



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

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Incidents

Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area Rangers Rescue Overdue Couple

On Sunday, January 14th, rangers were notified of a lost elderly couple when the couple's daughter called 911 to report them missing near Sheep Ranch in the southern area of the park.

Search efforts were conducted throughout the day in steep wooded terrain. The missing persons were spotted in the late afternoon from a Tennessee Highway Patrol helicopter, which was able to guide ground searchers to their location.

They reported that they'd gotten disoriented the previous day while hiking off trail and ended up spending the night out in single-digit temperatures. Both were hypothermic.

The woman was transported to Big South Fork Medical Center, where she was treated and released the next day. The man was flown to the University of Tennessee Hospital, where he was still in intensive care at the time of the report.

Members of the Scott County Rescue Squad, Scott County Sheriff's Office deputies, Tennessee Highway Patrol Air Operations staff, Scott County EMS personnel, and local landowners participated in the search.

Source: Big South Fork NR&RA [news release](#).

Natchez Trace Parkway Bicyclist Hit By Car And Seriously Injured

On the afternoon of December 29th, a bicyclist was struck by a 2017 Chevy Tahoe near mile marker 108 on the parkway. Rangers responded along with units from the Ridgeland Fire Department, Ridgeland Police Department, Madison County Sheriff's Department, and Pafford Ambulance Company.

The cyclist, later identified as 50-year-old Jacqueline McCarthy of Springfield, Missouri, was transported to the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson by ambulance with serious injuries. The driver of the Tahoe, identified as Sherry Evans of Jackson, Mississippi, was cited by the Ridgeland Police Department for not having insurance and faces additional charges from rangers.

The investigation continues.

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

New River Gorge National River Body Of Missing Man Found In Park

Search crews have found the body of George Gross, 56, of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, near the Diamond Point area of New River Gorge National River. The cause of death remains under investigation.

Gross told family members he was planning to hike in or around the park on Friday afternoon. When he failed to return by the weekend, the park was notified.

Rangers worked with West Virginia State Police to locate Gross. After his truck was found at the Fern Creek trailhead inside the park late on Monday night, search operations were concentrated on the trails and cliffs of that area. Other agencies involved in the search included the Fayette County Sheriff's Office K-9 unit, Fayette County Vertical Rescue Team, Fayetteville Fire Department, and Jan-Care Ambulance Service.

Source: New River Gorge NR [news release](#).

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

On January 10th, the president signed into law:

- H.R. 863, to authorize administrative and visitor center facilities at Coltsville National Historical Park, CT to be located in appropriate buildings within the Colt Armory Complex instead of the East Armory building. (P.L. 115-111).
- H.R. 2331, to require a new or updated Federal website that is intended for use by the public to be mobile friendly. (P.L. 115-114).

On January 12th, the president signed into law:

- H.R. 954, to remove the use restrictions on a parcel of land transferred to Rockingham County, Virginia under the Federal Lands to Parks Program to allow its continued use as a day care center. (P.L. 115-116).
- H.R. 2611, to modify the boundary of the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site to include seven historic structures across the street from the high school and make them eligible for financial and technical assistance from NPS. (P.L. 115-117).

Senate

On January 19th, the Senate rejected a motion to close debate, by a vote of 50 yeas to 49 nays (60 votes needed) on H.R. 195, making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2018, for federal agencies, including the Department of the Interior, through February 16th. This vote resulted in the federal government shutting down most operations at midnight on January 19th.

On January 30th, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will vote on the nominations of Susan Combs of TX, to be assistant secretary for policy, management and budget, and Ryan Douglas Nelson of ID, to be solicitor, Department of the Interior.

On January 22nd, the Senate passed H.R. 195, making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2018, for federal agencies, including the Department of the Interior, by amending the bill to allow funding through February 8, 2018. The vote was 81 yeas to 18 nays.

House

On January 16th, the House passed H.R. 2897, to authorize the Mayor of the District of Columbia and the Director of the National Park Service to enter into cooperative management agreements for the operation, maintenance, and management of units of the National Park System in the District of Columbia. The bill would allow for, initially, the rehabilitation of Franklin Square, where the D.C. government has set aside money for this purpose.

