides details, including photos, on upgrades made to the park's facilities and grounds, which will be formally dedicated this July 3rd at Fair St. Louis. Source: [CNBC](#).
- *Mammoth Cave NP* – The park is seeking comments on its draft cave/karst management plan. The purpose of this plan is to provide a consistent framework for managing the world-class cave and karst resources in the park and to work cooperatively with partners within the broader Mammoth Cave Area International Biosphere Reserve. The plan will provide direction to protect and conserve the park's complex and sensitive resources through the use of science to promote stewardship and understanding. The public scoping period began on March 20th and will run until April 13th. The public may provide written comments about the scope of the project online at the National Park Service Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/macac> . Source: [Bowling Green Amplifier](#).
- *Arlington House* – Construction on a multi-million-dollar project to rehabilitate Arlington House and improve surrounding parkland began on March 19th. When the project is completed, visitors will see Arlington House as it was in 1860, with rooms restored to their historical appearance. The quarters for the enslaved people of Arlington House will also be restored to better represent and tell their stories. Source: [Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial](#).
- *Chaco Canyon NHP* – Secretary Zinke has deferred action on a planned sale of oil and gas leases next to Chaco Canyon due to strong opposition – a total of 120 protests were lodged against the sale. "After hearing from tribes, Senators Udall and Heinrich, historic preservation experts, and other stakeholders, I've decided to defer the sale," said Zinke. "I've always said there are places where it is appropriate to develop and where it's not. This area certainly deserves more study." Source: [Santa Fe New Mexican](#).
- *Isle Royale NP* – The NPS has finished its appraisal of options for addressing the gray wolf's pending extinction on Isle Royale. The findings, as reported in *MinnPost*, were as follows: "[To] no one's surprise, [the Service's] final analysis and preferred response — transplanting new, wild wolves — are fundamentally unchanged from the draft form laid out 15 months ago.

Starting this autumn...[the NPS] plans to gather 20 to 30 wolves in the Great Lakes region and move them to the island over a period of two to three years, perhaps going to five years and more wolves if the first arrivals fail to form a viable and effectively predatory population.”

Source: [MinnPost](#).

- *Yosemite NP* – The English newspaper, *The Guardian*, has an article this week about the park’s latest amenity – a Starbucks – and the mixed response it’s gotten: “[The new Starbucks] was built to provide comfort, convenience and caffeine to the 4 to 5 million visitors who arrive each year. To many, however, the Starbucks represents a trend of encroaching commercialism inside one of the nation’s most beloved natural landmarks. That’s why more than 25,000 people petitioned to stop it from opening last week.” A spokesman for Aramark, the park’s concessioner, said that “the decision to put the Starbucks in the park was based on requests from visitors, and that Aramark is simply fulfilling its contractual obligation to the park service to create a dining experience that ‘better meets the expectations and needs of visitors.’” Source: [The Guardian](#).

Public Lands/Land Management Agencies

Public Lands And The 2018 Budget – *Outside* magazine has posted a short but informative piece on its webpage concerning the budget that was just passed (see “Weekly Legislative Roundup” above) and four ways in which it countered the administration’s plans:

- *Department of the Interior* – “Every major agency within the Department of the Interior received more money than Trump and Zinke asked for,” including \$3.2 billion for the NPS – a \$634 million increase.
- *Wildland Firefighting* – “A total of \$3.8 billion has been allocated to fighting wildfires, a \$500 million increase over last year. Another major improvement from Congress allows firefighting agencies to tap a disaster fund during over-budget fire seasons.”
- *Alaska National Forests* – “Proposals to exempt Alaska from the so-called Roadless Rule, which prevents construction on some national forest lands, were defeated. The rule has helped keep logging companies out of old-growth forests, and especially the Tongass National Forest...”
- *DOI Reorganization* – “If the secretary of the interior’s massive reorganization plan does happen, it all but certainly won’t be aligned by watershed, as Zinke originally proposed. A House committee report on the funding bill makes clear that ‘no agency shall implement any part of a reorganization that modifies regional or State boundaries’ without congressional blessing.”

The author offers this telling observation about the budget: “Public-land advocates received a valuable civics lesson this week: the president can talk all he wants about budget cuts, but it’s Congress that decides where the money goes.” Source: [Outside](#).

Conservation, Climate and The Environment

Report: Western Snow Packs Have Diminished Greatly Over Last Century – A new study has revealed an unexpectedly large decline in snowpack across the West over the past century. Researchers at Oregon State University found the average snowpack in western states has fallen by between 15 and 30 percent since 1915, with enough water lost to fill Lake Mead, the nation’s largest man-made reservoir. “We found declining trends in all months, states and climates, but the impacts are the largest in the spring, in Pacific states, and in locations with mild winter climates,” said lead author Philip Mote, director of the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute at Oregon State University. “In many lower-elevation sites, what used to fall as snow is now rain.” The study, [available at this link](#), was published on March 2nd in *NPJ Climate and Atmospheric Science*, a *Nature* publication. Source: [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#).