On January 17th, the House Committee on Natural Resources approved, among other bills:

- H.R. 443, to direct the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of designating the James K. Polk Home in Columbia, Tennessee, as a unit of the National Park System
- H.R. 553, to redesignate Gravelly Point Park, located along the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Arlington County, Virginia, as the Nancy Reagan Memorial Park. The bill was originally rejected by the committee by a vote of 15 yeas to 17 nays, but the committee decided to reconsider that vote and the bill was passed by a vote of 18 yeas to 16 nays.
- 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. 1417, to amend the National Law Enforcement Museum Act to allow the Museum to acquire, receive, possess, collect, ship, transport, import, and display firearms.
- H.R. 2987, to amend the Public Lands Corps Act of 1993 to establish the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps to place youth and veterans in national service positions to conserve, restore, and enhance the great outdoors of the United States.
- H.R. 3058, to redesignate the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in the State of Missouri as the "Gateway Arch National Park".
- H.R. 3961, to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate segments of the Kissimmee River and its tributaries in the State of Florida for study for potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

On January 18th, the House passed H.R. 195, making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2018, for federal agencies, including the Department of the Interior, through February 16, 2018, by a vote of 230 yeas to 197 nays.

On January 22nd, the House passed the Senate-amended version of H.R. 195, making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2018 for federal agencies, including the Department of the Interior, through February 8, 2018. The vote was 266 yeas to 150 nays. The bill now goes to the president to be signed into law. Upon the president's signature, the new law will allow the reopening of the federal government, which had been shut down for three days due to the funding impasse.

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

Park People, Friends and Allies

Fort Sumter National Monument Tracy Stakely Selected As New Superintendent

J. Tracy Stakely has been named the superintendent of Fort Sumter National Monument, Fort Moultrie and Charles Pinckney National Historic Site. He will also oversee Reconstruction Era National Monument.

Stakely is currently the superintendent at Congaree National Park and South Carolina state coordinator for Southeast Region, working to ensure cooperation between the NPS sites in South Carolina, South Carolina state parks, and various other state partners. Stakely will assume his new position on February 5th.

During his 19 years with the National Park Service, Stakely has worked with NPS staff, community partners and contractors in the areas of resource preservation and park management. He spent several years in Southeast Regional Office in Atlanta as program lead for the region's cultural landscape program. In that role, he led program staff and contractors in documenting park landscape resources and providing park managers with technical assistance to aid in cultural and natural resource management and preservation.

Stakely gained additional park management experience during time spent as acting superintendent and chief of resource management at Mammoth Cave National Park and acting superintendent at Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park.

Prior to his time in Southeast Region, Stakely was a landscape architect at the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation. There he authored cultural landscape reports and related planning documents and provided technical expertise on cultural landscape preservation to park managers and community partners.

Stakely has also served on national workgroups within the NPS to revise Director's Order #61: National Cemetery Operations, Director's Order #100: Resource Stewardship for the 21st Century, and the nationwide agreement for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

He earned a master's degree in landscape architecture from Louisiana State University and a graduate certificate in Leadership for Public Lands and Cultural Heritage through the Academic Consortium, a learning and development program cosponsored by the NPS, the Eppley Institute for Park Management, and six partner universities.

Both Stakely and his wife Cheri are originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. They are the parents of two active teenagers, Bryson and Bella.

Source: Fort Sumter NM [news release](#).

Reports and Releases

A summary of recent news stories and agency press releases pertaining to the department, the Service, public lands and the environment.

Administration

The Mad King – Timothy Egan, an author, journalist and op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*, wrote a column on Secretary Zinke on January 20th entitled “The Mad King Flies His Flag.” As you’d expect from the headline, it contains a scathing indictment of Zinke. Here’s the gist of his piece: “...Trump, using the very strange Zinke, is going after the sacred foundations of America’s much-loved public lands, brick by brick. Zinke has been called the Gulfstream Cowboy for his love of using charter planes to fly off to the nesting grounds of wealthy donors. But he’s more like a mad king. And this monarch has control over the crown jewels of America’s public land. They are not in safe hands.” [Full column](#).

DOI: A “Mad Hatter Tea Party” – The Eugene, Oregon, *Register-Guard* ran an editorial earlier this week entitled “National Parks In Trouble” which closed with a metaphor similar to the above. The editorial itemizes what the paper sees as Zinke’s shortcomings – a familiar litany – and notes that “the concept of public lands appears to be lost on the person most responsible for upholding their protection.” Here’s the closing sentence: “Interior is turning into a Mad Hatter tea party where up is down, public means private, preserving means destroying, and a man who likes to be portray himself

as a champion of the environment and rugged outdoorsman — complete with cowboy hat and horse — is a front man for the extractive industries.” [Full column](#).