Disappearing Cape Cod: Climate Change And The Shape Of Things To Come – Robert Thorson, a professor at the University of Connecticut and columnist for the *Hartford Courant*, wrote last week

about the impacts of nor'easters on Cape Cod and the slow erosion of the cape, despite constant sand replenishment – particularly with the simultaneous, climate-induced rise of the Atlantic. Says Thorson: “Within the next few thousand years, interglacial sea levels will likely rise 15 to 20 feet above present heights. New England's strong, rocky mainland will survive, but much of Cape Cod and the Islands will disappear, one storm-bite at a time.” By way of example, he then tells the little-known tale about Billingsgate Island, the “Atlantis” of Cape Cod, which was there when the Pilgrims arrived but has now entirely disappeared. Source: [Hartford Courant](#).

From The Archives

This section, put together for both CPANP veterans who were regular readers of the Morning Report 25 years ago and those who joined the NPS during the ensuing period, contains news and incidents taken from issues published during the corresponding week in the appropriate month and year. Today we go back to the last week of March, 1993:

- *New River Gorge NR* – Ranger Kinsey Shilling discovered a rockslide along a main CSX railroad line around 5 a.m. on the morning of March 21st. Due to the recent wet weather, a huge boulder – about twelve by eight by eight feet – had torn loose from a point near the top of the gorge and rolled down the canyon, hitting the tracks and bending the rails. Shilling radioed the park's dispatcher, who contacted CSX dispatch by phone. Trains on the track were immediately contacted and alerted about the hazard. Within ten minutes of Shilling's discovery, a coal train over a mile long and powered by four engines approached the scene of the slide, but the engineer was able to stop well ahead of time because of the warning he'd received. The engineer praised Shilling for his quick report and stated that the bent track would have definitely derailed the train. A second train arrived on the scene behind the first one within 20 minutes of the initial report. Shilling's prompt action very likely prevented either a second derailling or a collision between the two trains.
- *Lake Mead NRA* – At about 4 p.m. on March 26th, a husband and wife parked their mobile trailer at Boxcar Cove to go fishing. Their truck and mobile trailer were the only vehicles parked at the location. As the husband left the trailer on an errand, a man standing outside and to the right of the trailer's doorway immediately shot at him. The first shot missed; the second struck him in his throat, then lodged under the skin on his shoulder. His wife was struck three times by bullets fired through the trailer door as she attempted to retrieve her husband and close the door. The shooter made one more attempt to kill the couple by firing at them through another window in the mobile home, then fled the scene, escaping before rangers arrived. One of the bullets fired at the woman entered her chest and exited through her back without hitting any vital organs; a second grazed her skull; a third shattered a wrist. Both were hospitalized but survived. The shooter, a citizen of Scotland, was taken into custody a few days later. He'd been visiting this country for several months. When he missed his airplane flight home, he became depressed and drove a rental car to Boxcar Cove to commit suicide. When the couple arrived, they interrupted his plans, and he took out his anger by shooting them. He then drove to Barstow, California, where he turned himself in at that city's police department.
- *White Sands NM* – Spring breaks for southern New Mexico and west Texas schools began on March 7th and were to continue through April 9th. As of the end of March, over 40,000 visitors, including a very high percentage of high school and college students and airmen from nearby Holloman AFB, had descended on the park. The peak day occurred on March 24th, when an estimated 300 young people from El Paso arrived for a day of serious drinking. The park had to request the assistance of state police, county deputies and Border Patrol agents to quell a dangerous situation which developed when rangers attempted to enforce alcohol regulations and investigate a related hit-and-run accident. The park's two law enforcement rangers and chief ranger issued 56 violations for alcohol-related and traffic violations; investigated a wide range of incidents, including two firearms incidents, theft of government property, vandalism and suspicious person; conducted two SAR operations and two medical evacuations; evacuated over 5,000 visitors from the park during a missile launch; and assisted White Sands Missile Range in locating and recovering missile debris. At the time of the report

(late March), the park was gearing up for Easter weekend, when 25,000 visitors a day normally visit the park, and the "Day in the Sand" event on April 25th.

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If you see something that might be of interest to Coalition members, send it to Bill Halainen at the Weekly National Park System Report: BHalainen@gmail.com. Please don't submit them via his personal email address or Facebook page.

A Closing Observation

"For every far-seeing conservationist, there have been scores or hundreds of short-sighted practical persons who thought that we should be satisfied with a small number of areas which in narrow boundaries preserved specific scenes or wonders of nature. They lost sight of the need for spacious areas, if the wilderness, with its endowment of plant and animal life, is really to be preserved as more than a museum piece."

[Horace Albright](#), Director, National Park Service, 1929-1933

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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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