DOI Says ‘Good Riddance’ To NPS Advisory Board – On January 17th, the *Washington Examiner* ran a follow-up story on the resignation of ten of twelve members of the NPS Advisory Board (reported in the last edition). DOI was less than charitable in its response to the board members’ action, saying that it welcomed the resignations and looks forward to appointing new members. It included this zinger: “Interior spokeswoman Heather Swift accused some of the panel members of choosing to ignore sexual harassment while praising a repeat offender of ethics violations in expressing the agency’s praise for the departures. ‘We welcome their resignations and would expect nothing less than quitting from members who found it convenient to turn a blind eye to women being sexually harassed at National Parks and praise a man as ‘inspiring’ who had been blasted by the inspector general for ethics and management failures, all while taking credit for the extensive work of private companies during the NPS centennial celebration,’ Swift said in a statement to the *Washington Examiner*...” [Full story](#).

Bardacke v. Willens – There’s a story in the January 20th edition of *The New Mexican* about the dispute between two New Mexicans over the resignation of most of the members of the NPS Advisory Board – former New Mexico Attorney General Paul Bardacke, one of the advisory board members, and Todd Willens, an assistant deputy secretary at Interior. The article includes arguments made by both sides, but gives Bardacke the last word, quoting him on his reason for not getting into a prolonged fight with the administration on this issue: “You don’t want to wrestle with a pig because you’ll get dirty and the pig will like it,” he said.” [Full text](#).

DOI Makes Deal Allowing Road Across Alaskan Wildlife Refuge – According to the January 6th *Washington Post*, Interior has approved a land swap deal that will allow a remote Alaskan village to construct a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. “The action, says the *Post*, “effectively overrules wilderness protections that have kept the area off limits to vehicles for decades.” Said Randi Spivak of the Center for Biological Diversity: “Bulldozing a road through the heart of the refuge violates federal laws designed to protect Alaska’s pristine wild places. Zinke’s backroom deal is an end run around Congress and will destroy world-class wetlands critical to millions of migrating birds, bears and other wildlife. Once it’s destroyed, we’ll never get it back.” [Full text](#).

National Park System

“A Trojan Horse Threatens The Nation’s Parks” – Outdoors writer Christopher Ketcham had an op-ed piece under the above headline in the January 18th *New York Times*. The “Trojan horse” that he alludes to is a new bill ([H.R. 4558](#)) introduced in the House by a representative from Utah that nominally concerns protection of national monument land but in fact would erode federal environmental protections on public lands. “If it becomes law,” writes Ketcham, “the bill could set a precedent with enormous consequences nationally, all of them bad for the national parks and the park service...It is, in fact, a model for the piecemeal unraveling of the more than 400 national parks, monuments, battlefields, historic sites, recreation areas and other places in the park system.” Among other things, it would create a management council comprised of federal and state representatives to run the monument, would “elevate hunting and the grazing of livestock to core purposes of the park,” and would open up sections of what was once the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument to possible commercial and industrial development. The author’s conclusion: “The big picture is that if his bill passes, the anti-federalists of Utah will have legitimized a hostile takeover of the commons. And by becoming the bosses of the National Park Service in this small part of the American West, they will have accomplished a stunning achievement in deception.” [Full text](#).

Government Shutdown Causes Confusion At National Parks – This past Sunday’s edition of the *Washington Post* featured a story on “the confusing reality of the government shutdown’s first day” in national parks. The confusion came from the widely varied approaches parks took toward interpreting the rules of the shutdown, which in turn stemmed from the ambiguous guidance they received. “As with the chaotic hours before the shutdown, when even the nation’s federal agencies weren’t sure how to close or what to tell employees, the Trump administration’s decision to keep the national parks largely open presented people with confounding choices,” reported the *Post*. “The move, part of an

effort to reduce the public-facing impact of a shutdown, left many asking themselves if they should enter the parks and risk their lives without the support of park rangers. And it left others upset that their plans to experience American treasures were thwarted.” [Full text](#).

New Initiative To Link NPS-Administered And Other Southern Civil Rights Sites – The *Spokesman-Review* in Spokane had a story in its travel section last Saturday concerning a new joint effort by 14 Southern states to promote Civil Rights tourism. Landmarks on the trail include churches, courthouses, schools, businesses and other sites that played a role in the civil rights movement in the 1950s and '60s, plus memorials and museums that document the period. Many of the sites are administered by the National Park Service; the idea itself was advanced by Director Jarvis two years ago. [Full text](#).

Dan Wenk Speaks On Park Management Issues – *Mountain Journal*, a publication based in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (“meaningful public-interest journalism at the intersection of people and nature in America’s wildest, most iconic ecosystem”), recently posted the text of a speech given by Dan Wenk, Yellowstone’s superintendent, at Montana State University’s fall commencement. “We are at a crossroads in our decision making as a community, a region and a nation in our attitude about protection of wild places,” said Wenk. “All perspectives must be heard. We are all stewards of Yellowstone. It belongs to all of us. We are coming to decision points on the future management, preservation and use of Yellowstone.” He goes on to offer perspectives and insights on management issues. [Full text](#).

Sundry Actions and Updates – Here, briefly, are activities recently reported by parks, culled from park press releases. In each case, additional details can be found in those releases:

- *Yellowstone NP* – Last year was the second busiest on record, with 4,116,525 visits – down a bit from 2016. The park has seen a 40% increase in visitation since 2008. [News release](#).
- *Big Bend NP* – The park hit an all-time high in visitation, with 442,641 visitors (up 14% from last year). [News release](#).
- *Alaska Regional Office* – National Park Service compendiums for Alaska are now open for public comment. The closing date is February 15th. [News release](#).
- *Arches NP* – The park is currently reviewing comments submitted on its draft traffic congestion management plan. They received 421 comments; another 46 people attended a public meeting. [News release](#).
- *Death Valley NP* – The park will soon be improving parking and viewing platforms at Dante’s View. Due to the construction project, the scenic viewpoint will be closed to public access from January 23rd to early April. [News release](#).

Public Lands

Adieu, Forest Service; Welcome, OneUSDA – The Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics webpage has a story on it about Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue’s new plan to replace the names of the individual agencies and offices in the department – including the Forest Service – with a new, one-size-fits-all acronym: OneUSDA. Here’s what Perdue said in a taped holiday greeting to employees: “[From] today forward, you will hear all of our USDA leadership, from the Office of the Secretary on down, begin to refer to us as OneUSDA. Not as APHIS or as the Forest Service, not as Rural Development or of FAS, not as distinct agencies sitting in the same office, like FSA, RMA, or NRCS. No, instead, we’re gonna be one team all working toward the same goals: OneUSDA.” If you go to the webpage, be sure to read the pointed comments made by USFS employees and retirees at the bottom. You might also take the three minutes required to watch [Perdue’s holiday greeting](#) itself. Source: FSEEE [webpage](#).

The Environment

Climate Change Impacts On Coral Reefs Worsen – The numerous coral reefs protected by the NPS – from Buck Island Reef NM in the Caribbean to the National Park of American Samoa in the Pacific – are subject to an array of well-documented threats. A recent *New York Times* article focuses on one that is becoming more frequent: [coral bleaching](#). “Large-scale coral bleaching events, in which reefs become extremely fragile, were virtually unheard-of before the 1980s,” write the authors. “But in the years since, according to a study published [in early January] in the journal *Science*, the frequency of coral bleaching has increased to the point that reefs no longer have sufficient recovery time between severe episodes.” Scientists fear that they could be devastating to coral reefs. [Full story](#).

CPANP Member Notices

This section has been created to capture short notes from members to their colleagues across the country. Send submissions to BHalainen@gmail.com.

No new submissions.

Acknowledgements

This newsletter comes to you through the efforts of a number of people. First are our “regulars”:

- Producer: Steve Pittleman
- Congressional Correspondent: Don Hellmann
- At Large Correspondent: Dennis Burnett

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- Joan Anzelmo
- Cathy Halainen

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

“At a conscious or subconscious level, American continues to be 'the land of the free and the home of the brave' because we can still go to places that are fresh, primitive, and untamed. No one would ever describe France this way. But we think of ourselves as free and brave because we had to be to live in the landscape of our beginning. Wilderness has always fueled our imagination, nurtured our sense of freedom, and kindled our entrepreneurial energies. Without this taproot into our past, we will forget what we have been and may not like what we become. Our relationship with the land has both nurtured and challenged us, giving us those characteristics we consider uniquely American: heartiness, ingenuity, curiosity, toughness under fire, individualism, passion, creativity, warmth, good humor, optimism, and hope....Wilderness is as American as apple pie – food for our soul. We need all of it that is left, for without it we shall surely starve.”

Former Utah Congresswoman [Karen Shepherd](#)

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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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